

Fuente Ovejuna



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LOPE DE VEGA

Lope de Vega was born in 1562 to Felices de Vega Carpio and his wife, Francisca. It is said that de Vega dictated verses before the age of 5 and wrote plays by 12. He was educated at a Jesuit school in Madrid and later at the University of Alcalá de Henares. Around 1583, after graduating and serving a year in the Spanish Navy, de Vega began writing plays. He also fell in love with Elena Osorio, and the pair were in a relationship until 1587, when she fell in love with someone else. De Vega responded to this betrayal by publishing libellous attacks against Elena and her family. He was tried for libel in 1588 and banished from Madrid for eight years. Defying the sentence, de Vega returned to elope with Isabel de Urbina Alderete y Cortinas. He later moved to Valencia, Toledo, and then later moved near Salamanca, where he entered the service of the Duke of Alba. After his wife died in childbirth in 1594, de Vega began relationships with numerous women, and in 1598 he married Juana De Guarda, the daughter of a wealthy Madrid butcher, while beginning an affair with a well-known actress. Around that time, de Vega published several poems and poetic narratives, and by 1604 he had written around 230 three-act plays. In the early 17th century, de Vega was employed as a secretary by the Duke of Sessa. Carlos Felix, de Vega's favorite son, died around this time, followed soon after by Juana's death in 1612. Two years later, de Vega joined the priesthood, but he still kept up his romantic affairs and playwriting. De Vega lived until 1635, when he died of scarlet fever. De Vega is regarded as one of the most important writers in Spanish literature. Estimates suggest that de Vega wrote 1500 plays over his lifetime, the most famous of which was *Fuente Ovejuna*, written in 1619.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fuente Ovejuna is based on a true historical incident that took place in the village of Fuenteovejuna, part of the Kingdom of Castile, in 1476. At the time, Spain was divided into several Christian Kingdoms: Castile, Aragon, Leon, Navarre, and Portugal, with Castile and Aragon as the two major kingdoms. In 1469, Henry IV ruled Castile, and his half-sister Princess Isabel of Castile married King Ferdinand (called Fernando in the play) of Aragon, forming an alliance between these two kingdoms. King Henry IV's death in 1474 led to division: Isabel and Ferdinand claimed Castile for themselves, while Henry's daughter Juana and her husband, King Alfonso of Portugal, also claimed Castile. Then, in 1476, in support of Juana and Alfonso's claim, Rodrigo Téllez Girón, the Master of the Military

Order of Calatrava (a city in Castile), turned on Isabel and Ferdinand and attacked and seized the town of Ciudad Real as described in the play. The same year, the Commander of the Order of Calatrava, Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, was killed by the citizens of Fuente Ovejuna in revenge for his cruel and brutal behavior towards them. When the villagers were interrogated and tortured, their only response was "Fuente Ovejuna did it," providing the foundation for the climax of the play. It's been suggested that Lope de Vega also wrote *Fuente Ovejuna* as a commentary on Philip III, who was the King of Spain while de Vega was writing. Philip III was a weak ruler who gave most of his power to a lesser Duke, and so the play suggests that rulers' primary goal should be to attain peace and justice, and they should avoid being easily manipulated.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Fuente Ovejuna was written during the Spanish Golden Age. During this period, art and literature flourished in Spain while the Spanish Empire became more politically powerful under the Habsburgs, from approximately 1556 to 1659. Lope de Vega is perhaps the most important and prolific playwright of the time, as he created the three-act comedia structure that became popular throughout Spanish drama. Alongside *Fuente Ovejuna*, his most famous plays are *The Dog in the Manger*, *Punishment without Revenge*, and *The Knight from Olmeda*. Another notable playwright during the Spanish Golden Age (and widely considered to be Lope de Vega's literary successor) is Pedro Calderón de la Barca, whose plays [Life is a Dream](#), *The Mayor of Zalamea*, and *The Phantom Lady* also focus on the themes of Christian morality, honor, and revenge. Lope de Vega's works are often compared to Shakespeare's because of their verse mixed with their populist language, and *Fuente Ovejuna*'s themes of honor and morality can be similarly found in *Henry IV Part 1 and 2*, [Henry V](#), and [Julius Caesar](#), while its plot of a poorer collective rising up against a powerful tyrant can be found in [Coriolanus](#). Lastly, because the play is based on a historical incident that occurred about 150 years prior to when Lope de Vega was writing it, various sources for the play have been suggested: Francisco de Rades y Andrada's *Chronica de las tres Ordenes y Cavallerías de Santiago, Calatrava, y Alcántara*; and two histories published by Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, the *Emblemas morales* and the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Fuente Ovejuna
- **When Written:** 1612-1614
- **Where Written:** Madrid, Spain

- **When Published:** 1619
- **Literary Period:** The Spanish Golden Age
- **Genre:** Dramatic Play; History Play
- **Setting:** Fuenteovejuna, Castile
- **Climax:** The villagers kill the Commander; King Fernando and Queen Isabel pardon the villagers.
- **Antagonist:** The Commander

EXTRA CREDIT

A Call for Collectivism. Due to the play's collectivist message, it became a popular piece to stage during the rise of Communism in the early 20th century.

Apt for Adaptation. *Fuente Ovejuna* has been adapted into films in Spanish and other languages, two musicals, and even a Soviet Ballet called *Laurencia*.



PLOT SUMMARY

The play opens in 1476 in Spain, at a meeting between the 17-year-old Master of the Order of Calatrava, Rodrigo Téllez Girón, and his Commander, Fernán Gómez de Guzmán. After the recent death of King Henry IV of Castile, there is a dispute over who should rule the kingdom of Castile. Some are loyal to Henry's daughter Juana and her husband, King Alonso of Portugal, while others are loyal to Henry's sister Queen Isabel of Castile and her husband, King Fernando of Aragon. The Commander reminds the Master of his family's loyalty to Alonso, and he convinces the Master to take an army to capture the key stronghold of Ciudad Real from Isabel and Fernando, claiming that this will allow the young Master to prove his worth in battle.

The play picks up some days later, in the small town of Fuente Ovejuna, where the Commander lives. The young peasant Laurencia is telling her friend Pascuala how much she hates the Commander. The Commander pursues her relentlessly, but he has had sex with many of the women in town and quickly discards them afterward, and she doesn't want this to happen to her. She notes that she hates men generally, because they all lie to women to get them into bed and then abandon them in the morning.

Soon after this discussion, the Commander returns from his campaign against Ciudad Real—it was a bloody fight, but the Master and Commander prevailed. The townspeople welcome the Commander home and give him lavish gifts for his success, and he thanks them for their love. As the crowd disperses, he instructs his servants, Flores and Ortuño, to grab Laurencia and Pascuala and lock them in a nearby stable so that they can be part of his spoils of war, but Laurencia and Pascuala fight the men off and run away.

At Queen Isabel and King Fernando's court, two aldermen from Ciudad Real arrive. They explain that the Ciudad Real's citizens are loyal to "the Catholic Kings" (meaning Isabel and Fernando), and though they tried to fight off the Master's army, they were unsuccessful. They ask for help in regaining control over their town, and the King sends two armies to recapture the city.

Back in Fuente Ovejuna, Laurencia and Frondoso, a young villager, are talking in the woods. Frondoso is madly in love with Laurencia, but she hasn't really thought about marriage and is annoyed that the whole town gossips about them. Just then, the Commander comes down the path while hunting, and Frondoso hides in the trees. Seeing Laurencia, the Commander drops his **bow** and arrow and starts to force himself on her, but Frondoso emerges from his hiding place, picks up the bow, and points it at the Commander. Laurencia is able to escape, and Frondoso walks away—but still clutching the bow so that the Commander can't kill him with it. After Frondoso departs, the Commander vows to get revenge on him.

Soon after, at a town council meeting, the Commander tells Esteban (one of the town magistrates and Laurencia's father) that his daughter needs a talking to—she refuses to submit to his desire in the way that many other women in the town have. Esteban and the other council members point out that the Commander has been dishonoring the women of the town, as well as many of the men by sleeping with their wives. The Commander scoffs, saying that the peasants don't have honor to begin with. He disbands the meeting, angry and insulted. After the other men leave, a soldier reports to the Commander that Isabel and Fernando have sent an army to Ciudad Real, and the Master is asking for his help in maintaining a hold on the city. The Commander agrees to go.

As the Commander rides out, Flores and Ortuño try to abduct a woman named Jacinta to bring with them to Ciudad Real for the Commander's pleasure. When another villager, Mengo, defends her, the Commander orders his henchmen to flog Mengo severely. When the Commander arrives at Ciudad Real, he and the Master are quickly defeated by Fernando and Isabel's forces.

Later, Laurencia and Frondoso meet up once more. Moved by his bravery in the woods, Laurencia agrees to marry Frondoso. They ask her father, Esteban, for permission, who agrees to the match, and Frondoso is overjoyed. They wed soon after, but the Commander, returning from his defeat at Ciudad Real, interrupts the festivities. He arrests Frondoso and abducts Laurencia; when Esteban tries to protest, the Commander has Esteban beaten.

That night, the councilmen meet in secret, wondering what they can do to save Laurencia and Frondoso. Esteban points out that the Commander has dishonored all of them, and they should band together. Just then, Laurencia arrives at the meeting, completely disheveled with cuts and bruises all over her body—she had to fight off the Commander's servants to

prevent them from raping her. She calls on the men to act and defend the women's honor and their own. The men agree to take up her cause and make the Commander pay for what he's done.

After the men leave to storm the Commander's house, Laurencia gathers the women, imploring them to take up arms and defend their honor as well. At the Commander's home, he is about to hang Frondoso when the villagers burst through the doors, shouting, "Fuente Ovejuna!" and calling for death to tyrants. The men go after the Commander, while the women attack Flores and Ortuño.

The next day, Flores arrives at Isabel and Fernando's court, having escaped the women's wrath. He explains that the faithless villagers in Fuente Ovejuna unjustly rose up against the Commander, throwing him from a window and dismembering him. The King agrees to launch an investigation into what happened and punish those responsible.

Back in Fuente Ovejuna, the villagers rejoice at having killed the Commander. But when the King's judge arrives to investigate the murder, Esteban tells all of the townspeople to say that "Fuente Ovejuna did it." Although many villagers are tortured in the judge's attempt to glean information from them, they all stick to the story. Then Isabel and Fernando pay a visit to Fuente Ovejuna, where the Master humbly asks for their forgiveness for his treachery, and they welcome him in their court. The judge then summarizes his investigation, and Esteban, Frondoso, and Laurencia plead their case to Isabel and Fernando. They explain that they were rebelling against the Commander's brutal tyranny. Hearing the villagers' case, the King says that the crime was serious, but because there is no evidence, all of the townspeople must be pardoned. Frondoso thanks the King for being a wise and just ruler.

intelligence. The play thus makes a key point about honor through the Commander: even though he is of noble birth (which denoted honor in 15th-century Spain, where the play is set), the play suggests that true honor comes from moral virtue. And because the Commander consistently behaves immorally, he is clearly not an honorable man. The Commander's tyrannical behavior in Fuente Ovejuna is mirrored in his political maneuvers. He spurs the Master to attack Ciudad Real, a stronghold for King Fernando and Queen Isabel. But he does this purely for personal gain, in order to acquire more power and standing. The Commander is often called "the devil"—despite the **Cross** emblazoned on his clothing—which further speaks to his hypocrisy and lack of virtue. At the end of the play, the townspeople rise up against the Commander, killing and dismembering him and also attacking his servants. With this ending—and especially the fact that the villagers evade punishment for the murder—the play firmly repudiates the Commander's tyranny, disrespect, and self-interested desire for power.

Laurencia – One of the protagonists of *Fuente Ovejuna*, Laurencia is Esteban's daughter and Frondoso's love interest. At the play's outset, the Commander and his servants, Flores and Ortuño, have been relentlessly pursuing Laurencia. As a result, she complains to Pascuala about men, claiming they only care about sleeping with women and then disregard those same women by morning. Laurencia initially also wards off Frondoso's declarations of love, worried that people will gossip about them. However, when Frondoso bravely saves Laurencia from the Commander's advances in the woods (it's implied that the Commander intends to rape her), she begins to fall in love with Frondoso and agrees to marry him. The contrast between these two suitors, Frondoso and the Commander, illustrates how true love is built on mutual respect and leads to great harmony between people, as Laurencia experiences with Frondoso. But sexual desire without respect—in the way that the Commander ignores Laurencia's disdain for him—only leads to conflict. The conflict between Laurencia and the Commander intensifies when the Commander abducts Laurencia from her wedding. However, Laurencia's honor shows through: she fights tooth and nail to ward off the Commander's servants when they try to sexually assault her. At the end of the play, she gives a rousing speech to the other villagers to defend their honor and rise up against the Commander, organizing the women into a regiment to fight as well. Thus, Laurencia acknowledges that the only way to beat a predatory tyrant like the Commander is to band together and overthrow him.

Frondoso – Frondoso is one of the protagonists of *Fuente Ovejuna*. He is in love with Laurencia and in many ways acts as a foil to the Commander. While the Commander is older and lustful, Frondoso is young and his love for Laurencia is innocent. Unlike the Commander, who forces himself on



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán – The Commander is the play's antagonist. He lives in Fuente Ovejuna, and though the villagers are loyal to him there, he treats them terribly. He rapes or attempts to rape most of the women in the town, including those who are virgins (like Laurencia) or married (like Jacinta). The Commander is so notorious for this behavior that he is often compared to various kinds of predatory **animals** throughout the play. The women's repeated attempts to ward him off often rarely work, and the women vow vengeance on him. This underscores the play's core claim that when love or sexual desire are not based in mutual respect, it inevitably causes discord. The Commander also attacks or threatens any man who tries to defend the women, like Frondoso and Mengo. Additionally, the Commander openly offends the peasants, saying that they are without honor and insulting their

Laurencia (it's implied that he intends to rape her), Frondoso honorably protects her, putting himself in great danger by threatening the Commander with the Commander's own bow and arrow. Frondoso knows that the Commander will likely try to kill him for doing this, illustrating his self-sacrifice in contrast to the Commander's self-interest. Frondoso not only asks Laurencia to marry him, but he also respectfully asks her father, Esteban, for his permission as well. He also consults Laurencia about a possible dowry (Frondoso doesn't want to accept one, though Esteban insists he should). The fact that Laurencia returns his love after he protects her emphasizes the play's claim that true love must be built on mutual respect, as this is what leads to strong and harmonious bonds. This is further underscored when Laurencia inspires the town to save Frondoso after the Commander arrests him—she shows her own respect and love by coming to his rescue just like he came to hers earlier in the play. Moreover, all of Frondoso's actions affirm him as an honorable young man (and Esteban even refers to him as such), showing that honor doesn't derive from one's social rank; instead, it comes from one's morality and virtuous actions.

King Fernando – King Fernando is the King of Aragon and Queen Isabel's husband. Known together as “the Catholic Kings,” Fernando and Isabel are depicted as just and merciful rulers. In contrast to the corrupt Commander and the Master, who attack Ciudad Real for their own personal gain, the play suggests that Fernando and Isabel are defending Castile in order to bring peace and unify Spain. The King shows himself to be a measured and model ruler: when he hears about the Commander being brutally overthrown and killed in Fuente Ovejuna, the King decides to launch an investigation rather than immediately dole out harsh penalties to the villagers. He and Isabel are merciful in choosing to forgive the Master for his treachery and in forgoing punishment for the villagers of Fuente Ovejuna, knowing of the Commander's tyranny. The play thus suggests that the King and Queen's power is justified because they pursue Christian ideals like mercy, justice, and peace in the name of God. Additionally, Isabel and Fernando are depicted as a couple who respect each other and suit each other well. Isabel counsels Fernando on his political and military calculations, and Fernando in turn praises Isabel for helping to bring calm in the region. Thus, they parallel Laurencia and Frondoso in that they show how true, harmonious love is built on mutual respect.

Queen Isabel – Queen Isabel is the disputed heir of Castile and King Fernando's wife. Known together as “the Catholic Kings,” Isabel and Fernando are depicted as just and merciful rulers. In contrast to the Commander and the Master, who attack Ciudad Real for their own personal gain, the play suggests that Isabel and Fernando defend Castile in order to bring peace and unify Spain. They are merciful in choosing to forgive the Master for his treachery and in forgoing punishment for the villagers of

Fuente Ovejuna, knowing the Commander was tyrannical. Their power is thus only justified because they pursue Christian ideals like mercy, justice, and peace in the name of God. In fact, the villagers often praise them for acting based on Christian values. Additionally, Isabel and Fernando are known throughout Spain as a couple who respect each other and suit each other well. Isabel counsels Fernando on his political and military calculations, and Fernando in turn praises Isabel for helping to bring calm in the region. Thus, they parallel Laurencia and Frondoso in that they show how true, harmonious love is built on mutual respect.

Master Rodrigo Téllez Girón – Rodrigo is the 17-year-old Master of the Order of Calatrava. Following the death of the Master's uncle, the Commander reminds the Master that his family is loyal to Alonso, not Queen Isabel and King Fernando. The Commander, appealing to the fact that the Master should earn glory by proving himself in battle, instigates the Master to attack the Ciudad Real. The Master is able to conquer the city, but Isabel and Fernando's army quickly retakes it. When the Master hears about the Commander's death in Fuente Ovejuna, he declares that he would raze the city to the ground if it were up to him—in contrast with Fernando, who launches a careful investigation and ultimately pardons the citizens. This demonstrates how the Master is motivated by vengeance and self-interest, in contrast to the King, who pursues justice and mercy. Ultimately, the Master asks Fernando and Isabel for forgiveness for his treachery, vowing humility and loyalty to them to regain his honor. They accept his plea, once again reinforcing the play's idea that leaders should act with mercy and justice, not vengeance, self-interest, or the pursuit of glory.

Esteban – Esteban is Laurencia's father and one of the magistrates in town. Esteban is depicted as an honorable, fair, and intelligent man. At the beginning of the play, Esteban is a loyal vassal, presenting the Commander with gifts when he returns from his victory in Ciudad Real. However, as Laurencia continues to reject the Commander's advances and the Commander sexually assaults many women in the town, Esteban questions the Commander's honor. In return, the Commander beats Esteban and abducts Laurencia from her own wedding. Esteban then gathers the townspeople to discuss what to do about the Commander; spurred by a speech from Laurencia (who has escaped the Commander's clutches), Esteban and the other villagers rise up to kill the Commander. And after the murder, it is Esteban who comes up with the plan to say that “Fuente Ovejuna did it” so that no one will be punished when the King sends a judge to investigate what happened. In this way, Esteban recognizes the power of collective action against tyranny. Additionally, Esteban is another example of how honor is based in moral virtue, not in social rank: despite Esteban's commoner status, he acts with integrity throughout the play, unlike the higher-ranking Commander.

Mengo – Mengo is one of the villagers in Fuente Ovejuna. Even though Mengo is somewhat foolish (he cannot read and often makes nonsensical arguments), he is nevertheless one of the play's honorable men. He defends Jacinta from the Commander's lustful advances, and for this, Mengo is brutally whipped until his whole body is black and blue. Though Mengo is hesitant to rise up against the Commander because of his beating, he ultimately joins with the other townspeople. And even though the judge and the other villagers expect that Mengo will be the person who cracks under torture, Mengo remains in solidarity with the other villagers and says that Fuente Ovejuna is to blame for overthrowing and killing the Commander. Hearing this, the villagers praise Mengo for his bravery, and the judge grows tired of torturing the villagers. This emphasizes the power of collective action as well as the importance of every individual voice in that collective action.

Flores – Flores is one of the Commander's servants, along with Ortuño. Together, these men help the Commander plan his sexual conquests and also assault many of the women in the town. At the end of the play, Laurencia, Pascuala, and the other women attack Flores, but he is able to escape and report what happened in Fuente Ovejuna to King Fernando and Queen Isabel.

Jacinta – Jacinta is a woman in the village whom the Commander preys on. Mengo attempts to defend her, but the Commander carries her off, and it is implied that he lets his servants rape her. At the end of the play, Jacinta joins Laurencia, Pascuala, and the other women to take revenge on the Commander.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ortuño – Ortuño is one of the Commander's servants, along with Flores. Together, these men help the Commander plan his sexual conquests, and they also assault many of the women in the town. At the end of the play, Laurencia attacks Ortuño, and it is implied that she kills him.

Judge – King Fernando and Queen Isabel send the judge to investigate what happened in Fuente Ovejuna after Flores reports on the Commander's death. The judge tortures the citizens but is unable to find any of them individually guilty because the town collectively takes responsibility for what happened.

Pascuala – Pascuala is Laurencia's friend. Like Laurencia, she fears being taken advantage of sexually, and at the end of the play, she joins with Laurencia and the other women to take revenge on the Commander and his servants.

King Alonso – King Alonso is the King of Portugal, who is challenging Queen Isabel for the throne in Castile. The Master's family is loyal to Alonso, and he and the Commander try to capture Ciudad Real in Alonso's name.

Manrique – Manrique is the Master of the Order of Santiago

who is loyal to King Fernando and Queen Isabel's Army. After the Master and Commander take Ciudad Real, Manrique retakes the city.

Juan Rojo – Juan Rojo is Laurencia's uncle and an alderman in the town.

Alonso – Alonso is one of the magistrates in town, along with Esteban.

Barrildo – Barrildo is a young man in Fuente Ovejuna.

Leonelo – Leonelo is an educated villager in Fuente Ovejuna.

Cimbranos – Cimbranos is a soldier in the Master's army.

TERMS

Alderman – An alderman is a member of the city council, who represents the city's interests. In *Fuente Ovejuna*, **Juan Rojo** is an alderman.

Magistrate – A magistrate is a civil officer and judge who runs the town and administers justice. In *Fuente Ovejuna*, **Esteban** and **Alonso** are magistrates.

The Orders – The Spanish military Orders (referred to as just "the Order" in the play) were a set of religious and military institutions which arose in order to reconquer the Iberian Peninsula in Spain from the Muslim Moors. The most important Orders arose between the 12th and 14th centuries: the Order of Calatrava, the Order of Santiago, and the Order of Alcántara, the Order of Montesa. The Order's highest authority was given the title of Master, followed by the Grand Commander. These men were often tied to the Spanish nobility and pledged allegiance to various monarchies, as depicted in the play. In *Fuente Ovejuna*, **Master** of Calatrava heads the Order of Calatrava, the **Commander** also belongs to the Order of Calatrava, and **Manrique** is the Master of the Order of Santiago.

Vassal – A vassal is a person in the European feudal system who is loyal to a lord or monarch (and will often provide military support) in exchange for privileges, usually including land. In the play, the townspeople in Fuente Ovejuna are the **Commander's** vassals, as he is a member of the Spanish nobility.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



TYRANNY VS. COLLECTIVISM

Fuente Ovejuna's plot centers on the Commander, a tyrannical leader of the titular Spanish town Fuente Ovejuna. While the villagers are kind and loyal, the

Commander and his servants, Flores and Ortuño, abuse the townspeople—namely, by sexually assaulting the women in the town and by beating or threatening any man who tries to protect the women. Gradually, however, the townspeople realize how much the Commander has mistreated them, and they collectively rise up against him and kill him. When they are interrogated for their crimes, the townspeople simply say, “Fuente Ovejuna did it,” so that no individual can be punished. Because banding together is the only way for the villagers to escape the Commander’s cruelty and any penalty for their resistance, the play suggests that collective power is necessary to overcome tyranny.

Initially, the Commander’s ability to easily overpower and abuse the citizens in Fuente Ovejuna demonstrates how difficult it is for individual people to overcome his tyranny. The Commander preys on the women in particular, knowing that they are often unable to fight back because they are physically weaker than he is. When the Commander finds the young protagonist Laurencia alone in the woods, he attempts to rape her—and the men in the village discuss how he’s raped other local women as well. Laurencia only escapes this fate because Frondoso, a young man, rescues her. This highlights how if she were alone, it’s likely she wouldn’t have been able to escape the Commander’s oppressiveness, as none of the other women are able to do so. The Commander’s noble status also allows him to abuse the citizens at will: he vows to beat Esteban (Laurencia’s father and a town magistrate) over the head with a stick because Laurencia is warding off the Commander’s attacks. Esteban comments, “Then beat me! / I bow to you as overlord.” With this, Esteban speaks to how the Commander’s social rank enables him to act however he wishes, while the villagers have little recourse. The Commander’s stature also means that he has faithful servants (Ortuño and Flores) to support his tyranny. For example, Ortuño and Flores abduct a woman named Jacinta on the Commander’s behalf. Witnessing this, another villager, Mengo, tries to defend Jacinta and appeals to the Commander’s morality, asking what she has done wrong. In response, the Commander instructs his henchmen to carry Mengo off and brutally flog him. Through both Jacinta and Mengo’s inability to rise up against the Commander, the play demonstrates that it is hard for individual people to fight tyranny because tyrants can act outside the law and force others to do their bidding.

The citizens in Fuente Ovejuna soon recognize their common grievance, and by working together they find a collective power to overthrow and kill the Commander. At Laurencia and Frondoso’s wedding, the Commander arrests Frondoso for protecting Laurencia and abducts her for his own pleasure.

Referring to the Commander, Esteban says to his fellow townspeople that “there is not a single one / Of us whose life that criminal / Has not dishonoured.” Recognizing the truth in his words, another alderman says that “The town should die, / Or kill these tyrants. We are many, they are few.” Thus, the townspeople recognize that their common cause, and their ability to band together to address that cause, gives them power over tyranny. Taking action, the townspeople storm the Commander’s house. They shout, “Fuente Ovejuna!” as a rallying cry—suggesting that they have power in working collectively as one town with one voice and one purpose. They are then able to free Frondoso and kill the Commander. As individuals—and even at the wedding, where many townspeople were gathered—the villagers were unable to stop the Commander’s tyranny. But now, in recognizing their collective power, they are able to do so. Laurencia is even able to lead the women to attack the Commander’s henchmen, who have victimized the women as much as the Commander himself did. Individually, the women were easily preyed upon and had little means to escape the men’s vile behavior. But as a group, they can get vengeance for the cruelty they experienced.

Not only do the villagers find collective power in overcoming tyranny and killing the Commander and his henchmen, but their collective solidarity also helps them overcome that punishment and pursue justice without retribution. After killing the Commander, Esteban recognizes that the King and Queen will likely try to find out what happened to the Commander. He suggests that when they are interrogated, all of the villagers should say, “Fuente Ovejuna did it.” This again emphasizes that their power came from their collective action. Only by working together as a single town—as “Fuente Ovejuna”—were they able to overcome the Commander’s tyranny. When a judge interrogates the citizens, they all stick to their story and say, “Fuente Ovejuna did it.” The judge reports back to King Fernando, explaining that “the citizens are all of one accord, / United in their fortitude.” As such, the judge is unable to discover which individuals are guilty, and the King pardons the whole town. This illustrates how the citizens’ collective power not only enabled them to overcome tyranny, but also to avoid being punished for seeking justice.

Significantly, the townspeople only take up this collective action because of the Commander’s tyranny, and the play implies that they are only justified in doing so because he was so cruel. When the judge forces the villagers to plead their case to King Fernando, they explain how the Commander wronged them, declare their intentions to be the King’s loyal vassals, and ask him to be merciful—all of which convinces the King not to punish them. In this way, the play suggests that class hierarchies and power disparities are necessary and appropriate with a model ruler, while still maintaining that collective action is sometimes justified when facing a tyrant.



LOVE AND RESPECT

The two primary romantic couples in *Fuente Ovejuna* are the villagers Laurencia and Frondoso and King Fernando and Queen Isabel. Both of these relationships are based in deep mutual respect: Frondoso protects Laurencia from the Commander and always considers what she wants in their relationship, while Fernando and Isabel value each other's wise counsel and are openly affectionate toward each other. Outside of romantic love, the townspeople's love for each other is also based in mutual respect—like when Esteban, Laurencia's father, expresses his love for Frondoso when Frondoso does him the courtesy of asking permission to marry Laurencia. This contrasts with the Commander, who often expresses sexual desire by abducting and raping the village women, leading the villagers to rise up against him. In exploring different ways of expressing love and desire, the play suggests that harmonious love requires mutual respect, while lust without respect only creates discord.

Laurencia and Frondoso's relationship illustrates how true love is based on mutual respect, and that kind of love will in turn lead to harmony. At first, Frondoso declares his love for Laurencia openly, but she never really considered marrying him. However, after Frondoso protects Laurencia from the Commander's assault, she grows immediately fonder of Frondoso and agrees to marry him, amazed that he would prioritize her safety over his own. Thus, Frondoso's love and respect for Laurencia inspires her own love for him, showing how respect in a relationship provides a strong foundation for mutual love. Moreover, after Laurencia agrees to marry Frondoso, he asks her father, Esteban, for her hand in marriage. Esteban says he is "grateful to [Frondoso's] love / That [he] has shown such honesty" and tells Frondoso he can marry Laurencia. Thus, the respect that Frondoso affords not only Laurencia but her father bolsters Frondoso's bond with his future father-in-law, which makes their marriage even more joyful as a result. Then, when Frondoso and Esteban discuss the issue of a dowry, Esteban suggests asking Laurencia what she thinks of the matter. Frondoso replies, "Of course / No point in going against a person's wishes." Frondoso's regard for Laurencia directly opposes the Commander's lack of respect for Laurencia's wishes (as he forces himself on her despite her protests). The fact that Frondoso is the person who wins Laurencia's love, then, illustrates the importance of love and mutual respect in a strong, happy relationship.

Queen Isabel and King Fernando's relationship echoes Laurencia and Frondoso's, and they demonstrate how mutual respect not only leads to harmony in marriage but also harmony in society. In the first scene between Isabel and Fernando, they discuss how best to defeat King Alonso's army, and Isabel gives input freely on Fernando's strategy. When she suggests that Fernando strike Ciudad Real immediately, Fernando agrees, preparing Manrique to leave without "a

moment's respite," saying that this is the "best way forward." Even though Fernando has greater power as a male monarch in this time period (the 15th century), Fernando values Isabel's tactical opinions and insight, showing the respect he affords her. It is well-known throughout Spain that Isabel and Fernando have a strong bond. Frondoso sings a song with lyrics stating that Fernando and Isabel "suit each other very well," and that Saint Michael, who guards the gates of Heaven, will one day let them in. The song implies that their mutual respect and admiration not only makes their love strong but also makes them worthy of Heaven. The King and Queen's love is evident when they reunite at the end of the play in *Fuente Ovejuna* after traveling separately to the town—seemingly not having seen each other for some time. Fernando comments that it is "a joy to see [her] once again," and Isabel responds that it is a "welcome opportunity." Isabel then reports that Manrique was able to take back Ciudad Real, and that Castile is at peace. The King replies, "You are the one / Who fought to bring that peace." Thus, their mutual respect and love not only gives them a strong marriage, but the play also suggests that by working together (Isabel giving guidance and the King giving orders), they create greater harmony throughout Spain at large.

The love between the two primary couples of the play contrast with the Commander's sexual desire, as his disrespectful treatment of the women in the town causes complete disorder—even resulting in his own death. Throughout the play, the Commander assaults women in the town, including Laurencia. Unlike Frondoso, who makes sure he has Laurencia's consent in their relationship, the Commander has no such respect for Laurencia. When he comes upon her in the woods, he immediately assaults her and tells her there's "no point resisting"—clearly indicating that she is fighting his advances and that he plans to overpower her anyway. But with Frondoso's help, Laurencia is able to escape, and Frondoso nearly kills the Commander as a result. This sequence shows how the Commander's disrespect prevents him from satisfying his lust and even endangers him. Laurencia is not the only woman the Commander abuses—he even admits, "I love / These easy women well and pay them ill," suggesting that he does not pay any respect to the women in town as he pursues them. Ultimately, however, the women and the men retaliate for this abuse, killing the Commander. Thus, the Commander's lack of respect for others not only prevents him from forming a true, loving relationship but causes so much disorder in the town that the villagers feel they have to murder him to stop him. As the two primary couples in the play demonstrate, the best foundation for harmony both in society and in a relationship is through love that's built on mutual respect.



HONOR

From the Middle Ages to the late 1400s, when *Fuente Ovejuna* takes place, the concept of honor

was accorded only to men of noble standing—commoners did not have honor. This prejudice survived into the Spanish Golden Age, the time in which Lope de Vega was writing. However, around this time in the early 16th century, attitudes began to change about what constituted honor, and the play reflects this shift in values. Throughout the play, the Commander, a man of noble birth, is often referred to as an “honorable man.” However, his actions are anything but honorable, as he assaults the women and men in the town without cause. By contrast, the Commander repeatedly claims that the villagers do not have honor (because they are not of noble birth), but they are shown to be morally upstanding—trying to protect the women’s virtue or respecting the King and Queen, for instance. In this way, the play reflects the idea—a rather radical one at the time—that honor does not derive from one’s social rank. Instead, honor derives from a person’s moral virtue.

The Commander is a member of the nobility, but his domineering behavior towards women and disregard towards peasants demonstrates that noble birth doesn’t necessarily make a person honorable. The play establishes that the Commander is a nobleman when Esteban thanks the Commander for allowing the peasants to sit at a council meeting. Esteban says, “It falls / To noblemen to grant true honour. Those / Who have no honour cannot grant it.” This statement highlights how, at the time, noblemen are the only ones who have honor and who can grant respect to others—peasants are not worthy of this treatment unless the nobility deem them so. And yet the peasants quickly critique the Commander because he abuses the women in the town: an alderman in the town tells the Commander, “There are doubtless some who wear the **Cross** [a sign of high social rank] / You place upon their breast whose blood / Is far less pure than ours.” When the Commander questions this statement, the alderman notes that “bad deeds” stain a person’s blood. In this way, the alderman suggests that despite having a higher social rank and noble bloodline, the Commander and others who wear the Cross may not necessarily be as honorable as the peasants in the town. The play also emphasizes how honor codes among nobles don’t necessarily align with moral virtue. Frondoso saves Laurencia from the Commander’s sexual assault by pointing a **bow** and arrow at the Commander. Attempting to back away, the Commander laments, “Am I, a man of worth, to turn / My back upon a peasant? / I shall not break the rules of chivalry.” The Commander’s statement is ironic, as he shows that he is more concerned with keeping up chivalry (the code of honor associated with nobility) than actually acting in a chivalrous manner—as his treatment of Laurencia is anything but honorable. Highlighting this irony illustrates socially dictated codes of conduct or rank do not necessarily equate to upstanding moral virtue.

The citizens of Fuente Ovejuna show themselves to be much

more morally upstanding than the Commander, reinforcing that honor doesn’t necessarily derive from social rank, despite the prevailing attitudes. The Commander establishes the idea that peasants do not have honor because they are part of the lower class. When the peasants try to stick up for their worth, saying they deserve respect, the Commander states, “You believe / You have honour? You’ll be claiming next / You are knights of Calatrava!” In this way, the Commander illustrates that only those who have social rank—like the knights of Calatrava—can have honor, implying that it is ridiculous that the villagers believe they might have the same honor. Yet the peasants often have greater virtue than the Commander throughout the play. Frondoso is a clear example, as he saves Laurencia from the Commander’s assault, prompting her father Esteban to say that Frondoso is “an honourable boy.” While Frondoso is only a peasant in the town, his deeds reveal his integrity—unlike the Commander, whose “bad deeds” stain his high standing. Jacinta, a peasant woman whom the Commander abducts, also notes this distinction. She says, “My father is / An honourable man. Not of / Such noble birth as you, my lord, / But nobler in his deeds and actions.” The word “noble” is important, as it shows that just because a person isn’t a “noble,” they can still act more “nobly” than people like the Commander who are given honor at birth.

At the end of the play, the peasants restore their honor in the only way they feel they can: by killing the Commander to prevent him from abusing them further. As such, the play becomes a cautionary tale, warning those of high social rank that they have to bolster their socially accepted honor with true moral virtue; meanwhile, even peasants who act with virtue can earn greater respect and entitlement to life than corrupt noblemen.



POWER AND CHRISTIANITY

While the primary plot of *Fuente Ovejuna* focuses on the villagers’ rebellion against the Commander, a secondary subplot focuses on national political conflict across Spain. The Master of Calatrava, prompted by the Commander, attacks the key stronghold of Ciudad Real in the name of King Alonso of Portugal. Meanwhile, Queen Isabel of Castile and her husband King Fernando of Aragon (known together throughout Spain as “the Catholic Kings”) work to recapture that city for Castile. Though they both work to conquer the same city, these two sets of political figures have dissimilar motives: while the Master and the Commander are rash and work in their own self-interest, the Catholic Kings are aptly referred to as merciful and just “saviors.” Ultimately, Isabel and Fernando triumph, while the Commander is killed, and the Master humbly asks the Catholic Kings for forgiveness for his treachery. This contrast suggests that the pursuit and holding of power is only justified if it is rooted in Christian values like justice, mercy, and peace—rather than self-interest,

glory, or vengeance.

The play immediately establishes that King Fernando and Queen Isabel are just and merciful rulers, aligning their right to power with their Christian values. When the Master and the Commander conquer Ciudad Real, two aldermen from the city travel to King Fernando and Queen Isabel's court. The men call Fernando the "Most Catholic King Fernando / Whom Heaven has sent from Aragon / To be our help and savior in Castile." In this way, the aldermen emphasize that King Fernando's rule derives from a divine right because his actions are informed by Christian values. The aldermen go on to say that they want help in retaking the city so that they can continue to be the King's subjects, suggesting that his Christian values even cause the people to *want* to be ruled by the King. This suggests that his power in Spain and his desire to take Ciudad Real are justified because of those values. The citizens of Fuente Ovejuna also recognize the Catholic Kings' virtue, as they note that the "heavens have chosen [the King] to become / The ruler of Castile" and that the Catholic Kings will soon "bring peace / To all Castile." Like the people in Ciudad Real, the villagers in Fuente Ovejuna recognize that the Catholic Kings act in the interest of Christian values like peace and mercy, and therefore they are justified in maintaining and pursuing their kingdom.

In contrast to King Fernando and Queen Isabel, the Master and the Commander are driven by self-interest and glory, and those motivations are portrayed as being at odds with Christian values. At the play's outset, the Commander convinces the Master to conquer Ciudad Real, noting that the Master should prove himself as "worthy" of his position. The fact that the Commander is most interested in gaining glory on the campaign—treacherously betraying the just and merciful Catholic Kings to do so—shows that the Commander only has self-interest, and his power is not rooted in Christian values. In a rousing speech, the Commander says that the Master should live up to his family's past deeds and turn his sword "red as the **Cross** / Upon [his] breast." The mention of the Cross is particularly notable, because it is the emblem of the military Order. But it highlights how the Master's motivations—bloodthirstiness and glory—are actually at odds with the Christian values of peace and mercy. The play again emphasizes the Master's lack of Christian mercy when he discovers that the villagers in Fuente Ovejuna killed the Commander: he declares that he will take 500 men and "raze / [The town] to the ground." Later, King Fernando criticizes this impulse and takes the power of punishment out of the Master's hands. This again suggests that the Master's vengeful and rash instincts, which are not rooted in Christian values, make him unfit to hold power over the town.

The final fates of the play's political leaders reinforce that holding power is only justified if those leaders act with Christian values. When the villagers in Fuente Ovejuna rebel against and kill the Commander for his abuse, they shout "Long

live King Fernando! Death to all / False Christians and foul traitors!" In this way, the villagers underscore that the Commander's false Christianity and treachery makes him an illegitimate leader, which is what justifies their decision to murder him. The Master, meanwhile, humbly begs the King and Queen for forgiveness, noting, "I was misled both by [the Commander] and my self-interest." The King accepts his penitence, reinforcing the King and Queen's mercy while also illustrating that the Master is worthy of his position only when he is being humble and pursuing peace, rather than pursuing self-interest. Lastly, the King and Queen establish peace in Ciudad Real and also pardon the citizens of Fuente Ovejuna for their deeds. In the play's final scene, Frondoso thanks the King for being "the wisest ruler" and the villagers express how glad they are to be the King's vassals. As such, the play demonstrates that only the pursuit of peace, justice, and mercy justifies rule.

Some historical context illustrates why Christian values were so important in Spanish rule. In 711 C.E., Muslim Moors occupied much of the Iberian Peninsula in southern Spain. By the late 1400s, when the play takes place, the Muslims were largely expelled by Christian Kingdoms in Spain and were concentrated in Grenada (a southern region in Spain). In the play, the citizens look to their rulers to protect them from "the Moorish infidel." Thus, Christianity is so integral to the play's model rulers because of the real threat the Spaniards perceived at that time from forces who opposed Christianity.



LANGUAGE, KNOWLEDGE, AND TRUTH

In several short scenes, the townspeople in Fuente Ovejuna discuss various forms of language, including poetry, prophecy, academic books, or even everyday euphemisms. In each instance, one of the townspeople criticizes these forms of language, noting that flowery, overly sweet, or convoluted language can be intentionally misleading and make others think that someone is knowledgeable even if what they are saying is baseless or empty. Through these short discussions, the play emphasizes that praiseworthy, complex, or intelligent language should not be automatically accepted as expertise or truth.

The townspeople of Fuente Ovejuna emphasize that euphemism or academic writing (particularly language that is typical of people in the city rather than rural areas) can be misleading. When the play introduces the villagers for the first time, the villagers discuss how people in the city follow the fashion of using the opposite of what they mean when they want to insult others. For example, Laurencia criticizes their description of people who show mercy as "weaklings," or that someone who speaks their mind is considered "rash." Frondoso also notes that when they want to be polite, they temper their language: a blind person might be called "myopic." In this way, Laurencia and Frondoso demonstrate that euphemistic

language can be used to manipulate others' perceptions, because this language doesn't convey the full truth. Leonelo, a villager who has just returned from the University of Salamanca, emphasizes the same point about books, which have just come into fashion. He notes that books allow "so-called experts" to publish "pure rubbish in / The guise of wisdom," and also explains that people are able to publish in someone else's name to harm their reputation—and in fact, this often happened to the playwright, Lope de Vega. Thus, the play criticizes how language and books can distort people's perceptions of an author's expertise.

Flowery language is equally criticized, because people believe it is praiseworthy—but in reality, it has no substance or truth. Leonelo notes that the only thing he learned from the University of Salamanca is how to write "long-winded stuff, all froth / That only leads to more confusion." In this way, the play critiques how language that is often praised or believed to convey expertise actually leads to less understanding. And Mengo, who is illiterate, criticizes flowery language and argues that it is unnecessary. He notes that untalented poets are like men making fritters, throwing deformed lumps of dough in the pot and then covering up the fritters' bad taste afterward with honey. This metaphor speaks to how bad poets try to cover up their lack of talent with sweetness. By contrast, Mengo uses a plain metaphor in order to effectively communicate his message, showing the power of that plain language in contrast to bad poetry's oversweetness and clumsiness.

The play's discussions of prophecy and wisdom also illustrate that people who claim expertise are often those who know the least, while a person willing to learn is the wisest of all. Esteban notes that forecasters (prophesiers in the town) are often useless; they "carry on like theologians / Debating what has and will occur," and that "the one who seems / The wisest is the greatest fool." This implies that those who try to boost their reputation by claiming their prophecies are accurate or by giving a great debate, in reality usually prove to be the most useless—another critique of those who try to use language to claim expertise. The play contrasts these "experts" with the King and Queen, who listen to reason. When the King learns that the villagers in Fuente Ovejuna killed their lord, the Commander, he sends a judge to investigate what happened and then he and Isabel question the villagers themselves. At first, they call the villagers "assassins" and "villains," but hearing the villager's plain tale about the Commander's abuses convinces the King to change his mind about the villagers, and he does not punish them. For this, Frondoso calls the King "the wisest ruler," suggesting that true wisdom is not about formal education or complex language. Instead, it's about a willingness to listen to reason and make proper judgment accordingly.

De Vega had a personal investment in language and knowledge: up until this point, most plays were written in complex language and verse. De Vega countered this standard, saying of the

common audience member, "Let us then speak to him in the language of fools, since it is he who pays us." Thus, the villagers' attitudes in Fuente Ovejuna are in keeping with this conviction: plain language is the clearest and best, while complex, flowery language doesn't truly convey knowledge or truth.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE CROSS

While the Cross is usually a clear symbol for Christianity, in the play it more specifically represents the Master and the Commander's false Christian values. The Cross is the emblem of the Military Orders in Spain, and the Master and Commander wear the Cross embroidered on their clothes (in Calatrava, the Cross is red). The Cross is a traditional symbol of Christianity, particularly in the context of the Order, because the Order was a Christian religious military organization founded to reconquer Spain from the Muslim Moors. Thus, the Cross seems like it would indicate the virtue and holiness of the Order's endeavors. But in the play, characters only point out the Cross when the Master and Commander are being hypocritical, particularly when their actions do not align with the Christian values they claim to stand for. In the play's opening scene, the Commander notes that the Master should conquer Ciudad Real and prove his bravery by turning his sword "red as the Cross" on his chest. Thus, the Cross is associated not with the Christian values of justice and mercy, but with vengeance and glory instead.

Later, many of the characters say that they would mistake the Commander for the devil if he weren't wearing a Cross. The Cross thus points out the Commander's hypocrisy—his violent, lustful actions (like sexually assaulting local women) do not align with the Christian teachings that the Cross represents. Esteban also notes that King Fernando and Queen Isabel are going to rid villages of dishonorable men like the Commander, "whose power comes from wearing crosses." In this way, Esteban suggests that while the Cross is an indicator of power in Spain, it also highlights the Commander's lack of virtue when wielding that power.



ANIMALS

The play often uses animal characterizations to suggest that some of the men in the play adopt a predator-prey relationship with women. The Commander is often likened to a "beast" or a "wolf," indicating how he preys on the women in town, particularly Laurencia. Even Flores, the Commander's servant, is described as a "falcon," indicating how

he, too, is like a bird of prey in procuring women for the Commander.

Likewise, the play aligns its female characters with animals that are commonly hunted, like birds, deer, and rabbits. For example, Laurencia is described as a “young bird” and compared to a “deer” and a “hare.” All of these animals suggest Laurencia’s innocence and the fact that she is being preyed upon by the Commander. The comparison of Laurencia to a hare is particularly notable, as the hare was a Medieval symbol for the vagina—further stressing that the Commander is in pursuit of sexual conquest.

On the other hand, Frondoso notes that he and Laurencia will be like turtle-doves when they marry—another symbolic description, as turtle-doves have the reputation of being faithful and are associated with love. Unlike the Commander, whose descriptions clearly indicate his chase of Laurencia, Frondoso shows his respect for Laurencia by portraying them as equals in love.



THE BOW

The bow has two layers of symbolic significance: first, it symbolizes the Commander’s predatory nature, just as the **animal** descriptions emphasize the same idea. One day, while the Commander is hunting deer, he comes across Laurencia. Setting down his bow, he forces himself on her. In this sense, the play ties the Commander’s deer stalking with his pursuit of Laurencia, as he essentially treats her like an animal to be hunted. Notably, the bow and arrow are also associated with the image of Cupid and therefore with love, and so it is symbolic that the Commander drops it when forcing himself on Laurencia—indicating that there is no love between them.

While the bow represents the Commander’s predatoriness toward women, it also indicates Frondoso’s protectiveness toward those same women. After the Commander drops the bow in the woods, Frondoso then picks up the bow and points it at the Commander to rescue Laurencia. This demonstrates Frondoso’s honor, as he is putting himself at great risk (threatening the town’s overlord) in order to protect Laurencia’s chastity. Notably, Frondoso never attacks the Commander with the bow—explaining that he knows his place and doesn’t want to kill the Commander—but instead walks off with it because he worries the Commander will try to kill him. Thus, the bow and its implied targets draw a sharp contrast between the Commander’s lack of virtue and Frondoso’s chivalry and honor.

in 2008.



Act 1 Quotes

☞☞ COMMANDER: Respect’s the key
To men’s good will; discourtesy merely
Makes enemies.

ORTUÑO: If such men knew
How everyone detests them and longs
To see them grovel, they’d sooner die.

FLORES: Such people are so hard to take!
Such surliness and lack of manners.
Amongst equals it’s pure folly;
Towards inferiors sheer tyranny.

Related Characters: Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán (speaker), Master Rodrigo Téllez Girón, Flores, Ortuño

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.9-1.17

Explanation and Analysis

At the play’s outset, the Commander complains to his servants Flores and Ortuño that the Master is making him wait—explaining that this is very disrespectful behavior. The Commander’s statement speaks to how crucial respect is in forming strong, harmonious bonds of love—even when that love isn’t romantic, but is (as in this case) a love between superiors and inferiors. As the Commander implies, being discourteous only makes enemies. While the Commander is clearly talking about his relationship with the Master (who is the Commander’s superior), it also applies to the Commander’s relationship with the villagers in Fuente Ovejuna. Like the Commander says, his discourtesy toward the villagers only turns them into his enemies and creates conflict in the town.

Flores and Ortuño’s statements foreshadow what is to come. Ortuño’s harsh statement also comes to bear: when the villagers eventually rise up against the Commander, they take great pleasure in throwing the Commander from his window and dismembering him afterward. Likewise, Ortuño and Flores are tormented and made to grovel when the women in the village attack them. Flores’s comment suggests that disrespecting those of lower rank is tyranny, yet this is exactly how the Commander and his henchmen treat the villagers. The play illustrates how the only way to combat that tyranny is to band together and take vengeance on tyrants. However, this statement also acknowledges that leaders who treat their inferiors with love and respect do



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *Fuente Ovejuna* published

not make the same enemies, reinforcing how mutual respect can foster harmony not only in relationships, but also in society.

☛ Take your sword, so far unstained
By blood, and turn it red as the Cross
Upon your breast. How else can I
Address you as Master of the Cross
If the one is red and not the other?
Let both of them be crimson, and you,
Worthy Girón, crown the immortal temple of
Your famous ancestors.

Related Characters: Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán (speaker), Queen Isabel, King Fernando, King Alonso, Master Rodrigo Téllez Girón

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.95-1.102

Explanation and Analysis

In the play's opening scene, the Commander convinces the Master of Calatrava to conquer Ciudad Real in the name of King Alonso of Portugal, capturing it from King Fernando of Aragon and Queen Isabel of Castile. The Commander's arguments for why the Master should attack Ciudad Real demonstrate that he is motivated less by Christian values than by self-interest and glory—to prove his worth as the Master of Calatrava. The statement that the Master should “crown the immortal temple” of his ancestors also demonstrates his self-interested motivation to use political power to cement his and his family's legacy. This is a large difference from King Fernando and Queen Isabel, who are described as saviors working in the interest of peace.

The Commander's reference to the Cross puts these differences in stark relief. The Cross, a classic symbol of Christianity, is embroidered on their clothes as the insignia of the military Orders in Spain, and in Calatrava, the Cross is bright red. In saying that the Master should turn his sword as red as that Cross, the Commander is ironically highlighting how he is motivating the Master through unchristian impulses—like egging on his bloodthirstiness or his desire for glory—rather than Christian motivations like the pursuit of justice or mercy.

☛ I'd rather see beef and cabbage
Dancing to a merry, bubbling tune,
And when I'm tired from travelling,
A slice of bacon wedded to
An aubergine. Then later on,
While supper's cooking, a bunch of grapes
(God protect the vines from hailstones!),
And, when it's ready, a tasty fry
Of chopped-up meat with oil and peppers.
And so at last happily to bed,
To say my prayers, including “lead
Me not into temptation!” I much
Prefer all this to the tricks and lies
Of rogues with all their talk and promises
Of love. Their only aim's to leave
Us in the lurch. They take us to bed
For their pleasure; when morning comes,
It's “Goodbye, treasure!”

Related Characters: Laurencia (speaker), Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, Pascuala

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1.164-1.181

Explanation and Analysis


In this monologue, Laurencia describes to Pascuala an ideal day in her life—one that she doesn't want to share with men because she believes that their only desire is to have sex and then abandon women as soon as they have gotten what they want. Laurencia's language initially suggests idyllic and domestic images, like the beef and cabbage “dancing” together, or the bacon “wedded” to an aubergine (an eggplant). Using these pleasant images, Laurencia suggests that her life is better off without men, because she is able to keep her honor and act as she wishes. She doesn't have to wed or dance with men because being alone brings a different kind of joy and harmony into her life.

The harmony of these images is contrasted with the discord brought into her life by the men, who are “rogues” baiting her with “tricks and lies.” Laurencia simply wants to be respected as a “treasure,” rather than cast off as she implies here. The passage also implicitly refers to the Commander, who is exactly the type of rogue Laurencia refers to, as he is notorious for seducing or assaulting women and then immediately discarding them. The language here illustrates how, when relationships are not built on love and respect (as the Commander's pursuits are not), those relationships create conflict—and indeed, the Commander will soon violently disrupt Laurencia's life when he assaults her and

abducts her at her own wedding.

●● Be constant and they call you boring,
 Polite and you're a flatterer;
 Be kind and you're a hypocrite,
 A Christian's someone seeking favour.
 If you've got talent, that's just lucky,
 You tell the truth, that's impudence;
 Put up with things and you're a coward,
 When things go wrong, it's your come-uppance.
 A modest woman is a fool,
 Pretty but chaste, she's into seduction;
 If she's virtuous, she's...no, no,
 That's it, end of demonstration!

Related Characters: Laurencia (speaker), Pascuala, Mengo, Frondoso, Barrildo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.252-1.263

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Laurencia and the other villagers discuss the way that people in cities use euphemisms in order to insult others. Laying out several examples, Laurencia shows the problem with this kind of language, because it can easily obscure the truth about a person. This builds on another discussion in which Frondoso illustrates how, when people in the cities want to be polite, they use language that softens a person's problems. As such, this monologue conveys that euphemistic language can be used to manipulate others' perceptions, because this sort of language doesn't convey the full truth.

It is also notable that Laurencia ends on the idea that modest, chaste, or virtuous women are particularly vulnerable to these kinds of attacks—so much so that Laurencia doesn't even want to repeat the language because it upsets her, or because she doesn't want to reinforce stereotypes. This makes sense, because Laurencia is exactly this type of woman—and, as she expresses in her first scene in the woods with Frondoso, she is wary of tarnishing her reputation and her honor with it. In this way, Laurencia recognizes that she can earn honor, but that the way people talk about her can drastically alter whether they think of her as honorable. Thus, her criticism of this language is not only general but also personal, as she aims to maintain a good reputation.

●● COMMANDER: I'm talking to you, my pretty creature,
 And to your friend. You belong to me,
 Do you not?

PASCUALA: We do, my lord, but not
 In the way you mean.

COMMANDER: Step inside. My men are there. Don't be afraid.

LAURENCIA: I shall if the magistrates come too. One of them's my father, but otherwise...

COMMANDER: Flores!

FLORES. Yes, sir?

COMMANDER: Why aren't they doing what I say?

FLORES: Get in there!

LAURENCIA: Get your hands
 Off us!


FLORES: Come on, you stupid girls!

PASCUALA: Whoa now! For you to lock the stable-door?

FLORES: Inside! He wants to show you all
 The spoils of war.

Related Characters: Flores, Laurencia, Pascuala, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán (speaker), Esteban, Ortuño

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.474-1.486

Explanation and Analysis

After the Commander returns from his victory over Ciudad Real, the Commander instructs his servants Flores and Ortuño to lock up Laurencia and Pascuala so that he can later rape them. This illustrates several key dynamics in the play: first, it shows how the Commander abuses his power. Knowing that the women have little recourse, and also little means of escape as individuals, the Commander easily abuses them. This is a stark contrast from the same scene moments earlier, when the villagers showed deep respect for the Commander by showering him with gifts and praise. However, he doesn't return that respect, instead acting as a tyrant and using his power to victimize the women.

This is the first real evidence of the Commander's dishonor that the audience observes firsthand, showing that just because he is a nobleman doesn't necessarily mean that he is automatically worthy of honor or respect. Laurencia, meanwhile, tries desperately to preserve her honor, trying

to use her father, Esteban, to protect herself from the Commander. This demonstrates her virtue and her complete resistance to the Commander's foul plans.

Lastly, the Commander's actions demonstrate how lustful relationships that aren't based in mutual respect cause disorder. Here, the Commander clearly does not respect the women, as he has his men assault Laurencia and Pascuala, and he treats the women like his property—or like prey, a running motif throughout the play. The Commander and his men treat the women like horses in trying to back them into the stable—an idea reinforced by Pascuala's "Woah now!" responding in kind or perhaps as an attempt at levity in a dark situation. Because the Commander treats them like animals, they feel completely disrespected and try to fight against him, illustrating how his lack of respect in his pursuit only causes turmoil in the town.

☞ LAURENCIA: So God go with you
In the hunt, sir... I mean for deer.

If it weren't for that cross upon
Your chest, I'd take you for the devil, such
Is your pursuit of me!

COMMANDER: Such language is
Offensive! I'll put my bow aside
And let my hands overcome those airs
And graces!

Related Characters: Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, Laurencia (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:   

Page Number: 1.626-1.633

Explanation and Analysis

When the Commander encounters Laurencia in the woods, he immediately tries to assault her. This passage touches on three of the major symbols in the play, all of which illuminate a core piece of the Commander's character. First, the references to animals: when the Commander enters, he immediately compares Laurencia to the deer that he is hunting, indicating that he is taking on that same predatory nature in pursuing her. The fact that he compares her to an innocent and vulnerable creature like a deer (and one which is often hunted) reinforces that she is innocent and equally vulnerable to his advances. He also doesn't treat her with

respect; instead, he treats her as a lesser being that he can pursue.

Second, the bow ties into the same metaphor of the Commander hunting for Laurencia, reinforcing his predatory nature. The bow takes on another meaning here as well, as the bow and arrow is a symbol of Cupid (the ancient Roman god of love). Thus, in putting the bow aside in order to grab Laurencia, the Commander indicates that he is putting love aside and is motivated by lust instead.

Lastly, Laurencia's reference to the Cross (which is embroidered on the Commander's clothes as an emblem of his military Order) highlights the Commander's lack of virtue. The Cross is normally associated with Christianity, but in calling the Commander a devil, it ironically underscores how he is not motivated by Christian values and doesn't carry the honor that his rank should afford him—reinforcing the idea that honor is not dictated simply by one's social standing.

☞ COMMANDER: Am I, a man of worth, to turn
My back upon a peasant? I shall not break
The rules of chivalry!

FRONDOSO. I don't
Intend to kill you. I know my place.
But since I need to stay alive,
I'll keep the crossbow.

Related Characters: Frondoso, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán (speaker), Laurencia

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.652-1.657

Explanation and Analysis

After Frondoso rescues Laurencia before the Commander can assault her in the woods, the Commander struggles with how to leave while Frondoso is pointing a bow at him. This exchange highlights how the Commander and Frondoso are foils of each other. It is ironic that the Commander is so concerned here with maintaining the rules of chivalry—the moral code associated with knights in the Medieval era. The code prioritizes bravery, courtesy, and gallantry toward women, and so the Commander's treatment of Laurencia up until this point has been anything but chivalric. This suggests that just because the Commander was born into nobility doesn't necessarily

mean that he acts honorably.

Fronoso, by contrast, acts very honorably: first, he protects Laurencia from the Commander's advances. In addition, he doesn't kill the Commander even when he has a chance—even when he knows the Commander would likely kill him if the situation were reversed. Indeed, after this exchange, the Commander does vow to kill Fronoso for his insult. In this way, Fronoso proves the opposite point about honor: that someone who is born a peasant can still be honorable despite the fact that they weren't born with the honor afforded to people of nobility.

The way that each of them use the bow further reinforces their disparity. The Commander uses it to hunt, indicating that he is always on offense, preying on weaker beings (like Laurencia) without any respect for them. Fronoso, on the other hand, only uses the bow to defend Laurencia's honor, indicating that his love is built on respect for her. The fact that Laurencia ultimately falls in love with Fronoso as a result of this action indicates that love based on mutual respect is what creates lasting, harmonious relationships. The Commander's lust, on the other hand, only creates conflict and puts everyone (including himself) in danger.

using prophetic language or by giving great theological debates—are often given much more authority and trust that they deserve. In relaying how these forecasters make others believe that they know “God's secrets,” Esteban even suggests that people prop themselves up as having some kind of divinity just because of the prophetic language they use.

But Esteban's statements that these men “claim” to tell the future and “carry on,” suggests that people often take their claims and debates as truth, when in reality they don't actually know anything. Esteban's final claim that “the one who seems / The wisest is the greatest fool” is an indictment that the play makes not only of these prophesiers, but of anyone who uses flowery or praiseworthy language in order to convince others that they are knowledgeable, or that what they are saying is true. Instead, the play suggests through this (and many other scenes in which the villagers discuss language) that plain language is the clearest and best.

Act 2 Quotes

●● I cannot stand these forecasters
Who, knowing nothing, claim that they
Can tell the future, making us
Believe that they alone have access to
God's secrets. They carry on like theologians,
Debating what has and will occur,
But, as for the present, which is
What matters most to us, the one who seems
The wisest is the greatest fool.

Related Characters: Esteban (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.9-2.17

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Act 2, Esteban and a town alderman enter discussing what the town should do with its stocks of grain, and Esteban notes that he doesn't trust forecasters' predictions of the weather. This short assessment is another aspect of the play's criticism of how language can be manipulated to imply knowledge. In Esteban's eyes, those who claim to be able to tell the future—whether by

●● BARRILDO: There's such
A lot of books these days, everyone thinks
He's an expert.

LEONELO, Which is why I think
They know far less. It's not condensed
Enough, you see. Instead of summaries,
It's all long-winded stuff, all froth
That only leads to more confusion.
[...]
As well as this,
There are those so-called experts who
Have published pure rubbish in
The guise of wisdom, and those who,
Driven by envy, publish in the name
Of someone else they hate, merely to harm
His reputation.

Related Characters: Leonelo, Barrildo (speaker), Esteban

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.43-2.69

Explanation and Analysis

After Esteban and an alderman discuss the problems with prophesiers, Leonelo and Barrildo enter discussing the problem with books and expertise, thus continuing the same thread of critique. Like Esteban's earlier discussion, Leonelo

illustrates the problems with formal education: he wasn't taught greater knowledge, he was only taught "long-winded stuff" and "froth." Far from this giving him greater knowledge, Leonelo suggests that using this kind of language is actually counterintuitive, because it causes more confusion. In this way, the play critiques how language that is often praised or believed to convey expertise actually leads to less understanding.

Both Barrildo and Leonelo also reinforce how language can be used to actively manipulate others. Talking about "so-called experts" implies that Leonelo does not think that these publishers have expertise, and yet they publish "rubbish" under the assumption that people will take what they say as fact simply because they have been published in a book. Barrildo even emphasizes how then, people who read this "rubbish" mistakenly believe that they, too, are experts, because they have read about the topic—demonstrating how language and books can be used to give false credentials to people.

Leonelo's last example is a very personal one to the playwright, Lope de Vega, as many people tried to pass off their works as his in the time that he was writing. In this way, Leonelo's statement further critiques how language and books can distort people's perceptions of an author's expertise.

ALDERMAN: You speak
Unjustly. To speak of us like that
Is to deny us honour.



COMMANDER: You believe
You have honour? You'll be claiming next
You are knights of Calatrava!


ALDERMAN. There are doubtless some who wear the Cross
You place upon their breast whose blood
Is far less pure than ours.

COMMANDER: You think
My blood makes yours more impure?

ALDERMAN: Bad deeds have never cleansed, my lord.
They merely stain.

Related Characters: Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán (speaker), Esteban

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.122-2.128

Explanation and Analysis

When several of the villagers gather for a town Council meeting with the Commander, they bring up the Commander's disrespect toward both the women and the men in the town. Their ensuing exchange illustrates the standard assumptions about honor at the time the play is set (the 15th century), and also how the play is trying to disrupt those norms. The Commander's shock at the villager's assertion that they have honor or deserve honor reflects the accepted beliefs at the time: that only people of noble birth have honor. Therefore, he asks if the peasants believe they are knights of Calatrava to imply the ridiculousness of their suggestion that they, too, have honor, because only if they were knights would they be entitled to the honor they request.



And yet, the play also suggests that the common wisdom isn't true. First, the Commander's own disregard and disrespect for the villagers illustrates that just because he is of noble birth doesn't necessarily mean that he automatically warrants being treated with honor. The alderman's lines underscore this idea, as he emphasizes that some people who wear the Cross (a symbol of high social rank embroidered on one's clothing) do not have as much honor as the villagers have because their bad deeds undermine that honor. In fact, the Commander is one of those very people, as the alderman goes on to say. He, too, wears the Cross (which is also a symbol of Christian virtue). But because of his mistreatment of women and mockery of peasants, the Commander negates that symbol of honor and virtue and undermines the idea that others should respect him because of it.

FLORES: These village scum defy us!
You'd do well to raze their village to
The ground. They are nothing but trouble.

MENGO: My lord, I beg you. Punish these men
For what they try to do to us.
In your name they would take this girl
Away with them, despite the fact
She's married and has honourable parents.
I ask for leave to take her home.

COMMANDER: I give them leave to take revenge
On you. Hand over the sling at once!

Related Characters: Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, Mengo, Flores (speaker), Ortuño, Jacinta

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.294-2.303

Explanation and Analysis

When Ortuño and Flores try to abduct Jacinta, Mengo bravely attempts to defend her and he appeals to the Commander. This exchange illustrates the dynamics between the common villagers and the Commander. First, it demonstrates why it is so hard for the villagers to avoid the Commander's tyranny—his power in the town means that he can enlist others like Flores and Ortuño to do his bidding. Thus, from a pure physical standpoint, the villagers are at a disadvantage. Additionally, this exchange shows that the Commander has political power. Mengo's only option when facing Ortuño and Flores is to appeal to the Commander, because he has no other recourse for finding justice for Jacinta. In this way, too, the Commander has the upper hand over the villagers and is able to do whatever he wants because he holds all political and legal power.

Mengo's appeal to the Commander's is notable because of its assumption of the Commander's honor. In saying that Flores and Ortuño are abducting Jacinta in the Commander's name, Mengo suggests that the men are poisoning the Commander's reputation in attacking Jacinta for the Commander. Yet the Commander doubles down on his and his men's actions, again suggesting that the villagers are the ones in the wrong and that they have not earned being treated honorably. Yet the Commander's actions show that just the opposite is true: Mengo is acting honorably, while the Commander is not.

Lastly, the detail of Mengo's sling is a crucial one, as it alludes to the biblical story of David and Goliath, wherein David used stones and a sling to take down the giant Goliath. This episode implies that Mengo is similarly an underdog in the face of the Commander, and it also foreshadows how the underdogs (the villagers) will eventually succeed in taking down the giant (the Commander).

☛ **COMMANDER:** Why run away? Would you prefer
A yokel to a man of my
Great rank?

JACINTA: They offended my honour.
To take me for yourself is not
The way to give it back to me.

COMMANDER: To take you for myself?

JACINTA: My father is
An honourable man. Not of
Such noble birth as you, my lord,
But nobler in his deeds and actions.

COMMANDER: You think these peasant insults will
Dispel my anger? Come!

Related Characters: Jacinta, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán (speaker), Mengo, Ortuño, Flores

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.320-2.331

Explanation and Analysis

After Flores and Ortuño carry Mengo off to flog him, the Commander abducts Jacinta and asks why she avoids him. Jacinta's reply illustrates two key points about the Commander. First, that his behavior toward her offends her honor—which is to say that he treats her with immense disrespect. To “take [her] for [himself],” or to rape her, dishonors her, and their exchange illustrates how this kind of disrespect only creates discord and conflict, as it did when Mengo attempted to rescue her from Flores and Ortuño.



Moreover, Jacinta underscores the play's overarching point that honor does not necessarily derive only from one's inheritance—deeds are key to a person maintaining honor. As Jacinta explains here, her father might not be a “noble,” but his *actions* are “nobler,” playing on the word to subvert the idea that one's rank in society equates to one's honor. Clearly, the Commander treats her incredibly dishonorably, proving that he is not an honorable person despite his high rank. And though the peasants aren't usually discussed in terms of honor or viewed as worthy of honor in the Commander's eyes, they're more honorable because of their moral virtue. The Commander seems to think that his “great rank” warrants kind treatment from her, but the play underscores that respect is what earns respect in return.

FRONDOSO: Laurencia, I want
To know if you care for me at all;
If the loyalty I've shown has made
Me in the least deserving. The town
Already sees the two of us as one
And cannot understand why we
Are not. Why not forget all past
Disdain? I'm asking you to marry me?

LAURENCIA: Then you and all the village too
Had better know...that I agree.

FRONDOSO: I kiss your feet for such a favour.
I promise you it gives my life
New meaning.

Related Characters: Laurencia, Frondoso (speaker), Pascuala, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.350-2.362

Explanation and Analysis

After Frondoso saves Laurencia from the Commander's assault, the two meet up once more in the woods to discuss what happened, and Laurencia agrees to marry Frondoso. Laurencia's acceptance of his marriage proposal is a key development for both characters. Laurencia acknowledges that Frondoso truly respects her, both because of his loyalty, as he notes, and again when he kisses her feet. This is an action typical of a peasant honoring a monarch in a court and thus reinforces how much he respects her and treats her as someone of high honor—just as he did in the first act when he called her and Pascuala “lovely ladies.” Laurencia thus sees how much Frondoso values her and would treat her with the honor she deserves as his wife.

Likewise, Frondoso's actions have also shown his honor, particularly when contrasted with the tyrannical Commander. The fact that he protected Laurencia instead of trying to rape her, as the Commander did, makes him “deserving,” which is what prompts Laurencia to say yes. The fact that the town already thinks the two of them are meant to be married only reinforces this idea that they are both honorable people whose marriage will create great joy in the town. In this way, this exchange illustrates how mutual respect is what fosters love, and that love then brings about harmony.

You must
Have seen a fellow making fritters.
He throws great lumps of dough into
A pan of boiling oil until it's full.
Some come out swollen, some deformed,
Some totally misshapen, some
Are fine, others not, some burnt to death,
Some soggy. And that's your poetry too.
The subject matter is the poet's dough.
He throws it in the pan, which is
His paper, and after it spoonfuls
Of honey to cover up the taste
And make it sweeter.

Related Characters: Mengo (speaker), Barrildo, Frondoso, Laurencia

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.520-2.532

Explanation and Analysis



At Laurencia and Frondoso's wedding, Mengo hears a song that Barrildo is singing and complains about the saccharine lyrics. His monologue uses an extended metaphor of a person making fritters to illustrate how bad poets try to cover up their dreadful poetry with sweetness, but flowery, convoluted or overly sweet language does not convey truth or expertise.

In the first few sentences, Mengo demonstrates that poets often use too much language—tossing “lumps” of dough (suggesting a clunky idea) into the pan until it is full (which also indicates that the poets are overly wordy). Then, the lumps come out misshapen, burned, or soggy, but the cook then uses honey to make it palatable. Similarly, the poet doesn't end up with a good product but just makes the language overly sweet to cover up their incompetence. This continues the play's overarching critique of using language as a way of manipulating others' perceptions—in this case, making others believe that the poet is praiseworthy, when in reality, they lack talent.

Mengo's own language actually proves his point. Unlike the poets he is criticizing, Mengo uses a clear and plainspoken metaphor in order to make his argument. In fact, Mengo has stated prior to this that he is actually illiterate, but he effectively communicates his message with simple language, demonstrating that flowery language is unnecessary to being a great writer or orator.

●● The village-girl came down the path
 From Fuente Ovejuna,
 She was soon followed, by the knight
 Who came from Calatrava.
 She hid, amongst the branches there,
 She felt such shame and fear;
 Pretending she had not seen him,
 She drew the leaves around her.
 “Why try to hide yourself away?
 You really are quite pretty.
 My eyes can see through walls of stone
 When someone takes my fancy.”

Related Characters: Frondoso, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, Laurencia

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.546-2.557

Explanation and Analysis


At Laurencia and Frondoso’s wedding, the musicians sing a song about a village girl and a knight from Calatrava. Although the characters in the song are never named, the story has clear parallels with Laurencia (who is a village girl from Fuente Ovejuna) and the Commander (who is a knight from Calatrava, and who followed Laurencia in the woods). The song again reinforces the Commander’s predatory nature, as the girl hides herself in “fear” and “shame” much like Laurencia is afraid of losing her honor at the Commander’s hands. Even though the knight is trying to compliment the girl—just as the Commander often called Laurencia pretty—the way he ignores the girl’s wishes to be left alone and continues pursuing her illustrates how a lack of respect in a relationship causes discord.

The fact that the Commander’s entrance interrupts this song illustrates how ominous and frightening the situation is. Just as the knight in the song can see through walls of stone, ordinary barriers—like the fact that Laurencia has just gotten married—will not stop the Commander from attempting to abduct and rape her. His lack of respect for Laurencia, like the knight’s disrespect of the girl, creates complete chaos at the wedding.

●● There are new rulers in
 Castile who’ll introduce such laws
 And orders as will put an end
 To all disorder. When they have ceased
 To be engaged in war, they would
 Do well to rid their villages
 And towns of men whose power comes
 From wearing crosses. The King alone
 Should be allowed to wear the cross.

Related Characters: Esteban (speaker), Frondoso, King Alonso, Esteban, Laurencia, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, Queen Isabel, King Fernando

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.612-2.621

Explanation and Analysis



When the Commander interrupts Laurencia and Frondoso’s wedding and tries to carry Frondoso off, Esteban critiques the Commander for his vengeful behavior. This passage highlights the differences between the Commander and Fernando and Isabel—the “new rulers” in Castile. While the Commander’s tyranny and lack of respect for the villagers clearly cause disorder, Esteban suggests Isabel and Fernando will bring peace to the town, and to Spain more broadly. This involves not only fending off King Alonso’s army, but also bringing peace to the villagers by ridding them of tyrants like the Commander.

Esteban also makes a distinction between these sets of rulers by showing how Isabel and Fernando (the Catholic Kings) are motivated by Christian values, whereas the Commander is not. Esteban implies here that the Commander only gets his power “from wearing crosses,” referring to the Cross that the Commander wears, which indicates his social rank. This critique is two-fold: first, it highlights that the Commander receives his power arbitrarily, because he happened to be born into a “noble” family—but this doesn’t necessarily mean that the Commander has honor. Second, it shows that the Commander doesn’t actually follow or act on the Christian values that the Cross actually represents, which suggests that the Commander isn’t actually fit to rule over the town. The King, however, does act based on Christian virtues, and therefore he does have the right to rule and to wear the Cross. Both of these points illustrate that the Commander is a tyrant unfit to rule, while the King and Queen are just, merciful leaders who will bring peace to Spain.

Act 3 Quotes

☞☞ What honourable rites indeed,
If there is not a single one
Of us whose life that criminal
Has not dishonoured? Tell me now if there
Is someone here whose honour is
Unscathed. You are as one, I think,
In your complaints. And so I say
To you: if you have common cause,
What are you waiting for?

Related Characters: Esteban (speaker), Frondoso, Laurencia, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.15-3.24

Explanation and Analysis

When the villagers meet to discuss what to do about the Commander arresting Frondoso and abducting Laurencia, Esteban points out that all of them have been completely dishonored by the Commander's behavior. This is a turning point in the play: up until this point, the Commander has been able to abuse the villagers largely because he has preyed on them as individuals. Even at the wedding, where many of them were gathered, he was still able to abuse them (even beating Esteban over the head with his own staff) because they had not yet thought about working together.

Additionally, up until this point, Esteban has tried to appeal to the Commander by calling out his "virtuous" nature and his honor—both at the Council meeting at the beginning of Act 2 and even at the wedding. But here, Esteban has turned a corner, finally recognizing that the Commander's actions mean that he is truly without honor—and as a result of his actions, he is also taking away the villagers' honor because he refuses to treat them with respect. As such, Esteban posits that the only way to restore their honor—to escape the Commander's abuse—is to work together. Only by recognizing their "common cause" and acting together to address that cause, the play suggests, can they overcome the Commander's tyranny.

☞☞ JUAN ROJO: So what do you think
The town should do?


ALDERMAN. The town should die,
Or kill these tyrants. We are many, they
Are few.

BARRILDO: Take arms against our overlord?

ESTEBAN. In the eyes of God the King alone
Is our lord, not men like these,
No better than wild animals.
If God is on our side, why should we be
Afraid?

Related Characters: Esteban, Barrildo, Juan Rojo (speaker), King Fernando, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.48-3.56

Explanation and Analysis

When the villagers gather in order to determine what to do about the Commander, they weigh different options. As the alderman notes, the townspeople are "many," while the Commander and his henchmen are "few," indicating that the villagers are starting to recognize their collective power, and that that collective power is necessary in order to overthrow a tyrant. Their hesitation about this plan, however, indicates some of the context regarding nobility and the monarchs at the time the play is set (the 15th century). It would have been unusual for the people at this time to rise up against a nobleman, as monarchies (rather than democracies) were still the most common form of government. Because of this, the play still recognizes monarchy and divine right—the fact that the King is given the right to rule by God, which Esteban emphasizes here.


But the villagers make a distinction in explaining that just because a King has the right to rule and is aligned with God doesn't necessarily mean that all noblemen share the same benefit. In calling the Commander a "wild animal," Esteban again emphasizes the Commander's predatory and dishonorable nature in how he has treated all of them. Moreover, Esteban suggests that God isn't on the Commander's side, indicating that the Commander doesn't act virtuously or based on Christian morality, and therefore, the Commander does not have the right to rule in the same way that the King does. All of these points emphasize that revolution is justified and necessary when dealing with a

lawless tyrant, but model rulers who adhere to Christianity are to be obeyed.

☛ When Fernán Gómez took
Me off, you let him do it, just
As shepherds stand and watch the wolf
Which steals their sheep! They threatened me
With knives, abused me with their words,
Did everything they could to force
My chastity to their foul desires!
You see my hair? You see these marks,
These cuts and bruises? These stains of blood?
Do you believe that you are men
Of honour? Do you believe you are
True fathers? How can you see me here
And not feel all the pain I feel pierce
Your very souls?

Related Characters: Laurencia (speaker), Esteban, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.85-3.98

Explanation and Analysis

When the villagers have gathered to discuss what to do about the Commander's tyranny, Laurencia enters and gives an account of how she escaped the Commander. Her rousing speech first emphasizes how much the Commander has dishonored her, and in doing so, how he has treated all of them collectively with dishonor—a collective abuse that requires collective action in response.

Laurencia's description illustrates how the Commander treats her with disrespect, as it is implied that he and the other men tortured and physically abused her in order to try to rape her. Her simile that the Commander is like a wolf and she is like a sheep reinforces the use of animals to describe the Commander's predatory nature toward women, and especially toward Laurencia. She is innocent and vulnerable—and hoped the other villagers, represented by the shepherds, would protect her—but in the end, the wolf (the Commander) was able to steal her away.

The Commander's lustful mistreatment is in contrast to Laurencia's relationship with Frondoso, which is based on love and respect. And the fact that the Commander treats

her this way only causes chaos and riles up both Laurencia and now the other villagers to counter his cruel actions. As such, the play reinforces that disrespect in relationships not only causes discord within those relationships, but also animosity and conflict at large, as Laurencia's speech makes the other villagers decide to band together and kill the Commander for his tyranny.

☛ VILLAGERS: Injustice does
Not wait!



COMMANDER: You have to tell me what Injustices they are. I'll put them right, I swear.

VILLAGERS: Fuente Ovejuna! Long Live King Fernando! Death to all False Christians and foul traitors!

COMMANDER: Listen!
I am your lord and master.

VILLAGERS: The Catholic Kings
Are our lords and masters!

Related Characters: Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán (speaker), Queen Isabel, King Fernando

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.112-3.115

Explanation and Analysis

When the villagers arrive at the Commander's house, intending to kill him, the Commander attempts to make amends, but the villagers refuse. In this exchange, the play suggests that collective action is not only needed but justified in overthrowing tyranny. Several aspects of the dialogue illustrate that the villagers are finding power as a collective entity. First, they speak in one unified voice, emphasizing how they are acting as one entity with one central message: that they want to rectify the injustice the Commander has wrought and kill him. They also use "Fuente Ovejuna!" as a rallying cry, indicating that they are acting as the town itself in defending all of their honor.


The play also illustrates why the villagers are justified in choosing to kill the Commander instead of hearing him out. First, the play has repeatedly shown how abusively the Commander has treated them, and how many chances he had to correct his behavior. He has shown himself to be motivated by greed and lust—completely at odds with Christian values, as the villagers note that the Commander

is a false Christian. By contrast, King Fernando and Queen Isabel, whose authority the villagers recognize, clearly act according to those Christian values, inherent in the moniker (the Catholic Kings) that Spaniards give them. As such, the play argues that those who act tyrannically and do not adhere to Christian values do not have the right to rule, condoning the Commander's murder at the hands of the aggrieved villagers.

●● The people there
Have mercilessly killed their lord
And master: Fernán Gómez murdered by
His faithless subjects, vassals who,
Believing they'd been wronged, rose up
Without good cause. These people called
Him tyrant, and on the strength of that
Committed this foul deed. They broke into
His house, and though he offered, as
An honourable man, to see
To their complaints, not only did
They fail to heed his words but rained
Upon the Cross upon his breast
A thousand cruel blows.

Related Characters: Flores (speaker), Queen Isabel, King Fernando, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.277-3.290

Explanation and Analysis

After the villagers of Fuente Ovejuna kill the Commander and attack his henchmen, Flores manages to escape and travels to King Fernando and Queen Isabel's court to inform them about what happened. Flores's speech is a completely biased account, and he uses Christianity-based rhetoric in order to try to convince the King and Queen of his argument. Noting that the villagers are "faithless" and that they "mercilessly" killed their lord, Flores portrays them as acting in a way that opposes Christian values. In addition, the description that they brought blows onto the Cross embroidered in his clothing also plays into the symbolism of the Cross, as it is most commonly used as a symbol of Christianity.

Yet the passage is full of dramatic irony, as the play has repeatedly illustrated that it is the Commander himself who

does not adhere to Christian values. Therefore, it's the Commander who doesn't have the right to wear the Cross, claim that he is an "honourable" man, or rule the people of Fuente Ovejuna. His dishonorable and abusive actions are what led the people to rise up, and the fact that Flores can obscure this truth so fully adds to the play's overall skepticism of using language as a tool for manipulation.

The dramatic irony leads to a satisfying conclusion: rather than taking Flores at his word, the King proves himself to be interested in fairness, so he dispatches a judge to find out the truth. Thus, the King proves not only that he is a leader based in Christianity—interested in achieving true justice and ultimately peace—but also that he is not easily swayed by Flores's rhetoric. Instead, he wants to listen to all sides of an argument and judge accordingly, and the play's positive portrayal of honor and fairness supports this measured consideration.

●● Long life to lovely Isabel
And our King Fernando,
They suit each other very well,
Their love is strong, their love is true;
One day Saint Michael at the gates,
Will welcome them and let them in;
Till then long life to both of them,
And punish tyrants for their sins!

Related Characters: Frondoso (speaker), King Alonso, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, King Fernando, Queen Isabel, Laurencia

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.336-3.341

Explanation and Analysis

After killing the Commander, the people of Fuente Ovejuna sing in praise of King Fernando and Queen Isabel. This song, sung by Frondoso, illustrates some of the King and Queen's key characteristics, and how their relationship reinforces the moral values that the play supports. First, like Frondoso and Laurencia, the King and Queen are portrayed as a model couple. The fact that they "suit each other well" suggests mutual respect between them, like when they discussed what to do about Alonso's army and the conflict in Ciudad Real. This mutual respect is what makes their love so "strong" and "true," illustrating how the best and most harmonious relationships are founded in this mutual respect.

Secondly, the song reinforces their Christian values. “Saint Michael at the gates” refers to the Saint in Christianity who guards the gates of heaven. Thus, Frondoso emphasizes that the King and Queen are virtuous, even implying that their love and values make them worthy of Heaven. This is what makes them model rulers and what prompts Frondoso and the other villagers to cheer their long life, showing how vital mutual respect and love are in creating harmony, and how rulers’ power is only justified when they act with Christian values in mind. Frondoso’s final statement, to “Punish tyrants for their sin!” suggests that the Commander did not act with this virtue in mind and therefore did not have the right to rule in the way that Fernando and Isabel do. Thus, Frondoso’s song not only shows how the villagers are loyal to model rulers, but also illustrates how tyrants deserve to be ousted and punished for their cruelty.

●● MENGO: No more, no more! I’ll tell you.

JUDGE: Who killed the Commander?

MENGO: Fuente Ovejuna! Our little town!

JUDGE: Who ever saw such scoundrels! They mock

Their pain. The very one I thought

Would crack is most defiant. Release them!

This has become most tiresome.

Related Characters: Judge, Mengo (speaker), Laurencia, Frondoso, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.508-3.514

Explanation and Analysis

When the judge tortures the villagers in Fuente Ovejuna, Mengo sticks to the story despite the fact that the judge—and Laurencia and Frondoso, for that matter—believe that he is going to give up their story. This exchange once again affirms the power of working as a collective, and how that collective power is necessary to overthrow tyranny. Mengo, going along with the plan Esteban laid out, declares that Fuente Ovejuna killed the Commander. This language is particularly important because it echoes the rallying cry of the villagers when they were rising up against the Commander: “Fuente Ovejuna!” This demonstrates that they were working as a collective to overcome tyranny in that moment, and now, they are still working collectively to try to escape punishment for ridding themselves of that abuse.

The fact that Mengo calls Fuente Ovejuna “our little town” only reinforces the fact that, objectively, Fuente Ovejuna and its people don’t have a lot of power—they are a simple village made up of peasants. But when banded together, they are able to overcome someone much more powerful, like the Commander. Moreover, the fact that the judge and others thought that Mengo was going to crack and give up what really happened, shows that not only do they have power as a collective, but that each individual voice in that collective is crucial and can gain a lot of power in joining forces.

Because this is what leads the judge to release all of the villagers, the play suggests that the citizens’ collective power not only enabled them to overcome tyranny, but also to avoid being punished for seeking justice. Because the villagers avoid punishment, the play suggests that collective action and violence can be necessary—and even justified—in order to overcome tyranny.

●● I come to seek

Forgiveness, knowing that I was
Deceived and ill-advised in causing you

Displeasure. I was misled both by
Fernán Gómez and my self-interest.

I humbly beg that you forgive me.

If I am worthy of such favour,

I swear that from this moment on

I am your loyal and obedient servant.

The great campaign you plan against

Granada...I promise you you’ll see

The valour of my sword.

Related Characters: Master Rodrigo Téllez Girón (speaker), King Alonso, Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, King Fernando, Queen Isabel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.561-3.573

Explanation and Analysis

In the play’s final scene, the Master asks King Fernando and Queen Isabel for forgiveness for his treachery in attacking Ciudad Real on behalf of King Alonso. This marks a key turning point for the Master’s character and also reinforces the play’s viewpoint on what makes a model ruler. Here, the Master recognizes that before, he was misled by the Commander and that he was motivated by self-interest—illustrating that the Master’s desire for power

over Ciudad Real was not based in Christian values. This contrasts with Isabel and Fernando, who are depicted as merciful and just in their desire to bring peace to Castile.

The Master now takes on these Christian values, as he is penitent and humble, and he wants to be loyal. He also shows his greater desire to be honorable, illustrating that he knows honor has to be earned and is not simply given to a person based on their position at birth. The Master's reference to Granada further underscores his desire to adhere to Christian values, as Granada was at the time (the 15th century) held by the Muslim Moors. The campaign against Granada was thus a decidedly Christian campaign, and the Master's interest in it suggests that he no longer wants to hold power simply for himself but in order to spread Christianity across Spain.

The fact that the King and Queen immediately welcome the Master into their court not only shows their own Christianity—their mercy and forgiveness toward the Master—but it also underscores that only when the Master is acting based on Christian values is he then worthy of holding and pursuing power. Leaders who act in their own self-interest are not worthy of holding that power and therefore either have to repent (like the Master) or are ousted (like the Commander).

☞ ESTEBAN: Your Majesty, we wish
To be your loyal vassals. You are
Our rightful King, and so we have displayed
Your coat of arms in our town,
We pray you will be merciful,
Accepting our innocence as our defence.

KING: There is no written evidence
As proof of your guilt, and so,
Although this was a serious crime,
You must be pardoned.

Related Characters: King Fernando, Esteban (speaker), Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, Laurencia, Frondoso, Queen Isabel

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 3.646-3.655

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the play, Esteban and the other villagers plead their case to the King as to why they shouldn't be punished for killing the Commander, and he agrees to pardon them. The play's outcome thus provides several morals: first, in contrast to the play's criticism of flowery language and purported expertise, the King here shows what true wisdom looks like. The villagers were given the chance to tell their tale plainly about the abuse they suffered at the hands of the Commander. And rather than punish the villagers without hearing their tale or being swayed by Flores's description of what happened earlier in the act, the King shows his willingness to listen and make a proper judgment accordingly. Frondoso ends the play by calling the King the "wisest ruler," suggesting that this willingness to listen and judge reasonably—rather than supposed expertise—constitutes true wisdom.

Second, the fact that the villagers escape punishment by acting as a collective demonstrates that collective action is necessary to overcome tyranny and avoid punishment in bringing that justice. However, the play notably emphasizes that the villagers are only justified in doing so because of the Commander's tyranny. This is a key nuance: the play doesn't seem to advocate for total revolution or democracy. Rather, it emphasizes that model rulers—like the King and Queen—are able to rule effectively. And when they fulfill their part of the social contract (protecting the rights of the citizens), the citizens should, in turn, honor and respect their rulers.

The play also affirms that the King and Queen are model rulers. Again, Esteban emphasizes their Christian values of mercy and justice. And because of their reputation for these qualities, the townspeople *want* to be ruled by them (just as the alderman from Ciudad Real wanted to be ruled by them). This suggests that only model rulers, acting in the interest of Christian values, are worthy of holding their power.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán enters, flanked by his two servants Flores and Ortuño. The Commander asks his servants if the Master of Calatrava, Rodrigo Téllez Girón, knows that the Commander has arrived. It is disrespectful to make the Commander wait, especially given his high rank.

The Commander affirms that respect is the key to men's goodwill, and his servants agree that disrespecting an equal shows a lack of manners, while disrespecting inferiors is sheer tyranny. But Flores and Ortuño also assure the Commander that the Master is young, and so he doesn't know any better. The Commander counters, explaining that becoming the Grand Master of the Order of Calatrava should have been enough to teach the boy respect.

The Master enters, apologizing to the Commander and explaining that he was only just told of the Commander's arrival. The Commander says that this is no way for the Master to treat his most obedient servant, as the Commander's love for the Master and the Commander's social rank demand respect in return. The Master swears by the Order's **Cross** on their clothes that he honors the Commander as much as he honors his own father.

The Master asks for news of the war, but the Commander provides the Master's backstory instead: the Master of Calatrava owes his position to his father, who stepped down when the Master was eight years old. The Master governed with his uncle, Juan Pacheco, until the man's recent death, leaving the Master to rule alone at age 17. But the Commander implores the Master to continue to carry out his family's wishes. Now that King Henry the Fourth of Castile has died, the Master's family supports Henry's daughter Juana and her husband, King Alonso of Portugal, to rule Castile. However, others support Henry's sister Queen Isabel and her husband, King Fernando of Aragon.

The opening lines of the play introduces the way the society of the play (15th-century Spain) conceives of honor. A high social rank—like the Commander's—automatically makes people honorable and thus worthy of respect.



The Commander's statement that disrespecting people of inferior rank is tyranny foreshadows the main plot of the play, wherein the Commander himself disrespects the people of Fuente Ovejuna. Moreover, the Commander's beliefs fall in line with the idea that high rank automatically makes a person honorable. He argues that simply by earning his title, the Master should then know how to be honorable.



The Master and Commander's interaction here reinforces that men of a certain high social rank (as denoted by the Order's Cross) are automatically given honor and respect. Additionally, the Commander argues for the value of mutual love and respect: the Master should treat the Commander the same way the Commander treats him.



The Commander's speech here sets up two ideas. First, the Commander's treachery: at the time Lope de Vega was writing, King Fernando and Queen Isabel were real-life figures who were renowned throughout Spain for being just and merciful rulers (and the ultimate victors in this battle for succession). So, the Commander's suggestion that the Master support Alonso instead establishes the Commander as opposed to the moral values that Fernando and Isabel stand for. Moreover, the speech shows that the Master isn't interested in pursuing justice or peace—instead, he's worried about his family's social standing because they support Alonso. Thus, both of these characters desire power for self-interested reasons.



The Commander urges the Master to call upon the Knights of Calatrava to take Ciudad Real, a key stronghold between Castile and Andalusia that is loyal to Fernando and Isabel. The Commander says that the Master should surprise people who think he is too young and prove his bravery in battle, staining his sword with blood so that it is as red as the **Cross** embroidered on his clothing. The Master agrees, saying that he will support his family in their just cause, prove his courage, and turn his sword the color of the Cross.

The Master asks if the Commander has soldiers that he can provide from his town, Fuente Ovejuna. Though the Commander might be able to garner a few soldiers, he explains that his vassals are humble people who are more accustomed to fields than battles. The Master and Commander agree to summon their respective men and ride out to Ciudad Real.

The scene shifts to Fuente Ovejuna, and Laurencia and Pascuala enter. Laurencia says that she hopes the Commander never comes back to Fuente Ovejuna. Pascuala is surprised to hear Laurencia say this so fiercely. Laurencia asks Pascuala if she thinks the Commander would marry her, and when Pascuala replies no, Laurencia says that she wants nothing to do with him. Many girls in the village have put their trust in the Commander and seen their “reputation shot to pieces.” She explains that the Commander has been pursuing her for a month and even got his servants to gift her with clothes and necklaces on his behalf. The servants frightened her but didn’t persuade her at all.

Even though Laurencia “a young **bird**,” she feels that she’s too tough for men. She describes her ideal day: cooking herself a nice breakfast, a lunch of “beef and cabbage / Dancing to a merry, bubbling tune.” After traveling all day, she would eat a slice of bacon “wedded to” an eggplant. Later on, she would eat grapes, meat, and peppers. Then at night, she could say her prayers and go pleasantly to sleep. She’d much rather live like this than experience rogues’ “promises of love,” which are often empty. She declares that men just want to go to bed with women, and when the morning comes, the men are gone.

Under normal circumstances, the cross is a key symbol of Christianity and its values of justice, peace, and mercy. But here, the Commander’s encouragement that the Master turn his sword as red as the Cross in order to prove his worth in battle highlights how the Commander and Master act in their own self-interest and are spurred by a desire for glory and bloodshed instead.



Even before the scene shifts to Fuente Ovejuna, the Commander paints a picture of the villagers there as humble, peaceful people, in contrast to the battle-ready and high-ranking Commander—establishing the power disparity between them already.



While the opening scene set the stage for the Commander’s villainy on a national scale, Laurencia and Pascuala’s discussion illustrates the Commander’s abuse on an individual level. Laurencia suggests that the Commander is a womanizer and even an abuser, and the way that he quickly discards women shows him to be anything but honorable. It is notable that Laurencia seems open to the potential of getting involved with the Commander if he wanted to marry her. But because she implies that he simply wants sex, she is frustrated that he would treat her with such a lack of respect that would cause her to lose her good reputation. Moreover, this passage implies that it’s difficult for the women to avoid the Commander’s abuses because his status affords him servants who help him target the women. As individuals, the women do not have the same physical or social power.



Laurencia’s description of her ideal day is notable, as images like cooking and language like “wedded to” connote marriage and a traditional, domestic lifestyle. This is ironic when contrasted with the fact that she wants to achieve this idyllic vision alone rather than as a man’s wife. By contrast, men’s empty “promises of love” and lack of respect for her would fill her life with discord, emphasizing that lust without respect only creates conflict. In addition, the fact that Laurencia refers to herself as “a young bird” is key, because animals symbolize the predator-prey relationship between men and women throughout the play. Laurencia’s description suggests that she is innocent but also hints at the fact that she might be preyed upon.



Pascuala agrees with Laurencia, explaining that when men stop loving women, they are as ungrateful as **sparrows**. In the barren winter, sparrows enter the farmer's house and eat crumbs from his table. But in the summer, when fields are green and food is plentiful, the birds quickly forget about the farmer's kindness. Laurencia concludes that men should never be trusted.

In that moment, Mengo, Barrildo, and Frondoso approach, greeting the "lovely ladies." Laurencia is surprised that Frondoso is calling them ladies, and Frondoso replies that he's following the fashion. Nowadays, he says, a schoolboy is called a graduate, someone who is blind is called myopic, someone with a big mouth is an entertainer, someone who is cowardly simply lacks initiative. Big feet are the sign of a solid man, while the pox is only a runny nose—and so this is why he calls them ladies. Laurencia replies that that's just "city talk" when they want to be polite.

City people, Laurencia explains, use a different speaking style when they want to insult a person: they say the opposite of what they mean. A serious man is a bore; someone who speaks their mind is rash; talent is just lucky; putting up with things is cowardice; a modest woman is a fool; a chaste woman is into seduction. Mengo comments that Laurencia is very witty.

Mengo, Barrildo, and Frondoso want Laurencia and Pascuala to settle a debate for them. Mengo admits that he's not a philosopher and can't read, but he believes that love does not exist, while Barrildo and Frondoso think that this is ridiculous. Barrildo explains that there is harmony in this world and in Heaven, and that harmony cannot exist without love. Mengo clarifies that he thinks love is natural and exists in every man—but his point is that people love themselves, and no one else.

Pascuala carries on the bird imagery to demonstrate men's fickleness. Just as birds greedily eat the farmer's crumbs in the winter, men love women when it's convenient for them. But then, just as birds leave in the summer when fields are green, men leave when there are other options for them men to pursue. The metaphor implies that Pascuala and Laurencia simply desire faithfulness and respect in their relationships—that these qualities form strong bonds of love, which men like the Commander rarely show them.



That the women are shocked that Frondoso would call them "lovely ladies" illustrates how commoners aren't usually treated with the same kind of respect as people of high birth. Thus, his statement comes across as unusual because he is affording Laurencia and Pascuala honor that they wouldn't normally get. Laurencia's criticism of this statement as "city talk" (as opposed to the plain, honest language the villagers use) introduces the play's skepticism about euphemistic language, because it doesn't always tell the full truth.



Laurencia's additional criticism of "city talk" illustrates how euphemisms in language can be used to outright lie, including in the case of smearing a woman's reputation. Again, the play criticizes this kind of language, because of its power to manipulate what others think in a devious way.



Even though Mengo, Barrildo, and Frondoso are arguing, they all agree on the fact that love is natural and that it's the basis for harmony not only on an interpersonal level, but on a societal level. Their agreement supports the play's overall implication that mutual respect provides a strong foundation for love, and consequently, for harmony between people.



Pascuala argues Mengo's point, explaining that men and women love each other passionately. But Mengo says that this is self-love, because people just want pleasure for themselves. Barrildo recalls the village priest talking about Plato's idea of love, which is that people should love only the soul and virtue of the person they love. Pascuala says that these kinds of topics even challenge great thinkers like professors and academics. Laurencia agrees that Mengo shouldn't get tangled up in supporting the academics "idiocies" and says he should be grateful that he hasn't experienced love.

Mengo asks who Laurencia loves, and she says she only loves her honor. Barrildo asks who won the debate, and Pascuala says that the sacristan or the priest would have a better answer than she or Laurencia can give, because they've never been in love. Frondoso comments that Laurencia's coldness is his answer to the debate.

Just then, Flores enters, and Laurencia comments that he's a "fine **falcon**." Flores explains that he's just come from the battle at Ciudad Real, and he describes the scene: the Master was a splendid sight on a mighty stallion, and the Commander sat at his side. The city took up arms, as the people were loyal to Fernando and Isabel. In response, the Master seized the town. Those of high status who offended his name had their heads cut off, while those of lesser social rank were gagged and flogged. Flores explains that the Master is feared there but also loved, because even though he is young, the people believe he can one day beat the Moors and take back Granada.

Flores concludes that the Master has been generous to everyone, including the Commander—he gave the Commander many gifts taken from Ciudad Real and even from the Master's own estate. Then, Flores points out that the Commander will be arriving in Fuente Ovejuna imminently, and that the villagers should receive him joyfully. At that moment, the Commander and Ortuño walk into the square with Esteban and Alonso, magistrates of the town. Musicians sing, praising the Commander and the Master for conquering the enemy, and wishing the Commander a long life.

Laurencia again criticizes people who purport to have great knowledge, as she says that the academics' complicated debates are really just "idiocies" because the arguments become so convoluted. While the debate on love is never fully settled, the play does go on to illustrate that the best kinds of loving relationships are based in selflessness or mutual respect, disproving Mengo's theory.



Frondoso's comment here hints at his love for Laurencia, but Laurencia's statement that she loves her honor is telling. Despite Laurencia's lower class status, she has already established her honor in showing how important her reputation and her chastity are to her—and she wants to act in a way that will maintain that honor.



Laurencia's description of Flores as a "falcon" reinforces the symbolism of animals in the play. The falcon is a bird of prey, paralleling how Flores preys on women for the Commander. Additionally, the description of the battle reinforces how the Master is only interested in vengeance, rather than justice or peace, as he kills the nobility in the town simply for a perceived personal offense. The reference to Granada also touches on why Christian values were so important for leaders to have at this time. Grenada was controlled by Muslim Moors, and so many Christian Spaniards were afraid of being conquered by people who were not Christian, making Christianity integral to monarchs' reign.



The villagers' warm welcome for the Commander shows how they treat him with the honor and respect that would be afforded a lord in the feudal system. However, the fact that the Commander already has a reputation for abusing the women in the town illustrates that he isn't necessarily treating the townspeople with honor or respect in return.



After the musicians' song, the Commander thanks the people for receiving him so warmly. Esteban presents the Commander with humble gifts: baskets filled with polished pots of clay, a flock of geese, and salted hogs. The townspeople don't have fancy gifts like weaponry, horses, or gold, but Esteban comments that the townspeople's love is the purest gold of all. Esteban also presents him with wine and cheese, saying that these gifts represent the love that the Commander deserves. The Commander thanks Esteban heartily, and the musicians sing their song again.

As the crowd disperses, the Commander instructs Laurencia and Pascuala not to leave. He points out that Laurencia was cold to him the other day, and he says that Laurencia and Pascuala belong to him. He tells them to step inside a nearby stable, where his men are waiting. Laurencia says she'll only do so if her father, Esteban, comes as well. Frustrated that the women aren't obeying him, the Commander instructs Flores and Ortuño to bring the women inside and lock the stable door. But when Ortuño and Flores try to grab Laurencia and Pascuala and pull them into the stable, they women pull away and leave, refusing to become part of the Commander's spoils.

The scene shifts to King Fernando and Queen Isabel's court. Isabel explains that they have to act fast and strike King Alonso's army—if they can control Castile, their victory will be assured. Just then, two aldermen from Ciudad Real enter. The first man explains that they've come humbly to talk to "Most Catholic King Fernando / Whom Heaven has sent from Aragon / To be our help and savior in / Castile." The man explains that they enjoyed being the King's subjects, but now the Master has conquered their city. They fought as best they could, but they were no match for him and the Commander. The King asks where the Commander is now, and the alderman says that he is in Fuente Ovejuna, which the Commander rules as he wishes, "denying his subjects any kind of happiness."

Isabel again states that they should not delay, and the King agrees. He instructs his advisor, Don Manrique, to take two armies to retake Ciudad Real and "curb / The enemy's excesses." Manrique agrees with this bold action and says that he'll put an end to their enemies' arrogance. Isabel comments that with Manrique, their triumph is guaranteed.

Here, Esteban exemplifies another type of love: that between a noble and his vassals. The townspeople show their love through gifts in exchange for protection and often land from the Commander. And like other forms of love, when that relationship is built on mutual respect, it fosters harmony throughout the town. In this passage, Esteban demonstrates that the villagers are fulfilling their aspect of the social contract in providing their love and respect.



While the townspeople show their love and respect for the Commander, he does not return that respect. He abuses his power in trying to abduct Laurencia and Pascuala, showing himself to be completely dishonorable. The women have little recourse other than fighting off the Commander's henchmen and refusing to become part of the Commander's "spoils," illustrating how they are treated like objects. This skirmish also shows why it's often hard for the women to escape their abuse, because the Commander has henchmen who can overpower them.



The alderman's speech establishes King Fernando and Queen Isabel as having close ties to Christianity—even going so far as to say that Fernando has been "sent from Heaven." This speech suggests that the aldermen believe in the concept of divine right—that monarchs receive their right to rule from God. This depiction of Fernando and Isabel as being aligned with Christian values contrasts with the Commander and the Master, who are motivated purely by greed and bloodlust. The aldermen also make clear here that the Commander has a poor reputation even outside Fuente Ovejuna for his tyranny, as they point out that he "den[ies] his subjects any kind of happiness." Again, although the Commander expects people to treat him honorably and respectfully, he doesn't reciprocate that treatment.



Isabel and Fernando's rapport underscores their relationship as a marriage of equals: she gives Fernando counsel and he takes her advice into account, establishing their mutual respect. Additionally, Fernando's note to "curb the enemy's excesses" further reinforces that the Commander and Master have overstepped, taking what does not belong to them because they are greedy and self-interested rather than motivated by a desire for peace or justice.



Back in Fuente Ovejuna, Laurencia is chastising Frondoso for interrupting her doing laundry by the stream. People constantly gossip about her and Frondoso, and she doesn't want more rumors spreading. She tells him that everyone expects their marriage, but she never gave it a thought.

Laurencia's statement that she doesn't want the villagers gossiping about her ties back to her monologue about chaste or modest women being criticized. Laurencia cares deeply about her honor, and she doesn't want gossip to tarnish her reputation. Moreover, Laurencia doesn't give marriage to Frondoso a thought because she is wary of a potential husband disrespecting her the same way the Commander does. Thus, the play illustrates how the Commander's disrespect causes conflict not only between him and Laurencia, but also between Laurencia and Frondoso.



Hurt by Laurencia's coldness, Frondoso affirms that he wants to marry her. He can't eat, drink, or sleep without Laurencia, and he wonders if this touches her at all. When Laurencia tells him that he should see a doctor, Frondoso assures her that she is his cure. He tells her that when they marry, they'll be like **turtle-doves** making music together. Laurencia says she's not in love with Frondoso, though she admits there might be a small spark between them.

Commander and his henchmen are often described as predatory animals or beasts, while Laurencia has been likened to animals that are often hunted. Frondoso, by contrast, describes himself and Laurencia as two turtle-doves symbolizes the mutual respect and love that would form the foundation of their relationship. Turtle-doves are associated with both faith and love, and this metaphor suggests that they are equals, rather than having a predator-prey relationship.



Laurencia and Frondoso see the Commander coming—he is hunting deer with a **bow** and arrow. Laurencia tells Frondoso to hide in the trees, and he does so. As the Commander approaches Laurencia, he comments that he's come across much prettier game than the **deer** he was hunting. Laurencia tries to continue washing her clothes, but the Commander stops her. He tells her that she can't possibly reject him now that they are alone, because Pedro Redondo and Martin Del Pozo's wives surrendered willingly to him. Laurencia says that the other women knew how to please him and she doesn't, and she again tries to walk away. She says that if it weren't for the **Cross** on his chest, she'd take him for the devil.

This passage reinforces the Commander's predatory nature in several ways. First, in comparing Laurencia to the deer he was hunting and in holding a bow and arrow, he indicates that he similarly is hunting her. He pursues her out of lust rather than love and completely ignores her wishes. Moreover, Laurencia's comparison of the Commander to the devil indicates the irony that the Commander wears a Cross despite acting with no regard for Christian values. All of these symbols demonstrate the Commander's lack of respect, virtue, or honor.



Setting down his **bow**, the Commander tries to grab at Laurencia, telling her not to resist. Laurencia calls out for help, and Frondoso emerges from his hiding spot in the trees. He grabs the bow, which he points at the Commander, and tells Laurencia to run away; as she leaves, she implores Frondoso to be careful. The Commander warns Frondoso to set the bow down now that Laurencia is gone, but Frondoso refuses, worried that the Commander will try to kill him with it.

The bow and arrow are a common symbol of Cupid (the ancient Roman god of love), so the Commander setting down the bow indicates that he doesn't have any love for Laurencia—only lust. By contrast, Frondoso picks up the bow not to hunt or kill the Commander, but purely as an act of defense—indicating Frondoso's higher virtue, and the fact that he respects Laurencia's wishes and wants to protect her from the Commander's tyranny. Frondoso's opportunity to kill the Commander also demonstrates how the Commander's lack of respect for women creates disorder in the town and even endangers himself.



The Commander wonders what to do, not wanting to break the rules of chivalry and turn his back on a peasant. Frondoso says he knows his place and doesn't intend to kill the Commander, but he'll take the **bow** with him to stay alive. After Frondoso leaves, the Commander vows to get revenge on Frondoso both for the insult and for thwarting the Commander's advances on Laurencia.

This exchange again indicates the disparity in honor between the Commander and Frondoso. The fact that the Commander is concerned with the chivalric code of conduct is ironic, as his behavior toward Laurencia has been anything but chivalrous. This indicates that just because someone is a noble and is familiar with these codes doesn't make them honorable. Frondoso, on the other hand, does act honorably, both in protecting Laurencia and in choosing not to kill the Commander for his offense. This illustrates that even someone who isn't high-born can act with honor.



ACT 2

Esteban and an alderman are discussing what to do about their stocks of grain, noting that the weather seems to bode ill for the year ahead. Esteban says he hates prophesiers, who worry people to death with their predictions about the future. He notes that prophesiers forecast the death of some leader, but it will happen in another country. They debate what has happened and what will happen, but “the one who seems / The wisest is the greatest fool.”

Esteban and the alderman's discussion represents another criticism of using complex or obscure language to claim expertise or higher intelligence—the same points made in the villagers' discussion of language and debate in the first act. Here, Esteban implies that those who try to boost their reputation by claiming their prophecies are accurate or by giving a great debate are usually “the greatest fool[s].”



Leonelo and Barrildo enter. Barrildo asks Leonelo about his time at the University of Salamanca, and Leonelo says that although he tried to learn the things that matter, he probably knows as much as the local barber. He says that everyone knows the same type of things that he's learned—he's just learned how to say those things in flowery language that he learned from books.

Leonelo and Barrildo's discussion reinforces Esteban's point—criticizing people who use flowery or complicated language to make themselves seem smarter, when in reality, they only know as much as (or even less than) everyone else. Again, the implication is that this kind of complicated language doesn't actually indicate greater knowledge or truth.



Leonelo laments the invention of the printing press, because even though it's protected great works, it allows “so-called experts” to publish “rubbish in / The guise of wisdom” or enables people to publish in the name of someone else to harm the person's reputation. Barrildo thinks that printing is progress, so they agree to disagree.

Leonelo's lament about the printing press also comes directly from de Vega, the playwright, as de Vega often encountered the problem of people publishing their work under his name. Thus, this criticism is very personal, and it emphasizes the potential for language to be manipulated so that “so-called” (that is, fake) experts can claim knowledge or wisdom.



Juan Rojo, another alderman, and a peasant enter discussing the Commander. Juan Rojo is shocked at how the Commander treated Laurencia, and the peasant thinks the Commander is a **beast** who should be hanged. All of the men sit on nearby benches for a Council meeting, and the Commander, Ortuño, and Flores enter together. The other men in attendance (including Esteban, Leonelo, and Barrildo) rise, and but the Commander insists that they remain seated. Esteban thanks the Commander for granting them this honor, as those without honor cannot grant it.

As the men sit, Esteban asks the Commander if he saw the greyhound they gave him. The Commander remarks that he wants Esteban to set it on a **hare** that keeps escaping him—Laurencia, Esteban's daughter. The Commander explains that Laurencia refuses to give in to his advances, as the wife of someone in this square did when she saw how taken he was with her. Esteban says that if that's true, then the woman acted improperly, and the Commander is acting improperly by speaking freely about it. The Commander sarcastically remarks that Esteban is an eloquent peasant and should read a copy of Aristotle's *Politics*.

Esteban says that Fuente Ovejuna is happy to be governed by the Commander, but there are people of great worth in the town. The other men chime in, declaring that the Commander denies them honor by speaking so vulgarly to them. The Commander remarks that they don't have honor, but the alderman responds that there are many who wear the Order's **Cross** whose blood is far less pure than that of the villagers. He says that bad deeds stain the Commander's blood. Another magistrate notes that the Commander's words also dishonor the women in the town, and his actions dishonor them even more.

The exchange between Esteban and the Commander establishes a key idea about honor at the time the play is set (the 15th century). As Esteban notes, peasants were not considered honorable, and therefore, those of high social rank (like the Commander) were the only people who could grant honor or respect to others. The play complicates this idea, however, by showing that the townspeople are very honorable (hence their shock at how the Commander treated Laurencia), while the Commander is not. Additionally, the peasant's use of the word "beast" in this exchange again reinforces the Commander's predatory nature, particularly with regards to Laurencia.



*The Commander again reinforces his lack of respect for Laurencia in likening her to another animal of prey. The hare is a particularly notable reference, because it was a medieval symbol for the vagina—emphasizing that lust is the Commander's only motivation, instead of love based on respect. And just as the Commander lacks respect for Laurencia, he also lacks respect for the other women and men in the town—dishonoring another man's wife and making fun of Esteban. Hence, the play reinforces how honor is not necessarily equivalent with social rank. In addition, the Commander's reference to Aristotle's *Politics* (a work of political philosophy that compares various forms of government) is meant as a backhanded remark about Esteban's peasant status and relative lack of education, as the Commander is implying that Esteban isn't well-read.*



Again, the play reinforces that honor is not necessarily based on rank: the alderman points out that people who wear the Cross (those who are high-ranking in social status) don't necessarily have purer blood (meaning greater worth) than the people in the town. Moreover, this passage shows that the villagers have a great deal of respect for the Commander, as they're happy to be governed by him. But there's a limit to their compliance: if he doesn't show them the respect that they show him, that equates to tyranny (as the Commander himself noted in the play's opening lines).



The Commander exclaims in frustration that these are “tedious peasant values.” He thanks God for cities, where a “man / Of quality enjoys himself / Without hindrance.” Esteban says that God lives in cities too, and punishment for bad deeds can be even swifter in cities than in towns. The Commander shoos the men out of the square, demanding that they show him more respect. Worried that they intend to plot against him, he tells them to go home separately.

Once the Commander, Ortuño, and Flores are alone, Ortuño notes that the Commander never hides his disdain for the men. Commenting that the men are not his equals, the Commander then turns his attention to Frondoso, the peasant who stole his **bow**. Flores reports that Frondoso is still in town, and the Commander is shocked that Frondoso has the nerve to point his bow at the Commander and remain in town. Flores notes that his love for Laurencia is keeping him in Fuente Ovejuna.

The Commander says he has controlled himself thus far: if he had not, the town would have been reduced to ashes in two hours. He says he’ll rein in his longing for revenge until the right time. The Commander then asks Ortuño and Flores about some of the other women in the town whom he asked his servants to woo on the Commander’s behalf. Ortuño and Flores report that some of them refused the Commander and gave them money instead, but other women said that he can have them whenever he wants, or as long as their husbands don’t find out. The Commander says, “I love / These easy women well and pay them ill.” Flores and the Commander also discuss how women who give in too easily spoil men’s anticipation, and that when things men want are easily obtained, they easily forget about them.

A soldier named Cimbranos enters and informs the Commander that Isabel’s armies have surrounded Ciudad Real, which means the Master is in danger of losing the city, which they shed so much blood to obtain. King Alonso is in danger of losing battles of his own, so though he supports the Master, he can’t provide much support. Cimbranos asks the Commander for aid, and the Commander instructs Ortuño to gather 50 soldiers and ride out. He promises Cimbranos that the city will not fall.

The Commander claims that in cities, men can be freer (or in the Commander’s case, more disrespectful and tyrannical)—but the play doesn’t necessarily support this. As Esteban notes, people without Christian values are punished just as much in the city as in the country. (This also reinforces the idea that the Commander is at odds with those values). Meanwhile, Isabel and Fernando are quite virtuous despite their living in a city court. In addition, in telling the villagers to go home, the Commander seems to recognize and express his worry that the citizens could rebel against him—collectively, they are much more powerful than he is.



The Commander again reinforces the idea that he does not honor the peasants because their low birth means they are not worthy of that honor. But the fact that the Commander treats them however he pleases and abuses them only makes them aware of how tyrannical he is. The fact that he is outraged that Frondoso pointed a bow at him—despite the fact that he only did so because the Commander was about to rape Laurencia—only shows how perverted his values have become.



The Commander continues to show his tyranny and lack of honor. First, he believes he is being merciful by not razing Fuente Ovejuna to the ground, but then he vows to get vengeance at the right time. This is a clear departure from Christian values of mercy and justice. Second, the Commander even admits how his desire for the village’s women is not founded on respect, but is instead based in lust—which makes the women easy to discard afterward. It is for this reason, primarily, that the other villagers are so disgusted by the Commander’s actions, foreshadowing how his lust will ultimately lead to his downfall.



Though Isabel and Fernando are in pursuit of the same city as the Master and the Commander, the play illustrates that they do not share the same motivations. Fernando and Isabel claimed the city initially, and the citizens asked them to retake the city while acknowledging that Fernando has a divine right to rule. On the other hand, the Master and the Commander only want the city for glory, and they shed a lot of blood in order to take it, showing that their motivations do not reflect Christian values like Isabel and Fernando’s.



The scene shifts. Laurencia and Pascuala ask Mengo to accompany them into town, because they need his protection in case they run into the Commander. Mengo and the women lament that the Commander is ruining their lives—they compare him to the devil, a **beast**, and a disease poisoning the village.

Mengo comments that he heard Frondoso threatened the Commander to save Laurencia, and Laurencia admits that this is true—Frondoso was very brave to endanger himself for her. She's grown fond of Frondoso, and even though she's told him he shouldn't stay in town because the Commander has sworn to hang him, he still refuses to leave. Mengo says he wishes he could stone the Commander to death, using a sling to split his skull. The women also wish to see the Commander dead.

Jacinta enters, announcing that the Commander's servants are on their way to Ciudad Real, "armed less with noble steel than with / Their vile and sordid wickedness." She explains that they plan to abduct her and take her to the Commander. Laurencia and Pascuala leave, worried for their own safety, while Mengo assures Jacinta that he'll protect her, picking up stones from the ground to use as weapons.

Flores and Ortuño arrive, insistent upon abducting Jacinta. Mengo asks them to leave her alone, saying that Jacinta is his relative and it's his duty to protect her. Flores shouts, "Kill him!", and Mengo insists that he will use his sling if Flores and Ortuño provoke him.

When the Commander and Cimbranos come upon the scene, Flores notes that the "village scum" are defying them, and that the Commander should raze the village to the ground. Mengo begs the Commander to punish Flores and Ortuño for trying to take Jacinta in the Commander's name, despite the fact that she is married and has honorable parents. But in response to this, the Commander asks Flores and Ortuño to tie up Mengo's hands with Mengo's sling.

In this scene, Laurencia and Pascuala acknowledge the benefit of banding together in order to avoid the Commander's tyranny—they're better able to defend themselves as a group than as individuals. Moreover, they again reinforce the Commander's lack of honor and his predatory lustfulness in comparing him to the devil and a beast.



The fact that Frondoso's heroic actions are now spurring Laurencia's own feelings illustrates how respect (like the respect that Frondoso showed Laurencia) is a strong foundation for love. The Commander's lack of respect, on the other hand, is now spurring citizens like Mengo, Pascuala, and Laurencia to want to kill him as a tyrant.



In describing the Commander as "armed less with noble steel than with [...] wickedness," Jacinta underscores the fact that the Commander's noble birth doesn't necessarily make him a noble person. By contrast, Mengo honorably defends her from the Commander's servants. He knows that part of the Commander's ability to abuse women like Jacinta lies in the fact that he can overpower her as an individual—it's more difficult for him to do so when others are protecting her.



The contrast between Mengo and the Commander's henchmen reinforces the idea that common villagers like Mengo can act more honorably than people who have more authority or are honored simply because they're of noble birth.



Again, the Commander demonstrates not only his lack of honor but also how difficult it is for commoners like Mengo and Jacinta to fight the Commander's tyranny. This is true not only because the Commander has henchmen to back him up, giving him greater physical power, but also because his greater political power means that Mengo and Jacinta have no one they can appeal to in order to stop the Commander's tyranny. Mengo's sling also alludes to the fact that the Commander is a powerful tyrant. This recalls the biblical story of David and Goliath, whereby David brought down the giant Goliath using a sling—foreshadowing the fact that the villagers, who are similarly underdogs, may bring down the tyrannical Commander.



Mengo asks if this is how the Commander defends Jacinta's honor, but the Commander replies by telling Flores and Ortuño to strip and flog Mengo. Though Mengo begs for mercy, saying that the Commander is a noble man, the Commander commands his servants to beat Mengo senseless. Mengo cries out to Heaven for help as Flores and Ortuño carry him away.

Mengo's appeal underscores the distinction between social rank and true honor. The Commander is a "noble man," as Mengo points out, but he still has to earn that nobility or honor by acting honorably toward others. Instead, the Commander chooses to act without honor or mercy.



Alone with Jacinta, the Commander asks why she runs away from him. Jacinta explains that Flores and Ortuño offended her honor, and the Commander shouldn't take her honor away from her. She says her father is honorable—he may not be of noble birth, but he has nobler deeds and actions than the Commander. Insulted, the Commander says that Jacinta will be his "soldiers' baggage" and he takes her away as she cries out to Heaven to punish the Commander.

Jacinta points out that even though the Commander is of noble birth, people who have nobler deeds and actions are more honorable than he is, suggesting that social standing does not equate to honor. Moreover, the Commander again illustrates his disrespect and lustfulness toward women as abducts Jacinta and then suggests that he will let his other soldiers rape her.



Later that day, Laurencia warns Frondoso to leave the town. Frondoso says that he saw the Commander leave for Ciudad Real, and that his faith in Laurencia got rid of all his fear. He asks if the loyalty he has shown her has made her more inclined to marry him, and she says yes. Frondoso is overwhelmed with happiness, explaining that this gives his life new meaning. Laurencia says that the only thing he has to do is ask her father, Esteban, pointing out that he's walking this way with Juan Rojo. She hides in the trees to observe.

Frondoso again acts as a foil for the Commander, as he shows his respect for Laurencia in asking her if she would marry him, rather than forcing himself on her like the Commander does. Moreover, the fact that Laurencia says yes after Frondoso protected her demonstrates that respect fosters love and can lead to harmonious marriage.



As they approach, Esteban and Juan Rojo discuss the Commander's despicable actions. Juan Rojo says he feels bad for Jacinta as well as Mengo, who was flogged until his body was black and blue. Esteban is outraged at this injustice, wondering what his staff of office is good for if the Commander can do whatever he wants. Esteban remarks that the other day, the Commander had his way with Pedro Redondo's wife in the valley, and when he was done with her, he gave her to his servants.

Here the townspeople—particularly Esteban—start to recognize the extent of the Commander's abuse and how little power they have as individuals to stop it, despite Esteban's theoretical authority as one of the town magistrates. Additionally, Esteban's story about Pedro Redondo's wife is notable, because the Commander told Laurencia in Act 1 that the woman surrendered willingly to him. This exchange provides more context for that story and suggests that the Commander is lying about the fact that some of the women he's raped have wanted to have sex with him.



Just then, Frondoso approaches Esteban and Juan Rojo, asking permission to speak with Esteban. Esteban says that Frondoso is like a son to him, and he doesn't need permission to speak. Frondoso is glad to hear this, and he declares that he loves Laurencia and wishes to marry her. Esteban says that this request makes him extremely happy and allays his greatest fear. He is glad that Frondoso does him this honor and is grateful that Frondoso's love is so honest.

Frondoso shows respect not only to Laurencia, but also to her father, in asking Esteban's permission to marry Laurencia. This makes their engagement even more meaningful and joyful, reinforcing how love and respect can lead to harmony in marriage (and in society more broadly). This action also sets Frondoso apart from the Commander, who does not give Laurencia or Esteban the same honor. Esteban alludes to this in saying that Frondoso is allaying his greatest fear—seeming to imply how fearful he was that the Commander would abduct and rape Laurencia.



Esteban says that they should inform Frondoso's father, and if his father doesn't object, Frondoso and Laurencia can be married. When Juan Rojo asks if they should consult Laurencia, Esteban suspects that Frondoso wouldn't have asked without her agreement. Frondoso refuses a dowry, but Esteban says they should ask what Laurencia thinks. Frondoso agrees, saying that they shouldn't go against her wishes.

When Esteban calls to Laurencia, she immediately obeys him and emerges. He takes her aside and asks if her friend Gila would be a good match for Frondoso, whom he calls honorable. Confused and disappointed, Laurencia agrees. Esteban immediately counters and says Frondoso's better off with Laurencia—and Laurencia chides her father for the trick. He asks if she loves Frondoso, and she says that she's very fond of him, asking her father to say yes on her behalf. Esteban leaves to find Frondoso's father, again insisting that Frondoso take a dowry. Alone, Frondoso tells Laurencia that he's overjoyed that she will be his wife.

Back in Ciudad Real, the Master, the Commander, Flores, and Ortuño are discussing their defeat. The Master laments that the city wall was weak, while the enemy was powerful. Offstage voices hail Castile's victory in battle, and the Master declares that he must return to Calatrava. In turn, the Commander says that he will return to Fuente Ovejuna, and that they have to decide whether to accept Isabel and Fernando's rule or continue to support his family's cause.

Later, at Laurencia and Frondoso's wedding, musicians sing long life to the newlyweds. Mengo says that it's the song that needs more life, and Frondoso comments that Mengo knows more of whipping than composing. Mengo agrees, saying that a hundred soldiers beat him just for arming himself with a sling. After noting that the Commander is an **animal**, Barrildo also begins to sing about the newlyweds having a long and happy life. Mengo says that this is dreadful poetry, like a person making fritters. They throw in lumps of dough, which come out deformed and burned or soggy, and afterward they use honey to sweeten up the ill-cooked fritters. Barrildo tells Mengo to stop fooling around.

Frondoso continues to draw a contrast between himself and the Commander, as he refuses to do anything that would go against Laurencia's wishes. The Commander, on the other hand, would gladly show Laurencia the ultimate disrespect by raping her. This reinforces the idea that love based in respect is much stronger and more harmonious than the Commander's lust, which involves no respect for women whatsoever.



Laurencia, too, shows how much she honors and loves her father by asking Esteban to say yes on her behalf. The way that Laurencia and Frondoso respect their parents also bolsters familial love, reinforcing that even outside of romantic love, respect is a key component for creating harmony and joy. Additionally, Esteban explicitly calls Frondoso honorable, highlighting the idea that honor derives from actions, not just social rank.



In showing the Commander and the Master's loss of Ciudad Real, the play suggests that pursuing and maintaining power is only justified when informed by Christian values. The Master and Commander were not motivated by justice, mercy, or peace, and so the play underscores that they do not deserve to hold Ciudad Real.



Mengo's comment that 100 soldiers whipped him for having a sling indicates the scale of tyranny that the villagers are up against. Working alone, as Mengo was, he had no chance of escaping his abuse. Additionally, Mengo's comments about fritters are a simile for bad poets using flowery or oversweet language to convey wisdom or truth, when in reality their language is as clumsy as deformed dough. Mengo's illustrates this point even as he speaks, as his plain language communicates his critique effectively.



At that moment, Frondoso and Laurencia ask for Esteban and Juan Rojo's blessing, and afterward Juan Rojo calls for the musicians to start up again to celebrate the two lovers becoming one. The musicians sing about a village girl who comes down a path followed by a knight. Afraid and ashamed of being alone with the knight, the village girl tries to hide herself in the branches, but the knight calls her pretty and tells her not to hide herself. The knight says that a man in love can conquer any mountain and see through walls of stone when someone catches his eye. As the song ends, the Commander, Flores, Ortuño, and Cimbranos enter.

The Commander demands they stop the celebrations and brandishes his weapons. Laurencia tells Frondoso to run, but the Commander orders his servants to grab Frondoso and lock him up. Pascuala points out that Frondoso is getting married, and that if the Commander is so noble, he should forgive Frondoso. The Commander says that Frondoso's crime—pointing a **bow** at the Commander—was against the Master, the Order, and its sacred honor. The punishment is therefore out of the Commander's hands.

Trying to appeal to the Commander's "virtuous" nature, Esteban says that any man in love would have done what Frondoso did if their wife was going to be abducted. The Commander says he didn't try to take Frondoso's wife, because Laurencia wasn't his wife at the time. Esteban scoffs, saying that there are new rulers in Castile who will put an end to this kind of disorder. He says they would do well to get rid of men "whose power comes / From wearing **crosses**."

The Commander tells his servants to seize Esteban's staff and beat him with it. Laurencia points out that the Commander is only doing this because Esteban is her father, and she asks what she's done wrong to the Commander. The Commander orders his servants to take her away, so the men carry off both Laurencia and Frondoso. Pascuala notes that the wedding has become a wake, and Barrildo asks if anyone will speak out. Mengo says he tried to speak out, and he has the scars to prove it, so he's holding his tongue now. Juan Rojo comments that they all need to discuss what has happened.

The musician's song about the village girl and the knight recalls the Commander's treatment of Laurencia in the woods. Like the knight of the tale, the Commander didn't respect Laurencia's desire to avoid him, all because he lusted after her. The song also foreshadows the Commander's imminent arrival at the wedding, which illustrates how his lack of respect for Laurencia can create complete disorder, in contrast to the joyful and respectful celebration of love at the wedding.



Pascuala continues to point out that the Commander can choose to be honorable—he can live up to the honor that he received at birth. And yet, he continues to choose vengeance over mercy in dealing with Frondoso, showing that honor can also be tarnished through actions. The fact that he comes in with several henchmen also shows why it's so difficult for the villagers to counter the Commander's tyranny, because he has more support and can physically overpower them in this moment.



Again, Esteban highlights that the Commander can choose to live up to his "virtuous" nature (the position he was born into at birth), and yet he continues to act dishonorably. Additionally, Esteban's point that the rulers in Castile—meaning Fernando and Isabel—will get rid of people whose power comes from crosses. This is a reference to the Order's Cross, which indicates the Commander's social rank and power. But in calling attention to the Cross, Esteban highlights how the Commander is actually going against Christian values in his actions.



Even though many of the villagers were gathered together at this wedding, they haven't yet realized their collective power. Thus, they are unable to stop the Commander's tyranny as he carries off Laurencia and Frondoso and beats Esteban, simply because Laurencia refuses to have sex with the Commander. This shows how little recourse the villagers have to address the Commander's tyranny, even though they outnumber him and his henchmen.



ACT 3

Esteban, Alonso, Barrildo, Juan Rojo, Mengo and another alderman meet in secret to discuss what to do about Frondoso and Laurencia's capture. Esteban is overcome with sadness and wonders what they can do to restore honor in the town. He asks if there is anyone whose honor has been left unscathed by the Commander and notes that, because they all have a common cause, they should act together.

Juan Rojo points out that Isabel and Fernando are bringing peace to Castile, and the town should send two aldermen to ask them for help. But Barrildo doubts that Fernando will have time for their complaints in the midst of a war. They consider evacuating the town, but they know the Commander would never let them leave. The alderman points out that they are all overcome by panic at how much injustice they have faced.

When Juan Rojo asks what they should do, the alderman declares that the townspeople should die or kill the tyrant, saying, "we are many, they are few." Barrildo, Esteban, and Mengo are reluctant to take up arms against their "overlord"—Esteban notes that God is on their side and will see justice done against the Commander, who is acting like a wild **animal**. But Juan Rojo disagrees, saying that if the Commander is continuing to burn their houses and vineyards and act like an animal, the townspeople should take revenge.

Just then, Laurencia enters, looking so disheveled that at first Esteban doesn't even recognize her. Laurencia says she's not his daughter, because he did not fulfill the duties of a father and protect her from the Commander: he just watched as the Commander carried her off like a **wolf** stealing sheep. The Commander's men threatened her with knives and abusive words, and they did everything they could to steal her chastity.

In this scene, Esteban and the other men start to fully recognize the collective abuse that they have suffered at the hands of the Commander, and as such, how they need to similarly form their own collective to overcome that abuse.



Juan Rojo's discussion contrasts the Commander with Isabel and Fernando, again showing how their Christian kindness and mercy makes ordinary people want to be ruled by them, while the Commander's injustice makes the villagers want to band together and rise up against him. This reinforces the play's message that only those who align themselves with Christian values are worthy of power.



Here, Juan Rojo and some of the other men in the town start to recognize their need to fight the Commander by banding together as the "many" versus the "few." This suggests that collective power is necessary to overcome tyranny from an "overlord." Even though Esteban is hesitant about rising up against the Commander, he also notes that the Commander is no longer aligned with God or Christian values, and therefore is unfit to rule. His description of the Commander as an animal also speaks to how the Commander has been predatory and vicious toward the townspeople.



Laurencia's speech here again uses animals to reinforce the predator-prey relationship between her and the Commander. This symbol emphasizes that the Commander does not treat her as an equal but instead as something to be hunted. Unlike how her and Frondoso's respectful relationship has brought joy and harmony to the town, the Commander's treatment of Laurencia only creates disorder.



Laurencia goes on, asking how they can call themselves men of honor or true fathers and not feel the pain of what she's just experienced. She calls them timid **hares**, allowing other men to carry off their wives. She says the swords they have serve no purpose, and that women must be responsible for their own honor and make the tyrants pay. They must know that the Commander is going to have Frondoso hanged and will likely do the same to all the men, while the women will have to become as strong as Amazons and amaze the world.

Esteban says that he will not take Laurencia's insults—he will go alone and confront the Commander. Juan Rojo agrees that he will go as well, and the other men join in, saying that they are “as one, a single voice.” They shout in praise of Isabel and Fernando and say that the tyrants have to die as they leave to grab their bows and lances.

After the men leave, Laurencia calls the women of the town to restore their honor. The women convene, and Laurencia tells Pascuala, Jacinta, and the others that the men are taking up arms against the Commander in a common cause. She says that they should do the same, organizing into a woman's regiment. They agree, waving their shawls as flags. When Pascuala suggests they choose one of the men as captain of the women's regiment, Laurencia disagrees, saying that none of the men can match her in bravery. The women exit.

The scene shifts to the Commander's home, where he, Flores, Ortuño, and Cimbranos have tied Frondoso's hands. Just as the Commander tells them to hang Frondoso from the battlements, they hear a commotion outside. The villagers furiously bang on the doors, and the Commander realizes that the people are rising against him. The Commander tells his servants to untie Frondoso, and he implores Frondoso to calm the people. Frondoso says he'll try, noting that the villagers are attacking the house because they love Frondoso dearly. He leaves.

The Commander and his servants hear people shouting long live the King and Queen and that the Commander must die. While Flores tries to persuade the Commander to leave, the Commander insists that he should face the villagers himself. The villagers break through the doors, and the Commander tries to tell them that they should explain what injustices they have experienced so he can make things right. The villagers shout “Fuente Ovejuna” and “death to all false Christians and foul traitors!”

Laurencia's comparison of the men to hares is significant, as the Commander compared her to a hare earlier in the play. Given the villagers' characterization of the Commander as a predator, this implies that they've all become hares (his prey) in allowing him to get away with his misdeeds. Laurencia again emphasizes how the women have to band together—like the Amazons, a legendary group of female warriors—in order to overcome the Commander's tyranny.



Roused by Laurencia's speech, the men recognize their power when they work as a “single voice.” Notably, the play implies that their banding together is only justified against tyrants like the Commander. They still praise the King and Queen, emphasizing that they still adhere to class hierarchies when given model rulers.



Like the men banding together, Laurencia and the other women are much more powerful when they form a collective. This group mindset is particularly empowering for the women, because as individuals, the Commander easily victimized them. But together, they are capable of overthrowing their tyrannical oppressor.



This passage continues to show how the Commander and Frondoso are foils of each other. While the Commander is supposed to be the leader of the town because of his high rank, it is Frondoso's honorable behavior (in contrast to the Commander's dishonor) which leads the villagers to love him, and it's why he may be able to calm them down. This is another example of how those of low class status can have more honor than someone of high rank.



The townspeople rise up as one as they shout “Fuente Ovejuna,” showing how they are working together as a single entity to defeat the Commander's tyranny. In addition, the Commander's attempts to right his wrongs only come when he knows he is going to be overpowered—he was, after all, just about to hang Frondoso for no reason. The fact that the townspeople recognize this lack of mercy and justice is evident when they call the Commander a “false Christian.” The villagers refuse to back down, as they believe that this lack of Christian values makes the Commander unfit to rule.



The scene shifts outside the Commander's house, where the women have just arrived, calling for vengeance on the Commander and saying that they will drink his blood and attack him with lances. They hear the men attacking the Commander and his servants, and Laurencia runs inside, saying that her sword is no use in its scabbard. Mengo chases Flores outside, and Pascuala asks Mengo to leave Flores to them, saying it's appropriate for women to kill the traitor after he helped the Commander to assault so many of them. Laurencia then chases Ortuño out of the house. She insists that she's going to kill him, and they all shout, "Fuente Ovejuna!"

The next day, back at the King and Queen's castle, Manrique reports that their army was able to retake Ciudad Real after facing little opposition. Their soldiers will remain there to hold the town in case the enemies try to retake it. Just then, Flores enters, wounded, begging for the King's help. He explains that the "faithless subjects" in Fuente Ovejuna have risen up without cause against the Commander. They broke into his house and ignored him—though he offered, as an "honorable man," to hear their complaints.

Flores goes on: the villagers beat the Commander, threw him from the window onto where the women were standing with pikes and swords, tore his beard and face and mutilated him, smashed his coat of arms, and ransacked his house. Flores asks the King, who is renowned for being just, to make the criminals pay for their evil deeds. The King promises to investigate what happened and dispatches a judge and a captain to punish those who are to blame.

Back in Fuente Ovejuna, the villagers have the Commander's head fixed on a lance. Musicians sing in praise of Fernando and Isabel while declaring death to tyrants. Frondoso sings another song, describing Isabel and Fernando's pure and honest love, which will earn them a place in Heaven, and affirming that tyrants should be punished for their sins. Barrildo and Mengo also join in songs, praising the Catholic Kings and the end to tyranny. After the song, they remove the lance and put up the royal coat of arms outside the Council Chamber. Frondoso says it marks a new day for the town.

Just as the men recognize their collective power in shouting "Fuente Ovejuna," the women similarly find their own collective power and are able to get revenge on the servants who abused them so cruelly. It is also notable that the villagers' language is very gruesome. But up until this point, they have been peaceful and kind, illustrating how tyrants can incite this violence in people and in some ways make it necessary. In this case, acting violently as a group is seemingly the only way for the villagers to escape their abuse.



Flores's description of the townspeople is ironic and blatantly false given the play's events up to this point. While Flores portrays the townspeople as "faithless subjects," in reality they follow Christian values much more dutifully than the Commander does. And though Flores describes the Commander as an "honorable man," the villagers, too, have shown themselves to be much more honorable. This is another aspect of the Commander's (and Flores and Ortuño's) tyranny, because Flores has the power to misrepresent what happened to the Commander and Fuente Ovejuna, potentially prompting more injustice.



Here, the King shows that he is a model ruler, and one rooted in Christianity. Rather than simply taking Flores at his word and attacking the town or punishing the villagers, the King sends a judge to investigate what happened. This is a stark contrast to Flores and the Commander's dishonesty and cruelty, and the play implies that the King's desire to understand the situation and pursue true justice is what makes him a worthy king.



The villagers contrast the Catholic Kings (Spanish people's nickname for Isabel and Fernando) and the Commander in several ways. Frondoso's song implies that the King and Queen's mutual respect and admiration not only makes their love strong but also makes them worthy of Heaven. In this way, the play again emphasizes that love and respect lead to virtuous harmony—both in a marriage and even in society at large. Moreover, the villagers' songs are a testament to how Fernando and Isabel root their power in Christian values, unlike the Commander. In emphasizing that they want to be ruled by the king and queen, while calling the Commander a tyrant, the villagers suggest that only those who rule with Christian values are justified to hold that power.



Esteban addresses the villagers, saying that the King and Queen will likely investigate what happened in the town. He counsels them to say, on pain of death, that Fuente Ovejuna committed the crimes. They all agree, even rehearsing an interrogation and torture session to make sure they will all say that Fuente Ovejuna did it. Just then, the King and Queen's judge and captain arrive and begin arresting everyone. Esteban tells them that they don't have to be afraid—they just have to remember that Fuente Ovejuna committed the crime.

The scene shifts to the Master and a soldier discussing what happened in Fuente Ovejuna. The Master is shocked that the village could commit such a dreadful crime, and he says that he will take 500 men and raze it to the ground. When the soldier points out that the town is faithful to Fernando and it would be a bad idea for the Master to anger him, the Master concedes, realizing that he, too, has to submit to the King's authority. He feels shame for his mistakes, but his honor is what matters most, and he knows he has to be humble to regain it.

Back in Fuente Ovejuna, Laurencia soliloquizes, explaining that being in love is stressful, as she constantly worries about Frondoso. She loves Frondoso and knows that her life means nothing if he is hurt or tortured. The fact that he's still in the town makes her anxious, and yet she is tormented when he is not with her.

Frondoso enters, and Laurencia tells him that he shouldn't be there, because he could be killed or tortured. Frondoso says he couldn't turn his back on his friends or leave her alone to face the danger. Suddenly, they hear cries offstage, and they listen as a man is tortured. Still, despite his pain, the man says that Fuente Ovejuna killed the Commander. They also hear a young boy and Pascuala being tortured, but they, too, say that Fuente Ovejuna did it.

When the judge starts torturing Mengo, Laurencia and Frondoso worry that he'll give up what happened, but Mengo stands strong and says that Fuente Ovejuna did it. After this, the judge says that he thought Mengo would crack, but the citizens are all sticking to their story. The judge says that this has become tiresome, and he orders all the villagers' release. Frondoso and Laurencia are relieved.

Esteban's counsel to say that "Fuente Ovejuna" committed the crime of murdering the Commander illustrates how villagers can use their collective power not only to rid themselves of the Commander, but also to avoid punishment for doing so. This again underscores the need for collective power in overcoming tyranny and injustice.



The Master's attitude here contrasts with the King. While Fernando wants to listen to reason and investigate what happened, the Master is still motivated by rage and bloodthirstiness. Yet as the Master acknowledges that he has to be humble and restore his honor, he understands that honor isn't just dependent on his social standing—he has to act virtuously in order to earn it.



Laurencia's soliloquy about love again reinforces that her and Frondoso's relationship is strong because it is built on mutual respect. Moreover, this refutes Mengo's argument in the first act that the only love is self-love, because Laurencia loves Frondoso so much that her life means nothing without him.



Frondoso again shows how honorable he is, and this passage also proves that he loves and respects Laurencia so much (more than himself) that he refuses to leave her behind. Additionally, as the judge tortures the townspeople, the play demonstrates that their solidarity is still playing a key part in helping them achieve justice, so that they can avoid being punished for ridding themselves of tyranny.



The villagers' concerns about Mengo illustrates that even though the townspeople are working collectively, each individual voice in their collective is crucial to avoid punishment. They are only able to avoid punishment because everyone banded together and stuck to their story.



Mengo, Barrildo, and an alderman enter, and everyone praises Mengo and gives him lemon curd and wine for his bravery. They help him dress, and the alderman and Barrildo help carry him off to his bed. After they leave, Frondoso teases Laurencia, asking who killed the Commander, and she says Fuente Ovejuna, saying that he doesn't scare her. When Frondoso asks instead how he killed Laurencia, she says this: by making her love him to death.

Later, the King and Queen both arrive separately in Fuente Ovejuna and greet each other warmly, surprised to see each other there. Isabel reports that everything is calm in Castile—that they have brought peace. Just then, Manrique brings the Master of Calatrava to speak to the King and Queen. The Master seeks their forgiveness, explaining that both the Commander and the Master's own self-interest misled him. He declares that he will be their loyal servant in their campaign against Granada. He vows that he will not offend them again, and the King and Queen tell the Master that he is welcome with them because he is so penitent. The Master thanks them.

Manrique also reports that the judge who went to Fuente Ovejuna has returned. Hearing this, the Master says the murderers should get what they deserve, but the King states that the matter is no longer in the Master's hands. The judge enters and reports that he made every effort to investigate, even torturing young boys, but the citizens all told him that Fuente Ovejuna is to blame. Thus, the King has to pardon all the townspeople or put them all to death. The villagers have come and wish to make their case, and the King asks them to enter.

Esteban enters with Frondoso, Laurencia, Mengo and other villagers. Laurencia comments on how fine a couple the King and Queen are. Esteban explains that they are humble and obedient servants who experienced the Commander's tyranny and cruelty, which was the true cause of the trouble. The Commander robbed them, raped their women, and showed them no mercy. Frondoso chimes in, explaining that his wife, Laurencia, was carried off by the Commander on their wedding night as if she were his property—she only escaped because she fought to keep her virtue. Mengo also chimes in, noting that when he tried to save Jacinta from being raped by the Commander's servants, the Commander had him beaten.

The praise Mengo earns is important, as it shows how the villagers love and respect one another, just as Laurencia and Frondoso love and respect each other. And as a result of that respect and love, the villagers are able to restore peace and harmony in Fuente Ovejuna.



The warmth between the King and Queen echoes the love between Frondoso and Laurencia, showing how they, too, share a love based in mutual respect. Additionally, the Master's penitence—and the King's acceptance of that penitence—shows that those who are motivated by self-interest are not fit to rule, but those who are humble and act with justice and mercy are treated as model rulers. Lastly, the reference to Grenada illustrates why Christian values were so important to rulers at the time the play is set (the 15th century), as Grenada was still held by Muslim Moors. Therefore, Spanish Christians felt very threatened by forces motivated by something other than Christianity.



Even when the Master has reconciled with the King and Queen, the play still demonstrates a distinction between them. When the Master shows his hot-headed side, insisting on punishing the villagers, the King knows that his rage makes him unable to make decisions. By contrast, the King is interested in actually pursuing justice.



As the villagers tell their stories, they remind the audience of how much abuse they all individually suffered at the Commander's hands—emphasizing that his dishonorable behavior and disrespect toward them was the cause of the conflict in Fuente Ovejuna. Without his tyranny—and particularly his lack of respect for the women in the town—they would not have had to resort to such extremes as to kill him. But as he disrespected them, he turned into exactly the sort of tyrant that the Commander himself criticized in the opening scene, and their only option to escape that tyranny was to kill him.



Esteban concludes by saying that they want to be the King's vassals—they even displayed his coat of arms in the town. He asks the King to be merciful. The King rules that although this was a serious crime, there is no written evidence, so the townspeople must be pardoned, and the King will assume responsibility for the town until a new Commander can be found. Frondoso thanks the King for being a wise and just ruler.

The play's final exchange ties up several threads. First, it illustrates how the citizens' collective power not only enabled them to overcome tyranny, but also to avoid being punished for seeking justice. Second, it again emphasizes that the King and Queen are model rulers because they pursue justice and mercy—key Christian values. And lastly, the play underscores how the wisest people—like the King—are those who are willing to listen to reason and judge accordingly, rather than trusting flowery or manipulative language.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Emanuel, Lizzy. "Fuente Ovejuna." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 10 Feb 2021. Web. 10 Feb 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Emanuel, Lizzy. "Fuente Ovejuna." LitCharts LLC, February 10, 2021. Retrieved February 10, 2021. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/fuente-ovejuna>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Fuente Ovejuna* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

De Vega, Lope. *Fuente Ovejuna*. Oxford University Press. 2008.

CHICAGO MANUAL

De Vega, Lope. *Fuente Ovejuna*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 2008.