

Integrating Literary Theory and Critical Thinking



Course: Span 4900

Term: Spring 2016

Level: Advanced

Description: Students analyze an article through the lens of a literary theory. In this case, students read Anthony Cascardi's "The Old and the New: The Spanish Comedia and the Resistance to Historical Change," a Marxist reading of Lope de Vega's play *Fuenteovejuna*. The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with literary theory and challenge them to be critical readers. In this course, students discussed articles focused on Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Linguistics, Sociology, and Law.

Cascardi, Anthony J. "The Old and the New: The Spanish Comedia and the Resistance to Historical Change"

Article [5 minutes]

- What is the focus of the article?
- What key words would you chose to summarize the essay?

Capitalism [10 minutes]

- In discussing Spain, Perry Anderson argues that "no other Absolute State in Western Europe remained so resistant to bourgeois development" (3). Mention some of the explanations offered by Anthony Cascardi to support this argument.
- What is the "sistema de castas" ["caste system"]? How did it affect the development of Spain? Why does the author choose *Fuenteovejuna* as evidence for his views about late capitalism in Spain?

Taste [10 minutes]

- According to Anthony Cascardi, how does the play contradict Lope de Vega's literary manifesto "Arte nuevo de hacer comedias"?

- Why does Anthony Cascardi focus on the notion of “gusto” [taste]?
- How does this notion explain Lope de Vega’s success as playwright?

Politics [10 minutes]

- How do Leo Spitzer and Joaquín Casaldueiro interpret the play?
- What are their views on the political component of the text?
- Do you agree with these critics? Why? Why do you think Anthony Cascardi quoted these critics?

Class Consciousness [10 minutes]

- According to Anthony Cascardi, what are the implications for the play given that it “resists the emergence of anything resembling a ‘consciousness of class’” (19)? Anthony Cascardi uses Hegel’s master-slave dialectic and proposes the following: “Thus the *comedia* as seen from the dialectic of master and slave may be regarded as the effort to educate the slave in the enjoyment of his servile condition, which is to say, in deriving pleasure from his work” (20-21). Do you agree with this statement? Why?

Criticism of Criticism [10 minutes]

- What are the strengths of this essay?
- Do the select passages from the play support the main argument?
- What other examples from the play can you offer?
- What are the shortcomings of this essay?
- What aspects from the play are ignored in a Marxist reading of it? What new perspective of *Fuenteovejuna* does this essay offer?