

RMST202: Literatures and Cultures of the Romance World II

Midterm Examination, February 16, 2024

Pick *four* of the following nine passages. In each case, first identify the title and the author of the text from which it is taken. Then comment briefly on how this specific passage relates to the text from which it is taken, examining the significance of the passage for the text as a whole and how it fits within that text's broader narrative or story. Last, but by no means least, you should discuss what the specific passage has to contribute to (and/or how it is illuminated by) the themes and concepts we have been discussing in the course.

Please note that, in every case, your focus should be on trying to understand and explain the passage in front of you.

You have 24 hours to write this exam (until 2pm Pacific Time on Saturday, February 17), but in total it should not take you more than an hour and a half of focused concentration. You may consult the texts and/or any other material, but I do not particularly recommend you do so, as it will only slow you down. I expect you to write half a page or so (depending on font, size, and spacing etc.) or a couple of short/medium paragraphs for each passage, and that *most of your attention will be on a careful and close reading of the passages themselves.*

When you are finished, email your exam script (in Word or, ideally, PDF format) to me at jon.beasley-murray@ubc.ca.

- 1) I had just crossed an intersection whose name I don't know, in front of a church. Suddenly, perhaps still ten feet away, I saw a young, poorly dressed woman walking toward me, she had noticed me too, or perhaps had been watching me for several moments. She carried her head high, unlike everyone else on the sidewalk. And she looked so delicate she scarcely seemed to touch the ground as she walked. A faint smile may have been wandering across her face. She was curiously made up, as though beginning with her eyes, she had not had time to finish, though the rims of her eyes were dark for a blonde, the rims only, and not the lids (this effect is achieved, and achieved exclusively, by applying the mascara under the lid alone).
- 2) The action began; it seemed to me all the more obscure because in those days, when I read, I often daydreamed, for entire pages, of something quite different. And in addition to the lacunae that this distraction left in the story, there was the fact, when Mama was the one reading aloud to me, that she skipped all the love scenes. Thus, all the bizarre changes that take place in the respective attitudes of the miller's wife and the child and that can be explained only by the progress of a nascent love seemed to me marked by a profound mystery whose source I readily imagined must be in that strange and sweet name "Champi," which gave the child, who bore it without my knowing why, its vivid, charming purplish color. If my mother was an unfaithful reader, she was also, in the case of books in which she found the inflection of true feeling, a wonderful reader for the respect and simplicity of interpretation, the beauty and gentleness of the sound of her voice.

- 3) The stevedores remained alone on the shore at the foot of the mountains of merchandise they had just off-loaded. Covered with dust and dirt, they looked like veritable bronze statues. In order to quench the burning thirst that must have been consuming them, they emptied together, and without a twinge of remorse, bottles of strong rum. Afterwards, dropping their loin-cloths or their breeches, they dived into the sea, snorting like pure-breds. Standing in the water up to their navels, they rubbed their skins to get rid of the dirt, all the while talking and laughing with voices that carried far in the silence.

The sun, after lingering a long while on the horizon, had disappeared, melted, one could say, by its own heat.

And the whole twilight belonged to those naked black men—some standing, others swimming—with the silhouettes of the cargo boats riding at anchor and the mauve hills to the back of the port.

- 4) With a great effort, I pushed aside other bigger boys and reached the circle around Antero. In his hands he held a little top. The small sphere was made from a store coconut, one of those tiny, gray ones that come in tins. The tip was long and thin. The sphere had four round holes by way of eyes. Antero wound the top slowly, with a fine cord; making many turns he wound it right down to its sharpened tip and then cast it. The top hesitated for a moment in midair, then fell at the edge of the circle of boys, in the sunlight. Its long tip traced curves in the loose dirt; spinning, it gave off little gusts of air through the four eyeholes. It whirred like a large, singing insect, and then shifted, tilting on its axis. A gray shadow haloed its spinning head; a black circle divided the sphere in the middle. And its high-pitched song flowed out from the dark band made by the eyes—the four eyeholes that sank into the hard sphere as if into a liquid. A circle of very fine dust rose up around it, enveloping the little top.

The song of the top penetrated deep into my ear, reviving memories of rivers, and of the black trees that overhang the walls of the abysses.

- 5) Why, oh why must a woman's nature be such that a man has always to be the pivot of her life?

Men succeed in directing their passion to other things. But the fate of so many women seems to be to turn over and over in their heart some love sorrow while sitting in a neatly ordered house, facing an unfinished tapestry

In vain did she exhaust all the instinctive ways of passion to re-conquer Antonio: tenderness, violence, reproaches, silence, amorous pursuit. He either avoided her affectionately and dreadfully, or pretended to ignore her gloomy attitudes.

But sometimes when worn out emotionally, it would happen that a momentary indifference made her act naturally, her husband's sympathy and confidence would be drawn back to her spontaneously. He would then invite her to the city, escort her to the theater and to the stores and chat with her about herself, about himself, about the children, about life "which is so sad after all." "You are the most charming woman I have ever known, it's too bad you are my wife, Ana Maria," he used to say to her then.

- 6) Perhaps the immobility of the things around us is imposed on them by our certainty that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our mind confronting them. However that may be, when I woke thus, my mind restlessly attempting, without success, to discover where I was, everything revolved around me in the darkness, things, countries, years. My body, too benumbed to move, would try to locate, according to the form of its fatigue, the position of its limbs so as to deduce from this the direction of the wall, the placement of the furniture, so as to reconstruct and name the dwelling in which it found itself. Its memory, the memory of its ribs, its knees, its shoulders, offered in succession several of the rooms where it had slept, while around it the invisible walls, changing place according to the shape of the imagined room, spun through the shadows.
- 7) "It's him! I knew it was him!" Berto said triumphantly. And in a fit of malicious envy, "You're the third wheel, eh? Out on the boat it's you, her, and lover boy. That makes you the third wheel." His words were followed by gales of laughter. Even Saro was smiling beneath his mustache.
- "I don't know what you're talking about," Agostino replied, blushing, uncomfortable and uncomprehending. He felt as if he should object, but these uncouth jokes aroused in him an unexpected, almost cruel feeling of pleasure, as if the boys had unknowingly avenged through their words all the humiliations that his mother had inflicted on him lately. At the same time he was horrified at how much they knew about his affairs.
- 8) Quite late in the afternoon, the man she has been waiting for, finally arrives. As everyone moves away from around her bed, she realizes he is in the house and perhaps in the adjoining room.
- For a time, which seems unending to her, nothing disturbs the silence.
- Then suddenly, she knows her husband is there, leaning heavily against the side of the door.
- They have left him all by himself, lord and master of this death. And there he stands, motionless, gathering strength to face it with dignity.
- She then begins to stir the ashes of her memory, and through them recedes to a very far-off time, to an immense, silent, sad city, to a house where she had arrived on a certain night.
- At what time? She could not say.

- 9) As soon as he patted me on the shoulder and called me niece, my grandmother threw her arms around my neck, her light-colored eyes full of tears, and saying “poor thing” over and over again. . . .

There was something agonizing in the entire scene, and in the apartment the heat was suffocating, as if the air were stagnant and rotting. When I looked up I saw that several ghostly women had appeared. I almost felt my skin crawl when I caught a glimpse of one of them in a black dress that had the look of a nightgown. Everything about that woman seemed awful, wretched, even the greenish teeth she showed when she smiled at me. A dog followed her, yawning noisily, and the animal was also black, like an extension of her mourning. They told me she was the maid, and no other creature has ever made a more disagreeable impression on me.

Good luck!