

RMST202: Literatures and Cultures of the Romance World II

Midterm Examination, February 13, 2026

Pick *four* of the following ten 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 14), but in total it should not take you much 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) And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because that day I did not go out before it was time for Mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime blossom. The sight of the little madeleine had not reminded me of anything before I tasted it; perhaps because I had often seen them since, without eating them, on the shelves of the pastry shops, and their image had therefore left those days of Combray and attached itself to others more recent; perhaps because of these recollections abandoned so long outside my memory, nothing survived, everything had come apart; the forms and the form, too, of the little shell made of cake, so fatly sensual within its severe and pious pleating—had been destroyed, or, still half asleep, had lost the force of expansion that would have allowed them to rejoin my consciousness. But, when nothing subsists of an old past, after the death of people, after the destruction of things, alone, frailer but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, smell and taste still remain for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, upon the ruins of all the rest, bearing without giving way, on their almost impalpable droplet, the immense edifice of memory.

- 2) I swear it. The woman in the shroud did not feel the slightest desire to rise again. Alone, she would at last be able to rest, to die.

For she had suffered the death of the living. And now she longed for total immersion, for the second death, the death of the dead.

- 3) “Everytime my father tried to relate his life story,” he continued, “once he got to: ‘I had a big brother called Ousmane, a younger sister called Sonia, the last one,’ he would shut his eyes very tight and fall silent all of a sudden. And I, too, would bite my lips as if I had received a stab in my heart. ‘I was young,’ my father said, ‘when all the blacks fled from the plantations because it had been said that slavery was over.’ I, too, danced with joy and went running all over Martinique because, for a long time, I had so wanted to flee, to run away. But when the intoxication of my freedom was spent, I was forced to remark that nothing had changed for me nor for my comrades in chains. I hadn’t found my brothers and sisters, nor my father, nor my mother. I remained like all the blacks in this damned country: the *békés* kept the land, all the land in the country, and we continued working for them. The law forbade them from whipping us, but did not force them to pay us our due.”

“Yes,” he added, “at any rate, we remained under the *béké*, attached to his land. And he remained our master.”

- 4) The stones of the Inca wall were larger and stranger than I had imagined; they seemed to be bubbling up beneath the whitewashed second story, which had no windows on the side facing the narrow street. Then I remembered the Quechua songs which continually repeat one pathetic phrase: *yawar mayu*, “bloody river”; *yawar unu*, “bloody water”; *puk’tik yawar k’ocha*, “boiling bloody lake”; *yawar wek’e*, “bloody tears.” Couldn’t one say *yawar rumi*, “bloody stone,” or *puk’tik yawar rumi*, “boiling bloody stone”? The wall was stationary, but all its lines were seething and its surface was as changeable as that of the flooding summer rivers which have similar crests near the center, where the current flows the swiftest and is the most terrifying. The Indians call these muddy rivers *yawar mayu* because when the sun shines on them they seem to glisten like blood. They also call the most violent tempo of the war dances, the moment when the dancers are fighting, *yawar mayu*.

“*Puk’tik yawar rumi*,” I exclaimed, facing the wall.

And as the street remained silent, I repeated the phrase several times.

- 5) “Marry me, Ricardo, and take me to Europe.”

“I can’t, I can’t. I love you and I’m sorry, but I can’t. I must think of my future. Didn’t you, yourself, scream at me yesterday that I was a good-for-nothing? Well, perhaps you’re right. Now is the time for me to be doing something.”

Without any dignity—I’ve never learned to be dignified in love—for several months, obstinately, I persisted in linking my life to yours, not understanding why love should be incompatible with your career.

But now, now that I am dead, it occurs to me that possibly all men once in their lifetime long to make some great renunciation; to sacrifice regretfully something vital; to tear to pieces a butterfly, in order to feel themselves masters of their own destiny.

- 6) I had not been granted the realization, until today, of all that in Nadja's attitude toward me derives from the application of a more or less conscious principle of total subversion, of which I will give only this example: one evening, when I was driving a car along the road from Versailles to Paris, the woman sitting beside me (who was Nadja, but who might have been anyone else, after all, or even *someone else*) pressed her foot down on mine on the accelerator, tried to cover my eyes with her hands in the oblivion of an interminable kiss, desiring to extinguish us, doubtless forever, save to each other, so that we should collide at full speed with the splendid trees along the road. What a test of life, indeed! Unnecessary to add that I did not yield to this desire. It is clear how I felt—how, so far as I know, I have almost always felt—about Nadja. I am no less grateful to her for revealing to me, in such an overpowering way, what a common recognition of love would have committed us to at that moment. I feel less and less capable of resisting such a temptation *in every case*. I can do no less than offer thanks in this last recollection, to the woman who has made me understand its virtual necessity.
- 7) It's true that for a moment he had seen the woman he desired, standing in her sheer gown, her breasts naked. But he had a dark sense that this inadequate and ambiguous image would be the only picture of womanhood to accompany his memories for long years to come. In fact, years and years would go by, empty and unhappy, between him and the liberating experience. Not until he was as old as Tortima, he thought, would he be released once and for all from this awkward age of transition. But in the meantime he had to continue living in the same way. He felt his whole spirit rebel against the thought, like the bitter sense of a final impossibility.
- 8) *In that case I'll have a secret, a dirty, repulsive secret that will drive me to seek the dark origin of my roots. And when I have nothing to do, and I am sad, thinking of Rengo I'll ask myself: "Why was I such a rat?" And curious spiritual horizons will open within me as I search for the answer.*
- Besides, I could profit from this deal.*
- The truth is, I had to confess, I'm a low-down scoundrel who's half-crazy; but Rocambole was no less: he murdered people. . . . I don't. For a few francs he lied under oath and got "Papa" Nicolo hanged. He strangled old lady Fripart, who loved him like a mother. . . . Captain Williams, who made him a rich marquis, he killed. Is there anyone he didn't betray? . . .*
- 9) On one side of her bed was a large yellow chest of drawers of lemon wood and a table that was akin to both a dispensary and a high altar, on which, below a small statue of the Virgin and a bottle of Vichy-Célestins, could be found her missals and her medical prescriptions, everything needed for following from her bed both the services and her regimen, for not missing the hour either of her pepsin or of Vespers. On the other side, her bed lay by the window, she had the street there before her eyes and on it from morning to night, to divert her melancholy, like the Persian princes, would read the daily but immemorial chronicle of Combray, which she would afterward comment upon with Françoise.

- 10) I couldn't sleep. I found it idiotic to be feeling the same eager expectation that a year earlier had made me jump out of bed in the village every half hour, afraid I'd miss the six o'clock train, but I couldn't help it. I didn't have the same illusions now, but the departure moved me as if it were a liberation. Ena's father, who had come to Barcelona for a few days, would pick me up the next morning and I'd go back to Madrid with him. We'd travel in his car.

I was already dressed when the driver knocked discreetly at the door. The entire house seemed silent and asleep in the grayish light coming in through the balconies. I didn't have the courage to peer into my grandmother's room. I didn't want to wake her.

I went down the stairs slowly. I felt a strong emotion. I remembered the terrible expectation, the longing for life, when I had climbed them for the first time. I was leaving now without having known any of the things I had confusedly hoped for: life in its plenitude, joy, deep interests, love. I was taking nothing from the house on Calle de Aribau. At least, that's what I thought then.

Good luck!