

The Return of Martin Guerre Part I



The story you about to watch is based on a true incident which occurred during the Renaissance in France. The plot is both simple and complex, so it is necessary to pay close attention to everything that is going on. In fact, you will soon find there is a mystery that you will be able to solve only if you have been paying close attention. If you feel that at times not much is going on, think again.

Watch the characters' faces; do they sometimes reveal more than the words being said. Read the subtitles, but don't forget to pay attention to the action of the film. Read the questions below and jot down short answers as the movie progresses – some of the questions require deeper thinking (I've put those parts of the questions in *italics* – you can return to those later), but the part that needs to be jotted down now is based on the content that occurs in the film. **Answer what you can, immediately.**

Questions – put italic and nonitalic answers together when you turn in

1. When does this story take place? (keep your eyes on the screen). *How does the time period (so well recreated here) affect the story. Keep in mind most people never traveled farther than their home village. Come back to this question later. Also – this film has been redone with an American Civil War setting: Somersby, and in a Simpsons episode (think Principal Skinner). What do those very disparate settings say about this story? Could this story have happened today (you may want to wait till you finish the film to answer this) in our social media, internet, photographic evidence of everything world.*



2. What kind of boy is Martin Guerre? Does he change as he gets older? How? What is the reason that he is ridiculed (be specific). Is he responsible, now or later, for how he is treated? Be specific. *What specific (and insightful) connection can you make to "The Metamorphosis"?*



3. Does Martin's wife seem to love him? Why or why not? Does their marriage have any troubles? What? What does she make for him that he seems to care little about?

4. How is Martin humiliated during a feast day festival (he is wearing a bear suit – watch what they do to him)? *What must be going on with his sense of identity? (ok, I know this calls for some judgment here). Again – make a specific connection to "The Metamorphosis" (and think about the questions you answered on that story in your groupwork – YES, get it out) Are both Martin and his wife, Bertrande, struggling in their own ways? Explain.*

5. How does Martin react to the white breeches (pants) that Bertrande makes for him? *Does he seem to appreciate his wife? Why does Martin eventually leave the village? Does it have anything to do with #4 above; with anything else as well? Be as specific as possible. Make a connection between Martin leaving the village and Young Goodman Brown going into the woods.*

6. Who are the men questioning Martin Guerre's wife? What are they investigating? **Much of the movie takes place in flashbacks – pay attention.** *How does the effect of flashbacks contribute to the movie's search for truth?¹ In a German TV series called Dark – one character states that time is not linear: "Yesterday, today and tomorrow are not consecutive, they are connected in a never-ending circle. Everything is connected." Comment*

7. How do the people in the village react to Martin's return? Does everyone seem equally happy – *be specific in your answer.* There are a few people that Martin cannot or does not recognize – how do they react – *how would you react if you were the one person in the village that was not remembered?*

Complete these questions for Part 1, tonight (unless it says for a specific question to wait until you watch the entire movie). I will check these tomorrow – and you will get +20 points added to the first two parts (Weds & Thursday) for having done this. Questions from all 3 parts of the movies are due on Friday. There is no other homework (other than making sure you get *The History of Love*). Complete each Part of the Movie Questions each night right after you watch them (except for questions or parts of questions that imply you are to answer

¹ Think about what we've studied and/or read so far in this class about "truth." Aren't memories a flashback? Are they reliable?

the question after viewing the entire movie). If you miss any part of the movie – you must rent it and turn in the receipt with your questions. I don't mind if you ask a friend about 1 or 2 answers that you missed for the nonitalicized questions – but you are to do the italicized questions on your own. Answer in complete sentences (with complete answers on a separate sheet of paper (no -- each part does not have to be on a separate sheet, but they must be answered on loose leaf paper)– **do not type**).

Extra Credit

For extra-credit (50 points) write a 1 page essay on the following poem. Simply try to explain what the poet is talking about (don't look hard for hidden meanings -- the poem is quite literal). Examine the poem closely. Who is the persona talking about? How does she get away with hearing the truth? Why don't people take her seriously. Use an essay form with intro, body, conclusion (no more than 1 and 1/2 pages).

Magna est Veritas - by Stevie Smith

With my looks I am bound to look simple or fast. I would rather look simple
 So I wear a tall hat on the back of my head that is rather a temple
 And I walk rather queerly and comb my long hair
 And people say, Don't bother about her.
 So in my time I have picked up a good many facts,
 Rather more than the people do who wear smart hats
 And I do not deceive because I am rather simple too
 And although I collect facts I do not always know what they amount to.
 I regard them as a contribution to almighty Truth, magna est veritas et prevalebit,
 Agreeing with that Latin writer, Great is Truth and will prevail in a bit.



Le Retour de Martin Guerre - Part 2

If you have missed the first part of the film, you must rent the film (it may be hard to find – make sure you get a subtitled – not dubbed version) After you rent (or buy) it – you will need to take an oral quiz and show me a print out or receipt from the movie. Anyway, here is an incomplete, unreliable summary: In France in the year 1524, Martin Guerre marries Bertrande. Scorned and unhappy at home, he flees his village and is not heard from for a number of years. After a long absence a man claiming to be Martin Guerre returns and is enthusiastically greeted by the entire village. Unlike the man he used to be, Martin is now strong, responsible, and caring. Between flashbacks of his return to the village, the movie shows his Bertrande being quizzed by a member of the French parliament regarding Martin's return.

So what's the big deal here anyway? There are no Rambos, no exploding rockets; but there is food for your mind. I have been told not to teach this movie, that it would go over your heads; yet year after year it is a student favorite. I never underestimate your intelligence. Consider and answer the following questions (**all questions are due Friday, but complete each part after each day's viewing – I may collect any given part on the day after you watch it**).



1. Who do Martin and Bertrande run into in the field – *does the setting (the fog, the talk of ghosts beforehand, the ominous piles of hay) and Martin's taking Bertrande with him have anything to do with, serve as a metaphor for, or echo what is going on in his life and the doubts that are starting about him? Think about the "ghosts" and the narrative structure of this film – flashbacks – comment.*
2. List the reasons that Martin is doubted to be the *real* Martin. **Keep a running list.** Who is doing this doubting (and why?) *Do those having these doubts have any reasons of their own to get rid of Martin? Look back at question 7 from Part 1.*
3. Specifically, what does Martin do to get his uncle mad? How does his Uncle deal with him – what does it betray about his uncle (see question 2)? What does it say about Martin (that he goes for the "bait")? *How is Martin's uncle similar to Young Goodman Brown? Be specific. Think about why Brown is going into the forest*

– think about why and at what point Martin's uncle begins to suspect him. Also, speaking of leaving a beautiful wife behind...(finish that).

4. How have Bertrande's feelings towards her husband changed since his return? What key thing did Martin remember and ask her for (you may have to think back to yesterday) that she had made for him, that the old Martin didn't seem to care about at all. *What does that one incident (the remembering, the caring) say about Martin? What does it say about Bertrande?*



5. Does Bertrande have any doubts? What & Why?

How strong are they? In what concrete ways does she express them? *Is this ambiguity something that we (American movie viewers) are used to? Explain. How does this fit in with the "cave dweller" (from Plato's The Allegory of the Cave) – and their first getting used to the light outside of the cave?*

Extra Credit (50 points)

The following poem (or song) originates from the 16th century (about the time of our film) or earlier (some scholars believe it is MUCH older) England (those in my Brit Lit class saw it when we studied Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"). Though modernized, the poem remains powerful and evocative.

O Western Wind

O Western wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain?
Christ, that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.

What kind of story do you see as you read the poem? There are many. In fact, couldn't this have been written by Martin or Bertrande when they were parted? Write a one page essay describing what you believe the situation behind the poet's lament is. Tell why they are separated. Is a reunion hopeful or doubtful? Quote from the poem to support your hypothesis. Hint: Remember poets choose words carefully. Use the Oxford English Dictionary (in the media center or if you have a Chicago Public Library card it is in your included Data Bases) and look up some of those words (especially western wind).



Lies have 1000 faces,
even the demon's.
***Truth has only one,
and justice exists to discover the
truth***



Jean de Coras

Le Retour de Martin Guerre - Part 3

Does the above quote sound familiar? Where did you see it before? Today you will watch the final part of *The Return of Martin Guerre*. You will have learned the true identity of the central character and the story is brought to a close. Now you must ask yourself what all of this has to do with truth and identity. Another important question to begin asking yourself is, "Does it matter who the real Martin Guerre is?" ***Is it possible that a fake Guerre can be more true (True) than the real Guerre?*** Give this some real thought – it may not be as obvious as it seems.



The story of Guerre reminds me of the true story of a famous Rembrandt portrait that was hung for year in a Dutch museum. Since it was first appeared, patrons and critics admired the beauty of the work and they described it as one of the master's best. Recently, the painting was discovered to be a forgery and it was abruptly taken down. Yet, did the fact that Rembrandt didn't actually paint this picture make it any less beautiful. Was it less **true** than if Rembrandt had painted it himself? Please, revisit this incident when you are answering question #10.

Questions for Part 3 - all questions must be turned in **Friday** – (on a separate sheet of paper – REMEMBER – 1) Typed answers will not be accepted 2) Put your

nonitalicized and italicized answers together on your sheet [in other words answer all of question 1, then all of question 2]). **The answer to these questions are worth 350**

1. Was Bertrande ever threatened by her uncle? How? *What Look back at your answer to #3 – from Part 2.*



points.
would his motive be?

2. How does Martin prove his uncle did to try to have him killed? What is a direct result of him proving this? How is **where** Bertrande is staying during the trial changed?

3. How does the priest suggest that Martin has fooled everyone? Why is this an “easy” thing to believe. *Deep thinking question: Do we indulge in the same fantasies? When a famous person is assassinated, is it easier to believe in a conspiracy theory than a “lone gun man?” Almost everytime something horrific happens you will hear people blaming the media. Is it easier to blame the “media” than the perpetrators of the horrific event? And if you do blame the media – who buys or watches what the media shows? Explain.*

4. *Can you make the case that Betrande’s incredibly beautiful and sensitive reasoning for how she knows who the real Martin is – the greatest proof that could even be given as to his real identity? Be thoughtful and specific (remember don’t answer this until the film is over). Link her statement with something we have read so far this year.*

DO NOT TURN THESE SHEETS OVER UNTIL THE FINAL WITNESS (WHO INSISTS ON BEING HEARD BEGINS TO TESTIFY)

4. Who is the last witness who insists on being heard? How does Arnaud – during his testifying, trip himself up?

5. Why does Bertrande at the last minute decide to save herself to tell the truth? **Watch her face closely during this scene.** Pay close attention too, during her last interview with Coras, for why she does this (betray Martin).

6. Listen to Arnaud's account of how and what he did. *How can Arnaud's arrival in Martin's village be compared to Gregor's waking up (as an insect) in The Metamorphosis? How can that same arrival be compared to the cave dweller's first encounter with the outside, from Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave."* Be specific and thoughtful.

7. Why does Jean de Coras and the court spare Bertrande any punishment? *How does this contradict what her "real" husband says to her at the trial. How does what her "real" husband says have to do with the condemnation of Eve from the garden of Eden (think!)*

8. For some reason – when this movie was revised, they left off the very last subtitle (**it is probably the most important line in the film**): "The Spirit Lives on – all else perishes" . *How does that line sum up this movie? How does it also sum up the enigmatic ending of "The Night Face Up"? How can that sentiment be used in our lives? How is it true that the Spirit (perhaps even the spirit if Guerre (Arnaud) lives on, given that we are watching this movie – or that this movie has been made into so many other media (The Simpsons, an Opera, two musicals, an American Movie: Somersby).*



9. *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew was an uprising and subsequent killing of Protestants in France (including Jean de Coras). How does what happened to Jean de Coras echo Martin's fate? How is it ironic? How does that killing of these people with their new ideas (the Protestants) echo Chris Hedges's experience at Rockford College. You need to know what the Reformation was – look it up, if you don't know*

10. (50 points by itself- give me at least 2 to 3 full paragraphs on this) Who was the real Martin Guerre? Give me at least two paragraphs – Cite 2 specifics from the movie in your answer. Make sure you consider what we've talked about so far this year about truth including our readings – ("The Allegory of the Cave", "The Night Face Up" and especially The Metamorphosis.) Be specific and use as many quotes from these works as you can. Consider our discussions as to the (lack of) importance as to which meaning or ending of the Night Face Up is the "real" one, whether or not Young Goodman Brown went to a coven meeting and whether or not Gregor really was an insect. Don't go for the obvious and make sure you think this through and challenge yourself – perhaps you will give an answer that you wouldn't have before this movie.

