SUPERSUMMARY™

IN-DEPTH STUDY GUIDE

THE RETURN OF MARTIN GUERRE

NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS

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PLOT OVERVIEW

In *The Return of Martin Guerre,* Natalie Zemon Davis, historian and professor at Princeton University, reconstructs the sixteenth-century legend of Martin Guerre, a man with a wooden leg who arrived at a courthouse in Toulouse just in time to denounce an imposter who had stolen his wife, his family, and his inheritance. Arnaud du Tilh, a clever and persuasive peasant with a somewhat sordid past, had indeed taken Martin's identity, and he nearly escaped prosecution but for the perfect timing of the real Martin Guerre's return home. Though this story is widely considered a legend, the characters involved were real people who lived in the Languedoc region of France during the sixteenth century. Davis blends rigorous historical research with her own informed dramatization of the events leading up to the return of Martin Guerre in this book, a work of literature that defies easy classification.

Three French peasants hold the leading roles in this legendary story: Martin Guerre, his wife Bertrande de Rols, and Arnaud du Tilh, the imposter who took advantage of Martin's absence to usurp Martin's position. In 1527, Sanxi Daguerre, Martin Guerre's father, moved his family from their home in the Basque region to Artigat, in the Languedoc region of France. Sanxi and his family adapted to life in their new village, learning a new language and changing their surname from Daguerre to Guerre. They assimilated well enough for the young Martin to become engaged to Bertrande de Rols, the daughter of a respectable Artigat family, but not so well that Martin felt completely at ease in his new role of husband. The newlyweds needed assistance to consummate the marriage, and eight years passed before their son was born. Martin's humiliation was public, and Davis describes Martin as unhappy and restless, as a result of both this embarrassing series of events and Martin's generalized sense of unease. In 1548, after disgracing himself by stealing a bit of grain from his father, Martin abandoned his wife and young baby and left for Spain. Bertrande moved back into her childhood home to live with her mother, who had married Pierre Guerre, Martin's uncle. Humiliated and trapped by the constraints of patriarchal peasant society, Bertrande waited here, neither wife nor widow, for her husband to return for approximately eight years.

In 1556, Arnaud du Tilh arrived to Artigat, calling himself Martin Guerre and reminiscing affectionately about old times he had shared with Martin's family and

friends. Bertrande and other members of Martin's family listened to him talk about their shared experiences and memories from the years before his exit from Artigat, and they all accepted him fully. Here, Davis veers away from the recorded facts, imagining Bertrande as a woman and wife fully cognizant of the imposter; this imagining is significant because Bertrande's unspoken decision to accept Arnaud du Tilh though she knew he was a fraud made Bertrande a brave and unexpected champion of her own cause and her own willful pursuit of happiness. This departure from the historical documents that frame the legend of Martin Guerre is one example of Davis's unique writing style that blends creative writing with historical retelling.

Within a few years of his arrival to Artigat, Arnaud du Tilh, the new Martin, clashed with his uncle, Pierre Guerre, who was also Bertrande's stepfather. This conflict revived Pierre Guerre's doubts about the true identity of the new Martin, and soon, the new Martin found himself in court, fighting for his right to Bertrande, their children, and his property and inheritance. The case was complicated and long, and witnesses were split; for as many villagers who doubted the new Martin, there were just as many who believed he was indeed the real Martin. Just as the judges were about to dismiss the charges against the new Martin, the real Martin Guerre made a dramatic return and seized his old life back from the clutches of the imposter. Arnaud du Tilh eventually confessed, apologized, and died for his crime.

Few records of the sixteenth-century court case exist, so Davis relies mainly on two historical documents: *Arrest Memorable* by Jean de Coras, a respected judge and legal scholar of the time whom the Criminal Chamber tasked with writing a record of the case, and the popular news account by Guillaume Le Sueur, in Latin, titled *Admiranda historia,* and in French, *Histoire admirable*. Davis examines each of these records in detail, presenting the reader with a thorough description of the individuals involved in the case, the society in which the case took place, and the circumstances that permitted the events that led up to the trials to happen in the first place. Throughout the book, Davis reminds the reader that she has supplemented history with speculation and invention, and this combination of fact and fiction makes this book difficult to categorize. Whether a work of non-fiction, an imaginative history, a microhistory, or a scholarly monograph, *The Return of Martin Guerre* tells a true story of stolen identity with flair and memorable detail.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

Introduction-Chapter 1

Introduction Summary

Davis establishes her point of view as historian in the Introduction, explaining her research process and describing the usefulness of primary sources like diaries and letters. She points out one unique challenge she encountered while researching the lives she examines in this book: "the peasants, more than ninety percent of whom could not write in the sixteenth century, have left us few documents of self-revelation" (2). Literary sources about the peasants are also of limited utility, as "they follow the classical rules that make villagers a subject of comedy" (2). Davis explains that court documents and legal records are the most revealing of sources, and in the case of Martin Guerre, two specific texts are of particular usefulness: *Arrest Memorable*, written in French, by Jean de Coras, who was a judge and court reporter at the trial, and another work written by Guillaume Le Sueur, called *Admiranda historia* in Latin and known as *Histoire Admirable* in the French. Davis credits both of these writings as fundamental to her project while she reminds the reader that what she has written is "in part [her] invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past" (5).

Chapter 1 Summary: "From Hendaye to Artigat"

In the first chapter, Davis introduces the Daguerre family. In 1527, Sanxi Daguerre and his family left their home in Hendaye, in the Basque region "right on the border between France and Spain" (6), looking to establish a new life in Artigat, a village in the Languedoc region of France. Sanxi's life in Hendaye was not necessarily a bad one, but he may have moved to escape the pressures of war, plague, and possibly, some family problems: "[w]hatever the cause, Sanxi packed up his belongings and departed with his family and his younger unmarried brother" (7).

Davis explains that Artigat promised the Daguerre family more freedom and a different kind of peasant identity. In Hendaye, "[l]iving between the mountains, the river and the ocean, the villagers herded sheep, fished, and farmed" (7). In Artigat, peasant life was not limited to working the land or the sea; the Daguerres could become merchants or artisans. Peasants could even own property in Artigat, as well as rent it, so Sanxi may have envisioned a future as a landlord.

The Daguerres settled in Artigat and soon adapted to the new language and the new ways of their new home: "To be accepted by the village they had to take on some Languedoc ways. Daguerre became Guerre" (14). Sanxi's younger brother even changed his name to sound more French and became known as Pierre. Eleven years after their arrival, in 1538, Sanxi's son Martin was married to Bertrande de Rols, the daughter of a wealthy local family. Both husband and wife were young, perhaps as young as fourteen, but the marriage was promising, and "[a]long with future progeny, goods and exchange of service were surely considerations" (17). The Guerre's profession was tilework and Bertrande's brother may have been considered eligible, so the union was a strong one. Bertrande brought with her a dowry of "household goods and clothes that came with every bride in the region: a bed with feather pillows, sheets of linen and wool, a bedcover, a coffer with lock and key, and two or three dresses of different hues" (17). After their wedding, Martin and Bertrande were escorted home to the house of Sanxi Guerre, where they were given a marriage drink, meant to be an aphrodisiac to help them consummate their marriage.

Introduction-Chapter 1 Analysis

Davis lays a foundation for her role as historian and narrator in the Introduction, citing her sources and explaining her research process. Davis credits *Arrest Memorable*, published in 1561 by Jean de Coras, as the most comprehensive record of the events explained in *The Return of Martin Guerre,* and mentions Guillaume Le Sueur's *Historia,* published in the same year, as a useful supplement to Coras's book. Though Davis relies on these historical records for the facts, she weaves a narrative of her own creation throughout the book, bringing those historical facts to life.

Davis's tone as narrator and storyteller is engaging and conversational, which reveals her personal attachment to the characters and their lives. Early on, she reveals her particular interest in the experience of Bertrande de Rols, the wife of Martin Guerre; in fact, Davis starts the book with the French phrase *Femme*

bonne qui a mauvais mary, a bien souvent le coeur marry (A good wife with a bad husband often has a sorry heart), establishing her commitment to the wife's story from the very start of the book.

In Chapter 1, Davis presents thorough descriptions of the setting, all of which illuminate the culture and conditions of sixteenth-century French peasant life. There is information about the working lives of Basque and French peasants, the threats of warfare and disease to their peaceful lives and communities, and the alluring qualities of Artigat and the surrounding Languedoc region of France, which together function as a backdrop to the story of Martin Guerre.

Chapters 2-3

Chapter 2 Summary: "The Discontented Peasant"

In this chapter, Davis describes the unhappy conditions in which Martin may have found himself before and during his marriage to Bertrande de Rols. She explains that Martin was unable to consummate his marriage to Bertrande, which "may not have been the first of Martin's misfortunes" (19). Before his marriage at age fourteen, Martin lived in a household of mostly women, which might have made it difficult for him to relate to the boys his age in Artigat. As well, Martin may have encountered some more significant social problems. Martin's early years took place in the Basque country, which means that the French language may have been a challenge for him, and he also had the problem of his name: Martin was an unusual name for this part of France, and one that the locals used to refer to animals.

Witchcraft, or "a sorceress jealous of the Guerres and their fine alliance with the Rols or the agent of a jealous man or woman" (21), was generally blamed for Martin's problems in the marriage bed. Davis explains that the beliefs of the times would have assumed that "once a boy had his pubic hair, the pricks of the flesh were thought to start naturally" (20), so no one anticipated Martin's troubles. After eight years and some advice from "an old woman 'appeared suddenly as if from heaven'" (21), Martin and Bertrande consummated. A son was soon born, and they named him Sanxi after Martin's father.

Even after his son's birth, Martin continued to struggle. Davis explains: "His precarious sexuality after years of impotence, his household of sisters who would soon be marrying, his position as heir, now underscored by the arrival of his son

Sanxi, he wanted none of it." (21) But Martin had few options. Going back to the Basque country would offer him a life of "the sea and whaling ships" (22), and further afield in the Pyrenees, the only possibility was to work amongst the "shepherds with their flocks" (22). Neither option suited Martin nor his father, nor did the possibility of going to university, or to war. But, in 1548, when baby Sanxi was only a few months old and Martin was 24, he "'stole' a small quantity of grain from his father" (24) and because "theft was unpardonable by the Basque code, especially if done within the family" (24), Martin was now "in an impossible situation" (24). So, he left Artigat, deserting his family, and "he left his patrimony, his parents, his son, and his wife—and not one word was heard from him for many years" (24).

Davis states that Martin went to Burgos, Spain and worked for Francisco de Mendoza, a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. He lived in Burgos "with a sword and in the livery of one of the greatest houses of Spain" (26) and eventually, he served Francisco's brother, Pedro. Martin accompanied Pedro into the Spanish army and "became part of the force that Philip II would use against the French at Saint-Quentin" (26). On August 10, 1557, Martin was shot in the leg, which was later amputated and replaced with a wooden leg.

Chapter 3 Summary: "The Honor of Bertrande de Rols"

Davis describes Bertrande de Rols in this chapter, and she states that Bertrande was 22 years old when he left Artigat. Bertrande's childhood, before she married Martin, was one she spent "close to her mother's side, learning to spin and do other women's work" (27). According to Davis, being married to Martin was not easy for Bertrande at the beginning, and "it seems clear that for a while she was relieved that they could not have intercourse" (28), but "when urged by her relatives to separate from Martin, she firmly refused" (28). Bertrande's refusal to leave Martin revealed her strong sense of pride as well as her pragmatism and her obstinate nature. Staying married to Martin, in a sexless marriage, allowed her to have "a girlhood with Martin's younger sisters" (28) while she maintained her honor and reputation as a wife. When she finally had a child, she took "the first real step into adulthood" (29).

Through Bertrande's story, Davis describes the role of women in Artigat society, "where organizational structure and public identity were associated exclusively with males" (29). Thanks to this patriarchal social structure, in Artigat, the status of a wife was very different from that of a widow. When Martin left Artigat,

Bertrande's status and her future became uncertain. She had no choice but to move back in with her mother, who was by then a widow and remarried to Pierre Guerre, Martin's uncle. These circumstances may have caused Bertrande to feel trapped in a situation out of her control; if she did feel this way when the new Martin arrived, she may have decided to take advantage of the opportunity to choose a life of her own, no matter that the returning husband was not her husband.

Chapters 2-3 Analysis

These two chapters bring to life the relationship between Martin and his wife, Bertrande. The dissection of their personal histories illuminates the challenges they faced as a married couple, whose wedding took place while they were only young teens. A reader with a modern perspective could understand the challenges they faced while attempting to consummate the marriage as understandable, as Martin and Bertrande were practically children themselves. Davis explains that the age at which they married was typical of this time in history.

Martin's emasculating experiences in his marriage bed may have led him to desert his family, but his dissatisfaction may have come about much earlier in his life. The fragile state of his psyche is traceable in the subtext of his story and in the choices he made to live mainly among men doing manly things like soldiering. Bertrande, on the other hand, has a strong spirit, according to Davis's interpretations of her character, and it can be supposed that this strong female spirit likely further hindered Martin more than helped him. As well, the strength of Bertrande's character sets her up to the reader as a woman of her own mind who resists being told what to do and looks for opportunities to run her own life whenever possible.

Chapters 4-6

Chapter 4 Summary: "The Masks of Arnaud du Tilh"

In this chapter, Davis introduces Arnaud du Tilh, also known as Pansette, a man from Lombez, which was a diocese about "a good day's ride" (35) from Artigat. His country, and specifically his father's village of Sajas, was "'rich in grains'" (35),

but controlled by the seignior, who "tried to limit the inhabitants' rights to have a tavern and a butchershop" (35-36).

Arnaud's family "stood among the middle ranks of the peasants, with enough fields and vineyards so that when Arnaud Guilhem died and divided his property equally among his sons (the practice in Sajas and le Pin as it was in Artigat), there would be a little land for Arnaud" (36). Arnaud was a character, known throughout his village, and perhaps even further afield, as clever and full of potential: "So clever was Pansette that he began to be suspected of magic" (37). Arnaud's reputation as a "'dissolute,' a youth of 'bad life,' 'absorbed in every vice'" (37) led to his nickname, Pansette, which meant "the belly," a reflection of his hedonistic lifestyle. Arnaud "was as much at odds with family and peasant property as was Martin Guerre in Artigat" (37), so after a brief career as a petty thief, he ran away and became a soldier for Henri II.

Davis presents in this chapter the possible ways in which Pansette may have heard of Martin's story and glimpsed his opportunity to step in to Martin's life and take Martin's identity. One possibility is that Arnaud met Martin when they were both soldiers, and Arnaud learned about Martin's life directly from the source. Davis asserts that while it is true that both Martin and Arnaud served in the military, Martin fought for the king of Spain, and Arnaud for the king of France, so it is unlikely they met and became friends. In fact, during the trial, "[h]e claimed he had never encountered Martin Guerre before he went to Artigat" (39), which means Arnaud simply decided one day to take someone else's life, after "he encountered two friends of Martin…who took him for the missing man from Artigat" (39). Arnaud may have used his cleverness to learn everything he needed to know to take full advantage of the situation. As well, Davis discusses the types of deception that took place in this culture at this time, placing Arnaud's deception in a broader context and normalizing his decision to act so boldly.

Chapter 5 Summary: "The Invented Marriage"

Davis describes in this chapter the events that led up to Arnaud's arrival to Artigat and the circumstances that permitted Arnaud to pass successfully as Martin Guerre. In the days before Arnaud's arrival to Artigat, twelve years after Martin's departure, Arnaud stayed at a hostelry in a nearby village. Arnaud spoke to the hotelkeeper affectionately about Bertrande and young Sanxi Guerre, his so-called wife and son, and soon "[t]he words spread to his four sisters, who rushed to the inn, greeted him with delight and went back for Bertrande" (42). Davis supposes

that Bertrande was surprised to see him, as he now had a beard, but when he spoke to her of their past, she became convinced. Similarly, "Pierre Guerre looked him over steadily as well and did not believe he was his nephew until he reminisced about their activities together. Finally Pierre embraced him and thanked God for his return" (42). This pattern repeated itself over and over when the new Martin encountered other people in Artigat, and he explained that he had been "serving in the army of the king of France, had spent some months in Spain, and was now eager to be once again in his village with his relatives, his son Sanxi, and especially his wife Bertrande" (43).

For three years, the new Martin and Bertrande lived peacefully in "the invented marriage" (44). Davis asserts that Bertrande must have known that the new Martin was not her husband, and that she entered into the charade knowingly, as "[w]hat Bertrande had with the new Martin was her dream come true, a man she could live with in peace and friendship (to cite sixteenth-century values) and in passion" (44). They had two daughters together, and "one died, but the other, Bernarde, became Sanxi's little sister" (44).

Davis discusses the marriage in this chapter as well as Arnaud's seeming true love for Bertrande and her true love for him. Davis also describes the open terms around the tradition of marriage that may have made Bertrande's self-justifications of bigamy possible: "if they took each other as husband and wife in words of the present, even in the absence of the priest or any witness, exchanged tokens of consent, and especially if they then went on to have intercourse, they were joined in an indissoluble union" (46). Though this tradition perhaps allowed Bertrande to feel she was not breaking any laws, this tradition did not protect their Catholic souls, which is why, Davis claims, "the new Martin and Bertrande de Rols were becoming interested in the new religion" (48) of Protestantism. After 1545, the new marriage laws in Reformed Geneva meant that "marriage was no longer a sacrament," and "a wife abandoned by her husband…could after a year of inquiry obtain from the Consistory a divorce and permission to remarry" (50).

Chapter 6 Summary: "Quarrels"

In this chapter, Davis outlines the events that led up to the new Martin's imprisonment, a situation that eventually led to the trial that exposed Arnaud's fraudulent life. Though the new Martin seemed to fit in well with his new family life, and he seemed to adapt quickly to his life on the farm, his peaceful existence unraveled when "he tried to take commercial advantage of the properties that

Sanxi Guerre had carefully acquired in Artigat and passed on to his heir Martin" (52).

Though Bertrande may have been pleased with her husband's business acumen, Martin's uncle Pierre was not impressed with the plan to sell family property, a plan that violated Basque custom. To make matters worse, the new Martin offended Pierre when he "asked Pierre to give him the accounts he had kept after the elder Sanxi's death" (52), implying that "Pierre was withholding some of the inheritance" (53). Family jokes about the situation persisted until 1558 or 1559, when "the new Martin brought a civil suit against Pierre before the judge of Rieux" (53).

This family upheaval gave Pierre reason to revisit his initial doubts about the new Martin, and "Pierre convinced his wife and sons-in-law of the terrible truth" (54): the new Martin was an imposter. From then on, "Pierre Guerre went about telling everyone that the new Martin was a faker who had tricked him" (54). Some villagers took Pierre's side, and others took Martin's side, and for over a year, the family dispute carried on, and there was nothing the consuls of Artigat could do to bring order.

This conflict could have carried on for years but for two important events that took place in the summer and fall of 1559. Firstly, a soldier passing through Artigat claimed to know the real Martin, who had a wooden leg, and "seeing the disputed man, announced to witnesses that he was a deceiver" (56). Secondly, a seignior of a nearby town, Lanoux, accused the new Martin of arson when his farm building burned down, and he had the new Martin imprisoned in Toulouse. According to Davis, "in the course of his complaint—evidently tipped off by Pierre Guerre—he told the judge that the prisoner had 'usurped the marriage bed of another man'" (57).

At this point, Bertrande and the children again had to move back to live with Bertrande's mother and her stepfather, Pierre. At this time, Pierre pressured Bertrande to accuse the new Martin of being an imposter. Pierre hunted for information to support his accusation of the new Martin, and it turned out that "[t]he new Martin himself had left clues in the course of his travels" (58). These clues helped Pierre name the new Martin as Arnaud du Tilh. Then, Pierre lied to the judge of Rieux, claiming that Bertrande had sent him, and "he got permission to have a formal inquiry opened about the man calling himself Martin Guerre"

(58). The new Martin returned home from prison in January 1560 only to be seized the next morning and taken to prison in Rieux.

Davis points out at the end of this chapter the impact of the lies of Arnaud and Pierre, and their impact specifically on Bertrande. Davis believes that Arnaud was clearly secure in his position as the new Martin and that Bertrande was secure in her position as his wife and mother to their children; Pierre's accusation upset the balance of these situations, and now Bertrande had to keep her wits about her in case she was revealed to be a bigamist: "The stubborn woman calculated and made her plans. She would go along with the court case against the imposter and hope to lose it…But given all her doubts and the close calls of the past few months, she would also be prepared to win the case" (61).

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

These chapters introduce the imposter, Arnaud du Tilh, and the new marriage that exists between the new Martin and Bertrande, one that actually seems more like the marriage Bertrande may have ideally wanted.

By deepening the characterization of Bertrande, Davis goes deeper into the crux of her main argument: Bertrande may have wanted a happy marriage, but much more than that, she wanted agency, a way to make decisions for herself, a mindset not supported by the patriarchal norms of Artigat. When Arnaud arrived, Bertrande had an opportunity to decide for herself what to do, and Davis argues that Bertrande chose to be complicit in the fraud as the position of wife suited her better than the position of abandoned wife. As well, she may have been happier with Arnaud, whose background suggests he was more confident and self-assured than Martin, and possibly more interesting.

In these chapters, the motif of lies is foregrounded. First, the new Martin lies in order to gain a wife and a new life and identity. Then, if Davis is correct, Bertrande accepts the imposter and pretends that he is the real Martin, choosing to live a lie. These lies start the chain of events that eventually lead to Arnaud's downfall, when the motif of lies and deceptive behaviors continues, approaching a climax in Chapter 6, with the lies Pierre Guerre tells in order to expose the lies of the new Martin. Pierre also implicates Bertrande, emphasizing that Bertrande's lack of power is caused by yet another case of her husbandlessness; she is again living with her mother, and living under the rule of her stepfather. The quarrels

described in Chapter 6 all lead to more lies and more complicated posturing under more stressful circumstances within a courtroom setting, but the new Martin was unflappable, living the lie as authentically as if it were true.

Chapters 7-9

Chapter 7 Summary: "The Trial at Rieux"

In this chapter, Davis describes the challenges of the court case against the new Martin. Many cases from Artigat had ended up at the court at Rieux, but none were as difficult as this one: "Together with the king's attorney at Rieux and lawyers in the court, the judge faced one of the most puzzling cases of his career" (62).

The process to try the case was lengthy, but typical. First, the witnesses, "named by the civil party" (63) and identified by Bertrande and Pierre, gave depositions. Then, the king's attorney examined the testimony and offered an opinion, after which the judge opened the hearings and listened to the new Martin's explanations. Next, the judge heard Bertrande and then gave the new Martin another hearing to compare his version of the events with his wife's version. After these processes, the witnesses were given another opportunity to speak of their experiences with the accused. Finally, after the deposition of the witnesses was read aloud, the new Martin offered more explanations and alibis.

Though the process was meant to go according to process, the case of the new Martin's identity was much more complicated than anyone expected. Neither the new Martin's guilt nor his innocence was obvious to the judge after his testimony and the testimony of the witnesses.

Questions of identity and identification plagued the villagers who testified, as well as the officials involved in the trial: "In village after village in two dioceses, people were asking themselves how you could tell who a man was—" (67). The witnesses from Artigat were unified on only one point: "when the prisoner came into their midst, he greeted everyone by name and reminded them accurately of things they had done together in precise circumstances" (67). They even argued about details of his physical appearance, like the presence of warts and extra teeth and the shape and length of his legs.

In the meantime, Davis speculates about the internal struggles of Bertrande de Rols, who may have worried that her husband "must have been wondering about her loyalty" (68), and her family were likely questioning her motives. She had to play two parts to protect her honor, one that was loyal to the old Martin, should the new Martin be found guilty, and one that was loyal to the new Martin, should he be found innocent.

Despite a genius performance by the new Martin, who "never missed a step in any recollection" (69), and a strong defense argument that relied on evidence of Pierre's antipathy, the new Martin was found guilty and condemned to death. He protested and maintained his innocence, and "appealed immediately to the Parlement of Toulouse" (72).

Chapter 8 Summary: "The Trial at Toulouse"

Davis discusses in this chapter the outcomes of the new Martin's appeal. The Parlement of Toulouse judged both civil and criminal cases on appeal, "also deciding what to do about anti-Catholic image breakers in Toulouse" (73). The Criminal Chamber employed ten or eleven judges and two or three presidents, and the case of Martin Guerre included "the learned Jean de Coras" (74).

This group of officials were divided in their religious beliefs; three judges, including Jean de Coras, "soon emerged as strong Protestants" as well as a few others who "were at least sympathetic to the Reformed cause" (74). The role of Jean de Coras was "reporter for the proceedings, which meant that he would look closely into the issues and finally prepare a report on all the arguments and make a recommendation for the sentence" (75).

Bertrande began her hearing with a statement that attempted to clear her honor: "she had never been the prisoner's accomplice" (75). Her husband supported this statement with such strength that Bertrande and Pierre both were also imprisoned because, according to the report by Coras, "'there were few judges present who were not persuaded that the prisoner was the true husband and that the imposture came from the side of the wife and the uncle'" (76).

Coras recorded the testimony by even more witnesses, but none of this information made the situation clearer. "Coras was 'in great perplexity'" (79) because a court needed proof of a crime in order to find a person guilty, and this proof was elusive: "The more he reflected on the evidence, the more likely it

seemed that the defendant was who he said he was and that the sentence of the judge in Rieux should be reversed" (79).

Apparently, Coras gave more thought to the positions of Bertrande de Rols and Pierre Guerre: "It seemed probable, as Bertrande had earlier been heard to claim herself, that she had been coerced into bringing a false accusation" (80). Pierre had shown himself to be a liar as well, and "[h]is conspiracy with his wife and his sons-in-law to have the defendant killed has been described by 'several witnesses'" (80), which means there "was sufficient proof to warrant an order to torture Pierre Guerre to see if he would confess to attempted murder" (80). The efforts of Bertrande and Pierre to misrepresent the new Martin was a crime, "a grave and too frequent crime, a deliberate plan to do evil to one's neighbor against God's eighth commandment" (80).

The new Martin had the supportive testimony of his four sisters to give Coras and the Criminal Chamber reason to believe his story. As well, "the tested fact of the prisoner's assured and perfect recall of everything about the life of Martin Guerre" (81) and the Roman principle of law that stated "'it was better to leave unpunished a guilty person than to condemn an innocent one'" (81) meant that Arnaud du Tilh very nearly escaped condemnation. But, just as the Criminal Chamber was making a final judgment, "a man with a wooden leg appeared at the buildings of the Parlement of Toulouse. He said his name was Martin Guerre" (81).

Chapter 9 Summary: "The Return of Martin Guerre"

In this chapter, Davis ponders what might have motivated Martin Guerre to come back to Artigat after twelve years. He had been living "as a lay brother in one of the houses of the military order of Saint John of Jerusalem…a small part of an all-male world dominated by aristocrats" (82). Davis believes that Martin had heard the news of the trial, so his timely arrival was unlikely a coincidence.

Coras reported that Arnaud, the new Martin, challenged Martin as soon as the hearings began anew, accusing him of being a paid interloper arranged by Pierre Guerre. As the hearing continued, amazingly, "the man with the wooden leg remembered events in the house of Martin Guerre less well than the prisoner" (84).

According to Coras's record, Pierre, Martin's four sisters and Bertrande all wept at the arrival of Martin, but "Martin Guerre showed not a single sign of sorrow at the tears of Bertrande de Rols" (86), dismissing her emotions and blaming her for not knowing her husband and for "'the disaster that which has befallen our house'" (86). He accepted no guilt for abandoning her in the first place.

Arnaud du Tilh was soon found guilty, and "condemned to perform an *amende honorable*, a public apology, and then be put to death in Artigat" (86). Prison time was not a possibility for Arnaud, but other possible punishments could have included "fines, various kinds of physical punishment (whipping, branding, mutilation), banishment, a term rowing in the king's galleys" (87). Crimes similar to Arnaud's had been punished with consequences less harsh than death, but "Du Tilh's was a more serious crime…[i]t involved stealing a heritage" (88). As well, "he had committed adultery, a crime that Coras thought should be punished more severely and consistently in general" (88).

Though Arnaud would hang for his crime, the court "treated the interests of Arnaud du Tilh with consideration" (89): his daughter Bernarde was deemed legitimate, his belongings and property were not confiscated, and he was not sentenced to torture in order to name his accomplices. Bertrande de Rols was not prosecuted for fraud nor for bigamy nor adultery, and Martin Guerre was also determined to be innocent as "his departure could be attributed to his youth" (90). Pierre Guerre was not prosecuted for his lies and misrepresentations. Arnaud du Tilh maintained his innocence until after he was sentenced: "He would start his public apology in front of the church of Artigat and then be led through the village and executed before the house of Martin Guerre" (91). On the day of his death, he confessed and explained that he had been "hailed as Martin Guerre by the two men at Mane" (92) and this moment had inspired him to steal Martin's identity. Arnaud du Tilh admitted his real name and made no mention of Bertrande's role in the matter. He died moments after "preaching to the man who would take his place not to be harsh with Bertrande" (93).

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Throughout these chapters, Davis analyses the nuances of the medieval French legal system, which was supportive of anyone who had a legal problem no matter their social status. Davis provides more details about the villagers of Artigat who functioned as witnesses during the court case, as well as the Guerre family members who spoke out in support of the new Martin and against him. These

details support the theme of peasant identity, both in broad terms and in specific ones; peasants had a strong voice in their own legal proceedings, which means that they held a position in French society worthy of respect, yet the positions of individual peasants were harder to understand as there were no systems in place to determine one's identity with absolute certainty. The complicated nature of the case of the new Martin Guerre reveals this tension between the reach of social respect for a fellow villager's claims about him or herself and the limitations of legal proceedings around issues of identity.

Davis focuses on the trials and tribulations that led the new Martin to be so carefully scrutinized in Rieux and Toulouse but is careful to also discuss the impact of this process on Bertrande. Bertrande's potential for duplicity doubles as she must somehow play both the injured wife and the devoted lover. The outcomes of these trials do not only impact Arnaud du Tilh, Bertrande de Rols, Martin Guerre, and their close family members; Davis asserts that the complexity and the limitations of the French legal system, and the court's reliance on old traditions and Catholicism, reflects an institution's fear of giving in to the new Protestantism.

Chapters 10-11

Chapter 10 Summary: "The Storyteller"

Davis gives the reader a detailed description of Jean de Coras in this chapter. She also mentions Guillaume Le Sueur, the writer of *Historia,* or the "Admirable History of the Pseudo-Martin of Toulouse." Very little is known about Le Sueur, but Davis asserts that he had ambitions as a lawyer and a writer.

Jean de Coras, on the other hand, was somewhat well-known during his lifetime, so quite a bit of his biography has been recorded. He was a prodigy, "interpreting the civil law from a podium in Toulouse" (96) from the age of thirteen. After studying law and winning accolades for his academic work, he enjoyed a celebrated career as a university lecturer. Coras also had direct experience with the law. When his mother died, she left Coras everything, but his father did not allow Coras full access to the goods and property. Coras sued his father, and his

inheritance was validated, though his father was given access to all goods and property until he died.

Coras was a popular instructor of civil law, and he was also known as a competent writer of "Latin commentaries on the Roman law" (97). He married and had a daughter and a son, and then, after he lost his first wife, he remarried. His second wife was Jacquette de Bussi, and "Coras is expressively, deeply, almost foolishly fond" (98) of her. They were both committed to Protestantism, and after they married, Coras wrote a treatise in the French vernacular against secret marriages that reflects Protestant beliefs. Davis points out that by the time Coras served as a judge in the Criminal Chamber, "he was not a man of uniform sentiment and consistent goals" (100); at one point, he warned readers against being too passionate in their love relationships, which contradicts his own deep attachment to his own wife. Davis claims that, in Arnaud du Tilh, Coras "recognized a man with some of his own qualities" (102), which explains partly why Coras expressed sympathy for him and believed his fraudulent claims.

Chapter 11 Summary: "Histoire prodigieuse, Histoire tragique"

This chapter examines Coras's *Arrest Memorable* in detail and its popularity at the time of its publication. As well, Davis mentions the role Le Sueur's *Historia* played in the spread of the story.

Le Sueur's *Historia* "fits readily into the genre of the news account" (104), printed first in Latin and then later translated into French, while Coras's *Arrest Memorable* defies categorization. It too was available to readers both in Latin and in the vernacular, French, but Coras had applied the traditional form of a legal commentary to his own unofficial telling of the story. Within this framework, Coras took advantage of "a chance to comment on central issues in the legal practice of his day" (106), and he also had here an opportunity to "discuss marriage and its problems" (106), and to address religious matters. Davis asserts that Coras "reveals a Protestant sensibility" (107), though she later acknowledges that "*Arrest Memorable* easily found readers of both religions, and it was printed later in Paris by Catholic houses" (107).

Davis writes of *Arrest Memorable* as a complex work that is admirable in some ways and flawed in others. Davis explains that "Coras exaggerates certain things and omits others—we might even say that he lies a little—in shaping his account" (108) and she values these flaws especially. Coras wrote with an openness to

Arnaud du Tilh's "prodigious qualities" (109) and to the possibility that he was a magician. As well, Davis considers Coras's interpretation of Bertrande as a victim of fraud as a flaw, believing rather that Bertrande was a happy accomplice to Arnaud's duplicity.

Davis mentions one omission in the 1561 edition, when "Coras leaves his audience some room for doubt about whether the Criminal Chamber actually did get the right man" (111); Coras rewrites the statement in the 1565 edition and agrees with the Criminal Chamber, but calls the situation a "tragedy" (111), a notion with which Davis agrees.

Chapters 10-11 Analysis

In Chapters 10 and 11, Davis concentrates on the telling of the story by offering detailed characterization of the two key storytellers. Davis posits that though the judge and court reporter, Jean de Coras, and the legal scholar, Guillaume Le Sueur, had professional careers and ambitions in the realms of law, education and literature, something about the story of the peasant Martin Guerre resonated with them on a personal level. Because they felt a kinship of sorts with Martin Guerre, they created emotionally powerful literature about his story, which has given Martin Guerre an immortality typical of a legendary figure.

In Davis's description of Jean de Coras and the iterations of his work, *Arrest Memorable*, she returns to the theme of deception and lies, but much more gently than in earlier chapters. She points out flaws in Coras's account of the trial at Toulouse that may have misled other readers, not to discredit Coras but to emphasize the humanity of Coras and the humanity of any man or woman who bends the rules of society to live a happy and fulfilled life.

Chapters 12-Epilogue

Chapter 12 Summary: "Of the Lame"

Davis writes of the success of Coras's *Arrest Memorable* in the years that followed the trial, but Coras's success does not last. In 1572, five years after the fifth reprint of his book, Catholics imprisoned and lynched Coras, along with other Protestant judges. Coras's legacy lived on in his writings, and "[b]y the early seventeenth century, 'l'arrest de Martin Guerre' was listed among central texts for anyone being trained in jurisprudence" (115). Le Sueur's *Historia* "followed the

expected path of a news account as it is printed and reprinted and transformed into a popular legend" (115).

Judges, scholars and writers who read the story of Martin Guerre "were in accord in making Arnaud du Tilh the inventive figure in the tale, to be admired and feared, envied and rejected" (118). Bertrande de Rols did not play a significant role in the retellings of the story, until the twentieth century, except in the responses of two men in particular: "One comes from the poet Auger Gaillard," (118) who takes the side of the wife, and the other comes from Montaigne, who "insists how difficult it is to know the truth about things and how uncertain an instrument is human reason" (119). In an essay titled *Des boyteaux* ("Of the Lame"), Montaigne rebukes Coras for Coras's dependence on reason and "poor evidence" (120); he also criticizes Coras for recommending Arnaud be reprimanded with a punishment as severe and irreversible as death. Davis concludes this chapter with a defense of Coras, acknowledging as well the complex nature of the case: "Coras believed he had found out who the imposter was, but at the heart of his *Arrest Memorable* is an uncertainty as unsettling as Montaigne's" (122).

Epilogue Summary

Davis concludes the book with her imaginings of life in Artigat after the trial. She supposes that Bertrande and Martin must have resumed living together and that they may have even been mutually supportive of one another. Together, they had more sons, and Martin had yet another son by his second wife, whom he married after Bertrande died. In the years and centuries that followed, "[t]he Guerres and the Rols are on the best of terms, serving as godparents to each other's children, owning neighboring properties, and in some cases holding fields jointly" (124).

According to Davis, the story of Martin Guerre "lasted, beyond the other anecdotes and through major upheavals such as the Wars of Religion," (125) even to the present day. She admits at the end of the book that "[e]ven for this historian who has deciphered it, it retains a stubborn vitality" (125).

Chapter 12-Epilogue Analysis

As Davis concludes the book, she addresses the impact of the story on the world at large, acknowledging the male interpretations that she feels give adequate voice to the experience of Bertrande de Rols and Arnaud du Tilh. Davis also

discusses the literary quality of the story and its ability to connect with its readership, no matter how times change and move forward.

Davis looks closely at Montaigne's response to Coras's work, which may have been the inspiration for her own unwavering advocacy of Arnaud du Tilh. Montaigne's acknowledgement of the unreliability of human reason retrospectively chastises the Criminal Chamber and the villagers who gathered around Pierre Guerre to find fault in Arnaud du Tilh. The tragic elements of the story of Martin Guerre have little to do with Martin himself; Martin is remembered best for returning in time to reclaim his rightful position, while Pansette is remembered as the vibrant hero who did his best to live fully and richly.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Martin Guerre

Martin Guerre, the protagonist, is characterized as both victim and villain. Martin did not enjoy a happy childhood upon his arrival in Artigat as a 3- or 4-year-old child. Born in Hendaye, in the Basque region, he grew up surrounded by women. His father and his uncle shared the position of head of household, and both had intense personalities, perhaps even competing at times for the leadership position. Martin endured other challenges which may have compromised his development into a confident young man: as a child in Artigat, he had to learn a new language, which meant that communication may have been difficult, and he had an unusual first name for the Languedoc area that may have inspired mockery. He did, however, grow up to be a tall, slim eligible young man who was considered a good match for Bertrande de Rols, the daughter of a respectable Artigat family.

Married at about 14 years old, Martin was unsuccessful as a husband, as he was unable to consummate his marriage. Knowledge of his difficulty may have been public, and he may have endured any number of humiliations for eight years until he was able to impregnate his wife, which further imperiled his psychological and emotional stability. He and his wife had a son, named Sanxi, but this event did not seem to satisfy Martin in any way; in fact, it may have had the opposite effect. Within mere months after the birth of his son, Martin abandoned his family without warning after stealing grain from his father, and he left for a life among mainly men, in Spain. While he was away, he became a soldier and lost his leg in battle, only to have it replaced with a length of wood.

Twelve years passed before Martin returned to his family to find that an imposter had taken his place as Bertrande's husband and Sanxi's father and was standing trial for fraud at the insistence of Martin's uncle, Pierre. His family welcomed him back tearfully, but he rejected Bertrande's excuses of not recognizing the imposter as a fraud. Perhaps most revealing of all, Martin did not feel he was to blame for any part of the matter, even though he was the one to abandon his family and open vulnerabilities in the first place.

Bertrande de Rols

Bertrande de Rols was the wife of Martin Guerre. She grew up in her family home, learning the ways of women, much like any other peasant girl in the Languedoc region during the sixteenth century. Like Martin, Bertrande was young when they married, and she had likely just experienced the onset of puberty when her family decided that she should marry Martin. She too must have suffered from the humiliation of Martin's impotence, but she also benefited in some ways as she was able to live as a virginal girl for eight years longer than she expected. This extended childhood may explain why she stubbornly resisted her family's advice to leave Martin, but she may just have been a woman with a strong mind of her own, or a woman with a powerful sense of honor, or some combination of all three.

When Martin finally became able to consummate their marriage, Bertrande quickly became pregnant and had a son. After Martin left her and their baby, she had to move back in with her mother, who had married Martin's uncle, Pierre, which sheds light on her easy acceptance of the imposter husband. She may have clashed with the strongminded Pierre, and so when a charming version of her husband returned to her with words of love and regret, she may have found it

easy to overlook the fact that the new Martin was not actually the real Martin. In Coras's report of the trial, Bertrande is presented as a victim both of abandonment by the true Martin and a victim of fraud and betrayal by the new Martin; however, in Davis's book, she is presented as an accomplice in the fraud who is justified in her actions as they brought her agency, fulfillment, and greater happiness. This version of Bertrande is a feminist's heroine, a woman who challenged the patriarchy with impunity.

Arnaud du Tilh

Also known as Pansette, Arnaud du Tilh was from Lombez, a place full of lively economic exchange. He grew up with brothers, and though he was not physically impressive, Arnaud had a remarkable memory and a gift for language. Arnaud was a playful character with a reputation for excess, and he had few scruples to prevent him from pursuing pleasure and vice. All of this infamy inspired his nickname of Pansette, "the belly." Arnaud seemed to find the typical peasant existence unsatisfactory, and his restlessness may have led him to become a solider. His decision to leave Lombez may also have had something to do with getting caught for a few petty thefts.

Arnaud's bold nature and appetite for bending and breaking rules likely contributed to his decision to take advantage of Martin Guerre's disappearance. When two friends of Martin's encountered Arnaud while passing through the village of Mane, they mistook Arnaud for Martin, and clever Arnaud may have experienced a revelation: here was an opportunity for a theft like no other. Arnaud soon arrived at Artigat with his confidence and his new identity as Martin Guerre, having thoroughly prepared beforehand. He somehow learned enough about Martin Guerre's life in Artigat to convince Martin's wife and family that he was actually Martin. Once he was accepted, he cleverly collected and stored in his prodigious memory every detail that he later used while he was on trial for fraud. For three years, Arnaud enjoyed a wife, a comfortable home, and a family and role and earnings, until he was caught, tried, and eventually punished and executed for his crime.

Pierre Guerre

Pierre Guerre, previously known in his Basque homeland as Betrisantz, or Petri Daguerre, was the uncle of Martin Guerre, who traveled with Sanxi Daguerre to Artigat in 1527. After Martin abandoned Bertrande, Pierre had married Bertrande de Rols's mother, in order to improve the relationship between the Guerres and

the Rols, which was suffering as a result of Martin's desertion of his wife and newborn child. Pierre ran the household into which Bertrande and baby Sanxi moved back when Martin left them, the same household that housed Bertrande and her children when the new Martin was later jailed after only three years together.

Pierre is unsure of the new Martin from the start, and his suspicions are revived when the new Martin seeks to profit from the sales of the family land. Pierre is characterized as greedy and opportunistic, even though he likely begrudges the new Martin's business plans because they violate Basque tradition, and Pierre is dishonest himself, while suspecting others of dishonesty. Pierre's hypocrisy is revealed when he lies in order to catch Arnaud in his lies. Pierre may be understood as rather corrupt himself, or, in contrast, Pierre's actions could be defended; perhaps he only wanted to protect his family, his brother's memory, and the rightful heirs of his nephew, Martin. Pierre may have thought he was doing what he needed to do to catch a thief and bring the fraud to light. And of course, it ended up that he was right.

Jean de Coras

Born about 1515, in Realmont, Jean de Coras was "a native of the region, distinguished doctor of laws, author of Latin commentaries on the civil and canon law and humanist" (4). A child prodigy, Coras studied law and became a gifted lecturer and a popular writer. Coras eventually married, and when he lost his first wife, he married again. Surviving letters prove that Coras loved his second wife dearly.

Coras was a respected judge, and during the trial in Toulouse, Coras was assigned the responsibility of recorder. His observations and his documentation of facts, quotes and events related to the trial of Arnaud du Tilh provide the basis for *The Return of Martin Guerre*; however, Davis suggests that Coras's work, *Arrest Memorable*, is not entirely reliable. She claims that Coras exaggerated in places and omitted critical details in others, which has given her the space to fill in the blanks herself. As well, Coras represents Bertrande as a victim of fraud, while Davis believes Bertrande was a willing accomplice to Arnaud du Tilh's fraud.

Coras died, lynched by a Catholic mob, for his defense of Protestantism in 1572.

Guillaume Le Sueur

Not much is known about Guillaume Le Sueur, who wrote *Admiranda Historia*, or *Histoire admirable*, another account of the trial of Arnaud du Tilh. He was a legal scholar whose writings about the trial exist in both Latin and the French vernacular; Le Sueur's work spread throughout the land as a piece of interesting news writing, and Davis credits the popularity of his account as the reason behind the legendary status of the story of Martin Guerre.

Natalie Zemon Davis

Natalie Zemon Davis is an author and historian. She is the writer of this book, which is a creative work based on true historical events. Davis is not only a researcher who has studied primary documents in search of relevant facts, she is also a literary detective who has connected seemingly disparate moments in history in order to illuminate a marriage previously unexamined.

Davis's detailed analysis of the marriage of Martin Guerre and Bertrande de Rols focuses on the role of the peasant wife within the constraints of patriarchy typical of sixteenth-century France. Her interpretations of Bertrande's status, before and after Martin left, suggest that Davis is a feminist who is interested in and motivated by the potential of women to affect change in their own lives, no matter their social status.

THEMES

Peasant Identity in Sixteenth-Century France

In the Introduction, Davis begins by addressing the ways in which history and literature remember peasants, and throughout the rest of the book, Davis focuses on this particular culture within French society. Her version of the story of Martin Guerre illuminates peasant life and identity in sixteenth-century France, and she addresses directly the social conditions of the peasant existence that could have produced such a brazen act of dishonesty as Arnaud's fraud. In this culture, Davis sees a fluidity between truth and lies as the peasant culture seemed open enough

to allow some fluctuations in morality. As well, Davis looks closely at the French legal system of this time, which accords peasants in need of legal assistance the same rights as wealthier members of society. Between detailed descriptions of their daily lives, types of employment, and family dynamics, Davis paints a vivid picture of peasant life that goes far beyond traditional comic depictions.

The Impact of Patriarchy on Women and Men

Davis traces the complications of both the female and male peasant experience in sixteenth-century France, identifying the different challenges girls and boys, and women and men, faced under a patriarchal system. Girls lived a constrained life, first attached to their childhood home and then to the marriage home that was decided for them. Boys too were given opportunities by their fathers according to their birth order and their position in their families, another reflection of a patriarchal system.

Davis claims that women generally needed to know how to operate, or even manipulate, the patriarchal system in order to get from it what they needed. After all, both the Guerre and the Rols families benefited from Bertrande's marriage to Martin. However, the value of this required rite of passage to Bertrande and to Martin is unclear. So, when the patriarchal demands became too much for Martin, he could leave, which he did, but Bertrande was left behind with as little agency she had when she was committed by her family to become a wife in the first place. She had even fewer rights an abandoned wife who was unable to claim the rights of a widow; this reading might explain why Bertrande accepted a phony husband, if she was indeed aware of the difference between Arnaud and Martin.

Deceptions, Lies, and Other Fraudulent Behaviors

According to Davis, deception may be a typical and accepted part of peasant life in sixteenth-century France. For example, masks and costumes that hide one's true identity were an expected element of casual fun, the true identity of an heir was sometimes obscured by a greedy family member, and stretching the truth was a reasonable way to create a viable identity. Travelers from the Basque region, like the Daguerres, changed their names to fit in with the local French culture, a practical decision only a few steps away from Arnaud's more devious decision to change his name to Martin Guerre. A fine line must have existed between acceptable misrepresentations and unacceptable fraud.

SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

The Marriage Bed

This symbol of a lifelong union between a man and wife should represent stability and togetherness, but for Martin Guerre and Bertrande de Rols, their marriage bed represented dysfunction, incompatibility, and ridicule. The instability of their marriage had its origins in the unsuccessful first attempts at consummating soon after the conclusion of the wedding ceremony. Eventually, this problem was remedied by yet another woman, which may have further emasculated Martin.

Martin had grown up in a household full of women, led by two overbearing men, his father and his uncle. Martin's impotence was the likely result of an over-pressured situation on a young boy with few encouraging male role models. When

he first found himself in his marriage bed with Bertrande, Martin likely had little understanding of what was required of him. In contrast, Arnaud du Tilh had an excess of knowledge that he gained during his hedonistic youth pursuing women and other pleasures. The marriage bed Arnaud shared with Bertrande was perhaps a steadier one, representing the happy union Bertrande may have hoped for in Martin.

The Wooden Leg

Martin's wooden leg is a symbol representing Martin's figurative incompleteness as a husband, who required eight years and a magic spell to be able to consummate his marriage. Though Martin lost his leg in battle after his abandonment of his wife and family, the wooden leg that replaced his real leg can be interpreted as a symbol of his incompleteness in the context of his masculinity.

As well, the wooden leg is a synecdoche, representing Martin as a physically incomplete, but still very much a whole, person upon his return to his family. The legend of Martin Guerre is heightened by the drama of his wooden leg; one can imagine the sound of it against a cold floor as he enters the courtroom in Toulouse as clearly as one can imagine the shock of the people who recognized his face before they understood that his body was damaged and incomplete.

Names

The motif of names is identifiable throughout the story of Martin Guerre. The changeable quality of names, in the forms of nicknames, assumed names, and stolen names, can be traced in the individual stories of the Daguerres, whose Basque family name changed to Guerre, of Pierre, who took a French name upon his arrival to Artigat, and of Arnaud du Tilh, whose nickname "Pansette," precedes his stealing of the name of Martin Guerre.

During this time in France, no credible nor official system of identifying oneself existed, and peasants had no documents that they could produce at the ready to prove one was actually who he (or she) claimed to be. Names had a cultural value, one that could only be determined by interpersonal trust and observable qualities of believability. The Daguerres were easily identifiable in Artigat as

Basque travelers who had moved to settle in Languedoc, so the change in their names made sense and the villagers in Artigat likely accepted the change without any suspicion. Arnaud du Tilh's change of name, on the other hand, was underhanded and criminal, an abuse of trust that violated the unspoken laws of the open culture that accepted him.

IMPORTANT QUOTES

1. "My hope is to show that the adventures of three young villagers are not too many steps beyond the more common experience of their neighbors, that an imposter's fabrication has links with more ordinary ways of creating personal identity." (Introduction, Page 4)

Here, Davis states her goal for the book and admits her attitude towards Arnaud du Tilh. Davis does not condemn Arnaud du Tilh for his fraud, as evidenced by her use of the word "fabrication" instead of stronger words like "crime" or "theft." Davis explains that with this book, she seeks to

present a situation and a culture that exonerates Arnaud and normalizes his decision to take the identity and the life of another man.

2. "To be accepted by the village they had to take on some Languedoc ways. Daguerre became Guerre; if Pierre had used the Basque form of his name, Betrisanz or even Petri, he now changed it. Sanxi's wife probably continued to carry baskets of grain on her head, but she restitched her headdress and the decorations on her skirt so as to fit in with her neighbors." (Chapter 1, Page 14)

Davis presents the ordinary ways in which ordinary people change their identities, establishing early in the text that such changes are typical of this society at this time. These observations suggest that minor fabrications like the changing of one's own family name are actually essential to ensuring smooth interactions between the members of this society. Already, Davis is showing sympathy for Arnaud, who later in the book changes his name and identity in a much more dramatic and fraudulent fashion than the Daguerres, with a clear intent to deceive the wife of the real Martin, other Guerre family members, and all of the villagers of Artigat.

3. "Martin dreamed of life beyond the confines of fields of millet, of tileworks, properties, and marriages." (Chapter 2, Page 22)

Davis speculates here of the life that may have made Martin feel happier. Earlier in the book, Davis has characterized Martin as a man unsatisfied with his life, as it seemed not to belong to him in the first place. His marriage to Bertrande was arranged by his father, and proved to be disastrous. His relationship with Bertrande could not have been easy, and the eight years before the birth of his son may have been fraught for both husband and wife. Working the land and dealing with the family business and family properties may have bored him or overwhelmed him. So, within months of his son's birth, Martin left for Spain. Davis presents evidence he worked as a lackey in a grand home and as a soldier, which suggests he wanted to escape the constraints of peasant domestic life.

4. "The realities of this peasant world encouraged not only the skills of a good farm wife, but the wife's ability to get her way with the men and to calculate her advantages, say, in remaining a widow." (Chapter 3, Page 31)

Davis comments here on the patriarchy of peasant life in medieval France and the lack of agency many women experience while living within the constraints of this society. Within this rigid system of patriarchy, a woman must manipulate the rights that are accorded to her depending on her status as daughter, wife, and eventually, widow. Wives and widows have rights and advantages unique to their situation, and when Martin abandons Bertrande, she has neither set of privileges. Worse, she must return to her mother's home with her child, which means that her stepfather, Pierre Guerre, is now the head of her household. This situation may have influenced her to be complicit in Arnaud's fraud when he arrived to Artigat; though the new Martin was not her real husband, she may have seen him as an opportunity to live more freely and happily than under the roof of her stepfather.

5. "Bertrande's status was much reduced by all these events. Neither wife nor widow, she was under the same roof as her mother again. Neither wife nor widow, she had to face the other village women at the mill, the well, the tileworks, and at the harvest. And there was no easy remedy for her in the law." (Chapter 3, Page 33)

When Martin leaves his wife and baby son behind, Bertrande's situation changes dramatically for the worse. She no longer has the means to run her own household, and she must live indefinitely with uncertainty and the humiliation of knowing that everyone knows her husband has left her. Davis characterizes Bertrande as a stubborn woman who knew her own mind, so this situation may have been very difficult for her. As well, Bertrande was again under the same roof as her mother, which means that she was under the same roof as Pierre Guerre, who was married to her mother, and Davis characterizes him as a powerful personality. The subtext of this scenario suggests that a strong-minded woman like Bertrande may not have coped well with a similarly strong-minded man and head of house like Pierre.

6. "He became known as Pansette, 'the belly,' a man with big appetites, and he must have loved the carnivals, the costuming, the dancing, and all the games of the festive 'youth abbeys' (youth groups), which were so marked a part of village life in Gascony." (Chapter 4, Page 37)

This early characterization of Arnaud sets him up more as a joker who enjoys playing with appearances, and less as a criminal with a tawdry past.

Davis also presents Arnaud as a hedonist who enjoys life, and, often, this kind of light-hearted personality inspires fun in others. Arnaud may have had some attractive qualities that Bertrande may have preferred over her original husband, who clearly had a complicated personality. If Bertrande did indeed enjoy Arnaud's company, then Davis would have more evidence to support Davis's argument that Bertrande knew well that the new Martin was an imposter and chose deliberately to go along with his ruse. Bertrande did not have a very positive experience with Martin, and so she may have enjoyed the new Martin and found happiness and true passion in the fraudulent relationship.

7. "Was it so unusual for a man in sixteenth-century villages and burgs to change his name and fashion a new identity? Some of this went on all the time." (Chapter 4, Page 40)

Davis's casual tone and rhetorical question emphasizes her sympathy for Arnaud du Tilh. She clearly believes that his choice to take Martin Guerre's identity and life is not unusual for the time and place. Her justification reassures the reader that Arnaud wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary by taking on Martin's identity, and that he is in fact just an ordinary man trying to make his ordinary way in the somewhat fluid and open peasant world of sixteenth-century France. Davis normalizes Arnaud's decision, perhaps to minimize the crime and the fraud in order; this act of minimalization could work to emphasize the idealized notion that Arnaud and Bertrande were entitled to their adulterous, phony marriage because they actually liked each other.

8. "But the obstinate and honorable Bertrande does not seem a woman so easily fooled, not even by a charmer like Pansette. By the time she had received him in her bed, she must have realized the difference; as any wife of Artigat would have agreed, there is no mistaking 'the touch of the man on the woman.' Either by explicit or tacit agreement, she helped him become her husband." (Chapter 5, Page 44)

Davis ponders Bertrande's role as accomplice in the invented marriage in this passage, giving Bertrande's character depth, intelligence, and a canny ability to remember the feeling of her physical relationship with the real Martin. This passage also foreshadows Arnaud's recollections during his trial of various sexual episodes between Bertrande and Martin; in an attempt to

prove that he was the actual Martin, he spoke of their sex life, which suggests that Bertrande had spoken openly with Arnaud about the sexual problems she experienced with Martin. Davis is convinced of Bertrande's involvement in Arnaud's fraud but her version of Bertrande contradicts the victim status Coras gave Bertrande in Arrest Memorable.

9. "It is possible, even probable, that the new Martin and Bertrande de Rols were becoming interested in the new religion, in part because they could draw from it another justification for their lives." (Chapter 5, Page 48)

Davis posits that Arnaud and Bertrande would have moved away from Catholicism and leaned towards Protestantism as a way to justify their adulterous, and in Bertrande's case, bigamous, relationship. A Protestant couple engaged in an unlawful and sinful relationship may have been less fearful of their transgressions because Protestantism does not grant marriage the status of a sacrament. As well, Protestants do not have to partake in confession, a Catholic practice that ensures that believers unburden themselves of their sins and do their duties to atone to God. Perhaps not having to admit out loud to adultery and bigamy made the religious and legal violations somehow less worrying.

10. "For Pierre Guerre, however, the new Martin had gone too far. It may be that he felt the circumstances of Martin's absence did not entitle him to any rewards." (Chapter 6, Page 53)

Davis suggests here that perhaps Pierre Guerre had suspected all along that the new Martin was an imposter and that Pierre had chosen to allow the new Martin to live peacefully, until a particular moment in time. This moment in time came when the new Martin attempted to capitalize on the property that Sanxi Guerre, Pierre's brother, had left for his son Martin when Sanxi died. If Davis is correct, then Pierre may not have cared about Bertrande's bigamy and adultery; after all, Bertrande and the new Martin had a daughter together, and because the first child, born months before Martin's abrupt departure was a son, he would be the rightful heir to his father's goods and properties.

11. "If I were to hazard a guess about the Martin Guerre case, it would be that the local Protestant sympathizers tended to believe the new Martin and the Catholics tended to believe Pierre Guerre." (Chapter 6, Page 56)

Davis makes a case here for the division of opinion amongst the villagers who eventually became witnesses at the trial in Toulouse. Unusually for Davis, she acknowledges that she is "hazarding a guess," which departs from her more assertive style of creative interpretation. This clear statement of guesswork suggests that perhaps Davis's arguments around Catholicism and Protestantism are not the strongest nor the most well-supported of the book.

12. "Not that Arnaud was the only liar in Artigat: we have just caught Pierre Guerre in a falsehood, and we will hear of others before we are done. But a big lie, a whopper—especially one imposed by a single person on others—has troublesome consequences both for personal feelings and for social relationships." (Chapter 6, Page 59)

Davis compares Arnaud's deception with Pierre's and the lies of other villagers, and acknowledges that Arnaud's lie was the biggest and the most impactful. Again, her word choice is noticeably forgiving: Arnaud's lie is a "whopper," a child's term for a stretching of the truth, and the consequences aren't criminal, they are simply "troublesome." She associates Arnaud's lies with those of Pierre Guerre, who lied to the court, claiming that Bertrande had sent him to make a complaint about a strange man who had stolen her husband's rightful place in their marriage. Some may view Pierre's lie as justifiable because his lie enabled the truth to become plain, but others may view Pierre's lie as abominable because it ruined the imagined happiness of a possibly well-matched couple.

13. "But how, in a time without photographs, with few portraits, without tape recorders, without fingerprinting, without identity cards, without birth certificates, with parish records still irregular if kept at all—how did one establish a person's identity beyond doubt?" (Chapter 7, Page 63)

The peasants of Artigat all found it relatively easy to believe Arnaud du Tilh when he insisted he was Martin Guerre and provided context for their shared experience. Without the objective devices of modern day to prove objectively a person's identity, the whole notion of personal identity has fluidity, a fluidity that enabled Arnaud to do what he did. When Arnaud, who is characterized as a clever and opportunistic man, was mistaken for Martin Guerre in Mane, he saw his opportunity to take full advantage of his

supposed resemblance to Martin Guerre. Arnaud seized his chance, and his brazenness was temporarily rewarded.

14. "She had to manipulate the image of the woman-easily-deceived, a skill that women often displayed before officers of justice any time it was to their advantage." (Chapter 7, Page 68)

Davis deepens her characterization of Bertrande as an astute and intelligent woman in charge of her own life and her future with this description. According to Davis's research, peasant women knew how to operate within the confines of patriarchal society and use whatever opportunities came their way for their own benefit. Davis places her views of peasant women like a filter on Bertrande, and while it is possible that Bertrande had this particular skill, it is impossible to say with certainly if she actually did or not. This passage reflects the limitations of speculative history, which presents ideas that are difficult to prove, though they may be interesting to ponder.

15. "If the wife of Martin Guerre was divided, the new Martin seemed never so whole as during the trials." (Chapter 7, Page 69)

Bertrande de Rols had to keep her wits about her throughout the trial, as Davis argues that she had to juggle two roles during the trial; Bertrande had to protect herself and her interests no matter the outcome of the ruling. If the new Martin was found guilty of fraud, she had to ensure her honor was intact and that she was an innocent and over-trusting victim of fraud. If the new Martin was found innocent and the charges against him were dismissed, Bertrande had to ensure that he never doubted her loyalty to their relationship. While Bertrande's interests were split, Arnaud's was singularly uniform, as he was on trial for both his assumed life and his actual life; if he was found guilty, he would be executed. Arnaud had many reasons to motivate him to present a whole picture of himself as the true Martin Guerre.

16. "The Chamber decided that Jean de Coras would be the reporter for the proceedings, which meant that he would look closely into the issues and finally prepare a report on all the arguments and make a recommendation for the sentence." (Chapter 8, Page 75)

Though the role the Criminal Chamber invested in Coras suggests that he was a man respected for his legal acumen and keen sense of fairness, Davis considers Coras's report flawed. Davis identifies exaggerations and omissions in Coras's document, which suggests that the execution of Arnaud may have been unnecessary. Coras was also deeply sympathetic to Arnaud, calling his death and the outcome of the trial a tragedy, so it is likely that Arnaud and Bertrande would have continued their pretend marriage had the real Martin not interrupted the proceedings.

17. "The Criminal Chamber was about to make its final judgment of the case, opinions being 'more disposed to the advantage of the prisoner and against the said Pierre Guerre and de Rols,' when a man with a wooden leg appeared at the buildings of the Parlement of Toulouse. He said his name was Martin Guerre." (Chapter 8, Page 81)

The timing of Martin Guerre's return was cinematic in its perfection. As soon as he became aware of the interloper, Arnaud du Tilh accused the real Martin of being a fake Martin who had been paid by Pierre Guerre to incriminate Arnaud. Arnaud's protestations must have enhanced the drama of Martin's entrance, according to Coras's description of the episode. The Chamber was about to dismiss the charges against Arnaud and take action against Pierre Guerre for falsely accusing an innocent man so the irony of Martin Guerre's timing was acute.

18. "The original Martin Guerre may have come back to repossess his identity, his persona, before it was too late." (Chapter 9, Page 84)

Throughout the story of Martin Guerre, timing is everything. Davis states that it was unclear if Martin Guerre found out about the trial and then decided to return to Artigat, or if Martin was on his way home anyway, and arrived in the nick of time. Either way, had Martin appeared in Artigat after Arnaud's case had been dismissed and he had resumed his place in society as the new Martin Guerre, it would have been too late. Pierre at this point would have been criminalized himself and found guilty of the crime of false accusation; Pierre also would have been made to look foolish, greedy, and inexplicably hostile.

19. "The accused seemed to have an air of magic about him. Trying to take him off guard, President de Mansencal asked him how he had involved the

evil spirit that taught him so much about the people of Artigat. Coras said that he paled and for one hesitated, to the judge a sure sign of guilt. This reaction, I think, may have resulted not only from the defendant's sense of danger, but also from anger that his natural skills were being so misrepresented." (Chapter 9, Page 84)

Throughout much of the book, Davis emphasizes Arnaud's abilities to make Bertrande a happy wife while minimizing Arnaud's sordid past as a thief and a hedonist. The negative sides to Arnaud's character lessen in importance as his positive qualities take on heroic proportions. So, when Arnaud's skills at posturing were described as magical, Davis actually employs some objectivity by suggesting that he took umbrage at being misunderstood as a magician and not as a clever man who had it in him naturally to fool everyone. This objective view of Arnaud implies that he is an egotist, which risks making him less appealing, an unusual choice for Davis.

20. "Lawyers, royal officers, and would-be courtiers knew all about self-fashioning—to use Stephen Greenblatt's term—about the molding of speech, manners, gesture, and conversation that had helped them to advance, as did any newcomer to high position in the sixteenth century." (Chapter 10, Page 103)

By mentioning the tendency of well-reputed men, like lawyers and courtiers, to self-fashion at this time in the history, Davis may be suggesting that Arnaud's fraud is only slightly more egregious than the minor fraud of "self-fashioning" in general. These efforts at making oneself more presentable and more respectable were widely accepted, so perhaps Davis thinks that Arnaud's sentencing of punishment by execution in front of the Guerre house in Artigat was much too harsh.

21. "Here one can approve the cuckolding of the once impotent and now faraway husband. Here Arnaud du Tilh becomes a kind of hero, a more real Martin Guerre than the hard-hearted man with the wooden leg. The tragedy is more in his unmasking than in his imposture." (Chapter 11, Page 113)

Here, Davis's sympathy for Arnaud du Tilh and for Bertrande de Rols, who lost her only chance at a happy marriage when Arnaud was found guilty of fraud and executed, is clear. She echoes Coras's use of the word "tragedy" in this passage, as she idealizes Arnaud's misrepresentation of himself.

Davis, in her sympathy for his and Bertrande's relationship, chooses to ignore the criminal behavior and, instead, she chooses to appreciate the genuine human warmth that she believes must have existed between Bertrande and Arnaud (and was clearly lacking in Bertrande's marriage to Martin).

22. "Le Sueur's work followed the expected path of a news account as it is printed and reprinted and transformed into a popular legend." (Chapter 12, Page 115)

Though Coras's Arrest Memorable *provided Davis with most of the facts detailing the events of the trial and the circumstances surrounding the trial, she credits Guillaume Le Sueur for writing the work that made the story of Martin Guerre a legend. The popularity of Le Sueur's news report assured that the story would live on in the annals of marriage law and sixteenth-century French peasant history.*

23. "The legs of Martin Guerre and Arnaud du Tilh had also been a source of controversy, but was even the man 'arrived from Spain with a wooden leg' all that clear a sign?" (Chapter 12, Page 122)

When witnesses were called to testify in support of the new Martin or against him, some of them mentioned the physical characteristics of the man as proof of either his innocence or his guilt. Martin was remembered as having longer, more slender legs, which did not match the short, stocky stature of the new Martin, creating a controversy. Ironically, Martin's arrival with a wooden leg may have drawn even more attention to this particular detail of the men's physiques.

24. "If she were an adulterer, then he was a cuckold…She had to live down her easy acceptance of the imposter, his irresponsible desertion of the family." (Epilogue, Page 123)

Davis supposes that Martin and Bertrande resumed their life together after the execution of Arnaud du Tilh, and this passage addresses the terms of their reunion. Martin and Bertrande would have had to forgive each other for some difficult offenses, and Davis suggests that they are equally at fault and equally responsible for whatever challenges they faced while reconciling. Both Bertrande and Martin brought shame upon themselves and

each other, which brings an interesting balance to their power dynamic as a married couple.

25. "But it lasted, beyond the other anecdotes and through major upheavals such as the Wars of Religion." (Epilogue, Page 125)

Davis reminds the reader at the end of the book of the enduring qualities of the story of Martin Guerre by asserting its survival through history. At other points in the book, Davis claims that both Jean de Coras and Guillaume Le Sueur felt a personal connection to the case, and their writing reflected an emotional resonance that made for compelling reading. Here, at the end of the book, Davis also asserts her own personal connection to the case, wondering if Pansette had charmed yet another believer in herself, giving the reader an opportunity to wonder about his or her own allegiances to various characters in this legendary story.

ESSAY TOPICS

1. Davis attempts to justify "the invented marriage" between Bertrande de Rols and the new Martin; do these efforts reveal a feminist agenda, or is Davis simply a romantic?

2. In the Epilogue, Davis mentions that there may have been an "armistice" between Martin Guerre and his wife, Bertrande, once they reunited. What do you think might have been the terms of their armistice? What difficulties might they have faced as they reconciled?

3. Which of the following genres best suit this work of literature: non-fiction, creative history, or legend? Explain your choice and support it with evidence from the book.

4. Analyze the intentions of Pierre Guerre. What positive and negative qualities does he bring to the story?

5. Examine the role of patriarchy in the story of Martin Guerre through the experiences of Martin and Bertrande. Who was best able to make the most of their limited freedom?

6. Davis describes the marriage between Jean de Coras and his second wife in some detail; how does this portrait of Coras as a husband influence your understanding of his sympathy for Arnaud du Tilh?

7. The judges of the Criminal Chamber showed some leniency when they sentenced Arnaud du Tilh, even though they sentenced him to death; do you think du Tilh was deserving of such sympathy? Why or why not?

8. Describe a day in the life of a sixteenth-century French peasant living in the Languedoc region: with whom might you come into contact on any given day? What sort of work and leisure activity might have engaged you?

9. Whose behaviors and decisions appear more villainous: those of Martin Guerre, or those of Arnaud du Tilh?

10. Davis suggests that the tension between the emerging religion of Protestantism and the old traditions of Catholicism played a role in the story of Martin Guerre; explain this connection and support your explanation with evidence from the book.