



Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893), a journalist, novelist, poet, memoirist, playwright, and short story writer, was one of the most notable men of letters of nineteenth-century France. Above all, he is celebrated for his stories, which transformed and defined the genre for years. NYRB Classics also publishes de Maupassant’s *Alien Hearts* and *Afloat*.

Richard Howard is the author of seventeen volumes of poetry and has published more than one hundred fifty translations from the French, including, for NYRB, Marc Fumaroli’s *When the World Spoke French*, Balzac’s *Unknown Masterpiece*, and Maupassant’s *Alien Hearts*. He is a National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize winner.

LIKE DEATH

by Guy de Maupassant

Translated from the French by Richard Howard

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“The psychoemotional precision of Maupassant in an elegant new translation... A finely shaded portrait of desire, will, and the complex entanglement of love, set against cutting social commentary from a realist master.” —*Kirkus*, starred review

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Olivier Bertin is at the height of his career as a painter. After making his name as a young man with his *Cleopatra*, he has gone on to establish himself as “the chosen painter of Parisiennes, the most adroit and ingenious artist to reveal their grace, their figures, and their souls.” And though his hair may be white, he remains a handsome, vigorous, and engaging bachelor, a prized guest at every table and salon.

Olivier’s lover is Anne, the Countess de Guilleroy, the wife of a busy politician. Their relationship is long-standing, close, almost conjugal. The countess’s daughter is Annette, and she is the spitting image of her mother in her lovely youth. Having finished her schooling, Annette is returning to Paris. Her parents have put together an excellent match. Everything is as it should be—until the painter and countess are each seized by an agonizing suspicion, like death.... In its devastating depiction of the treacherous nature of love, *Like Death* is more than the equal of *Swann’s Way*. Richard Howard’s new translation brings out all the penetration and poetry of this masterpiece of nineteenth-century fiction.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What role does satire play in the book?
2. How did you find that Olivier Bertin perceived himself, and how does that differ from the way in which Maupassant portrays him in the book?
3. On page 89, Bertin observes the young marquis who will marry Annette, and becomes “exasperated and disgusted as though someone had mistaken and violated his rights, his mysterious and sacred rights.” Describe this moment and what it reveals about the characters. To which “sacred rights” does Bertin refer?
4. Does Annette strike you as an active or passive character?
5. On page 150, Bertin thinks, “We love a type, that is to say, the union in one signal person of all human qualities which separately may charm us in others.” Did you find this explanation of love to be compelling? How does it manifest in the novel?

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6. Paintings and mirrors appear throughout *Like Death*. Describe the role that viewing plays in the book—what does it mean to look at oneself and to be observed by others?
7. Why do you think Maupassant chose to make Bertin a painter?
8. Discuss Maupassant's portrayal of women in the novel. Did you find that there was a difference between how the male characters in *Like Death* view women and how Maupassant ultimately intended to describe the female characters?
9. The Countess's husband, Monsieur le Comte de Guilleroy, is a minor character in the novel, and yet is present throughout. What did you make of him, and what is his purpose in the book?
10. Did you find the end of the novel satisfying? Did you feel sympathetic toward the Countess and Bertin?

FOR FURTHER READING

Alien Hearts

Guy de Maupassant
(translated by Richard Howard)
ISBN 9781590172605

Afloat

Guy de Maupassant
(translated and introduced by Douglas Parmée)
ISBN 9781590172599

The Unknown Masterpiece

Honoré de Balzac
(introduction by Arthur C. Danto, translated by Richard Howard)
ISBN 9780940322745

Count D'Orgel's Ball

Raymond Radiguet
(foreword by Jean Cocteau, translated by Anna Paola Cancogni)
ISBN 9781590171387