

CHRISTOPHER BRACKEN

The Desire for Reproductions: Hillis Miller's *Versions of Pygmalion*

“One of the major functions of literary theory,” Hillis Miller remarks in *Versions of Pygmalion*, “is as a critique of ideology, that is, a critique of the taking of a linguistic reality for a material one” (83). To read narrated reality counts as an ethical act only if it satisfies two incompatible conditions. It must be freely performed, and yet it must respond to a categorical imperative (17). I am free to choose what I read, says Miller, but I cannot not read what I choose. The act of reading therefore resists even the reader’s mastery. What calls for reading, indeed what makes it imperative, is whatever is strange or unaccountable in a text. I cannot not read what I cannot explain. What I inevitably find unaccountable, though, includes not only what a text says, but what my own reading makes happen, which I cannot know beforehand (93). One outcome is nonetheless certain: “reading is always the disconfirmation or modification of presupposed literary theory rather than its confirmation” (21). In a remarkable, pre-emptive strike, Miller pre-programs his own deconstruction: the presuppositions that I bring to his text can only be disconfirmed by the reading that aims to confirm them. The following pages will suggest that Miller’s pre-emptive pre-programming of his own deconstruction makes him into a version of his own Pygmalion.

To mistake “a linguistic reality for a material one” is a conventional definition not only of ideology, but of what it used to be possible to call “savage philosophy.” The canonical work on the subject was published in 1871, not by savages, since they do not exist, but by the godfather of the English school of cultural studies, Edward Burnett Tylor. Savage philo-

sophy, as Tylor conceives it, hinges on the error of substituting an ideal for a real connection. This error, moreover, is the result of an insufficiently self-critical tropology. “Language is one of those intellectual departments in which we have gone too little beyond the savage stage,” he laments, “but are still as it were hacking with stone celts and twirling labourious friction-fire” (vol. 2, 446). Tropes are especially hot, and the two that burn with the most savage intensity are metaphor, which “names thoughts,” and metonymy, which “states their relation to one another.” The most tropical of tropes, though, is the actualizing metaphor, a semantic impertinence that makes what it describes actual by making it lively. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle classifies metaphorical actualization as a means of vivid description: “through the things’ being made animate they appear to be actual” (1412a). In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor classifies it as a characteristic trait of animist thought, and its archive is myth, that is, narrative: *mythos*. “First and foremost among the causes which transfigure into myths the facts of daily experience, is the belief in the animation of all nature,” he explains, “rising at its highest pitch to personification. This, no occasional or hypothetical action of the mind, is inextricably bound in with that primitive mental state where man recognizes in every detail of his world the operation of personal life and will” (vol. 1, 285). The discourse of myth does more than make description lively; it makes what it describes live, transforming the abstract into the concrete by substituting a linguistic for a material reality. Yet there is paradoxically no metaphor in myth:

Analogies which are but fancy to us were to men of past ages reality. They could see the flame licking its yet undevoured prey with tongues of fire, or the serpent gliding along the waving sword from hilt to point; they could feel a live creature gnawing within their bodies in the pangs of hunger ... Men to whom these were living thoughts had no need of the schoolmaster and his rules of composition, his injunctions to use metaphor cautiously ... what we call poetry was to them real life. (vol. 1, 297)

Tylor racializes the very error that Miller considers to be “essential to all storytelling and reading” (Miller vii). No wonder, then, that it is attended by a deep sense of guilt (11). If I am not careful when handling this trope that folds “poetry” into “real life,” I risk being accused — or worse of accusing myself — of regressing from civilized to savage thought. Miller’s name for the error is *prosopopoeia*. He defines it, after Paul de Man, as “the ascription

to entities that are not really alive first of a *name*, then of a face, and finally, in a return of language, of a voice” (Miller 5; De Man 75-76). Could it be that we all go a little savage when we read?

The only way not to is to give up reading altogether, but the hermeneutic imperative dictates that reading is the one thing that we cannot not do. Every reading, furthermore, produces consequences that are not themselves acts of reading. The prosopopoetic act simultaneously makes interpretation possible and precipitates events that no interpretation can master. “Insofar as theory has the performative face I have been recognizing in it,” writes Miller, making his own meditation on reading into a case of prosopopoeia, “its function is to cooperate with reading or to facilitate reading or in fact to be an act of reading that is a productive event in the real world of material history” (85). Only a conventionally savage philosopher, though, would be incautious enough to venture the hypothesis that interpreting interpretation can lead to the actualization of a concrete, “material” event. What for Miller is the necessary ethical consequence of “all” reading is for Tylor an irrational “stiffening of metaphor by mistaken realization of words” (vol. 1, 415).

For Nietzsche, though, a Nietzsche who has to be carefully pried apart from the one who agrees with Tylor, the real, material world itself is the effect of a prior “stiffening” of prosopopoeia. Reality is more vivid — more lively — than representation: that is all that the opposition between them entails. And nothing is more vivid than my sense that “I think, I feel, I will.” The notion of a thing in itself — of a material reality distinct from linguistic reality — rests on the premise of an unacknowledged personification: a trope. What we call “reality” is a survival of the error that Tylor calls the spirit doctrine and Nietzsche the “soul superstition” (§487). “The subject,” remarks Nietzsche, “this is the term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality: we understand this belief as the *effect* of one cause — we believe so firmly in our belief that for its sake we imagine ‘truth,’ ‘reality,’ ‘substantiality’ in general” (§485). Subtract the subject from the series and there survives only the deed, the act itself. “The question,” as he puts it elsewhere, is “whether that which ‘posits things’ [*was* “*Dinge*” *setzen*] is not the sole reality [*allein real ist*]” (§569). The Nietzsche of the late 1880s supplants the positivism that he endorsed at the end of the 1870s with a curiously headless animism, one which allows for self-invention but not for a self: “no subject but an action, a positing [*Setzen*], creative, no ‘causes and effects’” (§617).

Miller's reading of Kleist inclines him to agree: "the central topic of Kleist's work," he says, "is the human tendency to project personal agency and concatenation on what may be a random sequence" (137). The myth of Pygmalion supplies an allegory of the animating prosopopoetic act. We are all a little bit Pygmalion when we read narrative, Miller argues, because reading endows fictional characters with lives of their own and entails consequences that carry on outside the literary frame (vii). Pygmalion is a "personal agency" that Miller projects — "by the mistaken realization of words" — onto an otherwise random sequence of stories that, taken together, map out an ethics of interpretation and its effects.

It is Orpheus who summons Pygmalion to life in Book Ten of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The great "bard" describes Pygmalion as an artist of unusual skill. He — Pygmalion — sculpts a statue in ivory and "[gives] it a figure better than any living woman could boast of," indeed so much better it makes him doubt the border between animate and inanimate being: "You would have thought it alive, so like a real maiden" (350). So he performs a series of empirical tests. First he touches it. But the results are inconclusive: "*was* it a body, / or was it — this he would not yet concede — a mere statue" (350)? Next he kisses it. The results are better. He imagines it kisses him back. Then he addresses it, perhaps hoping, by prosopopoeia, to endow it with the capacity to respond to his advances. When he goes back to touching it again, his senses convince him that art really has supplanted nature, and his gropings turn to caresses. Soon he is flattering it and buying it lingerie: "a lacy brassiere" in Martin's 2004 translation (351). Finally he lays it down on a couch and uses it as his improbable sex toy. Pygmalion, of course, is not content to make love to stone. He asks Venus to mold him a living, breathing woman in the statue's image, and the next time he lies with it, the stone, as if in answer to his prayers, softens and becomes flesh. Galatea is, literally, born with her father's hands on her breasts. Orpheus says he is exciting them with both hands. To grope this daughter who is simultaneously his wife is Pygmalion's peculiar version of prosopopoeia: a sexual and "material" trope rather than a rhetorical and "linguistic" one. Conventionally, prosopopoeia endows one who is dead or absent with the capacity to reply. Galatea, however, does not speak when she comes to life. She simply "yields" to her father — who is also her husband and her mother — as wax softens beneath a sculptor's hands.

Why does Miller choose this of all stories as the best possible allegory of the ethics of reading narrative? Is he suggesting that there is a

fundamental, generative pornography of reading? Does “all reading” proceed from forbidden reading? Does reading inevitably amount to interfering with a text? Miller defines ethics as a kind of doing that does other things in turn (15). It is important to note that this definition is broad enough to include conventionally *un*ethical acts. To act ethically means taking responsibility for things that do other things. To read ethically is to be responsible for all the things that follow from the error of taking a figure of speech literally. Pornographic reading tends to take one particular figure literally more than any other. This figure is ekphrasis. It is sometimes defined as the figure of the picture that speaks but can be more broadly defined as the verbal representation of a visual representation (Mitchell 152). Miller warns that to mistake relations between words for relations between things, “like all illusions, aberrations, or misreadings, can cause great social, historical, and personal grief” (11). Indeed Tylor finds it so grievous that he takes the extreme precautionary measure of casting it beyond the limits of civilized thought. Marcel Proust, however, suggests that it is the necessary and enabling condition not only of reading in general, but of the particular kind of misreading that we conventionally call love.

Readers of *In Search of Lost Time* perhaps recall that when Swann is first introduced to his future wife, Odette de Crécy, he cannot not read her, but when he does, he finds that she offers him nothing to desire: “She had struck Swann not, certainly, as being devoid of beauty, but as endowed with a kind of beauty which left him indifferent, which aroused in him no desire, which gave him, indeed, a sort of physical repulsion” (213). But “desire,” as Swann experiences it, is structured like the trope of metonymy (Lacan 164). Hence he becomes attracted to Odette as soon as he finds a place for her in a series of objects that embody the “type” of beauty that his senses “demand” (213). These objects are texts — one musical, one tactile, one visual — and all of them stand for living things but nevertheless lack animation themselves. Swann handles and even caresses each of them, but Odette is the only one that, Galatea-like, softens and assumes flesh under his Pygmalion touch.

He takes an initial step towards his metonymic love when he attends the Verdurin’s salon for the first time. As we might by now have predicted, though, he cannot approach Odette until he adopts the Pygmalion position. His hosts have arranged a piano recital of the *andante* from Vinteuil’s sonata: the source of the “little phrase” that later comes to personify the love that he does not yet have for her (231). Madame Verdurin invites Swann to sit next to Odette on a settee. Out of politeness, he admires the chair before sitting

down: “What charming Beauvais” (226). Madame Verdurin invites him to feel the bronze moldings on the chair’s back, which “correspond to the subject” woven into its fabric and which have a metonymic, side-by-side, relation to Odette: metonymy, the trope of Swann’s desire. Swann, however, is a reluctant Pygmalion, for he caresses the mouldings — which are a graven imitation of a textual imitation — only halfheartedly. “No, no, you must feel them properly,” Madame Verdurin admonishes him, “with your whole hand” (226). It is not enough, she says, to look at a reproduction. You have to touch it completely. Reading is a caress. While Swann complies, Elstir — the artist who paints Odette’s portrait — complains that if Madame Verdurin is “going to start fingering her bronzes,” there will be no time left for music. She directs her response to Swann: “And yet we poor women ... are forbidden pleasures far less voluptuous than this. There is no flesh in the world to compare with it. None” (227). Her remark suggests that Swann’s reading of the settee has the capacity to confer life on its mouldings and make them “flesh”: mouldings that stand in a metonymic, side-by-side, relation to Odette’s flesh. But just when he has reluctantly consented to play Pygmalion, Madame Verdurin informs Swann that he is about to become Galatea instead. As he has fondled Odette’s chair (the French for flesh, of course, is *chair*), so will he be fondled by Vinteuil’s music, which is about to be conjured up by the touch of the pianist’s hands on the keyboard: “Come along,” she says, “you can caress them later. Now it’s you who are going to be caressed, caressed aurally [*à l’oreille*]. You’ll like that, I think. Here’s the young gentleman who will take charge of that” (227). To interpret a musical text, she tells him, is to take it “in the ear.” Swann will indeed “like” what “the young gentleman” is about to do to him, for the performance is the first in the series of readings that will finally lead him to “like” Odette.

Madame Verdurin’s reading of the act of reading has put the pianist in the Pygmalion position and Swann in the Galatea position. Swann’s own reading of the sonata, however, returns the “little” phrase to Galatea’s place and Swann himself to Pygmalion’s. He recalls that a year earlier at an evening party he heard the same sonata performed on piano and violin. Significantly, on that occasion, he had mistaken the little phrase from the *andante* for a living, breathing human being. His reading of it was a prosopoetic act. Though it is only a series of notes, he nevertheless experienced it as if it were a woman who had been brought to life under the performers’ hands. The phrase occurs only twice in Vinteuil’s score, but as he listened, Swann had “hoped, with a passionate longing, that he might find it again, a third time,”

for “he was like a man into whose life a woman he has seen for a moment passing by has brought the image of a new beauty which deepens his own sensibility, although he does not even know her name or whether he will ever see her again” (229). Of course, he does find it again in Odette, but not yet. The first performance endows it with the “beauty” that he will not find in Odette until after the second performance at the Verdurin’s salon. The woman whom Swann will come to love borrows her beauty from a text. Or rather a text holds a place open in the economy of his desire for the woman he does not love yet. The woman is thus a personified text; the text a reified woman. Only this tropological substitution of a text for a person and of a person for a text can make it possible for Swann to love Odette. She is in his eyes a text made flesh, not just any text, moreover, but one that he had been hoping to re-find for many months. But, again, not yet.

Swann does not invest Odette with desire, until he finds her personified in another text, this time a visual one. He arrives at his love only by this long detour of the sign. The narrator points out that whenever Swann, who likes to compare his friends to “the paintings of the old masters,” is about to see Odette, he forms “a picture of her in his mind” (242-43). When he makes his second visit to her apartment, moreover, he happens to bring her another kind of picture — “an engraving” — as a present. But on arriving he finds himself suspended between the picture that he wants to give to her and the picture that he is about to form of her. He finds her wrapped in a dressing gown and wearing her hair down, and she suddenly strikes him “by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro’s daughter, which is to be seen in one of the Sistine frescoes,” to be precise, in Botticelli’s fresco of scenes from the life of Moses, which is painted on the chapel’s south wall (242-43). The fresco is the final text in the series that leads Swann from “repulsion” to attraction. First he finds in a musical motif the beauty that he will not find later in Odette’s face; then he caresses a settee’s mouldings instead of Odette, who is sitting nearby but repels him; finally he recognizes in her state of *déshabillé* the traits of an image that is not an image of her. Only when he can approach her as if she were a text that he cannot not read is he ready to love her in the flesh. In Botticelli’s fresco, Zipporah appears to be turning like a corkscrew around the axis marked by her shepherdess’s staff. When her image makes its appearance, by way of ekphrasis, in Proust’s text, she takes up a place in a chain of metonymic associations that make the reader’s head spin. Zipporah is an allegory of the vertigo of reading.

Swann's recognition scene, by contrast, is an allegory of that "generative," prosopopoetic act which, according to Miller, makes all reading possible. A character in a novel assumes the form and the face of a figure in the real, material world, and that figure is simultaneously that most real and material of things, a wall, and that most volatile and allegedly immaterial of things, a fresco. Zipporah is a hinge that links Proust's narrative to an object in the real, material world, but that object, ironically, turns out to be another text. There is no outside of the textual frame. Odette is therefore both uniquely real and doubly unreal in Swann's eyes. She is at once the personification of a text and the textualization of a person who remains only a character in a novel. Swann, however, falls in love only with the text — that is, the Botticelli — in her. He looks on her as if she were a fresco come to life. He cannot not love her because he cannot not read the reproduction that she is for him. His reading, moreover, endows Odette with Zipporah's "lines" and Zipporah with Odette's mouth: "He no longer based his estimate of the merit of Odette's face on the doubtful quality of her cheeks and the purely fleshy softness which he supposed would greet his lips there should he ever hazard a kiss, but regarded it rather as a skein of beautiful, delicate lines" (244). Swann's love requires this chiasmus in order to refind its missing object: "The vague feeling of sympathy which attracts one to a work of art, now that he knew the original in flesh and blood of Jethro's daughter, became a desire which more than compensated, thenceforward, for the desire which Odette's physical charms had at first failed to inspire in him" (245). Swann has usurped Pygmalion's task of inventive interpretation. He makes Odette into an image so that the image can be made into the kind of flesh that displays his kind of beauty. What he desires henceforth is not so much to possess Odette herself as to "recapture" the "traces of the old fresco" that are "apparent in her face and body" (244). He does not want her; he wants that to which he connects her. At home he keeps "a reproduction of Jethro's daughter" on his desk and gazes on it "as if it were a photograph of Odette" (245). For Proust's readers, Odette is a conventional ekphrasis: a verbal reproduction of a visual representation that we can actually visit. For Swann, however, she is a special kind of ekphrasis, namely, the "living" reproduction of a visual representation (245). He not only looks at her reproduction, but, like Pygmalion, caresses it: "When he had sat for a long time gazing at the Botticelli, he would think of his own living Botticelli, who seemed ever lovelier still, and as he drew towards him the photograph of Zipporah he would imagine that he was holding Odette

against his heart” (245-46). Reading *Odette* is indeed a caress for Swann. He regards her not only as a picture that speaks, but as a picture that fucks. She promises him what has to be the supreme form of dilettantism, the chance to have sex with a Botticelli: “adapting to the idea of a living woman what he had until then felt to be beautiful on aesthetic grounds, he converted it into a series of physical merits which he was gratified to find assembled in the person of one whom he might ultimately possess” (245). Miller defines *prosopopoeia* as the trope of mourning because, he argues, it performs “a cover-up” for death or absence. Swann resorts to *ekphrasis*, which is a variant of *prosopopoeia*, to cover up the fact that he finds nothing to desire in *Odette*, but everything to desire in Botticelli. The new *Pygmalion* is a case-study in homosocial desire. His love follows from the exchange of a *Galatea* between two authors — Proust and Botticelli. Is the reader to conclude that homosocial exchange is the fundamental, generative act of aesthetic interpretation? Proust does not seem to have thought so, for in an earlier scene, he has already made a point of staging the exchange of a man — or to be precise the photograph of a dead man — between two women.

The young narrator witnesses the exchange on his way home from an excursion to the Montjouvain pond. He lies down and falls asleep in the bushes on a slope overlooking the house of M. Vinteuil, who has “but lately died” (174). When he wakes up it is almost dark, and just as he is about to leave, he looks through a window and sees Mlle Vinteuil enter a room. She is “deep in mourning” (174). He claims that he has no choice but to watch the scene that ensues. He cannot not read the woman whose movements are framed by the window as if she were a figure in a living fresco. His voyeurism is not his fault, in his view, because it obeys an imperative that exceeds him. “I could watch her every movement without her being able to see me,” he explains, “but if I had moved away I would have made a rustling sound among the bushes, she would have heard me, and she might have thought that I had been hiding there in order to spy upon her” (174). He spies on her in order not to be caught spying on her. Still, his situation is significantly different from *Pygmalion*’s in one respect: he can look on a woman as if she were a living image, but he cannot touch her.

Meanwhile, Mlle Vinteuil takes “a small photograph of her father” from the mantelpiece — though of course the reader sees only a verbal representation of this visual representation — and puts it on the table beside the couch, where she lies down (175). Soon her “friend” arrives, and they playfully debate whether or not they ought to close the shutters — a move

which would end the scene and foreclose reading, both the narrator's reading and our own. "People will see us," says Mlle Vinteuil, but she does not allow herself to state exactly what they are about to offer to our gaze. She wants to get her friend to say it instead. So she resorts to circumlocution: "When I say "see us" I mean, of course, see us reading. It's so tiresome to think that whatever trivial little thing you do someone may be overlooking you" (176). "Reading" has at least two senses here. It is a euphemism for foreplay: a prelude to those "pleasures" which, according to Madame Verdurin, are "forbidden" to women. And it is a statement of fact. The two lovers really are being read. Mlle Vinteuil knows that she is a character in a story, and she shares her predicament with the characters in all stories. She owes what life she has to the generative act of reading: *prosopopoeia*. She is an image in a frame — both the window-frame and the narrative frame — who speaks openly about what it is like to be framed and personified by those who "see" her. Hence she implicates us, her readers, in the scene that she is about to stage. We oversee her with her lover, and we are about to see them "reading" a picture that reads them as a prelude to that other kind of reading that involves the caress. We see them reading, however, only because our own reading endows them with face and voice. Mlle Vinteuil therefore oscillates between the opposing roles of Pygmalion and Galatea. She speaks as the subject and the object of the *prosopopoetic* act, as the one who personifies and as the one personified. For she is both the one who confers and the one who receives forbidden life.

Indeed she and her friend are incapable of pursuing their forbidden love *unless* they are being read by forbidden, voyeuristic means:

"Oh, yes, it's so extremely likely that people are looking at us at this time of night in this densely populated district!" said her friend sarcastically. "And what if they are?" she went on, feeling bound to annotate with a fond and mischievous wink these words which she recited out of good-naturedness, as a text which she knew to be pleasing to Mlle Vinteuil, in a tone of studied cynicism. "And what if they are? All the better that they should see us." (176)

The friend is right. It *is* extremely likely that she and Mlle Vinteuil are being read at the very moment that she offers Mlle Vinteuil a "text" to read. The narrator *is* of course "looking" at them though the window-frame just as a dense population of readers is looking at both him and them through the novel's frame. And it is indeed "better." Not only is it better to read than not

to read, the friend affirms, but it is better to be read than not to be read. The lovers want to be watched in order to be able to “enjoy” their forbidden caresses, though they do not necessarily want to be watched by us. But then we and the narrator are not the only ones watching them. As Mlle Vinteuil well knows, she and her friend have been read all along by the picture on the table, an image that we, her readers, can read as another vertiginous case of ekphrasis.

Mlle Vinteuil’s friend kisses her, Pygmalion-like, on the breast, and they chase each other around the room until they finally collapse on the couch. Only then does Mlle Vinteuil draw her lover’s attention to the photograph that she has put there not only to be seen by them, but to see them: “Mlle Vinteuil realized that her friend would not see it unless her attention were drawn to it, and so exclaimed, as if she herself had just noticed it for the first time: “Oh! there’s my father’s picture looking at us; I can’t think who can have put it there; I’m sure I’ve told them a dozen times that it isn’t the proper place for it” (177). The novel requires us to watch the narrator watching the lovers as they watch themselves being watched by the dead man’s photograph. Not only can they not not read the text that they themselves are, but they insist on being exposed to the gaze, and furthermore to the judgement, of the text that reads them. And together they take responsibility for the reading they solicit. “This photograph was evidently in regular use for ritual profanations,” the narrator infers, “for the friend replied in words which were clearly a liturgical response: ‘Let him stay there. He can’t bother us any longer. D’you think he’d start whining, and wanting to put your overcoat on for you, if he saw you now with the window open, the ugly old monkey’” (177)? Next, apparently, for their readers are not allowed to overhear, Mlle Vinteuil whispers that she would like to spit on her father’s — that is, on her reader’s — image. Her threat conforms to J. G. Frazer’s celebrated definition of homeopathic magic. The lovers treat the father’s likeness as if it were the father himself. Hence the scene that they offer up for reading culminates in that forbidden act which Miller puts at the basis of all reading and that Frazer, like Tylor before him, defines as a characteristic trait of savage philosophy: they bring a text to life by taking a figure of speech, in this case ekphrasis, literally. “Perhaps the most familiar application of the principle that like produces like,” remarks Frazer, “is the attempt which has been made by many peoples in many ages to injure or destroy an enemy by injuring or destroying an image of him, in the belief that, just as the image suffers, so does the man” (14). What exactly does the daughter do

to the dead father through the medium of his living likeness? The narrator concludes that she robs him “of the sacred rights of fatherhood” (178). In the scene that she stages, she invites her lover, literally, to take her father’s place. As the paternal image looks on, she jumps into the other woman’s lap “and [holds] out a chaste brow to be kissed precisely as a daughter would have done” (178). The narrator compares the kiss to stealing from the father’s tomb. Yet there is something ethical about this most unethical of acts. Galatea’s lover, remember, was her own father, and Ovid’s narrative does not permit her to refuse his unchaste demand for love.

There are some stories, says Miller, that “implicate the reader in the injustice they expose” (140). Mlle Vinteuil’s kiss implicates her reader, who is her own dead father, in acts that he considered *un*ethical, indeed forbidden, when he was alive. She stages a narrative, a love story, that her father cannot not read, for he is subject to the hermeneutic imperative even in death. The narrator accuses Mlle Vinteuil of sadism, but he concedes that it is a sadism mixed with virtue. And he insists that it is a kind of art. “A sadist of her kind,” he remarks, “is an artist in evil” (179). The daughter, it turns out, is fashioned in her father’s image, just as Odette is made in Zipporah’s image. When, according to the narrator, Mlle Vinteuil compels the father to read the love scene that she stages for his eyes only, she is trying to transcend her own gentleness, which is made in the image of his. She has to overcome the gentleness in her, moreover, in order to make her love just. She attacks the father’s likeness on the table in order to attack the father’s likeness in her. Above all she aims to remake her father’s law in her own love’s image. The object of her interpretive violence is the ekphrasis in her: the paternal image that speaks from within her and prevents her from enjoying her lover’s caresses. “Far more than his photograph,” the narrator explains, “what she really desecrated, what she subordinated to her pleasures though it remained between them and her and prevented her from any direct enjoyment of them, was the likeness between her face and his, his mother’s blue eyes which he had handed down to her like a family jewel” (179). She desecrates his likeness in order to become unlike it.

It is as if, to adopt Freud’s terms, Mlle Vinteuil were attempting to seize control of the means of introjection. Freud argues that the “likeness” between a child and her father cannot be exclusively attributed to inheritance. The child, rather, takes her father as her model and actively endeavors to “be like” him (105). The art of self-molding is “identification.” If the child loses her father, either because he dies or because he abandons

her, she can resort to identification to supply herself with a substitute for him. All she has to do is to incorporate him into her ego, where he lives on in the form of a speaking picture. The interiorizing identification is “introjection.” Freud suggests that it operates by prosopopoeia, for it divides the ego into two parts, “one of which rages at the second” (109). The part that rages, moreover, is the one made in the father’s image. Introjection endows the ego not only with the father’s image, but with the father’s voice and, more importantly, with the law to which the father gives voice. The introjected father is thus an ekphrasis: a visual representation that assumes a verbal form. The artist of sadism, however, turns the ekphrastic logic of introjection inside out. Her lost father does not rage in her. Instead she rages at his image even as it looks out from her own face and rages at his law even as it speaks with her own voice. Her “ritual profanation” is the first step in her refusal to remain the speaking portrait — the ekphrasis — of the father’s law. Hence she enlists desecration in the service of dis-identification.

But there is another turn to this vertiginous scene. When she offers him this text of her love to read, and he cannot not read it, Mlle Vinteuil invites the father in her to remodel his image after hers. The hermeneutic imperative urges the father to identify with a child who not only does not mourn his death, but indulges in pleasures that his law forbids her. Mlle Vinteuil restores him to life, by prosopopoeia, in order to implicate him in the performance, indeed the *mise-en-scène*, of her love, and by implicating him, she compels him to introject the law of the daughter. “In order to understand the story,” Miller explains, “the reader must become guilty of a version of the error condemned in story” (140). Mlle Vinteuil is an artist who makes dead reader guilty of her own profanation of his living, speaking image, as if she were a Galatea who requires Pygmalion to read her ethically against the grain of his own ethical code.

University of Alberta

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