

Origins, Loss, and Recovery in Patrick Modiano's
Voyage de nocés and *Dora Bruder*

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The preoccupation with absence, emptiness, and destruction that underlies the work of Patrick Modiano has been discussed by many commentators, following remarks made by the author himself. Modiano has revealed several biographical factors that contributed to his early awareness of loss and the destructive power of time, all of which originate in a childhood marked by his parents' frequent absences and secrecy concerning their life under the Occupation, and by the tragic death of a beloved brother: "j'ai senti, très jeune et de façon aiguë, que le temps finissait par tout ronger, par tout dissoudre, par tout détruire" 'Already at a very young age, I was keenly aware that in the end, time eats away at everything, dissolves and destroys it' (Morris 1996, 9).¹ He writes in part, as he explains, in order to illustrate, or to recreate for his readers, this inescapable feature of human existence, that is, "comment le temps passe et recouvre tout, choses et gens" 'how time passes and takes everything back, things and people' (Morris 2000, 64). On the other hand and at the same time, writing is an activity designed to compensate somehow for the lack of identity that resulted from the early absences and losses experienced by Modiano: "j'écris pour savoir qui je suis, pour me trouver une identité" 'I write in order to know who I am, in order to discover my identity' (Morris 1996, 7).

These statements, effectively equating writing with both loss and recovery and the realization of this conjunction in all of Modiano's works, have prompted critics to formulate various descriptions of Modiano's writing as both an emptying out and a filling up. Paul

Raymond Côté, for example, refers to a “scripturalisation du néant” ‘putting nothingness into writing’ and a “thématisation du vide,” ‘making emptiness his theme’ positing as a pretext for Modiano’s writing an emptiness that must be filled up: “L’orientation globale du récit sera nécessairement axée sur les tentatives de comblement et de reconstitution dans le but de faire disparaître ces ellipses, à la fois chronologiques et psychologiques” ‘The general orientation of the texts is based necessarily on attempts to fill up and to reconstitute empty spaces that are both chronological and psychological’ (144). Echoing these comments, Samuel Khalifa, in turn, states that in Modiano, “writing becomes a means of compensating for emptiness and . . . of creating an identity” (165). Similarly, Katheryn Wright remarks, “In the final analysis, writing is an attempt to overcome the anguish felt upon experiencing the emptiness brought about by the disappearance of people and their memories” (276). Finally, Alan Morris, who devotes an entire chapter of his most recent study to the dialectic “creation-destruction” as developed in the whole of Modiano’s writings, notes the author’s use of specific elements both to combat the destructive effect of time’s passage—“A côté de l’érosion et des ravages véhiculés par le Temps se manifestent les énormes possibilités créatrices de la mémoire, des documents, des langues et de la littérature” ‘Along with the erosion and the destruction caused by the passing of time are the important creative possibilities of memory, historical documents, languages and literature’ (85)—and to create an identity for himself—“Car, finalement, se forger une mémoire et un passé, rédiger une autobiographie romancée . . . ne reviennent qu’à cela: se servir de la littérature pour se fabriquer une identité. . .” ‘Because, finally, forging one’s memory and one’s past, composing a fictional autobiography . . . amounts to using literature to invent an identity for oneself. . .’ (84).

Interestingly, in one of his texts Modiano himself explains the writing of another work by explicitly outlining this movement from a feeling of emptiness triggered by disappearance and absence to the resurrection and preservation of the past and the construction of an identity through literature. In his 1997 *Dora Bruder*, classified by reviewers as more a “memoir” (Brookner) or an investigative report (Czarny 7) than a novel, Modiano recounts his attempts, during the late 1980s and 1990s, to “answer” a classified notice printed in the

Paris-Soir of December 31, 1941, which appealed for information about a Jewish-French teenager who had disappeared during the Nazi Occupation of Paris. Approximately one-third of the way into the work, the author outlines the process whereby the absence and emptiness that he associated with Dora's situation and his ignorance of it stimulated his writing of *Voyage de nocés*, a 1990 novel that is, in part, the story of a Jewish teenager who had run away during the war:

En décembre 1988, après avoir lu l'avis de recherche de Dora Bruder . . . je n'ai cessé d'y penser durant des mois et des mois. L'extrême précision de quelques détails me hantait. . . Et la nuit, l'inconnu, l'oubli, le néant tout autour. Il me semblait que je ne parviendrais jamais à retrouver la moindre trace de Dora Bruder. Alors le manque que j'éprouvais m'a poussé à l'écriture d'un roman, *Voyage de nocés*. . . (*Dora* 53; 43)

In December 1988, after reading the notice about the search for Dora Bruder . . . I thought about it incessantly for months. The precision of certain details haunted me . . . And all enveloped in night, ignorance, forgetfulness, oblivion. It seemed to me that I should never succeed in finding the faintest trace of Dora Bruder. At the time, the emptiness I felt prompted me to write a novel, *Voyage de nocés*. . . (43)

Writing *Voyage de nocés* was clearly an effort to fill in the blanks, to fashion an identity for the missing Dora, about whom the author knew only that she and her father had been part of a September 18, 1942, transport of prisoners from Drancy to Auschwitz, where they eventually perished. Writing the novel was "un moyen comme un autre pour continuer à concentrer mon attention sur Dora Bruder, et peut-être, me disais-je, pour élucider ou deviner quelque chose d'elle, un lieu où elle était passé, un détail de sa vie" 'as good a way as any of continuing to fix my attention on Dora Bruder, and perhaps, I told myself, of elucidating or divining something about her, a place where she had been, a detail of her life' (53; 43).

In effect, a coincidence between aspects of the lives of his characters Ingrid and Rigaud, which he constructs in *Voyage de nocés*, and information that he later learns about Dora Bruder, convince Modiano that in *Voyage* he was able to "capter, inconsciemment, un vague reflet de la réalité" 'capture, unconsciously, a vague gleam of the truth' (*Dora* 54; 44), that is, to uncover some piece of informa-

tion about Dora's past and her identity. In an observation in *Dora Bruder*—part of which is a description excerpted *verbatim* from *Voyage de nocés*—Modiano points out the coincidental connection between the destination in eastern Paris of a winter subway trip taken by Ingrid and Rigaud and the location of the convent from which Dora Bruder ran away in the winter of 1941:

“La rame s'arrêta à Nation. Rigaud et Ingrid avaient laissé passer la station Bastille où ils auraient dû prendre la correspondance pour la porte Dorée. A la sortie du métro, ils débouchèrent sur un grand champ de neige [. . .]. Le traîneau coupe par de petites rues pour rejoindre le boulevard Soult.”

Ces petites rues sont voisines de la rue de Picpus et du pensionnat du Saint-Cœur-de-Marie, d'où Dora Bruder devait faire une fugue, un soir de décembre au cours duquel la neige était peut-être tombée sur Paris.

“The terminus was Nation. Rigaud and Ingrid had allowed Bastille, the stop where they should have changed for Porte Dorée, to go by. Emerging from the exit, they were confonted by a vast expanse of snow. . . . The sleigh cut through the back streets to reach the Boulevard Soult.”

These side streets lay behind the Rue de Picpus and the Saint-Coeur-de-Marie boarding school from which Dora Bruder made her escape, one December evening when it was probably snowing on Paris. (54; 44)

As impressive as this coincidence might be, the reader of Modiano's texts who has accepted what appears here to be his invitation to re-read and to re-examine the previous *Voyage de nocés* through the more recent *Dora Bruder*, will be as struck by the reference, in this same passage, to where the characters *ought* to have taken the subway—to *la porte Dorée*. The significance of the *porte Dorée* is first that the word *Dorée* is nearly homophonous with *Dora*, which figures in *Voyage* Modiano's preoccupation with the young Jewish girl and her disappearance. Second, this eastern section of Paris is also where the narrator of *Voyage*, Jean, takes a hotel room after he himself ran away from both his marriage and his job as “explorer.” The fact that he escapes his own existence ostensibly in order to concentrate on Ingrid's parallels Modiano's writing of *Voyage de nocés* in order to focus on Dora Bruder. Finally, the *porte Dorée* in

Voyage de nocés assumes a seminal role in the life of the narrator. As Jean recounts, it was in this neighborhood that as children he and his friends would visit the zoo and the musée des Colonies and imagine their future lives as explorers: “Nous y avons rêvé de pays lointains et d’expéditions sans retour” ‘There we dreamed of far-off countries, and of expeditions from which there was no return’ (*Voyage* 20; *Honeymoon* 8). Commenting on his present circumstances, Jean declares, “Me voilà revenu au point du départ” ‘And here I am back at my point of departure’ (20; 8).

Prefiguring, therefore, the reference to *Voyage de nocés* in *Dora Bruder* are the covert allusions to the person of Dora Bruder in *Voyage de nocés*. It now becomes clear that the earlier designation of la porte Dorée as a point of departure always already signified that Modiano’s preoccupation with the life and death of Dora Bruder served as the pretext, or the inspiration, for the composition of *Voyage*. Furthermore, this “return to the beginning” as represented by the narrator’s taking up residence in a defining place of his childhood, establishes an association between the author / narrator’s preoccupation with Dora / Ingrid and issues of his own origins and identity, and this in a very essential way. On the basis of these elements and others to be examined in the following sections, we can posit a formal and thematic relationship between these two texts, one shaped first by a movement from origins—as an idealized fullness of being and identity—to loss, which underlies the narrative development of *Voyage de nocés*, and then by an inverse movement from loss to recovery as traced by *Dora Bruder*.

While there are fascinating connections between the two accounts, their respective importance may also lie in their disjunction. Most significantly, the single authentic detail that Patrick Modiano possessed about Dora Bruder when he wrote *Voyage de nocés*, that she eventually died with her father in Auschwitz, is not literally present in his novel about Ingrid Teyerson. To the contrary, near the end of the text Modiano’s narrator recounts having learned that Ingrid’s father alone was arrested and taken to “une destination inconnue” ‘[no one] knew where’ (155; 117), while her own death was by suicide in a Milan hotel room nearly thirty years later. Therefore, whereas aspects of Ingrid’s wartime experience, as brought to life in *Voyage*, repeat Dora’s and that of countless French Jews during

this period, her suicide constitutes an emotional or a psychological reaction, many years later, to this experience. In the novel, Ingrid's Jewish neighborhood is subject to strict curfews; her father's employment is threatened because he is Jewish; she must falsify papers in order to travel, during her "fugue," to the "free zone" in the south, and lives in constant fear of discovery while there; finally, her father is arrested and she never sees him again. Although her suicide is never fully explained, eighteen years following the event, the narrator suggests at the very end of his account a link between Ingrid's death and feelings of emptiness and remorse from which she was unable to break free upon learning her father's fate:

Un soir, elle était retournée elle aussi dans ce quartier et, pour la première fois, elle avait éprouvé un sentiment de vide.

Peu importent les circonstances et le décor. Ce sentiment de vide et de remords vous submerge, un jour. Puis, comme une marée il se retire et disparaît. Mais il finit par revenir en force. . . .

One evening, she, too, had returned to this district, and for the first time she had felt a sense of emptiness.

Circumstances and settings are of no importance. One day this sense of emptiness and remorse submerges you. Then, like a tide, it ebbs and disappears. But in the end it returns in force. . . . (158; 119-20)

Ingrid may, therefore, be described as a Dora who physically survived the war but who, because she could not dispel the emptiness and guilt that such survival entails, eventually took her own life. It is precisely in the introduction of these feelings on the level of story that lies the importance of *Voyage de nocés*'s divergence from the facts recounted in *Dora Bruder*. These feelings acquire added significance, moreover, when, at the same time and in one of the many moments in which the narrator establishes identification between himself and Ingrid, he signals his own inability to rid himself of feelings of emptiness and remorse, his allusion to which ends the novel: "[Ingrid] ne pouvait pas se débarrasser [de ce sentiment de vide]. Moi non plus" "[Ingrid] couldn't shake off [that feeling of emptiness]. Nor could I" (158; 120).

Key to this reading of *Voyage de nocés* is an understanding of the source of Jean's own feelings of emptiness and guilt. Although Jean himself does not identify these causes directly, he provides clues

when he reveals that summertime and its ability to provoke in him thoughts of the past are the basis of feelings of uneasiness and emptiness: "l'été est une saison qui provoque chez moi une sensation de vide et d'absence et me ramène au passé" 'summer has been a season that gives me a sense of emptiness and absence, and takes me back to the past' (26; 13). However, this was not always the narrator's experience of summer; elsewhere he describes a different summer conceived rather as an experience of the fullness of life, when he was twenty years old and hitchhiking in the south of France. It was then that he first met Ingrid Teyerson and her husband Rigaud, a couple old enough to be his parents: "Cet été-là, le malaise n'existait pas, ni cette surimpression étrange du passé sur le présent" 'That summer, the malaise didn't exist, nor did this strange superimposition of the past on the present' (27; 14). The uniqueness of this summer is connected to Ingrid herself and lies in the narrator's feelings of happiness in her presence: "Maintenant que je m'en souviens, il me semble que c'est l'un des rares moments de ma vie où j'ai éprouvé une sensation de bien-être que je pourrais même appeler: bonheur" 'Remembering it now, it seems to me that that was one of the rare moments in my life when I experienced a sense of well-being that I could even call Happiness' (34; 19). In another passage, the narrator associates walking next to Ingrid along the slope of a village street with a special feeling of being protected by another person: "Le contact de son bras et de son épaule me donnait une impression que je n'avais jamais ressentie encore, celle de me trouver sous la protection de quelqu'un. . . j'ignorais que de telles choses pouvaient se produire, dans la vie" 'The contact of her arm and shoulder gave me an impression that I had never yet had, that of finding myself under someone's protection . . . I didn't know that such things could happen, in life' (39; 24).

Upon examining the same passages, Junate D. Kamiskas notes that, for the narrator, Ingrid was the "idealized woman / mother" (92): "The warm comfortable feeling Jean experiences in her presence invites the reader to view Ingrid as a kind of mythical mother, who by her nurturing presence compensates for the absence of the real mother" (91) whom he describes as wanting nothing better than to "se débarrasser de [lui]" 'get ride of [him]' (*Voyage* 39; *Hon-eymoon* 23), much in the same way that Modiano has described his

own parents. The special maternal status held by Ingrid serves to explain, at least in part, the narrator's growing obsession with the couple during the years following Ingrid's suicide, an obsession that otherwise appears disproportionate to the relatively short-lived and superficial relationship he initially enjoyed with them, and to the fact that he encounters Ingrid only once more three years later and never again sees her husband.

This somewhat perplexing preoccupation with Ingrid that the narrator nourishes over the years takes many forms, but grows incrementally as he ages and as he experiences more and more frequently the aforementioned feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty about his life. First, he describes that following his return from Milan the summer of Ingrid's suicide, "[il a] voulu en savoir plus long sur le suicide d'Ingrid" '[he] wanted to find out more about Ingrid's suicide' (23; 10), but is unable to contact Rigaud. Yet this interest quickly wanes as he embarks on his new career as explorer: "J'ai commencé à voyager. Leur souvenir s'est estompé" 'I began to travel. The memory of them faded' (23; 11). Then, three years later, when the narrator once again feels the need to deepen his understanding of Ingrid's death by attempting to phone Rigaud, he is still relatively content with his life and his future prospects, although he begins to experience some feelings of distance and disconnectedness:

Le soir où j'avais essayé une dernière fois de téléphoner à Rigaud était un soir d'été comme aujourd'hui: la même chaleur, et une sensation d'étrangeté et de solitude, mais si diluée en comparaison de celle que j'éprouve maintenant . . . Ce n'était rien de plus que l'impression de temps mort que ressent un voyageur entre deux avions. . . . La vie était encore bruissante de mouvement et de beaux projets.

The evening when I had tried one last time to phone Rigaud was a summer evening like this one: the same heat and a sense of strangeness and solitude, but so diluted in comparison with the feeling I now have . . . It was no more than the impression of time standing still that a traveler has between two planes. . . . Life was still humming with movement and glorious projects (24; 11)

Also, about five years pass when, prior to his departure on an expedition across Asia, Jean, for the first time, has real doubts about his private life and his profession, spending "des jours de doute et de

cafarde” ‘days of doubt and depression’ (50-51; 33). Interestingly, it is at this time that, haunted by memories of Ingrid, he begins to write her biography.

Finally, we are brought to the present of the narration when, eighteen years following Ingrid’s suicide, Jean has completely abandoned his current existence as husband to Annette and as professional explorer. Casting off his own life and identity in order to focus exclusively on Ingrid’s, he first travels to Milan, where Ingrid had killed herself, instead of to Brazil where his work would have taken him, and then secretly returns to Paris to take a hotel room on the city’s edge. Toward the end of the narrative, Jean focuses on Ingrid through Rigaud, and upon locating the apartment that they occupied during the war, even gives up his hotel room in order to rent it. In this way, having relinquished his life of movement and travel, Jean opts instead for one of paralysis and immobility, entombing himself, as it were, in Ingrid’s past and in her death. Jean and Ingrid become, therefore, as Alan Morris puts it, “doubles,” and “his merging with her is almost total” (174).

Embodiment of a certain “paradise,” the wholeness and completion that a subject feels in the presence of the protective maternal, Ingrid ends up being associated with pure despair, her own, but also the narrator’s. The text itself is merely implicit in the explanations it offers for this, and in the connections it draws. As I have suggested, Ingrid’s own despair and the suicide it eventually provokes are born of the sudden disappearance and death of her father, the guilt associated with her not having been present at that brutal and unexpected separation, and with her unbearable survival of it. The narrator’s despair, like his multi-layered identity, is more complicated. On the one hand, in his primary identity as Jean, for whom Ingrid is the idealized maternal and an object of desire, her death becomes the loss of the possibility of perfect happiness. On the other hand, in his identification with Ingrid and his adoption of her emotional attitude, he mourns as well what she has lost. Indeed, hidden behind or encrypted in the loss of the narrative maternal lies the loss of the father.

The “lack” that Patrick Modiano felt while considering the case of Dora Bruder, and which is at the origin of his writing of *Voyage de nocces*, is therefore repeated in the emptiness and remorse that his

narrator eventually shares with Ingrid and which end the novel. As in most of Modiano's works, while a great deal of the stylistic effort is devoted to recreating these feelings for the reader, they remain unresolved in order to be taken up again in a subsequent work. Modiano's character in *Voyage de nocces* commits suicide in response to the loss of her father to the Holocaust; the author's own reaction to the loss of his father is *Dora Bruder*, since, as we shall see, the story of the concrete loss of Dora whose parents are searching for her from the very first page is also, in part, the story of Modiano's somewhat more abstract loss of his father, and, by extension, of his own identity. *Dora Bruder* thus actualizes what remains latent in *Voyage de nocces*, both participating in what Nathalie Rachlin has identified as the "Modiano syndrome," that is, Modiano's use of narrative to address specific personal identity issues resulting from his origins as the son of a Jew who collaborated under the Occupation (129).

Remarkably, while the paternal dominates in *Dora Bruder*, the maternal does not recede altogether, but rather serves to seal the relationship between the two texts, and mark the evolution from one to the other. In effect, near the beginning of the *Dora Bruder*, the author or the narrative voice recalls that it was in the company of his mother, when they would visit the Marché aux puces de Saint-Ouen, that for the first time he experienced "le vide que l'on éprouve devant ce qui a été détruit, rasé net" "that sense of emptiness that comes with the knowledge of what has been destroyed, razed to the ground" (35; 29). He will learn much later that this neighborhood "de baraques, de hangars, d'acacias et de maisons basses" 'of shacks, warehouses, acacias, and low-built houses' was Dora Bruder's neighborhood during the Occupation, one of the old Jewish sections of Paris, which had been torn down after the war. This feeling of emptiness in the face of loss experienced in the presence of the maternal in *Dora Bruder* can, of course, be strongly contrasted to the happiness that the twenty-year-old Jean, in *Voyage de nocces*, experiences in the company of the "ideal mother," Ingrid. So, while *Voyage* recounts the erosion and eventual destruction of this happiness or sense of well-being, *Dora* begins completely under the sign of loss.

The relationship between, or even the identification of the loss of Dora with that of the author / narrator's father is established and

sustained throughout the text. Information about Dora Bruder and her experiences, and the details of the author's efforts to uncover these, evoke allusions to Modiano's less-than-positive relationship with his father, and the experiences of this latter, a Jew who actually survived the Occupation and the war, that is, who was arrested but who escaped deportation, thanks to his connections with French collaborators and his participation in the Parisian black market. Part of the story of Dora is the author's vivid acknowledgement that she and countless others perished while his own father survived, understandably the source of paradoxical feelings on his part, as Rachlin explains (129) as well as that which grounds his writing.

Examples of the Dora—father connection abound in *Dora Bruder*. In an early passage, while recounting his visit to the Palais de Justice in order to obtain permission to access Dora's birth certificate, during which time he has difficulty locating the appropriate stairway, the author recalls his inability, years before, to locate his father who had been hospitalized in the Pitié-Salpêtrière. The author's recollection of this experience establishes a certain equivalency, at least on the symbolic level, between his search for Dora's birth certificate and his search for, and eventual loss of, his father even to the point of doubting that he ever existed:

Je me souviens d'avoir erré pendant des heures à travers l'immensité de cet hôpital à sa recherche. . . . Je finissais par douter de l'existence de mon père en passant et repassant devant cette église majestueuse et ces corps de bâtiment irréels. . . . J'ai arpenté les cours pavés jusqu'à ce que le soir tombe. Impossible de retrouver mon père. Je ne l'ai plus jamais revu.

I remember wandering for hours through the vastness of that hospital in search of him. . . . I came to doubt my father's existence, passing and repassing that majestic church, and those spectral buildings. . . . I tramped the paved courtyards till dusk. It was impossible to find my father. I never saw him again. (17-18; 12-13)

In another passage, Modiano contemplates, during the present of writing, the city of Paris on a rainy afternoon in November 1996, and links it to Paris under the Occupation: "Et au milieu de toutes ces lumières et de cette agitation, j'ai peine à croire que je suis dans la même ville que celle où se trouvaient Dora Bruder et ses parents, et aussi mon père quand il avait vingt ans de moins que moi" 'And

in the midst of all these lights, all this hubbub, I can hardly believe that this is the city where Dora lived with her parents, where my father lived when he was twenty years younger than I am now' (50; 40-41). Not only does this passage link the Paris of the present to that of the past, but connects as well Dora Bruder and her family to Modiano's father.

Perhaps the most compelling passages connecting Dora Bruder and Modiano's father are the various allusions to their arrests by the Occupation authorities. In fact, before learning that Dora had not returned home from her "fugue" until April 1942, Modiano believed that she had been arrested in February 1942, like his father, and even that she might have traveled to the police station in the same van as he. This association would perhaps have helped to exonerate, in the eyes of the son, the father who, equally as alienated and outcast as Dora, survived their shared circumstances:

Peut-être ai-je voulu qu'ils se croisent, mon père et elle, en cet hiver 1942. . . . Mon père non plus ne s'était pas fait recenser en octobre 1940, et, comme Dora Bruder, il ne portait pas de numéro de <<dossier juif>>. Ainsi n'avait-il plus aucune existence légale et avait-il coupé toutes les amarres avec un monde où il fallait que chacun se justifie d'un métier, d'une famille, d'une nationalité, d'une date de naissance, d'un domicile. Désormais il était ailleurs. Un peu comme Dora après sa fugue.

Perhaps it was that I wanted them to have met, she and my father, in that winter of 1942. . . . My father, too, had missed the census in October 1940 and, like Dora Bruder, had no "Jewish dossier" number. Consequently, no longer having any legal existence, he had cut all threads with a world where you were nothing without a job, a family, a nationality, a date of birth, and address. Henceforth he was in limbo. Not unlike Dora, after her escape. (63; 51-52)

While Modiano's father was able to escape, Dora, who was eventually arrested in June 1942 and interned at the Tourelles barracks, then Drancy and Auschwitz, died.

Indeed, because of the circumstances of his survival, the father's plight is never, and cannot ever really be, placed on the same level of that of Dora or others who perished, and his survival can never merely be a happy fact. As Modiano recounts in a lengthy digression from Dora's story, the same father who himself had been

arrested and transported in a police van under these harrowing circumstances was also responsible for his son's having to do the same, though under more banal ones: "La seule fois de ma vie où je me suis trouvé dans [un panier de salade], c'était en compagnie de mon père, et je n'en parlerais pas maintenant si cette péripétie n'avait pas pris pour moi un caractère symbolique" "The only time I ever found myself in [a Black Maria] it was with my father, and I wouldn't mention it now had not the episode taken on a symbolic character in my eyes' (68; 56). The paradox is not lost on the son, this incident perhaps figuring his father's status as both Jew and collaborator, as both victim and executioner:

[J]'étais étonné que mon père, qui avait vécu pendant l'Occupation ce qu'il avait vécu, n'eût pas manifesté la moindre réticence à me laisser emmener dans un panier à salade. Il était là, assis devant moi, impassible, l'air vaguement dégoûté, il m'ignorait comme si j'étais un pestiféré et j'appréhendais l'arrivée au commissariat de police, ne m'attendant à aucune compassion de sa part.

Yet I was surprised that, after all he had been through during the Occupation, my father should have offered not the slightest objection to my being taken away in a Black Maria. Sitting there, opposite me, impassive, with an air of faint disgust, he ignored me as if I had the plague, and, knowing that I could expect no sympathy from him, I dreaded our arrival at the police station. (70; 57)

Modiano then recalls seeing his father a few more times after that incident, the last time being when he attempted to force his son into military service, another form of detention or imprisonment of sorts: "il me déroba mes papiers militaires pour tenter de me faire incorporer de force à la caserne de Reuilly. Ensuite, je ne l'ai plus jamais revu" "he hid my call-up papers as a ruse to have me carted off by force to the Reuilly barracks. I never saw him again after that' (72; 59).

Punctuating the surface of the text of *Dora Bruder*, therefore, are descriptions of the disappearance / loss of the father, either in the form of the father's arrest, or figuratively as a source of disappointment to his son, or again as actually never being seen again. Thus, while Ingrid's father died, as did Dora's, and Dora herself, real deaths, what Modiano in part recounts in his text is also his father's,

and his own, metaphoric ones. Modiano's father attempts to contain his son in the same way he was contained, and then disappears. However, what Modiano also does in a certain way in this text is restore what was destroyed, redeem what was lost. At the same time that he conveys to us unfathomable loss in what he learned about Dora Bruder, her family, and the experience of others in Paris under the Nazi Occupation; while revealing, by reproducing the written and unanswered appeals for the release of children; as he lists the names of non-Jewish French adolescents and young adults, "des amis des juifs," who were arrested and deported for having engaged in parodic displays of the star of David; while describing the post-war destruction of entire neighborhoods whose streets and numbers corresponded to the addresses of those who were deported; in short, as he once again struggles to combat with his writing the collective forgetting by his fellow countrymen, Patrick Modiano breathes new life into what has disappeared. The Dora Bruder who was lost and about whom a notice in *Paris Soir* appeals for information is, to a certain extent, found. As the author himself remarks, describing the eighteen-year old who, instead of Dora, had ridden in the police van with his father: "Si je n'étais pas là pour l'écrire, il n'y aurait plus aucune trace de la présence de cette inconnue et de celle de mon père dans un panier de salade en février 1942, sur les Champs Élysées" "Were I not here to record it, there would be no trace of this unidentified girl's presence, nor that of my father's, in a Black Maria on the Champs-Élysées in February 1942" (65; 53).

Furthermore, the father, tainted by crime, intrigue, and maybe worse, absent and lost on many levels, the least of which is physical, is found again as well. For Modiano, according to Samuel Khalifa, "[writing] becomes a means of deliverance from his sense of guilt about the past: the dark years of the Occupation and, more especially, the uncertainty surrounding his parents, in particular his father" (165). Thus, having just described the burglaries committed by "Hena," a young Jewess who was shipped out from the Tourelles barracks to Drancy three days after Dora had arrived at Tourelles, Modiano draws compelling parallels to his father's situation:

Je me sens solidaire de son cambriolage. Mon père aussi, en 1942, avec des complices, avait pillé les stocks de roulements à billes de la société SKF avenue Grande Armée, et ils avaient chargé la marchandise sur des

camions, pour l'apporter jusqu'à leur officine de marché noir, avenue Hoche. Les ordonnances allemandes, les lois de Vichy, les articles de journaux ne leur accordaient qu'un statut de pestiférés et de droit commun, alors il était légitime qu'ils se conduisent comme des hors-la-loi afin de survivre. C'est leur honneur. Et je les aime pour ça.

I feel a certain solidarity with her act of burglary. In 1942, my father and his accomplices had plundered the SKF warehouse on the Avenue de la Grande-Armée of its stock of ball bearings, loading their loot onto trucks and transporting it back to the den on the Avenue Hoche from which they operated their black market business. According to German decrees, Vichy laws, and articles in the press, they were no better than vermin and common criminals, so they felt justified in behaving like outlaws in order to survive. For them, it was a point of honor. And I applaud them for it. (117; 97)

The activities of the father are granted new significance when replaced in the socio-historical context in which they were carried out. Because he was forced to survive in the overwhelmingly threatening environment of occupied Paris, which Modiano himself re-creates in *Dora Bruder*, his activities are justified, his "crimes" and his very survival, pardonable. The process by which the outlawed become outlaws is finally understandable thus allowing the losses that are described in this text to be recovered by it. Dora, whose very existence might never have been known, is immortalized by a work that bears her name, much like the cemetery headstone she was never given; the father, long the source of his son's feelings of emptiness and remorse, and subsequently of his confused sense of identity, is understood, loved, and, finally, forgiven.

To conclude, it appears that the emptiness that Patrick Modiano describes feeling upon contemplating Dora Bruder's situation was only partially assuaged by his writing of *Voyage*. Because he goes on to write *Dora Bruder*, we can assume that he no longer considered fiction completely adequate as a vehicle for the treatment of certain aspects of the Occupation or as a means of addressing his relationship with his father. One senses while reading *Dora Bruder* a different truth to be uncovered and recounted, a real monument to be erected in the name of those who are dead, those who might have died, and those who disappeared in other ways. Furthermore, while a literary account of Dora's "fugue," that is, a fictionalized response

to the notice found in the *Paris-Soir* of December 31, 1941, appears in the form of Rigaud and Ingrid's Riviera honeymoon in *Voyage de noces*, the fact that nothing verifiable about Dora's actual experiences has ever been elucidated is accepted in the end. In fact, the emptiness, the lack, the loss, and the unanswered questions that ground Modiano's writings and which are the source of the quiet despair that ends *Voyage de noces* are, to the contrary, valorized in the somewhat paradoxical final paragraph of *Dora Bruder*. There, information not possessed, no longer merely a sign of absence and source of emptiness, functions also to shape and protect identity, suggesting for us that although all that is really available upon which to construct our identity are partial details and incomplete facts—the origin was always already but a “point of departure” for exploration and discovery, and complete recovery is impossible—such a situation is not, finally, to be lamented:

J'ignorerais toujours à quoi elle passait ses journées, où elle se cachait, en compagnie de qui elle se trouvait pendant les mois d'hiver de sa première fugue et au cours des quelques semaines de printemps où elle s'est échappée à nouveau. C'est là son secret. Un pauvre et précieux secret que les bourreaux, les ordonnances, les autorités dites d'occupation, le Dépôt, les casernes, les camps, l'Histoire, le temps—tout ce qui vous souille et vous détruit—n'auront pas pu lui voler.

I shall never know how she spent her days, where she hid, in whose company she passed the winter months of her first escape, or the few weeks of spring when she escaped for the second time. That is her secret. A poor and precious secret that not even the executioners, the decrees, the occupying authorities, the Dépôt, the barracks, the camps, History, time—everything that defiles and destroys you—have been able to take away from her. (145; 119)

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the English translations of French quotations are my own.

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