"Oneself as Another": Identification and Mourning in Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder*

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> The one unbearable dimension of possible human experience is not the experience of one's own death, which no one has, but the experience of the death of another.
>
> —Jacques Lacan

> History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers.
>
> —Anne Michaels

These reflections take as their starting point a book by Paul Ricoeur, whose title is echoed in mine: *Soi-même comme un autre, Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur explains in his Preface that he takes the conjunction "comme," "as," in at least two senses: "oneself similar to another" ("semblable à un autre") and "oneself as . . . other" ("en tant que . . . autre")(14).[1] This dual meaning is far from exhausting the richness of Ricoeur's philosophical investigation, but I will use it as my guiding thread in discussing *Dora Bruder*, Patrick Modiano's personal exploration of a few months in the life of a young girl who was deported from France in 1942 and who died in Auschwitz, as did her parents, Cécile and Ernest Bruder. These were people who left very few traces, "almost anonymous," Modiano writes (*Dora* 29), barely more than names on a police blotter or an identity card. His book is an attempt to reconstruct the image of Dora Bruder and

her family, using the combined resources of the historical archive, of his novelistic imagination, and of his autobiographical memories. It is thus a hybrid work, not only between literary genres (biography, fiction, autobiography) but also between the ontological and phenomenological categories of memory and history. I will suggest that Modiano's exploration is based on a complex dialectic between identification and differentiation, or what Ricoeur calls "oneself as similar" and "oneself as other." I will also suggest that this dialectic allows Modiano to raise, in a compelling and original way, the ethical question of responsibility and its relation to mourning.

Before discussing *Dora Bruder* in detail, however, I want to linger a bit over Ricoeur. The ten studies in his book are arduous, and involve his internal dialogue with both analytic philosophers—who, as he sees it, tend to evacuate the subject from the their analyses by focusing only on "what is said" rather than on "who is saying"—and phenomenologists and metaphysicians, toward whom Ricoeur feels much closer, but from whom he also wants to distinguish himself in a number of respects. In the first instance, he deals with the problem of action: who is responsible for accomplishing an act (whether a speech act or a physical action), and more generally who is the subject of a life story (whether real or fictional)? Here Ricoeur very interestingly posits a dialectic between two kinds of identity: identity as sameness, and identity as the continuity of a self over time. When we speak of somebody's "character," whether in life or in a narrative, we usually mean a sum of permanent traits—these constitute sameness, or what Ricoeur calls the self as *idem*. We know that people also change, not necessarily remaining the "same." Yet, a certain continuity of the self exists, he argues, and it is that continuity which allows an individual to engage himself or herself toward the future—to make promises, to enter into contracts, and so on. This continuous (and potentially changing) self is the self as *ipse*. One of the many functions of the *ipse* is to guarantee the possibility of attestation, or of testimony: while I may change in various ways over time, the continuity of my self guarantees the truthfulness (not to be conflated with factual accuracy) of my testimony. Although Ricoeur does not dwell on it here, it is obvious that the self as *ipse* is involved in any act of remembering or recounting.

After the dialectic of *ipse* and *idem*, continuity and sameness,

which is linked to action, Ricoeur approaches what he calls a more difficult question: the dialectic of self (*ipse*) and other. "How can we account for the work of alterity at the heart of ipseity"? he asks (368). Using a phenomenological frame, he posits that the experience of alterity always involves passivity (vs. action), and he proposes three dimensions of the experience of passivity: first, the *ipse* in relation to its own body, and hence to its being in the world; second, the *ipse* in relation to another self, hence in its intersubjective dimension; and finally, the *ipse* in relation to itself, which he calls the dimension of conscience, as opposed to consciousness: *Gewissen* rather than *Bewusstsein* (368–69). In all of these cases, what interests him is the experience of "passivity," that is, instances when the self is not (or not only) acting but is acted upon, and therefore experiences itself as an "object" in some way. It is not clear why Ricoeur eliminates consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) in his discussion of the self's relation to itself, since in the phenomenon of self-consciousness the self does become a kind of object for itself. Possibly, he concentrates on conscience over consciousness because he is trying to come to terms here, at the end of his book, with the question of ethics; and against both Levinas (for whom the ethical injunction comes from a totally external Other, Ricoeur says) and Heidegger (whom he identifies with the "estrangement in the world" paradigm, hence cut off from ethical concerns), he posits a "third modality of otherness, that is, *being-enjoined as a structure of ipseity*" ("troisième modalité d'altérité, à savoir *l'être-enjoint en tant que structure de l'ipséité*") (409; Ricoeur's emphasis). I take this to mean that, according to Ricoeur, the injunction to ethical awareness, awareness of responsibility toward others, is part of the very structure of selfhood.

How does all this relate to Patrick Modiano and *Dora Bruder*? I will suggest that in this book Modiano moves from a very familiar—I am almost tempted to say "easy"—kind of identification with another person, who has suffered in ways similar to his own, to an ethical consciousness that depends less on identification than on differentiation; and that what results from this movement is a process that can be called mourning. Here I will be evoking not Ricoeur, who does not discuss mourning, but Freud and Lacan, who do.

Anonymous Persons

It is striking how strong is the appeal of unknown people who really existed. A year after Modiano published *Dora Bruder*, the noted historian Alain Corbin published a book subtitled "On the traces of an unknown man" ("Sur les traces d'un inconnu"). Its protagonist was an individual named Louis-François Pinagot, who lived from 1798 to 1876, and whose name Corbin found in a provincial archive purely by chance. Or rather, he happened to fall on his name after he had decided to undertake, as a historian, a rather unusual project: to write a historical study about someone who had made no mark on his time, who had completely disappeared from memory, even on the level of his family, in order to "bring to existence for a second time a being whose memory is abolished and to whom I have no affective ties . . ." (Corbin 8). Corbin chose Louis-François Pinagot because of his anonymity, because he was no more than "a name, a shadow thrown on documents in which he appeared simply as part of a group [*ensemble*] or a series" (12). To reconstitute the world of this man, he writes, would require a "history turned inside out" ("une histoire en creux"), a history of "what is revealed by silence" and absence rather than plenitude (13).

Corbin, accomplished historian that he is, proceeds to describe the landscape, both geographical and social, in which Pinagot spent his long life, and to reconstitute its major events in relation to the epochal historical events (Revolution, Restoration, more revolutions, Empire, Republic) that Pinagot lived through anonymously, or more exactly, as Corbin explains, as "part of a series." Whatever documents exist about Pinagot also exist about innumerable others—that is what Corbin means by series. Thus, although very little is known about the uniquely individual aspects of Pinagot's life, much can be known about those aspects he shared with others—profession, religion, marriage and parenthood, contractual commitments, geographical and historical location. Making use of archival documents as well as of contextual information, Corbin is able to write the 300-page life story of an unknown man. As he makes clear, it was the very absence of individualizing information about Louis-François Pinagot, combined with the documented fact that Pinagot had existed and had lived a long life, that triggered his investigation.

Patrick Modiano is a novelist, not a historian—he deals with imaginary characters, even if many of the events he recounts in his novels are based on aspects of his own life (as critics have shown and as he himself has confirmed).[2] But what distinguishes *Dora Bruder* from his other works, and makes it comparable in some ways to Corbin's book on Louis-François Pinagot, is that Dora Bruder was also a person who had been "abolished from memory," about whom very little was known or even knowable, but who had had a historical existence. Dora Bruder is not a fictional character: like Corbin to his subject, Modiano was drawn to Dora by the combination of anonymity and ontological "having-been-thereness" that her name and person represented. Furthermore, she was part of a "series" that has interested, not to say obsessed, Modiano during all of his writing life: Jews in France who had been hunted during the Occupation. Dora had been not only hunted but had also been caught, and deported along with 75,000 other Jews living in France.[3]

But after the initial resemblance, Modiano's and Corbin's enterprises diverge. Corbin chose expressly to write about an individual to whom he had no personal or affective ties: although, in his preface, he calls the book a "meditation on disappearance" and an attempt to bring back a man from oblivion (8–9), and even includes notes from his journal that describe his elation at having found Pinagot's name in a provincial archive (which he had chosen because it was located in the region of his own birth), such personal statements disappear after the prefatory chapter; from then on, Corbin maintains the impersonal tone and discourse of a historian as he attempts to reconstruct, by hypothesis and contextualization, his subject's life. Modiano, by contrast, was deeply, affectively, imaginatively engaged with Dora Bruder, over a period of years, before he wrote the book that bears her name. He first came upon Dora's name and those of her parents in 1988, while perusing the pages of an old newspaper. Six years later, several years before he published *Dora Bruder*, he wrote in an article that "Those parents and that young girl . . . all three of them disappearing in the transports toward Auschwitz, have not ceased to haunt me" ("Avec Klarsfeld" 8). Within the text of *Dora Bruder*, he mentions that his 1990 novel, *Voyage de noces*, was inspired largely by Dora, at a time when he knew almost nothing more about her than her name (76).[4]

In multiple and complex ways, Modiano *identifies* with Dora; and it is his various identifications with her that account, I think, for the heterogeneous discourses that characterize *Dora Bruder*. Furthermore, as I will try to show, in this work Modiano moves from an initial mode of appropriative identification toward other, more ethically inflected identifications and toward a position of differentiation and mourning.

Identification as Appropriation

What do I mean by appropriative identification? Using Ricoeur's terminology, I would define it as an instance of assimilation between self and other, with the emphasis on self: "*I* am like that person." The tendency to identify with others, to "use" others as a means of shaping one's own sense of self, has been recognized for a very long time. Freud considered identification a necessary step in the formation of subjectivity, as the child identifies with, and eventually differentiates him or herself from, parents and other idealized figures.[5] What I am calling appropriative identification is thus neither unusual nor harmful, in principle; rather, it constitutes one of the most basic responses one can have toward other human beings, whether in life or in art. *I am like the other, I want to be like the other, I could have been the other*—all these are ordinary or everyday versions of appropriative identification.

There are also pathological versions, to be sure: the mass psychology of fascism is based on a pathological identification with the group and its idealized leader, where the autonomous self disappears altogether. In a personal rather than political register, if "I am like the other" modulates into "I am the other," we have delusion or potentially suicidal melancholia. A Swiss man, born out of wedlock to an impoverished woman who had to give him up to foster care and adoption when he was a very young child, reads and views hundreds of horrific testimonies by child survivors of the Holocaust who were violently separated from their parents, and begins to take himself for such a child as well: Bruno Doesseker becomes Binjamin Wilkomirski, and writes a prizewinning "memoir" of his Holocaust childhood.[6] That is pathological appropriative identification, as is the suicide of a young Parisian woman who identifies so closely with a young woman in a photograph of the Warsaw ghetto that she

can no longer tell the difference between herself and the other—this example being drawn not from life, but from Henri Raczymow's novel *Un cri sans voix* (1995).

Pathological appropriative identification is a particular problem in Holocaust studies, and a number of theorists have sought to define a distanced mode of identification in opposition to other, more harmful forms in which the reader or viewer of Holocaust narratives "appropriates" the trauma, as well as the memories, of the victims.[7] I am arguing here that a certain degree of "appropriation" is within the normal range of identifications, even as regards Holocaust victims. I agree with other theorists, however, that a certain distance is necessary, here as in all other identifications: distance guarantees sanity ("I am not the other"), and also allows for the intellectual and moral faculties to come into play (as I will discuss later).

Modiano's appropriative identification with Dora Bruder is not pathological; but it is self-centered, and it makes itself felt from the start. He tells us, on the first page of the book, that "eight years ago" (an indefinite date he will later specify as December 1988), he came by chance upon a small ad that appeared in a daily newspaper in Paris on December 31, 1941:

> On recherche une jeune fille, Dora Bruder, 15 ans, 1m55, visage ovale, yeux gris-marron, manteau sport gris, pullover bordeaux, jupe et chapeau bleu marine, chaussures sport marron. Adresser toutes indications à M. et Mme Bruder, 41 boulevard Ornano, Paris. (9)

> Looking for missing young girl, Dora Bruder, 15 years, 5'1," oval face, hazel eyes, grey jacket, maroon sweater, navy blue skirt and hat, brown walking shoes. Contact M. and Mme Bruder, 41 boulevard Ornano, Paris.

Immediately after this, he writes: "Ce quartier du boulevard Ornano, je le connais depuis longtemps. Dans mon enfance, j'accompagnais ma mère au marché aux puces de Saint-Ouen. Nous descendions de l'autobus à la porte de Clignancourt. . . ." ("I have known that neighborhood of Boulevard Ornano for a long time. In my childhood, I used to accompany my mother to the Saint-Ouen flea market. We would get off the bus at the porte de Clignancourt . . .") and so on

for two more pages of autobiographical reminiscence: he remembers the fat photographer who used to propose "photos-souvenirs" to the passersby, and he also remembers a Sunday afternoon in 1958 when police lined the streets because of the "events" in Algeria. He had a girlfriend who lived near there in 1965, when he was twenty—he remembers the cafes in which he used to wait for hours, and his sense of loneliness. Only at the end of those two pages does he return to the ad which triggered these memories: Boulevard Ornano is where M. and Mme Bruder listed their address as they advertised for their missing daughter.

In this first piece of appropriative identification, then, Modiano launches an autobiographical discourse triggered by geographical proximity: he knows the neighborhood, and even the building, where Dora had lived with her parents. The allusion to his childhood and his mother, to his girlfriend in later years, to his loneliness, suggest other points of identification with Dora as well. The ad he had run across was a missing persons ad: Dora had disappeared, run away from a boarding school, and her parents were searching for her. Modiano will tell us quite soon that he too had "disappeared" when he was a young boy, running away for a day from the boarding school he hated, where his parents put him to get him out of the way. He also recounts some painful episodes from his adolescence, including one where his father called the police and had him taken to the station in a "panier à salade," a paddy wagon (70–73). By means of the autobiographical discourse that results from his appropriative identifications with the adolescent Dora, Modiano explores his own very difficult and unhappy relations with his parents, especially his father.

While he is unnamed here, Modiano's father appears under his full name in the autobiographical book that Modiano published in 2005, *Un pedigree*—his first piece of explicit, straightforward autobiography.[8] Albert Modiano was born in Paris to a Jewish father of Italian and Greek ancestry (we are told nothing about Albert's mother, but presumably she was French). He lived on the edges of a shady underworld of small-time blackmarketeers and "wheelers and dealers" in Paris, before and after World War II as well as during the Occupation. He succeeded in evading the Nazis, due to some unsavory friends who worked for the Gestapo, and he himself may have

been involved with the Gestapo in some way, though the details are not very clear. He met Modiano's mother, an aspiring actress born in Antwerp, in 1942, and they married two years later: Modiano was born in July 1945, and his younger brother Rudy was born two years later. The picture Modiano paints of his childhood and adolescence in *Un pedigree* is that of an unwanted child who was constantly being "sent away" by his parents: to the countryside to be taken care of by others, to boarding schools he hated—but the most painful event of his childhood, he implies, was the death of his brother in 1957, when Modiano was twelve years old.

Some of the life-story he recounts in *Un pedigree* is already present in the autobiographical discourse of *Dora Bruder*, especially his conflicted but passionate relation to his father. We could say, then, that his appropriative identification with Dora—she too had run away from school, she too had been a "rebellious" adolescent—allowed Modiano to engage in a form of self-narration and self-reflection about his own disturbed adolescence that would find its full-blown version (albeit a still quite reticent one, especially where his brother is concerned) in the autobiographical book published eight years later.

But if this were the only thing accomplished in *Dora Bruder*, it would be a rather troubling book: using the life of a young Holocaust victim so that you can tell your own story, no matter how painful it is, comes very close to exploitation, or to the kind of "excessive" identification with the victim that Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" has often been criticized for. In fact, there is another kind of identification at work as well in *Dora Bruder*, which produces very different effects, as well as different discourses and kinds of engagement.

Identification as Empathy

Martha Nussbaum, drawing on a long tradition of theorizing about the emotion of pity, or what today is more often called compassion, notes that pity is aroused when one witnesses misfortunes that befall another person, who did not "merit" them by willful wrongdoing (Nussbaum 31–33). From Aristotle onward, theorists have recognized that "identification with the sufferer" is an essential component of pity or compassion. However, Nussbaum emphasizes that the identification in question—which she calls em-

pathetic identification—involves both a recognition of kinship and an awareness of difference: "in the temporary act of identification [that characterizes compassion], one is always aware of one's own *separateness* from the sufferer—it is for *another*, and not oneself, that one feels" (35). Nussbaum is interested in the social and political possibilities of empathetic identification, arguing that it offers an "education in social justice" (40), and that "the ability to imagine the experiences of others and to participate in their sufferings [is] central to political life" (50).

Susan Gubar, borrowing the term from Nussbaum, has analyzed what she calls "empathic identification" in Anne Michaels's 1996 novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, which imagines the life of a child survivor of the Holocaust who grows up to be a major poet. Gubar's analysis is oriented toward the aesthetic possibilities and consequences of empathic identification: she sees in Anne Michaels's adoption of a male protagonist and of male narrators a recognition of the "dissimilarity" between the author (who was born in 1958 and has no personal connection to the Holocaust) and her characters, "an admission that generates compassion while simultaneously derailing it from a trajectory that could become a dangerous projection or appropriation" (Gubar 253).

In Ricoeur's terms, we could say that empathic identification places the emphasis not on the self but on the other: not "I resemble that person and now let me tell my story," but "That person resembles (or could resemble) me, and therefore what happens to that person concerns me." Whereas appropriative identification can lead to pathological forms where all distance is abolished between self and other (corresponding to Freud's notion of melancholia, where the lost object is "incorporated" by the melancholic subject—Freud 1957), empathic identification maintains both similarity and difference. It can lead to historical investigation and speculation; or, as Nussbaum claims, to better social policies and better jurisprudence; or, as Gubar shows, to complex fictions about Holocaust survivors, written by someone who "was not there." It can also lead, as I will soon argue, to ethical consciousness and mourning.

Dora Bruder, although it is not a novel (despite some critics' calling it one)[9] and not at all similar to *Fugitive Pieces*, does share with it one major structural feature: the narrator's gender is not the

same as that of the main subject of the narrative. In Modiano's case, however, the choice of a young girl as subject does not seem to be chiefly a means of distancing (as Gubar suggests, inversely, for *Fugitive Pieces*), because Modiano begins by emphasizing his similarity with Dora, not his difference from her. In March 1995, when he appears to have started thinking seriously about writing a book on a deported child, Modiano mentioned a few other possible subjects to Serge Klarsfeld, among them two teenage brothers whose "mother didn't take much care of them," Modiano thought.[10] Here too, his interest appears to have centered around a similarity that allows for appropriative identification, as if that was the prerequisite for the more distanced variety.

How is empathetic identification manifested in *Dora Bruder*? First, by the enormous energy that Modiano expends in trying to piece together Dora's story. He consults police archives, talks to a surviving niece of Dora's father, obtains photographs from her and others, tries to locate the boarding school from which Dora ran away (he speculates that her parents had put her there to keep her safe, not to get rid of her, like his parents—but the feeling of imprisonment, he thinks, was the same), consults histories about the detention center where she was held before being deported, gets the names of other women who were taken there around the same time as Dora, walks the streets of Paris to try and find the places where she had walked, speculates about where she was and when. This quest is recounted in the first-person, but the effect is quite different from the autobiographical discourse I discussed earlier. In fact, this is not autobiographical discourse in the personal sense; rather, it is metahistorical and investigative, as the author tells us how he came to find out certain things, or how he failed to find them.

He also speculates, not unlike a historian, on what may have happened to Dora and her family, and why. Thus, in first discussing Dora's "fugue" from the boarding school, he writes that he found her name on the school registry, with the notation that she had left the school on December 14, 1941, with the "cause of departure" listed as "consequence of running away" ("suite de fugue"). This is immediately followed by a piece of historical-biographical speculation: "C'était un dimanche. Je suppose qu'elle avait profité de ce jour de sortie pour aller voir ses parents boulevard Ornano. Le soir, elle

n'était pas revenue au pensionnat" (57). ["It was a Sunday. I suppose she had taken advantage of that free day to go and see her parents on Boulevard Ornano. In the evening, she had not returned to the boarding school"]. This kind of speculation can easily shade into fictional narrative, as is suggested by the last sentence, which seems to state a "fact" instead of remaining on the level of speculation. Occasionally, Modiano shifts into a whole paragraph of novelistic description or narration ("C'était comme de retourner en prison. Les jours raccourcissaient. Il faisait déjà nuit lorsqu'elle traversait la cour . . ." [47] ["It was like returning to prison. The days were getting shorter. It was already night when she crossed the courtyard"]), but it is surprising how *little* of this there is in *Dora Bruder*: it is as if Modiano the historical investigator purposely kept the imagination of the novelist under control. By emphasizing the speculative/metahistorical discourse ("I suppose she . . ."), Modiano affirms his separateness from Dora. But his "slips" into quasi-fictional narration indicate that no discourse is totally stable in this text: discourses jostle each other. Similarly, the difference between what I am calling appropriative identification (where it is Modiano's story that dominates) and empathetic identification (where Dora's story is the focus) is not always totally clear—one can shade into the other, even on a single page. Analytically, however, they are distinct—or more exactly, it is useful to distinguish them.

Consider, for example, Modiano's reflections on the reasons for Dora's running away, her *fugue*. He comes back to this question more than once, partly because it is Dora's *fugue* that eventually led to her arrest and deportation (her parents had not registered her as a Jew, but by going to the police to try and find her, her father gave her away) and partly no doubt because his own *fugue* when he was around her age constitutes a strong bond with the young girl. His first reflection begins with a question: "Qu'est-ce qui nous décide à faire une fugue?" ["What makes us decide to run away?"—note the first person plural, to which I'll return]. This is followed by what looks like a typical piece of appropriative identification, in the form of an autobiographical statement: "Je me souviens de la mienne le 18 janvier 1960" ["I remember when I ran away on January 18, 1960"]—but almost immediately after this, he swerves away from the autobiographical discourse, as if, in this instance, his person-

al story were offered simply as a way to understand Dora's better. Furthermore, he emphasizes the *difference* between his *fugue* and Dora's; he ran away in winter, but it was a winter in peacetime, not at all like her winter:

> Sur la route où je m'enfuyais, le long des hangars de l'aérodrome de Villacoubley, le seul point commun avec la fugue de Dora, c'était la saison: l'hiver. Hiver paisible, hiver de routine, sans commune mesure avec celui d'il y avait dix-huit ans. Mais il semble que ce qui vous pousse brusquement à la fugue, c'est un jour de froid et de grisaille qui vous rend encore plus vive la solitude et vous fait sentir encore plus fort qu'un étau se resserre. (59)

> On the road where I was fleeing, along the hangars of the Villacoubley airport, the only point in common with Dora's flight was the season: winter. A peaceful, ordinary winter, in no way comparable to the winter of eighteen years earlier. But it seems to me that what impels you suddenly to run away is a day of cold and greyness that makes you feel even more alone and makes you feel even more strongly that a vise is being tightened.

In the final sentence above, he uses his own feelings to try and answer the general question posed in the beginning: running away has multiple motivations—the cold and the dark, your feeling of being alone, your feeling of being caught in a tightening vise. Whose feelings and thoughts are described here? On one level, they are the adolescent Modiano's, and by extension Dora's—but they are also about "us" ("What makes us decide to run away?"), about "you."

Here we have a moment, then, where the autobiographical discourse leads not to the self and its story, but to the story of the other, and indeed to many possible others. At several points in the book, Modiano uses the generalizing "vous" to speak about what happened to Dora and her family. This indicates not only his own empathetic identification with them, but also functions as an invitation to the reader: "you too are concerned." One short chapter, about halfway through, begins with the factual statement that Ernest Bruder, Dora's father, was arrested on March 19, 1942 and interned in Drancy, the camp from which he and Dora were eventually deported (on

September 18, 1942). The chapter ends with a "vous":

> Un père essaye de retrouver sa fille, signale sa disparition dans un commissariat, et un avis de recherche est publié dans un journal du soir. Mais ce père est lui-même "recherché" . . . Ceux-là même qui sont chargés de vous chercher et de vous retrouver établissent des fiches pour mieux vous faire disparaître ensuite—définitivement. (84)

> A father tries to find his daughter, reports that she is missing to the police, and a missing-person notice is published in an evening newspaper. But that father is himself "missed," looked for . . . The very people who are supposed to look for you and find you set up files so that they can make you disappear later—once and for all.

I would suggest that this is not only an invitation to empathetic identification on the part of the reader, but is also a way of opening up and directing Modiano's own discourse toward what I earlier called ethical consciousness and mourning.

Ethics and Mourning

Of what does ethical consciousness consist? Of the realization that one has an obligation to others. In *Dora Bruder*, however, I think it consists first of all in the realization that many "others" suffered the same fate as Dora Bruder and her parents. After the short chapter about Ernest Bruder's arrest, Modiano gives us an avalanche of documents bearing the names of others who were arrested, others who were deported, or who experienced hardship: he quotes letters to the police commissioner written by Jews, asking for the release of a nephew, a daughter, a husband, a grandson, aged parents (86–88); he looks up biographies of writers (both Jews and non-Jews) who perished during the war (94–102); he checks the registry of the Tourelles detention center where Dora was first taken in June 1942, and lists the names and birth dates of other young women who were taken there that day (114–15); he gives us the names and short biographies of yet other women from the same center who were all deported together later that month (117–21); and he repro-

duces in its entirety a letter written to a relative by a man interned at Drancy, Robert Tartakovsky, apparently a publisher of art books, shortly before his deportation on the same transport as the women (123–29; Modiano tells us he found the letter by chance at a bookseller in Paris).[11]

The flurry of documentation and the proliferation of names that follows the account of Ernest Bruder's arrest put the individual story into a collective context. And it paves the way for the concluding reflections in the book, which involve the question of collective remembrance and obligation to the dead—especially to those who have left absolutely no trace behind them. Earlier, Modiano had evoked an episode in his father's life that he associated with Dora: his father had also been arrested once, he had told him, but was freed thanks to the intervention of a friend. Modiano fantasizes that Dora and his father were arrested on the same night, since his father had told him that he remembered a young girl sitting next to him in the police wagon. But this bit of appropriative fantasy is immediately corrected—no, it couldn't have been Dora, he has found out (66). Then who was it? No way to be sure, since so many archives have been destroyed. This leads to the realization: "If I wasn't there to write it, there would no longer be any trace of the presence of that unknown woman and of my father in a police wagon in February 1942 on the Champs-Elysées" (67).

The writer's responsibility is to try and compensate for the destruction of historical memory—especially, Modiano insists at the end, to compensate for the willful destruction of memory that comes from an unwillingness to acknowledge wrongdoing. In the final chapters, he describes his walks in some neighborhoods in Paris where the poorest Jews had lived, those who were deported in the largest numbers. These neighborhoods were razed soon after the war and new houses were built there. Modiano attributes the renovation of those streets to a planned amnesia, an attempt to erase all traces of those who had been made to "disappear once and for all." This is a clear if implicit accusation: those who had committed the crime also made sure that all reminders of it would be eliminated. "Les façades étaient rectilignes, les fenêtres carrées, le béton de la couleur de l'amnésie . . . On avait tout anéanti pour construire une sorte de village suisse dont on ne pouvait plus mettre en doute

la neutralité" (138). ["The façades were rectilinear, the windows square, the concrete the color of amnesia. . . . They had eliminated everything in order to build a kind of Swiss village whose neutrality could no longer be put in doubt"]. Modiano uses the impersonal "on," "they," without ever naming who "they" were—but it is clear that the French state and its bureaucracy, which registered the Jews and then handed thousands over to the Germans, are being accused here. The crime, Modiano implies, was not only the action that had been committed, but the attempt to repress it from memory after it had been committed.[12]

As we know, the repressed has a way of returning—and Modiano shows it beautifully a few pages later, just before the end, in a passage that repeats the accusation of planned amnesia but also shows its failure. Immediately after evoking the road that Dora and the other women must have traveled on August 13, 1942, when they were transferred from the Tourelles detention center to Drancy, Modiano writes:

> On a construit une autoroute, rasé des pavillons, bouleversé le paysage de cette banlieue nord-est pour la rendre . . . aussi neutre et grise que possible. Mais sur le trajet vers l'aéroport, des plaques indicatrices bleues portent encore les noms anciens: DRANCY ou ROMAINVILLE. Et en bordure même de l'autoroute, du côté de la porte de Bagnolet, est échouée une épave qui date de ce temps-là, un hangar de bois, que l'on a oublié et sur lequel est inscrit ce nom bien visible: DUREMORD. (144)

> They built a highway, razed houses, overturned the landscape of that north-eastern suburb to make it . . . as neutral and grey as possible. But on the way to the airport, some blue signs still bear the old names: DRANCY or ROMAINVILLE. And on the very edge of the highway, near the porte de Bagnolet, there lies a wreck that dates from that time, a wooden hangar they forgot and on which one can still read, quite visibly: DUREMORD.

Duremord: a difficult death for those who traveled the road, remorse for those who remain? We can read it either way, or both ways.[13] Or yet a third way: to recognize and recall the difficult death

of another person is one possible definition of mourning. Lacan, in his long meditation on Hamlet (which he said was essentially a play about incomplete mourning), uses a wonderful image: the death of a person one cares about, he says, creates a "hole in the real" (Lacan 37). Consequently, mourning is the ritual attempt to "fill the hole in the real" caused by another's death—and the work of mourning takes place wholly in the symbolic register, that of the signifier.

> The work of mourning is accomplished at the level of the *logos*: I say *logos* rather than group or community, although group and community, being organized culturally, are its mainstays. The work of mourning is first of all performed to satisfy the disorder that is produced by the inadequacy of signifying elements to cope with the hole that has been created in existence . . . (38)

It seems to me that in writing *Dora Bruder*, Modiano undertook just such a work of mourning—not only, not even principally, for a single person who had died an untimely and unmourned death, but for all the many thousands of individuals whose brutal disappearance in the summer of 1942 created a "hole in the real." Such work, as Lacan implies, is necessarily inadequate; it is at best a ritual, a gesture toward the stemming of disorder—which may explain why, in some instances, mourning can never be "complete," never be done once and for all. Freud, in his well known essay on "Mourning and Melancholia," opposed the former to the latter as the normal to the pathological: mourning for a lost object has an end, eventually allowing the subject to "move on" and form attachments to other objects, while melancholia (in which the subject "incorporates" the object in an extreme form of identification) is potentially endless and debilitating. But if Lacan is right that the work of mourning takes place in the register of the signifier, then for a writer, an endless mourning is not necessarily debilitating: it can be an endless source of creativity. Modiano's works are almost all "melancholy," famously so; in that regard, *Dora Bruder* is not an exception. But the very act of writing, of symbolization, introduces a necessary distance; and because of that distance, the "melancholy" tone of Modiano's works is not (or not only) a sign of pathology but the result of artistic shaping. And insofar as he is able to complete each book

and "move on" to the next one, his writing corresponds to both Lacan's and Freud's definition of mourning.

Is Modiano endlessly mourning the Jews killed in the Holocaust before he was born? That would be putting it too baldly, and too simply. One could, however, say that his obsession with the period of the war, and more generally with solitary, often inarticulate protagonists who drift through an emotional landscape suffused with devastation and loss (notably in the works that preceded and followed *Dora Bruder*, including *Fleurs de ruine*, *Chien de printemps*, *Des inconnues*, *La Petite Bijou*) has a repetitive quality that suggests both mourning and melancholia. Furthermore, paradoxically, this very combination seems to be a perfect machine for producing more texts—something not to be deplored, in a writer; at least, not if the texts are as moving as most of Modiano's have been.

There is more, however. After I had spent much time thinking about *Dora Bruder*, it suddenly occurred to me: *Bruder* in German (a language Modiano knows at least somewhat, since he lived in Vienna for an extended period when he was a teenager) means "brother." In *Un pedigree*, Modiano writes that apart from the death of his brother Rudy, when Rudy was ten years old (he died of leukemia, though Modiano doesn't tell us that—see Laurent 123), nothing in his unhappy childhood and adolescence really marked him deeply, "en profondeur" (Modiano 2004: 44). Rudy is never mentioned, either by name or allusion, in *Dora Bruder*. Yet, one can wonder whether the linguistic coincidence inscribed in Dora's name does not produce yet one more element of identification: in mourning for Dora, Modiano may also be mourning, or continuing to mourn, for his brother lost in childhood.[14]

Thierry Laurent, who has studied the autobiographical elements in Modiano's work up to 1997 (just before *Dora Bruder*), devotes a short chapter to Rudy, arguing for his importance in Modiano's emotional life, even though he is mentioned (usually not by name but as "mon frère," "my brother") in very few of his novels. Laurent suggests that Modiano's reticence about Rudy is a sign of the latter's importance, since to make him a "character" would be to somehow trivialize him. Laurent cites the ending of Modiano's novel *Chien de printemps* (1993), where the narrator writes about the older man, a typical Modiano-esque lost soul who is the main subject of the work:

> Il ne savait plus quel homme il était. Il m'a dit qu'au bout d'un certain nombre d'années nous acceptons une vérité que nous pressentions mais que nous nous cachions à nous-mêmes par insouciance ou lâcheté: un frère, un double est mort à notre place à une date et dans un lieu inconnus et son ombre finit par se confondre avec nous. (121)
>
> He no longer knew what man he was. He told me that after a certain number of years we accept a truth that we had had an inkling of but that we hid from ourselves by carelessness or cowardice: a brother, a double died in our place, on an unknown date and in an unknown place, and his shadow ends up merging with us.

Laurent interprets this as an allusion to Rudy, and quotes a critic who interviewed Modiano at the time of the book's publication: "De trou noir en trou noir, Modiano n'en finit pas d'expier la mort de Rudy" ["From black hole to black hole, Modiano is endlessly expiating Rudy's death"] (Laurent 132). But in reading that ending, I could not help thinking of Dora Bruder's death as well, especially since "an unknown date and place" would apply more to her and other Holocaust victims than to Rudy. The rapprochement seems all the more plausible, given that *Chien de printemps* was written at a time when Modiano had already been mulling over the story (or at least, the figure) of Dora Bruder.[15]

Does this mean that Dora is only a "stand-in" for Rudy, and that the true object of Modiano's endless mourning—even in this book about a person and persons who really existed—are not the victims of the Holocaust but his own brother? I would certainly not make that argument. The "hole in the real" left by the destruction of the Jews of Europe is clearly the main preoccupation of *Dora Bruder*, as it is of several other works by Modiano, and as it will no doubt continue to be in many works by many others, novelists and historians and philosophers. But the ethical and emotional force of this book is in no way diminished by the realization that its mourning is overdetermined, at once intensely personal and private, and collective.

Notes

1 Here and throughout, translations from the French are my own.

2 The most thorough study of the autobiographical elements in Modiano's novels up to 1997 is Thierry Laurent's *L'œuvre de Patrick Modiano: Une autofiction* (1997). Baptiste Roux (1999) also discusses autobiographical elements in Modiano's work, including *Dora Bruder*, focusing specifically on works that take place during the Occupation. Modiano recognizes the autobiographical aspects in his work (he wrote a letter to Laurent that is included as a preface to the book), but also claims that he is not at all "introspective." See his interview in *Le Monde*, "Le passé recomposé".

3 The complete documentation about these deportations is in Klarsfeld, "Le Mémorial des enfants"; in 1995, Klarsfeld devoted a book exclusively to the deportation of children. Modiano knows and admires Klarsfeld's work (see Modiano, "Avec Klarsfeld"), and had an intense exchange of letters and meetings with Klarsfeld around the time he was working on *Dora Bruder* (from October 1994 to April 1997). Klarsfeld provided him with photographs of Dora and her parents as well as other information, and was stung to the quick by Modiano's "erasure" of his contribution from the book (letter from Serge Klarsfeld to Patrick Modiano, April 25, 1997). I thank Serge Klarsfeld for communicating copies of this correspondence to me.

4 In an intermediate position between Corbin's objectivity and Modiano's subjective approach, one could place Espen Søbye's *Kathe, Alltid vært i Norge* (2003), a study of the life of a 14-year old Jewish girl deported from Norway in December 1942. Søbye, a Norwegian linguist, came upon the name of Kathe Lasnik while doing archival research on the questionnaires that Jewish Norwegians were forced to fill out in 1942, and was impelled to undertake a full-scale research project on the young girl. Unlike Corbin, Søbye does have a deep personal interest in (albeit no personal connection to) his subject; and unlike Modiano, he scrupulously documents all of his sources. (In addition to consulting historical sources, he interviewed two surviving sisters of Kathe Lasnik who had escaped deportation, as well as survivors of deportation from Norway). I thank Jakob Lothe for making Søbye's work known to me and for generously translating many passages from the Norwegian text.

5 See, for example, the chapter on "Identification" in Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. There is also a good discussion of identification in Laplanche and Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (1981).

6 The Wilkomirski "case" has been much commented on; see, among others, Maechler 2001 and Suleiman 2006, chapter 7.

7 Marianne Hirsch and Dominick LaCapra are among those who have grappled with the problem of identification, Hirsch in the context of what she calls "postmemory" (whereby those born after the war identify with the suffering of victims during the war), and LaCapra in his discussions of trauma and mourning. For Hirsch, the chief vehicle of identification is the act of looking ("Projected Memory" 10), whence her particular interest in the role of photographs in eliciting postmemory ("Projected Memory" and "Surviving Images"); LaCapra's main concern is to distinguish the "specular" identification that occurs in pathological melancholy (and that leads to "acting out," as in the case of Wilkomirski) from the more distanced identification that occurs in the process of mourning, which is characterized by "working through" (LaCapra, *History and Memory* 183–84; "Trauma, Absence, Loss" 713–16). I owe much to both Hirsch's and LaCapra's reflections, even though my own terminology does not exactly follow theirs. Modiano's relation to the Holocaust, and to Dora Bruder, incidentally, qualifies as a perfect example of postmemory as Hirsch defines it; but it does not pass through photographs, for his interest in Dora began much earlier than he ever saw a picture of her. The missing-person ad that triggered his fascination with Dora suggested a *narrative* rather than an image—which is no doubt appropriate, for a writer.

8 While all of Modiano's works have autobiographical elements, almost all were originally published with the subtitle "roman," clearly marked as fictions. A certain confusion, which Modiano may not be unhappy about, is created by the fact that the paperback "Folio" editions bear no such subtitles (by a policy of the publisher). *Dora Bruder* and *Un pedigree*, however, are marked *internally* as nonfiction, either by the presence of the author's and his family's names and other verifiable biographical facts, or by a factual reference to the author—for example, Modiano mentions in

Dora Bruder that he is the author of his 1990 novel *Voyage de noces. Un pedigree* begins like the most traditional autobiography ("Je suis né le 30 juillet 1945 à Boulogne-Billancourt . . ."), and lists facts about Modiano's parents, where he lived as a child, and so on. Of course, this doesn't mean that Modiano "tells all" and distorts nothing in this book—but that is true of all autobiographies.

9 See, for example, Khalifa 109, 110, and Hartman 111, 112. The fact that sophisticated critics like these use the word "novel" may be simply an indication of a widespread tendency to call any highly crafted literary work by that name. Marguerite Duras's *L'Amant* (*The Lover*) has received a similar treatment, as has Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir, *La nuit* (*Night*)—a treatment to which Wiesel has strenuously objected, reiterating most recently that despite its literary qualities, his book should *not* be called a novel: "I object angrily if someone mentions it as a novel" (quoted in Wyatt B8). I feel quite strongly that it is also a significant distortion to call *Dora Bruder* a novel. While there are a few "novelistic" moments in it, as I discuss below, the book is powerful—and ethically compelling—precisely because it is not a novel but a work that combines historical documentation with imaginative reflection and self-reflection. The generic status of memoirs versus novels received extensive renewed commentary recently, a propos of James Frey's contested memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*. It is true that I would not call *Dora Bruder* a straightforward "memoir" either.

10 Letter to Serge Klarsfeld, March 27, 1995; courtesy of Serge Klarsfeld.

11 There is no reason to doubt the factuality of the documents Modiano reproduces, though it would doubtless be interesting to double check them all. I have checked the women's names he mentions on pp. 117–20, who left Drancy in the transport of June 22, 1942: they are all correct, including birth dates (Klarsfeld, "Le Mémorial de la déportation"). Modiano gives other information about them as well, such as the circumstances of their arrest, which he could have found in police archives; he also appears to have interviewed one survivor of the transport, Claude Bloch, who told him about at least one of the others (118). Modiano's aesthetic decision not to provide sources in the traditional manner is somewhat unfortunate, since it allows readers to doubt even the most factual elements of his book—whence its

frequent designation as a "novel" (see note 9 above). Even if, for aesthetic reasons, he eschewed the usual citations, he could have given documentary indications in a Postface, as Philip Roth did for his "counterhistorical" novel *The Plot Against America* (2004).

12 One could, of course, object that Modiano is unfair in attributing the razing of certain slum neighborhoods in Paris to a conscious plan on the government's part to "forget" past crimes. But in a more general way, his accusation is borne out by the work of historians who have shown that the more shameful aspects of the Vichy regime in France, and especially its treatment of Jews, were "forgotten" for many years after the war. See Rousso, 1990.

13 "Dure mort": difficult death; "du remords": remorse. Marja Warehime has made an interesting rapprochement between Modiano's use of this "found" sign and Breton's use of the signpost "LES AUBES" at the end of *Nadja* (another autobiographical work that is often called a novel). Warehime writes that "Modiano reads the postmodern city in ways reminiscent of the Surrealists, seeing, instead of personal revelations—like the sky-blue signpost marked LES AUBES—signs of its guilty history" (Warehime 111).

14 When I first wrote this, I thought I was the only one to have noted the fortuitious (but for Modiano, highly meaningful) interlinguistic pun in Dora Bruder's name. But in fact, Colin Nettelbeck already remarked on this coincidence in his very fine discussion of *Dora Bruder* (246). He also notes that in addition to the meaning of "Bruder," "'Rudy' also shares two consonants with 'Dora'" (246).

15 As previously noted, Modiano's 1990 novel *Voyage de noces* was inspired by the missing-person ad about Dora; and *Chien de printemps* was among the last books Modiano published before *Dora Bruder*. Between the two were the novel *Du plus loin de l'oubli* (1996), which has no thematic link to the war, and a work written in collaboration with Catherine Deneuve, *Elle s'appelait Françoise* . . . a homage to Deneuve's sister Françoise Dorléac, who died very young.

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