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Silence in the works of Patrick Modiano

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Abstract

The 2014 Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to the French writer Patrick Modiano (b. 1945) for work that 'uncovered the life-world of the Occupation'. The jury recognised the author's significant role in addressing the heavy silences surrounding this uneasy period in French history. Modiano's novels, however, are full of silences, the unsaid, and the unsayable. While his work is an indictment of certain sociohistorical silences, it is also a literature which performs, and is permeated by, a multitude of silences. This thesis seeks to elucidate the nature of this tension through an analysis of silence across twenty-seven of Modiano's texts, from his first novel, *La place de l'étoile* (1968), to *Souvenirs dormants* (2017).

A defining aspect of silence is its fluctuating semantic value and the plurality of its applications, from language and noise, to art and ethics. Its meaning is not fixed; it is, rather, an amorphous concept and its denotation and connotations shift depending on the context in which it occurs. The way in which silence signifies also changes over time; what might be silenced in 1945 could become sayable a generation later. Given the intrinsic semantic plasticity of the concept, this thesis develops an evolutive analysis of silence, which exists in multiple guises and occupies multiple spaces in Modiano's works, from the awkward silences to those that are more eloquent, to the salutary, recuperative and respectful silences, to the silences that condemn and denounce, and the silences that gesture to the very limits of language, thought and logic.

This thesis is arranged in three parts, each one based on a particular interpretation of silence. Firstly, reading silence as a generative force which,

paradoxically, can be productive of narrative, the multiform silent beginnings and origins of Modiano's texts are investigated. Secondly, silence is considered as a place of forgetting, loss and erasure, which is opposed by Modiano's texts. This shifts the discussion to the ethical tensions associated with biographical writing and testimony in his works. Finally, silence is interpreted as something that can be created, both through the text and through other artistic media. Here, silence is positioned as a destination in its own right and the trajectories made towards and around silence by Modiano's characters in their various fields of expression are explored. Through these differing interpretations of silence, this thesis examines how Modiano's writing comes from and engages with silences, resists meaning and evades conclusion, creating a kind of literary silence unique to his work.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

(i) this thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;
(iii) this thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

_____

Phoebe Weston-Evans

Melbourne, July 2020

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List of Abbreviations

Accident nocturne (*AN*)
Les boulevards de ceinture (*BC*)
De si braves garçons (*BG*)
Chien de printemps (*CdP*)
Un cirque passe (*CP*)
Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue (*DLC*)
Dimanches d'août (*DA*)
Discours à l'Académie suédoise (*Discours*)
Dora Bruder (*DB*)
Du plus loin de l'oubli (*DPO*)
Fleurs de ruine (*FR*)
L'herbe des nuits (*HN*)
L'horizon (*H*)
Des inconnues (*DI*)
Une jeunesse (*UJ*)
Livret de famille (*LF*)
Un pedigree (*UP*)
La Petite Bijou (*PB*)
La place de l'étoile (*PE*)
Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier (*PQ*)
Quartier perdu (*QP*)
Remise de peine (*RP*)
La ronde de nuit (*RN*)
Rue des Boutiques Obscures (*RBO*)
Souvenirs dormants (*SD*)
Vestiaire de l'enfance (*VE*)
Villa Triste (*VT*)
Voyage de noces (*VN*)

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Introduction

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness
T. S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets* (1936)

Amid the riots, Molotov cocktails, union strikes and massive student protests of the spring of 1968, twenty-two-year-old Patrick Modiano's début novel, *La place de l'étoile,* was published. Though equally explosive, it was not set in the upheaval of its day, but in the immediate post-war years, haunted by the spectre of the Occupation, a period in which Modiano's two subsequent novels would also be set, and to which all of his later texts would return or refer in one way or another. These first three novels are described by Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert as '[u]n roulement de tambour qui répondait à un silence envahissant : silence de l'absence, à l'époque, de toute histoire collective légitime sur la période de la guerre' ('Travail du silence' 52). Just over forty years later, in 2014, Modiano was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Academy praised his work for having 'uncovered the life-world of the Occupation', underscoring its significance in dispersing a cloud of silence that had long hovered over this uneasy period of French history. Modiano's first two novels, *La place de l'étoile* (1968) and *La ronde de nuit* (1969), and, to a lesser extent, his third,

Les boulevards de ceinture (1972), are hyperbolic, boisterous, noisy novels.[1] Following the 'drumroll' of these first novels, his work from 1975 onwards is, in contrast, full of silences, the unsaid, and the unsayable. While his literature is a reaction to and an indictment of certain sociohistorical silences, it is also one which performs, and is permeated by, a multitude of silences. Indeed, one could see his entire oeuvre as orbiting great unnameable, ungraspable voids located in national narratives, family genealogy and personal identity. Modiano's work emerges from and begins with silences embedded in France's collective history, as well as those of personal family history, and every novel is infused with a range of silences, yet it is also a literature that ceaselessly confronts, challenges and breaks silence. This tension is at the heart of my research, which explores the polyphonic, multiform silences in Modiano's novels.

One of the defining characteristics of silence is its semantic richness and the plurality of areas in which it functions. The first entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for 'silence' is 'abstaining or forbearing from speech or utterance', and the second, 'absence of all sound or noise; complete quietness or stillness; noiselessness'. However, the application of silence in relation to noise and speech is just the beginning. The concept is applied in fields as varied as linguistics, music, theatre, philosophy, history, sociology, politics and psychoanalysis. Not only are the denotations and connotations of silence multiple and fluid, varying depending on the context; silence can also signify diametrically opposite things, from vengeful, indifferent or neglectful silences to those that are eloquent, salutary, recuperative or respectful, and all shades of meaning in between.

[1] Changes made between the 1968 edition and later editions of *La place de l'étoile* consist predominantly of euphemistic rephrasing and omissions from the original edition. For example, phrases such as 'ma grosse baronne juive' and 'ces djibouks', as well as much longer passages are omitted; 'Hervé' becomes 'Gérard' and 'hussard' becomes 'spahi'. The alterations do little to attenuate the overall tone. However, Jacques Lecarme notes in his examination of the different versions that some amendments dampen the humorous intensity ('Quatre versions' 103).

This thesis has three principal aims, which together offer an original and significant contribution to the field of Modiano scholarship. By identifying and tracing how the theme of silence develops and evolves throughout Modiano's novels, it presents a more comprehensive analysis of the theme than is found in any other study. The central positioning of silence as a prism through which to explore Modiano's work presents a privileged perspective and proposes an evolutive analysis of silence, which exists in multiple guises and occupies multiple spaces. This prism illuminates a framework comprised of opposing poles within which various manifestations of silence emerge: on the one hand, silence can work as a generative force, and on the other, it can function as a destination and goal. Between the axes of emerging from silence and being drawn towards it is a range of silences whose role and meaning are exposed and analysed. Through this tripartite approach, this thesis demonstrates how Modiano's work is both shaped by silence and how his texts inform certain readings and experiences of silence.

Polyphonic Silence

Modiano's work stood out in France's literary scene of the late 1960s; he refrained from adopting the formal austerity of the Nouveau Roman, maintained an ambiguous relationship with the 'Hussards',[2] and avoided the ludic dogmas of the Oulipians. He was certainly aware of their activities—he had been introduced to Gaston Gallimard by Raymond Queneau and shared their literary and intellectual spheres—but his own trajectory was comparatively solitary. His focus on the Occupation turned out to be prescient, anticipating the *mode rétro* which looked back to the war years with renewed and widespread interest. Dominique Viart and Bruno Vercier recognise Modiano's place as a forerunner in this respect, noting that from the beginning of the 1980s 'Modiano est longtemps à peu près seul à se soucier de la période de l'Occupation' (157). The *mode rétro* became a trend in many cultural expressions such as literature, film, fashion and design, and while Modiano was by no means the only writer to represent this tendency in literature, he was among the first. The questions and significant silences surrounding this period exert a constant magnetism, as do those concerning his own roots. The murky history of France's involvement and collaboration with the occupying forces obscures his father's activities as well as those of many others who, in 1940, after the Fall of France, quickly found themselves caught in impossibly difficult situations. Modiano's return

[2] The name 'Hussards' was coined by critic Bernard Frank after the title of Roger Nimier's *Le Hussard bleu* (1950). The short-lived and unorganised literary movement, including Nimier, Antoine Blondin, Jacques Laurent and Michel Déon, among others, opposed the left-leaning intellectual current expounded by Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus. The Hussards represented the young literary right, holding a more traditional, even anachronistic, ideology and view of France. Bruno Blanckeman notes that the young Modiano 'n'est toutefois pas insensible à cette veine iconoclaste' (*Patrick Modiano ou l'écriture* 95).

to this period was conscious and deliberate, but there was also an element of powerlessness against its pull. He writes in *Un pedigree,* 'je n'y peux rien, c'est le terreau—ou le fumier—d'où je suis issu' (20). The desire to delve into the unknowns of the past, knowing, however, that it is a history that can never be fully told and will always lie on the other side of a resistant silence, is a component of the increasingly intense and complex magnetism of the past.

This mute legacy and the theme of the untold and untellable, both at the levels of family history and state narrative, are at the origin of many of Modiano's novels, even his whole project, and are rarely far from the surface. Certain novels function as synapses, constituting exemplars of particular kinds of silence, inflecting the way silence signifies. *Dora Bruder* (1997), for instance, constitutes a paradigm of testimonial writing, of writing against silence by bearing witness, and gestures towards the possibility of preventing a life from disappearing into the silence of the forgotten past. Yet the text of *Dora Bruder* also embodies disappearance; Bruno Blanckeman argues, 'À mesure que l'écrivain poursuit Dora, elle se dissipe', which is expressed through and within the writing itself: 'Ainsi la langue écrite précipite-t-elle l'expérience du silence quand elle entend témoigner et celle du vide quand elle entend gagner en consistance' (28). *Un pedigree,* on the other hand, the closest Modiano comes to autobiography, is pivotal in filling in narrative lacunae in other works and functions as a form of record settling. We do not find the same silence(s) in every novel; rather, each novel is emblematic of a different expression or combination of silences, representing certain preoccupations with a particular kind of silence.

To understand silence in Modiano's world, its relationship with noise is a necessary point of enquiry. Often in his novels, in conditions of silence, sounds stand out more distinctly and take on greater resonance. The sound of footsteps, leaves

rustling in the wind, the tick of a clock and the hum of neon lights are among the most common (for example, *HN* 31, *DPO*, 29, 82, 159 respectively),[3] and there are other more unexpected examples besides. One protagonist, poring over advertisements and announcements in a newspaper, notes that silence creates a propitious environment for their 'resonance', which suggests a level of conflation between the sonic and visual realms:

> Parmi ces quantités de notes, certaines ont une résonance plus forte que les autres. Surtout quand rien ne trouble le silence. . . . Mais quelques noms se détachent avec netteté dans le silence et sur la page blanche… (*HN* 10)

Gérard Genette identifies a similar phenomenon in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary,* in which silences in speech give greater resonance to sounds such as a falling peach, bells chiming in clock towers and water droplets falling on silk (*Figures I* 236-237). He points out that in *L'éducation sentimentale,* after 'il y eut un silence', there follows, 'Ils n'entendaient que le craquement du sable sous leurs pieds avec le murmure de la chute d'eau' (237). Genette sees these moments as 'doubly silent' because they interrupt speech, urging us to listen to the world, and because they suspend even the parole of the novel, absorbing it for a time in voiceless inquisitiveness.

A striking facet of silence that soon becomes apparent is its polysemy and polyvalence; it has no single or stable meaning but is rather a fluid, amorphous concept, its meaning recreated and shifting depending on the context. Some directly stated silences in Modiano's work are left unmarked—'Il y a eu entre nous un moment de silence' (*SD* 39)—while others are guided: 'il était réconforté par sa

[3] Acronyms are used to refer to titles in in-text references following the same abbreviations established by Colin Nettelbeck and Penelope Hueston, adopted and expanded by Dervila Cooke and used in English-language collected works such as *Patrick Modiano,* edited by Jules Bedner. A full list is provided on page i.

présence silencieuse' (*PQ* 44), 'Un silence. Mais celui-ci n'était pas menaçant' (*PQ* 22). In contrast to the potential comfort of these silences, the noise and anonymity of crowds sometimes represent safety: 'Nous passions inaperçus parmi tous ces gens, et le brouhaha de leurs conversations nous protégeait' (*SD* 86). Silence has diverse relationships with space, time and what is expected within them: it can form a space for productivity: 'Il s'était enfin décidé à profiter du silence de la nuit pour relire une dernière fois toutes les feuilles du « dossier »' (*PQ* 108); certain times can be more propitious for breaking silence: 'C'était bientôt l'heure de la nuit où les maquillages se craquellent et où on se laisse aller au bord des confidences' (*PQ* 55), and, despite the ubiquitous presence of silence in Modiano's scenes, it is sometimes unexpected: 'Il avait été surpris tout à l'heure par le silence de la rue' (*PQ* 99).

Within a single novel, silence exists dialectically. In *Voyage de noces*, set on the south coast of France during the war, silence sometimes signifies safety, but periods of silence are also among the most fraught; the young couple lie awake at night in silence, listening for the sound of footsteps that would mean their hideout had been discovered. Similarly, at some points in history, in order to survive, it is necessary to silence certain details of one's identity, whereas at others, the same detail can be the very thing that saves. For example, in 1944, the fact that Modiano's mother, Louisa Colpeyn, is employed by a German company protects her and, by extension, Modiano's father, Albert Modiano:

> Au printemps 1944, mon père reçoit des coups de téléphone anonymes, quai de Conti. Une voix l'appelle par son véritable nom. Un après-midi, en son absence, deux inspecteurs français sonnent à la porte et demandent « M. Modiano ». Ma mère leur déclare qu'elle n'est qu'une jeune Belge qui travaille à la Continental, une compagnie allemande. (*UP* 27-28)

Later Louisa uses the Jewishness of the father in order to attenuate the culpability of her presence in Paris in German employment:

> Elle est convoquée par la police et subit un long interrogatoire. Elle est étrangère, ils voudraient qu'elle leur dise la raison exacte de son arrivée en 1942 sous la protection des Allemands. Elle leur explique qu'elle est fiancée à un juif avec qui elle habite depuis deux ans. (*UP* 29)

One of the principal ways in which silence arises in Modiano's novels is through characters' difficulty in verbal communication and voices that are muted or can barely be heard. While none are completely mute with aphasia, there are those who refuse to speak, cannot find the words or are temporarily struck dumb. This reticence or incapacity to speak is shared by Modiano himself, as Laurence Tardieu notes: 'Modiano . . . lui dont on s'est tant plu à dire, « C'est un écrivain qui ne sait pas parler »' (1). Similarly, in an interview, the singer Jacques Dutronc describes the atmosphere of suspense in Modiano's writing: 'c'est une quête incessante, la fascination d'une époque, le secret des phrases en suspens'. He then imagines a dinner with Modiano, Françoise Sagan, Wim Wenders and himself: 'c'est le silence qui fait mal aux oreilles' (Médioni). In contrast to this wordless dinner and the many quiet, voiceless characters in Modiano's novels, there is a small number of characters whose prolixity renders their discourse, paradoxically, silent. The sheer abundance of their speech amounts to nonsense and points to language's potential for futility and meaninglessness. Further, there are instances of people being held at a distance from themselves, or their pasts. Some characters are afflicted with various degrees of amnesia, which can be considered a form of silencing of internal communication with self, memories and identities. Olivier Adam, in his preface for the 2013 Seuil edition of *Remise de peine*, describes a reality filtered through the inexperience of the child narrator:

> Bribes d'un monde adulte dont on n'appréhende qu'en surface, les enjeux et les secrets, comme placés devant un téléviseur dont le son est coupé au beau milieu d'un film ne pouvant se fier qu'à des gestes qu'il ne nous reste qu'à interpréter, sans en connaître le contexte, les tenants, les aboutissants, ignorant jusqu'à l'identité précise des protagonistes. (vii)

The layered point of view, alternating between the child and adult narrator throughout the work, is described by Adam as akin to a television screen turned on, but without sound, a kind of silenced reality.

Only in his earlier novels does Modiano confront sociohistorical silences with clamour and direct denouncement and even here, Modiano could not be described as *engagé* in the Sartrean sense. His subsequent novels, in which silence is confronted quietly and obliquely, characterise his particular form of engagement. Certain subjects are talked around, spoken of indirectly and alluded to. By being talked and written around, they are defined though their outline, not unlike a chalk outline at a crime scene. His non-confrontational, indirect approach translates into a great limpidity and sobriety of style, resisting hyperbole and incendiary language, which, rather than attenuating his message, renders it all the more troubling.

The dynamics of the relationship between Modiano's writing and the sociohistorical backdrop it interrogates are central interests of this thesis. I pose the questions of how his work forms an indictment of the silences of the post-war narrative and how the silences within his literature interact with, and betray, extra-textual silences. Within this approach, silence can also be understood as a force against which Modiano writes, through resuscitation and reanimation, rewriting and imagining individual stories and forgotten histories.

A dimension of silence that is highly pertinent to this study is that which is peculiar to art and literature. Susan Sontag views silence both as bound to the semi-

spiritual conditions necessary for artistic creation and as signifying a more provocative refusal to communicate. In writing and literature, silence occupies what at first appears to be an antithetical space, constituting the opposite of language, yet it is deceptive. The role of silence in language and literature is decidedly productive rather than negative, and a fecund source of theoretical writing in literary and linguistic theory. There are a number of interpretations of literary silence both in the French- and English-speaking spheres. They take a range of approaches: from looking at possibilities of how an author might write silence or produce a specific kind of silence unique to the literary experience, to identifying silent symbols and motifs. The following section reviews relevant literature and is divided into four parts: critical literature on Modiano's work in general; literature and research specifically on silence in his work; literature on silence as an independent topic and, lastly, work on silence exclusively in literature.

Critical Literature

i. On Modiano's Work

Patrick Modiano's literature has been the subject of continuous academic and popular interest since the publication of his first novels in the late 1960s. The first monograph, by Colin Nettelbeck and Penelope Hueston, appeared in 1986 and abundant work has been published on both sides of the Atlantic since. Too large to provide an exhaustive inventory here, this growing body of work includes monographs, conference proceedings, chapters, theses and articles, not only in literary studies but also in journals specialising in Jewish studies, psychology,

history and the humanities in general. There are special issues of journals dedicated to Modiano, such as *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* in 2007, *French Cultural Studies* in 2012, and *Yale French Studies* in 2018. And while the popular press has always maintained a steady interest, there has been a proliferation of articles and interviews following Modiano's Nobel Prize win, as well as renewed activity in academia: Akane Kawakami's updated 2015 edition of her 2000 monograph *A Self-Conscious Art: Patrick Modiano's Postmodern Fictions*; France Grenaudier-Klijn's *La part du féminin dans l'oeuvre de Modiano* (2017); Bruno Blanckeman's *Patrick Modiano ou l'écriture comme un nocturne* (2019); and Régine Robin's essay, *Les lampes qu'on a oublié d'éteindre* (2019). Alongside academic work, the contribution of journalist and Modiano enthusiast Denis Cosnard should be acknowledged.[4] His well-researched book, *Dans la peau de Modiano,* about Modiano's life and work is rich in biographical details, and as something akin to a biography, it occupies a complementary place alongside *Un pedigree* in that it fills in structural and authorial silences created in other novels. Introducing the issue of *Yale French Studies* dedicated to Patrick Modiano, Richard Golsan acknowledged the significant body of academic criticism devoted to Modiano and posed the question of whether anything new could be added (2). The affirmative response is of course foretold in the form of the publication, with new and revisited perspectives offered in its pages; Modiano clearly continues to provide abundant material for analysis and research. Certain aspects of Modiano's work have attracted a great deal of investigation such as his relationship with memory, identity, Jewishness and Jewish history, autofiction, the urban landscape, photography and image as well as stylistic and literary analysis. The relatively fluid notion of silence borders or is obliquely connected to some of

[4] Cosnard runs the blog lereseaumodiano.blogspot.com, a repository of news, articles and publications about Modiano and related topics.

these topic areas. Their intersections are mapped and detailed in the following section.

ii. On Silence in Modiano's Novels

Critics and academics have recognised the motif and aesthetic treatment of silence in Modiano's work. Hugo Marsan commented in *Le Monde des livres*, 'Patrick Modiano possède le don de faire percevoir ce silence, l'émergence ralentie d'un désarroi essentiel' (1), and Patrick Delbourg refers to Modiano as 'celui qui possède l'art de créer le silence avec les mots' (71), referencing the challenge set by the photographer, Francis Jansen, in *Chien de printemps*. In academic criticism, there have been investigations of the theme of silence in Modiano's work, which are invaluable in opening up this line of enquiry. However, exploration has thus far remained fragmented, which is understandable given the inherent plurality and plasticity of the theme. Scholarship has not yet offered the holistic approach to silence that I propose; rather, critics have dealt with a particular aspect of silence in a selection of novels or focused on one title in isolation. In the conclusion to her monograph, *Present Pasts: Patrick Modiano's (Auto)Biographical Fictions*, Dervila Cooke positions silence among the key aspects of his work, inviting further study: 'The three thematic motifs that best sum up Modiano's texts are those of photographs, ghosts and silence' (313). She evokes the plurality of silences, emphasising the great freedom of Modiano readers to imagine and interpret as a consequence of the gaps surrounding fundamental questions raised in his texts.

Daniel Parrochia's study, *Ontologie fantôme, essai sur l'œuvre de Patrick Modiano,* focuses on the ideas of ghosts and haunting in Modiano's writing. Through an exploration of the ghost-like characters, he raises the notion of salvation from

oblivion through literature, which is closely linked to testimonial writing. He explains characters' avoidance of speech as an attempt to safeguard the small amount of existential coherence that they have been able to establish. The speech-silences identified by Parrochia relate to resistance and preservation. This accords with what Grenaudier-Klijn identifies in the abundant silence of female characters in Modiano's work. She suggests that for these women, keeping silent is less about a lack of voice or selfhood than it is about self-preservation; for these women, 'silence is a sanctuary' ('Eloquent Silence' 34). She observes a contrast between silent women and the author: 'in accordance with a musical metaphor, female silence operates contrapuntally to male voicing/scripting' (35). However, in comparing male–female voices diametrically, she risks overstating the dichotomy, considering the abundance of taciturn and silent male voices.

In addition, Parrochia suggests that silence should be read metaphysically as representative of the exile of God. As Rilke explored in 'Some Reflections on Dolls', the obscene silence of dolls prepares one in some measure for the silence of 'God Himself', the silence encountered whenever we 'approach the frontiers of our existence' (46). Parrochia discusses a third aspect of silence: the incomprehensibility of the deepest questions of existence. He sees this silence as reverential preservation of the unknown, reflecting Wittgenstein's dictum, 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.'[5] Another strand evoked by Parrochia is autobiographical and authorial silence, which he sees as manifested through self-doubling and dissimulation in his fictional, evanescent characters.

Scholars Martine Guyot-Bender (*Mémoire en dérive*) and Emna Beltaïef (Remise de peine *de Modiano*) treat a different component of authorial and narrative silence.

[5] This is the 1922 Ogden translation. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was retranslated in 1961 by Pears and McGuiness, who offered the alternative: 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'

They look into silences experienced by the child narrator who remains in an innocent, prelapsarian relationship with language. Guyot-Bender observes that the child narrator of *Remise de peine* is still at an age at which language retains a level of innocence, before becoming laden with the kinds of ambiguities, complexities and connotations that it inevitably accumulates later on. Modiano's protagonist talks to us through prelapsarian language in which silences mean something different, in language that is purer, playful and less loaded. For Guyot-Bender, the young narrator of *Remise de peine* hasn't yet lost the 'innocence face au langage' since he hasn't yet reached 'l'ère du soupçon' (*Mémoire en dérive* 87).[6]

A key figure in Modiano scholarship, Alan Morris, has written two monographs on Modiano, one in French and one in English. He is particularly interested in circularity and its relationship with the sense of loss of family and cultural heritage brought about by the rupture of the Second World War, and his research details the intricate connections between the two sources of rootlessness (*Patrick Modiano* 1996, 2000). The impact of the war is similarly central to Damamme-Gilbert's 'Le travail du silence dans l'écriture de la guerre', which is a comparative study of Julien Gracq's and Modiano's work focusing on two kinds of silence produced by the Second World War: the unsayable as a response to trauma and the silence to which subsequent generations are subjected. Damamme-Gilbert adopts a psychoanalytical viewpoint, tending towards a negative view of silence as the manifestation of repression or refusal to acknowledge events of the past. Both kinds of silence are problematic; the former for the subjects of trauma and the latter for the descendants, the inheritors of silence. These silences are the product of trauma and they point to what cannot be said. Notwithstanding this, clearly some silences are

[6] *L'ére du soupçon* also references Nathalie Sarraute's work published in 1956, a theoretical, critical work on the Nouveau Roman. It engages with important debates in the post-war literary landscape, notably the state, or crisis, of the novel.

salutary for the survival of individuals and societies that have undergone traumatic experience, at least for a period. This returns to the question of the inherent instability of silence and its changing significance over time. Damamme-Gilbert also points out some of the symbols of silence, such as the empty suitcases in *Du plus loin de l'oubli* and the cut telephone line in *Voyage de noces.*

It is widely agreed that *Chien de printemps* is as pivotal in understanding the function of silence. The tendency towards silence is taken up by Bruno Tritsmans in his article 'Poétiques du silence dans *Chien de printemps* de Patrick Modiano'. Tritsmans sketches an ontology of silence and demonstrates how the relationship between negativity and silence is deconstructed. He uses the work of Michel de Certeau and the philosopher and musicologist Vladimir Jankélévitch, for whom silence offers productive inspiration. For Jankélévitch the silence of *deus absconditus* is filled or at least countered by an ornamental writing style. In line with Jankélévitch and Certeau, Tritsmans sees *Chien de printemps* as issuing from a lack. The end of the article observes that we are ultimately presented with 'une image de la fragilité, du « presque-rien » de la littérature' (647), writing that becomes increasingly volatile and self-effacing and seems to lift off the page, erasing itself as it is read.

The stylistic aspect of silence in *Chien de printemps* is explored by Christian Donadille in 'Entre chien et loup : Incertitude de l'apparence et écriture du silence dans les œuvres illustrées et les images textuelles de Patrick Modiano'. He holds that silence is created by appealing to the emotional, rather than logical, register. For him, the fundamental paradox of Modiano's work is that the writing seems to be working against oblivion and forgetting, but actually leads towards it: 'une écriture en apparence contre l'oubli, mais qui débouche sur l'oubli' (329). Donadille implicitly interprets silence here as a form of non-conclusion, rather than the result

of a lack, as Tritsmans does. He sees Modiano's work as essentially concerned with existential nostalgia, which is evoked wordlessly through a series of black-and-white photographic images: 'laissant alors toute liberté à l'invasion de l'esprit par un flux émotionnel qui recouvre le sens du texte et finit par se substituer à lui dans la mémoire' (331). Like Cooke, Tritsmans recognises the resulting invitation for the imagination to fill the spaces created by the silences in the text. Donadille sees these images as absolutely quiet; they erase the text, but leave the image, without telling the reader what to make of it.

Silence in terms of reservation of interpretation is also identified by Roxanna Curto in 'Narrating via Fragments: Patrick Modiano's Metonymic Style in *Dora Bruder*'. For Curto, reservation is a consequence of a metonymic, as opposed to metaphoric, mode of writing. She links Modiano's fragmentary narrative style to a disinclination to make causal links or to attribute meaning, as a consequence of which he maintains a place of moral silence and ambiguity. Catherine Douzou's study of the poetics of white in Modiano's novels, 'Du blanc de la mémoire aux blancs du texte', also points to the importance of the fragment in Modiano's writing. Douzou concentrates on *Vestiaire de l'enfance* and *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, drawing links between whiteness, absence, emptiness and typographic blanks. She argues that the fragmentary quality of Modiano's writing is an extension of his prolific use of lists, and notes the way characters are described little by little, through snippets. Significantly, Douzou identifies the fact that Modiano's writing acts as a means of breaking silence, as a site from which to send out signals (300). An example of this can be found in *Vestiaire de l'enfance,* in which the narrator admits, 'Oui, ce sont des appels que je lance' (52).

Related to the stylistic silence of authorial reticence to interpret is the impression of temporal instability and imprecision. Douzou identifies the effect of

achronia in Modiano's writing, defining it as 'le sentiment d'absence de durée, d'intemporalité' ('Du blanc' 305). Another commentator, Baptiste Roux, holds that achronia created through 'l'annulation des oppositions logiques entre les sphères du présent et du passé' (167).

Thierry Laurent's essay 'Le silence dans l'œuvre de Patrick Modiano' identifies and discusses a small number of reported silences and absences of sound and is described by the author as 'un bref survol' (57). The essay contributes a useful preliminary catalogue that identifies some key instances of interpersonal and atmospheric silence and indicates their abundance.

Scholars of Modiano are broadly united in their recognition of the profound impact of the Second World War and the Shoah on Modiano's writing. These events constituted the most significant rupture in twentieth-century European history, engendering immeasurable social, political and cultural upheaval, the effects of which are still being revealed. Henry Rousso in *Le syndrome de Vichy (1944-198…)*, pinpoints Modiano as a forerunner among French writers confronting their country's past (144). Many of the silences encountered in Modiano's work are essentially rooted in the ruptures of the Second World War, which impacted the definition and inflection of silence in the twentieth century in general. One component of this is the undermining of certainties around language and a secure sense of historical continuity. Such insecurities both changed and created unprecedented conceptions of silence. To discuss how these fractures, which were already looming at the end of the nineteenth century, made their way into twentieth-century philosophical and literary theory, I refer to philosophers and cultural critics Theodor Adorno, Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, George Steiner, Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot, among others. The work of trauma theorists Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth provides a broader picture of how

traumatic narrative is passed on and received and informs an understanding of the way the ethics of listening and bearing witness has impacted on Modiano's literature.

iii. On Silence as an Ontological Subject

The currency of silence appears to be of growing value in today's increasingly noise-polluted world. In 2016-2017 there were around thirty 'jours de silence(s)' across France with events and lectures organised in connection with silence in dance, cinema, architecture, museology and visual arts. Limiting examples to just the last twelve years, there has been a great number of artworks, novels, studies and academic works involving the notion of silence, including Alfredo Jaar's *The Sound of Silence* (2006), Sarah Maitland's *A Book of Silence* (2008), Corinna Waffender's *Blood Stinks* (2008), George Prochnik's *In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise* (2011), Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Silence: a Christian History* (2013), John Biguenet's *Silence (Object Lessons)* and Thich Nhat Hanh's *Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise* (both in 2015), Scorsese's 2016 adaptation of Endo's 1966 novel *Silence*, a homage to Le Corbusier, *Formes du silence* (2016), Alain Corbin's *Histoire du silence* (2016), Erling Kaage's *Silence in the Age of Noise,* Amber Hatch's *The Art of Silence,* Steven Bindeman's *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art* (all 2017), Eddie Ayres's *Sonam and the Silence* and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* in 2018. This proliferation of 'silent' works in popular culture builds on existing interest in the potential of silence in other artistic and intellectual spheres such as John Cage's *4'33"*, first performed in 1952, followed by *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961), Nathalie Sarraute's *Le silence* in 1964, Pinter's *Silence* in 1969 and Susan Sontag's *Aesthetics of Silence* in 1969. While not exhaustive, this list suggests that silence, in

part due to its inherent polysemantic quality, has been seized by many thinkers and artists who have incorporated it into their particular field.

Two major works treating silence as an ontological subject in its own right are Max Picard's *The World of Silence* and Bernard Dauenhauer's *Silence, the Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance*, both of which appeared around the mid-twentieth century. Picard's work is structured as a series of aphorisms and more extended arguments which essentially extol the virtues of silence and broadly Catholic-spiritual grace. Dauenhauer, less prone to idealisation than Picard, still tends towards idealism and adopts a phenomenological approach to the notion of silence. Charles Courtenay's *The Empire of Silence* (1916) is an earlier, often-overlooked work that shares, or rather initiates, an effusive idealism about silence. The study focuses on silence in speech, but also offers observations about music and the use of silence as a disciplinary measure. These authors consider silence to have been historically maligned as a negative phenomenon and are drawn to glorification and romanticisation of silence. They display what Elizabeth Marie Loevlie sees as the 'tendency to posit silence as an immediate alternative to fragmenting discourse' (13). Loevlie defines these approaches to silence as succumbing to the 'dream of silence', since they are inflected with nostalgia and longing and position silence in contrast to the increasingly invasive noise of the modern world. Interestingly, Sontag sees silence as valuable in that it can serve as a form of spiritual mediation in the realm of creativity in increasingly secular cultures. A more detached perspective might be to see silence as morally neutral—neither inherently positive nor negative—relying on its usage in context to determine its value, weight and meaning. There is a general revalorisation of silence, which is seen as being under threat in the Western world; the increasing impossibility of silence and the perspective of its extinction has led to calls for its protection. This, of course, takes silence to be the opposite of noise,

predominantly man-made noise at that. Picard, Dauenhauer and, to a certain extent, the majority of commentators mentioned tell the story of the marginalisation of the phenomenon of silence and its movement into peripherality. Connected to the increasing rarity of silence and its reification are works such as Cage's *4'33"*, a musical composition made up of three silent movements lasting four minutes and thirty-three seconds, manifesting the constructability of silence. Yet Cage also talked about the impossibility of truly creating silence; during *4'33"* or in an anechoic chamber, the absence of noise serves to amplify internal noises such as the sound of one's heart pushing blood around the body. As part of the revaluing of silence and the perception of its increasing rarity, some critics and commentators have turned to investigate its place in the field of literature.

iv. On Silence in Literature

Silence in literature is one of the principal concerns of this thesis, so although silence as an independent field is hugely interesting, it is not the central focus. Certain studies concentrate on silence in discourse in literature. Pierre Van Den Heuvel's *Parole, Mot, Silence* (1985) draws on semiotic and narratological research to develop a theoretical approach to silence in literature. Criticising the dearth of attention paid to silence in both literature and linguistics—'La recherche littéraire a négligé le silence. N'observant que le seul énoncé, la linguistique ne s'en est pas souciée' (65)—he repositions silence as central rather than peripheral: 'le langage s'organise à partir du vide autour d'un silence qui est le commencement et la fin de tout discours' (68). It is a valuable and rich resource, but, like Picard and Dauenhauer, Van Den Heuvel tends to overstatement in an attempt to redress a perceived underappreciation of silence.

One thing is clear though: silence cannot be nothingness or absence. Writing about silence in works by Parain, Blanchot and Des Forêts and the Western conception of *logos*, Claude Perruchot writes, 'Se taire c'est encore parler, ce qui revient à dire que le mot « silence » signifie le contraire de ce qu'il désigne et que le langage perd tout sens au moment même où il se révèle sans issue' (111-112). Reading and writing, which are most often silent acts, could be considered the silent counterparts to recitation or conversation. As Cyril Le Meur remarks, 'L'écriture, fondée par l'absence du corps producteur, ne parle qu'à travers le silence, grâce à un autre corps, le corps lecteur' (80). The absent body of the writer leaves a trace which is actualised by the present, but silent action of the reader. In *Le vœu de silence,* Pascal Quignard writes, 'Qui écrit n'ouvre pas la bouche, reste muet, et pourtant toute la langue lui est présente, plus encore peut-être que dans le fait de parler' (24), framing writing as a form of silent speaking, which, however, affords the writer greater access to language.

Two further examples demonstrate different structural and conceptual frameworks through which silence has been approached in literature. Loevlie's study rejects the initial contradiction between the expressive quality of writing and the non-expression of silence. She develops a definition of a unique form of 'literary silence' which she sees as arising through the 'literary said', rather than the 'unsaid', and conceives of 'literary silence' as coming from inside rather than outside language. Further, she identifies repetition, aporia, and implosion as its defining elements (60). A second study by Jacqueline Michel, *Une mise en récit du silence, Le Clézio, Bosco, Gracq,* takes a more traditional, close-reading approach, with Michel structuring her inquiry around themes and symbols of silence found in works by the three writers.

Corpus and Rationale: A Case for Silence

As has been discussed, silence has been recognised as an important theme in Modiano's literature; the novelty of my research does not lie in its identification. Thus far, however, its recognition has resulted in a limited number of articles and small-scale studies and no extended or holistic analysis of silence across Modiano's body of novels has been undertaken. Existing preliminary inquiry is extremely valuable in opening up the discussion and highlighting certain aspects of silence in one novel or a selection of novels. This thesis undertakes a study encompassing the corpus of Modiano's principally novelistic work, comprising twenty-seven novels from *La place de l'étoile* to *Souvenirs dormants,* details of which can be found in the primary corpus section of the list of works cited. Modiano's most recent novel, *Encre sympathique,* was published in 2019, at the end of my candidature, and I have therefore not included it in the main body of research. It serves as a useful point of comparison, however, in the concluding remarks, as it demonstrates a continuation of, rather than a break with, currents and tendencies I identify.

Given the scope of the thesis and its aim, I investigate Modiano's complete corpus of published novels. There is a marked shift between the first three 'noisy' works—which have become known as the 'Occupation Trilogy'—and his post-1975 writing. Blanckeman, among others, notes this stylistic shift—'Depuis *Villa Triste*, Modiano invente ainsi les accords d'une poétique minimale' (*Lire* 31)—and he also sees in the choice of *Villa Triste* as the first in Modiano's self-selected Quarto collection[7] an indication that this is the real beginning of his oeuvre (*Patrick Modiano*

[7] Gallimard's Quarto collection began in 1995 and publishes collections or complete works of canonical French and foreign-language authors of literature and social sciences. In 2013 Modiano selected *Villa Triste, Livret de famille, Rue des Boutiques Obscures, Remise de peine, Chien de printemps, Dora Bruder, Accident nocturne, Un pedigree, Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L'horizon.*

ou l'écriture 84). Since 1975, Modiano's novels have been characterised by a high degree of continuity, cohesion and interconnectedness. For this reason, some novels can be used as exemplars to represent tendencies apparent in other novels to a certain extent, but to exclude any one from the primary corpus in a study of this scope would be unjustified and any division of the corpus would be drawn along arbitrary lines, artificially fragmenting what is a highly homogenous body of work. The 'étrange mêmeté' to which Kawakami refers (*Self-Conscious* 10) merits treatment in its entirety. Modiano himself has commented on the 'sameness' of his novels, both in interviews (with Sylvain Bourmeau 'Patrick Modiano' 3:40, 'Patrick Modiano: « Je travaille comme un somnambule »' and with Yves Calvi 23:25) and within his novels. When Louis, the protagonist of *L'horizon*, goes to collect his manuscript from a typist, he reflects on how different things are from when he began writing in the late 1960s and his manuscripts were typed on an old typewriter. In contrast to the change in process, the novels themselves are unchanged: 'C'était toujours les mêmes mots, les mêmes livres, les mêmes stations de métro' (130). The stable of themes and motifs reoccur in each novel to differing degrees, ebbing and flowing, resonating across the body of work, without ever disappearing altogether. Given the thematic nature of my research, there is no clear dividing line, and an arbitrary date dissection would ignore this important feature. Blanckeman further notes—'Si elle [intertextualité] constitue sa marque de reconnaissance, cette caractéristique de l'œuvre rend difficile toute présentation dissociée des récits qui la composent' (*Lire* 51)—and indeed it is this interweaving that simultaneously binds the novels and subverts our efforts to establish a sense of ontological certainty.

In order to establish boundaries and strategise this study, there are some areas of Modiano's output that will not be included as part of the main focus. Modiano's oeuvre includes screenplays (*Lacombe Lucien*, *Bon voyage*, *Fils de Gascogne*),

song writing (the song, 'Étonnez-moi, Benoît' (1968), sung by Françoise Hardy, and the album, *Fonds du tiroir 1967* (1979)), theatre plays (*La Polka*), children's books (*Une aventure de Choura, Une fiancée de Choura, Catherine Certitude*), collaborations (*Elle s'appelait Françoise* with Catherine Deneuve, *Paris Tendresse* accompanying Brassaï's photographs, *28 Paradis, 28 Enfers* with Dominique Zehrfuss), as well as numerous prefaces written for others. Much of this non-novelistic work contains the same identifiable themes, tone and even the same motifs, such as the scene of a father and child weighing themselves on the public weighing scales which features in one of his children's books, *Catherine Certitude,* as well as in *Un pedigree* and *Les boulevards de ceinture.* Apart from *Fils de Gascogne,* which is analysed in Chapter 6, Modiano's non-novelistic works are referred to but are not included in the primary corpus.

Chapter Outlines

Part I. Silence as Generative

To begin to address the function and dynamics of silence in Modiano's work, I explore the notion of *creatio ex nihilo;* how it is that something can come from nothing. Part I identifies different forms and themes of silence that act as sources of production and instigators of investigation and narrative. Potentially productive silences are identified at the familial, intergenerational and historical levels. How they reflect and conflate with each other and their relationships with social and political context are central concerns of the first part of this thesis.

Chapter 1. Silent Beginnings

In conceiving of silence as complete absence, I begin with the question of how something can come from nothing. Michel de Certeau, in *La fable mystique,* writes

that ‘un manquant fait écrire’ (9), an observation that, while coming from his writing on historiography, has significant bearing on Modiano’s literature. I consider how silence works as a force that informs and directs Modiano’s work using Hannah Arendt’s description of the rupture caused by the Second World War. I question the generative and productive nature of sociohistorical silencing, looking at rupture and severance from national heritage as providing the impetus for re-interrogation and imagination.

Moving from silence as a force that exerts itself in a global way to inform and direct Modiano’s work, I then study the incipits of Modiano’s novels, exploring how they begin concretely. Observing the opening gestures reveals how, from their first lines, the novels emerge from sources of silence, disappearance, lack, diminishment or destruction and seem to forestall any expectation of conclusion.

Chapter 2. Silence of Rupture

This chapter probes more deeply into the way in which Modiano’s texts are symptomatic of silences relating to the unsaid connected to transference of familial, intergenerational and social heritage, disconnections which mark ruptures in transmission and are experienced as forms of silencing. I investigate the ways in which these various levels and locations of rupture are imbricated in Modiano’s work. Given that questions raised are, for the most part, unanswered or generate more questions, things left unsaid and heavy absences thus become the novels’ (anti-)centres. Such themes are taken up by Viart, and others, such as Laurent Demanze, provide a framework to discuss the rupture of filiation and the extent to which being ‘orphaned’ functions as generative silence.

The mordant depiction of failed filiation in Modiano's first novels is discussed before moving on to more autobiographical texts, *Livret de famille*, *Remise de peine* and *Un pedigree,* to illustrate developments in the treatment of different levels of rupture.

Part II. Saving from Silence

The third and fourth chapters make up the second part of the thesis, in which I interpret silence as a place of forgetting, erasure and loss. I interrogate the ways in which Modiano's literature operates as a site and means of recovery where lost narratives are revived and saved from the silence of personal and collective amnesia, both unintentional and deliberate. Part II engages with certain historical silences that Modiano's work implicitly challenges and focuses on the ways in which Modiano's literature functions variously as a locus of silence and a means of breaking it.

Chapter 3. Ethics of Testimony

Chapter 3 focuses on the ethical implications and concerns involved in testimonial writing and literature's potential as a means through which to bear witness. I discuss how, through his writing, Modiano provides a means for recuperation, for lost voices to be heard and for the recovery of fading or lost memory. Yet it is no straightforward endeavour; the sense of responsibility to retell and preserve is checked at every step. The complex questions concerning the ethics, possibility and form of witness bearing, especially in the specific post-war context, constitute the main theoretical discussion points of this chapter. The lines of debate are set out with reference to ideas of Theodor Adorno, Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt as well as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman on trauma. This principally

theoretical chapter provides the groundwork for a discussion of the application of the theories in Modiano's work in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. A Poetics of Silence

While there is a discernible sense of responsibility to speak on behalf of others and recover lost stories, a contrasting force is also at play in Modiano's work: the inclination to reservation, discretion and resistance to telling results in a great deal of dissimulation and secrecy. The tension between the imperative and the impossibility of breaking silence and bearing witness and the way in which this tension is manifest through literary and poetic forms (such as metaphor, motif, etc.) are central foci of this chapter. I discuss how ethical implications of testimony impact on three 'minor biographies' contained within *Livret de famille, Rue des Boutiques Obscures* and *Chien de printemps* before undertaking a more detailed study of the form and the symbolic references and motifs in *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder*. I demonstrate the ways in which the moral and ethical ambiguities of bearing witness inform a network of interconnected chromatic and meteorological symbols involving snow and sun, black and white, light and dark.

Part III. Creating Silence

In Part III I reorient the conceptualisation of silence a third time. Having delved into the ways in which Modiano's works emerge from a form of silence, and having discussed sociohistorical impacts on the poetics and dialectics of silence in testimonial writing, in this part I situate silence as a quality or space that can be created, as a destination and goal.

Chapter 5. The Reticence of the Text

Chapter 5 investigates silence as a stylistic feature within literature and language and questions the means and forms of writing silence. I question the extent to which Modiano's writing can be considered part of the lineage of Roland Barthes' *écriture blanche* and John Barth's minimalism. I interpret expressions of effacement and a reduction of authorial governance as part of a broader reticence to guide readers to a particular interpretation. Linguistic, literary and rhetorical analysis informs my examination of ways in which Modiano's writing resists temporal and semantic precision using various typographic and stylistic techniques and tropes such as subtraction, elision, ellipsis and fragmentation at various levels of the text, from punctuation and grammar to motif, characterisation, narrative voice and structure.

Chapter 6. Towards Silence

The presentation of silence as an artistic destination and objective is one of the most fascinating elements in Modiano's world, which contains a series of characters, mostly artists, each of whom demonstrates a unique relationship with silence that is bound to their art form. I examine examples of various characters' trajectories towards and around silence in film, music, photography and, most notably, literature. For some, silence is the epitome of their art, for some it is a finality, while for others the trajectory entails a form of dissolution of the artist into their art, and into silence.

Maurice Blanchot's work on writing and literature centres around the negativity of language and proposes an understanding of silence as both prerequisite and purpose. I draw on essays in Blanchot's *La part du feu* to explore the inexorable reach towards an impossible beyond, an ineffable and contradictory space. In the realms of literature and language, the notion of silence is primordial. It

designates the uninterrupted foundation underlying and preceding all language, as well as the limitations of language, thought and logic.

Chapter 6 is followed by a conclusion in which my findings are summarised and evaluated and an appendix detailing all occurrences of the words 'silence' and 'silencieux/euse' in a Key Word in Context (KWIC) format.

Methods and Approaches

Given that the concept of silence is inherently polysemantic and multifaceted, it does not lend itself to a single or pre-established theoretical approach. The variety of ways in which it has been conceptualised as a phenomenon in literature alone indicates its resistance to a singular methodology. Considering instances of the word 'silence' or 'silencieux/euse' is a logical initial step, but a purely lexical study of the frequency and concentration of these words would be limited. Further, since there are countless ways to express silence, it would be insufficient for more complete and complex understanding. The Appendix shows the results of an exhaustive lexical enumeration of the words 'silence' and 'silencieux/euse' in their sentences. It represents a large amount of data and indicates a relatively consistent frequency of the words in each of Modiano's novels. The average number of occurrences is nineteen, the maximum is thirty-one in *L'herbe des nuits* and the least is six in *Un pedigree*. Modiano's first novel contains nine and his most recent, twenty. However, the data are unable to suggest what kinds of silences are most prevalent in which novels, to show how they linger, what combination of silences are found or how the nature of silence changes and develops over time. For instance, *Dora Bruder* contains only eight instances of 'silence', but the text is entirely centred around the disappearance of the eponymous Dora, the devastating loss of life and voice and the

(im)possibility of bearing witness or speaking on behalf of a silenced other. The text's central preoccupation is a form of silence, yet the word itself is scarce.

There are as many instances of the word 'silence' in *Villa Triste* as there are in *La place de l'étoile*, yet *Villa Triste* is vastly more silent. It is filled with silent spaces: 'Plus aucun bruit, plus aucune voix ne nous parvenait du salon' (49), 'Bientôt nous n'entendîmes plus aucun bruit. Ils étaient étouffés par une ouate très tendre' (176); people who don't speak or talk about nothing: 'Nous ne parlons pas' (30), 'Nous parlions de choses insignifiantes. Ils ne me posaient aucune question mais le chien appuyait sa tête contre mon genou et m'observait' (31); who can't speak: 'il voulait me dire quelque chose mais les mots ne passaient pas . . . Il restait là, les sourcils froncés, la bouche entrouverte, faisant des efforts de plus en plus violents pour parler' (61); or don't want to speak: 'J'ai risqué une question indirecte à ce sujet mais elle voulait me cacher quelque chose. Elle m'a répondu de manière très floue' (68). Similarly, in *Accident nocturne*, there are twenty-six occurrences of the word, which is above the average of nineteen, but the total doesn't give any indication of the progression or great variety of silences in the novel. Apart from the very first instance, the silences in the first half are atmospheric and either neutral or positive. This is interrupted when the protagonist encounters a woman bearing uncanny similarities to his mother (74); the silence associated with her attitude is threatening and sinister. Following this, silence is variously defiant (75), intergenerational and negative (90), associated with slipping into otherworldly spaces and intemporality (100, 124, 146), related to reservation and dissimulation (115), involved in power play (118), connected with greater access to memory (123), associated with fear of the police (131, 171) and atmospheres of anticipation, expectation and intensity (156, 159, 171) and, as we find across the length and breadth of Modiano's novels, silence is the background against which other sounds become more distinct (147). In order to

account for these inflections of silence across the novels, an understanding of the historical, biographical and narrative contexts has to be combined with close reading and literary analysis.

An initial and continuous methodological process is meticulous close reading of print-format books, as well as searching digitised texts to identify various specific concrete manifestations of silence. A detailed exploration of the ways in which silence is presented reveals a number of recurring symbols and metaphors associated with silence and uncovers the nature of the rich network of silences that echo and reverberate both within single novels and across the sum of Modiano's output. By reading *through* the silences and silence-symbols, an evolutive hermeneutic analysis of silence may be undertaken, outlining how silences change and develop within individual novels and over the body of work, from the turbulence and noise of the first novels to the limpid, crystalline, and far more 'silent' novels from 1975 onwards.

In order to unearth the multiple forms and functions of silence in Modiano's oeuvre, I employ a range of theoretical tools, each chosen to support the different conceptions of silence in each chapter of the thesis. Underlying this pluralistic approach to silence is the principle that silence, even within one writer's work, is polysemantic and operative. This is in line with the position held by Picard and Dauenhauer, among others, that silence should not be thought of as a void, but rather as a meaningful and positive entity. Studying the theme of silence using a range of theoretical approaches acknowledges its plasticity and mercurial nature. While my project is firmly embedded in literary studies, it is enriched by interdisciplinary investigation into historical and political studies, linguistics, philosophy, and cultural theory.

Silence is approached thematically rather than chronologically in order to map the plurality of its forms and functions in work spanning five decades. The principal analytic categories of silence in this thesis are generative, recuperative and creative. These categories were identified through close reading of the novels for instances of silence, both explicit and implicit, which were then analysed according to relevant theories. Theoretical frameworks provide an important underpinning for this thesis and enable deeper analysis and interpretation of examples and categories. This methodological approach based on traditional literary hermeneutics impacts the sequencing and structure of this thesis. For the most part, I set out my analysis and approach to the text first, followed by secondary theoretical sources or frameworks that help interpret and refine my research, validating the processes that lead to my conclusions. The polysemic nature and multiple functions of silence in Modiano's writing inevitably produce a palimpsestic effect. Themes, tropes and instances of silence can signify on more than one level, layered with meanings more fruitfully discussed in alignment with their generative, recuperative or creative effects, rather than attempting exhaustive investigation in a single study. Certain textual examples may therefore be probed more than once, according to differing interpretative perspectives, assembling a multifaceted form that reflects the complexities of Modiano's silences.

Part I, 'Generative Silence', is oriented around the generative nature of silence. Chapter 1, 'Silent Beginnings', looks closely into the opening lines, paragraphs and scenes of Modiano's novels. Simon Kemp in 'Patrick Modiano and the Problem of Endings' examined the endings of Modiano's novels, noting their typically inconclusive nature. The beginnings of his novels, however, have not been the subject of systematic academic study. My interest in the beginnings is linked to the question of forms of silence as sources of narrative. To investigate the role,

importance and semantic value of the incipit, I incorporate work of literary critics both within European and Anglophone literatures, including Victor Brombert, Steven Kellman, Claude Duchet, Genette and Jean-Jacques Lecercle, among others. The most comprehensive study is provided by Andrea Del Lungo in 'Pour une poétique de l'incipit', published in 1993, and *L'Incipit romanesque,* a decade later. His broadly structuralist writing on the narrative incipit aims to create a framework for classifying and interpreting literary beginnings. While Del Lungo's systematic organisation is useful for providing a framework, I do not strictly adhere to his classifications, but rather, group Modiano's beginnings into six categories according to their thematic similarities such as lack of voice, disappearance, absence, destruction and other expressions of lack, loss or silence.

Continuing to investigate the generative aspect of silence in Chapter 2, 'Silence of Rupture', I look into how Modiano's texts emerge from a different register of silence. Here, the silencing of rupture is interrogated through its familial, sociohistorical and political manifestations. The way these levels of rupture provide the grounds for re-interrogation, re-examination and imagination through fiction is a central question of this chapter. The work of Dominique Viart and Laurent Demanze on the *récit de filiation* is used to explore the literary and narrative responses to familial and intergenerational ruptures, recognising their cultural and temporal specificity. Viart and Demanze are interested in the dismantling of the father figure in its many guises and their work sheds light on how the deficit and problem of transmission more broadly inflect and shape narrative form. Although it is not my intention to identify a generic classification, the applicability of the *récit de filiation* genre to Modiano's work has some limitations. However, Viart and Demanze's work is particularly relevant to Modiano's texts as they draw the useful link between

familial and intergenerational absence and non-transmission, which create central narrative voids and provide the grounds for re-interrogation.

My research seeks to uncover the specific context-based silences in Modiano's texts. As such, I refer to the work of historians and literary scholars alike. Some research spans both disciplines, such as that of Richard Golsan, Catherine Douzou, Dominique Viart, Laurent Demanze, Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert and Bruno Vercier, among others. Other scholars are more focused on the wider context of sociohistorical and political upheaval and discontinuity, such as Henry Rousso in *Le syndrome de Vichy (1944-198…)* and with, Eric Conan, in *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* and Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin. These thinkers also look into the cultural responses to historical rupture and demonstrate the manifold links between historical context and cultural output, which is crucial in order to situate silence in context and understand it as culturally, politically and historically moulded.

Part II, 'Saving from Silence', views silence from a different perspective, necessitating different interpretative tools. In Chapter 3, 'Ethics of Testimony', questions around historical context that were raised in the periphery of Chapter 2 are brought to the centre. The works of Rousso and Conan, Annette Wieviorka and Annelise Schulte Nordholt contextualise the artistic, social and judicial context in France immediately preceding and during Modiano's arrival on the literary scene. Their work elucidates trends in publishing and artistic output more broadly since the end of the war, stressing the significant place occupied by Modiano as part of the *mode rétro* and re-interrogating the ongoing silences of the Occupation period. The work of other scholars such as Colin Nettelbeck, Pascal Ory and Margaret Atack further situates Modiano's writing in context.

Having thoroughly mapped out the historical, social and artistic context of the post-war decades, I then turn to the central question of Chapter 3, which is the

dialectical nature of silence in the specific context of the post-war period. On the one hand, the silencing of millions of voices and lost lives is to be fought against, with literature constituting a means of recovering lost stories and saving them through the act of writing. On the other hand, there are the ethics and moral implications of breaking silence, of speaking in place of others, and, most dangerously, running the risk of aestheticising traumatic experience. The arguments proposed in Adorno's highly influential 1951 essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society', although written in the post-Holocaust context, remain pertinent to this discussion. In addition to the content of written production, George Steiner sees the very medium of language as having been jeopardised in its capacity to convey truth or logic since it has been tarnished through its involvement in the atrocities of the twentieth century. The work of Giorgio Agamben, Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman contribute to a discussion of the fraught ethical tensions involved in testimonial writing and bearing witness. Laub and Felman state the responsibility of the receiver of others' traumatic experience, whereas Caruth is more concerned with potential betrayal of testimony and the contamination of traumatic experience through the act of bearing witness. Agamben's position is more extreme and is criticised for situating testimony in a logical and ethical impasse.

The ethically complex theoretical groundwork established in Chapter 3 paves the way for close analysis in Chapter 4, 'Poetics of Silence'. In this chapter, I first consider biographical discourse in parts of three Modiano works as well as two intimately linked texts, *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder*. I map Modiano's ethical vacillations against the poetic and literary fluctuations within these two texts, which provide excellent examples for comparison as they demonstrate two distinct ways in which Modiano grapples with the issue of how to write another's story. I demonstrate how ambivalence and uncertainly are written into the content but also

the form of his writing. I discuss this alongside literary manifestations of the tension between the silence of safety and the silence of danger. Secondary critical work from numerous Modiano scholars highlights particular aspects of the analysis. Among them, Dervila Cooke discusses the thread of biographical and testimonial writing. Dominique Meyer-Bolzinger identifies expressions of impossibility within *Dora Bruder* and Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert remarks on the unique cohabitation of speaking out and silence in the same novel. Erik-Sven Rose discusses the particularly treacherous ethical relationship with silence, empathy and appropriation in *Dora Bruder.* In addition to this body of academic work, I consult personal interviews, prefaces and other works by Modiano to complement and nuance my analysis.

In Part III, 'Creating Silence', the focus of the thesis turns to ways in which experiences of silence can be created, firstly in Modiano's writing, in Chapter 5, and secondly through various art forms practised by his characters, in Chapter 6. Chapter 5, 'The Reticence of the Text', begins by exploring certain aspects of Modiano's writing using Roland Barthes' *Le Degré zero de l'écriture*. I ascertain to what extent notions of *écriture blanche* and neutrality are useful in examining his work. Barthes' theory takes my investigation to a certain point, but there are limitations to the applicability of *écriture blanche* and I therefore turn to John Barth's tripartite framework for minimalist writing. This groundwork creates a framework through which to identify and explore groupings of reticent and resistant techniques in Modiano's work. Moving on from Barthes and Barth, I utilise linguistic and literary device manuals and dictionaries such as Maurice Grevisse and André Goosse's *Le bon usage. Grammaire française*, Émile Benveniste's *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Roger Fowler's *Linguistic Criticism* and Bernard Dupriez's *Dictionary of Literary Devices: Gradus, A-Z* to define and interpret occurrences of ellipsis, parataxis, nominal sentences, asyndeton, semantic syllepsis and other

figures and motifs. Van Den Heuvel writes about methods and meaning of writing silence in literature. He notes the effects of the imbrication of different levels of silence within the text, which is of particular importance to Modiano's writing.

Alongside these manuals, I refer to the work of Modiano scholars who have written about relevant aspects of Modiano's style, such as Nettelbeck in 'Modiano's Stylo. A Novelist in the Age of Cinema', in which he comments on fragmentation and its cinematic quality. Blanckeman identifies, in 'Patrick Modiano or Writing as Nocturne', what he calls *rémanence* (translated at 'perseveration'), which is the impression of erasure within the text itself. Hélène Andreeva-Tintignac notes the abundance of unfinished sentences in *Chien de printemps* and Viart points out that Modiano avoids directly naming historical events, but rather refers to them obliquely through litotes, allusion, euphemism and periphrasis. My analysis pursues other forms of resistance and reticence peculiar to Modiano's work and I take numerous examples from across Modiano's oeuvre to illustrate how reticence and withholding take form at every level, from the minutiae of his writing, to the characters and stories he creates and how he narrates them.

Chapter 6, 'Towards Silence', pursues the interpretation of silence as something that can be created, a goal or destination of creators and artists in Modiano's world. I discuss the place of silence within music and as a product of music, most notably in *Accident nocturne* and *Une jeunesse.* In the medium of film, I examine *Le Fils de Gascogne,* directed by Pascal Aubier, with whom Modiano co-wrote the screenplay, in which a famous director deliberately shoots a film without any film in the camera. In 'La Littérature et le droit à la mort', Maurice Blanchot similarly frames process, rather than the work created, as the defining component of the artist. Given that an artwork is outside the artist's ambit of control and is realised

externally to the creator, he concludes that the created artwork can never be the ultimate goal. Rather, the process of creation is what embodies the artist.

The relationship with silence in the media of photography and writing portrayed in Modiano's work is of a different order. I discuss several photographer characters, leading to my analysis of Francis Jansen in *Chien de printemps*. I include ideas from Roland Barthes' treatise on photography, *La chambre claire. Notes sur la photographie*, which endeavours to identify the singularity of photography in comparison with other art forms. Counterintuitively, impermanence is put forward as an important feature, with reference to the fragility of the photographic print, which is certainly relevant to photography in Modiano's work. Jean-Bernard Vray writes about the role of photography in Modiano's work in 'Noirceur de Modiano. Disparition et photographie', and sees photography as an attempt, though most often a failed one, to save from oblivion. However, so singular is Jansen's practice and understanding of photography that it requires analysis on its own terms. In *Chien de printemps,* Jansen's personal goal to 'create silence' is passed on to a writer, giving rise to the writer's compellingly enigmatic transformation, through language, leading to a form of dissolution of self and of the linguistic medium. To explore this to its fullest, I return to Steiner and Blanchot's essays in *La part du feu* (1949). Notions of negativity and destruction are at the heart of Blanchot's writing on language and literature. The true purpose of literature, according to Blanchot, is to reach towards an *au-déla,* an unnameable and unimaginable place beyond language. This sheds light on the inherent tension in language and writing, between creation and silence, that haunts Modiano's work. That writing can be a means of putting to rest, thereby reaching silence, while also working in the diametrically opposite direction, to reinstate and break silence, is discussed with reference to several writer characters in Modiano's novels, *Chien de printemps* in particular. The work of critics and scholars is

referred to and incorporated throughout, situating my research in a framework of dynamic critical dialogue.

Part I. Generative Silence

What images are conjured in our mind's eye when we think of 'silence'? How might it look? A desert panorama, a seemingly petrified landscape with folds of imperceptibly shifting dunes, or majestic snowed-covered glaciers stretching over the horizon. Or perhaps 'silence' turns us away from the earth towards an immense and infinitely expanding galaxy. The qualities of expansiveness and vastness are common to both visions, just as they are also inherently linked to notions of void, absence, and the unknown. Although they do not necessarily negate time, these silent images somehow conjure a sense of timelessness, immobility and immutability. At first, this sense of stasis would seem at odds with any notion of productivity, generation or emergence. From that which seems immovable and inert, still and timeless, how could it be that *something* is produced? The question echoes its theological equivalent, *creatio ex nihilo*, the idea, according to the Old Testamant, that the universe was created from nothing: 'Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters' (*New International Version*, Gen 1:2). The opening of the Gospel of John repeats a similar notion; this time it is language that appears *ex nihilo*: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1.1). Thus, the foundations of Judeo-Christian society are not antithethical to the notion of life, generativity and production emerging from nothingness.

In the realm of art, the capacity to create from nothing can demonstrate great inventive talent. The epigraph in Chapter 1 is taken from the preface to *Bérénice*, in which Racine praises the simplicity of the Ancients and their contentment to make

something from nothing: 'Que ce que vous ferez, dit Horace, soit toujours simple et ne soit qu'un'; he goes on, 'Il y en a qui pensent que cette simplicité est une marque de peu d'invention. Ils ne songent pas qu'au contraire toute l'invention consiste à faire quelque chose de rien' (16). In Racine's case, the whole of the five-act tragedy of *Bérénice* is based on one sentence in Suetonius and the skill of theatrical writing is to make something from nothing; 'nothing' is potential material. How is it that silence or 'nothing' can serve a source of productivity? How is it that from silence, noise, words and action are produced, and from a rupture or void, narratives find their source?

Chapter 1. Silent Beginnings

…toute l'invention consiste à faire quelque chose de rien
Racine, preface, *Bérénice* (1671)

Silent Sources, Sources of Silence

Questions of origins, origins of discourse and literature specifically, are central to this chapter which explores the relationship between silence and source in Modiano's writing, while situating his work within broader currents in twentieth-century French literature and a more general awareness of various forms of silence in literature. To explore this relationship, I ask to what extent silence, rather than being something inert and unproductive, can serve as a source of invention, production and generation. In conceiving of silence as absence, and asking the question of how something can paradoxically come from nothing, the work of historian Michel de Certeau provides a way of thinking about kinds of discourse produced by a lack, be it a lack of material, witnesses or evidence. In *La Fable mystique* Certeau states 'un manquant fait écrire' (9). This certainly seems to be the case in *L'herbe des nuits* as Modiano's narrator remarks, 'je ne regrette pas la perte de ce manuscrit. S'il n'avait pas disparu, je crois que je n'aurais plus envie d'écrire aujourd'hui' (56), identifying the loss of his work as that which spurred him on to write. However, in Modiano's own work, it is the absence of something more diffuse and unidentified that acts as an initiator.

How these more nebulous sources of absence in Modiano's texts are linked to the broader sociohistocial context are examined in this chapter. Hannah Arendt describes the profound rupture caused by the Second World War and the Shoah, thus shifting the focus of the study of silence to the effect of dislocation inherent in the rupture of social and historical continuity across Europe and around the world. Arendt describes how the severance from national heritage and belonging creates a widespread sense of displacement and dislocation, a people without bearings. Through Arendt's work, I discuss how these wider sociohistorical ruptures led first to silence, before going on to generate and inform discourse and narrative: from silence to source.

Cultural reactions to the Second World War are as varied as involvement in it; there neither was nor is presently a unified response. Annette Wieviorka and Henry Rousso demonstrate that large numbers of testimonial accounts of concentration camps and the war experience were published in the few years immediately following the war, but public interest and appetite waned. After this initial profusion of discourse, there followed an extended period during which the dark side of Vichy, collaboration and genocide were left unexplored in fictional and non-fictional narrative themes, while Resistance accounts accentuating the efforts for liberation and justice continued to be published in abundance. The rise of testimony that Wieviorka identifies in *L'ère du témoin* (1998) is linked to the watershed moment of the Eichmann trial in 1961, at which point 'le silence sera définitivement rompu' (Schulte Nordholt, *Perec, Modiano* 26). The shift that the trial brought about in public consciousness took place on such a large scale partially due to the rise of television, and the importance of testimony in the legal process marked a new era, which 'a libéré la parole des témoins' (*L'ère* 117). Born shortly after the Liberation, Modiano has no lived experience of the Occupation period, which doesn't mean he is exempt

from its influence, absorbed or inherited. Indeed, it seems that the impact of the war experience is magnified and refracted due to its distance, filtered through different levels of silence. Dominique Viart's theoretical proposal of the *récit de filiation* in 1999 provides a way of thinking about rupture and silence from a different perspective. Viart, followed by Laurent Demanze (*Encres orphelines*), raises questions around continuity and legacy on the generational, familial and interpersonal scale, noting how it is often the issue of rupture that becomes the central point around which filiation narratives take form. Viart and Demanze's frameworks inform my discussion of the rupture of *filiation* for Modiano, which investigates how the effects of being 'orphaned' function as a generative form of silence.

Modiano's novels are often set in a mode of negation, centred around something that is missing, a lack or the disappearance of a person, an object, or a memory. Missing or fragmentary information, paltry clues, incomplete pieces of evidence; these are the elements we have to start with. Inquiries that spring from questions about characters' pasts are met by palpable silence and begin with seemingly impossible searches sparked by the smallest scrap of information or a snippet of conversation overheard, unearthing a distant memory which takes on a magnetic, hypnotic quality. Silence, in the form of denial of knowledge, works in response to, and in conjunction with, the curiosity and desire to retrieve. The absence of replies and the paucity of information serve as an impetus for production and goad Modiano's writing in an effort to fill in the enigmatic silences and gaps he and his readers are confronted with. The act of writing can be seen as a way of taking possession of and reoccupying the space that silence once covered.

In 'Poétiques du silence dans *Chien de printemps* de Patrick Modiano', Bruno Tritsmans refers to Certeau's idea that one is compelled to write because something is missing. Tritsmans sees this as potentially holding true for all modes of writing

and conceptualises writing as a form of re-territorialisation. Speaking about Modiano's work at the 2011 'Entendez-voir' series, novelist Laurence Tardieu arrived at a similar conclusion about what motivates Modiano's writing. Highlighting the contrast between written and spoken language, she says 'on écrit parce qu'on ne peut pas dire' (1). As she sees it, the reticence of the spoken word and the silence of *la parole* are generative of written language. Modiano is well known for his hesitant speech, to which he alluded in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: 'Mais un écrivain—ou tout au moins un romancier—a souvent des rapports difficiles avec la parole' (7). For Tardieu, writing comes from severance from the spoken language; she describes writing as, 'fouillant de l'autre côté du silence' (1), both for her and Modiano, forming the bridge between the internal self and external expression. The bridge, however, can sometimes feel like a tightrope. Modiano himself confesses, 'j'ai parfois le sentiment que je n'arrive pas toujours à dire exactement ce que j'ai à dire… entre la volonté et le résultat, quel vertige' (Delbourg 'Modiano Cantabile' 73). Although the written word can provide a less hazardous pathway to expression, as corrections can be made in private, it is nonetheless strewn with pitfalls, and the result may still be a great distance from its initial impulse. Modiano has described this point of initiation for his writing in a way that closely echoes Certeau's words. In another interview, Modiano said of his own work, 'la motivation, la pulsion à écrire, c'est pour moi toujours de partir d'une disparition, de construire une quête à partir de là' (Heck 65). This finds its most salient expression in *Dora Bruder,* which begins with the discovery of a missing-person notice in an issue of *Paris-Soir* printed during the Occupation. The discovery of the notice, over forty years later, initiates Modiano's search for Dora, a search which is repeatedly set back by a lack of material evidence. Faced with the mute response to his investigations, Modiano pieces together scraps of information that he can find, and a portrait of Dora is

created from and through the constellation of silences left behind. Likewise, in *Fleurs de ruine*, the unnamed narrator describes what motivated his first novel:

> Ce n'était pas une vocation ni un don particuliers qui me poussaient à écrire, mais tout simplement l'énigme qui me posait un homme que je n'avais aucune chance de retrouver, et toutes ces questions qui n'auraient jamais de réponse. (86)

Often the smallest details, those which could so easily be overlooked, become the point of departure. In an interview, Modiano stated: 'J'éparpille mes souvenirs ici et là, je recolle sans cesse des lambeaux de réalité, rien que des lambeaux' (Garcin, 'Une rencontre'). From these 'shreds' or 'scraps', words which suggest being torn, worn and threadbare, a story begins.

The Space of the Possible

Certeau was a scholar of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but despite the temporal divide, what he says about the practice of historical investigation resonates with Modiano's description of his own process. Certeau describes the feeling of being 'exilé de ce qu'il traite' (*Fable* 9), held at a distance from his subject by the silence of historical material. This silence, rather than leading to an impasse, becomes the point of departure. Certeau's first major study was of the seventeenth-century Jesuit priest, Jean-Joseph Surin. He concluded that to fully recover the past, at least in the manner of Michelet in *Histoire de France*, is now impossible. Similarly, Modiano stated, 'Il me semble, malheureusement, que la recherche du temps perdu ne peut plus se faire avec la force et la franchise de Marcel Proust' (*Discours* 30). For Certeau, historical discourse can only ever hope to occupy an 'entre-deux', between

the language and artefacts of the past and the language of the contemporary historian. Yet the otherness of the historical subject does not necessarily have to be a constraint, and can mark the advent of discourse:

> Il [Surin] m'échappait ou plutôt je commençais à m'apercevoir qu'il m'échappait. C'est de ce moment, toujours réparti dans le temps, que date la naissance de l'historien. C'est cette absence qui constitue le discours historique. ('Histoire et structure' 168)

After finding the missing notice, but before the publication of *Dora Bruder,* Modiano wrote *Voyage de noces*, in which the character Ingrid Teyrsen appears as Dora's fictional double. In the pages of *Dora Bruder,* Modiano reflects on what motivated him to write the novel:

> Le manque que j'éprouvais m'a poussé à l'écriture d'un roman, *Voyage de noces*, 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. (53)

The productive absence described by Certeau is felt by Modiano, and this in turn provides a means of approaching the lost person and reckoning with the silence of their disappearance. The use of 'deviner'—to guess or divine—is a revealing description of Modiano's approach. Since archives maintain almost total silence and witnesses are rare, he is obliged to advance by supposition and guesswork. The hypothetical mode of the text is created through the abundance of questions and guesses: 'je suppose qu'elle avait fait preuve d'indépendance' (38), 'je devine à peu près les horaires des journées' (39), 'Dora Bruder y a peut-être passé quelques jours avec ses camarades' (40), 'Je doute que son père ait eu le temps et le désir de la faire inscrire sur un fichier' (57). Similarly, in *L'Ecriture de l'histoire*, Certeau describes historical discourse as situated in the realm of the possible: 'l'histoire ouvre ainsi au

présent un espace propre : « marquer » un passé, c'est faire une place au mort, mais aussi redistribuer l'espace des possibles' (180). For Certeau, definitive knowledge is impossible. His analysis of the Loudun Possession in the 1630s begins, 'l'histoire n'est jamais sûre' and follows, 'La possession ne comporte pas d'explication historique « véritable » puisque jamais il n'est possible de savoir qui est possédé et par qui' (7). This notion of historiography, which accords space to the possible rather than setting out with the promise of a definitive account, makes a place for history's silences and unsayables to sit alongside a more affirmative historical narrative. Modiano proceeds in a similarly tentative and hypothetical way, redistributing the space of possible realities. Employing the rhetorical device of apophasis, Modiano names the kinds of details of Dora's life to which he has no access and about which he has to conjecture, establishing entry points by comparing his own memories and those of his father to her silent ones.

In supporting an approach to historical practice that allows for mutability and encourages continuous reinterpretation, Certeau creates a place for silence that is positive in the sense that it generates interpretation and discourse. History's reticence to disclose its realities creates a place for an extended possible. Modiano's work and methodology can be seen to adhere to this; when he is invited to consult the student register of one of Dora's schools, he declines, or at least postpones in order that he might avoid disappointment and remain hopeful, maintaining the space of the possible by conserving the silence, and therefore the mystery and possibility, surrounding it.

Studying the ways in which silence works as a generative force in Modiano's novels draws attention to the fact that readers never quite escape their veil of silence, and a certain circularity begins to emerge. Just as an initial silence or disappearance can set writing in motion, with the writing emerging *ex nihilo* in a sense, the novels

seem to return to forms of silence. The original questions and absences, which lead us along uncertain investigative fictions, remain largely unanswered; we are left with hazy images and impressions, the facts we thought we could rely on evaporate and we cannot be truly certain of what has happened. The mechanics of this evanescent quality of Modiano's writing, writing which seems to create a form of silence of its own are discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters.

Beginning Without: Modulations of Inceptive Silence

There is a further similarity that can be traced between Certeau's statement that 'un manquant fait écrire' and the genesis of Modiano's work. Unanswered and unanswerable questions and the shared awareness of history's mutability and insuperable distance are embedded in the first words of their works. *La Fable mystique* opens: 'Ce livre se présente au nom d'une incompétence : il est exilé de ce qu'il traite.' An uncertain, destabilising tone is created, appearing to forestall any expectations that readers will gain concrete or definitive understanding of the subject; if the author remains exiled, surely readers are at even greater remove. Further, what effect can be attributed to the initiatory position of this seemingly self-undermining gesture?

In the beginning, it is written, was the word. And that is often the problem. The problem of the beginning. Few works have so ludically seized the potential of the incipit[8] as Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* in which Calvino experiments with staging multiple beginnings. The openings of Modiano's

[8] In English 'incipit' is used almost exclusively in reference to medieval texts while in French literary vocabulary it designates the commencement of any piece of literature, be it medieval or contemporary. In the following discussion, I use the term in the French manner.

successive novels perform a similar repetition, although not so overtly or in such a stylised manner. Studying the openings of Modiano's novels side by side, approaching them as an almost self-contained series, they appear as an extended anaphora, performing a succession of variations on a theme, or a set of analogous themes of absence, lack and silence. This isn't necessarily surprising given the homogeneousness of Modiano's production. In an interview given in the wake of the publication of *La Petite Bijou* in 2001, Modiano confessed to sharing the impression of some readers and critics that while his novels are published separately, they are in many ways successive parts of the same novel: 'J'ai l'impression depuis plus de trente ans d'écrire le même livre—c'est à dire, l'impression que les vingt livres publiés séparément ne forment en fait qu'un seul livre' (Gallimard). Modiano's comments on his own work should be treated with caution, and it would be erroneous to interpret this as a negation of the evident evolutions across more than five decades of work. There is certainly a high degree of cohesion and interrelation between Modiano's novels, however, and it is their interconnectivity that supports the study of the incipits as a cohesive unit of narrative. As Simon Kemp notes, the homogeneity of Modiano's oeuvre gives us the opportunity to deal with separate novels more closely (135).

Exploring the beginnings of these novels, a set of common features emerges. While Kemp identifies inconclusiveness as a common trait of the endings (134), the openings are characterised by different expressions or variations of silence; carrying within the beginning a seed of their own negation. Variations of silence are discussed thematically and are grouped into the following six categories: direct silences, where the word itself is present; vocal silences and expressions of language's fallibility; absence and disappearance of individuals, including death and suicide; destruction and emptiness of place and built environment; diminishment,

vacancy, statements of lack, paucity and unreliability of material; and finally, withheld information, inaccessibility of testimony and impossibility of discovery. Finally, the few exceptions to these categories are discussed.

Theory of the Incipit

The opening lines of a text are where first impressions are made; they are akin to a handshake, a greeting and a mutual acknowledgement between reader and writer. The initial words, the first advances into a text, occupy a unique role in the introduction of a text to its readers and have the capacity to inflect and set the tone for what follows, arguably more so than other parts of a novel. As well as occupying a symbolically eminent place simply by coming first, Victor Brombert notes that 'literally speaking, even in a subliminal manner, the first word of a text remains longest with the reader along the textual trajectory, and by this virtue alone acquires a privileged status' (494). Claude Duchet describes the importance of the incipit's role in shaping a text's ideology: 'Le statut de l'incipit est particulier, puisque la première phrase a aussi pour rôle de permettre le récit et ne peut donc se constituer en énoncé clos. Mais la façon dont le sens va se frayer passage engage l'idéologie du texte' (13). Although a piece of fiction may unfold in a temporally complex way, reading, in contrast, is generally diachronic and consecutive.[9] For Kellman, a text's opening has the 'ability to be integrated, to continue to reverberate against succeeding lines long after it has been read' (140). It is this, in part, that makes a novel's incipit the most memorable element, and dynamically so. By the end, it is

[9] Some well-known examples of novels that can be read in various, non-linear orders are Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch,* Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried.*

possible to apprehend a complete work as a synchronous whole, as one might experience a painting, but in the process of reading, successive parts of the narrative are held in suspension until the end is reached and the novel can be contemplated in its entirety.

Openings mark one of the frontiers between a novel's territory and all that exists outside. As such, starting to write at all could be considered a form of breaking silence since writing, which is productive of something rather than nothing, interrupts the silence of everything that, up to that point, was not being written, a boundary unmarked. It is a form of silence that is rendered almost material in the thick white space above the first lines on the first page. Conversely, committing to writing the initial line terminates potentiality, bringing an abrupt end to 'l'infinité des mondes narratifs possibles et commence à en construire un' (Lecercle 8), thereby silencing all other possible worlds that could have been, and concretising just one. Calvino makes a similar observation, designating the beginning as 'le lieu littéraire par excellence' and describing the act of fixing one of a multitude of possible narratives:

> le début est ce moment de détachement de la multiplicité des possibles : pour le narrateur, éloigner de soi la multiplicité des histoires possibles, de façon à isoler et rendre racontable chaque histoire qu'il a décidé de raconter ce soir. (*Défis aux labyrinthes* 106)

For the poet and novelist Louis Aragon, the dialectical reduction from complete potentiality to something is fraught, requiring heroic strength:

> Tout début, d'un poème ou d'un roman, fait renaître la vieille image d'Hercule au carrefour, qu'on a toujours considérée comme une fable pédagogique, une fable du destin de l'homme, de sa conduite dans la vie. Pour moi, la phrase surgie (dictée ?) d'où je pars vers quelque chose qui

> sera le roman, au sens illimité du mot, a ce caractère de carrefour, sinon entre le vice et la vertu, du moins entre se taire et dire, entre la vie et la mort, entre la création et la stérilité. (45)

This dramatic account of the act of creating echoes the similarly dialectical nature of silence. While stepping into the first words of a novel is presented along the lines of remaining silent and speaking, life and death, creation and sterility, silence is similarly characterised as relating to both poles of fullness (of potential) and absence (of fixed form).

With its first words, a novel breaks silence and moves into the realm of the written word, yet it also carries the assurance that it will return to silence when its final page is turned. The return to silence at the end of a novel is inextricably tied to its incipit: 'In my beginning', writes T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets*, 'is my end'. Given the general linearity of reading, the end of a novel is fore-played and inherent in its physical form. To push the logic further, any act of reading is a journey towards the silence guaranteed at its end. Blanchot sees this as part of the pleasure of reading: 'la narration impose la sécurité d'une histoire bien circonscrite qui, ayant eu un commencement, va avec certitude vers le bonheur d'une fin, fût-elle malheureuse' (*Le livre à venir* 280). There is a curious sense of security in the knowledge that whatever the book in question, it will, inevitably, even thankfully, end.

Before reaching the incipit, aside from the certitude of an ending, there are other *seuils*—to speak Genette's language—or 'thresholds' to cross, including the epitext and the peritext, which together make up the paratext. The peritext includes the author's name, cover image, title, subtitles, publisher's name and eventual dedication, preface, prologue and epigraph. The epitext encompasses elements outside the text but still connected to it, such as reviews, publicity, interviews and private letters. They are all means available to the author to direct the reading of the

novel, cast it in a certain light, draw links between works, or make explicit certain connections or themes. These elements make up a 'vestibule' that Antoine Compagnon accords a rather ancillary role, referring to it simply as a 'zone intermédiaire entre le hors-texte et le texte' (328), while Genette assigns this liminal space a more operative status, describing it as a:

> zone non seulement de transition, mais de *transaction*: lieu privilégié d'une pragmatique et d'une stratégie, d'une action sur le public au service, bien ou mal compris et accompli, d'un meilleur accueil du texte et d'une lecture plus pertinente. (*Seuils* 8)

This is more in line with what Philippe Lejeune sees as the 'frange du texte imprimé qui, en réalité, commande toute la lecture' (*Pacte* 45). As Genette has shown, the incipit is generally not the first meeting between a novel and its readers; a text's 'silence' may have been broken before the first lines.

Del Lungo's Poetics

Genette focuses on that which precedes the opening lines of the body of text, while Andrea Del Lungo, identifying the lack of comparable theoretical work on the role and function of narrative exordia, outlines a system of definition, codification and classification of incipits, their categories and purposes. He defines the incipit as 'un fragment textuel qui commence au seuil d'entrée dans la fiction . . . et qui se termine à la première fracture importante du texte' ('Pour une poétique' 137) and finds it useful to think of the incipit as a 'zone stratégique de passage dans la fiction, dont les limites sont parfois mobiles et incertaines et dont l'ampleur peut varier

considérablement suivant les cas' (137), which are useful and flexible definitions, catering for the range of lengths and forms incipits can take.

A student of Barthes and Genette, Del Lungo's study follows a broadly structuralist approach and identifies four principal types of opening according to the role they perform: *l'incipit statique* which is abundant in information and delays action; *l'incipit progressif* which is similarly abundant in information and also initiates action straight away; *l'incipit dynamique* which also establishes action straight away but provides less information; and *l'incipit suspensive,* which provides little information and delays action. He identifies certain functions, which are linked, but not strictly bound, to type. These functions are: codifying, which starts the text, establishes basic structural elements such as the narrative voice and is dominant in the static incipit; seductive, which draws readers in and piques interest; informative, which sets the scene of the narrative; and dramatic, which initiates action. The last two are important features of the dynamic and progressive incipits. Lastly, the suspensive incipit is a refusal or subversion of a traditional beginning in which all functions other than the codifying function are largely absent. This typology and framework of functions is useful in gauging the kinds of openings of Modiano's novels, and beginning to uncover the narrative mechanics at work.

Setting the narrative tone is one of the main functions discussed by Del Lungo. Reflecting on the openings of his novels, Modiano stated in an interview 'Dans mes livres, tout est miné au départ' (Ezine 24). In another interview given shortly after the publication of *Accident nocturne,* he was asked about the first line of the novel and replied: 'C'est elle qui donne la tonalité du roman, comme les premières mesures au piano' (Liban). Tonality is described by Jean-Pierre Martin as 'cet esprit fluide, ce génie ou ce démon qui surgit dès la première phrase, ne quitte pas le livre, jusqu'à son dernier mot' (264). The musical analogy is in line with

Kellerman's notion of reverberation and Del Lungo's description of the incipit as a 'référence constante dans la suite, tel un premier accord auquel doit se rapporter une symphonie entière' (*L'Incipit romanesque* 55).

Just as Certeau's cautionary incipit announces the writer as exiled, many of Modiano's opening gestures, or 'signals' as Brombert terms them, mark a distance and correspond most often to Del Lungo's *incipit suspensif*. While Modiano's opening 'signals' generally point towards kinds of silence and negation, the incipits of his novels can be grouped according to their thematic similarities, all of which relate to variations of kinds of diminishment, quietness or negation. As well as thematic silences, some novels open with scenes in which silence is directly named and summoned into the scene, and it is with these directly named silences that this study of the incipits of Modiano's novels begins.

Modiano's Incipits

i. Direct Silence

Gazing at his newborn daughter in the opening of the first vignette of *Livret de famille,* Modiano notes: 'La branche continuait d'osciller en silence' (11). The peaceful silence is linked to the expression of beatitude on the baby's face. Yet there are layers of glass between him, his daughter, and the silently swaying branch, creating a sense of distance. The spell is broken by an almost slapstick scene in which the narrator and an old family friend rush to the town hall to register the birth; they arrive out of breath and fall in heap before pantomime functionaries. We return to the mute motif of the silently swaying branch at the end of the motif—'Je revis le balancement

serein de la branche contre la vitre' (27)—with the new father walking among heavy traffic but thinking back to the silent tranquillity of his newborn's nursery.

The silence that reigns over the static opening passage of *De si braves garçons* is broken by M. Jeanschmidt's sudden call to stand to attention in direct discourse. The imperfect, 'Sa voix rompait le silence' (11), conveys the scene's routine occurrence, the same gestures breaking the silence day after day. The breaking of the directly named 'silence' also marks the passage from the static, descriptive incipit into action.

Quartier perdu opens with a dynamic incipit, plunging into movement and raising many questions about the autodiegetic narrator, returning to his native France. An extended absence is alluded to by his impression of the strangeness of hearing and speaking French. The opening words, 'C'est étrange d'entendre parler français', with no deictic markers to link the statement to the narrator's identity or location, stand apart, suspended through the present tense in contrast to the perfect and imperfect in the rest of the passage. The narrator is relieved that his taxi driver 'est resté silencieux tout au long du trajet' (9). Silence here is a relief and is juxtaposed by the discomfort of speech and language.

Vestiaire de l'enfance opens with a static incipit, which offers description while delaying action. The autodiegetic narrator states that he hardly dares mention his professional life, which 'se résume maintenant à peu de choses' (11). Here, it is the directly named silence in the passage, as well as the time of day and the sound of a colleague's voice over the radio, that plunge the narrator into meditation: 'La tombée du soir, le silence, la voix de Sirvent qui lisait mon feuilleton . . . m'a entraîné—chose dont je n'ai pas l'habitude—à la réflexion' (11-12). A level of suspense is also created by the length of the sentence, some nine lines, which separates silence from its effect. We return to silence at the novel's close as the narrator walks deserted streets and

notices fireworks in the sky: 'D'autres gerbes ont suivi, qui s'étalaient de plus en plus haut dans le ciel. Scintillantes. Et silencieuses' (151).

Another novel that features concrete silence in its opening scene is *Accident nocturne.* First, a car hits the narrator-protagonist then crashes into an arcade in a 'bruit de verre brisé' (9). In contrast to this dramatic noise, the narrator and the driver are then taken to a police station, accompanied by a mysterious man who observes them 'en silence' (11), and the narrator notes that from the moment of the accident, 'un silence profond régnait autour de moi, comme si j'avais perdu l'ouïe' (12). The surrounding silence creates a sense of distance between the narrator and his surroundings; his voice becomes a 'VOIX BLANCHE' (in upper case), which he is convinced would be inaudible should he attempt to speak. Jacqueline, the driver, gives her details to the nurse, as reported in indirect discourse, yet the narrator's identity remains concealed. A conversation goes on in the corridor, but the words can't be heard, and the last thing the narrator is aware of before passing out is the smell of ether. Silence here signifies on several levels. The strangeness of voice, which recalls *Vestiaire de l'enfance,* is compounded by the man's menacing, guilt-inducing silence and the layers of dissimulation which cumulatively inform the deep sense of mystery and unknown at the novel's outset.

The young couple in the opening scene of *Chien de printemps* are in no rush to break the silence of the short, evocative opening scene. The couple have just met Jansen who takes their photograph and invites them back to his studio. He offers them a drink but finds the cupboards empty. He sits awkwardly on the sofa, and the narrator remarks:

> Nous ne rompions pas le silence, mon amie et moi. La pièce était très claire avec ses murs blancs. Les deux fauteuils et le canapé étaient disposés à une

> trop grande distance les uns des autres, ce qui donnait une sensation de vide. (15)

Here, silence is associated with a spatial quality, as well as whiteness, reinforcing the blanched aspect of Jansen's studio. This colour, or lack thereof, often related to emptiness, silence, and fragile memory in Modiano's writing, returns again and again throughout *Chien de printemps* and Modiano's body of work in general and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The young woman in the third part of *Des inconnues*—a collection of three thematically bound but individual short stories, each with unnamed, female, autodiegetic narrators—describes her first night in Paris. In the opening scene, she describes her difficulty getting to sleep: 'tout était silencieux, comme si personne n'habitait l'immeuble' (118). She is woken from the silence and desolation of the first night, however, by the sound of horses' hooves. Later, she learns that there is an abattoir nearby, and thereafter associates the sound of hooves with mechanised butchery, and of course by extension, the millions of people deported to concentration camps. Preceding this silence, the story opens with a one-sentence paragraph: 'J'ai oublié sans doute beaucoup de détails, mais encore quand je pense à ce temps-là, j'entends encore le bruit des sabots' (117). It is significant that her most potent memory is sonic, and this sound, located in the past, reverberates, much as Keller describes, throughout the narrative and up to the present. When the full significance of the sound is realised, it echoes back and amplifies the first line with new meaning.

ii. Voice

Voices that are difficult to hear, whispering and reticent speech recur frequently at the beginnings of, and throughout, Modiano's novels. The first staccato lines and 'Des éclats de rire dans la nuit' (13) open *La Ronde de nuit* with a dynamic, *in medias res* incipit, jumping straight into action and direct discourse. The absence of deictic markers leaves the laughter suspended. Although the voices of Le Khédive and M. Philibert are 'coupées de chuchotements et d'inflexions graves' (13), M. Philibert calls for music, echoing the title and evoking music and movement, as well as carrying a more sinister connotation of a police round-up. Throughout the opening scene, the identity of the narrator, who is undergoing an interrogation, is dissimulated, with him being referred to as 'mon petit' and 'le jeune homme', but the first 'je' at the beginning of the second scene denotes a homodiegetic narrator. The boisterous, increasingly music-filled opening scene contrasts with the delay in revealing the narrator's identity. The opening scene spins and swirls increasingly with music and dancing—'un slow fox', 'un tango' (twice), 'une rumba!' (five times), 'Et si l'on dansait encore ?' (14-17)—as pressure mounts for the 'jeune homme' to answer the questions of his interrogators, yet he remains silent and anonymous. When the first 'je' finally arrives, the first descriptions the narrator gives are not of himself, but of two other characters who do not speak; he admits, 'C'est pour cela que je les aime' (20).

Les boulevards de ceinture's opening is both utterly silent and completely still; the present-tense description passes over the surface of the petrified scene and characters, which seem to be suspended in time. In the second line, 'Murraille' (the homonym *muraille* means a high wall, connoting impregnability and immobility) is described as leaning towards the narrator's father 'comme pour lui dire quelque

chose à voix basse' (13), but, just as in *Accident nocturne,* readers and narrator alike are held at a distance and cannot hear what is said. The impenetrability and temporal uncertainty of the scene is further enforced by the presence of a block calendar on which it is 'impossible de lire ni le mois ni l'année' (14). The sense of distance is maintained; at the end of the dinner scene, there is a conversation to which readers and the narrator again have no access: 'De loin quelques bribes vous parviennent, insuffisantes et désordonnées. . . . leurs chuchotements se perdent dans cette grande salle à manger déserte.' The light is too bright and 'pèse sur eux comme une ouate et étouffe le son de leurs voix' (18). The quality of light affects the quality of sound and silences voice. Conflation of the senses becomes a motif throughout Modiano's work, with sound being influenced by heat, air, weather and other atmospheric elements.

In the opening scene of *Dimanches d'août,* the man hawking clothes on the street instantly loses his confidence and loquacity upon seeing the narrator: 'A ma vue, il a perdu son bagout de camelot. Il parlait d'une manière plus sèche' (9). A few lines on, there is further vocal deterioration: 'La voix avait toujours son timbre métallique, un métal qui, depuis le temps, se serait rouillé' (9). Difficulty speaking and communication 'à demi-mot, ou par sous-entendus' (16) recur throughout the novel, as Alan Morris notes: 'C'est le manque d'échanges linguistiques qui l'emporte dans ce texte, et cela dès les premiers paragraphes' ('Des dimanches pas si doux' 125). Opening *in medias res* plunges the narrative into action, yet many elements remain opaque throughout the first passages. Despite the ample supply of locational and temporal markers, the identity of the narrator (first addressed as Henri, which is not his name) is not revealed until later. Similarly, the conversation in the first scene refers to a mysterious Sylvia and the Val-de-Marne area, about which the narrator says, 'Je ne voudrais pour rien au monde revenir dans cet endroit', to which his

interlocutor responds, 'Moi non plus' (12). The mystery of the narrator's identity is matched by the mounting intrigue of their terse, elliptical conversation.

The narrator of *Un cirque passe* recounts his interrogation in a police station when he was eighteen, and despite his innocence, can't help but pause before he answers: 'J'ai hésité quelques secondes' (11). Although we are told that the policeman takes down the narrator's name and details, they are kept from readers, as are the scene's temporal markers. We are let in, however, on the lie the narrator tells the policeman about attending university, which instigates a layered network of ruses, revelation and dissimulation.

Interrogation and hesitation also feature at the beginning of *La Petite Bijou*, one of Modiano's few novels with a female autodiegetic narrator. Rather than simply faltering as in *Un cirque passe*, the narrator is completely unable to formulate a response. The eponymous protagonist sees a woman in the metro who reminds her of her estranged mother, which in turn reminds her of a photograph that often appears in her dreams. In the dream, the photograph is shown to her in a police station or morgue to confirm her mother's identity, but she always remains silent: 'je restais muette. Je ne savais rien d'elle' (10). Simon Kemp notes that the initial closeness in this first scene, in which the two women are jostled towards each other in the carriage, rather than leading to connection and proximity, leads to its opposite: 'The hermeneutic thread of narrative is being counteracted by a symbolic one of increasing distance' (145). Narration breaks off at three points from the imperfect and perfect tenses to imagined scenes recounted in the conditional in which the narrator imagines leaving the woman asleep on the metro at the end of the line, or addressing her directly, but admits she doesn't have the courage. Blanckeman notes the repeated image of the 'tapis roulant' in the incipit, which

returns in a later chapter, reiterates 'l'engrenage associé au même décor' (*Lire* 77) and augments the lack of agency and impotence.

The opening scene marks the palpable presence of the absent woman, whether she is the protagonist's mother or not, and emphasises the unbridgeable distance between them. There is an accumulation of words and phrases in this scene that reinforces the distance, secrecy and obstruction between them: 'Elle paraissait ignorer tout ce qui l'entourait', 'La bouche se contractait dans un pli d'amertume', 'Je ne trouvais pas les mots', 'On m'avait dit qu'elle était morte, il y a longtemps, au Maroc, et je n'avais jamais essayé d'en savoir plus', 'faux nom', 'elle avait fermé les yeux', 'Elle avait ouvert ses yeux qui reprenaient leur éclat dur', 'Derrière les vitres, elle bougeait les lèvres . . . Mais je n'entendais rien', 'Elle m'a jeté un regard indifférent', 'Le silence', 'une vie clandestine', 'elle restait impassible', 'Elle ferait semblant de ne pas entendre', 'Je n'avais pas du tout envie de lui parler' (10-20). Petite Bijou's initial incapacity to respond to the photograph prefigures the failed search, and the cloud of silence that remains around the mother.

Another of Modiano's female characters, Louki, in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue,* shares this sparseness of speech, described in the first few lines: 'Les premiers temps, elle ne parlait à personne' (9) and further, 'Elle demeurait silencieuse et réservée et se contentait d'écouter' (12). Louki takes over the role of narrator in the second section and although she engages in conversation 'd'une manière aussi naturelle', she alludes to language's capacity to mislead:

> C'est l'avantage d'avoir vingt ans de plus que les autres : ils ignorent votre passé. Et même s'ils vous posent quelques questions distraites sur ce qu'a été votre vie jusque-là, vous pouvez tout inventer. (32)

This raises the potential of language to conceal, to communicate misinformation rather than truth, to actively create silence by diverting attention away from

something. The atmosphere and characters found at Le Condé are described, but action is delayed and Louki's story is evoked in fragments. Again, certain elements are withheld or only minimally depicted; it is not made explicit until the third page that the narration, rather than being omniscient, is in the first person.

These incipits staging reticence and unreliability of language, speech and voices that can't be captured, introduce these motifs from the start, but they are not limited to the beginnings, nor to the novels discussed. Vocal silence returns like a refrain across many novels, for example in *Du plus loin de l'oubli*: 'il lui arrivait de ne pas prononcer un mot pendant toute une soirée', 'Elle me regardait droit dans les yeux, en silence', 'Ils gardaient le silence', 'Ils gardaient tous les deux le silence' (21, 24, 28, 60), to cite only a few instances. The theme of vocal weakness and reticence of language presented in the incipits is entirely coherent with that which follows.

iii. Absence: Death, Suicide, Emptiness

Another recurring motif is absence, which can take the form of death, suicide and emptiness. Of course, the interpretation of death as a form of silence is limited to societies informed by a Judeo-Christian belief system in contrast to some Eastern religions' conception of death as part of a series of rebirths before one is released from the cycle of life.

The startling incipit of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* opens with the narrator's Beckettian statement, 'Je ne suis rien. Rien qu'une silhouette claire, ce soir-là, à la terrasse d'un café' (11). The brief use of the present tense subtly foreshadows the failure of the ensuing search, but narration quickly shifts to the past by 'ce soir-là'. The narrator embodies the poetic duality of being an amnesiac, in a sense silenced from his former self, and working as a private detective. The novel starts with his

decision to discard the temporary identity provided by the detective agency and go in search of the one he has forgotten. The agency is closing and the boss, Hutte, is retiring to Nice. His first words, in direct discourse, are, 'Eh bien voilà, Guy… C'est fini' (11). Thus, we are presented with a beginning that is embedded with multiple absences and endings. Emmanuel Bouju notes the opposing forces in this opening: 'Cet incipit est une fin et un commencement : fin de la vie et du nom d'emprunt accordés par l'agence de détectives de Hutte, commencement de l'enquête rétrospective sur le passé d'avant l'amnésie' (65). Hutte asks Guy what he's thinking about, to which he replies 'À rien' (*RBO* 13). This can be read both as not thinking and thinking about nothing, signifying a silence of thought, yet since the protagonist has described himself as 'rien', it could also imply that the protagonist is thinking about himself, a strange ontological state of nothingness. Later, when he tracks down Hélène Pilgram, a friend of Denise from her dressmaking days, and she asks 'qu'est-ce que vous êtes devenu ?, again he replies, 'Oh moi ? …rien…' (111).

The narrator's impression at the start is reiterated later in almost exactly the same terms, only slightly nuanced:

> Au fond, je n'avais peut-être jamais été ce Pedro McEvoy, je n'étais rien, mais des ondes me traversaient, tantôt lointaines, tantôt plus fortes et tous ces échos épars qui flottaient dans l'air se cristallisaient et c'était moi. (124)

This repetition embeds the absence of identity, and infuses it into the intangible texture of his environment. Bouju points out that the evacuation of the narrator allows space for other voices. In this silence of amnesia, other voices come in to fill the space in what Bouju sees as a process of anamnesis, reversing how one might normally think identity is created. Here, rather than coming from within, identity is situated at a point of convergence, made up from the traces of others (65).

The present tense 'Je ne suis rien' contrasts with the imperfect 'je n'étais rien' later in the novel, offering a glimmer of hope that, although he hasn't identified himself yet, there is a slightly greater possibility that he will. Despite this small glimmer, more often than not, the narrator is given information that leads him deeper into the mystery and complexity of a past he is not sure was his. People who might be able to help end up having no answers, are unfindable, have died or disappeared. The search takes him to Gay Orlow, whom he finds out has died, one of many dead-ends, enigmatic responses and obstacles: 'Et vous savez qui pourrait me renseigner sur cette… Gay Orlow ? Il m'a jeté un regard attendri. —Mon pauvre ami… personne… Peut-être quelqu'un, en Amérique' (48). Later, still looking for clues about Gay Orlow, impediments are all the more frustrating for their mundanity:

> Cette bribe de phrase que je parvins à saisir me causa un vif découragement… essayant de lui arracher des détails qui me renseigneraient sur mon propre compte et le bruit des métros m'empêchait de l'entendre. (61)

The initial unbreachable distance and absence from self is maintained and repeated in the protagonist's search for his own identity as well as for other people.

Both suicide and absence feature at the outset of *Remise de peine*. After situating the narrative in an era when French theatre groups still toured North Africa, it is the mother's absence that is foregrounded: she leaves the ten-year-old narrator and his brother with her friends. While stated without bitterness or comment, the placement of this absence in the second sentence marks its importance. The short static incipit, which provides greater geographic than temporal anchoring, concentrates on the house and village, deferring description of characters until the following section. The incipit includes a description of Dr Guillotin's grave in the garden and mentions the local pharmacist's suicide, adding to an underlying

macabre tone. This is accompanied by the remark, overheard by the narrator, 'Il paraît que les gens se pendent en été' (12) as well as a later comment about 'la bande de la rue Lauriston' (67). The reported indirect discourse reveals the innocence of the narrator, who reports the words verbatim, without understanding their full significance'. Sentences are short and simple, and several questions are posed with childlike curiosity.

The first voice heard in an all-but-deserted Milanese bar in the opening scene of *Voyage de noces* is that of the barman. It is described as resonating like 'un aboiement funèbre' (12), foreshadowing the news of a woman's suicide in a nearby hotel two days earlier, a woman whom the narrator later realises he knew. Refuge from the 'soleil de plomb' and the 'rayons meurtriers du soleil' (11, 13) is provided by the marble corridors of the hotel, yet, as Tritsmans notes, in this 'réseau de significations symboliques' ('Faits divers' 91), marble also connotes tombstones.

Walking around the fifth arrondissement in the opening scene of *Fleurs de ruine,* the streets are described by the narrator as silent and deserted, the area abandoned (12, 13, 12). The narrator arrives at 26 rue des Fossés-Saint-Jacques where, one night in 1933, a young couple committed suicide in mysterious circumstances. The explanation of the context of the double suicide marks the end of the descriptive static incipit, yet how the first-person narrator is privy to this information is never revealed. A report is mentioned at the beginning of the second section, but its provenance and author are unclear. The narrator finds the streets covered with 'feuilles mortes. Ou les pages calcinées d'un vieux dictionnaire Gaffiot' (11). That the dead leaves are likened to the pages of a dictionary and not another kind of book points to a questioning not only of language but its ability to delineate and define. Moreover, a few pages on, the narrator notices the sign of a closed-down bar that is missing two or three letters, suggesting a gradual crumbling of language.

Further, the area is filled with 'noms surannés', and the optimism of urban signs is in doubt: 'Hôtel de l'Avenir. Quel avenir ?' (11, 11, 12). The incipit goes on to describe the suicide that took place in 1933, noting 'Au cours de la demi-heure qui s'écoula ensuite dans le silence, deux coups sourds retentirent' (14). This establishes silence as an integral part of these scenes, both in the narrative present as an atmospheric component and in the scene from the past, in which silence instils a degree of suspense before the sound of a gunshot.

Modiano's most autobiographical text, *Un pedigree*, mentions the death, suicide, or assassination of no less than sixteen individuals in its first chapter. One of the most disconcerting among them being the suicide of the dog that belonged to Modiano's mother. The text begins matter-of-factly, following a standard autobiographical format detailing the identities of parents and grandparents, the 'pedigree' of the title. His mother, 'une jolie fille au cœur sec' neglected the dog, 'comme elle le fera plus tard avec moi' (9). The animal ends up throwing itself out of the window and Modiano confesses his feeling of solidarity with it.

By the end of the opening scene of *Chien de printemps*, it is clear that all the characters that have been introduced, Jansen, Capa, Colette and the friend of the narrator, have died or disappeared. The entire premise of *Dora Bruder* is centred around the palpable absence of Dora, whose missing-person notice is presented on the first page, staging the meagre materiality of her disappearance. This resonates with the narrator, who has an impression of his own dissolution into his surroundings—'Je n'étais rien, je me confondais avec ce crépuscule, ces rues' (8)—which echoes the stark opening words of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*: 'Je ne suis rien' (11) , and is echoed by the first words of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, 'Presque rien' (11). Bouju identifies the defining quality of nothingness in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* and *Dora Bruder*:

> On retrouve ainsi, tout au long du roman, cette même expérience évoquée par Modiano dans *Dora Bruder*, où le silence des traces laissait au bord d'une révélation touchant à son identité singulière—la conscience du rien qui définit en propre. (66)

Two of the three short stories that make up *Des inconnues*, the title of which introduces the theme of unknown identity, open with statements of absence or death. The second begins, 'Je suis née à Annecy. Mon père est mort quand j'avais trois ans et ma mère est partie vivre avec un boucher des environs' (57), which links to the abattoir of the third short story. For Dominique Meyer-Bolzinger, these absences are generative:

> L'énigme chez Modiano n'est pas mystérieuse : ce n'est pas un fouillis qu'on pourrait ordonner, un code à décrypter, une incongruité à résoudre. L'énigme est avant tout un vide initial qui donne son élan à l'investigation. ('Investigation' 233)

The silence of the detective's absent memory, like the silence of the father and mother through death and departure, is the impetus for investigation and action.

The epigraph of *De si braves garçons* is from Ivan Turgenev's 'Bezhin Meadow'. '… Un si brave garçon!' not only echoes the novel's title and closing words but also pre-empts the successive tragedies in the novel. 'Bezhin Meadow' recounts the stories told by five young men sitting around a campfire one evening, and concludes with the narrator's revelation that Pavlusha, the group's main character, died falling from his horse. This foreshadows, albeit indirectly, the predominantly tragic ends of the various characters in *De si braves garçons.*

iv. Destruction

Several incipits share the theme of destruction of place or the announcement of an ending. *Villa Triste*'s extended, static opening is exemplary of this type, beginning starkly:

> Ils ont détruit l'hôtel de Verdun. C'était un curieux bâtiment, en face de la gare, bordé d'une véranda dont le bois pourrissait. . . . Entre la gare et les pelouses de la place Albert-1er, il y avait un grand vide, maintenant. (13)

This sets the tone for the following paragraphs, many of which open with scenes or descriptions of destruction, desertion or negative change; the second paragraph evokes the impression of crossing 'une ville morte', and the third begins, 'Plus rien ne reste du grand café, de ses lustres, de ses glaces'. A little further on, the opening words of the eighth paragraph return to absence: 'L'Alhambra, lui, a été rasé. Plus aucune trace des jardins qui l'entouraient' (13, 14, 16). A sense of inaction and retraction is compounded in the incipits of the following three paragraphs—'Il est très tard en hiver', 'Les cafés sont fermés', 'On entend le bruit de ses propres pas, dans la rue Sommeiller déserte' (16,17)[10]—all of which are in the present tense, rendering the sense of destruction even more proximate. Modiano is sensitive to the silent testimony of built environment, and in *Villa Triste* particular emphasis is placed on destruction of buildings and the stories to which they have borne witness. In another of Modiano's texts, *Un roman sur Paris en été,* we get a sense of the extent to which place is a source of inspiration and reverie: 'Le bruit de ses pas réveille les fantômes et il écoute, dans le silence de ce quartier, les secrets terribles que les pierres conservaient depuis vingt ans' (5). The destruction of place is accompanied

[10] The street name, *Sommeiller*—to slumber, to nap, to lie dormant—further adds to the atmosphere of inaction and inertia. There is a rue Sommeiller in Annecy, the town on which *Villa Triste* is largely based; however, it is not strictly geography acurate here as the lake is said to border Switzerland.

by a certain sense of anguish since the edifices themselves are the holders of secrets and knowledge.

Immanence of destruction looms in the opening passage of *Quartier perdu*. The protagonist, a writer returning to Paris after a long time overseas, is relieved by the silence of his taxi driver. He describes the deserted avenues as they drive across the city and wonders if it isn't a 'ville fantôme après un bombardement et l'exode de ses habitants' (9). The impression of eerie emptiness is sustained in the following pages with the result that the silent, ghostlike city is interiorised, and the narrator is left wondering whether it is the city or himself that is the phantom. The strangeness is compounded by the detail of his light-green passport (9). We soon discover that he is a British citizen; however, British passports in 1984, the year of the novel's publication, were navy blue. The spell is lifted four pages in when descriptive discourse is punctuated by the first utterance in direct discourse, '– Un message téléphonique, monsieur' (12).

When the narrator of *Fleurs de ruine* comes upon the address where the couple's suicide took place in 1933, it is no longer the same building, but a modern apartment block: 'L'ancien immeuble avait sans doute été rasé une cinquantaine d'années auparavant' (13). Repeated observations of buildings that have been torn down or destroyed with new ones built in their place draws attention to the concrete expressions of the passage of time and the impossibility of return. When buildings disappear, so too do the stories, secrets and testimony that they contain. Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk rightly argues that for Modiano, Paris is a witness, one that has the power to hold accountable: 'elle ne permet pas au narrateur de les [événements passés] oublier et, par surcroît, de se déculpabiliser' (*Mythobiographies* 91). It is through specific names, places and addresses that Modiano's characters find solidity and retrieve memories from silence: 'On se dit qu'au moins les lieux gardent une

légère empreinte des personnes qui les ont habités' (*DB* 28). Thus, Paris appears as a field of flux in which edifices that could offer testimony inevitably disappear, falling into silence as time passes.

v. Diminishment and Reduction

The narrator of *Chien de printemps,* discussed above with regard to the unbroken silence in Jansen's studio, announces unpromisingly in the first sentence, 'je veux dire aujourd'hui le peu de choses que je sais de lui' (11), 'lui' being Francis Jansen, the novel's absent subject. After the narrator announces his intention to retell Jansen's story, he admits, 'Je n'ai jamais eu de nouvelles de lui et j'ignore s'il est mort ou vivant. . . . Jansen demeurerait quelqu'un que j'avais à peine eu le temps de connaître' (17,18). A similar paucity of information is echoed shortly after, in the opening of the fifth fragment: 'De Colette Laurent, je ne savais pas grand-chose. Elle figurait sur de nombreuses photos de Jansen et celui-ci ne l'évoquerait qu'à demi-mot' (28). This contrasts with the more specific markers of time and place in the first lines: 'J'ai connu Francis Jansen quand j'avais dix-neuf ans, au printemps 1964 . . . C'était tôt le matin, dans un café de la place Denfert-Rochereau', and the statement 'je veux dire **aujourd'hui**' (11) in the present tense. Again, in the opening section of fragment XIV, the narrator states that he never returned to Fossombrone in search of traces of Jansen, and 'Je n'ai pas eu de nouvelles récentes des autres personnes que Jansen avait conviées à son « pot d'adieu »' (89). This farewell scene remains suspended in the past and the silences surrounding the characters, their palpable absence, are the stimulus for the story and remain at the novel's centre. The recognition of the expanses of unknown territory and the attention paid to unanswered or unanswerable questions are far greater than that which surrounds

what is known and certain. From the outset, we are confronted with the reality that the information at hand is scant at best. Claude Duchet notes in 'Pour une socio-critique' that a text's incipit is not where it begins, that it never really begins anywhere; all that precedes it in terms of the broader socio, literary and political context, as well as an author's reputation begin the text before its opening page (8). As Peter Brooks notes, reading is often carried out with the 'anticipation of retrospection' (23) and the tacit assurance that a conclusion of sorts will be reached. This anticipation is subverted in *Chien de printemps,* which starts with an admission of paucity and lack, an admission that is reiterated throughout. Questions presented at the opening are no closer to being answered at the end.

The epigraph of *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* is from Stendhal's *Vie de Henry Brulard*: 'Je ne puis pas donner la réalité des faits, je n'en puis présenter que l'ombre' (697). This seems to suggest a similar avowal of the inability to present information directly. Only shadows or impressions are offered, like photographic negatives. While gesturing towards a desire for communication, the epigraph destabilises and casts into doubt the novel's project. Another shadowy epigraph, Dylan Thomas's enigmatic 'Qui es-tu, toi, voyeur d'ombres ?' opens *Villa Triste* and could be addressed to the narrator, the author, or intended as a challenge to the reader to decode that which follows. The evocation of shadows suggests mystery and clandestinity and sets a tone of ambiguity and concealment not only at the initial stage but continuously throughout the novel, which contains eight occurrences of 'd'ombre' or 'ombre(s)'.

Continuing the theme of diminishment, when the narrator of *Vestiaire de l'enfance* confesses at the outset, using an uncannily similar phrase to that in *Chien de printemps*, that his current professional life 'se résume en peu de choses', we have no reason to suspect otherwise. We are given little reason for optimism: 'Voilà pour

l'avenir' (11). The *in medias res* incipit of *Voyage de noces* describes the staged disappearance of the protagonist—'ce sera comme si je n'avais jamais existé' (20)—who escapes to the sweltering streets of Milan, where 'tout est fermé' (12). The opening lines have a hyperbolic emptiness—'Les jours d'été reviendront encore mais la chaleur ne sera jamais aussi lourde ni les rues aussi vides qu'à Milan, ce mardi-là' (11)—recalling the 'ville morte' crossed by Ambroise Guise in *Quartier perdu.*

The opening scene of *Du plus loin de l'oubli* is not devoid of people, but it is empty of personal effects. The narrator recounts a scene that took place thirty years ago in which he directs a couple to the nearest post office, then accompanies them to their hotel room. He remarks:

> Pas de valises. Pas de vêtements. Rien qu'un gros réveil, sur l'une des tables de nuit. Et, malgré ce réveil, on aurait dit qu'ils habitaient ici de manière clandestine en évitant de laisser des traces de leur presence. (11)

It is unclear why he goes with them to their hotel room, a detail that is left in silence and marked graphically by the three or four lines of blank space in between the first and second passages. This opening is one of Modiano's few progressive incipits, providing both immediate action and description, yet it is subverted by the multiple questions left unanswered. Once again, we are presented from the start with fugitive, ephemeral characters who seem to exist so lightly they leave no trace. Further, our attention is directed to the large alarm clock that makes no noise: 'je n'entendais pas son tic-tac' (12). Time has fallen silent here and, as in many other novels, there is an early sign that we are entering a zone where time is unreliable or proceeds differently. The mute clock gently unhinges the narrative from the usual passage of time and reality, with time falling silent signalling a movement into a different plane.

Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier's suspensive incipit, 'Presque rien' (11), recalls the 'Je ne suis rien' opening of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures.* The 'Presque rien', which the narrator, Daragane, compares to an insect bite, turns out to be the telephone ringing. It is the first time it has rung for months and it isn't a welcome call. Kawakami sees the bite as 'irresistibly reminiscent of Barthes' punctum from *La Chambre claire,* especially as Daragane's epiphany also involves a photo' (*Self-Conscious* 152). As well as recalling the opening of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* ('Je ne suis rien'), the opening 'Presque rien' returns at the end of the novel, when it is reiterated in a similarly unsettling key, announcing the narrator's abandonment:

> Au début, ce n'est presque rien, le crissement des pneus sur le gravier, un bruit de moteur qui s'éloigne, et il vous faut un peu de temps encore pour vous rendre compte qu'il ne reste plus que vous dans la maison. (146)

The return creates a circular structure and reverberates poignantly as it returns to the greater silence of the literal end of the novel. In addition to 'presque rien' bookending the novel, the insect bite to which it was first connected in the incipit reappears on page 33. Here the pain it causes develops into a tearing sensation, closely linked to the conflation of past and present, which 'n'étaient séparés que par une paroi de cellophane'. The initial 'presque rien' gathers meaning over the course of the novel and is connected not only to the telephone call that summons him from his retreat, his abandonment, but also contributes to the sense of destruction or piercing of linear time.

vi. Withholding and Doubt

The final salient theme in Modiano's openings is that of information withheld, germane to the announcements of paucity of information discussed in relation to

Chien de printemps and *Vestiaire de l'enfance*. In the latter, a series of screens appear between the narrator and what he is looking at, such as the one-way window of Cisernos Airways, the soundproof glass at Radio Mundial and the image of a silent-film screen (21, 26, 27), all of which create distance between people. Withholding and doubt are also linked to reticence of speech and weakness of voice, such as the hesitation or refusal to provide testimony in *Un cirque passe* and *La Petite Bijou.* As discussed, the subject of *Dora Bruder* is Dora's disappearance and eventual deportation and Cooke notes that of the text's twenty-six sections, ten begin with a note of 'inquiry, disappearance, emptiness or lack of knowledge' (*Present Pasts* 293).

The narrator's father in *Les boulevards de ceinture* tries to hear what is being said between two other characters in the opening scene and is put through a painful and humiliating cheek-pinching exercise as punishment for his curiosity; Marcheret warns, 'Ça t'apprendra, Chalva, à être trop curieux…' (19). Here, remaining in silence and wilful ignorance is safer and, as such, it is a relief that Marcheret's 'rares propos' become indistinguishable 'borborygmes' (19). Remaining in ignorance is safer, but it is also a form of exclusion. The power dynamics of being held at a distance heightens a sense of intrigue and hierarchy. As the group continues its evening of decadence and consumption, silence increases and light decreases, fading gradually: 'Ils demeurent prostrés et silencieux dans la pénombre qui les ronge' (20). Whereas the stark light silenced their voices earlier in the scene—'Elle [une lumière crue] pèse sur eux comme une ouate et étouffe le son de leurs voix' (18)—here the lack of light is linked to silence, a lack that, moreover, seems to eliminate the people. Just as the scene is about to re-petrify into a 'vieille photographie', Marcheret moves abruptly, the scene simultaneously lights up and animation returns creating a strange, unsteady rhythm.

A different kind of withholding is manifest in *L'horizon.* Rather than being excluded from the conversations of others, the protagonist, Bosmans, is held at a distance from his own memory, which is too fragmented and distant to access. *L'horizon* is one of Modiano's rare novels with an extradiegetic narrator, and here the incipit steps into Bosmans' psychological world. There are elements of Del Lungo's static and suspensive incipits here, in both cases delaying action. As we have seen in many other novels, the focus is on the unreachable or absent memories:

> Depuis quelque temps Bosmans pensait à certains épisodes de sa jeunesse, des épisodes sans suite, coupés net, des visages sans noms, des rencontres fugitives. Tout cela appartenait à un passé lointain, mais comme ces courtes séquences n'étaient pas liées au reste de sa vie, elles demeuraient en suspens, dans un présent éternel. (9)

He is cut off, his own past silenced, and again the silence in the form of rupture from oneself proves generative. Like the narrator of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, who embarks on a search for himself, Bosmans procures himself a notebook and takes down details in an attempt to create links between isolated fragments of memory. However, despite his persistence, the fragments and traces are held fast in a suspended silence: 'Il ne cesserait de se poser des questions là-dessus, et il n'aurait jamais de réponses. Ces bribes seraient toujours pour lui énigmatiques' (9), the conditional 'cesserait', 'n'aurait' and 'seraient' prolong the suspense into the present, thwarting any expectation of revelation. The narrative is set up as a form of investigation and, like Ambrose Guise, Bosmans is both subject and object. In *Poétique de la prose,* Tzvetan Todorov describes the detective novel as being structured around two narratives, one absent—the crime, the murder, etc.—and one present, the investigation. However, in these cases, the events precipitating the investigation are unknown, rendering the narrative doubly absent. An investigation

is underway, but the reason for it is unknown. Like Bosmans, readers are left with unanswered and apparently unanswerable questions. The statement in the opening paragraph, 'Il ne cesserait de se poser des questions là-dessus, et il n'aurait jamais de réponses', while pertaining to Bosmans specifically, could also be read as true of Modiano's project more generally. By foregrounding narratives replete from the outset with modulations of silence, readers are made to experience the state of unknowing and unknowability, propelled into an un-renounceable search, stretching towards something that is always out of reach.

In *L'horizon,* the situation is further complicated as the harder one concentrates on a particular memory, the more fugitive it becomes; memories have to be approached cautiously. Slipping into free indirect discourse, Bosmans explains his method:

> Il ne fallait pas trop se concentrer là-dessus de crainte que le scintillement ne s'éteigne pour de bon. . . . Faire semblant de penser à autre chose, le seul moyen pour que le souvenir se précise de lui-même, tout naturellement, sans le forcer. (11)

It is only by looking sidelong at these fragile memory-objects that their luminescence might be captured and prevented from falling definitively into silence. For the multi-text reader, this refers back to Jansen's advice that you have to approach things 'en douceur et en silence sinon elles se rétractent' (*CdP* 99).

L'herbe des nuits returns to a familiar protagonist, Jean, and to the same notebooks and fragments of memories. The *in medias res* incipit opens with Jean trying to reassure himself: 'Pourtant je n'ai pas rêvé' (9). If Jean's memories in *L'herbe des nuits* remain just as distant and ineffectual in this novel as they are in *L'horizon,* it is increasingly due to his sense of being alone with them: 'Plus personne avec qui en parler' (9). The short opening paragraph is made up of a series of short phrases—'Il

doit bien se trouver deux ou trois témoins encore vivants. Mais ils ont sans doute tout oublié. Et puis, on finit par se demander s'il y a eu vraiment des témoins' (9)—extending the doubt from the memory of an event to whether there was ever really anyone who bore witness, implying that forgetting is akin to erasing. In *L'herbe des nuits*, the narrator's attempt to reassure himself of the veracity of his memory returns like an anaphora in the incipit of the second paragraph, with 'non' in place of 'pourtant': 'Non, je n'ai pas rêvé' (9). Proof of reality is provided by the notebooks filled with fragments, some of which are more resonant than others, 'Surtout quand rien ne trouble le silence' (10). The protagonist's memories are most eloquent in a silent, uninterrupted, almost deathly atmosphere: 'Ils doivent croire que je suis mort' (10). The narrator is acutely sensitive to the generative potential of silence, since it is only in silence that the most fragile memories can reappear. With the most heightened concentration, some are still accessible: 'quelque noms se détachent avec netteté dans le silence et sur la page blanche…' (10). The names that emerge induce a malaise or reverie that some sort of twin is in proximity, a twin who exists outside linear time and continues living a parallel or past life around rue Montparnasse. Silence is the prerequisite associated with this slip into an awareness of an atemporal, parallel existence. Modiano's later novels, from *Dans le café de la jeunesse* onwards are increasingly preoccupied with time, the nature of its movement, coexistent temporal layers and suspension. The relationship between time, memory and silence is introduced from the outset of the novels and the difficulty of fugitive memory announced at the beginning of *L'horizon* seems to find its answer in the silence of the incipit of *L'herbe des nuits*.

Many of Modiano's incipits present not just one but several of these themes, compounding the notion of starting from emptiness, diminishment and lack. The same essential absence at the foundation of the novel is expressed in various ways.

The distance between a narrator and his or her memory is mirrored for the narrator—and readers too—through the experience of information withheld.

vii. Exceptions

There are certain exceptions to the general tendencies: the first short story of *Des inconnues* is one such exception. The young female protagonist is leaving France for the beaches of Torremolinos and the story begins in an outward-looking, positive tone. However, it begins in autumn: 'Cette année-là, l'automne est venu plus tôt que d'habitude, avec la pluie, les feuilles mortes, la brume sur les quais de la Saône' (9). Unlike spring, autumn is not usually associated with new beginnings, and here, the season has come early, bringing the end of the year forward. It also features 'brume', which, as will be discussed, is one of the symbols associated with silence and dissimulation. In another exception, the seemingly placid and happy opening scene of *Une jeunesse*—'Les enfants jouent dans le jardin et ce sera bientôt l'heure de la partie d'échecs quotidienne'—(9) is checked by the fractured arm of Louis and Odile's son. The opening scene also announces the closure of 'Sunny Home', the holiday centre for children that the couple run. However, it is not a regrettable end and after Louis has pulled the nails from the sign and put it away, 'Il se sent soulagé. Le home d'enfants, c'est fini' (10). Beginning with an end here seems to be a way of embedding the negative within the positive and placing a note of termination into the incipit. Struck by the pale skin of her son's arm when the plaster cast is removed, Odile wonders, tellingly, if 'la vie recommence à zero à trente-cinq ans ?' (12), raising the question of whether it is possible to sever and silence a section of one's life from the past and begin again. The desire to start from scratch is felt by many of Modiano's characters, one example of which is the aptly named 'Newman' in *De si*

braves garçons. The narrator asks him why he has changed his name, to which he replies: 'Parce que je recommence ma vie à zéro' (177). Finally, Modiano's 2017 novel, *Souvenirs Dormants,* opens with the recollection of a book title, *Le Temps des rencontres*. The narrator admits 'Pour moi aussi, il y a eu un temps des rencontres, dans un passé lointain' (9). The past perfect tense and 'passé lointain' situate this period of meeting people far in the past, and we are left with the impression that there has been little activity or newness for a long time. In addition, the narrator falters, unsure how to tell his story:

> Dois-je vraiment parler tout de suite de Martine Hayward et des quelques individus disparates qui l'entouraient, ces soirs-là ? Ou bien suivre l'ordre chronologique ? Je ne sais plus. (10)

* * *

With every beginning, something happens, but what emerges through this study of Modiano's incipits is that the initial something, in nearly all cases, is an iteration of absence, not knowing or silence. The concrete silences, declarations of paltry knowledge, suicides, deaths, absent identities, 'rien's, 'presque rien's and settings that foreground architectural destruction or are so empty they take on a morbid or ghostly atmosphere, all perform the initiating move into the fictional realm with an expression of lack. Following from this, silences are restated and reiterated continuously, modulations of silence are progressively layered, constructing narratives around and from traces, unknowns and unobtainable answers. The plethora of unanswered questions raised is like a litany to the unknown, with an assurance of silences returned in response. Each new narrative voice speaks and formulates the silence, rather than breaking it.

Viart draws attention to the generative potential in the context of archival silences rather than those of personal memory:

> Que la pulsion d'écriture puisse naître d'un défaut de l'archive aussi bien que d'une rencontre de l'archive est particulièrement significatif. Dans les deux cas c'est l'*insavoir*, plus que la curiosité, qui met l'écriture en branle. Mais cet insavoir stimule ainsi l'invention.' ('Silence des pères' 109)

In Modiano's case, the unknown and its related themes are not only the stimulus for writing and creation but also the objects and central themes of the novels themselves.

Employing Del Lungo's classification system is intended not as a strict structural framework, but an approximate measure to find out whether general characteristics and tropes can be identified. All four of Del Lungos' main types are represented and the predominant type corresponds to Del Lungo's static incipit, providing description while delaying action and corresponding to the codifying function which conveys certain unavoidable structural features such as the narrator or narrating voice but defers action. To a greater or lesser extent, openings are infused with reservation and uncertainty, a minor or major misgiving that initiates a process of destabilisation. The extent of destabilisation is sometimes not made manifest until later, as in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, in which the full impact of abandonment and loss implied by the 'presque rien' of the incipit's *piqûre* is not delivered until the novel's closing lines. A pattern that is even more significant than the stillness of the predominantly static incipits is the statement of some form of lack or absence, initiating the narrative with the presentation of fragmented and eliminated material.

While Del Lungo's study of incipits is, as he states, synchronous, he concludes with a broad, and explicitly non-rigid diachronic classification. He makes a case for

the prominence of the static incipit in realist novels, the rise of the dynamic incipit in the nineteenth century, and a gradual rise in the *in medias res* incipit. The post-war period is described by Del Lungo as the period of the 'refusal of the beginning' (*L'Incipit romanesque* 176). Modiano's novels, at least those from *Les boulevards de ceinture* onwards do not perform the striking formal rupture like those of Samuel Beckett or Claude Simon cited by Del Lungo. They do not shout silence and absence from the first lines and they do not stubbornly refuse to start. However, there is an undercurrent of undermined confidence in the literary project expressed through the sheer uncertainty, doubt and ambiguity presented in the incipits. Modiano himself commented at the very beginning of his writing career: 'la forme romanesque semble de plus en plus périmée', 'il n'y a rien de plus anachronique aujourd'hui que le roman' (Ezine 22, 25). In the pre-war world, there had been greater confidence in the capacity of art to transmit some form of universal and knowable message. In contrast, Modiano's world belongs to a later, more dispersed and precarious phase of civilisation, where too much has broken down for art to have such confidence; he alluded to this loss of confidence in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech (*Discours* 30). This does not equal a loss of faith in literature, or a turning away from the novel form, but the abundance of absences could be seen as a consequence or reflection of the departure of past certainties.

Chapter 2: Silence of Rupture

The opening silences of the incipits illustrate the plurality of silences in Modiano's work and they sketch a portrait of narrators who, while breaking silence in the act of beginning, also speak and produce silence. These incipits quietly undermine traditional expectations, replacing a fullness that one might anticipate from an opening with elements of emptiness, starting with very little, sometimes nothing at all. As well as beginning with silence quite tangibly, creating atmospheres of silence and lack from the start, Modiano's texts can be seen to move from or be symptomatic of a different register of silence. These silences relate to the unsaid and the unconveyed bound up in transference of familial, intergenerational and social heritage. Interruptions in continuity and transmission mark ruptures that can be experienced as forms of silencing which, in turn, provide the grounds for reinvestigation and imagination. They play a generative role in that it is not what is passed on, but rather the consequence of not passing on that instigates movement. In an interview with Christian Ono-dit-Biot given at the time of the publication of *Souvenirs dormants*, Modiano said, 'On décide d'écrire parce qu'il y a quelque chose qui cloche, sinon on se contenterait de vivre' (11:14). If everything were fine, it would be a different story, or no story at all, but there is something not quite right that spurs a response, and this is often an omission, a story not fully told or a gap in understanding.

The most conspicuous silences of transmission in Modiano's work are at the familial level, in the father–son and other parent–child relationships. Beyond this, a

more diffuse and disquieting sense of discontinuity underpins Modiano's work, on a broader, cultural and social level. Although these expressions of rupture in Modiano's work are distinct and distinguishable, they are deeply interrelated and become more so as the opus progresses and as layering and intertextual references become increasingly dense. Beyond the familial and intergenerational context, the trauma of interrupted transmission of heritage is linked to and informed by the broader historical ruptures of the Second World War, which in turn echo earlier historical upheavals. Ultimately, since questions posed within Modiano's narratives are predominantly unanswered, unanswerable, or lead to further questions, the unsaids, unsayables and palpable absences become the (anti-)centres around which the novels turn. These themes are taken up by Dominique Viart in his formulation of the *récit de filiation* genre: 'le besoin de savoir et parfois le soupçon que l'insavoir instille suscitent l'enquête . . . Plutôt que de livrer le produit de l'enquête, c'est l'enquête elle-même qu'il raconte' ('Silence des pères' 105). Seen from this angle, such texts seem to move from silence, from a place of conscious not knowing, and sketch the contours of that which can't be known or that which is impossible to convey, delineating, through the search, the shape of un-transmitted heritage.

Different forms of silence, the consequences of varying degrees of rupture and interruption of transmission, function as generating forces that inform and instigate, serving as vectors that direct and carry narrative. I discuss the violent, phantasmagorical treatment of filiation in Modiano's first novels before moving on to more autobiographical texts, *Livret de famille*, *Remise de peine* and *Un pedigree*, published in 1977, 1988 and 2005 respectively, to illustrate evolutions in the treatment of different levels of rupture. Recurring patterns and motifs of interrupted, failed and ephemeral sources of familial or cultural belonging are explored, with many texts staging connections that are at best fleeting, but are more frequently,

impossible. The continuing absence of connections and responses to questions about the past suggests that it is precisely the void they produce that holds Modiano's interest and remains central to his oeuvre.

Rupture in the First Degree

At the intimate, familial level, the father–son relationship, and, to a lesser extent, the mother–daughter relationship, furnish the most immediate and fraught instances of silence and rupture of heritage, and are evident more or less immediately in all of Modiano's novels. Across his complete body of work, this source of familial rupture resurfaces in various guises, making it one of the thematic mainstays of his novels. Modiano self-effacingly referred to the effect of his early family context in his Nobel acceptance speech:

> Je ne voudrais pas vous ennuyer avec mon cas personnel mais je crois que certains épisodes de mon enfance ont servi de matrice à mes livres, plus tard. Je me trouvais le plus souvent loin de mes parents, chez des amis auxquels ils me confiaient et dont je ne savais rien, et dans des lieux et des maisons qui se succédaient. . . . Cette volonté de résoudre des énigmes sans y réussir vraiment et de tenter de percer un mystère m'a donné l'envie d'écrire, comme si l'écriture et l'imaginaire pouvaient m'aider à résoudre enfin ces énigmes et ces mystères. (22-23)

In *La place de l'étoile*, the father–son relationship is presented as one of antagonism, contradiction and combat, as well as strange tenderness and pity. The protagonist's name is Schlemilovitch; '-ovitch' means 'son of' and 'schlemihl' denotes an unlucky,

idiotic character in Yiddish.[11] The first appearance of the narrator's father is in a re-enactment of a play written by Schlemilovitch, in which the son, wearing an SS uniform, strangles the father, dressed in orthodox Jewish clothing and singing the Kol Nidre.[12] Shortly after, the protagonist remembers that his father is actually in America running a kaleidoscope business, a pursuit befitting his mercurial, fragmentary nature.

The strident symbolism inherent in the theatrical murder of the father by the son against the backdrop of the extermination of Jews in the Second World War is one of the earliest and most striking portrayals of the father–son rupture in a specific historical context. When his father leaves, Schlemilovitch remarks,

> Je regrettai amèrement le départ de mon père. Pour moi commençait l'âge adulte. Sur le ring, il ne restait qu'un seul boxeur. Il s'envoyait des directs à lui-même. Bientôt il s'écroulerait. (73)

This leaves the reader with a poignant image of a deeply internecine relationship: either they destroy each other, or, alone, they self-destruct. Philippe Zard sees the whole novel as a formulation of the question 'How could I kill my father?' When Schlemilovitch asks 'comment pourrais-je vous tuer ?', we are invited to understand the question both in the sense, 'How could I possibly do it?' and the practical sense of 'By what means would it be done?' (60, 72). Patricidal tendencies are given ground in a fictional series of publications written into the novel, *Comment tuer votre père*, co-authored by André Breton and Jean-Paul Sartre in which young people are encouraged to thoroughly insult their fathers before killing them (59). This is

[11] Peter Schlemihl is the protagonist of an 1814 moral novella, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* (*Peter Schlemihl's Miraculous Story*), written by Adelbert von Chamisso, an exiled French aristocrat. Schlemihl sells his shadow to an incarnation of the Devil for a bottomless purse and is consequently rejected by his fellow humans. When he falls sick, he is cared for by his former community, but eventually leaves and finds contentment in his solitary study of the natural world.

[12] The Kol Nidre is a Jewish prayer recited on the eve of Yom Kippur. The first words are a legal formula recited three times, absolving Jews from vows made under duress.

inverted in Modiano's subsequent novel, *La ronde de nuit*, in which the narrator reads Madame Léon Daudet's *Comment élever nos filles* (a real book), both books demonstrating the concern for the mechanics of filiation.

Schlemilovitch works his way through a number of substitute father figures before morphing into his biological father and taking over his father's job alongside Bonny and Laffont at the French Gestapo. He is eventually executed at the Gestapo's Paris headquarters, but rises again, appearing in Vienna on Freud's couch. In pursuit of his father, he puts himself in his shoes, and even in his mind. Morris notes: 'en poursuivant Albert, Modiano finit par s'assimiler à lui, à tel point qu'il s'approprie même les souvenirs de celui-ci' (*Patrick Modiano,* 2000 56). A few novels later, in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, Jimmy Pedro Stern, whom the amnesiac, protagonist Guy Roland thinks he might have been, and Freddie Howard de Luz, a childhood friend, both share Modiano's father Albert's year of birth of, 1912 (177, 179, 236). In addition, Freddie's birthdate is an amalgamation of Patrick Modiano's, July 30, and Albert Modiano's, 1912. The conflation between the search for self and the search for the father is intertwined to the point of being entangled, indicating that it is not just his own identity, but also the knowledge of his lineage that he is searching for.

The frenetic rhythm of *La place de l'étoile* continues throughout Modiano's second novel, and in his third, *Les boulevards de ceinture*, the pace slows, but the search endures. Here, however, the father does not recognise his son, Serge Alexandre, or feigns not to. The derisory and sardonic tone of the first two novels is replaced by a sort of fatalistic sympathy, and when the father tries to kill the son by pushing him under a train in a kind of Oedipus reversal—another violent symbol of rupture—the son is as unsurprised as he is unangered (98). The novel opens and closes with the narrator looking at a photo of his father, as if in a mirror. Again, the search is internalised; the father cannot provide answers, so the investigation has to

be led by the son, and the two figures merge: 'Je me perdrai dans le dédale des rues, à la recherche de votre ombre. Jusqu'à me confondre avec elle' (179). In an interview given not long after the publication of *Les boulevards de ceinture*, when talking about his father's reaction to anti-Semitism, Modiano stated, 'Je me mets à la place de mon père. . . . J'endosse sa propre peau pour répondre . . . il ne souciait pas de répliquer, il n'avait pas les armes' (Brunn 10). Identifying with the father is part of an effort to understand his father's reality and the mentalities of the time.

Commenting on *Les boulevards de ceinture*, Dominique Fernandez concluded, 'Notre époque qui se débat entre le meurtre des pères et la nostalgie des pères trouvera dans ce livre un miroir éclatant', highlighting the difficult position of experiencing both anger and regret, shared to some extent by a whole generation. After a thoroughly derisory portrait, the more sympathetic approach in this third novel sets the tone for the treatment of the father figure in subsequent texts. He and his life remain objects of mystery and deep ambivalence, and are regarded with a mixture of suspicion and sympathy. There is no real conclusion and the outlook isn't particularly optimistic. Despite his efforts, the father never acknowledges Serge Alexandre as his son and in turn Serge fails to save his father from the ambush set up for him at the end. Just before the final devastating scene, the father finally explains himself, but even though he is sitting next to him, Serge cannot hear his father, whose voice is muted by distane and time: 'Je vous entendais mal, comme si vous me parliez au téléphone. Un filet de voix étouffé par la distance et les années' (147). Marcheret has a similar story. He joined the Légion to go in search of his father, but finds only 'la solitude, le sable et les mirages du desert' (71). Viart notes that one of the characteristics of the *récit de filiation* is that 'Les pères n'apparaissent plus comme des garants d'un système de pensée, mais comme les victimes d'une Histoire qui s'est jouée d'eux' ('Filiations littéraires' 121). In this light, the shift to a

more sympathetic tone can be understood in a broader context, with the father now in the position of victim rather than authority.

Modiano's more autobiographical works *Livret de famille*, *Remise de peine,* and *Un pedigree,* fill in or shed light on the silences and deficits of transmission in relation to his parents, Albert Modiano and Louisa Colpeyn. Recurring motifs and continued concerns show the persistent and unresolved nature of rupture in the novels, published in a period of some five decades. There is, however, a discernible shift by the end of *Un pedigree.* Although the idea of catharsis is treated with circumspection, the possibility of less laboured relationships in the future is alluded to.

Autobiographical Works

i. *Livret de famille* (1977)

Livret de famille is the first work Modiano published after becoming a father. Although the work bears no indication of genre, the editors' note on the back cover describes it as 'un livre où l'autobiographie la plus précise se mêle aux souvenirs imaginaires' and the narrator is referred to throughout as Patrick or M. Modiano, inviting a reading that is based, at least partially, on the author's lived experience. It is the first major statement of Modiano's status as a writer, as Nettelbeck and Hueston note: 'Modiano présente ce texte pour révéler son identité d'écrivain. C'est cette identité qui est le véritable sujet du livre' (80). Indeed, Modiano writes at the end of the twelfth section, 'J'avais dix-sept ans et il ne me restait plus qu'à devenir un écrivain français' (190). The first of fifteen chapters or vignettes[13] begins with the

[13] Although the back-matter states that there are fourteen parts, there are in fact fifteen, marked with roman numerals.

new father registering his daughter's birth in the eponymous *livret de famille*[14] at the town hall and describes his reverence for this mysterious document, as well as other official genealogical records and certificates. The document's talismanic attraction is linked to his own blurry lineage:

> On avait laissé en blanc les lignes correspondant à : « fils de », pour ne pas entrer dans les méandres de mon état civil. J'ignore en effet où je suis né et quel nom, au juste, portaient mes parents lors de ma naissance. (12)

His parents' marriage certificate is stapled onto his *livret* and, since their wedding took place during the Occupation, his father is listed under a false name. Just three pages in, we come to the first of countless questions about his parents and family: 'Que faisaient mon père et ma mère en février 1944 à Megève ? … Et ce « de Jonghe » que mon père avait ajouté à son premier nom d'emprunt ?' (13). Near the end of the section is another flurry of questions:

> Et lui ? avait-il été enregistré à un état civil quelconque ? Quelle était sa nationalité d'origine ? Belge ? Allemand ? Balte ? Plutôt Russe, je crois. Et mon père, avant qu'il ne s'appelât « Jaspaard » et qu'il n'eût ajouté « de Jonghe » à ce nom ? Et ma mère ? Et tous les autres ? Et moi ? (25)

Clearly, beginning his own family does not put questions about his parents to rest, but rather instigates renewed interrogation. Leaving the hospital, Modiano unexpectedly meets Koromindé, an old friend of his father's in a bar. Neither have heard from Albert Modiano for over ten years: 'Nous ignorions l'un et l'autre ce qu'il était devenu' (14). Father–son severance seems complete, yet this chance appearance of Koromindé at the moment of his daughter's birth reunites him with

[14] While the text on the back cover explains that a *livret de famille* is the document that attaches 'tout être humain' to his or her society, Colin Nettelbeck and Penelope Hueston point out that it is in fact specific to French civil administration. In the English-speaking world there is no equivalent, but it is comparable to a certificate of births, deaths and marriages.

the past, causing notions of lineage and heritage to resurface. Koromindé drives Modiano to the town hall at 'une allure de procession' (17), conjuring an atmosphere of solemnity and ceremony as Koromindé points out places connected to his father, as if handing over part of his heritage. Later, as they return to inner Paris on foot, Koromindé recounts how he once visited a garage in the area with Modiano's father, and how he had later come back to search for it, in vain. We are not told why he wanted to find this particular garage; it could be an anodyne comment, but considered in the light of subsequent novels in which garages figure as important centres of mystery and trepidation linked to the enigma of the father, it is unlikely to be insignificant, and links into the greater network of garages, their names and addresses.[15]

Reverence for the *livret de famille* is reiterated at the end of the first section; apparently neither Koromindé nor the narrator had ever had a complete *état civil*, and the daughter's registration marks the beginning of something, she becomes their delegate for the future (27). Her identity is not, like theirs, relegated to the silence and danger of irregularity. The disconnectedness he feels from his family lineage and the ironic treatment of any sense of belonging contrast with the official registration and acknowledgement of his child and a great sense of peace accompanies the possibility of instating officialdom and continuity. The desire for *régularité* is, of course, connected to the dangers and complications of classification during the Occupation. As recounted in *Dora Bruder* and *Un pedigree,* Modiano's father only just escaped deportation through his connections, having been made an outlaw because of his official identity (*DB* 62, 64, *UP* 14-16).

[15] Emna Beltaïef's Remise de peine *de Modiano. Voyage au pays de l'enfance* (2013), interprets the list of thirty-one garages that appears in this text. She classifies them broadly into two kinds: ones that are associated with the father and the seventeenth arrondissement, related to secrecy, absence, disappearance and loss, and those which are, in contrast, sources of happiness.

The third vignette relates to Modiano's grandmother. Despite being the shortest, at just three pages, it contains eight questions, of which all but one are left unanswered. There are multiple statements of not knowing—'Je l'ignore', 'peut-être', 'D'elle je ne sais presque rien', 'Je ne connais pas son visage car toutes les photographies—s'il y en avait—ont disparu' (43-45)— which create a tone of interrogation as well as powerlessness. The section ends:

> J'ai voulu moi aussi en savoir plus, mais je n'ai pas encore trouvé la moindre trace, la moindre preuve du passage de James Levy sur la terre. J'ai même consulté les archives à la mairie d'Enghien. (45)

The few details he does know, especially about the disappearance of James Levy, with whom his grandmother stayed during the First World War, indicate violent familial rupture caused by external upheavals. The state of not knowing, the silence of the archives, and stymied inquisition are at the centre of this brief, emotive account. In contrast, Modiano manages to find his own baptismal certificate from a small parish church in Biarritz, yet its discovery creates more questions: 'Qui a pris l'initiative ? Et pourquoi sommes-nous restés près d'un an à Biarritz ?' (114). The discovery of the site of his baptism—the ceremonial admission into the family of the Church—doesn't turn out to be all that meaningful. Rather, it reveals the absence of connection, as Nettelbeck and Hueston note, 'le certificat de baptême tant recherché ouvre sur le vide' (88). The section ends on an ironic note: 'c'était tout de même réconfortant d'avoir retrouvé son ancienne paroisse' (115). Despite having discovered the place of his baptism and obtaining the certificate, no veritable sense of heritage or history has been found.

In the second vignette, a certain Henri Marignan involves the young protagonist in his farfetched plans to relocate to China. Marignan is the first in a series of father figures in *Livret de famille* and shares many characteristics with

Modiano *père*: they wear their hair in the same style and have a predilection for rubber-soled shoes (29). The narrator says: 'Parfois, il me semble même qu'il fut l'une des multiples incarnations de mon père' (28). 'Marignan' returns in the ninth vignette in association with his father—'un restaurant de la rue Marignan, presque à l'angle de l'avenue des Champs-Elysées. C'était mon père' (127)—and in *Remise de peine,* in which it is on the rue Marignan that his father is caught in a round-up (83). Henri Marignan's fate is unknown—'J'ignore ce qu'il est devenu' (28)—much like that of the vanished father of the first vignette. Like the fathers and father substitutes in other novels, Marignan straddles a morally ambiguous line; during the war he associated both with the International Brigade, which opposed dictatorship in Spain, and La Cagoule, a French fascist group. Like the real father, Marignan is surrounded by mystery and Modiano finds out about Marignan's past not from him, but from an unnamed third party: 'Au bout de quelque temps, j'ai su à qui j'avais affaire. Cela n'est pas venu de lui car il ne parlait de son passé que si je lui posais des questions' (29). Towards the end of the chapter, Patrick wonders why he became involved in the plan to go to China and recognises the unrealistic hopes he had pinned on Marignan: 'Je me persuadais que là se trouvaient mes racines, mon foyer, mon terroir, toutes ces choses qui me manquaient' (41). Having begun with Marignan as a simulacrum father, the vignette ends with this statement of rootlessness and lack of belonging.

Bruce Tellegen,[16] an ageing actor he works with on a film set, is another paternal figure. He bids Patrick goodnight every evening by saying, 'Thank you, my son…' (106). He gives world-weary advice to the young writer, most of which is forgotten with the exception of one piece of advice: 'dans la vie, il ne faut jamais

[16] He shares his surname with Lou Tellegen, a Dutch-born silent-film actor whose life ended tragically in Hollywood. There are other key similarities but the careers of the two actors diverge substantially.

écouter les conseils des autres' (106), which is revealing in that this pitiful father figure advises the narrator not to look to anyone for advice, not even himself. The two men are both remarkably tall, suggesting the conflation of the father figure and son in yet another guise. The world of cinema is presented as a potential substitute family for the young writer; the director, Georges Rollner, inebriated, declares, 'Nous sommes tous parents entre nous… Le cinéma est une grande famille…' (108), before going to vomit, making his pronouncement somewhat less appealing. He pleads with the young scriptwriter to add in the line, 'Figurez-vous qu'on peut être juif et être un as de l'aviation, monsieur…' (99), which he describes as 'tout ce que j'avais à dire' (108). Modiano's mother worked in cinema and it was through the German-controlled company Continental Films that she established herself in Paris during the Occupation. Although Modiano had already written for film (*Lacombe Lucien* 1974) and would continue to do so, the industry, which was predominantly his mother's territory, is not presented here as offering a particularly attractive or wholesome community.

The fragmentary vignettes featuring multiple father figures provide a means of indirect interrogation of the real father. The ultimately fruitless project to write the biography of Denise Dressel's father, Harry, relayed in the twelfth section, is interspersed with elements of his own father's biography. The last time Harry was seen before disappearing was at a villa just like 'Tara' in *Gone with the Wind*, and earlier, Koromindé wonders if Albert Modiano still looks like Rhett Butler. Denise is obsessed with her father, whom she last saw around ten years earlier: 'elle avait dit : « Une Dressel », comme elle aurait dit une Habsbourg ou une Luisgnan' (173). Since the narrator is besotted with Denise, he adopts her fascination: 'elle, c'était le seul sujet qui l'intéressait. Je lui ai dit que moi aussi son père m'intriguait au plus haut point' (173). Like Albert Modiano, little is known about Denise's father, but the

silence surrounding Harry Dressel is greatly amplified; he seems the very substance of silence and absence; when they dine out, a place is respectfully reserved for the absent father: 'Le silence. Une lumière ambrée. J'avais toujours soin de choisir une table à trois places, au cas où Harry Dressel, ouvrant la porte…' (186). There is a photographic melding of parent and child, similar to the mirror-photograph at the beginning and end of *Les boulevards de ceinture*: Denise has her portrait taken in the same pose as her father and with same lighting, making them look more like brother and sister. The gifts Denise brings represent a further conflation: she buys him Bülow's *Mémoires* (175), which, we find out two vignettes later, was the same book his father would read in the evenings before he was born (207).

As well as according a central place to the absent, unwritable life, the Dressel story gives an insight into Modiano's process; from the fragments of information surrounded by expanses of silence, blanks are filled in through imagination. In an interview with Maryline Heck, Modiano talked about the incentive to create: 'la motivation, la pulsion à écrire, c'est pour moi toujours de partir d'une disparition, de construire une quête à partir de là.' Absence and disappearance become productive elements and disappearances and voids become the drivers of fictional searches.

Livret de famille interrogates immediate family members and also makes a place for many non-blood relations who are brought into a large alternative family circle. It also proposes various alternatives to a 'real' family, with varying degrees of success. There is the cinema and the Church, and a number of foreign countries such as China, Portugal and Switzerland offer the possibility of making a break with the father and mother and a break with France. These abundant substitute family members and father figures contrast with the paucity of knowledge of his own heritage, which gives rise to the desire to create his own family on his terms. His uncle Alex rules himself and his father out as a source of stable identity, stressing: 'Il

faut essayer de trouver des racines', 'On ne peut pas toujours être un homme de nulle part…', 'Ton père et moi, nous sommes des hommes de nulle part, comprends-tu ?', 'tu sais que nous n'avons même pas un acte de naissance… une fiche d'état civil…' (156-157). Discontinuity and the problems of identity and its sources are manifested in the text's fragmentation, the seeming lack of chronological order and the way characters narrate 'par bribes' (Douzou, 'Du blanc' 298). Rather than a coherent récit, *Livret de famille* presents us with 'une anthologie *d'extraits* de diverses vies qui constituent progressivement un registre familial' (Nettelbeck and Hueston 79), marking an attempt to fill the blanks and respond to the abounding silences and absence of knowledge.

The narrator is weighed down by the burden of memory that precedes his own birth and the inexplicable recollection of some ignoble characters from the Occupation period. Switzerland represents a place of neutrality and atemporality, 'un pays plus proche qui n'avait pas connu les tourmentes ni les souffrances du siècle : la Suisse' (*LF* 117), where the general sense of non-reality is couched in a peaceful 'silence d'ouate' (118). However, the escape Switzerland represents is unstable. In *Villa Triste*, the narrator gets close to Switzerland before realising that 'la Suisse n'existe pas' (22). But it is here, however temporarily, that Modiano finds peace: 'J'étais heureux. Je n'avais plus de mémoire. Mon amnésie s'épaissirait de jour en jour comme une peau qui se durcit. Plus de passé. Plus d'avenir' (*LF* 118). Peace and respite are found when memory is severed and silenced, juxtaposing with the desire to know one's history. It is also in this vignette that the protagonist expresses his fear of being hunted down by the same man who arrested his father: 'Il venait me poursuivre jusque dans ce pays où j'avais cru que je perdrais peu à peu la mémoire' (128-9). Why this man should hold the son accountable goes unexplained, suggesting that the son has inexplicably absorbed the father's guilt.

Gesturing towards circularity, though not closure, the last section of *Livret de famille* returns to his daughter, now one year old, the last lines expressing reverence for innocence and ignorance. In contrast to his impression of omniscient memory—'Je me souviens de tout' (214)—while watching his daughter sleep, he writes, 'Rien ne troublait son sommeil. Elle n'avait pas encore de mémoire' (215). Here, the silences of amnesia or pre-memory are desirable, representing an escape from the burden of knowledge and protection from the violence of history. A similar salvation is echoed later, in *Vestiaire de l'enfance* in a letter written to the protagonist, Jimmy Sarano: 'Le silence, voilà le seul moyen de tenir le coup. Le silence et l'amnésie' (129). We also return to a garage in the last vignette. The 'garage Greuze' is about to be demolished, signalling a separation from the older generation, and, with it, the past, the father and the stories surrounding him, liberating the son and making the rupture definitive. However, the past is not set to rest and the theme continues in *Remise de peine*, in which the protagonist looks for a garage connected to his father, noting 'toutes ces rues ont été rayées de la carte au moment de la construction du périphérique, emportant avec elles leurs garages et leurs secrets' (83). A few pages on, the search takes a pessimistic turn and the narrator concludes that 'toutes ces années n'auront été, pour moi, qu'une longue et vaine recherche d'un garage perdu' (88), alluding ludically to Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Livret de famille presents a family network that is fragmented and discontinuous in response to obstacles and ruptures in transmission of heritage. Real-life lacunae provide the grounds for the investigation of real and fictional family members whose identities bleed into one another, suggesting a disintegration of normal intergenerational transmission and circling the problems rather than the proclamation of identity. Many of the stories are centred around a void or absence, which is accorded a place of centrality. Two photographs feature on the cover of the

Folio edition, the smaller of which shows Modiano looking candidly at the camera, while the larger, more central photograph depicts his father, eyes cast downwards, giving nothing away. They appear to be around the same age, yet what their stances communicate is leagues apart. There is little to suggest that by the end a place of understanding or closure has been reached. In the penultimate vignette, Modiano returns to a childhood home in Paris and notices the coat rack where his father would hang up his many overcoats (195-196), alluding to continuous mystery surrounding his multifarious guises.

ii. *Remise de peine* (1988)

Published eleven years later and written predominantly from a child's perspective, *Remise de peine* (1988) is another highly autobiographical work. In Remise de peine *de Modiano. Voyage au pays de l'enfance,* Emna Beltaïef argues that the text should be read as pure autobiography, but this is countered by Denis Cosnard: 'toute une série d'éléments montre que ce récit n'est pas une pure autobiographie: plusieurs noms de personnes ont été changés, plusieurs noms de lieux aussi.'[17] Modiano remarked that both *Un pedigree* and *Remise de peine* 'ne sont pas vraiment des romans' (Bourmeau 'Je travaille') thus making generic classification ambiguous. While gauging the degree of autobiography in the text is a puzzle in itself, what is patent in both cases is how absent Modiano's parents were from his childhood. His mother is mentioned in the first paragraph—'Ma mère était partie jouer une pièce en tournée et nous habitions, mon frère et moi, chez des amies à elle' (11)—and his father is not

[17] In his critique of Beltaïef's Remise de peine *de Patrick Modiano* on his blog reseaumodiano, Cosnard cites the example of Modiano's baptism. In *Livret de famille* and *Remise de peine* the location is the église St Martin, but in the former the godmother is Madeleine Ferragus (114) and in the latter it is Annie (47). lereseaumodiano.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/remise-de-peine-analyse-par-emna.html.

mentioned until page 34, also in a manner suggestive of distance rather than proximity: 'Mon père nous rendait visite entre deux voyages à Brazzaville.' After his visits, he would say goodbye 'd'une main distraite, que nous voyions encore s'agiter mollement à travers la vitre' (36). This stark description conveys the image of a distracted, indifferent paternal figure.

Modiano and his brother are left in the care of three women who take on various parental roles. However, this adopted family disappears abruptly too. One of these substitute mothers, Annie, reappears nearly thirty years later in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, and some details of her disappearance emerge. The young woman, Blanche Neige, who is employed to take care of the children is described as 'silencieuse', 'son silence et ses yeux transparents nous intimidaient, mon frère et moi' (23), and she too leaves suddenly one day. As the motley family network takes part in typical childhood pastimes, the real parents slip into the background:

> Nous allions ramasser des châtaignes dans la forêt. Nous n'avions plus de nouvelles de nos parents. La dernière carte postale de notre mère était une vue aérienne de la ville de Tunis. Notre père nous avait écrit de Brazzaville. Puis de Bangui. Et puis, plus rien. (71)

Later, when Modiano runs away from boarding school, not even the headmaster can reach his parents (102). One parent is chasing El Dorado on the other side of the world and the other is perpetually away on tour.

As mentioned, their garden is said to be the site of Dr Guillotin's grave. The guillotine is a potent symbol of violent and absolute severance. It is also connected to the Revolution, itself an immense social and political schism in France's history. When the house is later abandoned, and before the police arrive, the two boys are alone, in a scene in which the adjectives 'seul', 'vide', 'abandonné' and the noun

'silence' are repeated numerous times, creating an impression of great isolation and abandonment: 'Le silence de la maison nous faisait peur', 'A mesure que nous marchions, le silence était de plus en plus profond autour de nous', 'Ce silence nous enveloppait toujours' (112-113). When the police arrive, their home becomes a crime scene, leaving them stranded. The narrator displays immense reserve in denouncing the parents' behaviour, yet the muted pathos and the lack of complaint seem to indicate deep resentment. Modiano gestures to what isn't known using imagery of light and dark: 'Un soir, à cause d'une panne d'électricité, la pièce était éclairée par une lampe à huile posée sur la cheminée et qui laissait autour de nous des zones d'ombre' (23). This creates a highly cinematic image of illuminated areas in a sea of darkness, underscoring their disconnection and isolation. Similar imagery of areas of detachment and disconnection returns later in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier,* in a scene that takes place with the same Annie during a period directly following that covered in *Remise de peine*: 'on traversait *un no man's land*, ou plutôt une zone neutre dans laquelle on était coupé de tout' (105).

The image of the child narrator cut off from his parents, what Laurent Demanze terms an 'héritier problématique' (*Encres orphelines* prologue), is starkly portrayed in *Remise de peine.* The child is taken to get his hair cut and the barber gives him 'une brosse si courte que cela piquait quand je passais la main sur mon crâne . . . Mais je n'avais rien à dire. Le coiffeur prenait sa tondeuse, sans me demander mon avis' (53). He doesn't object to the ordeal and while it could be read on one level as a relatively innocuous visit to the barber, the closeness of the shave and the lack of consent has connotations of the head-shaving process endured on arrival at concentration camps as well as the public punishment exacted on women accused of collaboration. The melancholy image is relatively innocent, yet it holds

within it the echo of the horrific story of the deliberate erasure of identity, severance from heritage and genocide.

Twenty years on, the adult narrator is still haunted by stories from the past involving his father: 'Un passé lointain me hantait, à cause de mon père' (*RP* 83). He retells the story of his father's narrow escape after being caught without papers during the Occupation, a story that is told in *Livret de famille* with slightly different details. He also recounts his father's arrest a year later, his short internment and subsequent release. The question of who intervened on his behalf is one of the mysteries that returns in numerous novels. His father began to tell him about it one night, but it is untellable: 'J'ai senti ce soir-là, qu'il aurait voulu me transmettre son expérience des choses troubles et douloureuses de la vie, mais qu'il n'y avait pas de mots pour cela' (84). Yet, when they do have the opportunity, communication doesn't necessarily flow. When father and son are on the train to Sologne in *Livret de famille*: 'Nous aurions dû parler, mais nous n'avions pas grand-chose à nous dire' (*LF* 59). The poignancy of the unutterable returns, or rather, never leaves; the phrase is repeated almost verbatim seventeen years later in *Un pedigree*: 'Ce soir-là, j'avais senti qu'il aurait voulu me confier quelque chose mais les mots ne venaient pas' (27). This example is discussed in Chapter 5, along with multiple other examples of characters who are on the brink of confiding but cannot find the words.

There is a sense of determination to find the person who had his father released: 'Eddy Pagnon ou un autre ? Il me fallait bien une réponse à mes questions' (84). He discovers, or deduces, that they are linked through a garage. Although he is initially convinced that his search will lead to something, eventually a sense of lassitude takes over: 'à quoi bon essayer de retrouver les lieux ?' (81), 'J'avais consacré tant de journées à chercher des garages dans Paris sans les trouver que je n'y croyais plus' (91). His despondency intimates that he might draw a line under

the period definitively, but this is not the case. Rather, there is an ongoing vacillation between wanting to know and fatigue with the search, much like the ambivalence in *Livret de famille* about attempting to fill the silences of the unknown and the desire for amnesia. The longed-for oblivion remains out of reach, as indicated by the repetition of similar phrases, such as: 'elles [leurs paroles] se gravaient dans ma mémoire' (90), 'Quelques phrases vous restent gravées dans l'esprit pour toujours' (95).

Loss of innocence is a central theme in *Remise de peine*. There is a clear sense of childhood curiosity, but often the children are held at distance. Watching Annie and Jean D. in the car, he wonders 'Quels secrets pouvaient-ils bien se dire ?' (57), and 'Lui [Roger Vincent] et la petite Hélène parlaient dans la cour de la maison, mais je n'entendais pas leur conversation' (63). However, his inquisitiveness is checked, and the young narrator is warned that it can be perilous to reveal anything: 'Moins on parle, mieux on se porte' (90). The nickname 'imbécile heureux' given to him by Mathilde alludes to the serenity that comes with not knowing and the protected/ive silences children are often afforded. Mathilde endeavours to maintain a certain age-appropriate innocence and scolds him when she finds that he's reading the magazine *Noir et Blanc*: 'Ce n'est pas de ton âge…' (25). At the end, their house is searched and a police officer asks him where his parents are. He remembers the lie Annie told the headmistress, in pretending that she was his mother, and tells the policeman that his parents are dead. His rationale follows Annie's: the untruthful version is less complicated than the real story, yet it remains deeply unsettling. With the lie to the policeman, *Remise de peine* can be read as presenting childhood ignorance or innocence and culminating in the beginning of its loss, not through the complete lifting of silences, but through a gaining of awareness.

A central element of familial rupture in *Remise de peine* is the loss of his brother, Rudy to whom Modiano's first eight novels are dedicated (both to him alone and with others). Nettelbeck and Cooke see Rudy as central to Modiano's search for meaning (41) and Olivier Adam notes in his preface that he is 'un centre absent, un silence assourdissant'. This is corroborated in *Un pedigree*: 'En février 1957, j'ai perdu mon frère. . . . À part mon frère Rudy, sa mort, je crois que rien de tout ce que je rapporterai ici ne me concerne en profondeur' (44). The locution 'mon frère et moi', which never employs his brother's name, appears on the first page of *Remise de peine* and returns like a refrain, thirty-one times,[18] its consistent repetition urging its reading as a painful, unresolved silence of absence and death. In an interview, Modiano shed light on this locution and his avoidance of using 'Rudy':

> En relisant les épreuves de *Remise de peine* j'ai eu ce sentiment. Il y avait un blanc. Nabokov a bien expliqué que quand on mettait un personnage de la vie réelle dans la fiction, il se confondait avec le tissu romanesque et c'était une trahison. Mais je n'ai pas eu ce sentiment avec Rudy. Parce que je ne lui ai pas donné d'existence individuelle. Pas de prénom. C'était toujours 'mon frère et moi'. Je ne l'ai pas trahi… (Assouline 37)

In a rare episode from his adulthood, he chances upon Jean D. after not having seen him for many years. They conspicuously do not talk about their shared past or the house on the rue Docteur Dordaine: 'Nous n'avons pas dit un seul mot au sujet de ces articles' (74). Jean D. and his girlfriend accompany him back to his attic apartment, and here again, the avoidance of any painful topic becomes the glaring, unspoken subject. He is grateful for the presence of Jean D.'s girlfriend, since, had they been alone, they might have broached the subject:

[18] 'Mon frère et moi' appears on page 11 (first page), 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 23, 33, 36, 39, 40, 47, 50, 51, 54, 55, 56,57, 69, 70, 70, 71, 72, 77, 78, 83, 94, 108, 115, 116 and 118 (last sentence).

> Il se taisait. Moi aussi. . . . Il valait mieux, au fond, que cette fille soit là, sinon nous aurions parlé, Jean D. et moi. Ce n'était pas facile, je l'ai lu dans son regard. Aux premiers mots, nous aurions été comme les pantins des stands de tir qui s'écroulent quand la balle a frappé le point sensible. Annie, la petite Hélène, Roger Vincent avaient certainement fini en prison… J'avais perdu mon frère. Le fil avait été brisé. (76)

The statement the he has lost his brother is preceded by an ellipsis, marking a pause which confers a certain heaviness and gravity.

In *Remise de peine,* there are multiple expressions of rupture, from the glaring absence of the parents to the sudden disappearance of the foster family that replaces them. The young protagonist is expelled from one school and runs away from another. Alongside this is the world of organised crime and gangs, which is never described directly and from which 'l'imbécile heureux' is sheltered through ignorance. The silences and mystery surrounding this second network colour the atmospheres of subsequent novels. Again, that which is untold and untellable becomes the (anti-)centre of narrative, the origins of which can be traced back to these autobiographical texts.

iii. *Un pedigree* (2005)

In *Remise de peine* the past is, for the most part, unknowable and unsayable, even potentially mortal if uttered aloud as in the scene with Jean D. cited above, in which the two men resemble target practice dummies (76). In *Un pedigree*, published almost twenty years later, there are signs of potential reconciliation. Silences of origin prevail, however; at the beginning of the text, we encounter the silence of recently liberated Paris, where Modiano was born: 'Le 2 août 1945, mon père vient à vélo

déclarer ma naissance à la mairie de Boulogne-Billancourt. J'imagine son retour par les rues désertes d'Auteuil et les quais silencieux de cet été-là' (31). The parents' lack of involvement is no less stark than in *Remise de peine.* In 1946, the maternal grandparents come to take care of the children: 'Je suis toujours avec eux, et je ne comprends que le flamand' (32). At this point, Modiano doesn't understand his father's language, that which would have been spoken between mother and father. Scenes of familial closeness stand out for their rarity:

> En février 1953, un matin, mon père vient mous chercher en voiture, mon frère et moi, dans la maison déserte, et nous ramène à Paris. . . . Le château en ruine et, devant lui, la prairie aux herbes hautes d'où nous lâchions un cerf-volant. (37)

And there are still numerous instances of 'mon frère et moi'.[19] He recounts the painful experience of his father calling the police and having him taken away (104) and scenes of isolation and neglect at boarding school where he receives curt, dismissive letters from his father (67-68). He buries himself in literature but doesn't have enough to eat (71-73). He also alludes to his mother's unspeakable cruelty: 'Je me tais. Et je lui pardonne. Tout cela est désormais si lointain…' (90). Finally, he relays verbatim the letters between him and his father that concluded with the severance of their relationship (121).

In spite of the rupture of their relationship, there is a shift at the end of *Un pedigree* when a cordial meeting, taking place ten years later, is imagined: 'Il aurait été ravi que je lui parle de littérature, et moi je lui aurais posé des questions sur ses projets de haute finance et sur son passé mystérieux' (123-124). However, this might be the kind of optimism one affords oneself with the safety of hindsight, and in the knowledge of the impossibility of such a meeting actually taking place.

[19] The refrain appears on page 33, 35, 37, 39, 42, 42, 42, 109 and 112.

Throughout *Un pedigree,* as a parallel to Modiano's pathway into adulthood, his exploration of literature is detailed. At the end, he recounts the day in spring 1967 when he learns that his first book will be published. His separation from the immediate family network is starkly juxtaposed with, and even reconcilied by, his acceptance into an alternative, literary family:

> Ce soir-là, je m'étais senti léger pour la première fois de ma vie. La menace qui pesait sur moi pendant toutes ces années, me contraignant à être sans cesse sur le qui-vive, s'était dissipée dans l'air de Paris. J'avais pris le large avant que le ponton vermoulu ne s'écroule. Il était temps. (127)

The issue is not settled for good, however, and the father returns as an ambient silent presence in subsequent works. *Souvenirs dormants* (2017) begins with the young narrator, whose date and place of birth are the same as the author's (97) trying to get in contact with the daughter of a friend of his father, with the hope of obtaining some explanations: 'Peut-être m'aideraient-elles [explications] à mieux comprendre mon père, un inconnu qui marchait en silence à mes côtés, le long des allées du bois de Boulogne' (13). It could be that resolution is not, in fact, the objective. In *Un pedigree,* Modiano states:

> Je n'ai rien à confesser ni à élucider et je n'éprouve aucun goût pour l'introspection et les examens de conscience. Au contraire, plus les choses devenaient obscures et mystérieuses, plus je leur portais de l'intérêt. (45)

The intention is not to elucidate, but to maintain zones of silence and to adopt a permanent stance of curiosity, interrogation and intrigue. In Modiano's work, as in the work of many of his contemporaries, heritage is often presented as something to grapple and contend with rather than as a source of meaning, identity and belonging. Jongy and Keilhauer note that 'l'héritage peut être perçu comme enrichissant. Toutefois, dans l'écriture autobiographique contemporaine, il est

souvent vécu comme un traumatisme' (11). Asked about his father in an interview with Dominique Jamet in 1975, Modiano stated:

> J'aimerais en savoir davantage, mais je ne l'ai pas revu depuis une dizaine d'années. Pour des raisons familiales. C'est juste au moment où je ne l'ai plus vu que j'ai appris ce qu'était cette époque, et que je n'ai pas pu lui poser les questions.

Timing, it seems, wasn't on their side. That his father moved out of reach taking with him his secrets constitutes one of the most significant unsolvable knots in Modiano's literature, marking an uncrossable divide between the generations. This remains, therefore, one of the most fecund silences, the source of continuous mystery and obscurity.

In Light of the *Récit de filiation*

The mystery and unknowability of the father and father figures are re-examined time and time again, forging a narrative motor centred around re-interrogation in Modiano's work. Beyond this, problematic father–son relationships and the resultant interrogation have been identified as relatively widespread characteristics of contemporary French literature. The rise of the *récit de filiation* has been seen as integrally linked to a broader sense of cultural rift. In 'Filiations littéraires', Dominique Viart advances an argument for the *récit de filiation* as a discrete genre, developed in a specific context of sociohistorical rupture and crisis. While the genre has literary antecedents in the *roman familial* and the *roman généalogique*, Viart holds that the emergence of the *récit de filiation* should be seen as symptomatic of an epoch:

> celle qui, après la fin des 'Trente Glorieuses' et de la 'Guerre froide', voit le XX^{e} siècle se retourner sur lui-même, mesurer l'impact des tragédies qui l'ont traversé et prendre acte de la 'défection des Grands Récits' humanistes. . . . il ne s'agit pas là d'un phénomène d'école, mais bien d'époque. ('Silence des pères' 97)

The aesthetic range of works that Viart considers to be part of the genre suggests a symptomatic relationship unified more by time than stylistic commonalities. It is not my intention to argue that Modiano's work should be classified as part of the *récit de filiation* genre, but the framework is useful in shedding light on his project and the context of a broader literary response to familial, social and cultural rupture. There are aspects of Modiano's texts which partially align his work with other literary currents, such as the *mode rétro* (Rousso, *Syndrome* 149-154) or forms of *écriture de soi* (Lis, 'Dévoiler et/ou déguiser' 237-248), such as autofiction (Blanckeman, *Lire* 38-49) or autobiography (Beltaïef, Remise de peine *de Modiano*).

Viart identifies the transmission deficit of which the writer or narrator appears to be a victim, focusing on the figure of the father. In the search produced by the deficit, it is both that which is discovered and that which is not that triggers the imagination: 'Dans les deux cas c'est l'insavoir, plus que la curiosité, qui met l'écriture en branle. Mais cet insavoir stimule aussi l'invention' ('Silence des pères' 109). Viart describes *récit de filiation* works as filled with a gallery of 'pères « taiseux»' ('Silence des pères' 99), a description applicable to Albert Modiano, who took all his secrets with him (*UP* 19). Carine Trevisan, writing about First World War literature, employs the notion of the *récit de filiation*, again using the figure of the father:

> Ces récits de filiation se construisent à partir d'un vide, énigmatique en ce que se conjuguent l'absence du père et l'absence même du sentiment de l'absence, trou dont l'écriture qu'il suscite n'en peut que dessiner les contours. (197)

This describes a similar characteristic of writing that is structured around a central void and outlines rather than fills in narrative. It also draws an interesting parallel between Modiano's work and literature grounded in broader post-war experiences.

Extending Viart's work, Laurent Demanze emphasises the upheavals of modernity at the source of the genre—'l'émergence du récit de filiation comme l'indice d'un malaise dans la transmission, suscité par le projet moderne' ('Récit de filiation')—stressing the historical context of the genre's appearance. Demanze is particularly interested in the inherently melancholic tone of the *récit de filiation* and sees in the contemporary writer an 'héritier problématique' (prologue).

In a subsequent article elaborating aspects of the *récit de filiation* in its historical context, Demanze described another element, pertinent to Modiano's project:

> il s'attache aux secrets tus, aux paroles non dites et aux rumeurs familiales assourdies pour écrire autour de ce silence initial sa trajectoire individuelle. Archéologie d'une parole absente, le *récit de filiation* se construit autour d'un vide ou d'un long récit en creux. ('Un Héritage sans testament' 228)

Modiano's narratives often seem to be formed around that which is not present; they are written around the object, which leaves its imprint. As seen in various vignettes in *Livret de famille*, in Rudy, 'ce « blanc » au centre de son oeuvre' (Assouline 36), and the untold world of crime and gangs in *Remise de peine*, narratives arise from a sense of void, and accord emptiness a central space. As Demanze sees it, the silence-filled *récits de filiation* strive to find answers, following the traces of an incomplete heritage or attempting to negotiate a new one. The mysteries around Modiano's father and his activities, as well as the absence of maternal care are palpable. Despite this, evidence for an effort at exorcism, or even of catharsis, is less salient, if only for the

simple fact of repetition and we find less of an effort of restitution but more of permanent interrogation.

> Demanze states that the *récit de filiation* works to:
>
> restituer les figures parentales, dans une célébration qui emploie fréquemment un lyrisme assourdi, et se constituer à travers le geste même de cet hommage dans une renégociation critique et fidèle de son héritage. ('Récit de filiation')

In Modiano's work we can identify 'muffled lyricism', but it may not be in a gesture of celebration or restitution of his parents. The figure of the father and his various incarnations haunt Modiano's novels with little hope of reconciliation.

As Viart notes, the problematic father figure constitutes the object of efforts at re-interrogation. Yet, faced with so many unanswered questions it is precisely the *insavoir* that is brought to the centre of the narrative. Viart and Demanze identify the link between the kinds of preoccupations that characterise the *récit de filiation* and the awareness of a broader cultural and social rift that is not simply chronological, but symptomatic and causal. This is revealing in relation to Modiano's work and illuminates the way different degrees and contexts of rupture are overlaid and embedded in one other.

From Familial to Intergenerational

The intrigue created by the myriad silences shifts from the frantic tone of the earlier novels to a far more muted and contained tone. Yet, since questions are never actually answered, they continue to inform and propel subsequent narratives in a range of guises. The theme of rupture and lack of transmission is not contained

exclusively in the more autobiographical texts and can be identified in varying manifestations across Modiano's entire oeuvre. Morris notes that Modiano's typical protagonist is 'un jeune dont le manque de racines de toutes sortes se complète par un vide au niveau de la famille et il en va plus ou moins de même pour les personnages de deuxième rang' (*Patrick Modiano* 2000, 49). *Un cirque passe* exemplifies one of the ways in which silence derived from familial rupture extends the specific autobiographical father–son relationship to inform more fictional works, affecting primary and secondary characters alike.

The novel opens with a scene in which the homodiegetic narrator, Lucien, is questioned in a police station. Asked about his parents, he replies, 'ils étaient partis à l'étranger et j'ignorais la date de leur retour, à supposer qu'ils reviennent jamais' (12). Although it is made matter-of-factly, the inceptive position of this statement denotes its importance and resonates with the description of the parents' absence in *Remise de peine*, showing how the experience is transposed from the more autobiographical to the more fictional texts. Lucien's father is in Belgium or Switzerland and Lucien lives in his father's apartment, which is conspicuously empty of personal effects. The family abode is an empty shell, there is nothing homely about it and no family is present, which is symbolically potent. Gisèle, whom Lucien meets at the police station and who seems to be completely without family attachments herself, asks why the apartment is so bare. Lucien explains that they have to move out and that his father is in Switzerland, a place which, as noted, has a complicated relationship with amnesia and neutrality.

A character named Grabley, 'la doublure de mon père' (26), employed as his father's assistant, also lives in the apartment. He is a pitiful, dissolute figure and Lucien remarks that of his 'bonne education' all that remains is his habit of going to mass every Sunday; Grabley's attachment to religion and the Church has become an

empty gesture, devoid of any real sense of meaning. He even 'plays' his role, barely covering an underlying hollowness—'il jouait le maître de maison. D'ailleurs toute sa personne correspondait si bien à cet appartement vide' (62)—and thus represents yet another lacking father substitute. There is another father figure in *Un cirque passe* who, conversely, represents potential escape from Lucien's unhappy existence in Paris. Dell'Aversano is an avuncular character who tries to help Lucien move to Rome. His profession is telling; as an antique merchant, he is concerned with conservation and memory and cares for historical objects, their lineage and origin. While one father figure is a performer cloaking his essential emptiness, the other's attempts to help are ultimately futile.

The only direct reference to the circus of the title is made in relation to Gisèle's husband, and the topic is quickly suppressed: 'Oh, un drôle de type… Il s'occupe d'un cirque…', 'Ça m'embête de parler de tout ça… Et le silence s'est établi entre nous. . . . Nous avons sonné à la porte de l'appartement. Personne ne répondait' (124). The substance of the title, the circus, can't be discussed and the sense of impasse is compounded by the unanswered door. Further, the circus of the title 'passes', suggesting its impermanence.

One of the novel's secondary characters, Alain Charell, also embodies a form of rupture. Like uncle Alex in *Livret de famille*, Charell and his wife 'appartenaient à cette catégorie de gens qui ne se fixent nulle part' (*CP* 102). He features briefly in the novel, recalled in a memory of walking around Neuilly. As Lucien and Gisèle are walking along rue de la Ferme, they pass the Charell's door, and he notes: 'le manège Howlett qui semblait abandonné. Les Charell avaient certainement quitté leur maison' (102). He asks himself what could have become of Charell and wonders what he might have made of the dubious work he and Gisèle were embroiled in. Apart from these enigmatic appearances, Charell passes almost imperceptibly

through the novel. He appears earlier, however, in *De si braves garçons*, as one of the narrator's classmates, one of 'des enfants du hasard et de nulle part' at collège Valvert where their schoolmaster endeavours to inculcate them with the 'bienfaits d'une discipline et au réconfort d'une patrie' (11), which, even though most of them are indeed French, they do not have. Like the litany of ill-fated young men—'tous nés au lendemain de la guerre, les enfants d'un temps brisé et une civilisation suicidée' (Blanckeman, *Lire* 60)—Charell follows a path of dissipation and the narrator finds him, twenty years on, in a waiting room at the Gare du Nord surrounded by other down-and-outs and an odour of urine. When he sees him, the narrative voice shifts to direct address: 'C'était toi, Charell' (*BG* 151). We return to the same 'rue de la Ferme', with its familiar riding schools. 'Ferme' has connotations of tradition, attachment to land and patrimony, and also firmness and safety; however, it is also a homonym of 'ferme(r)', as in 'to shut' or 'to close', which is emphasised when the words appear in close conjunction: 'Il n'y avait pas un seul promeneur rue de la Ferme et les manèges paraissaient fermés' (*CP* 84-85).[20] In *De si braves garçons*, Charell's parents lived on this road, and Charell and his wife lived there too, years later, suggesting familial continuity and rootedness. But something has been altered. Charell exclaims that'—Ils ont foutu en l'air tous les manèges de la rue… Il avait l'air accablé, brusquement' (155)—and a few pages on, he continues: '—Tu as vu comme la rue de la Ferme a changé ? me dit Charell. La maison de mes parents n'existe plus…' (157). Although specific to Charell's situation, there is an allusion to something larger that has broken, a breach between the generations; not just one but 'tous les manèges' have gone. The remark that 'La maison de mes

[20] The 'manège' also carries darker connotations: Modiano's father hides at the manège in the bois de Boulogne during the Occupation (*LF* 201-2). Modiano revisits the same spot thirty-three years later with his daughter and the buildings have not changed: 'Les bâtiments en brique des écuries où se réfugiait mon père n'avaient certainement pas changé depuis' (202).

parents n'existe plus' on the rue de la Ferme, with the connotations noted above, emphasises the sense of being adrift. The narrator doesn't have the courage to ask about Charell's parents:

> Qu'étaient devenus ses parents ? Son père, aux cheveux et à la moustache jaune safran, ressemblait à un major de l'armée des Indes. Avaient-ils disparu comme leur pelouse et leur Trianon ? Je n'osais le lui demander. (159)

This rupture cannot be interrogated directly, but stands as an empty, unutterable epicentre. The mention of the 'trianon' (a small villa or pavilion generally built in the grounds of a larger estate) once again broadens the notion of disappearance by alluding to the Trianons of Versailles built under Louis XIV and XV, who epitomised absolute monarchy and a regime which itself came to a brutal end. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator learns about Charell's hospitalisation in the newspaper, he was shot 'accidentally', though not fatally, in his apartment.

The character of Charell in *Un cirque passe* and *De si braves garcons* illustrates how the theme of rupture is neither isolated to Modiano's protagonists nor situated uniquely in the father–son dynamic, but is, rather, spread throughout his work and arises in diverse forms. In these novels, silences of rupture and transmission are further from the centre than in more autobiographical texts. Similarly, in other novels, the notion of transmission is manifested obliquely. In *Chien de printemps*, for example, Denis Cosnard notes that Jansen is exactly one generation older than the narrator: 'C'est donc une histoire de filiation qui s'écrit' (*Dans la peau* 210). And in *Villes du sommeil*,[21] the narrator notices 'une silhouette', whose shadow is cast before him, crossing Place de l'Europe: 'Nous regrettions de ne pas l'avoir abordée. Cet

[21] *Villes du sommeil* is a short text based on Le Tan's drawings, concerned, obliquely, with nationality. Modiano creates a character of Russian descent, Jean-Pierre Oblomov, apparently wanted by the KGB. He wonders whether he could be saved from his fate if he were to be given a French name.

homme avait disparu, avec son secret.' In light of Modiano's comment about his regret at not having asked his father the questions he would have liked to ask, this 'silhouette' appears to carry a flicker of the father, significantly walking across the 'place de l'Europe', implying that familial heritage is entwined with a sense of broader European heritage. Rupture and discontinuity are also evoked in the built environment through empty apartments, deserted boulevards and urban renewal, as well as more personal and voluntary rupture such as running away and deliberate disappearance. Michael Sheringham explores the symbolic link between the 'fugue' and notions of loss of filiation and even suicide in *Dora Bruder* and *Voyage de noces*. The sense of an obscure heritage is not confined to fathers, but changes host in different novels; rootlessness and rupture prove thematically elastic, being displaced and infused into a range of characters and motifs.

Kevin Telford claims that Modiano's father disappeared at the end of the war (355), which appears to be erroneous,[22] however, his conclusion that 'this loss is translated into a perpetual generating force for his fiction' holds currency. He writes: 'The text is a means of communication that the spoken word does not offer' (355). Communication, granted, but whether it is conclusive is another matter. In reality, as in his novels, those who hold knowledge about the past remain, for the most part, out of reach or provide unsatisfying answers; the silence of interrupted transmission is that which generates the successive interrogations of the father figure in a variety of iterations.

Since Modiano's father appears to be behind various avatars, we can fairly interpret Modiano's interrogation as directed at him specifically. However, considering that Albert Modiano was certainly not unique in his complicated identity and dubious involvements during the Occupation, interrogating him is also

[22] See interview with Jamet 'Patrick Modiano s'explique' (1975).

a means of interrogating fathers—in the plural—and beyond them, authority figures, institutions and mechanisms of transmission of that generation. As Blanckeman points out, Modiano is not just the child of an individual, but of an era: 'le fils d'une époque délétère, avoir été par elle enfanté, coupable avant de naître et innocent du fait même de cette naissance' (*Patrick Modiano ou l'écriture* 23). In Modiano's work, generative silences are identified at the familial, intergenerational and even national-narrative levels, resonating and echoing from one to the other. The question of how to extrapolate the meaning from rupture with the single and specific father figure to a broader kind of severance was discussed by Modiano in an interview:

> Ce père minable et fantomatique que recherche le narrateur peut être le symbole de beaucoup de choses. Symbole de l'effritement des Valeurs (avec un grand V), de la disparition de tout principe d'autorité et de toute assise morale, etc.… toutes choses qui étaient liées à l'image traditionnelle du Père. (Malka)

There is a great range of characters whose fathers or mothers are centres of the unknown and objects of unanswerable questions, and these characters are often objects of tenderness or lovers (*Un cirque passe*) or become kinds of proto-siblings (*De si braves garçons*), which together create a broader family network of orphan-types whose heritage has been silenced. This expands the effects of broken transmission from the individual level to a whole swathe of post-war generations and a broader sense of rupture.

From Intergenerational to Historic

Modiano's novels are replete with expressions of rupture, from subtle fissures to overt severance, intertwined and interrelated to such an extent that they become hard to distinguish. In the last section of *Livret de famille*, the taxi driver's name is also Patrick. Modiano remarks that there was a vogue for the name in 1945, perhaps, he posits, because of the influx of Anglo-Saxon soldiers and jeeps and the American bars that cropped up at the end of the war: 'L'année 1945 était toute entière dans les deux syllabes de « Patrick »' (214). He is so fully a product of this period that even his name and, by extension, his identity are inseparable from it. One of the name's associations is with the Liberation, which is in itself indistinguishable from the preceding period of Occupation, of which he sees himself as a product: 'l'odeur vénéneuse de l'Occupation, ce terreau dont je suis issu' (*LF* 202), 'le terreau—ou le fumier—d'où je suis issu' (*UP* 19). The Occupation period is described by Richard Golsan as 'that moment in history when Frenchmen as a whole were deprived of their roots, their pasts, and their traditions and were forced to wonder who and what they were' ('Collaboration, Alienation' 109). Modiano's identity, no less in 2005 than 1977, is bound to this period of profound rupture both in an individual way—Patrick is his name—and at a broader level—Patrick was a common name among that generation. The proximity of the Occupation to the present is exemplified in the taxi scene, with less direct but more visceral imagery. The 'banquette arrière' where he sits with his wife and child at the opening of this vignette features just lines earlier, at the end of the previous vignette (XIV). In the latter the back seat is stained with the blood of Georges Mandel, assassinated in 1944 by the Milice. The concrete and visual closeness between the two back seats is compelling. While the contrast

between blood in the first and a child's pushchair in the second is stark, it suggests the potential for renewal and rebirth, a return to innocence.

Like Trevisan, Viart and Demanze, Catherine Douzou also makes the link between broader cultural and historical rifts and the consequent rise of literary forms:

> La fréquence de cet avatar du roman policier dans le dernier quart du XXe siècle, qui repose sur la recherche de traces et se construit par définition autour d'un vide central—le mystère à résoudre—, est liée à la conscience d'une cassure historique résultant des événements de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, qui eux-mêmes réactivent les remises en cause provoquées par les massacres des champs de bataille de 1914-1918. ('Histoires d'enquête' 115)

That the central void is intimately bound to a historical breach is pertinent in Modiano's case, illuminating the deeper resonance and complexity of rupture as a source of silence. These silences are situated within the novels as present absences, mysteries to resolve, and also function as elements of production through being interrogated and probed; the sources of silence become silences of substance.

Both Douzou and Demanze hold that the rupture of the Second World War amplified shockwaves produced by the First World War, which in turn connect back to earlier upheavals in the eighteenth century:

> [l']irruption de la modernité ne cesse de se répéter . . . Tout se passe comme si la Révolution continuait et que l'ombre de la modernité jetait encore sur les contemporains la noire livrée, qui avait enténébré le siècle de Baudelaire. (*Encres orphelines* prologue)

Further, Demanze describes a temporal shift, from experiencing an event in the present to the subsequent effort, in hindsight, to make sense of it, from and through its incomplete traces:

> On passe d'une succession événementielle à une rétrospection herméneutique, et à l'ordre des faits se substitue le travail de reconstruction d'une mémoire incertaine, qui tente de rassembler une communauté à partir de ses ruines, et de dresser le portrait morcelé du passé. (*Encres orphelines* 22-23)

What Demanze sees as the 'morcellated portrait' chimes with what Rousso finds in Modiano's treatment of the Occupation period: 'Chez lui, l'Occupation a perdu son statut historique. C'est un puzzle qu'il ne faut surtout pas reconstituer, la vérité filtrant des vides' (*Syndrome* 152). This also returns to what Modiano said of his own work: his objective is not necessarily to demystify or to discover an objective truth, but is, rather, to shine light on the unsaid and unsayables of the past and to focus on its mysteries. This is also apposite with regard to *Livret de famille,* which creates a substitute family or ersatz community from the fragments and silences of his own, which are fundamentally connected to the fractures and silences of an epoch. Modiano's novels are deeply embedded in place and history, as well as the inherent interstices of silence surrounding them. In a scene from *Une jeunesse*, the protagonist, Louis, returns to his place of work at a garage on rue Delaizement to find it newly emptied. He is enlisted to help incinerate all the business's files. His boss states: 'Le feu purifie tout' (160). In his attempts to decipher the silences of the past, Modiano's work performs, circles and interrogates imagined instances of deliberate erasure and loss.

The work of Douzou, Viart and Demanze locates Modiano's texts within the context of literature that is born from forms of rupture, literature that comes as a

response to severance and discontinuity. Viart notes that 'le silence n'est pas simplement personnel ni familial . . . il est plus vaste : social, historique' ('Silence des pères' 102). Although the silent father is framed within the family confines, the great range of sources and reasons for this breakdown in communication indicates that the phenomenon transcends the familial.

Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin, whose itineraries were forged by the vicissitudes and conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century, wrote about the massive effects of upheaval and discontinuity caused by the world wars. Arendt often quoted René Char, opening her essay 'The Crisis of Culture' in *Between Past and Future* with 'Notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament'. In between an ungraspable past and an unknowable future, the present is situated in an irreparable breach in the chain binding one generation to another; failure of transmission means that the 'crisis' of the present moves blindly into the future, since it is severed from its consciousness of heritage. The epigraph of Demanze's *Encres orphelines* is from Derrida and resonates bleakly with Char: 'Faire sa propre histoire n'est possible qu'à la condition de l'héritage', which seems to point to an impasse. The Char's quotation depicts Modiano, like so many Europeans in the post-war period, armed with a blank instruction manual. And if history can only be 'done' with access to heritage, we are left with an image of a stranded people, immobilised by a silent or unsayable inheritance. Modiano also takes a quote from Char for the epigraph of *Livret de famille*: 'Vivre c'est obstiner à achever un souvenir.' Considering the frailty of memory, coupled with the degree of interconnectedness, the magnitude of the task of either 'completing' or 'destroying' memory seems gargantuan. This is both addressed and complicated by Modiano's incorporation of the memory of others, encouraged as he was by Emmanuelle Berl to 'créer un passé et une mémoire avec le passé et la mémoire des autres' (*Interrogatoire* 9).

In 'Le conteur', Benjamin frames the Great War as a seismic rupture that challenged the possibility of cultural heritage by undermining the human capacity for the transmission of stories. Like Douzou, he drew a causal connection between rupture and literary form, seeing the First World War as the beginning of a movement towards greater fragmentation and individualisation in the way stories are transmitted. As well as form, Benjamin described another silencing effect of war:

> Avec la Guerre mondiale, on a vu s'amorcer une évolution qui, depuis, ne s'est jamais arrêtée. N'avait-on pas constaté, au moment de l'armistice, que les gens revenaient muets du champ de bataille—non plus riches, mais plus pauvres en expériences communicables ? (115)

Writing at a later date and thus with greater hindsight, Carine Trevisan describes the stifling impact of war in a similar manner. She depicts the event as one that 'affecterait non seulement la possibilité d'une narration traditionnelle mais aussi de la parole en tant que telle' (149), expanding from one mode of expression in particular to language in general. While the present referred to by Arendt and Benjamin is not Modiano's present, similar conclusions can be drawn. Demanze identifies the *récit de filiation*, a product of accumulated crises, as responding to and accounting for its own set of silences:

> Le présent n'est pas vécu comme un moment entier de plénitude mais semble entravé par les non-dits et les silences du passé, par les lacunes de l'histoire qui pèsent sur la conscience des individus. Les récits de filiation sont alors autant d'investigations historiques qui prennent en charge les silences familiaux et s'attachent à redonner des mots aux pages blanches de l'histoire. ('Récit de filiation')

He attaches a moral charge to the *récit de filiation*, which is where its applicability to Modiano diverges. In as far as the present is impeded by 'silences of the past', as a

member of the post-war generation which was spared experiencing its horrors first-hand, it is possible that instead of being silenced, Modiano's project is responding to the silencing force in a different way, while still bearing its legacy.

In his study of Georges Perec and Claude Simon, Claude Burgelin noted the resurgence of phantoms and angels in contemporary literature after un 'siècle bavard et « communiquant »'. Their silent presence seems to prompt reflection on the past: 'anges et fantômes savent, en restant silencieux et secrets, nous obliger à jeter des regards moins obliques sur notre relation à la mort, au passé, à la transmission, à l'au-delà des apparences' (Introduction). Burgelin believes that the last time ghosts were seen in literature in such great numbers was during the upheavals of the Revolution, the Terror and the battles that took place as part of French colonial expansion. These were periods of 'broken transmission and wounded memory', like the present, which has accumulated the experience of two world wars, genocides and mass assassinations, to which Burgelin adds, 'avec pour séquelles de grands saccages de la mémoire, de ruptures de la transmission' (Introduction). Daniel Parrochia identifies the many phantom figures in Modiano's work, but he sees their appearance as a form of salvation through literature and their silence a facet of Modiano's response to broken transmission and the effects of silencing.

The silences surrounding the father singular, the fathers plural, and those affecting transmission of heritage have been framed here as the sources of the generative silence informing Modiano's literature. As Damamme-Gilbert sees it 'l'œuvre entière peut se décrire comme bâtie sur certains silences de l'après-guerre: elle se situe au carrefour de la mémoire individuelle—familiale—trouée et de la mémoire collective' ('Travail du silence' 47). These silences are indeed at the intersection of these sources, and another aspect of the way they function is the way

in which they conflate. The theme of the problematic inheritor inhabits a range of characters and resurfaces throughout Modiano's work. The theme appears through the multiform silent centres, the elusive objects and subjects of the search which shape the outlines and contours of a fragmented heritage. There are poignant instances of connections being found through resonant silences, which carry echoes of their earlier significance. In *Un cirque passe,* Jean looks through the window and reflects that his father would have looked through the same window, seen the same quays and bridge, and experienced the same silence during the Occupation (146). A few pages later, after meeting a certain M. Guélin who informs him of his girlfriend's criminal record, the phone rings, but it's silent when he picks up:

> Je cherchais à tâtons le téléphone :
>
> — Allô…
>
> Le Silence. (154)

Jean remarks that his father received a similar call with the same lack of response at the other end from a man probably just like M. Guélin, but from the 'Service Permilleux chargé de dépister les juifs clandestins' (155). The contexts of these shared silences demarcate them as much more than a neutral part of the atmospheric backdrop; they are directly linked to the silences his father experienced. The augmented sense of threat they carry for the narrator is informed by the earlier, far more high-risk silence.

* * *

Modiano's literature can be seen as aligned in many ways with the *récit de filiation* genre, sharing a preoccupation with the problem of transmission, and the disposition of investigation or search that this produces. As Viart indicates, it is both

the knowledge and its opposite, the *insavoir,* that come from the search that animates and generates narrative. As Modiano's first protagonist in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* says, 'si toute cette période est parfois vivace dans mon souvenir, c'est à cause des questions restées sans réponse' (27), which shows how, conversely, it is the unanswered questions and the silences that stand in place of answers, that cause particular periods, people and topics to attract curiosity and remain present.

Moving from silence as a generative source and an instigator of text in Part I to notions of saving from silence in Part 2, I turn to silence as a component of testimonial writing and witnessing. I investigate the ways in which literature confronts silence and reanimates lost voices. Like the ghost figures highlighted by Parrochia, I discuss the means and ethics of literature in which silence figures as a force to be countered, mitigated by literature in an effort to reinstate and preserve.

Part II. Saving from Silence

The inherent polysemy of silence means that it can be punitive just as it can be merciful, can signify deprivation just as it can be essential to recovery. Moving from the productive quality of silence and the ways in which it acts as a generative source in the first two chapters of Part I, the third and fourth chapters further probe the multiform nature of silence. Thinking of silence as a place of forgetting, erasure and loss, I interrogate the ways in which literature works as a site and means of recovery by which lost voices are resuscitated and saved from oblivion.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus primarily on two intimately connected texts, *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder*, drawing out the ways in which they contain and expose ethical issues involved in retelling and testimony. To lay the groundwork for close analysis of the two texts in Chapter 4, Chapter 3 briefly introduces them before considering the ethical issues surrounding bearing witness and testimonial writing. I set out the historical-literary context in which Modiano was writing, including the rise of the *mode rétro* (retro fashion) and the inception of the *ère du témoin* (era of the witness), which introduced their own sets of ethical concerns. Key theoretical voices on testimony and the ethics of understanding and witnessing in this period, including Theodor Adorno, Giorgio Agamben and George Steiner, are incorporated. In addition, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's writing on trauma, testimony and bearing witness is examined to bring contextual understanding to the historically specific issue of silence and bearing witness. While the work of these critics is closely

related to direct Holocaust memory and survivor testimony, Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' (2009) is useful in describing the shift from first- to second-hand or 'inherited' experience. Many of these thinkers offer broadly psychoanalytic approaches to witness bearing, and my reading uses their insights to access a deeper understanding of the literary and formal implications in Modiano's work.

Building on the theoretical groundwork and historical contextualisation set out in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, 'A Poetics of Silence', studies three minor biographies within *Livret de famille* (1977), *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* (1978) and *Chien de printemps* (1993) to reveal the recurring and unresolved nature of the ethical predicaments connected to biographical and testimonial discourse. I then explore *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder* in detail, examining the ways in which the moral and ethical ambiguities inform a network of opposing poetic symbols. I argue that a fundamental ethical uncertainty and ambivalence gives rise to a performance of opposing actions of attempting to save from silence and, at the same time, lay to rest in reverential silence. The sense of responsibility to tell, which is inflected by a deep reverence for the unknown and the untellable, becomes infused into a nexus of poetic associations made up of meteorological and chromatic elements linked to silence and amnesia. The writing in these texts could be seen, in some ways, to adhere to Adorno's notion of immanent criticism, which expresses astute awareness of its own inefficacy and futility, but could also be subject to Agamben's criticism of over-aestheticisation of traumatic experience. Silence is investigated to ascertain what place it occupies and what semantic value it carries, shifting between the gulf from which people and stories are to be saved, and the high degree of respect and almost sanctity that it can impart.

Chapter 3: Ethics of Testimony

All words like Peace and Love,
All sane affirmative speech,
Had been soiled, profaned, debased
To a horrid mechanical screech.
W. H. Auden, 'We Too Had Known Golden Hours' (1951)

The testimonial impulse and desire to resurrect and retell others' stories are central motivations in Modiano's literature. Nettelbeck and Hueston identify René Meinthe in *Villa Triste*, as the first in a long series of those who are, in a sense, 'saved' through their story being told:

> Modiano offre en ce personnage le premier exemple de ce qui sera désormais une constante de son œuvre : une tentative de 'sauver', en les racontant, au moins des fragments de vies qui autrement auraient été tout à fait oubliées, et donc inutiles. (70)

Later, in *Fleurs de ruine*, the narrator tells the tragic story of Gisèle and Urbain T., explaining: 'Je les tire une dernière fois du néant avant qu'ils y retournent définitivement' (134). Hesitation about to whether to write about people from the past about pervades Modiano's works. In *L'herbe des nuits*, the narrator, blurring boundaries of fiction, wonders whether he should write about Dannie:

> J'hésite à écrire en toutes lettres le nom de famille que j'avais noté sur le carnet noir . . . et je ne veux pas attirer l'attention sur elle au cas où elle serait encore vivante quelque part. (16)

The acts of bearing witness, giving testimony and producing biographical discourse, fictional and otherwise, are, as indicated in the examples above, traversed by ethical issues and complications. Just as they have been recurring concerns in Modiano's work from an early date, their attendant ethical complexities have always inflected narrative form. In Modiano's work, the sense of responsibility to speak on behalf of others is often matched by a diametric inclination towards reverence for reservation, a resistance to telling and a tendency towards dissimulation and secrecy. In *Un Pedigree,* Modiano considers how his father felt during the Occupation and speculates that his hesitation to talk about the period arose from the fear he had felt of being persecuted for bearing a label he didn't even understand. But Modiano then interrupts himself, concluding, 'Mais on ne doit pas parler à la place d'un autre et j'ai toujours été gêné de rompre les silences même quand ils vous font mal' (32).

Modiano's hyper-awareness of speaking over or in place of another gives rise to a great deal of restraint and ambiguity in the way he retells people's stories. The tension involved in retelling and testimonial writing leads both towards and away from silence, mirroring the simultaneous resistance and desire to bear witness. Being bound to contrasting poles, silence plays a fundamental role yet encompasses two intrinsically opposing forces in this ethical dynamic. Modiano's characters often express gratitude or relief for silence; the phrase 'nous vivons à la merci de certains silences' recurs on several occasions. In *Quartier perdu* the phrase is found in a letter to Ambroise Guise from an old friend, who reassures him that he can count on his discretion and attributes the phrase to a French moralist (30). In *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue,* Caisley, the narrator of the second section, refrains from asking a certain Dr Vala about his past: 'Je me suis tu. Nous vivons à la merci de certains silences' (33). The phrase occurs twice in *L'herbe des nuits*, first in a letter to the protagonist, Jean, from the private detective Langlais—'Comptez sur ma discrétion.

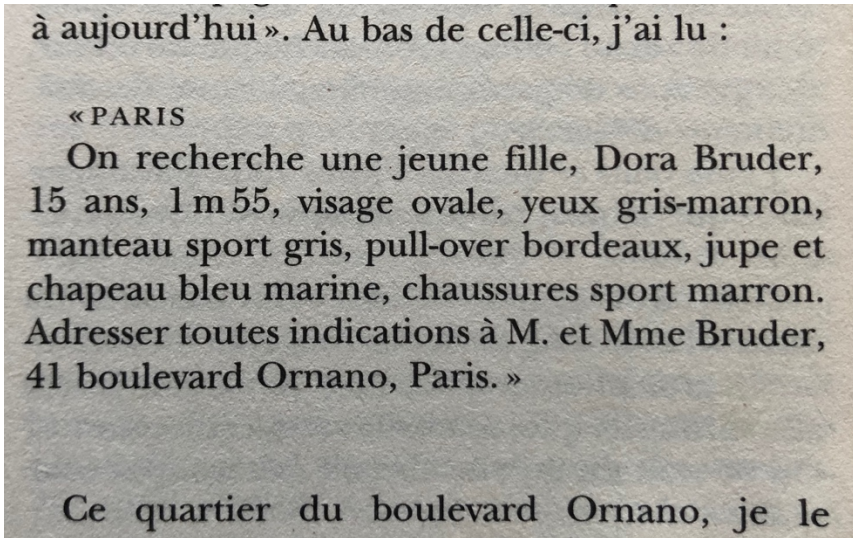
D'ailleurs, je crois que vous avez écrit quelque part que nous vivons à la merci de certains silences' (145)—and secondly some pages later, when Jean says 'Je croyais, jusque là . . . que nous étions à la merci de leurs silences' (159). More recently, in *Souvenirs dormants,* the narrator expresses his gratitude for the discretion of his former acquaintances: 'Ou bien, tout simplement, vivons-nous à la merci de certains silences' (80).

One Subject, Two Texts: *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder*

The tension between the imperative and impossibility of bearing witness and relaying another's story is clearly manifest in *Voyage de noces*, published in 1990, and *Dora Bruder*, published seven years later. In different ways, both confront the moral necessity of revealing and retelling forgotten lives from the Holocaust and its aftermath, yet they are also, necessarily, full of gaps and missing pieces, which invariably stake out silent spaces. On the first page of *Dora Bruder,* Modiano recounts finding a missing-person notice in a copy of *Paris Soir* dated 31 December 1941. We learn that he first discovered the notice eight years prior to the novel's publication. The initial temporal obscurity—we don't yet know when the author-narrator is writing from—followed by precise, seemingly verifiable historical details, sets in motion a dynamic relationship between precision and ambiguity that pervades the entire text. We have reason to believe that the discovery pertains to reality on the basis of corroborating paratextual elements including interviews in which Modiano talks about the genesis of the text.[23] The notice is reproduced on the first page, set

[23] See interview with Gallimard, 'Rencontre avec Patrick Modiano, à l'occasion de la parution de *Dora Bruder'* and P. Modiano 'Avec Klarsfeld contre l'oubli'. The names of Dora and her parents also appear in the first volume of Serge Klarsfeld's *Le mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France* (1978),

apart from the body of text, with blank lines above and below and the first two lines indented:


à aujourd'hui ». Au bas de celle-ci, j'ai lu :

« PARIS
On recherche une jeune fille, Dora Bruder, 15 ans, 1 m 55, visage ovale, yeux gris-marron, manteau sport gris, pull-over bordeaux, jupe et chapeau bleu marine, chaussures sport marron. Adresser toutes indications à M. et Mme Bruder, 41 boulevard Ornano, Paris. »

Ce quartier du boulevard Ornano, je le

Figure 1. *Dora Bruder,* p. 7.

This chance encounter—one in which Modiano had a degree of agency, since he was actively looking through the paper—led first to a work of fiction, *Voyage de noces* in which Modiano invented an altogether different, although ultimately tragic, outcome for the young runaway. *Voyage de noces* opens with the suicide of Ingrid, Dora's fictional incarnation. However, a few pages from the novel's close (153), Ingrid's missing-person notice is reproduced. The notice is neither set apart from the text with blank space above nor indented, but followed simply by an asterisk on the following page:

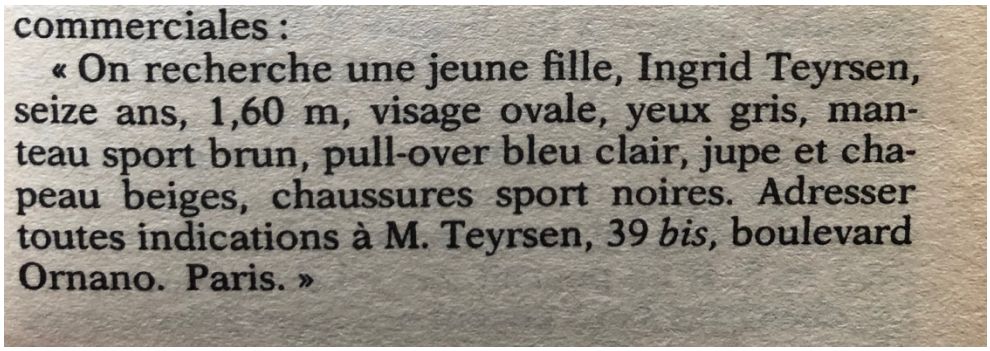

commerciales :
« On recherche une jeune fille, Ingrid Teyrsen, seize ans, 1,60 m, visage ovale, yeux gris, manteau sport brun, pull-over bleu clair, jupe et chapeau beiges, chaussures sport noires. Adresser toutes indications à M. Teyrsen, 39 *bis*, boulevard Ornano. Paris. »

Figure 2. *Voyage de noces,* p. 153.

and Dora's again in the 1995 edition of *Le mémorial des enfants juifs déportés de France* (1994) (Morris, 'Avec Klarsfeld' 280).

Although there are minute and intriguing differences between the missing-person notices, the overriding similarity of detail and, most significantly, the shared context of the two disappearances are striking: both Dora and Ingrid are reported missing in winter in Paris during the Nazi Occupation.

In an interview with his publisher, Gallimard, Modiano said that he was deeply troubled by the notice and that writing *Voyage de noces* was a way of maintaining proximity to Dora and even discovering more about her (1997). In *Dora Bruder,* Modiano makes two references to his earlier novel:

> Le manque que j'éprouvais m'a poussé à l'écriture d'un roman, *Voyage de noces,* 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 passée, un détail de sa vie. (53)

He also states:

> Dans le roman que j'ai écrit, sans presque rien savoir de Dora Bruder, mais pour que sa pensée continue à m'occuper l'esprit, la jeune fille de son âge que j'avais appelée Ingrid se réfugie avec un ami en zone libre. (74)

Modiano is quite disparaging about the verisimilitude of his evocation of Dora in fiction, which he describes as 'un vague reflet de la réalité' (54). This vague reflection is a passage describing a journey in a horse-drawn sled across a snow-covered Paris, during which a possible convergence of itineraries could have brought Dora and Ingrid together. Modiano says it is 'le seul moment du livre où, sans le savoir, je me suis rapproché d'elle, dans l'espace et le temps' (54). It is significant that snow is a central element of the scene that unites Dora and Ingrid. Snow is a central motif across Modiano's novels in general and in these two in particular, the poetics and association of which are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

While this scene is a point of convergence where the real-life Dora Bruder and the fictional Ingrid Teyrsen meet, *Voyage de noces* affirms itself as a novel, and *Dora Bruder* remains, for the most part, in the realm of non-fiction. However, the genre of *Dora Bruder* is a moot point. It has been variously described as biography (Gratton 43), a 'hybrid' text drawing on 'biography, autobiography, documentary, memoir, and detective novel' (Rose par. 2), a 'second-generation Holocaust ekphrasis' (Howell 59), a kind of 'lutte contre le *roman policier*' (Xanthos 890), a 'book which is and is not a novel' (Pérez 109) and simply a 'book' by Modiano ('Correspondance' 186). Frölicher described it as '« vraie » biographie', 'roman' and 'récit documentaire' (68), Kacandes calls it a 'paramemoir' and an example of 'co-witnessing' (205) and Mary Jean Green notes that the amount of statements and clues in the text that 'would be sufficient to establish a sort of *pacte autobiographique'* (435) following Philippe Lejeune's definition.

Classification of *Voyage de noces* has been less extensively debated, but there is a similar lack of consensus. Characteristic points of convergence between narrator, protagonist and author have invited discussions about the applicability of 'autofiction' (Laurent *L'oeuvre de Patrick Modiano* and Kawakami *Self-Conscious* 106-108) and one commentator initially evokes features of the 'roman psychologique, biographie, autoportrait et roman policier', before settling on its placement at 'l'intersection de deux genres, à la fois remémoration et invention, en partie roman policier, en partie auto-portrait' (Kaminskas 933, 939). However, this was in 1993, before Modiano, in the above excerpt from *Dora Bruder*, referred to the earlier text simply—or misleadingly—as a 'roman'. Defining genre is not solely about form. As Lynn Higgins sees it, the ambiguity of genre is directly related to the aims of Modiano's project:

> His need to know merges with his equally compelling desire to respect the reality of her life and death, forcing him to modify his conception of the novel genre and to forge for the novelist a new professional ethics—what in French is called a déontologie—that will bring his project into harmony with his subject. ('Fugue States' 453)

The text clearly occupies multiple undefined generic spaces, and while genre is not my principal concern here, the fact that it continues to be debated is significant; difficulty of classification is linked to the existential and ethical ambiguities at the heart of these texts. While it might be enough to say that *Dora Bruder* takes a more direct approach with regard to historical veracity than *Voyage de noces,* one common element is the central theme of biography and its ethics. Susan Suleiman summarises the issue, connecting generic form with a new awareness specific to Dora as a historical subject and the associated ethical charge. She regards *Dora Bruder* as 'a hybrid work, not only between literary genres (biography, fiction, autobiography) but also between the ontological categories of memory and history'. It is precisely this interstitial space that allows Modiano to confront 'the ethical question of responsibility and its relation to mourning' ('Oneself' 326).

While Modiano sets out to reconstruct Dora Bruder's life from meagre archival sources and scarce witnesses, the narrator-protagonist of *Voyage de noces,* Jean B. (the usual Modianesque protagonist 'Jean' becomes 'Jean B.' much like '41 boulevard Ornano' becomes '39 bis') disappears, abandoning his wife, colleagues and career to take refuge in the outskirts of Paris to write a biography of Ingrid, the woman whose suicide is reported in the opening paragraphs. Jean B. is faced with a similar dearth of material for his biographical project: 'tout ce que je savais d'elle, c'est-à-dire pas grand-chose…' (51).

Few of Modiano's primary themes are found in one novel in isolation. Rather, they rise and fall, occupying a more central or peripheral place from one text to the next, rarely disappearing completely. The current of biographical writing and concern for bearing witness is not limited to these texts. Denise Cima identifies it as one of the 'schémas narratifs de l'œuvre modianesque' and sees the influence of the father as so pervasive that each work can be read as 'une biographie « éclatée », fragmentée, du père' (17), which slightly overstates the point, yet nevertheless recognises the theme's pervasiveness. However, Cima describes Modiano's biographic process as incomplete, leaving many blanks and grey areas since the process of discovery is both painful and gradual.

To get a clearer perspective of the semantics of silence in the thread of biographical writing, it is critical to understand the specific context underpinning and informing these novels. The following section 'Historical Context: Between Silence and Noise', explores the broader social and political climate and considers how these testimonial and biographical texts responded both to personal motivation and diffuse forces at a clear historical juncture.

Modiano's connection to the Occupation period, specifically as experienced in Paris was mentioned in the previous chapter, and he returns to it in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

> À cause de l'absence des voitures, c'était une ville silencieuse—un silence où l'on entendait le bruissement des arbres, les claquements des sabots des chevaux, le bruit des pas de la foule sur les boulevards et le brouhaha des voix. (15)

The capacity of atmospheric silence to make other sounds stand out recurs again and again in Modiano's work, and while this kind of silence seems to have an almost

peaceful, bucolic aspect, silence in communication and speech has another, much more sinister side:

> Les adultes et les enfants pouvaient disparaître d'un instant à l'autre, sans laisser aucune trace, et même entre amis, on se parlait à demi-mot et les conversations n'était jamais franches, parce qu'on sentait une menace planer dans l'air. (15)

In his preface to Françoise Verny's *Serons-nous vivantes le 2 janvier 1950 ?*, Modiano describes Paris in 1942 as 'un Paris silencieux et sans regard' (16), anthropomorphising the city into a witness, that averts its gaze from what is taking place within its walls.

Historical Context: Between Silence and Noise

During the years of recovery and rebuilding in post-war France, there was an extended period during which the wartime experience was largely channelled through Resistance narratives. This has been seen, in part, to have helped the French nation restore a sense of national cohesion and return to a state of normality. However, the idea of a strong France that was united in its resistance to the occupying forces eventually gave way to greater questioning and counternarratives.[24] The rise of renewed interrogation and speaking out in turn

[24] It was not until 1995 that then President, Jacques Chirac made a public statement (on 16 July, the anniversary of the *Vél' d'Hiv* round-up) officially recognising the responsibility of the French State in crimes committed by collaborationist Vichy. According to Rousso, this was 'la première fois depuis la fin de l'Occupation que la responsabilité de l'État dans les persécutions antisémites a été aussi clairement reconnue et affirmée, une nouveauté abondamment soulignée par les commentateurs de tous ordres' ('Sortir du dilemme' 199). Nettelbeck and Cooke note that in 1992 Modiano signed the petition addressed to Mitterrand appealing for recognition of Vichy's crimes, which was rejected (46n24).

raised questions of form: what was the most appropriate means of communicating these narratives and speaking on behalf of others who might have endured unspeakable experiences? Was literature, non-fiction, film or documentary the most suitable medium, or should accounts first be heard in the courtroom? Françoise Verny's account of her friend and classmate, Nicole Alexandre, who disappeared and was sent to Auschwitz in 1943, entitled *Serons-nous vivantes le 2 janvier 1950 ?*, for which Modiano wrote the preface, was written some sixty years later. In the text, Verny writes: 'On préférait garder le silence. On voulait presque oublier. On n'avait pas encore trouvé les mots. Il aura fallu soixante ans pour trouver les mots' (15). It was not known whether it was possible to find the words, nor how to give form to such experiences.

Although *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder* were both written well after the initial period of questions and reassessment, there is clear questioning about the appropriate form in which to tell Dora's story. As seen above, there is a shift from a more fictional way of writing, to one that is more aligned with verifiable historical reality. Situating these generic shifts and tensions between commemoration and suppression in their historical and social context is instructive since these concerns are connected to broader debates about the ethics of testimony and witnessing, especially in the context of Occupation and Holocaust memory.

As mentioned, Modiano has written multiple prefaces and forewords, often for works connected to wartime experience and personal testimony. For the 2009 edition of E. M. Remarque's *À l'Ouest rien de nouveau* (original German title: *Im Westen nichts Neues*), he wrote:

> L'un des privilèges de la littérature, c'est justement de rompre le silence, de crever la carapace du conformisme, des idéologies et des mensonges

> politiques, de dire 'Je', au nom de ceux qui n'ont pas pu parler ou que personne ne voulait entendre.

Modiano describes literature's capacity to reanimate silenced or ignored voices and to counteract the suffocation of ideology and political untruth. Remarque's novel, which describes the physical and mental exhaustion of a soldier returned from the First World War battlefields, and its sequel *Après* (original title *Der Weg zurück*), were banned under the Nazi regime, repressing both Remarque's voice and his novels' pacifist message. It may be one of literature's 'privileges' to break such silence and one might even venture that for Modiano, it is also one of its responsibilities. Mireille Hilsum notes in 'Modiano préfacier' that his prefaces allow us to hear people's voices as if they were whispering to us (230). She cites as an example the preface he wrote for Hélène Berr's *Journal*, in which Modiano describes Berr's voice as 'si proche, dans le silence de ce Paris-là…' (7).

Silence of the Aftermath and Inflation of the Myth

In *Le syndrome de Vichy*, Henry Rousso divides the post-war period into four phases, the first of which is a period of 'unfinished mourning'. This stage was characterised by reticence confronting the contradictions of France's involvement with its occupiers and was tinged with latent hope that the passing of time would eventually heal past fractures. As mentioned in the introduction, Annette Wieviorka nuances Rousso's account of this period, noting that there was in fact a short-lived abundance of testimony produced in the years immediately following the Liberation (1944-48), including works such as Robert Antelme's *L'espèce humaine* (1947).

Similarly, Pierre Sorlin, writing on post-war memory in film, notes a flurry of testimony during these years (74). However, Schulte Nordholt writes that saturation point was soon reached and an extended silence followed: 'Suivent de longues années de silence et d'indifférence de la part du public, alors que les ouvrages sur la Résistance tiennent le dessus du pavé' (*Perec, Modiano* 26). This structural amnesia that superposes one version of history over another might be referred to, in the words of Paul Connerton, as a form of 'repressive erasure' (60). Rousso cites the example of Chanoine Desgranges, deputy of Morbihan, who, as part of his anti-*épuration* efforts in the years after the war, suggested that the terms 'vichysme' and 'Collaboration' be banned from French vocabulary (*Syndrome* 41).

Wieviorka's point about the rise of Resistance narratives aligns with Rousso's second phase. The long period of 'refoulement' from 1954 to 1971 saw the inflation of 'résistancialisme gaullien', which Rousso defines as:

> un nouveau concept, très prisé à droite: le 'résistantialisme' écrit avec un 't' , et non avec 'c' comme résistancialisme. La différence est fondamentale. Dans le premier cas, la connotation péjorative désigne les résistants, particulièrement les fanfarons de la dernière heure. . . . Étrange Résistance sans résistants. (*Syndrome* 39)

It was less a recognition of the Resistance as an actual movement than the idea of the French people united in resistance. Cima's definition, years later, underlines the mythological aspect: 'sous l'impulsion du général de Gaulle, [le résistancialisme] ré-interprète les années de guerre, occulte la Collaboration et forge le mythe d'une France en grande partie opposée à l'Occupant' (6). This predominantly inflected national-level rhetoric and commemorative processes; however, Margaret Atack points to a concurrent trend in literature. She describes the majority of literary output during the war and immediate post-war period functioning as 'a paradigm of

the French resistance so enthusiastically espoused after the Liberation' (3). An antidote to this triumphalist trend was provided by the literary right, represented by the 'Hussards', who focused more on the nation's failures and shortcomings, giving voice to the general malaise of an era.

Rise of Testimony

For literature to be able to speak more fluently about the full range of wartime experience, a change in consciousness was needed. Wieviorka identifies the Eichmann trial in 1961 in Jerusalem, breaking almost fifteen years of silence, as the catalyst that made this possible. The Eichmann trial, Wieviorka says, 'a libéré la parole des témoins' (117). It marked the beginning of what she terms, in the title of her book, *l'ère du témoin*. Atack argues that in France the 'era of the witness' came about after 1961, when the country's own high-profile trials began to take place. One of the most significant of these hearings was that of Maurice Papon, former secretary-general of the Gironde, accused of complicity in crimes against humanity. It was described by Adam Gopnik in *The New Yorker* as 'the longest, the most discouraging, the most moving, at times the most ridiculous, and certainly the most fraught trial in postwar French history' (86). Charles Forsdick sees the Papon trial—which took place from October 1997 to April 1998, making it the longest in French history—as a crucial event, firstly because it came after nearly two decades of legal wrangling, and secondly because it followed a series of earlier attempts to bring other figures to justice, and thus previous events resurfaced. Among them were the

conviction in 1979 of Jean Leguay for crimes against humanity;[25] the trial of Klaus Barbie in 1985;[26] the discovery in 1991 in the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs of a list of 150,000 names and addresses of Jews drawn up during the Occupation and used to find them for arrest; the assassination of René Bousquet in 1993;[27] and the trial of Paul Touvier[28] in 1994 along with revelations about the protection he was granted.

Publishing channels also responded to the increased production of *témoignage* literature and public appetite for it. In 1965 Pierre Nora created Gallimard's 'Témoins' collection about which Françoise Dosse remarks 'on ne peut pas ne pas faire le lien en ce milieu des années soixante avec la montée de l'ère du témoin après le procès Eichmann' ('Pierre Nora' 931). One of the collection's first publications was the translation of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* along with a number of translations of German memoirs and testimonial works, such as Peter Schwiefert's letters *L'Oiseau n'a plus d'ailes*..., translated by Claude Lanzmann, Heinrich Brunning's *Mémoires (1918-1934),* both published in 1974, Heinrich Himmler's *Discours secrets* in 1978 and Claudine Vegh's *Je ne lui ai pas dit au revoir*, a collection of interviews with Jewish orphans whose parents were killed in the camps. The collection continues to this day, in line with Rousso's schema, though its outlook has

[25] Jean Leguay (1909-1989) was René Bosquet's second-in-command in the Paris Police under the Vichy government. He was charged in 1979 for crimes against humanity in his role in the *Vél' d'Hiv* round-up in July 1942. Another set of charges was brought against him in 1986 for further deportations of Jews from Paris in August 1942. He was never brought to trial.

[26] Klaus Barbie (1913-1991) was head of the local Gestapo in Lyon. He fled to South America after the war and was extradited from Bolivia in 1983. He was charged with 177 crimes against humanity and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1987. He died four years later.

[27] René Bousquet (1909-1993) was secretary general in charge of police under Laval's Vichy government from May 1942 to December 1943. The *Vél' d'Hiv'* round-up in 1942 was organised and executed under his command. He was assassinated in 1993 shortly before he was due to stand trial for crimes against humanity.

[28] Paul Touvier (1915-1996) was an intelligence officer under Klaus Barbie in the *Milice.* He was discovered in 1989 in a Catholic monastery in Nice, put on trial and convicted of crimes against humanity. He died in prison.

broadened over time and now includes witness accounts from around the world, yet always with a focus on the Second World War.

However, before the public trials and scandals of the era of the witness in France, there were the events of 1968, which not only protested the state's educational policies but also contested an unresolved historical legacy (Ungar, *Scandal* 9). The complicated release of Marcel Ophüls' *Le Chagrin et la pitié,* filmed in 1967-68, exemplifies the opposing forces and ideologies in France at the time. It was released in 1969 in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United States, but its distribution in France was obstructed by the ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française); the organisation's boss, Jean-Jacques Bresson, explained that the film would have 'détruit des mythes dont les Français ont encore besoin' (Rousso, *Syndrome* 125). It was shown only in one small cinema in 1971 and again in 1979, and it was not until October 1981, during the Mitterand era, that it was released on television. Although the film didn't initially reach a mass audience, the scandal of censorship, and the process of de-/re-mythification was what made its impact on collective memory so great (*Syndrome* 126). This was part of what Rousso sees as the dawning of the *miroir brisé* phase, which also heralded the emergence of the *mode rétro*. It was in this period that historical works looking into France's role in the Second World War started to become available to the public. Robert Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944* appeared in 1972 in English and in French the following year, followed some years later by French works by Jean-Pierre Azéma *La collaboration : 1940-1944* in 1975 and *De Munich à la Libération : 1938-1944* in 1984.

This phase was short (1971-1974), but it had a powerful impact. It shattered much of the myth of a united resistant France described by Pascal Ory as an 'image sépia, réconfortante, de peuple uni en ses profondeurs dans une même hostilité à

l'Allemand et au régime fantoche de Vichy' (109). Like Rousso, Ory identifies Ophüls' film as a 'fracture' that released a 'flot de paroles' challenging the dominant narrative. However, *Chagrin* didn't appear in a vacuum; Ory noted in *Comme de l'an quarante* that novelists and filmmakers had already begun to prepare the ground. Among these forerunners, Modiano is singled out: 'Patrick Modiano est longtemps à près seul à se soucier de la période de l'Occupation' (Viart and Vercier 153). *Lacombe Lucien,* for which Modiano wrote the screenplay with director Louis Malle, came out in 1974.[29] Film scholar Ian Christie, responding to the comment that *Lacombe Lucien* caused quite a stir on its release, remarked:

> Oh a huge stir. It was, it was one of those landmarks—I mean, like Marcel Ophüls' film *Le chagrin et le pitié,* for instance, which really blew apart a kind of complacency or almost a conspiracy of silence to not talk about what happened during the war. (42:09)

Modiano had already begun unearthing such material some years before the release of *Lacombe Lucien.* Already in *La place de l'étoile,* Léon Rabatête (a thinly veiled Lucien Rebatet) and Brasillach appear, two anti-Semitic writers who had quite divergent post-war fates. Brasillach was executed in the post-war *epuration,* whereas Rebatet went on to write an encyclopedia of music history (Silkin). Ory describes Modiano's pioneering place among writers and artists in this movement: 'Patrick Modiano ne poursuivait pas un cycle; il en ouvrait un, et n'allait guère quitter l'atmosphère de l'Occupation avant un bon lustre' (Ory 110). It was true that Modiano hadn't turned away from the Occupation period in 1981 when Orly wrote this, and the observation still holds true of Modiano's recent publications. Although references to the

[29] *Lacombe, Lucien* follows the story of a young country lad who, after being rejected by the local Resistance group headed by his school master, somewhat inadvertently joins the Carlingue. He denounces his teacher but falls in love with a young Jewish woman, France Horn.

Occupation become more indirect and stylised, it remains a central reference point and component of the atmosphere.

It was during this period of investigation and heightened awareness, amid high-profile scandals and trials described by Rose as an 'intense new phase in France's confrontation with its ambiguous past' (par. 2), that Modiano was working, publishing a book every year or two. Here again, Modiano's importance is singled out by Rousso, in this instance for the place he accords ambiguity and his restraint in allocating blame or drawing clear moral lines:

> Modiano constitue une catégorie à lui tout seul, tant a été grande son influence dans ces années-là. Dans tous ses livres (ou presque), il dévoile une fascination pour le chien et le loup de l'Occupation . . . Il joue avec les ambiguïtés des engagements, refusant jusqu'à l'excès tout déterminisme idéologique, et promenant ses personnages comme des pantins sans conscience ni morale. (*Syndrome* 144)

Modiano was among the first writers to challenge uncomfortable, outdated silences, yet he did so in a restrained way, resisting simplified accounts and opposing ethically uncomplicated solutions.

Significantly, at the time as *Dora Bruder*'s publication in 1997, Maurice Papon's trial was under way and there was an atmosphere of institutional and state-level re-examination. Charles Forsdick notes that it 'had been preceded by a series of recognitions of guilt from French doctors, bishops and police as they acknowledged collective remorse for their respective roles in collaboration during the Occupation' ('Direction les oubliettes' 333-4). Papon's activities during the Algerian conflict also resurfaced during the trial, which highlights the extent to which past national

traumas and conflicts were enmeshed.[30] Also in 1997, of the Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Spoliation was established.[31]

Despite the questioning and apparent public will for investigation, a clear history detailing France's involvement was not established. However, conditions shifted, allowing new narratives and new ways of probing the past to emerge. In Steven Ungar's view, what makes Rousso's account of the period so compelling is his 'refusal to dismiss from his own treatment the gaps and silences that gave presence and immediacy to the memory of Vichy': silences that 'implied that memory was always incomplete because it was doubled by a structure of forgetting' (*Scandal and Aftereffect* 11). There was no clear-cut movement from absence to revelation. Indeed, in literature, Atack makes the point that many of the recurrent themes of the *mode rétro* were already present earlier, when Gaullist and Communist myths were gaining ground. (*Literature and the French Resistance* 3) and Wieviorka cites Schwarz-Bart's *Le dernier des justes,* which won the Prix Goncourt in 1959, as part of what she sees as the emergence of a specific 'Shoah memory' in the 1950s and 1960s ('Deportation and Memory' 283). This is not to suggest that there were no discernible shifts, but rather that it was a complex and multi-layered evolution that was not unidirectional. In *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas,* Rousso and Conan describe a continued state of fantasised unveiling with each new novel that came out dealing with an aspect of the Second World War, as if what was being related had been dragged from silence, even though the issues had been discussed in newspapers and historical works (24). Rousso and Conan describe this cyclical 'pseudo-unveiling' as

[30] See also Jean-Luc Einaudi and Maurice Rajsfus, *Les silences de la police* (2001) which compares the massacre of some 200 Algerian independentists in Paris in 1961 with the *Vél' d'Hiv* round-up in 1942.

[31] Established in March 1997 by Prime Minister Alain Juppé, the Commission was also known as the Mattéoli Mission. It investigated confiscation of Jewish intellectual and real property in France by occupying forces and Vichy authorities between 1940 and 1944. See: www.civs.gouv.fr/en/resource-materials/the-matteoli-mission/.

a kind of reminiscence of the 1970s and 1980s when novels and witness accounts really did touch on taboo areas and shed light on grey areas (24).

Obsession and the *mode rétro*

Rousso calls the fourth period that of obsession, in which the *mode rétro* continued to inform fashion, music, journalism, film and literature, reanimating stories and trends from the 1940s. *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* describes the ways in which Vichy memory has continued to haunt the (re-)constructing of national narrative. Rousso describes the *mode rétro* as a necessary part of the public's reconciliation with the past. This included authors and artists pre-empting and giving intelligible aesthetic expression to collective mentalities (145). As part of the *obsession*, Viart and Vercier suggest that there was a 'vague 1997' (158) for literature that focused on the Second World War. Alongside *Dora Bruder* they cite Lydie Salvayre's *La Compagnie des spectres* (1997), François Thibault's, *Notre Dame des Ombres* (1997), Denis Lachaud's *J'apprends l'allemand* (1998), Pierre Assouline's *La Cliente* (1998), Jacques-Pierre Amette's *Les deux léopards* (1997) and Marc Lambron's *1941* (1998) as part of the same wave. Again, these works didn't spring from nowhere; the ground for this writing that took a fresh look at France's past had, according to Viart and Vercier, been prepared by earlier writers: 'les livres de Claude Simon, de Modiano, de Duras, de Robbe-Grillet ont ouvert le champ de questionnement' (166).

Much *mode rétro* literature is set during the war or looks back to it, evoking or facing it more or less squarely and reanimating the polyphony of voices from the period. Speaking out, re-examining and in some cases re-opening wounds, especially with regard to Holocaust memory, necessarily takes place in an ethical

arena fraught with difficulties. A sense of immediacy to do so came with the rise of of Shoah denial. One example being Roger Garaudy's *Les Mythes fondateurs de la politique israélienne* in 1996. Again, discourses of denial were not new; on 28 October 1978, Louis Darquier 'de Pellepoix',[32] former Commissioner for Jewish Affairs under Vichy who fled before Liberation, was discovered in Spain. He gave an interview with Phlippe Ganier-Raymond, published in *L'Express* titled '« À Auschwitz on n'a gazé que les poux. »' (164) in which Darquier denied that anyone had been killed in the gas chambers and qualified the Final Solution as pure invention. This was swiftly supported in an open letter by Robert Faurisson, a Lyon academic, who was in turn supported by Noam Chomsky, who defended Faurisson's right to free speech.

As part of the 'Témoins' collection mentioned above, and to 'faire pièce aux thèses négationnistes' (Dosse 932), Pierre Nora published works that challenged denial narratives, two examples being *Les chambres à gaz ont existé* by Auschwitz and Buchenwald survivor George Wellers, a study of concentration camp documentation, and Walter Laqueur's *Le terrifiant secret. La solution finale et l'information étouffée* (both 1981), which contested allied powers' purported ignorance of the extermination of Jews from 1942 and questioned their enduring silence on the subject.

All of these contributing factors raised questions about the value of bearing witness, to which there was no simple answer. Rousso notes that successive scandals pointed to the essential issue of transmission: 'faut-il en parler ?', 'comment en parler ?', 'pourquoi en avoir parlé ?' (*Syndrome* 176). This atmosphere, in which Modiano was writing, contained the desire to bear witness and provide testimony

[32] Louis Darquier was a self-styled aristocrat—he invented and added 'de Pellepoix'—and anti-Semite who climbed the ranks of the Vichy administration. His rise to power in the context of ascendent French anti-Semitism and his tumultuous marriage to a Tasmanian woman, Myrtle Jones, are brilliantly and devastatingly detailed in Carmen Callil's *Bad Faith: A Forgotten History of Family and Fatherland* (2007).

on the one hand, and the reluctance to speak out, coupled, for some, with the insurmountable unsayability of the past, on the other. Denise Cima describes the changing norms in terms of what is possible and sayable and sees Modiano's movement into historical commentary as marking a shift from taboo to acceptability: 'Ce qui avait été considéré antérieurement comme de la provocation était désormais légitimé, banalisé' (20). Her commentary joins that of Ory and Rousso in recognising the centrality of Modiano's output in the shift to greater facility in speaking out on the subject, and his role in this regard continues to be reiterated to the present day. Blanckeman wrote in 2019:

> il convient donc de ne pas la [l'œuvre de Modiano] banaliser au regard des évidences culturelles du XXI^e^ siècle. Elle a contribué en pionnière à rompre l'interdit de parole concernant en France le régime de Vichy et la responsabilité de ce dernier dans la déportation des juifs. (*Patrick Modiano ou l'écriture* 28)

While facilitating testimony and expression, the passing of time means that the Second World War is filtered across an increasing temporal distance and through different media. Hirsch uses the notion of postmemory to describe memory whose 'connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (22). Writing from a postmemorial position involves the myriad difficulties and ethical issues that complicate the testimonial and biographical impulse. In some cases, complications in an individual's relationship with memory are further obscured by their being transmitted through another. For Blanckeman, Modiano's position as witness is complexified because he deals with experience that is not his lived experience. He describes Modiano as 'Un témoin paradoxal. Il ne fonde pas son récit sur une expérience oculaire, comme en termes de droit, mais sur une expérience qui serait strictement visionnaire' (*Patrick Modiano ou l'écriture* 25). It is precisely because he is dealing with memory that is not

his own, but which has been to some degree internalised, that he is so ambiguous about recovering others' stories from silence and giving them form.

Ethics of Bearing Witness, Ethics of Understanding

As we continue to move into the twenty-first century, the gap between the Second World War and the present increases and the number of living witnesses decreases. We are, in James Young's words, 'At Memory's Edge', an inevitability to which Modiano is acutely sensitive: in *Dora Bruder,* he writes, 'J'ai l'impression d'être tout seul à faire le lien entre le Paris de ce temps-là et celui d'aujourd'hui . . . le lien s'amenuise et risque de se rompre' (50). With time and history slipping into oblivion, inscribing in literature offers a potential safe house, but it is not an uncomplicated one. Debates regarding whether one should—and how—to absorb, remember and reckon with collective historical trauma necessarily change over time, as do questions about what memory signifies and whether the purpose of remembering is to comprehend. Claude Lanzmann's trenchant statement that 'there is indeed an absolute obscenity in the project of understanding' (279) is an extreme, but unambiguous one that equates understanding with exoneration and begins to explain why the question of the Holocaust immediately opens onto a chasm of unspeakability. However, to remember or understand is not necessarily to forgive, as Eric Hobsbawm holds in *The Age of Extremes*: 'there is no truth in the familiar French phrase *tout comprendre c'st* [sic] *tout pardonner*' (5).

The ethics of interpreting and understanding became increasingly tense as more light was shed on the atrocities of the Second World War. The title of the essay in which Lanzmann equated understanding with obscenity, 'Hier ist kein Warum'

(Here there is no why'), was taken from Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*. It is the answer Levi receives from a guard when he asks why he is not allowed to eat an icicle he finds on the ground; the 'why' is inadmissible. Despite their different contexts, they both point towards the same fundamental absurdity. However, Lanzmann's ostensibly prohibiting statement belies the effort to understand. The series of seemingly aporetic statements throughout the essay, such as 'Blindness should be understood here as seeing in its purest form, the only way not to avert the gaze from a reality that is literally blinding: blindness as clear-sightedness itself' and 'one must speak out and yet keep silent at the same time, knowing that in this case silence is the most authentic form of speech' (279), point to the profound disruption in any post-Auschwitz project of knowledge and comprehension, as well as to the self-conscious and vigilant will to redress, which passes inevitably through knowledge.

In 1949, in the aftermath of the revelations of the brutality of the concentration camps, Adorno wrote, 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' ('Cultural Criticism' 34), which appears, out of context, to be even more forbidding than Lanzmann's statement. It seems to be a call for a moral ban on poetry, and has often been interpreted as such.[33] Adorno's essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society', from which his dictum comes, is an examination of the role of the cultural critic who finds himself[34] inextricably implicated and therefore complicit in the very same system and culture that are his objects (25). And since this system became one in which genocide was possible, culture too is culpable: 'Auschwitz demonstrated irrefutably that culture has failed' (*Negative Dialectics* 366).

[33] Elaine Martin cites a number of misinterpretations in literature dealing with representations of the Shoah, including Susan Gubar, 'Adorno's *injunction* against poetry' and 'nihilism of his *prohibition* against poetry', the title of Günther Bohnheim's work 'The attempt to show that Adorno's claim, that after Auschwitz poetry cannot be written, is correct', and Elrud Ibsch's misreading: 'Adorno must be contradicted. The silencing of poetry would mean the triumph of the National Socialist barbarity' (2).

[34] Invariably Adorno's cultural critic is male. However problematic this may be, it would be anachronistic to dwell on it here.

To summarise Adorno's argument in 'Cultural Criticism and Society', the offence of criticism is its gradual effacement of difference and simultaneous support of cultural homogeneity. Even though it is incumbent on criticism to assume a position of independence in bourgeois society, it generally succumbs to the opposite: 'it has fallen increasingly under the anonymous sway of the *status quo*', leading to the dangerous position of irresponsibility and 'renunciation of interference' (22, 23), failing its critical purpose. The problem is that criticism 'detracts from the true horrors'; instead of illuminating truth, cultural critics 'help to weave the veil' (28, 20). Adorno offers a way out of this bind through the 'unideological thought' of what he calls 'immanent', as opposed to 'transcendent', criticism. Immanent criticism should contain and express its inherent dialectical tension; it 'pursues the logic of its aporias, the insolubility of the task itself'. In facing its own contradictions, it highlights others: 'In such antinomies criticism perceives those of society' (32). Immanent criticism essentially gestures towards the unsayable; it 'strives solely to help the things themselves to that articulation from which they are otherwise cut off by the prevailing language' (29). This kind of critical engagement cannot and should not try to 'resolve objective contradictions in a spurious harmony' but rather should point to them 'by embodying the contradictions . . . in its innermost structure' (32). In their own ways, both Lanzmann and Adorno evoke the necessity of striving towards representation that encompasses the will to reveal, to speak and to transmit, all the while acknowledging a fundamental process of corruption that renders this effort incomplete, at best. Although Adorno doesn't offer a concrete example of the form of such criticism, Jorge Semprún and Elie Wiesel's essay *Se taire est impossible* could be seen as an example. They express a state of wordlessness—'on ne peut pas dire'—but are unable to remain in silence—'se taire est impossible' (18).

Even out of context, 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' constitutes a marker of unspeakability (Mandel 219), bound to the idea that Western culture, by being part of a world in which Auschwitz could exist, was complicit in its barbarism. Yet for Adorno, culture and cultural criticism are still capable of, and indeed responsible for, repairing Western culture. It is the responsibility of the cultural critic and indeed all citizens to 'arrange their thought and action in such a way so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself' (*Negative Dialectics* 365). As Adorno sees it, the situation of all post-Auschwitz writers and artists is conditioned by the aporia whereby its imperative to represent unspeakable experiences that are inherently unrepresentable. Adorno later revisited the idea, writing in a form of palinode that '[p]erennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems' (*Negative Dialectics* 362), thus highlighting that what is sayable or writable is not fixed over time. He continues, 'All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage' (367). If poetry is an expression of the desire to decipher meaning in the world, it is precisely this that is barbaric: 'they [our feelings] balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate' (361). Yet opting out is not an option: 'Not even silence gets us out of the circle.' There is, it seems, no right way:

> Whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be. (367)

Part of the difficulty is not just the complicity of culture, but also that language, through which culture is expressed, has been corrupted. George Steiner wrote:

> Use a language to conceive, organise and justify Belsen; use it to make out specifications for gas ovens . . . Something will happen to it. . . . Something of the lies and sadism will settle in the marrow of the language. (101)

As Steiner sees it, the Second World War engendered a breakdown, if not the complete destruction, of language's capacity to carry logic or truth. The barbarity surpasses the limits of language's ability to represent it: 'The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason' (123). As well as undermining language and the ability of a culture to evaluate itself usefully, the Second World War is psychologically traumatic more generally because it moves between individual, familial, collective, social and state levels. This is taken up by Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, among others, who see the historic trauma of the Second World War as a 'watershed of our times' that is 'essentially *not over*' (*Testimony* xiv). Through their work on trauma and their consideration of the ethical issues of witnessing and testimony, they position the Second World War as an event:

> whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively evolving (Eastern Europe and the Gulf War are two obvious examples) in today's political, historical, cultural and artistic scene. (xiv)

They return to the point that what is considered sayable or writable in the wake of trauma is always in flux and draw attention to the presentness of the debate and its ongoing, unresolved nature.

Trauma Theory: Listening to the Void

Modiano's work comes after and therefore in the shadow of the Holocaust, a legacy that is expressed in different ways in each of his works, more starkly in some novels, and in more muted tones in others. *Dora Bruder* and *Voyage de noces* deal with issues involved in representing others who have directly and indirectly experienced trauma. They cautiously enter the realm of biography, both fictional and non-fictional—as well as the realm of poetry, following Adorno's thinking—with the attendant pitfalls of appropriation, over- or under-identification and face the risk of aestheticising trauma. In 1997 interview, Modiano said that he was 'profondément troublé' (Gallimard) by the discovery of Dora's missing-person notice, so much so that he could felt compelled to pursue his search for her, reimagining and rewriting her through Ingrid—'pour deviner quelque chose d'elle' (*DB* 52)—reaching out through a newspaper article to which Serge Klarsfeld replied, and finally, writing the account of his search in *Dora Bruder*.

Elie Wiesel stated that 'when you listen to a witness you become a witness';[35] the act of listening brings about a kind of transference of experience. Modiano strives to listen or be receptive to Dora's testimony in her absence; he walks her itineraries and goes to the addresses where she and her parents lived to listen to the traces they left:

[35] This was a statement Wiesel voiced on several occasions, including an interview with Patt Morrison, *LA Times*, 23 April 2013: http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/23/opinion/la-oe-morrison-wiesel-20130418.

> On se dit qu'au moins les lieux gardent une légère empreinte des personnes qui les ont habités. Empreinte : marque en creux ou en relief. Pour Ernest et Cécile Bruder, pour Dora, je dirai : en creux. J'ai ressenti une impression d'absence et de vide, chaque fois que je me suis trouvé dans un endroit où ils avaient vécu. (28)

Trauma theory is concerned with the kind of ethical responsibility that Wiesel refers to, especially in terms of receiving testimony. Agamben notes that the word 'responsibility' comes from the Latin *spondeo*, meaning 'to become the guarantor of something for someone' (21) and it is in this respect that Jean B. is entrusted with Ingrid's story in *Voyage de noces* (153): he acknowledges it, carries it with him and finally attempts to understand it by committing it to a written biography. Felman and Laub agree that the act of listening necessarily implicates the listener: 'by extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself' (57). In this sense, we can think of Modiano as the 'receiver' of Dora's trauma and by extension a carrier of it. In an interview in 1990, he stated:

> Le choc de sa mort a été déterminant. Ma recherche perpétuelle de quelque chose de perdu, la quête d'un passé brouillé qu'on ne peut élucider, l'enfance brusquement cassée, tout cela participe d'une même névrose qui est devenue mon état d'esprit. (Assouline)

Modiano's implication in someone else's trauma narrative is here complicated by the fact that it is held at a distance. Further, what Modiano is listening to is Dora's silence, which makes his navigation of the ethical dilemmas of testimony and witnessing more complex. Unspeakability haunts Modiano's texts and giving testimony is no simple cure. The risk in testimony is never resolved, as Felman and Laub note: 'The act of telling might itself become severely traumatising, if the price

of speaking is re-living; not relief, but further retraumatization' (67). They discuss poets and writers who ended their lives voluntarily, including Primo Levi, Paul Celan and Jean Améry. *Voyage de noces* begins with Ingrid's suicide and at the end, suicide isn't quite predicted, but the existential burden of testimony weighs heavily:

> Peu important 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 et elle ne pouvait pas s'en débarrasser. Moi non plus. (158)

Like Adorno, Agamben is concerned with ethical principles that can be salvaged or rebuilt in a post-Auschwitz world. He is conscious of the extreme difficulties of orienting the 'new ethical territory' that comes in the wake of such an event (13). For Agamben, Auschwitz constitutes 'the very aporia of historical knowledge: a non-coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension' (12). In the simultaneous impulsion towards truth, through fact, and the awareness of their non-synonymy, it seems that Modiano is acutely aware that knowing doesn't necessarily lead to understanding, given the shifting nature and contingency of truth. Although Agamben's work deals directly with Holocaust survivor testimony, there is a similarity in the way the process of testimony is framed:

> it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to. As a consequence, commenting on survivors' testimony necessarily meant interrogating this lacuna or, more precisely, attempting to listen to it. (13)

In *Unclaimed Experience,* Cathy Caruth describes the binding nature of transmitting traumatic experience in a similar way: 'one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another . . . trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with

another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound' (8). Agamben criticises Felman and Laub for turning to the notion of song to illustrate the possibility of testimony and charges with aestheticising testimony (36). Agamben, in turn, is criticised for ignoring the specificity of the Shoah and essentially theorising testimony into a complete impossibility, akin to Zeno's paradox of infinite divisibility (Rose par. 36). Agamben's is the most radical perspective, situating testimony in the most impossible of logical and ethical impasses. The reality is that testimony *is* produced, with varying degrees of success. Discussing the ethical burden of history in *Hiroshima mon amour*, Caruth describes the film as performing 'the unremitting problem of *how not to betray the past*' (27). Like Alain Resnais, Modiano is deeply aware of the weight of his writing, as noted by Cooke—'The voice of the narrating "je" is very conscious of the responsibility vested in it, and of the fact that it is functioning as a delegate for voices that have been silenced' (*Present Pasts* 284)—since it is not his own experience, nor only Dora's, but that of countless others.

* * *

Adorno's work led to the questioning of the validity of language and the possibility of writing in the post-Shoah context, naturally prompting investigations into different, more appropriate modalities of writing, both formal and stylistic. This gives rise to the question of how the mechanics of writing can embody the ethical aporia that Adorno, Agamben and Steiner, among others, spoke of, expressing silence through certain qualities of writing, such as reticence, fragility, and non-conclusion. If I dwell on the historical context and theoretical frameworks surrounding testimonial writing, it is in order to thoroughly prepare the ground for

a close reading of *Dora Bruder*, *Voyage de noces* and a number of other biographical narratives in the following chapter.

Along with the myriad silences of the archives and Dora's silence, Modiano evokes the unspoken in a scenario in which his father had him arrested as an eighteen-year-old in the early 1960s. Modiano connects this episode with his father's arrest in February 1942. He recalls not asking his father if he was reminded of it too. Modiano allows this question to remain in silence, a respectful or fearful silence, a taboo. Through apophasis, It is acknowledged and brought into the realm of the said. He asks us to listen to their shared silence, which is referred to on several occasions: 'Il ne m'a pas répondu', 'nous avons suivi notre chemin, côte à côte, en silence' (71), 'Nous n'avons pas échangé un seul mot pendant tout le trajet ni dans l'escalier, avant de nous quitter' (72). The unspeakability of the episode and the father's inability to talk or even look at the son—'il évitait mon regard' (69)—partly explain why the episode has taken on 'un caractère symbolique' (68). We learn that they never speak to each other again after this episode and their wordless last meeting and its sparse description give readers no indication of how Modiano reacts or how we should interpret it, leaving us, and the scene, in suspense.

Chapter 4: A Poetics of Silence

One has a moral obligation to take responsibility for one's actions, and that includes one's words and silences, yes, one's silences, because silences rise to heaven too, and God hears them, and only God understands and judges them, so one must be very careful with one's silences.

Roberto Bolaño, *By Night in Chile* (trans. Chris Andrews, 2003)

The sub-genre of biographical and testimonial writing within Modiano's oeuvre can be examined through those protagonists who undertake biographical projects on fictional or non-fictional subjects**.** They demonstrate the ongoing concern with saving or recovering through writing and retelling lives or fragments of lives that would otherwise be forgotten. Modiano has identified the act of recovery from forgetting as part of novelists' duty:

> c'est sans doute la vocation du romancier, devant cette grande page blanche de l'oubli, de faire ressurgir quelques mots à moitié effacés, comme ces icebergs perdus qui dérivent à la surface de l'océan. (*Discours* 30)

While the sense of duty informs Modiano's sense of his vocation in general, here I look more specifically at how it arises in the context of biographical writing, fictional and otherwise. After having discussed the equivocations evident in these tentative biographies, then I explore *Dora Bruder* and *Voyage de noces* in greater detail to reveal the ways in which the ethical and moral implications of bearing witness and writing the stories of others inflect literary form.

La ronde de nuit (1969), written in Modiano's career, demonstrates his sense of responsibility to record—'Nous devons témoigner . . . C'est un devoir. Je ne peux

pas me taire'—as well as a level of anxiety about not recording: 'Si je n'écrivais pas leur nom : Coco Lacour, Esmeralda, il n'y aurait aucune trace de leur séjour en ce monde' (114, 83). In his subsequent novel, *Les boulevards de ceinture,* the same tension can be observed. The character Serge Alexandre states, 'C'est mon devoir, à moi qui les ai connus, de les sortir—ne fût-ce qu'un instant—de la nuit' (66), but later, his desire to retell forgotten stories is checked: 'Quelle drôle d'idée, vraiment, de remuer toutes ces choses mortes' (136). In contrast, there is also the desire to forget everything—'J'aurais donné tout au monde pour devenir amnésique' (*LF* 117)—and doubt regarding whether probing the past is admissible: in *L'herbe des nuits* the detective Langlais says to the narrator, 'Il ne faut pas trop remuer le passé. Et je me demande si j'ai eu raison de vous donner ce dossier…' (140-1). In the closing lines of *La ronde de nuit*, the double-agent Swing Troubadour signs off and unenviously hands over the reins to his future biographer: 'De toute façon, je n'ai jamais su qui j'étais. Je donne à mon biographe l'autorisation de m'appeler simplement « un homme » et lui souhaite du courage' (153). As intimated in these examples, the biographical project is seldom straightforward and these would-be biographers' investigations are invariably arduous and filled with doubt about whether their aims are morally acceptable.

This vacillation continues throughout Modiano's work, as evidenced by the author's and his protagonists' sensitivity to trespassing into others' affairs while also being compelled by a sense of responsibility to save through bearing witness: 'sauver de l'oubli les papillons qui tournent quelques instants autour d'une lampe', saving them from the 'anonymat de la grande ville' (*DLC* 17, 20). Yet there are instances when Modiano casts the biographical project in a cynical light. In *Voyage de noces* the very possibility of telling a life is called into question. Jean imagines the reactions that his disappearance will cause and the notice that would appear in the

papers: 'Ils s'imaginent, dans leurs articles nécrologiques, pouvoir retracer le cours d'une vie. Mais ils ne savent rien' (*VN* 21). No one, it would seem, can ever really know anything of another's life. And sometimes it's preferable not to know: the questioning of ethics of revelation and discretion is central to *Vestiaire de l'enfance*. The employees of Radio-Mundial exhibit the utmost restraint in sharing details of their pasts. When the boss, whose discretion is 'proverbial' (124), snaps one day, releasing a deluge of information from his past, he writes a letter to apologise, later stating, 'Le silence, voilà le seul moyen de tenir le coup. Le silence et l'amnésie' (129). Likewise, those who frequent Le Condé refrain from prying: 'nous ne nous posions jamais de question les uns aux autres concernant nos origines' (*DLC* 20). Dominique Rabaté notes this 'moral dilemma of the Modianesque narrator', who questions the impertinence of his investigations in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, implicitly raising questions about the right of the author too ('Abandon' 53).

Hesitations in Biographical Discourse: *Livret de famille, Rue des Boutiques Obscures, Chien de printemps*

Of the numerous types of silence in Modiano's work, one cited by Dervila Cooke is 'the silence of biographical respect' (*Present Pasts* 315). This respectful silence is accompanied by an ongoing, opposing desire to actively engage in biographical discourse, to relay and reveal in order to recuperate and preserve. The following section focuses on three attemps at biographical discourse as sub-genres within his texts, revealing the ambiguity and hesitation with respect to the ethics and the possibility of writing biographical discourse, albeit fictional.

The twelfth section of *Livret de famille*, itself a collection of vignettes, character portraits and fragments forming a kind of autobiographical sketch, contains an attempted biography, treated variously with irony, solemnity and anxiety. After a chance meeting with the beautiful Denise Dressel, the protagonist, 'M. P. Modiano' (178), in an effort to endear himself to Denise undertakes to write a biography of her father, a once-renowned circus performer last seen in Egypt in 1952, when Denise was a child. What begins as a whim becomes increasingly serious and M. P. Modiano ends up adopting Denise's fascination with her father, eventually addressing him directly, 'Mon cher Dressel', explaining that he is writing his story to 'donner un père à votre fille que j'aimais' (186), restoring him to life and reuniting a broken family.

The term 'biographie' is used only once, after which the text is referred to as to a 'livre', and the title shifts from the capitalised 'LA VIE D'HARRY DRESSEL' to 'Les vies d'Harry Dressel' (176, 185) as the impediments to the project multiply and the possibility of following a single life thread decreases. The narrator tries to track down anyone who might be able to help him, buying old phone books to search for possible links, but the numbers are no longer connected and the letters he writes are returned. The lack of primary information spurs him to guess and invent: 'Je n'en possédais pas la preuve et mon dossier était bien mince, mais je comptais laisser aller mon imagination' (185). He compares the work of a biographer to that of an archaeologist who fills empty spaces and reconstructs a statue by concentrating on the remains.

Doubt regarding the ethics of his undertaking arise though a character named Georges Jansenne (note the similarity to Francis Jansen of *Chien de printemps*, who seeks anonymity above all else) who asks 'Pourquoi voulez-vous remuer le passé ?'

(182). We understand his reticence better later, when he intimates that he and Harry are former lovers.

There is a tragi-comic aspect to the undertaking as the closer the scrutiny of Harry Dressel, the further he recedes. The significant lack of information contrasts with the lavish writing desk and paraphernalia that Denise buys for him. The would-be biographer affixes the few documents and paper clippings he finds to the wall, studying them like a detective: 'Je les observais à la loupe pendant des heures, tant j'avais fini par douter de l'existence d'Harry Dressel' (183). M. P. Modiano nevertheless continues to amass disparate details, such as the name of the hair product he used, the route he and Denise took on her birthday and the flavour of the ice cream they ate, which happens to be 'pistache-fraise' (177), the same flavour that which is chosen by the child in *Une jeunesse* (11). Yet resurrecting this man seems impossible: 'Malgré les notes que je rassemblais, je ne parvenais pas à combler les lacunes de cette vie' (178). The questions of which details a biographer should include in a biography and what in fact makes a life are articulated in *Voyage de noces*:

> J'ai éprouvé un vague remords : un biographe a-t-il le droit de supprimer certains détails, sous prétexte qu'il les juge superflus ? Ou bien ont-ils tous leur importance et faut-il les rassembler à la file sans se permettre de privilégier l'un au détriment de l'autre, de sorte que pas un seul ne doit manquer, comme dans l'inventaire d'une saisie ? (53-4)

Denise recalls their dog and the kennel it came from. The narrator goes to the kennel and meets the manager, who has kept meticulous records of all the dogs to have passed through there in the last forty years. The manager confesses his torment at the thought of the thousands of dogs to have died in total anonymity, 'sans qu'ils eussent laissé la moindre trace' (185). By naming and recording them, he protects the

dogs from this fate. The associated between dogs and horses, and Jews and Holocaust victims goes back to Modiano's first novel, *La place de l'étoile* in which Modiano refers to his father as a dog—'C'était un chien malheureux'—and later writes, 'la litanie pour les morts d'Auschwitz rappelait les fourrières où on avait conduit six millions de chiens' (68, 158). In *Dora Bruder,* the missing-person notice was bunched together in the *D'hier à aujourd'hui* section with the 'chiens écrasés' (77). Dogs also appear as benevolent, silent apparitions and often occupy the role of guide or portent, notably in *Accident nocturne* and *Chien de printemps.*[36]

Obsession with listing and recording is a recurring trait among Modiano's characters—Bauer in *Une jeunesse,* the protagonist of *Chien de printemps*, Bowing in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and Walter in *Des inconnues*—and is shared by Modiano himself. He expressed great admiration for Serge Klarsfeld's work *Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France* (1978), which consists of a list of the names and details of over 70,000 Jews deported from France. The book had a significant effect on Modiano, who confessed, after reading it, his doubts about whether literature was viable: 'd'abord j'ai douté de la littérature . . . il me semblait que le seul livre qu'il fallait écrire, c'était ce mémorial' ('Avec Klarsfeld'). Later, in a handwritten letter to Klarsfeld, Modiano thanked him for the new edition of his book and described how important the book was for him: 'Pour moi, ce livre où vous avez rassemblé tous ces destins brisés, et où vous avez témoigné pour toute cette innocence que l'on a saccagée, est le plus important de ma vie' ('Correspondance' 181). Modiano and Klarsfeld later fell out over the latter's effacement from the search recounted in *Dora Bruder,* an episode explored in detail

[36] Other notable dogs include Choura in *Une aventure de Choura, Une fiancée pour Choura*, *Les Chiens de la rue du soleil,* the latter a children's book featuring dogs illustrated by Modiano's daughter Zina Modiano, and the Labrador belonging to Kovnovitzine in *De si braves garçons*, also called Choura.

by Alan Morris and Maryline Heck.[37] Despite this, Modiano's regard for Klarsfeld's work shows his conviction of the power of naming in print to work against erasure of memory. It also reveals that behind the anxiety to tell Harry Dressel's story in *Livret de famille*, there is deeper anxiety embedded within this singular story that relates to the traceless deaths of millions of people in the Holocaust.

It is revealing that in *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, published in 1989, shortly after Modiano came across Dora's missing-person notice, the protagonist Jean Moreno (Jean is Patrick's first name and Moreno/Modiano are sonically and graphically similar) is a former novelist who has renounced writing literature in favour of something more austere, a completely stripped-back, unadorned, more 'silent' form of expression:

> Alors, je comprends pourquoi je ne peux plus écrire de romans, pourquoi j'ai renoncé à la littérature. Écrire désormais, ce sera remplir des cahiers comme les trois précédents, avec tous ces détails hétéroclites et oubliés qu'un speaker lit d'une voix précise. (52)

He adds that the voices of the presenters who read his texts 'sont limpides et se détachent sur un silence pur du moindre parasite' which seems to question the truth value or 'purity' of literature as the most appropriate form of writing. The factualness and almost clinical nature of the list seems to be the best way to reunite things that have become separated, communicating his desire for connectedness and reparation.

[37] Alan Morris's meticulous work '"Avec Klarsfeld, contre l'oubli" Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder*' reveals the numerous amendments made between the 1997 Blanche edition of *Dora Bruder* and the 1999 Folio edition. Some of these changes are minute, which does not distract from their importance. The cumulative effect of greater accuracy and reliability demonstrates the 'attempt to bring Dora further out of oblivion' (273). See also Maryline Heck, 'Modiano, Klarsfeld, and Dora: Revisiting a Misunderstanding'. In summary, Klarsfeld was offended that his part in the search for Dora was not mentioned: 'l'enquête, telle que vous la narrez, tient plus du roman que de la réalité, puisque vous m'effacez' (Heck and Guidée, *Cahiers de l'Herne* 186).

Statements of uncertainty and doubt in the context of attempts to find out about people's lives appear throughout Modiano's texts. The protagonist Guy Roland of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* sits at a bar listening to Waldo Blunt playing the piano and is described as safe in his peaceful indifference to the room around him. Guy wonders, 'Avais-je le droit de le tirer brusquement de cette torpeur, et de réveiller chez lui quelque chose de douloureux ?' (57), and later, as they walk together he wonders: 'Pourquoi vouloir renouer des liens qui avaient été sectionnés et chercher des passages murés depuis longtemps ?' (63). Remaining in silence means that the past is left undisturbed, and sleeping dogs are let lie. But despite the hesitation, the search continues tentatively, at the risk of unearthing painful memories. Commenting on *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* and *Dora Bruder,* Meyer-Bolzinger notes that the two texts contest and oppose silence through their respective searches: 'L'enquête en effet est un combat contre le silence' ('Investigation' 237). Although the silence they fight is not quite the same silence, both texts are working against the weaving of the veil, to use Adorno's terminology. They strive for revelation and clarity, searching for forgotten or dissimulated personal stories, concentrating predominantly on individual accounts, thereby drawing attention to the wider social and political context.

Chien de printemps was published in 1993, after Modiano had found Dora's missing-person notice and after the initial fictional exploration of her life in *Voyage de noces* but before *Dora Bruder* was published. Following from earlier minor biographies, in *Chien de printemps,* the implications and ethics of dredging up the past and looking into others' lives are increasingly present. After stating his

intention to recount what little he knows about Francis Jansen (11), the young 'Scribe'[38] questions the morality of his undertaking. He concludes:

> J'éprouve une gêne à donner ces détails, et j'imagine l'embarras de Jansen s'il les voyait notés noir sur blanc. C'était un homme qui parlait peu. Et il aura tout fait pour qu'on l'oublie (20).

The tension is made more explicit in a conversation about Jansen's old photographs. While the narrator undertakes to record and categorise systematically the names of the people and places in the photographs, Jansen would rather let them be. For the young narrator the photos are important witnesses—'ces photos avaient un intérêt documentaire puisqu'elles **témoignaient** de gens et de choses disparus'—but for Jansen the photos carry a heavier burden: 'c'est comme si chacune de ces photos était pour moi un remords… Il vaut mieux faire table rase…' (24). Jansen's aim is to forget and be forgotten: 'Il aurait voulu oublier « tout ça », être frappé d'amnésie' (25). However, for the Scribe the undertaking is serious—'Si je m'étais engagé dans ce travail, c'est que je refusais que les gens et les choses disparaissent sans laisser de trace' (35)—and he regrets not having asked more questions when he had the opportunity: 'par discrétion, j'évitais de lui parler de Colette Laurent. Cela aussi, je le regrette' (42).

There is high degree of melding and interplay between the Scribe and Jansen, as well as between other characters, indicating that the poles of amnesia and memory are semi-porous, or even that they express the range of a single mind. Jansen gives the Scribe 'un double de la clé de son atelier' (23);[39] the Scribe answers Jansen's phone and works on his photo collection. Further on, the narrator recounts

[38] The moniker 'Scribe' describes his chosen profession and desire to become a writer, but it also denotes, in Jewish history, a member of the class of record keepers, writers and interpreters of Scripture (*OED*).

[39] This recalls the key with which Jean opens Rigaud's bedside table drawer in *Voyage de noces* (107).

a dream in which he is struck by the resemblance between Jansen's girlfriend Colette, and his former girlfriend of the same name. During the dream, the thought that his name is in fact 'Francis Jansen' crystallises in his mind (92). Just as the Scribe and Jansen bleed into each other in places, so too do the novel's two 'Francis Jansens'. When requesting identity papers, an administrative error results in his being delivered the papers of another Francis Jansen, deceased, deported from Rome in 1944. Jansen is deeply troubled by this. The novel's closing lines—'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)—seem to apply to the whole series of interwoven characters. They indicate the extent to which the disappearances of the narrator, Jansen, the second Francis Jansen as well as Modiano's brother Rudy overlap and resonate with each other. There are also similarities between Jansen's experience and that of Modiano's father: both were arrested in a round-up during the Occupation and subsequently released (66). Interestingly, Jansen was arrested at the exit of the Georges V metro station, which is where the father attempts to push the son under a train in *Les boulevards du ceinture* (98).

The notion of making a central space for silence in one's art is raised early in the novel, when Jansen challenges the burgeoning writer to 'créer le silence avec des mots' (21), as Jansen tries to do with photography. However, it is not until near the end of the novel that the full meaning of this is realised. Years later, when the writer's first book is published, he flicks through Jansen's photography album, *Neige et Soleil*, and reflects that he clearly didn't respect the 'consignes de silence' (109) given by Jansen, but concedes, 'je ressentais de plus en plus ce que Jansen avait voulu communiquer et qu'il m'avait mis gentiment au défi de suggérer moi aussi avec les mots: le silence' (109). The first photographs are of the façade of the apartment building where a friend of Jansen's, whom he met in Drancy and who

was deported to a concentration camp, used to live. Finding it empty in 1945, he decided to photograph the building 'pour que soit au moins fixé sur une pellicule le lieu où avaient habité son camarade et ses proches' (110). The younger Jansen's impulse to record is similar to the narrator's, yet the poignant outcome is that the images render absence even more palpable and conclusive: 'Mais la cour, le square, et les immeubles déserts sous le soleil rendaient encore plus irrémédiable leur absence' (110). Far from bringing him closer to the memory of his friend, his photographs emphasise distance, a paradox that begins to reveal why any project of memorialisation, retelling and biography is traversed with such hesitations and complications.

In this passage, Jansen's advice resonates: 'prendre les choses en douceur et en silence sinon elles se rétractent' (99). Scarred by the failure of memorialisation, Jansen ends up rejecting it entirely, whereas the young writer still sees a possibility of salvation in recording, incorporating the lesson of silence into his approach. This, as Cooke writes 'cancels some of the horrors of injustice and loss through a type of spare poetry' (*Present Pasts* 316). The most authentic approach to memorialisation seems to be through capturing the absence, emptiness or silence, of place or of people; however, any such project is therefore destined to simultaneously hold them and push them further away.

Ethical vacillations between telling and reticence structure these minor biographies and inform sets of poetic connections around illumination and dissimulation. The contrast between darkness, light, sun and snow appears early on in Modiano's writing and in *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder*, which form a fiction–non-fiction pair, a network of (mono)chromatic and meteorological poetic associations develops a complex structure. The following section further explores

how this poetic nexus of symbolic associations expresses ethical tensions inherent in biographical and testimonial writing.

Dora Bruder and *Voyage de noces*: Ambivalence and Ambiguity

Ambiguity and elusiveness have become hallmarks of Modiano's style. As previously noted, Modiano was among the first French novelists to challenge the silences of the post-war period, yet he declined to take a clear moral standpoint, 'refusant jusqu'à l'excès tout déterminisme idéologique' (Rousso, *Syndrome* 144). In this context, ambivalence and hesitation should be considered political, and ethics, I argue, make their way into the aesthetics of writing. On the one hand, there is reluctance to intrude and the wish to leave history undisturbed, whereas, on the other, there is the responsibility to transmit. One of the central enquiries in *Dora Bruder* and *Voyage de noces* relates to the tension between remaining silent and telling someone's story. Given that the texts were published, Modiano evidently concluded that it is preferable to tell such stories. Nevertheless, the texts record the process of questioning the necessity and ethics of bearing witness. Cooke describes *Dora Bruder* as a 'cautious form of biography, one in which the narrator is painfully conscious of his own subjectivity in representing the other person' (283). I argue that in *Voyage de noces*, in which Ingrid appears as Dora's fictional incarnation, it is precisely the turn to fiction that allows for greater aestheticisation, poeticisation and symbolic sublimation of the difficulties and ethical tensions related to the biographical drive.

Dora Bruder documents Modiano's patient and determined search for his 'real-life' subject: 'Je peux attendre des heures sous la pluie' (14). In a letter to

Klarsfeld dated 21 March 1997, he expresses his hope that the book might open up new clues: 'Je crois que ce livre sera une sorte de sonde qui permettra d'avoir d'autres renseignements' (Heck and Guidée, *Cahiers de l'herne* 186). Further on, Modiano recounts his father's arrest in February 1942 and recalls the young woman in the police van with his father. Although characteristically muted, he is clearly distressed at the thought of her anonymity:

> Je crois qu'elle demeurera toujours anonyme, elle et les autres ombres arrêtées cette nuit-là. Les policiers des Questions juives ont détruit leurs fichiers, tous les procès-verbaux d'interpolation pendant les rafles ou lors des arrestations individuelles dans les rues. Si je n'étais pas là pour l'écrire il n'y aurait plus aucune trace de la présence de cette inconnue. (*DB* 64-5)

Modiano clearly states his sense of personal responsibility for recovering her story. Further on, several letters sent to the police by family members of people interned are reproduced verbatim. The letters politely beg for information about their loved ones. Modiano presents them simply and with little commentary, adding:

> Ceux à qui elles étaient adressées n'ont pas voulu en tenir compte et maintenant, c'est nous, qui n'étions pas encore nés à l'époque, qui en sommes les destinataires et les gardiens. (84)

Again, Modiano expresses his feeling of responsibility as a guardian of the letters. As Bouju describes, 'La copie de l'archive n'est plus simple réduplication des mots écrits : elle avive, elle fait entendre la voix des absents' (29). He hands over narration to others' voices directly, the shift in tone and minimal interpretation making their impact even more troubling.

Despite this desire to record and reanimate voices of others, and the awareness of the force of administrative erasure, some stones are consciously and conspicuously left unturned. When invited to consult some school records, Modiano

equivocates: 'Un jour, j'irai. Mais j'hésite. Je veux encore espérer que son nom figure là-bas' (14). And other possible research avenues are postponed: 'Un jour, j'irai à Sevran…', 'Un jour, je retournerai à Vienne…' (12, 22). His desire to uncover is complicated by a reluctance to confront what might be found, which allows him to maintain a space for the unknown. In his introduction to Françoise Frenkel's *Rien où poser sa tête,* the diary of a Polish Jewish woman who opened a French bookstore in Berlin before fleeing to Paris, Modiano lists the few known facts about its author, then asks 'Est-il vraiment necessaire d'en savoir plus ? Je ne crois pas. Ce qui fait la singularité de *Rien où poser sa tête* c'est qu'on ne peut pas identifier son auteur de manière précise' (9). He continues, 'Je préfère ne pas connaitre le visage de Françoise Frenkel, ni les péripéties de sa vie après la guerre, ni la date de sa mort' (10). For Modiano, it is precisely this disparity between knowing and not knowing, between the audible voice and the unseeable face, that gives him a feeling of greater intimacy. The first words of Frenkel's that we read underscore the responsibility to bear witness: 'Il est du devoir des survivants de rendre témoignage afin que les morts ne soient pas oubliés, ni méconnus les obscurs dévouements.'

Walking around the outer Paris suburbs in *Voyage de noces*, Jean describes a sensation of vertigo he experiences thinking of all the untold lives surrounding him, to which he has no access, and indeed, the lives of people who prefer to keep it that way: 'Ils pourraient vous en dire long mais ils garderont le silence jusqu'au bout et cela les indiffère complètement que le monde les ait oubliés' (25-6). In contrast, near the end of the novel, Ingrid gives him the missing-person notice that her father put in the paper, and in doing so, transmits and confers to him not only her 'burden', but also the responsibility of following the bidding of the notice to find her.

> Je me souviens qu'elle s'était tue à ce moment-là et que son regard prenait une drôle d'expression comme si elle voulait me transmettre un fardeau qui

> lui avait pesé depuis longtemps ou qu'elle devinait que moi aussi, plus tard, je partirais à sa recherche. (153)

We learn of Jean's project to write Ingrid's biography only once he has returned to Paris, and it is one of the few times the term 'biography' (50) is used. When he refers to the project later, he calls it 'mes Mémoires', which downgrades the project from a biography, a researched account of a person's life, to 'memoirs', which are based on the personal knowledge or experience of the author, observations or reminicences (*OED*). Later, when he is questioned, he admits, 'Pas vraiment des Mémoires . . . Mais presque' (151), further downplaying its scope, and also blurring the third-person 'biography' with the first-person 'my memoirs'. Although he is trying to throw others off the scent, the ambiguity of the project is clear, and it is evident that his memory and memoirs are entwined in Ingrid's.

As noted, the missing-person notice that ends *Voyage de noces* is the one that begins *Dora Bruder*; in a sense, the 'burden' and the responsibility are taken on by Modiano. For Bruno Doucey, Modiano's writing is a form of 'combat contre la peur, le silence et la mort. . . . Écrire, c'est donc lutter contre le temps qui érode les êtres ; c'est résister à l'amnésie, au silence, à la mort' (69). The implications and consequences not just of his own literature, but of the act of writing itself weigh heavily on Modiano's conscience. Thinking about the ordinance that sent Dora to the camp de Tourelles, he wonders about the person who signed it—'Au moment de signer, ce fonctionnaire mesurait-il la portée de son geste ? Au fond, il ne s'agissait, pour lui, que d'une signature de routine' (115)—joining Steiner's idea of language undermined and tainted.

While *Voyage de noces* was, in a sense, written from and because of the silences surrounding Dora Bruder, both novels recount the ethical imperative to tell her story along with the difficulties, even impossibility of telling it. Meyer-Bolzinger describes

Dora Bruder as 'un récit qui fait revivre la jeune fille en racontant qu'il est impossible de faire revivre Dora Bruder par un récit' ('Investigation' 238). In this way, Modiano could be seen to adhere to Adorno's notion of 'immanence', discussed above, in that these texts seem to express within themselves part of their failure to transmit, containing within their form an acknowledgement and criticism. But, as Meyer Bolzinger notes, the silence of Dora's unaccounted-for months is transformed into a secret (238), which seems to give meaning and poetic value to her disappearance, and this is perhaps what Adorno would contest. By the end of the text, some information has been gathered about Dora's life and itinerary, but the few weeks of her 'disappearance' in the winter of 1941-2 simply cannot be accounted for. And this is precisely what is returned, almost gifted to Dora at the very end of the text:

> J'ignorerai toujours à quoi elle passait ses journées . . . 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, les temps—tout ce qui vous souille et vous détruit—n'auront pas pu lui voler. (144-145)

Here, what is unknown and unknowable is lifted out of the machines of state administration and almost sanctified, hidden, or rather, protected by silence. As Damamme-Gilbert writes, 'la possibilité de la parole travaille aussi l'œuvre en profondeur et dialogue avec le silence' ('Travail du silence' 53). This marks out a place not just for the silence of the unknown and unknowable, but a meaningful even salutary silence within the mess and seeming meaninglessness of lives' details. What Adorno saw as untenable was the idea of forging meaning through artistic means from the unspeakable suffering of the Holocaust, and Modiano's transformation of Dora Bruder's time into a secret could be seen as an attempt to

find a sense, a silver lining as such. Notwithstanding this, in general, *Dora Bruder* announces silences, while *Voyage de noces* gives them literary and poetic form.

Saving and Condemning through Naming

The slim folder containing material for Ingrid's biography made up of 'notes et même de courts chapitres' (50) doesn't seem to hold much promise. As in *Chien de printemps*, the would-be biographer admits that he doesn't actually know much about his subject. He castigates his younger self for seeing meaning in the 'accessoires' and 'paillettes', and for being unable to identify the essential elements (52). He wonders what right a biographer has to choose which details to include or leave out and wonders if, eventually, our lives shed all the non-essential, decorative elements, leaving just the 'essentiel': 'les blancs, les silences et les points d'orgue' (54).

On the one hand, the project of writing her biography could be read as a failure, but on the other hand, by the end of the novel there has been a shift from judging the minor details he knows about her as superfluous to judging them as central; they are the fragile elements that make up our lives, however desultory or thin this might seem. When Jean meets Ingrid again years later, he describes the gossamer-thread connection between disparate details:

> Il arrive qu'un soir, à cause du regard attentif de quelqu'un, on éprouve le besoin de lui transmettre, non pas son expérience, mais tout simplement quelques-uns de ces détails disparates, relié par un fil invisible qui menace de se rompre et que l'on appelle le cours d'une vie. (*VN* 118-119)

The ineffable blancs/blanks, silences and fermata, the details held tenuously together, are what makes up a life's narrative. Tritsmans sees the 'blancs' and 'silences' as that which 'permettent de dérober le personnage à la saisie systématique, au regard social', and being linked to the 'poétique du secret' and 'brouillage temporel et narratif' (100), which are used as the means to save Ingrid.

A similar presentation of the dynamics between detail and essential elements animates *Dora Bruder.* Modiano notes that Dora and her family have left hardly any trace of their lives behind: 'Ce que l'on sait d'elles se résume souvent à une simple adresse. Et cette topographie contraste avec ce que l'on ignorera pour toujours de leur vie—ce blanc, ce bloc d'inconnu et de silence' (28).[40] It is often the case that no other detail is left of a person but their name, and sometimes not even that. This is a source of anguish in *Dora Bruder*, as well as in earlier novels, such as *La ronde de nuit* (cited above, 83) and *Un pedigree* (11). In *Dora Bruder,* Modiano tries to find the name of the young woman who was in the same police van as his father, in the momentary hope that she was Dora. He finds a list of women interned at Tourelles on the days following his father's arrest, in place of Dora's name, he provides the names of two women of about the same age (64). Later, there is a short, distressing passage about a German writer Friedo Lampe, (connoting peace and light), about whom Modiano says, 'C'était son nom qui avait d'abord attiré mon attention' (92). Tiphaine Samoyault demonstrates how names very often contain semantic clues in Modiano's writing (86-89) and as Mireille Hilsum notes: 'Les noms jouent de nouveau un rôle d'embrayeur' (189). The incredible potency and polyvalence of the name 'Dora Bruder' has been well commented upon (Nettelbeck and Hueston (246), Suleiman

[40] The English translation loses the dual meaning of 'blanc' and is obliged to be more specific than the French. It also omits the word 'silence' and replaces it with 'mute': 'this blank, this mute block of the unknown' (20). This is a significant loss since the triad of 'blanc, bloc d'inconnu et de silence' in *Dora Bruder* resonates with the slightly altered 'les blancs, les silences et les points l'orgue' in *Voyage de noces* (54).

'Oneself' (342), Higgins 'Fugue States' (450), Cima (21), Prince (71-2)), and Dora has been linked to Modiano's brother, Rudy, ('bruder' in German is 'brother'), to Françoise Dorléac (the French actress who died at a young age about whom Modiano co-wrote a book), to Freud's patient Ida Bauer, renamed Dora, who suffered from aphonia (loss of voice), to Modiano's father's cousin Dora whose three brothers were killed by the SS (Cosnard 200), and to the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp. To this, it should be added that 'Dora' comes from 'Θεοδώρα' (Theodora), Greek for 'gift from God'. While 'θεός' (theos-God) is absent, the 'δῶρον' (gift) remains. This is linked to novelists' 'don de voyance' (52) as well as Dora's 'secret' that Modiano returns as a form of gift back to her.

In contrast to the redemptive power of naming, there is also a great danger in being named. Modiano describes the absurdity of naming and classification—'On vous classe dans des catégories bizarres dont vous n'avez jamais entendu parler et qui ne correspondent pas à ce que vous êtes réellement' (37-8)—especially for children forced to wear the star, who, like Dora, were 'si parisiens qu'ils confondaient avec les façades des immeubles, les trottoirs, les infinies nuances de gris' (139). When Modiano discovers that thirteen days went by before Dora's father reported her missing, he imagines Ernest Bruder's tortuous deliberations since by breaking his silence he risked bringing attention to her, since she hadn't been registered as a Jew:

> On imagine son angoisse et ses hésitations au cours de ces treize longues journées. Il n'avait pas déclaré Dora au recensement d'octobre 1940, à ce même commissariat, et les policiers risquaient de s'en apercevoir. En essayant de la retrouver, il attirait l'attention sur elle. (76)

It is not clear whether reporting Dora as missing caused her arrest, but since Modiano, like the police, is trying to track Dora down, the ethics of any search for

someone, even with the most humane intent, must therefore be questioned. This affects the way in which Modiano retells Dora's experience, as he runs the risk of speaking for her or aestheticising her trauma. As Higgins writes, 'to speak in Dora's place might risk entering somehow into league with those who invented her in the first place (as a Jew), only to erase her' ('Fugue States' 453), hence Modiano's preoccupation with the brutality of labelling and categorisation. Morris notes that between the 1997 Blanche edition and the 1999 Folio edition, 'les juifs' becomes 'ceux qui avaient été classés dans la catégorie « juifs »' (78, 76—in the same passage as Ernest's anguish about reporting Dora missing) and that the following italicised words were added to the second edition: 'Elle était entrée au Saint-Coeur-de-Marie en mai 1940, lorsqu'il n'y avait pas encore de persécutions *et que, pour elle, le mot "juif" ne devait pas signifier grand-chose*' ('Avec Klarsfeld' 271).

In *Voyage de noces,* after the threatening figure, the 'tache sombre' (62), makes lists of the people staying at the Hotel Provençale, looking around the restaurant as if making an inventory, an article appears in a Paris newspaper that causes people to flee from the southern coastal town of Juan-les-Pins: 'Une liste de noms au début de l'article' (77). Here, the danger of being named is evident; once you have been singled out, registered and fixed on a list, there are serious implications. When Modiano finds a woman who attended the same convent school as Dora in 1942, he only mentions the false name 'Suzanne Albert' (44), under which she was registered to protect her Jewish identity, and refrains from giving her real name even after all this time, out of discretion. Modiano is aware that naming can pose a danger, but it can also indict:

> Morts depuis longtemps, les commissaires et les inspecteurs qui participaient à la traque des juifs et dont les noms résonnent d'un écho lugubre et sentent une odeur de cuir pourri et de tabac froid : Permilleux, François, Schweblin,

> Koerperich, Cougoule . . . qui écrivaient leur nom sur le procès-verbal. (*DB* 83-84)

In cases where Modiano does not know the names of those he accuses, he uses a form of apophasis, stating his ignorance of individuals' names in an attempt to identify them despite their anonymity: 'L'équipe de la fouille était composée de sept hommes—toujours les mêmes. Et d'une femme. On ne connaît pas leur noms' (67).

The desire to save through naming is checked by a resistance to divulging and the potentially horrific precision of naming, the resistance being linked to a respect for the silence of anonymity and the safety that it can bring. Recording and inscribing can save and leave a trace, yet classification and identification can also carry potentially devastating outcomes.

Disappearance, *Fugue* and Suicide

Almost as a mirror image of the desire to inscribe and make present through biography is the opposing current in both novels of running away and disappearing without a trace, which is a further literary manifestation of the tension between silence of safety and silence of danger. Ingrid unintentionally runs away by disobeying the curfew and never gets word back to her father, whose voice, incidentally, remains entirely silent, heard only once, mediated through the missing-person notice he sends to the newspaper; Dora runs away and is returned home by the police; Modiano, following from Dora's story, recounts the time he ran away in January 1960; Jean attempts to disappear by going to Milan instead of Brazil. For Jean, travel is linked to his need to escape (19). He later adds: 'Tous ces voyages lointains que j'avais entrepris non pour satisfaire une curiosité ou une vocation d'explorateur, mais pour fuir. Ma vie n'avait été qu'une fuite' (95).

While they all run away in different ways, what running away signifies depends greatly on the era. Jean reflects that not returning home at other times would have been simply to run away, and not so serious: 'En d'autres temps on n'aurait pas attaché à son geste une grande importance, il aurait même semblé banal de la part d'une fille de son âge et l'on aurait simplement appelé ça: une fugue' (*VN* 136). For Modiano, the act of running away represented 'l'ivresse de trancher, d'un seul coup, tous les liens : rupture brutale et volontaire', giving him the 'sentiment de révolte et de solitude porté à son incandescence et qui vous coupe le souffle et vous met en état d'apesanteur'. He goes on to write, more alarmingly, that, 'La fugue—paraît-il—est un appel au secours et quelquefois une forme de suicide' (*DB* 77-78). And for Dora, the implications of the *fugue* are even more drastic. Her first disappearance portends the final disappearance and death in the concentration camps, as Meyer-Bolzinger describes:

> le silence, dans *Dora Bruder*, est double: celui de la fugue dissimule celui d'Auschwitz. Le récit d'enquête vient buter sur cet impossible—rien à raconter sur la fugue de Dora—pour ne pas s'effondrer dans l'indicible : le sort de Dora à Auschwitz. ('Investigation' 238)

Sheringham describes the contradictory call for help and the mute quality of running away: 'On dit volontiers que c'est un appel. Deuxièmement, fuguer, c'est tirer à blanc. Il y a une blancheur de la fugue, un mutisme' (264). To run away, disappear or to commit suicide, can be radical assertions of one's absence and silence. In this sense, the *fugue* is a 'mute' but strident cry. Further, since the silences of her *fugue* in Paris and her eventual death in Auschwitz are so interconnected, writing about it is limited by the unspeakableness of the Shoah.

Dora's unaccounted-for months in Paris remain unspeakable. It is significant that most critics interpret Modiano's transformation of the unknown—what is

essentially a failing of the biographical project—into Dora's 'secret' is as a positive transformation. Alongside Golsan ('Modiano's Catharsis' 103), another example is Peter Frölich: 'au terme de ses recherches, le narrateur assume la distance qui le sépare à jamais de la jeune fille et transmue en valeur positive son caractère insaisissable' (72). This raises the semantic plasticity of silence; here, the shift in perspective changes its meaning, not just by degrees, but diametrically. For Jens Brockmeier, 'ce blanc, ce bloc d'inconnu et de silence' is not the failure of understanding, but rather the recognition that some events are beyond the reaches of human imagination and thus stand for acceptance of radical alterity (93). Whether Modiano intended for this ultimate silence to be interpreted as positive is unknown, yet it says something about our desire as reader-witnesses to draw some fragment of positive meaning from her story. As Rose concludes, '*Dora Bruder* negotiates a relationship to silence, to be sure, but the silence is never pure. Equivocal "noise" haunts Modiano's Paris' (par. 41).

Modiano develops the notion of the *fugue*, investigating Dora's and comparing it with his and his father's. He is careful, however, to point out divergence rather than similarity, and not to speak for her: 'Je me dis que sa fugue n'était pas aussi simple que la mienne une vingtaine d'années plus tard, dans un monde redevenu inoffensif' (78). He writes that his own experience of running away gave him a sense that he was slipping into eternity—'Les aiguilles de l'horloge du jardin des Tuileries sont immobiles pour toujours' (78)—imbuing the *fugue* with a sense of intemporality, further encasing it in a timeless suspension. Other Modianesque characters are also susceptible to running away, and again, running away is linked to suicide; in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, Louki, whose suicide is revealed at the end of the novel states, 'Je n'étais vraiment moi-même qu'à l'instant où je m'enfuyais' (102).

Furthering the theme of disappearance in *Voyage de noces* is an extensive sub-theme of explorers who disappear and the writers or subsequent explorers who go looking for them, often disappearing themselves. The purpose of Jean's trip is to make a documentary, *Sur les traces de colonel Fawcett,* about the real-life British explorer who disappeared in Mato Grosso. Not mentioned in Modiano's novel, Mato Grosso was in turn the subject of Maufrais's book (spelled 'Mauffrais' in *Voyage de noces*), *Aventures au Mato-Grosso*. Maufrais himself disappeared in Guyana. Also not mentioned in *Voyage de noces,* Peter Fleming (1907-1971) wrote *Brazilian Adventure—Exploring the Brazilian jungle in search of the lost Percy Fawcett,* a strikingly similar title to that of Jean's documentary. Additionally, mention is made of 'Stanley' (a reference to the real-life Henry Morton Stanley who went in search of David Livingston), 'de Savorgan de Brazza' (Pierre de Savorgan de Brazza, the French-Italian explorer who facilitated French entry into the Congo and Central Africa) and 'Gerbault' (probably a reference to Alain Gerbault, a pilot and sailor who sailed solo around the world; he was born in Laval, died in Timor and published accounts of his adventures. Gerbault is also mentioned in *Une jeunesse*, as Bauer looks through old photographs). When the young Jean first meets Ingrid and Rigaud, he tells them he has written an article about the explorer 'Henry R. Stanley' (likely a reference to Henry Morton Stanley with the middle initial changed). The narrator is meant to follow in the footsteps of these explorers, but he reroutes the journey and ends up in the Paris suburbs instead of the jungle. Significantly, it is here, and through his own staged suicide/escape back to Paris that he finds the right atmosphere in which to access Ingrid's story:

> je n'éprouve aucune difficulté à me transporter, de ce paisible après-midi de juillet où je suis en ce moment, jusqu'à l'hiver lointain où Ingrid a rencontré

> Rigaud pour la première fois. Il n'existe plus de frontière entre les saisons, entre le passé et le présent. (125)

In this peripheral space where the frontiers between past and present and between seasons break down, he finds a way to access Ingrid's reality enabling him to tell her story. This is one of the only instances of Modiano's expressing facility of telling Ingrid's story. It is predominantly the difficulty in telling or transmitting that is expressed and reiterated through the theme of interrupted communication. In *Dora Bruder*, there is a similar difficulty, but impediments to finding information are reported with less fictionalisation and metaphor. The tension between the desire to be present and the opposing desire to abandon and disappear is expressed, reaching a level of aestheticisation in *Voyage de noces* that we do not find in *Dora Bruder.*

Cycles of Identification

The respect for silence and reservation that Jean shares with Ingrid and Rigaud is one of several overlapping and interchangeable characteristics linking the biographer with his subject(s). Cooke describes *Voyage de noces* as 'a strong example of autobiography by proxy', and considers it to be concerned with the narrator as much as, if not more than, the subject (*Present Pasts* 296). There is a conflation and merging of experience through reviving and speaking through subjects' voices, re-placing them by occupying the places they have been or inhabited. There is a circular movement in which characters momentarily overlap, albeit at different times, a process that puts the narrator in the same places or situations, has him tread the same pathways and experience uncannily similar situations. This is a further demonstration of the ambiguity with which Modiano incorporates biographical writing into his texts and tells the stories of others, and again, the way conflation of

identities takes on aesthetic, literary form is more pronounced in *Voyage de noces* than *Dora Bruder*.

In the opening scene in Milan, the barman tells the narrator that the woman who committed suicide was also French and they both ordered the same drink (14). Moreover, Jean also remarks that when he 'disappeared' he was the same age as Ingrid and Rigaud were when they met and that their attitude, which he found strange at the time, was now his own (49). Significantly, it is through a particular relationship with silence that Jean identifies with Ingrid. When they meet years later and have dinner together, he says:

> Je l'imaginais seule, dans son appartement, devant la même assiette et le même verre de bière, au fond de ce silence que je ne connaissais pas encore à l'époque, et qui m'est si familier aujourd'hui. (118)

Similarly, it is through particular sounds, heard against a background of silence that Modiano connects with Françoise Frenkel. He writes in the preface: 'Elle entend le murmure d'un jet d'eau que j'entendais aussi, les débuts d'après-midi de silence et de très grande chaleur…' (*Rien* 12).

The narrator overlaps in interesting ways with Rigaud: Jean rents Rigaud's old apartment, where he and Ingrid lived years earlier; Rigaud also lived in an apartment on Place de l'étoile (the title of Modiano's first novel), but with a rear entrance on rue de Tilsitt; Jean manages to force open the drawer of the bedside table in Boulevard Soult with the key from his cité Véron apartment (107); mention is made of 'lits jumeaux' (108) in the apartment as well as a neglectful mother. The twin beds, 'collés l'un à l'autre', are mentioned again (148), but here they are drawn apart, which could indicate a process of individualisation.

At the end, the shared 'sentiment de vide' (159) leads Ingrid to suicide and Jean to escape to pursue his search for her. Van Kelly notes that there is a passage

from Jean's intradiegetic narration to autodiegetic narration as he 'fuses the supposition of *her* inner emptiness with his own crisis' (45). The same 'impression d'absence et de vide' (29) arises in *Dora Bruder* yet in comparison to Jean's identification with Ingrid, Modiano is more cautious in his identification with Dora. He identifies with her though place: he visits her old addresses and inhabits places where she might have walked, communing with her through itinerary and urban landscape. Although this way of bridging their respective experiences is less personal, there is still a high degree of merging: 'Je n'étais rien, je me confondais avec ce crépuscle, ces rues' (8). This melding with urban fabric returns towards the end of the text in relation to the Parisian children made to wear the star of David, who 'confondaient avec les façades des immeubles, les trottoirs' (139). Modiano inserts his own experiences, such as the *fugue* mentioned above, to fill in missing information about Dora and to find ways of identifying with her, however, movements into fiction are clearly signposted.

Cooke agrees that there is limited identification: 'The fusion between biographer and biographee is slight, and a sense of distance between these two figures predominates' (*Present Pasts* 283). In contrast, Rose emphasises the 'appropriative', as opposed to 'empathetic', nature of Modiano's identification with Dora. He sees Modiano's 'over-invested', 'phantasmagoric identification' as coming close to transgression:

> The text's deep and demanding personal inscription, the overwhelming needs Modiano brings to his encounter—at times, indeed, near-identification—with Dora Bruder make it an intricate, ethically risky and courageous balancing act between retrieval and appropriation of the other. (par. 20)

He points out the pronominal ambiguity of the French 'on': 'On oubliait, le temps d'une séance, la guerre et les menaces du dehors', 'on était serrés les uns contre les

autres' (80), as well as the shift from 'son secret' to 'vous souille' (145), which result in the narrator and reader inserting themselves into the story more wholly. It should be noted, however, that there are many examples of 'heteropathic identification'. Kaja Silverman (24) uses Max Scheler's terminology from *The Nature of Sympathy* to explain the phenomenon that, as Hirsch sees it, is 'the ability to say "It could have been me; it was me also" and , *at the same time*, "but it was not me"' ('Projected Memory' 9).

Susan Suleiman observes a transition from appropriation to more ethically aware identification, differentiation and mourning ('Oneself' 330). The continuing critical disagreement about the level of identification between Modiano and Dora points to the degree of ambiguity and ambivalence in the text. In *Voyage de noces*, identification between individuals is far more pronounced and intricate, and the search and the tensions between revelation and reticence are more openly aestheticised. In Kelly's view, however, *Voyage de noces* 'exposes limits of the empathetic merger of minds' (56) and, in terms of the ability of the two novels to confront the Shoah, Kellyconsiders the greater distance between writer/biographer and story/subject in *Dora Bruder* as more successful.

Vacillations: Sun, Snow, Light, Dark

In his attempt to find Dora, Modiano visits the addresses where she lived and schools she attended and walks where she might have walked, which Greenberg describes as 'narrative mapping', one method Modiano employs to 'pull the past out of silence' (352). He consults old telephone books, finds out the dates when Paris

was bombed and watches *Premier rendez-vous*, because Dora might have seen it.[41] He imagines a chemical process resulting from viewers' gazes changing the very substance of the film, covering it with a sort of veil that heightens the contrast, and sometimes erases the image entirely (*DB* 80). Senses conflate, and he describes the light in the film as simultaneously too bright and too dark, which has the effect of muffling actors' voices or deepening their timbre. A similar light–dark distortion and contrast appears in *Voyage de noces* when Jean is walking around Les Issambres with Ingrid. There is a blend of prolepsis and analepsis in the same passage, which jumps forward to subsequent years when Jean returned to the village with his wife and friends, and also refers back to the increasingly distant memory of the summer he is in, creating a movement stretching simultaneously forward and backward in time, which has a curious effect on his acuity:

> la lumière de cet été-là a subi une curieuse transformation avec le temps : loin de pâlir, comme les vieilles photos surexposées, les contrastes d'ombre et de soleil se sont accentués au point que je revois tout en noir et blanc. (38)

The one person Modiano finds who also attended Saint-Coeur-de-Marie, remembers the convent, but because of the long winter and the blackout, all her memories are in black, apart from the white wimples of the nuns who provided them safety but little comfort (44).

Emna Beltaïef, in Remise de peine *de Modiano* (239), notes the interplay between light and shadow in *Remise de peine*, in which the silence and grey zones surrounding the father and the 'darkness' of the Lauriston gang contrast with the 'light' cast by the innocence of the child. Beltaïef draws a comparison between Modiano's *La ronde de nuit*, and Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, in which there is

[41] Lynn Higgins 'Modiano at the Movies' provides a thorough account of this passage, providing a synopsis and insightful historical contextualisation of the film.

incessant movement between light and shadow. In *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder,* the innocent child narrator is replaced by adults who are painfully aware of past atrocities, so the semantic weight of darkness and light is not the same, yet there is a similar vacillation between the poles.

One important way in which Modiano tries to find Dora and understand her experience is through weather: 'Le seul moyen de ne pas perdre tout à fait Dora Bruder au cours de cette période, ce serait de rapporter les changements du temps' (89). This line is followed by a detailed description of the bitterly cold weather and snowfall in the winter of 1941-2. Modiano thinks about the weather on 14 December, the day she ran away, wondering if it was

> un de ces dimanches doux et **ensoleillés** d'hiver où vous éprouvez un sentiment de vacance et d'éternité—le sentiment illusoire que le cours du temps est suspendu, et qu'il suffit de se laisser glisser par cette **brèche** pour **échapper** à l'étau qui va se refermer sur vous. (59)

A link is made between sunlight and a feeling of freedom and timelessness, through which Modiano connects with Dora. Weather associations are not isolated to this pair of texts; the seemingly anodyne title of Jansen's photography book, *Neige et Soleil* (*CdP* 110), is anything but. It obliquely references Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard*, in turn a translation of Hitler's *Nacht und Nebel* decree.[42] And there is an even more direct reference in *La place de l'étoile*: 'La nuit et le brouillard évitent de rendre des comptes' (30). In *Chien de printemps* the narrator goes to Fossombrone to try to meet some old friends of Jansen, the Meyendorffs. Many of these meteorological elements are combined, linking silence to an oneiric sensation—'Le silence, l'immobilité des

[42] Hitler's 1941 decree targeted political activists and anyone suspected of endangering German security by causing them to disappear into 'night and fog'. The name 'Nacht und Nebel' comes from Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and is part of a spell (*Nacht und Nebel niemand gleich – Night and fog make you no one/disappear*) that Alberich casts on the Tarnhelm helmet to grant himself.

feuillages, les taches de soleil sur lesquelles je marchais me donnaient de nouveau l'impression de rêver' (82)—and later, sunlight augments an impression of absence: 'la cour, le square, et les immeubles déserts sous le soleil rendaient encore plus irrémédiable leur absence' (110). In *Villa Triste,* Yvonne enjoys lying in the sun, whereas the protagonist, Victor Chmara, prefers the shade: 'Elle se baignait et s'étirait au soleil. Je préférais l'ombre' (124). This could be simply their preference; however, nationality and clandestinity are among Victor's central concerns so the sunlight/shade contrast could relate to Yvonne being French, free and with nothing to hide, whereas Victor is an outsider, and thus in a grey zone.

Weather and colour associations appear throughout Modiano's works, and in this pair of texts the weather in general, and sunlight and snow in particular, play a significant poetic role. They are linked to a larger nexus of poetic associations in which chromatic contrasts and meteorological elements carry notions of silence and amnesia as well as being linked to both safety and danger. From the first page of *Voyage de noces,* the oppressive heat is associated with the superlatively empty streets of Milan. The 'soleil de plomb' (11) turns deathly—'rayons meutriers du soleil' (13)—and afterwards, when Jean returns to the Paris suburbs, his attention, and ours, is again directed towards the effects of sunlight: 'Les immeubles se découpaient à contre-jour. Quelquefois sur la façade de l'un d'eux, une grande **tache de soleil'**. The second sentence is elided through the omission of the verb and continues, 'J'en remarquais aussi, de temps en temps, sur les trottoirs. **Ces contrastes de l'ombre et de lumière du soleil couchant,** cette chaleur et ce **boulevard vide**' (25). This is the first instance in a series of light–dark contrasts linked to a sense of emptiness, the significance of which is explained shortly thereafter:

> Depuis longtemps déjà—et cette fois-ci d'une manière plus violente que d'habitude—**l'été** est une saison qui provoque chez moi une sensation de **vide**

> et d'**absence** et me ramène au **passé**. Est-ce la lumière trop brutale, **le silence des rues, ces contrastes d'ombre et de soleil** couchant, l'autre soir, sur les façades des immeubles du boulevard Soult ? (26)

In *Dora Bruder,* we find the same association between sun and emptiness as Modiano walks to the Tourelles camp where Dora would have been interned:

> Rue de Ménilmontant. Les blocs d'immeubles du 140 étaient **déserts**, sous le **soleil**. Dans la dernière partie de la rue Saint-Fargeau, j'avais l'impression de traverser un village **abandonné**. . . . Le boulevard était **désert**, ce dimanche-là, et perdu dans un **silence si profond** que j'entendais le bruissement des platanes. (130)

The nexus combining sunlight, silence and emptiness is reiterated and silence has the effect of making sounds stand out more distinctly, not unlike the increased light contrast in the film. The impression of oblivion, however, is tinged with the intuition of impermanence— 'sous cette couche épaisse d'amnésie, on sentait bien quelque chose, de temps en temps, un écho lointain, étouffé, mais on aurait été incapable de dire quoi, précisément' (131)—intimating that even under the sun with its connotations of mortality and emptiness, silence is not totalitarian; there is still movement and therefore hope. In contrast, in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue,* light deepens silence—'La lumière m'a fait cligner des yeux, une lumière blanche qui rendait le silence encore plus profond (45)—showing again that silence is rarely attached to one element without its opposite. There is further reference in this novel to the connotations of emptiness and light. When Roland hears about Louki's suicide, he says:

> À partir de cet instant-là, il y a eu une absence dans ma vie, **un blanc**, qui ne me causait pas simplement **une sensation de vide**, mais que je ne pouvais pas

soutenir du regard. Tout **ce blanc** m'éblouissait d'une **lumière vive, irradiante**. Et cela sera comme ça, jusqu'à la fin. (159)

The emotional effect of her suicide is experienced as a blinding white void, and these harrowing but captivating absences are by nature unresolvable, thus they continue to pervade Modiano's writing.

The interweaving of sunlight, silence and emptiness goes further in *Voyage de noces,* in which, as in the example above, sunlight has the effect of increasing the experience of silence. Ingrid and Rigaud are on the beach in Juan-les-Pins and notice that everyone else has left suddenly: 'Et tout autour d'eux **la lumière du soleil approfondissait le silence**' (76). These associations are not binary, unidirectional or unchanging; as well as sunlight, emptiness and solitude are associated with moonlight: 'Derrière la vitre défilait lentement une banlieue **silencieuse** sous la **lune**. J'étais **seul** dans le compartiment' (*VN* 22).

Interestingly, there is an elemental shift in *Voyage de noces* from the first half of the novel, in which sun instils a layer of silence, and the second half (the majority of which chronologically precedes the first half), in which snow has the same effect: 'Le **soleil enveloppait d'une nappe de silence** la plage, la mer et la terrasse du Moorea' (35),[43] compared with 'Ils contemplaient à travers les grandes fenêtres du salon cette **neige qui recouvrait** la place et les avenues tout autour et qui enveloppait la ville **d'une nappe de silence**, de douceur et de sommeil' (124). This could be seen to portend the text's tragic end. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, under the subtitle 'One Subject, Two Texts: *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder*', Modiano writes in *Dora Bruder* (54) that the only moment he came close to Dora in *Voyage de noces* was in a snow-covered scene in which Ingrid and Rigaud cross Paris to get to Boulevard

[43] This, in turn, recalls an earlier instance of coastal sun emanating silence in *La ronde de nuit*: 'Du soleil, tombent sur la plage de grandes nappes de silence' (82).

Soult. As in *Chien de printemps,* silence, along with moonlight, snow and the black horse contrasting with the phosphorescent snow mark a chimerical shift: 'Ils virent passer, le long du trottoir, un traîneau attelé à un cheval noir. Le silence, la pleine lune et la neige phosphorescente provoquaient peut-être des **mirages**' (146).

Leading up to this passage, snowfall begins lightly and increases steadily over several pages, simultaneously increasing the surrounding silence and its connotations: 'une neige fine tombait' (142), 'Maintenant la neige tombait à gros flocons', 'Il neigeait de plus en plus fort' (143), 'La neige tombait toujours. Le trottoir était recouvert d'une couche blanche qui luisait dans l'obscurité', 'La place était déserte et ils s'enfonçaient jusqu'aux chevilles dans la neige' (144), 'A la sortie du métro, ils débouchèrent sur un grand champ de neige' (145), '…depuis quinze jours que Paris était enseveli sous la neige…' (146).

Snow carries opposing connotations here. On the one hand, it creates a feeling of safety and the possibility of escape, but it also has a dysphoric connotation. The sleigh moves at 'une allure de corbillard' (146) and there is the risk of being buried, 'enseveli'. In the following scene, Jean worries about the impending winter, and wonders, 'Mon dieu, où et comment passerais-je l'hiver ?' (149). This fear, coming directly after the snow-covered crossing, is bound up with the seasonal approach of snow, of covering up and cutting off his ability to get into Ingrid's mind. It was, after all, in the sun near a fountain that he felt the frontiers between seasons and between past and future vanish, allowing him to access her easily (125).

The gradual build-up of snow may well have been inspired directly from Modiano's research for *Dora Bruder*, in which he wonders if Dora found a place to shelter when she ran away in Paris, though he can't fathom it, since it was so harsh and cold:

> ce Paris de l'hiver 1941-1942, qui fut le plus ténébreux et le plus dur hiver de l'Occupation, avec, dès le mois de novembre, des chutes de neige, une température de moins quinze en janvier, l'eau gelée partout, le verglas, la neige de nouveau en grande abondance . . . (61)

The notion of snow is both positive (douceur et sommeil) and negative (as above) in *Voyage de noces*, whereas it is more singularly linked to danger and suppression in *Dora Bruder*. To fully interpret the place of snow in these two novels, it is instructive to return to *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* since snow is one of its central motifs, presenting the possibility of escape as well as entrapment. Meyer-Bolzinger interprets Modiano's poetic use of snow as follows: 'Alors que le champ de neige est par excellence le lieu où l'on laisse des traces, Modiano en fait une image de l'absence de trace, une métaphore de la disparition' ('Investigation' 235). However, snow connotes much more than disappearance. It interferes with sound—'La voix du haut-parleur était étouffée par la neige' (214)—and even the shapes of movements and entire lives: 'L'écho de nos gestes et de nos vies, il me semblait qu'il était étouffé par cette ouate qui tombait en flocons légers autour de nous' (225). It offers a sense of hospitality and assurance:

> Le train glissait à travers un paysage blanc de neige. Comme il était doux, ce paysage, et amical. J'éprouvais une ivresse et une confiance que je n'avais jamais ressenties jusque-là à voir ces maisons endormies (216).

Snow also blends with the fog to create an impenetrable shelter: 'Nous ne risquions rien. Nous devenions peu à peu invisibles' (217). On the other hand, snow implies oppression and, again, creates the impression of being buried:

> D'autres nuits, la neige tombait et j'étais gagné par une impression d'étouffement. Nous ne pourrions jamais nous en sortir, Denise et moi. Nous

étions prisonniers, au fond de cette vallée, et la neige nous ensevelirait peu à peu. (225)

Eventually, the snow-covered environment puts him in a state of detachment: 'j'éprouvais un détachement, une tristesse sereine qui venaient du paysage' (225).

To these connotations, we could add the inherent ephemerality of snow, which recalls the instability of the layer of amnesia through which Modiano detects the far-off, muffled echoes at the Tourelles camp (*DB* 131).

Sunlight and snow are entwined with silence, and in turn, silence has the effect of increasing the clarity of certain sounds. After describing the 'nappe de silence', Jean goes on: 'Et sur ce fond de silence, le moindre son se détachait avec une acuité particulière' (*VN* 35). Later, in Juan-les-Pins, the same impression receives more lyrical treatment: 'Vers une heure du matin, sur le trottoir de l'avenue le silence était si profond que l'on entendait les feuillages des arbres bruire de leur respiration nocturne' (*VN* 119). Attentiveness to noise and silence is key in the game that Ingrid and Rigaud play in which they listen for the sound of horses' hooves along the road outside their hotel, competing to hear them the longest: 'Le soir, le silence était si profond que les claquements de sabots sur la route mettaient très longtemps à mourir' (57). As mentioned above, when Jean stays with Ingrid and Rigaud, their neighbours have a party and Ingrid and Rigaud explain that they turn out the lights and keep still and silent to avoid being invited; indeed, they pretend to be dead (42). Their silence, which initially has a surreal, comic effect, takes on a darker character when we realise its connection to the real danger they faced when in the south. First the Bersaglieri, then German troops surrounded the villa in Juan-les-Pins and keeping silent was tantamount to survival: 'Il fallait éteindre les lumières et faire semblant d'être morts' (85). The quality of this intense silence recalls the earlier scene through the almost word-for-word description of playing dead.

The refuge of silence is linked both to sunlight and darkness, vacillating between the two poles like the light–dark contrasts discussed above. After imagining the cat-and-mouse game he and Ingrid would have to play should their trackers come to the Hotel Provençal, Jean wakes in the safety of silence and light:

> De nouveau, il s'éveilla, en sursaut. **Pas un bruit**. Pas le moindre claquement de porte. Les stores des fenêtres laissaient passer la **lumière du jour**. Il se retourna vers Ingrid. La joue appuyée contre le bras, elle dormait de son sommeil d'enfant. (79)

Here, safety is connected to light and silence, akin to how snow and silence area associated with safety above. Later, Ingrid remembers Rigaud's mother's apartment 'le sentiment de **sécurité** que lui avaient inspiré les meubles anciens, **les tapis qui étouffaient les pas**, les tableaux, **les lustres** . . .' (108), a recollection that reinforces the silence–light–safety triad. In contrast, silence is also linked to darkness and concealment. As Jean, Ingrid and Rigaud listen to the music and revelry from the party next door, Jean says, 'Nous sommes restés un long moment **silencieux** sur nos transats, dans l'**obscurité**, comme si nous nous cachions' (43). In Juan-les-Pins, the darkness and obscurity inside the Hotel Provençal, where they arrive in 1942, are linked to an uneasy sense of security:

> Un seul étage de l'hôtel demeurait ouvert, et les rares clients semblaient y habiter en cachette. Avant d'y accéder, l'ascenseur traversait lentement des **paliers d'ombre et de silence** où il ne s'arrêterait plus jamais. (57)

The series of dark corridors and their clandestine safety mixed with silence and obscurity return a few pages later:

> Et c'était la montée lente dans l'ascenseur, les paliers **obscurs** qui défilaient, laissant deviner des couloirs **silencieux** et interminables, des chambres dont il

ne restait sans doute que le sommier des lits. À mesure que l'ascenseur montait, l'air était plus léger, la **pénombre** les enveloppait de fraîcheur. (60)

The silent corridors keep them safe, but the sense of security is problematic; the hotel is deserted because of the war. Rising to the darkness of the upper floors creates a fresh feeling of coolness; whether this is a positive or negative sensation is ambiguous. When they reach the fifth floor, Jean states, 'la grande porte grillagée claquait derrière eux et **rien ne venait plus troubler le silence**' (60), which returns like a refrain a few pages later: 'Maintenant, les claquements étaient presque imperceptibles, là-bas, sur la route. Ils allaient s'éteindre **et plus rien ne troublerait le silence**' (69).

There is a further contrast between whiteness that protects and darkness that threatens, and there is a key to the symbolism of white here. The whiteness of the Hotel Provençal is reiterated several times over: 'l'énorme masse **blanche** de l'hôtel Provençal', and later on the same page, 'La grande salle à manger demeurait close, son lustre enveloppé d'un drap **blanc**' (57). Its whiteness, like snow, is connected to its ability to protect: 'Dans la brume de chaleur, la **grande façade blanche** du Provençal s'élevait pour l'éternité et vous aviez l'impression que ce monument vous **protégeait**' (62). However, also like snow, the protection it affords turns out to be temporary. When they have to move to a different villa, they choose the bedroom with the white walls instead of the larger room with dark wood panelling because the latter has a funereal aspect (81).

The residents of Juan-les-Pins do their best to ignore the war—'On faisait, à Juan-les-Pins, comme si la guerre n'existait pas' (57)—and, in contrast to the black-and-white scenes that predominate, people in town are described in full colour: 'Les hommes portaient des pantalons de plage et les femmes des paréos aux couleurs claires', their skin is tanned, they have a youthful air and a 'fausse insouciance' (57-

8). In an attempt to blend in, Rigaud buys Ingrid a light green bathing suit and a colourful sarong, but they are careful not to speak to anyone. Amid the colour, and in contrast to the carefree residents, the white hotel is like a 'paquebot échoué parmi les pins' (58). From the window of their white refuge, they have a view of the 'tache blanche' (60) of the casino and the deserted street below, which further emphasises the link between whiteness and emptiness. Shortly thereafter, the appearance of a 'dark patch' signals the end of their fragile sense of security:

> Il aura suffi d'un tout petit détail pour gâcher ce paysage, une **tache sombre** . . . Et contrastant avec la **couleur sombre** de son costume, son teint était d'un **blanc laiteux**, comme celui qui **ne s'expose jamais au soleil**' (62).

He is marked out as a creature of darkness. The contrast is even more distinct on the following page: 'son costume plus **sombre** encore par **contraste** avec les galeries et les cabines **blanches** de la plage' (63). Rigaud is about to tell Ingrid of his presence, but resolves not to, the vacillation between the poles of colour mirroring his internal equivocation.

The relationship between darkness and silence shifts to Paris in the second part of the novel, which recounts the period before the couple leave for the south. The night Ingrid breaks the curfew, deciding not to go home to her father's apartment, the curfew area is described as a 'zone **noire** et **silencieuse** d'où personne ne pourra plus jamais sortir' (128) and later, after an attack on German police, the curfew is brought forward: 'La ville toute entière s'enfonçait dans le **noir**, le **froid** et le **silence**. Il fallait se blottir là où on était, faire le moins possible de gestes et attendre' (137). This resonates back (but chronologically forward) to the villa being surrounded by troops and having to be as motionless as possible, almost inert, to avoid being detected, a scene in which darkness and silence are associated with danger. Similarly, during the last meeting with Ingrid back in Paris, she tells him

that from where she lives, 'J'ai une belle vue mais il y a trop de silence dans cet appartement'. Silence is uncomfortable here, likely because it allows her to dwell on the past. Jean doesn't reply: 'Je suis resté sans rien dire. La nuit tombait' (115). The night falling mutely echoes his powerlessness facing the painful silence she describes. In contrast, certain noises are reassuring. In the south there is the 'le chant rassurant des grillons' (73), and each time Ingrid and Rigaud leave the noise and hubbub of the restaurant and move into the darkness and silence, 'Le murmure des conversations s'éteignait' (61) and they feel scared. The huge white hotel that shelters them suddenly appears like a cardboard stage set and Ingrid breaks down in tears, highlighting the fragility of their safety and foreshadowing the arrival of the 'dark patch' on the following page. In addition to the shift from sun to snow in *Voyage de noces,* there is also a reversal of white for black. When Ingrid and Rigaud are picked up at Juan-les-Pins, 'Un fiacre attendait devant la gare, un fiacre **noir** attelé d'un **cheval blanc**' (56), then in a later scene a black horse contrasts with the phosphorescent white snow (146).

The underlying nature of the constant oscillation between elemental poles and the varying connections to safety, danger, dissimulation and revelation are suggested in two key passages. The first appears around halfway through the novel:

> Au terme de leur lente ascension dans l'obscurité, ils accédaient à un palier et à un couloir qu'éclairaient faiblement des ampoules nues. C'était ainsi. Ils passaient de la **lumière à l'ombre et de l'ombre à la lumière**. Il fallait s'habituer à ce monde où tout pouvait **vaciller** d'un instant à l'autre. (62)

This inconsistency of light gestures to the changeability and precariousness of their situation.[44] Not only does light change to darkness suddenly, but so too do the

[44] As discussed in Chapter 5 under the subtitle 'Minimalism in character: *Papillons*', this light–dark vacillation has clear connections to his own family history. In *Livret de famille* he describes his parents

implications of lightness and darkness, which are variously associated with safety and danger. The second passage reveals Jean/Modiano's fascination with the in-between:

> Avant que les lampadaires ne s'allument, je profiterais de cet instant, celui de la journée que je préfère. **Plus tout à fait le jour. Pas encore la nuit**. Un sentiment de trêve et de calme vous envahit et c'est le moment de prêter l'oreille à des échos qui viennent de loin. (101)

The junction between day and night can be read both concretely and metaphorically as describing the grey zone between poles in which certain messages or 'echoes' can be captured, as at the Tourelles camp in *Dora Bruder*. However, the in-between is not necessarily celebrated as having greater truth; rather, it holds its own kind of magnetism and sense of suspension. In *Dora Bruder,* the grey of the in-between is the colour, and concrete the very substance of amnesia—'Les façades étaient rectilignes, les fenêtres carrées, **le béton de la couleur de l'amnésie**. Les lampadaires projetaient une lumière froide' (136)—and in the description of the itinerary of the train that would have transported women from Tourelles to Drancy, it is linked to what seems like a deliberate attempt to erase the past: 'On a construit une autoroute, rasé des pavillons, bouleversé le paysage de cette banlieue nord-est pour la rendre, comme l'ancien îlot 16, aussi **neutre** et **grise** que possible' (142).

Near the end of *Voyage de noces*, as Jean rides his bicycle with mysterious facility along boulevard Mortier, the elements of silence, sun and snow and intermittent darkness and light combine in a new configuration. There are signals pointing out of Paris, with references to Mongolia and the Atlas Mountains ('rue de l'Atlas'), and, accompanying the geographical shift, time also undergoes

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using very similar phrasing: 'deux papillons dans cette nuit de Paris de l'Occupation où l'on passait si facilement de l'ombre à une lumière trop crue et de la lumière à l'ombre' (*LF* 208).

transformation: 'je comprends pourquoi il suffisait de me laisser glisser en roue libre sur ce vélo rouge: je remontais le temps' (157). For the first and only time in the novel, 'Le silence' (156) appears as a standalone sentence, followed on the next page by 'Rien ne trouble le silence. Sauf l'eau des caniveaux qui coule dans un murmure de fontaine' (157), recalling the two earlier iterations (60, 69) of untroubled silence in the Hotel Provençal. Here, the silence is accompanied by running water that sounds like a fountain, and it was at the fountains near the *musée des Colonies* (125) that linear time broke down and Jean was able to access Ingrid with great ease. Water, an element that flows freely, is in a sense, the result of sunlight on snow. Snow features in the scene but only in a reported memory, and the water here in this closing scene is bound to the blurring of past and present, biographer and subject.

In *Dora Bruder,* we are presented with a stark image of the impermanence and inaccessibility of traditional archives. The staff at the town hall of the twelfth arrondissement are 'sentinelles de l'oubli' (16) and there are multiple instances of archival destruction (65, 76, 84). In an effort to save Dora from the possibility of re-entering another cycle of erasure, Modiano lifts her from the problematic traditional archive and embeds the text in an alternative archive, one constructed by weaving together literary and cinematic references as well as chromatic and meteorological connections. Modiano recounts that while writing *Dora Bruder* he was re-reading *Les Misérables*. He describes how Cosette and Jean Valjean, in their attempt to escape, suddenly cross into an imaginary area of Paris called 'Petit Picpus' where they find sanctuary (51). The striking coincidence is that Dora's convent school Saint-Coeur-de-Marie was on rue du Petit-Picpus. There are also references to Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher', in which the great estate disappears into a tarn, and to Robert Desnos, whose title Modiano inadvertently borrows and a link to Genet, who wrote *Miracle de la rose* in Tourelles prison where Dora was also interned.

Moreover, Morris highlights the suite of similarities between Perec's parents, as described in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975), and the Bruders ('Avec Klarsfeld' 277). Links with Perec appear in *Voyage de noces* too: Ingrid used to live on the same street as Perec, rue de l'Atlas (106), as pointed out by Roland Brasseur in Cooke (*Present Pasts* 270). Through his search for Ingrid and Dora, memory is shown to be fallible, people unreliable, records erasable and archives destructible. By embedding stories in alternative existing narratives, Modiano renders them less vulnerable to erasure.

* * *

From his first novels, Modiano has vacillated between the sense of responsibility to bear witness and the futility or even absurdity of doing so. Modiano's hesitant detectives and biographers tread a path which steers between extremes; there is the austerity of Moreno, the former novelist who renounces literature to collect disparate forgotten details to be read over the radio, and the poetically and personally invested biographer-protagonist of *Voyage de noces.* The search continues, both for the subject and for a satisfactory way of conducting and retelling the search. A satisfying position is never quite reached, but each approach offers, in its own way, a counterpoint in positing literature or literary writing as a place to inscribe.

The higher degree of reticence in *Dora Bruder* is connected to the fact that the stakes are higher as a result of the book's overtly stated real-life subject. Statements of non-fiction in the text prevent Dora from becoming a literary figure. For example, the footnote on p. 67 references a report related to searches carried out on inmates at Drancy and Pithiviers. Erasure and destruction are reported more insistently and more matter-of-factly in *Dora Bruder*:

> Les policiers des Questions juives **ont détruit leurs fichiers**, tous les procès-verbaux d'interpolation pendant les rafles ou lors des arrestations individuelles dans les rues. (65)
>
> Quelques années après la guerre, d'autres archives des commissariats **ont été détruites**. (76)
>
> Toutes ces dizaines de milliers de procès-verbaux **ont été détruites** et on ne connaîtra jamais les noms des 'agents capteurs'. (84)

By comparsison, in *Voyage de noces*, treatment of decay and absence is more evocative and poeticised:

> J'ai ouvert l'un après l'autre les battants de l'armoire mais à l'intérieur il ne restait plus que des cintres. Le soleil qui se reflétait dans les glaces m'a fait cligner les yeux. Rien sur les murs dont la peinture beige s'écaillait par endroits, sauf une marque au-dessus des lits qui indiquait qu'un tableau ou un miroir avait été suspendu là. (*VN* 106)

Here, absence and erasure are evoked more metaphorically through the use of imagery: sunlight, the empty wardrobe, peeling paint and the contour of an object taken down from the wall.

The poetic and symbolic treatment is more elaborate and varied in *Voyage de noces* than in *Dora Bruder* through the way the *fugue* is presented, the sub-theme of people going in search of disappeared explorers, the level of merging and identification between writer and subject, as well as the greater development of the network linking silence, chromatic contrasts, seasons, snow and sunlight, and their connotations of safety and danger.

For these reasons, in its intention and treatment, we might consider *Dora Bruder* as more in line with Adorno's notion of 'immanence' than *Voyage de noces*. Although it brings us into Dora's world, it states within its own borders the

limitations and failures of its capacity to access and relay Dora's experience. It is not a question of which of the texts is the more successful or accomplished, but that their different approaches to retelling and the different ways ethical issues are attached to the biographical drive are expressed in written form. Nettelbeck argues that Modiano is not trying to write history, but rather 'to provide a vehicle for the transfer of what would otherwise remain marginalised and ephemeral socio-political experience into a mode in which historical thought can usefully operate' ('Novelists' 245). Part of this process involves the integration of a level of doubt and vacillation, through which ethical and moral terrain can be expressed and a place can be accorded to the silences of doubt, the unknown and unknowable. We are, as Adorno writes, 'after Auschwitz', a place and word that has come to signify the vast unthinkable bureaucratic and ideological reality that made the Shoah possible, a word that has come to stand for the unspeakable. It is talked about in terms of indescribability; as Mandel writes, 'the word refers to the limit of words, pointing toward a realm inaccessible to knowledge' (205). *Voyage de noces* and *Dora Bruder* give form to the unspeakable nature of their subjects' experience. Ingrid is saved from Auschwitz, but is still among its victims and we do not follow Dora into the camps—this part remains unspoken.

The poetics of the biographical impulse take varying forms in different texts and are more or less fragmented, more or less embellished by literary metaphor, more or less interwoven into external literature, shaping and reshaping a sense of the past. Included in the biographical drive is the shifting place and significance of silence, which fluctuates between reverence and contradiction, refuge and danger, sun and snow.

Part III. Creating Silence

Varying interpretations of silence have been explored as a source of productivity in Part I, and in Part II silence has been considered as a divisive fate which is to be guarded against or as synonymous with reverence and respect. The third and final part reorients ways of thinking about silence once again, situating it as a quality that can be created, as a property within the media of language and writing in Chapter 5, and as a more nebulous artistic space or destination in Chapter 6.

The idea of writing silence with words or pronouncing silence with language might at first appear oxymoronic. Yet, the connections between silence, language and literature are multifold. In Chapter 5 considers the ways in which an experience of silence text can be conveyed and instilled through reticence and withholding. These facets of Modiano's language are explored at the micro level, including punctuation and lettering, progressively moving through larger units of language to motifs, themes and characterisation and on to the macro level of narrative form and voice. At each stage, I demonstrate the techniques and devices of elision and circumlocution that render the text resistance to readers' grasp of temporal and semantic threads.

The impression of withholding and authorly restraint was raised by Modiano in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. He stated that often readers know more about a book than its writer and described the transfer of information as analagous to the process of film development, yet for this transfer to take place, the writer must not direct readers with a heavy hand:

> Mais pour qu'il existe un tel accord entre l'auteur et son lecteur, il est nécessaire que le romancier ne force jamais son lecteur—au sens où l'on dit d'un chanteur qu'il force sa voix—mais l'entraîne imperceptiblement et lui laisse une marge suffisante pour que le livre l'imprègne peu à peu. (*Discours* 11)

This illustrates the kind of distance and restraint he wishes to maintain to avoid putting his readers under pressure or force, and it is only through this form of withholding that the desired relationship can be formed.

In Chapter 6, 'Towards Silence', the focus shifts to the concept of creating silence through art and the placing of silence as an artistic destination and objective. Thinking of silence as a place that can be readed after or at the end of writing, Modiano has expressed his respect, even envy, for writers who have been able to renounce writing, as if they had said all they had to say and could finally rest. In an interview he stated: 'Comme si je me disais : « Si j'écris ce livre, ce sera bien parce que, après, je n'aurai plus besoin de parler de ces trucs... »' (Liban 2003). This raises the idea of writing was a way of purging, through which one can attain a place of silence.

Modiano has created a series of characters, who are generally artists, whose unique relationships with silence within their art form are the subject of the final chapter. There are examples of artists working in film, music, photography and literature whose art practice leads them towards and around silence. In the realm of language and literature, I incorporate essays from Blanchot's *La part du feu* to illustrate the tendency to reach towards the limits of language, towards the other side of linguistic expression, towards the unsayable. Blanchot's work helps us to understand the place of silence in language: it occupyies a fundamental yet

diametrical place as both prerequisite and destination, as the foundation preceding language, as well as delimiting its confines.

Chapter 5. The Reticence of the Text

J'écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable
Je fixais des vertiges
Rimbaud, *Une saison en enfer*, 'Délires II : Alchimie du verbe' (1873)

Reticence and withholding are the central motifs examined in this chapter. 'Reticence' comes from the Latin *reticēre*, 'to keep silent, to leave unsaid', formed from *tacēre*, 'to be silent', coupled with the prefix 're'. The etymon *reticēre* was, in rhetoric, a device used to 'pass over the very point one wishes to emphasize' or 'leave a sentence unfinished' (*OED*). This etymological root is shared by the French noun 'réticence' and the verb 'taire', 'to keep quiet' or 'to silence'. Its synonym, 'aposiopesis', in rhetorical and literary discourse, from the Greek ἀποσιώπησις describes 'a sudden silence' or 'an abrupt breaking off of speech' (Dupriez 57). This chapter responds to the questions of how Modiano's texts manifest reticence, how they fall silent, resist conclusion, and how narrative logic and meaning often seem to resist or evade direct denotation.

The precision and apparent simplicity and transparency of Modiano's work have been amply identified: 'l'écriture de Patrick Modiano, limpide jusqu'à la transparence' (Rambaud 121), 'langue parfaite, académique même' (Brunn 10). Yet what is conveyed often remains highly elusive, seeming to auto-erase or disintegrate; it is writing that 's'efface à peine écrit' (Blanckeman, 'Encres sympathiques' 317). Despite the limpidity of Modiano's writing, counterintuitively,

his novels create elaborate narratives full of obscurity and incompleteness: 'À la longue, cela donne l'impression que Modiano cultive l'ambiguïté comme on cultive une belle fleur, mais vénéneuse' (Brunn 10).

Modiano's reticence to make explicit or avoid ambiguousness is nuanced by the notion of transparency. While transparency evokes limpidity and clarity, in his work it is associated with impotence and incapacity, as if stuck within a film, seeing everything file past without being connected. Modiano is attracted to obscurity—'plus les choses demeuraient obscures et mystérieuses, plus je leur portais de l'intérêt' (*UP* 45)—but nonetheless conveys a sense of transparency: 'Les événements que j'évoquerai jusqu'à ma vingt et unième année, je les ai vécus en transparence . . . tout défilait en transparence et je ne pouvais pas encore vivre ma vie' (*UP* 45), 'tout ce décor glissait, en transparence' (*DA* 107). Transparency is incorporated as an unlikely component of reticence, communicating a sense of absent presence and being held at a distance from experience.

This chapter's methodology first employs close reading, using linguistic and rhetorical analysis to discuss ways in which Modiano's writing demonstrates reticence, resisting temporal and semantic precision. I begin my analysis with the smallest units, from punctuation, words and mise-en-page, then sequentially broaden the field of analysis, while maintaining the same line of enquiry, demonstrating how the text resists being grasped and withholds from the reader at each stage. By incorporating the study of the minutiae and then expanding to a wider viewpoint, I trace the progression of forms of reticence through these progressive levels.

I explore the extent to which Modiano's writing can be considered part of the lineage of Barthes' *écriture blanche*, drawing comparisons between Barthes' work on Stéphane Mallarmé and specific features in Modiano's writing. While the application

of *écriture blanche* can be problematic, Viart notes that its persistent use and continuous employment to describe a growing corpus of contemporary art and literature demonstrates its fecundity and usefulness ('Blancheurs' 10). Recognising the limitations of *écriture blanche* in answering this chapter's central questions, I discuss elements of minimalist writing using John Barth's tripartite minimalist framework, identifying a range of rhetorical, literary and linguistic tropes at clause and sentence levels. The theoretical work in the first section of the chapter serves to underpin analysis in the section, 'Resistance in Dialogue, Motif, Character and Narration', in which the scope broadens once more. Here, reticence in dialogue and communication, character development and thematic treatment is studied. Taking a further step back to consider resistance as an overarching trope in narrative voice and narrative structure, I demonstrate how these versions of silence contribute to impressions of ambiguity, non-resolution and suspension in Modiano's work.

Écriture blanche

Barthes' *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* was published in 1953, though parts of it had previously been published in 1947 and 1950 in *Combat*. The notion of *écriture blanche*[45] has emerged as one of the text's most influential concepts and *blancheur* has become part of critical vocabulary in the arts more broadly. Interpreting the notion itself has been both problematic and generative given Barthes' evocative, rather than prescriptive, definitions. There are only three references to *écriture blanche* in the essay: first, Barthes cites Jean Cayrol, Maurice Blanchot and Albert Camus as

[45] 'Écriture blanche' is translated as 'colourless writing' in Annette Lavers and Colin Smith's translation (Jonathan Cape, 1967).

examples of writers producing *écriture blanche* (12); second, he describes *écriture blanche* as 'libérée de toute servitude à un ordre marqué du langage' (108), suggesting its freedom from traditionally indexable conventions; and lastly, he writes of its inevitable transformation into a 'manière' (111). Difficulty circumscribing its meaning also arises as a consequence of the term being used more or less synonymously with other terms such as 'zero degree', 'neutral', 'innocent' and 'amodal writing'. One example from Modiano's writing could be the following:

> Juillet. Train de nuit, debout sans le couloir. Vienne. Je passe quelques nuits dans un hôtel borgne près de la gare de l'Ouest. Puis je trouve refuge dans une chambre, derrière l'église Saint-Charles. Je rencontre des gens de toutes sortes au café Hawelka. Un soir, avec eux, j'y fête mes vingt ans. (*UP* 106)

Events are relayed in a purely matter-of-fact manner with an almost complete absence of adjectives or descriptive language. Modiano's lexical simplicity could also be seen as a characteristic of *blancheur*. His range of vocabulary is markedly reduced and refined in comparison with the rich, varied language and voice of his first novels.

Barthes pitched *Degré zéro* in the following way: 'il ne s'agit que d'une Introduction à ce que pourrait être une Histoire de l'Ecriture' (13). He outlines a schematic view of writing, proposing three 'dimensions': 'la langue', 'le style' and 'l'écriture'. While the first two dimensions fall within the remit of 'Literature', and are therefore beyond the control of individual writers, 'écriture' concerns the relationship between writer and society. For Barthes, 'écriture' is the only dimension in which writers can demonstrate individual agency and situate themselves in relation to society. For Barthes, 'écriture' is the very centre of the problematics of literature; it is 'essentiellement la morale de la forme' (26), which links back to ideas about the relationship between ethics and modes of writing.

Barthes outlines a history of writing in the second section of the text, concentrating predominantly on the development of bourgeois writing in the nineteenth century, through to the 'silence de l'écriture' (106). At each stage, he demonstrates how language is controlled by the institutional structures of its time and criticises Naturalist writers Émile Zola and Guy de Maupassant for the discrepancy between the realism of their subject matter and the artificial literariness of style. Central to the subsequent and apparently inevitable 'silence de l'écriture' is an effort to achieve emancipation from the strictures of Literature, an attempt to escape its bourgeois baggage and compromises. It is manifest in the disintegration of language in Arthur Rimbaud and Mallarmé, the pluralisation of styles (especially in modern poetry) and a movement towards the neutralisation of style: *écriture blanche*.

Barthes links the 'abasement' of subject in the work of writers such as Victor Hugo and Maupassant to the attempted 'abasement of form' (95-104). Within this general movement, he notes the desire to convey the labour of writing, using the example of Garaudy's heavy use of metaphor, which makes it abundantly clear that a literary text has been *written* and is a product of toil. Barthes cites the emergence of veritable 'neutral writing' with authors such as Camus, who was searching for an 'innocent' mode of writing that dispensed with the illusionistic devices and artificiality of literary language. A linguistic analogy is used to illustrate this:

> certains linguistes établissent entre les deux termes d'une polarité (singulier–pluriel, prétérit–présent) l'existence d'un troisième terme, terme neutre ou terme-zéro; ainsi entre les modes subjonctif et impératif, l'indicatif leur apparaît comme une forme amodale. Toutes proportions gardées, l'écriture au degré zéro est au fond une écriture indicative, ou si l'on veut amodale. (108-9)

The idea is that *écriture blanche* describes the world while retaining a certain distance: 'la problématique humaine est découverte et livrée sans couleur' (111).

Like the English 'white' or 'blank', the French 'blanc/he' teems with connotations of purity and innocence, as well as emptiness and incompletion, as in *chèque en blanc*, *vers blancs*. Whereas in English we 'bleed something dry', in French this is 'saigner à blanc'. 'Blanc' can indicate the absence of consequences, as in *test à blanc* and covers much of the same semantic ground as 'blank' such as 'shooting blanks'—'tirer à blanc'—as well as a 'blanc/k' being an interval or space left in conversation or writing, or a brief failure of memory. *Voix blanche* is a particularly interesting case, describing a voice without timbre, divested of its habitual qualities. The most suitable, although still unsatisfying translation is a 'toneless' or 'emotionless voice'. This is discussed in more detail further on. In terms of *écriture blanche*, all of these connotations are operative at some level, driven by an impulsion towards greater purity of style, towards a 'style de l'absence qui est presque une absence idéale du style' (109). As Bernard Vouilloux writes, 'l'« écriture blanche » désignerait une écriture dépourvue de ces propriétés qui permettent de percevoir un style' (33), and since style *signifies*, this struggle for decontamination conveys its own political and moral posture.

Without referring specifically to *écriture blanche*, Dubosclard's description of *Dora Bruder* fits neatly into Barthes' typology:

> un vocabulaire simple, une syntaxe limpide, une écriture qui suggère plus qu'elle ne définit. Cette discrétion stylistique est même ici accentuée, au point que l'on est souvent face à une écriture du constat, qui paraît exclure toute recherche formelle. (82)

Critics and scholars, such as Mathias Rambaud and Bruno Blanckeman, directly situate Modiano in the lineage of *écriture blanche*. However, whereas Barthes is categorical about *écriture blanche* being related to writing rather than subject matter, what is most often discussed in relation to Modiano's work is *blancheur* in theme,

motif and subject matter. So, to what extent is *écriture blanche* useful in identifying the particular kind of silence and reticence in Modiano's work at a linguistic level?

In terms of specific features and mechanics of *écriture blanche*, Barthes is quite elusive. He cites Mallarmé and his heirs as epitomising the fragile moment of writing's frustrated death drive. Mallarmé's 'agraphie typographique' (107), consisting of placing words in voids of white space, has the effect of liberating particular words from their social connotations, habitual syntactical chains and embedded signification. In this visual reprocessing, words are rendered innocent, but not without them performing a kind of annihilation:

> Cet art a la structure même du suicide : le silence y est un temps poétique homogène qui coince entre deux couches et fait éclater le mot moins comme le lambeau d'un cryptogramme que comme une lumière, un vide, un meurtre, une liberté. (107)

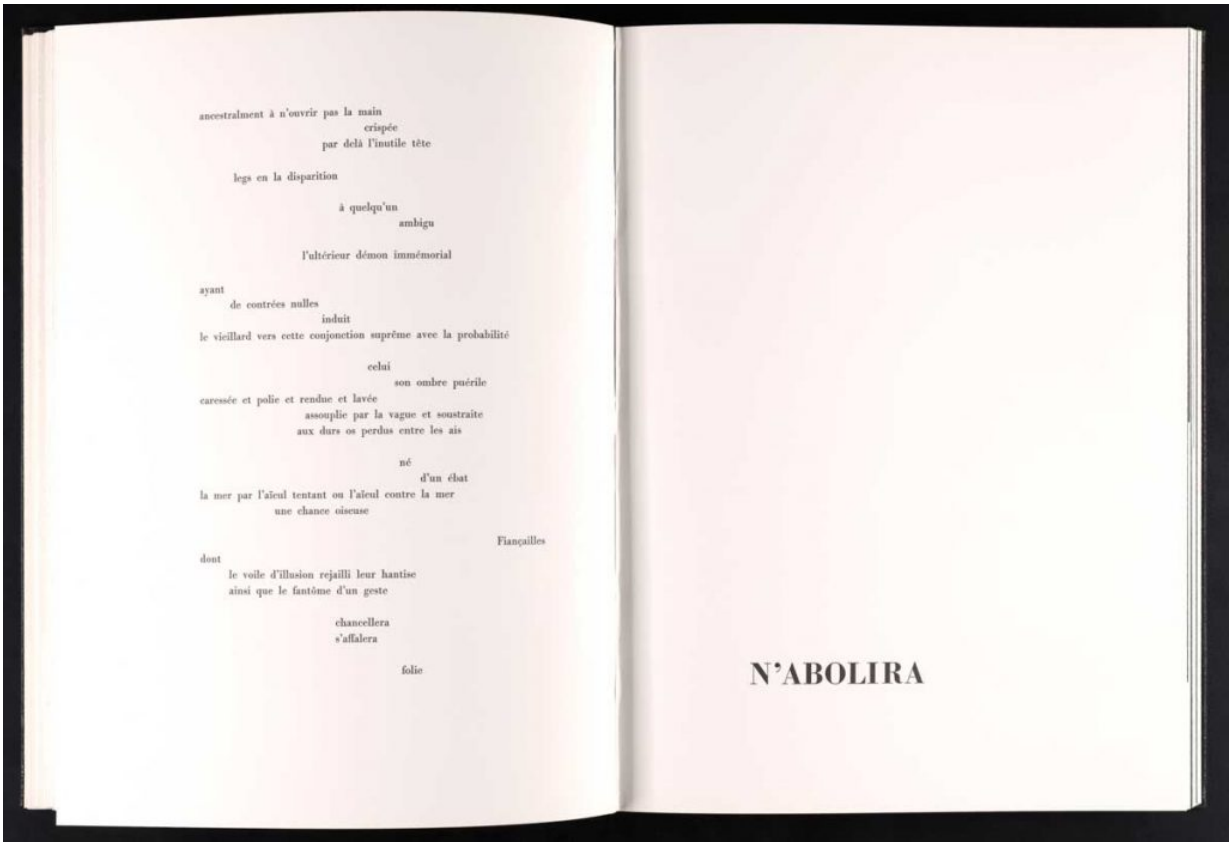

Figure 3. Mallarmé, *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, 1914 [1897] p. 5.

Modiano doesn't employ the same avant-garde typology as Mallarmé, or devote any books so entirely to blank space as Gérard Wajcman's *L'Interdit* (1986) or the singular blank page in Robbe Grillet's *Le Voyeur* (1955), but similar effects can be seen in his typesetting. *Rue des Boutiques Obscures'* 251 pages are divided into forty-seven chapters, averaging 5.3 pages per chapter. However, many chapters are far shorter; the entirety of chapter XIX on page 136, approximately at the centre of the book, reads:

Mansoure. Jean-Michel. 1, rue Gabrielle,

XVIIIe. CLI 72-01.

This is the most 'blank' chapter in the novel, the words surrounded by the greatest expanse of white page, but many other chapters are barely over one page in length.[46] Chapter XIV is almost exclusively made up of extracts from a telephone directory, each of which is surrounded by blank space. Typographical layout is sometimes described rather than presented. In *L'herbe des nuits* Jean describes his fraying memory, but states that 'quelques noms se détachent avec netteté dans le silence et sur la page blanche…' (10), and when Bosmans, the protagonist of *L'horizon,* rediscovers an old manuscript, he is struck by the density and compactness of the writing, which covers the whole page including the margins, leaving 'aucun espace blanc' (32). He interprets this as a way of expressing his feeling of suffocation at the time. In these examples, blankness and silence are associated with access to memory since it is on a visually and sonically blank background that names and images can

[46] Nineteen of the remaining forty-six, chapters: V, VI, IX, XIII, XVI, XVIII, XXI, XXII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXIX, XL, XLI, XLII, XLIV, XLV, XLVI.

emerge. Conversely, overabundance of writing leaves no space and goes beyond plenitude to asphyxiation.

Thinking about silence in music, Dubloscard notes that silences are coloured by preceding notes, and the silences, in turn, act to reinforce that which precedes them (85). Applied to typography in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, silences of musical phrasing are akin to white spaces on the page. The separated fragments are delivered without context, left open and uninterpreted and, suspended from the continuity of the text, disrupt the fictional narrative rhythm. This effect of stepping out of fiction is further amplified by the 'real-life' nature of the shortest sections and may also alter the act of reading, the eyes flitting over the brief, prosaic details, adding to the sensation of evanescence. Or, it could be that readers take these details as clues and pay more attention to them, slowing the pace.

What is seen in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* is representative of other novels. Apart from the three novellas that make up *Des inconnues*, demarcated with I, II and III, the use of chapter numbers after *De si braves garçons* (1982) ceases completely. Nettelbeck sees this as creating an 'impression of unbroken continuity' ('Modiano's Stylo' 46). Unmarked breaks often signal shifts in time and location, which augments the impression of being temporally and geographically unanchored.

An analogous effect is created in Modiano's work through the use of inverted commas and capitalisation. Certeau holds that 'mis entre guillemets le mot devient opaque ; il est considéré comme chose et non plus comme signe' (*Fable* 201). This is similar to Barthes' description of the 'matité' created by Mallarmé's halos of empty space, which prompt readers to apprehend the 'parole comme objet' (*Degré zéro* 110). Certeau describes words taking on an opaque quality in the process of dissociation from habitual signification. The signifier–signified relationship is altered through presentation, becoming 'objet absolu', 'mots-objets sans liaison' (*Degré zéro* 73). In *La*

Petite Bijou, the words 'Pays Natal' first appear with initial capitals, then as « pays natal » in guillemets, then finally in lower case and without guillemets. This is in line with the shift from the first instance of a dream-like return to a 'Pays Natal' she never had, to the second « pays natal » where she comments 'Ces deux mots devaient correspondre à quelque chose qui me touchait de près ou bien m'évoquait un souvenir', recalling how she did once arrive by train in a small town, with a tag around her neck, suggesting that she had been evacuated during the war. By the time the last instance of the term appears, the dream of a home country has dissipated: 'Il n'existait pas de pays natal, mais une banlieue où personne ne m'attendait' (66-67). As well as perhaps obliquely referencing Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, its capitalisation first gives it prominence, then its placement between inverted commas separates and dissociates it, prompting it to be regarded with circumspection and in the final instance, the 'pays natal' loses its evocative dream-like quality and the protagonist realises that it never existed for her. Becoming a 'word-object' rather than simple signifier and being isolated this way invites a level of doubt and scepticism as to the word's truth value and origin.

Capitalisation works in a similar way, isolating certain words and making them stand out in their lower-case surroundings, thus dissociating them from their visual and semantic context. In *Remise de peine*, the word CASTROL (also in capitals in *L'horizon* 58) is capitalised. The narrator says:

> je ne pouvais pas détacher les yeux d'une plaque métallique fixée au mur, une plaque jaune sur laquelle je lisais un nom de sept lettres en caractères noirs, dont le dessin et la sonorité me remuent encore le cœur aujourd'hui: CASTROL. (79)

The phonic and graphic qualities of the proper noun take precedence over the word's semantic field, which socially and temporally anchors the narrative. Beltaïef

sees capitalisation as highlighting the word's orality, as if it were spoken aloud by the narrator, rather than causing dissociation (*Remise de peine* 146). Notwithstanding an effect of bringing the term into reality, a shift to orality interrupts the text's hitherto written nature, adding to the notion of atonality or *blancheur.* Further, some capitalised groupings are from poster advertisements, such as 'PUPIER, LE CHOCOLAT DES FAMILLES' (*LPB* 24). Both examples emphasise visual aspects of language; the first without sound attached and the second drawing attention to the appearance as well as the sonority of the capitalised words.

There is a significant amount of capitalisation in *Des inconnues:* 'ALBERTO ZYMBALIST' (41), 'NON IDENTIFIÉE' (51, 53), 'ON EST MAITRE DE SA VIE ET DE SA MORT' (64), 'VAUGIRARD' (73), 'LE GRAND AMOUR' (74), 'NOUS VIVIONS DANS LE SOMMEIL' (154), 'OCCULTISME, MAGIE, ÉSOTÉRISME HISTOIRE DES RELIGIONS' (155). Such capitalisation interrupts the text and destabilises or questions the signifier–signified relationship. Although capitalisation and guillemets do not visually isolate to the same extent as Mallarmé's 'typographical agraphia', a similar effect is achieved. These typographical devices create a kind of reticence within the fabric or texture of the text by creating a gap or a distance which prompts the reader to question the word's significance.

The notion of mot-object is not new. In François Rabelais' *Le Quart-Livre,* Pantagruel and Panurge journey to consult the Oracle of Bacbuc. Out at sea, they hear words and cries, yet they cannot see anyone who could be making them. Pantagruel proposes that they have come across the 'frozen words' of Plato, which are thawing, or the laments from the severed head of Orpheus and his lyre, which were thrown into the Hebrus. Their skipper informs them that they are in fact at the site of a battle that took place in winter, the cries and plaints of which were frozen, suspended in the air. Now, at the end of winter, the words are melting. Pantagruel

and his fellow travellers take these frozen words to thaw them and free their sound. However, they cannot understand their meaning as they are in an unintelligible language. Barthes posits that silence, as a form of homogenous poetic time, 'sets off' words like 'a light, a void, a murder, a freedom' (63) and in Rabelais' story, the frozen word-objects are 'set free', yet their meaning remains indecipherable. What Modiano does with capitalisation, guillemets and the use of empty white space is a form of liberation too, dislocating or destabilising the relationship between word and signification, interrupting the expected flow of language.

Discussing French literature more broadly, Bruno Blanckeman identifies four cases of *écriture blanche*, the fourth of which he terms 'écriture néo-lazaréenne'[47] (316), exemplified, as he sees it, by Modiano's post-1975 work. He observes:

> la narration se développe toujours en retrait de sa propre histoire, cumulant les épisodes de retard et les séquences d'absence. Les données romanesques—personnages, décors, situations, méditation—peinent à prendre ou à durer, s'égarent entre un mode de surgissement spectaculaire et un devenir atone qui les dilue progressivement. (316)

However, these features relate more to characters, situations and subjects that struggle to take robust form than the Barthesian conception of *blancheur*; he identifies subjects rather than the features of *écriture blanche*'s styleless style.[48]

Jacques Lecarme also conflates form and subject, describing Modiano's writing as tending towards 'une sobriété radicale . . . une pauvreté savante' (25), 'écriture blanche, neutre, minimaliste, jamais conceptuelle ni dialectique' (29), before noting the kinds of characters, attitudes and themes privileged by Modiano.

[47] In 'D'un romanesque concentrationnaire' (1949), published in *Esprit,* Jean Cayrol used the figure of Lazarus to describe post-war literature, coining the term *le romanesque lazaréen*. Lazarus evokes the return from the dead, symbolising the promise of resurrection.

[48] Blanckeman discusses these kinds of features, especially in *Villa Triste* and *Une jeunesse* in *Lire Patrick Modiano* (29–38).

Lecarme describes Modiano's writing, most conspicuously in *Un pedigree,* not as 'blanche', but as 'grise' (42), simply relaying the cold fact of maternal neglect: 'pas le moindre ornement' (44). He interprets the lack of auctorial adjudication as an invitation for readers to judge for themselves.

Aside from concrete typographical features, *écriture blanche* is only useful to a certain extent in identifying and interpreting the linguistic technicalities of what Viart and Vercier describe as Modiano's 'phrase sèche' (157). As we have seen, the notion of *blancheur* has been seized by critics as a conceptual gateway to explore more thematic or narrative aspects of restraint and reticence. However, *écriture blanche* only partially describes the features of reticence peculiar to Modiano. His work contains typographical and stylistic elements that convey a sense of restraint and dissociation, thorough analysis of which is limited by adhering only to Barthes' schema. The notion of minimalism in literature offers different pathways to identify and understand the particular features of Modiano's writing and their impact.

Minimalist Features

In his 1986 text on minimalism, John Barth identified three 'minimalisms': firstly, minimalism of unit, form or scale, which is to say, shortness applied to the word, sentence, paragraph or whole work; secondly, minimalism of style, referring to parsimonious use of complex syntactical structures, verbose formulations and figurative language; and finally, minimalism of material, which relates to character, action and plot. Barth's schema is useful for classifying features that could be seen as part of the legacy of *écriture blanche,* but in a more contemporary and broader context of literature, art and design. Here I discuss the following features: fragmentation,

ellipsis, noun phrases, parataxis, semantic syllepsis and other means of 'speaking silence' that contribute to a highly condensed, reduced and restrained literary language. The consequence of such writing, however, it is not impoverishment of meaning or message, but conversely, a demonstration of the truth of the adage 'less is more'.

Fragmentation

Modiano's book-length publications to date are all relatively short. Bearing in mind the slight variations between editions, the longest is *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* at 251 pages, while the rest are between 105 (*Souvenirs dormants*) and 215 pages (*Livret de famille*). The majority are around 150 pages (see the Appendix). In an interview with journalist Laurence Liban, Modiano discussed his and his contemporaries' capacity to write the kind of long-form literature their predecessors wrote:

> J'ai souvent le sentiment que des gens de ma génération ont une infirmité par rapport à ceux de la génération précédente . . . Je pense à Proust ou à Lawrence Durrell et à son *Quatuor d'Alexandrie*. Ces gens vivaient dans un monde où l'on pouvait se concentrer davantage tandis que pour les gens de ma génération, c'est fragmentaire. On arrive peut-être à faire un truc global, mais avec des fragments.

Modiano returned to the same observation more recently, noting the perceived difference in temporal flow between generations, though there are notable exceptions to this generalisation, such as Quignard, Littell and Houellebecq:

> À cette époque-là, le temps s'écoulait d'une manière plus lente qu'aujourd'hui et cette lenteur s'accordait au travail du romancier car il pouvait mieux concentrer son énergie et son attention. Depuis, le temps s'est accéléré et

> avance par saccades, ce qui explique la différence entre les grands massifs romanesques du passé, aux architectures de cathédrales, et les œuvres discontinues et morcelées d'aujourd'hui. (*Discours* 17)

While many, not least the members of the Swedish Academy, see merit in the impression of fragmentation in Modiano's body of work, this brevity of unit, following John Barth's schema, is not universally lauded: novelist Chevillard described Modiano's novels as 'aérosols' (par. 2), likening them to vapourous, atmospheric, but intangible substances. Yet their short length, Nettelbeck suggests, adds to their cinematic quality; they can be read in an evening, just as one would watch a film ('Modiano's Stylo' 50). This, among other features discussed by Nettelbeck, makes a case for literature's continuing relevance and participation in the audiovisual age.

Brevity is not only found at the level of unit; within the texts themselves, as discussed in relation to *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, there are layers of fragmentation at the sentence, paragraph and chapter level. Breaking up text into short blocks creates an impression of discontinuity and non-conclusion. That these fragments don't necessarily correspond to logical sequencing, chronological order or demarcate coherent thematic units further adds to this impression. In relation to *Dora Bruder*, Blanckeman refers to the work's *rémanence*, translated as 'perseveration', as in that which persists, fleetingly and difficult to distinguish, when all else has been erased:

> *Rémanent* writing is writing that lets erasure shape its very structures, play with its crumbling paragraphs, erase its frame, fragment its phrases, jot hastily-made notations to the detriment of their narrative coherence. It is narrative decomposition, in sync with the chaos of consciousness/ consciences. ('Patrick Modiano or Writing' 14)

The text's form reflects the recording of a fragmentary process, which ultimately concludes in a life cut short and a biography unfinished. After writing out a thirteen-line list of names, addresses and places, one of Modiano's many nameless protagonists remarks:

> J'aurais brassé les papiers, comme un jeu de cartes, et je les aurais étalés sur la table. C'était donc ça, ma vie présente ? Tout se limitait donc pour moi, en ce moment, à une vingtaine de noms et d'adresses disparates dont je n'étais que le seul lien. . . . Si je le décidais, je quittais cette table et tout se déliait, tout disparaissait dans le néant. Il ne resterait plus qu'une valise de fer-blanc et quelques bouts de papiers où étaient griffonnés des noms et des lieux qui n'auraient plus aucun sens pour personne. (*DPO* 72-73)

It is notable that the four verbs after 'Si' are in the imperfect tense, only returning to the conditional in the following sentence, which augments the impression of ambiguity. On the following page, there is another list containing fourteen phonebook entries. Nothing unites these elements, other than Modiano having selected them, so we, like him, are left to create meaning between them. The protagonist reflects on the tenuousness of this network and how it could so easily unravel and be forgotten forever should he decide to simply get up and walk away. These episodes leave the impression of existences that are highly fragile, atomised and unanchored.

Françoise Susini-Anastopoulos discusses the silencing quality of fragmentary structure, arguing its 'nomadic', 'haggard' and 'whispering' effect within text leads to inter-contamination: 'Le fragment, suspendu dans le silence, devient lui-même silence, ou plutôt lieu de rencontre du discours et du silence.' She suggests that for some writers, the fragment offers a way of incorporating silence into writing.

Responding to a question about the shortness of *Chien de Printemps* and the high degree of suggestion through the guided silences in the novel, Modiano replied:

> [cela] tient du fait que j'ai voulu suggérer beaucoup de choses. Il y a toute une partie invisible. Sans s'en rendre compte le lecteur devrait pouvoir reconstituer de lui-même ce que j'imagine par le silence. (Lamy 32)

That which is 'invisible', evoked through allusion, suggestion and silence, contrary to equalling blankness or void, constitutes an invitation to readers to do the work of reconstructing and filling in. Alongside the fragment, I discuss further ways in which these 'invisible' layers arise in the texts. It is through these textual silences, abbreviations, and contractions that the text resists our attempts to draw conclusion or feel a sense of narrative completion.

Ellipsis

The term 'ellipsis' has its roots in the Latin term *ellīpsis*, from the Greek ἔλλειψις, meaning 'an omission, a falling short, a defect' and the verb ἐλλείπειν, 'to come short, to leave out' (*OED*, Picoche). Pierre Fontanier classifies ellipsis as a 'figure de construction par *sous-entente*' (305), along with zeugma and anacoluthon, themselves subcategories of ellipsis. Ellipsis consists in the suppression of words necessary for complete expression, without necessarily resulting in obscurity or uncertainty. Suppressed words or information may be replaced by a pronoun or complement, but ellipsis is essentially substitution by zero and results in an internally dependent relationship whereby coherence requires the meaning of one unit or sentence to serve one or more others (Fowler 85). From Modiano's work, one example of simple

verbal ellipsis is: 'Les rues étaient silencieuses, le froid coupant' (*AN* 131). Here, 'être' serves both clauses. The copula is omitted, reducing the volume of words, but not negatively impacting clarity.

Ellipsis can also be represented typographically with three dots, which graphically stand in for the elided information. In discourse analysis, Van Den Heuvel differentiates between involuntary silences—what a writer cannot say—and voluntary silences—what a writer won't or does not want to say—and categorises the three-dot ellipsis as the simplest form of voluntary silence, since it is the most visible (73). In *Chien de printemps,* Jansen declares the ellipses his favourite typographical unit. In a key passage, the protagonist tells Jansen of his ambition to become a writer, which Jansen sees as an impossible task, a squaring of the circle. As a photographer, he endeavours to express silence, but for a writer, whose material is language, this seems impossible, and when he challenges the aspiring writer to 'create silence with words', the enunciation terminates elliptically:

> En effet, on écrit avec des mots, et lui, il recherchait le silence. Une photographie peut exprimer le silence. Mais les mots ? Voilà ce qui aurait été intéressant à son avis : réussir à créer le silence avec des mots. Il avait éclaté de rire :
>
> – Alors, vous allez essayer de faire ça ? Je compte sur vous. Mais surtout, que ça ne vous empêche de dormir…
>
> De tous les caractères d'imprimerie, il m'avait dit qu'il préférait les points de suspension. (21)

In other instances, readers are asked to 'see' ellipses without them being present. The narrator in *Souvenirs dormants* describes listening to people's conversations and noting down the details: 'Elles remplissaient cinq cahiers, avec des dates et des points de suspension' (*SD* 42). We are prompted to imagine a great

mass of ellipses in the five notebooks, separating each fragment, yet none of them are presented.

Louis-Ferdinand Céline, one of Modiano's great inspirations, uses '. . . ' quite differently, creating an impressionistic effect, or to hold a place for the drone of idle conversation. Conversely, there are myriad examples in Modiano's novels of ellipses in passages of dialogue in which silences are graphically represented, marking unproduced utterances. In *Voyage de noces,* the protagonist, Jean, comes across Ingrid, having not seen her for some years. He asks after her husband and she replies:

> Il est en voyage…
>
> Elle m'a répondu d'un ton sec, et j'ai compris que je ne devais plus aborder ce sujet.
>
> …
>
> Elle levait son visage vers moi et je lisais de l'inquiétude dans ses yeux gris. (114)

The first ellipsis marks Ingrid trailing off, her speech somewhat unfinished, indicating the euphemistic value of the ellipsis. The second marks a different kind of silence, drawing out the shared pause that lingers after she speaks. There is another example in *Livret de famille* in a conversation between father and son, preceded by an overt indication of their stilted communication:

> Nous aurions dû parler, mais nous n'avions pas grand-chose à nous dire. . . .
>
> - Dommage que nous n'ayons pas trouvé une paire de bottes à ta taille, dit pensivement mon père en levant la tête de son dossier.
>
> - …
>
> - Mais Reynolde t'en prêtera.
>
> - …

- Et le pantalon de cheval ? Tu crois qu'il t'ira bien ?

- Oui, papa. (59)

These three-dot ellipses prolong and draw attention to the silences, allowing readers to experience and 'hear' the long pauses and dwell on their implications.

In addition to reported speech, in-text ellipses recur with high frequency, in line with Jansen's typographical preferences. The following is from *Dimanches d'août*:

> Cette confusion des saisons, les rares voitures qui passaient, ce soleil, les ombres si nettes sur le trottoir et sur les murs… (106)

On the one hand this instance of ellipses could be read as aposiopesis, a sudden breaking-off of the narrator-protagonist's description, which is interrupted by the interjection of speech. On the other hand, it could be an instance of the withdrawal or disappearance of the narrative voice, leaving readers to fill in the remainder. For Van Den Heuvel, the use of ellipsis can demonstrate mutual understanding between writer and reader:

> Dans le cas des points de suspension, le silence prend la valeur de l'aposiopèse qui marque la passation de la parole au lecteur supposé capable de compléter tout seul la phrase tronquée. Dans de tels cas, les fonctions sont claires : l'écriture lacunaire nous invite à dire une évidence que la situation graphique suggère. (73)

Thought of in this way, typographic blanks are part of an idealistic interpretation of silence, founded on the supposition that readers are equipped to complete the blank. The blanks can be interpreted as a form of complicity on the part of the writer since it recreates scenarios in which silences can be filled in through extra-linguistic means. The material mark of incompletion is an invitation to readers to become implicated as the reins are handed over, when silence seems to say: 'voici ce que je ne veux ou ne peux pas énoncer : à vous de le dire' (74). However, this also requires

readers to interpret that which the writer is reticent to make clear, and thus can also be a further mechanism of reticence and restraint.

Van Den Heuvel looks beyond silences in discourse, recognising that the function of blank space becomes more complex as its dimensions expand (73), such as when these silences are entwined in texts' broader subject matter. Joseph Jurt gives the example of the ellipsis in the middle of Perec's *W ou le Souvenir d'enfance* that represents the disappearance of Perec's mother in Auschwitz: 'La disparition est simplement suggérée par trois points de suspension' (92). This ellipsis stands for the unspeakablility of her death in an ethical sense and points to the inadequacy of language to describe certain events.

Although a means of subtraction or contraction rather than addition, ellipses and elliptical language often have the inverse effect of adding rather than subtracting, in terms of atmospheric development and meaning. For Fontanier, 'l'*Ellipse* est une des figures qui disent le plus et font le plus penser' (308). As Modiano described in the citation above, his writing reaches into the vast potential of the suggestive power of silence in its many incarnations.

Phrases nominales

Sentences without a finite verb, *phrases nominales/averbales,* or 'nominal', 'averbal' or 'verbless sentences' are far more stylistically and grammatically acceptable in French than in English. According to Émile Benveniste, 'Elle [la phrase averbale] est aussi complète que n'importe quel énoncé verbal' (159). Like ellipses, they are both more common in French than in English and carry different literary value, and although in isolation, averbal sentences may not constitute 'silent' writing in isolation, when considered alongside the numerous additional features discussed, they create a

cumulative effect of reduction and reticence. Modiano's sentence structures generally dispense with complex syntactical arrangements, are relatively short and favour simple, paratactical juxtapositions of clauses. There are also many nominal sentences, for example, 'De temps en temps, la musique d'un clavecin' (*DI* 23), in which 'il y avait', 'j'entendais' or any other finite verb clause is omitted.

Benveniste notes that nominal sentences remove temporal connections and prescribed causal relationships, and defines them: 'intemporelle[s], impersonnelle[s], non modale[s]' (159). Further, they blur the relationship between the temporality of the reported act and the temporality of discourse, unanchoring the statement and placing it in an atemporal, or suspended, plane. In the example above, despite there being an adverbial phrase of frequency, 'de temps en temps, the 'when' of the statement is unspecified. Benveniste analyses Pindare's *Pythiques*, describing it as a long list of advice and reprimands in which permanent truths are presented in averbal sentences; he notes their appositeness for aphorisms and maxims: '[les phrases averbales] pose[ent] un rapport intemporel et permanent qui agit comme un argument d'autorité' (t1 162-163). This is one of the cases for uses of averbal sentences given by Maurice Grevisse, along with interrogative and exclamative language and stage directions and setting indications (539-540).

Some examples of nominal sentences in Modiano's works convey a germane notion of altered time in their subject matter—'Après-midi vides. Heures lentes' (*VT* 125)—while others are connected to a sense of fragmentation:

> J'essayais de m'imaginer cette pièce, jadis, quand nous y prenions nos repas. Le plafond où j'avais peint le ciel. Le mur vert où j'avais voulu, par ce palmier, ajouter une note tropicale. Les verrières à travers lesquelles un jour bleuté tombait sur nos visages. (*RBO* 87)

In this passage, the first verbal sentence could have been connected to the following averbal clauses through asyndeta, with different parts separated by commas, forming one whole phrase. Instead, Modiano separates the phrases, thus adding short silences. This isolates the details and concentrates our attention on each individual still image, encouraging us to experience the scene in a fragmentary way. Viart sees this as a pervasive trait in Modiano's writing: 'Le régime de l'asyndète, déjà très visible dans le détail du texte, semble être élevé au niveau d'une poétique globale' ('Impossible narration' 52).

The autodiegetic amnesiac narrator, held outside of his own memory and identity, strives to find connections to his past and to himself. The passage comes from the part about his trip to Valbreuse, the estate of Freddie Howard de Luz, whom he thinks he might be. He is shown in by the groundskeeper and notices the ceiling mural, which the groundskeeper tells him was painted by Freddie. In an attempt to convince himself that he is Freddie, he imagines himself painting it in the sentence in the temporally anchored imperfect, before shifting into the series of isolated averbal sentences. These are temporally disconnected, and, as it later turns out, imaginary, the silences of the interstices creating space in which potential meaning arises.

Not all nominal sentences follow Benveniste's atemporal designation, however: 'Deux heures de l'après-midi, le lundi premier décembre mil neuf cent soixante-quinze. Du soleil' (*LF* 212) is a nominal sentence denoting a specific time and date and nothing more. Here the precise temporal marker is divorced from an action, creating a different unanchored quality while also being suspended and unresolved.

Some nominal sentences are paratactic, as in 'Une lumière aussi, à l'entrée du cinéma' (*DI* 82), and the example above, 'De temps en temps, la musique d'un

clavecin' (*DI* 23), in which the comma is equivalent to an unwritten verb (Riegel et al. 459). In *Mimesis*, ErichAuerbach notes Augustine's use of parataxis to express urgent and impulsive matters concerning inner life (71). Similarly, in *Des inconnues*, there is a passage in which the protagonist abruptly decides not to go back to boarding school, but instead return to Annecy. She is increasingly overcome with panic, a sense of breathlessness and vertigo. The three-page scene is marked by a series of very short sentences:

> Je lui demanderais de m'aider. Je marchais vite. J'essayais de respirer le plus régulièrement possible. La panique était toujours là. Rue de la Poste, le café était fermé. Je suivais la rue Royale en sens inverse. Mes pas résonnaient sur le trottoir' (83).

Throughout this frenetic scene, there are multiple nominal sentences interspersed among the short verbal sentences:

> 'Une tête brûlée. Des coups de cafard', 'Toujours la même route', 'Personne. Derrière moi, l'avenue d'Albigny, déserte, avec ses arbres qui avaient perdu leurs feuilles', 'Une lumière aussi, à l'entrée du cinéma', 'Pas une seule voiture', 'Une femme, assise derrière la caisse vitrée, là où l'on prend les billets de cinéma.' (81-3)

These nominal sentences interspersed through the passages of short, paratactic phrases add to the sense of destabilisation, urgency and the protagonist's impulsiveness. Fowler defines parataxis as 'a sequence of clauses of similar status linked by 'and' or 'then' or merely an implied temporal link, with very few subordinate clauses or non-temporal cohesive ties' (229). This might be considered an element of 'colourless' style from a Barthesian perspective and by the 1990s it had become self-consciously stylistic. Fowler goes on: 'This simple parataxis is *not*

neutral, but a definite literary style, traditionally and widely associated with plain, simple, often naïve narration' (229).

Among the nominal sentences, there are other examples of anacolutha that are also nominal sentences. This syntactic device, the name of which derives from the Greek ανακολουθος, meaning 'not following', interrupts the expected sequencing within a sentence (Dupriez 34). For example:

> À droite, avant le tournant de la route, en contre-bas, le portail de la villa des Tilleuls où ma tante avait travaillé, un été, chez des Américains en vacances. (*DI* 62)
>
> Une femme, assise derrière la caisse vitrée, là où l'on prend les billets de cinéma. (*DI* 83)

What appears to be the subject at the outset of the sentence turns out not to be (Grevisse 254), creating a slight sense of disorientation and distance. Bernard Dupriez notes that, '[a] writer would begin the sentence again, unless its function were to illustrate confusion of mind or spontaneity of reporting' (35).

In other novels, nominal sentences describe the physical scene, concrete objects, geography and sensory elements such as audible and olfactory elements, eschewing laboriously atmospheric or metaphorical language. In *Du plus loin de l'oubli,* when the unnamed protagonist and his girlfriend Jacqueline are being taken to their new accommodation, the description alternates between verbal and verbless sentences:

> **Un escalier très raide**. Linda nous précédait. **Deux portes sur le palier**. Linda a ouvert celle de gauche. **Une chambre aux murs blancs.** Ses fenêtres donnaient sur la rue. **Aucun meuble. Un grand matelas à même le sol**. La pièce voisine était une salle de bains. (102)

The narrative flow is disjointed, with minor interruptions between the verbal sentences, creating a sense of distance and irregularity.

Concrete silences also often appear as nominal sentences. Of the twenty-two instances of the word 'silence' in *Livret de famille*, nine are found in nominal sentences and six consist uniquely of the noun and article: 'Quelques secondes de silence' (39), 'Et votre père, à quelques mètres, inquiet et silencieux et contemplant la pointe de ses souliers caoutchoutés' (77), 'Un silence' (109), 'Un silence' (126), 'Un silence, de nouveau' (126), 'Un silence' (141), 'Un silence' (141), 'Le silence' (178), 'Le silence' (186). There are fifty-three instances of the word 'silence' and 'silencieux/euse' in averbal sentences in Modiano's novels to date,[49] to the extent that this could be considered one of Modiano's literary 'tics' like the recurring scar on a character's cheek or cheekbone (*RBO* 192, *FR* 23, *AN* 103, *PQ* 33, 53), or the navy blue overcoat (*RBO* 31, 34, *AN* 33, 38, *H* 139, among others). Each of these silences is set within its own individual context, giving it a particular colour, yet each is presented in a nominal sentence, and neither commented on nor temporally actualised. These silences are stated as facts, like axioms or precepts, resonating beyond habitual temporal flow.

Semantic Syllepsis

One salient feature of *écriture blanche* and minimalist writing is the reduction or omission of metaphor. When describing Minuit's stable of 'minimalist writers', in

[49] Such verbless sentences include: 'Silence.', 'Un silence.', 'Le silence.', 'En silence.', 'De nouveau, un silence.', 'Un silence de nouveau.', 'Et silencieuses.', 'Le silence, (tout) autour de nous/d'eux.', 'Le silence, enfin.', 'Le silence brusquement.', 'Le silence et l'amnésie.', Un instant de silence.', 'Un moment de silence entre nous.', 'Un silence entre nous.', 'Encore un silence.', 'Le même silence entre ses phrases', 'Puis, le silence.', 'De longs silences.', 'Un silence d'aquarium.' and 'Un silence d'ouate.' See the Appendix.

reference to Marie Redonnet specifically, Fieke Schoots notes that her writing is 'presque exempte de métaphores' (130), and when comparisons are made, they are most often framed in the negative, describing what things are *not* like or using 'comme si', conveying uncertainty with regard to character and setting.

Mathias Rambaud holds that one of Modiano's 'sacrifices' is the metaphor (123-4), an observation with which Modiano may well agree; looking for a way to describe Raymond Queneau's laughter in *Un pedigree*, Modiano states: 'Mais je ne suis pas doué pour les métaphores. C'était tout simplement le rire de Queneau' (113). It would be fair to say that metaphor and extraneous description are predominantly absent from Modiano's writing, and the scant examples are often conferred upon secondary characters. Moreau-Badmaev in *La Petite Bijou* is one such example. He describes the language he transcribes with ironic poetic flourish and usses clichéd imagery: 'On y retrouvait la caresse du vent dans les herbes et le bruissement des cascades' (45).

In Modiano's writing, instead of overt metaphor, a different kind of restrained and discrete metaphorical language appears in what I interpret as instances of semantic syllepsis. Semantic syllepsis is a figure of speech whereby a word or expression is used simultaneously or sequentially in both its literal and figurative senses (Dupriez 440). One example can be found in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* in the same scene from which the examples of averbal sentences are taken. After being shown around and told about Freddie Howard de Luz and Gay Orlow, the narrator reflects:

> Je craignais de ne pas retenir tous ces détails. Il aurait fallu les consigner immédiatement sur un petit carnet. Le chemin montait en pente douce et j'avais de la peine à marcher, **à cause de l'épaisseur des feuilles mortes**. (96)

This can be read in the literal sense of the narrator having trouble walking due to the thick layers of leaves, and in the figurative sense of the layers of fallen leaves representing the layers of the past, his state of amnesia, and of the encumbered work of memory more broadly. The motif returns at the end of the novel, when the protagonist is recognised as Pedro McEvoy by André Wilmer in a bar: '[il] portait un manteau de la **couleur des feuilles mortes**, qui lui arrivait presque aux chevilles' (186). He appears fully cloaked in the symbolic colour of the past, an embodiment of lost identity that has resurfaced in the present, yet the revelations he brings come with further questions and complications; the dead leaves are again associated with complications and impediments to a clear-sighted relationship with the past.

A further instance is found in *Des inconnues* as the unnamed protagonist and 'Guy' are walking in the Bois de Boulogne, where he used to go as a child: 'Le soleil était voilé et tout baignait dans une lumière rousse. Nous marchions sur **une couche de feuilles mortes**' (43). This can be read in the literal sense, as above, as well as in the figurative sense since they are traversing an area connected to an untold, difficult past. The motif continues in later works, connoting the same sense of memory's opacity and an unreconciled past. In *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier,* Jean Daragane tries to remember, to travel back in time and he feels the weight of the past return: 'il avait vraiment senti l'automne peser sur lui : la brume, l'odeur de la terre mouillée, **les allées jonchées de feuilles mortes**' (42-43). Later in the novel, he goes to the cinema with Perrin de Lara, who is able to tell him a little of what happened to Annie, the woman he is trying to find out about, but again, what he reveals does little to dispel the mystery. Daragane watches him walk away: 'il faillit perdre l'équilibre, poussé dans le dos par un coup de vent et **une brassée de feuilles mortes**' (85). In *De si braves garçons*, 'feuilles mortes' occurs twice in a short scene, along with a clue regarding their connotation:

> leur odeur amère était la même que celle de vieux journaux dont on tourne doucement les feuilles cassantes, une à une, à rebours du temps, pour essayer de retrouver une photo, un nom, la trace enfouie de quelqu'un. (37)

In light of the accrued connotations the motif of dead leaves carries the literal image of someone being pushed around on a blustery evening as well as conveying the layering of the past and the laboriousness of memory.

These instances of semantic syllepsis are another means by which language is elided and reduced. By layering imagery in this way, motifs accrue signification and intertextual connections from one novel to the next, subtly concentrating meaning through text that, for the most part, resists metaphorical language. Further, in line with a minimalist paradigm and aesthetic framework, the range of images used is reduced and the images are used in a repetitive, even obsessional way. The same images, such as dead leaves, shadows and nightlights recur, over and over again in different settings.

Onomastics

Just as meaning is condensed and conveyed through semantic syllepsis, onomastics are another way in which Modiano's texts communicate using highly restricted means, compounding and condensing meaning through the resonance of names. Through phonic connotations, wordplay and homonyms, semantic networks are elaborated, sparking off associated meanings and inferences, inter, intra and extra-textually. Blanckeman states that '[l]'onomastique est à l'écriture littéraire de Patrick Modiano ce que le lapsus est à la langue du parleur ou l'image générée par un mot à celle du rêveur : une manifestation de l'inconscient' (158). Although the way the subconscious mind works is useful in thinking about the way proper names make

subliminal connections, it may underplay the deliberateness of the way Modiano uses names. Nettelbeck rightly points out that 'names are rarely gratuitous, and most frequently signal hidden layers of meaning that need reference to extra-textual materials for the text to yield its full significance' (*Stylo* 42). Further, names are not always reliable, with some characters having multiple aliases. Kawakami argues that since names are usually stable reference points, Modiano's system of inconsistent naming creates 'a sense of ontological uncertainty' (*Unreliable Detectives* 197).

Some connections are subtle, as in *Des inconnues*, in which the protagonist of the first novella has a formative audition on 'rue de la Grolée' (11), 'les grolles' being an informal term for 'shoes'. In the awkward and embarrassing audition that later haunts her, she has to take off her shoes to demonstrate her walk (12). Other connections are more overt and loaded; the protagonist and Guy Vincent, whose suicide concludes the novella, often meet at 'Le Nuage' or 'La Malmène' (24); 'nuage' connects to the shadows surrounding Guy's identity, while 'malmener' portends his tragic fate.

There are many other examples besides, for example, the towns of 'Menton' and 'Castellar' (*DA* 141), between which a fatal car crash takes place. These two place names set off a series of homonyms which contribute to the ambient sense of danger and act as narrative signposts. 'Menton' is suggestive of 'mentir' and the word 'menton' arises several times in the novel. Firstly, in reference to blood dripping down Villecourt's chin after Jean pushes him. Secondly, when the protagonist tries to get help finding Sylvie. An officer listens to him in a posture of indifference and disparagement, his chin held heavily in his hand. 'Castellar'

connotes 'casser', 'stèle', 'astre', 'stellaire', 'étoile'; the diamond the couple stole, and which is stolen from them, is named after the constellation, the 'Croix du Sud'.[50]

There are also instances of characters with multiple names. In *La Petite Bijou*, the mother is called Suzanne Cardères, Sonia O'Dauyé, Mme Boré/Borand, 'la Boche' (71) and 'Trompe-la-Mort' (69), names which speak of her shape-shifting, unstable, unknowable nature. For Van Den Heuvel, multiple names are a form of silence in the text, a 'figuration narrative à valeur métaphorique', a 'tabernacle' in which secrets known only to the subject are hidden from the reader (83). Doubt is cast over the veracity of the child's mother's name: '« Appelez-moi… Véra. » Elle avait marqué une légère hésitation comme si elle avait inventé ce prénom' (57), which carries its own ironic connotations of 'vrai' et 'véracité'. In contrast to Thérèse's mother's plethora of names, the protagonist's real name is almost never used and even she seems to be on the brink of forgetting it on one occasion: 'Heureusement que je portais mon étiquette, sinon je me serais perdue parmi tous ces gens. J'aurais oublié mon nom' (136). Likewise, the child Thérèse takes care of is never named:

> L'un et l'autre [parents] disaient « elle ». Et quand ils appelaient leur fille, ils lui disaient simplement : Où es-tu ? Qu'est-ce que tu fais ? Mais jamais son prénom ne venait sur leurs lèvres. Après toutes ces années, je ne pourrais plus dire moi-même quel était ce prénom. Je l'ai oublié et je finis par me demander si je l'ai jamais connu. (107-8)

Just as the phonetic connotations of naming can carry several strata of meaning, absence of name can prove equally instructive. A significant number of Modiano's

[50] This diamond arises later in *Un pedigree* in relation to Modiano's father, who was purportedly involved in its trafficking after the war (22).

protagonists are never named, most notably and eponymously the three 'inconnues' of *Des inconnues*.

There is an accumulation of 'resistant', 'minimal' and 'silent' elements that infuse Modiano's work on multiple levels, from the smallest typographical elements and, moreover, their absence, to the level of the word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and on to motif, theme, character, and to the level of plot, narration and structure. Elements of *blancheur* in Modiano's texts, explored through the framework of Barthes' *Degré zero* and an examination of typographical and grammatical devices used to dislocate words and phrases from their habitual signification, function as forms of semantic silencing within the realm of language. Features of minimalism, discussed by Barth and Schoots, at the levels of unit, form and scale, reveal the omnipresence of ellipses, omissions and forms of fragmentation, as well as Modiano's tendency to eschew metaphorical language and his preference for euphemism. These collectively display the tension between reticence in relation to explicit signification and techniques that create high levels of transparency and limpidity. Futher, the exploration of onomastics and instances of what I term semantic syllepsis indicates ways of caching meaning laterally within language, using phonetic connotation, allusion and inter-textual references.

Resistance in Dialogue, Motif, Character and Narration

Theme doesn't necessarily follow form; writing about silence doesn't necessarily mean writing in a silent way. But in Modiano's case, the two are closely connected. Having analysed techniques and features that convey qualities of resistance and

withholding at the level of punctuation, word and phrase, features of minimalism and *blancheur* are discussed at the levels of dialogue, thematic centres, motifs, characterisation and euphemism.

The presence of silence in dialogue is one of the most overt and abundant ways in which reticence appears in Modiano's texts. They teem with scenes involving people who are difficult to hear, remain silent or withhold speech. Modiano takes pains to name and include silence in speech, making it an active component of dialogue that inflects meaning. Although named, silence in discourse is not always qualified, leaving it open to interpretation. Conversations repeatedly include stated absences of speech. Sometimes lack of speech is stated matter-of-factly: 'Nous marchions côte à côte, sans rien dire', 'Elle ne disait rien' (*VE* 28, 55), 'Un long silence entre nous' (*DLC* 121).

There are other scenes in which the act of speaking is dislocated from the meaning of words, as in *Des inconnues:*

> Sa voix s'était cassée. Ce n'était plus lui qui parlait, mais un disque qui tournait. Les mêmes paroles se répétaient pour l'éternité . . . et elles avaient perdu leur sens. (14-15)

There are also scenes in which people's mouths move but their words are not heard, leaving only their shape and creating a sense of absurdity and distance. For example, when the protagonist of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* is standing on the Bir-Hakeim bridge with Waldo Blunt under the overground section of the metro:

> Leur [trains] fracas a étouffé la voix de Blunt. Il me parlait, je le voyais aux mouvements de ses lèvres.
>
> — … La plus belle fille que j'ai connue… (*RBO* 61)
>
> Derrière la vitre, elle bougeait les lèvres. (*LPB* 15)

Here, we 'see' speech in its mute shape but it is devoid of meaning. This prevails through to later works, stirring the protagonists' distrust of their own words: 'Chaque fois que je prononçais un mot, il me semblait faux ou anodin. Mieux valait garder le silence' (*DLC* 95). Modiano's characters often end up in aquariums, experiencing their darkness and silence and watching the silent movement of sea creatures. Towards the end of *Fleurs de ruine,* the protagonist recalls a memory of going to the aquarium to quell his anxiety. The aquarium grants him a sensation of calm and disconnection from the outside world:

> Ils [les poissons] ne faisaient pas de bruit. Ils glissaient le long des parois de verre. Ils ouvraient la bouche sans émettre aucun son, mais de temps en temps des bulles montaient à la surface de l'eau. Ils ne me demanderaient jamais de comptes. (121)

Here, the noiselessness of the voiceless creatures has a consoling effect, since the fish cannot use language and therefore cannot accuse him of, or hold him responsible for, anything. Later, in *L'horizon,* Bosmans imagines people who are living in the same space but in different 'time corridors' trying to communicate: 'S'ils voulaient se parler, ils ne s'entendraient pas, comme deux personnes qui sont séparées par une vitre d'aquarium' (123). These scenes, in which speech is dislocated from meaning, are written in the kind of reticent *écriture blanche* discussed above, which allows for the formal expression of the separation of the subjects from their actions or the scene they witness. Scenes in which words are heard but meaning is unintelligible or carries no semantic value are sometimes accompanied by a soporific effect—'Conversations techniques. Mots incompréhensibles. Bourdonnement doux et berceur, sous le soleil' (*VT* 71)—whereas in other scenes, empty language that is unable to broach certain topics casts greater doubt over the fundamental capacity of language to relay, relate or access reality:

> Des mots vides, des phrases creuses, comme si, elle et moi, nous nous survivions à nous-mêmes et que nous ne pouvions même plus faire la moindre allusion au passé. (*DPO* 156)

Silence in speech does not necessarily simply signal a refusal to communicate, but can be used strategically. As Jean-Jacques Lecercle points out, 'L'absence de mots est une arme' (13), which is how Jean imagines using it in *Dimanches d'aout*. He describes a hypothetical phone call from Villecourt, which he would answer, though he would remain silent:

> Il répéterait : « Allô… Vous m'entendez ? … Allô, vous m'entendez ? … Je suis tout près de chez vous… Répondez-moi… Répondez-moi… » Je n'opposerais à cette voix de plus en plus inquiète et de plus en plus plaintive que le silence. Oui, j'aimerais bien lui transmettre ce sentiment de vide que j'éprouve moi-même. (27-8)

Here, reticence is employed as a means to further perturb Villecourt and as a way of instilling in him the feeling of emptiness that the narrator feels. In this instance, silence is more powerful than language in its capacity to affect an interlocutor.

Sartre wrote of Jules Renard, who came from the countryside to Paris to become a writer: 'il recherchait la compagnie pour y montrer sa solitude . . . il est venu se taire par écrit' (*Situations* 295). Renard cherished economy of language above all else, clearly displaying his own taciturn disposition. Similarly notable in Modiano's work is the repeated performance of silence as a component in dialogue, drawing readers' attention to the limits of language.

Reserving and Withholding in Speech

One of the central sources of silence in Modiano's writing is, unsurprisingly, connected to his parents. Before details of his relationship with them were elucidated in *Un pedigree,* scenes involving them arose in novels under fictional guises, as in *Du plus loin de l'oubli:*

> il choisissait des endroits de passage pour se débarrasser de moi et s'enfuir avec ses secrets. Nous restions silencieux, l'un en face de l'autre. De temps en temps, il me jetait un regard en biais. Ma mère, elle, me parlait de plus en plus fort, je le devinais aux mouvements saccadés de ses lèvres car il y avait entre nous une vitre qui étouffait sa voix. (137)

The breakdown in communication and common language with a mother figure appears starkly in *L'horizon*: 'Elle lui lança un flot d'injures dans une langue gutturale qu'il ne comprenait pas' (41). This demonstrates another way of creating silence even when words are present, much like the logorrheic chatter in Louis-René des Forêt's *Le Bavard,* discussed by Quignard. Where there is *bavardage*, 'la langue se tait en parlant' (*Le vœu de silence* 41-2). There are rare examples of characters in Modiano's novels who use language to obfuscate or hide behind, such as the narrator of *Chien de printemps,* who hides his shyness by talking loquaciously: 'Je devenais volubile tout à coup, pour cacher ma timidité et mon embarras' (50). Hélène Andreeva-Tintignac notes that the novel's subject, Jansen, rarely finishes his sentences and that of his thirty-six spoken utterances, twenty-three contain a form of reticence (234).

In other passages, whole conversations are elided. In *Dora Bruder,* Modiano recounts his father's single visit to Patrick when he was boarding at the Lycée Henri-

IV (*DB* 86-87). We are led up to the point at which the two of them are sitting in front of each other, but their conversation is skipped in a syncope. It is marked neither by a blank space nor a new line or paragraph. The text simply picks back up after the father's departure.

The image of the mother speaking as if from behind glass recalls the aquarium scenes and the troubled communication with the father feeds into some more troubling conversational silences relayed later. There is a key moment in *Un pedigree* when the two men go to watch *Le procès de Nuremberg*, after which Modiano relates that, 'Quelque chose a changé en moi, ce jour-là. Et mon père, que pensait-il ? Nous n'en avons jamais parlé ensemble, même à la sortie du cinéma' (57). After the father's arrest and subsequent liberation—probably through his black-market contacts—we are told about his second arrest during the Occupation, in the winter of 1943, when he was denounced, and later liberated by an unknown person, but the desire to share is curbed: 'Ce soir-là, j'avais senti qu'il aurait voulu me confier quelque chose mais les mots ne venaient pas' (27). Here we are presented with the father's incapacity to return to the memory, as well as the incapacity of language to describe the event. This was brought up earlier in *Remise de peine*, and here, too, the father cannot find the right words:

> un soir de mes quinze ans où j'étais seul avec lui et où il se laissait aller jusqu'au bord des confidences. J'ai senti, ce soir-là, qu'il aurait voulu me transmettre son expérience des choses troubles et douloureuses de la vie, mais qu'il n'y avait pas de mots pour cela. (84)

The unbridgeable gulf between experience and expression is a problem of language rather than a lack of will to relate.

In pointing to what cannot be broached, Modiano employs a form of apophasis, also known as paralipsis, whereby a topic is mentioned by stating that it

cannot or will not be mentioned, a device described by Genette as 'lateral omission' (*Figures III* 93). An example of this can be found in *Dora Bruder* in reference to the searches carried out on detainees at Drancy and Pithiviers—'Je ne parlerai pas de la fouille des femmes effectuée en des endroits intimes' (66)—and later, Modiano surmises about Dora's motives and experience through a form of apophasis, outlining what he cannot know:

> J'ignore si la proximité de la gare de Lyon avait encouragé Dora à faire une fugue. J'ignore si elle entendait, du dortoir, dans le silence des nuits de black-out, le fracas des trains de marchandises ou ceux qui partaient de la gare de Lyon pour la zone libre… Elle connaissait sans doute ces deux mots trompeurs : zone libre. (74)

The multiple areas of the unknowable are circumscribed, concluding with a return to the 'zone libre' and language's capacity to mislead. In other cases, the protagonist is barred from finding out information not by external, temporal and other contextual factors, but voluntarily. In *Un cirque passe*, Jean hides many details from Gisèle and he is conscious that she withholds information too, but he refrains from interrogating her:

> Elle me cachait la vérité et j'étais sur le point de lui poser des questions précises, mais je me suis retenu. Elle finirait par s'habituer à moi, elle me ferait peu à peu confiance et m'avouerait tout. (56)

Here, reticence is linked to a confidence that all will be revealed eventually. Later, Jean has the opportunity to find out concrete details, but holds back, choosing to remain patiently in ignorance:

> Son sac à main était posé sur le tableau de bord. Il ne contenait pas grand-chose et je suis tombé tout de suite sur le permis de conduire. J'ai été tenté de

> l'ouvrir pour connaître son nom, son adresse, sa date et son lieu de naissance. Mais je ne l'ai pas fait, par discretion (59).

Information is held at an even greater distance in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* when the protagonist goes to the apartment of a certain Hélène Pilgram, where he and his girlfriend Denise once stayed. Hélène doesn't withhold information about their past and there is no apparent reason to abstain from asking questions. There is still much he wants to rediscover, yet he hesitates: 'Je n'osais pas aller plus loin. Pourquoi suis-je si timide et si craintif au moment d'aborder les sujets qui me tiennent à cœur ?' (*RBO* 116). Similarly, in *Des inconnues,* the young woman of the first story refrains from asking Guy Vincent direct questions:

> Je me gardais bien de lui poser des questions. J'étais très jeune, je connaissais encore mal les hommes, mais j'avais vite compris que lui, il n'était pas un homme à répondre aux questions. (43)

Here, we are distanced even further than in instances of apophasis or scenes in which questions remain unasked; we are presented not only with unasked questions, but are told they wouldn't be answered even if they were to be posed. By demarcating that which will never be broached and thus will remain unknown, Modiano encircles negative spaces of the undetermined and unknowable, which instil silence in his texts.

There are a great many instances of secondary characters that seem to be on the brink of confiding in the narrator, but they are either unable to find the words or restrain themselves at the last minute. Numerous lost characters in *De si braves garçons* reach the verge of confession—'Sans doute, m'aurait-il volontiers confié quelque chose à ce moment-là, mais il se raidissait' (137), 'comme s'ils cherchaient des mots pour me demander de les aider ou pour me confier quelque chose (160)—as well as Pacheco in *Fleurs de ruine* (78) and Véra in *La Petite Bijou* (111). In a rare

instance of someone managing to surmount their internal obstacles and speak, the process is arduous and language seems to get in the way rather than facilitate:

> Son visage s'était assombri et je sentais bien qu'il voulait me confier quelque chose. Enfin il s'était résolu à parler, mais avec une telle réticence que ses propos étaient embrouillés et que l'on aurait dit qu'il avait de la peine à s'exprimer en français. (*CdP* 119-120)

It is not only secondary characters that find themselves stuck on the verge of disclosure. In *Un cirque passe*, Jean considers divulging everything to Gisèle but restrains himself at the last minute: 'J'aurais voulu lui confier la vérité. Je me suis retenu à temps' (147). Likewise, in *Des inconnues*, the young protagonist of the first story wants to share her experience, but decides against it: 'J'avais envie de me confier à elle, mais je gardais le silence' (21).

These instances of apophasis are embedded in the ongoing theme of severed and impossible communication, which directly concerns the father. In *Un cirque passe,* the father is conspicuously absent having, left for South America for an obscure business opportunity. Jean recounts a time when his father gave him advice. Jean is silent throughout—'Je restais muet' (23)—and the father subsequently falls silent too:

> Au bout d'un instant, il s'est tu, il a soufflé un nuage de fumée et il a haussé les épaules.
>
> Nous n'avons plus échangé une parole jusqu'au moment où il est entré dans le wagon . . . (24)

In his stead, the father leaves a factotum, Grabley, through whom broken, incomplete messages and the father's present absence is filtered:

> Votre père a téléphoné ce matin mais la communication était très mauvaise car il appelait d'une cabine téléphonique en plein air : on entendait des klaxons et des bruits de circulation qui étouffaient sa voix. (98)

In other novels, the protagonist admits his difficulty understanding the language of others, even that of his contemporaries: 'Ils avaient mon âge mais ils étaient pour moi des étrangers. C'est à peine si je comprenais leur langue' (*DPO* 33-34). Indeed, silence is sometimes more eloquent: 'Elle me regardait droit dans les yeux, en silence. Elle voulait sans doute me faire comprendre qu'il n'y avait rien à dire de plus sur ce sujet' (*DPO* 24). And when an avowal is made in *Un cirque passe*, Jean's response is unspoken:

> J'ai fait semblant de n'avoir pas entendu. Le moindre mot et le moindre geste risquaient d'interrompre cette confidence. Mais elle est redevenue silencieuse, le regard fixé au plafond. (*CP* 66)

Jean even pretends not to have heard, fearing that making any sound or movement might somehow suspend their trust, preferring to let her confession pass into a diffident silence.

Silence in spoken contexts is tenacious. It infuses spoken language even when an interlocutor manages to speak. Modiano's characters are often afflicted with a *voix blanche*. Like other things blanc, they are in a state of lack: the *Petit Robert* defines *voix blanche* as 'sans timbre' and the *Larousse* defines it as 'aux intonations effacées, sans timbre'. In *Accident nocturne,* the protagonist finds he has a *voix blanche* that, he believes, prevents him from being heard, literally silencing him: 'J'aurais voulu lui poser la question, mais je savais d'avance qu'il ne m'entendrait pas. Désormais, j'avais une VOIX BLANCHE' (13). The same scepticism about being heard is evident in *Des inconnues*:

> Je restais muette. Puis, j'ai quand même réussi à dire : « Est-ce que je pourrais parler à Mirelle Maximoff ? » d'une voix blanche que l'on ne devrait pas entendre, là-bas, à Paris. (15)

It also prevents Jean from speaking at all in *Du plus loin de l'oubli*, the void of speech preceded by ellipses:

> Pendant le trajet, nous n'avions pas échangé un seul mot.
>
> …
>
> Ma voix était blanche. Je ne pouvais plus articuler un seul mot. (87)

Even though speech is produced, when done so with a *voix blanche* it is diminished, presenting a form of silence that is infused within speech. There are certain germane qualities in Barthes' description of *écriture blanche*: 'il [l'instrument formel] est la façon d'exister d'un silence ; il perd volontairement tout recours à l'élégance ou à l'ornementation' (*Degré zéro* 110). Similarly, this *voix blanche* that is given voice in Modiano's texts rejects ornamentation and progressively becomes a deliberate technique, and an increasingly integral aspect of Modiano's style and outlook. Ornamentation, Barthes argues, are effects that situate writing—and speech in the case of *voix blanche*—in Time and thus History; therefore, their absence dislocates speech or writing from a precise moment. A case in point is the *voix blanche* in the opening lines of *L'herbe des nuits,* in which doubt is expressed about the provenance of voice:

> Pourtant je n'ai pas rêvé. Je me surprends quelquefois à dire cette phrase dans la rue, comme si j'entendais la voix d'un autre. Une voix blanche. Des noms me reviennent à l'esprit, certains visages, certains détails. Plus personne avec qui en parler. Il doit bien se trouver deux ou trois témoins encore vivants. Mais ils ont sans doute tout oublié. Et puis, on finit par se demander s'il y a eu vraiment des témoins. (9)

Not only is doubt cast on the provenance and truth-value of voice, but *blancheur* seems to contaminate the likelihood of finding survivors who can corroborate his recollections, the possibility of memory and, beyond this, the nature of witnessing or experience in general.

Euphemism

Another way in which silence operates in Modiano's texts is in circumlocutive and euphemistic language, which is a type of attenuation (Dupriez 177) that renders something less shocking by modifying its form (Grevisse 212). Two principal topics raised in a highly indirect, and oblique way are the Occupation period and sex. In *Villa Triste*, Victor Chmara and Yvonne's romance is glossed over—'Je crois que nous ne sommes pas sortis pendant deux jours' (67)—and in *Du plus loin de l'oubli,* sex is alluded to through a form of syncope; after the narrator and Jacqueline have inhaled ether together and lain down in Jacqueline's room, the following paragraph opens, 'Nous sommes sortis de l'hôtel vers six heures du matin…' (29-30) and later, we read, 'C'était étrange de voir sa veste et ses vêtements éparpillés sur le parquet. Beaucoup plus tard, nous nous sommes endormis' (49). Another example can be seen in *Un pedigree* when Mireille Ourosov, a friend of Modiano's mother, stays with them for a while: 'Elle n'arrive pas à dormir dans ce vieux canapé défoncé. Et moi, j'ai un grand lit…' (*UP* 78).

Historical events referred to directly, most notably the Occupation, are also often raised through euphemism or allusion. Viart argues that prior to 1997, the year of *Dora Bruder*'s publication, historical events are present only in the periphery, through litotes, allusion, euphemism and periphrases ('Impossible narration' 54).

There is no *mot juste*, no commensurate word or definition, and if there is, it cannot be pronounced and ethically fall within the jurisdiction of that which is unsayable.

Les boulevards de ceinture is quite clearly set during the Occupation, yet precise terms are absent. Instead, we read 'les temps sont troubles' (23), 'Nous vivons des temps où l'on finit par ne plus s'étonner de rien' (34), 'nous vivons une drôle d'époque' (41, 108). In *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, Bowing, who records the names of those who frequent the Condé cafe is cautioned by Dr Vala:

> 'Et puis c'est dangereux de faire ça.' . . . 'Votre cahier, on dirait un registre de la police ou la main courante d'un commissariat. C'est comme si nous avions tous été pris dans une rafle…' (26).

Shortly thereafter, the protagonist is looking at the façade of the École supérieure des Mines and notices bullet marks: 'Sur les murs du bâtiment voisin, j'avais remarqué des traces de balles, comme si on y avait fusillé quelqu'un' (31). The round-up that is referred to undoubtedly connotes the Occupation period. Viart suspects Modiano of caching meaning within certain words, embedding a 'texte souterrain' ('Impossible narration' 58) within the surface-level text. He suggests the 'improper' use of 'érafler' in *Livret de famille* evokes 'rafle' when it is used to describe rain on the train window as father and son are on their way to Sologne and passing through 'Villejuif'. 'Sologne', which is so close to 'Pologne', is subsequently described as 'comme à Varsovie', referencing the notorious Warsaw ghettos. Although Viart concedes that there might be some over-interpretation on his part, he makes a strong case for semantic transference, terming such instances 'trouées du texte' (54), which, he argues, encourage a reading that is more attuned to that which is communicated through the 'non-dit ou inter-dit' (55).

These techniques of euphemism and circumvention are further ways in which the text holds back from overtly referring or giving explicit description while still

alluding and implicating. What appear to be relatively simple, straightforward narratives on the surface in fact hold multiple layers. Devices such as semantic syllepsis and apophasis, without appearing to say much, are the means through which the text says a great deal.

Silent Motifs

In Modiano's oeuvre, there are several motifs through which silence, emptiness, absence and loss of memory resonate, resisting direct confrontation. In contrast to euphemistic avoidance, these motifs often veil or envelop certain subject areas. Claude Burgelin suggests that because remembering is so problematic for Modiano, the only way to access painful memories is to neutralise them by wrapping them in a form of erasure: 'encapsulé d'oubli, anesthésié ou protégé par un nuage d'effacement' (*Lectures* 47). Pursuing this observation, we can identify certain volatile substances that envelop experience and its recollection in a protective layer. Ether, fog and vapour permeate certain scenes and places and surround memories, and there are, in addition to these vaporous elements, other recurring motifs, such as the outlines left where artworks once hung and a telephone ringing in an empty room.

Ether is especially prominent in *Accident nocturne* and *Du plus loin de l'oubli,* in which the substance is strongly attached to childhood memory, as well as having the conflicting effects of giving greater access to memory and rendering it more obscure:

> On dit que ce sont les odeurs qui ressuscitent le mieux le passé, et celle de l'éther avait toujours eu un curieux effet sur moi. Elle me semblait l'odeur même de mon enfance, mais comme elle était liée au sommeil et qu'elle effaçait aussi la douleur, les images qu'elle dévoilait se brouillaient aussitôt.

> C'était sans doute à cause de cela que j'avais, de mon enfance, un souvenir si confus. L'éther provoquait à la fois la mémoire et l'oubli. (*AN* 104)

In *Du plus loin de l'oubli*, ether has a slightly different effect. It is linked to a feeling of coolness and an increased awareness of sound amid ambient silence:

> Une fraîcheur m'a envahi les poumons. J'étais allongé à côté d'elle. Nous étions serrés l'un contre l'autre et nous tombions dans le vide. La sensation de fraîcheur était de plus en plus forte et le tic-tac du réveil se détachait, de plus en plus net, dans le silence, au point que je pouvais entendre son écho. (29)

Later, in *Un pedigree* (33-34), Modiano's personal encounter with ether is recounted, shedding light on his sensitivity to it; forgotten about after school, he walks home alone and is hit by a vehicle. He is taken in by nuns who treat him with ether. Henceforth, ether provokes a dichotomous effect, which retrospectively elucidates its effect on the protagonist of *Accident nocturne*:

> Depuis, je serai particulièrement sensible à l'odeur de l'éther. Beaucoup trop. L'éther aura cette curieuse propriété de me rappeler une souffrance mais de l'effacer aussitôt. Mémoire et oubli. (*UP* 34)

The episode is woven into the memories of the fictional protagonists of *Accident nocturne* and *La Petite Bijou*.

Fog is another substance that is bound up with dissimulation and silencing. It is particularly present in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* in which the protagonist endeavours to see through the mists of his trauma-induced amnesia: 'j'avais brusquement été frappé d'amnésie et . . . je tâtonnais dans le brouillard' (15). Fog also chokes the voices of people who are possible sources of clues about his past: 'j'étais sûr à ce moment-là qu'il me disait encore quelque chose mais que le brouillard étouffait le son de sa voix' (50). Further on, fog figures as a substance into which people might disappear and escape across the Swiss border, and even

evaporate completely: 'Nous devenions peu à peu invisibles. Même nos habits . . . se fondaient dans le brouillard. Qui sait ? Peut-être finirions-nous par nous volatiliser' (*RBO* 217-218).

Similarly to the way ether is connected to the opposing poles of memory and its absence, fog dissimulates from the perspectives of both the one looking and the one trying to escape. In *Livret de famille*, the motifs of fog, ether and silence are combined:

> Je me suis arrêté à la lisière de la place de la Concorde. Ce brouillard m'inquiétait. Il enveloppait tout, les réverbères, les fontaines lumineuses, l'obélisque, les statues des villes françaises, d'une nappe de silence. Et il avait une odeur d'éther. (92)

The haze of fog thickens into a blanket of silence, which conflates with the presence of ether, heightening the impression that the scene is receding into inaccessibility. These vaporous substances make things obscure and indistinct, as well as being able to pervade all areas, meaning that nothing is impervious to their effects.

Motifs that communicate non-communication, absence, emptiness and a sense of entropy also take forms other than the misty, ephemeral ones discussed. One motif already mentioned that recurs so frequently that it becomes a refrain is a telephone ringing without response, of which there are many examples including:

> Le téléphone sonna mais elle ne bougea pas. Les sonneries se succédèrent pendant longtemps, puis, dans le silence, le rayon de soleil glissait sur la moquette grise. (*UJ* 55)[51]

The visible outlines marking the place where artworks used to hang represent another recurring motif:

[51] Also *DPO* 73, 120, *H* 44.

> Sur les murs, des traces rectilignes indiquaient que des tableaux y avaient jadis été accrochés. (*BG* 66)[52]

This motif describes negative space and communicates palpable voids. In other instances, attention is paid to the emptiness of people's apartments, devoid of personal effects or ornamentation. While it goes without direct authorial interpretation, the evocation of wartime looting and plunder lies just below the surface.[53] The absence of domestic furnishings and evocation of objects removed also highlight the precariousness of the lives of people who live in these spaces. Such people are often on the margins, in transit or seem to inhabit these places illegally, a precarity that affects both central characters such Jean and Grabley in *Un cirque passe,* as well as secondary characters such as Guy Vincent in *Des inconnues* and the Valadiers in *La Petite Bijou.*

Minimalism in Character: *Papillons*

Following on from silence manifesting through dialogue, euphemism and motif, a further way in which silence infuses Modiano's novels is through the characters themselves. This can be observed in the way they are portrayed and given, or deprived of, corporeal form and psychological depth as well as in their personal character traits. I discuss these aspects here, drawing predominantly on examples from *Des inconnues* (1999). Across Modiano's texts, characters are generally presented in a cursory way with limited description, sometimes condensed into a singular detail, an address or phone number, a particular feature, such as a scar, or

[52] Also *QP* 175, *CP* 90-91.

[53] This evocation, through void, of spaces that have been vacated by their previous owners and squatted in by others is prophetic in terms of State restoration of rights and property. See Chapter 3, footnote 31.

piece of clothing. In an interview in 1986, Modiano said: 'Plutôt que de donner une plus grande épaisseur à mes personnages, je préfère laisser des blancs' (Bauby 4). Indeed, in *L'herbe des nuits* when Jean comes across Dannie in the café Luxembourg, her face is so overexposed that she is reduced to a patch of whiteness: 'Elle n'était plus qu'une tache lumineuse, sans relief, comme sur une photo surexposée. Un blanc' (*HN* 29). Claude Burgelin terms these kinds of displacements 'mises à l'écart métonymiques' [metonymic sidelining] (*Lectures* 53), interpreting them as a strategy for dealing with difficult pasts in an indirect way.

Bosmans, in *L'horizon*, commits addresses and telephone numbers to memory in order to 'lutter contre l'indifférence et l'anonymat des grandes villes' (25). Nothing seems to differentiate him and his girlfriend, Margaret Le Coz, from the great throngs of Paris: 'Ils ne se distinguaient pas de la foule, tous les deux. Ils étaient des anonymes' (*H* 34). Sometimes single features are used for multiple characters, creating an overlapping effect, which further blurs distinction and individualisation. In terms of characters' personal traits, their ephemerality, their congenital impermanence and their lack of agency are so striking that readers may have the impression of their being hardly there, on the brink of evaporating or vanishing. In her discussion of minimalism, Schoots identifies absence of clear motivation as a key feature: 'La réflexion sur le hasard est essentielle dans les romans « minimalistes » . . . La motivation des personnages n'est pas plus précisée que celle des événements' (135). This trait is particularly evident in Modiano's description of himself in his early years:

> Et de menus événements se succèdent et glissent sur vous sans laisser beaucoup de traces. Vous avez l'impression de ne pas pouvoir vivre votre vraie vie, et d'être un passager clandestin. De cette vie en fraude, quelques bribes me parviennent. (*UP* 114)

Lack of agency and the state of clandestinity—hiding or silencing one's origins—are currents that traverse the length and breadth of Modiano's texts. *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* begins 'Je ne suis rien', and a similar ungroundedness afflicts even the more physically substantial characters. Waldo Blunt admits that he's gained 30 kilos since his younger years (67), but he is still susceptible to flying off in the wind: 'je le surveillais de très près car je craignais qu'au moindre coup de vent à travers l'esplanade, il ne s'envolât, en me laissant seul avec mes questions' (70).

Along with motifs such as 'lucioles' (*RBO* 147), 'revenants' (*RBO* 63), 'ombres' (*H* 12), 'fantômes' (*DLC* 146, *H* 17), 'comparses' (*DLC* 12, 62, *HN* 28), 'somnambules' (*DLC* 23), and 'anonymes' (*H* 34), the motif of the 'papillon' is one that Modiano often uses to designate this type of fugacious character, through metonymic sidelining, referred to by Burgelin. Butterflies and moths are associated with ephemerality and fragility. They are at the mercy of the wind, while also being objects of fascination as creatures of intricate beauty that undergo complete metamorphosis. The genesis of Modiano's attachment to this defining motif can be traced back to his parents, whom he sums up in an early work as 'deux déracinés, sans la moindre attache d'aucune sorte, deux papillons dans cette nuit du Paris de l'Occupation' (*LF* 208) and later as 'Deux papillons égarés et inconscients au milieu d'une ville sans regard' (*UP* 19). Characteristics of transience and flimsiness also characterises those in their entourage—'Des personnes sur lesquelles il est impossible de s'appesantir' (*UP* 24)—as well as contaminating his own generation: 'Les gens de mon âge que l'on voyait au Sporting ou à la Taverne et que le vent emporte' (*UP* 82). These people populate Modiano's novels, both as central and peripheral characters, appearing for brief periods before floating away, their fates most often unknown.

In *Une jeunesse*, when Bellune sees Odile for the first time he thinks of a 'papillon hésitant qu'attire la lampe'. She blends into the shadows—'un visage qui se différenciait à peine de l'ombre'—combining butterflies' characteristic of fragility with an element of veiled anonymity. Later, when Odile and Louis make it to the UK and are sitting with their hosts, they are described as being like butterflies, pinned down for inspection:

> La lumière de la lampe éclairait violemment Odile et Louis, et, sur le canapé, ils étaient très rapprochés l'un de l'autre. Axter et Harold les observaient. Deux papillons immobiles, cloués sur un tissu et contemplés par des amateurs. (*UJ* 144)

In *Dimanches d'août*, Jean goes to the police to report the disappearance of his girlfriend, Sylvia. Jean hands the despondent officer who listens to his account a photograph of Sylvia: 'Il la saisit délicatement entre le pouce et l'index comme l'aile d'un papillon mort et la posa sur son bureau, sans la regarder' (*DA* 139). The text resists stating outright that Sylvia has been killed, but a number of indications woven into the text, such as the place names along the road where the car went off the road—Menton and Castellar, discussed earlier—and the image of the butterfly wing, suggest, but do not insist, that this is the case.

For Lecarme, these vaguely unreal, marginal people whose lack of agency denies them entry into modern society, are natural products of their historical setting and Modiano's general outlook. They grew up in the 1960s and their disillusionment and lack of attachment comes from bitterness and frustration with consumer society, the Algerian war, the prospect of waning youth and the fading pillars of both Gaullism and Communism (*Lectures* 40). Interestingly, Alain Bony (1986) explores the symbolism of whiteness, and other colours, focusing predominantly on *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* and draws connections between whiteness and the characters'

butterfly-like nature. There are numerous examples of these bleached, disembodied entities and bodies without agency. In 1999, with the publication of *Des inconnues,* the first of Modiano's female autodiegetic narrators appeared, after which there were further female subjects, protagonists and other marginalised voices in *Dora Bruder, La Petite Bijou,* and *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*. While the image of the butterfly is not present in *Des inconnues*, the ephemerality of the three female protagonists, their inability to take root in the world and their fear of getting lost or consumed in anonymous crowds are especially salient, even, strikingly, in the title.

The protagonist of the first section, walking around Paris for the first time, keeps a copy of the address and telephone number of where she is staying, for fear of getting lost (18). She stays with a woman she met in Torremolinos, Mireille Maximoff, who invites her to parties, where she remains silent and isolated, preferring to slip away unnoticed: 'Moi, je ne disais rien. Je restais à l'écart. Souvent je quittais ces soirées pour faire un tour dans le quartier. Je partais sans attirer l'attention de personne' (25). She feels a sense of joy at being able to vanish without anyone noticing—'j'éprouvais le même plaisir à disparaître sans attirer leur attention. À les semer' (31)—and falls in love with a man who is also remarkable for his tendency to leave no trace and move without sound:

> il ne laissait jamais rien traîner sur la table de nuit, sur le fauteuil ou sur la moquette. Pas un vêtement, pas un mégot de cigarette, même pas une paire de chaussures. Quand nous quittions la chambre, il n'y avait plus trace de notre passage, sauf le lit défait. (39)
>
> On ne l'entendait pas venir quand il ouvrait une porte et qu'on entrait dans la chambre. (45)

He also worries she'll get lost, so he draws a map for her to get to his hotel. He, too, is described as being out of place (41) and it is insinuated that his father, who

returned to Peru during the war, forgot all about him (44). Doubt is cast on the veracity of this version of events, yet even his lies carry little weight, and the protagonist states that it is precisely the void or emptiness he carries that attracts her:

> Je ne lui en voulais pas s'il m'avait menti. Après tout, ses mensonges étaient une partie de lui-même. Tant pis s'ils ne cachaient que du vide. C'était le vide qui m'attirait aussi chez lui. (45)

She also hides her past from him when he asks her about her childhood: 'comme lui, je brouillais les pistes' (50). When at the end she learns of his suicide, she fears that she will faint but manages to retain her grasp on reality by forcing herself to listen and watch people talk, clinging to the movement of their lips (53). Language is divorced from sound and semantic significance, yet it is this absurd language that anchors her.

The protagonist of the second novella feels the distance between herself and others and between herself and her experiences. Her years in boarding school '[ne lui] ont laissé aucun souvenir' (61); they were filled with thick fog that erased faces and details. She doesn't feel that she belongs with those around her: 'je sentais une distance entre nous' (65), 'Il est vrai que je ne les voyais que de loin' (66). The superior of the convent reprimands her but she can barely hear: 'Vous avez l'air absente… Vous m'entendez ?' . . . J'étais si loin… Je ne l'entendais plus' (76). The impression of distance is echoed through the father, who died after the war and whose shadow she feels hovering around her (79), yet she can't find the words to evoke him: 'Je voulais lui parler de mon père mais je ne trouvais pas les mots. . . . je suis restée silencieuse' (80). The woman who puts her up in Paris, Madame El-Koutoub, leaves one night without a word, and the protagonist remarks simply 'Les

gens ont une curieuse manière de disparaître…' (101). Her lack of shock at the disappearance is all the more poignant since she has become so inured to loss.

The third unnamed protagonist returns to France believing that she's been away too long for anyone to remember her and stating that she too has forgotten many things (117). She tries to blend in, but fails, thus reiterating the distance that pervades the second novella and contaminates common language:

> Tous ces gens de mon âge parmi lesquels j'essayais de me fondre dans les cafés ou les petites salles de cinéma me paraissaient des étrangers. Ou plutôt, c'était moi, l'étrangère. Je les entendais parler, je ne comprenais plus leur langue, et j'étais sûre qu'eux aussi auraient du mal à me comprendre. (120)

She fears being consumed, erased by the crowds on the metro—'à chaque station, un flot de voyageurs entrerait dans le wagon et me repousserait encore plus loin vers le fond' (122)—and recalls a scene in which a shopkeeper, unable to perceive her presence, ignores her and the flow of customers threatens to pull her in and out of the shop, since she is unable to stand her own ground (135). Since her arrival in Paris, practically no one has spoken to her, which augments her sense of ontological precarity. Like the second protagonist, to maintain a sense of stability, she anchors herself in language markers: 'Je me répétais à haute voix mon prénom, mon nom, ma date de naissance, pour bien me convaincre que c'était moi' (123). Despite her attempts to reassure herself through repetition of these details, she fears being consumed by the city's greyness:

> Si je m'éloignais trop de l'atelier, je craignais de dériver, loin de mes derniers points de repère, et de me laisser peu à peu imprégner par ce gris, jusqu'à me confondre avec lui et oublier où j'habitais. (128)

Grey is described as 'la couleur de l'amnésie' (136) in Modiano's previous text, *Dora Bruder*, an association that is reiterated this section's evocation of lost memory. Like

the narrator of the first story, who fears fears the disappearance of Guy Vincent, she too is afraid that Michel Kérourédan, a Gurdjieff-type character who involves her in his philosophy group, will vanish: 'j'ai eu peur que Michel Kérourédan disparaisse dans le flot des voyageurs qui descendaient du train' (163).

These flimsy, insubstantial characters contribute to the ambient sense of precariousness, giving the impression that they might vanish, silently, without a trace, leaving just an impression or a small artefact in their wake. Their evanescent quality contributes to the sense of the texts' resistance allowing readers to fully invest and grasp the texts in their imagination.

Resistance in Narration: Interruption, Apostrophe, Narrative Switching, Suspension

Pursuing the same angle of enquiry, I now explore resistance and reticence at the level of narrative voice and narrative construction, paying close attention to authorial presence and disappearance. An examination of silence at this level will allow us to identify further ways in which we experience it as a form of resistance to interpretation, reliable narrative or authorial guidance. Typical Modianesque autodiegetic narrators have been amply explored in relation to the ways in which they resemble and contrast with the author. What is interesting from the point of view of literary silence are the moments when this voice, highly homogeneous for the most part, breaks off, creating a caesura and momentarily suspending narrative continuum and logic. As Dorrit Cohn argues in her study of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, sometimes that which is left *unsaid* by the narrator is equally important: 'The narrator's silence, in short, speaks louder than his words, undercutting his trustworthiness even more effectively than his normative excesses' (145). Adam

Shatz notes that the refusal to reveal Lucien's motives in *Lacombe Lucien* led to accusations that Modiano and Malle failed to address the social and ideological causes of collaboration. Yet, as Shatz rightly points out, 'the film's silence was an epistemological decision as much as a political one'; Modiano and Malle's reticence to provide answers was not them avoiding making a point, but was the point itself. Moreover, it is a disposition that Modiano maintains. In *L'herbe des nuits*, the narrator describes his position as one of distance; he is reticent to make strong judgements: 'A cette époque, n'ai-je pas toujours été en retrait, dans la position du spectateur' (26).

Instances of apostrophe, where the narrative voice 'breaks off to address someone or something' (Dupriez 58) is another kind of narrative interruption. The narrator interrupts himself to address someone outside the text's boundaries, breaking the tacit pact of fiction. Multiple examples of characters included in the novel but external to the specific story can be found in *Quartier perdu* (124, 128) and *De si braves garçons* (19, 151). The epigraph and title of the latter reference Turgenev's 'Bezhin Meadow', a short story about a group of friends sharing tales around a campfire. Thus, the occurrences of apostrophe could be seen as a way of recreating the impression of various narrators sharing a common space and recounting stories from their childhood. The narrator increasingly addresses Louki directly in the last section of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* (133, 139, 149, 149) and apostrophe also occurs, directed at an unspecified addressee in *Dora Bruder*: 'N'oublie pas : demain après-midi, rendez-vous à la terrasse des Gobelins' (90). Damamme-Gilbert remarks that this 'leaves the reader baffled, unable to identify who might be speaking and to whom' ('The Question of Genre' 61). This moment of confusion, when the narrative voice shifting from addressing no one person in particular to addressing an unidentified addressee, represents a form of silence in Modiano's texts.

Both the futility and the optimism of the effort to communicate are expressed in *Dora Bruder*: 'En écrivant ce livre, je lance des appels, comme des signaux de phare dont je doute malheureusement qu'ils puissent éclairer la nuit. Mais j'espère toujours' (42). There are more clues to interpreting apostrophe in *Vestiaire de l'enfance*; as noted by Douzou ('Du blanc' 300) the protagonist Jimmy Sarano/Jean Moreno states, 'Oui, ce sont des appels que je lance, entre deux cours de chevaux et de jockeys disparus' (52). He goes on to name racehorses and jockeys and relays an announcement for a lost dog; Modiano is known for identifying with dogs, strays and lost dogs especially. The 'appels' are, in this sense, both inward and outward. The instances of apostrophe are sent out of the text, breaking through the confines of fiction to reach people in the outside world. In parallel we see an inwardly directed search, which remains more covert and located within the inter-textual fabric of the novels, through which there is an attempt to reunite disconnected parts. In *L'herbe des nuits*, we see the desire for reciprocal outreach as the protagonist is on the other side, hoping to capture a signal sent out from afar: 'Vous êtes seul, attentif, comme si vous vouliez capter des signaux de morse que vous lance, de très loin un correspondant inconnu' (10). Further on in *Vestiaire de l'enface*, Jimmy Sarano gives Mercadié a note to read out with the other 'appels' over the radio. Mercadié asks if he really thinks there could be anyone who could possibly respond to such an arcane announcement, to which Jean replies: 'Au moins que j'aurai lancé un appel. Cela vaut mieux que le silence' (123). He defends his practice, despite its futility, continuing to send out messages over the radio. This defence could be seen to stand for Modiano's—and his characters'—practice of sending out messages through literature, momentarily silencing the narrative continuum to address individuals outside the diegetic space.

Narrative is also fractured is in instances of narrative switching. In *L'horizon,* the narration shifts from a heterodiegetic narrator in the third person to first-person narration at a number of points towards the end of the novel. In one instance the shift happens halfway through a paragraph and reverts at the beginning of the following paragraph (151). Two pages on, there is another shift, suddenly including the heterodiegetic narrator:

> Yvonne Gaucher avait souri de cette question. L'avenir… Un mot dont la sonorité semblait aujourd'hui à Bosmans poignante et mystérieuse. Mais, en ce temps-là, nous n'y pensions jamais. Nous étions encore, sans bien nous rendre compte de notre chance, dans un présent éternel. (153)

Later, there is another movement from third-person narration to Margaret's unmarked speech in the first person before third-person narration resumes:

> Bosmans tâche encore de la raisonner et de la convaincre de rester à Paris. Mais non, Jean, ce n'est pas possible. Ils savent des choses sur moi que je ne t'ai pas dites et qui sont dans leurs dossiers. Elle préfère disparaître . . . (157)

The final shift occurs at the end, halfway through a paragraph; thenarration remains in the first person for three sentences before switching back (163). These unannounced, unexplained shifts of voice have an interesting effect that could be interpreted as abandonment by the narrator. They create rifts or creases in the texture of the text and increase the impression of precariousness and unpredictability.

Aestheticisation of time and temporal flow create similar effects of interruption and a form of silence in narrative continuum. There are stark images of endless cycles, such as the recurring dream of the father cycling around and around a velodrome in *Une jeunesse* (14) and the shady character 'Jackey Gérin' endlessly driving around a lake (*UP* 84). In addition to interminable loops, there are instances

of time being completely arrested, as in *Des inconnues:* 'Là où je suis maintenant, il n'y a plus d'automne. Un petit port de la Méditerranée où le temps s'est arrêté pour moi' (19). Sometimes such instances are presented as a peaceful and desired renunciation, whereas in other moments, characters express melancholic awareness of all the questions that will remain forever unanswered: 'Et la question demeura à jamais en suspens : que pouvait-il bien faire, ce dimanche-là, sans diplômes, au Salon nautique ?' (*UP* 49).

Questions left unanswered in an eternal present become a central concern in *L'horizon*. Their amorphous presence is evident on the first page and they continue to accrue, layer upon layer: 'Et si toutes ces paroles restaient en suspens dans l'air jusqu'à la fin des temps et qu'il suffisait d'un peu de silence et d'attention pour en capter les échos ?' (21). These questions are posed eternally, answered by infinite silence. What is notable here is the suggestion that under the right circumstances, namely silence, one can tap into the echoes of these questions being posed over and again.

There are other instances of linear time being interrupted in which readers experience subtle sidesteps outside linear time or reality. These instate pauses and create singular effects of suspension or sense of slipping into a different temporal plane. Sometimes these passages are associated with particular places, such as the Jardin des Tuileries, where Modiano would spend summer afternoons with his brother, Rudy: 'L'horloge aux aiguilles immobiles pour l'éternité, porte sud du palais' (*UP* 39). The Jardin des Tuileries is also associated with the feeling of eternity and ecstasy he experiences when he runs away:

> Vous éprouvez quand même un bref sentiment d'éternité. Vous n'avez pas seulement tranché les liens avec le monde, mais aussi avec le temps. . . . Les

aiguilles de l'horloge du jardin des Tuileries sont immobiles pour toujours. Une fourmi n'en finit pas de traverser la tache de soleil. (*DB* 78)

There are also instances of time collapsing in on itself and becoming 'transparent', which is a way of instating a pause or silence both in time and logic: 'Dans la lumière de fin d'après-midi, il m'a semblé que les années se confondaient et que le temps devenait transparent' (*FR* 43). There is a sense that the present moment connects momentarily with myriad past epochs and our habitual notion of horizontal time is tipped up, becoming vertical—'C'était l'automne de 1962, mais aussi le dix-neuvième siècle et peut-être une époque encore plus reculée dans le temps' (*UP* 86), 'Toutes ces années sont abolies' (*DLC* 33)—creating what Paul Gellings describes as 'tunnels temporels' (51) and Kawakami terms 'gateways' (*Self-Conscious* 59). These breaks with linear, progressive time often lead backwards and are associated with movements out of urban space; the following passage is one of many geographical syncopes:

> J'avais oublié aussi le silence et le calme de l'avenue Rachel qui mène au cimetière, mais l'on n'y pense pas, au cimetière, on se dit que tout au fond on débouchera sur la campagne, et même avec un peu de chance sur une promenade de bord de mer. (*DLC* 63-64)

A similar impression is felt by Margaret Le Coz one evening in Paris: 'elle se disait que, si elle descendait à vélo l'une de ces avenues désertes, elle déboucherait sur une plage' (102).

The phenomena of time collapse, stasis and disrupted temporal progression are present across Modiano's work but become more prominent in later works. In *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* this temporal morphing begins as an impression, a simple effect of lighting, often associated with an atmosphere of silence—'La rue ne m'avait jamais semblé à ce point déserte et silencieuse. Elle était éclairée par des

réverbères d'un autre temps' (96)—before becoming an increasingly central preoccupation: 'Depuis quelque temps, les jours et les nuits se confondaient pour nous' (*DLC* 138). The fourth section is narrated by Louki's boyfriend, Roland, speaking in the present, decades later. Roland still hears her calling his name, but when he turns around, no one is there:

> Pas seulement le soir, mais au creux de ces après-midi d'été où vous ne savez plus très bien en quelle année vous êtes. Tout va recommencer comme avant. Les mêmes jours, les mêmes nuits, les mêmes lieux, les mêmes rencontres. L'Éternel Retour. (115)

Roland is struck by a sense of temporal blurring and the feeling that everything is going to start over again, thus directly introducing the notion of the eternal return. However, not all 'gateways' are to be trusted. Kawakami identifies certain misleading instances—'Modiano here seems to be putting the reader on his or her guard against fake versions of "atmosphere"' (*Flowers of evil* 262)—which further entangle the reader's sense of temporal and ontological clarity.

Louki and Roland frequent gatherings conducted by 'Guy de Vere', a lightly veiled fictional incarnation of the situationist philosopher Guy Debord, cited in the novel's epigraph. Guy de Vere discusses various esoteric ideas and occult philosophies. At one meeting Roland is given a book on Friedrich Nietzsche's *Philosophie de l'Éternel Retour du même,* which he reads attentively (143). Nietzsche's interpretation of eternal recurrence is based on the precept that given that time is infinite but energy and events are not, it follows that present events have already occurred and will continue to recur infinitely (*Complete Works* 237). While the concept has roots in Eastern philosophies and religions, Nietzsche's approach is novel in that it is completely material, since he did not believe in the existence of anything outside the material universe. There is nothing otherworldly or mystical

about the concept; we are simply returned to our same selves and everything happens again without there being an underlying direction or will. Nietzsche first introduced the doctrine in *The Gay Science*, proposing it more as a thought experiment than a veritable epistemological framework, but one which could have a profound effect on the way we conceive of our lives; faced with the prospect of the same life, relived infinitely, do we react with horror or delight (aphorism 341)?

The book is not mentioned directly after Roland has Absorbed Nietzsche's ideas, but the notion of eternal recurrence pervades the text. In a rare carefree moment, the couple consider where to holiday that summer, and conclude that the destination doesn't matter:

> Les lieux n'avaient plus aucune importance, ils se confondaient les uns avec les autres. Notre seul but de voyage, c'était d'aller AU CŒUR DE L'ÉTÉ, là où le temps s'arrête et où les aiguilles de l'horloge marquent pour toujours la même heure : midi. (134)

The time of day is significant since Nietzsche's text concludes with an enigmatic affirmation that midday is the time when people might initially realise or embrace the phenomenon of the eternal return:

> And in every one of these cycles of human life there will be one hour where, for the first time one man, and then many, will perceive the mighty thought of the eternal recurrence of all things:—and for mankind this is always the hour of Noon (*Complete Works* 250).

Despite multiple impressions of time collapsing and eras blurring, Roland experiences the sensation of eternal recurrence only once:

> j'ai senti, pour la seule fois de ma vie, ce qu'était l'Éternel Retour. . . . Nous étions là, ensemble, à la même place, de toute éternité, et notre promenade à

travers Auteuil, nous l'avions déjà faite au cours de mille et mille autres vies. (156-157)

The passage is written in what could well be described as *écriture blanche* in the Barthesian sense; the experience is presented neither as positive or negative—it simply is.

In Modiano's following work, *L'horizon* the legacy of eternal recurrence is ever-present, but neither Nietzsche nor his texts are mentioned directly. The protagonist couple, Jean Bosmans and Margaret Le Coz are typical *papillon* characters, described as having 'Aucune famille. Aucun recours. Des gens de rien' (69). Again, time is a central concern, and the notion of the eponymous 'horizon' hovers as an undefined but magnetic force, appearing most often in an atmosphere of silence: 'Ces soirs-là, les rues désertes et silencieuses du quartier étaient des lignes de fuite qui débouchaient toutes sur l'avenir et l'HORIZON' (82). The narrative is pitted with unexpected temporal fractures and slippages throughout, with many sensations of timelessness and eternity: 'il avait la certitude qu'ils étaient hors du temps' (44), 'Une lumière limpide et intemporelle' (50), 'figé dans l'éternité' (51). These temporal fractures generally appear in conjunction with a conflation of the seasons—'Les saisons se confondaient' (52)—or create the impression that 'le temps s'est arrêté' (155). This aestheticisation of time presents it as highly malleable, able to be simultaneously arrested, in movement, warped and extended indefinitely: 'Un été indien dont on se disait qu'il se prolongerait pendant des mois et des mois. Pour toujours peut-être' (81).

Towards the end, Bosmans reads a science-fiction novel, *Les Corridors du temps*,[54] in which certain members of a group of friends grow old, while others do not. They encounter one another some forty years later, but don't recognise each

[54] A real novel written by Hélène Dorion, published in 1988.

other, since they occupy different 'time corridors'. Bosmans then sees someone he is sure is Margaret Le Coz and assumes she must be in a different time corridor as she is still young, so he doesn't approach her. However, he is convinced that one day, they'll find each other in the same time corridor again: 'Mais un jour, par miracle, nous emprunterons le même corridor. Et tout recommencera pour nous deux dans ce quartier neuf' (123). Bosmans feels that merely by remaining still, surrounded by ever-increasing silence and illumination, he will be able to simply slip through 'un mur invisible' and into eternal recurrence: 'Ce qui avait lieu une fois se répétait à l'infini' (161). Finally, Bosmans goes to Berlin to look for Margaret. He experiences a feeling of serenity and has the impression that he has returned to the same place at the same time and in the same season, from which he started 'comme deux aiguilles se rejoignent sur le cadran quand il est midi' (166), which returns to Nietzsche's indication that noon is when people are likely to experience eternal recurrence. Questions surrounding the eternal return resurface in *L'herbe des nuits* and are viewed with scepticism:

> Etait-il vraiment possible qu'un double que j'avais laissé là continue à répéter chacun de mes anciens gestes, à suivre mes anciens itinéraires pour l'éternité ?
>
> Non, il ne restait plus rien de nous par ici. Le temps avait fait table rase. (11)

However, shortly thereafter, the protagonist Jean finds himself drawn through temporal channels: 'Mais les dimanches, surtout en fin d'après-midi, et si vous êtes seul, ouvrent une brèche dans le temps. Il suffit d'y glisser' (12). In Modiano's subsequent novel, *Souvenirs dormants*, it is directly named 'j'avais acheté un livre dont le titre m'avait frappé: *L'Éternel Retour du même*' (49). Employed as Modiano does, the eternal return can be thought of as creating a form of silence if we conceptualise silence as supreme ambiguity, a space of prolonged reticence to circumscribe. Further, it is a repetition linked closely to his writing:

> Le temps est aboli et tout recommence : comme autrefois, avec la même écriture, je remplis des pages en consultant de nouveau les notes de mon ancien carnet noir. (*HN* 56)

Resisting Conclusion

Throughout Modiano's novels there is the desire to start afresh and to be free from the past, demonstrated in the numerous expressions of characters wanting to 'recommencer à zéro' (*UJ* 10, *BG*, 187, *PB* 22), to 'repartir à zéro' (*Mes vingt ans* 190, *DPO* 137) or to 'faire peau neuve' (*UJ* 10, *DLC* 24, 32), the hope that 'leur vie prendrait un cours nouveau' (*H* 52*)* and even the failed suicide at the end of *La Petite Bijou* that marks 'le début de la vie' (169). There is also a countercurrent: manifestations of resignation to an endless and inescapable repetition, which can be seen in the theme of circularity and recurrence, as well as in the endings of novels which loop back to their titles, as in *Dimanches d'août,* back to the opening lines, as in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier,* or return to the same place, as in *Villa Triste.* This enmeshing, looping forwards and back, resists straightforward conclusion or progression, while also containing expressions of hope for liberation within the cycle.

Kemp's study of the endings of Modiano's novels identifies a set of common features, of which 'inconclusiveness is one of the most reliable structural aspects' (*French Fictions* 132), which is why Kemp prefers to term them 'endings' rather than 'conclusions'. Furthermore, Blanckeman highlights the contiguous quality of Modiano's endings, the incompleteness of which instigates the next work:

> la fin même des récits ne constitue pas un achèvement mais une suspension, une ellipse supplémentaire avant que le récit suivant ne relance un

> phénomène de création fondé sur cet essentiel mouvement de vertige. (*Lire* 37)

For Viart, Modiano's resistance to conclusion and resolution 'sonnent l'échec du romanesque narratif: qui n'aboutit à rien, sinon à un autre suspens' ('Impossible narration' 62), and while Modiano has referred to the inability of his generation to write the kinds of cathedral-esque novels possible in the nineteenth century (*Discours*), he has done so with more nostalgia than regret. In an interview in the wake of the publication of *Des inconnues,* he described the effect created by the three unnamed women's stories as akin to tuning in momentarily to a radio station, before moving out of range:

> Chacune raconte un épisode de sa vie. On ne sait pas ce qui s'est passé avant et après. C'est comme si on captait une émission de radio pour ensuite la perdre en manipulant le poste. (Le Fol)

While there are many possible conclusions to the women's stories, none are delivered within the pages. Readers simply move from one fragment to the next and then out of range. This approach negates the traditional narrative arc, but it doesn't come across as defiant or belligerent; rather, it conveys a quiet resistance to tie up loose ends.

In *S/Z,* Barthes describes five 'codes' that are interwoven through all narrative. One of these is the hermeneutic code, exemplified by the classic detective novel. The hermeneutic code includes the enigmatic elements of a narrative that serve to raise questions, delay revelation and create suspense (19), such as snares, equivocations, partial answers and jammings (acknowledgments of insolvability), all of which suspend mystery and keep questions open. The expanse between mystery and revelation is characterised by 'reticence', the rhetorical figure that interrupts the sentence, suspends it, turns it aside (75).

Jeanne Ewert uses Barthes' model to examine *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* which contains what might be the most frustrating scene in Modiano's work: the narrator, having finally relayed the scene that led him to lose his memory, returns to the village on the Swiss border, but leaves without even getting out of the taxi, refuting the reader's desire for and expectation of disclosure. Ewert classifies the novel as an 'example of the pure antidetective novel, as a genre illustrating the breakdown of the hermeneutic code' (168) and sees its failure to provide answers as typical of Modiano's structural style. Indeed, many of Modiano's works adhere to the hermeneutic code up to the point of revelation, whereupon they typically delay indefinitely, obfuscate or defer. Writing about minimalism, Schoots sees the principle of chance, which is so deterministic for characterisation, as a major structural principle (134). This again applies to Modiano's work where the initial search or point of intrigue, such as the death of Gisèle and Urbain T. in 1933 in *Fleurs de ruine,* is abandoned without apparent reason, and another line of inquiry is followed. However, things are not so straightforward in Modiano's work and we do not find a neat and predictable refutation of narrative arc. In a rare moment of compliance with Chekhov's gun principle, the revolver that appears on page 102 in *Des inconnues* is used on page 113.

Modiano's proclivity for non-conclusion can be seen as part of a broader trend in contemporary French literature. Catherine Douzou's essay, 'Histoires d'enquête : quand le récit déclare forfait', discusses this tendency in Modiano's work in conjunction with Michel Del Castillo and Didier Daeninckx. For Ewert, the refusal to provide conclusion and the tendency towards precarity rather than stability are part of the postmodern condition and its reaction to inductive reasoning (171-2). This leads to questions of what resistance, understood in its multifaceted dimensions, as

discussed in this chapter, tells us about Modiano's writing, what its context can reveal, and ultimately, what it signifies.

Why White? Why Resistance?

In *Degré zero,* Barthes argues that while 'language' and 'style' are determined by a writer's epoch, 'mode' is the only arena in which writers have true freedom of expression and can make their individual mark (15). Barthes links the movement from the unity of classical writing to the plurality of modes in modern times to the 'great crisis in general History', which is reflected in literature, only 'much more confusedly' (17). In the final section, Barthes returns to the notion of 'mode' and argues that in the context of increasing pluralisation, more choices become available to the writer, and these choices constitute an ethic of writing; form and meaning cannot be understood separately (70). Ryckman interprets Barthes's promotion of zero-degree writing 'as a postwar wish for verbal hygiene uncluttered by propaganda and other wartime distortions' (17). Similarly, for John Barth, American minimalism of the 1970s and 1980s was deeply influenced by the 'national hangover from the Vietnam War, felt by many to be a trauma literally and figuratively unspeakable'. Of course, as Blanckeman notes, the socio-political situation in Europe when Barthes was writing isn't the same as the situation in which Modiano is writing (and the same goes for Barth and the United States), yet their concerns are not dissimilar. In an interview with Julien Brunn in *Libération,* Modiano discussed the anti-Semitism of André Gide and Jean Giraudoux, who represented 'l'humanisme français, la quintessence française'. Modiano stated that he undertook to use their language, on their terms, to turn it against itself: 'Je me suis dit que ce

serait bien comme une arme . . . je voudrais utiliser le français pour qu'il se retourne contre lui-même… C'est un peu un travail de sape.' By extension, he turned language, in its most purified, classic style, against its embodied contradictions.

In the context of the ethical conundrums discussed in the previous chapter, the complex relationship between bearing witness and silence have informed the development of *écriture blanche.* Jean-Philippe Riman holds that *écriture blanche* is part of the response to the 'dynamique conflictuelle entre une impossibilité et une obligation absolue d'exprimer' (Viart and Rabaté, *Écritures blanches* 71). It offers a way of writing that expresses, while remaining reserved, maintaining a silence of judgement. In the introduction to *Écritures blanches,* Viart writes:

> La 'blancheur', comme la 'transparence', métaphores de la pureté et de l'authenticité, laissent entendre que derrière la réflexion esthétique ou stylistique se profilent des enjeux éthiques. (*Écritures blanches* 8)

Seen in this light, the way in which Modiano's texts, steeped in *blancheur* and threaded through with so many forms of resistance, from 'mode' through to motif, character, narrative voice and structure, appear entirely coherent with a disposition that recognises the necessity of confronting ethical and moral issues, yet is unable to draw definitive conclusions.

The notion of *écriture lacunaire* has been used in criticism of Modiano's work. While it might appear to be oxymoronic, it is instructive in understanding this kind of writing that wilfully includes in its fabric a multitude of gaps, blanks and holes. Laurent Douzou, writing about the revelation in *Dora Bruder* that all of the Bruders were eventually killed in Auschwitz argues that '[l]e blanc, l'absence, les lacunes ne sont pas des manques ici : ils aident à comprendre ce à quoi ces trois êtres ont été confrontés' (132); deliberate absences and glaring omissions are that which invite empathy and understanding. In the context of Shoah literature, lacuna and

responsibility are closely connected. For Joseph Jurt, *écriture lacunaire* is a way of implicating readers: 'la mémoire est ainsi la tâche du lecteur à qui incombe à la suite de cette écriture lacunaire fragmentaire une responsabilité spécifique' (101). As discussed above, *écriture lacunaire*, like fragmentary writing, relies on and expresses complicity between writer and readers, as well as engaging the imagination to fill in that which cannot or will not be written.

Alongside the *blancheur* and minimalism of Modiano's writing, the retreat of the metaphor and resistance to allegorical language, impressions and atmospheres are created that are highly loaded, images and connotations condensed into the language, while remaining indistinct. Specific techniques associated with *écriture blanche* and minimalism demonstrate the abundance of elliptical and suppressive linguistic forms, as well as a clear tendency towards forms of fragmentation and a resistance to metaphorical language. Along with semantic syllepsis, onomastics and other ways of inserting meaning through connotation and implication, these demonstrate the interplay between reticence to explicit signification and techniques that create high levels of transparency and limpidity, and often dissimulating the complexity of that which is being evoked.

Following on from these devices with which forms of silence are written into the fabric of the text, the centrality of silence in discourse is shown to be of particular relevance in Modiano's texts, especially in relation to the parent–child dynamic. A great deal of care is taken to make space for silence to be expressed, heard and responded to in dialogue. Alongside the silences in speech, there are the myriad silences manifested in scenes where language and speech acts are depicted as unreliable, misleading, absurd or point to the complete breakdown of linguistic communication.

* * *

Modiano's texts are replete with silences at the level of punctuation, the letter and mise-en-page, in written and spoken language, silent motifs, themes, characters and narrative. At the narrative level, unannounced and unexplained breaks in the narrative voice are further ways in which the texts resist solid grasp. Similarly, the influence of the Nietzschean eternal return, particularly in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L'horizon,* and the interruptions and suspensions in linear temporal progression present time, and sometimes place, variously as malleable, shifting or frozen. This gives a sense of temporal and geographical precarity, as well as brilliant expansiveness, raising questions about simultaneity and the nature of reality and memory.

Barthes was not the first theoretician to write about a turn to simplicity, a restrained, pared-down style and Camus was not its first practitioner. Viart notes that Joachim du Bellay and François de Malherbe described similar tendencies among their contemporaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But, as Barthes argues, since a particular historical moment informs form, and form informs meaning, the same form at different times signifies differently. *Écriture blanche* is posited both as utopian and impossible. Barthes insists that there is nothing so 'infidèle' ('fickle' in Lavers and Smith's translation, 65) as *écriture blanche* since, like other styles, it gets caught in its own cycle of automatisms (111):

> L'écrivain accédant au classique, devient l'épigone de sa création primitive, la société fait de son écriture une manière et le renvoie prisonnier de ses propres mythes formels. (57)

Indeed, Modiano's writing, which shares some features of *blancheur,* has become an identifiable, idiosyncratic style, scholars and critics commonly refer to a *style*

modianesque. Moreover, it is a style that signifies, and we have come to read meaning in the ellipses, lacunae, gaps and absences. In *Signes,* Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes:

> L'absence de signe peut être un signe et l'expression n'est pas l'ajustage à chaque élément du sens d'un élément du discours, mais une opération du langage sur le langage qui soudain se décentre vers son sens. (55)

The resistance of Modiano's writing and the generous space allocated to silence in its manifold forms can be understood in the context of the long post-war period, as well as a family legacy of dissimulation and obfuscation. This is combined with deep sensitivity to the fallibility of language and the impossibility of expression, combined with the responsibility to express.

Chapter 6: Towards Silence

Le silence même en dit plus long que les mots
Et tout ce qui parle est fait de chair mortelle
Louis-René des Forêts, *Poèmes de Samuel Wood* (1988)

Through the multiplicity of interpretations of silence in the first five chapters, the notion of silence has been shown to be highly polysemantic with applications and relevance in a variety of fields. To take the example of music, silence can occupy such diametric spaces as to be the soundless pause designated by a fermata, and it can feature at the very centre of a work, as in Cage's *4'33"*, a musical composition made up of three silent movements lasting four minutes and thirty-three seconds. This final chapter situates silence as an artistic destination and objective in its own right, a space or quality that can be moved towards. In Modiano's world, there is an intriguing series of artists each of whom demonstrates a unique relationship with silence in connection with the art form they practise. For some, silence constitutes the epitome of their art and, for others, the trajectory entails a form of dissolution of the artist *into* their art, and into silence. I explore examples of various trajectories towards and around silence in Modiano's work including a filmmaker whose masterpiece was shot with no film in the camera, a composer whose creative career was halted by Nazi invasion, a photographer whose ultimate goal is to figuratively and physically disappear into the background of his images, and most notably, a writer endeavouring to write or attain silence with language.

Unsurprisingly, the writers are the most complex characters in Modiano's work and their experiences the most developed in this series. In the field of literature and language, the notion of silence can designate the limitations of language and thought, as well as the uninterrupted foundation underlying all language. In the case of the writer from *Chien de printemps*, his identity breaks down, he becomes increasingly porous and he begins to move through language and beyond it. The process destabilises both the writer's ontological stability and language's semantic grounding, asking us to question its capacity to reliably describe reality. Blanchot's theoretic writing on the literary project centres around the inherent negativity at the heart of language and proposes an understanding of silence as both prerequisite and purpose. Much of Blanchot's writing returns to these themes but here I draw principally from essays published in *La part du feu* (1949) to explore the inexorable reach towards an impossible *au-delà*,[55] an ineffable and contradictory space. Roland Barthes' treatise on photography, *Camera Lucida,* is also drawn on in the discussion of photography in *Chien de printemps*, which considers the notion of effacement, passivity and the role of the photographer, as well as the silent force of the punctum.

The movement towards and away from silence not only concerns those involved in creative work; it is discussed in relation to the integrity of memory and identity more generally.

[55] Blanchot uses the term *au-delà*, often in italics, to designate an amorphous and changeable concept that is both before and beyond language and conscious thought, as well as that for which literature aims. See *La part du feu*, p. 46.

Towards Silence in Film and Music

Film: *Le Fils de Gascogne*

Modiano employs the motif of film to explore the nature of memory in many novels. In *Accident nocturne,* the protagonist describes the sensation of forgetting using the image of disintegrating film, eaten away by mould:

> L'oubli finit par ronger des pans entiers de notre vie et, quelquefois, de toutes petites séquences intermédiaires. Et dans ce vieux film, les moisissures de la pellicule provoquent des sautes de temps. (93)

Later, in *L'herbe des nuits,* Jean leafs through an old notebook and remarks: 'Elles me sont utiles, ces notes, pour donner un peu de cohérence aux images qui tressautent au point que la pellicule du film risque de se casser' (18).

Also in *La Petite Bijou*, published just before *Accident nocturne*, the protagonist Thérèse says:

> j'avais envie de demander à Moreau-Badmaev si la pellicule d'un film vieillit et se décompose comme les cadavres, avec le temps. Alors, les visages de Sonia O'Dauyé et la Petite Bijou seraient rongés par une sorte de moisissure et on ne pourrait plus entendre leurs voix. (136)

We return to the image of decaying film, but here, instead of skipping forwards and backwards in time, the decomposing film has the effect of diminishing memory's aural vividness, indicating that if the memory-film were left to decompose even more, it would fall further into silence. In addition to the motif of film as an interface for accessing memory, film and filmmaking shed interesting light on how Modiano

views the process and purpose of artistic creation. Nettelbeck and Cooke note that his work on film is a minor part of his output but one that he takes seriously (49), referring to an interview in *Les Inrockuptibles* in 1997.

In the mid-1990s Modiano wrote the screenplay for *Le Fils de Gascogne* (1996) with Pascal Aubier, the film's director. Grégoire Colin plays Harvey, a young man who is approached by Marco Garciano, who claims to recognise him as the son of a famous (fictional) Nouvelle Vague director, Gascogne, who died years earlier. Although sceptical at first, Harvey is drawn into the narrative and starts to play the part. While there is a burgeoning love story in the foreground, the principal narrative is about Gascogne's last film, the rushes of which were never found. The lost film, *Chaleurs*, unanimously agreed to have been Gascogne's masterpiece, is based on a true story about the Austrian actress Hedy Kiesler, later Hedy Lamarr, who starred in Gustav Machatý's *Extase* (1933), which includes some nude scenes. The Pope condemned the film and her future husband tried to buy all the copies of it. In *Le Fils de Gascogne* Hedy becomes Adriana Bogdan (a real actress who worked with Aubier) and *Extase* takes the new title *Chaleurs*. The film's denouement is reached at a party bringing together those who had worked on the film and Gascogne's purported son. It is revealed that the long-lost rushes never actually existed; although there was a full production crew and cast, the whole film was intentionally shot without any material film in the camera.

Alexandra, the actress who was the sole person aware of the truth reveals the news, explaining that for Gascogne, the ultimate film would be perfectly invisible:

> Il a bien eu huit semaines de tournage, mais il n'y avait pas de pellicule dans les caméras. Son idée c'est que c'était beaucoup plus intéressant de faire du film que de faire du cinéma. Il m'avait même expliqué qu'un film devait être

comme l'élégance vestimentaire pour un dandy ; ça ne devait pas se voir. Que le comble du chic au fond, c'était de faire un film invisible. (1:31:21)

The news is met with sharp intakes of breath and indignation, and one man exclaims: 'Idée formidable, faire un film invisible. C'est une trouvaille. Il faut continuer' (1:32:12). The revelation highlights the centrality of process in creation, the importance of making rather than the product made that is made. The film is not only silent and invisible, but it does not even exist. Kawakami makes a similar observation with regard to the many unfulfilled, futile quests in Modiano's novels, which she sees as: 'an expression of the postmodern preference for process and practice over accomplishment, ceaseless activity over completed creation' ('Unreliable Detectives' 204). Gascogne's preference is for the ephemerality of the unrepeatable performance, he works with all the standard gear, props and script, but knows all along that there will be no physical trace of the film.

Given the intellectual and literary space Modiano inhabits, he could not be unaware of Blanchot's writing, but we also know for certain that he has read his work closely and has a level of affinity with in on the basis of the epigraph to his 2019 novel, *Encre sympathique*: 'Qui veut se souvenir doit se confier à l'oubli, à ce risque qu'est l'oubli absolu et à beau hasard que devient alors le souvenir'. In 'La Littérature et le droit à la mort', Blanchot interrogates the nature of artistic creation, writing in particular. He reasons that since a work is continuously realised externally to the creator in a process that he or she will never be able to control, the work in itself can never be that which is worked towards. Instead, it is the experience of creation that embodies the maker: 'en écrivant, il a fait l'épreuve de lui-même comme d'un néant au travail et, après avoir écrit, il fait l'épreuve de son œuvre comme de quelque chose qui disparaît' (*La part* 312). This frames process, rather than work created, as the defining characteristic of the artist, since the work is

ultimately outside the artist's ambit of control. It seems that Gascogne is working within this awareness, with full complicity, deliberately making a work that denies the very possibility of it ever being in the world.

In 1990, before collaborating on *Le Fils de Gascogne,* Modiano was interviewed on the programme *Cinéma Cinémas*. In relation to film titles, he says that he sometimes prefers not to watch a film whose title is too evocative because the film itself would surely be a let-down: 'Je me disais que ce n'était même pas la peine de les voir, parce que je serais déçu. Le titre suffisait, on n'avait pas envie de dissiper le mystère.' Modiano is fascinated by the notion of withholding, often preferring to remain—and keep readers—in the space of infinite possibility and potential rather than finding out what lies behind it, thereby fixing one reality. Reverence for the unknown and the withheld is taken further in *Le Fils de Gascogne* as it is impossible for anyone to discover what is beyond the title, keeping it suspended forever in the realm of unrealised potential, forever invisible, forever silent.

Music

Music occupies a singular place in Modiano's oeuvre and relates to silence in intricate ways. As Thomas Clifton argues in 'The Poetics of Musical Silence', silence is so deeply embedded in a reciprocal relationship with music and 'participates in the presentation of musical time, space, and gesture' that 'in the resulting collaboration silence articulates the sound, while sound confers a specific character on the silence' (163). Modiano clearly acknowledges this symbiotic relationship in his work; questioned in an interview about the musical dimension of his novels he referred to the tone peculiar to his use of the first-person singular, adding 'mes

phrases doivent être trouées de silence' (Bourmeau 'Je travaille'). Further, in the preface to the Quarto collection of ten of his novels, published in 2013, he describes the process of writing as a kind of ekphrastic gathering of people, streets and landscapes transformed into an imperfect musical score, adding that '[i]l y aura chez le romancier le regret de n'avoir pas été un pur musicien et de n'avoir pas composé les *Nocturnes* de Chopin' (10), which he reiterated in his *Discours à l'Académie suédoise* (12), underscoring the proximity and interconnectedness Modiano feels with music and the project of writing.

In *28 Paradis, 28 Enfers,* an illustrated work created with his wife and daughter, Modiano installs silence in the opening scene of idyllic reverie—'Dans le silence je demandais / Si le train express s'arrêterait à vingt et une heures' (first vignette)—and later, now well immersed in the eponymous paradisiacal world, there is promise of an oxymoronic 'silent music': 'Si tu traverses la prairie / Tu entendras / Les musiques silencieuses' (fifteenth vignette). In classical mythology, it is the sirens' song that is irresistible, yet here it is their silence that renders them even more appealing: 'Et tu comprendras que les sirènes / Sont encore plus belles / Quand elles se taisent' (sixteenth vignette). In contrast, in the book's reverse half, *Enfers,* while there is no music, the sounds are disturbing and negative: 'Qui fera donc taire le long sanglot des arbres ?' (third vignette) and 'Rumeur des pleurs éternels' (tenth vignette).

The idea of silent music also appears in *Accident nocturne.* The protagonist's girlfriend, Hélène Navachine, is a musician who has an interest in Hindu music. She explains that she listens to it

> pour être délivrée d'un poids qui l'oppressait et atteindre enfin une région où l'on respire un air limpide et léger. Et puis c'était une musique silencieuse. Elle avait besoin d'un air léger et de silence. J'étais d'accord avec elle. (61)

While it is clearly positive and desirable, what exactly Hélène understands by 'silent music' is not further elucidated. The couple stays in hotels around the gare de Lyon, followed around by the smell of ether from the vial he procures when Hélène cuts herself, and in these hotel rooms they both enter the kind of silence she describes: 'Et, malgré le brouhaha, nous parvenions tous les deux à atteindre la zone de silence dont elle m'avait parlé, où l'air était léger à respirer' (66). He adds that the silence is so deep that he imagines a little train station near a border buried under snow, which again involves silence in a shift into a chimeric zone and confers a spatial quality to silence. These examples all position silence as part of a desirable, safe, yet illusory space.

In a scene from the second story of *Des inconnues,* the protagonist decides not to return to boarding school and ends up in a bar, where, because the proprietor puts on music, 'Nous n'avions plus besoin de parler' (89). The people she is with start dancing, but she declines and becomes absorbed by the music:

> Je ne les écoutais plus. Je n'écoutais que la musique, une musique triste, voilée, et j'avais l'impression qu'elle ne venait pas de l'extérieur mais de moi. L'une de ces musiques que l'on n'entend pas, à cause du brouhaha des conversations et dont la mélodie résonne, très tard, dans le silence, avant qu'elle ne soit de nouveau étouffée. (90)

The music reflects and deepens her melancholic mood and seems to emanate not from outside but from within. Yet the music is also inaudible because of the background noise, only arising in the silence that inevitably returns. As she watches the movements of people's lips without hearing their words, she drifts into the music herself, melding with the fragile melody:

> je n'étais plus que cette musique lointaine dont on croyait qu'elle allait s'interrompre mais qui reprenait, de plus en plus lente, comme si elle voulait profiter du silence pour qu'on l'entende en peu. (91)

The extent to which music and silence are intertwined and interdependent is apparent here. Alex Ross stated that in Cage's 'silent piece', *4'33"*, the point was 'to make people listen', and here too the music itself slows down to allow more silence in and to allow the silence to be heard more clearly. While still associated with an otherworldly state, in the example from *Des inconnues,* music has more to do with escapism and yearning for freedom. However, merging into the music is not enough for the young woman, and she wants to go still further: 'j'aurais voulu fuir encore plus loin, dans un pays où l'on ne parle pas français, pour couper définitivement les ponts' (95).

In *Une jeunesse*, we are introduced to the two principal characters, Louis and Odile, shortly before they meet each other and become involved in a semi-illegal trafficking job. Before meeting Louis, Odile befriends Bellune, a promoter and music scout, at a venue in Paris. Watching the band play, Bellune reflects on what their musical ambitions mean:

> Et leur rêve était si fort, si violent leur désir d'échapper par la musique à ce qu'ils pressentaient de leur vie, que Bellune percevait souvent les stridences des guitares et les voix qui s'éraillaient comme des appels au secours. (27-28)

Again, music figures as a means of escape and freedom. Bellune approaches Odile, not for her singing talent, but because of her silence and discretion: 'Bellune avait choisi quelqu'un qui ne disait rien, qui ne bougeait pas et paraissait noyé au milieu du vacarme' (29). Later, at Bellune's office, Odile is struck by the deserted quietness:

> Dans le bureau de Bellune régnait un grand calme et, si l'on était resté quelques instants sur le seuil, on aurait pu penser que personne n'occupait ce

> local. Pas le moindre éclat de voix. Pas même le cliquetis d'une machine à écrire. (32)

He is listening to a record, and he asks her opinion, but it is so quiet she can barely hear (32). On another occasion, she observes him simply watching the tape moving silently: 'Un après-midi, elle l'avait même surpris qui regardait pensivement tourner la bande, sans juger nécessaire de mettre le son' (32). Over the course of their conversations, he often falls silent or seems no longer to hear her—'lui toujours silencieux' (32), 'Il se taisait de nouveau' (33), 'il ne lui répondait pas' (33), 'Bellune gardait le silence' (52), 'il ne répondait pas' (52)—and Odile wonders, 'Peut-être passait-il ainsi ses après-midis à regarder les bandes noires se dérouler dans le silence' (33).

Odile too has an interesting relationship with silence, but one that travels in the opposite direction; while Bellune is drawn towards silence, she longs to have a stronger voice to break through the wall of noise. At the record shop Sinfonia, Odile chooses a disc to listen to, goes into a cabin and puts on the headphones. There follows: '[u]n silence d'ouate' (37). She forgets the tumult around her and is absorbed by the voice of the singer: 'Un jour, elle parviendra à crever cet écran de bruit et d'indifférence et elle ne sera plus qu'une voix, une voix qui se détache avec netteté, comme celle qu'elle écoute en ce moment' (37). She closes her eyes and dreams that one day she will no longer be among the stifling crowds and commotion, but will somehow have transformed into pure voice.

Bellune explains that after a successful musical career in Vienna and Berlin, he fled when the Nazis rose to power and has not written any music since (38). Later he tells Odile about the day he went to the Austrian embassy but the country no longer existed (54). In the following sequence, separated only by an asterisk, Odile goes to Bellune's apartment and lets herself in since there's no answer. Again, the space is

silent: 'L'appartement était silencieux' (54). She finds a suicide note in which he tells her that he has taken his life in a hotel where he first stayed when he left Austria, but explains nothing else: 'ce serait trop long à expliquer et je ne veux pas t'ennuyer' (54). He urges her to leave the apartment before she is questioned. Odile is dumbfounded and simply stares at a ray of sunlight on the piano, which underscores the instrument's soundlessness. Then the telephone rings out into the room and the ray of sunlight moves across the carpet: 'Le téléphone sonna mais elle ne bougeait pas. Les sonneries se succédèrent pendant longtemps, puis, dans le silence, le rayon de soleil glissait sur la moquette grise' (55). Silence is instated at the very beginning and end of this scene, bracketing the movement within a pair of fermatas. The silence as Odile enters Bellune's apartment recalls the initial silence in his office, which can then be read as portentous, and the suicide note informs the quality of the final silence.

Odile remembers Bellune watching, as if hypnotised, the silently turning tape (96). His suicide could be seen as prefigured through the silent music he listens to and his tendency to break off mid-conversation or seem suddenly absent. He is one of a series of characters who commit suicide in Modiano's novels: Rocroy in *Quartier perdu*, Schlemilovitch (numerous times) in *La place de l'étoile,* René Meinthe in *Villa Triste*, Gay Orlow in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, Ingrid Teyrsen in *Voyage de noces,* and Gisèle and Urbain T. in *Fleurs de ruine*. As Paul Gellings understands it, some characters carry burdens from their pasts that are so heavy that death seems the only possible deliverance (159).

Odile leaves the apartment and ends up in a café at gare Saint-Lazare, where she orders a drink and is gradually overwhelmed by the events of the day; she can no longer make out people moving past and all sounds are muted by a deafening hum: 'tandis qu'un bourdonnement d'insecte à son oreille recouvre peu à peu tous

les autres bruits' (57). This is where Louis comes across her, in the café where 'régnait maintenant un silence à peine troublé par le bruit de moteur des taxis…' (58). He accompanies her home.

Odile continues to try to make it as a singer and she and Louis wait in the receptions of recording studios where '[l]e silence était si profond dans cette pièce qu'elle entendait le léger grésillement du néon' and Louis wonders 'si tout cela servait à quelque chose' (70). She gets involved with the sleazy M. Vietti who listens to her disc in his office, and says he likes it. He then proceeds to unbutton her shirt, promising to record her. She tries to pretend it isn't happening by concentrating on the silence: 'Elle se laissait envahir par le silence et le confort de ce bureau' (72). She also recalls one of Bellune's expressions, 'se fondre dans le décor' (71), a significant refrain which returns in connection to Francis Jansen in *Chien de printemps*.

Finally, Odile's dream of singing is broken; she is fired from the nightclub where she has been performing and Vietti abandons her:

> Le rêve s'est cassé. Elle ne chantera plus. Elle n'a pas réussi à se faire entendre, sa voix ne s'est pas dégagée du brouillard et du vacarme comme la voix de cette chanteuse dont elle avait lu l'histoire. (96)

For different reasons, both Odile and Bellune abandon music. Odile dreams of escaping the sense of impotence and voicelessness she feels and manages, with the help of Bellune, to sing briefly, only to see the dream ruined. Her loss is, however, on a vastly different scale. For Bellune, silence comes in the form of exile and his career being severed due to the greater forces of history, which are eventually too much to bear and result in the ultimate silence of suicide.

Towards Silence in Photography

There are several photographers in Modiano's work, from the protagonist of *Dimanches d'août*, a former photographer, who describes other practitioners of the art as 'gardiens de la mémoire' (90), to the ambulant photographer who appears in *Dora Bruder* selling 'photos souvenirs' (8) and also appears, looking ever more worn out in *Paris Tendresse* (42), and Walter in *Des inconnues,* who 'voulait faire un reportage sur les gens qui disparaissent à Paris' (53). For Jean-Bernard Vray, 'Toutes ces entreprises photographiques ont un point commun : sauver de l'oubli' (357). This is partially what motivates the photographer Jansen in *Chien de printemps.* This short novel centres on the fictional character Francis Jansen, protégé and colleague of the photographer Robert Capa.[56] Jansen is befriended by the narrator, a young unnamed writer, who, some years later, recounts their brief friendship up until Jansen's disappearance.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the protagonist acknowledges the merit of Jansen's work for saving and preserving something of the past. Even though his friend has been killed, Jansen photographs the apartment block where he lived, 'pour que soit au moins fixé sur une pellicule le lieu où avaient habité son camarade et ses proches' (*CdP* 110), and evidently, the desire to create a permanent record is integral to the pursuit of photography. Barthes' *Camera Lucida* seeks to determine what it is about photography that distinguishes it from other art forms and sets out his theory of the

[56] Robert Capa (1913–1954) was a Hungarian-born photographer who studied in Berlin. With the rise of Nazism, he left Germany for Paris in 1933 and, at the outbreak of the Second World War, he moved to North America and later founded Magnum with Henri Cartier-Bresson, David 'Chim' Seymour and George Rodger. He was killed by a mine while covering the first Indochina war.

studium and punctum. In this work, he notes that, a photograph itself is impermanent and perishable:

> Not only does it commonly have the fate of paper (perishable), but even if it is attached to more lasting supports, it is still mortal: like a living organism, it is born on the level of the sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages... Attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes; there is nothing left to do but throw it away. (93)

Modiano is abundantly aware of this materiality, as seen through the imagery of decaying film and memory discussed above. And here, Jansen's photograph of the apartment has the effect of making the absence of the space's former occupants even more poignant: 'Mais la cour, le square et les immeubles déserts sous le soleil rendaient encore plus irrémédiable leur absence' (110). Jean-Bernard Vray astutely remarks that, '[d]'une manière générale, dans l'univers modianien, la photographie devient « certificat d'absence » pour inverser le propos de Roland Barthes sur la photographie comme « certificat de présence »' (367). For Barthes, this 'certificat de présence' heralds a new relationship with history; he suggests that the curious resistance we have to the past, except in the form of myth, is arrested by the proof of photography—'henceforth the past is as certain as the present' (88)—and of course this includes the presentation or proof of absence. Reflecting on Alexander Gardner's photograph of Lewis Payne before he was hanged, Barthes, struck by the horror of the 'anterior future of which death is at stake', adds that, '[w]hether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe' (96). In the case of Jansen's photograph of the apartment, the tangible artefact is meant to preserve something of his friend's memory, yet it ends up presenting his death more saliently, holding it up as proof of their absence. Furthermore, the photograph is itself subject

to decay and dissolution, a paradox that obliquely yet insistently questions the central purpose of the art form.

Jansen interrogates the use of photography in other ways, and while his practice is firmly attached to memory and preservation, it is not a straightforward relationship. Jansen peels off layers of posters in the street, photographing them as he goes, until there is nothing left; thus, in order to make a record of them and preserve them, essentially he has to destroy them:

> Il m'avait expliqué qu'il lacérait lui-même les affiches dans les rues pour qu'apparaissent celles que les plus récentes avaient recouvertes. Il décollait leurs lambeaux couche par couche et les photographiait au fur et à mesure avec minutie, jusqu'aux derniers fragments de papier qui subsistaient sur la planche ou la pierre. (36)

The role of the photographer figures as one of the text's central concerns, which is where things become increasingly complex in terms of the artist disappearing into or merging with their art form. For Jansen, the best way to take photographs is to be as discreet as possible and to efface oneself as as much as possible, merging with the environment that is or that surrounds the subject of the photograph:

> Il pensait qu'un photographe n'est rien, qu'il doit se fondre dans le décor et devenir invisible pour mieux travailler et capter—comme il disait—la lumière naturelle. (113)

For Jansen, 'se fondre dans le décor' is akin to being so silent, still and unobtrusive as to approach a state of invisibility. At one point he says that as a photographer, you have to 'prendre les choses en douceur et en silence sinon elles se rétractent' (99), a sentiment that is reiterated in different formulations in subsequent works, emphasising the need to allow things to happen at their own pace, and to accept the

silence of others: 'Plutôt que de toujours soumettre les autres à un interrogatoire, il vaut mieux les prendre en silence tels qu'ils sont' (*HN* 66).

The phrase 'se fondre dans le décor' is repeated time and again, not only in *Chien de printemps,* but in other novels. As well as appearing in the context of Odile's attempt to disengage from her degrading ordeal in *Une jeunesse,* discussed above, the phrase appears in *Accident nocturne.* The narrator wonders if he has given too much away by pronouncing the name Jacqueline Beausergent out loud and concludes:

> Il faut attendre que les autres viennent à vous d'un mouvement naturel. Pas de gestes trop brusques. Rester immobile et silencieux et se fondre dans le décor. (115)

For Barthes, '[t]he photographer's "second sight" does not consist in "seeing" but in being there' (47), which chimes with Jansen's desire to let things come to him and to merge into the background. For Barthes, the punctum, a detail that reaches out of the image and 'wounds' the viewer, is not necessarily intentional or a product of the photographer's artistry, but has more to do with chance, putting oneself in the right place and being available (27).

Jansen's story is never fully told, and he has a singular and intriguing relationship with silence; as well as revering it in his art practice, he yearns for amnesia, for his memory to be erased, to be silenced: 'Il aurait voulu oublier « tout ça », être frappé d'amnésie…' (25). But as readers, we never find out what it is that 'tout ça' is. After his disappearance, he is never heard from again, and the protagonist wonders if Jansen were to read the book written about him—the very book we are reading (possibly unsettling the reader with a sense of guilty voyeurism having broken his desired silence)—he might receive a note with a simple instruction: 'TAISEZ-VOUS' (20). But he concludes that he'd surely not even receive that because, in his view, Jansen had perfected the art of silence:

> Mais non, je ne recevrais rien. Il me suffit de regarder l'une de ses photos pour retrouver la qualité qu'il possédait dans son art et dans la vie et qui est si précieuse mais si difficile à acquérir : garder le silence. (20)

Jansen was able to create silence both in his photographs, images that come from and instil a sense of visual silence, and personally, through his own devotion to reticence and non-disclosure, as well as his eventual unannounced disappearance.

However, the narrator may not have fully understood what silence meant to Jansen at the time; some three years later, he receives the news that his first manuscript will be published, and wonders what Jansen would have made of it, surmising that he would surely judge the book too wordy or garrulous: 'Je n'avais pas respecté les consignes de silence qu'il m'avait données le jour où nous avons parlé de la littérature. ll aurait sans doute jugé tout cela trop bavard' (109). Barthes describes the delayed effect of the punctum: 'Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the punctum should be revealed only after the fact' (53). The narrator picks up one of Jansen's albums, *Neige et Soleil,* whereupon he is struck by what in Barthes' idiom is the photographs' punctum:

> À mesure que je tournais les pages, je ressentais de plus en plus ce que Jansen avait voulu communiquer et qu'il m'avait mis gentiment au défi de suggérer moi aussi avec les mots : le silence. (109)

Barthes describes the sensation of being touched, wounded by the detail of the punctum, as 'il a provoqué en moi un petit ébranlement, un *satori*, le passage d'un vide' (80-81), and this appears to be how it affects the narrator, looking at the photograph some years later: 'A travers cette neige et ce soleil, transparaissaient un vide, une absence' (111). It is this void and absence that Jansen, intentionally or otherwise, silently transmits to the viewer, from across a temporal divide.

Barthes makes a case for photographs being silent: 'la photographie doit être silencieuse (il y a des photos tonitruantes, je ne les aime pas) : ce n'est pas une question de « discrétion », mais de musique' (88). He also advocates that photographs should be regarded in an attitude so silent that one must close one's eyes:

> La subjectivité absolue ne s'atteint que dans un état, un effort de silence (fermer les yeux, c'est faire parler l'image dans le silence). La photo me touche si je la retire de son bla-bla ordinaire : *'Technique'*, *'Réalité'*, *'Reportage'*, *'Art'*, etc. : ne rien dire, fermer les yeux, laisser le détail remonter seul à la conscience affective.' (88-89)

Barthes situates silence as a component of art on the part of the creator, as well as part of an ideal approach on part of the receiver, and Jansen's practice exemplifies some of these theoretical notions.

The old adage holds that a picture is worth a thousand words, but what if the words themselves are drawn to silence? Various interactions with silence in relation to film, music, and photography can be seen as analogues for Modiano's ongoing background meditation on silence in the literary project. I now turn to examine the place occupied by silence in its relationships with writing, language and literature.

Towards Silence in Language

In the examples of Gascogne, Bellune and Jansen, we observe inclinations towards different forms of silence, and in the case of the literary project, a germane force can be seen to affect some of the writers in Modiano's novels. However, in the case study I present here, the draw towards silence is of an altogether different order; the writer is drawn towards and through language, but then into a form of disappearance

through the silent face of language. In 'The Retreat from the Word', Steiner argues that the ultimate form of contemplation is reached only when language is left behind, that '[i]t is only by breaking through the walls of language that visionary observance can enter the world of total and immediate understanding' (30). We can see that this conception of silence goes beyond the relatively simple notion of silence within language, the silence of non-expression, and constitutes a rather more fundamental turning away from language.

Jansen's Challenge: Write Silence

As Jansen and the aspiring writer in *Chien de printemps* discuss the latter's ambition to become a writer, Jansen says he sees this as an impossible activity, a squaring of the circle (21), because to write, one has to use words, and for Jansen, silence is the goal:

> Une photographie peut exprimer le silence. Mais les mots ? Voilà ce qui aurait été intéressant à son avis : réussir à créer le silence avec des mots. Il avait éclaté de rire : Alors, vous allez essayer de faire ça ? Je compte sur vous. (21)

Somewhat flippantly, Jansen sets the paradoxical challenge to write silence with words, and nothing more is said of it or the subject of writing in general until the penultimate fragment, which contains one of the most singular and enigmatic scenes in Modiano's work. Having just been struck by the piercing silent punctum of Jansen's photographs, the newly published writer undergoes a process, through the medium of language, that leads into a form of abstract annihilation.

The fragment opens with 'Il pensait qu'un photographe n'est rien' and Jansen's refrain 'se fondre dans le décor' (113) circling through the narrator's mind

as he walks around the Jardin du Luxembourg, absorbed by the notion of vanishing into a scene or completely disappearing. He wanders among the crowds, listening to idle, innocuous chatter: 'J'étais heureux de me perdre dans cette foule et–selon l'expression de Jansen–me fondre dans le décor' (115). He sits on a bench next to two women, overhears their conversation and is lulled and soothed by their words: 'leurs paroles me berçaient' (116). At first, he tries to make sense of what the women say, then he is struck with a feeling of torpor and the words begin to detach themselves from the story they tell:

> Au début, j'essayais de concentrer mon attention sur ce qu'elles disaient et de recueillir quelques détails qui me serviraient de points de repère . . . J'étais frappé d'une somnolence. Des mots me parvenaient encore à travers un brouillard ensoleillé . . . les paroles de mes voisines n'étaient maintenant à mes oreilles que des onomatopées. (116-117)

As the voices get further and further away, he is gently distanced from the physical world around him and words lose their attachment to denoted meaning, reaching into a place of semantic silence. This triggers a process of gradual disengagement that is aestheticised and experienced as unexpected and strange, but undoubtedly positive. It is important to note that this takes place just after the narrator has learned that his first novel will be published and has revisited Jansen's photographs, finally understanding what Jansen meant when he challenged him to write silence. As in the case of the young woman in *Des inconnues*, the sense of attachment to the world is predicated on common language, and it is silence in the form of linguistic and semantic disconnection that she reaches towards. Likewise, Odile and Louis recognise that with a new language comes the possibility of a new life and a fresh start. In a London pub they hear a foreign language being spoken: 'Et ils étaient contents d'entendre aux tables voisines une langue étrangère qu'ils connaîtraient

bientôt et parleraient entre eux, avec l'impression de commencer une nouvelle vie' (*UJ* 138). A few years after the publication of *Une jeunesse,* Modiano expressed a similar statement about the link between language and identity: 'Pour recommencer sa vie le seul moyen c'est de ne plus parler sa langue maternelle' (Chapsal 58).

Towards the conclusion of 'Le Mythe de Mallarmé', Blanchot asks, 'À quoi tend l'écriture ?', to which he responds, quoting Mallarmé himself:

> A nous libérer de ce qui est. Et ce qui est, c'est tout, mais c'est d'abord la présence des 'choses solides et prépondérantes', tout ce qui pour nous marque le domaine du monde objectif. (46)

If we are to interpret the Jardin du Luxembourg scene as an analogy for the process of writing, it is interesting to examine it in light of Blanchot's statement that writing serves to 'free us from what is'. We can see that for Modiano, silence can be embedded within language; a character from *Des inconnues* reads slowly to the group, making room even for the silences: 'Gianni lisait de plus en plus lentement. Il laissait des silences entre les phrases, si bien que ce texte prenait le rythme d'un poème' (167). For those listening, the effect is soothing, creating distance and freedom even in the realm of language.

Blanchot's statement comes at the close of the essay and it is instructive to trace his line of thought to understand how he arrived at this conclusion. Blanchot's writing on language and literature is deeply concerned with the notion of negativity and destruction, and this essay elaborates his thinking through his reading of Mallarmé and Valéry. He begins with a citation from Mallarmé:

> À quoi bon la merveille de transposer un fait de nature en sa presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de parole, cependant ; si ce n'est pour qu'émane, sans la gêne d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure. (37)

Blanchot interprets this as signifying that a word can only obtain meaning through the suppression or destruction of the thing named, thereby imbuing language with the function, even purpose, of making things disappear:

> Le mot n'a de sens que s'il nous débarrasse de l'objet qu'il nomme : il doit nous en épargner la présence ou 'le concret rappel'. Dans le langage authentique, la parole a une fonction, non seulement représentative, mais destructive. Elle fait *disparaître,* elle rend l'objet absent, elle l'annihile. (37)

This annihilation by naming is not literal, nor is it lasting; rather, it suppresses the object as an object in itself before immediately reviving and replacing it with the abstract idea of the object through the evocative power of language. This is what he and Mallarmé refer to as 'vibratory disappearance' (37), through which an object's pure essence emanates. Blanchot then incorporates silence into this theory of language, recognising its significance and difficulty it poses for those whose primary material is language:

> On sait que le silence a hanté le poète. Ce que l'on a quelquefois oublié c'est que ce silence ne marque pas pour lui l'échec de ses rêves, pas plus qu'il ne signifie un acquiescement à l'ineffable, une trahison du langage, un à quoi bon jeté à des ressources poétiques trop inférieures à l'idéal. Le silence est sans doute toujours présent comme la seule exigence qui vaille. (41-42)

Blanchot argues that silence is not language's ultimate end, nor is it the opposite of language. Rather, silence is implied by language and, moreover, it is its precondition:

> Mais moins d'apparaitre l'opposé des mots, il est au contraire supposé par les mots, et comme le parti pris, leur intention secrète, plus encore la condition de la parole, si parler c'est remplacer une présence par une absence et, à travers des présences de plus en plus fragiles, poursuivre une absence qui est toute la

> vertu de parler (qui est elle-même notre pouvoir de donner un sens, de nous séparer des choses pour les signifier). (41-42)

This illuminates how the writer in *Chien de printemps* is liberated from the world and reaches towards silence, since it is 'la seule exigence qui vaille'. This takes place through a systematic disengagement from the world as language, from the objective world and 'la présence des « choses solides et prépondérantes »', in order to reach towards the true purpose of literature:

> La littérature a pour loi ce mouvement vers autre chose, vers un *au-delà* qui pourtant nous échappe, puisqu'il ne peut être, et dont nous ne saisissons 'chez nous' que 'le conscient manqué'. C'est donc ce manque, ce vide, cet espace vacant qui est l'objet et la création propre du langage. (46)

Jansen says that you have to 'prendre les choses en douceur et en silence sinon elles se rétractent' (99); this category of silence prevents the objects he photographs from withdrawing or disappearing, or more precisely, it is only in silence that they can continue to exist. Their ontological status and preservation are contingent not only upon a gentle approach but equally upon the preservation of silence. It is understood within Blanchot's theory that naming destroys, and here we see that Jansen's rare ability to 'garder le silence' suggests that he is able to silently, wordlessly, capture the essence of objects without annihilating them in themselves or transforming them into abstractions of themselves.

Negation of Language to Negation of Writer

In the Jardin du Luxembourg scene, the process continues, with words separating from meaning, the signifier detaching from the signified, and the reality of the world

unravelling. Then the process turns inwards, and the writer too becomes separated from his sense of self in a process that is deeply entwined with language:

> J'étais presque soulagé de cette perte progressive d'identité. Je percevais encore quelques mots, les voix des deux femmes devenaient plus douces, plus lointaines . . . J'allais disparaître dans ce jardin . . . Je perdais la mémoire et je ne comprenais plus très bien le français. (117)

The movement out of self and the release from the world are portrayed as entirely peaceful, even ecstatic, and involve with the loss of—or rather, the liberation from—identity and memory, the need for understanding, and the effort of language, the very medium of his craft:

> Les efforts que j'avais fournis depuis trente ans pour exercer un métier, donner une cohérence à ma vie, tâcher de parler et d'écrire une langue le mieux possible afin d'être bien sûr de ma nationalité, toute cette tension se relâchait brusquement. C'était fini. Je n'étais plus rien. (117)

Similarly, Blanchot describes how the negativity and the destructive power of language turn back on those who use language:

> On dirait que, du fait que l'homme parle et, par la parole, donne un sens nouveau au monde, l'homme est déjà mort, est, du moins, en instance de mourir et, par le silence qui lui permet de parler, tenté à chaque instant de faire défaut à lui-même et à toutes choses. (48)

The narrator finally breaches the ultimate divide, and seemingly succeeds in 'blending into the background', evaporating into the air and leaving nothing more than his raincoat: 'À la fermeture des grilles, il ne resterait de moi que l'imperméable que je portais, roulé en boule, sur un banc' (117). The imagery of the sentence goes from closure to closure, from 'fermeture' and 'grilles' to the enclosure of 'roulé en

boule', to the negation 'ne … que', and the phrase ends with 'banc' which is phonetically so close to 'blanc'.

Jansen is a mentor and role model for the young writer, but ultimately his example is not followed to its conclusion of complete severance and disappearance. This is where we see the tension between the desire to transcend completely, and the desire to reveal, the same tension between expression and silence that is played out in all of Modiano's novels, and here in the field of artistic creation. The protagonist talks of his desire to 'briser cette couche de silence et d'amnésie' (43), whereas Jansen longs to be 'frappé par l'amnésie' (25). But both are complicated desires and the will alone cannot give access to memory:

> j'éprouve le besoin de retenir les silhouettes qui m'échappent et de les fixer comme sur une photographie. Mais, après un si grand nombre d'années, les contours s'estompent, un doute de plus en plus insidieux corrode les visages. (70)

For Morris, the tension based on the 'construction/destruction' (2000, 85) dialectic lies at the heart of Modiano's work. Indeed, it is through it that Modiano succeeds in meeting Jansen's challenge:

> Modiano a sciemment relevé le défi de Jansen—il a bel et bien réussi à 'créer le silence avec des mots'. De plus, ce faisant, il a de nouveau (mais de façon plus fondamentale) imbriqué présence et absence, plénitude et vide. Bref, il est parvenu à faire 'la quadrature du cercle', à écrire des textes qui *sont* et qui *ne sont pas*, des textes qui *sont ce qu'ils ne sont pas*'. (86)

The question then is not whether to obey the 'TAISEZ-VOUS' (20) instruction, but how to attain a different, productive silence. The scene in the Jardin du Luxembourg suggests that this kind of silence is not one of renunciation, as represented by Jansen's withdrawal, but is, rather, a sublimation and porousness, which allow one

to be permeated by the 'vibratory disappearance' of language and the world, and to dissolve into it, that is, to reach silence *within* art, rather than silence as a renunciation of art. In 'Silences de Flaubert', Genette cites Flaubert's desire to 'mourir au monde pour entrer en littérature' (242). But the death, as Genette sees it, has to be of language rather than the writer:

> Mais le langage même ne se fait littérature qu'au prix de sa propre mort, puisqu'il lui faut perdre son sens pour accéder au silence de l'œuvre. Ce retournement, ce renvoi du discours à son envers silencieux, qui est, pour nous, aujourd'hui, la littérature même, Flaubert a été bien évidemment, le premier à l'entreprendre. (242)

In her study of the principal movements and characteristics of the French novel from 1830 to 2003, Aline Mura-Brunel supports this, claiming that [l]e silence est devenu objet du désir romanesque ; il est peut-être aussi le fil qui favorise l'investigation d'un champ littéraire spécifique' (8). For Genette, Flaubert reaches silence through his abandonment to detail, when he momentarily forgets his characters and their predicaments to indulge in pure description, such as that of a door that slams shut and is said to 'vibre[r], *interminablement*' (241). Interestingly, it is described in the same idiom by Blanchot; it is in the 'vibration' that silence resounds: 'cette vibration qui s'interpose entre un réseau de signes et un univers de sens, défait un langage et instaure un silence' (*La part* 241).

Some Modiano scholars such as Damamme-Gilbert and Tritsmans, argue that silence in *Chien de printemps* is essentially negative. Tritsmans sees it as a malign obsession that represents a threat of artistic death, the negativity of which the two protagonists manage to transform into something of value through the process of aestheticisation:

> À la menace d'effondrement, Jansen superpose, en guise d'ultime échappatoire, une esthétisation du silence, qu'il revendique comme une attitude délibérée. . . . Le silence est ici paradoxalement présenté comme une technique qui permet d'éviter la disparition des choses, et Jansen déconstruit ainsi le rapport fondamental entre silence et négativité. ('Poétiques' 642)

The deconstruction of the relationship between negativity and silence is certainly the first stage of what is at play. Beyond this, however, the ontological repercussions of the statement are, as I see it, far more radical than a simple 'paradoxical presentation'. The representation of silence as artistic death or termination is only threatening in an abstracted sense. It is true that Capa died in the physical sense while working, and Jansen disappears, his fate unknown. However, from the outset, silence, symbolised as death or dissolution, exerts a strong and positive magnetism that both the narrator and Jansen are mesmerised by and drawn to. It would seem that the dynamic is not one of an increasing fear of silence over time, but rather, a dynamic of multiple silences which are layered and synchronous, the artistic trajectory of the narrator being fundamentally dissimilar to that of Capa and Jansen.

An End to Writing

A significant proportion of Modiano's protagonists or main characters are writers. Some renounce the practice altogether, or transform the way they write to align their art more closely with its greater purpose. *Vestiaire de l'enfance* was published in 1989, shortly after Modiano came across the missing-person notice for Dora Bruder. The eponymous text, as discussed in Chapter 3, is concerned with the ethics and aesthetics of bearing witness. The protagonist Jimmy Sarano (whose real name is

Jean Moreno) is a former novelist who has abandoned literature in favour of writing for a radio programme at Radio-Mundial, a serial, *Aventures de Louis XVII,* as well as *Appels dans la nuit,* which involves reading out a collection of unrelated details noted down over decades. On the topic of writing, Sarano says:

> Alors, je comprends pourquoi je ne peux plus écrire de romans, pourquoi j'ai renoncé à la littérature. Écrire désormais, ce sera remplir des cahiers comme les trois précédents, avec tous ces détails hétéroclites et oubliés qu'un speaker lit d'une voix précise. (52)

Sarano explains that he 'exiled' himself at Radio-Mundial to try to 'm'alléger d'un poids qui augmentait au fil des années et d'un sentiment de culpabilité que j'essayais d'exprimer dans mes livres' (51). Renouncing literature seems to have effectively, although temporarily, removed the weight, replacing it with a void: 'Maintenant, je ne rêve plus à rien' (52). The voices of the presenters who read his announcements are 'limpides et se détachent sur un silence pur du moindre parasite' (52), which suggests that this, in comparison to literature, has greater austerity and purity. The sparse list-like announcements he writes up are linked to a deep-seated desire to reunite things that have become separated. They express a profound effort to achieve connectedness and reparation, further evidenced by the patient waiting for a letter or call from a listener to provide the missing detail to link up the lost fragments. This shift to a highly condensed, abstracted writing made up of fragments, with no connecting narrative and stripped of context, is paradoxically part of the effort to reunify and reconnect.

There is a diametric force at play, however, and again the tension between silence (of his past and writing) and recovery and communication (through the 'appels', among others) is played out both in the principal narrative, as well as in other oblique ways: Jimmy sees an aeroplane overhead and thinks it might be one of

the old mail planes, forgotten in a hangar for half a century, filled with bags of letters that a pilot is finally delivering, expressing a longing for connection (91). However, the same aeroplane prevents him from hearing his interlocutor: 'le bourdonnement de l'avion de l'Aéropostale qui passait de nouveau au-dessus de nous, à très basse altitude, étouffait sa voix' (92); the opposite poles of achieving and failing communication are very much entwined. Neither solution prevails; rather, we get a sense of immobility and that time passing doesn't equal progress in any direction: 'En cinq ans, je n'avais fait que traverser la rue' (73).

Later, Jimmy Sarano prepares to write an episode of *Aventures de Louis XVII,* saying it will be easy since he recently purchased some old novels and plans simply to copy out entire chapters: 'Ainsi ai-je réalisé ce rêve : ne plus écrire, mais recopier' (71). This recalls Barthes' seemingly contradictory vision in *Degré zéro*: 'l'absence de tout signe, proposant enfin l'accomplissement de ce rêve orphéen : un écrivain sans Littérature' (12). While neither expressed a desire for the end of writing altogether, there is a suppression or silencing of its creative element; it is reduced to its most mechanical component to render it somehow lighter or liberated from part of its labour.

In an interview, Modiano was asked about his admiration for writers who gave up writing completely:

> Je me disais, c'est formidable, ils ont trouvé la paix de l'âme. Parce que, dans ma naïveté, j'imaginais qu'ils étaient libérés, qu'ils avaient écrit la chose et puis voilà, c'était liquidé, ils n'avaient plus envie de... Ça, ça me fascinait. Je rêvais de ne plus avoir cette espèce d'insatisfaction, que ce soit une page tournée. Comme quelqu'un qui se désintoxique. J'avais l'impression que si j'avais écrit tel livre, cela m'aurait comblé et que tout serait liquidé. Comme quelqu'un qui est comblé. (Liban 2003)

Modiano had long realised long before the interview that stopping writing was not necessarily a consequence of attaining peace. On the contrary, the notion that writing might have the power to put things to rest has continued to surface across his work, and is discussed in the following section.

Writing to Make Disappear

In Modiano's work, among ideas expressed on the project of writing, whether it be in order to confide, relay or stake out space for the unsayable and unutterable, the conviction or hope that by writing something down, it will be put to rest, is expressed through certain characters. In the prologue to *Encres orphelines,* Laurent Demanze cites Michel de Certeau—'raconter est une manière de mettre au tombeau et de délaisser cela même qu'on veut pieusement recueillir' (16-17)—suggesting that recounting or writing can act as a form of burial or letting go. One of the most incisive statements to this effect is found in *Un pedigree*:

> J'écris ces pages comme on rédige un constat ou un curriculum vitae, à titre documentaire et sans doute pour en finir avec une vie qui n'était pas la mienne. Il ne s'agit que d'une simple pellicule de faits et gestes. (44-45)

It is widely agreed that *Un pedigree* is written in a more personal, non-fictional framework. In interviews too, Modiano makes claims regarding a similar process in his fictional work: 'C'est le miracle de la fiction, je m'en sers pour vaporiser certains moments, certains lieux de ma jeunesse, oui, c'est le mot, vaporiser' (Garcin 'Paris'), vapour bringing together the characteristics of lightness and immateriality.

Not long after the *Lire* interview in 2003, Modiano published *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue,* in which the central character, Louki, is questioned by a police officer, and divulges everything:

> Et moi, j'éprouvais une sensation nouvelle : à mesure que je lui donnais tous ces pauvres détails, j'étais débarrassée d'un poids. Cela ne me concernait plus, je parlais de quelqu'un d'autre et j'étais soulagée de voir qu'il prenait des notes. Si tout était écrit noir sur blanc, cela voulait dire que c'était fini, comme sur les tombes où sont gravés des noms et des dates. (77)

Louki feels a weight lifting as she speaks and feels that she in undergoing a process of expunging through her words being written down by the officer. She experiences a sensation of renewal, and, to go even further, wants her recorded testimony to be crossed out and deleted even more definitively: 'Tout commencerait à partir d'aujourd'hui, et pour bien prendre mon élan, j'aurais préféré qu'il raye ce qu'il venait d'écrire' (77).

In *L'herbe des nuits*, rather than writing acting as a form of silencing, certain details are deliberately withheld from the page for fear of losing hold of them:

> Je n'avais noté ni le nom ni l'adresse sur le carnet noir, comme on évite d'écrire les détails trop intimes de notre vie, de crainte qu'une fois fixés sur le papier ils ne nous appartiennent plus. (33)

It is not only writers or speakers who experience the silencing effect of giving something linguistic or literary form. Further on, the protagonist senses a level of suspicion on the part of those who fear that they might be robbed by writers gleaning from their lives:

> j'avais le sentiment que les gens se méfiaient de vous s'ils se rendaient compte que vous écriviez là, tout seul dans votre coin. Ils craignaient sans doute que vous leur voliez quelque chose, leurs paroles, des morceaux de leur vie. (81-82)

Similarly, the writer-protagonist in *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* avoids putting certain details into fiction unless they are disguised or transformed in some way, again because in entering fiction, they risk slipping away:

> Il n'avait jamais compris que l'on introduise dans un roman un être qui avait compté pour vous. Une fois qu'il s'était glissé dans le roman comme on traverse un miroir, il vous échappait pour toujours. Il n'avait jamais existé dans la vraie vie. On l'avait réduit à néant. (70)

Finally, in *Souvenirs dormants*, the narrator makes an intertextual reference to an earlier novel:

> La veille, il s'était passé un événement auquel j'ai fait allusion vingt ans plus tard, en 1985, dans un chapitre de roman. C'était une manière de me débarrasser d'un poids, d'écrire noir sur blanc une sorte de demi-aveu. (74)

It seems most probable that this event, written down to exorcise it, refers to the shooting of Ludo F. in *Quartier perdu.* The protagonist describes the process of mixing real-life details with fiction in order to dissimulate them and silence them for good:

> Le seul moyen de désamorcer définitivement ce mince dossier, c'est d'en recopier des extraits et de les mêler aux pages d'un roman comme je l'ai fait il y a trente ans. Ainsi, on ne saura pas s'ils appartiennent à la réalité ou au domaine du rêve. Aujourd'hui, 10 mars 2017, j'ai ouvert de nouveau la chemise vert pâle, j'ai ôté le trombone qui a laissé une tache de rouille sur le premier feuillet et, avant de déchirer le tout et de n'en laisser aucune trace matérielle, je recopie quelques phrases et j'en aurai fini. (96-97)

These cases explore the possibility of abstraction or burial through words, both spoken and written, giving voice to the desire to reach silence via lexical

formulation. Nevertheless, situating silence as the ultimate goal is only one avenue, and, as we will see, the return to language often exerts a far stronger magnetism.

The Return to Language

In 'Le Paradoxe d'Aytré', Blanchot returns to what he calls 'le mythe de Mallarmé' (69), the idea that in 'authentic' language a word is not the expression of a thing, but the absence thereof, which, he argues, is the very foundation of poetry. The word's power of representation is what creates a distance between the thing and its name, and it is in this space, that creation can occur. The object, made absent, is immediately summoned in the form of an abstracted idea. Following this, if the absence is to be maintained, another word must be substituted for the word, one that distances it, and another for this word that flees from it, and then another for this last one. For Blanchot, it is through this movement that the realm of images is entered, each image being unstable and fleeting, made of allusion and transition occurring in an endless trajectory. This infinite series of passing images works its way into pure poetry, which rests not on the world and the concrete objects therein, but on words themselves, their rhythm and liaison, making a totality that rests only on itself.

Blanchot concedes that this is contradictory, impossible and unattainable. The process would entain a vibrating suppression of each thing as it is named, a series of pure absences, and, taken to the extreme, would be the absence of language itself. Mallarmé also sees it as a delusion, but believes it is the effort of true poetry to tend towards this contradictory, unattainable place (70). Blanchot cites Mallarmé: '« le silence, seul luxe après les rimes », « c'est au poète, suscité par un défi, de *le* traduire »' (72). In this he sees a certain logic: the absence that each word creates is

directly linked to its power to signify the thing it has made absent. Therefore, silence, far from being the opposite of language, is already present in its most simple operation; silence is at once language's prerequisite and destination.

Yet silence cannot be the ultimate endpoint; even though, as Blanchot sees it, the task is to 'proférer tout et tout réduire au silence, même le silence', as we have seen, the word destroys then restores, and we are returned to language: 'Mais le silence, grâce auquel nous parlons, nous ramène au langage' (48). In the final fragment of *Chien de printemps,* the narrator recounts how Jansen went to the Belgian and Italian consulates to get a copy of his passport and after some confusion, the papers of another Francis Jansen were sent, but this Francis Jansen was dead. The narrator later finds some handwritten details next to Jansen's telephone when he returns to his abandoned studio. The other Jansen was deported from Fossoli in 1944 and died 'in luogo e data ignoti' (120). This is one of the rare instances when one of Modiano's narrators has the feeling that his interlocutor 'voulait me confier quelque chose' and his interlocutor ends up actually doing so. It is patently difficult for Jansen to confide: 'Enfin il s'était résolu à parler, mais avec une telle réticence que ses propos étaient embrouillés et que l'on aurait dit qu'il avait de la peine à s'exprimer en français' (119-120). The cards fall, only just, on the side of telling and sharing rather than silencing 'tout ça' (25). He takes refuge in silence through his renunciation of his art and his disappearance but also returns to language, by divulging and sharing part of his burden.

In terms of Modiano's literary project more broadly, the same conclusion—to return time and again to language, to writing, to creating—is confirmed. This may not just be down to a desire to to get the story right rather than a desire just to confide. In a recent interview Modiano described his need to return to writing after finishing each book:

> J'avais toujours l'impression qu'au fur… quand j'écrivais un livre j'avais un sentiment d'insatisfaction quand je l'avais fini donc quand je réécrivais un autre livre à la suite j'avais l'impression que ça allait un peu rectifier le tir que.... (Calvi 10:03)

This draw towards silence ties into the notion of the unsayable, in terms of singular personal histories, the history of Europe in the twentieth century and that of humanity in a larger sense, especially given the fundamentally scriptural foundations of Western culture. Jansen's story touches on the horrors of the Second World War very briefly, yet the gaping void at the centre of this character points unequivocally to the war. Entwined in Jansen's story is the reference to Modiano's loss of his brother and his ongoing connection with his death: 'un frère, un double est mort à notre place . . . et son ombre finit par se confondre avec nous' (121). The pain and magnitude of these events are simply unimaginable and unutterable—there are no words for them—yet they are gestured towards. Silent spaces are carved out within Modiano's literature, wherein their ineffable significance vibrates. In this sense, they can be considered eloquent silences, part of writing that points to its own limitations. Emmanuel Levinas, a friend and collaborator of Blanchot, wrote in his essay 'On Blanchot: The Poet's Vision', here in translation by Michael B. Smith:

> The essence of art, from this perspective, is the passage from language to the ineffable that says itself, the making visible of the obscurity of the elemental through the work. . . . Thus literature casts us upon a shore where no thought can land—it lets out onto the unthinkable. (133-134)

In a key passage in *Vestiaire de l'enfance,* Jimmy Sarano tries to name that which is unnameable:

> La sensation de vide m'a envahi, encore plus violente que d'habitude. . . . De tout ce que j'ai pu éprouver au cours des années où j'écrivais mes livres à

> Paris, cette impression d'absence et de vide est la plus forte. Elle est comme un halo de lumière blanche qui m'empêche de distinguer les autres détails de ma vie de cette époque-là et qui brouille mes souvenirs. Aujourd'hui, je sais la manière de surmonter ce vertige. Il faut que je me répète doucement à moi-même mon nouveau nom : Jimmy Sarano, . . . bref, que je m'agrippe à tous ces points de repère pour ne pas me laisser aspirer par ce que je ne peux nommer autrement que : le vide. (101)

This takes place in the eleventh section, after Jimmy Sarano is recognised by a journalist who addresses him by his real name, the one he was published under: Jean Moreno. He tries to evade the journalist who asks, point blank, if 'la nuit de l'accident' he was involved in was 'un crime ou tout simplement un cas banal de non-assistance à personne en danger ?' (98). After this troubling scene in which his past is brutally resurfaced, the sensation of emptiness overwhelms him. In order to resist it, he repeats simple, everyday words to ground himself. This is his usual technique to resist the vertigo of 'le vide'. However, this time, his efforts aren't sufficient:

> J'avais beau me répéter cela de plus en plus fort, ma voix, mes activités quotidiennes, ma vie se diluaient dans le silence et le soleil de cette ville morte. (102)

His past is summoned suddenly when his real name, the one he had successfully kept silent for so long, is pronounced out loud. The language and simple naming which normally combat the consequent sensation of emptiness, are of no use, and silence appears as a threatening place of dispersal and dissolution. The scene rehearses the tension at play between, on the one hand, the positive and safe aspects of silence, and its hostile, negative ones on the other.

The young woman, Marie, who reminds him of someone from his youth, awakens the desire to unearth the past. He has a suitcase full of documents and papers from his 'past life' and he wonders for the first time if he should open it there in the hope of finding something that might help him identify the young woman. But his efforts are vain:

> Mais à peine avais-je traîné cette valise de cuir vert au milieu de ma chambre que le découragement m'a envahi. Non, je ne sentais pas la force de compulser toutes ces archives. (42)

He decides to lie down on the terrace and '[s]e laisser engourdir par les bruits de la rue' (42-3). The noise contrasts with the silence of the opening pages that led him 'à la réflexion' (12). He recalls Carlos Sirvent questioning why one would be dragged into the past when one could live in an eternal present. He lets himself be lulled by the sounds of the street, the 'voix sourde' of Carlos Sirvent reading Jimmy's work translated into Spanish. Eventually, Jimmy convinces himself that he was mistaken in thinking that Marie reminded him of someone from his past. Counterintuitively, sounds bring him back to a mundane, stagnant and safe reality and silence leads him back to thought, to doubt, to mystery and to the past. Thus, by remaining surrounded by benign, ambient sounds of the present, the past remains unassessed and silent.

Memory towards Silence

The pull towards silence is manifest in the various art forms discussed above, as well as through the interrogation of memory more generally. Time passing normally leads to more and more memories being forgotten, fading to silence, but this need

not necessarily be the case. In *Les abus de mémoire,* Todorov makes an alternative distinction between memory and forgetting:

> la mémoire ne s'oppose nullement à l'oubli. Les deux termes qui forment contraste sont l'*effacement* (l'oubli) et la *conservation* ; la mémoire est, toujours et nécessairement, une interaction des deux. La restitution intégrale du passé est une chose bien sûr impossible, et, par ailleurs, effrayante ; la mémoire, elle, est forcément une sélection. (14)

This suggests that although memory is susceptible to fading into silence over time, silence doesn't equal forgetting or obliteration, but is rather a reorienting, a reinscribing of effaced-but-present memory. Memory is subjective, but can also carry a deeply political aspect; Todorov states that no one has the right to 'empêcher le recouvrement de la mémoire' (16), citing Klarsfeld's *Mémorial des déportés juifs* as an example of recovery in action. However, unselective remembrance would be both impossible and undesirable, and Todorov recognises the right to silence: 'Il y aurait une infinie cruauté à rappeler sans cesse à quelqu'un les événements les plus douloureux de son passé : le droit à l'oubli existe aussi' (24). This is the case for Jimmy Sarano and his colleagues at Radio-Mundial, who maintain an environment of utmost discretion, never asking each other even the most trivial questions about their private lives: 'nous observons une si grande réserve entre nous' (50).

In Modiano's work there are instances of time both covering over memory, but there are also instances of faces, words and phrases resonating just as clearly across the years. In *Dimanches d'août*, time leads not to forgetting, but to increasing contrast:

> la lumière de cet été-là a subi une curieuse transformation avec le temps : loin de pâlir, comme les vieilles photos surexposées, les contrastes d'ombre et de soleil se sont accentués au point que je revois tout en noir et blanc. (38)

In other novels, colour is distorted and sound is suppressed over time:

> Le temps a enveloppé toutes ces choses d'une buée aux couleurs changeantes : tantôt vert pâle, tantôt bleu légèrement rosé. Une buée ? Non, un voile impossible à déchirer qui étouffe les bruits et au travers duquel je vois Yvonne et Meinthe mais je ne les entends plus. (*VT* 165)

In yet other novels, it only takes a single word or note of music to revive a memory:

> au détour d'une rue, en croisant un visage—et même il suffisait souvent d'un mot surpris dans une conversation ou d'une note de musique—, le nom, Annie Astrand, lui revenait en mémoire. (*PQ* 88)

But even though certain memories remain almost instantaneously accessible, they too are subject to the effect of silencing and fading over time: 'Mais c'était de plus en plus rare et de plus en plus bref, un signal lumineux qui s'éteignait aussitôt' (*PQ* 88).

Both in early and later works, we observe the desire to put unresolved memories to rest:

> Le monde auquel appartenaient ces gens réveillait des souvenirs d'enfance . . . Je les tire une dernière fois du néant avant qu'ils y retournent définitivement. (*FR* 134)
>
> Je me suis posé une dernière fois ces questions avant qu'elles ne se perdent sans réponses dans la nuit des temps. (*SD* 14)

Complicating the relationship between time, memory and silence further, there is also the inherited memory of past silence, which is interwoven into the present, the temporal layers co-existing:

> La ville était déserte, comme pour marquer l'absence de Dora. Depuis, le Paris où j'ai tenté de retrouver sa trace est demeuré aussi désert et silencieux que ce jour-là. Je marche à travers les rues vides. Pour moi elles le restent, même le

soir, à l'heure des embouteillages, quand les gens se pressent vers les bouches de métro. (*DB* 144)

Even amid the crowds and bustle, the poignant absence and silence of Dora continue to be present, powerfully persistent, resistant to the silence of oblivion, but entwined within an ever-present silence.

Dériver, disparaître, dissoudre

The movement towards silence and the disappearance of self not only concerns those involved in creative work, nor is it confined to a relationship with language. There are many characters, often the *papillon* characters discussed in Chapter 5, who feel they may evaporate or disappear, their lives being consumed in the tumult of the world or gently slipping into the ambient atmosphere. The third narrator of *Des inconnues* fears disappearing into the grey fabric of the city: 'je craignais de dériver, loin de mes derniers points de repère, et de me laisser peu à peu imprégner par ce gris, jusqu'à me confondre avec lui et oublier où j'habitais' (128). The impression of depletion and attrition can be seen elsewhere; at the outset of *De si braves garçons,* Edmond Claude's name is printed in miniscule letters on the poster for his theatre performance (27) and by the end, his name is all but invisible (176).

Disappearance is often positive, enabling a withdrawal from undesirable company. The young protagonist in *Livret de famille* starts to become invisible to those around him, which he welcomes: 'On ignorait complètement ma présence et j'en étais très heureux' (83). This marks the beginning of his dissociation from the group when they go hunting and his transformation into the hunted. Likewise, invisibility can mean safety. As the group is travelling to Mégève in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* Guy Roland remarks, 'Nous ne risquions rien. Nous devenions peu à peu

invisibles' (217), 'Peut-être finirions-nous par nous volatiliser' (218), which is what they want, since it is precisely this invisibility that facilitates their escape across the border. The evocation of a vaporous substance, one that is there but can't be seen, again denotes an absent presence. The protagonist of *Accident nocturne* also experiences a sense of his own insignificance and smallness instigated by the act of reading, and again the experience is positive, albeit for different reasons:

> À mesure que j'avançais dans les chapitres, je ne savais même plus pourquoi j'étais allongé sur ce lit, dans cette chambre d'hôtel. J'avais oublié où j'étais, dans quel pays, dans quelle ville, et cela n'avait plus d'importance. . . . Je n'étais rien dans cet infini, mais je pouvais enfin respirer. (*AN* 142-3)

Other characters experience the sense of disconnection differently, and for the protagonist of *Du plus loin de l'oubli,* the thought of a completely blank memory and identity does not evoke fear, but rather a certain sense of remorse:

> Les liens qui me rattachaient au présent s'étiraient de plus en plus. Cela aurait été vraiment dommage de finir sur ce banc dans une sorte d'amnésie et de perte progressive d'identité et de ne pas pouvoir indiquer au passants mon domicile. (136)

Fortunately, he has his birth certificate with him, which reassurea him. It is noteworthy that he ascribes the feeling of drifting to the fact that he hasn't spoken to anyone for some time. One of the more obscure disappearances in Modiano's work takes place at the end of *Fleurs de ruine.* The marquis who comes looking for Jacqueline physically disappears, dissolving into the wall:

> Peu à peu, cet homme se fondait dans le mur. Ou bien la pluie, à force de tomber sur lui, l'effaçait comme l'eau dilue une peinture qui n'a pas eu le temps de se fixer. J'avais beau appuyer mon front contre la vitre et scruter le mur gris sombre, il n'y avait plus trace de lui. (138-9)

The passage recalls Marcel Aymé's, 'Le Passe-muraille', which is no coincidence since Modiano had, only two years before the publication of *Fleurs de ruine*, written the preface for a collection of Aymé's short stories.

In the last paragraph of *Une jeunesse,* there is a disappearance not of a unified self, but of a part of the self. The protagonist feels part of himself break away, and experiences a feeling of lightness:

> Quelque chose, dont il se demanda plus tard si ce n'était pas tout simplement sa jeunesse, quelque chose qui lui avait pesé jusque-là se détachait de lui, comme un morceau de rocher tombe lentement vers la mer et disparaît dans une gerbe d'écume. (183)

The titular 'jeunesse' detaches from Louis, a process likened to a rock, a geological element, undergoing a shifting, settling process. This recalls a scene from the beginning of the novel:

> En traversant de nouveau le petit hall de la gare, Louis a remarqué un appareil distributeur de confiseries, près des guichets fermés. Il introduit deux pièces dans la fente. Quelque chose tombe, enveloppé d'un papier rouge et doré, l'un de ces chocolats qu'on appelle rochers. (18)

In this scene, Louis is an adult with his youth safely behind him and this 'rocher' comes in the form of wrapped confectionary, completely benign and harmless, even sweet. Further, the breaking away of rock, the silencing of this part of his life, is framed as an entirely natural process, a simple and logical response to physical laws.

* * *

There is a powerful magnetic attraction exerted by silence in Modiano's work, revealing an unmistakable proclivity towards it, in its many guises. Manifesting this

trajectory is a clear series of characters demonstrating complex relationships with silence, many of whom are subject to a kind of pressure that pushes them towards places of silence. Some of these characters are artists of various stripes and their negotiation with silence is expressed through the practice of their art.

For the film director Gascogne, the ultimate film consists of negating a crucial element, reaching a strangely aestheticised transparency. His work also exemplifies the abstract idea of creativity and a return to making through staging the shooting of a film and forsaking the film product. In *Une jeunesse,* both Bellune and Odile move towards silence through the loss of music, but their silences, occurring in different periods of history, have markedly distinct tones. Bellune's ultimate silence, that of suicide, is prefigured by his halted musical career, the silent music he listens to and the silent spaces he inhabits. Odile's loss of voice and abandonment of her musical ambitions are attenuated by our knowledge from the outset that she has found love and harmony with Louis.

For Jansen, in *Chien de printemps*, things are certainly more complicated; his ambition is to create silence though image, which involves a level of effacement and even negation of the photographer. He embodies an artist merging almost completely with his art form to the point of disappearing, yet this is bound up in a painful personal history and many unanswered questions regarding what exactly he is trying to negate and forget. Barthes' theoretical writing on photography provides valuable insights into notions of effacement, passivity and the role of the photographer and offers a way of apprehending the underlying 'catastrophe' inherent in photography.

For the writer challenged to write silence with words, we witness a delayed effect of the silent punctum that triggers a breakdown of language, meaning and euphoric liberation from self. Exploring Blanchot's conception of language and the

literary project as inherently destructive and negative introduces an understanding of silence as both prerequisite and purpose in his description of the undeniable lure of an impossible, ineffable beyond. The example of the writer in *Chien de printemps* is overwhelmingly positive, and points to the possibility of freedom through and from language, the raw material of his art form.

Alongside examples of the artists, there is a more general pull towards silence that is manifest through physical diminishment, motifs of smallness, attrition and vaporousness. These movements towards disappearance are often accompanied by memory tending towards an entropic silence, although this is not always the case and is rarely a linear process in Modiano's world. For some, the experience of silencing of self is an asset, facilitating escape or liberation. Through forms of diminishment and dissolution, these characters are drawn towards a mysterious space that is difficult to identify, somewhere beyond linguistic reach: 'Je n'avais même plus besoin de pédaler. Une impulsion mystérieuse m'entraînait. Pas une voiture. Le silence' (*VN* 156).

Conclusion

Silences in Patrick Modiano's work are inseparable from those embedded in his country's collective past, which are in turn entwined in silences of personal and family history. His identity and his literature are inextricably linked to the Occupation period, especially as it was experienced in Paris, the 'ville sans regards' (*UP* 19). Silence is a constant presence throughout his novels, yet silences are also confronted and broken in them, and my thesis has sought to investigate this central tension asking how a body of work can highlight and challenge so many silences while remaining itself brilliantly quiet, oblique and restrained.

I have used silence as a prism through which to investigate texts from their smallest units of punctuation through to their broader social, political and literary contexts. Reading Modiano's texts through the lens of silence provides a unique portal both into his writing and into the environment in which his writing is received. Silence has been shown to command a centrally important place, yet it is also inherently multiform and polyvalent, denoting no stable meaning or ethical weight and inviting no single interpretative angle. Modiano harnesses the entire spectrum and polysemantic nature of silence, from the ordinary silences in phatic communication to the poignant, heavy silences and the intimate, almost telepathic, silences shared in crowded spaces, and all the kinds of silence in between: awkward, elegant, harrowing, punitive, salutary. I identified the 'negative' transcriptions of silence, associated with loss, abandonment, absence, the dysfunction and inadequacy of language, and the positive silences, those that are considerate,

generous and foster rehabilitation, recovery and reconciliation. Silence is not simply ambiguous: it can denote diametric opposites, figuring variously as an object of fear or veneration, danger or safety, survival or destruction, lack or plenitude, misunderstanding or comprehension. These defining characteristics of semantic ambiguity and diametric opposition have informed the structure of this thesis. My research has illuminated how silence signifies in context since contextualisation rather than any prescribed definition provides the means to interpret it.

In the first part of this thesis, silence was investigated as a productive source, and I ask how it is that something can come from nothing, a lacuna or lack. Starting at the literal beginnings of Modiano's texts and studying the incipits, we saw how, from the first lines, they emerge from forms of silence. Notwithstanding a small number of exceptions, we observed that the opening gestures relate to the themes of disappearance, diminishment and directly named silences. They make the initiating move into the fictional realm with statements of lack and continue to reiterate such statements through the texts, layering and accruing modulations of silence.

Continuing to think of silence as a generative source, but shifting the angle slightly, I demonstrated how Modiano's work can be seen as a response to the mute legacy of historical heritage and interrupted familial and intergenerational filiation. The context of the ruptures and disclocations in social and political continuities and severance from national heritage and belonging in the twentieth century, informs silence's deeper semantic value. Using the *récit de filiation* framework, I discussed the portrayal of filiation in Modiano's more autobiographical texts, *Livret de famille*, *Remise de peine* and *Un pedigree*, showing how non-transmission and lack of knowledge generate narrative. Since the different levels of rupture and silence—historical, intergenerational and familial—are so embedded with each other, many silences hold the echo of others within them. The silences between parent and child,

for example, are not only instances of non-communication, but are fundamentally located in the realm of the unsayable that is rooted in traumatic experience.

In Part II, silence was conceived of as a place of forgetting, avoidance and erasure. I investigated silence as a component of testimonial writing and bearing witness and exhibited ways in which Modiano uses literature as a means of mitigation, confronting silence and reanimating lost voices, saving them from the silence of personal and collective amnesia. In the specific context of post-Holocaust writing, the complicated ethical implications of speaking on behalf of others and testimony were shown to shape the forms and modalities that writing and ways of telling can take. Such writing must necessarily be acutely aware of language's limitations and its capacity to deform and corrupt. Linked to a search for truth, revelation and reconciliation, silence points to the confines of language and morality, the limits of the sayable. Lanzmann and Adorno, among others, evoke the need to attempt representation that transmits the will to speak and to transfer, all the while aware of the inherent corruption that makes these efforts incomplete. Adorno outlined a way in which post-Holocaust writing might ethically do this, developing the notion of 'immanence' as that which gestures towards the unsayable and embodies an awareness of its own limitations and contradictions.

Competing with Modiano's sense of personal responsibility to speak on behalf of others and recover lost stories is the opposing inclination to discretion and resistance to telling, which results in a great deal of dissimulation and secrecy. The theoretical framework in Chapter 3 led, in Chapter 4, to a deeper analysis of the seam of biographical discourse in which Modiano's fictional biographers express their hesitations and equivocations in speaking on behalf of others and how they question the very possibility of knowing or understanding others' experience. Analysis of the fiction–non-fiction pair, *Dora Bruder* and *Voyage de noces*,

demonstrated the ways in which the moral and ethical ambiguities of telling others' stories inform a network of fluctuating poetic symbols combining meteorological and chromatic elements linking silence to suppression and reverence, amnesia and memory. I argued that in an effort to save Dora from re-entering another cycle of being forgotten, Modiano makes a new place for her alongside the traditional archive by embedding her story in an alternative archive, strewn with literary and cinematic references. Proffering silences through reticence, fragmentation, and non-conclusion, these novels can be considered examples of poetic embodiments of the ethical aporias involved in testimony and witnessing.

The third and final part of the thesis reorients silence one final time, defining it in Chapter 5 as a quality or space that can be created through writing and in Chapter 6 as a form of artistic destination and goal. I responded to the questions of how the mechanics of Modiano's writing contribute to the experience of silence and how highly limpid prose can maintain a high level of ambiguity. With reference to Barthes' concept of *écriture blanche* and Barth's minimalist framework, I identified typographical and rhetorical devices of reticence from the smallest units of writing, sequentially expanding the field of analysis to demonstrate how Modiano's text resists temporal and semantic precision and withholds from the reader at each stage.

The formal qualities of reticence and restraint are also significant as manifestations of an ethical aversion to the allocation of blame or the prescription of precise meaning. While it is true that Modiano's literature worked to uncover the life-world of the Occupation, as the Swedish Academy recognised, it did so not necessarily by filling in the silences of this period, but by pointing to them, both through the subject matter of his novels and the very form of his writing.

Finally, I identified a series of artist characters whose engagement with their art forms leads them into fascinating relationships with silence. For these artists—the

photographer, the filmmaker, the musicians and the writers—silence is deeply connected to the ultimate purpose and destination of their practice. For some it is a finality, whereas for others the trajectory entails a form of effacement in and surrender to their art and silence. Blanchot's work on language, specifically in the post-war climate, exposes literature and language as inherently destructive and negative, and silence as both prerequisite and destination. For Jansen, the photographer in *Chien de primtemps*, silence is the epitome of his practice, and he challenges the budding writer to a seemingly impossible task: to write silence with words. Jansen's challenge is taken up years later as the writer undergoes a form of ontological dissolution, becoming unbound from the semantic strictures of language, passing through its limitations to a space of exultant deliverance from self. Through these artists' relationships with silence, Modiano leads us towards the edges of the linguistic realm, beyond logic and thought, through the medium of language, towards that which it cannot encompass, opening onto an experience of the ineffable.

There is no singular arc or linear trajectory of silence in Modiano's texts. His novels ask us to listen to the polyphonic tones and rhythms of silence, layered, simultaneous and interweaving. The distinctive, restrained writing style that he first adopted in *Villa Triste* and that has continued to characterise his work up to his more recent novels, is described, for example, as '[u]n sommet d'épure' (Fillon). The notions of fallible memory and unsayability are just as central in later works: 'Il l'a oublié, ou plutôt, avec le temps, il n'y pense plus. Ou, tout simplement, il ne trouve pas les mots' (*PQ* 97-98). One might 'simply' not be able to find the words, but readers familiar with his work would surely have come to know that there is nothing simple about that which is unsaid.

Discretion and acceptance of people as they are remain key characteristics of the typical Modianesque narrator:

> Il faut prendre les gens tels qu'ils sont, manteau de fourrure ou non. Au besoin, leur poser quelques questions discrètes, en douceur, sans éveiller leur méfiance, pour mieux les comprendre. (*SD* 67)

In these later novels, the narrators are as wary as ever of being confided in, as they are aware of the burden of bearing witness: 'il craignait que ces confidences ne durent jusqu'au matin' (*PQ* 57), 'Il regretta aussitôt de lui avoir posé la question. Mais apparemment elle se sentait en confiance' (*PQ* 61).

Modiano's most recent novel, *Encre sympathique,* was published in October 2019, towards the end of my research period, too late to be included in my primary corpus. However, it has appeared at an opportune moment as it can stand as a work against which to gauge my findings. Its evocative title *Encre sympathique*—invisible ink—conjures notions of clandestinity, secrecy, transparency and speaks of an absent presence. Interestingly, the plural *Encres sympathiques* (2009) is the title of Blanckeman's essay in *Écritures blanches,* in which he frames Modiano's writing as writing that erases itself moments after being written and that only becomes visible again when in contact with readers who know how to make it reappear (317).

Predictably, in *Encre sympathique,* we see a continuation of the trends and tendencies in Modiano's oeuvre presented in this thesis. The novel shows an ongoing interest in silence in its many guises rather than marking a departure or initiating a new relationship with silence. The opening lines read:

> Il y a des blancs dans cette vie, des blancs que l'on devine si l'on ouvre le 'dossier' : une simple fiche dans une chemise à couleur bleu ciel qui a pâli avec le temps. (11)

Almost identical phrasing opens a subsequent section: 'Il y a des blancs dans une vie' (48). Again, the blanks open the investigation and are the empty sources of narrative.

The novel is richly intertextual, incorporating not only the same themes but also the same motifs and characters, albeit in slightly different guises. We return to Hutte's detective agency, which featured in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures,* but this time the protagonist is leaving the agency, rather than Hutte. Khédive reappears as the name of a café (*ES* 67), whereas he was a character in *La ronde de nuit*. There is also the return of the capitalised CASTROL (85), which appears numerous times in *Remise de peine* (79) and *L'horizon* (58), and similar motifs and descriptions that feature in many novels, such as the 'voiture américaine décapotable' (86). Readers are guided by a familiar 'unreliable detective', as identified by Akane Kawakami. Here, the protagonist is an unlikely sleuth, being naturally shy, unable to ask the simple questions he has about Noëlle Lefebvre, for whom he is looking: 'Des phrases anodines se bousculaient dans ma tête, qui auraient pu entraîner de sa part des réponses précises. . . . Mais quand il m'a servi ma grenadine, je n'ai rien dit' (14). We encounter the same familiar Modianesque phrases and motifs too:

> je me sentais capable d'attendre pendant des heures sous le soleil et les averses. (16)
>
> Il a eu un instant de silence entre nous. Encore un témoin qui emporte ses secrets avec lui. (57)
>
> Il avait encore ralenti, et la voiture glissait en silence comme si elle était en roue libre. (88)

Hutte even gives the same counsel as Jansen in *Chien de printemps,* advising the protagonist to 'prendre les choses en douceur' (*ES* 26, *CdP* 99). And again, Jean wonders whether searching for answers is worth it: 'Ne serait-il pas préférable de

laisser autour de soi des terrains vagues où l'on puisse s'échapper ?' (102). Most significantly, however, there is still a remarkable reverence for the unnamed and unnameable, the unsaid and unsayable, the undescribed and indescribable.

In the novel, a dictionary definition of 'encre sympathique' is given on page 91 as Jean reads a diary and has the impression that certain parts have been written in invisible ink. He finds comfort in the thought that if we sometimes have blanks in our memories, all the details of our lives have been committed to paper in invisible ink somewhere (93). This brilliantly encompasses the tension at the centre of Modiano's oeuvre. There is the desire that nothing should be forgotten, an enduring will to archive and conserve, that is opposed by the wish that this should somehow remain secret or be disclosed only to the deserving.

It is a given when researching the work of a living writer that the story cannot be fully told. Modiano is likely to publish more novels and it will be fascinating to observe how his engagement with silence develops or continues into the future.

In addition to future texts, there are components of Modiano's work that have not been included in this study, given the natural time constraints and limitations of the PhD framework. This material, including children's books, screenplays, song lyrics, plays and essays, would constitute a natural expansion of this research. Further, using silence as the central component of an interpretative framework as I have done here, offers lateral expansion that could be used to explore the works of Modiano's contemporaries, those working in his wake or other writers who address similar or related themes.

It seems highly likely that the kinds of findings made here will remain mainstays of Modiano's work in the future. His relationship with his own silence is still a source of wonder and curiosity for himself:

— Vous savez, lui ai-je dit, depuis que je suis enfant, j'ai appris à me taire. »

> La manière solennelle avec laquelle j'avais prononcé cette phrase m'étonnait moi-même. (*HN* 85)

However, Modiano may change his style, as he has done before. Indeed, he has experimented with different voices, such as the female narrators of *Des inconnues*, *La Petite Bijou* and parts of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L'horizon*. He also wrote three of his more recent texts predominantly in the third person (*L'horizon*, *L'herbe des nuits*, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*), which he had not done since *Une jeunesse* in 1981 and short sections of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* in 1978. Changes are subtle, however, and certainly do not transform the distinctive Modianesque atmosphere, or his incessant instating and breaking of silence. What is clear in his continuing embrace of silence in all its polysemantic variations is that there is much to be heard in Modiano's silences.

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Appendix. Silence in Context

Title	Total	Silence in context
La place de l'étoile (1968)	9	15 - Je ne passais pas sous **silence** ses pamphlets antisémites, comme le font les bonnes âmes chrétiennes. 20 - Dans le **silence** de l'hôtel des Bergues, je lisais les bucoliques grecs et m'efforçais de traduire élégamment *L'Énéide*. 23 - « Depuis le mois de novembre dernier, je suis coupable de désertion mais les autorités militaires françaises jugent plus prudent de garder le **silence** sur mon cas. 27 - Sartre supplia Jacob X de renoncer à l'anonymat, mais le **silence** obstiné du déserteur découragea les meilleures volontés. 30 - Je ne veux pas mécontenter Maurice : je le fais mourir en 1945 et passe sous **silence** ses diverses réincarnations de 1945 à nos jours. 61 - La nuit, dans le **silence** de notre turne, nous parlerons de nos maîtresses à venir : baronnes juives, filles de capitaines d'industrie, actrices de théâtre, courtisanes. 108 - « Pour vous, Excellence, les gazons bien peignés des plates-bandes de l'entrée ont fait toilette et les fleurs qui les parsèment—malgré la rigueur d'une saison difficile—chantent la symphonie de leurs couleurs ; pour vous, notre Maison, ruche bourdonnante et bruyante à l'ordinaire, se peuple de recueillement et de **silence** ; pour vous, le rythme un peu monotone des classes ou des études a rompu son cours habituel... 126 - Plus rien ne trouble le **silence**. 138 - Il y eut un moment de **silence**.
La ronde de nuit (1969)	26	21 - Coco Lacour, Esmerelda, ces noms vous suffisent comme me suffit leur présence **silencieuse** à mes côtés. 22 - Toujours **silencieux**. 23 - De temps en temps les battements d'une horloge rompaient le **silence**. 25 - J'abattrai mes victimes avec un **silencieux**. 35 - Le **silence** brusquement. 38 - Le **silence** qui y régnait jadis à partir de huit heures du soir avait quelque chose de rassurant. 38 - **Silence** bourgeois de feutre, de velours et de bonne éducation. 54 - Une nuit d'été, si douce et **silencieuse** que vous croyez aimer. 68 - Doux et **silencieux** comme des gazelles. 70 - J'éprouve le même vertige que la première fois : tirer le **silencieux** de ma poche et les tuer. 71 - Le **silence**, tout autour de nous. 74 - Le **silence**, enfin. 75 - Le **silence**. 78 - Le **silence**. 82 - Du soleil, tombent sur la place de grandes nappes de **silence**. 89 - Le **silence** et les feuillages du jardin des Champs-Élysées 90 - Ils croyaient ainsi s'assurer notre **silence** et notre protection, Monsieur Philibert entretenant des rapports suivis avec ses anciens collègues, les inspecteurs Rothé, David, Jalby, Jurgens, Santoni, Permilleux, Sadowsky, François et Detmar. 98 - Ce **silence**, cette ville déserte correspondait à mon état d'esprit. 102 - Le **silence**. 109 - Paris s'enfonçait dans le **silence** et le black-out. 113 - Un **silence** suivit au cours duquel Saint-Georges, Pernety, Jasmin, tous les autres me fixaient, l'œil ému. 119 - Un moteur **silencieux**. 135 - Trouver le calme et le **silence** après des années de tumulte, vertiges, mirages, tourbillons éperdus. 141 - Toujours **silencieux**. 142 - Le **silence**, l'immobilité après avoir enduré tant de vociférations et gesticulations inutiles. 144 - Les heures passaient, **silencieuses**.
Les boulevards de ceinture (1972)	17	20 - Ils demeurent prostrés et **silencieux** dans la pénombre qui les ronge. 21 - Un long **silence** encore avant qu'ils se laissent aller aux souvenirs et aux confidences. 27 - Le **silence**. 39 - Il s'attendait que je lui donne des précisions, mais j'ai gardé le **silence**. 52 - Sylvaine profite du **silence** pour raconter qu'un certain Eddy Pagnon, dans un cabaret où elle se trouvait en sa compagnie, a brandi un revolver d'enfant devant les clients terrifiés. 56 - Il y eut un très long moment de **silence**. 62 - Nous marchions en **silence**. 63 - Marcher, sans qu'aucun de nous rompe le **silence**. 79 - Ils restaient là, à nous observer en **silence**, et j'eus le sentiment que nous nous étions introduits par effraction dans cet intérieur bourgeois. 81 - Une heure s'écoula dans un parfait **silence** et je déclinai l'invitation qu'il me fit de l'accompagner au wagon-restaurant. 97 - Zone de **silence** et de douce pénombre où le souvenir des années mortes et des promesses non tenues vient vous pincer le cœur. 123 - Nous sommes restés un moment **silencieux**, vous, elle et moi, avant de faire demi-tour en direction du Clos-Foucré. 138 - Le **silence**, la fraîcheur de la nuit.

		139 - C'est moi qui ai rompu le **silence** : 167 - De la profondeur du **silence** et de la beauté des arbres. 178 - Avez-vous remarqué, baron, comme Paris est **silencieux** cette nuit ? 180 - Nous restions **silencieux** l'un et l'autre.
Villa Triste (1975)	8	35 - Pendant quelques secondes, il y a eu un **silence** absolu dans la salle de restaurant. 50 - J'aurais voulu que le jour ne se levât jamais, pour rester avec elle recroquevillé au fond de ce **silence** et de cette lumière d'aquarium. 62 - Il marchait à mes côtés, **silencieux**. 138 - Il a eu de longues minutes de **silence**. 173 - On entrait dans une zone de calme et de **silence**. 176 - Il fallait être le plus **silencieux** possible, et le plus lent, pour que l'un des deux surprenne l'autre. 206 - Il restait **silencieux**. Moi aussi. 207 - Nous nous sommes assis sur le banc. Personne d'autre que nous. Le **silence**, la tiédeur de l'air, l'éclairage avaient quelque chose de tropical.
Livret de famille (1977)	22	11 - La branche continuait d'osciller en **silence**. 20 - Ils se tenaient tous les trois debout, derrière la grille, à nous observer en **silence**. 39 - Quelques secondes de **silence**. 69 - Cette phrase fut suivie de quelques secondes de **silence**. 77 Et votre père, à quelques mètres, inquiet et **silencieux** et contemplant la pointe de ses souliers caoutchoutés. 91 - Il enveloppait tout, les réverbères, les fontaines lumineuses, l'obélisque, les statues des villes françaises, d'une nappe de **silence**. 105 - Le bruissement de nos pas troublait un **silence** de plus en plus profond et Bella appuyait sa tête contre mon épaule. 109 - Un **silence**. 110 - De rares voitures passaient, troublant à peine le **silence**. 118 - La rame glissait dans un **silence** d'ouate. 126 - Un **silence**. 126 - Un **silence**, de nouveau. 141 - Un **silence**. 141 - Un **silence**. 144 - Badrawi fumait et l'Indonésienne se tenait à côté de moi, impassible et **silencieuse**. 151 - Il baissa la tête et nous gardâmes le **silence**. 163- Il y a eu un **silence**. 168 - Nous restions **silencieux**. 178 - Le **silence**. 180 - S'il gardait le **silence**, qui d'autre me parlerait d'Harry Dressel ? 186 - Le **silence**. 208 - Quelquefois, quand ils avaient tiré les rideaux du salon et que le **silence** était si profond qu'on entendait le passage d'un fiacre ou le bruissement des arbres du quai, mon père ressentait une vague inquiétude, j'imagine.
Rue des Boutiques Obscures (1978)	11	15 - Il a gardé le **silence**. 41 - Il y eut un moment de **silence**. 48 - Nous mangions en **silence**. 83 - Cette bâtisse **silencieuse** m'intriguait. 107 - Vous tournez à gauche et ce qui vous étonnera ce sera le **silence** et le vide de cette partie de la rue Cambacérès. 116 - Nous restions **silencieux** l'un et l'autre. 123 - J'entendais son souffle, un souffle presque imperceptible, mais la pièce était à ce point **silencieuse** que le moindre bruit, le moindre chuchotement se serait détaché avec une netteté inquiétante. 133 - Plus loin encore, le jardin des Plantes, et l'ombre et le **silence** lourd de la Halle aux Vins ajoutaient au calme du quartier. 165 - La fenêtre donnait sur une rue **silencieuse**, bordée d'arbres. 166 - J'ai arpenté pendant plusieurs jours le XVI^{e} arrondissement, car la rue **silencieuse** bordée d'arbres que je revoyais dans mon souvenir correspondait aux rues de ce quartier. 216 - Nous sommes restés **silencieux** jusqu'au départ du train.
Une jeunesse (1981)	22	16 - La voiture descend la petite route droite en **silence**. 32 - Ils remontaient la rue de Berri vers les Champs-Élysées lui toujours **silencieux**, elle n'osant pas le distraire de sa rêverie. 33 - Peut-être passait-il ainsi ses après-midi à regarder les bandes noires se dérouler dans le **silence**. 37 - Un **silence** d'ouate. 47 - Comme elle restait **silencieuse** : — Vous vous rendez compte, si vous étiez une fille comme ça ... Ignoble, non ? ... 52 - Bellune gardait le **silence** et semblait préoccupé. 54 - L'appartement était **silencieux**. 55 - Les sonneries se succédèrent pendant longtemps, puis, dans le **silence**, le rayon de soleil glissait sur la moquette grise.

		58 - Le serveur avait quitté le buffet et il y régnait maintenant un **silence** à peine troublé par le bruit de moteur diesel des taxis qui s'arrêtaient en bas, à la station, et le claquement régulier des portières. 70 - Le **silence** était si profond dans cette pièce qu'elle entendait le léger grésillement du néon. 72 - Elle se laissait envahir par le **silence** et le confort de ce bureau aux teintes douces : moquette grise, bois clairs, rideaux de gaze le long de la baie vitrée, abat-jour bleu de la lampe. 78 - **Silence**. Un violon. 84 - Louis et Odile gardaient le **silence** tandis que Brossier marchait vers le bar. 90 - Le **silence**, autour d'eux. 96 - Son visage penché au-dessus du magnétophone, tandis que la bande tournait en **silence**. 106 - Il gardait de longs moments le **silence** et l'on croyait, chaque fois, qu'il avait raccroché. 111 - Bejardy et Brossier, appuyés au bureau, observaient le **silence**, craignant peut-être de provoquer d'une parole la mauvaise humeur de Nicole Haas. 114 - Bejardy et Louis suivaient la partie en **silence**. 119 - Quand il eut fini, ils restèrent un instant **silencieux**. 151 - Le **silence**. 179 - Peut-être parce qu'il ne restait plus rien de cette Geneviève dans la salle **silencieuse**. 180 - La place Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, avec le square et l'église, est aussi déserte et **silencieuse** que ces lieux familiers que l'on traverse en rêve.
De si braves garçons (1982)	23	11 - Sa voix grave rompait le **silence**. 14 - Nous étions restés quelques minutes tous les deux, face à face, dans le **silence**. 18 - Après l'extinction des feux, à neuf heures, les aspirants veillaient à ce qu'on ne rallumât pas la lumière et que régnât le **silence**. 20 - Et quand ce fut mon tour d'entrer en scène pour quelques minutes et cinq répliques, j'entendis du fond du **silence** une voix souffler aux premiers rangs : « Bravo ! Bravo ! » 24 - J'accueillis cette nouvelle avec détachement, mais le lendemain, elle me causa la sensation d'un vide, comme le **silence** et la poussière au-dessus des pans de murs écroulés. 36 - Michel avait ouvert la portière en **silence**. 56 - Un **silence** accueillait l'arrivée de Pedro et de Kovo, rompu quelquefois par de discrets applaudissements. 65 - Elle est restée **silencieuse** pendant tout le repas. 68 - Bijou semblait être la seule élève de cet établissement et, chaque fois que j'allais le chercher, le matin ou l'après-midi, je la retrouvais en compagnie de cette dame, tout au fond d'une salle de classe aussi sombre et **silencieuse** qu'une chapelle désaffectée. 76 - Pedro et tous les professeurs attendaient, debout sur le perron, qu'il y eût le **silence**. 89 - Desoto a enduré le même calvaire que Yolande : l'annonce de son renvoi au réfectoire, la montée sur le perron devant tous les élèves et les professeurs **silencieux**, la voix sèche de Pedro lui déclarant qu'il était « indigne » ... 91 - Je cherchais une phrase pour rompre le **silence**. 107 - Nous avons entendu un bruit de moteur qui se détachait de plus en plus nettement du **silence**. 110 - Il y eut un instant de **silence**. 112 - Les autres fumaient en **silence**. 132 - La nuit était douce, **silencieuse**, et l'autoroute déserte. 133 - Mme Portier souriait. Je cherchais une phrase qui rompît le **silence**. 140 - Et puis, ce serait la montée **silencieuse**, en rang, jusqu'au dortoir. 154 - L'éclat de rire d'une femme a rompu le **silence** qui s'était établi entre nous. 155 - Le **silence**. 159 - La rue Longchamp et la rue de la Ferme étaient désertes et **silencieuses**. 159 - Vous montez à cheval, Suzanne ? dis-je pour rompre le **silence**. 175 - La fillette mangeait sa glace en **silence**.
Quartier perdu (1984)	24	9 - Mais il est resté **silencieux** tout le long du trajet. 15 - L'ascenseur glissait dans un **silence** d'ouate. 17 - Les mots ne venaient pas et il a respecté mon **silence**. 19 - En bas, c'étaient les lumières, le vacarme, la nuit étouffante de juillet, alors qu'ici, la trop grande fraîcheur de l'air climatisé me faisait claquer des dents et qu'il régnait une demi-pénombre et un **silence** que troublait à peine le tapotement du fume-cigarette de Tatsuké contre le cendrier. 30 - Jusqu'à présent, tout le monde ici ignore que vous êtes devenu Ambrose Guise, et puis, comme le dit un moraliste français, « nous vivons souvent à la merci de certains **silences** ». 34 - Les sonneries se succédaient et au bout de quelques minutes on a fini par décrocher. Un **silence**. 35 - Un **silence**. 35 - De nouveau, un **silence**. 36 - La rame glissait en **silence**. 44 - Elle fixait son regard sur moi, en **silence**. 68 - Cette chaleur, ce **silence**, ce café désert, la lumière blanche que les néons déversaient sur nous... Un rêve ? 80 - Il restait **silencieux**. 86 - Et tout retombait dans le **silence**. 87 - Il fait trop chaud et puis ce **silence** de Paris... 103 - Quelques secondes de **silence**. 106 - Au bout de quelques secondes de **silence**, il s'est raidi et m'a annoncé, d'un ton solennel : Madame dort. 108 - Le **silence** était pesant.

		109 - Le **silence** et les variations trop contrastées de la lumière me causaient un léger—oh, bien léger—sentiment d'angoisse. 113 - On avait fermé les volets intérieurs des portes-fenêtres et le salon était encore plus **silencieux** que dans la matinée. 125 - À l'angle de la rue du Dôme, par l'une des fenêtres grandes ouvertes de l'*Hôtel de Bois,* la musique d'une radio s'échappe, si forte dans le **silence** et la chaleur, que je l'entends encore cent mètres plus loin. 153 - Nous étions restés un moment **silencieux** à notre table, Rocroy et moi. 155 - Cette brise caressant les feuillages des platanes et leur bruissement dans le **silence**... 182 - Il y a eu un moment de **silence**. 184 - Nous sommes seuls, tous les deux, sur ce boulevard perdu, écrasé de soleil et de **silence**.
Dimanches d'août (1986)	22	13 - C'est lui qui a fini par rompre le **silence**. 21 - Autour de moi, des femmes et des hommes, aux raideurs de momie, prenaient le thé, **silencieux**, leurs regards fixés vers la Promenade des Anglais. 24 - Je restai **silencieux**. 26 - Il y eut un **silence**. 27 - Je n'opposerais à cette voix de plus en plus inquiète et de plus en plus plaintive que le **silence**. 49 - Le **silence** augmente mon angoisse. 52 - Elle fumait, en **silence**, à côté de lui. 60 - Ils nous considéraient tous les deux, en **silence**, dans la même position, les visages rapprochés. 65 - Chaque fois, je guettais le glissement lent et **silencieux** et l'apparition des clients comme j'aurais surveillé un système d'horlogerie dont la régularité me rassurait. 106 - Nous avons marché en **silence** jusqu'au tournant que surplombe la façade courbe de l'ancien hôtel Majestic, et par le boulevard Dubouchage nous avons rejoint le centre de la ville. 114 - **Silence**. 118 - Les hommes d'équipage, vêtus de blanc, marchaient **silencieusement** entre les tables et je m'aperçus qu'ils étaient chaussés d'espadrilles. 120 - Il y a eu un instant de **silence**. 131 - Mais l'obscurité et le **silence** m'enveloppaient comme un linceul, et j'avais l'impression d'étouffer. 140 - Mais il demeurait immobile et **silencieux**, le menton sur la paume de la main. 140 - Il gardait toujours le **silence**. 145 - Là, dans le **silence** de ma chambre, j'entendais un bruit qui revient souvent au cours de mes insomnies : celui d'une machine à écrire. 146 - L'une d'entre elles [photos], dont j'avais perdu le souvenir, a provoqué chez moi un mélange de terreur et de fascination que rendaient encore plus vif le **silence** de cette chambre et ma solitude. 154 - Tout était **silencieux** et tranquille sous le soleil, et tendres toutes les couleurs : le bleu du ciel, le vert pâle des peupliers et des saules pleureurs ; et l'eau de la Marne, d'habitude lourde et stagnante, si légère ce jour-là qu'elle reflétait les nuages, le ciel et les arbres. 175 - Mme Villecourt est demeurée un long moment **silencieuse** puis elle s'est tournée vers Sylvia : —Chérie, va lui dire qu'il nous serve du café... 176 - Et vos photos sur La Varenne ? m'a-t-elle demandé comme si elle voulait rompre le **silence** par politesse. 184 - Avant de tourner à droite, une dernière fois le Beach de La Varenne, là où tout a commencé, son plongeoir, ses cabines de bain, sa pergola sous la lune, ce décor qui, l'été, paraissait si féerique dans notre enfance et qui, cette nuit, est **silencieux** et déserté pour toujours.
Remise de peine (1988)	9	23 - Son **silence** et ses yeux transparents nous intimidaient, mon frère et moi. 29 - Son **silence**, son chignon noir et ses yeux transparents inspiraient le respect. 30 - Mathilde était restée un moment **silencieuse** et avait dit : —Vous comprenez, Linou, vous avez quand même de drôles de fréquentations... 42 - La rue déserte sous la lune, le **silence** et le sentiment qui nous prenait d'avoir quitté pour toujours la maison, nous faisaient peu à peu ralentir le pas. 55 - Elles gardaient le **silence**. 69 - Il nous tendait en **silence** à chacun des paquets enveloppés de papier d'argent. 112 - Le **silence** de la maison nous faisait peur. 112 - À mesure que nous marchions, le **silence** était de plus en plus profond autour de nous. 113 - Ce **silence** nous enveloppait toujours, et j'essayais de jouer un air sur l'harmonica qu'Annie m'avait donné.
Vestiaire de l'enfance (1989)	26	11 - La tombée du soir, le **silence**, la voix de Sirvent qui lisait mon feuilleton en langue espagnole pour d'hypothétiques auditeurs égarés du côté de Tétouan, de Gibraltar ou d'Algésiras [...] 13 - Elle fouillait dans le sac posé à côté d'elle sur la banquette, et de temps en temps, les bracelets de ses poignets cliquetaient dans le **silence**. 48 - Le fuselage argenté d'un avion traversait ce ciel limpide en **silence** car il volait à trop haute altitude pour qu'on entende le bruit des moteurs. 49 - Cette esplanade, au milieu de laquelle se dresse un socle sans statue, contribue à la sensation de vide que j'éprouve tôt le matin, ou bien au coucher du soleil, dans les couloirs et les bureaux **silencieux**. 52 - Les voix des speakers, à ces heures-là, sont limpides et se détachent sur un **silence** pur du moindre parasite. 56 - Nous restions **silencieux**, tous les trois. 60 - Puis il s'est tourné vers moi d'un mouvement de tête nonchalant et m'a dévisagé un instant en **silence**. 61 - Et comme elle restait **silencieuse** et qu'elle ne se déridait pas, j'ai ajouté : —Je suis sûr que si j'en avais besoin, vous me prêteriez de l'argent...

		63 - Une femme—une Française—accablait de reproches quelqu'un qui gardait le **silence**. 63 - Le **silence**. 68 - Tout glissait dans le **silence** et la douceur du demi-sommeil et du rêve. 89 - Il m'a considéré un instant en **silence**. 102 - J'avais beau répéter cela de plus en plus fort, ma voix, mes activités quotidiennes, ma vie se diluaient dans le **silence** et le soleil de cette ville morte. 105 - Elle avait mis son doigt devant sa bouche pour que nous gardions le **silence**, la petite et moi. 110 - Mais celle-ci a gardé le **silence**. 115 - Nous restions **silencieux**, mon père et moi. 115 - De temps en temps, pour rompre le **silence**, il disait : —On va se peser ? 115 - De nouveau, le **silence** entre nous, jusqu'à l'instant où mon père laissait tomber, de sa voix distraite : On va se peser ? 118 - Rien ne troublait le **silence** de l'avenue, sauf nos voix, à Magdebourg et à moi. 123 - Cela vaut mieux que le **silence**. 129 - Le **silence**, voilà le seul moyen de tenir le coup. 129 - Le **silence** et l'amnésie. 132 - Un instant de **silence**. 132 - Encore un **silence**. 136 - Il demeurait là, **silencieux** et réprobateur. 151 - Et **silencieuses**.
Voyage de noces (1990)	30	20 - Et je m'assurerai de son **silence**. 22 - Derrière la vitre défilait lentement une banlieue **silencieuse** sous la lune. 25 - Ils pourraient vous en dire long mais ils garderont le **silence** jusqu'au bout et cela les indiffère complètement que le monde les ait oubliés. 26 - Est-ce la lumière trop brutale, le **silence** des rues, ces contrastes d'ombre et de soleil couchant, l'autre soir, sur les façades des immeubles du boulevard Soult ? 33 - Elle me regardait, en **silence**, derrière ses lunettes de soleil. 35 - Le soleil enveloppait d'une nappe de **silence** la plage, la mer et la terrasse du Moorea. 35 - Et sur ce fond de **silence**, le moindre son se détachait avec une acuité particulière [...] 43 - Nous sommes restés un long moment **silencieux**, sur nos transats, dans l'obscurité, comme si nous nous cachions. 47 - Je déboucherais donc sur la terrasse et tomberait ce que je peux appeler : un **silence** de mort. 54 - Alors, il ne reste plus que l'essentiel : les blancs, les **silences**, et les points d'orgue. 57 - Avant d'y accéder, l'ascenseur traversait lentement des paliers d'ombre et de **silence** où il ne s'arrêterait plus jamais. 57 - Le soir, le **silence** était si profond que les claquements de sabots sur la route mettaient très longtemps à mourir. 60 - Et c'était la montée lente dans l'ascenseur, les paliers obscurs qui défilaient, laissant deviner des couloirs **silencieux** et interminables, des chambres dont il ne restait sans doute que le sommier des lits. 60 - Au cinquième étage, la grande porte grillagée claquait derrière eux et rien ne venait plus troubler le **silence**. 69 - Ils allaient s'éteindre et plus rien ne troublerait le **silence**. 76 - Et tout autour d'eux la lumière du soleil approfondissait le **silence**. 100 - Son **silence** ne m'inquiétait plus. 114 - C'est elle qui a rompu le **silence** : —« Et vous restez à Paris au mois de juillet? 115 - J'ai une belle vue mais il y a trop de **silence** dans cet appartement... 118 - Je l'imaginais seule, dans son appartement, devant la même assiette et le même verre de bière, au fond de ce **silence** que je ne connaissais pas encore à l'époque, et qui m'est si familier aujourd'hui. 119 - Vers une heure du matin, sur le trottoir de l'avenue, le **silence** était si profond que l'on entendait les feuillages des arbres bruire de leur respiration nocturne. 124 - Il me souriait en haussant les épaules. Nous sommes restés **silencieux** quelques instants. 124 - Ils contemplaient à travers les grandes fenêtres du salon cette neige qui recouvrait la place et les avenues tout autour et qui enveloppait la ville d'une nappe de **silence**, de douceur et de sommeil. 128 - Elle ne veut pas penser à son père car elle se sent encore trop proche de cette zone noire et **silencieuse** d'où personne ne pourra plus jamais sortir. 137 - La ville tout entière s'enfonçait dans le noir, le froid et le **silence**. 146 - Le **silence**, la pleine lune et la neige phosphorescente provoquaient peut-être des mirages. 146 - C'est un village de montagne désert et **silencieux** pendant la messe de minuit. 155 - J'ai gardé le **silence**. 156 - Le **silence**. 157 - Rien ne trouble le **silence**.
Fleurs de ruine (1991)	10	12 - Rue Gay-Lussac—cette rue **silencieuse** où l'on avait jadis arraché des pavés et dressé des barricades - la porte d'un hôtel était murée et la plupart des fenêtres n'avaient plus de vitres. 14 - Au cours de la demi-heure qui s'écoula ensuite dans le **silence**, deux coups sourds retentirent. 39 - Je leur ai avoué ma fugue. Ils gardaient un **silence** embarrassé. 46 - Le grondement lointain du métro sur le pont de Bercy trouble de temps en temps le **silence**. 49 - Les platanes et le **silence** de la Halle aux vins. 91 - Ces aiguilles immobiles nous enveloppent d'un **silence** profond et apaisant. 93 - Il y régnait un **silence** et une demi-pénombre de grotte marine [San Cristobal] les après-midi de juillet où la canicule vidait les rues de la butte Montmartre.

		103 - L'eau moirée conserve pour toujours ces échos et, par les nuits **silencieuses**, ils se mêlent les uns aux autres... 104 - Puis il s'était tu, et le **silence** entre nous avait duré jusqu'à la place de la Concorde, où il m'avait posé des questions sur mes études. 138 - Le **silence** est revenu.
Un cirque passe (1992)	20	14 - Je restais **silencieux**. 35 - Le **silence**, entre nous. 52 - Nos rires résonnaient dans la rue déserte et **silencieuse**. 57 - Il nous observait tous les deux en **silence** et m'évoquait le policier de la veille. 60 - Elle restait **silencieuse**. 63 - Notre **silence** l'embarrassait. 66 - Mais elle est redevenue **silencieuse**, le regard fixé au plafond. 86 - Ce monsieur monte à cheval ? ai-je dit pour rompre le **silence**. 96 - Il y a eu un long moment de **silence**. 111 - En effet, ils ne porteraient pas plainte puisque ce soir nous étions devenus leurs complices et qu'ils devaient compter sur notre **silence**. 124 - Et le **silence** s'est établi entre nous jusqu'à ce que nous arrivions devant l'immeuble de la rue Raffet. 127 - Il y eu un instant de **silence**. J'ai même cru que la communication était coupée. 133 - J'étais **silencieux**. 136 - Nous sommes passés devant la voiture mais je n'ai rien dit et Gisèle a été la complice de mon **silence**. 142 - Il y a eu un **silence**. 144 - Le **silence**. 144 - Le **silence** n'est troublé que par le murmure de la fontaine. 146 - Et avant que les rares voitures apparaissent de nouveau, il se faisait un **silence**, le même sans doute que mon père avait connu les soirs de l'Occupation derrière la même fenêtre. 154 - Le **silence**. 161 - Bientôt tout est devenu **silencieux**.
Chien de printemps (1993)	20	15 - Nous ne rompions pas le **silence**, mon amie et moi. 20 - Il me suffit de regarder l'une de ses photos pour retrouver la qualité qu'il possédait dans son art et dans la vie et qui est si précieuse mais si difficile à acquérir : garder le **silence**. 21 - En effet, on écrit avec des mots, et lui, il recherchait le **silence**. 21 - Une photographie peut exprimer le **silence**. 21 - Voilà ce qui aurait été intéressant à son avis : réussir à créer le **silence** avec des mots. 25 - Et je l'imaginais seul, assis tout au bout du canapé, écoutant les sonneries qui se succédaient dans le **silence**. 43 - Un jour, peut-être, parviendrai-je à briser cette couche de **silence** et d'amnésie. 47 - Elle a rompu le **silence** : —Vous ne savez pas où il est ? 53 - Nous étions assis l'un en face de l'autre dans le **silence**. 61 - L'autre restait **silencieux**. 62 - L'autre demeurait toujours **silencieux**. 71 - Par moments, l'un d'eux se levait, marchait vers le buffet pour se servir un verre de whisky ou un biscuit salé, et le **silence** des autres enveloppait cette démarche d'une solennité inhabituelle. 74 - Leurs voix se mêlaient maintenant dans le **silence** de la rue : celle, très douce et très lente, du docteur de Meyendorff, la voix grave de sa femme, celle, ponctuée de grands éclats de rire, de Deckers. 74 - Seul, Jacques Besse, son sourire aux lèvres, restait **silencieux** sur le banc à écouter Meyendorff. 81 - J'aurais voulu rompre le **silence**. 82 - Le **silence**, l'immobilité des feuillages, les taches de soleil sur lesquelles je marchais me donnaient de nouveau l'impression de rêver. 83 - Une femme qui portait un chapeau de paille tondait la pelouse et j'étais soulagé qu'un bourdonnement de moteur rompe le **silence**. 99 - Un jour que je m'étonnais de cette feinte désinvolture, il m'avait dit qu'il fallait « prendre les choses en douceur et en **silence** sinon elles se rétractent ». 109 - Je n'avais pas respecté les consignes de **silence** qu'il m'avait données le jour où nous avions parlé de littérature. 109 - A mesure que je tournais les pages, je ressentais de plus en plus ce que Jansen avait voulu communiquer et qu'il m'avait mis gentiment au défi de suggérer moi aussi avec les mots : le **silence**.
Du plus loin de l'oubli (1995)	23	13 - J'avais rompu le **silence** en lui demandant s'ils habitaient ici depuis longtemps et s'ils venaient de province ou de l'étranger. 18 - Mais j'avais peur du **silence**. 21 - Mais, peu à peu, je m'étais habitué à ses **silences** et à sa brusquerie. 24 - Elle me regardait droit dans les yeux, en **silence**. 26 - C'est moi qui ai rompu le **silence** : —Et votre grippe, ça va mieux ? 28 - Ils gardaient le **silence**. 29 - La sensation de fraîcheur était de plus en plus forte et le tic-tac du réveil se détachait, de plus en plus net, dans le **silence**, au point que je pouvais entendre son écho. 53 - Quelques secondes de **silence**. 56 - Et cette gêne, je la retrouvais maintenant dans le **silence** de Jacqueline et les réponses évasives de Van Bever. 60 - Ils gardaient tous les deux le **silence**. 80 - À côté de moi, le billard électrique était pour la première fois **silencieux**.

		82 - Plus aucun client au comptoir. Dans le **silence**, autour de nous, j'entendais le grésillement des néons. 98 - Il y eut un instant de **silence**. 106 - L'appartement était **silencieux** et aucune lumière ne filtrait plus à la porte de Linda. 113 - Autour de la table, ils gardaient le **silence**. 131 - Je ne voulais pas profiter de la paix et du **silence**. 136 - Puis il était rentré chez lui, à pied, par les rues désertes de cet été-là où l'on entendait les sonnettes cristallines des vélos, dans le **silence**. 137 - Nous restions **silencieux**, l'un en face de l'autre. 152 - Et comme elle gardait le **silence**, il a bien fallu que j'ajoute : —Une belle soirée... 158 - Tout au fond, quatre personnes étaient assises autour d'une table et jouaient aux cartes dans le **silence**. 159 - L'avenue était **silencieuse**. On entendait le bruissement des arbres. 161 - Tout était **silencieux** autour de nous. Sauf les arbres qui bruissaient. 163 - J'ai commencé à éprouver une drôle de sensation, sans doute à cause des trottoirs déserts, de la brume de chaleur et du **silence** autour de moi.
Dora Bruder (1997)	8	28 - Et cette précision topographique contraste avec ce que l'on ignorera pour toujours de leur vie—ce blanc, ce bloc d'inconnu et de **silence**. 46 - Puis, en rang, en **silence**, jusqu'au dortoir. 71 - Comme nous habitions dans le même immeuble, nous avons suivi notre chemin, côte à côte, en **silence**. 74 - J'ignore si elle entendait, du dortoir, dans le **silence** des nuits de black-out, le fracas des trains de marchandises ou ceux qui partaient de la gare de Lyon pour la zone libre... 94 - Il y observe le restaurant d'une gare parisienne et sa faune, le ministère des Affaires étrangères abandonné, avec ses centaines de bureaux déserts et poussiéreux, au moment où les services allemands s'y installent, les lustres qui sont restés allumés et toutes les pendules qui sonnent sans arrêt dans le **silence**. 123 - Mon **silence** ne signifiera jamais que cela va mal. 130 - Le boulevard était désert, ce dimanche-là, et perdu dans un **silence** si profond que j'entendais le bruissement des platanes. 144 - Depuis, le Paris où j'ai tenté de retrouver sa trace est demeuré aussi désert et **silencieux** que ce jour-là.
Des inconnues (1999)	24	**PART 1** 13 - Il m'a serré la main, en **silence**, et m'a guidée jusqu'à la porte qu'il a ouverte lui-même pour me laisser le passage. 21 - J'avais envie de me confier à elle, mais je gardais le **silence**. 22 - Elle m'a regardée un moment en **silence**. 24 - J'étais heureuse de ce **silence**. 27 - Il y a eu un **silence**. 29 - Guy Vincent était resté **silencieux** et, dans son regard, il n'y avait plus seulement de la curiosité, mais un souci, comme s'il cherchait à deviner mes pensées. 40 - Elle avait les yeux grands ouverts, elle était attentive et **silencieuse**. **PART 2** 68 - Il y a eu un **silence**. 74 - À minuit, tout était **silencieux**. 78 - Nous sommes restés un moment à nous observer en **silence**. 80 - Mais je suis restée **silencieuse** et je pensais que, parmi tous ces gens, quelqu'un avait connu mon père. 82 - Tout était **silencieux**. 90 - Ils me considéraient tous les trois en **silence**. 90 - L'une de ces musiques que l'on n'entend pas, à cause du brouhaha des conversations et dont la mélodie résonne, très tard, dans le **silence**, avant qu'elle ne soit de nouveau étouffée. 91 - Et moi, je n'étais plus que cette musique lointaine dont on croyait qu'elle allait s'interrompre mais qui reprenait, de plus en plus lente, comme si elle voulait profiter du **silence** pour qu'on l'entende un peu. **PART 3** 118 - Tout était **silencieux**, comme si personne n'habitait l'immeuble. 118 - Un **silence**. 121 - Je faisais marcher tout l'après-midi le transistor ou le tourne-disque à cause du **silence** qui m'oppressait. 130 - Elle était vide, **silencieuse**. 151 - Nous suivions la rue Castagnary, tranquille et **silencieuse**. 154 - Mais bientôt, j'ai décidé de travailler dans le **silence** pour essayer de bien comprendre ce que je tapais. 157 - Il me regardait droit dans les yeux en **silence**. 167 - Gianni lisait de plus en plus lentement. Il laissait des **silences** entre les phrases, si bien que ce texte prenait le rythme d'un poème. 167 - Gianni a achevé sa lecture, et un **silence** a pesé sur nous comme si les deux autres voulaient encore capter l'écho de sa voix et peut-être, à travers elle, la voix du docteur Bode [...]
La Petite Bijou (2001)	14	17 - Le **silence**. 56 - Elle gardait le **silence**, mais elle paraissait confiante, comme si ce n'était pas la première fois que nous marchions ensemble. 59 - Le **silence** autour de nous, le même que celui que j'avais connu à Fossombronne-la-Forêt, à cette même heure et au même âge que la petite. 61 - De là-bas, au fond de la pièce, la voix douce de M. Valadier me parvenait entre de longs moments de **silence** et, chaque fois, je me demandais s'il avait interrompu sa conversation au téléphone. 90 - Je préférais rester là, **silencieuse**, les jambes allongées. 94 - Elle restait **silencieuse**.

		100 - À une table du fond, d'autres jouaient aux cartes, dans un **silence** très lourd. 104 - Elle aussi restait **silencieuse**. 120 - J'avais peine à rester **silencieuse**. 133 - Il restait **silencieux**. 146 - Quelqu'un parlait dans une langue aux sonorités gutturales et, entre chaque phrase, il y avait un long **silence**. 152 - Le même **silence** entre les phrases. 154 - Ce qui me frappait surtout, c'était le **silence**. 154 - Les manèges tournaient dans le **silence** et il n'y avait personne sur les chevaux de bois.
Accident nocturne (2003)	26	11 - L'homme continuait de nous observer, l'un après l'autre, en **silence**, de son regard froid. 12 - Depuis l'accident, un **silence** profond régnait autour de moi, comme si j'avais perdu l'ouïe. 21 - Je me suis demandé si j'étais toujours à l'Hôtel-Dieu, mais j'avais l'impression que non, à cause du **silence** autour de moi, à peine troublé par ces deux voix rassurantes derrière la porte. 24 - À cette pensée, j'ai fermé les yeux et le sommeil est venu dans un fou rire **silencieux**. 53 - La nuit serait limpide et **silencieuse**. 61 - Et puis c'était une musique **silencieuse**. 61 - Elle avait besoin d'un air léger et de **silence**. 66 - Et, malgré le brouhaha, nous parvenions tous les deux à atteindre la zone de **silence** dont elle m'avait parlé, où l'air était léger à respirer. 66 - Le **silence** était si profond que j'imaginais la petite gare d'une ville de province près d'une frontière perdue sous la neige. 74 - Elle me suivait du regard et elle restait là, **silencieuse**, dans une attitude menaçante. 75 - J'ai soutenu ce regard en **silence**. 90 - Lui non plus ne parlait pas et nous nous quittions sans avoir rompu le **silence**. 100 - Et d'abord je n'avais jamais connu un **silence** aussi profond autour de moi. 115 - Rester immobile et **silencieux** et se fondre dans le décor. 118 - Il me considérait en **silence**. 123 - Et puis en contemplant les poissons dans le **silence**, je me suis rappelé la réponse que m'avait faite le patron du café, quand je lui avais demandé qui était exactement le dénommé Solière : « Ce n'est pas un enfant de chœur. » 123 - Le souvenir était beaucoup plus net dans cette salle **silencieuse** qu'éclairait la lumière des aquariums. 124 - Et j'étais venu ici, à la même époque, j'avais contemplé les mêmes poissons multicolores qui glissaient derrière les vitres, dans le **silence**. 131 - Les rues étaient **silencieuses**, le froid coupant. 146 - Rien ne troublait le **silence**. 147 - Le **silence** autour de nous. 156 - Elle me dévisageait en **silence**. 159 - Elle me fixait droit dans les yeux, en **silence**, comme si elle voulait deviner mes pensées—et cette attention, je ne l'avais jamais rencontrée chez personne. 171 - Dans le **silence**, je croyais entendre le pas régulier de quelqu'un qui se rapprochait de nous. 175 - Elle m'avait pris le bras et j'imaginais, près de nous, tous ces poissons multicolores tournant derrière les vitres dans l'obscurité et le **silence**. 177 - Elle gardait le **silence**.
Un pedigree (2005)	6	31- J'imagine son retour par les rues désertes d'Auteuil et les quais **silencieux** de cet été-là. 32 - Mais on ne doit pas parler à la place d'un autre et j'ai toujours été gêné de rompre les **silences** même quand ils vous font mal. 50 - Il demeurait **silencieux**, sur le canapé, pendant des heures. 80 - Il parlait avec un léger accent parisien—celui de la cité d'Hauteville et de la rue des Petits-Hôtels et aussi de la cité Trévise, là où l'on entend le murmure de la fontaine sous les arbres dans le **silence**. 105 - Il reste **silencieux**. 110 - Puis le **silence**.
Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue (2007)	25	12 - Elle demeurait **silencieuse** et réservée et se contentait d'écouter. 22 - Tout ce qui la rendait invisible au regard de Bowing m'avait frappé. Sa timidité, ses gestes lents, son sourire, et surtout son **silence**. 33 - Nous vivons à la merci de certains **silences**. 34 - Il a paru soulagé de mon **silence** et de ma discrétion quand je me suis assis sur la banquette de moleskine, à l'autre bout de la salle. 43 - Après quoi un long **silence**, comme s'il regrettait cet aveu. 43 - Là, dans ce hall désert et **silencieux**, je me suis dit que je venais trop tard. 45 - La lumière m'a fait cligner des yeux, une lumière blanche qui rendait le **silence** encore plus profond. 49 - Un **silence**, entre nous, mais cela ne paraissait pas le gêner. 50 - Et le **silence**, à peine troublé par le passage d'une voiture dans l'avenue de Bretteville. 53 - Deux photos que je tenais entre pouce et index et que j'ai contemplées en **silence**. 63 - J'avais oublié aussi le **silence** et le calme de l'avenue Rachel qui mène au cimetière, mais l'on n'y pense pas, au cimetière, on se dit que tout au fond on débouchera sur la campagne, et même avec un peu de chance sur une promenade de bord de mer. 73 - Nous marchions en **silence**. 73 - Elle s'est assise au pied du lit et elle restait **silencieuse**. 85 - Elle m'observait toujours, en **silence**.

		95 - Mieux valait garder le **silence**. 96 - La rue ne m'avait jamais semblé à ce point déserte et **silencieuse**. 97 - J'avais l'impression qu'elle allait tomber d'un moment à l'autre et rendre encore plus profond le **silence** autour de nous. 100 - Je suis demeurée une dizaine de minutes dans le **silence** avant qu'il tourne la tête vers moi. 107 - C'est moi qui ai rompu le **silence**. 117 - Le **silence**. 119 - Il a dit d'une voix d'outre-tombe : « Un peu de **silence**, s'il vous plaît. » 121 - Un long **silence** entre nous. 123 - Elles marchaient vers moi dans le soleil et le **silence**. 148 - La nuit, le long de l'avenue Denfert-Rochereau, nous étions dans une ville de province, à cause du **silence** et de tous les hospices religieux dont les portails se succédaient. 152 - Il ne répondait pas et finissait par rompre le **silence** en éclatant de rire.
L'horizon (2010)	30	12 - Un blond au visage osseux portait des lunettes teintées et une chevalière, et, le plus souvent, gardait le **silence**. 21 - Et si toutes ces paroles restaient en suspens dans l'air jusqu'à la fin des temps et qu'il suffisait d'un peu de **silence** et d'attention pour en capter les échos ? 22 - Il aurait voulu savoir pourquoi cette Bretonne était née à Berlin, mais elle restait **silencieuse**. 23 - La nuit, il s'échappait du dortoir et marchait le long de l'avenue **silencieuse** jusqu'aux lumières de Pigalle. 28 - Il y eut un **silence**. 29 - Il cherchait une phrase pour rompre le **silence**. 29 - De nouveau, le **silence**. 34 - Le **silence** autour d'eux. 44 - Le **silence**, le téléphone du hall qui sonnait pour rien, la machine à écrire sur laquelle Margaret achevait de taper un « rapport », tout cela laissait à Bosmans une impression de rêve éveillé. 52 - Tout était paisible et rassurant par ici, les feuillages des arbres, le **silence**, la façade de l'immeuble où étaient sculptées, au-dessus de la porte cochère, des têtes de lions. 53 - Ils marchaient le long d'une avenue bordée d'hospices et de couvents, à proximité de l'Observatoire où Bosmans imaginait quelques savants, dans le **silence** et la pénombre, qui observaient au télescope les étoiles. 55 - Elle gardait le **silence**. 56 - Un **silence**. 64 - Peut-être, les jours de congé, les enfants se tenaient-ils près d'eux sur le canapé, absorbés dans leurs livres, et les samedis après-midi se passaient ainsi, et rien ne troublait le **silence** qu'observait cette famille studieuse. 64 - Ce **silence** et cette tranquillité, il semblait à Bosmans qu'il en profitait en fraude, avec Margaret. 67 - Une nuit, en sortant de l'immeuble, dans le **silence** des jardins de l'Observatoire, Bosmans fit une remarque qui provoqua chez Margaret un petit rire à cause du ton grave qu'il avait employé [...] 72 - Il y eut un **silence**. 72 - Le professeur Ferne et sa femme le considéraient en **silence**, l'air de n'avoir pas compris sa question. 82 - Ces soirs-là, les rues désertes et **silencieuses** du quartier étaient des lignes de fuite, qui débouchaient toutes sur l'avenir et l'HORIZON. 105 - Elle la vit s'éloigner et, dans le **silence**, on entendait le claquement régulier de ses talons hauts. 108 - Margaret se tenait en retrait. L'autre ne bougeait pas, les bras croisés, et gardait le **silence**. 114 - Depuis ce moment, et jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient arrivés devant l'immeuble, il était de plus en plus fébrile mais il gardait le **silence**. 126 - Un **silence**. 136 - Rien. Le **silence**. Le néant. 143 - Il y eut un **silence** que Bosmans voulut rompre. 150 - À la sortie de l'école, il la prenait gravement par le bras et marchait ainsi, très droit et **silencieux**, à côté d'elle. 156 - *L'Unité **silencieuse***, de H. Kirkwood. 160 - Les premiers temps, il avait éprouvé une si profonde sensation de vide à cause du **silence** de Margaret… 160 - La rue était **silencieuse**. 161 - La rue serait encore plus **silencieuse** et plus ensoleillée.
L'herbe des nuits (2012)	31	10 - Surtout quand rien ne trouble le **silence**. 10 - Mais quelques noms se détachent avec netteté dans le **silence** et sur la page blanche… 13 - De longs **silences**. 21 - Les confidences qu'il m'a faites—mais peut-on vraiment parler de confidences ?—, c'était sur le chemin de la place Monge à Montparnasse, entre de longs **silences**, comme si la marche l'encourageait à parler. 31 - Tout était **silencieux** autour de nous. 31 - Le **silence** était encore plus profond, et nous entendions le bruit de nos pas. 45 - J'ai été étonné qu'elle emploie ce terme, elle dont les propos étaient toujours mesurés et qui gardait souvent le **silence**. 66 - Plutôt que de toujours soumettre les autres à un interrogatoire, il vaut mieux les prendre en **silence** tels qu'ils sont. 72 - Il était resté **silencieux** et, simplement, il avait haussé les sourcils. 82 - Et, justement, la rue Cuvier s'ouvrait devant nous déserte et **silencieuse** jusqu'à la Seine. 83 - Il y avait très peu de lumière dans la rue, et au fond de cette pénombre et de ce **silence** nous risquions

		d'entendre le rugissement des fauves. 84 - Nous longions les grilles de la halle aux vins, noyée de pénombre et qui était encore plus déserte et **silencieuse** que la rue. 88 - Un moment de **silence** entre nous. 92 - Je restais **silencieux** pour le laisser parler. 107 - Il y a eu un moment de **silence**. 108 - Un **silence**. 108 - À mon tour, je gardais le **silence**. 108 - Et je sentais à l'autre bout du fil le trouble de mon interlocuteur, et même son inquiétude à cause de mon **silence**. 112 - Le **silence**. 119 - Il régnait autour de nous un tel **silence** qu'il ne pouvait plus être troublé par le passage d'une voiture mais par le claquement des sabots d'un cheval de fiacre. 120 - Elle restait **silencieuse** comme si je n'avais rien dit ou que la distance du temps était si grande entre nous que ma voix ne pouvait pas lui parvenir. 131 - Ils vivent de leur vie secrète, et cela n'est possible pour eux que dans des endroits **silencieux**, loin du centre. 135 - Un **silence** entre nous. 138 - Dehors, sur le trottoir de la place, nous étions immobiles et **silencieux**, Langlais et moi. 145 - D'ailleurs, je crois que vous avez écrit quelque part que nous vivons à la merci de certains **silences**. 149 - J'espérais vraiment que quelqu'un finirait par ouvrir, que le **silence** serait rompu et qu'il y aurait de nouveau de la lumière. 149 - Le **silence**. 153 - Mais nous avons continué à marcher, je ne sais plus par quel chemin. Je me souviens d'avenues **silencieuses** où les feuillages des platanes formaient une voûte, de rares fenêtres éclairées aux façades des immeubles, et du lion de Belfort qui montait la garde, le regard fixé vers le sud. 159 - Je croyais, jusque-là, qu'ils sondaient les reins et les cœurs, que leurs fichiers contenaient les moindres détails de nos vies, tous nos pauvres secrets, et que nous étions à la merci de leurs **silences**. 164 - Cette question m'a causé une telle tristesse que je suis resté **silencieux**. 166 - Un **silence** d'aquarium.
Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier (2014)	20	12 - Il y eut un **silence**. 14 - Il suivait la rue de l'Arcade, déserte et **silencieuse** sous le soleil. 18 - Un **silence**. 22 - Un **silence**. Mais celui-ci n'était pas menaçant. 26 - Un **silence**. 35 - Derrière la porte de la salle de bains, de grands moments de **silence** et, chaque fois, Daragane croyait que la conversation était terminée. 38 - Mais l'autre gardait le **silence**. 41 - Ils avaient gardé le **silence** pendant une grande partie du trajet. 44 - Et bien qu'il soit presque onze heures du soir, il était réconforté par sa présence **silencieuse**. 50 - Il était près d'une heure du matin, et il se dit qu'à cette heure-là, dans le **silence** et la solitude, on se monte la tête pour un rien. 72 - Après le signal, c'était le **silence**. 79 - Mais il restait **silencieux**. 83 - Les mots qu'il venait de prononcer étaient très clairs et d'une sonorité métallique dans le **silence** de cette terrasse, mais il pensa que cela ne servait à rien. 84 - Perrin de Lara restait **silencieux** dans la pénombre. 89 - Le **silence**. 93 - Il n'avait jamais compris pourquoi tous ces gens, dans les casinos, restaient longtemps autour des tables, **silencieux**, immobiles, avec leurs têtes de morts-vivants. 99 - Il avait été surpris tout à l'heure par le **silence** de la rue et par la grille, au bout, qui faisait de cette rue une impasse. 108 - Il s'était enfin décidé à profiter du **silence** de la nuit pour relire une dernière fois toutes les feuilles du « dossier ». 126 - Puis ils marchèrent en **silence**, l'un et l'autre, le docteur, très droit, très raide, l'allure d'un ancien officier de cavalerie. 140 - Au bas de l'escalier, elle avait mis son index sur ses lèvres pour lui indiquer qu'il fallait monter en **silence**.
Souvenirs dormants (2017)	16	11 - Un **silence**. 13 - Peut-être m'aideraient-elles à mieux comprendre mon père, un inconnu qui marchait en **silence** à mes côtés, le long des allées du bois de Boulogne. 31 - Elle nous guidait en **silence** le long d'un couloir, jusqu'au salon. 32 - À cause du **silence**, vous vous demandiez si vous étiez vraiment à Paris. 36 - Elle était sur le point de me donner d'autre détails, mais elle est restée **silencieuse**. 39 - Comme elle le faisait toujours, elle me guidait, en **silence**, le long du couloir. 39 - Il y a eu entre nous un moment de **silence**. 48 - J'essayais d'engager la conversation, mais elle semblait trouver naturel que nous marchions côte à côte en **silence**. 69 - « Vous avez toujours les masques d'Afrique et d'Océanie dans votre appartement ? » lui ai-je demandé pour rompre le **silence**.

		70 - Je suis resté **silencieux**. 77 - D'où venait une telle tranquillité ? Du **silence** et de l'air limpide de la place du Trocadéro ? 77 - Et la voiture roulerait sans heurts, l'une des voitures américaines de ce temps-là, dont on aurait dit qu'elle glissait sur l'eau, en **silence**. 80 - Ou bien, tout simplement, vivons-nous à la merci de certains **silences**. 86 - Les premiers instants, nous n'étions pas très rassurés dans le **silence** de la chambre. 92 - Et puis le **silence** était si profond qu'au bout d'un quart d'heure j'ai craint qu'elle ne m'ait faussé compagnie, comme je l'avais souvent fait moi-même en disant [...] 99 - Le soleil et le **silence**, le bleu du ciel, la couleur ocre de l'immeuble, le vert des arbres du parc... tout cela formait un contraste, dans ma mémoire, avec le bassin de la Villette ou le canal de l'Ourcq, un peu plus haut dans le même arrondissement et que j'avais découverts une nuit de décembre grâce à Madame Hubersen.
Encre sympathique (2019)	20	15 - Et Hutte m'avait observé en **silence**, les sourcils froncés, l'air de me reprocher ma légèreté. 19 - Il gardait le **silence** et paraissait vraiment désappointé. 26 - En **silence**. 32 - Le reste du chemin , nous avons marché côte à côte en **silence**. 33 - Il se tenait à côté de moi et il gardait le **silence**. 41 - On aurait dit une voix qui rompait le **silence**, quelqu'un qui aurait voulu vous faire une confidence, mais y avait renoncé ou n'en avait pas eu le temps. 52 - Un **silence**. 57 - Il y a eu un instant de **silence** entre nous. 60 - Il y a eu un long moment de **silence** entre nous. 69 - Elle restait **silencieuse**. 71 - Si je ne lui posais pas de questions, j'avais le sentiment qu'elle aurait gardé le **silence**. 72 - Elle gardait le **silence** et paraissait préoccupée. 73 - Ce Brainos ne semblait pas beaucoup l'intéresser. De nouveau, elle gardait le **silence**, et moi je ne trouvais plus de questions à lui poser. 86 - À cette heure-là, l'avenue était déserte et **silencieuse**. 88 - Il avait encore ralenti, et la voiture glissait en **silence** comme si elle était en roue libre. 94 - Son regard s'était assombri et il gardait le **silence**. 99 - Le passage était désert et **silencieux**, comme d'habitude. 112 - Et elle aussi gardait le **silence**. 118 - Bien sûr, au fil des années, les gens disparaissaient, les lumières s'éteignaient, le **silence** se faisait dans les lieux où l'on s'était habitué au brouhaha des conversations et aux éclats de rire. 123 - Elle avait dit cette phrase sans réfléchir, juste pour rompre le **silence**.