

Patrick Modiano's Voice: from *La Place de l'Etoile* to *Dora Bruder*

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Abstract

The way an author individualizes his writing is expressed through voice, a feature of writing that is often overlooked, generally not analyzed. The phenomenon of voice is not easy to grasp and when we think of Patrick Modiano, an adjective comes to mind, one which makes it even less detectable: imperceptible. Is it possible to analyze a voice that fades, that allows the contents to be "carried on writing"? However, examining Modiano's work, we realize that his voice is not homogeneous. On the contrary, the loud shouting voice of the young writer of the seventies is no longer the one of the mature novelist of the nineties. It has undergone esthetic metamorphoses. It leaves deep traces in the contemporary novel, but no critic would think to connect that voice to a shout.

*This paper examines Modiano's voice during the period between 1968 and 1997, attempting to reveal its evolution from *La Place de l'Etoile*, via *Missing Person* up to *Dora Bruder*, studying the tension between outcry and whisper that destabilizes the writing. Two main questions demand analysis: What is Modiano's voice at the beginning of his career? Which transformations or tendencies has it undergone along these years?*

Key words: *voice, tone, outcry, whisper, transformation, individualizing writing, history, imagination, unresolved tension, irony.*

"All that can save [written language] is the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in the words and fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination." (Robert Frost)

Patrick Modiano's novels have been described as literary detective stories, but the mysteries he examines are never actually deciphered, which is probably the reason why, when informed of his Nobel Prize, he states: "I always have the impression that I write the same book, which means it's already forty five years that I've been writing the same book" (Riding, 2014). The Swedish Academy honored him "for the art

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of memory with which he has evoked the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life-world of the occupation" (Riding 2014). Indeed, memory and his unfinished exploration of the German occupation of France are essential tags for his writing, as is the father's character that is at the heart of most of his novels. However, what seems to be more flagrant in the novels is the epistemological and ethical challenges of relating to these subjects, both strongly linked to the particular "voice" of his writing.

The way an author individualizes his writing is expressed through voice, a feature of writing that is often overlooked, which is generally not analyzed. Bakhtin argues that the power of voice originates in the coexistence with the multiple voices in literature: "For the prose writer, the object is a focal point for heteroglot voices among which his own voice must also sound; these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they "do not sound" (1981: 278). It is the individual writing style of an author, a combination of a common usage of syntax, diction, punctuation, character development, dialogue, within his oeuvre. A voice can be thought of in terms of the uniqueness of the writer. It comes from the depths and imposes itself from the inside, it is an act without thought; it springs. It is in fact the genius of the writer: to obey a need that is enforced on him. Each writer has his particular voice and anything written should have the author's voice. According to Jean-Pierre Martin: "La voix en écriture est la fiction d'un imaginaire, l'utopie d'un secret. Un mythe, un mirage, au mieux une métaphore, qui ne fait que redoubler le mythe et la métaphore de la voix sensible... Elle est ce qui échappe à la description du texte" (1998: 34). However, the readers "hear" the voice in a text, and when they do, they are often more attracted to read it, as it often makes the narrative much more appealing.

The phenomenon of voice is not easy to grasp and when we think of Modiano, an adjective comes to mind which makes it even less detectable: *imperceptible*. The voice is so difficult to characterize that it seems in fact, at least at first sight, indefinable. Is it possible to analyze a voice that fades, that allows the contents to be "carried on writing"? As Roger Yves Roche argues, even though this voice is indefinable, it is "reconnaissable entre autres, une longue et identique phrase que l'on dirait travaillée à l'économie en même temps qu'élaborée à l'extrême,

simplement, mais exactement, ce qu'on appelle un style" (2009: 15). Considering Modiano's writing, we think of what Barthes called an "impassive" or "innocent" writing. This is a writing that ignores judgments and is only based on their absence: "Cette parole transparente accomplit un style de l'absence qui est presque une absence idéale du style". (1972: 60). However, examining Modiano's work, we realize that his voice is not homogeneous. On the contrary, the voice of the young writer of the seventies is no longer the one of the mature novelist of the nineties. It has undergone esthetic metamorphoses. In his preface to *La Place de l'étoile* in 1968, Jean Cau notes about Modiano's writing:

Une sensibilité faite de tant de rires, de tant de douleurs qu'aucun Dieu (fût-il d'Abraham) n'y reconnaîtra les siens. En vérité, la voix unique d'un écrivain de vingt ans qui ouvre d'une poussée les lourdes portes de la littérature et qui, hagard, se dresse sur le seuil en jetant un grand cri (Modiano, 1968 : foreword).

Thirty years later, the distinct and typical voice of Modiano resonates more than ever. It leaves deep traces in the contemporary novel, but no critic would think to connect that voice to a shout. It is rather an undeniably present "inner music", as suggested by Pierre Assouline, who considers Modiano "un homme de biais"; or else a "little music" as put forward by Christine Jerusalem noting that at the heart of Modiano's work there is an "éternel retour "... "qui conduit parfois le lecteur à s'égarer dans ses souvenirs et à ne plus savoir dans quel récit il a croisé tel personnage, telle situation" (2009: 87).

This paper examines Patrick Modiano's voice during the period between 1968 and 1997 and attempts to reveal its evolution from *La Place de l'étoile*, via *Missing Person* up to *Dora Bruder*. Two main questions demand analysis: What is Modiano's voice at the beginning of his career? Which transformations or tendencies has it undergone along these years?

Keeping Distance and Screaming

In an attempt to analyse Modiano's voice, it is necessary to consider ethical elements that account for the restrained nature of the imaginative merging in the texts, and the tinge of historical details. The novels are historic in the sense that they embrace a very special period. Modiano, since childhood, has felt both victim and executioner, Jew and

anti-Semitic, French and foreigner. The period that preoccupies him most is undoubtedly that of the Second World War, to which he refers constantly, especially in his first three novels. In 1965, Raymond Queneau mentions that in literature there is a 'before and after' 1945:

Devant l'horreur des camps d'extermination... on peut estimer que la littérature a trouvé dans l'histoire une concurrence sérieuse. Et l'on ne peut nier qu'actuellement poètes et prosateurs ne soient quelque peu «soufflés» par ce qui leur a été donné de vivre - ou de voir vivre- ou d'entendre raconter (1994 : 183).

It is probably from this observation that the work of Modiano starts: from the historical event that cannot be ignored, from the suffering of anti-Semitism consequences. But the most painful and striking aspect to emerge is the anti-Semitism of the great writers of French literature, especially those admired by Modiano:

Gide disait que les juifs feraient mieux d'écrire en hébreu. Giraudoux aussi était antisémite... je cite ces gens parce qu'ils représentent l'humanisme français, la quintessence française, tout cela je l'ai éprouvé profondément (Interview 22/9/1975).

According to Charlotte Vardi, writing becomes for Modiano "un acte de vengeance et en même temps de dévouement au père muet devant les antisémites" (2007). To his father he wishes to lend his own voice, a voice stamped by a paradoxical writing, as it uses a perfect French, but as Modiano states, this language "se retourne contre lui-même, de l'intérieur ... C'est un peu un travail de sape» (Modiano, 22/9/1975, Interview).

There are shades here of the aesthetic element that seems to contribute most to Modiano's voice in his first novel, *La Place de l'étoile* (1968). A sarcastic and grotesque tone reinforced by irony, black humor, as well as scathing mockery is used, so that Alan Riding claims that it is arguably Modiano's "most explosive novel". (Riding, Dec. 24, 2014). The world described in the novel often unexpectedly switches into a spooky world: incipits, absurd passages mingle with the narrative of historical facts. Modiano tries to get rid of his obsession of occupancy by creation of a world of his own: the one he invents in his personal interpretation of this period (which he has not experienced since he was born in 1945). The "Jewish question" is therefore approached in a tone of parody. It's rather similar to Romain Gary's sarcasm, a comic dramatization that is supposed to save pain. An attempt to incorporate laughter into tragedy

is felt on all levels to reconfigure tragedy as laughter. It seems that the Jewish question hides behind playful or deliberately cynical remarks, in order to conceal the narrator's dismay: in fact, it seems that Modiano escapes into narration, into literature, so that never to have to fully assume the reality of the occupation years and the veracity of the Holocaust in all its horror. In this case, the hierarchical and dialectical irony which, by antiphrastically asserting the opposite of what is meant, reaffirms and arrogates the subject as a privileged source of truth. As Gilles Deleuze's explains: "...l'ironie est la coextensivité de l'être avec l'individu, ou du Je avec la représentation" (Deleuze, 1969 : 166).

From this point of view, Modiano is both near and far from those writers who attempt to testify in their own way to what is possible and impossible to say after the camps. Does the originality of George Semprun, Elie Wiesel, George Perec, Robert Antelme, Primo Levi not come from the new relationship between truth and fiction testimony they have tried to establish? Modiano addresses these issues without aiming to reconstitute history. In an interview in *Le Point*, he states: "Ce n'est pas vraiment l'Occupation qui me fascine. Elle me fournit un climat idéal, un peu trouble, une lumière un peu bizarre, l'image démesurément grossie de ce qui se passe aujourd'hui" (1974). Modiano's turn in the different novels exemplifies the epistemological and ethical challenges of relating to the Holocaust and its legacy each time in a different manner.

Thus, in *La Place de L'étoile*, the voice of Modiano is intense and resounding. This book, conceived more as a pamphlet than a novel, immediately introduces us into an ironic and buffoon universe, where black humor is present, similar to Albert Cohen's magnificent series *Les Valeureux*. These hallucinated memories tell the psychic trauma of the Jewish people, of the Jewish fear stalked by legacy of centuries of persecution and massacres, revived by the tragedy of the Holocaust in the twentieth century. Accordingly, starting with the epigraph of the book, a voice breaks, its echoes reverberating throughout the whole novel:

Au mois de juin 1942, un officier allemand s'avance vers un jeune homme et lui dit: «Pardon, monsieur, où se trouve la place de l'Etoile?»
Le jeune homme désigne le côté gauche de sa poitrine. (Histoire juive).
(Modiano, 1968).

Throughout the novel, between light but ironic and sometimes even burlesque passages, the black lines of the Jewish people's tragedy

described in detail, Modiano's voice is "heard" deep and resonant. The hero narrator Raphael Schlemilovitch (which means "poor guy" in Yiddish) seems to embody all Jews. At the same time, he pursues an amazing spiritual journey where each station or chapter of the book is an attempt to join a system of values, rooted in a geographical space, history and culture, an attempt ruined by the obsessive memory of the collaboration and Auschwitz. Assertive and emotional, Modiano's voice merges with that of Schlemilovitch. Like it, it is strong and burly:

Si je trouvais Léon Daudet divertissant, le colonel de La Roque m'ennuyait. Horace de Carbuccia et Béraud m'invitaient quelquefois pour parler du complot judéo-anglais. Maurois m'enviait mes amitiés fascistes. Je lui donnais la recette: abandonner définitivement son exquise pudeur de juif honteux. Reprendre son véritable nom. Devenir comme moi, Raphael Schlemilovitch, un juif antisémite. (Modiano, 1968: 25)

The irony in this case, is a form of resistance, expressing the refusal to step into insurmountable suffering. Modiano reveals the violent truth of evil and his way to retort to it is through his young writer's resounding voice of that period.

The passages about Nazism and the Gestapo, carefully mingled with descriptions of Israeli pioneers and heroes of the story, are dedicated to the "white slave trade". Schlemilovitch is a hallucinatory character, through which the lives that could be his come and go in a moving fantasy. The comic, bizarre, buffoon voice is evident. Or even the voice of the remote and playful confession of atrocious facts described in this passage:

Un matin, profitant de mon absence, Tania se tranche les veines. Pourtant, je cache avec soin mes lames de rasoir. J'éprouve en effet un curieux vertige quand mon regard rencontre ces petits objets métalliques: j'ai envie de les avaler. (Modiano, 1968: 32).

This uttered voice is a resisting voice even in extreme cases. It is clear that the reader, in order not to get lost in a story that constantly forks, must interpret the provocations of the hero-narrator, located in the historical facts implied, or in the literary panorama to which the author refers - irony mingles with great admiration. A constant shock merges with permanent vigor - the voice is of intense violence, whether in tragic rage or sarcastic humor.

A Restrained and Fragile Voice

But it is all too easy to read Modiano as the mere author of a resounding voice. Ten years after his first book, it seems that Modiano's booming voice has undergone some changes. In *Missing Person*, the voice is always his, yet it is less vibrant, more timid, more hesitant. The preamble of the two novels is indeed very different: if in *La Place de l'Etoile*, the opening sentence is solid and confident ("C'était le temps où je dissipais mon héritage vénézuélien. Certains ne parlaient plus que de ma belle jeunesse et de mes boucles noires"), in *Missing Person*, the opening sentence expresses anxiety, revolving around nothingness echoing vulnerability : "Je ne suis rien. Rien qu'une silhouette claire". The voice is disturbed, fragile, broken. The first sentence of Modiano's stories has an essential significance and provides an undeniable weight. According to Jean-Pierre Martin, the tone is "cet esprit fluide, ce génie ou ce démon qui surgit dès la première phrase, ne quitte pas le livre, jusqu'à son dernier mot" Indeed, Modiano himself explains about the first sentence of a novel: "C'est elle qui donne la tonalité du roman, comme les premières mesures au piano" (Modiano, 2001).

In the case of *Missing Person*, another tone is used to build a completely different linguistic ritual. Indeed, *Missing Person* published in 1978, interrogates memory while incorporating the themes of the Second World War and the Holocaust. But this time, the weakness of the narrator (as well as that of the other characters) is felt. Irony, in other words, is no longer used for assertion of life, a form of resistance. In the course of the narrator's investigation, we share his doubts, we follow false leads. He creates a heavy, distressing, atmosphere inhabited by a shaky voice. He embodies the painful past with vulnerable, fragile characters that hardly dare emerge from the foggy atmosphere; this background finally creates a disharmony effect and contributes to the construction of Modiano's new voice: it is a restrained voice.

In this novel, Patrick Modiano's restrained voice succeeds in being silent without, nonetheless, falling into muteness – a voice in between, a voice on the brink, a precise voice that touches; let us first try to see if Modiano himself can enlighten us on this matter. This is how he evokes the relationship between the narrative in the first person and voice posture:

"Le «je» ... c'est moi et pas moi. Mais utiliser le je me concentre mieux, c'est comme si j'entendais une voix, comme si je transcrivais une voix

qui me parlait et qui me disait je. Ce n'est pas Jeanne d'Arc, mais plutôt comme quand on capte une voix à la radio, qui de temps en temps s'échappe, devient inaudible, et revient. Ce je d'un autre qui me parle et que j'écoute me donne de la distance par rapport à l'autobiographie, même si je m'incorpore parfois au récit" (Modiano, 2001).

Modiano proceeds in the manner of a detective or a sleek historian, who requires from the reader complicity, an attention to detail and especially to what is not written, what is silenced. Modiano's voice becomes a call for a careful reader, able to listen to what is said between the lines. Like a strange and disturbing music, it has a sort of "playback" effect on the reader, a feeling that is hard to describe as it is so intimate. Modiano's voice repeatedly escaping the attempt to locate it preserves the prospect of seriousness by sacrificing laughter and mockery and adopting hesitation and silence. The imbrication of hesitation and silence is established, marking the style of the text of *Missing Person*.

This fragile voice relies on modifiers that serve to display the limits of language and highlight the incapacity of the narrator and the doubtful atmosphere. The characters of *Missing Person* express themselves in scattered elliptic sequences, their voice quiver in broken sentences: "Il a été au consulat de Géorgie à Paris, jusqu'à ce que..." (Modiano, 1978: 36). The sentence is unfinished as if censored, and silence replaces words. The suspended words mean nothing, strictly speaking, but suggest a lot. According to Jean Starobinski: "la parole cherche souvent à s'effacer pour laisser la voie libre à une pure vision, à une intuition parfaitement oublieuse du bruit des mots" (1999 : 12-13). And silence is language. Silence and speech are no longer antithetical or mutually exclusive in Modiano's text, but connected through rhetoric. The tensions then unite into a malleable paste and not in hard rock.

Moreover, this voice, far from being restricted to Stioppa's voice, is also echoing that of the narrator: it expresses inability and paralysis that are finally outspread through the entire novel: "Je restais immobile... et j'étais sûr à ce moment là qu'il me disait encore quelque chose mais que le brouillard étouffait le son de sa voix". (Modiano, 1978: 41) Surprisingly, the voice is not drowned out by a sound but the fog: sight and hearing are strangely inverted reflecting the stagnation of the writing. The narrator sees less and as a result, hears less. Similarly, the writer's voice and that of the character are merged in a space where an indefinite mist cancels the voice. One of the paragraphs of Chapter IV ends with an ellipsis: "Et j'avais découvert dans ce dédale

d'immeubles, d'escaliers et d'ascenseurs, parmi ces centaines d'alvéoles, un homme qui peut-être..." (Modiano, 1978: 38). The narrator's unfinished sentence, reinforced by the word "dédale" (the figure of the labyrinth designed to show imprisonment and inactivity) and the adverb of uncertainty "peut-être" (intended to express doubt), fuses with Stioppa's, as if the author has borrowed his voice for good.

If irony has almost disappeared in *Missing Person*, comical effects (which are somehow recalls or echoes of the voice of the first novel) are still recurring here and there in the text: for instance, in the case of the wandering bride in Heurteur's restaurant, or when the narrator and Stioppa of Djagoriew, too tall to stand in the apartment, are forced to lie in order to talk: "lui et moi, nous avons une tête de trop pour franchir l'embrasure de la porte de communication et j'ai imaginé qu'il s'y était souvent blessé le front" (Modiano, 1978: 33) In this case, the comic effects do not express resistance anymore, but rather embody a kind of discreet, subtle humor, which slips into the seriousness of the novel as if to remind us of *La Place de l'étoile*, and may be understood as the author's wish to send the reader a sign of connivance: "listen, I'm different now and yet, I am still the same."

Whispered Vocalizations

In Modiano's later work, the gradual extinction of the loud voice goes on to be finally replaced by the a delicate and more discreet tone which opens the way for an affirmation of a living tone that leaves far behind irony an cynicism, to construct a "whispering voice". On the occasion of the publication of *A Pedigree*, Modiano explains: "Je ne peux pas trop employer dans la fiction cet 'humour discret, plutôt noir et décapant', parce que, à trop forte dose, cela orienterait la fiction vers la satire, et j'ai besoin que les personnages de fiction me fassent rêver" (Interview, 2005).

We realize that Modiano's voice is not ironic anymore for the last fifteen years, but soft and moderate. It permeates the text almost silently. As Modiano explains: "Au cinéma on peut chuchoter, comme dans un roman" (Bonnaud, 1997). At the same time, in the novels written since the nineties we find no trace of burlesque excess: in *Un cirque passe*, *Chien de printemps*, *Du plus loin de l'oubli*, *Des Inconnues*, *La Petite Bijou*, Modiano's voice has changed considerably. *Dora Bruder* (1997) is a good example of the development of stylistic elements that have undergone considerable change, influencing the tone, and finally Modiano's voice.

Firstly, the story's tone is an antithesis of the grotesque. The father character is not named Schlemilovitch anymore, he is not arrested by "Gérard Le Gestapiste", but simply by French collaborating administrators who obey the new laws of occupation. The will to prove the young author's writing skill and artistic performance gives way to the humility of a simple and real story, the poignant account of the disappearance of a Jewish teenager. The writing is essentially stripped and nude. Modiano reports the facts noting a strange coincidence between the fate of the young deported Jewish girl and his own father. The ripened Modiano of the nineties has removed the mask of the clown to address his subject with the sensitivity it deserves. *Dora Bruder* is a story -- based on a news item -- of a very young girl stalked and broken by the machinery of the occupation, the story of a poor girl on the run.

Secondly, the story is much more emotional. While functioning as facilitator for the memorial, the fruit of eight years of research and reflection, the voice of the narrating "je" disappears here and there to give way to the description of the atmosphere. Accordingly, whenever the narrator loses the track of Dora Bruder, he makes moving efforts to hold on to her dodging story. For example, he tells about the weather of that period:

Le seul moyen de ne pas perdre tout à fait DB au cours de cette période, ce serait de rapporter les changements du temps. La neige était tombée pour la première fois le 6 novembre 1941...Le 29 décembre, la température avait encore baissé... le froid était devenu sibérien... Le 12 février, il y avait eu un peu de soleil, comme une annonce timide du printemps (Modiano, 1997: 91).

This voice is then one of emotion, it is affectionate and tender. We should also note that immediately after the weather break, Modiano evokes his father, for his fate and Dora's are closely linked: this is Modiano's manner to remember and refer to all the people hunted by the occupation. As Pierre Lepape puts it: "Pour combler les trous, Modiano offre à *Dora Bruder* des fragments de sa propre jeunesse, en mesurant la distance infinie qui les sépare" (1997: 2). According to Laurent Douzou: "there is a constant tension between on the one hand, the will to snatch the young girl from the oblivion, the void, the blankness left by her journey, and on the other hand, the intuition that at the same time it would be impossible." (2009: 126). This position creates an effect of vacillation and hesitation translated in the narrator's voice.

Another significant change in the tone is that the rhythm of *Dora Bruder* fluctuates ambiguously between short, laconic, dry chapters, (like the one on pages 114-115, consisting of the Tourelles register) and long loaded ones. Modiano, artist of the ellipse and conciseness, takes a new path, and doing so, a new voice. In fact, the narrative proceeds by notations or dry pieces of information and has a preference for parataxis and juxtaposition of details: "Lever vers six heures. Chapelle. Salle de classe. Réfectoire. Salle de classe. Cours de récréation. Réfectoire. Salle de classe. Chapelle. Dortoir. Sorties, les dimanches" (Modiano, 1997: 40).

It seems that a hidden voice is behind this dry information, slipping between the concise elliptic sentences and the terse words. A voice without identity, not always attributed to a character, where subject and verb are erased, a voice that looks for a rather strong sensation. A game between fiction and reality, between fiction and life is built. These curt words, stripped of any sense, reinforce the icy description of what Dora's daily life could be, drawing attention to the fact that her life within the walls of the boarding had been very cold and in deep "solitude" (Modiano 1997: 42). Indeed, the narrator concludes by one single, essential word that sums it all up: "Solitude." Behind these lines, the silent voice of the author is here, hidden this time, wishing to express the unbearable suffering, but in fact, only pointing a finger. Modiano argued on this point in 1981: "je n'ai aucune facilité de plume, et écrire est donc pour moi un travail un peu pénible, bien que le résultat donne une impression de simplicité. J'essaie de dire les choses avec le moins de mots possible" (Interview, 1981: 56-57).

Another essential practice related to the rhythm of the novel is the use of repetition and retraction, a kind of refrain or a strand of music in harmony. This is what might be called the "Tango voice": two steps forward, one step back, which implies recurrence. Incidents, gestures, thoughts are repeated with some regularity. However, this is not a romantic tango, but a rather tired, minor tango, a daily tango that escorts the narrator's activities and represents a simple life style closely linked to a quest for identity as well as to the banality and boredom of existence. To that we can add minimalistic music as the one of Eric Satie and Philip Glass: rehearsals are part of the text and provide parallel thought about time and its uses. Because time is that of melancholy to Modiano and, like the story, it is repetitive and cyclical. Thus the voice is naked as the scenes and settings where the lonely narrator moves.

The text of *Dora Bruder* shows other features of style. For instance, the tight frame of the opening is an APB in an ad of Paris-Soir: "On recherche une jeune fille, Dora Bruder, 15 ans, 1,55m, visage ovale, yeux gris-marron, manteau sport gris, pull-over bordeaux, jupe et chapeau bleu marine, chaussures sport marron (Modiano, 1997: 9). It seems that the writer disappears, overtaken by the prose of the world. From then on, the story will only comment on this notice in each chapter without real progress in the inquiry. It will end with the fact that Dora Bruder takes her secret with her, and no one will ever know how she spent the fugue days before her deportation.

In Modiano's whispered voice, many signs of the spoken words are inscribed. Hence we can note the many expressions of hesitation, formulations granting the story the meaning of a gesture: we hear, as in an uncontrollable chorus, the repeated words: "Je ne sais rien" (Modiano, 1997: 32) et "je ne sais pas" (28, 89, 96, 125), "on ne savait pas si" (141) "on ne saura jamais" (110) "je savais vaguement", (102) "Je me demande" (39, 75, 111, 125) "on se demande" (94) "je me demandais si" (63) "Je suppose" (39, 57, 85) "Cela suppose" (109) "Qui sait?" (61) "Longtemps je n'ai rien su de Dora Bruder" (62), "je doute" (43) "j'en doute" (104) "j'ignore si" (75, 85, 129), "j'ignorerai toujours" (147). It is a repressed voice, full of regret of inability to elucidate Dora Bruder's story and, at the same time, it is also the voice of a narrator who lets us know of the evolution of his work still in the making, informs us of its chronology.

These expressions are reinforced by adverbs like "probably" (Modiano, 1997: 92) "maybe" (41,65, 112) and by the conditional of the French verb "pourrait" (the modal "could") Such repetitive effects that are a kind of spoken mimesis in writing, lend themselves to transcribing affectivity trademarks, and refer to a sensitive identification which is absent in other novels (as if Modiano prohibited himself before) as if Modiano indulged himself in this novel, letting his emotional voice be heard. This broken voice, hardly noticeable is the voice of an absence, of a hesitation, an infinite quest that also falls within the spoken word, a voice described by Jean-Pierre Martin as: "cette impulsion respiratoire, ce souffle vital, cette présence d'un corps énonciateur et proférateur qui peut traverser l'écrit comme le parlé" (1998: 263). This new voice comes with many unanswered questions that disrupt the text and give it a surprising rhythm. They come to break the style of the dry detective investigation and turn the story of Dora Bruder into an emotional and moving poetic narrative.

The unresolved tension between outcry and whisper destabilizes any attempt to assign Modiano's voice a final position. However, this uncertainty is what accounts for the author's uniqueness. From the resounding novel to the whispered novel, Modiano's voice is heard. It emerges from the depths of the heavy background of history to tell what is impossible to tell. Finally, there is no theory, no recipe, no solution at all, only a quest, a march against the current, sometimes guaranteed, sometimes stumbling and staggering, where the narration regresses while moving forward, looking into the depths of memory for an unlikely truth. Borrowing Olivier Bardolle's words when he describes Houellebecq as an author who writes "avec sa peau, avec son épiderme", I would like to say about Modiano that he writes with his breath (2002: 48)

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