



Research Article

ARTISTIC AND STYLISTIC FEATURES OF THE WORKS OF PATRICK MODIANO

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ABSTRACT

Almost all the works of the contemporary French writer Patrick Modiano, starting with his first novel "The Square of the Star", are built around two main themes: the search for identity and the period of the German occupation of France. Two problems are closely connected with them, namely: memory as a synonym for the past and renunciation of oblivion.

KEYWORDS

"Dora Bruder", "The Sacred Heart of Mary", "Les Misérables".

INTRODUCTION

Reading Modiano, you think first of all about the Second World War in the subjunctive mood

unusual for history. What would have happened if Paris had not been surrendered in the fortieth

and the French, suffering terrible losses, would have retreated to the Pyrenees?

Modiano was born in 1945, when the war had already ended, however, almost all of his works are permeated with the theme of war, more precisely, the period of German occupation. It was she who determined the whole structure of his thoughts and allowed him to create an artistic concept of the period of German occupation, which most of all occupies the author.

The writer is only interested in what preceded his birth, he calls himself "a prisoner of the time preceding his birth."

The instability of society after the war gave rise to a feeling of fragility, vagueness of being, in which there was nothing to cling to. Was the defeat of France in the war the cause of this phenomenon, did it lead to a well-known identity crisis, the "disease of the century", expressed, according to French postmodernists, "... a torn, ... devoid of integrity man" [1, 187].

Each novel by Modiano is inevitably perceived in the context of the previous ones. Sometimes a writer is even called the author of one book, he quite consciously deepens the same thoughts.

This thematic tautology is one of his artistic devices. In all his works, both the motives of memory and its loss are invariably present; memory is a real participant in events that has an impact on the characters and determines their past and present life. In his first novels *Star Square* (1968), *Night Watch* (1969), *Boulevard Ring* (1972) and *Street of Dark Shops* (1978), the author insistently refers to the period of the occupation of Paris. In the novel *Dora Bruder*, he notes that in the first novel, the Square of the Star took upon himself all the pain experienced by his father during the occupation. This time haunts him and forces him to return to the past.

The novel "Dora Bruder", written in 1997, is documentary and at the same time confessional, deeply personal. For the first time the book is named after the heroine.

We can agree with Umberto Eco that "without the biography of the author it is impossible to understand the works." The novel "Dora Bruder" should be analyzed in a biographical context.

Already in the title of the novel there is a hint of the author's tragedy - the untimely death of his brother, since the name of the heroine Bruder in German means brother. Thus, it can be assumed

that the author sees himself as the older brother of Dora Bruder.

The autobiographical beginning arises with the appearance of the father on the pages of the novel, Modiano introduces several autobiographical facts from the life of his father into the book:

«Pour mon père qui avait quatorze ans de plus que Dora Bruder, la voie était toute tracée: puisqu'on avait fait de lui un hors-la-loi, il allait suivre cette pente-la par la force des choses, vivre d'expédients a Paris, et se perdre dans les marécages du marché noir»[2,63].

The plot begins with lines from a 1941 newspaper:

«Il y a huit ans, dans un vieux journal, Paris Soir, qui datait du 31 décembre 1941, je suis tombé a la page 3 sur une rubrique: «D' hier a aujourd' hui». A la fin de la page j'ai lu : « Paris. On recherche une jeune fille, Dora Bruder, 15 ans, 1,55 m, visage ovale, yeux gris-marron, manteau sport gris, Adresser toutes indications a M. et Mme Bruder, 41 boulevard Ornano, Paris. » [3, 63].

These few lines haunt the narrator. Knowing almost nothing about Dora, but keeping her in his

memory, the author in the novel "Honeymoon Journey" in 1990 writes about a girl, the same age as Dora, named Ingrid, who runs with her friend to the free zone. Modiano writes six more books, and only eight years later does the novel Dora Bruder appear [4, 26].

Dora Bruder is a real person found in the lists of deported Jews during the war, but possibly under a different surname. This is evidenced by the author: "When I wrote the book" Dora Bruder "I was based on a fact that really existed" [5, 104]. The search for traces of this family continues after the writing of "Honeymoon Journey". Patiently and painstakingly, the narrator searches in the archives for evidence of the life of the family of an unknown girl before the war and during the war and her parents and makes attempts to take their archive keepers away from the "sentinels of oblivion", as he calls them. It took the narrator 4 years to find the date of her birth and another two years to find out the place of her birth: "A lot of time is needed to restore and see what was once carefully erased" [6, 13].

The narrator is trying to "feel for the strings" in the distant past. It is not limited to searches in the archives, but also collects the memories of many eyewitnesses of that time. Thus, the narrator



recreates the life and fate of an unknown Jewish teenage girl and her family. From a small message found by the author, a story of an obscure life and oblivion grows. It turned out that you can find one drop, dissolved in a sea of grief.

Modiano reconstructs Dora's life through the prism of time and space: time is the occupation, the space of the book is Paris. The author made Paris a protagonist of wartime. When you read a book, you have the strange feeling of being inside an old photograph; the impression that you are slowly looking at an album of photographs of Paris made by a talented artist.

The atmosphere and the "black and stuffy" time of the occupation are transmitted through the toponymy of the 18th arrondissement of Paris. The reader is given a detailed description of the north of the capital: Barbey, Ornano, Ney boulevards from the Simplon and Chateau Rouge metro stations, Clignancourt, Simplon, Ermel streets. The names of hotels and cinemas are being recreated, the original phone numbers of the city that no longer exists. The streets have changed, there are no traces of the past, only the original names remain, and it is no longer possible to clear up the mystery. Such a description of Paris convinces of the authenticity of the events.

Modiano restored the time of the occupation literally according to the days of the events that unfolded in Paris in 1940-1942. Immersed in the archives, looking for witnesses, the author restored the time of the curfew, German raids and executions in Paris.

His hero passes through the places associated with the fate of Dora Bruder, her parents and his father in his youth. It runs along Ornano Boulevard, where Dora's parents lived, Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe. "Lights, bustle – and I can't believe that I am in the same city where Dora Bruder and her parents lived, and my father when he was twenty years younger than I am now. I feel like the only thread connecting the Paris of that time with the present, as if I alone remember all this in detail. Sometimes the thread becomes very thin, is about to break, but there are evenings when the features of yesterday appear through today's city, visible only to me" [7, 50].

The narrator inhabits Paris with ghosts from that time, he himself is so immersed in this world that contact with the departed is stronger than with the living. He sees himself as a phantom among these people. "January 1965... I was nobody, I dissolved in this twilight, in these streets" [8, 50].

The narrator lives "in a world overturned into the past", trying to extract its secrets "from the depths of oblivion" (this is the title of one of his latest novels). Epochs are layered in his mind one on top of the other. Reality mixes with fiction "Yesterday and today. I look back on the past years, but they mix in my mind, and one winter overlaps another. Winter 1965 and winter 1942" [9, 10].

The author devotes a significant place in the novel to the boarding house "The Sacred Heart of Mary" on Picpus Street, from where Dora left without permission on December 14, 1941. This is intertwined with the fact of the author's biography, his stay in the boarding house at the age of the heroine.

Probably, Dora's parents tried to save her from the German threat by placing the girl in the Sacred Heart of Mary boarding school. The narrator learns from one of the few survivors of Dora's age about the conditions of the boarding house: "It looked more like an orphanage. Iron discipline. No heating. We were fed with one turnip. The pupils were supposed to pray at six o'clock" [10, 44].

It becomes clear why Dora, independent and obstinate by nature, escaped, and that returning to the boarding house, according to the narrator, "was like returning to prison" [11, 46]. Dora, in her worldview, is marginal, does not accept the living conditions of the orphanage and morally protests, like the author during her adolescence: He and the heroine are looking for themselves, this search lies in the need to be independent, to escape from society, the symbol of which is the boarding house for them. The narrator talks about what he experienced at the age of fifteen, 37 years after the incident.

«Je me souviens de l'impression forte que j'ai éprouvée lors de ma fugue de janvier 1960 – si forte que je crois en avoir connu rarement de semblables. C'était l'ivresse de trancher, d'un seul coup, tous les liens : rupture brutale et volontaire avec la discipline qu'on vous impose, le pensionnat, vos maîtres, vos camarades de classe. Désormais, vous n'aurez plus rien à faire avec ces gens-là ; rupture avec vos parents qui n'ont pas su vous aimer et dont vous vous dites qu'il n'y a aucun recours à espérer d'eux; sentiment de révolte et de solitude porté à son incandescence et qui vous coupe le souffle et vous met en état d'apesanteur» [12, 77].

For the narrator, flight is a break with the world and with time., «est un appel au secours et quelque fois une forme de suicide» [13, 78].

Here he coincides on his life path with the fate of Dora Bruder. There is a similarity between the fates of the author and the heroine. The narrator communicates with the girl, their points of contact are emotionally close to each other: "Only in communication, in the interaction of a person with a person, is "a person in a person revealed, both for others and for himself" [14, 12]. Thoughts about the heroine give rise to the author's internal dialogue with himself, thanks to which he again recreates and experiences his own story.

These memories of escaping from the orphanage provide an opportunity to understand yourself. Understanding the surrounding world and oneself arises through the understanding of the "other", namely through the attitude "I am the other", through past experience and the present: "This is the only moment in the book when, without knowing it, I approached Dora in time and space" [15, 54]. At that very moment, he sheltered the girl in his soul.

Escape from the orphanage threatened Dora, who did not wear a star, with death, «à seize ans elle avait les monde entier contre elle, sans qu'elle sache pourquoi» [16, 78]. The hero's escape fell on peacetime, and, nevertheless, was also a painful break with the environment and with time. Escape is a search for oneself, despite all its dangers.

The author finds it no coincidence that the "great seer Hugo" also described in the book "Les Misérables" the garden of the boarding house "The Sacred Heart of Mary", where Jean Valjean and Cosette hid, fleeing from Javert with the police. Dora and the author, aged 15, are as outcast as Hugo's heroes.

The narrator draws a parallel between his father and Dora, the similarity of their situation in the days of the occupation, despite the difference in their age and their destinies. Describing the roundup in which the father and, presumably, Dora fell, the author intertwines their fates.

« Si différents qu'ils aient été, l'un et l'autre, on les avait classés, cet hiver-la, dans la même catégorie de réprouvés » [17, 63].



Twenty years later, the narrator is looking for his own biography in the novel, he follows the routes of Dora, wanders through the familiar quarters, where even before his birth something happened that determined his future life. So bringing together the distance that separates him from his heroine and, getting to know her closer, he comes to the conclusion “it seems to me that I knew her” [18, 138].

Modiano is the king of details and things. He endows ordinary things with an attractive power, they help to recreate the authenticity of the situation in the novel. He uses photographs, newspaper clippings, official papers, police protocols, the true names of the streets where the characters lived. A special role belongs to photographs, the only evidence of the peaceful life of the heroes. Photos excite the mind, memory and resurrect people who have already left this world.

The author traces Dora's genealogy and describes the history of her family in great detail. Her parents are immigrants from Austria and Hungary, her mother comes from Russia. The writer depicts their difficult life in France before the war and two more war years of chaos and confusion, when they fought for their salvation

and for the salvation of their daughter. Almost simultaneously, the entire family perishes in Auschwitz.

Following in the footsteps of Dora, her parents and many other innocent victims, the author deduces their “zones of emptiness and oblivion”, recalls the crimes of the occupation time, the Tourelles and Pithivier prisons, the Drancy camp and Auschwitz. Modiano resurrects the girl and those who were next to her from obscurity, darkness and oblivion 55 years after their death, since the dead are given to live only in the memory of those who remain on earth.

“There used to be a house here, but now it is no more... And people I heard about lived in this house, they are also long gone... and I lived or visited here once. I did not know these people, but I must tell about them. Otherwise, who will remember them? Why then do I live? [19, 54].

He himself explains the purpose of his investigation and, moreover, the meaning of his life in this way.: «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 » [20, 42].

It is impossible not to notice the similarities between the author and the narrator, sometimes it seems that the author and the narrator are one and the same person. The protagonist has neither a name nor a surname, nothing is known about his profession and sources of existence. The author, as if imperceptibly, endows him with his biographical facts: separate phrases, hints. He also appears as an author in chapters when describing the life stories of other people who died in the camps. Like all of Modiano's works, the book is written in the first person, so the theme of "author" runs throughout the book. Modiano comments on this trend: "This is me, and this is not me. It is the "I" of the other person who speaks to me and whom I listen to; it helps me keep a distance from my own biography, although I sometimes connect to it" [21, 277].

Memory returns to a person "lost time", Modiano can be called the keeper of the memory of those who lived before him. In his novel *Dora Bruder*, he breaks through the oblivion of today, Dora's past and the memory of her father help to find herself.

Modiano protests against the suppression of the past, he is against the "killers of memory" and against the "sentinels of oblivion".

In this book, he admits that he writes, fulfilling his duty to the past, to those who "died in the year I was born", to those who, "if I had not written these lines, they would have been enrolled - dead or alive - in the category unidentified persons", as well as "to those who, before my birth, took all conceivable torments so that I could experience only minor sorrows» [22, 98].

The novel about *Dora Bruder* is a conversation with the departed, a return to the memory of those who once lived, because they left their imprint on the soul of the writer. The writer could say about his book, like Georges Perec: "I write - and that's it: I write because we lived together, because I was one of them, a shadow among the shadows ... I write because they left on me an indestructible an imprint, and the trace of this is a letter: the memory of them dies with the letter, the letter is the memory of their death and the affirmation of my life" [23, 59].

The past does not disappear and cannot disappear, it is next to us. And only through the past can one come to know oneself, because the past is our future.

Both the hero and the author have not finished their search: «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 elle le restent, même le soir, à l'heure des embouteillages, quand les gens se pressent vers les bouches de métro. Je ne peux pas m'empêcher de penser à elle et de sentir un écho de sa présence dans certains quartiers» [24, 144].

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