

The Magic of Modiano's Memories¹ / *A magia das memórias de Modiano*

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ABSTRACT

As master of remembrance, Patrick Modiano is passionate about the theme of reminiscences from his literary creation. In his works, the flexible use of memory techniques leads the protagonist to the forgotten past through the process of quest and investigation. The memory, being a way by which we try to reappear the past and escape the reality, is Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory to which we can draw the sources of the poetic art and puts us in the reflection in the old experiences that could have offered us different choices and whose value deserves further study. This text tries to situate itself in the diptych of Modiano : *Sleep of Memory* and *Our Beginnings in Life* and will be divided into 3 main parts : the first will apply to textual analysis which will study the lexical fields, the forms and the symbolic values of the elements; the second will focus on stylistic analysis which will study the discourse register and will examine the grammatical structures as well as their effects of meaning; the last part will dedicate itself to the philosophy of Modiano's memories by virtue of the "duration" created by Bergson.

Keywords: memory, gap, poetic, stylistic, metaphor, value

RESUMO

Como mestre da lembrança, Patrick Modiano é um apaixonado pelo tema das reminiscências a partir de sua criação literária. Em suas obras, o uso flexível de técnicas de memória leva os protagonistas ao passado esquecido através do processo de busca e de investigação. A lembrança, enquanto via pela qual tentamos fazer reaparecer o passado e escapar da realidade, é Mnemosine, a deusa da memória que nos permite extrair das fontes da arte poética; ela nos abre também a reflexão sobre as antigas experiências que nos poderiam oferecer diferentes escolhas cujo valor merece estudos aprofundados. Este texto propõe uma interpretação do díptico de Modiano: *Lembranças adormecidas* e *Nossos inícios na vida*² será dividido em 3 partes principais: a primeira será voltada para uma análise textual que estudará os campos lexicais, as formas e os valores simbólicos dos elementos; a segunda será dedicada à análise estilística que tratará do registro do discurso e examinará as estruturas gramaticais e seus efeitos de sentido; a última se dedicará à filosofia das memórias de Modiano em virtude da "duração" criada por Bergson.

Palavras-chave: memória, lacuna, poética, estilística, metáfora, valor

莫迪亚诺的回忆魔法

摘要: 莫迪亚诺作为一名回忆大师，从创作初期就表现出对回忆主题的钟爱。他在作品中灵活运用回忆技巧，通过探寻和调查的方式将主人公引向一段被封尘的过往。我们想通过回忆重现过去以及逃离现实。回忆既像掌管它的谟涅摩叙涅女神，能带给我们诗艺的源泉，也能让我们反思过去那些牵一发而动全身的经历，这些经历值得我们进行深层挖掘。本文以莫迪亚诺最新的两部小说为对象，首先从文本分析角度讨论小说中的语义场以及象征符号的形式和价值；其次从结构出

¹ Published for the first time in the Journal *Synergies* Chine n° 13 - 2018 p. 215-227. Translated from Portuguese by Lucas Tavares and reviewed by Normando Brito.

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²The book *Souvenirs dormants* was translated by Artur Lopes Cardoso. *Nos débuts dans la vie* does not have a translation in Portuguese.

发探讨小说的文体及形成的意义效果；最后一部分将结合柏格森的绵延理论发掘莫迪亚诺的回忆哲学。

关键词：回忆；间隔；诗意；风格；隐喻；价值

1 Introduction

The origins of the concept of memories can be related to the Ancient Greek Mythology: Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, and to Plato's *theory of reminiscence* in which Plato wrote: *The exploration and the learning as realized only by memories*. Due to his works, the communication between the conceptual world and the phenomenological world became philosophically possible. After Plato, memory is endowed by philosophers of an aesthetic sense and a poetic attribute; subsequently, memory interests psychoanalysts who dedicate their studies to the unconscious, to the individual and collective memories, to the Oedipus Complex and to archetypes.

Over time, different conceptions of memory were present in literature, among which one of the most well-known conceptions goes through all the work of Marcel Proust, in particular on *In search of a lost time*. This French romanticist and essayist is one of the great masters of the stream of consciousness, as well as Lu Xun, from China, whose work *Fleurs du matin cueillies au soir*³ is composed by 10 essays about the memories of his youth. Likewise, the American sinologist Stephen Owen wrote a book entitled *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature*, which consists of a description of the 8 types of the reappearance of the past found in the classic Chinese literature. These works marked the literature dedicated to the art of the memory.

Patrick Modiano was born 74 years after the great Marcel Proust, who deeply influenced his writing; likewise, he dominates the art of memory with which he evoked the most illusory human destinations and unveiled the world of the Occupation. The year of 1985 is when a great change on Modiano's writing can be acknowledged. The search for identity as the main reason of his previous works is then transmuted into a search of the memory that returns in fragments of an immemorial past. In the last years,

³ "Morning flowers picked in the evening" is a suitable translation for English.

different studies that were dedicated to his works showed that a thematic reading was rewarding, especially those about his magical memories, a subject to be deepened.

2 Modiano's universe of memories

Modiano builds his universe of memories through language and unique forms. Inexhaustible memories always incite the author to return to the past. However, as the latter is always veiled by a dark light and then the sight of everything is lost, the author must return to the starting point. Indeed, the shapes of Modiano's memories compose a circle which is similar to the circulation of the universe, answering Taoism which advocates the harmony between the sky and the man whose transformation is connected to the movement of the Earth. Considering that the man is a component of the universe, our life must perform a cyclic movement.

2. 1 The eternal return

Modiano uses the term “eternal return” in both books. He was assured that he had returned to the past through a phenomenon that could be called eternal return or that time had simply stopped for him on a given period of his life. As the narrator of *Missing Person*⁴ expresses: what matters in life is not the future, but the past where the origin of everything is. As Henri Bergson states,

But if we examine it thoroughly, we will notice that our memories mold a chain of the same type, and that our character, which is present in all of our decisions, is exactly the current synthesis of all our past states. Under this condensed form, our previous psychological life exists to us even more than the exterior world, of which we never perceive more than a small part, while otherwise we use the totality of our lived experience. (BERGSON, 1999, p.170-171)(*Our translation*⁵).

⁴Translation by Daniel Weissbort. Ed. Jonathan Cape, 1980.

⁵The source text for this translation was a Portuguese translation from the original made by Paulo Neves: « *Mais, en y regardant de près, on verrait que nos souvenirs forment une chaîne du même genre, et que*

In this sense, consciousness can connect the past to the future all the time. Bergson (1999) considers this feature of the consciousness as simultaneity because our current feelings are a perception of the past and the certainty of the future at the same time. The emphasis of Modiano on memories is exactly the incarnation of this notion of time. Nevertheless, a difference in Modiano distinguishes it from Bergson's in that it is centered on the infinitude of the dimensions of time coexisting inside the narrative and suggesting the concept of reincarnation. Modiano is keen on memories and the reincarnation of the past. Regardless if the characters live in the past, in the present or in the future, they always fall on the chains of memories.

Concerning the eternal return, the narrator dreams of reviving everything they have lived, but to live it in a better way, without mistakes... The events which occur throughout the narrator's life seem to be put under the sign of coincidence and of chance, but these are different names for the destiny, we can also dream that we have hundreds of semias that were responsible for the multiple possibilities that life offered us.

2.2 The escape

The theme of the escape is also very strong in the text. The escape, but also the return at a certain level; both contradictory concepts compose a chorus. The narrator dances his waltz in his memories like a panther chases its eternal circle in its cage. The successive Modiano's novels are repetitions or chorus, like in music. "I wish I understood why the escape was at some level my style of life". After each escape, everything restarts, the story is rewritten. Not only memories become his recurrent

notre caractère, toujours présent à toutes nos décisions, est bien la synthèse actuelle de tous nos états passés. Sous cette forme condensée, notre vie psychologique antérieure existe même plus pour nous que le monde externe, dont nous ne percevons jamais qu'une très petite partie, alors qu'au contraire nous utilisons la totalité de notre expérience vécue» (BERGSON, 2011, p. 176). The Portuguese translation by Paulo Neves is: «Mas, se examinarmos de perto, veremos que nossas lembranças formam uma cadeia do mesmo tipo, e que nosso caráter, sempre presente em todas as nossas decisões, é exatamente a síntese atual de todos os nossos estados passados. Sob essa forma condensada, nossa vida psicológica anterior existe inclusive mais, para nós, do que o mundo externo, do qual nunca percebemos mais do que uma parte muito pequena, enquanto ao contrário utilizamos a totalidade de nossa experiência vivida».

theme, but intrigues and symbolic signs are also recurrent in his novels, like the ghosts in *Sleep of Memory*.

This recurrence composes the obsessions and the figures of the author. The repetitions of the intrigues, one of the forms of embodiment of the eternal return, is another characteristic of his magic of memories, but under an appearance of the reappearance of the story, the narrator goes back to the past in order to fall asleep easily.

Memories or reality, past or present, these are distinctions that do not matter at this point. Feelings and perceptions awaken on the spiritual level. The notion of resonance according to Bachelard (1996) grants a singular life to the poetic image, “For this repercussion, beyond all psychology and psychoanalysis, a poetic power can be felt naively growing on us. It is after the repercussion that the resonances, the sentimental repercussion, and the memories of the past can be felt (BACHELARD, 1996, p. 6-7)⁶. Modiano saw this reverberation arising on him through memory. He returns to some chapters that he lived, in the present, at the disorder, and gives them, with the retreat of time, a certain musicality.

3 The structures of memories

The exploration of French novels in the narrative level started with a novel with a stream of consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century and reached its peak during the period of the New Novel. In April of 1970, during a seminar of literature in Strasbourg, Jean Ricardou, a theoretician of the New Novel, pointed out that “the modern novels are those which dare to narrate. Reading modern works gives us access to a new interpretation of novels: composition rules, generative and organizational principles. Alain Robbe-Grillet looks thoroughly at the narrative according to formal principles close to the generator theory which reveals the arbitrary and playful nature of the narrative; consequently, against the New Novel, the linear narrative of the Romanesque tradition is reached by the obsolescence and condemned to reveal its

⁶Our translation based on a Portuguese translation by Antônio da Costa Leal and Lídia do Valle Santos Leal of the source text: « *Par ce retentissement, en allant tout de suite au-delà de toute psychologie ou psychanalyse, nous sentons un pouvoir poétique qui se lève naïvement en nous-mêmes. C'est le retentissement que nous pourrions éprouver des résonances des répercussions sentimentales, des rappels de notre passé* ». The Portuguese translated text is: « *Por essa repercussão, indo de imediato além de toda psicologia ou psicanálise, sentimos um poder poético erguer-se ingenuamente em nós. É depois da repercussão que podemos sentir as ressonâncias, repercussões sentimentais, recordações do nosso passado*» (BACHELARD, 1957/1961, p.14).

weaknesses and limits. As pointed out by Mansuy (1971): “the new novels even seek to transform the studies of literary techniques into a privileged study of narrative and textual construction.” As a Post-New Novel writer Modiano is deeply influenced by these theories. He goes even further against the linear narrative, choosing the memory and the identity instead. The memories and the reality go together and the author deliberately carries the readers to alternation of repeated passages between both worlds.

3.1 The overlapping of time, seasons and voices

In *Sleep of Memory* and *Nos débuts dans la vie*⁷, the past, the present and the future exist simultaneously and alternately in the narrative while the characters act on different planes. The overlap of time produces a vertigo and disorientation effect.

The diptych where memories succeed without a strict chronology and the seasons are overlapped on one another according to movements of a spiral-shaped memory where the author tells about his youth in the 60s. At the beginning of *Sleep of Memory*, the author reminds striking encounters of his past: “I used to say it to reassure myself: there will be an opportunity to keep you company⁸. The Memory of the past is transformed into a flash-forward. After having evoked the encounter with Martine Hayward at the age of 20, he resumes the narrative in a chronological order. In the sequence, he employs a flashback to return to the past: “by the age of 14, I was accustomed to walk alone on the streets⁹...” and to evoke his second encounter with the daughter of Stioppa whose father, a Russian drug dealer, has connections with his. *Our beginnings in life* is a theater play written by Modiano in which *The Seagull*, by Chekhov, is repeated on stage, and thus the past, the future and the dreams are intertwined. While Dominique repeats the Russian play, Jean dreams and receives ghosts in his dressing room. Once he dreamed about his mother and Caveux, his mother’s companion, who wants to be his master in thought. He treats them like dead

⁷*Nos débuts dans la vie* can be translated as *Our beginnings in life*.

⁸ Translation based on the Portuguese translation of : « *Je me disais pour me rassurer : il se présentera bien une occasion de leur fausser compagnie* » (MODIANO, 2014, p.9). The Portuguese translation is : «*Eu dizia para me tranquilizar: haverá uma oportunidade de lhes fazer companhia*».

⁹ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of : « *Vers quatorze ans, je m’étais habitué à marcher seul dans les rue* » (MODIANO, 2014, p.10). The Portuguese translation is : «*Por volta dos 14 anos, eu estava acostumado a andar sozinho nas ruas*».

ones: “I had gone back in time... It was like I would dive abruptly into the past while I already knew everything about the future¹⁰...”. He always says everything is going to happen like in his dreams, where he already knows the future.

Besides the non-linear narratives, the overlap of stations also accentuates the atmosphere of drowsiness and immobility. In the novel, during his fifth encounter with Mrs. Hubersen, who is wearing a fur coat during the month of August in Paris, she says: “It may be very hot, but if you only knew how cold I get...”¹¹ This image gives a sensation of unreality. In the theater play, the narrator recalls the day that *The Seagull* is enacted: “*We didn’t know in which season we were... the Indian summer? The spring of the autumn?*”¹² From winter to summer, the author mixes the cold and the heat, but a lot of times we feel emptiness similar to the white of the snow and the author hypnotizes us. The effect of reality is mitigated by revivals, returns to the past, and evasions.

While we follow Modiano’s reminiscences, he withdraws us from reality by the overlapped voices of the narrator and the character, as for instance, in the final description of his third encounter, for instance: “I frankly asked you a question: could I go to Spain with her?¹³”. Six years later, at the moment of the unexpected encounter with Geneviève Dalame on the street, the dialogue is replaced by a free indirect speech: “I asked if he was her son. Yes. Did she get married? No. She lived alone with her son¹⁴”, in a way that the voices of both the character and the narrator intertwine and we cannot separate them.

3.2 Space and memory

¹⁰ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of: « *J’avais remonté le cours du temps...C’était comme si je me plongeais brusquement dans le passé alors que je connaissais déjà tout de l’avenir* ». (MODIANO, 2014, p.62). The Portuguese translation is: «*Eu tinha voltado no tempo... Era como se eu mergulhasse abruptamente no passado quando já sabia tudo sobre o futuro*».

¹¹ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of: « *Il a beau faire très chaud, si vous saviez à quel point j’ai toujours froid...* » (MODIANO, 2014, p.68). The Portuguese translation is: «*Pode até estar muito quente, se você soubesse o quanto frio eu sempre tenho*».

¹² Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of: « *Nous ne savions plus en quelle saison nous étions... l’été indien ? Le printemps de l’automne?* » -italique de l’auteur-. (MODIANO, 2014, p.91). The Portuguese translation is «*Não sabíamos mais em que estação estávamos... o verão indiano? A primavera do outono?*» -italics from the author-.

¹³ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of: « *Je lui ai posé franchement la question : est-ce que je pouvais partir avec elle en Espagne?* ». (MODIANO, 2014, p.19). The Portuguese translation is «*Eu lhe fiz francamente a pergunta: eu poderia ir com ela para a Espanha?*».

¹⁴ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of: « *Je lui ai demandé si c’était son fils. Oui. S’était-elle mariée ?* ». The Portuguese translation is «*Perguntei se era seu filho. Sim. Ela se casou? Não. Ela morava sozinha com o filho*».

The procedures of deconstruction in Modiano's works are not limited to time only, but they also play a role on the evocation of the singular spaces of each memory. Each particular space is thus revisited by the memories of a narrator "convinced that true encounters are only possible on the streets"¹⁵ [*persuade que l'on ne pouvait faire de varies rencontres que dans la rue*]. Modiano, who feared emptiness, began to walk at the age of 14 to overcome the fear and to venture each time further into the depths of the city, for instance, at cafes where he encounters and makes notes of dialogues in his notebook. It is at a cafe at dawn and at an occult science bookstore that he meets Geneviève Dalame; six years later he encounters her on the street. To the author, Paris is filled with ghosts as numerous as the subway stations.

It is in his mother's apartment that the narrator of *Sleep of Memory* encountered the third woman, Mireille Urousov: on the shelves of the child's bedroom, emptied of any other presence, he found old books sometimes emphasizing melancholy, sometimes the esotericism and the esteem for the mystery. Under the apparent simplicity of a refined style, the complexity of returning to the past is always there. "A strange February with that veiled light in the apartment and the attacks from the SAO."¹⁶ The Secret Armed Organization, created on February 11th, 1961, is a clandestine military organization that fights against the rise of the independence of Algeria. The apartment is surrounded by the dark atmosphere of that period, which results in a profound reflection about the relation between the individual and the community. Shortly after the Second World War, while the persecuted Jews were not totally out of the shadows, the Algerian people launched the Liberation Movement which made the Jews have memories of the sufferings of the war and the still perennial fears. Through Mireille Ouroussov, Jean met Jacques, a well-known journalist who always traveled between Paris and Algiers. They would frequently go to two places frequented by the police during the Algerian War: a club and the *La Rose des Sables*, a Tunisian and Mediterranean cuisine restaurant. The narrator is involved in the terrible war atmosphere. And while he encountered with Geneviève Dalame's brother at the cafe, he also expressed mistrust and fear, and had the

¹⁵Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of: «convencido de que só se poderia fazer verdadeiros encontros na rua».

¹⁶ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of «Un étrange mois de février avec cette lumière voilée dans l'appartement, et les attentats de l'OAS» (MODIANO, 2014, p.13).The Portuguese translation is «Um estranho mês de fevereiro com essa luz velada no apartamento e os ataques da OEA».

sensation of being in a mousetrap and that a police attack was imminent. He thought he had to get out of there before the police attack. On the axis of the historical time, the individual does not produce a great effect, but according to the human destiny's point of view, the Jew group suits as a milestone in history. The panic provoked by the war made Jean run away, remembering the several other forced migrations of these people caused by war or persecution.

Memories come back every time the narrator finds himself in a specific place that gives him the impression of a *déjà vu*. This perception of time distant from the reality creates a chaotic atmosphere specific for Modiano's novels due to an insistent sensation of the eternal return: "It looked as if I had come here on a previous life to visit someone". *He was assured that he had returned to the past through a phenomenon of eternal return or that time had stopped for him at a given period of his life.*

The space is limited while time is unlimited. It is contradictory to introduce an unlimited time on a limited space where the future is projected and the past is refracted. However, it is due to this contradiction that time in Modiano's novels is expressed in a multidimensional manner and it has an abstract meaning, but yet comprehensible. Time corresponds to space that in the past corresponded to a city, a neighborhood and an apartment, while the future seems like "the horizon", a title of his old novel in which the future represents time and the horizon represents space. The common point between both of them is their distant and uncertain meaning. In *Our Beginnings in Life*, Modiano also talked about the future in a particular tone, he wants to become a writer and get rid of his mother's control and of Caveux who wants to become his mentor. Modiano remembers the hope that inhabited his past and introduces a time and a place on this evocation, rich in symbols and poetic expressions. The overlap of several temporalities (past, present, future) in the same space answers to a topic that is placed between myth and the concept of the eternal return according to Modiano.

3.3 Metaphor and characterization

The act of remembering is still a process of restoration of past experiences, but it is not the faithful reappearance of memories. There is a temporal and special gap between the individual that remembers and the object of their memories. However, through this gap, which is not threatening, memories are poetized and transformed into

a psychological gap on an aesthetic level. Therefore, the individual that remembers is immersed in the past with all their emotions and recreates a poetic world that liberates memory and imagination. Youth recaptured from the past has an imaginary twist, a way of thinking in an uncertain period.

According to Genette (1969, p. 127), “The gap or detour is the mark of the effect of style. The poetic can be defined as a genre style which studies and measures the characteristic detours of a type of language.”¹⁷ Modiano’s refined style nurtures the effects of characteristic meanings of the poetic language: the metaphor. For Peyroutet (1994)

Depending on the situations of usage, the metaphor belongs to the very essence of literature, from the portrait to the marvelous narrative, from the description to the poetic images. It allows the disautomatization of reality. The abrupt change of the isotope breaks the usual and tranquilizing view of the world and imagination regains its rights. Multiple connotations are born¹⁸. (PEYROUTET, 1994, p.66)(*Our translation*).

The hallucinatory characters and sense slips in his novels make up a poetics of reminiscence.

The narrator’s memories return distorted in a light sleep and get mixed with the imaginary. We find ourselves in a state of daydreaming. The imprecision of the first sentences is a poetic fog that separates the pains of the world and of the being. It is a fog like a cotton wad to soften the blows. The narrator acts like a “night viewer” that explores the mysteries of Paris. “The importance of the night is maybe due to the fact that men, even before the emergence of psychology and psychoanalysis, understood the restoring and reveling role of the night life, namely of sleep and dreams.”¹⁹ The “Electricity Cutting”, the “veiled light” creates a hypnotic atmosphere.

¹⁷Our translation for: «A lacuna ou desvio é a marca do efeito de estilo. A poética pode ser definida como uma estilística de gênero que estuda e mede os desvios característicos de um tipo de linguagem.».

¹⁸Translation based on the Portuguese translation of «Selon les situations d’emploi, la métaphore appartient à l’essence même de la littérature, du portrait au récit merveilleux, de la description à l’imagerie poétique. Elle permet la désautomatisation du réel. Le brusque changement d’isotopie rompt la vision habituelle et rassurante du monde et l’imagination reprend donc ses droits. De multiples connotations naissent.»(PEYROUTET, 1994, p.66). The Portuguese translation is «Dependendo das situações de emprego, a metáfora pertence à própria essência da literatura, do retrato à narrativa maravilhosa, da descrição às imagens poéticas. Ela permite a desautomatização do real. A mudança abrupta da isotopia rompe a visão habitual e tranquilizadora do mundo e a imaginação recupera seus direitos. Conotações múltiplas nascem.»

¹⁹Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of «L’importance de la nuit vient peut-être de ce que les hommes, longtemps avant l’essor de la psychologie et de la psychanalyse, ont compris le rôle à la fois réparateur et révélateur de la vie nocturne, c’est à dire du sommeil et du rêve» (AZIZA ; OLIVIERI ;

For Modiano, Paris is full of ghosts – as many as subway stations and all of its points of lights –, and it happens when the buttons of the table of “correspondences” are touched. The “Correspondences”, also called synesthesias, designate the relation between the material world and the spiritual world, reminding Baudelaire. According to Baudelaire, only artists can decode the feelings of the analogies that allow us to pass from the world of perception to the world of ideas. Modiano establishes several relations of similarity between perceptions. Here, the touching of the buttons of the table of correspondences causes ghosts or people from his past to emerge. In the future, one touch on the screen will be enough to meet them again in the city.

Modiano has a preference for the winter. The winter that causes an apprehension of returning to boarding school, the strange winter during SAO, the suspended winter between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m, the harsh winter... “We go up the White street under this layer of snow...as in a dream.” [Subimos a Rua Branca sob essa camada de neve ... como em um sonho ...²⁰]; “At night, you breathe a cold and clean air as intoxicating as summer” [À noite, você respira um ar gelado e límpido que é tão inebriante quanto o verão.²¹]. “The phosphorescent snow”, “winter”, “ether”, “cold air”, “white street” express a vertigo from the past which we do not want to leave.

The word “light” is also widely used in his novel, the light air before dawn and at dusk, the light and flexible step of Geneviève... This lightness makes us think on the unbearable lightness of the being of Milan Kundera. All individuals should handle the alienation, the loss and the nothingness that can beat them at some point. According to Baudelaire, who wrote *The Taste for Nothingness*, nothingness is the torturer which imprisons people and the lover to whom we cling during our whole life. How to fight against nothingness and approve our very existence? Maybe the memories are the only antidotes.

4 The philosophy of life

SCTRICK, 1978, p. 139). The Portuguese translation is «*A importância da noite talvez se deva ao fato de que os homens, muito antes do surgimento da psicologia e da psicanálise, entenderam o papel restaurador e revelador da vida noturna, isto é, do dormir e do sonhar*».

²⁰Source text : *Nous montons la rue Blanche sous cette couche de neige...comme dans un rêve...*

²¹Source text : *La nuit vous respirez un air glacé et limpide et aussi enivrant que l'été*

“The duration” that systemically exposes the creativity, the freedom and the meaning of life stresses Bergson’s philosophical affirmation. The duration, considered as the final objective of philosophy, is related to the state and the return to the course of life. The duration, the so called perpetual progress to the past, invades the future and enriches itself during the development. Everything that time created is due to the duration. All the feelings derived from duration are heterogeneous. Besides that, time becomes more real due to the memory in which all the past is realized and which makes the creation over time. The memory represents time while the duration illustrates the spirit. The duration comes from time and returns to it, it is the philosophical cycle of life that corresponds to the Modiano’s world of memory.

4.1 Duration and the free will

Freedom is frequently associated to the will and the free will cannot be effective only in duration terms. The discussion of freedom is based on the description of the mental state, which is qualitative and connected to time. The generative and creative characteristics of free will and of the mental state are represented by time. They are inseparable and constitute integrality.

A book, quoted widely in *Sleep of Memory*, entitled *Dreams and the Ways to Direct Them: Practical Observations*, reveals Modiano’s free will trying to change the story to the duration of memories. It seems that he always writes the same stories, but there are many details that are clarified and the result is not the same. Free will is the opposition of the determinism which takes amplitude, synchronism and quantity as preconditions. Modiano fights against determinism because of his wish of directing the stories according to duration. With the psychological extensions and penetration, man has the hope of finding the lost time. It is this freedom which gives the opportunity of resisting to the passage of time.

4.2 Duration and the vital impulse

Bergson’s theory of the vital impulse is an essential point of the creative evolution. The vital energy is in motion. Bergson declared: “The vital impulse inundates

the entire universe and dominates the process of evolution” [*O impulso vital inunda todo o universo e domina o processo de evolução*²²]. Life enters the kingdom of time with new things in which the vital impulse can accomplish its mission. The vital impulse performs the evolution of creation after entering duration. This is the tendency and the intention of life.

The act of remembering is also under the impetus of the vital impulse, “millions and millions of your semias engage themselves in the thousand ways that you did not take on the crossroads of your life, and you, you believed that there was just one”²³. When we accept a certain truth, it is possible, at the same time, that we close other 99 doors that lead to the truth. On the experience, the proximity and the immediacy of events limit the perception and throw a veil on the truth. Memories’ vital impulse allows us to get rid of the barriers of the sensible, to experiment and consider the experience of the past with an evolved mind. This way, truths can be revealed, life and the world are opened to an unlimited abundance of meanings. Every time that we remember, the experience opens a particular side of reality to us. In each one of these new openings, we begin a new phase in a world on the edge of the symbolic and the imaginary, and this process of evolution will never end.

4.3 Duration and the living world

The world derives from nature while philosophy derives from life. Consequently, life should move towards nature and the philosophy of time towards the sense of the world. The philosophy of duration in which life has the right to inexhaustible creativity offers different possibilities to the world. Bergson said: “The material world in which we live is a fact, a contemporary history of our conscience”²⁴. The conscience describes the world through duration. Our definition of “small” and

²² *L'élan vital inonde l'univers entier et domine le processus de l'évolution*

²³ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of «*Mille et mille sosies de vous-même s'engagent sur les mille chemins que vous n'avez pas pris aux carrefours de votre vie, et vous, vous avez cru qu'il n'y en avait qu'un seul.*» (MODIANO, 2014, p. 104). The Portuguese translation is «*Milhares e milhares sócias seus se en nos mil caminhos que você não tomou na encruzilhada da sua vida, e você, você acreditou que havia apenas um*»

²⁴ Translation based on the Portuguese rendering of «*Le monde matériel dans lequel nous vivons est un fait une histoire contemporaine de notre conscience*» (BERGSON, 2013, p.12). The Portuguese translation is «*O mundo material em que vivemos é um fato, uma história contemporânea de nossa consciência*».

“big” things in life is not quantitative, but we qualify them according to the duration of spirit. Our spiritual life is full of unpredictable things, where millions of unrelated events are born. The uncertainty of the events of the spiritual life brings new things, which means that the spiritual life promotes creativity and freedom from the philosophy of duration, otherwise the world becomes monotone.

The world of the memories that Modiano showed us is interpreted through philosophical terms. The starting point of his world is deeply connected to the creativity of duration. His spiritual life is connected to duration and to freedom. Modiano’s world, full of duration nuances, is presented through different forms and life contains multiple semias, since art has different images. Modiano’s philosophical duration extends to the world of memories.

Conclusion

As a writer who is faithful to memories, Modiano always keeps awake the forgotten past through a unique and special perspective. The memory as main content of Modiano’s works is described by the art of repetition. In Modiano’s fictional world, memories suit as mediation in search of the past of the different protagonists – and it happens through different stories. In order to compensate the limits of the repetitive theme of the novel, Modiano never stopped exploring the form of the modern novel and experiencing new techniques of creation.

His work is subtly transformed, but the themes remain the same: the search for identity, memory and youth. Due to the content of his work, it seems that he is increasingly inclined to describe, in a fragmented way, dark and delicate feelings. As he said in an interview: the insignificant things are, in fact, really important in a person’s life. We can guess and even find everything in details. As to forgetfulness, memories and human nature, Modiano always composes the same chorus in his world where we hide to appreciate Paris’ beautiful landscape or aspire after the overflowing and wasted youth of the protagonists. Modiano dedicated all of his life to explore the past, the truth of which challenges all forms of its representation. Undoubtedly, we learn that in every case we can go to the future only by reviving the past.

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Data de recebimento: 06/06/2019

Data de aceite: 27/06/2019