

‘LIGNES DE FUITE VERS L’HORIZON’:
READING A NIETZSCHEAN NARRATIVE OF LIBERATION IN
THE WRITINGS OF PATRICK MODIANO

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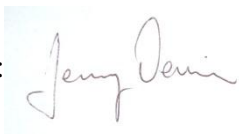
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Declaration of Authorship

I, Jenny Devine, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jenny Devine", is written in black ink on a light blue rectangular background.

Date: 21st December 2011

With the publication of *L'Horizon* in 2010, Patrick Modiano introduces a new perspective in his writings. The title alone indicates a fresh direction, a projection into a realm of possibility and potential, marking a significant departure from the apparent retrospection of his preceding texts (*Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, *Du plus loin de l'oubli*, *Vestiaire de l'enfance*....).

Informed and enlightened by Nietzschean philosophy, this thesis traces a narrative of liberation in Modiano's writing and investigates the subtle development in his philosophical outlook which has led to this new perspective. Following a trajectory towards what Nietzsche termed Dionysian or tragic wisdom, it identifies three stages of liberation undergone by Modiano's protagonists throughout the course of his oeuvre; namely the dissolution of their values, their ensuing disorientation, and their affirmation of the eternal return. In doing so, this thesis reveals a gradual process of revaluation whereby suffering, in the form of uncertainty and ignorance comes to be both valued and relished.

In the course of its examination, this thesis reveals a complementarity between the output of Nietzsche and that of Modiano. While Nietzsche offers a theoretical account of the beneficial and liberating qualities of dissolution, disorientation and the eternal return, Modiano's writings immerse the reader in the confusing and often terrifying experience of these events. Although Modiano is often described as a philosophical writer, the philosophical nature of his work is hitherto underexplored. This reading of Modiano through a Nietzschean lens addresses this lacuna in Modiano studies.

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1) Introduction

As the author of twenty-five novels and non-fiction texts, Patrick Modiano is now an established literary figure with a growing international academic reputation.¹ Described as 'l'homme d'un seul livre [qui] occupe toute [sa] vie d'écrivain',² his work has sometimes been regarded as repetitive and unchanging, with the author revisiting the same themes and preoccupations over the course of his œuvre.³ However, with the publication of *L'Horizon* in 2010, he introduces a new perspective to his writings. The title alone indicates a fresh direction, a projection into a realm of possibility and potential, marking a significant departure from the apparent retrospection of his preceding texts. Despite subtle variations, however, *L'Horizon* does not, on the surface, deviate from the pattern we have come to expect from a Modiano novel. We thus encounter familiar tropes; a mature protagonist recalls his liaison with a mysterious woman in 1960s Paris. The young couple live an outsider existence and, feeling themselves to be 'à l'écart de tout',⁴ have 'aucune assise dans la vie.

¹ This academic interest has in the last decade resulted in three major international conferences on the author and his œuvre at Canterbury, Lyon, and Dublin respectively, as well as numerous academic publications, including two volumes of essays.

² Laurence Liban, 'Entretien: Modiano', *Lire*, October 2003, p. 104.

³ For example, Frédéric Beigbeder describes Modiano as 'l'auteur français le plus facile à imiter, parce qu'il se pastiche lui-même' in 'La Chronique de Frédéric Beigbeder', *Lire*, September 2007 <http://reseau-modiano.pagesperso-orange.fr/dans_le_cafe_de_la_jeunesse_perdue_revue_de_presse.htm> [site accessed 24 October 2011].

⁴ Patrick Modiano, *L'Horizon* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), p. 46.

Aucune famille. Aucun recours’. In short they are ‘Des gens de rien’ (p. 72). Typically, a sense of threat hangs over them, and both are running from their past. During the short months they spend together they meet a number of shady characters before the female protagonist disappears leaving her friend with nothing more than ‘[des] bribes [...] énigmatiques’, and the sensation that his knowledge of her will remain in suspense, ‘dans un présent éternel’ (p. 11).

An initial reading of this novel thus reveals a story which is more than familiar to a Modiano readership. Yet, as Minh Tran Huy notes in her review of *L’Horizon* for *Le Magazine-Littéraire*, ‘pour la première fois, rien n’a changé et tout a changé dans ce nouveau livre de Modiano.’⁵ The new perspective introduced in *L’Horizon* is not reflected in a change of content or subject matter; it manifests itself instead in the transformation of its philosophical outlook.

This thesis aims to demonstrate that the shift in perspective evident in *L’Horizon* is the natural outcome of a Nietzschean process of a revaluation of values, a narrative of liberation which has been taking place over the course of Modiano’s oeuvre. It is a process that begins with the dissolution of existing values, namely those of certainty, knowledge, fixity, permanence and stability, and ends with their revaluation so that the protagonist of *L’Horizon* now values uncertainty, ignorance, fluidity, impermanence and instability. It is a gruelling though ultimately liberating process during which protagonists will face a nihilistic void (a ‘trou noir’), undergo feelings of despair or disorientation as they struggle to fill the vacuum left after their values have dissolved, before eventually affirming the eternal return. This affirmation firstly by Roland in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and subsequently by Bosmans in *L’Horizon*, is an event which marks their acceptance of a new set of values, inverse to those they had previously espoused. Finally, in the wake of this affirmation, this

⁵ Minh Tran Huy, ‘L’Horizon: critique’ in *Le Magazine Littéraire*, March 2010 <<http://www.magazine-litteraire.com/content/critiques/article.html?id=15587>> [site accessed 18 July 2011].

thesis argues that Modiano's *L'Horizon* is imbued with what Nietzsche terms Dionysian wisdom; the protagonist, Bosmans relishes his new values, which have liberated him and enable him at last to break away from an eternal present to contemplate the 'lignes de fuite vers l'horizon'.

1.1 Nietzsche and Modiano

The trajectory that the thesis follows is informed and underpinned by Nietzsche's philosophical project of overcoming nihilism. It thus turns to Nietzschean concepts such as his proposal that 'God is dead', the eternal return, the revaluation of values and the will to power, and explores their relation to Modiano's literature.

A co-reading of Nietzsche and Modiano may at first appear unusual; the abrasive and assured rhetoric of the philosopher seems at odds with Modiano's nebulous and oneiric writings. However, despite Modiano's claim that he lacks any 'culture philosophique',⁶ this thesis seeks to demonstrate that Modiano's writings are not only steeped in Nietzschean thinking, but that a Nietzschean reading of his oeuvre is both enlightening and productive.

If anything, a Nietzschean reading is certainly timely as Modiano has explicitly introduced the philosopher's thought in his recent novels, whilst also referring to him in corresponding interviews. In *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* (2007), one of the multiple narrators is engrossed by Nietzsche's thought and particularly by his concept of the eternal return. This has led to Nietzsche being more readily acknowledged in popular discourse of the author's work but as yet an in-depth and more probing analysis of the relationship between Modiano and Nietzsche remains absent from the secondary literature on the author.

⁶ MK2 Diffusion, '[Rencontre] Patrick Modiano: à l'occasion de la sortie de *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, in 'Au Temps', *Dictionnaire Patrick Modiano* (24 January 2008) <http://www.litt-and-co.org/au_temps/autemps_t.htm> [site accessed 1 October 2011].

While Modiano has referred more directly to Nietzsche and to the eternal return in his recent publications, the idea of ‘l’éternel retour’ has nevertheless been present throughout his oeuvre. Interviewed following his publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, Modiano insists that, despite the public’s tendency to view his writings as being primarily retrospective, he has in fact been more interested in the concept of time itself rather than the past, adding that ‘cette notion d’“Eternel Retour” m’a frappé’.⁷ *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* offers some hints as to the extent of Modiano’s consciousness of Nietzsche. Situated in Paris, the novel has as its focal point a bar, ‘Le Condé’, frequented, as Jérôme Garcin writes, by ‘des écrivains étranges et des artistes désenchantés’.⁸ The novel brings to life an intellectual, literary and artistic scene of the 1960s, which Modiano further evokes in his inter-textual references. The author recalls books such as James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*, which he later describes as being ‘un best-seller [...] très connoté sixties quand les gens partaient pour Katmandou en l'idéalisant’. ‘Il a sa place dans le livre’ he continues, ‘parce qu’il marque vraiment cette époque.’⁹

Nietzsche too marks this period which saw an explosion of interest in his philosophy amongst French intellectuals. As Alan D. Schrift outlines in *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, the French literary and cultural avant-garde, including writers such as Camus, Malraux and Blanchot, developed an interest in Nietzsche in the 1940s and 1950s, a period which saw the publication of Georges Bataille’s *Sur Nietzsche* (1945). However, it was not until the 1960s that a more rigorous engagement with Nietzschean thought was undertaken by French philosophers. In 1962, Gilles Deleuze published his *Nietzsche et la philosophie* and three years later he attended, alongside many prominent thinkers, an international conference on Nietzsche, held at Royaumont in 1965. Schrift remarks that the following decade ‘saw

⁷ MK2 Diffusion, ‘[Rencontre] Patrick Modiano’

⁸ Jérôme Garcin, ‘Un entretien avec Patrick Modiano : “Paris, ma ville intérieure”’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, September 2007 <<http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20070926.BIB0104/paris-ma-ville-interieure.html>> [site accessed 19 September 2011].

⁹ Ibid.

books dealing exclusively or primarily with Nietzsche by, among others, Jean Granier, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski, Jean-Michel Rey, Bernard Pautrat, Pierre Boudot, Sarah Kofman, and Paul Valadier; special issues on Nietzsche by some of France's leading journals; and a second major conference, at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1972, addressing the theme "Nietzsche aujourd'hui", with many of France's leading philosophers in attendance'.¹⁰

It was during this period that Modiano became active as a writer, with his first novel, *La Place de l'étoile* being published in 1968. In an interview with Jérôme Garcin following the publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, the author stresses that all of the narrators of this novel 'ont eu en eux quelque chose de celui que j'ai été dans ces années là',¹¹ and he particularly identifies with the narrator Roland, an aspiring young writer, working on a text relating to 'les zones neutres'.¹² Interestingly, it is young Roland who becomes fascinated by Nietzsche and the idea of the eternal return, raising questions as to whether Modiano, despite claiming to have no 'culture philosophique', nonetheless encountered Nietzschean ideas during the 1960s. The heavy presence of Nietzsche in French cultural discourse during this period certainly renders such an encounter possible. Furthermore, Modiano goes beyond a mere nod to Nietzsche in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* when he refers to a specific interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy, that of Karl Löwith, whose 1935 treatise, *Nietzsche et la philosophie de l'éternel retour*, Roland borrows from his friend and mentor Guy de Vere. Modiano is thus aware of Löwith's book, and we might go further and speculate on its presence in the author's own library.¹³

¹⁰ Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: between hermeneutics and deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 77.

¹¹ Garcin, 'Un entretien avec Patrick Modiano : "Paris, ma ville intérieure"'

¹² In his September 2007 interview with Jérôme Garcin in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Modiano recalls that 'le texte, par exemple, sur 'les zones neutres' que Roland écrit correspond à une obsession que j'avais à 20 ans de la topographie en suspens, en transit, et dont j'ai tiré alors, non pas un vrai texte, mais une étrange liste de rues, de boulevards, de quartiers périphériques, et de lieux improbables [...]'.¹³

¹³ Roland reads the French edition of Löwith's treatise, which was originally published in German as *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen*.

It is difficult to establish conclusively the extent of Modiano's consciousness of Nietzsche, and attempts to contact the author directly with a view to clarifying this have proved unsuccessful.¹⁴ He evidently engages with Nietzschean thought and particularly with the concept of the eternal return but, as we have seen, he is also quick to deny having any 'culture philosophique'. As such, while this thesis traces a Nietzschean narrative of liberation in the writings of Modiano, it does not suggest that the author has himself consciously undertaken a literary exposition of Nietzschean nihilism and its overcoming.

Reading Nietzsche and Modiano in parallel, this thesis proposes that it is precisely Modiano's distance from any philosophical theory, his very lack of consciousness in this regard, that renders his writing so effective in communicating existential states. While Nietzsche describes the sensation of events such as the dissolution of values, or nihilistic disorientation, for example, his accounts are always underpinned by theoretical reasoning. Thus, his experiential descriptions, remaining subordinate to his ideas, lack the immediacy of Modiano's accounts, which, without theoretical foundation, immerse the reader to a far greater extent in the confusing and often terrifying experience of certain existential states. Nietzsche was conscious of the pitfalls of theoretical discourse, which may account for his stylistic experimentation.¹⁵ Drawing from literary, visual, and musical sources throughout his oeuvre he expresses in *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (1888) his ultimate preference for his most literary text, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which he feels best communicates his philosophy. In 'The Use and Abuse of History for Life', for example, he discusses historiography, expressing his abhorrence of the sober detachment that historians assume and the distanced language used in historical discourse. Equally, in his essay *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873) he discusses the strength and coolness of 'the

¹⁴ Attempts to arrange an interview with Modiano via his publisher, Gallimard, did not yield results.

¹⁵ Nietzsche produced texts comprising a series of aphorisms, stand-alone essays, as well as his literary creation in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in which he mimics the style of the bible.

great *columbarium* of concepts',¹⁶ and argues that they distance us from our vivid first impressions, rendering us 'removed from the coils of the intestines, the rapid flow of the bloodstream, the intricate vibrations of the fibres' (p. 254). As a theorist, then, Nietzsche works with concepts yet he often advocates an approach which places greater emphasis on the immediacy of experience rather than on theoretical discourse.

A certain complementarity therefore exists between the output of Nietzsche and Modiano. Despite his reservations about conceptualising, Nietzsche is primarily a theorist whose writings arguably focus on a philosophical problem of nihilism and its overcoming. Understanding their theoretical significance, Nietzsche can thus view events such as dissolution of values, disorientation, or the eternal recurrence as being ultimately beneficial and liberating. Without this conceptual underpinning, however, Modiano's writings take us back to an 'intuitive world of first impressions', so that we experience Nietzschean ideas as he may have desired us to: at 'the nerve stimulus'.¹⁷

1.2 Reading Nietzsche systematically: Löwith and Reginster

To describe this thesis as undertaking a Nietzschean reading of Modiano leaves it open to query. As we shall see, Nietzsche's ideas have been subjected to many varying interpretations and the often contradictory nature of his ideas has given rise to equally conflicting readings in Nietzsche scholarship. This co-reading of Nietzsche and Modiano relies on two interpretations of Nietzsche's thought, which, though they differ in their conclusions, share two particular objectives. Firstly, both approach Nietzschean thought *systematically*, thereby unifying distinct themes in his writings by articulating their relation to one another, and secondly, they each foreground the question of nihilism and its overcoming.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense' in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Writings from the Early Notebooks*, ed. by Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas, trans. by Ladislaus Löb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 261.

¹⁷ 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense', p. 256-58.

While Modiano has invited Nietzschean readings of his work by referring explicitly to the philosopher, readers also encounter, in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, an allusion to Karl Löwith's seminal 1935 text on the philosopher, *Nietzsche et la philosophie de l'éternel retour*. This inter-textual reference provides us with our first 'piste', offering an insight into the reading which may have informed Modiano's understanding of Nietzschean thought. The second interpretation on which this thesis relies is that of contemporary Nietzsche scholar, Bernard Reginster, whose 2006 publication, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* deals with many of the ideas raised by Löwith, whilst subjecting them to a more robust and rigorous analysis. Reginster's book offers a contemporary voice, which, in a dialogue with Löwith's earlier interpretation, reveals significant variation in meaning and interpretation. While both share a systematic approach, placing an emphasis on nihilism and the affirmation of life, there is considerable disparity in their conclusions. Importantly, Reginster's interpretation overcomes some of the problems with which Löwith struggled in his analysis of Nietzsche.

1.2.1 Karl Löwith

Modiano's reference to Karl Löwith has added significance in light of the scholar's background which involved displacement and emigration due to the rise of Hitler in 1930s Germany, themes which have preoccupied Modiano throughout his writings.¹⁸ Löwith, a German Protestant, whose family was of Jewish descent, wrote his treatise on Nietzsche in Italy, having emigrated there to avoid National Socialism, with the work subsequently published in Berlin in 1935. The publication had political significance, and was in itself a

¹⁸ More specifically, Modiano has evoked the period of the Occupation repeatedly, and has often portrayed characters in exile having fled Germany. Himself of Jewish descent, Modiano has equally written about Jewish flight and persecution during the period of the Occupation, most notably in his *Dora Bruder*. The author's preoccupation with the Occupation has been thoroughly documented and analysed by Modiano scholars; see for example Baptiste Roux, *Figures de l'Occupation dans l'œuvre de Patrick Modiano* (Paris: Harmattan, 1999) and Martine Guyot Bender and William Vanderwolk (eds.) *Paradigms of Memory: The Occupation and Other Hi/stories in the Novels of Patrick Modiano* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

risky endeavour since Löwith presents Nietzsche in an altogether different light to Alfred Baeumler, whose depiction of Nietzsche as the philosopher of the ‘will as power’ was adopted by the National Socialists and essentially served as the officially accepted interpretation.¹⁹

Despite the unfavourable context of its birth, Löwith’s thesis on Nietzsche has become one of the most important interpretations of Nietzsche to date. In his foreword to J. Harvey Lomax’s English translation of the treatise, Nietzsche scholar Bernd Magnus argues that ‘Löwith’s Nietzsche established the framework within which much Anglophone Nietzsche scholarship has moved in the past three decades,’²⁰ and goes so far as to propose that ‘perhaps all that has been done is to update the vocabulary of the fundamental distinctions Löwith introduced into the Nietzsche debate’ (p. xvi). Similarly, in his recommendation for further reading in the Cambridge edition of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Robert Pippin cites Löwith’s treatise as being ‘still the most compelling philosophical treatment to date of the unifying doctrine of *Zarathustra*.’²¹

Löwith’s thesis presents us with a systematic reading of Nietzsche in which he argues that, despite the apparently fragmentary nature of his writings, the themes of ‘nihilism, the superman, courage, the will to power, the revaluation of all values, *amor fati*, death, the last man, the death of God – and the overarching motif of the eternal recurrence’²² are related and form part of a coherent and cohesive whole. Central to his argument, as the title of his work indicates, is the question of the eternal return, a concept, he argues, that has an inherent and latent paradox. On the one hand, he considers the eternal return as a cosmological theory

¹⁹ J. Harvey Lomax, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in Karl Löwith’s *Nietzsche’s philosophy of the eternal recurrence of the same* (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. xx.

²⁰ Bernd Magnus, ‘Foreword to the English Translation’, in Karl Löwith’s *Nietzsche’s philosophy of the eternal recurrence of the same*, p. xvii.

²¹ Robert Pippin, ‘Further Reading’ in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. By Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. xli.

²² J. Harvey Lomax, ‘Translator’s Introduction’ in Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche’s philosophy of the eternal recurrence of the same*, p. xxiv.

proposing that, while time is infinite, there exist a finite number of states, and as such recurrence of the same is inevitable and necessary. On the other hand, Löwith observes an alternative anthropological formulation of the eternal return whereby Nietzsche exhorts us to live our life in such a way that we would desire its eternal recurrence. Problems arise when one attempts to reconcile these two formulations, and Löwith thus unearths a deep paradox which he feels to be central to Nietzsche's philosophy, succinctly summarised by Bernd Magnus:

How could one will a state of affairs which—given the cosmological account—will have to occur no matter what one wills? Is there not a fatalism implicit in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same which renders any imperative impotent? Even the decision to live in such a way that you would gladly will the eternal recurrence of each and every moment of your life would seem to be predestined, as would its rejection or indifference. How can one *will* what must happen in any case?²³

While Löwith identifies an inherent paradox in Nietzsche's thought, he argues that it is a deliberate and necessary paradox designed to make us 'own up to the futility of all willing',²⁴ thus inciting a reconciliation with, or love of fate (*amor fati*).

This thesis is indebted to Karl Löwith for his revelation of the tension between willing and fate, a tension, it argues, that is heavily present in Modiano's writing. The thesis is equally indebted to Löwith for its overall structure. Löwith's identification of stages of liberation leading to what Nietzsche terms Dionysian wisdom, namely, the 'dead God' phase, the 'man before the nothing' and 'the affirmation of the eternal return,' has proved invaluable for elucidating an overarching framework of understanding in Modiano's texts. Although the thesis ultimately deems Löwith's conclusions unsatisfactory, it nevertheless emulates and embraces his methodological process.

²³ Magnus, 'Foreword to the English translation' in Karl Löwith, p. xv.

²⁴ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 207.

1.2.2 Bernard Reginster

This thesis is indebted secondly to Bernard Reginster's 2006 publication, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. Reginster argues that Nietzsche's philosophical aim was principally to achieve the affirmation of life and suggests that despite the apparent inconsistencies in Nietzsche's oeuvre, there in fact exists within it an overarching philosophical project for overcoming nihilism. Like that of Löwith, Reginster's systematic approach provides a unifying framework, one which draws together the distinctive themes of Nietzsche's philosophy into a coherent narrative. He begins by establishing the different sources and effects of nihilism, drawing a distinction between nihilism of disorientation, brought about by the sense that our highest values have been undermined such that they no longer guide and inspire us, and nihilism of despair which is the result of the realisation that the world is no longer hospitable to our values. If we consider our highest values to be contingent on the existence of God or another metaphysical world, he argues, we adopt life-negating (or nihilistic) values because we essentially believe that they cannot be realised in 'this world'. In Reginster's account then, Nietzsche's revaluation of all values acts as a response to this, whereby values dependent on the existence of God are replaced with values suitable to a life-view that is non-metaphysical.

Reginster proposes that Nietzsche's theory of the will to power acts as a life-affirming means to fill a metaphysical vacuum. He begins by discussing the concept in relation to Schopenhauer's pessimism and his explorations on the subject of the will. For Schopenhauer, happiness cannot be achieved due to the nature of human willing, which makes the 'once-and-for-all satisfaction of our desires impossible'. Nietzsche's concept of the will to power is a development, Reginster suggests, of the idea of 'second-order desires', or desires whose objects include further desires. He thus presents the will to power as a 'peculiar kind of second-order desire', which he defines as the will to overcome resistance. Overcoming

resistance can lead to satisfaction, but resistance is equally required in order for that satisfaction to be achieved. As such, the will to power does not relate to a desire for the 'state in which resistance has been overcome', but rather it is a desire for 'the *activity* [itself] of overcoming resistance' (p. 11).

The will to power, in Reginster's interpretation, fundamentally alters the role and perception of suffering, enabling us to value and, even further, to love it. Aligning suffering with the encountering of resistance in the pursuit of our desires, Reginster posits that Nietzsche provides us with a key to revaluing suffering. The will to power involves willing the overcoming of resistance; this in turn necessarily implies willing the resistance to be overcome, which amounts, Reginster claims, to willing the very act of suffering itself.

Reginster notes that the 'wholesale' condemnation of suffering and the desire for a life without suffering, in the form, for example, of a Christian afterlife, are symptomatic of our adoption of life-negating values. Since suffering is an essential component of life, our condemnation of it therefore marks a negation of life. As such, Reginster proposes that central to Nietzsche's project of overcoming nihilism, is the revaluation of suffering. Suffering can be seen to be valuable when considered in its relation to creativity; in order to overcome resistance, we must be active and creative. In addition to this, we must be *constantly* creative, since our aims cannot be achieved once and for all, and we cannot attain permanent satisfaction.

Reginster sees the concept of the eternal return as defining Nietzsche's ideal of the affirmation of life. Contrasting the eternal recurrence with the concept of eternity, Reginster argues that it demands that we adopt life-affirming values, namely that we value becoming and impermanence, both of which 'Nietzsche takes to be characteristic of the sort of activity involved in the pursuit of power' (p. 15). Finally, Reginster outlines Nietzsche's promotion of Dionysian wisdom, which he understands to be the wisdom gained from a revaluation of

values. In the possession of such wisdom, we not only bear but desire suffering. We take pleasure in impermanence and becoming.

Reginster's systematic analysis of Nietzsche has been largely welcomed by scholars and is generally deemed to constitute an important addition to Nietzschean studies.²⁵ However, it has encountered some criticism, particularly from those who deem a rigorous analysis of Nietzschean texts to be subversive of the very spirit itself of Nietzsche's output. Reviewing *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* for *The Nietzsche Circle*, Benjamin Moritz notes that 'the paradoxical and ecstatic nature of Nietzsche's texts has long led to secondary literature that maintains a degree of the poetic and literary approach characterized by the original'.²⁶ Nietzsche's oeuvre does not overtly follow a teleological narrative, it contains many contradictions and is communicated in a startling variety of styles, all of which renders systematic analysis difficult, and in some eyes, unwarranted. Reginster pre-empted such criticism in his introduction where he himself draws attention to Nietzsche's famous denunciation of systematisation in *Twilight of the Idols* where the philosopher claims to 'distrust [and avoid] all systematisers'. When Nietzsche criticizes the 'lack of integrity' in the 'will to a system',²⁷ Reginster argues, he 'repudiates a distinctive philosophical ambition that remains particularly tenacious throughout the first half of the nineteenth century [which is] to make philosophical knowledge well founded and all inclusive, by showing how the entire body of knowledge can be derived from a small set of fundamental self-evident propositions'. As such, Reginster proposes that Nietzsche rejected such an ambition but that this did not amount to a rejection of all forms of systematic thinking. Thus, he demonstrates

²⁵ See for example Ariela Tubert, 'The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism: Review', *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 38 (2009), pp. 90-93; Christopher Janaway, 'Review: Bernard Reginster: The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism', *Mind*, 118(470) (2009), pp. 518-522.

²⁶ Benjamin Moritz, 'Review', 2006 <<http://www.nietzschercircle.com/review6.html>> [site accessed 20 September 2011]

²⁷ *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), trans. by Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 159.

his consciousness of the potential pitfalls of a systematic approach and states his own ambition: to present us with a systematic interpretation which ‘simply assumes that, appearances notwithstanding, Nietzsche’s thought is [...] organized and logically ordered, and not a haphazard assemblage of brilliant but disconnected ideas’ (p. 3).

This thesis draws much from Reginster’s rigorous analysis of Nietzsche, and is particularly indebted to his exposition of the role of the will to power the eternal return in the reevaluation of values. His approach is refreshingly thorough and methodical and teases out subtleties in Nietzsche’s thinking, which often go unexamined.

While Reginster and Löwith each undertake systematic analyses of Nietzsche, Reginster is critical of approaches to Nietzsche that ‘consist in identifying a central doctrine in Nietzsche’s philosophy and understanding everything else in relation to it’ (p. 2). This criticism would presumably apply to Löwith, whose thesis places the eternal return at the centre of its analysis. Approaching Nietzsche through the lens of one of his important doctrines runs the danger of overlooking other prominent themes, or at least of reducing their relevance so that they can be moulded to suit a particular narrative. This thesis draws particular attention, however, to the differing approaches of Löwith and Reginster to the idea of the eternal return and ultimately argues that it is Reginster’s reading which allows us to account for the liberation depicted in *L’Horizon*.

The aim of this thesis corresponds in many ways to Reginster’s objective in his *The Affirmation of Life*, to articulate the connections between key themes and ideas and to identify an underlying system. As with Nietzsche’s output, Modiano’s writing can appear to be resistant to systematisation of any kind. While Nietzschean scholars are faced with the dramatic mutation of style and form from one publication to the next, Modiano scholars are confronted with a selection of texts that are, on the contrary, self-consciously consistent in

style and subject matter.²⁸ This presents us with a difficulty of a different nature, but one that is nevertheless equally problematic. The repetition of content in Modiano's oeuvre makes it resistant to teleological readings and its stylistic and formal character seem at odds with a systematic approach. This is further compounded by the image of Modiano cultivated by critics, and perhaps suggested by the author himself, which projects an idea of his writings as being deliberately nebulous, vague or naïve and certainly lacking in theoretical content. His interviews in the public media are equally enigmatic, with the author regularly leaving explanations and ideas undeveloped and sentences unfinished.²⁹ Alongside the nebulous qualities of his publications, such interviews create a perception of the author's oeuvre as being oneiric and, to use his own term, 'flou', and therefore unsuited to systematic interpretation. Modiano does not engage with the academic community, and in his 1975 interview with Jean-Louis Ezine, he observes that 'les recherches sur l'écriture, tout ce byzantinisme pour chaires et colloques, ça ne m'intéresse pas'. Furthermore, he laments that 'la littérature est depuis quelques années aux mains des universitaires', suggesting that the spirit of his writing could only be undermined and subverted in the hands of academics.³⁰

As is the case with secondary literature on Nietzsche's philosophy, scholarly readings of Modiano have at times therefore acquired a tone and literary approach that mirrors that of the author.³¹ In his introduction to the volume of essays, *Lectures de Modiano*, for example, academic Roger-Yves Roche describes Modiano's literary voice as 'indéfinissable', continuing as follows:

Une voix qui traduit quelque chose d'essentiel plutôt qu'elle ne trahit une existence, une voix qui a su muer sans pour autant tomber dans le mutisme. Une voix au bord, une voix

²⁸ This statement applies to the author's novels and autofiction, and does not encompass his other literary output, such as his writing for children and film.

²⁹ Modiano's hesitancy can be detected, for example, in a video interview with Sylvain Bourmeau on the subject of his publication of *L'Horizon*, March 2010 <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xcfyh0_2-8-patrick-modiano-au-moment-ou-pa_news> [site accessed 18 October 2011].

³⁰ Jean-Louis Ezine, *Les écrivains sur la sellette* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 22.

³¹ This is particularly so in Francophone readings of the author.

entre, une voix juste, une voix qui confine, ou touche à quelque chose (mais quoi, là encore) de la poésie... [...] Lire Modiano, c'est être attentif au bruissement d'un texte qui s'écrit comme la mer se retire. En laissant derrière elle des débris de temps et d'histoire, ici la trace d'une étoile dont le jaune est encore visible, là l'empreinte d'un nom qui ne s'effacera jamais tout à fait. Lire Modiano, c'est être "attentionné", savoir se tenir à l'écoute d'un écrivain qui parle une langue fragile, mélange de mots pesés et de silences choisis. Lire Modiano, c'est attendre: que l'auteur apparaisse enfin, dans les anfractuosités d'un roman sans fin'.³²

Furthermore, as Akane Kawakami notes in the introduction to her formal analysis of Modiano's work, academic critics have tended to view the author as 'naïve and non-theoretical.'³³ Symptomatic of this is the response of Modiano scholars to the idea of the eternal return in his writing. The concept is alluded to in five of the essays featuring in *Lectures de Modiano*, for example, but its origin in Nietzsche's writing is barely acknowledged, and nowhere is its philosophical or existential significance actually addressed. Christine Jérusalem includes the eternal return in the title of her essay, but shies away from any real engagement with the concept. As such, she writes, 'si Modiano se place sous un patronage nietzschéen, c'est finalement moins en référence à une théorie précise de l'Eternel Retour qu'à la vie même du philosophe, celui qui pleure à Turin en voyant un cocher fouetter son cheval.'³⁴

This lack of theoretical engagement with the concept of eternal return may stem from a reluctance by academics to see Modiano as being theoretically engaged. Whether or not Modiano does knowingly reference a 'precise theory' of the eternal return, this thesis aims to demonstrate that a closer theoretical engagement with Nietzsche in the study of Modiano can nevertheless be enlightening.

³² Roger-Yves Roche, 'Avant-Propos' in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.) *Lectures de Modiano* (Nantes: Editions Cécile Default, 2009), p. 15.

³³ Akane Kawakami, *A Self-Conscious Art: Patrick Modiano's Postmodern Fictions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 4.

³⁴ Christine Jérusalem, 'L'Eternel Retour dans l'Œuvre de Patrick Modiano: Portrait of the artist as a young dog' in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.), *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 94.

1.3 Literature review

Modiano's wariness of academic scholarship is perhaps justified when we consider the particular manner in which some scholars have approached his writing. There has been a strain in Modiano scholarship which is engaged in unravelling the web of historical references, signs, and inter/intratextual allusions,³⁵ resulting in studies which are, for Modiano scholars, enlightening because they reveal the methodological processes that transform historical fact into Modiano's literary output. However, they are in danger of treating his work as a puzzle to be solved, which runs the risk of narrowing its potential for newness. If Modiano is disapproving of the academic community and its approach to literature, it is perhaps the result of a misconception that it is engaged in finding answers and reaching conclusions, and hence in denying novels of their 'ouverture', closing down avenues that could otherwise 'déboucher sur l'horizon'.³⁶

On the contrary, academic studies of Modiano have led to his writing being discussed in a variety of contexts and theoretical frameworks, thus drawing it into unexpected territories. This is particularly true in recent years, which have seen a significant broadening in the range of approaches to the author's work, exemplified in the publication of two volumes of essays, resulting from conferences in the UK and France respectively.

In John E. Flower's *Patrick Modiano*,³⁷ featuring sixteen essays by Anglophone and Francophone scholars, we thus encounter Modiano in a psychogeographical context in Akane Kawakami's contribution, alongside a psychoanalytical reading exploring the status of the secret in Modiano's writing by Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert. Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk addresses the concretising nature of language and Modiano's tendency to move beyond the textual by embracing other art forms, an idea developed by Jurate D. Kaminskas in her

³⁵ See for example Alan Morris, 'And the "Bande" played on' and Anne-Marie Obajtek-Kirkwood, 'Une certaine presse de "plumitifs": celle des "Boulevards de ceinture"' in John E. Flower (ed.) *Patrick Modiano* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2007).

³⁶ Modiano, *L'Horizon*, p. 85.

³⁷ John E. Flower (ed.), *Patrick Modiano* (Amsterdam-New York: Rhodopsin, 2007).

analysis of the musicality of Modiano's writing, in which she notes the significance of repetition and refrain. Simon Kemp draws our attention to the 'inachèvement' in Modiano's texts and questions why we are not dissatisfied when the hermeneutic thread is left in suspense. Reflecting on the relationship between literary form and content, he demonstrates how Modiano adeptly steers us away from any expectation of a neat conclusion and argues that compatibility exists between the lack of formal conclusion and the central themes of memory and identity.³⁸ The volume, with its varied approaches and interpretations, offers an overview of Modiano studies today and reflects the academic interest that his writing continues to generate.

Roger-Yves Roche's edited volume of essays resulting from a conference on Modiano in Lyon, 2008, provides an insight into Modiano scholarship from a largely Francophone perspective. *Lectures de Modiano* is divided into four broad themes, 'Auto-Modiano', 'Histoire, Histoires...', '& Géographies', and 'Etre et/ou Ne Pas Etre' and features eighteen essays. Many of the themes raised in John E. Flower's volume are further elaborated on in this collection. We thus encounter further psychoanalytical readings, in, for example, Claude Burgelin's exploration of 'douleur' in his essay on *La Petite Bijou*; re-examinations of the Occupation and the 'question juive'; and a historiographical reading examining Modiano's historical approach in *Dora Bruder* by Laurent Douzou. Isabelle Dangy compares the ephemeral nature of private spaces to the fixity of public places while Mattieu Rémy undertakes a psychogeographical reading, discussing Modiano's relation to Guy Debord. Michael Sheringham examines the existential significance of the search for Dora Bruder, comparing the fictitious or performative search in *Voyage de Noces*, with the non-fiction version entitled *Dora Bruder*, while Jean Bernard-Vray articulates the relation between photography and the theme of 'disparition'.

³⁸ See, Jenny Devine, 'Patrick Modiano (review)', *French Studies*, 63 (2009), 112- 13.

Introducing the collection of essays in his edited volume, John Flower cautions that they ‘return inevitably to a number of themes and issues raised by earlier critics’.³⁹ This thesis equally addresses questions that are familiar to readers and scholars of Modiano; it thus discusses themes such as (1) the outsider status of narrators and protagonists, (2) dissolution, (3) the ‘trou noir’ and ‘points fixes’, (4) ‘fuite’, (5) the eternal return and (6) inconclusion/‘inachèvement’, all of which have previously received critical attention to varying degrees. The thesis differs from previous studies in its articulation of the relation between these issues, presenting them as components in a broader, unifying system. In doing so, it confers greater importance on aspects of Modiano’s writing which have hitherto been under-explored or to which has been attributed only passing regard. The question of dissolution, for example, has received minimal attention in studies to date, whilst the ‘trou noir’ and ‘eternal return’ have not been taken seriously as existential states or philosophical concepts. In its systematic approach, this thesis hopes to shed greater light on distinct themes by demonstrating the role they play in an overarching Nietzschean narrative of liberation.

1.3.1. Outsiders

This thesis has greatly benefited from the scholarly readings of Modiano to date. For the most comprehensive examination of the ‘outsider’ in Modiano’s writings, it turns to Jules Bedner’s essay, ‘Patrick Modiano: Visages de l’Etranger’ in the volume of essays of which he is editor, entitled *Patrick Modiano*. Bedner begins by noting the extent to which Modiano’s narrators and protagonists have origins outside of France, separating them from French society and hindering their sense of belonging. Focusing on the voice of the narrator, Bedner remarks that Modiano’s early novels present us with a depiction of the outsider principally in relation to the question of Jewish identity. However, Modiano subsequently broadens his portrayal of

³⁹ John E. Flower (ed.), ‘Introduction’, *Patrick Modiano*, p. 13.

outsiders focusing, more generally, on ‘l’aliénation de l’homme moderne’.⁴⁰ Of particular interest is Bedner’s investigation into the sort of life that Modiano’s outsiders long to have. He thus notes their desire to belong to ‘un monde stable, bien ordonné, nourri par la tradition’, their longing for an affectionate mother and father who have firm geographical and cultural roots as well as social prestige (p. 49). Furthermore, Bedner stresses that this longing results from their past which saw them excluded from ‘une adolescence heureuse, propre, sûre d’elle-même’.⁴¹ Ultimately, Bedner’s analysis of Modiano’s outsider narrators centres on their relation to France and their idealisation of French identity:

Le sentiment de n’être pas vraiment Français, de n’être pas acceptés par les autres Français, voire même d’être l’objet d’une menace plus ou moins obscure les amène au désir d’une assimilation complète, désir d’autant plus irréalisable qu’ils ont de la France une image étrangement idéalisée, voire mythique... (P. 52).

This thesis draws on many of Bedner’s useful observations, but while he places the question of identity at the centre of his discussion, this thesis investigates the role of the outsider in the framework of values, thereby divorcing it of spatial or geographical significance. It therefore focuses on the outsider status of narrators and protagonists, but suggests that this is the result of their inability to fit in with the received value system, a value system that is not unique to France. Thus, when Modiano’s protagonists flee the country their situation remains unchanged; though their physical location is altered, they continue to espouse the same set of values. Developing Bedner’s observations, this thesis also recognises in Modiano’s narrators a longing to assimilate into a ‘stable’ and ‘ordered’ society but goes further and suggests that their inability to do so causes their value system to dissolve altogether.

⁴⁰ Jules Bedner, ‘Patrick Modiano: Visages de l’Etranger’, in Jules Bedner (ed.), *Patrick Modiano* (Amsterdam: Rhodopsin, 1993), p. 44.

⁴¹ Modiano, *Une Jeunesse* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1985), p. 136.

1.3.2. Dissolution

The question of dissolution, or what Modiano has called the ‘perte progressive d’identité’,⁴² has been remarkably underexplored in Modiano studies, given the frequency with which it takes place in his oeuvre. To date, Jean-Marc Lecaudé’s essay, ‘Patrick Modiano: Le narrateur et sa disparition ou qu’y a-t-il derrière le miroir?’, in John E. Flower’s *Patrick Modiano*, is the only study which directly addresses the presence and importance of dissolution in Modiano’s work, placing the question of ‘disparition’ into an existential context. Lecaudé draws a distinction between a voluntary and involuntary ‘disparition’; in the first instance, he argues, a narrator might desire to escape a situation that is disagreeable to him, whilst in the second instance, he feels the ‘sensation de disparition [...] comme une angoisse contre laquelle il cherche à s’opposer’.⁴³

Initially, this thesis focuses on the latter form of ‘disparition’, which it redefines as the ‘dissolution of values’. Where Lecaudé identifies some of the physical factors which set this form of ‘disparition’ in motion, (including, for example, the role played by light and shadow in triggering involuntary disparition), this thesis seeks to undertake a more sustained analysis of the process. Lecaudé thus covers some of the groundwork for this thesis in identifying the presence and contexts of dissolution but his essay stops short of questioning why it takes place, what is actually dissolving, and how narrators attempt to overcome it. This thesis contends that the ‘dissolution de l’être’ or the ‘perte de personnalité’ that Lecaudé identifies forms part of a larger narrative in which received values dissolve leading ultimately to a reevaluation of values.

⁴² *Chien de printemps* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993), p.117.

⁴³ Jean-Marc Lecaudé, ‘Patrick Modiano: Le narrateur et sa disparition ou qu’y a-t-il derrière le miroir?’ in John Flower (ed.), *Patrick Modiano*, pp. 239-40.

1.3.3. The 'trou noir' and 'points fixes'

In his evocation of the 'perte d'identité', Lecaudé briefly refers to the 'trou noir', which he indicates to be the result of a 'dissolution de l'être' (p. 240). This 'trou noir', is often mentioned in passing in Modiano studies and appears in a range of theoretical contexts. Scholars and critics have aligned the phrase, for example, with the death of Modiano's brother, Rudy,⁴⁴ with collective memory and the Occupation,⁴⁵ and with personal memory-loss or amnesia.⁴⁶ Broadly speaking, the 'trou noir' is understood to denote absence; in the framework of this thesis, it is representative of an absence of a system of values. The thesis concurs therefore with Lecaudé's suggestion that the 'trou noir' relates to dissolution, whilst developing the idea and presenting the 'black hole' as an existential state entered after our value system has disintegrated.

In opposition to this 'trou noir', we find numerous references in Modiano's œuvre, and in corresponding interviews with the author, to 'points fixes'. Contrary to the 'trou noir', these fixed points are generally understood to denote presence and stability. In his introduction to *Lectures de Modiano*, Roger-Yves Roche defines Modiano's 'points fixes' as 'ces images-mots qui reviennent souvent tels quels sous sa plume et qui semblent clignoter comme des signaux [...] proches et lointains'.⁴⁷ They are thus flags, which pinpoint meaning in an otherwise formless world. They are equally considered in topographical contexts, acting as 'points de repère' which counter the chaotic and fluid nature of the city.⁴⁸ In the form of photographs and documents, Modiano's 'points fixes' have the function of saving from

⁴⁴ For example, see chapter on 'Rudy' in Thierry Laurent, *L'oeuvre de Patrick Modiano: Une autofiction* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1997).

⁴⁵ Anna Bitton, 'Patrick Modiano ôte le masque', *L'Histoire*, 299 (2005) <http://www.histoire.presse.fr/content/2_portraits/article?id=365#titre> [site accessed 09 September 2011].

⁴⁶ Jacques Lecarme, 'Variations de Modiano: (autour d'Accident nocturne)', in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.), *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ Roger-Yves Roche, 'Avant Propos' in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.) *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Norbert Czarny, 'Prendre le large' in *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 954 (2007) <http://reseau-modiano.pagesperso-orange.fr/dans_le_cafe_de_la_jeunesse_perdue_par_norbert_czarny.htm> [site accessed 09 September 2011].

oblivion, acting as testaments to existence, proof and certainty amidst the unknown and forgotten.

The ‘trou noir’/ ‘points fixes’ binary which is occasionally alluded to in Modiano studies receives greater attention in this thesis, which demonstrates how the struggle of Modiano’s protagonists to establish ‘points fixes’ can be understood as a reactive measure employed when they are faced with the ‘trou noir’ in the wake of the dissolution of their values. ‘Fixed points’ therefore allow Modiano’s protagonists to reconstruct the boundaries and limits that have delineated their system of values, allowing them to restore meaning to their world.

1.3.4. Fuite

This thesis identifies a second reactive measure employed by Modiano’s narrators after the dissolution of their values; namely the decision to flee. While the ideas of the ‘trou noir’ and ‘points fixes’ have been relatively neglected in Modiano studies, the question of flight (‘fuite’) has received significantly greater attention. For example, Jules Bedner notes that ‘le thème de la fuite est omniprésent dans l’oeuvre [de Modiano]’,⁴⁹ whilst in her essay dedicated to the subject, Nelly Wolf notes that ‘il est rare qu’un récit modianesque se déroule sans fuite, fugue, emigration, refuge, cachette, fugitive ou réfugié.’⁵⁰ Wolf investigates the forms of ‘fuite’ that take place in Modiano’s writings, arguing that the author’s lacunary story-telling and his narrative structure imitate and respect the act of flight. She draws a distinction between three forms of flight; the flight for survival, existential flight, and the ‘fugue’. In the first instance, she briefly discusses the need to disappear during the Occupation, noting how, failing to flee, certain characters were subsequently arrested and killed during the Shoah. In the second instance, Wolf addresses a psychological need for

⁴⁹ Jules Bedner, ‘Patrick Modiano: Visages de l’Etranger’, in Jules Bedner (ed.), *Patrick Modiano*, p. 46.

⁵⁰ Nelly Wolf, ‘Figures de la fuite chez Patrick Modiano’, in John E. Flower (ed.), *Patrick Modiano*, p. 211.

flight, which, similar to Lecaudé, she identifies as a ‘disparition volontaire’ (p. 212). Wolf also addresses the question of the ‘fugue’ before demonstrating how all three forms of flight are intertwined and related.

Of particular interest for the purposes of this thesis, is Wolf’s assertion that by fleeing, Modiano’s protagonists effectively break their social contract, and her key observation that ‘en s’évadant, le personnage en fuite se retire d’un contrat social dont il a déjà été exclu’ (p. 212). Importantly, then, Wolf recognises that prior to their ‘fuite’ Modiano’s characters are already outsiders; however, she aligns the breaking of a social contract with an ensuing anti-social or criminal behaviour. As such, this thesis concurs with many of Wolf’s observations, but develops her ideas in a different direction. Like Wolf, it recognises that the Modiano protagonist is often an outsider who is ‘incapable de continuer à jouer le rôle que la société lui impose’ (p. 213). Unable to relate to the received values of their society, such protagonists witness the dissolution of their value system. This thesis thus argues that the ‘disparition volontaire’ is a reactive measure to counter the dissolution of their values. As such, protagonists seek a geographical ‘other’ where they reconstruct their world and live an unchallenged existence, in which they can carefully maintain a status quo. In this respect, Lecaudé’s discussion of a voluntary ‘disparition’ is more pertinent to this thesis, and particularly his recognition of its ultimate failure as a means for overcoming a nihilistic void. This form of ‘fuite’ does not liberate Modiano’s protagonists, but rather it leaves them suspended in ‘un présent éternel’.⁵¹

1.3.5. *Eternal return*

As we have seen, the eternal return is a subject that has received increased attention in Modiano studies since the publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, with the term

⁵¹ Jean-Marc Lecaudé, ‘Patrick Modiano: Le narrateur et sa disparition ou qu’y a-t-il derrière le miroir?’ in John E. Flower (ed.), *Patrick Modiano*, p. 240.

appearing, for example, in five of the eighteen essays in Roger-Yves Roche's volume, *Lectures de Modiano*. Interestingly, the concept of the eternal return has largely been divorced from its Nietzschean origins; in some cases the term 'éternel retour' is employed simply to denote the repetition of circumstances and events in Modiano's oeuvre, whilst as a concept it is often considered in psychoanalytical contexts. Jacques Lecarme draws a connection between the philosophical and psychoanalytical understanding of the concept when he notes that 'la réédition des scènes traumatisantes et des accidents nocturnes, la reproduction des mêmes rencontres avec les mêmes personnages malfaisants, manifestent le retour éternel, si l'on est nietzschéen, [ou] la compulsion de répétition si l'on est freudien,' concluding that 'la répétition, loin de rassurer, devient la forme moderne de la fatalité.'⁵²

In his essay on Modiano's *La Petite Bijou*, Claude Burgelin suggests that Modiano's protagonists, and indeed the author himself, find relief in repetitive mechanisms since the eternal return of the same prevents progression and thus enables them to avoid any real contact with their suffering. He thus argues that they prefer to 'rester dans l'éternel retour du même' as this allows them to delay any confrontation with their trauma.⁵³ In her essay 'L'Éternel Retour dans l'oeuvre de Patrick Modiano: Portrait of the artist as a young dog', Christine Jérusalem lists the forms of repetition that take place in Modiano's writing and focuses on the reappearance of the dog in his oeuvre. Associating the dog with the themes of 'l'enfance, l'accident' and 'l'abandon', she suggests that the animal is representative of those who are 'dans la faiblesse'.⁵⁴ However, although she refers to Nietzsche, she does not address his theory of the eternal return at all, but rather aligns the philosopher broadly with the 'sentiment mélancolique' found in Modiano's publications. In his topographical study of

⁵² Jacques Lecarme, 'Variations de Modiano: (autour d'Accident nocturne)', in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.), *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 36.

⁵³ Claude Burgelin, 'De quoi se plaindre? Comment se plaindre: (une lecture de "La Petite Bijou")', in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.), *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 53.

⁵⁴ Jérusalem, 'L'Éternel Retour dans l'oeuvre de Patrick Modiano: Portrait of the artist as a young dog', pp. 94-95.

Modiano's writings, Bruno Blanckeman examines the author's interest in ring roads and peripheries, arguing that the city of Paris is presented as an ensemble of circles, 'tantôt infernaux [...], tantôt magiques', which form the site for the eternal return, 'dont l'écrivain fait un motif et une structure de création privilégiés'.⁵⁵

While the question of the eternal return has undoubtedly received attention in Modiano studies, there has been surprisingly little attempt to explore the philosophical significance and implications of the concept, and its relevance in Nietzschean thought has been largely overlooked. This lack of investigation possibly stems from the perception that Modiano's writing does not engage theoretically with the idea and therefore that little would be gained from a more sustained Nietzschean analysis. Nevertheless, critical discussion of the eternal return in Modiano's writing to date has brought to light many thought-provoking and valuable insights. Of particular interest in the context of this thesis is the extent to which the concept of the eternal return is associated with melancholia, with repetition and return largely presented within a negative framework. This is possibly the result of its interpretation as a cosmological phenomenon, whereby events and situations recur in such a way that man can have no impact on them. This is noted by Jacques Lecarme, for example, who dwells on the unsettling nature of repetition, which he argues, 'loin de rassurer, devient la forme moderne de la fatalité' (p. 36). Providing a more in-depth exploration of the eternal return, this thesis examines its cosmological interpretation and focuses on the tension between fate and human willing. Within a cosmological reading, it becomes clear why scholars and critics have generally framed the eternal return in a negative and melancholic framework, since it renders protagonists helpless and unable to change their circumstances. However, the critical literature on Modiano has failed to address the striking affirmation of the eternal return in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, in which one of the protagonists experiences the eternal

⁵⁵ Bruno Blanckeman, 'Droit de cité: (Un Paris de Patrick Modiano), in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.), *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 165.

return as a moment of ecstasy and joy. This thesis argues that such an affirmation cannot be accounted for in a cosmological interpretation of the eternal return. It therefore suggests that in light of this euphoric affirmation of the eternal return, an alternative reading of the concept, which understands it as a non-teleological device advocating ‘inachèvement’ and becoming, is more appropriate.

1.3.6. *Inconclusion*

In its focus on the relation between the eternal return and ‘becoming’, this thesis articulates the relation between Nietzsche’s concept and a subject which has received much attention in Modiano studies, namely, the question of inconclusiveness or ‘inachèvement’. This aspect of Modiano’s writing has been addressed repeatedly throughout the decades of Modiano research, and most particularly in the framework of an inconclusive search. Often examined in the context of detective fiction, for example, scholars have frequently focused on the author’s non-linear narratives and the ultimate failure to satisfy the narrator’s (and reader’s) quest for truth. For example, Anna Botta notes that the detective story usually acts as a narrativisation of ‘hermeneutic structuration’, and subsequently demonstrates how Modiano manipulates the codes of detective story telling. Focusing on Modiano’s *Rue des boutiques obscures*, Botta argues that the novel ‘adopts certain conventions of the detective genre’ whilst also subverting it by ‘playing them off against a narrative structure that defies any attempt at closure and leaves the story’s initial enigma unresolved’.⁵⁶ Jeanne Ewert similarly presents Modiano’s narrators as postmodern detectives,⁵⁷ whilst Akane Kawakami draws attention to the relation between the detective novel and the quest for identity in her study on

⁵⁶ Anna Botta, ‘Detecting Identity in Time and Space: Modiano’s “Rue des boutiques obscures” and Tabucchi’s “Il filo dell’orizzonte”’, in Patricia Merivale (ed.) *Detecting texts: the metaphysical detective story from Poe to postmodernism* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 218.

⁵⁷ Jeanne Ewert, ‘Lost in the Hermeneutic Funhouse: Patrick Modiano’s Postmodern Detectives’, in June Frazer and Ronald Walker (eds.) *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* (Macomb: Western Illinois University Press, 1990).

Modiano, demonstrating how the author employs the conventions of the detective genre as a means of offering us ‘an updated version of the writer as seeker, ultimately of his own identity.’⁵⁸

These, amongst other studies, focus on the absence of resolution in Modiano’s searches, and the sense that the hermeneutic thread has been left dangling. Kawakami dwells on this further in her discussion of Modiano’s ‘disorderly narratives’; noting that despite the reader’s hermeneutic expectations, his/her attempts to re-order Modiano’s narratives will be ‘doomed’ because ‘there is no final closure, no triumphant detective, but an anti-climactic fade-out or a displacement effect’ (p. 29). In his essay, ‘Fade Out: Patterns of inconclusion in Modiano’s novels’, Simon Kemp also addresses the lack of closure in Modiano’s narratives, and suggests that the central themes of memory and identity are reflected in narrative form.

Elsewhere, we encounter the question of ‘inachèvement’ in relation to the historical quest. Studies of Modiano’s *Dora Bruder*, for example, have explored the task of the historian and brought to light a tension between the desire to know and the realisation that any real knowledge of the past is unattainable. Laurent Douzou thus notes that the author/narrator’s search for Dora begins with the discovery of a notice in a newspaper, which ‘détermine chez Modiano une rage de comprendre, de savoir’, yet ‘en même temps, et tout le récit est bâti sur cette tension, l’auteur est hautement conscient que c’est une impossible quête, que la démarche est, au bout du compte, vaine.’⁵⁹ The tension between the desire to know and the realisation that complete certainty is impossible, explored by Douzou in the context of history writing, forms part of a broader narrative of ‘inachèvement’ present throughout Modiano’s oeuvre. Roger-Yves Roche remarks that ‘cela pourrait même s’appeler une *mystique de l’intime*, exactement comme d’autres voudraient atteindre le blanc d’un

⁵⁸ Kawakami, *A Self-Conscious Art: Patrick Modiano’s Postmodern Fictions*, p. 104.

⁵⁹ Laurent Douzou, ‘Quand la fiction vole au secours de la réalité: le cas de “Dora Bruder”’, in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.), *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 126.

sommet jamais conquis. Tout en sachant très bien qu'ils ne le peuvent.'⁶⁰ The task of undertaking a project or search, in the knowledge that it cannot lead to success or achievement should provoke a sentiment of despair in Modiano's protagonists, and this is often the case.

However, relating the question of 'inachèvement' to Nietzsche's eternal return, this thesis aims to shed new light on the subject; the affirmation of the eternal return, it argues, marks a revaluation of the process of becoming so that it is valued and loved above all else. As such, in the wake of the affirmation of eternal return in Modiano's *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L'Horizon*, this thesis draws attention to a perceptible change in attitude to the process of becoming. Certainty, revelation and closure are no longer deemed valuable, since they close down potential for exploration and newness. Instead we witness the endorsement of self-conscious ignorance, mystery and fluidity; values promoting the act of becoming, which in turn promote creativity.

Many of the issues discussed in this thesis have been raised by academics and explored in alternative theoretical frameworks. As such, it is indebted to much of the scholarly output on Modiano to date. It is important to stress that this review of the critical literature on Modiano is not exhaustive but is indicative of the range of studies that have proved particularly relevant to this thesis. It does not, for example, refer to the many articles about Modiano, and interviews with the author, which have featured in popular periodicals or in the media and which have been immensely informative. Nor has it dwelt, for example, on the invaluable online resource, *Le Réseau Modiano*, created by Denis Cosnard, who has himself recently published a monograph on Modiano entitled *Dans la peau de Modiano*.⁶¹ The network contains articles and reviews, provides information on new publications and refers to new

⁶⁰ Roche, 'Avant-propos' in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.), *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 14.

⁶¹ Denis Cosnard, *Dans la peau de Modiano* (Paris: Fayard, 2011).

material and interviews relating to Modiano, and has served as a useful resource throughout the writing of this thesis. Further sources will be referenced throughout this thesis, and subsequently indicated in its bibliography, which provides a comprehensive inventory of the secondary literature consulted during the course of writing this thesis.

1.4 Chapter Outline

This thesis is formed of six chapters. Following this introduction, the second chapter establishes the unifying theory on which the thesis is based. Its structure, and that of the thesis as a whole, is indebted to Karl Löwith and, in acknowledgement of this, it borrows its title from Löwith's chapter 'The unifying fundamental idea' in his *Nietzsche's philosophy of the eternal return of the same*. The aim of this chapter is to outline a narrative of overcoming nihilism in Nietzschean thought and to demonstrate its relation and relevance to Modiano's writing. As such it introduces a theoretical framework, and whilst it refers to examples from Modiano's oeuvre, it does not at this point undertake close readings of his texts. Its purpose is to present a broad picture of the ways in which Nietzsche and Modiano can interact.

Following Löwith's structuration, the chapter thus identifies three existential stages, which result ultimately in the gaining of what Nietzsche terms Dionysian wisdom. These stages mark a process of a revaluation of values; the first stage, identified as the 'dead God' phase relates to the dissolution of received values due to their being undermined or deemed unattainable and the subsequent onset of a nihilistic void; the second phase, describing 'the man before the nothing', involves experimentation in the attempt to overcome this void; whilst finally the affirmation of the eternal return marks a revaluation of values. The chapter demonstrates how the application of a Nietzschean narrative of overcoming nihilism allows us to articulate the connections between key themes and ideas in Modiano's writings such as the question of the outsider, dissolution, flight, recurrence and inconclusion.

The third chapter undertakes an in-depth analysis of the first two stages in the process of a revaluation of values. In doing so, it adopts a detailed approach, examining some of the nuances of Nietzschean ideas and terminology and exploring them in close readings of two of Modiano's novels. Discussing the 'dead God' phase, it questions what constitute the 'received' values of Modiano's protagonists, concluding that they adhere to a system of values based on fixity, stability, certainty, and limitation. The chapter questions why this value system dissolves, identifying two principal causes for dissolution; in the first instance, dissolution takes place when a protagonist realises that his/her goals are unrealisable, while in the second instance it occurs when the validity of those values is undermined. The chapter demonstrates how these causes for dissolution can be aligned with correlating forms of nihilism, namely the nihilism of despair, and nihilism of disorientation.

Chapter three subsequently focuses on the second phase towards a revaluation of values that describes 'the man before the nothing'. It identifies three methods employed by Modiano's protagonists to overcome a nihilistic void; the attempt to reconstruct the values dissolved by establishing 'points fixes', the attempt to 'recommencer à zéro' in an alternative city, and suicide, elucidating the reasons why these experiments ultimately fail to liberate Modiano's protagonists. The chapter focuses in particular on two of Modiano's novels, *Chien de printemps* and *Vestiaire de l'enfance*.

Chapter four discusses the third stage in our liberating process of a revaluation of values. Investigating the theory of the eternal return, it identifies two interpretations of Nietzsche's concept discernible in Modiano's oeuvre. In the first instance, it analyses the concept of the eternal return in a cosmological context, understanding the eternal return as entailing a necessary and unalterable eternal recurrence of events and situations throughout time. Such an interpretation has fatalistic implications since man cannot intervene in a cosmological occurrence and human willing is therefore rendered redundant. The fourth

chapter thus explores the clashing of the cosmological and anthropological spheres in a close reading of *La Petite Bijou*, bringing to light the struggles of the young narrator, Thérèse, as she tries to overcome her fate.

However, the chapter notes how such an interpretation can only lead to a sense of resignation and does not enable liberation, nor does it account for the kind of affirmation of the concept that takes place in Modiano's *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*. In a close reading of this novel, chapter three subsequently explores an alternative reading of the eternal return, which understands the concept as a non-linear or non-teleological process promoting becoming and the act of willing over being. This alternative reading of the eternal return advocates the revaluation of impermanence, becoming and their concomitant values and is a liberating interpretation; its proposition that everything we do becomes undone and must be redone renders the will constantly active and creative, and its rejection of permanence enables and promotes newness. The chapter demonstrates how this alternative non-cosmological interpretation of the eternal return is more easily reconciled with Nietzsche's rapturous appraisal of the concept, and with Modiano's mystical evocation of its affirmation in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*.

Our fifth chapter undertakes an analysis of Modiano's novel, *L'Horizon* and argues that it is imbued with Dionysian wisdom. Such wisdom is gained after the affirmation of the eternal return and it is inextricably related to the concept. The eternal return presents a scenario wherein the world is eternally becoming and being (or sustained satisfaction) is impossible. However, this chapter argues that Nietzsche recognises in humans an innate will to overcome resistance and achieve goals. In a situation of eternal becoming these goals cannot be achieved and as such the will remains in a state of constant toiling. The eternal return therefore is a concept that promotes suffering, since in its formulation, the will is forever frustrated and the unable to satisfy its desires.

This chapter suggests that in urging us to affirm the eternal return, Nietzsche therefore exhorts us to affirm suffering. Suffering is desirable if we recognise what can be gained from the constant toiling of the will, and when we understand what is exciting about a world of eternal becoming. The satisfaction of our desires is unfavourable because it would render the will inactive, leaving us suspended in an eternal present. On the contrary, all newness, potential and possibility – in short, all ‘lignes de fuite vers l’horizon’ – derive from a situation of becoming. In its close reading of Modiano’s *L’Horizon*, this chapter identifies a shift in attitude to becoming and suffering, demonstrating how its narrator Bosmans relishes all that cannot be known, contained, fixed or resolved.

Finally, the sixth and concluding chapter of this thesis reflects on what Modiano studies can gain from a Nietzschean reading of his work. Tracing a Nietzschean narrative of liberation in Modiano’s writing enables us to articulate the relation between themes and ideas in his writing and to unify them in a coherent and comprehensive system. As such, where the bulk of Modiano studies to date have treated themes and motifs in his writings in isolation, this thesis identifies a system which allows us to understand such themes as components of a larger, philosophical narrative. However, this final chapter seeks to reveal a further complementarity between the output of Nietzsche and that of Modiano. While Nietzsche offers a theoretical account of the beneficial and liberating qualities of dissolution, disorientation and the eternal return, Modiano’s writings immerse the reader in the confusing and often terrifying experience of these events, thus doing what Nietzsche deemed so important, taking us back to the ‘nerve stimulus’.

In its tracing of a Nietzschean narrative of liberation in Modiano’s writings, this thesis will thus focus in particular on the following five novels, whilst also referring to selected novels and texts from the author’s œuvre: *Vestiaire de l’enfance* (1989), *Chien de printemps* (1993), *La Petite Bijou* (2001), *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* (2007), and *L’Horizon*

(2010). The novels chosen for close analysis are deemed to demonstrate most effectively the three stages of liberation on which the thesis is based, with the two earlier publications offering an insight into the first two stages of liberation, ‘the dead Christian God’ and ‘the man before the nothing’. *La Petite Bijou* and *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* are discussed in relation to the third liberation and the affirmation of the eternal return, whilst *L’Horizon* is seen as conveying Dionysian wisdom. While the thesis does not argue that, from one publication to the next, Modiano’s œuvre follows a neat and linear trajectory towards Dionysian wisdom, the publication dates of the five novels here selected do indicate some chronological progression. More importantly, while the thesis draws attention to the commonalities of these novels, it hopes to reveal in its close readings the subtle mutation of the author’s philosophical outlook. In his chapter ‘From the souls of artists and writers’ in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche suggests that writers and artists should necessarily return continually to the same motif, since the public would otherwise ‘never learn to get beyond interest in the material alone; but once it has come to be familiar with the motif from numerous versions of it, and thus no longer feels the charm of novelty and anticipation, it will then be able to grasp and enjoy the nuances and subtle new inventions in the way it is treated’.⁶²

⁶² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 89.

2) Becoming Dionysian: the unifying fundamental idea

In a letter dated 1888, Nietzsche asserts that he is the inventor of a ‘new kind of pessimism’, describing it as being ‘Dionysian’, ‘born out of *strength*, which takes its *delight* in seizing the problem of existence by the horns’.⁶³ This new pessimism, elsewhere described by Nietzsche as ‘Dionysian wisdom’,⁶⁴ enables those who possess it to value suffering, not contingently, but in itself, as an inherent and necessary component of becoming, willing and creativity. The affirmation of the eternal return marks the transition into this newfound wisdom, through a reevaluation of values; the idea, which dispels any sense of progression and linearity by suggesting that everything we do becomes undone and must be re-done, embodies the frustration of the will, and the inability to permanently ‘achieve’. It is the symbol of a situation of eternal becoming, and gives rise to troubling existential questions: what is the point of our existence if humans do not progress teleologically? And how can we humanly bear a life of suffering embodied in the eternal frustration of our will? The affirmation of the

⁶³ Nietzsche, excerpt from a letter to Overbeck, dated 28 December 1888, quoted in Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Several allusions to ‘Dionysian wisdom’ can be found, for example, in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. by Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 39, 48, 53, 80, 85, 105.

eternal return, the willing of this potentially crippling concept, marks the transition into a ‘truly liberated spirit’.⁶⁵

This chapter introduces the Nietzschean path of liberation leading to the affirmation of the eternal return, and to the birth of Dionysian wisdom. It outlines a unifying fundamental idea underlying Nietzsche’s philosophy, and traces its literary counterpart in the writings of Patrick Modiano. Reading Nietzsche and Modiano in parallel, the chapter traces a trajectory of liberation identified by Nietzsche scholar Karl Löwith in his seminal treatise, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. It discusses the ‘dead God’ stage, ‘the man before the nothing’ and the ‘affirmation of eternal return’ respectively before outlining the meaning of Dionysian wisdom, thus providing an overall idea of the framework of the thesis.

Karl Löwith identifies two important stages which must be attained before we can affirm the eternal return, which he summarises as ‘the dead Christian God’, and ‘the man before the nothing’.⁶⁶ The first stage involves the rejection of existing values and the liberation from received ties, and necessarily entails separation from normal society, or what Nietzsche terms the ‘herd’.⁶⁷ The second phase involves dealing with the void which forms in the absence of such received values and as such it is an experimental phase in which the ‘free spirit’ attempts to find solutions to overcome this nihilistic void. Affirming the eternal return constitutes the third challenge for the free spirit, but one that is ultimately liberating. Promoting a revaluation of values, it offers a framework in which we can take pleasure in a state of eternal becoming. Resisting resolution and closure, the idea of the eternal return renders the will persistently frustrated, but constantly active, toiling and creative. In this

⁶⁵ Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 36

⁶⁶ Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 37.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 41.

formulation, stagnation is avoided and one is confronted with a terrifying, but liberating world of incalculable possibilities.

These three stages in liberation can be traced in the mutation of the meaning of the term ‘free spirit’ over the course of Nietzsche’s oeuvre. As such, the term will appear throughout this thesis but its meaning will not remain static. Nietzsche begins with a relativistic description of the ‘free spirit’ in *Human, All Too Human*, suggesting that the process of becoming a ‘free spirit’ involves liberation *from* another condition, namely that of tradition.⁶⁸ However, in his chapter entitled ‘The Free Spirit’ in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche’s perception of this concept has mutated. Here, his ‘free spirits’ are ‘experimenters’ or ‘attempters’,⁶⁹ ‘curious to a fault, researchers to the point of cruelty [...] ready for every trade that requires a quick wit and sharp senses, ready for any risk’ (p. 42). Finally, as Löwith points out, by the time he is writing *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche’s ‘free spirit’ is ‘interpreted as “the most comprehensive spirit”’, who can permit himself everything because he has the “tolerance of strength” that says its Yes to everything that is. [...] He who previously was the teacher of the most extreme mistrust now stands as a spirit who has become free... [...] The concealed Yes was stronger than all negativity...’⁷⁰ Nietzsche acknowledges the difficulties and potential despair faced by free spirits during the course of their liberation. However, as a theorist, he writes from the position of one who can recognise the value of such struggle. This liberation, the ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to do’, is often evoked with exuberance and joy in Nietzsche’s writings, but the reality for those on a path to Dionysian wisdom can be quite different.

Delving into Modiano’s oeuvre, this chapter demonstrates how we can read in Modiano’s writings literary explorations of the Nietzschean stages of liberation and the

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for free Spirits*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 7.

⁶⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 39.

⁷⁰ Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 35.

eventual attainment of Dionysian wisdom. It thus follows a trajectory in which we encounter Modiano's narrators or protagonists as outsiders, witness episodes of dissolution, and observe their descent into a 'trou noir', before examining their experiments or attempts at overcoming this void. These difficult and sometimes profoundly disturbing existential experiences culminate in the euphoric affirmation of the eternal return in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*:

Nous sommes arrivés sur la place de l'Eglise, devant la station de métro. Et là, je peux le dire maintenant que je n'ai plus rien à perdre: j'ai senti, pour la seule fois de ma vie, ce qu'était l'Eternel Retour. [...] C'était juste avant de descendre les escaliers de la station de métro Eglise-d'Auteuil. [...] Je suis resté un moment immobile et je lui ai serré le bras. 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.⁷¹

Finally, in its exposition of Dionysian wisdom, this chapter draws attention to Modiano's *L'Horizon* and identifies it as reflecting a newfound valuation of becoming, manifested in the pleasure of *inachèvement*.

2.1 First Liberation: the 'dead God' phase

Karl Löwith identifies the first liberation in Nietzsche's thought as involving the unshackling from traditional values, or from 'received ties'. During this phase, one becomes an outsider, separated from the herd and incapable of relating to society. In his descriptions of free spirits, Nietzsche suggests that their liberation may or may not be voluntary. Furthermore, their separation from society might not feel liberating at all; as such Nietzsche stresses that becoming a free spirit can result in a sense of failure:

He is called a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of dominant views of the age, would have been expected of him. He is the exception, the fettered spirits are the rule [...] In any

⁷¹ *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 145.

event, however, what characterises the free spirit is not that his opinions are more correct but that he has liberated himself from tradition, whether the outcome has been a success or a failure.⁷²

Readers of Modiano will be familiar with the abundance of ‘outsiders’ depicted throughout his oeuvre. We encounter innumerable misfits who, without jobs, fixed abodes or family life congregate, for example, in bars like ‘Le Condé’, which forms the focal point of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*. This bar is frequented by ‘outsiders’, more favourably described by the student-narrator as ‘bohemians’. ‘Je cherche dans le dictionnaire “bohème”: Personne qui mène une vie sans règles ni souci du lendemain. Voilà une définition qui s’appliquait bien à celles et ceux qui fréquentait Le Condé’ (pp. 14-15), he informs us before noting that one, in particular, a certain ‘Jacqueline’, differed from the rest. What separates Jacqueline from her companions at the bar is not her relative normality, but rather that her ‘outsider’ status provokes in her a more profound anxiety. As we learn about Jacqueline, we discover that her separation from society causes her to feel a deep-seated malaise and sense of failure. The novel thus presents us with two outcomes to the first liberation: in the first instance, the ‘strange’ occupants of ‘Le Condé’ are free spirits who have readily rejected their ‘received ties’ or traditional values, becoming bohemians, ‘sans souci’. In the second instance, Jacqueline considers her inability to conform to traditional societal values as a great failure, and she ultimately commits suicide.

Elsewhere, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche offers an alternative account of the first liberation and the becoming of a free spirit. In this instance, one actively desires separation from society; it is a voluntary break that is underlined by a determination to abandon received ties. Nietzsche draws attention to the desire for alienation involved in this first liberation, which he describes as a ‘victory’:

⁷² *Human, All Too Human*, p. 108.

A drive and impulse rules and masters it like a command; a will and desire awakens to go off, anywhere, at any cost; a vehement dangerous curiosity for an undiscovered world flames and flickers in all its senses. 'Better to die than to go on living *here*' – thus responds the imperious voice and temptation: and this 'here', this 'at home' is everything it had hitherto loved! A sudden terror and suspicion of what it loved, a lightning bolt of contempt for what it called 'duty', a rebellious, arbitrary, volcanically erupting desire for travel, strange places, estrangements.... (P. 7).

This voluntary and determined desire to detach oneself from the received values of society can be identified only rarely in Modiano's oeuvre. For example, in the novel *Voyage de noces*, the narrator pretends to his family and friends that he is going to Rio, while he in fact flies to Milan only to return to Paris to hide on the outskirts of the city. This narrator organises his 'disappearance', according to Jean-Marc Lecaudé, because 'il semble reposer sur une sorte de fatigue de vivre qui le rend incapable de s'adapter et de jouer selon les règles d'une société qui n'a guère de sens pour lui'.⁷³ The narrator thus abandons family friends and his sense of duty and steps outside society.

Modiano's narrators and protagonists are more commonly involuntary outsiders, who harbour a sense of failure due to their inability to fit in within society. They look upon the apparent success of others with envy and awe, while they themselves feel 'un sentiment de culpabilité', as though they are living 'en fraude'.⁷⁴ For protagonists like Jacqueline, such feelings can give rise to a nihilistic despair, caused by the recognition that she can never achieve her goals or live comfortably within the received system of values. This form of nihilism, then, results from a perception that integration into the traditional value system is unrealisable.

If Modiano's outsiders tend to linger on the fringes of society, unable to assimilate, they sometimes undergo a more dramatic and terrifying disconnection from the world around

⁷³ Jean-Marc Lecaudé, 'Patrick Modiano: Le narrateur et sa disparition ou qu'y a-t-il derrière le miroir?' in John Flower (ed.), *Patrick Modiano* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 254.

⁷⁴ *L'Horizon*, p. 78; p. 68.

them, during which their entire system of received values dissolves. Nietzsche describes such dramatic estrangement as a ‘great liberation’, which comes to those who are ‘fettered suddenly, like the shock of an earthquake: the youthful soul is all at once convulsed, torn loose, torn away – it itself does not know what is happening.’⁷⁵ Modiano’s accounts of dissolution certainly convey a sense of being wrenched from society as the parameters that delineate it disintegrate. In the lengthy description of dissolution in *Chien de printemps*, we witness the unravelling of the narrator’s world as his language, memory, profession, all of which have hitherto provided his life with coherence, become meaningless. In such instances, a system of values dissolves because its validity is undermined. This becomes clear in a second episode of dissolution in *Chien de printemps*, in which the narrator again descends into a ‘trou noir’ because the thread of causality, which had led to his perceiving the world in a particular way, begins to break down. In the glaring sunlight, the world around him is reduced to two-dimensional shadows, and appears to him as artifice. This form of liberation gives rise to a nihilism of disorientation since, after the undermining of one’s values and their subsequent dissolution, one can no longer identify any form of guidance so that anything becomes possible.

While the nature and conditions of the first liberation can vary, one factor remains common throughout: becoming a free-spirit necessarily entails solitude. Unsurprisingly, this solitude can be overwhelming and as such Modiano’s outsiders generally seek kindred free spirits, whom they hope will provide them with company.

Nietzsche too, suffered from loneliness and in his preface to *Human, All Too Human*, he admits to having found comfort by inventing a cohort of fellow ‘free spirits’ to whom he dedicates the book:

⁷⁵ *Human, All Too Human*, p. 7.

Thus when I needed to I once also *invented* for myself the ‘free spirits’ to whom this melancholy-valiant book [...] is dedicated. [...] I had need of them at the time if I was to keep in good spirits while surrounded by ills (sickness, solitude, unfamiliar places, *acedia*, inactivity): as brave companions and familiars with whom one can laugh and chatter when one feels like laughing and chattering [...] as compensation for the friends I lacked. (P. 6)

Nietzsche ‘invented’ fellow ‘free spirits’ because, he tells us, they did not yet exist and he revels in the prospect that one day they will. He is perhaps mistaken in his estimation of the pleasure that such company might bring, however. While Modiano’s narrators often find fellow ‘free spirits’ their company does not provide consolation. On the contrary, readers witness a series of abortive relationships; friends or lovers know little about one another and are reluctant to reveal anything about themselves. Even among kindred spirits, then, solitude seems a necessary condition when on the path to Dionysian wisdom. For Nietzsche, fellow ‘free spirits’ were themselves illusory, ‘merely phantoms and hermit’s phantasmogoria’,⁷⁶ but Modiano’s narrators do encounter like-minded thinkers. What is illusory in Modiano’s narratives is the comfort that such fellow free spirits can provide.

2.2 Second Liberation: the man before the nothing

The second phase towards the willing of eternal return is a terrifying phase of experimentation during which the now ‘free spirit’ must find the means for combating a nihilistic void. Nietzsche describes this phase after the first liberation as one of experimentation during which the newly liberated spirit will ‘attempt’ to overcome the existential dilemmas raised by nihilism. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche heralds ‘a new breed of philosopher’, whom he calls a ‘*Versucher*’, a play on the similarity between *Versuch* (attempt or experiment) and *Versuchung* (temptation).⁷⁷ As such, these experiments are potentially diabolic as they may tempt us in the wrong direction and result in disastrous

⁷⁶ *Human, All Too Human*, p. 6.

⁷⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 39.

outcomes. This is evident in the failed ‘attempts’ by Modiano’s narrators and protagonists to overcome nihilism. Three distinct types of experiment or attempt are identifiable, all of which are futile, unsuccessful and in some cases even fatal.

2.2.1 First attempt: Suicide and despair

The course of action taken during the second phase of liberation is dependent on the form of nihilism in question. Where a person feels their goals to be unrealisable within a given value system, they are likely succumb to nihilistic despair. Narrators such as Thérèse in *La Petite Bijou*, or Jacqueline in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* fall into nihilistic despair and seek liberation through suicide. This is a course of action abhorred by Nietzsche, for whom the ending of one’s own life amounts to a refusal to ‘[seize] the problems of existence by the horns’.⁷⁸ In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the philosopher attacks the ‘preachers of death’ who counsel an abandonment of life, but he is equally critical of those ‘to whom departure from life must be preached’,⁷⁹ particularly those who are weary of life and see only suffering in it. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra ultimately rejects any reasoning which leads to a desire for death and denounces those who say ‘no’ to life and the suffering inherent in it, though with sarcasm he suggests that we can benefit from these sermons of death, since they present an opportunity to rid the world of those who adopt an attitude of weariness and resignation:

‘Life is only suffering’, so speak others, and do not lie; then see to it that *you* cease! Then see to it that the life that is only suffering ceases! And let the doctrine of your virtue speak thus: ‘Thou shalt kill thyself! Thou shalt steal thyself away!’— [...] Everywhere sounds the voice of those who preach death: and the earth is full of people to whom departure from life must be preached. Or the ‘eternal life’. It’s all the same to me--if only they pass away quickly! (P. 32)

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, excerpt from a letter dated 1834, quoted in Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 31.

Thérèse and Jacqueline undoubtedly regard suicide as a means of overcoming nihilism. Before throwing herself from her apartment window, the narrator of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* ‘avait eu le temps de prononcer quelques mots, comme si elle se parlait à elle-même pour se donner du courage: “ça y est. Laisse-toi aller.”’ (p. 149). Suicide constitutes a failed attempt at overcoming nihilism in Nietzschean terms because it does not involve a revaluation of values. Those who descend into a nihilism of despair feel themselves to be outsiders to the existing value system but they do not break away from it altogether and do not consider adopting alternative values.

2.2.2 *Second attempt: disorientation and reconstruction*

Nihilism of disorientation occurs for different reasons to that of despair because it involves a more definitive break from traditional or existing values. In this instance, a person descends into a nihilistic void because the validity of his/her values has been undermined, causing their value system to unravel altogether. Describing such dissolution in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche evokes feelings of horror and ecstasy,⁸⁰ whilst in *The Gay Science* he conveys the ensuing sense of disorientation through the voice of a ‘madman’, who has been driven insane because he no longer has a system of values to guide his conduct or to confer meaning onto his life. In the madman’s exclamations of despair, Nietzsche describes the possible effects that the dissolution of values might have upon the newly liberated spirit. Thus after the unshackling from received ties (the earth is ‘unchained’ from its sun), ‘wanderers’ can no longer identify any goals, their perspective is shifting and inconstant, they plunge alone through a void and search for ‘new’ values which might now dictate their existence.⁸¹

Disorientation is regularly evoked in Modiano’s writing and it appears to be a general condition of many of his narrators and protagonists. Their ‘unchaining from the sun’ causes

⁸⁰ *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 18.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. by Bernard Williams, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 119-20.

them to become wanderers without goals. They are often unemployed and spend much time ‘en dérive’, typically in Paris. Some, such as Thérèse in *La Petite Bijou* pretend to be students, and she indeed longs for this to be the case, as though this occupation might confer some validity on her lifestyle.⁸² In an interview with Laurence Liban, Modiano describes this phase of disorientation as a period in which ‘des gens [...] n’ont pas d’assises. Des gens [...] ne sont pas sur des rails, encadrés par un milieu [...]. C’est une période que j’ai éprouvée, à la fois incertaine et...’⁸³ Modiano’s wanderers equally lack any sense of fixity and refer to the world as being blurred or fluid (‘flou’). The author frequently employs this term and in doing so evokes a world without clear boundaries, be they temporal, geographical or social, while equally suggesting that a lack of firm ground beneath one’s feet causes perspectives to shift and consequently renders the world out of focus. This is further reinforced in the author’s references to ‘sable mouvant’ in interviews and within his texts. In the opening pages of *Un Pedigree*, for example, the author-narrator writes:

Je suis un chien qui fait semblant d’avoir un pedigree. Ma mère et mon père ne se rattachent à aucun milieu bien défini. Si ballottés, si incertains que je dois bien m’efforcer de trouver quelques empreintes et quelques balises dans ce sable mouvant...⁸⁴

In *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, the retired detective, Hutte, warns the narrator that the ground is always shifting and that ‘le sable [...] ne garde que quelques secondes l’empreinte de nos pas’.⁸⁵ Equally, the narrator of *Accident Nocturne* admits that he is seeking ‘un fond solide sous les sables mouvants’,⁸⁶ whilst the term appears again in *Villa Triste*,⁸⁷ in *L’Horizon*⁸⁸ as well as in interviews with the author.⁸⁹

⁸² Modiano, *La Petite Bijou* (Paris: Gallimard - folio, 2001), p. 102.

⁸³ Laurence Liban, ‘Entretien: Modiano’, p. 100.

⁸⁴ *Un Pedigree* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 13.

⁸⁵ *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1978), pp. 72-3.

⁸⁶ *Accident nocturne* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 2005), p. 141.

⁸⁷ *Villa Triste* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1975), p. 178.

⁸⁸ *L’Horizon*, p. 78.

⁸⁹ Le Club de l’Actualité Littéraire, ‘Le Club reçoit Modiano’, April 2001

<<http://www.grandlivredumois.com/static/actu/rencontres/modiano.htm>> [site accessed 26 September 2011].

Many of Modiano's protagonists can be described as being disoriented, and their inability to establish direction and perspective is commonly depicted in his novels. However, the author describes disorientation more vividly in the wake of his accounts of dissolution. As such, following his descent into a 'trou noir', the narrator of *Chien de printemps* feels a sense of dizzy disorientation, causing him to recall a childhood experience of being knocked down by a vehicle and treated with ether. Similarly, following his experience of dissolution, the narrator of *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, Jimmy Sarano evokes the sensation of horrifying disarray. Standing beneath a statue, he can no longer discern the direction indicated by its pointing finger, which at first appears to indicate one direction, and then another, giving rise to an uncontrollable, and nightmarish, shift of perspectives.

Modiano's accounts of disorientation are strongly reminiscent of that of the madman in Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human*. Of particular interest is Nietzsche's insistence on the breakdown of guiding values, limits or boundaries, points of definition, all of which render the world comprehensible and manageable. One of the principal ways in which Modiano's 'wanderers' attempt to overcome this period of turmoil is by endeavouring to reconstruct these boundaries by locating 'points fixes', which in fact act as 'points de repère' in a world that is 'flou'. This is a regressive experiment because it involves reinstating the limits of individuation, the received value system, in short, the 'fetters' from which one has become liberated. Languages, jobs, addresses and telephone numbers, maps, documents and photographs constitute what Modiano terms as 'points fixes' and many of his narrators call upon them as a means of restructuring their fluid world. For example, during the process of his dissolution, the narrator of *Vestiaire de l'enfance* repeats his name, address, and profession aloud in a panicked attempt to counteract the disintegration of his world.

Nietzsche's early philosophy, which focused on the dichotomy of Apollo and Dionysus, offers some insight into the aspirations of such a methodology for overcoming

disorientation. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes Apollo as being ‘the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis*’, a term he borrows from Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation*. According to Nietzsche, the Apollonian is representative of ‘measured limitation’ (p. 16), and as such the figure of Apollo is seen as a healing figure, making bearable the ‘horror which seizes people [...] when they suddenly become confused and lose faith in the cognitive forms of the phenomenal world because the principle of, in one or other of its modes, appears to sustain an exception’ (p. 17). This ‘horror’ is invoked by Dionysus, who in contrast to Apollo does not advocate an adherence to boundaries. Under his influence, Nietzsche writes, ‘all the rigid, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice or “impudent fashion” have established between human beings, break asunder’, so that man has ‘forgotten how to walk and talk’ (p. 18).

In Nietzsche’s early philosophy, Apollo is thus called upon to restore order and coherence to a world which is, to use Modiano’s term, ‘flou’. This method involving the construction of the ‘*principium individuationis*’, through the establishment of ‘points fixes’ is employed by narrators and characters throughout Modiano’s oeuvre. In some cases this collation of ‘points fixes’ becomes an obsessive activity, with characters filling notebooks with timings, names, and topographical trajectories in an attempt to counteract the fluid and uncontrollable nature of life and the city.⁹⁰ This attempt by Modiano’s ‘wanderers’ to overcome nihilistic disorientation is ultimately unsuccessful because it is a regressive measure which undermines their liberation. Although they have witnessed the devaluing of their values, they strive to return to their received ties and as such they fail to contemplate a revaluation of values.

⁹⁰ See the role of the character Bowling in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, pp. 18-19.

2.2.3 *Third attempt: flight*

The third attempt employed by Modiano's protagonists in the face of their nihilism, be it a nihilism of despair, or of disorientation, is flight. In this scenario, narrators and protagonists consider, and at times succeed in, undertaking journeys with a view either to 'recommencer à zéro', or simply to invent for themselves a situation in which they will not be obliged to engage with their nihilism at all. These places, 'derrière le miroir',⁹¹ are variously typified by the cities, countries and states of Nice and Rome, Switzerland, and Wyoming, as well as an unnamed Mediterranean town, and tend to be populated by other free spirits. They are also embodied by certain areas on the outskirts of Paris. However, Nietzsche is critical of those who seek to escape their challenges, and who choose to hide away in 'citadels'. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he suggests that those who flee interaction with men with whom they disagree and all the burdens presented by their society are not 'predestined' for knowledge:

Every choice human being strives instinctively for a citadel and a secrecy where he is *rescued* from the crowds, the many, the vast majority; where, as the exception, he can forget the human norm. The only exception is when he is driven straight towards this norm by an even stronger instinct, in search of knowledge in the great and exceptional sense. Anybody who, in dealing with people, does not occasionally glisten in all the shades of distress, green and grey with disgust, weariness, pity, gloominess, and loneliness – he is certainly not a person of higher taste. But if he does not freely take on all this effort and pain, if he keeps avoiding it and remains, as I said, placid and proud and hidden in his citadel, well then one thing is certain: he is not made for knowledge, not predestined for it. (P. 27).

Modiano's narrators and characters do not gain from their flight to 'citadels' and these places are ultimately portrayed as 'échappatoires illusoires',⁹² or 'villes fantômes',⁹³ where free spirits live in 'un présent éternel'.⁹⁴ Like those who choose to take their lives, inhabitants

⁹¹ Lecaudé, 'Patrick Modiano: Le narrateur et sa disparition ou qu'y a-t-il derrière le miroir?', p. 239.

⁹² Lecaudé, 'Patrick Modiano: Le narrateur et sa disparition ou qu'y a-t-il derrière le miroir?', p. 256.

⁹³ *Quartier perdu* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1984), p. 11.

⁹⁴ *Vestiaire de l'enfance* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1989), p. 40.

of ‘citadels’ shy away from the ‘burdens of life’; they do not take pleasure in ‘seizing the problem of existence by the horns’ and seek instead to escape this task. Thus, in such places, their nihilism ‘still hangs in a state of suspense’, and free spirits are nothing more than phantoms.⁹⁵ The narrator of *Dimanches d’août*, for example remembers his encounter with a woman in Nice, whom he describes as ‘un fantôme aimable, parmi les milliers d’autres fantômes qui peuplent Nice’.⁹⁶ He later recalls his own motivation for moving to the city:

Je croyais que ma vie prendrait un cours nouveau et qu’il suffirait de rester quelque temps à Nice pour effacer tout ce qui avait précédé. Nous finirions par ne plus sentir le poids qui pesait sur nous. Ce soir-là, je marchais d’une allure beaucoup plus rapide que celle d’aujourd’hui. [...] Je n’étais pas encore un fantôme, comme ce soir. Je me disais que nous allions tout oublier et tout recommencer à zéro dans cette ville inconnue. Recommencer à zéro. C’était la phrase que je me répétais en suivant la rue Gounod d’un pas de plus en plus léger. (P. 38)

On his arrival to Nice, the narrator is thus convinced that he is progressing towards his eventual liberation, but, as he later admits, this feeling was merely an illusion:

Nice n’était qu’une étape pour nous. Très vite nous partirions loin d’ici, à l’étranger. Je me faisais des illusions. J’ignorais encore que cette ville était un marécage et que je m’y engluerais peu à peu. Et que le seul itinéraire que je suivrais, au cours de toutes ces années, serait celui qui mène de la rue Cafarelli au boulevard de Cimiez où je vis maintenant. (P. 46)

Thus, while the narrator initially considers his time in Nice as no more than a necessary step towards his ultimate freedom (which is once again mistakenly conceptualised as a geographical ‘other’), he is in fact caught in an eternal present, unable to progress. Modiano describes the city as being populated by phantoms but elsewhere he recalls its inhabitants as ‘shadows’. Sitting outside a café, the narrator and Sylvia observe ‘les ombres qui défilaient devant nous à contre-jour’ (p. 46). Like the shadow in Nietzsche’s account of *The Wanderer*

⁹⁵ Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the eternal recurrence of the same*, p. 33.

⁹⁶ *Dimanches d’août*, (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1989) p. 37.

and his Shadow, these inhabitants have not developed psychologically and philosophically to embrace and overcome their nihilism and therefore have not become whole and three-dimensional.⁹⁷ This passivity and apathy, the inability to act, manifests itself in a number of ways. The narrator of *Villa Triste*, for example, escapes to a holiday house, which is a haven away from society. He stays indoors for several days over the course of which his physical actions become sluggish so that he begins to feel an inertia similar to that invoked by ether. Equally, the inability to act is represented in images such as that of the ‘tapis roulant’. When the narrator of *Dimanches d’août* ‘escapes’ to Nice with Sylvia, they are unable to rid themselves of a sense of being trapped in ‘un présent éternel’ and they pass through life as though standing on a conveyor belt:

Plutôt la sensation que les journées s’écoulaient à notre insu, sans la moindre aspérité qui nous aurait permis d’avoir une prise sur elles. Nous avançons, portés par un tapis roulant et les rues défilaient et nous ne savions plus si le tapis roulant nous entraînait ou bien si nous étions immobiles tandis que le paysage, autour de nous, glissait par cette artifice de cinéma qu’on appelle : transparence. (Pp. 106-07)

This effort to overcome nihilism, like those before it, is ultimately unsuccessful. All three attempts have in common a refusal to contemplate alternative value systems. In Nietzsche’s project for overcoming nihilism, true liberation is only achieved through a revaluation of values, which is marked by the affirmation of the eternal return.

2.3 Final Liberation: The affirmation of the eternal return

Nietzsche’s descriptions of the eternal return vary from one text to the next and have given rise to a corresponding multiplicity of interpretations in Nietzsche studies. The philosopher does not develop his idea over the course of any single publication, but rather, it is alluded to, and touched upon throughout his oeuvre, although it does receive particular attention in *Thus*

⁹⁷ ‘The Wanderer and his Shadow’ in *Human, All Too Human*, p. 394.

Spoke Zarathustra. As such, later philosophers and academics have continued to struggle with its significance.

Nietzsche's portrayal of the eternal return has thus invited cosmological readings, such as that of Karl Löwith, which in some cases have responded to the philosopher's own attempts to develop the concept into a scientific theory, according to which 'everything that is, has already been and is fated to be again'.⁹⁸ Other interpretations consider the concept as a thought experiment, the purpose of which is 'to determine whether [one is] life-affirming or life-negating'.⁹⁹ These often take their cue from Nietzsche's challenging proposal in *The Gay Science*, in which the philosopher asks us to reflect on the prospect that 'this life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live it once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all the in the same succession and sequence' (p. 194). In this context, if we react with joy to the possibility that we may relive our lives over and over, we are life-affirming. Conversely, if this prospect leaves us in a state of despair, we negate life. This in turn has ethical implications in its suggestion that we should live our lives in a way that will allow us to embrace eternal recurrence. Philosophers such as Deleuze reject mechanistic interpretations of the concept because 'the final state is held to be identical to the initial state and, to this extent, it is concluded that the mechanical process passes through the same set of differences again'.¹⁰⁰

Deleuze draws attention to the difficulties presented by such a formulation:

We cannot understand how this process can possibly leave the initial state, re-emerge from the final state, or pass through the same set of differences again and yet not even have the power to pass once through whatever differences there are. The cyclical hypothesis is incapable of accounting for two things- the diversity of co-existing cycles and, above all, the existence of diversity within the cycle. (P. 45)

⁹⁸ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 205.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London-New York: Continuum, 2006) p. 45.

As such Deleuze argues that ‘we misinterpret the expression ‘eternal return’ if we understand it as ‘return of the same’ and he presents an argument in which he identifies the eternal return as ‘an answer to the problem of passage’ (p. 45). This reading of the eternal return as depicting transience and passage has since been developed by scholars such as Maudemarie Clark and Bernard Reginster, the latter of whom also examines the relation between the eternal return and impermanence.

As such, the interpretations of the eternal return have varied considerably in response to Nietzsche’s own contradictory accounts of the idea. Modiano’s treatment of the eternal return is equally intriguing in its contradictions. On the one hand, the eternal return is represented in his oeuvre as an oppressive and negative phenomenon which gives rise to despair, whilst in later novels it is portrayed as being deeply liberating, with the author depicting the affirmation of the eternal return as a euphoric, epiphanic moment of realisation and release. This shift in attitude to the eternal return may reflect the change in the Modiano’s interpretation of the concept. In the first instance he appears to conceive of it as a cosmological occurrence of repetition, whilst in the second case, it is aligned with creativity, willing, and becoming. Although only the latter interpretation can lead to liberation, it is informative to consider Modiano’s cosmological portrayal of the eternal return because it enables us to articulate its relation to melancholy and to nihilism of despair.

2.3.1 The cosmological interpretation: melancholy and nihilism of despair

Notwithstanding the high level of recurrence taking place from one text to the next (the repetition of plot, theme, location, and characters, and even actual names throughout his oeuvre), Modiano regularly draws attention to the repetitive cycle of weather, seasons, to the sense of ‘déjà vu’ experienced when walking in certain streets, the recurrence of sensation and the return of one’s past. When questioned on his interpretation of the eternal return in an

interview following the publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, he related how the idea of an eternal recurrence, and the sense of ‘timelessness’ it invokes, interests him:

Cette notion d’‘Eternel Retour’ m’a frappé parce qu’elle donne une impression d’intemporalité. J’ai toujours été obsédé par le temps – pas par le passé, mais par le temps. J’ai l’impression qu’il y a parfois comme des superpositions du passé, du présent et même du futur, et que cette surimpression des époques aboutit à une sorte de transparence intemporelle. C’est cette sensation que j’essaye de traduire dans mes romans.¹⁰¹

In this interview, Modiano thus describes the eternal return as a cosmological phenomenon, which, like all forces of nature, is oblivious to the anthropological sphere. In his formulation of the idea, past, present and future are overlapping and indistinguishable from one another, giving rise to a sensation of ‘intemporalité’ that permeates Modiano’s oeuvre, and hindering his protagonists from establishing temporal fixity.

The eternal return is depicted as a curious but benign occurrence in many of Modiano’s texts while in others, and most particularly in *La Petite Bijou*, the concept is seen to contain more sinister and oppressive qualities. Such texts consider two interrelated existential implications of the eternal return as a cosmological phenomenon: firstly, that the cyclical nature of an eternal recurrence undermines our teleological development, and secondly that our outcome is fated thus rendering the will redundant. Both scenarios are explored in Modiano’s writings, and in some cases they result in nihilistic despair and attempts at suicide.

If Modiano conceives of the eternal return as giving rise to ‘des superpositions du passé, du présent et même du futur’, this ‘intemporalité’ negates any notion of purpose or progression and consequently undermines one’s movement towards achieving goals. This fact pertains to the very act of desiring liberation and the overcoming of nihilism. For example, Jacqueline, one of the multiple narrators of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*,

¹⁰¹ MK2 Diffusion, ‘[Recontre] Patrick Modiano’.

seeks spiritual guidance with a view to overcoming her nihilistic outlook, and although she does occasionally achieve this overcoming in brief moments of enlightenment, liberation and release, her achievement is quickly undermined by the cycle of eternal return. Nietzsche's Zarathustra suffers a similar fate when he discovers that his goal of teaching the overcoming of nihilism to humankind will not succeed. At the end of the second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the enlightened Zarathustra comes down from the mountain to preach and to seek kindred 'free spirits'. However, when the soothsayer reveals the dreadful truth to him that 'everything is empty, everything is the same, everything was' (p. 105), Zarathustra is filled with self-doubt. He no longer feels able to preach, and before departing in solitude once more he exclaims, 'Oh my friends! There is still something I could tell you, there is still something I could give you' (p. 117). Discussing the fate of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, Robert B. Pippin draws our attention to the protagonist's realisation that there can be no linear or teleological progression:

Zarathustra had clearly earlier placed his hopes for mankind in a dramatic historical, epochal moment, the bridge from man to overman, and he now realises that it was a mistake to consider this a historical goal or broad civilisational ideal, that such a teleology is a fantasy, that 'all returns eternally', that the last human being cannot be overcome in some revolutionary moment'.¹⁰²

Zarathustra is initially deflated by this discovery of the eternal return as it undermines his aim to guide humankind out of its nihilistic state. Similarly, Jacqueline's elation during her moments of overcoming is short-lived, her feelings of 'extase' and 'ravisement' giving way to the disappointing realisation that her life is to continue 'avec des hauts et des bas' (p. 96). As such, like Zarathustra, Jacqueline recognises that there can be no teleological progression towards her ultimate liberation and thus that her goal of permanent overcoming and contentment is unrealisable. This causes her to despair, and ultimately to commit suicide.

¹⁰² Robert B. Pippin, 'Introduction' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. xxx.

Modiano has expressed a similar frustration with a scenario of eternal recurrence when discussing his own writing process. In interviews, he has conveyed his displeasure at being unable to achieve a satisfactory conclusion and laments the fact that he finds himself returning to the same themes and concerns over and over again.¹⁰³

Modiano explores the relation between a cosmological recurrence and despair from a different perspective in *La Petite Bijou*. In this novel, the eternal return is aligned with the idea that everything has already happened and is fated to happen again, rendering human endeavour and willing entirely futile. The narrator, Thérèse is thus trapped in a world of repetition, with the same anxieties and failures being experienced from one generation to the next. The repetition of circumstances is portrayed as something entirely inevitable in this novel, in which we witness the struggle of the narrator's will to counter fatality. These attempts to change the course of events are unsuccessful and Thérèse falls into despair, later attempting suicide.

In an interview with Laurence Liban in the wake of the publication of *Accident nocturne*, Modiano alludes to the question of fate, suggesting that 'on est simplement prisonnier des hasards de la naissance', and consequently that 'on est condamné à écrire la même chose'.¹⁰⁴ The author's comments are revealing of the negative and melancholic implications of a cosmological interpretation. Operating independently of the anthropological sphere, a cosmological return gives rise to a fundamentally fatalistic outlook, in which humans are 'condemned' to follow a path that is already decided. They thus become 'prisoners' of their fate and are unable to exercise their will. As such, within this interpretation, the will is rendered passive.

¹⁰³ For example, Modiano laments that 'plus je me promets de fuir le marécage, plus j'y retourne'. See Jérôme Garcin, 'Sans Famille' in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 26 September 2007, <<http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20070926.BIB0114/sans-famille.html>> [site accessed 26 October 2011].

¹⁰⁴ Liban, 'Entretien: Modiano', p. 101.

In this framework, we can understand why Modiano scholars have to date primarily addressed the question of the eternal return within melancholic contexts. However, the fatalistic interpretation of the eternal return has been largely abandoned in Nietzsche studies, partly because it appears to fundamentally contradict another of Nietzsche's principal ideas, that of the will to power. Karl Löwith draws attention to this contradiction, focusing on the problematic of willing something which cannot be willed because it is already fated. Löwith identifies a 'double-equation one on the side of man, the other on the side of the world. The *problem* of the teaching of the return is [...] the *unity* of this *schism* between the human will to a goal and the goalless revolving of the world.'¹⁰⁵ In an attempt to reconcile Nietzsche's apparently conflicting ideas, he proposes that Nietzsche had deliberately created this contradiction in order to exhort a certain 'will-lessness'. In his fatalistic interpretation, then, willing the eternal return implies acknowledging our fate and willing a state in which the will no longer wills anything. It is an unsatisfactory proposal, because it can only realistically result in resignation, a state of mind that does not correspond to Nietzsche's joyous and rapturous appraisal of the eternal return. Equally, Löwith's proposal does not accord with Modiano's depictions of the experience of the eternal return in his novels *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L'Horizon*, which evoke joy, serenity, and awe.

2.3.2 *The eternal return as 'pure becoming': the will to power and the revaluation of values*

In this second interpretation of the eternal return, Nietzsche's concept is seen to embody 'pure becoming'. Its non-linear and non-teleological qualities are once more the focus of attention, but in this formulation they are removed from the context of fatalism. While the cosmological version of eternal recurrence renders the will redundant, this alternative framework sees the eternal return as advocating 'pure becoming', in which the will is constantly active. Similarly, where the cosmological interpretation insists on the recurrence

¹⁰⁵ Löwith, *Nietzsche's philosophy of the eternal recurrence of the same*, pp. 62-63.

of the exact same, this second reading focuses on the potential for creativity inherent in the eternal return. Importantly, this alternative reading of the concept reconciles itself with Nietzsche's thoughts on the will to power and entails a revaluation of values.

Considering the plight of Jacqueline in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, we noted that although on occasion she momentarily rises out of the 'trou noir', these episodes of liberation are short-lived. Viewed in the light of a cosmological formulation, her inability to definitively overcome her nihilism could be understood to be caused by a force external to her, which dictates a cycle of recurrence, and denies her any impact on her situation. In contrast to this, if we are to view the eternal return as a concept that advocates becoming, we can begin to envisage a situation whereby it would be undesirable to achieve one's goals at all. In *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Maudemarie Clark proposes that the eternal return creates a scenario wherein one 'cannot imagine his goals as ever really achieved' since 'whatever he achieves will come undone, and he will need to redo it,'¹⁰⁶ Considering the implications of Clark's proposal, we can begin to recognise the potential for the concept to be liberating. Bernard Reginster thus writes:

The individual who values life only as a means to some goal will despair at the prospect of the eternal recurrence, for it implies that his goal will never be achieved once and for all. By contrast, for the individual who values the *activity* of pursuing a goal – who is 'joyfully willing to engage in the same activities again and again, even if one had no hope of the goal being finally achieved' – the prospect of the eternal recurrence will be a source of joy, since it promises an indefinite repetition of this activity.¹⁰⁷

Affirming the eternal return thus entails a revaluation of values, whereby the activity or process of the pursuit of goals is deemed more valuable than their achievement, which amounts, in short, to a valuation of becoming over being.

¹⁰⁶ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 272.

¹⁰⁷ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, pp. 221-22.

Reginster reconfigures Clark's argument by considering it in the context of permanence and transience. Suggesting that the concept of 'eternity' may be aligned with 'permanence', 'inasmuch as it escapes the temporal order, which is the order of "change" or "becoming"', Reginster proposes that Nietzsche's idea deliberately rejects the Christian model of the eternal life. As such, he writes, 'in objecting to the aspiration for the eternal life, [...] Nietzsche is in fact objecting to [the Christian] valuation of permanence, or 'being', and their corresponding devaluation of "becoming"' (p. 224). Reginster's interpretation of the eternal return is constructive because it brings the question of revaluation into focus. It also reconciles the eternal return with another of Nietzsche's principal proposals, that of the will to power. He thus argues that becoming is an essential feature of the will to power, 'a paradigmatic manifestation of which is creative activity' (p. 226).

In his configuration of the eternal return, Reginster appears to draw on a Deleuzian interpretation of the concept, in which he identifies the thought of 'pure becoming' as being the 'foundation for the eternal return'. He conceives of the concept as being 'the expression of a principle which serves as an explanation of diversity and its reproduction, of difference and repetition.' Thus, he continues, 'Nietzsche presents this principle as one of his most important philosophical discoveries. He calls it will to power.' As such, for Deleuze, the eternal return does not constitute a mechanistic recurrence of the same, but rather, 'returning is the being of that which becomes.'¹⁰⁸

Contrary to mechanistic and fatalistic interpretations, which conceive of the eternal return as entailing a recurrence of the same, this alternative view of the eternal return entails newness and creativity. The idea presents us with a 'force of energy' which 'contains within itself the elements of change and activity, tension and release, repulsion and attraction,

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 44.

destruction and creation’;¹⁰⁹ it is ‘the will to power – the unexhausted begetting will of life’.¹¹⁰ In his passage on self-overcoming and the will to power, Nietzsche describes the will as travelling on a ‘crooked path’:

I must be struggle and becoming and purpose and the contradiction of purposes [...] Whatever I may create and however I may love it – soon I must oppose it and my love’.¹¹¹

Nietzsche thus stresses that one can only overcome nihilism by overcoming the self. As such one must always seek resistance, and take pleasure in the act of overcoming it.

In endorsing becoming and self-overcoming, Nietzsche’s eternal return is ultimately liberating. Achieving one’s goals is no longer deemed valuable, whilst the activity of pursuing them is; this in turn eradicates the question of success or failure in the traditional sense. For Nietzsche, success is measured not by the attaining of objectives, but rather it is measured in one’s willingness to remain active in their pursuit. Becoming a free spirit in the truest sense therefore involves liberating oneself from a system in which achievement, or being, is valued at all; his/her freedom is characterised by the fact that ‘he has liberated himself from tradition, whether the outcome has been a success or a failure’.¹¹²

Furthermore, if the first liberation entails separation from received values, leaving one disoriented on the ‘open sea’, the eternal return proposes that we take pleasure in this freedom from limits. The inability to achieve not only renders the will constantly creating, but also removes conclusiveness and certainty from equation, leaving the enticing and thrilling prospect that anything is possible, that ‘all is permitted’.¹¹³ Under the framework of the eternal return, being is devalued because it renders the will static, whilst becoming leaves avenues open for exploration.

¹⁰⁹ Rose Pfeffer, *Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972), p. 144.

¹¹⁰ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 88.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹¹² *Human, All Too Human*, p. 108.

¹¹³ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 221.

This second reading of the eternal return enables us to recognise the liberating nature of the concept. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche presents the doctrine of the eternal return as central to his philosophical agenda and he describes his inspiration for it as ‘an ecstasy’ or as a thought that ‘flashes up like lightning’.¹¹⁴ Similarly, this interpretation of the eternal return can be more easily aligned with Modiano’s recent treatment of the idea in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L’Horizon*, in which the author depicts the affirmation of the eternal return as taking place in a rare moment of comprehension and perfection. Furthermore, in relation to the former of these novels, we could argue that it is precisely Roland’s affirmation of Nietzsche’s concept that saves him, whilst his female counterpart commits suicide.

For the majority of Modiano’s oeuvre, the eternal return is depicted as an oppressive and negative phenomenon and in interviews the author appears to express resignation to the fact of the eternal return, and its concomitant insistence that one is ‘comdamné à écrire toujours la même chose’.¹¹⁵ However, there is a marked shift in Modiano’s attitude towards the eternal return in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L’Horizon* in which the eternal return is experienced as something positive and liberating. Thus Modiano no longer presents the eternal return as something inevitable which must be accepted with resignation, but rather through a revaluation of values, whereby process is conferred greater importance over being, his narrators can escape the imprisonment felt in ‘inachèvement’ and repetition, leading ultimately to their liberation.

2.4 Dionysian Wisdom

In his letter, cited at the beginning of this chapter, Nietzsche declares his Dionysian pessimism to be ‘born out of *strength*, which takes its *delight* in seizing the problem of

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 72.

¹¹⁵ Liban, ‘Entretien: Modiano’, p. 101.

existence by the horns'.¹¹⁶ Similarly, in the passage 'On Redemption' in the second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche describes the frustration of the will when faced with its inability to will backwards and thus change the past. The will, writes Nietzsche, 'rolls stones around out of wrath and annoyance', and 'because willing itself is suffering, based on its inability to will backward – thus all willing itself and all living is supposed to be – punishment!' (p. 111). Nietzsche's assertions might be aligned with his insistence that one who remains 'quietly and proudly hidden in his citadel [...] [is] not made, [is] not predestined, for knowledge'. Rather than seeking to escape the problems of existence by fleeing to a 'citadel', then, Nietzsche reminds us that a *Versucher* 'of knowledge in the great and exceptional sense' is precisely the person who takes on the 'effort and pain' to face 'all the shades of distress' of humanity before them.¹¹⁷ As such, the philosopher conceives of the will to power as a force that seeks resistance, a force which rolls stones around, despite the fact that it potentially has 'no hope of the goal being finally achieved'.¹¹⁸ Related to this, if we consider suffering to be the 'experience of resistance to the satisfaction of our desires', Nietzsche secondly aligns becoming with suffering; as such, Bernard Reginster posits that in Nietzsche's time, 'becoming' had been devalued precisely because of its relation to suffering and concludes that the *revaluation* of becoming must therefore entail a *revaluation* of suffering.¹¹⁹

The relation between willing, becoming and suffering is central to Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy. In exhorting us to love the eternal return, the philosopher thus demands that we love becoming and therefore suffering, a demand that might potentially seem unreasonable. However, Nietzsche often aligns the will to power with a desire to attain knowledge, providing us with a formulation in which the love of suffering is conceivable.

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, excerpt from a letter dated 1834, quoted in Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p.272.

¹¹⁹ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 233.

Where the will is exercised in connection with the ‘seeker after knowledge,’ their suffering will take the form of being unable to know. A revaluation of values whereby we value suffering therefore equates to a revaluation of self-conscious ignorance.

Nietzsche discusses the value of not knowing in his early writings and subsequently throughout his oeuvre. For example, in his essay ‘On the uses and disadvantages of history for life’, he stresses the importance of cherishing the unknown so that things might always have the capacity to invoke creativity. Writing of the dangers of the historical consciousness, Nietzsche claims that an object ceases to live ‘when it is dissected completely and lives a painful and morbid life when one begins to practise historical dissection upon it.’¹²⁰ Thus, if the historical drive has the singular goal of attaining knowledge without also having a ‘drive to construct’ or ‘the instinct for creation’ it ‘uproots the future [by robbing] the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live’ (p. 95). In this early essay, Nietzsche is already engaged in the task of a revaluation of values, since he suggests that it is precisely the inaccessibility of certainty and knowledge that is of value. Knowing is understood as being destructive because it renders the world static and lifeless; conversely, when we do not know, it remains in constant flux, everything is possible and the will remains active, as it seeks and explores, and in doing so, creates.

Although Nietzsche had not developed these ideas into his own ‘language’, they retain at their heart the thrust of his later philosophy suggesting as they do a revaluation of suffering, or a revaluation of ignorance.¹²¹ Nietzsche is already translating the hitherto negative qualities aligned with our inability to know into something positive. It is a revaluation that appears in later texts such as *Beyond Good and Evil*, which opens with the question ‘Granted we will the truth: *why not untruth instead? And uncertainty? Even*

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, ‘On the uses and disadvantages of history for life’ in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. by Daniel Breazeale, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 97.

¹²¹ Nietzsche published a new edition in 1886 of his first text, *The Birth of Tragedy*, accompanied by an ‘attempt at self-criticism’, in which he laments the fact that he had not yet established his own voice and declares his early writing as being ‘alien’ to him. See *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 5.

ignorance?’¹²² Outlining the role of his ‘new philosophers’, Nietzsche proposes that they should not definitively espouse a particular route to knowledge and exhorts them to remain uncertain. As such, Nietzsche suggests that self-conscious ignorance is preferable to dogmatic, and potentially erroneous, claims to knowledge because it opens up new avenues for exploration.

The lack of closure in Modiano’s writings is frequently noted in the media and in academic studies, and the question of ‘inachèvement’ has received much critical attention. The concluding paragraph of Modiano’s *Dora Bruder*, a text recounting the narrator’s search to uncover the past of a young Jewish girl living in Paris during the Occupation, is often cited as an example of the narrator/writer’s admission of his ignorance, in the wake of an attempt to learn about Dora:

J’ignorerais toujours à quoi elle passait ses journées, où elle se cachait, en compagnie de qui elle se trouvait pendant les mois d’hiver de sa première fugue et au cours des quelques semaines de printemps où elle s’est échappée à nouveau. 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, le temps – tout ce qui vous souille et vous détruit – n’auront pas pu lui voler.¹²³

Modiano thus conceives the revelation of Dora’s secret, the attaining of knowledge, as being destructive. The writer clearly hopes to uncover the truth (he would not undertake the search otherwise), but he nonetheless understands that such a revelation of truth is dangerous.

Although Modiano admits to being ultimately ignorant as a seeker of knowledge, interviews with the author reveal that the impossibility of reaching closure gives rise in him a sense of dissatisfaction and he has expressed envy of writers who can cease to write, feeling that they have achieved their aims, become liberated and found ‘la paix de l’âme’.¹²⁴ As such, although his writings may appear to espouse Dionysian philosophy, the author’s attitude

¹²² *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 5.

¹²³ *Dora Bruder* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 2000), pp. 144-45.

¹²⁴ Liban, ‘Entretien: Modiano’, p. 104.

reveals that he has not yet undertaken a revaluation of values since he continues to align liberation with closure.

The publication of Modiano's most recent novels, *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L'Horizon*, has, however, marked a significant change of attitude in his depiction of the eternal return. The latter novel is imbued with Dionysian wisdom, with the narrator, Bosmans, expressing his valuation of not knowing, and his delight in the 'lignes de fuite vers l'horizon' that such ignorance presents (p. 143).

2.5 Conclusion

Embracing the eternal return involves a revaluation of values whereby we confer greater importance on the process of becoming over being. In this revaluation, true satisfaction lies in impermanence and self-conscious ignorance. Becoming has an essential relationship with the will to power, which is a force that continually seeks resistance, and thereby exhorts us to take problems 'by the horns'. Since the will is never satiated, in that it never attains the status of being, its desires are continually frustrated so that willing necessarily entails suffering. As such, Nietzsche's revaluation requires a positive estimation of suffering. Equally, in its inability to be satiated, the will remains eternally active, or eternally creative, giving rise to 'lignes de fuite vers l'horizon'. This proposal, in its entirety, constitutes Nietzsche's idea of Dionysian or *tragic* wisdom:

The psychology of the orgiastic as an overflowing feeling of life and strength where even pain acts as a stimulus, gave me the key to the concept of *tragic* feeling, a concept that had been misunderstood both by Aristotle and even more by our pessimists. [...] Saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems; the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types - *that* is what I called Dionysian, *that* is the bridge I found to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* to escape the horror and pity, not to cleanse yourself of a dangerous affect by violent discharge – as Aristotle thought -: but rather, over and above all horror and pity, so that *you yourself may be the*

eternal joy in becoming, - the joy that includes even the eternal *joy in negating* ... and with this I come back to the place that once served as my point of departure – the ‘*Birth of Tragedy*’ was my first revaluation of all values: and now I am back on that soil where my wants, my *abilities* grow - I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus—I, the teacher of the eternal return ...¹²⁵

¹²⁵ *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 228-29.

3) ‘La quadrature du cercle’: Dissolution, disorientation, and experimentation in *Chien de printemps* and *Vestiaire de l’enfance*

The first two stages of liberation identified by Karl Löwith in his ‘unifying fundamental idea’ relate firstly to the liberation of man from ‘received ties’, and secondly, one’s attempt to overcome the ensuing nihilistic disorientation. Löwith summarises these stages as that of the ‘dead Christian God’, and ‘the man before the nothing.’¹²⁶ In the first instance, the existing values of society cease to make sense and they become discredited because their validity has been undermined. This can result in the dissolution of an entire value system due to the devaluation of values. In the second instance, this devaluation of existing or traditional values gives rise to a sense of disorientation because protagonists are no longer certain of what they should will. As such, this phase entails experimentation as the newly liberated spirit attempts to overcome a nihilistic void.

This chapter explores these two stages of liberation through a close reading of Modiano’s *Chien de printemps* and *Vestiaire de l’enfance*. It begins by establishing what constitutes the ‘received values’ of Modiano’s narrators and protagonists by identifying their goals highlighting in particular their high valuation of *certainty, fixity/stability, limitation,*

¹²⁶ Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 37.

coherence and *purpose*. However, it suggests that Modiano's protagonists have generally been raised in environments and circumstances which have lacked these traditional values and they thus find it difficult to adhere to them in the present. Nevertheless, they continue to idealise these received values and as a result they find themselves in the constant position of an outsider.

The chapter subsequently examines the causes and contexts of dissolution through a close reading of *Chien de printemps*. It discusses the role that solitude, light and shadow, and modes of transport play in the triggering of the onset of the 'trou noir'. During his episodes of dissolution, the narrator finds himself in extreme solitude, with the sense that no one around him can understand him and that he is alone in seeing the world as he sees it. Strong sunlight and deep shadow cause his surroundings to lose their three-dimensional qualities so that they appear to him as a theatre of shadows, and therefore as artifice. Furthermore, whilst on a train, the narrator once more experiences a descent into the 'trou noir'; he feels himself to be travelling at speed into the unknown and, as a passenger, he has no control over his destination.

In its examination of *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, this chapter discusses the ways in which Modiano portrays the sensation of disorientation felt by his narrator in the wake of the dissolution of his world. Liberated from his received values, the narrator finds himself in disarray because he no longer has external guidance as to what is valuable. As such, he can no longer establish parameters for willing, and is left without goals. Discovering that 'nothing is true' and 'all is permitted', the narrator desperately seeks guidance and is unwilling to accept that he must now command himself.¹²⁷

This stage of liberation, in which man is faced with a nihilistic void, entails experimentation as free spirits attempt to overcome this 'trou noir'. This chapter identifies

¹²⁷ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 221.

two attempts to overcome this void; in the first instance Modiano's narrators attempt to restore and reconstruct the system of 'received values' through an insistence on 'points fixes', and in the second, they attempt to avoid dealing with it altogether by fleeing to a new geographical location with the aim of starting again from zero. Both attempts at overcoming nihilism are ultimately futile, the chapter argues, because they do not entail a revaluation of values. Rather, in the first instance, narrators take a regressive step by reconstructing the received value system from which they had been liberated, whilst in the second case, they do not tackle their nihilism at all but instead choose to flee it, ultimately ending up in 'un présent éternel'.¹²⁸

Chien de printemps and *Vestiaire de l'enfance* form a complementary pairing.

Although *Chien de printemps* was published at a later date than *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, it is useful for the purposes of our narrative of liberation to consider the former as a prelude to the latter. Whilst *Chien de printemps* focuses to a greater extent on the process of dissolution, *Vestiaire de l'enfance* more comprehensively addresses the ensuing sensation of disorientation. Furthermore, in *Chien de printemps*, we witness the protagonist's gradual disengagement from society leading to his sudden departure for a new life in Mexico, whilst in *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, we encounter a narrator *after* his disappearance. The novel is set in a Mediterranean town, possibly in North Africa, and recounts the narrator's struggle to 'faire table rase' as he is plagued by recollections of his troubled past.¹²⁹

In their reluctance to undertake a revaluation of values, the narrators of these two novels end up engaged in a process similar to that of 'la quadrature du cercle',¹³⁰ attempting to solve a problem that is insoluble. The problems of their existence cannot be rectified, and only their change of attitude towards them through a revaluation of values, will enable them to be liberated.

¹²⁸ *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, p. 43.

¹²⁹ *Chien de printemps*, p. 24.

¹³⁰ *Chien de printemps*, p. 21.

3.1 ‘Received Ties’ in Modiano’s novels

In *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, Bernard Reginster draws a useful distinction between goals and values, one that is often blurred in Nietzsche’s writings. A goal, he asserts, ‘designates the *state of affairs* that an action or a process is intended to bring about whereas the value provides the *reason* why such a state of affairs is worth bringing about’.¹³¹ In the dramatic representation of dissolution, which takes place in the final pages of *Chien de printemps*, we witness the narrator losing first his memory, then his knowledge of the French language, claiming that:

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. Je n’étais plus rien.¹³²

This revealing passage provides an idea of what constituted the narrator’s goals *prior* to this moment of dissolution and consequently allows us to establish his values. As such, we are told that the narrator wishes to carry out his ‘métier’ effectively, to speak and write a language (French) as best he can, to give his life coherence, and to be sure of his nationality. We might conclude from this that prior to the dissolution of his world, the narrator’s values therefore involve *certainty, fixity/stability, limitation, coherence* and *purpose*. This passage from *Chien de printemps* reveals other important details relating to the narrator’s goals and values: firstly, that the narrator has had to exert significant effort in order to achieve his goals; and secondly, that his value system has been hitherto held together by the narrator’s willpower and its unravelling constitutes a relaxing of ‘toute cette tension’. As such, we might argue that the narrator does not naturally adhere to his value system since it does not

¹³¹ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 23.

¹³² *Chien de printemps*, p. 117.

come from within him and he does not easily relate to it. Rather, his values are dictated by a force external to him; they are inherited or ‘received’ values.

In Nietzsche’s account, these ‘received ties’¹³³ are embraced by the ‘herd’,¹³⁴ who are content to have their actions dictated by external forces. The extract from the narrative of dissolution in *Chien de printemps* thus suggests an idea of what the author valued prior to the dissolution of his value system, but it is equally indicative of the values that have been inherited by the narrator and by society as a whole. Broadly speaking, Modiano’s protagonists display throughout his œuvre a desire to ‘fit in’ to society, or to be a part of the herd. There is a marked yearning for normality amongst his protagonists who wish to be guided unquestioningly by the ‘received’ values of their peers. Equally, Modiano’s protagonists are often convinced that the goals which they struggle to fulfil are effortlessly achieved by others. The expectations of Modiano’s narrators, then, are based on values which have been inherited and which are held in high esteem by society as a whole: to be brought up in a stable family unit, to be well educated, to obtain a respectable job, to live at a fixed address, perhaps even to marry and have children; these are the received expectations of Modiano’s narrators. It is unsurprising therefore that the narrator of *Livret de famille* should hold this book of family documents in high esteem since it is a record of the achievement of these goals, a testament of success.¹³⁵

Many of Modiano’s narrators and characters, however, are brought up in environments in which the goals and values of society do not feature. From one publication to the next, we revisit recollections of childhood which do not align with the expectations of society hitherto identified. The author’s upbringing has undoubtedly informed his depiction of childhood and youth, with his own background revealed obliquely throughout his novels,

¹³³ Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 29.

¹³⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 41.

¹³⁵ *Livret de famille*, p. 12.

and more directly in his autobiographical text, *Un Pedigree*.¹³⁶ As children, narrators and characters live in dysfunctional circumstances; their parents tend to be living apart, and the father figure is largely absent from Modiano's narratives.¹³⁷ The character of the mother, often an actress, appears in shows late into the evening and is therefore not available to spend time with her child. Mothers in Modiano's novels rarely display any affection for their children, who are often depicted as being a burden to them. They do not receive guidance from their mother and are left to their own devices, without limitations or boundaries being imposed. These children endure frequent moves from one apartment to the next, and they consequently are forced to change their school on a regular basis. In their youth, Modiano's narrators and protagonists grow to have little sense of purpose; they rarely obtain or retain a stable job and spend much of their time wandering around the city without work. Such instability is exacerbated by a lack of a secure national identity. The author, whose mother was a Belgian Catholic, and father an Italian-Alexandrian Jew, creates narrators who are without a secure sense of belonging and community. As such, it would be reasonable to assert that on the whole, Modiano's protagonists are raised in environments that lack certainty, fixity/stability, limitation, coherence and purpose and that his texts thus explore the difficulties encountered when one is 'apatride, sans raison sociale ni domicile fixe'.¹³⁸

Having grown up without these values, and recalling their childhood as a negative experience, Modiano's protagonists tend to idealise these 'received' or 'traditional values'. They long to have an ordinary existence, to be without complicated origins and to be certain of their identity. They equally desire a valid and respected occupation, and in some cases they crave the security of marriage and a stable home. On his quest to uncover his own past, the amnesiac narrator of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, for example, visits a château where he

¹³⁶ See for example Thierry Laurent, *L'œuvre de Patrick Modiano: une autofiction* and Dervila Cooke, *Present pasts: Patrick Modiano's (auto)biographical fictions* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005) for further discussion.

¹³⁷¹³⁷ This is with the exception of Modiano's early novels dealing with the Occupation, which explore the father-figure and his dubious role during this period.

¹³⁸ *Les boulevards de ceinture*, (Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1980), p. 145.

mistakenly believes he was raised by his grandparents. The narrator's wishful projections provide an insight into the sort of upbringing he longs to have had. Touring the gardens of the now dilapidated house, he enters a maze:

Enfant j'avais dû faire ici des parties de cache-cache en compagnie de mon grand-père ou d'amis de mon âge et au milieu de ce dédale magique qui sentait le troène et le pin, j'avais sans doute connu les plus beaux moments de ma vie.¹³⁹

However, the narrator discovers that this imagined and much desired childhood is not actually his at all:

Voilà, c'était clair, je ne m'appelais pas Freddie Howard de Luz. J'ai regardé la pelouse aux herbes hautes dont seule la lisière recevait encore les rayons du soleil couchant. Je ne m'étais jamais promené le long de cette pelouse, au bras d'une grand-mère américaine. Je n'avais jamais joué, enfant, dans le 'labyrinthe'. Ce portique rouillé, avec ses balançoires, n'avait pas été dressé pour moi. Dommage. (P. 92)

The narrator's projections of an idealised childhood, in which he is raised by his gentle and loving grandparents in a château in the provinces provides a sharp contrast to the solitary and atypical upbringing in the city of Paris, which is continually evoked by the author.

If narrators dream of a stable family life, they equally long to have been reared in a single location, which they might now refer to as their *assise*. In *Villa Triste*, for example, the narrator is outraged by the flippancy with which his friends regard their hometown, thus revealing his own longing for an unremarkable (or normal) upbringing, once more in an idealised provincial France:

Quand je les ai rencontrés, c'était le premier été qu'ils passaient dans leur ville natale depuis bien longtemps, et après toutes ces années d'absence entrecoupées de brefs séjours, ils s'y sentaient des étrangers. Yvonne m'a confié qu'elle eût été étonnée si elle avait su, vers seize ans, qu'un jour elle habiterait l'Hermitage avec l'impression de se trouver dans une ville d'eaux inconnue. Au début, j'étais indigné par de tels propos. Moi qui avais rêvé de naître dans une petite ville de province, je ne comprenais pas qu'on pût renier le lieu

¹³⁹ *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, p. 90.

de son enfance, les rues, les places et les maisons qui composaient votre paysage originel. Votre assise. Et qu'on n'y revînt pas le cœur battant. J'expliquais gravement à Yvonne mon point de vue d'apatride. (P. 171)

It is a sentiment echoed in the voice of the narrator of *Accident nocturne*, who similarly laments his lack of fixed origins:

Déjà à cette époque, j'avais le sentiment qu'un homme sans paysage est bien démuné. Une sorte d'infirmé. Je m'en étais aperçu très jeune, quand mon chien était mort et que je ne savais pas où l'enterrer. Aucune prairie. Aucun village. Pas de terroir. Pas même un jardin. (P. 167-68)

Lacking a homeland, then, one is left without; furthermore, one is disabled, and cannot function 'normally' in society. Thus, a secure place of origin and upbringing, in short, a place one can call 'home', is valued highly by Modiano's narrators.

If Modiano's protagonists and narrators frequently express a desire to be of less complicated origins, and to belong to a stable and loving family unit and homeland, they equally desire a settled existence in the present, and long to live at a fixed or permanent address and to have a role in society. Official documents are highly esteemed by Modiano's narrators, acting as testaments to belonging, validity and certainty (in the form of proof). Such documents are often reproduced and incorporated into the body of his texts, assuming primacy in the author's narrative structure. Modiano's *Livret de famille* (1977) takes its title from the French book of official documents relating to the family. Charged with the task of updating his 'livret de famille' after the birth of his daughter, the narrator expresses his respect for the document:

Ce titre m'inspirait un intérêt respectueux comme celui que j'éprouve pour tous les papiers officiels, diplômes, actes notariés, arbres généalogiques, cadastres, parchemins, pedigrees... (P. 12)

As he travels with his friend, Koromindé, to the *mairie* where he is to register his daughter's birth, the narrator realises that the office will be closing shortly:

Je regardai ma montre. Seize heures cinquante et une. L'état civil allait fermer. Une panique me prit. Et si on refusait d'inscrire ma fille sur les registres de la mairie? (P.17)

The lengthy and comic account of the narrator's quest to have his newly born daughter registered at the 'état civil' is testament to the narrator/author's valuation of such a documented identity. Although he might have returned to the office the following day, the narrator finds himself running through Paris, charging up stairs and falling through the door as the 'état civil' is about to close. Finally, having begged the 'fonctionnaire' to fulfil his request and to inscribe his daughter in the 'grand registre', the narrator and Koromindé leave the *mairie* feeling 'tout drôles':

En somme, nous venions de participer au début de quelque chose. Cette petite fille serait un peu notre déléguée dans l'avenir. Et elle avait obtenu du premier coup le bien mystérieux qui s'était toujours dérobé devant nous : un état civil. (P. 24)

The narrator's efforts in *Chien de printemps*, to 'exercer un métier' correspond to the desire to have a 'raison sociale'.¹⁴⁰ As such, work is regularly portrayed as a valuable tool, allowing one to be accepted by society. Being unemployed epitomises narrators' and characters' inability to belong. Combined with their lack of fixed address (many live in temporary 'chambres d'hôtels'), such characters live outside of society's system, since they evidently do not pay taxes, nor do they contribute to society in a valid and recognised way. The narrator of *Chien de printemps*, for example, can afford to engage in the task of making an inventory of Jansen's photos and has enough money to live for a year, he tells us, 'grâce à la vente de meubles, de tableaux, de tapis et de livres d'un appartement abandonné'.¹⁴¹ Thus Modiano's protagonists do not undertake a standard occupation but rather they tend to earn their living from some dubious and unstable source.

To have a respected profession is evidently considered essential for those wishing to 'fit in' with society. Thérèse in *La Petite Bijou* feels ashamed because she is not employed

¹⁴⁰ *Les boulevards de ceinture*, p. 145.

¹⁴¹ *Chien de printemps*, p. 23.

and her desire to be a student seems to be driven less by an aspiration to learn than by the longing that her non-professional lifestyle be validated.¹⁴² In a conversation with her friend, Moreau-Badmaev, Thérèse is embarrassed when she is forced to admit that she has not passed her *baccalauréat*:

‘Vous avez dû faire de bonnes études, vous...’

Et j’ai eu peur que dans ma voix perce un peu d’envie et d’amertume.

‘Simplement le baccalauréat et l’Ecole des langues orientales...’

‘Vous croyez que je pourrais m’inscrire à l’Ecole des langues orientales ?’

‘Bien sûr.’ [...]

‘Vous avez passé vos bachots?’

J’ai voulu d’abord lui répondre oui, mais c’était trop bête de mentir encore, maintenant que je m’étais confiée à lui.

‘Non, malheureusement.’

Et je devais avoir l’air si honteuse et si désolée qu’il a haussé les épaules et m’a dit:

‘Ce n’est pas très grave, vous savez. Il y a tas de gens formidables qui n’ont pas leur bachot.’ (P. 138)

Later, Thérèse visits a job agency, and the ensuing encounter with the agent is revealing of her perception of employment:

J’aurais beaucoup étonné le monsieur roux en lui disant que, moi, cela ne me dérangeait pas de porter un uniforme de nurse ou, surtout, d’infirmière. L’uniforme m’aurait aidée à reprendre courage et patience, comme un corset grâce auquel vous continuez à marcher droit. (P. 53)

For Thérèse, the uniform has a positive connotation because it offers an irrefutable proof of her purpose or ‘raison sociale’.¹⁴³ Acting as a corset, she feels it will allow her to walk

upright, or to be ‘upstanding’, in other words, to be respected and understood by her peers.

In *L’Horizon*, the young Bosmans is deeply impressed by a couple, the Fernes, for whom his friend, Margaret Le Coz is babysitting. The couple, a lawyer and a professor of constitutional law, epitomise high moral and social standing; they are upholders of social order and

¹⁴² Thérèse lies to the pharmacist, telling her she is a student at the Ecole des langues orientales.

¹⁴³ *Les boulevards de ceinture*, p. 145.

propriety and appear to Bosmans to form a complete contrast with his own goalless and outsider existence. Furthermore, the couple are hard-working and arrive home late only to proceed straight to their desks to undertake additional duties and study. Their children are also studious, preferring to read or improve their mathematic skills rather than to play. Bosmans is convinced that he can learn from the Fernes and that they will be able to guide him so that he too can become an upstanding citizen and make a contribution to society.

If Modiano's narrators and characters idealise what we might call 'traditional' goals, they are convinced that the realisation of these goals will lead to their contentment. Their negative recollections of a past without received values lead them to conversely presume that a future with the attainment of these values will be positive. A crisis arises, however, when Modiano's protagonists do realise their goals but find that having done so they remain discontented. For example, when the narrator of *Vestiaire de l'enfance* escapes to a Mediterranean town and rebuilds his life, he finds a stable position writing episodes of a radio drama for the station Radio-Mundial. He lives at a fixed address and his time is spent in a coherent routine, but he nonetheless experiences the dissolution of his values. Marie, the young female protagonist in this text obtains a job as a typist in Cisneros Airlines but can only retain her position for a week before being fired. As the narrator passes the window at which her desk is situated, he observes her typing, her fingers hesitating over the keys:

Par instants, elle ne se servait plus que de ses deux index. Après avoir glissé une nouvelle feuille dans la machine à écrire, elle a eu un soupir de lassitude et elle a regardé vers la rue [...] De nouveau, elle tapait à la machine, mais d'une manière encore plus désinvolte : d'un seul index. Elle donnait l'impression d'appuyer au hasard sur les touches. (Pp. 21-22)

Equally, when Jacqueline/Louki of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* is recruited by the company Zannetacci, she works as a secretary for Jean-Pierre Choureau, and within two months they marry. She moves into his apartment in the Parisian suburbs but their marriage is

short-lived, lasting only a year, before Jacqueline/Louki leaves her husband having ‘lui faisait de plus en plus de reproches au sujet de leur vie quotidienne.’¹⁴⁴ Modiano’s protagonists frequently blame their past for their inability to fulfil their goals and to be contented having done so, and are conscious that they are perpetuating some hereditary dysfunction. This is a central preoccupation in *La Petite Bijou*, in which Thérèse attempts to fight what she feels to be her inevitable and fated dysfunctional existence which mirrors that of her mother. As such, in order to overcome this inevitability, narrators seek a clean break from their past; the phrase ‘recommencer à zéro’ acts as a refrain throughout the author’s œuvre.¹⁴⁵ The past, however, cannot be forgotten and their attempts to start afresh, fully embracing traditional and accepted values of society ultimately end in failure.

Modiano’s protagonists thus face a difficult and insoluble problematic: having lived an unhappy youth, which lacked the values of stability, limitation, coherence and purpose, they idealise these values in the present, regarding them as belonging to another, better, world. Yet when they attain their goals, obtaining work, an apartment, and in some cases a husband or wife, thereby satisfying their idealised values, they remain discontented. The fulfilment of their goals, through an adherence to a received system of values, does not result in their contentment. As such they cannot happily live within the framework of the existing traditional values of society, nor can they happily live without them and as such, the values themselves are undermined and called into question, which can ultimately result in their dissolution.

Karl Löwith identifies this phase, in which existing values dissolve and lose their meaning as the ‘dead [...] God’ phase and recognises it as the point at which an agent’s actions are no longer dictated by an exterior command, or by ‘received’ values. As such, this

¹⁴⁴ *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁵ For example, see *La Petite Bijou*, p. 91; *De si braves garçons*, p.177; *Dimanches d’août*, p. 38.

phase, marks a movement from ‘thou shalt’ to ‘I will’,¹⁴⁶ and is seen by Nietzsche to constitute a liberating and joyous transition.

3.2 Dissolution and the devaluation of values

The dissolution of values takes place when one’s value system is undermined and its validity questioned. In *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, Bernard Reginster underlines a crucial assumption in Nietzsche’s understanding of nihilism:

A goal makes life worth living only if it inspires the agent to go on living. The assumption concerns the ability of a given goal to *inspire an agent*, which he once calls the ability to ‘inspire faith’ (*The Will to Power* 23). A goal’s ability to inspire depends on two conditions: first, it depends on the agent’s estimation of the *value* of the goal; second, it also depends on the agent’s estimation of the *realisability* of this goal. [...] Nihilism, then, may have two sources: a devaluation of the goals in the realisation of which our life has hitherto found its meaning, or the conviction that these goals are unrealisable. (P. 24)

For the purposes of this chapter, we will address the former source of nihilism, which is brought about by a devaluation of values. Modiano’s narrators often idealise traditional goals but ultimately find that they are unhappy even when they have achieved them. As such, their goals no longer inspire them and their values are consequently undermined, causing them to consider the possibility of an alternative way of living. For example, when Louki of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* finds herself in full-time employment and married, she is disappointed that she remains unhappy despite, superficially at least, fitting in to society and adhering to its values. In an argument with her husband, Louki refers to their day to day existence, exclaiming that ‘ce n’était pas cela, ... la vraie vie’.¹⁴⁷ Considering the possibility that her values are false, she contemplates the prospect that there exists a different life, an alternative set of values, which is potentially more real. Louki thus faithfully attends sessions

¹⁴⁶ Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, p. 50.

held by a spiritual mentor, Guy de Vere, where she hopes to find answers to what might constitute 'la vraie vie'. However, Louki is mistaken in thinking that any 'real life' actually exists and that she can espouse an alternative and true set of values. Undergoing dissolution comprises not only the realisation that one's existing system is false, but also that no true system actually exists.

For Nietzsche scholars, the devaluation of existing values is generally recognised to be the result of the realisation that there can be no objective value, that the received values are nothing more than 'false projections'¹⁴⁸ which might claim to offer the truth but which merely offer a single perspective. The implication of Nietzsche's proposal is potentially drastic, and the philosopher summarises the idea in *The Will to Power*, in which he states that 'every belief ... is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*.'¹⁴⁹

Objecting to philosophies which assume a dichotomy between 'truth' (or the 'thing in itself') and 'appearance', Nietzsche suggests a scenario in which there exists no ultimate truth, but rather a myriad of constructed realities:

Let us admit this much: that life could not exist except on the basis of perspectival valuations and appearances; and if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and inanity of many philosophers, someone wanted to abolish the 'world of appearances,' – well, assuming *you* could do that, - at least there would not be any of your 'truth' left either! Actually, why do we even assume that 'true' and 'false' are intrinsically opposed? Isn't it enough to assume that there are levels of appearance and, as it were, lighter and darker shades and tones of appearance - different valeurs [values], to use the language of painters?¹⁵⁰

The 'dead God' phase to which Löwith refers not only involves the discrediting of the Christian ethical code, with its emphasis on asceticism and a metaphysical 'beyond', but equally the discrediting of the notion of any objective value. As Reginster writes, 'it is not that we [now] lack reliable guidance to the good life, it is rather that there is really no good

¹⁴⁸ *The Gay Science*, pp. 170-71.

¹⁴⁹ *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 14.

¹⁵⁰ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 35.

life to be had' (p.27). As such, we should not be doing or avoiding anything, because, as Zarathustra's shadow exclaims, 'nothing is true [and] all is permitted'.¹⁵¹

While Nietzsche depicts the devaluation of values as a liberating process, Modiano's accounts of the disintegration of meaning and value rarely convey a sense of freedom or pleasure. A close reading of the episodes of dissolution in *Chien de printemps* reveal the terror that such a process can invoke. The novel contains three accounts in which the narrator experiences the unravelling of his world, which together offer an insight into Modiano's literary depiction of the process of a devaluation of values.

3.2.1 Dissolution in *Chien de printemps*

Chien de printemps is recounted by a narrator who recalls his youthful encounter with a photographer, Francis Jansen, whom he met in a bar. The young narrator finds himself engaged in the task of archiving Jansen's photographs before the photographer flees the country to live in Mexico. The pair has an unusual friendship based on their common outlook on life, and a shared outsider status. The mature narrator recalls his encounter with Jansen as taking place at a time of uncertainty in his life, remembering it as 'cette période de flou et d'incertitude pendant laquelle je vivais en fraude' (p. 108). During this period, Modiano's young narrator is an outsider and, like so many of Modiano's narrators, he is unsure of himself and unable to integrate into normal society. He does not have a job, but rather has made some money selling furniture from an abandoned apartment. He spends his time 'en dérive' in Paris and hopes to become a writer.

At several points in this novel, we witness the unravelling of the narrator's world, with both the young and mature narrator experiencing episodes of dissolution. The first detailed description, which we have already encountered, takes place outside a café, where the narrator has arranged to meet Jansen. It is the same café frequented by the narrator and his

¹⁵¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 221.

father when he was a boy. The narrator recalls a machine which, when coins were inserted, distributed a pink ticket displaying his weight, and is surprised to find that it is still in situ. He thus weighs himself and sits down with his pink piece of paper. At this point, his world begins to dissolve. This is triggered by a resurgence of memories relating to the narrator's past and the blurring of temporal boundaries, which leads subsequently to the dissolution of other 'points fixes', which have hitherto rendered his life meaningful. He gradually descends into what Jansen terms a 'trou noir', becoming increasingly estranged from the surrounding world:

J'éprouvais une drôle de sensation, assis tout seul à la terrasse du café de la Paix où les clients se pressaient autour des tables. Était-ce le soleil de juin, le vacarme de la circulation, les feuillages des arbres dont le vert formait un si frappant contraste avec le noir des façades, et ces voix étrangères que j'entendais aux tables voisines ? Il me semblait être moi aussi un touriste égaré dans une ville que je ne connaissais pas. Je regardais fixement le ticket rose comme s'il était le dernier objet susceptible de témoigner et de me rassurer sur mon identité, mais ce ticket augmentait encore mon malaise. Il évoquait une époque si lointaine de ma vie que j'avais du mal à la relier au présent. Un engourdissement, une amnésie me gagnaient peu à peu, comme le sommeil le jour où j'avais été renversé par une camionnette et où l'on m'avait appliqué un tampon d'éther sur le visage. D'ici un moment je ne saurais même plus qui j'étais et aucun de ces étrangers autour de moi ne pourrait me renseigner. J'essayais de lutter contre cet engourdissement, les yeux fixés sur le ticket rose où il était écrit que je pesais soixante-seize kilos. Quelqu'un m'a tapé sur l'épaule. J'ai levé la tête mais j'avais le soleil dans les yeux. [...] Je voyais Jansen en ombres chinoises. (Pp. 96-97)

This passage enables us to identify many of the triggers typical in the onset of dissolution in Modiano texts. To begin with, we note that the narrator is sitting alone in the crowded café. His solitude acts as a catalyst to dissolution as the narrator is already separated from the rest of society and is forced to observe them from the position of an outsider. Throughout Modiano's œuvre, friendship, or indeed random acquaintances, diminishes the potential for anxiety and dissolution because it harbours a sense of belonging. Thus the 'engourdissement'

felt by the narrator only abates when Jansen joins him at his table. As we have seen, this solitude was familiar to Nietzsche too, who admits that he often felt lonely and consequently invented an imaginary cohort of free spirits in order to cure his isolation.¹⁵²

Solitude, however unbearable, is nevertheless the natural and necessary outcome for those who question the validity of the status quo. In the preface to *Human, All Too Human: A Book for free spirits*, Nietzsche establishes further crucial links between dissolution and solitude, suggesting that one who *questions* will necessarily find themselves without friends. As such, Nietzsche describes this questioning as belonging to a ‘perilous curiosity’. Contemplating that ‘everything [is] perhaps in the last resort false’, that ‘we are deceived’, the liberated spirit is led ‘further away, even further down’ by his thoughts:

Solitude encircles and embraces him, ever more threatening, suffocating, heart-tightening, that terrible goddess and *mater saeva cupidinum* [wild mother of passions] – but who today know what *solitude* is?... (P. 7)

The sensation of solitude is rendered all the more acute for the narrator of *Chien de printemps* because he is surrounded in the café by foreign visitors who speak in a language that is alien to him. As such, he is not only physically separated from those around him, but he equally is unable to share meaning with them, so that he feels himself to be ‘un touriste égaré dans une ville qu’[il] ne connaissait pas’.¹⁵³ Thus, what makes ‘sense’ and has meaning for the narrator’s neighbours, who happily chat together, safe in one another’s company, does not have meaning for him. This sentiment is echoed in Modiano’s earlier novel, *Voyage de noces*, in which the narrator, experiencing a ‘sentiment d’irréalité’ contemplates going to the ‘grand café de l’avenue Daumesnil’, with a view to sitting outside and talking to strangers at the neighbouring tables. He decides against this, however, when it occurs to him that ‘si j’engageais la conversation avec des inconnus, ils me répondraient dans une autre langue que

¹⁵² *Human, All Too Human: A Book for free-spirits*, p. 6.

¹⁵³ *Chien de printemps*, p. 96.

la mienne'.¹⁵⁴ Without the company of those with whom he might share meaning, the narrator finds himself alone, at least until Jansen, his fellow free spirit in *Chien de printemps*, arrives.

Sunlight and the casting of shadow act as other important triggers for the dissolution of the narrator's world. The narrator himself wonders if this dissolution has been caused by 'le soleil de juin' and 'les feuillages des arbres dont le vert formait un si frappant contraste avec le noir des façades'.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the narrator of *Voyage de nocces* comments that for him 'l'été est une saison qui provoque chez moi une sensation de vide et d'absence [...] Est-ce la lumière trop brutale [...] ces contrastes d'ombre et de soleil couchant?',¹⁵⁶ whilst Modiano too has expressed his dislike of the summer, which he feels to be 'une saison brutale, oppressante et métaphysique'.¹⁵⁷ Light and shadow have a significant influence on the 'psychisme du narrateur';¹⁵⁸ the chiaroscuro effect brought about by unrelenting and blazing sun often causes Modiano's narrators to feel a deep anxiety. This may be due to their perception of the world as being reduced to 'ombres chinoises'. Thus, the narrator of *Chien de printemps* sees his surroundings as a theatre of shadows because the blinding sunlight obliterates the three-dimensional qualities of objects and people. As such, the world appears as artifice, and we are reminded of Nietzsche's evocation of the liberated spirit, who in horror asks 'is everything perhaps in the last resort false?'.¹⁵⁹ This episode in which the narrator views what he once felt to be real and what had hitherto given his world meaning, as nothing more than a theatre of shadows is reminiscent of Plato's allegory of the cave. However, there exists a crucial difference between a Platonic and a Nietzschean version of such events. While the sun ultimately represents truth in Plato's allegory, for Nietzsche it reveals the

¹⁵⁴ *Voyage de nocces*, p. 98.

¹⁵⁵ *Chien de printemps*, p. 96.

¹⁵⁶ *Voyage de nocces*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁷ Garcin, 'Un entretien avec Patrick Modiano'

¹⁵⁸ Lecaude, 'Le narrateur et sa disparition', p. 246.

¹⁵⁹ *Human, All Too Human: A Book for free-spirits*, p. 7.

complete and devastating absence of truth. The sun, which is symbolically associated with clarity, truth and knowledge, is for Modiano a trigger for obscurity, doubt and falsity.

The narrator's resurfacing from the 'trou noir' is marked by two events. In the first instance, he begins to return to normality when he is joined by his friend Jansen. There is indeed a palpable sense of relief when Jansen approaches the narrator in the café, reassuring him that he too often descends into a 'trou noir'. In his preface to *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche stresses the importance of friendship:

What I again and again needed most for my cure and self-restoration, however, was the belief that I was *not* thus isolated, not alone in *seeing* as I did – an enchanted surmising of relatedness and identity in eye and desires, a reposing in a trust of friendship, a blindness in concert with another without suspicion or question marks... (P. 5)

The narrator evidently derives similar comfort from Jansen who is able to lift him out of his dissolved world.

When Jansen joins the narrator, his doubts about the reality of his perceived world are temporarily dispelled. His resurfacing is secondly marked by the return of colours and clarity to his surroundings. 'Le monde autour de moi', he recalls, 'reprenait ses formes et ses couleurs, comme si je réglais une paire de jumelles pour que la vision devienne de plus en plus nette'.¹⁶⁰ Referring to a pair of binoculars which, through focusing, enable the narrator to restore clarity to his world, Modiano creates a distinction between a perception of the world as blurred, unfocused, and unclear and one of complete clarity and certainty, a distinction also drawn by Nietzsche. However, the philosopher is suspicious of worldviews which are formed with absolute lucidity and conviction and, describing his theory of perspectivism, he advocates a worldview which incorporates grey areas. The evocation of a world viewed through binoculars lends itself to Nietzsche's perspectivist theories; viewing from one position one can establish a clear image, but this clarity is destabilised when we move to

¹⁶⁰ *Chien de printemps*, p. 98.

another position, so that what was once perfectly in focus is now rendered blurred and indistinct. Modiano's narrator thus struggles to adopt the traditional and normal perspective, and, as though through a pair of binoculars, he thus refocuses his world.

The second detailed account of dissolution takes place towards the end of *Chien de printemps*, as the narrator sits in the Jardin du Luxembourg. Many of the triggers hitherto identified appear once again in this account, which is this time experienced by the mature narrator. Once again, he is alone, and this time surrounded by crowds enjoying a holiday weekend in the park. The sun is shining and he finds just enough room to perch on the end of a bench. He listens to his neighbours' conversation, but although they are speaking in French, their words become alien to him, and are nothing more to his ears than 'des onomatopées'. The constant flow of people passing in front of the bench create a sense of blurring so that the narrator now feels he is in an 'état de demi-sommeil', lacking the clarity and focus of one who is fully awake. Once more, he begins to lose his memory and he undergoes what he terms a 'perte progressive d'identité'; the dissolution of the narrator's world in this passage ending only with his movement towards modes of transport.:

Je suis entré dans le jardin en fendant la foule massée devant les grilles. Tous les bancs, toutes les chaises étaient occupés et il y avait une grande affluence dans les allées. Des jeunes gens étaient assis sur les balustrades et sur les marches qui descendent vers le bassin central, si nombreux qu'on ne pouvait plus accéder à cette partie du jardin. [...] Il restait assez de place - une vingtaine de centimètres - pour m'asseoir à l'extrémité d'un banc. Mes voisins n'ont même pas eu besoin de se pousser. Nous étions sous les marronniers qui nous protégeaient du soleil, tout près de la statue de marbre blanc de Velléda. Une femme, derrière moi, bavardait avec une amie et leurs paroles me berçaient : il était question d'une certaine Suzanne, qui avait été mariée à un certain Raymond. Raymond était l'ami de Robert, et Robert, le frère de l'une des femmes. 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 pour que les destins de Robert, de Suzanne et de Raymond sortent peu à peu de l'inconnu. [...] J'étais frappé d'une somnolence. Des mots me parvenaient encore à travers un brouillard ensoleillé : Raymond... Suzanne...

Livry-Gargan... A la base... Pépin dans l'œil... Èze-sur-Mer près de Nice... La caserne des pompiers du boulevard Diderot... Le flot des passants dans l'allée augmentait encore cet état de demi-sommeil. Je me rappelais la réflexion de Jansen : « Ne vous inquiétez pas, mon petit... Moi aussi il m'est souvent arrivé de tomber dans des trous noirs... » [...] J'allais disparaître dans ce jardin, parmi la foule du lundi de Pâques. Je perdais la mémoire et je ne comprenais plus très bien le français car les paroles de mes voisines n'étaient maintenant à mes oreilles que des onomatopées. 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. Tout à l'heure, je me glisseries hors de ce jardin en direction d'une station de métro, puis d'une gare et d'un port. A la fermeture des grilles, il ne resterait de moi que l'imperméable que je portais, roulé en boule, sur un banc. (Pp. 115-17)

The brief final passage describing the unravelling of this narrator's world brings to light an additional trigger for dissolution. As the mature narrator travels to Fossombrone to seek information as to Jansen's whereabouts, he once again experiences the disintegration of his self, this time whilst on a train. The usual signals are again present in this account; the sun is shining, it is hot and the leather of the seats is burning. The narrator is relieved to have the company of an elderly lady, who sits opposite him in his carriage. However she alights after two stops leaving him in solitude and he is seized with panic:

J'étais seul, désormais. Je craignais que la micheline ne m'entraîne dans un voyage interminable en augmentant au fur et à mesure sa vitesse. (P. 81)

Here the narrator's world begins to unravel whilst he is in a train; modes of transport indeed occasionally feature during episodes of dissolution in Modiano's texts. In referring to trains, trams, and cars, the author suggests a sense of unease, and sometimes panic, felt by one who is travelling to a new and unknown destination, and whose movement is involuntary and beyond their control. In *De si braves garçons*, he thus evokes a sense of 'engourdissement' and 'paralyse' experienced during 'des mauvais rêves, à l'instant de fuir un danger ou de prendre un train' (p. 118). Released from their value system, Modiano's free spirits become

wanderers who are without goals and guiding values. As Zarathustra exclaims, ‘nothing is true’ and ‘all is permitted’, a prospect that leaves them in a state of disorientation. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche alludes to the horror felt in the wake of one’s liberation from the herd and the dissolution of one’s old value system, comparing it to being on the open sea with no land in sight:

*In the horizon of the infinite. – We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean; it is true, it does not always roar, and at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realise that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against you the walls of this cage! Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more freedom there – and there is no more ‘land’!*¹⁶¹

3.3 Disorientation

If dissolution is a result of the devaluation of values, this ‘dead God’ phase is closely followed by ‘the man before the nothing’. When free spirits are ‘unchained’ from the values to which they were previously shackled, they are separated from the herd. Thus, they ‘cannot feel other than a wanderer on the earth – though not as a traveller *to* a final destination: for this destination does not exist.’¹⁶² Nietzsche incites such wanderers to revel in their unshackling but he equally acknowledges that it will cause displeasure.¹⁶³ In *The Will to Power*, he describes the feeling invoked by this transition as being similar to the sensation of losing the ‘centre of gravity by virtue of which we have lived’ and suggests that during this phase ‘we are lost for a while’.¹⁶⁴ Disorientation is perhaps the greatest difficulty faced by the

¹⁶¹ *The Gay Science*, p. 119.

¹⁶² *Human, All Too Human: A Book for free spirits*, p. 203.

¹⁶³ In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche discusses the status of the wanderer as necessarily involving ups and downs. See p. 203.

¹⁶⁴ *The Will to Power*, p. 20.

wanderer. No longer subscribing to their previous values, liberated spirits become masters of themselves, without the structures of an external value system to guide them.

While the prospect that ‘all is permitted’ may appear enticing, Nietzsche admits that it can be terrifying because man cannot live without goals. Rather than finding pleasure in their now goalless existence then, they are horrified by the loss of something to will. Nietzsche communicates this terrible disorientation through the voice of the madman in *The Gay Science*, who enters the market place crying ‘Where is God?’:

We have killed him - you and I. [...] Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down?’ Aren’t we straying as though through an infinite nothing? (Pp. 119-20)

Interestingly, towards the end of his soliloquy, the madman or liberated spirit wonders what goals should now be constructed, asking ‘what festival of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves?’ (P. 120). Thus the madman is distressed at the prospect of having nothing to will and feels the need to construct some system by which he might be guided. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche discusses man’s fundamental need to will, which he suggests had hitherto been satiated by the Christian tradition of the ascetic ideal:

*The ascetic ideal offered mankind a meaning! It was the only meaning offered so far; any meaning is better than none at all; [...] man was saved thereby, he possessed a meaning, he was henceforth no longer like a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense—the “senseless”—he could now will something; no matter at first to what end, why, with what he willed: *the will itself was saved.*¹⁶⁵*

If the now dissolved values of Modiano’s narrator in *Chien de printemps* were nothing more than ‘false projections’, they at least acted as ‘points de repère’, providing parameters for establishing goals and consequently enabling the will to be exercised. Nihilism of

¹⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 162.

disorientation might be thus understood as a consequence of the frustration of the need to will.

Modiano's *Vestiaire de l'enfance* provides a particularly effective literary account of the sense of disorientation experienced in the wake of dissolution. The narrator of this novel panics when his world unravels and he is plunged into a nihilistic void; he no longer knows what to will and consequently cannot establish which direction to take. He thus undergoes a crisis that mirrors that of Nietzsche's madman, providing us with an insight into the potentially terrifying sensation of being 'lost for a while'.

3.3.1 *Disorientation in Vestiaire de l'enfance*

Vestiaire de l'enfance is primarily set in an unnamed Mediterranean town to where the narrator has escaped with a view to starting a new life, with a new identity. Jimmy Sarano writes a drama serial for a local radio station and spends the rest of his time wandering around the town in solitude and living in a self-imposed state of exile. This carefully constructed life is interrupted by the arrival of a woman whom he recognises from his past in Paris, prompting recollections of his youth. Jimmy's upbringing in Paris mirrors that of many of Modiano's protagonists. His father is absent from his reminiscences, whilst he recalls his mother's life as an actress, working late into the night and apparently ignoring him for much of the time. He wanders around Paris alone in the evenings while his mother is at work, smoking and stopping into bars along the way. The only structure and routine in this young narrator's life appear to relate to his schooling but he cannot settle in this milieu either and decides to break from it. Like the young narrator of *Chien de printemps*, Jimmy's youth lacks certainty, fixity/stability, limitation, coherence and purpose. We encounter the narrator as an older man, living a life in which he strives to maintain those values that he lacked in his youth but when his past returns to haunt him his world begins to crumble.

The disintegration of Jimmy's world thus takes place when his carefully constructed existence and value system is disturbed by the arrival of a person from his past. The process of dissolution takes place under similar conditions to those evoked in the episodes of dissolution in *Chien de printemps*. To begin with, despite striving to fit in with society, the narrator is nevertheless depicted as an outsider. Writing episodes for a radio serial, he is available to go swimming when the pool is empty, and equally finds himself wandering around the town during the hours of siesta. As such, we encounter throughout the narrative empty beaches, unoccupied squares, shops and restaurants which are closed, and a tram without passengers. Unsurprisingly, the isolation in which the narrator lives gives rise to feelings of apprehension and anxiety:

Toujours, une sensation de vide me prenait à la sortie de la radio, au milieu de l'esplanade et le long de cette route, jusqu'à l'arrêt du tram. A cette heure de l'après-midi, le quartier était désert, un quartier excentrique que l'on avait construit récemment, des ronds-points et quelques avenues bordées de villas. Je préférais attendre à Radio-Mundial en compagnie de Carlos Sirvent et de mes autres collègues jusqu'à six heures du soir pour rentrer en ville, car ces débuts d'après-midi me causaient de l'apprehension et un sentiment de solitude. [...] Trois heures de l'après-midi. Je savais qu'en bas les rues seraient désertes, les magasins clos et que je risquais même de trouver, à la porte du Rosal, le panneau : "Fermé pour l'instant." (Pp. 31-33)

Typically, then, we encounter a narrator who lives in solitude, whose movements are not synchronised with those of the rest of society, and who feels 'détaché de tout' (p. 48). As is the case in *Chien de printemps*, the most detailed and lengthy episode of dissolution in *Vestiaire de l'enfance* takes place on a hot and sunny day. The narrator experiences a sudden and unpleasant encounter with his past, a past which he has assiduously attempted to forget. Jimmy's world begins to unravel as he stands alone under the statue of Cruz-Valer, in the middle of a town square. Readers will have encountered this statue earlier in the narrative as the narrator stands beneath the bronze figure with a girl with whom he is falling in love. In

this earlier evocation, the statue of Cruz-Valer has a protective function; he is a *bienfaiteur* of the town. However, even in this early episode, it is suggested that the statue will play a crucial role in depicting disorientation. Looking up, the narrator contemplates the figure of Cruz-Valer, whose bronze finger signals a point on the horizon:

J'ai levé mon index vers l'index bronze de Cruz-Valer indiquant pour l'éternité un chemin à suivre, mais lequel?

As the narrator stands beneath this statue once more, experiencing the dissolution of his world, Cruz-Valer becomes increasingly ominous:

Le soleil tapait si fort que je sentais la pierre brûlante, malgré la semelle de mes espadrilles, en traversant la place du marché. Je me suis abrité à l'ombre de la statue de Javier Cruz-Valer. Encore une centaine de mètres et j'atteindrai l'arrêt du tramway, là-bas, en bordure de l'avenue. [...] Ainsi, j'étais revenu dans l'ombre protectrice de Cruz-Valer, à cet endroit même où, l'autre nuit, je m'étais arrêté avec cette Marie de l'hôtel Alvear [...] Une sorte de complicité me liait à Cruz-Valer, dont l'index était pointé – me semblait-il- en direction de la plage comme s'il m'intimait l'ordre de retourner sur cette plage et d'y rejoindre le vieux jeune homme en blazer. [...] J'étais seul, par quarante degrés à l'ombre, au pied d'une statue de bronze. Devant moi, l'esplanade du Fort, déserte. Pas une seule table à la terrasse du café Lusignan. Personne. Pas un bruit. Une ville morte sous le soleil. Et cette angoisse à l'idée de traverser la distance qui me séparait de l'arrêt du tram, d'attendre encore ce tram une demi-heure peut-être, et de me retrouver sur les sièges de cuir brûlants, et plus tard au milieu de l'autre esplanade, devant Radio-Mundial [...] La sensation de vide m'a envahi, encore plus violente que d'habitude. [...] Je ne quittais pas du regard l'index de bronze de Cruz-Valer pointé maintenant vers une autre direction que celle de la plage. Un mauvais rêve où les doigts des statues bougent et indiquent chaque fois une direction différente? Ou bien, simplement, cet index m'apparaissait-il sous un autre angle de vue? (Pp. 100-103)

While the usual catalysts for dissolution are present in this passage, namely those of isolation, sunlight and shadow, modes of transport (the tram), blurring of perception ('elle est comme un halo de lumière blanche qui m'empêche de distinguer les autres détails de ma vie', p. 101), this evocation of dissolution focuses less on the process of a 'perte progressive

d'identité', offering us instead an insight into the confusion and disorientation felt after dissolution has taken place. This mirrors the disorientation felt by Nietzsche's madman who in his town square undergoes a similar crisis. As such, Jimmy Sarano loses all sense of perspective; the statue does not indicate a fixed direction, so that he can no longer establish what constitutes 'up' and 'down' as if the earth has become 'unchained from its sun'. Being freed from all received ties, and as masters of themselves, liberated spirits may not know which direction to follow. Jimmy looks to Cruz-Valer to provide him with external guidance, but the bronze index finger points at first in one direction, and then another, resulting in a nightmarish shifting of perspective. His reality, which he had hitherto perceived from a single perspective, disintegrates and he can no longer establish which path to follow.

The mature narrator of *Vestiaire de l'enfance* recalls having a similar experience of disorientation as a young man. Sitting in the theatre where his mother is performing, the young narrator makes the decision to abandon his life as it has been up to that moment, to leave the theatre and never to return:

J'ai déchiré mon devoir d'algèbre puis mon cahier de textes, puis l'ouvrage scolaire que je consultais et j'ai jeté le tout dans la corbeille d'osier d'Henri de la Palmira. Et j'ai pris cette décision irrévocable : désormais, il n'y aurait plus de collège, plus de car à la porte d'Orléans, plus d'études, plus de baccalauréat, plus de service militaire. Plus rien. (P. 74)

The young narrator leaves the theatre in a moment of joyous liberation but his exultation is short-lived. Having broken away from his fetters, he no longer knows what direction to take:

J'ai hésité un instant: où aller? Vers la droite ou vers la gauche? Vers la Place Blanche ou de l'autre côté? J'ai choisi de descendre la pente de la rue. Voilà, je n'avais plus aucune attache nulle part et la vie commençait pour moi. Je sentais la panique me gagner. Je devais me retenir pour ne pas aborder le premier passant et lui dire: 'Est-ce que vous pourriez m'aider'? (P. 75)

Once again, the narrator desires external command and is terrified by the prospect of being master of himself. The possibility that, having broken free of his ties, 'all is permitted'

terrifies him so that he ends up walking ‘au hasard’ for a short while, only to return once more to his mother.

The young narrator’s call for help is echoed later in his life when he meets a young woman who similarly appeals to him for help as they stand together under the statue of Cruz-Valer. As such, the narrator concludes:

Il faut croire que cette phrase revient comme un leitmotif, tous les vingt ans, murmurée d’une voix sourde, ou sur le ton précipité d’un aveu. Moi aussi, je l’avais dit à quelqu’un qui marchait à mes côtés, une nuit, à Vienne.

‘Vous ne pourriez pas m’aider?’ (P. 66)

If Modiano’s narrators find themselves in a state of nihilistic disorientation after the dissolution of their values, they seek to overcome this nihilism in a number of ways. This second liberation, ‘the man before the nothing’, thus entails a period of experimentation, as Modiano’s protagonists and narrators attempt to find their way out of a ‘trou noir’.

3.4 Attempts at overcoming nihilism

Although Nietzsche is conscious of the terrifying disorientation that the dissolution of values can produce, he nevertheless regards it as an exhilarating liberation in which the once fettered spirits find themselves free to experiment and attempt new things. They thus become ‘*those who attempt*’,¹⁶⁶ who Nietzsche describes in *Beyond Good and Evil* as being ‘ready for every adventure’, ‘inquisitive to a fault’, ‘investigators to the point of cruelty’ with ‘teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible’ (p. 42). For the narrators of *Chien de printemps* and *Vestiaire de l’enfance*, however, this unchaining is deeply unsettling. Both narrators shy away from adventure and the only attempts they undertake whilst they are in a nihilistic void involve reinstating the shackles from which they have been liberated. As such, they do not have ‘teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible’, nor are they inquisitive, but rather, as

¹⁶⁶ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 39.

Nietzsche predicted in his aphorism on the horizon of the infinite, they once more seek the land from which they have set sail. Modiano's narrators become 'homesick' and regard the infinite potential of their newfound horizon as forming the walls of a new sort of 'cage'.¹⁶⁷

The narrators of these novels thus undertake regressive measures when they are faced with a nihilistic void. Although they had been outsiders in their supposed 'homeland', they do not seek an alternative system. In the first instance, we witness attempts to restore normality by establishing fixed points and reconstructing the structure which had dissolved, whilst in the second we witness the disengagement from society, flight from the 'burdens of existence' and the attempt to start anew in a different geographical location. As regressive experiments, these 'attempts' are ultimately futile and do not lead to true liberation.

3.4.1 First Attempt: Reconstructing boundaries, establishing 'points fixes'

In the lengthy passage describing dissolution, the narrator of *Vestiaire de l'enfance* calls upon a method which he has invented in order to overcome his nihilistic episodes. 'Aujourd'hui', he explains, 'je sais la manière de surmonter ce vertige' :

Il faut que je me répète doucement à moi-même mon nouveau nom: Jimmy Sarano, ma date de naissance, mon emploi du temps, le nom des collègues de Radio-Mundial que je rencontrerai le jour même, le résumé du chapitre des *Aventures de Louis XVII* que j'écrirai, mon adresse, 33, Mercedes Terrace, 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.[...] 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. (Pp. 101-02)

Not knowing what direction to take in his newfound freedom, the narrator thus resorts to a regressive measure, choosing to *reconstruct* the structure, which, though it rendered him unhappy, had nonetheless provided him with something to will prior to its dissolution.

¹⁶⁷ *The Gay Science*, p. 119.

Modiano refers in this passage to ‘points de repère’ but he often employs the term ‘points fixes’ to indicate these solid elements which punctuate and give structure to a world which would otherwise be ‘flou’. Rather than establishing something new to will, thereby constructing different limits, Modiano’s narrators tend to struggle to reinstate the shackles from which they have been freed. There thus exists a disparity between Nietzsche’s descriptions of ‘unshackling’ and the experience of Modiano’s narrators who do not perceive their frequent descents into a nihilistic void as being liberating, but rather consider them as something to which they are involuntarily subjected. Thus in their ‘attempts’ at overcoming nihilism, they shy away from any real experimentation, and seek instead to return to their fetters.

Modiano’s ‘points fixes’ have two identifiable roles in his literature. In the first instance they act as ‘points de repère’, devices providing orientation, with which one can delineate and establish parameters. In *La Petite Bijou*, for example, the character Moreau-Badmaev states the importance of finding a ‘point fixe’, since without it one will have ‘cette sensation désagréable de flotter, comme si un courant vous emportait et que vous ne pouviez vous raccrocher à rien’.¹⁶⁸ Evoking a world under the influence of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes how ‘all the rigid, hostile barriers [...] established between human beings, break asunder’ (p. 18), and contrasts this fluidity with the Apollonian world of ‘measured limitation’ and the ‘principium individuationis’. As such, Apollo provides parameters, limits and guidelines, which Nietzsche identifies as being ‘healing’ (p. 19). During his episode of dissolution under the statue of Cruz-Valer, the narrator of *Vestiaire de l’enfance* experiences the breakdown of ‘barriers’ and he is enveloped by what he terms a ‘void’. From Nietzsche’s description of the Apollonian, then, we might consider the potential for limitation to provide comfort, to be healing, and to make life ‘possible and worth living’

¹⁶⁸ *La Petite Bijou*, p. 38

(p. 16). Man must have something to will, he must delineate a path to follow, and fixed points will therefore act as his ‘points de repère’.

In the second instance, Modiano’s ‘points fixes’ act as embodiments of certainty because, being fixed, they do not allow for the mutation of knowledge or meaning. Prior to his episode of dissolution in the Jardin du Luxembourg, the narrator of *Chien de printemps* walks along the section of boulevard Saint-Michel, which links the old Luxembourg station to Port-Royal. He recalls walking here with Jansen as a younger man and remembers how the photographer had drawn his attention to the facade of the Ecole des mines, ‘dont toute une partie, à hauteur d’homme, portait des traces de balles’:

Une plaque fendue et légèrement effrité sur ses bords indiquait qu’un certain Jean Monvallier Boulogne, âgé de vingt ans, avait été tué à cet emplacement le jour de la libération de Paris. J’avais retenu ce nom, à cause de sa sonorité qui évoquait une partie de canotage au Bois avec une fille blonde, un pique-nique à la campagne au bord d’une rivière et d’un vallon où se trouvaient réunis la même fille blonde et des amis – tout cela tranché net un après-midi d’août, devant le mur. Or ce lundi, à ma grande surprise, la plaque avait disparu, et je regrettais que Jansen, l’après-midi où nous étions ensemble au même endroit, n’ait pas pris une photo du mur criblé de balles et de cette plaque. Mais là, brusquement, je n’étais plus sûr que ce Jean Monvallier Boulogne eût existé, et, d’ailleurs, je n’étais plus sûr de rien. (Pp. 114-15)

The role of photography is central to this novel; the young narrator diligently catalogues Jansen’s photographs because he regards them as being highly valuable. These photographs ‘témoignaient de gens et de choses disparus’ (p. 24), he remarks, implying that they have the function of ‘sauver de l’oubli’.¹⁶⁹ However, photographs not only act as reminders of the past, but equally have the role of making information static and therefore allowing for certainty. In the passage recalling the plaque on the Ecole des mines, the narrator does not appear to regret that Jean Monvallier Boulogne might no longer be remembered, but rather

¹⁶⁹ Jean-Bernard Vray, ‘Noirceur de Modiano: disparition et photographie’, in Roger-Yves Roche (ed.) *Lectures de Modiano*, p.357.

that he cannot be certain that the plaque ever existed. As such, the passage indicates the source of the author's high estimation of photography, and indeed of any documentary evidence; it is the ability of a photograph to fix, and make certain and immutable a piece of information, which appears to be of value to him. Conversely, the narrator fears the mutation of knowledge and its potential to change and shift. The introduction of uncertainty caused by the supposed removal of the plaque relating to Jean Monvallier Boulogne takes place just moments before the narrator enters the Jardin du Luxembourg where he experiences the dissolution of his world. Lacking a 'point fixe', a documentary piece of evidence, Modiano's narrator thus witnesses the breakdown of certainty, as he is exposed to the idea that knowledge is not a fixed entity, but rather something mutable and without limits, and therefore ultimately unattainable.

However, Modiano is conscious of the fallibility of these 'points fixes', and although he calls upon them to render a fluid world meaningful, he is nevertheless aware of their potential to be perishable, corrupted, incorrect and misleading. As Jean-Bernard Vray points out, the author is aware of the 'caractère périssable de la photographie', and quoting Barthes Vray notes:

La photographie n'en est pas moins mortelle: comme un organisme vivant, elle naît à même les grains d'argent qui germent, elle s'épanouit un moment, puis vieillit. Attaqué par la lumière, l'humidité, elle pâlit, s'exténue, disparaît.¹⁷⁰

Vray emphasises the extent to which Modiano's interest in photography is imbued with an inherent anxiety that the fixity offered by this tool is nonetheless predisposed to dilution and evaporation. However, Modiano's concern relating to documents as 'points fixes' goes beyond the potential for physical degradation. The author has built an archive of his own containing documents and photographs but importantly he acknowledges that these alone cannot provide a satisfactory knowledge of life. In an interview with Laurence Liban, he

¹⁷⁰ Barthes, quoted in Vray, 'Noirceur de Modiano: disparition et photographie', p. 362.

suggests that ‘tout cela forme une masse de fragments’, and remarks that even in police reports ‘il peut y avoir des erreurs’.¹⁷¹ In *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, one of the multiple narrators questions the validity of his friend’s enterprise of recording the coming and going of the clientele of the Condé café. Bowling, or ‘le Capitaine’, is ‘hanté par ce qu’il appelait les ‘points fixes’:

Le Capitaine notait aussi nos adresses de sorte que l’on pouvait imaginer le trajet habituel qui nous menait, chacun, jusqu’au Condé. C’était encore une manière, pour Bowling, d’établir des points fixes. [...] Pour être franc, cela n’avance pas à grand-chose. Si l’on feuillette le cahier, à part des noms et des adresses fugitives, on ne sait rien de toutes ces personnes ni de moi. Sans doute le Capitaine jugeait-il que c’était déjà beaucoup de nous avoir nommés et ‘fixés’ quelque part. (Pp. 19-21)

While the narrator is doubtful of the relevance and benefit of Bowling’s task, he nevertheless recognises that ‘le Capitaine’ had ‘attempted’ to do *something* to counteract a world which would otherwise be ‘flou’. Bowling has perhaps been ‘tempted’ to follow an erroneous path but his cataloguing nonetheless constitutes an act of willing. His desire to map the addresses and routes of the clientele of the Condé is representative of the potential for ‘points fixes’ to serve as ‘points de repère’, guidelines for creating routes, establishing boundaries and orienting oneself. Equally, his notebook provides a space for ‘fixing’ a piece of information, making it thus immutable.

Episodes such as that at the Ecole des mines give rise to dissolution because they cause one to question one’s ability to fix information and to therefore be certain. If certainty is a goal which is unattainable, it raises questions as to whether or not it should be valued at all. The narrator of *Chien de printemps* hopes that ‘points fixes’ will allow him to make knowledge static, while Jimmy Sarano of *Vestiaire de l’enfance* calls upon them to act as boundaries and guidelines. In both cases, narrators are working within the parameters of particular values; certainty, fixity, coherence, and their appeal to restore such ‘points fixes’

¹⁷¹ Liban, ‘Entretien: Modiano’, p. 100.

after the dissolution of these values constitutes a regressive measure. Although such values temporarily dissolve after their relevance is brought into question, these narrators nevertheless do not contemplate their *revaluation*.

3.4.2 Second Attempt: Fuite

Recalling his underlying and ever present urge to ‘disparaître’, the narrator of *Voyage de nocces* remarks that ‘ma vie n’avait été qu’une fuite’. He thus tells us that he has undertaken a number of long-distance journeys, ‘non pour satisfaire une curiosité ou une vocation d’explorateur, mais pour fuir’.¹⁷² The desire to travel, then, is not based on a love of discovery and novelty, but rather it is indicative of the need for ‘disparition’, avoidance, hiding and exile.¹⁷³ The act of disappearing or ‘fuite’ can be understood as a strategy for overcoming nihilism; unable to assimilate with their society, some of Modiano’s narrators decide to flee it altogether with a view to starting anew elsewhere. In their new location, they hope to construct a life in which they no longer feel inadequate, and wherein they might achieve their goals. As we have seen, Modiano’s narrators and protagonists have often been brought up in an environment that lacks the values certainty, fixity/stability, limitation, coherence and purpose and they recall their childhood negatively. They also blame their past for their inability to successfully assimilate into society in the present. Flight thus entails deliberately disengaging from one society and resurfacing with a fresh identity in another, leaving behind the burden of the past.

Modiano’s *Chien de printemps* offers us an insight into the gradual disengagement from society undertaken by its protagonist, Jansen. Jansen eventually flees Paris and installs himself in Mexico. However, we do not learn about the outcome of this flight. Conversely, in *Vestiaire de l’enfance*, we encounter a protagonist *after* his flight from Paris. The narrator has

¹⁷² *Voyage de nocces*, p. 94.

¹⁷³ For further discussion on this issue, see Lecaudé, ‘Patrick Modiano: Le narrateur et sa disparition ou qu’y a-t-il derrière le miroir?’, p. 254.

adopted a new identity and lives in a Mediterranean town under the name of Jimmy Sarano. Together, these novels provide an idea of the process and outcome of flight and demonstrate its ultimate failure as a means for overcoming nihilism.

In *Chien de printemps* we witness Jansen's sustained disengagement from society and its values. Jansen gradually renounces all his ties, an action which manifests itself symbolically through his increasing disinterest in his archive of photographs, which he has carelessly crammed into three suitcases. He no longer answers the telephone, nor does he open his door when he has a visitor and he increasingly refrains from staying at his fixed address preferring the flexibility and anonymity of a hotel. When Jansen organises a 'pot d'adieu' at his studio, the narrator remarks that '[il] semblait [...] absent, lui qui aurait dû être le lien entre tous ces gens' (p. 70), and thus we encounter the photographer as one is beginning to 'se replier sur lui-même' (p. 50). Modiano variously describes Jansen's disengagement from society throughout this text. For example, the character Nicolle, with whom we presume Jansen has had relations, speaks of 'cette manie qu'il a de faire le mort' while the narrator recalls the distance which existed between Jansen and his surroundings:

Les quelques semaines où je l'ai fréquenté, il considérait les êtres et les choses de très loin et il ne restait plus pour lui que de vagues points de repère et de vagues silhouettes. Et, par un phénomène de réciprocité, ces êtres et ces choses, à son contact, perdaient leur consistance. (P. 69)

As such, while the youthful narrator of *Chien de printemps* experiences the dissolution of his 'points de repère' as something dramatic and overwhelming, the mature Jansen's nihilism appears to be more resolute, deep-seated and irrepressible. He is accustomed to a constant state of dissolution, nothing remains fixed and solid, and everything with which he is in contact loses its substance and weight. Having concluded that 'tout cela devient fatigant et ridicule' (p. 68), Jansen decides to flee Paris and to move to Mexico.

Jansen's disappearance to Mexico takes place unexpectedly and he does not bid farewell to his young friend. However, the narrator does not resent the photographer for his sudden departure remarking that he understands the motives for his actions. A short exchange between narrator and Jansen provides us with an insight into Jansen's reasons for departing. As the young narrator sorts through the photographers collection of images, classifying and archiving them, Jansen remarks that, 'je ne supporte plus de les voir', and taking a 'ton grave', he continues, 'vous comprenez, mon petit, c'est comme si chacune de ces photos était pour moi un remords... Il vaut mieux faire table rase...' (p. 24). By moving to Mexico, then, Jansen hopes to start again with a clean slate, or to employ an expression heavily present in Modiano's texts, to 'recommencer à zéro'.

Although we do not know the outcome of Jansen's disappearance, certain signals indicate that he will not overcome his nihilism by changing his location, and as such, his disappearance to Mexico is unlikely to result in his liberation. For example, when the narrator arrives at Jansen's studio one morning, he discovers that the photographer has left the country, taking with him his suitcases of photographs and a copy of the notebook in which the narrator had classified and archived information relating to his collection. This seemingly insignificant detail acts as important clue as to the outcome of Jansen's disappearance. Rather than leaving his photographs, which are after all 'pour [lui] un remords', Jansen brings them with him to Mexico, thereby refusing to definitively break with his past. As such, although Jansen undergoes a dramatic change in his location and surroundings, he nonetheless arrives at his new destination with 'received ties'. Rather than seizing an opportunity to revalue his values, we might presume that Jansen understands his relocation as offering the possibility to more successfully adhere to his received values. This conclusion is corroborated by an interview with Modiano in *Lire* magazine, in which

Laurence Liban asks the author if, after thirty five years of writing, he has himself felt, ‘le désir fort, ou l’angoisse, de changer’, to which Modiano’s responds:

Quelquefois, j’ai eu envie d’aller – je ne sais pas- au Mexique pour essayer de faire quelque chose qui se passerait dans un autre décor. Evidemment, ce serait toujours la même manière de voir les choses mais dans une autre atmosphère... [...] Mais il y a une constante, c’est le regard que vous portez sur les choses. Vous savez, on est condamné à écrire toujours la même chose.¹⁷⁴

A change in location might thus provide a new ‘atmosphère’ but, as Modiano suggests, it will not necessarily entail a revaluation of values. Rather, although in a new place, one will continue to see things in the same manner.

In *Vestiaire de l’enfance*, we encounter a narrator *after* his flight from Paris, living and working in an unnamed Mediterranean town, possibly in North Africa. Jimmy Sarano, a name adopted by the narrator after his disappearance, is employed as a writer by a local multilingual radio station; he has an apartment, and therefore a fixed address, and he carries out his daily activities routinely and in coherent manner. This narrator has therefore achieved that which Jansen sought; while his past was uncertain, lacking in fixity, boundaries and coherence, he is now successfully fulfilling these values in his new location. Importantly, however, Jimmy Sarano is not contented; his daily life, he tells us, has put him in a state of mind which is ‘bien particulier’, and the novel opens with a flat and disappointed statement:

J’ose à peine évoquer ma vie professionnelle, qui se résume maintenant à peu de chose: l’écriture d’un interminable feuilleton radiophonique, *Les aventures de Louis XVII*. Comme les programmes ne changent guère à Radio-Mundial, je m’imagine au cours des prochaines années, ajoutant encore de nouveaux épisodes aux *Aventures de Louis XVII*. Voilà pour l’avenir. (P. 11)

Life after flight is rarely depicted in Modiano’s texts in positive or liberated tones. When Jean and Sylvia ‘escape’ to Nice in *Dimanches d’août*, for example, they find themselves circling

¹⁷⁴ Liban, ‘Entretien: Modiano’, p. 101.

the city as though they are ‘dans une cage’, and feel themselves to be ‘des prisonniers d’un aquarium [...] nous regardions à travers sa vitre le ciel et la végétation du dehors’ (p. 64).

Furthermore they find themselves in such isolation that ‘l’odeur d’humidité et de moisissure de [leur] chambre [les] pénétraient’ (p. 61).

In *Vestiaire de l’enfance*, the author evokes life after flight as a lugubrious and oneiric reality in which time passes slowly and where one day follows the next with no discernible change or development. As such, the author suggests an immobile and goalless existence which the character Carlos Sirvent in *Vestiaire de l’enfance* terms as ‘un présent éternel’ (p. 40). Thus, as the narrator of this novel observes his neighbour, assiduously undertaking daily exercise on his balcony, he remarks that ‘les jours succéderaient aux jours, monotones, au même rythme que ces mouvements de bras et de jambes’ (p. 20).

The town in which this novel is based is home to a number of exiles, constituting, as the character Mercadié suggests, a ‘Légion étrangère’ (p. 129), all of whom are diligently forgetting their past and attempting to start afresh in their new location. They do not question one another, nor do they probe each other for information about their past, preferring to suppress it and pretend that it has never happened. We thus witness abortive conversations between the characters of this novel, such as that between the narrator and his colleague Carlos Sirvent, who telephones him in a moment of ‘metaphysical’ angst. He suggests to the narrator that his life might be adequately represented by the empty pedestal on which a statue once stood, which is situated near the buildings of the radio station, Radio-Mundial. ‘On finit par douter de la réalité de cette ville’, he exclaims, and continuing, he describes his view of the ‘socle vide, au milieu de l’esplanade... Vous m’en avez si souvent parlé, Jimmy, de ce socle vide... Oui, il est l’image de cette ville, de Radio-Mundial, de notre vie à tous ici...’ The narrator, however, is uncomfortable throughout this exchange, and puts an end to the

conversation, suggesting that it is ‘un peu tard pour faire de la métaphysique’ (p. 133-34). In a similar outburst another of the narrator’s colleagues, Mercadié, exclaims:

Il n’y a personne à qui parler ici... Personne... C’est le désert... Le bout du monde... Ça ne vous fiche pas le cafard de travailler dans cette saloperie de radio perdue, sans pouvoir parler à personne? Non? (P. 125)

While this town, which has other incarnations in Modiano’s œuvre, most notably as the town of Nice, is filled with outsiders who have escaped Paris in search of some kind of liberation, these ‘exilés’ do not communicate with one another nor do they provide each other with comfort.¹⁷⁵ However, these self-exiled inhabitants struggle to conserve their invented lives, and tired, or lacking the energy that this conservation requires, they occasionally allow their past to overcome them. Thus, despite refusing to speak about their former lives in France, nor their reasons for relocating to a new town, Jimmy Sarano notices their past beneath their constructed exterior:

Et pourtant, ces speakers et ces metteurs en ondes français de Radio-Mundial portent sur leurs visages, à l’heure où la fatigue provoque chez eux un relâchement, les traces d’une faute qu’ils ont commise, d’une erreur initiale dont ils traîneront le poids jusqu’à la fin. (P. 50)

If the narrator resents the outbursts of his colleagues it is because he does not wish to acknowledge the questions that they raise and fears their potential to destabilise his carefully constructed existence.

Sirvent’s anxious telephone call is filled with uncertainty and on two occasions his thoughts begin with the phrase ‘on finit par douter’. Not wishing to doubt, and preferring to remain within the boundaries which he has created, Sirvent’s thoughts are not welcomed by the narrator who does not desire the crumbling of his values. When his carefully built world does dissolve, as we have previously seen, he experiences a disturbing sensation of

¹⁷⁵ Modiano employs the term ‘exiles’ early in the novel *Vestiaire de l’enfance*; the narrator, in conversation with Marie, admits that ‘les étrangers qui viennent s’exiler ici le font en fin de parcours’, p. 36.

disorientation and does not know which direction he should take. Knowing that such dissolution and disorientation is a constant threat, the narrator thus strives to maintain an unquestioning routine. ‘Il vaut mieux rester immobile une bonne fois pour toutes’, he decides, ‘où aller désormais ? Ici je suis arrivé au bout du monde et le temps s’est arrêté’ (p. 24).

Jimmy Sarano and his colleagues at Radio-Mundial are fearful of their past and its potential to undermine and destabilise their present. Regretting his outburst, the character Mercadié later writes to the narrator to apologise, acknowledging that ‘dans la Légion étrangère on se tait sur les raisons de son engagement – qui sont, la plupart du temps, douloureuses... Le silence, voilà le seul moyen de tenir le coup. Le silence et l’amnésie’ (p. 129). Modiano suggests, when discussing this ‘Légion étrangère’, that it requires significant effort to maintain this desired state of ‘amnésie’ and to control the destructive and unsettling return of the past. As such, Jimmy, similar to Jansen, keeps documents relating to his former life safely locked within a suitcase. Although he contemplates opening this case in order to revive his memory, he is quick to change his mind:

Moi aussi, dans une valise que je n’ai pas ouverte depuis mon départ de France, je possède une masse de vieux papiers qui se rapportent à ma vie antérieure. Ce soir-là, je me suis demandé si je ne devais pas les consulter. [...] Non, je ne me sentais pas la force de compulsurer toutes ces archives. [...] A quoi bon revenir en arrière quand vous pouvez vivre – selon l’expression de Sirvent – un présent éternel? (Pp. 42-43)

For Modiano’s narrators, as we have seen, the past is filled with uncertainty and their former lives lacked coherence, and limitation. For this reason they seek to forget so that they can construct a stable, certain and coherent present. Similarly, these narrators fear what lies ahead; uncertainty, ignorance, change, and limitless possibility are inherent in their perception of what the future entails. As such, they seek to be motionless and to maintain the static qualities of an eternal present.

Flight and relocation constitute a second failed ‘attempt’ to overcome nihilism. At the heart of this ‘attempt’ is the desire to avoid and the longing to be isolated from change and its inherent qualities. Installed in new towns, such narrators avoid the past and the future; they avoid questions and overly probing reflection. In their carefully constructed world, these narrators strive to prevent the dissolution of their received values, thus bypassing the need to rethink them and to become masters of themselves. Their wish to ‘recommencer à zéro’ cannot be satiated through flight alone for, as Modiano himself admits, their outlook will remain unchanged if they do not consider a revaluation of their values. In short, remaining isolated and imprisoned in their ‘citadels’, narrators such as Jimmy Sarano avoid ‘seizing the problems of existence by the horns’, and the project of ‘starting over’ must involve tackling these problems in order to undergo a transition from ‘thou shalt’ to ‘I will’.

3.5 Conclusion: towards a revaluation of values

Reviewing what we have hitherto discovered about the goals and values of Modiano’s protagonists, it is clear that they are fundamentally opposed to those promoted by Nietzsche and his ‘free spirits’. Modiano’s protagonists desire the fixity and certainty of a homeland, and long to have been raised in a stable and loving milieu. They seek comfort from others and find that friendships keep the onslaught of the ‘trou noir’ at bay but when they have supposedly started anew they desire isolation and detachment in order to negate any potential for destabilisation. They call on ‘points fixes’ to act as static and stable embodiments of knowledge and fear situations in which their certainty is called into question. Modiano’s protagonists do not want to be wanderers; they prefer immobility and the comfort of routine and limitation. When, during episodes of dissolution, their character is tested and they are presented with opportunities of adventure, they choose to return to the world and values that they know. These narrators abhor situations in which their values are tested and strive to

avoid such occurrences. The static, listless and monotonous nature of Jimmy Sarano's carefully constructed 'présent éternel' does not result in the liberation that the author/narrator desired and Modiano depicts such a life as oppressive, frustrating and ultimately imprisoning.

However, in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche advocates a very different approach to life, one which he argues to be liberating, and therefore crucial if one is to be a free spirit:

We have to test ourselves to see whether we are destined for independence and command and we have to do it at the right time. We should not sidestep our tests, even though they may well be the most dangerous game we can play, and, in the last analysis, can be witnessed by no judge other than ourselves. Not to be stuck to any person, not even somebody we love best – every person is a prison and a corner. Not to be stuck in any homeland, even the neediest and most oppressed – it is not as hard to tear your heart away from a victorious homeland. [...] Not to be stuck in some field of study: however much it tempts us with priceless discoveries, reserved, it seems, for us alone. Not to be stuck in our own detachment, in the ecstasy of those foreign vistas where birds keep flying higher so that they can keep seeing more below them: - the danger of those who fly. [...] We must know *to conserve ourselves*: the greatest test of independence. (P. 39)

4) From ‘un présent éternel’ to ‘l’éternel retour’: Towards a revaluation of values

J'ai fait de Paris ma ville intérieure, une cité onirique, intemporelle où les époques se superposent et où s'incarne ce que Nietzsche appelait «l'éternel retour.» Il m'est très difficile maintenant de la quitter. C'est ce qui me donne si souvent l'impression, que je n'aime pas, de me répéter, de tourner en rond.¹⁷⁶

Discussing his relationship with the city of Paris following the publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, Modiano evokes a city that is a site of the eternal return. The author's interest in the concept is manifested in one of the multiple narrators of the novel who becomes intrigued and captivated by Nietzsche's concept, and as we have seen, sets about reading Karl Löwith's treatise, *Nietzsche: philosophie de l'éternel retour du même*. Following the publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, the question of the eternal return has received increased attention from Modiano scholars and critics,¹⁷⁷ although Modiano's intertextual reference to Löwith's 'ouvrage à la couverture blanc et noir', read by Roland 'avec beaucoup d'attention', remains unexplored.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Garcin, 'Un entretien avec Patrick Modiano'.

¹⁷⁷ We encounter five distinct references to the concept in the academic volume of essays on Modiano's writing, *Lectures de Modiano*, for example, while Modiano has alluded to the eternal return in interviews such as that cited above with Garcin.

¹⁷⁸ *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, p. 133.

For Nietzsche, the eternal return marks a progression into a truly liberated state and is ‘the highest formula of affirmation that can possibly be attained’.¹⁷⁹ He describes the concept as ‘overwhelming’; it ‘shakes and overturns one to the depths’,¹⁸⁰ and as such, Nietzsche conceives the idea as being weighty, joyful and thrilling. However, until recently, the idea of an eternal recurrence has, in Modiano’s writings, been depicted in a largely negative and melancholic framework, with narrators and protagonists lamenting the reality that ‘tout allait recommencer’.¹⁸¹ Scholarly discussion on the eternal return in Modiano’s writing has thus centred on its melancholic representation and the relation between the recurrence of the same and ‘souffrance’ or ‘douleur’.¹⁸² In such academic studies, the eternal return is thus considered within a negative framework in which the concept does not appear to harbour the potential for joy, ecstasy, and self-overcoming that Nietzsche proposes.

Modiano’s perception of the eternal return appears, however, to have changed since the publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and *L’Horizon*. These novels present us with a portrayal of the eternal return which, in line with Nietzsche’s projections, offers a path to liberation through a revaluation of values. Where previously Modiano’s protagonists and narrators have expressed a valuation of certainty, fixity/stability, limitation, coherence and purpose, now characters such as Roland and Bosmans appear to value self-conscious ignorance, fluidity, impermanence, a lack of goals and the absence of structure in line with Nietzsche’s description of a true free spirit.

This chapter will explore Modiano’s treatment of the eternal return, focusing firstly on its negative and melancholic depiction. It argues that such a portrayal of the eternal return results from a cosmological interpretation of the concept. In a cosmological reading of the eternal return, the recurrence of the same operates independently of the anthropological

¹⁷⁹ *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, p. 69.

¹⁸⁰ *Ecce Homo*, p. 72.

¹⁸¹ *La Petite Bijou*, p. 80.

¹⁸² For example, see Claude Burgelin, ‘De Quoi se plaindre? Comment se plaindre? (Une lecture de La Petite Bijou) in *Lectures de Modiano*, p. 53.

sphere and this in turn gives rise to a fatalistic outlook since we can have no impact on our outcome. In its examination of the cosmological interpretation, the chapter focuses on Karl Löwith's reading of Nietzsche, in which he identifies a conflict between the human will to a goal and 'the goalless revolving of the world';¹⁸³ in Löwith's interpretation, the human will is rendered impotent and futile since our outcome is already determined through a cosmological return of the same. Löwith thus identifies a discord or paradox in Nietzsche's thinking, in which human willing, or the will to power is pitted against a fatalistic return of the same.

In a close reading of *La Petite Bijou*, this chapter examines this discord between willing and fate, thus bringing to light the potential for the eternal return to be imprisoning. The novel recounts the story of young woman, Thérèse, who finds herself re-enacting her mother's past, whilst she also recognises the repetition of her own childhood in the life of a young girl whom she is looking after. Thérèse is horrified by this return of the same and she longs to break away from its cycle. However, she becomes trapped in a cycle of return and inevitability and struggles to assert her will so as to break away from a life of eternal recurrence. The narrator's will is left redundant in the face of her fatalistic perspective; she feels unable to change the course of her life and she consequently attempts suicide. In its analysis of *La Petite Bijou*, this chapter thus establishes the relationship between a cosmological interpretation of the eternal return and nihilism of despair.

Considering the concept of the eternal return in an alternative framework, this chapter will subsequently discuss the joyful affirmation of the idea, which is understood now as embodying and promoting 'inachèvement' and 'pure becoming'. A close reading of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* is undertaken, discussing the differing outcomes of two of the novel's protagonists, Jacqueline and Roland. The chapter demonstrates how Jacqueline

¹⁸³ Löwith, *Nietzsche's philosophy of the eternal recurrence of the same*, pp. 62-63.

succumbs to nihilistic despair in the realisation that she can never definitively achieve her goals whilst, conversely, Roland is saved by his affirmation of the eternal return.

The affirmation of the eternal return is deemed to be liberating in this second interpretation because it entails a revaluation of values. This revaluation enables Roland to recognise the necessity and desirability of impermanence and becoming, since they render the will active and create potential for change and newness. Comparing Thérèse's narrative in *La Petite Bijou* with that of Roland in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, the chapter will demonstrate the shift in outlook that takes place from one narrative to the next. Imprisoned in a fatalistic recurrence of the same, Thérèse cannot progress towards her liberation and she thus remains in 'un présent éternel' unable to contemplate the horizon. Conversely, Roland affirms the eternal return and in doing so 'la ligne d'horizon' stretches out before him 'là-bas, vers l'infini' (p. 144).

4.1 'Tout allait recommencer': the melancholic return of the same in *La Petite Bijou*

La Petite Bijou recounts the life of a young woman, Thérèse, as she struggles to escape a tragic cycle of repetition in which she feels herself to be fated to relive her mother's life, whilst also recognising the recurrence of her own melancholic childhood in the life of a little girl whom she looks after. Return presents itself throughout his novel, which opens with a chance sighting of a woman whom Thérèse suspects to be her mother, apparently returned from the dead:

Une douzaine d'années avait passé depuis que l'on ne m'appelait plus "La Petite Bijou" et je me trouvais à la station de métro Châtelet à l'heure de pointe. J'étais dans la foule qui suivait le couloir sans fin, sur le tapis roulant. Une femme portait un manteau jaune. La couleur du manteau avait attiré mon attention et je la voyais de dos, sur le tapis roulant. Puis elle marchait le long du couloir où il était indiqué "Direction Château-de-Vincennes". Nous étions maintenant immobiles, serrées les uns contre les autres au milieu de l'escalier, en attendant que le portillon s'ouvre. Elle se tenait à côté de moi. Alors, j'ai vu son visage.

La ressemblance de ce visage avec celui de ma mère était si frappante que j'ai pensé que c'était elle. [...] Le même profil que celui de ma mère, le nez si particulier, légèrement relevé du bout. Les mêmes yeux clairs. Le même front haut. [...] J'avais la certitude que c'était elle.¹⁸⁴

As a young girl, Thérèse had been told that her mother had died in Morocco but on seeing this woman, in her distinctive yellow coat, she is convinced of the contrary. This sighting of her mother provides the first premise for return in the novel. She thus follows the woman as she makes her way to her apartment in the suburbs. Thérèse does not confront her mother, but rather she attempts to glean information from the concierge of her mother's apartment who informs her that the woman is known in the area as 'Trompe-la-Mort' because 'on a l'impression qu'elle va se laisser mourir et puis, le lendemain, elle est fringante et aimable, ou bien elle vous balance une vacherie' (p. 70).¹⁸⁵

Instances of recurrence and return become increasingly frequent and complex as the novel progresses. For example, the narrator experiences her life as if it were a repetition of that of her mother. The bouts of depression to which the concierge refers when she speaks of 'Trompe-la-Mort', are equally a reality for Thérèse. Looking back to her childhood, Thérèse recalls how her mother would disappear for days, locking herself in her bedroom and refusing any visitors, a tendency to which she is herself prone. When she presents herself at a job agency, for example, she tells us that doing so is an act of survival, 'sinon je n'aurais pas eu le courage de quitter ma chambre et mon lit' (p. 53).

Moving to Paris, Thérèse seeks the hotel in which her mother lived for many years, and in which she herself was born. She is surprised to find that the hotel has been converted into apartments and she rents a studio there. As such, she finds herself living in the building once inhabited by her mother and wonders if she might even be renting the very same room.

¹⁸⁴ *La Petite Bijou*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁸⁵ This is a nod to Balzac's character Vautrin in *Comédie Humaine* who is nick-named 'Trompe-la-Mort' on account of his numerous escapes from the law and his subsequent reincarnations.

Equally, she has returned to the site of her own beginning. ‘J’étais revenue au point de départ’, she tells us, ‘puisque cette adresse était mentionnée sur mon acte de naissance comme étant le domicile de ma mère. Et sans doute j’y avais habité moi aussi au tout début de ma vie’ (p. 48). Hotels feature again later in the text when Thérèse accompanies her boyfriend to dank hotel rooms. These places are familiar to her, she remarks, because ‘c’était le genre d’hôtel où ma mère devait échouer au même âge que moi, les mêmes dimanches soirs’ (p. 97).

Further echoes and repetitions exist between Thérèse’s life and that of her mother. Before her sudden departure for Morocco, her mother, an unsuccessful actress and dancer, had attempted to shape her daughter’s life to mirror her own, hoping that her daughter might succeed where she herself has failed. Thus, her mother gives her child a stage name, ‘La Petite Bijou’, just as she herself had appropriated a stage-name of her own and Thérèse is coerced into acting alongside her in a film. After years of reflection, Thérèse concludes that her mother saw in her the opportunity to start again:

Après toutes ces années, en regardant ces photos, j’avais compris que si elle tenait à me pousser sur la piste, c’était pour se donner l’illusion qu’elle pouvait recommencer à zéro.
(P. 91)

In addition to the many recurrences that take place within the mother-daughter scenario in this novel, there exists another crucial aspect of the narrative in which recurrence is once more foregrounded. Here, Thérèse undertakes a job as *une garde d’enfant* only to find that her own childhood is being re-enacted by the little girl whom she is minding. Even before she meets the Valadier family, Thérèse senses recurrence taking place. Approaching their apartment, she is certain that she has previously walked in its surrounding streets:

Je connaissais ce quartier. Je me suis dit que j’avais dû rêver à cette première visite chez ces gens. Et maintenant, je vivais ce que j’avais rêvé : le métro, la marche jusqu’à leur domicile et voilà pourquoi j’avais cette sensation de déjà-vu. Le boulevard Maurice-

Barrès longea le bois de Boulogne, et, à mesure que j'avançais, cette sensation devenait de plus en plus forte et je finissais par m'inquiéter. Mais maintenant, au contraire, je me demandais si je ne rêvais pas. Je me suis pincé le bras, je me suis frappé le front de la paume de la main pour essayer de me réveiller. (P. 54)

On meeting the Valadier family this sense of repetition increases. The little girl, or 'la Petite', as Madame Valadier calls her, thus echoing the narrator's own childhood appellation, is strikingly similar in temperament to Thérèse. In many ways, both have been deprived of childhood due to their neglectful parents; both have been brought up in large, empty apartments, and both have delayed their return from school so as to spend as little time as possible at home. Like La Petite Bijou', 'La Petite' has adult handwriting, and writes with a pen, unlike most children of her age. Thérèse is quick to recognise these similarities. She also notes that 'la Petite' is scared of the dark, just as she was and still is herself. She takes the young Valadier girl for a walk and once more senses that she has been in the *quartier* many times before. The little girl too seems immediately comfortable in her presence, as though they have known each other for some time. Returning from their walk and knocking at the apartment door, they are met with silence. Monsieur Valadier eventually answers but he is on his way out to dinner and he leaves his daughter alone in the apartment. Later, Thérèse recalls how she too was often locked out of her mother's apartment. 'Je devinais ce qu'elle pouvait ressentir', Thérèse remarks, 'j'avais été, à peu près, le même genre d'enfant' (p. 122). As such, Thérèse witnesses the recurrence of her life with the young Valadier girl now playing what had once been her role.

Parallels equally exist between Madame Valadier, Thérèse and Thérèse's mother. When Thérèse describes where she is living, Madame Valadier declares that for many years she too used to live in hotels and they soon discover that Madame Valadier grew up in the *quartier* now inhabited by Thérèse. Eventually Thérèse begins to equate Madame Valadier

with her own mother and suggests that the young girl's life will consequently unfold in the same manner as her own:

La voix de Véra Valadier avait changé. Elle exprimait une sorte d'amertume. Peut-être pensait-elle à ce temps proche – les années passent si vite- où sa fille serait grande et où elle, Véra, hanterait les couloirs du métro pour l'éternité avec un manteau jaune. (P. 119)

This pattern of circularity and return is further exemplified, however, in a short sequence of the novel, which takes place around the Gare de Lyon. After a failed attempt to approach her possible mother, Thérèse is thrown into disarray. She decides to exit the metro as quickly possible and finds herself at the Gare de Lyon, the station at which she used to meet her uncle (or father), when she was a child. She wanders down some side-streets, intending to move away from the station but despite this, she ends up back at the station once more:

Maintenant, je marchais au hasard et j'espérais bientôt rejoindre la place de la Bastille, où je prendrais le métro. [...] Mais maintenant que je croyais que ma mère n'était pas morte, je ne savais plus quel chemin prendre. Sur la plaque bleue, j'ai lu : avenue Ledru-Rollin. Elle coupait une rue au bout de laquelle j'ai vu de nouveau la masse de la gare de Lyon et le cadran lumineux de l'horloge. J'avais tourné en rond et j'étais revenue au point de départ. (P. 84)

This topographical circularity is echoed in the magnetic centrality in the narrative of place Blanche, the place where Thérèse's mother lived and where Thérèse now lives, and as we have seen, the locality in which Madame Valadier grew up. When Thérèse is later saved by a kindly pharmacist, who cares for her and offers her friendship and comfort, she discovers that the pharmacist too had once worked at place Blanche.

The word 'même' appears with remarkable frequency throughout this novel; 'le même chemin' (p. 62); 'la même couleur' (p. 33) 'le silence autour de nous, le même que celui que j'avais connu à Fossombrone-la-Forêt à cette même heure et au même âge que la petite' (p. 59); 'ces mêmes couloirs' (p. 63); 'le même sentiment' (p. 62)'. This 'sameness',

however, is not depicted as coincidental. For example, when Thérèse discovers that Madame Valadier grew up in the *quartier* where she is now living, she does not appear to be surprised by this coincidence. Rather, over the course of the novel, recurrence is regarded as being entirely inevitable.

4.1.1 *The eternal return and fate*

The premise of the eternal return presents itself in a negative and melancholic framework in *La Petite Bijou*, and in desperation its narrator remarks that ‘tout allait se répéter, aux mêmes endroits, aux mêmes heures, jusqu’à la fin. J’étais prise dans le vieil engrenage’ (p. 92).

Thérèse’s experience of recurrence leaves her feeling trapped in a life with an outcome that is already thoroughly fated. Although she may desire change, she is unable to instigate it and this inability to break free from a cycle of inevitability eventually leads to her attempting suicide.

This oppressive depiction of the eternal return results from its interpretation as a cosmological phenomenon entailing an endless repetition of the same or *la même* throughout time. It is an inherently fatalistic interpretation according to which humans can have no impact on their outcome. Nietzsche’s attempts to present the eternal return as a viable scientific theory, according to which static elements will necessarily return in the exact same form because matter is finite, while time is infinite, may have contributed to subsequent fatalistic readings of his concept, although the philosopher subsequently abandon his flawed scientific theory.¹⁸⁶ However, even as a ‘thought experiment’, Nietzsche presents the eternal return as involving a return of the same so that ‘this life as you now live it and have lived it,

¹⁸⁶ Nietzsche’s scientific proposals are discussed in Rose Pfeffer, ‘Eternal Recurrence in Nietzsche’s Philosophy’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 19 (1965), pp. 277-82, and Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 325-27.

you will have to live once more and innumerable times more', describing this prospect as 'the heaviest weight'.¹⁸⁷

If a fatalistic reading of the eternal return gives rise to a sense of weight and burden, it is because the concept requires that we live as if we do not have any choice.¹⁸⁸ A cosmological or mechanistic repetition of the same leaves humans without potential for development. Thérèse thus feels a heavy weight because she feels herself to be living a life with an outcome that is utterly fated, and she is trapped in a world which does not appear to harbour potential for change. When she first moves back to Paris, she is compelled to return to place Blanche, where her mother lived and where she was herself born. On reflection, Thérèse begins to understand the motive behind this compulsion:

Tu es là parce que tu as voulu remonter une dernière fois le cours des années pour essayer de comprendre. C'est là, sous la lumière électrique, place Blanche, que tout a commencé. Une dernière fois, tu es revenue dans ton Pays Natal, au point de départ, pour savoir s'il y avait un chemin différent à prendre et si les choses auraient pu être autrement. (P. 162)

Over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that things could not have been any different because they are fated to be as they are. Realising this, Thérèse attempts suicide.

The stifling and oppressive nature of a fatalistic interpretation of the eternal return is exemplified in an episode wherein the narrator recalls being forced to act in a film alongside her mother. The relationship between mother and daughter thus becomes a performance but Thérèse's mother is unused to displaying any tenderness towards her daughter in real life and therefore finds it difficult to convincingly convey a sense of affection in front of the cameras:

Puis elle me caressait la joue et se penchait pour m'embrasser, et je me souviens que nous avions dû recommencer plusieurs fois. Dans la vie courante, elle n'avait jamais ces gestes tendres. (P. 134)

¹⁸⁷ *The Gay Science*, p. 194.

¹⁸⁸ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 206.

Gradually, and after many takes, Thérèse's mother's affection becomes more believable and the filmmakers are eventually satisfied with the scene. This episode brings to light a more positive interpretation of return, one which Thérèse's mother appears to embrace; having 'recommencée à zéro', she is given the opportunity to improve her performance, something she undoubtedly aims to achieve when she later stages her own disappearance and resurfacing.

This is an outlook that Thérèse does not share with her mother and she is aware of the futility of such optimism. She thus sees her mother's belief that one can succeed after starting again from zero as nothing more than 'une illusion' (p. 91). Flight and attempts to start anew are, as we have seen, generally depicted in Modiano's writings as being futile since all that can be gained from them is 'un autre décor', while 'le regard que vous portez sur les choses' remains constant.¹⁸⁹ From Thérèse's perspective, any potential for development and change which might have presented itself in the re-shooting of the mother-daughter scene is ultimately undermined by its eventual fixing on a reel of film. Thérèse is horrified to discover that this film might still exist. When her friend Moreau-Badmaev suggests that he find it for her, she is filled with anxiety as she contemplates the possibility that the scene with her mother might persist and could potentially be replayed for eternity. She thus hopes that time will destroy the reel:

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'Daüyé et de la Petite Bijou seraient rongés par une sorte de moisissure et on ne pourrait plus entendre leurs voix. (P. 136)

Thérèse is unsettled by the prospect of a mechanical repetition of events, which cannot incorporate difference. Captured on a photographic reel, she will appear in the *exact* same

¹⁸⁹ Liban, 'Entretien: Modiano', p. 101.

form and will say the *exact* same things for as long as the film remains intact without having any further impact on its content.

La Petite Bijou does not present us with an entirely mechanistic interpretation of the eternal return. There is some variation to that which returns and the instances of repetition central to this novel do incorporate difference. As we have seen, meeting the Valadier family, Thérèse recognises a recurrence of her own childhood; however she is no longer the child in question and has been replaced instead by the young Valadier girl. Other differences mark this ‘return of the same’. For example, Thérèse notes that the Valadier child must face two parents, while she had only her mother to contend with:

Pour moi, le mauvais sort et les mauvais souvenirs ne se résumaient qu’à un seul visage, celui de ma mère. La petite, elle, devrait affronter ces deux personnes, avec leurs sourires et leurs visages lisses... (P. 113)

While the circumstances and characters involved in situations might change, however, their outcome or fate remains the same. We might remember the narrator’s suggestion that the little Valadier girl will equally find *her* mother haunting the underground station in the not too distant future. Modiano’s assertion that ‘on est [...] prisonnier des hasards de la naissance’ is useful for understanding how the author conceives of the eternal return in *La Petite Bijou*.¹⁹⁰ Rather than proposing that there exists an exact repetition of events, he suggests that, like prisoners, we are forced to work within certain confines. This outlook is echoed in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, in which it is remarked that ‘il existe des frontières infranchissables dans la vie’ (p. 83). Within these boundaries there may be some slight variation of circumstance, but those inside will ultimately be confronted by the same limitations. Significantly, Thérèse’s friend, Moreau-Badmaev lends her a text by Lev Shestov entitled, *Sur les confins de la vie*.

¹⁹⁰ Liban, ‘Entretien: Modiano’, p. 101.

4.1.2 *The redundancy of the will and nihilism of despair*

If Thérèse eventually attempts suicide, it is because she realises that her attempts to break away from a cycle of inevitability will be futile. As we noted in the previous chapter, a goal ‘makes life worth living only if it inspires the agent to go on living’ and its ability to inspire depends ‘on the agent’s estimation of the realisability of this goal’.¹⁹¹ Adopting a fatalistic perspective, any goals that Thérèse may independently have will be unrealisable because her outcome is already decided and she thus descends into a nihilism of despair. A fatalistic interpretation of the eternal return thus renders the will inactive and completely redundant, so that Thérèse now proceeds through life as though permanently standing on a ‘tapis roulant’, observing its passage without participating in shaping its direction. As such, ‘les jours succédaient aux jours sans que rien ne les distingue les uns des autres, dans un glissement aussi régulier que celui du tapis roulant de la station Châtelet. J’étais emportée le long d’un couloir interminable et je n’avais même pas besoin de marcher’ (p. 38).

Before succumbing to nihilistic despair and the lure of suicide, however, we witness the voice of the will which strives to escape this fatalistic cycle of repetition but which is nearly always suppressed. On occasion, then, we witness Thérèse’s sudden desire for assertive and rebellious action with the author drawing our attention to the voice of the will through the capitalisation of letters. For example, as the narrator unintentionally circles the Gare de Lyon, she is convinced that the station is attracting her for a reason. She is compelled to take a train and thus to cut any ties with her past and present existence. The thought takes her by surprise:

Il fallait que je monte dans un train, tout de suite, et que JE COUPE LES PONTS. Ces mots m’étaient brusquement entrés dans la tête et je ne pouvais plus m’en débarrasser. Ils me donnaient encore un peu de courage. Oui, le temps était venu de COUPER LES PONTS. (P. 84)

¹⁹¹ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 24.

On another occasion, Thérèse recalls how her mother had deliberately ‘lost’ their pet dog in the Bois de Boulogne and later awakens from a dream with the thought: ‘IL FALLAIT TUER LA BOCHE POUR VENGER LE CHIEN’.¹⁹² At several points, Thérèse’s will strives to assert itself but it is always undermined by an underlying fatalistic perspective. In a rare moment of creativity, she adamantly tells us that ‘je ne voyais pas pourquoi il fallait que tout recommence. Alors je me suis enfuie’ (p. 97), and it is the prospect of some eventual ‘escape’ from an apparently inevitable course of events which acts as an incentive to continue living:

Dès que j’aurais un peu d’argent, je partirais dans le Midi, et même beaucoup plus loin, vers le Sud. J’essayais de me raccrocher à cette perspective, et de ne pas me laisser couler une fois pour toutes. (P. 53)

In desiring liberation through some form of flight, Thérèse in fact once more echoes her mother who, in escaping to Morocco, herself believed that her life could be better elsewhere.

Thérèse’s will for change and difference is nearly always thwarted. Throughout the text, we witness failed attempts on the part of the narrator to combat the inevitable. Rather than take a train at the Gare de Lyon, for example, Thérèse continues to walk away from the station, thus failing to steer her life in a new direction. Equally, although she may have the opportunity to alter her relationship with her mother, she fails to do so. This potential for confrontation between mother and daughter forms a climactic episode in the novel. Unlike many of Modiano’s texts in which a search takes place over the course of the novel, *La Petite Bijou* begins with the accidental sighting or finding of her mother. Thérèse follows her mother home on the metro and identifies where she lives. We thus expect a confrontation between daughter and mother and the subsequent revelation of the truth about their past. For Thérèse, this would undoubtedly be a positive outcome because it might at least help her to ‘comprendre’. The first half of the text certainly leads us in the direction of such an encounter

¹⁹² P.128; ‘La Boche’ is another nick-name attributed to her mother due to her suspected association with collaborators.

but the climax (or rather the anti-climax) of this plot is reached only half way through the text as Thérèse climbs the stairs to her mother's apartment. Ultimately this apparent climax is foiled as Thérèse loses her nerve and flees the building. She does not attempt to meet her mother again. As such, at an early stage, the narrator fails to change the order of things. Her possible mother, who might after all resolve many of Thérèse's questions and thus appease her, is never approached and any positive progression is consequently thwarted.

Thérèse's failure to confront her mother is perhaps understandable. Were she to approach her mother, she might at least gain a comprehension of her past but she cannot, after all, change it.¹⁹³ However, Thérèse does hold the power to alter the future of the young 'Petite' Valadier. At one point she contemplates bringing the girl home with her, in order to save her from her parents, and the young girl seems to desire this flight. However, Thérèse does not do so, walking the little girl back to her parents instead. Such scenes suggest that there is little point in attempting to alter our situation when our outcome has already been decided. This view surfaces in interviews with the author who, as we have seen, asserts in a conversation with Laurence Liban, that 'on est [...] prisonnier des hasards de la naissance'. The author subsequently suggests that due to circumstances beyond our control, we are fated to operate within specific limits and parameters. As such, he explains that he will never be able to write a novel set in a small village or in the countryside, not merely because he is not familiar with such a milieu, but because he is in some way imprisoned by his own circumstances and is fated to re-explore them over and over again.

4.1.3 Will-lessness and Resignation

A cosmological interpretation of the eternal return thus gives rise to a tension between the will and fate. Karl Löwith draws attention to this apparent paradox in Nietzsche's thinking.

¹⁹³ In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche discusses the ultimate frustration of the will: its inability to will backwards and to change what has passed. See p. 110.

On the one hand Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return proposes a scenario in which a sequence of events is eternally repeated and one's outcome is therefore thoroughly fated, but he equally argues that human life is governed by an innate desire to create and surpass, or by the 'will to power'. Löwith thus outlines the problematic, which he feels is central to Nietzsche's philosophy:

But how, with the freedom of the will that has sprung from the Christian understanding of existence, can one will again the necessity of simple being-thus-and-not-different, except through a *willing of what must be*—which as a double will denies both? The whole *problem* of a *creative willing* of the eternal *recurrence of the same* is contained in this double will that wills against itself. (P. 74)

Identifying this 'double-equation one on the side of man, the other on the side of the world', Löwith considers the '*problem* of the teaching of the return' as involving the '*unity* of this *schism* between the human will to a goal and the goalless revolving of the world' (pp. 62-63). Löwith suggests that this apparent contradiction is deliberate and integral to Nietzsche's overarching agenda and he proposes that it is designed to invoke a love of fate, or *amor fati*. As such, according to Löwith, Nietzsche exhorts us to will our fate, which amounts to willing a situation of non-willing:

In [Löwith's] view, the injunction [to live life as if the eternal recurrence is true] is designed not to incite us to will anything (including to will the eternal recurrence of our life), but to make us own up to the futility of all willing. 'Willing' the eternal recurrence is not the willing of an open future, but a reconciliation with fate, or '*amor fati*' – strictly speaking, a state in which 'the will no longer wills anything'. I 'love' my fate, in this view, not by somehow bending it to my will but by renouncing the will to which fate is recalcitrant.¹⁹⁴

In his analysis of Löwith's interpretation, Bernard Reginster questions the validity of his conclusions. To begin with, Reginster finds fault in Löwith's suggestion that our individual fate is *predetermined*. As such, even within a cosmological framework, he argues, what

¹⁹⁴ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 207.

Nietzsche's doctrine actually implies is that, 'Whatever my life will turn out to be, an exactly identical life has already occurred indefinitely many times':

But that does not tell me that what *my* life will turn out to be is already fated. In other words, the fact that all the possible lives I could live have already been lived, indefinitely many times, does not determine *which* of these possible lives I will actually live. Indeed, the doctrine of eternal recurrence may well allow that it remains up to me which life I live. (P. 208)

In this formulation of cosmological recurrence, Reginster demonstrates how the subject is presented with an opportunity to choose, and the will is therefore allowed to play a role. One's future is now an open horizon, even though whatever we eventually will has already been willed many times over.

More importantly however, Reginster is critical of Löwith's interpretation of *amor fati* which he feels does not accord to Nietzsche's characterisation of it. 'Although Löwith's will-lessness is intended to designate a state of indifference', he writes, 'living in accordance with the thought of eternal recurrence can justifiably motivate nothing more than resignation' (p. 209). Resignation certainly cannot be aligned with Nietzsche's 'love' of fate nor does it allow for the levels of joy described by Nietzsche in his realisation of the potential of the concept of the eternal return. As Reginster points out, we cannot reasonably be expected to take pleasure in a state of will-lessness and resignation seems the most likely sentiment to result from such a philosophy.

In *La Petite Bijou* the outlook of non-willing and resignation is exemplified in the character of the pharmacist who looks after Thérèse when she is experiencing an existential crisis. As is the case with Thérèse and the young Valadier girl, there is an evident bond between these protagonists and it is implied that the pharmacist understands Thérèse and her plight because she too has undergone similar crises. After all, similar to Thérèse, she does not like to think about her past, (which unsurprisingly is topographically located at place

Blanche). Although the pharmacist undoubtedly has a positive influence on the narrator, caring for her and offering her friendship, she is not capable of showing Thérèse any solutions for overcoming her despair. Rather, the pharmacist appears to be reconciled to her own fate and attempts to nudge Thérèse into taking a similar perspective. Instead of exhorting a creative change of circumstances, then, the pharmacist appears to recognise the futility of willing, and her advice to Thérèse is to accept her lot and, so that her life might be bearable, to ‘chasser le cafard’ and to ‘[penser] à des choses agréables’ (p. 97). The pharmacist also offers the narrator some tablets which she can take ‘chaque fois que vous vous sentez un peu bizarre...’ (p. 158).

The pharmacist’s outlook is symptomatic of the tiredness and ‘retreat from intellectual strength’¹⁹⁵ or the ‘exhausted life that prefers not to will’¹⁹⁶ which Nietzsche associates with passive nihilism. Thérèse takes this desire for non-willing further when she attempts suicide, an act which she hopes will relieve her of the burden of her despair. She appears to see in her suicide the potential for her liberation and it is possible that she has planned it for some time. For example, she dreams of an idyllic future and of gathering some memories ‘one last time’:

J’ai pensé que j’allais bientôt quitter cette ville et que je n’avais aucun motif sérieux de me sentir prisonnière de rien. Tous les horizons s’ouvraient devant moi, des prairies à perte de vue, qui descendaient vers la mer. Une dernière fois, je voulais rassembler quelques pauvres souvenirs, retrouver des traces de mon enfance, comme le voyageur qui gardera jusqu’à la fin dans sa poche une vieille carte d’identité périmée. (P. 44)

Equally, as the narrator contemplates taking a train and cutting ties with her life in Paris, she decides that before doing so she must ‘aller jusqu’au bout, sans savoir très bien ce que voulait dire “jusqu’au bout”’ (p. 84).

¹⁹⁵ Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *A Companion to Nietzsche* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 255.

¹⁹⁶ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 143

If we are prisoners of our birth and upbringing, as Modiano suggests in his interview with Laurence Liban, Thérèse's death and rebirth is a significant act as only through her 'renaissance' can she alter the parameters and limitations of her life. This may explain why Thérèse's mother has potentially staged her own death in Morocco and it is possible that she saw it as a crucial opportunity to 'recommencer à zéro'. Like her mother, Thérèse is also reborn at the end of this novel. Having attempted suicide she awakens to find herself alongside new-born babies in the nursery of a hospital. Due to a shortage of space, the narrator's bed has been placed here and thus, we presume, she is to begin a new life.

From a Nietzschean perspective, it is doubtful that Thérèse's (near) death and subsequent rebirth will lead to a significant change in her existential outlook. To begin with, it constitutes yet another form of escape, and is indicative of passive nihilism, which no longer '[seizes] the problem of existence by the horns'.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, while her suicide may appear as an act of defiance and therefore an assertion of the will, she is in fact once more re-enacting the actions of her mother and falling into the cycle of inevitability which she strives to escape. In her mimicking of her mother's death and rebirth, Thérèse is perhaps equally destined to 'hanter les couloirs' of Châtelet station.

Löwith's cosmological interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return, and his insistence on the tension that exists between willing and fate, provides a useful framework for exploring Modiano's melancholic portrayal of the fatalistic return in *La Petite Bijou*. The frustration of the will as it is pitted against the 'goalless revolving world' accounts for the tendency in Modiano studies to reference Nietzsche's eternal return in negative contexts, with scholars such as Christine Jérusalem aligning the concept with a 'sentiment mélancolique'. The tone and message of Modiano's *La Petite Bijou* is indeed melancholic and is not suggestive of any form of joyous enlightenment, nor of any self-overcoming.

¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche, excerpt from a letter dated 1888, quoted in Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 5.

However, when the Eternal Return appears once more in Modiano's *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, the author's perception of the idea appears to have taken a new direction. One of the multiple narrators, rather like Nietzsche himself, experiences the eternal return 'pour la seule fois de sa vie', in an epiphanic and transitory moment of realisation. This affirmation of the eternal return is better aligned with Nietzsche's portrayal of it, not as a harbinger of 'will-lessness' and negativity, but as the revelatory key to a revaluation of values and to liberation.

4.2 The affirmation of the eternal return in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*

Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue contains four separate narrative voices all of which share a tie to the Condé café. We encounter the voice of Jacqueline, a character very similar to Thérèse, who wanders unhappily through life seeking some meaning in her existence. The second narrative voice is that of Roland, Jacqueline's friend and lover, who is sometimes spotted with her at the Condé café. They meet at the house of Guy de Vere, a spiritual or existential mentor who hosts discussions and séances, whilst also providing Jacqueline and Roland with books from his extensive library. Thirdly, we encounter the story of a private detective, hired by Jacqueline's husband to find his missing wife. The detective sits in the Condé café hoping to catch sight of her, whilst also scrutinising those around him. The fourth narrative voice is that of a young student who, disillusioned with his life, finds himself at the Condé amongst fellow misfits, observing the coming and going of the clientele. The Condé café thus acts as an anchor in this novel and for many it is a 'refuge contre [...] la grisaille de la vie' (p. 29).

Our principal interest for the purposes of this thesis lies in the characters of Jacqueline and Roland. Having met at one of Guy de Vere's sessions, Roland and Jacqueline immediately form a bond and they recognise in one another a kindred spirit. Their

understanding of one another is such that Roland remarks, ‘j’avais dû la connaître dans une vie antérieure’ (p. 104), and when he later recalls his relationship with Jacqueline, he stresses their similarity:

J’étais convaincu que nous nous ressemblions l’un et l’autre, puisque nous avons souvent des transmissions de pensée. Nous étions sur la même longueur d’onde. Nés la même année et le même mois. (P. 139)

The couple share troubled backgrounds, and they both wish to erase their memories and to cut ties with their past. They seek refuge in what Roland terms ‘les zones neutres’,¹⁹⁸ living in hotels or ‘lieux de passage’ alongside ‘des absents’ (pp. 110-11). Roland and Jacqueline thus occupy the position of outsiders and they appear to be disconnected from the values of those around them, remaining, much like the rest of the clientele at the Condé café, on the margins of society. Neither Roland nor Jacqueline is comfortable with their status as outsider and the couple dream of escaping to another city with the aim of starting their lives anew. They attend the sessions of Guy de Vere whom they hope will enlighten them and enable them to overcome their nihilistic outlook.

However, although Roland recalls being on the same ‘longueur d’onde’ as Jacqueline, he retrospectively recognises that ‘il existait une différence entre nous’ (p. 139); something had led Jacqueline to take her own life, where he had not himself felt the need to do so. Significantly, Roland’s account of his ‘experience’ of the eternal return is immediately preceded and followed by his recollections of Jacqueline’s self-inflicted death. Equally significant is the foregrounding of Nietzsche in Roland’s narrative; he borrows Karl Löwith’s treatise on Nietzsche and studies it in great detail so that Jacqueline recounts how ‘[il lui] parle souvent de l’Éternel Retour’ (p. 68). In contrasting the experience of eternal return with Jacqueline’s suicide, Roland implies that his affirmation of the concept accounts for the

¹⁹⁸ Roland has written a text on the subject of ‘zones neutres’, in which he lists, by arrondissement, the roads and areas of Paris which he would describe as ‘neutral zones’, ‘des *no man’s land* où l’on était à la lisière de tout, en transit, ou même en suspens’. See p. 108.

‘difference’ that existed between himself and Jacqueline. One could go further, therefore, and propose that Nietzsche saved him.

What is interesting in the relationship between Jacqueline and Roland is the closeness of their personalities and desires, and the disparity of their outcome. This may be accounted for by Roland’s revaluation of values, a process which is inherent in the affirmation of the eternal return. Neither Roland nor Jacqueline are capable of definitively overcoming their nihilism, but while this powerlessness drives Jacqueline to despair, Roland, on the contrary, recognises the process of ‘attempting’ as being of greater value than achieving. As such, he does not overcome his nihilism, nor does he find any lasting solution to it, but rather he overcomes himself. Nietzsche aligns this self-overcoming with the will to power, the process of becoming, the desire for creativity and the pleasure in opposition and resistance.¹⁹⁹

4.2.1 Jacqueline’s downfall

Modiano does not abandon Thérèse’s oppressive world of return in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*; rather it is re-explored in the voice of Jacqueline (also known as Louki), one of the multiple narrators of this text, whom in many ways might be considered as an extension of the character of Thérèse, or even as Thérèse herself, in the wake (quite literally) of her attempted suicide. Several common factors enable us to align the characters of Jacqueline and Thérèse. For example, Thérèse commits suicide, so as to definitively ‘couper les ponts’, and she awakens amongst new-born babies in a hospital ward. When Jacqueline begins to frequent the Condé café in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, we are told:

Alors, si elle est venue au Condé en Octobre, c’est qu’elle avait rompu avec toute une partie de sa vie et qu’elle voulait faire ce qu’on appelle dans les romans : PEAU NEUVE. D’ailleurs, un indice me prouve que je ne dois pas avoir tort. Au Condé, on lui a donné un

¹⁹⁹ See Nietzsche’s passage ‘On Self-Overcoming’ in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 88-90.

nouveau prénom. Et Zacharias, ce jour-là, a même parlé de baptême. Une seconde naissance en quelque sorte. (P. 24)

Jacqueline also invents a mythical student status for herself. She thus repeats the lie that Thérèse told the pharmacist in *La Petite Bijou*, assuring her husband that she is a student at the *Ecole des langues orientales* (p.49). A pharmacist too features in Jacqueline's narrative:

Depuis que je quittais l'appartement la nuit, j'avais de brefs accès de panique ou plutôt des "baisses de tension", comme avait dit le pharmacien de la place Blanche, un soir que j'essayais de lui expliquer ce que j'éprouvais. (P. 88)

Equally, place Blanche plays a central role in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, just as it did in *La Petite Bijou*, and it is once more a magnetic force and a site for eternal recurrence:

Un après-midi ensoleillé d'automne où la vie aurait recommencé de zéro. Après tout, c'était dans cette zone qu'avait commencé sa vie, à cette Jacqueline Delanque... Il me semblait avoir rendez-vous avec elle. A la hauteur de la place Blanche, le cœur me battait un peu et je me sentais ému et même intimidé. (P. 60)

If we are to view Jacqueline as Thérèse reborn, we must equally recognise the futility of suicide or flight. Despite having abandoned her past life and started anew with her 'peau neuve', Jacqueline remains troubled and unhappy and she seeks comfort and release in cocaine and ether.

Like Thérèse, Jacqueline conceives of the eternal return as something negative and inherently oppressive. Returning with Roland to place Blanche, an area of the Paris which harbours troubled childhood memories for her, she recalls that 'j'étais prise de vertige':

J'avais l'impression que si je traversais la place, je tomberais dans les pommes. J'avais peur. [...] Oui, tout recommençait pour moi, comme si le rendez-vous avec ces gens n'était qu'un prétexte et qu'on avait chargé Roland de me ramener en douceur au bercail. (Pp. 67-68)

In this context, Jacqueline conceives of the eternal return as involving an oppressive return of the same. However, Modiano introduces an alternative portrayal of the eternal return in *Dans*

le café de la jeunesse perdue; rather than conceiving of it as a cosmological return, the concept now represents the inability to definitively achieve. Thus in this new formulation, the eternal return insists that ‘whatever [we] achieve will come undone, and [we] will need to redo it.’²⁰⁰

In this alternative conception, Jacqueline experiences the eternal return as something negative because it hinders her from permanently achieving her goals and prevents her from being happy. Modiano expresses similar displeasure when discussing his own writing process, in which he describes the frustration he feels in his inability to definitively deal with a particular subject:

A chaque fois que je finissais un livre, j'avais l'impression que je pourrais repartir sur quelque chose de nouveau. J'ai d'ailleurs la même impression avec ce nouveau livre, *L'horizon*. L'impression d'avoir déblayé. D'avoir suffisamment déblayé pour pouvoir repartir. Mais tout cela n'est qu'une fuite en avant... Après chaque livre, j'ai donc cette impression d'avoir suffisamment déblayé ce qui est devant moi - ou derrière moi - pour pouvoir enfin aborder quelque chose de nouveau. Mais cette impression est illusoire. C'est donc une sensation assez désagréable. C'est comme si vous vouliez dégager quelque chose pour pouvoir enfin traiter une autre chose, comme si vous vouliez vous débarrasser de certaines choses de votre passé, de votre vie, pour pouvoir enfin partir d'un nouveau pied et avoir le champ libre, mais, finalement, cela ne marche jamais comme ça. Ce sentiment est une illusion.²⁰¹

Jacqueline's goal, to ‘découvrir un sens à la vie’ (p. 118) is thus constantly frustrated by a situation of eternal return. Although she experiences brief episodes of overcoming and enlightenment, she is unable to sustain these achievements and they always unravel, so that her life consists of a cycle of highs and lows, of darkness and light.

²⁰⁰ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p. 272.

²⁰¹ François Busnel, ‘Patrick Modiano: "Mon Paris n'est pas un Paris de nostalgie mais un Paris rêvé"', *Lire*, March 2010 <http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/modiano-mon-paris-n-est-pas-un-paris-de-nostalgie-mais-un-paris-reve_852746.html> [site accessed 24 October 2011].

When Roland reflects on the past, he remembers Jacqueline predominantly as a shadowy figure. The novel begins with the statement: ‘Des deux entrées du café, elle empruntait toujours la plus étroite, celle qu’on appelait la porte de l’ombre’ (p. 11). Later, when Roland encounters Guy de Vere in the street many years after Jacqueline’s death, he notices that they are ‘quelques mètres du Condé et de la porte par laquelle entrait toujours Louki, celle de l’ombre’ (p. 130). Roland’s impression of Jacqueline as a shadowy figure is further fuelled by his perception of her relationship with a friend, Jeanette (significantly nicknamed ‘tête de mort’), whom Roland considers as Jacqueline’s ‘part d’ombre’ (p. 115). Like the pharmacist in *La Petite Bijou*, Jeanette proffers drugs as a cure, or at least a respite, from nihilistic anxiety. For this reason, Jacqueline is often in the company of Jeanette when she is in despair, and significantly she is with her when she commits suicide.

In her own narrative, Jacqueline too recalls her preference for shadow. She thus describes her night time childhood wanderings in Paris during which she traversed the bright neon lights of the boulevard de Clichy:

Orange, vert émeraude, bleu nuit, jaune sable, des couleurs trop violentes qui me donnaient la sensation d’être [...] dans [un] film ou dans un rêve. Un rêve ou un cauchemar [...] Je crois que je marchais sur l’autre trottoir, celui de l’ombre. (P. 75)

However, she equally recounts moments of strength and positivity, of joy and optimism. Thus, although she recalls her youth as causing her great anxiety, particularly on the occasions where her mother left her alone at night whilst she worked at the Moulin-Rouge, her dark memories are punctuated by recollections of excitement and adventure:

J’ai éprouvé cette sensation d’angoisse qui me prenait souvent la nuit et qui était encore plus forte que la peur- cette sensation d’être désormais livrée à moi-même sans aucun recours. [...] Mais d’autres soirs, l’angoisse disparaissait et j’attendais impatientement le départ de ma mère pour sortir. [...] Dehors, je ne suivais pas le trottoir de l’ombre, mais celui du Moulin-Rouge. Les lumières me semblaient encore plus violents que celles des films du Mexico. Une ivresse me prenait si légère... J’en avais éprouvé une semblable le

soir où j'avais bu une coupe de champagne au Sans-Souci. J'avais la vie devant moi. Comment avais-je pu me recroqueviller en rasant les murs? Et de quoi avais-je peur? (Pp. 77-78)

In this recollection, Jacqueline chooses to step out of the shadow, and follows instead a path of bright, dazzling light. Elsewhere, her overcoming of nihilism is described not as an emergence from shadow, but as a climbing of heights, thus mirroring Nietzsche's depiction of Zarathustra, the 'wanderer and mountain climber':²⁰²

Le soir, à la sortie de la librairie, j'étais étonnée de me retrouver sur le boulevard de Clichy. Je n'avais pas très envie de descendre jusqu'au Canter. Mes pas m'entraînaient vers le haut. J'éprouvais maintenant du plaisir à monter les pentes ou les escaliers. Je comptais chaque marche. Au chiffre 30, je savais que j'étais sauvée. Beaucoup plus tard, Guy de Vere m'a fait lire *Horizons Perdus*, l'histoire de gens qui gravissent les montagnes du Tibet vers le monastère de Shangri-La pour apprendre les secrets de la vie et de la sagesse. Mais ce n'est pas la peine d'aller si loin. Je me rappelais mes promenades de la nuit. Pour moi, Montmartre, c'était le Tibet. Il me suffisait de la pente de la rue Caulaincourt. Là-haut, devant le château des Brouillards, je respirais pour la première fois de ma vie. (P. 94)

In a further, more detailed description, Jacqueline's overcoming takes place at dawn, at the emergence of daylight, and involves her once more climbing the hill at Montmartre:

Un jour, à l'aube, je me suis échappée du Canter où j'étais avec Jeanette. [...] J'étouffais. J'ai inventé une excuse pour aller prendre l'air. Je me suis mise à courir. [...] Je me laissais envahir par une ivresse que l'alcool ou la neige ne m'aurait jamais procurée. J'ai monté la pente jusqu'au château des Brouillards. J'étais bien décidée à ne plus jamais revoir la bande du Canter. [...] Il y a une rue, un peu plus haut, où j'aimerais bien revenir un jour ou l'autre. Je la suivais ce matin-là. [...] Là-bas, la rue débouchait en plein ciel, comme si elle menait au bord d'une falaise. J'avais avec ce sentiment de légèreté qui vous prend quelquefois dans les rêves. Vous ne craignez plus rien, tous les dangers sont dérisoires. [...] Vous êtes invincible. Je marchais, impatiente d'arriver au bout, là où il n'y avait plus que le bleu du ciel et le vide. Quel mot traduirait mon état d'esprit ? Je ne dispose que d'un très pauvre vocabulaire. Ivresse ? Extase ? Ravissement ? En tout cas, cette rue m'était familière. Il me semblait l'avoir suivie auparavant. J'atteindrais bientôt le

²⁰² Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 121

bord de la falaise et je me jetterais dans le vide. Quel bonheur de flotter dans l'air et de connaître enfin cette sensation d'apesanteur que je recherchais depuis toujours. (Pp. 95-96)

Jacqueline's nihilism is thus punctuated with moments of its overcoming, but as 'moments' they necessarily end and this causes her to despair. She thus continually searches for 'cette sensation d'apesanteur' but finds that its attainment is only transitory. As such, she recalls that, despite her experiences of overcoming her nihilism, 'la vie reprenait toujours le dessus' (p. 95) and that it consequently continued 'avec des hauts et des bas' (p. 96). Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Jacqueline thus realises that 'whatever may come to [her] as destiny and experience – it will involve wandering and mountain climbing'.²⁰³

In his interpretation of the eternal return in *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, Bernard Reginster discusses the concept in relation to permanence and transience. Whilst acknowledging the general assumption that 'eternity' is understood in terms of infinity, Reginster suggests that it equally implies *permanence*, noting that 'something is eternal inasmuch as it escapes the temporal order, which is the order of "change" or "becoming"' (p. 224). He continues this line of investigation by drawing a distinction between wishing the eternity of a moment, and wishing its eternal recurrence. If we are to wish the eternity of a moment, he suggests, that moment must be 'a source of *permanent* satisfaction, a kind of perfection that, at the very least, would not be altered or corrupted by permanence'. Alternatively, he notes that the desire for the eternity of a moment might indicate that it is not perfect 'simply by virtue of lacking permanence, of being subject to change' (p. 225). In both cases, by wishing the eternity of a moment, Reginster proposes that we are acknowledging and anticipating its end, and that this is cause for regret and disappointment.

²⁰³ Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 121

Recounting her brief experience of joyous liberation as she climbs the hill at Montmartre, Jacqueline aligns this overcoming with feelings of ecstasy, drunkenness and rapture. Her account is brought abruptly to an end, however, with the blunt and disappointed statement that ‘et puis la vie a continué, avec des hauts et des bas’ and that she continued to have ‘[des jours] de cafard’ (p. 96). This forms the last statement in Jacqueline’s narrative and we later realise through Roland’s account that she had subsequently chosen to take her own life. It is possible that Jacqueline suffers from nihilistic despair because, like Thérèse, she believes her goal to ‘découvrir un sens à la vie’ to be unrealisable (p. 118). Her brief episodes of clarity and overcoming are not sustainable and she does not wish to have a life of highs and lows; rather she seeks the means to ‘[voir] plus clair en [elle]-même’, to attain a feeling of contentment and ‘légèreté’ and to make this state *permanent*.

As such, we might conclude that Jacqueline wishes the eternity of the moment, which may in fact be ‘*necessarily* [as opposed to contingently] impossible’ because the world is not hospitable to the value of permanence at all, and ‘no change in the particular circumstances of [her] would make a difference’.²⁰⁴ Roland recalls how Jacqueline was terrified by the prospect that one cannot make things permanently disappear. As such, every now and then, she is overcome by ‘un peur panique, [...] à la perspective que les comparses que vous avez laissés derrière vous puissent vous retrouver et vous demander des comptes’, and she hopes that one day she will be ‘définitivement hors de leur portée. Là-haut, dans l’air des cimes. Ou l’air du large’ (pp. 118-19). However, whilst Zarathustra discovers the necessary interrelatedness of ‘peak and abyss’ Modiano’s narrator of *Voyage de nocces*, for example, also eloquently reminds us of the impossibility of achieving permanence:

Ce sentiment de vide et de remords vous submerge un jour. Puis comme une mare il se retire et disparaît. Mais il finit par revenir en force et elle ne pouvait pas s’en débarrasser. Moi non plus. (P.158)

²⁰⁴ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life; Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, pp. 24-25.

For Jacqueline, the prospect that she will never permanently overcome this ‘sentiment de vide’ is defeating, giving rise to her descent into nihilistic despair.

4.2.2 Roland’s affirmation of the eternal return

As we have seen, Roland and Jacqueline have much in common. The couple were born in the same year and month; they share ‘des transmissions de pensées’ as though they are ‘sur la même longueur d’onde’ (pp. 138-39). Like Jacqueline, Roland experiences highs and lows or periods of darkness and enlightenment. Yet, as he recalls, ‘il existait une différence entre nous’ (p. 139); unlike Jacqueline, he does not despair to the point of suicide.

It is tempting to consider Roland and Jacqueline as forming simple binaries of light/darkness, strength/weakness, overcoming/despair and to suggest that Roland does not resort to suicide because he has succeeded in a way that Jacqueline could not. However Roland does not permanently overcome nihilism, nor does he live a life of complete contentment and enlightenment. Roland’s situation is no different to that of Jacqueline, but his outlook on life is altered through his experience of the eternal return and in affirming Nietzsche’s concept he is ultimately liberated.

On the day that he ‘experienced’ the eternal return, Roland recalls that he was ‘heureux’ and ‘léger’, and that he felt ‘une certaine ivresse’ adding that ‘la ligne d’horizon était loin devant nous, là-bas, vers l’infini’ (p. 144). His account closely resembles Jacqueline’s description of overcoming as she climbs the hill at Montmartre; it also takes place in the morning, ‘par l’une de ces matinées limpides de froid, de soleil et de ciel bleu’ (p. 144). However, while Jacqueline’s account ends with the weary discovery that her life is to continue with highs and lows, Roland’s is immediately followed by his experience of the eternal return:

Nous sommes arrivés sur la place de l’Eglise, devant la station de métro. Et là, je peux le dire maintenant que je n’ai plus rien à perdre: j’ai senti pour la seule fois de ma vie, ce

qu'était l'Eternel Retour. Jusque-là, je m'efforçais de lire des ouvrages sur le sujet, avec une bonne volonté d'autodidacte. C'était juste avant de descendre les escaliers de la station de métro Eglise-d'Auteuil. Pourquoi à cet endroit? Je n'en sais rien et cela n'a aucune importance. Je suis resté un moment immobile et je lui ai serré le bras. 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. Pas besoin de consulter ma montre. Je savais qu'il était midi. (P. 145)

Significantly, Roland's experience begins in the morning and proceeds to midday, a progression that does not take place in Jacqueline's description of her overcoming. Nietzsche frequently refers to midday in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which he announces the arrival of 'the great noon' (p. 137), describing it as the 'perfect' hour which is 'round and ripe' (p.223-24), and the way to 'new dawns' (p. 158). In his discussion of the symbolic significance of midday in Nietzsche's writings, Nicolas J. Perella describes midday as constituting for Nietzsche the hour of 'perfect latency and potentiality', the moment at which 'fruition is imminent'.²⁰⁵ Thus, noon does not merely symbolise an hour of attaining some kind of knowledge, but rather the ' stillest' hour is charged with imminent (and infinite) potential and motion, embodied in the concept of the eternal return. Roland's experience of the eternal return is far removed from the oppressive fatalistic depiction found in *La Petite Bijou*. Presenting the eternal return as a concept in which goals are never really achieved, it is here depicted as being positive and liberating, since it represents constant process, flux, and infinite potential.

Where Jacqueline despairs at the prospect that 'whatever [s]he achieves will come undone, and [s]he will need to redo it',²⁰⁶ Roland's affirmation of the eternal return enables him to recognise this insistence on process as being liberating. In his discussion of the

²⁰⁵ Nicolas J. Perella, *Midday in Italian Literature: Variations on an Archetypal Theme* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 24

²⁰⁶ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p. 272.

question of permanence and transience, Bernard Reginster examines the implication of wishing the eternal recurrence, rather than the eternity of a moment:

Here, too, the invocation of eternity is meant to express how perfect, how fully satisfying, that moment is. The crucial difference [...] is that in wishing the eternal recurrence of that moment, I acknowledge that its perfection is impermanent. This in turn can mean two things. First, it means that there are perfections that are not altered by their impermanence. Second, and more radically, it suggests that there are perfections to which impermanence might actually be essential. These perfections are such that permanence would actually undermine them. So, the wishing for the eternal recurrence of a moment is not only suited to the expression of impermanent perfections, it is also *not* suited to the expression of satisfactions whose perfection requires permanence. (P. 225)

In desiring the eternal recurrence then, we effectively align ideas of perfection with impermanence so that we now value transience and the ‘temporally extended process that involves change’ (p. 226). Valuing impermanence over permanence or becoming over being is ultimately liberating because we no longer equate success with the definitive attainment of our goals. On the contrary, if we value becoming, we are successful because we enjoy the activity of pursuing a goal, whilst the end result remains unimportant.

Where Karl Löwith’s interpretation of the eternal return identifies a conflict between Nietzsche’s ideas on the will to power and the eternal return, this alternative interpretation sees the two ideas as going hand in hand. If life consists of a series of temporally extended and finite processes, we must continually create since we cannot reach a state of permanent satisfaction, and as such the will must be constantly active. In eternally pursuing goals which can never be attained, the will is therefore destined to suffer. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche elucidates the relationship between suffering, impermanence and creativity:

Creating – that is the great redemption from suffering, and life’s becoming light. But in order for the creator to be, suffering is needed and much transformation. Indeed much bitter dying must be in your life, you creators! Therefore are you advocates and justifiers of all that is not everlasting. (P. 66)

While Roland's affirmation of the eternal return might constitute the 'difference' that exists between him and Jacqueline, another significant factor distinguishes him; he is a creator, where Jacqueline is not. Roland is a writer and during his relationship with Jacqueline is working on a text about 'les zones neutres' (p. 133). Their differing outlook on life becomes apparent in their contrasting approaches to literature. Faithfully attending Guy de Vere's sessions and studying his recommended reading-matter, Jacqueline seeks solutions, a bolt of enlightenment, or the key to some permanent state of satisfaction. By contrast, Roland is interested in Guy de Vere's books as products of creativity. He thus recalls:

Je crois que nous ne lisons pas ces ouvrages de la même façon. Elle espérait y découvrir un sens à la vie, alors que c'était la sonorité des mots et la musique des phrases qui me captivaient. (P. 118)

In his approach to reading, then, Roland displays a preference for creative process, the becoming of a narrative, whilst its ultimate message is less important to him.

4.3 Conclusion

Roland's narrative in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* marks a transition from a conception of the eternal recurrence as a cosmological phenomenon and its ensuing oppressive logic that our outcome is fated, to one in which the eternal return is deemed positive and liberating. The former framework is exemplified by Modiano's *La Petite Bijou* whose narrator, Thérèse, finds herself trapped in 'un présent éternel'; she is unable to consider the future, since any progression she hopes to make is thwarted and undermined by the fatalistic return of the same. Thérèse reappears in the form of Jacqueline/Louki in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, who similarly cannot find a way to progress towards her liberation so that she recalls how 'je vivais au présent sans me poser des questions' (p. 70).

Conversely, Roland's affirmation of the eternal return leads to the revelation of horizons. Embodying 'inachèvement', this second interpretation of the eternal return promotes all that is becoming so that the future remains open-ended and therefore filled with potential. In order to affirm the eternal return, Roland must revalue his values so that he no longer seeks certainty, fixity/stability, limitation, coherence and purpose. The affirmation of the eternal return thus entails the willing of a world that is fluid, and without structure and meaning; a world, in other words, that is 'pure becoming' in which the will remains constantly creative.

Modiano's former depiction of the eternal return is possibly informed by his reading of Karl Löwith, who interprets Nietzsche's eternal return as a concept that is intended to reveal to us the futility of all willing and to encourage us to enter a state of will-lessness. Conversely, since the publication of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, Modiano appears to present the eternal return as the embodiment of 'pure becoming' and in this context, the will is eternally active because it is unable to permanently achieve its goals. As such, we see a transition from a portrayal of will-lessness to the depiction of the will to power.

Modiano describes this sense of will-lessness with particular detail in *Villa Triste*. Here the narrator is offered the use of a friend's villa and for the duration of his stay he ceases to engage with the world, living instead in an isolated and oneiric state in which times passes as though in slow motion:

J'avais la certitude que le temps s'était arrêté pour de bon. Nous flottions. Nos gestes avaient une infinie lenteur et lorsque nous nous déplaçons, c'était centimètre par centimètre. [...] Tout flottait autour de nous. (Pp. 177-78)

Importantly, the narrator does not wish to leave this villa as doing so will reintroduce him to the hectic and endless world of fluctuation:

Ne plus jamais sortir de cette villa. Ne jamais quitter cette pièce [...] Chez moi cela correspondait à un horreur du mouvement, une inquiétude vis-à-vis de tout ce qui bouge,

ce qui passe et ce qui change, le désir de ne plus marcher sur du sable mouvant, de me fixer quelque part, au besoin de me pétrifier. (P. 178)

The narrator of *Villa Triste* thus expresses his revulsion of a world that is in constant flux and which is ceaselessly becoming. Implied in this attitude is the estimation that becoming causes suffering and a sense of displeasure. A situation of eternal change and mutation hinders potential for fixity, and the will becomes frustrated because it can never definitively achieve its goals. Seeking to avoid this suffering, many of Modiano's protagonists have attempted to disengage from a world that is eternally becoming. In *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, for example, Jimmy Sarano creates a life for himself that need not involve willing at all. 'Il vaut mieux rester immobile une bonne fois pour toutes', he remarks, 'où aller désormais? Ici je suis arrivé au bout du monde et le temps s'est arrêté' (p. 24).

In affirming the eternal return, however, Roland of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* undertakes a revaluation of values which enables him to recognise the value of becoming. This in turn involves a revaluation of suffering, whereby it is seen as something positive and desirable. This recognition and affirmation of suffering, the strength and capability in 'seizing problem of existence by the horns'²⁰⁷ and enjoying the challenge of doing so accounts for what Nietzsche terms Dionysian or tragic wisdom.

Roland's experience of the eternal return is revelatory and filled with awe but when the affirmation of the eternal return takes place again in Modiano's *L'Horizon*, its protagonist, Bosmans, evokes a sensation of tranquillity and quiet understanding. Bosmans is about to meet Margaret Le Coz, a friend and lover who had suddenly disappeared many years before. On his way to the bookshop where she is working, he experiences the eternal return:

²⁰⁷ Excerpt from a letter dated 1888 in Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, p. 5.

Il était fatigué d'avoir marché si longtemps. Mais il éprouvait pour une fois un sentiment de sérénité, avec la certitude d'être revenu à l'endroit exact d'où il était parti un jour, à la même place, à la même heure et à la même saison, comme deux aiguilles se rejoignent sur le cadran quand il était midi. Il flottait dans une demi-torpeur en se laissant bercer par les cris des enfants du square et le murmure des conversations autour de lui. Sept heures du soir. Rod Miller lui avait dit qu'elle laissait la librairie ouverte très tard. (Pp. 171-72)

Bosmans' account mirrors that of Zarathustra in the fourth and final part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; Zarathustra's shadow of doubt encroaches so that he briefly 'loses his way' and is disconcerted by his lack of goal and he runs alone 'so that things clear up around [him] again'. At noon, Zarathustra is exhausted from his running and under the midday sun, he falls into a half slumber, 'like a ship that sailed into its stillest bay – now it leans against the earth, weary of the long journeys and uncertain seas.' His world becomes still, perfect, and 'ripe'; he is replenished and ready to face his task once more (pp. 222-24). Roland's youthful affirmation of the eternal return in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* might thus be seen as a precursor to Modiano's following novel, *L'Horizon*, which is imbued with Dionysian wisdom.

5) Dionysian Wisdom and ‘lignes de fuite vers l’horizon’

The title of Modiano’s 2010 novel, *L’Horizon*, suggests a new perspective, an optimism, the potential and anticipation of something yet to come. This seems at odds with the retrospection generally associated with Modiano’s writings and is at first glance surprising given that this novel too, like so many before it, involves a venture into the past. However, what differs in *L’Horizon* is not the presence of this retrospective journey, but rather the outlook of Modiano’s protagonist, Bosmans, in his approach to his task.

The departure that *L’Horizon* marks from Modiano’s previous publications has been reflected in the critical reaction to it in the popular media. In her review of Modiano’s novel for *Le Magazine-Littéraire*, for example, Minh Tran Huy notes that ‘au paysage urbain et existentiel se superpose le paysage littéraire, avec cette invitation permanente à (re)parcourir les autres textes de Modiano’. ‘*L’Horizon*’ she continues ‘ouvre cependant une perspective nouvelle [...] Pour la première fois, rien n’a changé et tout a changé dans ce nouveau livre de Modiano’.²⁰⁸ Similarly, for *Télérama* Nathalie Crom describes *L’Horizon* as representing

²⁰⁸ Tran Huy ‘L’Horizon: Critique’.

‘une variation subtilement nouvelle’ in Modiano’s œuvre,²⁰⁹ while for *France Today*, Julien Bisson describes the novel as marking ‘a new step’.²¹⁰

In her review of *L’Horizon*, Minh Tran Huy usefully establishes a connection between the new forward-looking perspective of this novel and the question of the eternal return. Suggesting that the introduction of the words ‘avenir’ and ‘horizon’ is related to a liberation from the circle of the eternal return, she writes, ‘jamais l’auteur n’a été si près de briser le cercle de l’“éternel retour” qui fascinait l’un des héros de *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, de quitter l’ombre pour rejoindre la lumière, le réel, le présent et retrouver - peut-être - ce qui a été perdu.’²¹¹ Tran Huy clearly interprets the eternal return as something inherently oppressive and negative, from which it is necessary to escape. As such she shares the view of academics such as Jacques Lecarme, Claude Burgelin and Christine Jérusalem, who, as we noted in the previous chapter, have considered the concept in terms of its relation to melancholy and sorrow in Modiano’s earlier novels.

However, far from being interrupted or dispersed, the circle of the eternal return remains intact in *L’Horizon*. Furthermore, Modiano specifically insists on it in the concluding pages of the novel, which do not suggest that any breaking away from an eternal return has taken place. On the contrary, the narrator remarks that ‘ce qui avait lieu une fois, se répétait à l’infini’, and in the final paragraph we are told that Bosmans ‘éprouvait pour une fois un sentiment de sérénité, avec la certitude d’être revenu à l’endroit exact d’où il était parti un jour, à la même place, à la même heure et à la même saison’ (P. 171). Thus, it seems more likely that the new contemplation of the horizon does not mark an escape from the cycle of eternal return but rather it indicates a change in the author’s interpretation of the concept.

²⁰⁹ Nathalie Crom, ‘L’Horizon: Critique’ in *Télérama* n° 3138, 1 March 2010 <<http://www.telerama.fr/livres/l-horizon,53102.php>> [site accessed 18 July 2011].

²¹⁰ Julien Bisson, ‘Patrick Modiano: Literary Giant’, *France Today*, 22 August 2010 <http://www.francetoday.com/articles/2010/08/22/patrick_modiano_literary_giant.html> [site accessed 23 October 2011].

²¹¹ Tran Huy, ‘L’Horizon: Critique’.

This chapter argues that an affirmation of the eternal return has taken place in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and in its wake we find a new novel imbued with what Nietzsche terms Dionysian wisdom.

This chapter begins by elucidating Nietzsche's interest in and proposals for Dionysian wisdom, establishing the relation between the Dionysian, the eternal return, suffering, the will to power and creativity. It subsequently addresses the task of pursuing the past, exploring Nietzsche's proposals for a Dionysian historiography in which he stresses the importance of self-conscious ignorance and creativity. The chapter subsequently turns its attention to Modiano's pursuit of the past suggesting that, superficially at least, his writings appear to conform to Nietzsche's depiction of Dionysian historiography. Rather than presenting conclusive narratives of the past, they generate further questions and lines of inquiry, thus indicating a valuation of the process of the search. However, the chapter demonstrates the extent to which Modiano, his narrators and protagonists are frustrated by their inability to reach conclusions; they do not derive pleasure from the unknown and as such, they cannot be deemed to possess Dionysian wisdom.

The transition into Dionysian wisdom begins to take place in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* but it is more perceptible in Modiano's subsequent publication, *L'Horizon*, whose protagonist, Bosmans, might be seen as the first in Modiano's œuvre to truly possess Dionysian wisdom. This is indicated in his approach to the past whereby, focusing less on the search for 'that which was', he demonstrates a pleasure in the exploration of what might have been. Bosmans is thus creatively engaged with the past, which enables the opening of horizons. This 'ouverture' is facilitated by the 'ligne de fuite' which is involved in the actualisation of connections and potential, and the deterritorialisation of spatial and temporal boundaries, rendering the world entirely 'flou'.

5.1 Nietzsche's Dionysus

Dionysus is a key figure in Nietzsche's thought to the extent that he describes himself in his foreword to *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* as 'a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus' (p. 3). The Greek god appears throughout Nietzsche's writings and can be associated with many of the philosopher's key ideas. Dionysus is first foregrounded in *The Birth of Tragedy* where Nietzsche aligns the god with 'intoxication', 'ecstasy and sublimity' and the breakdown of 'rigid, hostile barriers' (pp. 17-18) and he examines the symbiotic relationship between Dionysus and Apollo, the god of 'semblance' (p. 15). Later however, Nietzsche places his entire philosophy into a Dionysian framework and in the chapter 'Why I am a Destiny' in his autobiography *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, he summarises his philosophical achievement as involving the unmasking of Christian morality and the resurrection of Dionysus.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is useful to note that Nietzsche aligns the Dionysian with the breakdown of limits and boundaries; under Dionysus the world loses its meaning and order and it becomes fluid and without territory or demarcation. As such, Dionysus is seen to be representative of a world in a state of becoming and Nietzsche therefore recognises the potential of the Dionysian to be horrifying and disconcerting but also thrilling and liberating. Secondly, the Dionysian is related in Nietzsche's thought to suffering since suffering is inherent in a state of eternal becoming. One is deemed to have Dionysian wisdom, in Nietzsche's opinion, if one can value and appreciate suffering.

5.1.1 *Dionysus against the crucified*

In order to clarify his concept of Dionysian wisdom, Nietzsche presents Dionysus in opposition to 'the Crucified'. In his estimation, Dionysus is the symbol of the affirmation of life, while the Crucified represents its negation. The Dionysian and Christian positions both

involve suffering, ‘life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation’; however, they diverge not in regard to their martyrdom but in the significance of it:

One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic [Dionysian] meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be the path to a holy existence; in the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering. The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so.²¹²

In the Christian paradigm then, suffering must be endured and will be ultimately redeemed in an afterlife. The Dionysian perspective, on the contrary, considers suffering as both necessary and *desirable* in the current life, with Zarathustra describing himself as the ‘advocate of life, the advocate of suffering’ (p. 174). In addition to this, Nietzsche suggests that it takes considerable strength to adopt a Dionysian perspective, whilst he considers the Christian as weak, unable to face the inherent anguish in life and therefore in need of some justification for it in the form of an afterlife.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche insists that under the influence of Dionysus, ‘pain does not count as an objection to life’ (p. 70):

He who has the ‘most abysmal thought’, none the less finds in it no objection to existence, not even to the eternal recurrence of existence [...] [he is] the eternal Yes to all things, ‘the tremendous unbounded ‘Yes and Amen’ ... ‘Into every abyss I still bear the blessing of my affirmation’ ... (P. 77)

Similarly, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we are thus told that ‘cold souls, mules, the blind, the drunk – these I do not call brave of heart. Whoever has heart knows fear, but *conquers fear*, sees the abyss, but with *pride*. Whoever sees the abyss, but with eagle’s eyes, whoever *grasps* the abyss with eagle’s talons: he has courage’ (p. 233). The Dionysian thus entails having the

²¹² *The Will to Power*, pp. 542-43.

strength to affirm and embrace suffering and a willingness and pleasure in encountering resistance.

5.1.2 Dionysus against Schopenhauer

It is useful to examine Nietzsche's formulation of Dionysian wisdom in relation to Schopenhauerian investigations into the will. For Schopenhauer, both being and becoming entail suffering. 'The basis of all willing' he asserts, 'is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin [any animal] is therefore destined to pain':

If ... it lacks objects of willing, because it is at once deprived of them again by too easy a satisfaction, a fearful emptiness and boredom comes over it; in other words its being and its existence itself becomes an intolerable burden for it. Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents.²¹³

As such, becoming involves suffering because the need which drives the will may never be satiated. On the other hand, if willing is a necessary component of all animal life, the satiation of the will can only lead to frustration.

Nietzsche draws on the idea that permanent satisfaction is impossible to achieve in his conception of the eternal return, which in turn forms a necessary component in his evocation of Dionysian wisdom because it embodies a suffering of the highest order. In essence, as we have seen, the eternal return brings about a situation of endless becoming; man has an innate will towards something, a will to achieve but the eternal return denies us any permanent satisfaction. Thus the will remains constantly active, restless and toiling in its search to attain its goals but it is equally conscious of the impossibility of doing so. This should surely give rise to a hopeless situation and, in Schopenhauer's formulation, it leads to pessimism and the outlook that life necessarily entails suffering and boredom. However Nietzsche's Dionysian

²¹³ Arthur Schopenhauer quoted in Julian Young, *Schopenhauer*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 210.

philosophy differs from Schopenhauer in that it proposes a way in which we can value such suffering. For Nietzsche it is precisely our inability to attain permanent satisfaction (in other words, our suffering) which enables the will to remain active and creative in the first place, and in the will's eternal toiling against resistance, myriad new possibilities and horizons are created.

5.1.3 Suffering and the will to power

Nietzsche's alternative proposals enable us to understand the *necessity* of suffering but we are in danger of attempting to justify it by suggesting, as the Christian might, that it is a pre-condition of something good; in other words, that suffering is a pre-condition of creativity. However, in the Dionysian framework, as Reginster points out, suffering is a constituent and not a precondition of something good:

As Nietzsche sees it, the good lies in the activity of overcoming resistance – it is the will to power. From the standpoint of the ethics of power, suffering is not just something that, under the circumstances of this world, individuals have to go through in order to be happy; it is rather part of what their very happiness *consists* of. (P. 231).

In the Dionysian framework then, we do not relish suffering because once it is overcome our life will be better, but rather we relish the very challenge itself of overcoming resistance because it renders the will creative and active. In this formulation, suffering is seen to be liberating, because all 'willing liberates'.²¹⁴

5.2 The will to power and the pursuit of knowledge

The logic of the will to power can be more readily understood when considered in relation to the pursuit of knowledge. For example, despite the impossibility of knowing completely, we still strive to attain knowledge; in other words we endeavour to attain a goal whilst also

²¹⁴ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 110.

acknowledging that this goal is unattainable. We might reasonably conclude that significant pleasure is to be gained in the process of inquiry itself and, therefore, in the resistance we face when *seeking* knowledge.

In chapter three, we noted that after their separation from received values, Nietzsche's free spirits find themselves in a situation where everything is possible because the certainty and knowledge they felt they had hitherto possessed has unravelled. We similarly encountered Modiano's narrator Jimmy Sarano in the wake of the dissolution of his world, noting how he descends into a state of nihilistic disorientation because he is no longer certain of what he should will. Jimmy's will is frustrated because he would like to achieve certainty once more, but he is unable to do so. The infinite potential and avenues for exploration after his liberation are therefore terrifying, disorienting and imprisoning. Desiring something to will, Jimmy mourns, like Nietzsche's madman in the marketplace, the loss of guiding values. Under the influence of Dionysus, however, the breakdown of certainty and meaning is deemed desirable because it enables exploration and creativity. Released from their fetters, free spirits become discoverers, voyagers, experimenters, 'individuals [...] who value knowledge not for the security of its possession but for the challenges- dangers – of its quest'.²¹⁵ Nietzsche thus urges that we consider life as a riddle or a problem in which we must revel:

The *will* henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly and quietly than one had previously questioned. The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a *problem*. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one sullen. Even love of life is still possible – only one loves differently. [...] But the attraction of everything problematic, the delight in an *x*, is so great in highly spiritual, more spiritualised people such as these that this delight flares up like bright embers again

²¹⁵ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 236.

and again over all the distresses of what is problematic, over all the danger of uncertainty.²¹⁶

In a Dionysian framework then, we suffer because we cannot really know anything yet we nevertheless love the resistance we face in seeking knowledge because we enjoy the challenge of the quest and the myriad routes we may accidentally take along the way. This amounts to a love of becoming over being, of process over end result.

The Socratic model of questioning, whereby a question leads not to a correct answer but rather to further exploration and inquiry is suggestive of an approach to knowledge that is closer than Nietzsche would like to admit to his own Dionysian philosophy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, for example, Nietzsche attacks Socrates, criticising him for his outright rejection of instinctive knowledge and accusing him of applying a despotic logic, and monocular vision to all things (pp. 46-48). In his estimation, Socrates harbours a hatred for obscurity and is on a mission to uncover truth, leaving no stone unturned. Nietzsche thus suggests that Socrates has as his aim the replacing of the unintelligible with the intelligible, an approach which can only lead down ever narrowing paths of inquiry and eventually to a dead end. However, when Socrates famously admits in Plato's *Apology* that the only thing he knows is that he knows nothing (or rather, in a more literal translation, 'I do not think I know what I do not'), he seems to advocate a self-conscious ignorance.²¹⁷ On the one hand one could argue that Socrates believes self-conscious ignorance to be preferable to erroneous claims of certainty, but one could equally suggest that he values self-conscious ignorance because not knowing creates potential for further examination and inquiry. If this is the case, for both Nietzsche

²¹⁶ *The Gay Science*, Preface to the second edition, p. 7.

²¹⁷ Socrates quoted in Plato's *Apology*, *The Dialogues of Plato* (vol. I), trans. and comment by R. E. Allen, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 84.

and Socrates, it is preferable to be self-consciously ignorant because this enables the ‘ouverture’ of the horizon.²¹⁸

Certainty, on the contrary, draws investigation to an end, renders the will inactive and shuts down all possibility, potential and newness. In his chapter ‘From the souls of artists and writers’ in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche thus stresses the value of ‘uncompleted thoughts’ suggesting that we therefore ‘must not torment a poet with subtle exegesis but content oneself with the uncertainty of his horizons, as though the way to many thoughts still lay open’ (p. 96).

In the context of Modiano, if Roland’s affirmation of the eternal return in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* hints at a movement into Dionysian wisdom, this is further implied when Guy de Vere meets Roland for the first time for many years and remarks, ‘vous êtes toujours le même, Roland... Vous répondez à une question par une autre question...’ (p. 131). The refusal to contemplate answers and the insistence on questions indicates a pleasure in pursuing resistance and in not knowing.

5.3 Dionysian historiography

A major theme of Modiano’s œuvre is the pursuit of knowledge about the past. Fictional narrators attempt to understand the past of others (in *Villa Triste*, for example); fictional narrators attempt to learn about their own past (*Rue des Boutiques Obscures*); ‘real’ narrators, or the author/narrator seek to learn about the past of ‘real’ others (*Dora Bruder*); the author/narrator attempts to write his own past (*Un pedigree*).

The task of pursuing the past perhaps embodies the ultimate frustration of the will.

We can never ultimately know about the past and as such the will (to knowledge) is

²¹⁸ Kaufmann suggests Nietzsche’s criticism of Socrates has been overstated by critics, quoting from lectures he delivered on the ‘pre-Platonics’ from 1872-76 given at the University of Basel: ‘the pre-Platonics embody the “purest types: Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates—the sage as religious reformer, the sage as proud and lonely truth-finder, and the sage as the eternally and everywhere seeking one”. One may suspect that Nietzsche must have felt a special kinship to the ever seeking Socrates.’ *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 396.

consequently eternally destined to be unsatisfied. Nietzsche is conscious of the particularly tragic nature of historical pursuit and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he describes the past as a stone that the will cannot roll aside. However, Nietzsche subsequently suggests that, faced with history, the will nevertheless ‘rolls stones around out of wrath and annoyance, and wreaks revenge’ (pp. 111-12). Thus, meeting constant resistance in the pursuit of the past, the will remains constantly active and the task of seeking knowledge of the past is therefore liberating since all ‘willing liberates’ (p. 110). The impossibility of knowing ‘that which was’ leaves questions unanswered and avenues open so that anything becomes possible. In a Dionysian framework, then, we are liberated if we no longer worry about attaining knowledge but enjoy the process of its pursuit and the contemplation and creation of what might have been.

In his essay *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life* (1874), published as part of his series of texts, *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche addresses the question of the historical consciousness and identifies differing approaches to the past. In this early essay, Nietzsche is keen to draw a distinction between passive and active historiography; in the former case, the historian attempts to reconstruct that which was, whilst in the latter s/he takes pleasure in the impossibility of knowing and enjoys exploring the myriad avenues of possibility that are opened up in the course of historical inquiry. Although it was written early in his career, *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life* already contains key ideas which would later inform Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy and provides us with a hint as to what Dionysian historiography might entail.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ In his introduction to *Untimely Meditations*, Daniel Breazeale informs us that these essays ‘retained a special, deeply personal significance for their author who considered them to be key documents for understanding his development as a philosopher’. See *Untimely Meditations*, p.vii.

5.3.1 Nietzsche's proposals for Dionysian historiography

In *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*, Nietzsche identifies and critiques different forms of historical inquiry. In his analysis, the philosopher denounces those who approach the past seeking to form conclusions and he advocates self-conscious ignorance over misconceived certainty. He thus draws a distinction between active and passive historical inquiry. While passive historians amass facts with a view to piecing together 'that which was', active historians recognise that the past is rendered lifeless if all is revealed. Nietzsche emphasises the value of obscurity, suggesting that complete revelation, if it were attainable, would not be desirable because clarity 'robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live.'²²⁰ Thus Nietzsche stresses the importance of maintaining a sense of mystery, secrecy, of cherishing the unknown so that a thing might always have the capacity to provoke curiosity and creativity.

Related to the question of the unknown, Nietzsche argues that the historian should take pleasure in the process of the search. 'If the value of the drama lay solely in its conclusion', he writes, 'the drama itself would be merely the most wearisome and indirect way possible of reaching this goal, and so I hope that the significance of history will not be thought to lie in its general propositions' (pp. 92-93). Nietzsche is critical of those historians who have certaintist pretensions and who, like the dramatist, 'think of all things in relation to all others and weave the isolated event into the whole: always with the presupposition that if a unity of plan does not already reside in things it must be implanted into them'. He thus condemns those who impose structure on the past so that they can derive meaning from it, arguing that supposed objective historians in reality merely seek to 'spin [their] web over the past and subdue it' (p. 91). What these historians attempt to subdue is firstly an entity that is unknowable to them and secondly an entity that is therefore mutable, fluid and full of

²²⁰ *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*, p. 95.

potential, an entity, we might propose, that is becoming. Quoting Grillparzer,²²¹ Nietzsche writes:

What is history but the way in which the spirit of man apprehends *events impenetrable to him*; unites things when God alone knows where they belong together; substitutes something comprehensible for what is incomprehensible; imposes his concept of purpose from without upon a whole which, if it possesses a purpose, does so only inherently; and assumes the operation of chance where a thousand little causes have been at work. All human beings have at the same time their own individual necessity, so that millions of courses run parallel beside one another in straight or crooked lines, frustrate or advance one another, strive forwards or backwards, and so, quite apart from the influence of the occurrences of nature, make it impossible to establish any all-embracing necessity prevailing throughout all events. (Pp. 91-92)

On the uses and disadvantages of history for life provides an outline of what Nietzsche envisages as worthwhile and valid history writing. Nietzsche stresses the value of the unknowable, arguing that the perfect dissection of the historical subject renders it, in his view, lifeless (p. 97). As such, we should not seek to fully know about ‘that which was’, but rather we should enjoy the process of investigation. Related to this, Nietzsche argues that the historian should not seek to impose logic and order on the past and he is critical of approaches to history writing which aim to construct a chronology. Finally, Nietzsche argues that something new must be created in our encounters with the past; the ‘historical drive’ must ‘also contain a drive to construct’ (p. 95) and as such the ‘experienced and superior’ historian should be considered as ‘an architect of the future’ (p. 94). This approach to the past has more recently been adopted in postmodern historiography. In *Re-Thinking History*, for example, Keith Jenkins claims that the postmodern approach to history has allowed ‘cracks’ to open up in the past where new histories can be made:

[If history is understood] not as a discipline aiming at a real knowledge of the past, but seen rather as what it is, a discursive practice that enables present-minded people(s) to go

²²¹ Austrian poet and playwright 1791-1872.

to the past, [and] there to delve around [...] then such history [...] may well have a radical cogency that can make visible aspects of the past that have previously been hidden or secreted away'.²²²

In his analysis, Jenkins notes the devaluation of the attainment of knowledge in postmodern historical inquiry, and stresses the creative potential of the pursuit of the past. Thus Nietzsche and subsequent postmodern historians emphasise the importance of a constructive (as opposed to re-constructive) approach to the past.

5.3.2 *Modiano's pursuit of the past*

In his essay on historical inquiry, Nietzsche effectively describes the task of addressing the past as being tragic or Dionysian. Nietzsche thus highlights the tension that exists between the aspiration to know about the past, and the realisation that we cannot ultimately know about it at all. The task is equally marked by a tension between the desire to impose order on the past, and the pleasure to be gained in its fluidity; historical inquiry raises a tension between the urge to re-construct and the desire to construct.

In Modiano's many literary explorations of the past, we similarly encounter the expression of a desire to know and the recognition of the impossibility of knowing. Many narrators amass facts with the view to creating a chronological account of 'that which was' but their projects are 'systématiquement vouées à l'échec'.²²³ Their aims to re-construct are thwarted by lack of information and they are forced to fill in the gaps through imaginative intervention.

On the surface Modiano's ventures into the past conform to Nietzsche's conception of valuable (or Dionysian) historiography. They lack conclusiveness indicating a valuation in the author's eyes of the process of examination over the knowledge that the examination

²²² Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 68.

²²³ Martine Guyot-Bender, *Mémoire en dérive: poétique et politique de l'ambiguïté chez Patrick Modiano*, (Paris-Caen: Lettres modernes Minard, 1999), p. 49.

might itself produce. Narrators (and readers) are often only moderately wiser (if at all) by the end of a search than they are at the beginning and rather than formulating conclusions, the process of research tends to generate new lines of inquiry. *Dora Bruder*, which constitutes Modiano's most explicit historical inquiry, provides many examples of such a situation. The author/narrator tracks down information which should provide him with an answer but which instead gives rise to yet more questions. For example, when he locates Dora's name in the register of the boarding school she attended, he receives another piece to complete the jigsaw puzzle of her life but this soon leads to yet more questioning and the desire to further his knowledge:

Le registre de l'internat porte les mentions suivantes:

« Nom et prénom : Bruder, Dora

Date et lieu de naissance : 25 février 1926 Paris XIIe de Ernest et de Cécile Burdej,
père et mère

Situation de famille : enfant légitime

Date et conditions d'admission : 9 mai 1940

Pension complète

Date et motif de sortie :

14 décembre 1941

Suite de fugue. »

Pour quelles raisons ses parents l'ont-ils inscrite dans cet internat? [...] Je me demande aussi par quel hasard Cécile et Ernest Bruder ont connu l'existence de ce pensionnat du Saint-Cœur-de-Marie. Qui leur avait donné le conseil d'y inscrire Dora ? [...] Il y avait environ trois cent pensionnaires. Les ' grandes ' de douze à seize ans étaient divisées en deux catégories : les 'c lasses ' et les 'ouvroirs'. [...] Dora Bruder était-elle aux 'ouvroirs' ou aux 'classes'? (Pp. 36-39)

Modiano's narrators lack the certainist pretensions required for the formulation of historical chronicles and, on the whole, solid factual evidence is always quickly undermined by questions and doubts. Furthermore, Modiano has stated that he is often drawn less to the historical fact itself than to its traces. In an interview with *Lire* the author tells us:

Ce qui me motive, pour écrire, c'est retrouver des traces. Ne pas raconter les choses de manière directe, mais que ces choses soient un peu énigmatiques. Retrouver les traces des choses, plutôt que les choses elles-mêmes. C'est beaucoup plus suggestif que lorsqu'on aborde les choses de face. Comme une statue mutilée... on a tendance à la reconstituer. La suggestion est plus grande.²²⁴

In the final paragraph of *Dora Bruder*, Modiano highlights the undesirability of knowing everything about the historical subject and seems to advocate a self-conscious ignorance.

J'ignorerai toujours à quoi elle passait ses journées, où elle se cachait, en compagnie de qui elle se trouvait pendant les mois d'hiver de sa première fugue et au cours des quelques semaines de printemps où elle s'est échappée à nouveau. 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, le temps- tout ce qui vous souille et vous détruit – n'auront pas pu lui voler. (Pp. 144-45)

If for Nietzsche, the perfect dissection of the past leaves the historical subject lifeless and Modiano's concluding paragraph offers a very real demonstration of this idea, the revelation of Dora's secret might *quite literally* have led to her death. On the other hand, Modiano's narrators do undertake their inquiries into the past with a view to finding out and as such find themselves in a frustrating position; desiring to know and to bring to light, but equally conscious that the unknowable cannot and even *should* not be uncovered. In other words they are driven to achieve a goal in the knowledge that it cannot or should not be attained.

It is tempting to suggest that Modiano's historical inquiries contain an underlying Dionysian wisdom. Displaying a lack of certainty, an obsession with the search, a ceaseless curiosity despite constantly encountering resistance, they certainly appear superficially to conform to a perspective in which becoming and consequently suffering are valued.

However, a closer look at Modiano's motivation for undertaking historical inquiry, and his

²²⁴ Liban, 'Entretien: Modiano', p.100.

reaction to the resistance he faces during the process indicates a sense of resignation, rather than an innate pleasure in the search.

Both in interviews and within his texts, Modiano suggests that he has embarked upon research into the past so as to return to a realm of consciousness things and people which might otherwise be forgotten. On countless occasions, his narrators express a fear of the inevitable disappearance of people and events into oblivion and, in an attempt to counteract this anxiety, they set about recording stories and characters so that they may prevail. In his account of the somewhat dubious characters of the Collaboration in *Les boulevards de ceinture*, for example, the narrator remarks:

Je consignais, sur de petites fiches, les renseignements que j'avais glanés. Je sais bien que le curriculum vitae de ces ombres ne présente pas un grand intérêt, mais si je ne le dressais pas aujourd'hui, personne d'autre ne s'y emploierait. C'est mon devoir, à moi qui les ai connus, de les sortir -ne fût-ce qu'un instant- de la nuit. C'est mon devoir et c'est aussi, pour moi, un véritable besoin. (Pp. 64-65)

Similarly, as discussed in chapter three, the young narrator of *Chien de printemps* recounts how he undertook the cataloguing of Jansen's photographs because '[il refusait] que les gens et les choses disparaissent sans laisser de traces' and he continues to remark that 'ces photos avaient un intérêt documentaire puisqu'elles témoignaient de gens et de choses disparus' (p. 24). This sentiment echoes throughout Modiano's œuvre and appears once again in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* where Bowling tracks the arrivals and departures of the clients of the Condé café, inscribing dates and times into his treasured notebook:²²⁵

Il notait depuis bientôt trois ans les noms des clients du Condé, au fur et à mesure de leur arrivée, avec, chaque fois, la date et l'heure exacte. Il avait chargé deux de ses amis de la même tâche au Bouquet et à La Pergola, qui restaient ouverts toute la nuit. [...] Au fond,

²²⁵ Bowling's project is reminiscent of Georges Perec's *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien* (1974), in which he observed the Place Saint-Sulpice for three days 'from the vantage point of three cafés on different sides of the square, and on one occasion from a bench in the middle' resulting in a text which 'consists of written up transcript notes Perec took over the three days' (see Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], pp. 261-62).

Bowing cherchait à sauver de l'oubli les papillons qui tournent quelques instants autour d'une lampe. (P. 19)

These tasks of cataloguing and documenting imply a sense of duty felt by the author and his narrators to record for posterity. Furthermore, the obsessive documenting undertaken in Modiano's historiography indicates a desire to fix and make the past static, to give form to an otherwise meaningless mass of knowledge and thereby subdue the unfathomable. In chapter three we noted the role that photography plays in fixing information thus enabling Modiano's protagonists to establish some form of certainty. When the narrator of *Chien de printemps* cannot locate a plaque that once rested on a building in Paris he regrets having no photographic evidence of its existence. Without a photograph, he doubts his memory and wonders if it existed at all, and he clearly finds this uncertainty unsettling.

Discussing his writing process in interviews, Modiano has also expressed the displeasure he feels in being unable to attain conclusion. As such, he regrets the fact that he is compelled to re-visit the same subject matter and laments his inability to '[se débarrasser] d'un truc' and 'accéder à autre chose'.²²⁶ Modiano strives to reach a definitive conclusion, which will release him from 'le marécage' in which he feels himself to be endlessly turning in circles.²²⁷ In his interview with Laurence Liban in *Lire*, the author reveals his envy of those writers who reach a point where they can definitively cease to write:

Je me disais, c'est formidable, ils ont trouvé la paix de l'âme. Parce que, dans ma naïveté, j'imaginai 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. (P. 104)

Modiano's historical inquiries thus place an emphasis on process and demonstrate the impossibility of achieving certainty. They imply a valuation of self-conscious ignorance and reveal the danger of attaining full knowledge. They lay bare the impossibility of fixing the

²²⁶ Liban, 'Entretien: Modiano', p. 104.

²²⁷ *L'Horizon*, p. 168.

past, admitting that the collation of information and documents can only ever amount to ‘une masse de fragments’.²²⁸

However, Dionysian wisdom pertains not to the acknowledgement of a situation whereby the will cannot be satisfied, but rather this wisdom is indicated by our *reaction* to such a situation. Importantly, in his interview with Liban, Modiano regards writers who are satisfied and who have therefore ceased to write as being ‘libérés’, suggesting that he equates liberation with the achievement of one’s goals and that he has hitherto felt his own ‘inachèvement’ to be imprisoning. His narrators and protagonists therefore have not tended to revel in the resistance they face when undertaking investigations of the past and we do not observe a sense of excitement, celebration of or pleasure in ‘everything problematic’ nor any delight in the ‘danger of uncertainty’. Rather, Modiano’s historiography has hitherto revealed an attitude that is generally more akin to duty and resignation than to adventure and as such, his writings, although they hint at it, cannot be said to be expressions of Dionysian wisdom.

5.4 Dionysian Wisdom in *L’Horizon*

While *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* might be seen to mark a transition towards the Dionysian, Modiano’s *L’Horizon* is the first of his novels to convey a true sense of Dionysian wisdom. Although it is difficult to detect any seismic shift in its content and outlook, a close reading of the novel reveals subtle but significant changes in the author’s philosophical perspective.

L’Horizon recounts a similar narrative to that of many of Modiano’s previous publications. The narrator, Bosmans, contemplates a particular period in his past recalling fragments of memory relating to his relationship with a woman, whom he encountered in his youth and who soon disappeared from his life. This woman is Margaret le Coz, with whom

²²⁸ Interview with Laurence Liban, p. 100.

the young Bosmans had fallen in love after they were quite literally thrown together during demonstrations in 1960s Paris. Margaret is mysterious and impenetrable. Born in Berlin in 1945 (a dubious family history is hinted at), she finds herself in Paris having fled at first from Annecy and then from Switzerland in an attempt to shake off her peculiar and threatening stalker, Boyaval. Bosmans has a stalker of his own who he is at pains to avoid, changing address regularly and steering clear of certain quarters of Paris. He is hunted by his aggressive mother who, accompanied by her partner, tracks him down and harasses him for money.

Margaret and Bosmans live an outsider existence in Paris and neither have friends. While Bosmans has a solitary job running an esoteric book shop and publishing house specialising in occult literature, Margaret works as a secretary in a suspicious and mysterious company where she attempts to avoid her few colleagues as much as possible. Bosmans and Margaret thus resemble protagonists such as Roland and Louki in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* who, as outsiders, recognise in one another a kindred spirit. The couple have no real ties. ‘Ils n’avaient décidément ni l’un ni l’autre aucune assise dans la vie’ the narrator tells us, ‘aucune famille. Aucun recours. Des gens de rien. Parfois, cela lui donnait un léger sentiment de vertige’ (p. 72). Their lives consist of brief encounters and Bosmans likens their existence to being on a night train; he and Margaret share ‘une certaine intimité’, the kind which exists between ‘les voyageurs dans les trains de nuit’ (p. 151). Furthermore, the narrator suggests that the couple’s lives are discontinuous and chaotic and made up of a series of experiments and plans which, like a train journeying in the dark of night, travel blindly with uncertain destinations.

Typically, these youthful protagonists are ill at ease with their lack of roots and they do not enjoy a life resembling a night-train adventure. For example, Bosmans is in awe of the Fernes whose two children Margaret looks after. Maître Ferne is a lawyer in the Paris courts

and her husband a professor of constitutional law. They epitomise everything that the young Bosmans values and longs for, living in a tranquil and grand apartment by the Observatoire. Their professions and manner intimidate him and instil in him a great respect so that he associates them, we are told, with words such as ‘Justice. Droit. Rectitude’ (p. 171). On occasion, Bosmans joins Margaret at the Ferne’s apartment and as he explores their home he conjures up a fantasy of their existence. ‘Un divan et un pick-up dans le coin gauche de la pièce’, he recalls, ‘le professeur et maître Ferne s’asseyaient sans doute sur ce divan, côte à côte, pour écouter de la musique à leur moments de loisir’:

Ce fut ce soir-là que Bosmans sentit combien ils étaient livrés à eux-mêmes. Quel contraste entre le professeur Ferne et sa femme, leurs enfants, cet appartement tranquille et ce qui les attendait dehors, Margaret et lui, et les rencontres qu’ils risquaient de faire... [...] Il fallait qu’il se décide à parler au professeur et à sa femme et à leur demander un conseil ou même un appui moral. (P. 171)

Like the many youthful protagonists we have thus far encountered, Bosmans and Margaret are free spirits, separate from the herd, ‘à l’écart de tout’ (p.46) and deeply anxious as a result. Their freedom is thus unwelcome and they would rather fit in with the rest of society. As upholders of social laws and governance, Bosmans hopes that the Fernes will be in a position to set him on the right track.

In *L’Horizon*, we once more encounter a young protagonist who, finding himself separated from society and in a position of experimentation, has undergone a process that Nietzsche might describe as a liberation. However, Bosmans does not experience his life without ties as something liberating. Recalling a novel that he tried to write during his youthful months with Margaret, the older Bosmans leafs through his notebooks and notices that his handwriting from this period is much smaller and tighter than it is in the present. Struck by the way that he had written in the margins filling all available space on the page the

narrator concludes that ‘c’était sans doute sa manière à lui d’exprimer un sentiment d’asphyxie’ (p. 34).

5.4.1 ‘*Ce qui aurait pu être*’

If the young Margaret and Bosmans are familiar to Modiano readers, it is in the attitude of the older Bosmans that we can identify something new in Modiano’s writing. Thus, despite its apparent similarity with its predecessors, *L’Horizon* undoubtedly marks a departure from the norm in Modiano’s œuvre. This novel involves a search into the past but Bosmans’ outlook and his attitude to the past are markedly different. We have noted that up to this point in his œuvre we cannot truly assert that Modiano’s writings possess Dionysian wisdom. This is because we do not sense in his previous writings an outright love of suffering and a joy in all things problematic. In contrast, we can argue that *L’Horizon* is imbued with Dionysian wisdom and that Bosmans’ search into the past provides us with an insight into what Dionysian historiography might entail.

As we have seen, narrators of earlier texts, such as *Les boulevards de ceinture*, to give just one example, have expressed a sense of responsibility to the past, feeling duty-bound to bring to light the lives of people and places from the past, ‘de les sortir – ne fût-ce qu’un instant- de la nuit’.²²⁹ *L’Horizon*, on the other hand, begins by asserting the impossibility of knowing ‘that which was’ since we cannot ‘revenir en arrière pour retenir les ombres et en savoir plus long sur elles’ (p. 13). Bosmans does not undertake archival research but relies on his memory alone. Furthermore, rather than striving to reconstruct his memory, Bosmans recognises that the very fragmentary nature of his recollections can give rise to a world of possibility and potential. These fractions of memory, the narrator tells us, ‘correspondaient

²²⁹ *Les boulevards de ceinture*, p. 65.

aux années où votre vie est semée de carrefours, et tant d'allées s'ouvrent devant vous que vous avez l'embarras du choix' (p. 12).

The opening pages of *L'Horizon* are strongly reminiscent of Grillparzer's account of history quoted by Nietzsche in his essay *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*. For Grillparzer the past is a series of 'impenetrable events' or 'millions of courses [that] run parallel beside one another', with no unifying purpose, necessity or meaning.²³⁰ For Bosmans, the past is a 'matière sombre':

Derrière les événements précis et les visages familiers, il sentait bien tout ce qui était devenu une matière sombre: brèves rencontres, rendez-vous manqués, lettres perdues, prénoms et numéros de téléphone figurant dans un ancien agenda et que vous avez oubliés, et celles et ceux que vous avez croisés sans même le savoir. Comme en astronomie, cette matière sombre était plus vaste que la partie visible de votre vie. Elle était infinie. Et lui, il répertoriait dans son carnet quelques faibles scintillements au fond de cette obscurité. Si faibles, ces scintillements, qu'il fermait les yeux et se concentrait, à la recherche d'un détail évocateur lui permettant de reconstituer l'ensemble, mais il n'y avait pas d'ensemble, rien que des fragments, des poussières d'étoiles. (P. 13)

Later Bosmans remarks that 'tout finissait par se confondre et les fils qu'avait tissés le temps était si nombreux et si emmêlés' (p. 152), yet although he realises the impossibility of knowing 'that which was' and of extrapolating from the masses of lives and situations any coherent narrative of the past, this fact does not appear to disturb him. Rather than seeking to reconstruct 'that which was', Bosmans adopts a different approach to the past; he recognises the many different paths that his life may have taken and questions why he chose one route over another ('pourquoi avait-il suivi ce chemin plutôt qu'un autre?'). As such, Bosmans does not attempt to know 'that which was', but rather he considers 'ce qui aurait pu être' (p. 12).

This approach to the past is hinted at in Roland's narrative in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* when he and Jacqueline are offered the use of a friend, Bob Storm's, holiday

²³⁰ 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life', pp. 91-92.

house. The couple plan to go away but Jacqueline commits suicide and the trip is consequently abandoned. The mature Roland later ponders how, ‘parfois, le cœur se serre à la pensée des choses qui aurait pu être et qui n’ont pas été, mais je me dis qu’aujourd’hui encore la maison reste vide, à nous attendre’ (p. 144). Like Bosmans, Roland considers the past as being in suspense, waiting ready and ripe for the contemplation of alternative narratives.

Bosmans’ attitude is immediately indicative of one who possesses what Nietzsche terms Dionysian wisdom. From the outset he establishes that it is impossible to know what happened in the past but he desires nevertheless to explore it, thus undertaking the process of uncovering knowledge whilst acknowledging that this cannot be achieved. ‘Il ne cesserait de poser des questions là-dessus’, the narrator tells us, ‘et il n’aurait jamais de réponse’ (p.11). Bosmans writes names and memories in a notebook initially with the aim to make sense of the past and to establish some kind of structure or narrative. However, he subsequently appears to recognise the pleasure to be gained from obscurity. For the young Bosmans such names and dates served as welcome ‘points fixes’, testimonies of certainty in a world that is ‘flou’:

Il n’oubliait jamais le nom des rues et les numéros des immeubles. C’était sa manière à lui de lutter contre l’indifférence et l’anonymat des grandes villes, et peut-être aussi contre les incertitudes de la vie. (P. 28)

For the mature Bosmans, however, these details ‘servaient d’aimants [qui] faisaient ressurgir des impressions confuses que vous aviez du mal à éclaircir. Appartenaient-elles au rêve ou à la réalité? (p. 13). Names and dates conjure up images and impressions that may or may not correspond to any reality. What is important for the mature Bosmans is their relation to the imaginary, their potential to stimulate reverie.

5.4.2 *The horizon*

Crucially, in *L'Horizon*, the word 'horizon' appears in the context firstly of self-conscious ignorance and secondly in relation to creativity. Contemplating the horizon, the future and the potential for newness, it would seem, involves taking pleasure in the unknown and in the creative attempts to know. In the first instance Bosmans asserts his preference to remain in the dark, sensing that the less he knows, the more potential there is for projection into something new. Sitting in a café, he recognises Yvonne Gaucher, an acquaintance of his and Margaret. Margaret had looked after the son of Yvonne Gaucher and her partner 'docteur André Poutrel' but the couple were arrested on account of their dubious occultist activities (do we think satanic?) and the police had requested that Margaret come to the station to be interviewed as a witness. This caused Margaret to panic and to flee Paris for Berlin, claiming that 'ils savent des choses sur moi que je ne t'ai pas dites et qui sont dans leurs dossiers' (p. 162). Yvonne Gaucher and docteur Poutrel are thus catalysts for Margaret's sudden disappearance and the now aged Yvonne, sitting opposite Bosmans in the café could potentially '[lui donner] enfin toutes les explications depuis le début' (p.143). However Bosmans decides against approaching her:

Je préfère que les choses restent dans le vague. [...] Mieux valait ne pas en savoir plus. Au moins, avec le doute, il demeure encore une forme d'espoir, une ligne de fuite vers l'horizon. On se dit que le temps n'a peut-être pas achevé son travail de destruction et qu'il y aura encore des rendez-vous. (P. 143)

Choosing to remain ignorant of 'that which was', Bosmans identifies the value of not knowing because it allows a subject to remain living. For Bosmans, Yvonne's revelations might close down horizons which have hitherto remained enticingly open and which have provided potential avenues for exploration and flights of fancy. Significantly, Bosmans only considers actually finding Margaret at the end of the novel. He types the name MARGARET LE COZ into an internet search engine and discovers that a woman of this name is running a

bookshop in Berlin (to where Margaret had fled many years previously). In the final pages of the novel, we encounter Bosmans in Berlin and on his way to make contact with Margaret but we do not witness their reunion. The body of this novel therefore pertains to Bosmans' recollections and the reverie and imaginative projections that they trigger. Bosmans is not troubled by the gaps in his memory and knowledge but appears to enjoy the process of revisiting and creating the past and he is not in a hurry to locate Margaret. Discussing the pros and cons of the internet in an interview with Sylvain Bourmeau, Modiano suggests that the internet can provide answers 'd'une manière brutale' and that this hinders the potential for creativity in the search.²³¹ Similarly, it is significant that Modiano does not recount the reunion between Bosmans and Margaret. This acts as an appeal to the reader to engage in a process of willing. If we were to witness their encounter, we would know 'that which was', whereas we instead find ourselves in a position to state 'thus I willed it.'²³²

We have noted that Modiano has expressed a valuation of not knowing in previous texts and remarked that in *Dora Bruder*, the author/narrator stresses the importance of maintaining secrecy. In this context Modiano reminds us of the danger of revelation but he does not draw on the potential pleasure of such ignorance. However, in *L'Horizon*, Bosmans appears to relish the prospects and potential inherent in the unknown. Nietzsche's valuation of ignorance is further developed by thinkers such as Derrida, for example, who in his *Spectres de Marx* and other texts argues that we should resist the urge to 'return [the secret] to the order of knowledge' at all and that we should seek 'to encounter what is strange, unheard, *other* about [it]'.²³³ For Derrida, secrets are elevated in status because they cannot always be articulated in the languages and logical processes available to us. For this reason 'they push at the boundaries of [...] thought', providing catalysts to 'raise the stakes of

²³¹ Bourmeau, 'Patrick Modiano: un roman du future anterieur'.

²³² See Zarathustra's desire to 'recreate all "it was" into "thus I willed it"' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 110.

²³³ Colin Davis, 'Etat Présent: Hauntology, Spectres and phantoms', *French Studies*, 59, 373-379, p. 376.

[historical] study, to make it a place where we can examine the elusive identities of the living and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought' (p. 379).

If the word 'horizon' appears in the context of self-conscious ignorance, it surfaces for a second time in connection to creativity. The young Bosmans locates a retired secretary, Simone Cordier, who agrees to type up his notes from his *clairefontaine* notebooks. When bringing his writings to Simone's apartment, Bosmans discovers that in doing so he no longer feels the sensation of asphyxiation and that 'il respirait un air léger pour la première fois de sa vie' (p. 84). Leaving her apartment with his newly typed texts, he retires to a nearby café to make corrections:

Il avait toute la soirée devant lui. Il préférait rester dans ce quartier. Il lui semblait atteindre un carrefour de sa vie, ou plutôt une lisière d'où il pourrait s'élancer vers l'avenir. Pour la première fois il avait dans la tête le mot: avenir, et un autre mot: l'horizon. Ces soirs-là, les rues désertes et silencieuses du quartier étaient des lignes de fuite, qui débouchaient toutes sur l'avenir et l'horizon. (P. 85)

While Bosmans' notebooks are filled with fretful and tense writings, their translation into typed texts has a liberating effect on him. It is possible that in their transformation, Bosmans recognises his writings to be more than a collection of confused and anxious notes, seeing them now as part of a creative process. In themselves, they act as a reflection of his state of mind, both in form and content, but Bosmans subsequently takes great pleasure in the evolution of his writings, enjoying the task of correcting his notebooks and making them legible for Simone. Furthermore, his writings begin to take a life of their own when in the hands of the typist. When she returns her copies to Bosmans, the pages are covered with unfamiliar signs and symbols:

[...] Des O barrés d'un trait, des trémas à la place des accents circonflexes, des cédilles sous certaines voyelles, et Bosmans se demandait s'il s'agissait d'une orthographe slave ou scandinave. Ou tout simplement d'une machine de marque étrangère, dont les touches avaient des caractères inconnus en France. (P. 94)

Bosmans is not annoyed by these strange versions of his notes but rather he enjoys these mutations of his writings, which he feels add something new and ‘exotique’ to his words.

Interestingly, Bosmans’ note writing does not in itself have a cathartic effect on him. He does not solve or overcome his suffering by recording his thoughts on paper, and despite expressing himself creatively, his suffering continues. He still feels himself to be an outsider and continues to dread his mother and her partner, for example, striving to avoid certain parts of the city for fear of being found. However, Bosmans does feel liberated when he sees his words taking flight, when they are in process, or when his writings are becoming. As such, suffering is not redeemed by creativity; it merely sets in motion an ever evolving creative process, giving rise to lines of flight towards the horizon.

5.5 Lignes de fuite: ‘The middle is everywhere’

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari draw a distinction between ‘rigid segmentarity’ and ‘lignes de fuite’, using as a metaphor the relationship between the Roman Empire and ‘barbarian tribes’:

On one side, we have the rigid segmentarity of the Roman Empire, with its centre of resonance and periphery, its State, its *pax romana*, its geometry, its camps, its limes (boundary lines). Then, on the horizon, there is an entirely different kind of line, the line of the nomads who come in off the steppes, venture a fluid and active escape, sow deterritorialisation everywhere, launch flows whose quanta heat up and are swept along...²³⁴

These ‘ligne de fuite’ can be read as the embodiment of the Dionysian. Developed by Deleuze and featuring heavily in his work with Guattari,²³⁵ the ‘ligne de fuite’ has two distinct characteristics. In the first case, the line of flight serves as a force of energy that

²³⁴ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Bruce Massumi (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 222.

²³⁵ Deleuze was himself heavily influenced by Nietzsche, who he references in nearly all his texts and on whom he wrote a monograph, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962).

actualises the inherent and dormant potential in all things, whilst secondly, it is involved in the dissolving of limits and boundaries so that wherever the ‘ligne de fuite’ encounters resistance, something new and previously unheard of is created. Deleuze’s ‘ligne de fuite’ embodies what is exciting when the Nietzschean/Dionysian perspective is adopted.

Discussing his interpretation of the idea, Tamsin Lorraine summarises Deleuze’s ‘ligne de fuite’ as a ‘path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or ‘virtual’) that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond’.²³⁶ Lorraine’s description directs us once again to Grillparzer’s description of history as a mass of events running parallel with, frustrating, and advancing one another. These events may have a purpose that it is implicit or ‘inherent’ in them but they rely on the ‘spirit of man’ to catalyse it.

In its insistence on the dissolution of limits and boundaries, the ‘ligne de fuite’ is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s evocation of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In chapter three, we encountered the distinction that Nietzsche draws in this early text between the Apollonian and the Dionysian which is echoed in Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor of the Roman Empire and the barbarian tribes. The former, we suggested, relates to limits and boundaries, which can be healing because they allow for measure and control. Underlying this, on the contrary, is an uncontrollable force, which is revealed when limits dissolve and disintegrate, and which Nietzsche associates with Dionysus. Describing the Dionysian, Nietzsche employs a vocabulary denoting liberation and abundance. ‘The chariot of Dionysus is laden with flowers’, he writes, and ‘all the rigid, hostile barriers [...] break asunder’ (p. 18). One could begin to envisage the Dionysian, he tells us, ‘if one were to transform Beethoven’s jubilant ‘Hymn to Joy’ into a painting and place no constraint on one’s imagination’ (p. 18). Thus, the deterritorialising nature of the ‘ligne de fuite’ resembles the

²³⁶ Tamsin Lorraine, ‘Lines of flight’ in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 145.

limitless unhindered flow of the Dionysian; it is not chained to a sun, it moves ‘backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions’ so that one cannot establish what is ‘up and [what is] down.’²³⁷ In their constant movement and creativity, they deny us any fixed points from which we might construct a meaningful world so that, as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra remarks, ‘the middle is everywhere’ (p. 175). Where the ‘ligne de fuite’ encounters resistance, it mutates and creates something new. It does not consider barriers as obstacles, but rather as stimulants for further mutation. For the ‘ligne de fuite’ anything is possible, and ‘all is permitted’,²³⁸ they are the embodiment of the will the power.

5.6 Lignes de fuite in *L’Horizon*

When Bosmans settles down in a café near Simone Cordier’s apartment to undertake corrections of his writings, the word ‘horizon’ and ‘avenir’ appear in his mind for the first time. ‘Ces soirs-là’, we are told, ‘les rues désertes et silencieuses du quartier étaient des lignes de fuite, qui débouchaient toutes sur l’avenir et l’horizon’ (p. 85). This sentence alone indicates a change in perspective from that of Modiano’s previous writings. In earlier texts deserted streets are presented in negative contexts, instilling in protagonists the unwelcome sensation of loneliness and fear, and often acting as catalysts for a terrifying dissolution of their values. More importantly, however, the prospect of avenues and open-ended streets has rendered protagonists confused, disoriented and unwilling to make choices for themselves. We might recall from chapter three, for example, the youthful narrator of *Vestiaire de l’enfance*, who is seized by panic when he finds himself without guidance and navigation:

J’ai hésité un instant: où aller? Vers la droite ou vers la gauche? Vers la place Blanche ou de l’autre côté? J’ai choisi de descendre la pente de la rue. Voilà, je n’avais plus aucune attache nulle part et la vie commençait pour moi. Je sentais la panique me gagner. Je

²³⁷ *The Gay Science*, pp. 119-20

²³⁸ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 221

devais me retenir pour ne pas aborder le premier passant et lui dire: ‘Est-ce que vous pourriez m’aider?’ (P. 75)

Equally in chapter three, we encountered the detective narrator of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* who comments that:

[D]ans cette vie qui vous apparaît quelquefois comme un grand terrain vague sans poteau indicateur, au milieu de toutes les lignes de fuite et les horizons perdus, on aimerait trouver des points de repère, dresser une sorte de cadastre pour n’avoir plus l’impression de naviguer au hasard. Alors on tisse des liens, on essaye de rendre plus stables des rencontres hasardeuses. (P. 50)

Here the term ‘ligne de fuite’ appears once more alongside the word ‘horizon’ but in this context both are viewed negatively. If we are to interpret ‘fuite’ as a puncture, a leakage, or a flowing, the term ‘ligne de fuite’ represents all that is uncontrollable and uncontainable. For one who values stability, certainty, fixity, coherence, and boundaries, lines of flight are therefore unwelcome since they cannot be contained, but rather they weave in all directions, unhindered by territories, limits, and barriers.

In *L’Horizon*, however, the ‘ligne de fuite’ is depicted as something liberating, once more indicating the transition into Dionysian wisdom. In this novel, Modiano explores the idea of the ‘ligne de fuite’ as a positive force; it enables him to revisit the past and reactivate it, thereby actualising connections. Furthermore, the ‘ligne de fuite’ is unhindered by spatial and temporal boundaries, giving rise to the depiction in *L’Horizon* of a world that is entirely and enticingly ‘flou’.

5.6.1 Actualising connections

When the protagonist of *L’Horizon*, Bosmans, plunges into what he calls ‘matière sombre’ he does not aim to reconstruct the past, but rather he undertakes the actualisation of its potential. The idea of a ‘ligne de fuite’ as a ‘path of mutation’ which ‘releases new powers in the

capacities of [...] bodies to act and respond,²³⁹ enables Bosmans, through creative ‘flights’ to return to the past and reactivate it, enabling it thus to remain living. In the opening page of *L’Horizon*, we are told that Bosmans has been thinking for some time about certain episodes of his youth. These episodes, the narrator remarks, are nothing but short sequences which have no link with the rest of his life because after Margaret Le Coz’s sudden departure he has no concept of how her life (or that of their acquaintances) progressed. His memories, then, remain as paused events, they ‘demeuraient en suspens, dans un présent éternel (p.11)’ and in returning to them, Bosmans reactivates them, thus actualising their potential. Modiano likens this process to the reanimation of paused scenes:

Un soir, il [Bosmans] attendait Margaret sur le trottoir de l’avenue de l’Observatoire, appuyé contre la grille du jardin, et ce moment était détaché des autres, figé dans l’éternité. Pourquoi ce soir-là, avenue de l’Observatoire? Mais bientôt, l’image bougeait de nouveau, le film continuait son cours et tout était simple et logique. (P. 44-45)

Modiano stresses throughout *L’Horizon* that people and events from the past do not perish and disappear, but rather he suggests that they remain in hibernation and that certain factors will bring them back to action. In the scene where the mature Bosmans meets Margaret’s stalker, for example, we are told that Bosmans had not forgotten the name ‘Boyaval’ but rather that it remained ‘dormant’ in him, requiring a catalyst for its resurgence and reactivation. This interest in the ‘ligne de fuite’ is detectable, as we have seen, in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, where Roland suggests that, after many years, Bob Storm’s holiday house still remains empty and static, awaiting his arrival with Jacqueline. As such, the house lies in anticipation; filled with possibility and potential it can be reanimated at any moment.

Modiano depicts the ‘ligne de fuite’ as a force for actualising connections spatially in his conception of an alternative or ‘virtual’ city of Paris. He thus depicts ‘lignes de fuite’

²³⁹ Lorraine, ‘Lines of flight’, p. 145.

topographically, likening them to deserted and silent streets, which lead to unknown destinations. This idea is further developed in *L'Horizon* in his suggestion that the city of Paris has an alternative map, which is ever mutating and filled with secret passages and hidden potential. Thus, while Bosmans looks at the 'petit plan de Paris, sur les dernières pages du carnet de moleskine', he ruminates on the 'plis secrets' of certain quartiers and contemplates a city that consists of parallel and alternative realities:

[D]es passages cachés à travers les immeubles, des rues qui semblaient à première vue des impasses et qui n'étaient pas mentionnées sur le plan. En rêve, il savait comment y accéder à partir de telle station de métro précise. Mais au réveil, il n'éprouvait pas le besoin de vérifier dans le Paris réel. Ou plutôt, il n'osait pas. (P. 54)

Thus, there exists a series of connections that are 'virtual' or 'implicit' and which do not heed the borders, streets and quartiers delineated on the normal Parisian map. As a young man, Bosmans is fearful of exploring these secret folds of the city outside the realm of his dreams because their existence is testament to the utterly fluid nature of his world and he finds their presence unsettling. In addition to the spatial fluidity of the city, Bosmans is convinced of the presence of invisible walls, streets and passageways that not only lead to parallel places, but more importantly, to worlds, which exist 'à l'abri du temps'.²⁴⁰

5.6.2 Deterritorialisation

The actualisation of connections is made possible by the deterritorialising nature of the 'ligne de fuite'. As such, Bosmans can encounter and reactivate the past because the 'ligne de fuite' does not acknowledge boundaries and the delineation of past, present and future is therefore dissolved. Where Bosmans conceives of Paris as a city that is entirely 'flou' in which 'lignes de fuite' encounter, react with and ultimately transcend topographical borders so that the city is constantly mutating, these unexplored streets lead not only to parallel and alternative

²⁴⁰ *L'Horizon*, p. 54.

spaces, but more importantly they can open into different temporal zones. The 'ligne de fuite', then, encounters and transcends physical limits but it equally transcends the frontiers of time creating new temporal spaces altogether. With this in mind, it is perhaps misleading to propose that *L'Horizon* offers an insight into Dionysian historiography since in a Dionysian context there can be no history, no present, no future, and all of time exists on a single plane.

Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return has the function of deterritorialising time since the idea promotes an understanding of time that is non-teleological. Just as his free spirits should have no goal, but rather should sail without knowing 'which wind is good',²⁴¹ so too the movement of time does not progress from the past to the present and then into the future. Instead, 'the year of being runs eternally':

Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally. In every Instant being begins; around every Here rolls the ball There. The middle is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity. (P. 175)

In his evocation of the eternal return, then, any logical sense of time and progression is abolished and the world becomes a site of eternal creativity and constant directionless motion, leaving us with no static point or perspectival coordinates with which to establish spatial or temporal fixity. This conception of time is further evoked in *Human, All Too Human* where, similar to Grillparzer, Nietzsche proposes:

Every action performed by a human being becomes in some way the cause of other actions, decisions, thoughts, that everything that happens is inextricably knotted to everything that will happen, one comes to recognise the existence of an actual immortality, that of motion. (P. 97)

Modiano has been firm in his assertion that despite the public's impression of his writings as being primarily retrospective, he is in fact more interested in time itself as a

²⁴¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 222.

concept and in an interview with *MK2*, he tells us, ‘j’ai toujours été obsédé par le temps – *pas par le passé, mais par le temps*’ (my italics).²⁴² Throughout his œuvre, we discover a portrayal of time that is non-teleological, with narrators frequently referring to the ‘surimpression’ or ‘transparence du temps.’ In *Vestiaire de l’enfance*, to cite one of many examples, Jimmy remarks how ‘tout se confondait par un phénomène de surimpression — oui, tout se confondait et devenait d’une si pure et si implacable transparence... la transparence du temps, aurait dit Carlos Sirvent’ (p. 151).

The author’s interest in seasons has been constant in his œuvre, their cyclicity depicted as thwarting any sense of temporal progression. In some cases the return of seasons has a jarring and disarming effect on Modiano’s narrators who inadvertently find themselves projected into different temporal spheres, which in turn can lead to the reactivation of a particular period. As such, seasons could be seen as portals which enable the movement across space and time. For example, contemplating why Jansen emerged from having been ‘en hibernation’ in his mind, the narrator of *Chien de printemps* wonders whether it was on account of his chance finding of a photograph that Jansen had taken, ‘ou bien pour la simple raison que les printemps se ressemblent’:

Aujourd’hui, l’air était léger, les bourgeons avaient éclaté aux arbres du jardin de l’Observatoire et le mois d’avril 1992 se fondait par un phénomène de surimpression avec celui d’avril 1964, et avec d’autres mois d’avril dans le futur. (Pp. 17-18)

In *L’Horizon*, seasons once more play a vital role in the portrayal of time.

Interestingly, when Bosmans thinks about Margaret Le Coz, he cannot place his encounter with her in a particular season, not because his recollection is failing him, but because the seasons themselves do not adhere to boundaries, but rather they overlap and mingle, inhibiting any sense of temporal linearity. When he reflects on Margaret’s disappearance, for example, he asks himself ‘mais en quelle saison était-ce?’:

²⁴² MK2 Diffusion, ‘[Rencontre] Patrick Modiano: à l’occasion de la sortie de *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*’.

Sans doute le printemps de l'hiver, comme il appelait les beaux jours de janvier et de février. Ou l'été du printemps, quand il fait déjà très chaud en avril. Ou simplement l'été indien, en automne - toutes ces saisons qui se mêlent les unes aux autres et vous donnent l'impression que le temps s'est arrêté. (P. 160)

Whilst Modiano continues to refer to the seasons and their role in dissolving temporal boundaries in *L'Horizon*, this novel introduces a more radical conception of time by referring to the existence of many parallel worlds and temporal layers that can be accessed by passing through invisible barriers. During their arrest, Yvonne Gauche and docteur Poutrel advise Margaret to take their son, Peter, to the apartment of a certain Suzanne Kraay, which Bosmans later locates during his search for Margaret. Although the concierge cannot provide him with any information about Suzanne Kraay, Bosmans is not concerned. He need only stay outside the apartment and wait for the correct conditions to allow him access the moment itself of Margaret's arrival:

Une femme, d'une trentaine d'années. Elle semblait ne pas comprendre. Elle le fixait d'un œil soupçonneux. Il lui épela le nom. Elle eut un mouvement négatif de la tête. Puis elle referma la porte de sa loge. Il s'y attendait, mais cela n'avait aucune importance. Dehors, il demeura encore quelques instants devant la façade. Du soleil. La rue était silencieuse. Il avait la certitude, à ces instants-là, qu'il suffisait de rester immobile sur le trottoir et l'on franchissait doucement un mur invisible. Et pourtant, on était toujours à la même place. La rue serait encore plus silencieuse et plus ensoleillé. Ce qui avait lieu une fois se répétait à l'infini. De là-bas, du bout de la rue, Margaret s'avancerait vers lui... (P. 166)

In an attempt to describe this alternative conception of time, Bosmans refers to a science fiction novel called *Les corridors du temps*. As a mature man, he notices a woman who resembles Margaret as she was during the months that he knew her, and this sighting reminds him of the narrative of *Les corridors du temps*:

Des gens étaient amis dans leur jeunesse, mais certains ne vieillissent pas, et quand ils croisent les autres après quarante ans, ils ne les reconnaissent plus. Et d'ailleurs il ne peut plus y avoir contact entre eux: Ils sont souvent côte à côte, mais chacun dans un corridor du temps différent. [...] Il s'était arrêté et la regardait s'éloigner en direction de la Seine.

Il ne sert à rien que je la rattrape, pensa Bosmans. Elle ne me reconnaîtrait pas. Mais un jour, par miracle, nous emprunterons le même corridor. Et tout recommencera pour nous deux dans ce quartier neuf. (P. 128)

Spatial and temporal spheres are intertwined in Modiano's depiction of the 'ligne de fuite' in *L'Horizon*. These are further unified in his depictions of the experience of the eternal return, where both Roland in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* and Bosmans in *L'Horizon* refer to midday, the hour when 'deux aiguilles se rejoignent sur le cadran' (p. 171). As discussed in the previous chapter, this hour is depicted as being still, frozen and timeless; it is the 'noontide pause' representing the 'perfect stasis of latency'.²⁴³ In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche describes noon as the moment at which the connectivity of everything becomes briefly perceptible, 'man sees many things he never saw before, and for as far as he can see everything is enmeshed in a net of light and as it were buried in it' (p. 387), whilst Zarathustra envisages a world in which 'everything [is] enchained, entwined [and] enamoured' (p. 263). As such, noon appears to represent the moment where the eternally travelling, mutating, weaving and creating 'lignes de fuite' slow down, become still and briefly reveal themselves in a 'spatial montage'²⁴⁴ and when this moment passes 'life again draws man to it'.²⁴⁵

5.6.3 Wanderers/nomads

Modiano's *L'Horizon* depicts a world that is entirely 'flou'. Temporal and spatial boundaries no longer apply, corridors, lines, or 'paths of mutation' travel over a single plane weaving and actualising connections as they go. The middle is everywhere and no single perspective

²⁴³ Nicholas J. Perella, *Midday in Italian Literature: Variations on an Archetypal Theme*, pp. 24-26

²⁴⁴ Lev Manovich describes 'spatial montage' as the representation of a 'multitude of separate events within a single space' in *The Language of New Media* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), p. 322.

²⁴⁵ *Human, All Too Human*, p. 387.

can be adopted so that no true meaning or purpose can be established; rather the navigation of such a world is nomadic. In the possession of Dionysian wisdom, the ‘ligne de fuite’ is exciting and enticing and it opens up horizons. As we have seen, Nietzsche depicts the Dionysian world as a chariot laden with flowers; it is ‘ripe’ and filled with potential and for ‘truly active men’ it is thrilling and truly liberating.²⁴⁶

Unlike earlier narrators, such as those of *Chien de printemps* or *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, Modiano's protagonist, Bosmans, appears to value and relish the fluid nature of the world and he is happy to become a wanderer, without particular goals. Modiano's earlier narrators are not ready to embrace such a fluid vision of the world because they have not undertaken a revaluation of values by affirming the eternal return. As such, a Dionysian evocation of the world is for them overwhelming and disorientating. These earlier narrators lament the lack of a ‘point de repère’; they seek to regain fixity and stability so that they no longer travel without direction.

Nietzsche is conscious of the potential for those who have not yet attained Dionysian wisdom to be overwhelmed by the revelation of a goalless and fluid world, which he depicts metaphorically as the open sea. For example, in his section ‘The shadow’ in the fourth part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra undergoes a moment of self-doubt and his shadow wonders:

Do I - still have a goal? A harbour toward which *my* sail turns?

A good wind? Indeed, only the one who knows *where* he is sailing knows also which wind is good and which is his favourable wind [...]

Oh eternal everywhere, oh eternal nowhere, oh eternal – in vain! (P. 222)

Throughout his œuvre, Modiano's protagonists have expressed their fear of such directionless travel. For example, the detective narrator of *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* longs for some ‘points de repère’ so that he no longer has ‘l'impression de naviguer au hasard’ (p. 50)

²⁴⁶ *Human, All Too Human*, p. 387

whilst, as discussed in chapter three, trains and cars feature heavily in the author's novels with protagonists rarely in the driver's seat. As such they cannot control their destination, a situation which usually instils in them a sense of panic and asphyxia. We encounter this fear in *Chien de printemps*, for example, when the narrator is thrown into disarray whilst on an accelerating train (p. 81). Similarly, in *Dimanches d'août*, the grey car marked CD (*corps diplomatique*) belonging to the Neals becomes a disquieting presence in the novel. The protagonists, Jean and Sylvia find themselves in the rear seat while the Neals are driving and Jean recalls how 'l'inquiétude me gagnait, peu à peu. Je voulais faire un signe à Sylvia. Nous descendrions de la voiture au prochain feu rouge. Et si les portes étaient bloquées?' (p. 57). Equally, in *L'Horizon*, the young Bosmans and Margaret Le Coz feel themselves to be constantly taking night trains, a sensation that they are uncomfortable with.

However, as he matures, Bosmans' outlook appears to change and we witness an increased pleasure in random travel and chance encounters. In the final pages of *L'Horizon*, he finds himself in Berlin where he hopes to locate Margaret Le Coz many years after their separation. He stays up late into the night observing the trams as they come and go. If he wishes to meet Margaret again, he ruminates, 'il suffisait de prendre l'un d'eux, au hasard' (p. 167). As such, the presence of forms of transport in Modiano's writing seems strongly related to the concept of the 'ligne de fuite'. In chapter three, we noted their presence during episodes of dissolution; just as the silent streets and routes terrify narrators, so too do the vehicles and trains that hurtle down them with unknown destinations. In *L'Horizon*, however, the trams are enabling; with their potential to transcend space and time, they allow him access to a myriad of possible destinations.

If Nietzsche recognises the potential fear one might experience on the 'open seas', he nevertheless exhorts us to value random and directionless travels. If we truly possess Dionysian wisdom, he argues, we will relish setting sail, being 'restlessly and aimlessly on

[our] way',²⁴⁷ being buffeted in all directions and without any particular destination. Having identified Margaret's name through an internet search, Bosmans makes his way to a bookshop where she may be working. Despite not knowing the city, he decides not to consult a map:

Il n'avait plus besoin de consulter le plan. Il marchait droit devant lui, il traversait le pont de la voie ferrée, puis un autre pont sur la Spree. Et si c'était un détour, cela n'avait aucune importance. (Pp. 168-69)

5.7 'Avec le temps...'

As with the work of Nietzsche, which does not present itself as a teleological development of ideas, the path to Dionysian wisdom in Modiano's writings does not take place in a linear and logical way. The narrative of liberation thus does not begin in Modiano's early writings and progress neatly throughout his oeuvre towards an eventual attainment of Dionysian wisdom. In many novels, however, a sense of progression is implied through the pairing of youthful narrators and older protagonists or through the recollections of a mature narrator as he revisits his youth. In *Chien de printemps*, for example, we encounter the friendship between the young narrator and the more mature Jansen, whilst in *La Petite Bijou*, Thérèse is befriended by the pharmacist, who similarly is older than her. In *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*, the young Roland and Jacqueline find themselves under the wings of Guy-de-Vere and Bob Storms, while in *L'Horizon* this binary is manifested in the dichotomy of the mature and youthful narrator.

Modiano's youthful narrators and protagonists tend to experience the dissolution of their world, or their first liberation, as a crisis; their unravelling is visceral and it causes them a deep anxiety. They thus find themselves in need of guidance and take comfort from their friendships with more mature and therefore empathetic free spirits. These youthful

²⁴⁷ *Human, All Too Human*, p. 7

protagonists also mistakenly believe that their ‘période de flou et d’incertitude’ will eventually pass and they hope that with age they will find solutions to overcoming it.²⁴⁸

Mature protagonists, however, are unable to guide the youthful narrators towards their liberation. Despite appearing older and wiser, they have not been liberated themselves; they are merely resigned and accustomed to their outsider status, to their own frequent episodes of dissolution and to the fact that their lives ‘basculent du bon ou du mauvais côté’.²⁴⁹

As such, Modiano often presents us with the dichotomy youth and maturity in which he draws a distinction between the uncertain and unhappy youth who nonetheless is hopeful that his future will become certain and happy, and the mature man who has realised that in his present condition he might never attain the certainty and contentment he seeks at all. This duality is explored with particular detail in *Chien de printemps* in which the mature narrator recollects his youthful encounter with the photographer Jansen. As a young man, the narrator is hopeful that his life will improve and is comforted by the suggestion that, being young, ‘la vie commence pour [lui]’ and that ‘il y avait encore toutes ces longues années devant [lui]’ (p. 75). However, the youthful narrator finds his expectations of liberation thwarted as he recognises that his own outcome is likely to mirror that of Jansen. As such Modiano suggests that we might conflate the characters of the narrator and Jansen, and consider them as a single person viewed at different periods of his life. The narrator thus recalls a dream in which his own identity merges with that of the photographer:

Le trottoir était tapissé de feuilles mortes et je longeais le mur et le talus du gazon du réservoir de Montsouris derrière lesquels j’imaginai l’eau dormante. Une pensée m’accompagnait, d’abord vague et de plus en plus précise : je m’appelais Francis Jansen.
(Pp. 91-92)

As an older man, the narrator suggests that he is in a position to understand Jansen’s desire to disappear to Mexico:

²⁴⁸ *Chien de printemps*, p. 108

²⁴⁹ Liban, ‘Entretien: Modiano’, p. 100.

Je ne lui en voulais pas. Et même, je le comprenais si bien... J'avais noté chez lui certaines manières d'agir et certains traits de caractère qui m'étaient familiers. [...] Je ne pouvais présager de l'avenir mais d'ici une trentaine d'années, quand j'aurais atteint l'âge de Jansen, je ne répondrais plus au téléphone et je disparaîtrais, comme lui, un soir de juin, en compagnie d'un chien fantôme. (Pp. 106-07)

The idea of progression implied through the maturing of narrators and protagonists is ultimately false and misleading. Older protagonists are rarely wiser, rather they are wearier, displaying a 'retreat from intellectual strength'²⁵⁰ and living an 'exhausted life that prefers not to will'²⁵¹ that is indicative of passive nihilism. Jansen thus gradually disengages from society before disappearing to Mexico, for example, whilst as we saw in the previous chapter, the pharmacist in *La Petite Bijou* can give Thérèse no other advice than to take medication and to 'lutter contre les idées noires' (p. 96). Neither of these mature protagonists have found themselves liberated over the course of time. They have not undergone a revaluation of values and therefore continue to endorse their existing value system and consequently struggle to adhere to it.

In *L'Horizon* we once again encounter the dichotomy of mature and youthful protagonist as Bosmans recalls his past. Here, however, the mature Bosmans is finally depicted as being liberated, possessing a Dionysian wisdom that he lacked in his youth. In the section of this novel beginning with the words 'Avec le temps...', a reference to Léo Ferré's song of the same title, Bosmans suggests that, with time, his outlook changed so that the things that caused him to suffer when he was young no longer have the power to overcome him. As such, while the young Bosmans feels the need to 'lutter contre l'indifférence et l'anonymat des grandes villes, et peut-être aussi contre les incertitudes de la vie' (p. 28), the mature Bosmans, as we have seen, enjoys uncertainty and is happy to be 'en dérive' and without a destination. More importantly, his attitude to suffering is significantly altered so

²⁵⁰ Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *A Companion to Nietzsche*, p. 255.

²⁵¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 143

that he is now able to remark that ‘ce qui nous a fait souffrir autrefois paraît dérisoire avec le temps’ (p. 43).

As such, we might suggest that Bosmans is the first protagonist in Modiano’s oeuvre to be truly liberated and therefore to be truly wise. He has experienced the eternal return and its ‘fearful insight into reality’, yet despite contemplating this ‘most abysmal thought’ he nonetheless finds in it ‘no objection to existence’. He is ‘the eternal Yes to all things, “the tremendous unbounded Yes and Amen”’ and ‘into every abyss [he] still bear the blessing of [his] affirmation’...²⁵²

5.8 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter we identified the relation between Dionysian wisdom and the eternal return. The eternal return presents us with a scenario whereby the world is eternally becoming, where being (or sustained satisfaction) is impossible. Yet Nietzsche recognises in humans an innate will to overcome resistance and achieve goals. In a situation of eternal becoming these goals cannot be achieved and as such the will remains in a state of constant toiling. The eternal return therefore is a concept that promotes suffering, since in its formulation, the will is forever frustrated and unable to satisfy its desires.

In urging us to affirm the eternal return, Nietzsche therefore exhorts us to affirm suffering. In order to be able to do so, we must re-evaluate our values so that we recognise both the necessity of suffering and its desirability. Suffering is desirable if we recognise what can be gained from the constant toiling of the will, and when we understand what is exciting about a world of eternal becoming. The satisfaction of our desires is undesirable because it would render the will inactive, leaving us suspended in an eternal present. On the contrary, all newness, potential and possibility – in short, the horizon – derive from a situation of

²⁵² *Ecce Homo*, p. 77.

becoming. Becoming, then, is a crucial component of creativity. Thus, suggesting that permanence, certainty, knowledge, and the removal of resistance have hitherto been conferred too great a value, Nietzsche calls for a revaluation of these values. Rather than seek permanence, we can derive happiness from transience, self-conscious ignorance, and resistance. This revaluation enables our liberation, projecting us into Dionysian wisdom.

We have thus far examined the ways in which this path to Dionysian wisdom can be traced in Modiano's oeuvre. In earlier texts we encounter narrators and protagonists who have witnessed the dissolution of the values they have received from society, but who have not yet progressed to affirm the eternal return and re-evaluate their values. Such protagonists are therefore uncomfortable with a world that is eternally becoming and seek certainty, fixity/stability, limitation, coherence and purpose. However, in more recent novels, we witness the affirmation of the eternal return and in its wake, we find in *L'Horizon* a protagonist who could be seen to possess Dionysian wisdom, and therefore to be, in Nietzsche's terms, liberated. This Dionysian wisdom manifests itself in the approach of the protagonist, Bosmans, to his inquiry into the past, in which he displays a pleasure in suffering, not knowing and lack of certainty, recognising their desirability and inherence in all creativity. He is excited by 'lignes de fuite', which are representative of a world that is eternally becoming and of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power. Like the will, these lines weave and toil and they thrive on resistance. They do not heed limits and borders but merely change shape and mutate in their encounters with them so anything becomes possible, rendering the world, to use Modiano's term, completely and utterly 'flou'.

6) Conclusion

Reading Nietzsche and Modiano in parallel may at first appear unusual. Nietzsche's uncompromising, often aggressive and argumentative writing style seems far removed from Modiano's nebulous and suggestive narratives. Where the philosopher presents his thoughts with assurance and strident self-belief, Modiano's writings display hesitance, doubt and gentle rumination. In interviews, the author appears indecisive and vacillating; he struggles to explain his ideas and is consequently apologetic. Interviewers often describe him as being humble, and lacking self-assurance,²⁵³ and in their written form his responses to their questions contain many ellipses, or 'points de suspension'.²⁵⁴

However, this thesis hopes to have demonstrated how, despite Modiano's claim to have no 'culture philosophique', a co-reading of the seemingly disparate Nietzsche and Modiano is both relevant and productive. Tracing a Nietzschean narrative of liberation in Modiano's writings offers a fresh perspective which sheds new light on some of the aspects of his writing which have hitherto been underexplored by Modiano scholars, such as the question of dissolution, disorientation, and the affirmation of the eternal return. Furthermore,

²⁵³ For example, Julien Bisson, 'Patrick Modiano: Literary Giant', *France Today*, August 2010 http://www.francetoday.com/articles/2010/08/22/patrick_modiano_literary_giant.html [site accessed 7 September 2011].

²⁵⁴ See, for example, Marianne Payot and Delphine Peras, 'Patrick Modiano: "Je suis devenu comme un bruit de fond"', *L'Express*, March 2010 <http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/patrick-modiano-je-suis-devenu-comme-un-bruit-de-fond_852718.html> [site accessed 24 October 2011].

a Nietzschean reading enables us to approach Modiano systematically, and to thus reveal the interconnectedness of his ideas. As such, where scholars have largely undertaken thematic approaches to his work, discussing as independent themes the question of inachèvement, the outsider status of narrators and protagonists, or ‘disparition’, for example, this thesis provides a framework in which these ideas can be seen as interrelated, and where they can be unified in a broader philosophical narrative of self-overcoming and liberation.

The thesis has thus suggested that we can identify in Modiano’s literary output a Nietzschean trajectory towards Dionysian wisdom, and has identified the ways in which the concepts of the eternal return, the revaluation of values and the will to power provide productive and enlightening avenues for exploring his work. In doing so, we have considered Modiano’s writings as literary counterparts to Nietzsche’s predominantly discursive output in such a way that they form a duality which perhaps itself merits attention.

Taking its cue from Nietzsche’s promotion of ‘uncompleted thoughts’, this chapter suggests further avenues for exploration. It draws on the problematic of writing ‘experience’, noting the differing ways in which Nietzsche and Modiano evoke the experience of the eternal return and subsequently exploring their use of visual language, focusing in particular on their treatment of light, shadow and perspective. In doing so, the chapter questions whether Modiano’s texts could be seen to succeed in a way that Nietzsche’s do not in taking the reader close to what the philosopher terms ‘the nerve stimulus’.²⁵⁵

6.1 Nietzsche and the pitfalls of concept

Nietzsche habitually draws attention in his writings to the failures of theory and concept, which he feels distance one from vivid encounters, and visceral sensations. We can detect in Nietzsche’s writing a distinct unease with his own status as a theorist or thinker, which is turn

²⁵⁵ *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, p. 256

reflected in his stylistic experimentation. Creating books of aphorisms, essays, music scores and poetry, he himself favours from within his œuvre his literary philosophy in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a book which he feels ‘stands by itself’.²⁵⁶ One might suggest that these literary experiments offered a space in which to explore and interrogate the visceral and immediate emotions and sensations, something that academic philosophical rhetoric was ill-suited to do. As such, in his foreword to the second edition of his treatise, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, Karl Löwith notes Nietzsche’s insistence on ‘the experiences of thought’ and suggests that he may be best understood as a ‘philosophic author’ (p. 8). In a similar vein, Walter Kaufmann questions why Nietzsche valued ‘so extravagantly’ his ‘most dubious doctrine’, that of the eternal return, concluding that ‘the answer must be sought in the fact that the eternal recurrence was to Nietzsche less an idea than an experience – the supreme experience of a life unusually rich in suffering, pain and agony’.²⁵⁷

As a thinker, Nietzsche necessarily works with concepts yet he often advocates an approach in which the immediacy of experience takes preference over detached theoretical discourse. In *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*, he criticises the sober detachment adopted in the so-called ‘objective’ approach to the past which ‘produces no emotion at all’ and wherein ‘the driest phrase is the right phrase’ (p. 93). Furthermore, he rejects notions of objectivity wherein the ‘proper man to describe [the past]’, is deemed to be ‘he to whom a moment of the past *means nothing at all*’ (p. 93), thus insisting on the importance of intellectual and emotional proximity to one’s subject. Similarly in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche depicts the great thinker as one who ‘has the experience, the sensation’, and whose ‘deep-rooted passion’ ‘gnaws at [him] and often consumes him’ (p. 98).

²⁵⁶ *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, p. 5

²⁵⁷ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 323

If Nietzsche draws attention to the importance of experience, he is equally conscious of the challenge of communicating it and the chasm between vivid perception and its description, or the ‘abyss between language and lived experience’.²⁵⁸ He undertakes a closer analysis of this problematic in his essay *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873). Here Nietzsche discusses the levels of metaphor which necessarily distance man from what he calls ‘the nerve stimulus’ (p. 255), thereby locking him up ‘within a proud deceitful consciousness, removed from the coils of the intestines, the rapid flow of the bloodstream, the intricate vibrations of the fibres’ (p. 254). Aligning language with concept, Nietzsche claims that words are removed from ‘intuitive first impressions’ of perception (p. 258), placing language at the end of the process that converts experience into concept. To begin with, the nerve stimulus is transferred into an image. This image represents the first metaphor for ‘the nerve stimulus’. Next, the image is imitated in sound, which constitutes the second metaphor. Finally, ‘the nerve stimulus’ becomes conceptualised through its linguistic manifestation. Nietzsche thus reminds us that:

[E]very word immediately becomes a concept because it is not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique, entirely individualised primal experience to which it owes its existence, but because it has to fit at one and the same time countless more or less similar cases which, strictly speaking, are never equal or, in other words, are always unequal. (P. 256)

Putting experience into words thus takes one away from the individual subjective experience and universalises the unique; through their universality and repeat usage, words have thus lost their ‘sensuous force’ (p.257).

Importantly, Nietzsche also describes words as being ‘firm, canonical and binding’ (p. 257); they impose form and meaning and as such they limit freedom, set in stone, and provide rigid rule over perceptions and impulses. Nietzsche questions the validity of language for the

²⁵⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 252

expression and communication of experiences that are ‘not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks’,²⁵⁹ suggesting that man has wilfully surrounded himself with falsehood in the belief that language is an equivalent for truth when it is in fact only a metaphor for things that are impossible to comprehend and express. As such, stressing the arbitrariness of language, Nietzsche posits that man’s conception of the ‘the thing in itself’ is in fact nothing more than a ‘mobile army of metaphors metonymies, anthropomorphisms’ (p. 257):

In short, [truth] is a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred [and] decorated [...] truths are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions’. (P. 257)

Nietzsche asserts therefore that man takes comfort from his ability to conceptualise because in doing so he is able to construct order, a ‘world of laws, privileges, subordinations and border demarcations’. In translating experience into concepts we render the world ‘solid’ thus subduing and classifying the ‘mysterious X of the thing-in-itself’ (p. 256).

As we have seen, Nietzsche’s interest in the problem of describing things that ‘push at the boundaries of thought’ is self-reflexive in nature and the philosopher appears to recognise the ambiguity of his own situation.²⁶⁰ As a writer and philosopher, words and ideas are his tools yet he sees in them the ‘rigid regularity’ of ‘the great edifice of concepts’.²⁶¹ Modiano too draws attention to the problematic of communicating intuitive and visceral experience. We might recall from chapter four, for example, Jacqueline’s recollection of her rising out of the ‘trou noir’ as she ascends the hill of Montmartre in *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue*. She struggles to conceptually express the sensation of this overcoming, which she likens to being overwhelmed by ‘une ivresse’ (p. 95). As such, in her account of this primal

²⁵⁹ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 9.

²⁶⁰ Colin Davis, ‘Etat Présent: Hauntology, Spectres and phantoms’. p. 379.

²⁶¹ *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, p. 258.

experience, she evokes the sensation of drunkenness, a state in which one's conceptualising capacities are significantly reduced or even rendered entirely redundant. Subsequent to this, Jacqueline gropes for words to depict the intensity of her experience. 'Quel mot traduirait mon état d'esprit?', she wonders, 'Ivresse? Extase? Ravissement?' before concluding that 'je ne dispose que d'un très pauvre vocabulaire' (p. 96).

In an alternative context, Modiano again raises the question of the adequacy of language in an exchange between the narrator of *Chien de printemps* and the photographer, Jansen:

[Jansen] m'avait demandé ce que je comptais faire plus tard et je lui avais répondu:

– Écrire.

Cette activité lui semblait être 'la quadrature du cercle' – le terme exact qu'il avait employé. 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 pas de dormir...

De tous les caractères d'imprimerie, il m'avait dit qu'il préférerait les points de suspension.
(Pp. 20-21)

For Nietzsche and Modiano, both of whom are engaged in conveying things close to the 'nerve stimulus', the problem of writing could indeed be seen as the 'quadrature du cercle'. Examining their respective descriptions of the experience of the eternal return brings to light the differing approaches employed by the two writers as they attempt to overcome the inherent remove between language and sensation as experienced at the 'nerve stimulus'.

6.2. Writing the experience of the eternal return

As we have seen in chapter two, Nietzsche presents the idea of the eternal return as a thought experiment. However, in *Ecce Homo* he describes first experiencing the eternal return in a timeless moment in August 1881 'a moment of ecstatic suspension under an Alpine zenith by

Lake Silvaplana in the Upper Engadine in Switzerland'.²⁶² The philosopher subsequently depicts his experience as a flash of 'inspiration', and in a lengthy passage, attempts to convey the intensity and significance of the moment of its occurrence:

The concept of revelation, in the sense that something suddenly, with unspeakable certainty and subtlety becomes visible, audible, something that shakes and overturns one to the depths, simply describes the fact. One hears, one does not seek; one takes, one does not ask who gives; a thought flashes up like lightning, with necessity, unfalteringly formed [...] An ecstasy whose tremendous tension sometimes discharges itself in a flood of tears, while one's steps now involuntarily rush along, now involuntarily lag; a complete being outside oneself with the distinct consciousness of a multitude of subtle shudders and trickles down to one's toes; a depth of happiness in which the most painful and gloomy things appear, not as an antithesis, but as conditioned, demanded, as necessary colour within such a superfluity of light; an instinct for rhythmical relationships which spans forms of wide extent – length, the need for a wide-spanned rhythm is almost the measure of the force of inspiration, a kind of compensation for its pressure and tension... Everything is in the highest degree involuntary but takes place as in a tempest of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity... The involuntary nature of image, of metaphor is the most remarkable thing of all; one no longer has an idea what is image, what metaphor, everything presents itself as the readiest, the truest, the simplest means of expression. [...] This is my experience of inspiration; I do not doubt that one has to go back thousands of years to find anyone who could say to me 'it is mine also' .(Pp. 72-73).²⁶³

In itself, the length of this description is significant as Nietzsche struggles to evoke the sensation of his experience in a variety of ways, recounting how his inspiration for the eternal return was revealed to him, it was given without his asking for it, its impact was physical and he had the sensation of a slowing of motion, which in turn enabled his encounter with things that otherwise are hidden from view. Evoking 'flashes of lightning', 'tremendous tension', 'ecstasy', 'floods of tears', 'shudders' and 'divinity', the philosopher's account employs a vivid terminology; however, he does not succeed in fully conveying his sensations, which can

²⁶² Nicholas J. Perella, *Midday in Italian Literature: Variations on an Archetypal Theme*, p. 22

²⁶³ In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche presents an entirely contradictory opinion on 'inspiration' where he scorns artists who 'have an interest in the existence of a belief in the sudden occurrence of ideas' (p. 83).

only be achieved by immersing the reader in the same experience. It is possible that Nietzsche's failure to involve the reader derives precisely from the abundance of words in his account, words which, as he proposes in *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, necessarily distance us from the 'nerve stimulus'. As such, Nietzsche's passage could be described as containing what Kristeva terms 'empty linguistic signs';²⁶⁴ since they fail to 'evoke a teeming life-world of embodied existence'.²⁶⁵

Conversely, Modiano's evocations of the experience of the eternal return are fleeting and barely sketched, thus mirroring the transience of the 'moment' itself. They contain no descriptive language but rather, in their refusal to 'céder au mélodrame', they are comparatively stark and lacking in the dramatic hyperbole employed by Nietzsche:²⁶⁶

Nous sommes arrivés sur la place de l'Église, devant la station de métro. Et là, je peux le dire maintenant que je n'ai plus rien à perdre: j'ai senti pour la seule fois de ma vie, ce qu'était l'Éternel Retour. [...] C'était juste avant de descendre les escaliers de la station de métro Église-d'Auteuil. Pourquoi à cet endroit? Je n'en sais rien et cela n'a aucune importance. Je suis resté un moment immobile et je lui ai serré le bras. 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. Pas besoin de consulter ma montre. Je savais qu'il était midi. (P. 145)

One could argue that it is precisely the spare and pared down nature of Modiano's accounts which enable the reader to comprehend his narrators' experience of the eternal return.

Writing on 'Le Sentiment du Vide et les Limites du Langage', Daniel Parrochia discusses the importance, in Modiano's texts, of speaking as little as possible:

Il y a donc aussi du silence à préserver parce qu'il y a dans le monde de l'incompréhensible, à commencer par cet élément mystique de la présence des choses et du monde lui-même, en deçà ou au-delà de toute prédication, de tout tableau logique. Il y

²⁶⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*, p. 252.

²⁶⁵ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 98.

²⁶⁶ Daniel Parrochia, *Ontologie Fantôme: Essai sur l'œuvre de Patrick Modiano* (Fougères: Encre Marine, 1996), p. 55.

a du silence à maintenir parce que [...] il y a, en somme, de l'indicible et de l'ineffable, et que [selon Wittgenstein] 'ce dont on ne peut parler, il faut le taire'.²⁶⁷

If Modiano attempts to say as little as possible, he does not deprive the reader of sensation. Rather, his suggestive passages recounting his narrators' experience of the eternal return could be seen to succeed in a way that Nietzsche's does not, providing the reader with subtle linguistic and visual signs that assist in evoking the disturbing nature of these crises.

6.2.1 *The quotidian and the sublime*

It could be argued that it is the very mundanity of the setting of Modiano's protagonists' crises which renders them so unsettling and their depiction so effective since they transform the everyday into something alien and disquieting, but also 'perfect'. While Nietzsche's sublime experience takes place high in the Swiss mountains, with the awe-inspiring scenery serving as a dramatic counterpart to the visceral emotional state that the writer is embroiled in, Modiano sites such episodes in altogether more banal locales. As we have seen above, Roland's experience of the eternal return takes place outside a metro station whilst in chapter three, we might recall that two of the episodes of the dissolution of values that the narrator of *Chien de printemps* undergoes occur as he is sitting in a café and in a park surrounded by busy urban life.

The Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, himself heavily influenced by Nietzschean philosophy, describes a similar metaphysical crisis to that undergone by the narrator of *Chien de printemps*:²⁶⁸

One clear autumnal morning I was sitting on a bench in the middle of the Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. It was of course not the first time that I had seen this square. I had just

²⁶⁷ Daniel Parrochia, *Ontologie Fantôme: Essai sur l'œuvre de Patrick Modiano*, p. 57

²⁶⁸ De Chirico's early writings reveal the extent of his interest in Nietzsche and he even goes so far as to see himself as the only person to have truly understood the philosopher. Letters to Fritz Gartz published in Paolo Baldacci, 'The Function of Nietzsche's Thought in de Chirico's Art', in *Nietzsche and 'An Architecture of Our Minds'*, ed. by Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), p. 92.

come out of a long and painful intestinal illness, and I was in a nearly morbid state of sensitivity. The whole world, down to the marble of the buildings and the fountains, seemed to me to be convalescent [...] Then I had the strange impression that I was looking at all these things for the first time...²⁶⁹

Discussing this passage in an essay on convalescing, Matthew Beaumont notes how in de Chirico's account, 'life itself, condemned to a state of deadening repetition, especially in the routine spaces of the city, is apprehended as if for the first time' (p. 59). The reader is at once at home in the everyday description, but simultaneously disquieted by it as it begins to lose its meaning and is seen afresh. As with Modiano's passages, the episode is imbued with an unsettling air that relies on the reader's recognition and familiarity with the everyday from which the protagonist is removed by his dissolution. This effect is perhaps not so readily achieved in Nietzsche's attempt to describe the experience of the eternal return, which, as we have seen, is situated in the sublime alpine setting.

6.3 The importance of the visual

In *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche describes the layers of metaphor that convert the 'nerve stimulus' into concept, noting that it 'is first transformed into an image' (p. 256). Nietzsche thus suggests that an image, whilst never escaping its metaphorical status, is at least in a better position to take us close to our 'intuitive first impressions'.

In *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche suggests that the image acts as a bridge between the 'thing-in-itself' and its linguistic manifestation, and he therefore advocates 'painting in writing':

An object of significance will be best represented if, like a chemist, one takes the colours for the painting from the object itself, and then employs them like a painter: so that the outline is allowed to grow out of the boundaries and shadings of the colours. Thus the

²⁶⁹ Giorgio de Chirico, 'Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon' (1910), quoted in Matthew Beaumont, 'Convalescing', in *Restless Cities*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont and Greg Dart (London: Verso, 2010), p. 59.

painting will acquire something of the ravishing element of nature which makes the object itself significant. (P. 96)

However, despite stressing the importance of the visual for the evocation of visceral experience, Nietzsche himself primarily employs visual devices to aid the communication of concepts, relying on visual properties of sunlight, darkness and perspective for the communication of some of his key ideas. Like Nietzsche, Modiano also relies on visual properties and processes in his evocation of certain existential states, and similar to the philosopher, light, darkness and perspective play a crucial role in the depiction of a descent into nihilism and the ensuing sense of disorientation. However, Modiano differs from Nietzsche in that his visual evocations do not have theoretical underpinning and therefore have the function of once more plunging us into an experience and taking us back to ‘the nerve stimulus’.

6.3.1 Light, shadow and perspective in Nietzsche's writings

Light and darkness often feature in Nietzsche's texts as visual metaphors for the sensation of nihilism and self-overcoming, perhaps most explicitly in his evocation of *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, in which the shadow struggles to come to terms with nihilism whilst the wanderer stands in full sunlight having found the means for self-overcoming. Like Modiano's ‘trou noir’, Nietzsche's evocation of darkness acts a useful device for communicating the experience of nihilistic despair and the disorientation felt by those who are unsure as to where they should turn after the dissolution of their values. However, Nietzsche's depiction of the wanderer and his shadow has a yet more subtle significance. The philosopher does not conceive of light and darkness as forming a distinct dichotomy, but rather he is interested in the potential of the metaphor to convey the very relatedness of nihilism and self-overcoming. As such, his wanderer and shadow do not present us with binary opposites; on the contrary one cannot exist without the other, they are inextricably linked and as Nietzsche writes, the

two 'stand lovingly hand in hand'.²⁷⁰ The wanderer cannot *permanently* master self-overcoming and his nihilism will always exist within him. At times the wanderer will be drawn back into the depths of nihilistic despair, and as such his shadow may outsize him. Conversely, Nietzsche aligns the experience of self-overcoming and the affirmation of the eternal return with the midday sun, under which shadows are at their shortest.

Similarly, Nietzsche relies on perspective as a visual metaphor for conveying the absence of overarching truth, and he states, for example, in his 'Attempt at Self Criticism' in *The Birth of Tragedy* that 'all life rests on [...] deception, prismatic effects, and the necessity of perspectivism and error' (p. 9). The term 'prismatic effect' provides a visual equivalent of Nietzsche's perspectivism and the dispersion of truth. Looking through a prism, we see light, (or truth) refracted and split into multitudes, which mutate with the alteration of light and the angle from which we observe. This idea is once again depicted visually in his assertion, which we encountered in chapter three, that 'life could not exist except on the basis of perspectival valuations and appearances' where he queries:

Why [...] we even assume that 'true' and 'false' are intrinsically opposed? Isn't it enough to assume that there are levels of appearance and, as it were, lighter and darker shades and tones of appearance - different valeurs [values], to use the language of painters?²⁷¹

The above passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* is indicative of Nietzsche's adoption of the visual; he uses 'the language of painters' primarily as a means of communicating concepts.

6.3.2 Light, shadow and perspective in *Chien de printemps* and *Vestiaire de l'enfance*

Modiano's texts display a predilection for the visual, particularly when they attempt to evoke things and experiences that are linguistically and conceptually difficult to express. Depicting empty urban scenes, solitary figures, uncanny interiors, trains, and seaside towns, Modiano's

²⁷⁰ *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, p. 301

²⁷¹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 35.

imagery is underpinned by an adept treatment of light, shadow and perspective. In some cases, and most particularly in the case of *Vestiaire de l'enfance*, Modiano's visual depictions read as ekphrastic accounts of the early metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico who, as mentioned above, was himself influenced by Nietzschean philosophy.²⁷² Interestingly, De Chirico's *Mélancolie: la rue* appears as the frontispiece of the Gallimard-Folio edition of *La Petite Bijou*. While de Chirico and Modiano draw on a common repertoire of images, they equally rely on the visual properties of light, shadow and perspective as a means to convey the sudden and involuntary 'sentiment d'irréalité'.²⁷³

In our examination of the episodes of dissolution that take place in *Chien de printemps* in chapter three, we noted the effect that the interplay of light and shadow have on its narrator's psyche. As such, we might recall that the narrator's world unravels outside the café de la Paix and how he retrospectively wonders whether his dissolution may have been caused by the June sunshine and the contrast it creates between light and shadow. Awaiting the arrival of Jansen, the narrator experiences the blurring of temporal boundaries which in turn leads to the dissolution of other 'points fixes' which had hitherto rendered his life meaningful. He gradually descends into a 'trou noir', becoming increasingly estranged from the surrounding world:

J'éprouvais une drôle de sensation, assis tout seul à la terrasse du café de la Paix où les clients se pressaient autour des tables. Était-ce le soleil de juin, le vacarme de la circulation, les feuillages des arbres dont le vert formait un si frappant contraste avec le noir des façades [...]. Quelqu'un m'a tapé sur l'épaule. J'ai levé la tête mais j'avais le soleil dans les yeux. [...] Je voyais Jansen en ombres chinoises. (Pp. 96-97)

²⁷² The sun-drenched Mediterranean town in *Vestiaire de l'enfance* lends itself in particular to the evocation of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings. For example, the narrator recalls watching the female protagonist as she moves through the town: 'Elle traversait l'esplanade en plein soleil. Je suis resté un instant immobile, à suivre du regard sa silhouette perdue au milieu de cette esplanade déserte. Était-ce une illusion d'optique, mais son ombre s'étendait derrière elle, de plus en plus longue, et la faisait paraître si petite, avec son sac de paille en bandoulière...' (p. 28).

²⁷³ *Chien de printemps*, p. 80

Seeing his surroundings in silhouette, the narrator momentarily views his world as being unreal. This is echoed in an episode later in the text where once again the contrast between light and shadow triggers his dissolution. In this instance, the narrator is travelling to a house belonging to friends of Jansen, where he hopes to glean some information and the early afternoon sun causes in him ‘un sentiment d’irréalité’ (p.80):

Les volets des maisons de la grande rue étaient clos, à cause du soleil. [...] La grande rue se transformait maintenant en une très large allée bordée de platanes dont les feuillages laissaient à peine filtrer les rayons du soleil. Le silence, l’immobilité des feuillages, les taches de soleil sur lesquelles je marchais me donnaient de nouveau l’impression de rêver. (P. 82)

If sunlight prompts the narrator’s dissolution in this account, the disquieting effect of ‘irréalité’ is further triggered by the shifting of perspective. This shifting causes our understanding of the world to be undermined because the thread of causality that exists between the sign and the signified is broken. As such, we need only alter our viewpoint slightly for the chain of logic to unravel, leading to what de Chirico terms as the ‘solitude of signs’, in which signs no longer point us in a recognisable direction. De Chirico describes such a moment in his metaphysical manifesto:

Let us take an example: I enter a room and see a man seated in a chair, hanging from the ceiling I see a cage with a canary in it, on a wall I notice pictures, and on the shelves, books. All this strikes me, but does not amaze me, since the chain of memories that links one thing to another explains the logic of what I see. But let us suppose that for a moment and for reasons that are inexplicable and independent of my will, the thread of this chain is broken, who knows how I would see the seated man, the cage, the pictures, the bookshelves; who knows what terror and perhaps what sweetness and consolation I would feel when contemplating that scene. But the scene would not have changed, it would be I who would see it from a different angle.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Giorgio de Chirico, ‘On metaphysical art’ in Massimo Carrà (ed.), *Metaphysical Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), p. 89.

This altering of perspective leads to the revelation of a myriad alternative viewpoints and possibilities, hindering the potential to establish any fixed meaning at all. As we have seen in chapter three, this gives rise to disorientation, a sensation that Modiano evokes in *Vestiaire de l'enfance* through the depiction of sliding perspective. The narrator of this novel thus observes in horror how the finger of the statue of Cruz-Valer points at first in one direction and then another so that he wonders if he is experiencing ‘un mauvais rêve où les doigts des statues bougent et indiquent chaque fois une direction différente’ or whether ‘simplement, cet index m'apparaissait-il sous un autre angle de vue?’ (p. 103).

Light, shadow and perspective therefore play an important role in depicting the experience of dissolution and disorientation in *Chien de printemps* and *Vestiaire de l'enfance*. The narrator of the former novel describes his return from the ‘trou noir’ in terms of adjusting one’s lens in order to bring the world back into focus:

Je buvais lentement le lait glacé. Oui peu à peu, le monde autour de moi reprenait ses formes et ses couleurs, comme si je réglais une paire de jumelles pour que la vision devienne de plus en plus nette. (P. 98)

As such, the sensation of overcoming of the ‘trou noir’ is visually communicated, the flat monochrome shapes gradually filling out into three-dimensional, colourful forms through the (re)fixing of perspectival co-ordinates.

6.4 Modiano’s writings as ‘the antidote to the stifling of life’

Suggesting in *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* that the image constitutes the metaphor which is closest to ‘the nerve stimulus’, one might expect Nietzsche to have a high estimation of the visual arts, and also of literature, since literary texts are more hospitable to ‘the language of painters’ than traditional academic rhetoric. However, in his chapter ‘From the Souls of Artists and Writers’ in *Human, All Too Human*, he displays a surprising disdain

for artistic ventures, and in a series of predominantly critical aphorisms he questions their validity. In doing so, Nietzsche often places the artist in opposition to the thinker:

Creative People.—That the painter and the sculptor, of all people, give expression to the ‘idea’ of the human being is mere fantasising and sense-deception. [...] Plastic art wants to make characters visible on the outside; the art of speech employs the word to the same end, it delineates the character in sounds. Art begins from the natural *ignorance* of mankind as to his interior (both bodily and as regards character): it does not exist for physicists or philosophers.

Furthermore, Nietzsche creates a dichotomy between experience and description, suggesting artists are only involved in the latter:

Achilles and Homer. – It is always as between Achilles and Homer: the one *has* the experience, the sensation, the other *describes* it. [...] Artists are by no means men of great passion but they often *pretend* to be, in the unconscious feeling that their painted passions will seem more believable if their own life speaks for their experience in this field. [...] But deep-rooted passion, passion which gnaws at the individual and often consumes him, is a thing of some consequence: he who experiences such passion certainly does not describe in dramas, music or novels. (P. 98)

Nietzsche thus suggests that the visceral and profound run the risk of being lost in artistic creations which he considers to be primarily concerned with the manner of its description.

As we have seen, Nietzsche is wary of language and theory since the ‘edifice of concepts’ necessarily distances us from ‘the nerve stimulus’. Equally, in *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*, he condemns the supposed objectivity of academic discourse, which he aligns with ‘a lack of feeling and moral strength’ and ‘incisive coldness and detachment’ (p. 93). On the other hand, he is equally disparaging of artistic production, which he deems to be obsessed with style and innovation and lacking in profundity. One might argue, then, that Nietzsche effectively seeks a path between these two poles, an ‘antidote to the stifling of life’ through cold conceptualisation and aestheticisation.

Reading Nietzsche and Modiano in parallel, we could conclude that it is Modiano's lack of a 'culture philosophique' and his distance from the domain of theory that renders his writing so effective in communicating existential states. On the other hand, his pared down narratives equally resist aestheticisation, managing to convey visceral experience and to immerse the reader in the experience of existential crises without resorting to hyperbolic description.

Reading a Nietzschean narrative of liberation in the writings of Modiano broadens and enriches our understanding of the author's work; however we might also argue that Modiano's writings complement those of Nietzsche. The author could be seen to succeed where Nietzsche has failed since, by saying very little at all, he takes us back to an 'intuitive world of first impressions', so that we experience Nietzschean ideas as he may have desired us to: at 'the nerve stimulus'.

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