

# COMPARISON OF THE PAST AND PRESENT IN WORKS OF PATRICK MODIANO

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This article is devoted to the work of the famous French writer. The winner of the Nobel Prize - Patrick Modiano. He takes a special place in the French literature of post-modernism. From the very first steps in literature, he stated about himself, about his personal creative way. In his works his creative manner, his world outlook is shown fuller and brighter. Modiano confuses the reader, plays a game with him, and the reader cannot find a traditional "hero" in his novel, positive or negative, who he is used to associate with. The author analyzes his main novels and the postmodern world view ( "The Street of Dark Shops", "Lost World").*

**Key words:** Patrick Modiano, postmodernism, novels, Paris

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This article is dedicated to creativity of famous French writer, Nobel Prize laureate Patrick Modiano. The writer is ridden by searching of his own roots and tries to understand the fate of people. Modiano also points the real reasons of human troubles and is tortured by wish to find answer of all problems, troubling him. It's significant that in some works by Patrick Modiano the exposition of plot is impossible practically. But, in some cases, it's more necessary not simply to trace the plot, events or intrigues, but to trace the gallery of images and their characters. As a matter of fact, the plot in some works by Modiano is factor of secondary order, despite it, the stress is increasing by each page. So, author's main aim is creating of atmosphere, in which he could express his philosophical hypothesis completely and reliably as much as possible. By such means the writer also decides the task of correlation between Past and Future. Modiano's most famous two novels- "Street of Dark Shops" and "Lost World" narrate about it.

## **2. PECULIARITIES OF PATRICK MODIANO'S POSTMODERNIST PERCEPTION OF WORLD**

The playing character of literature has become dominated in literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because a play becomes a world outlook basis of our modern life. Everything turns into a game - business, politics, and relations between people, culture.

Game becomes a basing item in post-modern literature, the basis of intellectual activities, some kind of a basis for the thinking style of postmodern epoch. It was underlined by Ortega-I- Gassed, who spoke about dehumanization of arts and pointed out the main parameters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century arts, drew attention that the creative work turns into a game. First of all, it is connected with the fact that post-modern philosophy does not accept category of "essence", which guides the researcher to the search of depth, roots of phenomena and it brings to the situation when such terms as "aim", "conception" remain unclaimed, and terms "game", "chance" become more preferable.

Patrick Modiano takes a special place in the French literature of post-modernism. Due to his creative work, beginning with his initial works, he has been showing a net picture of post-modernism world outlook.

From the very first steps in literature, he stated about himself, about his personal creative way. In his works his creative manner, his world outlook is shown fuller and brighter. Modiano confuses the reader, plays a game with him, and the reader cannot find a traditional "hero" in his novel, positive or negative, who he is used to associate with. Nearly all Modiano's novels are autobiographical ones and are being written in the first person. He is able to set a contact with a reader, speaks with him in private and as if about himself.

Modiano observes closely the past and tries to understand why life unsettles people, what is the reason for people's troubles, does not matter if these troubles are his or others. He is worrying over the wish to find a response to the questions he is interested in. He is busy by finding the roots, relations, friendly connections by restoration of the broken links between the past and present, generations, he searches of a common dominant, uniting different people.

It is narrated in all Modiano's works, it is the main subject of his creative activities.

The creative manner of Modiano is characterized by a playing style of narration. Heyzing, in "Homoludens" wrote, that this is a way outside the limits of everyday life, reflection of a non- playing space, and for the writer, this is reality, consisting of permanent movements and modifications, this is a kind of a transition from reality to the world of symbols. He is diving into the environment, and everything going on there is accepted naturally whether by himself or by someone of his surroundings. This knowing of the arisen illusion emphasizes entirety of life.

He feels a writer of the modern reality, and the past - war, occupation - spell him over due to the fact that it helps him to obtain this "vague light" of today - and it attracts the writer. Modiano formulated it in the interview, speaking about basics of his writer's art. He feels horror about "ignoble epoch of occupation", and this epoch gave birth to modern times and "troubulous literature" without inner depth (interview with the "Monde" newspaper of May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1973).

This vision comprises specifics of main components of the writer's creative work: dependence of the present on past, search of the roots and beginnings, which are felt in present and which attract even by their "opacity".

The same facts, persons and fates, mainly taken from life itself, are played up in Modiano's novels. However, one should not trust them fully, as to the "first" person, who is narrating. Even in one of the most autobiographic works, "Family Chronicle" (1977) there are facts recalled by the narrator and which could have never been seen by him, as the events which had taken part before his birth. This unique ability, this necessity for a post modernist writer makes up the basis of Modiano's creative work.

A thought about father appears in Modiano's works, which, probably, is connected with the main idea of his art - determination and search of his own roots. "Everything is in agony" - this

is the conclusion of the writer, after the analysis of reality he was living in. His race after ghost must be the characteristics of the present but not past epoch. So, the thesis "the past is more important than the future" is very much topical for the author, taking into account the fact, that there is no attempt to find out the future in his works, everything ends by the modern stage, when a man is fated to useless existence and hopeless search. These ideas run through the first novels of Modiano about war, in which he reflected the "troubled and shameful" epoch of the occupation of France - "Square d'Etoile" (1969), "Night Patrol" (1969), "Boulevard Ring" (1972)

### **3. SEARCH OF HIMSELF IN NOVEL "STREET OF DARK SHOPS"**

The same topic runs through the most well known works of the first decade of his creative activity, awarded by the Gonkur prize - "The Street of Dark Shops" (1978). Paraphrase of the plot outline design is impossible, in fact, in spite of the tension, increasing on each next page of the novel and a wish to look ahead would not satisfy the interest, as it returns you to the stage, at which you started reading the book.

The main art task of the writer is to create the atmosphere, when it is possible to express the philosophic hypothesis, to solve the task of correlation of the Past and Present.

Will the main character of the novel, who lost his memory for ten years and consequently, his name, past, family, obtain the truth, to find his "Me", to find out his roots. The writer does not put a full stop, he does not give the answer to this question, the reader himself is to do it.

In this novel, as well as in the rest of the novels of this writer, the main forms of the logics of game are in effect. First of all is existence of the events, in which the reader is interested in (he is the player). Further on, a possibility to create new unexpected events and logical situations in the game begins to form. The main character of the novel, Guy Roland, he is the narrator of the novel, he is facing the problem to find himself, as well as characters of the previous novels. However, the novel is very much original not in the task itself, but in the playing manner of narration and absence of the solution of the main issue. There is no response, there is only a hope, which does not leave neither the main character no the reader in their search of the roots and sources.

In his troubled world, one realizes the past, one's experience, sank into oblivion through emotions and anxiety, like Prust's "lost time", but not withdrawing you from the modern reality. Modiano's characters are searching the past for understanding the present, trying to overcome its instability. Guy Roland is led on this road of searching the truth not by a miss for the past, for the lost days of his youth - no, if one looks back, he will see that everything is vague and washed out over there. Today's Paris is real, its addresses, houses, people, who Roland meets. The road of search of the past does not bring him to the solution, but people who he meets, give a chance to feel their sympathy, warmness of their hearts and readiness to come and help the main character to find their common past. This idea is growing, expanding and introduces cheerful signs and optimistic spirit to melancholic character of the novel.

The plot of the "Street of Dark Shops" is connected with thoughts about fates of people, of those who could not manage to find their place in life. He outlines psychological portrait of the main character by a few signs, depicts the social environment, reveals tragic fates of people, who have lost their "Me", their motherland, and who could not find refuge at last. His characters are not active; they are not revolting against Nazism. The power of the talent of Modiano is concentrated in hatred against inhuman fascism, depicted with psychological details in his works.

There are elements of a detective story in all Modiano's works. In this novel, the reader follows attentively how a detective is searching for himself, follows a few people, who have already gone to non-existence. By showing negatives of the passed life, Modiano clears up the features of his own face in this vacuum, which is being filled step by step with the events, names, people from life passed.

The structure of the novel "Street of Dark Shops" is very original, the writer makes no tries to reconstruct that epoch. He moves freely in different periods - from the German occupation of 40s up to nowadays. Underlined non-focused composition offered by the author is explained by the fact when the arranged rhythm of the novel is broken by an unpredicted, inventively sudden change of the author's thought. Modiano contrasts his own vision of the Past and Present to the readers, who are supposed to comprehend development of definite collisions.

Nearly in all his novels, the readers are eyewitnesses of absurd, free junction of non-combining things and non-logic situations.

The writer considers the ordinary chains consisting of the reasons and consequences, of wars, revolts, important events to be non-safe, as if they exhaust history, consisting of sensible wishes, intentions, overcoming, as if directing the existence of an individual. The way in which the narration is organized speaks for it. Here we find the notion of a "chance", due to which people's fates are ruined and the order of things is changing in the world. Modiano has a different vision to dialectics of chance and appropriateness.

Guy Roland, who undergoes fateful disease - amnesia - and as a result a search of himself, is a very much typical and justified manner for creative art of Modiano, though it were impossible in the other system of art relations. The system on which Modiano bases is determined by acknowledgement of apparent chances, details, non- important events, secondary facts, actually being the most significant ones, as well as refusal of universally recognized criteria of important and unimportant, on new acknowledgement of the correlation between typical and individual, non- repeatable and common. In one word, postmodernism, which dedicated itself to rearrangement of meanings, has found in Modiano one of its most significant supporters.

What made Guy Ronald, a detective of a private company to start a search of a man who disappeared long ago? Probably, this man is himself.... This thought comes from the very beginning of the novel, when reader became an unintentional eyewitness of the narrator's biography. A wish to find himself after years and years of amnesia, gives a chance to understand the original, which we could only guess. During this search, Roland collects step by step the traces of a man, who disappeared, who could be himself, and with whom he flew together in his imagination.

Will the main character be able to find himself? Or to show , that he identified himself, restored the main link of his life? However, making his way through the thick fog of time, restoring the truth, he is being swallowed up. It is difficult to understand, who was the man found at last by Guy Roland - himself or some else. There is a response - because those people disappeared - only mirages remained.

The writer underlines that it is impossible to imagine, what happened or did not happen in the past, the events that fill our memory. People are changing in this fast passing times, and it is difficult to catch, what took place in fact and what did not, what is the game of imagination and what happened in reality?

The novel "Street of Dark Shops" looks like an improvisation, in which the main aim, as well as in other novels, is to break the legalized oppositions such as "just and sinner", "clean and dirty", "durable and transient", etc. Interpretation of well-known motives with a new accent for

these aims cannot be underestimated. Let these topics are so familiar - amnesia, detective story - Modiano makes them more effective, gives new interpretation of classical plots, disproving seeming axiomatic of approved interpretations.

Taking out a few episodes from the history of fascist occupation of France and uniting them correctly, the author is seeking to create a kind of a tragic-comical chronicle of history. He refuses the claims for being objective, supposing that the truth about the past is impossible, there are only hypothesis, which is always subjective and, consequently, doubtful. As a writer-postmodernist, he refuses to classify the events as main and non-important ones. Even if he makes this classification, he prefers this non-important, secondary and special.

His characters, surrounded by the atmosphere of lack of understanding, vagueness, vague light of semi-tones, unsteadiness of moral foundations of modern life, show their "Me" in the times of fascist occupation, by means of frequent, non- important episodes.

Now, the odd structure of the "Street of Dark Shops" becomes more understandable. In fact, in this book Modiano disproves the existing norms of the art unity, presupposing hierarchy of comprehension of the reality, non-acceptable neither for him, no for any other writers - postmodernists. The Vision of the world cannot be interesting only in some sorted parts and non- fascinating in others. Not agreeing with this point of view, Modiano does not acknowledge the art unity basing on this idea. He opposes a mixture of everything and everyone to this idea. The "Street of Dark Shops" is not a retro novel. It narrates about the past of a concrete man - in this case, the narrator himself - and the author's interests is concentrated on philosophic problem, related to the timing itself. It is related to the other novel "Lost World" (1984).

#### **4. PROBLEM OF HERO'S CHOICE IN NOVEL "LOST WORLD"**

This novel is very much alike to the "Street of Dark Shops". However, the main character, Embroise Guys is not a detective, he is an author of detective bestsellers. He became famous in London, and he comes to Paris after 20 years and as well as Guy Roald tries to revive his forgotten past, disappeared world, his "Me" and his real name, as Embroise Guys - is his nick-name.

Paris, this unique city, makes him to find the lost world. From the very beginning of the novel, we see that he wants to take a car and go for a ride round the streets of Paris to "see again familiar places", and to "walk round the city". Guys travels to his past, round the city, avoiding, as usual, the rules of dimensional order. He goes to a lower Rocrois in 1964 and comes back in 1984. The pictures of the movie chronicle, where the events of different times and places are being edited, creating a general and single dimension and time. The lawyer died long ago, but the homes, pavements remained the same, as if time has stopped for a moment, and the past revives in the present, becomes today. Constancy of Paris makes the truth important, the truth that Embroise Guys comes to "Nothing of us remains".

The scenes of night race in Paris, round its streets charm us and according to the context of the book are very much important, being a part of the lost world, where main events of the last years took place. There is the atmosphere of illusiveness in all this. George Mayo is riding in the car round the city, as an escaping shadow, he is not alive for a few years, but, maybe, he did not die, he transformed into a ghost, into a mirage of the past.

Against the background of this sad panorama, the author of detective novels Embroise Guys is an exclusion, as he is rich, he has his own villas, he is flourishing, he has a nice family. For him, Paris is a strange and needless, full of secrets - the lost world. His return to Paris makes to doubt about his life in London. At the end of the novel, Embroise Guys becomes Jean Dekker

again, trying to forget everything, to forget the life of a flourishing businessman from London. This revived world charms, voodooos Dekker, making him "needless" man and a real writer.

Modiano's character makes his choice in favour of Jean Dekker. As writing is the only possibility to preserve, to immortalize the escaping, given up, disappearing world. Opposition of two names of the same man is done inventively. A prosperous author of detective novels becomes a writer. So, Modiano directs the attention in two recognition of the literature activities, which dramatically came across in the epoch of total industrialization.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As far back in antic period philosophers insisted that the human being can cognize himself and comprehend the mysteries of being only by means of understanding of his own essence. This wise saying is actual nowadays also and reflects the sense of all our dynamic life. So, the future of humanity wholly depends on the fact, if we can find the way to ourselves. Most outstanding writers of France are busy by search of way to Truth and human Freedom and Patrick Modiano isn't exception.

Modiano tried to study the matter of subject in the depth of his own being, that is by means of his Past revival. It means, that for writer the problem of memory and imagination isn't the problem of artistic imagination, but the problem of life existence, which always connect objective and subjective beginning. The memory as "grandiose container of life experience and events are not the main matter here, he main matter is formed by episodes. This experiment, undertaken by French writer is fascinating. Really, experimental literature is never meant for immediate acceptance. As for Modiano's novels, they are necessary as stimulus for further searches of new world outlook, in which the art and culture is need for.

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