

LES CHERCHEURS D'HISTOIRE: THE HISTORICAL INVESTIGATOR IN THE CONTEMPORARY

FRENCH NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

LES CHERCHEURS D'HISTOIRE: THE HISTORICAL INVESTIGATOR IN THE CONTEMPORARY FRENCH NOVEL

Marla Epp

Gerald Prince

This dissertation studies what I call the investigative historical novel, texts that, although about a historical subject, are told from the perspective of modern-day investigators who narrate their process as they piece together fragments of the past. Taking a transnational approach, I analyze novels that represent a variety of major historical events that occurred across the globe. The chapters are organized thematically according to the most prominent kind of historical trace being studied by the investigators as they carefully observe these physical manifestations of a historical real. The first chapter considers how the writer-historians in *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH*, and *Le météorologue* engage with archival documents, using the written fragments as the beginning of a dialogue with the historical subjects across time and space. In the second chapter, I argue that the investigators in *Mémoires d'outre-mer* and the *Sic transit* trilogy can be considered historians in the oldest sense; like Herodotus, they write what they see and hear. In these novels, the concrete material is the physical space itself, observed as the writer-investigators travel the same routes as their historical subjects. Using studies of the everyday, the third chapter analyzes how shameful family secrets directly affect the day-to-day lives of the investigators in *Un roman russe*, *L'Origine de la violence*, and *Le village de l'Allemand*

ou le journal des frères Schiller. The final chapter studies the incorporation of oral history practices in *Pas pleurer* and *La Seine était rouge*; the investigators listen and piece together auditory traces of the past. With this dissertation, I examine one of the developments in contemporary French literature – the turning away from the realm of fabling or invention to focus more explicitly on the process of writing. Through the running meta-commentary offered by a historian-writer, the novels foreground the question of how to write about a true story when the historical details are limited. I argue that the texts find their literary dimension not in the invention of plot, but rather in the creative combination of historical fragments and the *mise en scène* of the writing process.

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Introduction

Henri Mouhot, a French lepidopterist known for being the first European traveler to reach the Angkor Wat; Georges Zourabichvili, a Georgian immigrant to France in the 1920s who, after working a series of odd jobs, became a translator for the German occupying forces; Montserrat Monclus Arjona, nicknamed Montse, a refugee of the Spanish Civil War; Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, a Slovak and a Czech parachutist, respectively, who led a botched assassination attempt against Reinhard Heydrich; Maxime Ferrier, an acrobat in the circus in Madagascar; Dora Bruder, a young Jewish girl who disappeared during the Occupation. These are some of the individuals whose stories are recounted in the novels published after 1997 that form the corpus of this project. Although the subjects of these novels come from around the world and represent a spectrum of ages, races, classes, and life experiences, the novels all belong to what I call, loosely, the investigative historical novel. Rather than being organized like a typical biography, following the birth-to-death chronology of a life and told by a non-intrusive narrator, these novels are told from the perspective of a first-person investigator who narrates his or her process as he or she pieces together the traces that remain of these lives. With my study of the investigator, I examine one of the major developments in 21st century French literature – the turning away from the realm of fabling or invention to focus more explicitly on the process of writing. Through a running meta-commentary offered by the first-person writer-narrator, these texts grapple with the question of how to write a novel about a true story, especially when the historical details are limited. Positioned between history and literature, the texts find their literary dimension not in the

invention of plot, but rather in the *mise en scène* of the writing process and the creative combination of historical fragments.

The novels I study are symptomatic of French novelists' continued fascination for the past. In a 2014 interview, Lydie Salvayre affirms "qu'autant les écrivains américains sont des écrivains de la géographie et de l'espace, du déroulement dans l'espace, autant les écrivains français et européens sont des écrivains de l'histoire" (Conti 131). France's continued literary interest in history does not seem to be abating. In 2017, two major literary prizes were awarded to historical novels – Olivier Guez's *La disparition de Josef Mengele* won the Prix Renaudot and Eric Vuillard's *L'Ordre du jour*, about Hitler's rise to power, won the Prix Goncourt. Indeed, since Jonathan Littell won in 2006 for *Les Bienveillantes*, six more Goncourt-winning novels dealt with major historical events or their aftermath.¹ The obsession with the past coincides with a fascination for the archive – "we are certainly in a position to diagnose an epidemic of archive fever," writes Lia Brozgal (34). The contemporary "goût de l'archive," to use Arlette Farge's phrase, is described by Marielle Macé as arising out of the anxiety around memory: "Maison hantée, cimetière que l'on traverse, butin, désir de trouver l'origine, le 'mal d'archive,' cette passion brûlante comme l'a montré Derrida, est l'effet d'un besoin de mémoire" (40). For Derrida, "le mal d'archive," "c'est brûler d'une passion. C'est n'avoir de cesse, interminablement, de chercher l'archive là où elle se dérobe. [...] C'est se porter vers elle d'un désir compulsif, répétitif et nostalgique, un désir irrépressible de retour à l'origine, un mal du pays, une nostalgie du retour au lieu le plus archaïque du commencement

¹ These novels include: Alexis Jenni, *L'Art français de la guerre* (2011); Jérôme Ferrari, *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome* (2012); Pierre Lemaitre, *Au revoir là-haut* (2013); Lydie Salvayre, *Pas pleurer* (2014); Mathias Énard, *Boussole* (2015).

absolu” (142). The novels in my corpus are all caught up in archive fever, with historical investigators drawn to archives of all kinds – family, political, personal, and even imprints in the stone of buildings.

Interest in the traumatic history of the twentieth century is also typical of the French mania for memory. In *Mémoires d’outre-mer* (2015), Michaël Ferrier writes: “La mémoire est un muscle: si on ne l’exerce pas, elle s’atrophie” (36). This injunction to memory might initially seem surprising, given that France is known for overworking its memory muscles. Much ink has been spilled discussing the national obsession with history, and even more so, memory. Initially focused on the legacy of the Second World War, qualified already in 1994 by Eric Conan and Henry Rousso as “ce passé qui ne passe pas,” the turn of the 21st century saw the emergence of other “nœuds de mémoire,” centered most notably around the Algerian War, although public and scholarly interest has also turned to the history of other former French colonies, as well as historical events less immediately related to France, such as the Spanish Civil War and the Stalinist Purges.² The national obsession with memory has grown to a point that, as Rousso writes, “les notions de mémoire ou de patrimoine ont envahi l’espace public et scientifique” (*La dernière catastrophe* 24). Public gestures of memory abound in 21st century France: one can think, for example, of the images of four newly pantheonized leaders of the *Résistance* floating outside the Pantheon for months following the May 2015 ceremony, or President François Hollande formally recognizing the October 17, 1961 Paris massacre.

² The term “nœuds de mémoire” is used by Michael Rothberg, Debarati Sanyal, and Max Silverman in their special issue of *Yale French Studies*, “Nœuds de mémoire. Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture” (2010) and appears again in Henri Rousso’s *Face au passé* (p. 23).

This emphasis on “le devoir de mémoire” can become exhausting: “L’histoire ne se décline plus de prime abord sous la forme de traditions à respecter, d’héritages à transmettre, de connaissances à élaborer ou de morts à commémorer, mais plutôt de problèmes à ‘gérer’, d’un constant ‘travail’ de deuil ou de mémoire à entreprendre” (Rousso, *La dernière catastrophe* 24-25). Revisiting the question of memory in the 21st century, over 20 years after first noting the continued obsession with the past, Henry Rousso analyzes the sense of duty associated with memory and the toll caused by the litany of phrases like “la France doit faire face à son passé” and “pour préparer l’avenir, il faut affronter le passé” (*Face au passé* 26). He argues that the belief in the need to confront, and if possible, vanquish, the past in order to enter into an era of peace and harmony (27) is a “mythe de la mémoire”: “sans nul doute le grand mythe contemporain des sociétés démocratiques modernes, une forme de conjuration contre la répétition des catastrophes de l’histoire récente dont on commence à voir les limites” (*Face au passé* 27). This project is not intended as another entry into the fray of the memory wars.³ My corpus is, however, made up of novels that engage with one or more of these “nœuds de mémoire,” which were written against the backdrop of scholarly and public fascination with history, archive, and, memory. Throughout this project, therefore, I question the extent to which its texts engage with or challenge the “mythe de la mémoire.”

It is this complementary obsession with archives and memory that fuels the “return” of the historical novel. In *La littérature française au présent*, Dominique Viart

³ For more in-depth studies on the debates occurring over memory in France, see: Pascal Bruckner, *La Tyrannie de la pénitence: Essai sur le masochisme occidental* (2006); Richard J. Golsan, *The Vichy Past in France Today: Corruptions of Memory* (2017); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009); Henry Rousso, *La Dernière catastrophe. L’Histoire, le présent, le contemporain* (2012); Henry Rousso, *Face au passé. Essais sur la mémoire contemporaine* (2016); Benjamin Stora, *La Guerre des mémoires. La France face à son passé colonial* (2007).

and Bruno Vercier note: “Car si l’Histoire avait quasiment déserté la scène littéraire durant trente ans, le récit vient au milieu des années 1970 renouveler l’historiographie” (129). Of course, the French novel never really abandoned history as a subject, even at the height of the *nouveau roman* – Robert Merle’s *Week-end à Zuydcoote* (1949) and Béatrix Beck’s *Léon Morin, prêtre* (1952), both Prix Goncourt winners, come immediately to mind, as well as Claude Simon’s *La Route des Flandres* (1960), itself an example of the *nouveau roman*. But the 1970s can be considered the beginning of a new era of historical novel, encapsulated by the trio of Georges Perec’s *W ou le souvenir d’enfance* (1975), Patrick Modiano’s *Rue des boutiques obscures* (1978), and Didier Daeninckx’s *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1983). According to Viart and Vercier: “Elle [l’Histoire que la littérature contemporaine interroge] diffère des romans historiques traditionnels, dans ses contenus et dans la manière qu’elle a de dire le passé: ici, plus de récit linéaire, de chronologie tendue par un sens positif, mais la reconstruction hésitante et inquiète d’expériences partielles, habitée par une double question: comment est-on arrivé là? L’homme a-t-il encore un quelconque avenir?” (130).

We are far from the linear historical novels that carefully build an immersive historical world, like those of Sir Walter Scott, much beloved by Lukács, or like those theorized by Italian novelist Alessandro Manzoni, who in his 1850 text, muses on the question of the historical novel. He writes: “for if, while enjoying the apparent poetic invention, the reader were approached and told, ‘you know, that is an actual fact, taken from a specific document,’ the poor man would be brought down with a thud from the poetic skies onto the field of history” (71). He would perhaps be surprised to discover the trend in the historical novel of the late 20th and early 21st century to do exactly this, with

novels unveiling the research process, showing the seams and cracks in historical reconstitution, highlighting the work done by a historian-writer, and alternating between the present and the past, effectively keeping the reader from the ‘poetic skies’ but rather in the trenches of historical work.

Georges Perec’s *W ou le souvenir d’enfance* is arguably the foundational example of the investigative historical novel. Indeed, Dominique Rabaté convincingly states that Perec “s’impose chaque jour plus évidemment comme le grand romancier de la seconde moitié du XXe siècle, sans doute plus précisément en ce que la problématique de son écriture est celle de la trace, de la disparition (des juifs bien sûr, et qui renvoie au traumatisme intime de la Seconde Guerre mondiale et de la Shoah), d’une méditation magistrale sur l’original et la copie, le réel et ses doubles, sur la nécessité de maintenir dans tout système une part de jeu [...]” (“Résistance et disparitions” 20). Perec’s influence is easily observed in all the novels studied in this project, providing a model for ways of writing that which is absent, using “fragments, doubling, discontinuity, and absence” (Suleiman, *Crises* 186). *Meurtres pour mémoire*, by Didier Daeninckx, “one of the iconic texts of late twentieth-century committed literature” (Atack 271), was published in Gallimard’s *Série noire* and uses the detective genre to access crimes related to the Holocaust and the massacre of October 17, 1961, discussing the latter event for the first time in a publication intended for a wide audience.⁴ The figure of the detective, in this case, Inspecteur Cadin, seems to be an important inspiration for the novels in my

⁴ For more on *Meurtres pour mémoire* and its relationship to history and noir fiction, see: Maragret Atack, “From *Meurtres pour mémoire* to *Missak*: Literature and historiography in dialogue” in *French Cultural Studies* (2014); Catherine Douzou’s article, “Histoires d’enquête” (2014); and Claire Gorrara, *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War* (2012).

corpus. Their investigators, like a detective, collect and piece together clues; like the detective, they are the central organizing figure of the text and all information passes through them.

Patrick Modiano is also a key literary predecessor for the novels studied in this project. One of the first to write about Vichy collaboration in his Occupation Trilogy he adds an element of investigation with *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*. The novel follows the narrator, Guy Roland, an amnesiac, as he searches for his past. “He is the missing person who must be located. [...] He finds a new track to follow, and this is the partial story he reconstructs (we reconstruct)” (*Narrative* 121). Gerald Prince’s parenthesis, “we reconstruct,” is equally pertinent for *Dora Bruder*. In this book, the missing person is a Jewish girl who is arrested and deported during the Occupation, but like in *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, the investigator (here an avatar of Modiano himself) and the reader reconstruct Dora’s past from the archival fragments left behind. For Viart and Vercier, *Dora Bruder*, published in 1997, is symptomatic of a shift in literary focus: “si les années 1989-91 ont été celles des romans et récits de la Grande Guerre, ce sont plutôt les années 1997 et suivantes qui se (re)tournent vers la Seconde, au point que l’on pourrait parler à propos de la Seconde Guerre mondiale d’une ‘vague de 1997’” (162). The increase of interest in the Second World War in the 1990s is attributed in part to the public fascination with the trials of Klaus Barbie, Maurice Papon, and Paul Touvier. But *Dora Bruder*, positioned as it is at the threshold of a new century, is also an indication of the historical investigative novels to come, novels that adhere to the historical record rather

than inventing stories, but which are told from the perspective of an investigator who did not personally experience the historical events in question.⁵

Although the fascination for history continues, the relationship of writers to the tragedies of the 20th century is changing. While the past itself might still engage readers and novelists, the witnesses of many of these historical moments are dying. If literature is to continue to be written about this past, it will be done by people who did not experience it, and who may not have a direct connection to it. We are entering an era of ‘after testimony,’ to use the title of the collected volume edited by Jakob Lothe, Susan Suleiman, and James Phelan. Authors must engage with questions about major historical events of the 20th century and how to write about them without having lived through them, but yet still ethically and engagingly. One of the most common ways of writing about the history of the 20th century is to rely on the investigative model, keeping the use of fragments and juxtapositions (like in Perec), the central organizing figure of an investigator (as per Daeninckx), and involving the reader in the reconstruction process (à la Modiano). This contemporary trend, which I call the investigative historical novel, shows no signs of abating; in 2017 the most high-profile examples were *L’Ordre du jour* by Éric Vuillard and *L’Art de perdre* by Alice Zeniter, one of which, as we have already seen, won the Prix Goncourt, and the other the Prix Goncourt des lycéens.

Emmanuel Bouju, using the term “la transcription de l’histoire,” is one of the major critics to theorize this kind of novel, centering his definition around the etymology of history. In these novels, history is not only the source for the content, but also the form. Inspired by the Greek root of history, *historia*, meaning inquiry or knowledge

⁵ Although a sense of melancholy tied to the Occupation pervades Modiano’s œuvre, he was born in 1945.

gained through investigation, these texts emphasize the process of making sense of the past, including the choosing and combination of historical sources. The texts describe both the gathering of information about the past and the writing of a report about the findings. Bouju adds that this double narration – of the investigation itself, and then the subsequent report or *compte rendu* – “fait du roman l’exercice des mémoires possibles de l’histoire – l’exercice alter-historiographique, en quelque sorte, des ‘narrations provisoires’ qui se constituent en ‘instances médiatrices entre interrogations et sources,’ pour reprendre une formule employée par l’un des principaux contradicteurs des excès du ‘tournant linguistique’ de l’histoire, Carlo Ginzburg” (“Exercice des mémoires possibles” 418).

Dominique Viart, incorporating Foucault’s theory of the archive as a space of archaeology, uses the term “le roman archéologique” to designate these novels that recount a past event through telling the story of the historical investigation that unearthed it, and that are distinguished by the orientation towards the past as something unknown, a puzzle to be reconstructed, rather than a story to be recounted.⁶ Like historiographic metafiction, the investigative historical novel is self-reflexive.⁷ However, unlike this kind of Anglophone postmodern fiction, it shies away from fully putting into question the historical record. The investigative historical novel reflects the debates around the

⁶ Viart is not the first to use the term “roman archéologique.” In *Legacies of the Rue Morgue*, Andrea Goulet notes that Léo Malet called his crime novels of the 1950s and 1960s archeological novels. She explains: “In the case of Malet, the term ‘archéologique’ should be understood not just as the detective’s abstract investigation of past events, but as his entry into the actual spaces of crime, with their own particular topologies” (119).

⁷ Linda Hutcheon writes: “Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity” (92-93).

linguistic turn, Hayden White's *Metahistory*, and the possible elimination of frontiers between fiction and history – "l'écrivain ne se défait pas aisément du soupçon que la modernité a portée sur les modalités traditionnelles de la représentation, bien au contraire" (Viart, "Nouveaux modèles" 20). Nonetheless, as Bouju's reference to Ginzburg suggests, the investigative historical novel believes in the archive as a source of historical proof and affirms that it is structured around real and extensive historical research.

My main point of interest is the figure of the investigator. These first-person narrators, who comment, sometimes intrusively, on their investigation and writing processes, are truly involved in the practice of *historia*. Indeed, the use of the first person is not uncommon in contemporary historiography.⁸ However, while the first person narrators of those texts generally limit themselves to academic interjections, the investigators in these novels also add intimate comments about their emotions and the details of their daily lives. The narratorial voice in these novels resembles what Ivan Jablonka, in *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine: manifeste pour les sciences sociales*, calls a "je d'émotion." "Le chercheur n'est pas un robot, mais un individu qui a investi une partie de sa vie dans une recherche. Il serait étonnant que, au cours de l'enquête, il ne ressente rien, ne s'étonne de rien, n'apprenne rien. Pourquoi ne parlerait-il pas de ces infradécouvertes sur lesquelles repose le 'résultat final'?" (292). While Jablonka proposes that this emotional first person should be incorporated into contemporary historical writing, it remains something towards which only a very few French historians are tentatively gesturing, and is, for the moment, primarily the purview

⁸ Cf. Chapter One: The Investigator in the Archives.

of the self-conscious literary narrator, in a tradition that stretches back to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Of this self-conscious narrator, Wayne C. Booth writes: "He is himself in some way the central subject holding together materials which, were it not for his scatterbrained presence, would never have seemed to be separated in the first place" (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 222). The narrators in these investigative historical novels are also the "central subject holding together materials;" theirs is the central, organizing voice that weaves together archival citations and literary references, factual chronology and imagined encounters, and musings on cataclysmic events of the past as well as minutiae about their daily lives.

The investigators are also engaged, according to Emmanuel Bouju's definition of "l'engagement littéraire" as "le geste par lequel un sujet promet et se risque dans cette promesse, entreprend et met en gage quelque chose de lui-même dans l'entreprise" (11). The investigators become emotionally invested in their quests to uncover the details about a person's life in the past, but they are also personally implicated in the narrative as they share details about their life in the present. In some of the novels studied, these discussions about the ways in which their investigation and its revelations impact their lives or echo their present situations are developed to the point where the novels become as much about the contemporary moment as a study of a particular historical time.

The term "contemporary historical novel" is therefore not an oxymoron. With their focus on the present time of the investigation, the novels I study are inscribed in the "régime présentiste" of François Hartog, who writes of "[...] cette expérience contemporaine d'un présent perpétuel, insaisissable et quasiment immobile, cherchant malgré tout à produire pour lui-même son propre temps historique. Tout se passe comme

s'il n'y avait plus que du présent, sorte de vaste étendue d'eau qu'agite un incessant clapot" (*Régimes* 28). At the same time, with their fascination for the past, the investigators embody Agamben's definition of contemporariness: "a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it" (39). "If, as we have seen, it is the contemporary who has broken the vertebrae of his time (or, at any rate, who has perceived in it a fault line or a breaking point), then he also makes of this fracture a meeting place, or the encounter between times and generations" (Agamben 52). With their interplay between past and present, these novels also create a space of encounter between different historical moments and generations. In *Brouhahah. Les mondes du contemporain* (2016), Lionel Ruffel describes this multitemporality as "une représentation palimpseste ou feuilletée du temps" (20), also bringing to mind Max Silverman's concept of palimpsestic memory.⁹ Ruffel, too, turns to the metaphor of archaeology to understand his conceptualization of contemporary time, writing of moving from "une représentation historiciste à une représentation archéologique, concevoir une temporalité polychronique et non euchronique" (25).

The recurrent archaeological metaphor, as well as the interest in the practice of history, is typical of the contemporary novel, according to Dominique Viart, who notes: "elle est en dialogue avec les sciences humaines, avec les sciences 'pures', [...] elle est informée de leurs analyses, et [...] elle avance ses propres réflexions, irréductibles à telle ou telle discipline" ("Les menaces de Cassandre" 33). Patrick Deville also speaks of this

⁹ Silverman defines palimpsestic memory as follows: "The relationship between present and past therefore takes the form of a superimposition and interaction of different temporal traces to constitute a sort of composite structure, like a palimpsest, so that one layer of traces can be seen through, and is transformed by, another" (3).

tendency of the contemporary novel to look to various other disciplines for inspiration and to incorporate pieces of information gleaned from perhaps unconventional sources. “Je crois que si on choisit d’être romancier, c’est justement parce qu’on ne peut pas se résoudre à être spécialiste de quoi que ce soit. Il y a un goût de l’encyclopédie. Certes, on ne peut pas tout savoir, tout contrôler, mais il y a un goût, une tentative et, comme toutes les tentatives, elle est vouée à l’échec et, à la fois, non finalement: ça donne au bout du compte des petits objets de plaisir, et ce n’est pas absolument inutile” (“Entretien” 326).

The novels studied in this project reflect this encyclopedic tendency and incorporate a variety of historical sources as well as a wide range of both high and low brow literary and cinematic allusions. Their appeal to an encyclopedic metaphor is closer to that described by Laurent Demanze: “non pas comme recherche d’exhaustivité ou ambition de totalité, mais comme parcours individuel, exercice intime voire fabrique de singularités” (*Les Fictions encyclopédiques* 28). Not only do these novels incorporate this vast mass of references and historical archives, but they also describe the construction process, and the role of the investigator-writer in piecing it all together. My analysis of the historical investigator therefore leads to a broader discussion of one of the major trends in the contemporary novel, namely a focus on form rather than on invention. As Deville explains, after having collected all the information: “Donc le travail, ensuite, est principalement un travail de forme, parce qu’il faut réussir à donner une forme à tout cela” (“Entretien” 32). The novels I study focus on how the investigator-writers stage themselves in the text as they select and organize historical facts and write around these fragments.

My chapters are organized taking into consideration the corollary of the thesis of Ivan Jablonka's *L'histoire est une littérature contemporaine*: if history is looking to literature for stylistic influence, is literature turning to the practices of observational social science? The investigators in the novels I explore attempt to learn about a particular historical moment through the careful observation of the physical traces of the past that can be experienced sensorially, as physical manifestations of a historical real. The first chapter, "The Investigator in the Archives," begins with *Dora Bruder*, putting it in relationship with Laurent Binet's *HHhH* (2009) and Olivier Rolin's *Le météorologue* (2014). I study how these novels incorporate archival citations, one of the defining features of historiographical writing, to position themselves in the space between history and literature. I also look at how the investigators manipulate and engage with the archival documents, forcing themselves and the readers to use the written fragments as the beginning of a dialogue across time and space with the historical subjects.

In the second chapter, "The Investigator as Traveler," I read Michaël Ferrier's *Mémoires d'outre-mer* (2015) and Patrick Deville's *Sic transit* trilogy, which is composed of *Pura Vida: Vie & mort de William Walker* (2004), *Équatoria* (2009), and *Kampuchéa* (2011). The investigators in these novels travel beyond Europe to Madagascar, Nicaragua, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia, in search of historical information. I argue that these investigators are historians in the oldest sense; like Herodotus, they write what they see and hear. Although the novels also rely on textual archives, the concrete material that forms the basis of the historical accounts of the investigators is the physical space itself and the observations they make as they travel the same routes as their historical subjects.

The third and fourth chapters study novels that are “*récits de filiation*,” a subgenre of the “roman archéologique,” as studied by Dominique Viart and Laurent Demanze; which is to say, the subjects of the investigation are family members.¹⁰ In the third chapter, “The Daily Life of the Investigator,” the narrators investigate their fathers or grandfathers, all of whom were complicit to varying degrees with the Nazi regime. Using studies of the everyday, I analyze how this family secret and the investigation around it directly affect the day-to-day lives of the investigators. The disruption can be read as a manifestation of the past as the investigators literally feel its impact on their present-day lives. Of the texts studied in this chapter, only *Un roman russe* (2007) by Emmanuel Carrère is non-fictional. Fabrice Humbert’s novel *L’Origine de la violence* (2009) and Boualem Sansal’s *Le village de l’Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* (2008) are both fictional, although based on extensive historical research, and I therefore also comment on how the knowledge that the historical plot is invented might affect the way these novels are approached.

In the last chapter, “The Investigator as Listener,” I study the incorporation of oral history practices in *Pas pleurer* (2014) by Lydie Salvayre and *La Seine était rouge* (1999) by Leïla Sebbar. These novels focus on daughters who listen to their mothers speak about their past, and are the only two texts where the historical subject is still alive. Rather than touching physical traces of the past, the sensorial experience of these investigators is auditory, and I consider how engaging with a living archive changes the

¹⁰ See: Laurent Demanze, *Encres orphelines. Pierre Bergounioux, Gérard Macé, Pierre Michon* (2008) and Dominique Viart, “Le récit de filiation. ‘Éthique de la restitution’ contre ‘devoir de mémoire’ dans la littérature contemporaine” (2011).

rhythm of the investigation. *La Seine était rouge* is the only novel studied that is not written in the first person, and I read it as a sort of counterpoint, focusing on the ways in which the text incorporates multiple investigations.

All of the investigators in these novels take Paris, or at least Metropolitan France, as their point of departure, but their investigations take them across the world, to places such as Madagascar, Cambodia, Russia, Algeria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Angola, and the Republic of Congo. My research engages with the concept of multidirectional memory, developed by Michael Rothberg, not only as it is demonstrated in the novels I study, but also in the elaboration of my corpus. I take a transnational approach rather than reading novels connected to the same historical moment and analyze texts that represent a variety of major historical events occurring across the globe. Inspired by recent collected volumes such as Susan Suleiman and Christie McDonald's *French Global* (2010) and Patrick Boucheron's *L'Histoire mondiale de la France* (2017), as well as Lynn Hunt's *Writing History in a Global Era* (2014), I put these novels by contemporary authors in dialogue with one another across time and space. I am careful not to create false equivalencies between the various historical events studied but consider each in its own specificity. The novels themselves promote this kind of transnational and multidirectional approach. Not only do they demonstrate a porosity between past and present, but they also are not limited by national borders: most of the historical subjects and the investigators travel outside of Hexagonal France, or arrive there as an immigrant.¹¹

¹¹ For some scholars, such as Michael Rothberg, who proposed the theory of multidirectional memory, and Max Silverman, who works with the concept of palimpsestic memory, different “nœuds de mémoire” can work together generatively. For others, such as Benjamin Stora, the model is more combative, as he explains in his 2007 text, *La guerre des mémoires. La France face à son passé*. Richard J. Golsan, in his 2017 book *The Vichy Past*, also insists that “the memory, or memories in question here [primarily those of

Reasserting the difference between the traditional historical novel and the investigative historical novel, Lydie Salvayre comments with disfavor about those texts where there is “un auteur qui regarde en surplomb, à distance, sans se mouiller, qui recueille l’événement sans s’y perdre, sans s’y installer, sans s’y noyer, qui est tout à fait périphérique à son sujet, très extérieur, et ce pour déranger le moins possible le confort tranquille de la classe bourgeoise qui est son lectorat” (Conti 84). The novelists I study, through the figure of the historical investigator, depict someone fully immersed in the history being explored. Nor is the reader left in a state of “confort tranquille,” allowed to escape into a chronologically-organized historical novel that has no resonance with the present.¹² The investigators recount in detail their immersion process, the start-stop rhythm of their research, and the feelings evoked by their discoveries. They present the fragments of their findings in texts that are themselves fragmentary and alternate between past and present, all of which forces the readers to engage in their own reconstruction of past events. The novels further trouble the readers intellectually as well as emotionally by shining a light on the tragic stories of some of the individuals directly affected by the violent events of the 20th century. But they also ensure that the present and the past reflect each other and resonate together, providing new angles of approach not only to complicated historical moments, but also to difficult contemporary issues and debates. The investigators, therefore, are doubly “chercheurs d’histoire”: they not only investigate

the Second World War and Algeria] remain fundamentally competitive, and even conflictive” (xxiv). Nor were the critical responses to Patrick Boucheron’s *L’Histoire mondiale de la France* universally favourable – as might be imagined, right-wing polemicists such as Alain Finkielkraut and Éric Zemmour took offense, calling its authors “fossoyeurs du grand héritage français” (Finkielkraut) and charging it with “dissolving France in 800 pages” (Zemmour).

¹² Here and throughout I use “the reader” to mean simply “the decoder or interpreter (of a written narrative)” (Prince, *Dictionary* 81). The rare cases when I am referring to a particular implied reader will be explicitly noted.

the past but also, in the colloquial sense of the expression “aller chercher des histoires,” go looking for trouble, and, specifically, to trouble the reader.

Chapter One: The Investigator in the Archives

Vous éprouvez quand même un bref sentiment d'éternité. Vous n'avez pas seulement tranché les liens avec le monde, mais aussi avec le temps. Et il arrive qu'à la fin d'une matinée, le ciel soit d'un bleu léger et que rien ne pèse plus sur vous. Les aiguilles de l'horloge du jardin des Tuileries sont immobiles pour toujours.

-- Patrick Modiano

In an interview about his novel *HHhH*, Laurent Binet states: "Sans m'en rendre compte, j'ai immédiatement posé la problématique du livre, qui est (je l'ai compris des années plus tard, après sa parution): comment raconter une histoire vraie" (Watts 155).

This question of how to write about the life of a real individual, especially when faced with a paucity of historical data, is central to the three novels studied in this chapter. In *Dora Bruder* (1999), Patrick Modiano tells the story of the eponymous young Jewish girl, who runs away from school to brave the streets of Paris during the Occupation, only to be ultimately rounded up and deported to Auschwitz. *HHhH* (2009) by Binet is about Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, respectively Slovak and Czech parachutists, who lead a botched assassination attempt in Prague against the high-ranking Nazi, Reinhard Heydrich, which nonetheless ends with both his death and their own. In *Le météorologue* (2014), Olivier Rolin honours the memory of Alexey Feodosievich Wangenheim, the titular meteorologist, who is arrested, imprisoned, and executed during the Stalinist purges.

Although all three writers commit to abiding by the historical record, they choose to write biographical texts in the form of the novel, described by Binet in an article for *Le Débat* as "un genre hybride et protéiforme dont les ressources sont probablement infinies. La fiction est l'une d'elles, et sans conteste l'une des plus riches et des plus efficaces, mais ce n'est pas la seule" (85). Fiction is what first comes to mind when opening a novel, but, of course, it can be notoriously difficult to separate fact from fiction, even to

the point where John Searle posits: “there is no textual property, syntactical or semantic that will identify a text as a work of fiction” (325). The debate surrounding the possibility of demarcating fact from fiction continues to be particularly heated around the disciplines of history and literature. In 2011, Pierre Nora asserted: “S’il est cependant légitime de se demander *aujourd’hui* où passent réellement les frontières entre les deux genres, c’est qu’elles se sont, depuis trente ou quarante ans, largement effacées” (6). Françoise Lavocat noted in 2016: “l’idée selon laquelle les frontières de la fiction auraient disparu ou seraient définitivement brouillées est largement répandue” (11). Yet both scholars, as well as many other critics, have continued to identify textual features that indicate whether a text is more likely to belong to the realm of fact or fiction. My interest in this chapter is therefore not to determine whether Modiano, Binet, and Rolin adhere to the historical facts, but instead to study how and to what ends they manipulate these textual elements.

For Käte Hamburger in *The Logic of Literature*, and later, Dorrit Cohn, one characteristic that differentiates fiction from non-fiction is the novelist’s privilege to be omniscient. Cohn writes in *The Distinction of Fiction*: “what history cannot be or do: it cannot present past events through the eyes of a historical figure present on the scene, but only through the eyes of the (forever backward-looking) historical narrator” (119). Neither Modiano, Binet, nor Rolin take advantage of the novelist’s privilege of omniscience, refraining from imagining the thoughts of their historical protagonists and instead writing their texts from the point of view of a present-day first person narrator who delves into the past stories that surround their biographical subjects. The narrator’s trustworthiness does not arise from his status as a witness to historical events, but rather

from his detailed account of his historical investigation; that is, he provides testimony about his process of uncovering the past rather than about the historical event itself. The narrator also pledges not to stray from the historical record, as will be examined more extensively later. This promise or assurance to the reader of a careful, conscientious handling of history again engages with the delineation of fictional texts; according to Lavocat's summation: "Genette et nombre de ceux qui, après lui, se sont penchés sur la question de la frontière (y compris des historiens, comme Philippe Carrard 1998 [1992]) affirment que les seuls critères décisifs de fictionnalité sont: l'adhésion sérieuse ou non de l'auteur à l'histoire dont il assume la responsabilité et garantit la véracité (c'est la thèse de Searle); l'identité ou la distinction, entre l'auteur et le narrateur" (38). The authority of the narrator, especially as a historically dependable voice, is further reinforced by his resemblance to the author; while the narrators are never explicitly named, they share the general life experiences of the author and thus link the textual world to the real one.

The narrators support their claim to trustworthiness by incorporating the style of writing typical of historical texts, using "un discours qui comprend en lui-même, sous forme de citations qui sont autant d'effets de réalité, les matériaux qui le fondent et dont il entend produire la compréhension" (Chartier 93). *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH*, and *Le météorologue* adopt the conventions of historical writing and include excerpts from real archival documents within the body of the text. This form of historical discourse became widespread in Europe in the late nineteenth century, as Ranke and others tried to distance history from the unscientific fields of philosophy and literature and align it with the fledgling social sciences as an objective discipline. The practice was codified in France in

the famous Langlois and Seignobos manual of historical writing, *Introduction aux études historiques* (1898), which explained that all texts must conform to a “forme scientifique” that provides cited excerpts from “sources valables.”

This kind of historical writing is described by Michel de Certeau in *L'Écriture de l'Histoire* (1975) as “écriture feuilletée”: “se pose comme historiographique le discours qui ‘comprend’ son autre – la chronique, l’archive, le document –, c’est-à-dire celui qui s’organise en texte *feuilleté* dont une moitié, continue, s’appuie sur l’autre, disséminée, et se donne ainsi le pouvoir de dire ce que l’autre signifie sans le savoir” (130-131). He adds that this kind of writing “fonctionne à la manière d’une machinerie qui tire de la citation une vraisemblance du récit et une validation du savoir. Elle produit de la fiabilité” (131). The concept of the historical citation as proof, included in the body of the text, has been reaffirmed by historians like Roger Chartier, Carlo Ginzburg, and Paul Veyne, and is frequently used as one of the basic distinctions between history and literature: in Krzyztof Pomian’s 1999 text “Histoire et fiction” he affirms that “le fait que les études historiographiques soient ‘dédoublées’ comme conséquence des exigences documentaires constitue une importante ‘marque d’historicité’” (33). The novels of Modiano, Binet, and Rolin mimic this historical style of *écriture feuilletée* and cite at length many real historical documents. These documents are not simply light-handedly used as a stylistic device, as Barthesian “effets de réel,” but are in fact real, narratively structural materials gleaned from extensive archival and secondary source research.

In addition to contributing to the text’s aura of historical trustworthiness, the inclusion of historical citations, culled from what are presented as authentic archival materials, seems to break the self-sufficient referentiality inherent in fiction. In *Fiction et*

diction, Gérard Genette writes that “le texte de fiction ne conduit à aucune réalité extratextuelle, chaque emprunt qu’il fait (constamment) à la réalité (‘Sherlock Holmes habitait 221B Baker Street,’ ‘Gilberte Swann avait les yeux noirs,’ etc.) se transforme en élément de fiction, comme Napoléon dans *Guerre et Paix* ou Rouen dans *Madame Bovary*” (37). David R. Ellison develops this idea, stating: “Does not the difference between a newspaper account of the political and social events of 1848 in Paris and Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* lie in the fact that the newspaper refers to events in reality, whereas Flaubert’s fiction creates its own self-sufficient topography of significance?” (6). Modiano, Binet, and Rolin apply pressure to this concept of self-sufficient referentiality with their inclusion of citations from the historical record and emphasize the factual nature of their historical commentary, thus leaving cracks in the text for the ‘real’ outside world to come in. The work of the novels becomes closer to what Doležel calls “an activity of *noesis*: its possible worlds are models of the actual past” (viii), rather than “an activity of *poesis*: fictional worlds [as] imaginary possible alternatives to the actual world” (viii).

The ongoing commentary of the first-person narrator, who describes his research and writing process, adds to the sense of historical accuracy. It is also in keeping with current trends in French historical writing, as Philippe Carrard explains in *Le Passé mis en texte: poétique de l’historiographie française contemporaine*: “la présence de l’énonciateur sous ses formes les plus visibles, soit celles de pronoms et d’adjectifs de la première personne du singulier, est l’un des traits les plus distinctifs de l’historiographie française contemporaine” (113). The historians often focus on how they find their documents and chose to frame and organize their discussion. They also note what is

uncertain or not completely verified, commenting on “conjectured, hypothesized events” (Doležel 39). These moments are accompanied by, as Doležel notes, “a rich vocabulary of expressions that assess the reliability of their conjectures [...] Perhaps, it is probable, it is possible, possibly not, [...] we may surmise, it may well be, we may suspect, we do not know exactly” (39). The first person narrators in *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH*, and *Le météorologue* make similar comments, although theirs are frequently formulated using the first person: “j’ignore” (Modiano 74); “j’avais cette vision” (Binet 178); “j’imagine” (Binet 178); “je suppose” (Rolin 45). The first person subject pronoun draws attention to the fact that the historical documents are selected and organized by the narrator, and acknowledges that their personal preoccupations likely influence their account.

According to Dominique Viart, these texts are symptomatic of the dialogic position characteristic of the contemporary novel: “Ce qui caractérise peut-être le plus notre temps, c’est cette posture ‘dialogique’ que la littérature actuelle semble favoriser, un dialogue ‘généralisé’: entre l’héritage et la modernité, entre le sujet et l’autre, entre la réflexion et la fiction, entre l’histoire et l’imaginaire, entre le présent et le passé” (“Écrire au présent” 334). In these novels, the narrators enter into a literal, albeit imaginary, dialogue with the historical individuals that are the subjects of their biographies. As the narrator shares his own interests, personal history, preoccupations, and literary preferences, he becomes a character in his own right – to use Booth’s term, a “dramatized narrator.” If they do not quite become “characters who are as vivid as those they tell us about” (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 152), they present themselves as implicated, active participants in the discussion.

These dramatized narrators create a kind of intimacy with the historical subject, which by extension encourages the readers to engage actively with the historical material. The archival documents are not presented as if in a museum, under glass and removed from the individual, but are woven into the text, mixed together with the reveries and musings of the narrator. These documents act as both an inspiration to the investigator-writers and as a kind of check that recalls the novels to the real and the historical. *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH*, and *Le météorologue* play with referentiality, sometimes setting up a self-sufficient bubble within the textual space and sometimes breaking out to make explicit reference to the world outside the text. By incorporating elements of historical and novelistic writing, biography and autobiography, and by citing archival documents as well as literary texts by Flaubert or Shakespeare, these texts seem to activate two modes of reading: they encourage the readers to immerse themselves in the story, as if reading traditional historical fiction, only to simultaneously jerk them back by drawing attention to the stark reality of the historical facts.

Dora Bruder

Patrick Modiano's search for Dora Bruder began long before the publication in 1997 of *Dora Bruder* itself. He explains that initially, "Il me semblait que je ne parviendrais jamais à retrouver la moindre trace d'[elle]. Alors le manque que j'éprouvais m'a poussé à l'écriture d'un roman, *Voyage de nocces*, un moyen comme un autre pour continuer à concentrer mon attention sur Dora Bruder" (53). This novel, published in 1990, tells the investigation by Jean B. of the fictional Ingrid Teyrsen, a young woman

who, like Dora, ran away in 1942.¹³ Modiano returns to the historical material, this time in the form of a non-fictional, autobiographical novel, published initially in 1997 in the Gallimard Blanche series and then reissued, with the addition of new historical documents, in 1999 in the Gallimard Folio collection, now the standard version of the text.¹⁴

Dora Bruder opens with the reproduction of the text of a missing persons ad from the December 31, 1942 edition of *Paris-Soir*: “On recherche une jeune fille, Dora Bruder, 15 ans, 1m55, visage ovale, yeux gris-marron, manteau sport gris, pull-over bordeaux, jupe et chapeau bleu marine, chaussures sport marron” (7). This *avis de recherche* introduces Dora, but also proves to be programmatic, acting as a literal *avis* that warns the readers that the novel will be about research. The reproduction of a newspaper clipping signals that this research will provide the outline of the plot of the novel and gestures towards Modiano’s commitment to telling only that which is historically verifiable. This is further stressed by the use of an *écriture feuilletée* throughout the novel. He cites a wide variety of official documents, including birth certificates, phone directories, the log of the police station, and the registers of the Drancy camp, each time carefully placing them between quotation marks and differentiating them from his own words.

¹³ Michael Sheringham’s article, “Le Dispositif *Voyage de nocces – Dora Bruder*,” provides an incisive look at the relationship between these two texts.

¹⁴ The mention of his novel *Voyage de nocces* is one of the clues that the narrator is a version of Modiano himself.

See Alan Morris’s “‘Avec Klarsfeld, contre l’oubli’: Patrick Modiano’s *Dora Bruder*” (2006) for a detailed analysis of the changes between the two editions of *Dora Bruder*. He argues in particular that the major changes reflect new discoveries made by Serge Klarsfeld.

These historical documents apparently confirm the text's status as non-fiction, but much of the traditional historiographical apparatus is missing: there is no bibliography or list of archives consulted, and, significantly, there is only one footnote. While footnotes, of course, can appear in novels, a footnote that provides further information about a source is typical of historical writing: Dominick LaCapra writes that the "note (footnote or endnote) is the correlate of research, and its use as a referential component of research is one criterion that serves to differentiate history from fiction" (5-6). Anthony Grafton, in *The Footnote: A Curious History*, describes the effect of the footnote: "Like the high whine of the dentist's drill, the low rumble of the footnote on the historian's page reassures: the tedium it inflicts, like the pain inflicted by the drill, is not random but directed, part of the cost that the benefits of modern science and technology exact" (5). The one footnote in *Dora Bruder* is neither particularly informative, nor reassuring. It comes after a lengthy citation about M. Schweblin, *chef de police des questions juives*, and his practice of violently searching Jewish detainees and appropriating their valuables. The footnote reads: "D'après un rapport administratif rédigé en novembre 1943 par un responsable du service de la Perception de Pithiviers" (67). The reference itself does not, as a historical footnote should, provide the place where the *rapport* could be found; rather, it seems intended to draw attention to the lack of footnotes elsewhere and to highlight the text's hybrid position between historical and fictional modes of writing.

The single footnote also puts into question the provenance of Modiano's historic documentation, which is not otherwise explained, even in an acknowledgments section – in this case, an egregious omission. Despite the apparent emphasis on documentary proof and historical accuracy, there is one key figure not mentioned in the book: Serge

Klarsfeld, noted editor of the *Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France* (1978). Modiano read Dora Bruder's name for the first time in the *Mémorial*, an event he describes in the text without specifying where he saw the name. "J'avais lu son nom, BRUDER DORA – sans autre mention, ni date ni lieu de naissance – au-dessus de celui de son père, BRUDER ERNEST, 21.5.99. Vienne. Apatride, dans la liste de ceux qui faisaient partie du convoi du 18 septembre 1942 pour Auschwitz" (54). Modiano later wrote an article published in *Libération* in 1994, praising Klarsfeld's work: "J'ai été reconnaissant à cet homme de nous avoir causé, à moi et à beaucoup d'autres, un des plus grands chocs de notre vie" (cited in Heck and Guidée 176) The two men developed a friendly relationship, with Klarsfeld sharing documents he and his team unearthed with a very grateful Modiano. Their correspondence, which lasted from 1995 until the publication of *Dora Bruder*, snippets of which, generally the parts where Modiano expresses his awe and gratitude (as well a reproduction of the *Libération* article) are found in the fourth volume of Klarsfeld's *La Shoah en France* (2011), subtitled *Le Mémorial des enfants juifs déportés de France*, under the heading Bruder, Dora.¹⁵ There is also a photo, recognizable as one of those described by Modiano in *Dora Bruder*: "une photo de forme ovale où Dora est un peu plus âgée – treize, quatorze ans, les cheveux plus longs – et où ils sont tous les trois comme en file indienne" (33).

The choice to exclude Klarsfeld's name from the novel has been scrutinized by scholars, including Ivan Jablonka, who marvels at the callous way in which a literary text

¹⁵ Modiano writes on 27 March 1995 to Serge Klarsfeld: "J'ai été bouleversé par votre lettre et les photos de Dora Bruder et de ses parents. Vous étiez le seul à pouvoir les sortir du néant." On 25 April 1995 he further expresses his gratitude: "Tout ce que vous avez reconstitué sur ce qui s'est passé pour Dora Bruder et ses parents m'a de nouveau bouleversé." These letters are reproduced in L'Herne's *Cahier Modiano*, edited by Maryline Heck and Raphaëlle Guidée (pp. 179, 180).

can get away without citing its sources. “Le mot de malhonnêteté n’est pas ici adéquat: toute littérature est réécriture d’autres textes, emprunt volontaire ou inconscient, hommage, vampirisme, fictionnalisation, et même les citations de l’historien composent un ‘texte feuilleté.’ En revanche, on peut dire que [...] Modiano [a] choisi de relâcher une contrainte, celle qui consiste à citer ses sources” (268). Klarsfeld himself wrote to Modiano on 3 April 1997, expressing his annoyance at being airbrushed from the text: “En tout état de cause, après l’appel que vous m’avez publiquement lancé dans ‘Libération’ pour savoir quelque chose sur Dora Bruder, comment avez-vous pu me faire disparaître de votre enquête-roman, alors que j’avais répondu à cet appel et très précisément. Ce n’est pas une plainte que je pousse, mais une espèce de constat irritant.”¹⁶ The choice of word, ‘disparaître,’ is telling. As Alan Morris contends:

Leaving Klarsfeld’s contribution [...] as a *non-dit* helps to bolster the thematics of *Dora Bruder*, where silence, absence, voids, secrets, hidden or lost information, and the untold are paramount while, more generally, having a protagonist who conducts his *own* investigation, and who is not always entirely reliable, or even able to reveal information known to exist, is one of the aforementioned – and perfectly understandable – ways in which Dora Bruder is integrated into a coherent oeuvre. (283)

It can therefore be argued that Modiano made Klarsfeld disappear from his text to better portray Dora Bruder and to express the hole left by her disappearance.

Much of the coherence of the novel comes from the ever-present first person narrative voice, the “dramatized narrator.” Everything, including the archival material, is filtered through his perspective, the narratorial “I” acting also as a subjective “eye.” Modiano describes what he sees on the archival documents, such as notes marked in pencil, and presents the photos of Dora and her family through *ekphrasis*. He not only

¹⁶ The letter is reproduced in full in L’Herne’s *Cahier Modiano* (p. 177).

describes the photo – “les trois femmes sont côte à côte, la grand-mère entre Cécile Bruder et Dora. Cécile Bruder porte une robe noire et les cheveux courts, la grand-mère une robe à fleurs. Les deux femmes ne sourient pas” (91) – but also adds his personal interpretation – “son visage et son allure n’ont plus rien de l’enfance qui se reflétait dans toutes les photos précédentes à travers le regard” (90). This scene represents in microcosm the historian’s work; he is always a subjective eye, and constantly choosing which aspects of which archival documents to emphasize. In *Dora Bruder*, given its lack of footnotes and other bibliographical information, the readers are excluded from the possibility of taking on the subjective work of the historian and cannot verify these documents, which are accessibly only through the eyes of the first person narrator.

The ways in which his subjectivity and personal preoccupations colour his investigation are particularly apparent when the narrator tries to track down a document in the labyrinthine French records system. Told to go to the “Palais de Justice, 2 boulevard du Palais, 3^e section de l’état civil, 5^e étage, escalier 5, bureau 501. Du lundi au vendredi, de 14 à 16 heures” (16), Modiano follows a sort of obstacle course, through metal detectors and along unmarked passages, until after much wandering he eventually finds staircase 5. The complicated process is sadly familiar to anyone who has tried to access a French archival document, and, by portraying him in the midst of his archival research, seems to support Modiano’s claim to historical accuracy. However, according to Bertrand de Saint-Vincent, who fact checked some of Modiano’s work, this supposed precision is not so precise and works instead to undermine the narrator’s credibility: “Modiano décrit son parcours jusqu’au bureau de l’état civil, qu’il situe au 5^e étage, porte, 201...Le bureau 501 est celui des mariages; l’escalier 5 n’existe pas. Au palais de

justice, Modiano a donc frappé à la porte du bureau 521 B. Pour y accéder, il a emprunté l'escalier S" (122). This scene ultimately does not even end up as pertinent to the narrator's search for Dora; as he recalls being lost in the hallways of the Hôpital Pitié-Salpêtrière, the focus shifts to the narrator's search for his ill father. "J'entrais dans des bâtiments très anciens, dans des salles communes où étaient alignés des lits, je questionnais des infirmières qui me donnaient des renseignements contradictoires. Je finissais par douter de l'existence de mon père" (17). The passage ends with the sorrowful, "Impossible de trouver mon père. Je ne l'ai plus jamais revu" (18). This moment foreshadows in microcosm the ultimate failure of Modiano's historical quest; no matter how long he wanders through the archives and records, he will never really find Dora, and each document leads only to more questions. It also reveals what the narrator is really looking for: the search for more information on Dora is doubled by his search for his father, also arrested during the Occupation.

As the text develops, Modiano reveals more about his father, who was certainly active on the black market and possibly involved with the Gestapo during the war, as well as sharing his own experiences when he ran away from home in the 1960s. Klarsfeld's summation of the novel is justifiable: "J'ai bien reçu 'Dora Bruder' qui est un beau livre sur elle et sur vous aussi" (Heck and Guidée 177). Susan Suleiman also notes that "Modiano's appropriative identification with Dora Bruder is not pathological; but it is self-centered, and it makes itself felt from the start" ("Oneself as Another" 331). Modiano's interest in Dora Bruder stems, at least partly, from the points of intersection between their lives, as exemplified near the beginning of his investigation by his excitement when he thinks for a brief moment that Dora might have been in the same

panier à salade as his father. The name Dora Bruder is also significant for Modiano – *bruder* of course means brother in German, and scholars such as Blanckeman, Nettlebeck, and Suleiman have studied the possible link with Rudy, Modiano’s brother, who died of leukemia in 1957.¹⁷ Suleiman suggests that “in mourning for Dora, Modiano may also be mourning, or continuing to mourn, for his brother lost in childhood” (342).

Even if Modiano uses Dora’s life as a means of analyzing his own relationship with his father and mourning the loss of his brother, to the point where it may seem that his family stories overwhelm Dora’s, the novel is, crucially, animated by the way the two stories work together. The skeleton of the book is provided by the archival documents about Dora Bruder, but it is the narrator’s voice that breathes life into them as he tells his own story. As Bruno Blanckeman writes: “L’écritain instaure un échange, offre une voix de substitution à celle dont l’existence lui fournit quelque trame narrative pour penser sa propre personnalité” (*Lire* 132).¹⁸ Modiano’s relationship with Dora can be read as one of empathic unsettlement. According to Dominick LaCapra:

The role of empathy and empathic unsettlement in the attentive secondary witness [...] involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other’s place. Opening oneself to empathic unsettlement is, as I intimated, a desirable affective dimension of inquiry which complements and supplements empirical research and analysis. Empathy is important in attempting to understand traumatic events and victims, and it may (I think, should) have stylistic effects in the way one discusses or addresses certain problems (78).

Although Modiano brings in different story lines to complement elements of Dora’s life, he is careful not to conflate his experience with hers and not to minimize the tragedy of

¹⁷ Rudy is not mentioned at all in *Dora Bruder*, but is discussed in Modiano’s autobiographical text, *Un pedigree. La place de l’étoile*, Modiano’s first novel, as well as his next seven books are dedicated to him.

¹⁸ For more detailed analyses of the multiple layers of narrative in *Dora Bruder*, see, among others: Catherine Douzou, “Naissance d’un fantôme;” Joseph Jurt, “La mémoire de la Shoah;” Annelies Schulte Nordholt, “*Dora Bruder*: le témoignage par le biais de la fiction.”

her life. Her version of running away from home is a particularly sombre one, and Modiano admits that the only thing his experience truly shares with hers is the season of winter.

In *Dora Bruder*, Modiano's practice is similar to what Marie Darrieussecq describes as: "Parler *pour*, voilà ce que peut être le témoignage imaginaire. Parler pour celui qui n'a pas la parole, pour celui qui est empêché de parole. Pour les enfants. Pour les dépossédés. Pour les fous. Pour les morts. Non pas faire parler les morts, ni parler à leur place, mais parler *pour* eux. Vers eux" (255). "Parler pour" (Darrieussecq) and "une voix de substitution" (Blanckeman) are both accurate ways of describing Modiano's narration, but I would argue that he also speaks *to* Dora Bruder. He establishes himself as, if not a friend, at least a friendly interlocutor, someone who chooses to pay attention to her personally, not minimizing her concerns due to the more general and overwhelming worries of the war, as could have been the case during her lifetime, and not reducing her to a shadowy abstraction, one victim among many. While Modiano could (and arguably should) have acknowledged Klarsfeld's contribution in a postface or acknowledgements section, bringing the famous Nazi hunter and Holocaust memorialist into the main text of *Dora Bruder* would break the intimate space of the novel and shift the attention away from Dora's personal story to refocus on her more representative status as a victim. The novel is, instead, about her life and the exchange that is established between two adolescents, young Patrick Modiano and Dora. Although the historical documents that are cited refer to a reality outside the space of the novel and gesture to a larger historical narrative, once immersed in the body of the text they act

more like stepping stones, indicating the way across the vast ocean of history.¹⁹ The space between the documents is left to be filled in, not with more documents or more archives, but with the personal stories and imaginings of Modiano, and then later, those of the reader. The space between the archival fragments becomes then a kind of hybrid space that does not quite belong to the realm of fiction but is also not confined by the limits of the historical record.

In his article for *Libération* in support of Klarsfeld, Modiano wrote, “et d’abord, j’ai douté de la littérature. Puisque le principal moteur de celle-ci est souvent la mémoire, il me semblait que le seul livre qu’il fallait écrire, c’était ce mémorial, comme Serge Klarsfeld l’avait fait” (Heck and Guidée 176). In *Dora Bruder*, he suggests how the novel can work as a memorial, precisely by activating this half-fictional, half-historical space. As he walks through the streets of Paris, providing precise and detailed descriptions of his route and his observations, as is typical of Modiano, the narrator imagines where Dora might have walked or where he might encounter the ghost of his father. He also catches glimpses of fictional characters: he feels the presence of Manon Lescaut at Salpêtrière and marvels that Dora’s boarding school shares an address (62 rue du Petit-Picpus) with the imaginary convent where Cosette and Jean Valjean hide from Javert. In *Dora Bruder*, a Paris emerges that is half real and half imaginary, and, momentarily, safe in this textual space, Dora fleetingly exists as a timeless literary character, walking the streets beside a younger and an older Modiano, alongside Manon Lescaut and Cosette. This passing glimpse of a constructed, fictionalized Paris during the Occupation provokes further

¹⁹ This metaphor is taken from the acceptance speech Modiano gave when he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2014, where he compares books like *Dora Bruder* to “ces icebergs perdus qui dérivent à la surface de l’océan” (p. 22).

intertextual associations, and we can easily imagine adding other figures, real or imaginary, to this space. One of these could be Antoine Doinel, who ran away from home in a wintery Paris and took a famous trip in a paddy wagon, or even François Truffaut, who also ran away during the Occupation.²⁰

As much as Modiano and his readers are tempted to linger in this hybrid Paris, the text must adhere to the chronology dictated by the historical documents. Here, Modiano's commitment to writing only the real takes on a particularly tragic sense. In his text, the streets of Paris cannot remain a magical, imaginary space that protects Dora, as they do in *Les Misérables* to shelter Valjean and Cosette, and the city cannot feed her like a glorious, maternal mother, as it does when Antoine Doinel drinks milk left on the street during his night out in Paris.²¹ Lynn Higgins writes, "Like *Les 400 Coups*, *Dora Bruder* ends with a freeze frame" (460), but Dora's ending is more than a momentary freeze frame. Her secret remains hers forever – there is no possibility of a sequel. The historical facts, supported by the archival material, are unequivocal, and there is a terrible finality in the statement, "Tous les deux, le père et la fille, quittèrent Drancy le 18 septembre, avec mille autres hommes et femmes, dans un convoi pour Auschwitz" (143), the use of the passé simple emphatically driving home the fact that Dora's life is now in the past.

Of the novels studied as part of this corpus, *Dora Bruder* concerns itself the least with the contemporary situation of the narrator, whether his personal life or in relation to political debates of the time. The narrator describes his perambulations around Paris as he

²⁰ For a full description of this intertext, see: Lynn Higgins, "Fugue States: Modiano *Romancier*" (2007).

²¹ Writing about *Les Misérables*, Modiano explains: "Et soudain, on éprouve une sensation de vertige, comme si Cosette et Jean Valjean, pour échapper à Javert et à ses policiers, basculaient dans le vide: jusque-là, ils traversaient les vraies rues du Paris réel, et brusquement ils sont projetés dans le quartier d'un Paris imaginaire que Victor Hugo nomme le Petit Picpus" (51).

writes the text – that is, the experiences that ground him in a specific historical act of writing – but he resists providing the details that would definitively anchor his descriptions to a precise moment. His gaze is resolutely aimed towards the past as he imagines the Paris of Dora, and also the Paris of his adolescence. *Dora Bruder* is, as Max Silverman points out, an excellent example of palimpsestic memory, but I would contend that the statement, “A similar imbrication of colonial and Holocaust detail can be located in Patrick Modiano’s *Dora Bruder*” (Silverman 111) is perhaps overstating the relationship that Modiano establishes between the Algerian War and the Holocaust.²² He does, however, allude specifically, if briefly, to the Algiers putsch and the ensuing May Crisis of 1958, in the opening pages: “Je me souviens du boulevard Barbès et du boulevard Ornano déserts, un dimanche après-midi de soleil, en mai 1958. A chaque carrefour, des groupes de gardes mobiles, à cause des événements d’Algérie” (8). Even if he does not precisely establish multidirectional memory links in accordance with Michael Rothberg’s definition, Modiano also does not deny them and leaves it to the readers to pay attention to or ignore these parallels.²³

While Modiano leaves enough clues in his novel to allow readers to forge multidirectional memory links between the Algerian War and the Holocaust or to see parallels between the treatment of immigrants at different points in France’s history, the narrator’s own response as he considers the past is one of gratitude for not living during the Occupation. Modiano alludes to a Jewish author nicknamed ‘le Zébu,’ who had lived

²² Similar, here, refers to Silverman’s previous discussion of *W ou le souvenir d’enfance*.

²³ Mary Jean Green also argues that comparisons could be drawn between the Bruders and the new wave of immigrants living in the neighborhood around the Boulevard Ornano and métro Simplon, although she notes that “these more recent immigrants [primarily from North and Sub-Saharan Africa], however, are almost invisible to Modiano’s narrator, who, in this book, is hard to separate from Modiano himself” (435).

in his father's apartment and who, like him, published his first novel with Gallimard at twenty-one. Although not mentioned by name in *Dora Bruder*, 'le Zébu' is author François Vernet, the pseudonym of Albert Sciaky, who died in Dachau in 1945.²⁴

Modiano muses:

D'autres comme lui, juste avant ma naissance, avaient épuisé toutes les peines, pour nous permettre de n'éprouver que de petits chagrins. Je m'en étais déjà aperçu vers dix-huit ans, lors de ce trajet en panier à salade avec mon père, trajet qui n'était que la répétition inoffensive et la parodie d'autres trajets, dans les mêmes véhicules et vers les mêmes commissariats de police – mais d'où l'on ne revenait jamais à pied, chez soi, comme je l'avais fait ce jour-là. (99)

The repetition of 'les mêmes' echoes his earlier comment about the need to remember what happened in the buildings that people unthinkingly walk past everyday, but which were the sites of atrocities during the Occupation: "La préfecture de police de l'Occupation n'est plus qu'une grande caserne spectrale au bord de la Seine. Elle nous apparaît, au moment où nous évoquons le passé, un peu comme la maison Usher" (83). In many ways, it is understandable to idly and comfortably suppress the past; few eagerly adopt the role of Edgar Allan Poe's narrator and venture into the murky depths of the House of Usher. "Et aujourd'hui, nous avons peine à croire que ce bâtiment dont nous longeons les façades n'a pas changé depuis les années quarante. Nous nous persuadons que ce ne sont pas les mêmes pierres, les mêmes couloirs" (83). In *Dora Bruder*, Modiano affirms the importance of remembrance so that it is not only the buildings that remember; *Dora Bruder* pleads for continued research into the past, work performed not to effectuate blame but to remember, and work that fosters a move towards a heightened

²⁴ Modiano's text "15 Quai Conti" about "le Zébu" was published as a sort of foreword to the 2004 edition of François Vernet's *Nouvelles peu exemplaires*. See also the chapter dedicated to the 15 quai de Conti apartment in Denis Cosnard, *Dans la peau de Patrick Modiano* (2010).

sense of responsibility and awareness that in remembering history one might avoid its repetition.

The use of “nous” in the passages previously cited marks a shift from the usual “je” of the novel. From the beginning of the text, Modiano implicates the readers in the reconstruction of Dora’s life from the fragments of history and now he implicates them in the efforts to continue to remember her and the other victims of the Holocaust. He suggests that he is not alone in walking past the sites of past atrocities with calm complacency, and he encourages readers not only to be passively grateful for living at a time when Paris is not under a military occupation but also to take responsibility for remembering those who lived at a time when it was.²⁵ Perhaps the metaphor that best understands *Dora Bruder* is Modiano’s own: “mais, faute d’éléments, j’ai été obligé de broder, de délayer le vrai dans une sorte de potage” (cited in Morris 276). Interestingly, it is through the careful and focused telling of Dora’s story as a real individual rather than as a representative victim that this “potage” emerges: the basic outline of events – arrest and deportation to a concentration camp – was a tragically common occurrence during the Occupation. The very quotidian nature of the image of “potage” reinforces the bizarre, horrifying mundaneness of the general plan of Dora’s narrative, and renders this outcome unsettlingly immediate. Still, as Modiano emphasizes, people continue to walk carelessly by buildings imprinted with the clues to past atrocities. He encourages his

²⁵ Irene Kacandes, using her concept of co-witnessing, makes a similar argument about the use of ‘vous’ in Modiano’s sentence “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” (144-145). She writes: “The use of ‘vous’ in this last sentence is particularly relevant to the kind of co-witnessing I’m presenting because it both establishes a Buberian relationship of intersubjectivity between the narrator and Dora, and implicates readers who should subsequently feel motivated to carry out a similar act” (206).

readers to pay attention, not only to the details of his novel, but also to the clues of the past that exist around them. In *Dora Bruder*, historical fragments and autobiographical comments, imagined scenes and factual statements, are left to simmer together, creating a “potage” that, through its refusal to boil down its narrative to a comfortable historical abstraction, presents Dora, an ephemeral image of whom, complex, immediate, and relevant, gradually emerges from the steam if the reader carefully pays attention.

HHhH

Like *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH* is presented from the perspective of a first person writer-narrator, who, speaking from the present moment of writing, looks back and tries to reconstruct and capture, if only fleetingly, the lives of two members of the Resistance who died fighting the Nazi regime. If *Dora Bruder*'s narrator is best characterised as melancholic and introspective, the narrator of *HHhH* is outwardly excited and almost frenetic, passionately into his subject matter and apparently eager to share all of his knowledge. He is never explicitly said to be Binet himself, although there are parallels that align narrator and author, including the name of their partner, Natacha, and their experience working as a French teacher.²⁶ They also share the same enthusiasm for writing historically real stories, with Binet expressing many comments similar to those of his novelistic counterpart in a 2011 issue of *Le Débat*. Still, a full autobiographical pact, in accordance with Philippe Lejeune's rules, is never established, and the slippery,

²⁶ This biographical information comes from the more explicitly autobiographic text, *La vie professionnelle de Laurent B.* (2004).

shifting autobiographical almost-pact proves symptomatic of *HHhH*'s relationship to the real and signifies its intention to blur any potential demarcation between fact and fiction.

The first sentence of the novel immediately situates it at the crossroads of history and literature, the real and the imaginary: “Gabčík, c’est son nom, est un personnage qui a vraiment existé” (9). The use of the word “personnage” rather than simply “personne” presents Gabčík as a character in a novel, while “vraiment existé” indicates the book is dealing with real events and people: specifically Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking Nazi, known as the butcher of Prague, who was one of the key engineers of the Final Solution, and Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, respectively Slovak and Czech parachutists, who were involved in Operation Anthropoid, an assassination plot devised by the Czech government in exile. The attack did not go as planned, but Heydrich died of the injuries he sustained a week later, in early June 1942. Gabčík and Kubiš took refuge in a church in Prague where, after a stand off with Nazi troops, they were eventually killed.

For Binet, it is the parachutists who are the true authors of this story – “lui [Gabčík] et ses camarades sont, à mes yeux, les auteurs d’un des plus grands actes de résistance de l’histoire humaine” (10) – and he is simply their chronicler, writing in homage to them. He does not, however, hesitate to describe the text as a novel. In addition to the subtitle, “roman,” the narrator also evokes the nineteenth century French realist novelists in the opening pages and places himself in their lineage. “J’espère simplement que derrière l’épaisse couche réfléchissante d’idéalisations que je vais appliquer à cette histoire fabuleuse, le miroir sans tain de la réalité historique se laissera encore traverser” (10). The mention of a mirror of course evokes Stendhal’s famous mirror along the road, except this one is a two-way mirror, and reflects both history and

narrator. However, like Stendhal's mirror, it only occasionally reflects the glories of the narrator's historical investigation, more frequently reflecting, in all its minutiae, his daily life as he wades through the morass of his investigation and writing processes – the “fange” as it were.

The narrator emphasizes his stance against invention and foregrounds his historical investigation by talking about doing research in museums and archives, reading secondary sources by famous historians like Raoul Hilberg, and even doing internet research. He provides extensive documentation, often in the form of citations, culled from a wide range of sources including recorded speeches and official meetings, Goebbels's diaries, formal declarations, photographs, newspapers, and the memoirs of Heydrich's wife, Lina. This inclusion of archival materials goes beyond functioning as a simple “effet de reel,” a technique that the narrator vehemently condemns in the opening pages as a “puéril souci d'effet de réel” (9), but rather mimics the style of historical writing.

Yet, while Binet, with his generous inclusion of citations, seems to want to activate the credibility and reliability associated with this kind of conventionalized historical writing, the overall appearance of the text belies this ambition. At the level of the paratext, there is no bibliography or works cited, no list of archives consulted, and again, as with *Dora Bruder*, only one footnote. Here it is a playful comment on the German expression translated as “bouffer le tapis,” supposedly applied to an angry Hitler in 1938. The footnote ends: “je me suis renseigné et n'ai trouvé trace nulle part de cette expression idiomatique” (105). This kind of detail-oriented and often inconclusive digression is typical of the narrator, but is usually included in the body of the text.

Placing it as a footnote only makes the reader wonder why there are not more footnotes, undermining the text's credibility as a historically conscientious document and reinforcing that, despite its apparent commitment to the real, *HHhH* does not actually adhere to real historiographical conventions. Like the solitary footnote in *Dora Bruder*, this footnote does not "tediously reassure" (Grafton 5), instead forcing the reader to question the reliability of the narrator's historical documentation.

Although the narrator cites a wide-variety of both primary and secondary sources, he is often cavalier about indicating their provenance, not disclosing whether he found them himself in archives or a secondary source and not giving details on the possible archives he may have used. The reader does not have the information necessary to verify his documentation and therefore must rely on the tenuous trust established by Binet's narrator – a trust that is particularly strained when it comes to indirect speech. Early in the novel, the narrator carefully explains: "rien n'est plus artificiel, dans un récit historique, que ces dialogues reconstitués à partir de témoignages plus ou moins de première main, sous prétexte d'insuffler de la vie aux pages mortes du passé. En stylistique, cette démarche s'apparente à la figure de l'hypotypose, qui consiste à rendre un tableau si vivant qu'il donne au lecteur l'impression de l'avoir sous les yeux" (33). His solution is taken almost directly from Thucydides, who explains in *The Peloponnesian War*:

Insofar as these facts involve what the various participants said both before and during the actual conflict, recalling the exact words was difficult for me regarding speeches I heard myself and for my informants about speeches made elsewhere; in the way I thought each would have said what was especially required in the given situation, I have stated accordingly, with the closest possible fidelity on my part to the overall sense of what was actually said. About the actions of the war, however, I considered it my responsibility to write neither as I learned from the

change informant nor according to my own opinion, but after examining what I witnessed myself and what I learned from others, with the utmost possible accuracy in each case. (13)

In his notes on the passage cited above, Steven Lattimore adds that “the degree of self-contradiction possibly involved in Thucydides’ policy for the speeches continues to be exhaustively discussed” (13). Binet, while appealing to one of the founding historians, also leans into the potential confusion caused by this approach to historical dialogues. He writes: “Quoi qu’il en soit, mes dialogues, s’ils ne peuvent se fonder sur des sources précises, fiables, exactes au mot près, seront inventés. Toutefois, dans ce dernier cas, il leur sera assigné, non une fonction d’hypotypose, mais plutôt, disons, au contraire, de parabole” (33). While seemingly creating a clear pact of historical reliability, the narrator not only admits to inventing dialogues, but even underlines rhetorical figures of speech, a stylistic technique that remains the purview of literary writing.²⁷

His invented conversations, in fact, are not even always carefully marked. A long scene in French transcribes the dialogues that happened over the phone at Nazi headquarters during the Night of the Long Knives: they are plausible, realistic conversations, but likely belong to the category of invented speeches. However, a few pages later, the narrator insists to a friend who read a few pages of the book manuscript that every statement corresponds to a real situation, and that he could provide specific names and details. Of course, these specific sources are ultimately not included, which suggests that Binet wants the reader to wonder whether the dialogue really happened or

²⁷ Philippe Carrard writes, “la stylistique normative de l’école méthodique avait banni la rhétorique en général, les figures de mot en particulier, et [...] les manuels les plus récents prononçaient toujours les mêmes interdictions” (268). While new trends in historical writing, such as Ivan Jablonka’s literary movement, begin to invite more figures of speech into historical writing, such rhetorical devices remain more common in literary writing.

not. The narrator tells his friend, who is skeptical about the historical accuracy of his text, “J’aurais dû être plus clair au niveau pacte de lecture” (67), but then complicates the situation with subsequent dialogues. He not only makes flippant statements like “pourquoi ai-je inventé cette phrase? Sans doute parce qu’il l’a vraiment prononcée” (378), but also plays with the use of quotation marks, sometimes to indicate a citation from a historical source, and sometimes simply to indicate dialogue. While in both cases the quotation mark sets apart one voice from the rest of the text, Binet makes it unclear whether the other voice is in fact truly distinct from the author’s, as would be the case with a historical source – or if it is simply different from the narrator’s, and, as is the situation with dialogue put into the mouth of historical people, is still invented by the author.

The narrator, for example, imagines the scene when the two parachutists meet the attractive granddaughters of their London landlady, who says, “*Come in, darlings, venez, que je vous présente! [...] Messieurs, je vous présente mes deux grandes filles*” (222). This dialogue is perfectly plausible but not verifiably accurate, and the quotation marks in this case indicate only that the words could have been spoken. In other cases, the words in quotation marks are a matter of historical record, such as Churchill’s famous declaration, “vous deviez choisir entre la guerre et le déshonneur. Vous avez choisi le déshonneur. Et vous aurez la guerre” (110). The hazy delineation of historically verifiable dialogue and fictitious conversations is further confused by the issue of translation. The people in the novel speak in English, Czech, and German, but their words are reported in French, without any indication of their means of translation. Binet admits that his German is not excellent but does not elaborate. For Peter Tame, this problem is more

than a minor irritation: “Il a beau déclaré ce qu’il appelle son ‘faible niveau d’allemand’, des erreurs grossières comme ‘Reichprotektor’ pour désigner Heydrich, la victime principale du livre, ou ‘Ordnungspolizei’ ou encore ‘Schweinehund’ choquent quand même” (132). The issue of translation relates to the broader question of referentiality and reliability. Not only are references not given for the sources, but even those dialogues that are supposedly from real historical documentation have been modified.

The play with the dialogues, vacillating between real and imagined, is only one way that Binet’s narrator proves himself to be untrustworthy.²⁸ He gives seemingly precise information – “À 9 heures, enfin, le premier char allemand pénètre dans la ville” (130) – only to begin the next chapter by backtracking and admitting, “en fait, je ne sais pas si c’est un char qui pénètre en premier dans Prague. Les unités les plus avancées semblaient être massivement constituées de motos et de side-cars” (131). The narrator, then, shows himself to be, in many ways, untrustworthy, but he is also oddly reliable, as he often goes back to correct his mistakes. This technique, along with the rest of the running commentary, which emphasizes the historical process rather than the result, keeps the readers on their toes: Binet forces the readers to remember what the narrator said earlier when he circles back to it, and requires them to sort through and make sense of the mass of details.

At the end of the novel, the narrator quotes Barthes, who advises, “surtout, ne cherchez pas à être exhaustif” (442) – advice he chooses not to take. Instead, he presents

²⁸ Although the narrator might be untrustworthy, he is very reliable, according to Wayne Booth’s definition of an unreliable narrator: “unreliable narrators thus differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart from their author’s norms. [...] All of them make stronger demands on the reader’s powers of inference than does reliable narration” (“Distance and Point of View” 93). Having already established that Binet’s narrator is very close to Binet himself, he is not unreliable according to Booth’s definition. He does, however, show himself to be possibly untrustworthy, or, at the very least, imprecise.

a “foule de choses” (28): historical fact and supposition, conversations real and imaginary, and information that ranges from Nazi policy, to the sweethearts of Gabčík and Kubiš, to the composers Heydrich liked (his father’s compositions and composers like Handel and Beethoven). All of this information is presented piecemeal in a series of very short chapters (the text is composed of 257), which not only works to keep the reader’s attention, but also to foster a critical reflection of the historical writing process. The title itself, *HHhH*, already indicates this preoccupation with historiographical debates. The *HHhH* in question refers to the saying *Himmlers Hirn heisst Heydrich*, meaning Himmler’s brain is called Heydrich; but the visual of the four H’s of the title, figuring both upper and lower case h’s, seems also to reference the convention of differentiating between *Histoire* avec un H majuscule – the history of nations, wars, and politics – and *histoire* avec un h minuscule – the history of the everyday, the lives of the individual people who experience the major political and military events. In his novel, Binet considers both, presenting *Histoire* and *histoire* as inextricably strands of the same narrative: he mentions minutiae like whether one of the parachutists drank tea or coffee, alongside official meetings between heads of state.

While the basic events of the assassination attempt are easily summarized – “deux hommes doivent en tuer un troisième. Ils y parviennent, ou non, et c’est fini, ou presque” (283) – the historical outcome itself is the product of both careful planning and a series of unforeseen events, including Heydrich running late that morning and Gabčík’s gun not going off. It is impossible to know which details were ultimately significant in determining the outcome of the attack, and so Binet provides them all. His text resembles in some ways a historical chronicle, in which information is collected in more or less

chronological order about a central subject. Hayden White writes that “the chronicle, like the annals but unlike the history, does not so much conclude as simply terminate; typically it lacks closures, that summing up of the ‘meaning’ of the chain of events with which it deals that we normally expect from the well-made story. The chronicle typically promises closure but does not provide it” (16). The narrator presents the information he has gathered before having culled the key points and crafted a well-organized narrative. He simply puts forward the raw historical material and encourages the reader to choose what is significant, and to trace his or her own path through the accumulated historical details.

The narrator suggests that one of the ways people are tempted to process and synthesize this detail is through the imposition of a fictional, narrative framework. While Binet admits to a personal bias for the real, and that he gets goose bumps knowing that the story he is being told really happened (*Le Débat* 82), he recognizes the influence of fictional narratives on the ways in which people make sense of the world around them and their own lives. The narrator, for example, calls the head of the British Secret Service, M, before backtracking: “J’ai dit une bêtise, victime à la fois d’une erreur de mémoire et d’une imagination quelque peu intrusive. En fait, le chef des services secrets anglais, à cette époque, se faisait appeler “C”, et non pas “M” comme dans *James Bond*” (51). While this error is harmless, Binet suggests elsewhere that conceiving of one’s own life in literary terms can take a darker turn. This is the case for Heydrich who, according to the narrator, used what he learned from detective stories to get a job with Himmler in the intelligence department. “Donc il se concentre pour rassembler ses connaissances en la matière. Celles-ci se limitent principalement à ce qu’il a retenu des nombreux romans

d'espionnage anglais qu'il dévore depuis des années" (51). Unlike the James Bond reference, the influence of spy novels on Heydrich turns sinister: "Heydrich, comme Sherlock Holmes, joue du violon (mais mieux que lui). Et, comme Sherlock Holmes, il s'occupe des enquêtes criminelles. Sauf que, à la différence du détective, lui ne cherche pas la vérité; il la fabrique, c'est autre chose" (82). The narrator, with the James Bond slip, suggests that he too is prone to imposing the coherence of narrative fiction on the disparate events of real life. However, he commits in his novel to remaining within the confines of the historical record, paradoxically taking as his model the fictional character Sherlock Holmes's commitment to precise, verifiable facts and the pursuit of a careful inquiry.

The narrator refuses to act like traditional historical novelists and impose an artificial teleology on the historical events. He complains: "tout le monde trouve ça normal, bidouiller la réalité pour faire mousser un scénario, ou donner une cohérence à la trajectoire d'un personnage dont le parcours réel comportait sans doute trop de cahots hasardeux et pas assez lourdement signifiants" (68). The narrator-researcher portrays this messiness of history and historical documentation, with his fragmented novel that reflects the disorganization of the historical archive. However, while Binet's text is crafted to refute a causal, linear view of history, there is nonetheless a sense of teleology, of the unstoppable march of time towards a key moment. The novel can be plotted using the traditional narrative structure of exposition, rising action, climax, and denouement, the climax being the attack in the street. The tragedy inscribed into the very structure of *HHhH*, though, and what distinguishes it from a conventional historical fiction narrative, is that these events are emplotted rather than plotted. While both historical and literary

narratives are constructed, the historical narrative must conform to the basic events proven to have occurred in the past, while the fictional narrative is more free to shape and arrange events to suit itself. Dorrit Cohn explains that the writing of history is “highly constrained and controlled, subject to the author’s justification and the reader’s scrutiny, with its obligatory correspondence to the happenings it narrates overtly displayed in the text itself. The novelist’s relation to his sources is free, remains tacit, or, when mentioned, is assumed to be spurious; its true origination may (and often does) remain forever unknown – sometimes to the writer himself” (114-115).²⁹

In addition to recounting his historical investigation, the narrator-writer also comments on his writing process, noting the ways in which his findings impact the construction of his text: “Mon histoire est trouée comme un roman, mais dans un roman ordinaire, c’est le romancier qui décide de l’emplacement des trous, droit qui m’est refusé parce que je suis l’esclave de mes scrupules” (396). He self-consciously constrains himself to the historical record, refusing to take advantage of the novelist’s privilege of omniscience, and attempting to present the story as it played out in 1942. As the climactic scene of the assassination attempt nears, the text develops a cinematic flair, but it is a more removed, muted flourish than a suspension of disbelief in which the reader is immersed. Rather, it is as if the reader is watching the filming of a movie: the script is already written, and everyone must play their roles.

²⁹ Cohn develops this idea further: “A novel can be said to be plotted, but not *emplotted*: its serial moments do not refer to, and can therefore not be selected from, an ontologically independent and temporally prior data base of disordered, meaningless happenings that it restructures into order and meaning. In this respect, the process that transforms archival sources into narrative history is qualitatively different from (and indeed hardly comparable to) the process that transforms a novelist’s sources, whether they be autobiographical, anecdotal, or even historical – into his fictional creation” (114).

The lead up to the climatic action scene and the moment of the assassination itself are written with a kind of fatalism. The narrator knows how the events will unfold, as is repeatedly emphasized by his use of the future tense: “Bientôt le cours du monde va se figer dans un virage. La terre cessera de tourner exactement en même temps que la Mercedes” (328). He puts off the arrival at the moment, however, writing: “en remontant à l’infini la chaîne des causalités, cela me permettrait de retarder le moment d’affronter le soleil en face, le morceau de bravoure du roman, la scène à faire (78). Van Kelly argues that this delay, which lasts almost the entire first section of the book, is partly to allow him to do justice to Gabčík and Kubiš. He compares this extended first part to an oratory in the Greek tradition: “la Première Partie du roman prend la forme d’une ‘définition oratoire’ filée, répondant aux questions implicites *qui est Heydrich? et pourquoi l’Opération Anthropoïde?* Chacun des deux cent vingt-et-un chapitres ajoute des éléments au dossier d’inculpation, la conclusion tacite de l’énumération des griefs étant que *Les Alliés, la Résistance tchécoslovaque, Gabčík et Kubiš eurent raison d’assassiner Heydrich*” (139). Gabčík and Kubiš are established as heroes, setting off to perform a necessary act. Delaying this the key moment also builds suspense: while the readers likely know what will happen, Binet keeps them interested, partly by starting to tell the scene, invoking the black Mercedes, and then backing off. “Le moment approche, je le sens. La Mercedes est en route. Elle arrive” (327). Like his readers, though, Binet recoils from the fact that the car must begin to move. In his capacity of conscientious historian-narrator, he remains powerless to do anything but present the historical real, and the events in the street must unfold in *HHhH* as they did that day in 1942.

Although Binet cannot change the course of history, he does take advantage of a literary mode of reading to transport himself and his readers back to the scene of the attack. When the three key players – Heydrich and the two parachutists – are in place, Kubiš throws his grenade, which momentarily pauses the scene when it explodes. There is a blank page in the text, representing the stunned silence in the street after the explosion, before the readers find themselves transported with the narrator back to the street in 1942. It is as if the blast from the grenade blurs together with the “vent de l’Histoire” (330), “winds of History,” to create a sort of vortex. All of the pieces of historical information swirl together, coalescing for one brief moment into an image of the scene in Prague and sucking the reader back to the past. The text gradually zooms in on the scene, first describing what is happening in the rest of the theatre of war at that time: Hitler sleeping, Benèš flicking through reports, Churchill drinking whisky – his second of the day – and de Gaulle fighting to legitimize France in the eyes of the Allies. The description then closes in on the street in Prague – the Mercedes in the street, the passengers stuck in the tram. “Une veste de SS, posée sur la banquette arrière, s’envole. Pendant quelques secondes, les témoins suffoqués ne verront plus qu’elle” (353). The narrator adds, “moi, en tout cas, je ne vois qu’elle” (353), placing himself as a witness in the street. As noted earlier in the novel, there are increasingly few eye-witnesses to these events in Prague, but the narrator instates himself as a kind of ersatz witness, describing the scene as precisely as possible in short, informative sentences.

By transporting himself (and by extension, the reader) onto the street and narrating the attack scene from that very immediate vantage point, Binet fosters a sense of solidarity with Gabčík and Kubiš. While LaCapra’s term of empathic unsettlement

deals primarily with victims of genocide, Binet's work here nonetheless provokes a feeling of empathy. LaCapra writes, "Empathy involves virtual not vicarious experience – that is to say, experience in which one puts oneself in the other's position without taking the place of – or speaking for – the other" (135). Binet literally places himself beside Gabčík and Kubiš, standing with them in solidarity. Van Kelly evokes the idea of a community of readers, writing, "le narrateur s'efforce aussi de réunir une communauté de lecteurs à même d'épouser les valeurs méritoires que les actions de Gabčík et Kubiš illustrent, et de penser avec justesse la force pathétique mais rayonnante de l'Opération Anthropoïde mesurée à la double aune de l'historicité et de notre passion contemporaine" (144). Binet forges a community of resisters, across nations and time periods, but all standing shoulder to shoulder in this narrative-historical moment.

As Thomas Pavel explains, "Fictional borders, territories, settlements – all call for metaphoric travelers. [...] We, too, visit fictional lands, inhabit them for a while, intermingle with the heroes. We are moved by the fate of fictional characters, since [...] when caught up in a story, we participate in fictional happenings by projecting a fictional ego who attends the imaginary events as a kind of nonvoting member" (85). In Binet's text, the feeling of being a nonvoting member is intensified as the reader watches the attack unfold, powerless to make Gabčík's gun go off properly or to protect the members of the resistance from the SS. Binet's readers might feel transported back to the street in Prague, but no matter their narrative implication in the scene, they are ultimately bystanders, helpless to intervene. This feeling of powerlessness is foreshadowed throughout the novel by the narrator's various metacommentary about his commitment to confining himself to the historical facts despite the temptation to fictionalize the story –

Binet's "fictional ego" can only act as a witness, and is troubled by his inability to save the heroes.

As the novel nears its conclusion, the narrator reaffirms that the events in question are real, even if the secret plan to assassinate Heydrich might seem fictional and remote, as if taken from an espionage movie. "Pendant ce temps, Gabčík court toujours. La cravate au vent, les cheveux décoiffés, on dirait Cary Grant dans *La Mort aux trousses* ou Belmondo dans *L'Homme de Rio*. Mais évidemment, Gabčík, même très bien entraîné, n'a pas l'endurance surnaturelle que l'acteur français affichera dans son rôle extravagant. Gabčík, contrairement à Belmondo, ne peut pas courir indéfiniment" (362). Gabčík is not a character in a spy thriller and, just as Paris cannot magically change to save Dora Bruder, Gabčík cannot suddenly develop the implausible lung capacity of Belmondo. The narrator imagines a peaceful life for Gabčík, but it is ephemeral and illusory, no more than a brief respite from the harsh historical realities. He tries to project a future for the hero by imagining himself as Gabčík – "j'habite mon personnage" (414) – and dreaming of a promotion and a wife and baby. This future is foreclosed, though, and the reverie, along with the reader's time in the past, ephemeral and fleeting. Binet breaks the fictional dream and the readers find themselves restored to the present, but perhaps carrying with them a more varied historical viewpoint after their immersion in a complex, multi-faceted historical moment.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator writes that he was surprised to find that, when he lived in Prague, he often unwittingly walked past the church where the final standoff with the SS took place without stopping to notice the commemorative plaque or to study the bullet holes that still scar the stone. *HHhH* acts as a reminder of the traces of

history that exist in the present, and also as an effort to keep memory alive across generations, especially as those who experienced the events gradually disappear.

Although the narrator criticizes novelists who take liberties with the historical record and insists throughout that he is bound by historical facts, he grudgingly acknowledges in the end the power of literature to share stories. “Pour que quoi que ce soit pénètre dans la mémoire, il faut d’abord le transformer en littérature. C’est moche mais c’est comme ça” (244). Like Flaubert before him, who while writing *Salammbô* worried, “C’est l’Histoire, je le sais bien, mais si un roman est aussi embêtant qu’un bouquin scientifique...” (251), Binet strives to make history interesting: “En même temps, j’ai dit que je ne voulais pas faire un manuel d’histoire. Cette histoire-là, j’en fais une affaire personnelle. C’est pourquoi mes visions se mélangent quelquefois aux faits avérés” (146). He tries to make the story personal for his readers, both emotionally by sharing his enthusiasm and excitement, and intellectually, through the destabilized referential pact, the metanarrative comments, and the narrative digressions. While the references to historical sources enforce the straightforward historical veracity of the account, Binet also subtly encourages his readers to follow his lead and move away from a coldly distant recounting of the causes and effects of events, towards a more immediate, personal, and comprehensive history.

Le météorologue

Olivier Rolin’s 2014 text, *Le météorologue*, tells the story of the Russian meteorologist Alexey Feodosievich Wangenheim, head of the Hydrometeorological Service of the USSR and card-carrying member of the Communist Party, who was caught

up in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.³⁰ Arrested in 1934, he was imprisoned in the Solovki prison camp before being killed in Medvezhyegorsk on 3 November 1937, a victim of the Great Terror. *Le météorologue's* brief prologue ends with, "Il était né en 1881 à Krapivno, un village d'Ukraine..." (14), a statement that reads like the opening of a traditional biography, presenting the year and place of birth of the subject; however, rather than beginning the account of Wangenheim's life, the next chapter begins, "Mais avant de commencer à raconter la vie et la mort de cet homme qui se destinait à l'observation paisible de la Nature et que la fureur de l'Histoire brisera, je dirai quelques mots des circonstances dans lesquelles j'ai croisé son chemin" (15). This leads not to a brief parenthesis, but rather to the extensive introduction of a first-person narrator who will continue to be foregrounded throughout the text. He tells not only the story of the meteorologist but also his own, commenting on his travels in Russia, his process of research and investigation, and the ways in which the story of Wangenheim resonates with his own life and leftist militant past.

The first person narrator, though never formally named, seems to be a version of Olivier Rolin who, along with his brother Jean, was a key member of the extreme leftist Maoist group "la Gauche prolétarienne." Olivier Rolin was active in this group until 1974: as Gérard Cartier explains in his introduction to the *Europe Revue littéraire mensuelle* volume centered around Rolin's work, "il dirigea la 'branche militaire', ce qui le contraignit à passer dans la clandestinité – cet engagement, qui confine à la légende, fut pour lui une expérience capitale qui, à défaut de l'écrivain, façonna durablement l'homme" (3). The story of Wangenheim, then, has an added personal dimension for the

³⁰ Except when citing Rolin, I will use the English transliteration of the Russian.

narrator, as he considers his own revolutionary engagement and subsequent hopes and disappointments. The link between narrator and author is further reinforced by the mention of *En Russie* (168), which Rolin published in 1987 about his trip to Russia the previous year, along with references to his other travels in Russia, which provided the subject matter for *Sibérie* (2011).

The author-narrator of *Le météorologue* commits to writing only the factual, or that which he has studied or observed, and to presenting alongside the information its provenance. In the opening chapters, this first person writer-investigator tries to establish himself as a trustworthy, reliable narrator. As he notes, “les histoires ne tombent pas du ciel ni des nuées, il n’est pas mauvais, me semble-t-il, qu’elles présentent leurs lettres de créance” (15). He explains that in 2010, while on a speaking engagement at the University of Arkhangelsk, he visited the Solovetsky Islands, where the first Goulag camp was established in a fifteenth century monastery. Fascinated by the history of the space, as well as the beautiful location, he returned in 2012 and met Antonina Sotchina, “une des mémoires de l’île” (18). She showed him a commemorative album made by Wangenheim’s daughter, who had been only four when her father was arrested, of reproductions of the letters and drawings that her father had sent her from the camp. He had carefully drawn and coloured pictures of animals and plants, as you might find in a children’s book.

Rolin describes these pages in a touching moment of *ekphrasis*, explaining: “Herbiers et dessins étaient beaux, mais ils n’étaient pas composés seulement pour plaire à l’œil, ils avaient une fin éducative. À l’aide des plantes, le père apprenait à sa fille les rudiments de l’arithmétique et de la géométrie” (19). The physical description of this

document, though, is not essential; these letters, which provide the emotional heart of the text, are also physically included in the form of an insert at the centre of the book.³¹ The reproduced documents not only act as archival proof of the factual basis of Rolin's text but also provide the thrill that Arlette Farge writes about in *Le Goût de l'archive*, the impression of "toucher le réel" (18) that is inspired by archival documents. The narrator understands the strength of emotions provoked by encountering traces of the past. He notes of the ballast stones and cross-ties that remain of the railway tracks that used to run from Kem to the transit camp at Rabocheostrovsk: "Émotion de voir se matérialiser des choses qui viennent de la double immatérialité du passé et des lectures: ce qui est advenu il y a très longtemps, que je ne connais que par des livres, en voici la trace concrète ici et maintenant" (73). For his readers unable to experience firsthand the physical traces of the past, the narrator offers himself as a sort of ersatz witness; he cannot testify to past events but will faithfully recount his travels and investigations. Andrew Sobanet, building on Froma Zeitlin's work on the concept of vicarious witnessing in the context of Holocaust literature, develops the idea of the narrator as a "vicarious witness," someone who speaks on behalf Wangenheim because he no longer can speak for himself. But Rolin's narrator is also interested in recounting the present, exhibiting to the reader his own research and writing process, as well as his imaginary relationship with Wangenheim that develops as he writes the biography. The narrator both presents himself in the role of historical or vicarious witness for those who cannot bear witness, and also as an interlocutor, who works to enter into dialogue with and bridge the space between both Wangenheim and the reader.

³¹ The images are added at the end in the Points edition.

In the same way he presents the “lettres de créance” of Wangenheim’s story, the narrator offers his credentials that support his position as a guide through Russia. He explains that he has travelled frequently in Russia, to the point where he has “[s]es habitudes là-bas” (15), and his frankness about his Russian language skills – “lamentable” (170) – establishes trustworthiness. He points out his attention to detail at the beginning of the novel – “J’avais pris ensuite le petit avion (un Antonov-24, pour être précis), qui, deux fois par semaine, joint Arkhangelsk aux îles Solovki, un archipel au milieu de la mer Blanche” (16) – setting the tone for the text and suggesting that he will approach his historical discussion with similar care and precision. This commitment is reaffirmed at the end of the novel: “J’ai raconté aussi scrupuleusement que j’ai pu, sans romancer, en essayant de m’en tenir à ce que je savais, l’histoire d’Alexeï Féodossiévitch Vangenheim, le météorologue” (165). The multiple uses of the first person subject pronoun in this one sentence reinforce, too, the narrator’s role in structuring the narrative. This use of the first person to draw attention to the constructed nature of historical narratives is, of course, aligned with the developments in contemporary historical writing discussed earlier, and is a particularly good example of Ivan Jablonski’s “je d’émotion.” This first person voice “témoign[e] d’un cheminement” (292), which, for Rolin, is physical, intellectual, and emotional. As Jablonski states:

Pourquoi n’admettrait-il pas qu’il [the historian] a été touché par un paysage, bouleversé par une rencontre, gêné par une situation, déstabilisé par une découverte? Aucun égocentrisme ici, mais un simple constat: le processus de connaissance a souvent pour effet d’ébranler nos certitudes. Cette implication du chercheur [...] montre qu’il est autant l’ordonnateur de la recherche que son objet, son étoffe. (292)

Rolin's narrator knows that a simple explanation of the steps he takes as part of his historical investigation is inadequate: he understands that in this investigation his own perspective is inextricable for the historical record, and so traces the ways in which his militant experience informs his reactions to Wangenheim, and documents the personal memories provoked by the meteorologist's story.

The narrator's tendency to use literary references as a means of making sense of what he observes and reads is one of the ways in which his subjectivity influences the construction of the narrative. Travelling through Russia, he naturally references Blaise Cendrars, perhaps the most famous French language writer to describe the Steppes, but admits that he may be misquoting: "Il me semble que Cendrars parle quelque part des cloches d'or (ou des clochers d'or?) d'Arkhangelsk, mais je n'ai retrouvé ça nulle part. Peu importe, les écrivains ne sont pas seulement ce qu'ils ont écrit, mais ce que nous croyons qu'ils ont écrit" (16). The statement is significant, not in the misquotation itself – he is confused by a line from a Marcel Thiry poem – but in his description of the way in which a text enters into a reader's mind and lies there, dormant but potentially mutating in meaning and association, until eventually emerging to provide a point of reference or a comparative image.³² Rolin's tendency of finding literary comparisons continues throughout the text, as he notes that a fellow airplane passenger, an Orthodox priest, looks like Georges Perec, and comments that Wangenheim's early agricultural research makes him feel like "on est de nouveau dans *Bouvard et Pécuchet*" (25). William Shakespeare, André Gide, William Blake, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Varlam Shalamov

³² In "Toi qui pâlis au nom de Vancouver," Marcel Thiry writes: "Je me souviens des jours d'automne boréale / Où j'ai connu, parmi les pâleurs idéales / Dont l'haleine du Pôle angélisait le ciel, / Le Nord, le gel, et les clochers d'or d'Archangel..."

are among the literary references, along with Chekhov, who proves to be a particularly pertinent intertext.

Rolin does not just allude to Chekhov in order to activate a certain image of Russia in his reader's minds – “c'est le paysage de 'La steppe' [...] de beaucoup de récits de Tchekhov” (22) – but the text itself occasionally adopts aspects of the sparse structure and tone of Chekhov's plays. In the same way that many of Chekhov's plays eliminate extraneous elements, making it inevitable that each theatrical factor must act itself out (that the proverbial Chekhov's gun must be fired), the readers understand that the historical events dictate the fate of Wangenheim. Writing from the vantage point of the present, Rolin imbues his text with a sense of inevitability; through his frequent use of the future tense, he reminds his readers that he knows what will happen. He writes, “Vangenheim va quitter pour toujours Moscou, puisque toute la suite et la fin de cette histoire, son histoire, vont se dérouler dans une petite région au nord-ouest de la Russie” (69), and frequently introduces new characters with statements like “il est temps de” (149), as if following a pre-established script. Rolin occasionally dwells on a historical moment, adding detail as if he saw a brief glimpse of the past. With terse sentences that almost resemble stage directions, these passages evoke a feeling of the lights going up on a dark stage to reveal the scene. Wangenheim's interrogation is described as: “une salle vide, violemment éclairée. Un homme en blouse blanche. Déshabillez-vous. Tournez-vous. Baissez-vous” (59). The scene outside the theatre in Moscow where Wangenheim is arrested is presented in a similar way, as is the final execution scene. “Dans la forêt, un grand feu brûle, autour duquel les hommes du NKVD se réchauffent, fument, boivent de la vodka, plaisantent. [...] Le capitaine Matveïev finit sa cigarette, jette le mégot dans le

feu, boit un coup de vodka, s'essuie la bouche, saute dans la fosse, arme son Nagant” (161). These moments feel like theatrical tableaux, as if a curtain was briefly drawn back to reveal a scene in progress, and then closed again. It can be read as symbolically significant that Wangenheim is arrested on his way to the theatre – he was on his way to meet his wife at the Bolshoi Theatre to see Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sadko* – but he is taken before he enters. The story of Wangenheim remains essentially real, and even if there are moments in the text that seem to come from a fictional novel, the narrator, with the support of his archival and historical research, quickly reinforces that he is telling a true story. Wangenheim is not the hero, nor the antihero, of a drama, but a man existing in the real world, struggling to survive and protect his family.

The narrator of *Le météorologue* is the first to admit that the subject of his biography is not a hero. “Je n’ai pas caché les faiblesses d’Alexeï Féodossiévitch, quand je les connaissais. Je n’ai pas cherché à en faire un héros exemplaire. Ce n’était ni un génie scientifique ni un grand poète, c’était à certains égards un homme ordinaire, mais c’était un innocent” (166). The interaction between the once reactionary and militant narrator and the prosaic subject of his biography provides much of the tension of the text. The first-person narrator, like Jablonka’s “je d’émotion,” is unsettled by his (even if metaphorical) encounter with the meteorologist. He narrates his “cheminement” or progression as he prepares to write the biography, considering the interactions between biographer and subject, as he works to present Wangenheim’s life with dignity, even while admitting that he finds many of his qualities irritating. Rolin informs the reader on the first page that “les nuées n’étaient pas prétexte à songerie, rien de vaporeux chez lui, je le soupçonne même d’une certaine raideur” (13). Despite imagining Wangenheim’s

career choice as the result of a whimsical, poetic connection with the clouds, Rolin is forced to note that, unlike the eponymous hero of Bunin's novel, *The Life of Arseniev*, who remarks as he lies on the grass, "Quelle bouleversante beauté! Monter sur ce nuage et s'envoler, voguer dans ces hauteurs effrayantes, dans l'immensité des airs..." (24), Wangenheim's reaction to clouds is more pragmatic, and his professional path was likely set for him by his father.

The narrator notes with fairness that Wangenheim was skilled in his position as head of the Hydrometeorological Service and worked with passion and energy to expand the service over the vast territory of the USSR, but also brings up the Ukrainian Famine – "Alors, bien sûr, ce n'est pas de prévisions météorologiques que les campagnes ont d'abord besoin, mais d'un peu d'humanité, simplement" (30) – and asks the uncomfortable question, "Mais lui, le sait-il? Le sait-il plus que tous les autres?" (30). Of course, we will never know, but, more significantly, as the narrator insists, "Staline sait, bien sûr, que les campagnes d'Ukraine meurent, et s'obstine dans une politique meurtrière parce qu'il ne peut pas être dit qu'il s'est trompé, et aussi pour briser une paysannerie en qui il voit un ennemi de classe" (31). Once imprisoned in the Gulag, Wangenheim shows less intellectual enthusiasm than he did as head of the Hydrometeorological Service: "[il] n'a pas du tout le même point de vue que Iouri Tchirkov, qui s'émerveille du brio intellectuel de la petite société réunie autour de la bibliothèque. Mais Tchirkov est un jeune homme plein d'optimisme, et Vangenheim un neurasthénique qui sent que sa vie s'en va, inutile désormais" (111). The narrator's approval for Chirkov's youthful intellectual verve and optimism is made clear, while a

whiff of disdain colors his description of Wangenheim, who suffers from the old fashioned ailment of neurasthenia.³³

It is hardly surprising, though, that the meteorologist would suffer from lassitude, fatigue, headache, and irritability, which are among the symptoms of neurasthenia. He nonetheless remains supportive, at least outwardly, of the Party's cause in prison, and reaffirms his continued faith and support in the letters he writes to his wife and daughter. For the revolutionary-minded narrator, this kind of declaration of passive complicity is difficult to comprehend. Even more troubling, for Rolin, is Wangenheim's decision to pass the time by making mosaics out of bits of rock, often featuring the portrait of Stalin or other Party luminaries; although he notes that, "curieusement à chaque fois qu'il fait un portrait de Staline, il fait ensuite celui d'un animal domestique" (120), perhaps reading into these artistic choices a subliminal critique of Stalin. The meteorologist sends one of these mosaic portraits of Stalin to his wife in 1937, an act the narrator qualifies as "une chose troublante et même choquante" (132). He offers a lengthy description of the object, which he was able to see and hold, providing the detailed *ekphrasis* as proof that Wangenheim did indeed send such an unthinkable gift.

The friction between the outlooks of the more prosaic meteorologist and militant narrator adds a dynamic quality to the biography; for instance, what would be to many an obvious and satisfying explanation of Wangenheim's continued support of the Party – his commitment to trying to protect his family – is not particularly convincing to the narrator,

³³ The symptoms of neurasthenia were first described by American doctor George Miller Beard, in texts like *Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment* (1880) and *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences. A Supplement to Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)* (1881); it is no longer considered an official illness, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

who only once alludes to this possible motive. He acknowledges that “cette crainte peut expliquer ses récurrentes protestations de fidélité au Parti, sachant que toutes ses lettres passaient évidemment par le contrôle de la censure” (133), but also laments: “On aimerait qu’il soit plus lucide, plus révolté, mais non, il continue à être un bon militant communiste, un bon Soviétique gavé d’idéologie, le sort qui lui est réservé, et qu’il n’est tout de même pas le seul à subir, ne semble pas ébranler ses convictions” (93). Although at odds with Wangenheim’s choices, the narrator nonetheless takes him seriously and engages in a sort of debate with him, which by extension implicates the readers in this dialogue and encourages them to consider their own points of view and instincts in terms of the action.

The narrator, like Wangenheim, seems to remain true to his convictions. Rolin speaks candidly about bias when thinking of victims, admitting that the stories of certain people seem to get taken up and told more often. They become the representatives of a particular tragic moment because they have more appeal, whether because of creativity, beauty, or passion. Looking at the memorials on the site of the mass graves at Sandarmokh, Rolin’s eyes are drawn to the photo of “cette belle Nina Zarkharovna Delibache au regard farouche, une économiste géorgienne fusillée le premier novembre 1937 à l’âge de trente-quatre ans. Dans le convoi des Solovki, donc. Il est injuste sans doute que la beauté d’une fusillée augment soudain l’émotion qu’on éprouve à croiser ces regards assassinés, mais c’est ainsi, il faut le reconnaître” (157). The narrator does not speak of Wangenheim with the same kind of enthusiasm he reserves for the passionate Evgeniya Yaroslavskaya-Markon: “Cette femme extraordinaire [...] qui, infirme à la suite d’un accident, tenta tout de même de faire évader son mari, échoua, fut à son tour

déportée aux Solovki, refusait toute obéissance, se mit un jour autour du cou une pancarte où elle avait écrit ‘Mort aux tchékistes!’, et finit fusillée, en 1931, non sans avoir craché au visage du commandant du camp” (94). The fiery brio of Evgeniya is appealingly dramatic, and Rolin confesses that, although his investigation and biography are dedicated to Wangenheim, he sometimes wishes his subject were more militant. “Je préférerais qu’il soit intraitable comme Evguénia, je préférerais l’admirer, mais il n’est pas admirable et c’est peut-être ça qui est intéressant, c’est un type moyen, un communiste qui ne se pose pas de question” (94).

As the narrator struggles throughout the text to reconcile the tensions of art, literature, and fiction with real life and history, the narrative of *Le météorologue* becomes increasingly about his changing relationship with the meteorologist. He describes Wangenheim at the beginning of the text as “une victime parmi des millions d’autres de la folie stalinienne” (19) and “un innocent moyen” (94) in the middle of the text, but eventually the narrator reveals his deeper understanding and respect for the meteorologist. He writes: “Je pourrais prétendre que c’est en raison de ce caractère ‘moyen’, et donc représentatif, que j’ai entrepris de raconter la vie et la mort, la passion de cet homme: mais ce serait mentir, sociologiser abusivement un propos qui doit beaucoup plus à l’accident” (167). He is intrigued by the drawings from the Gulag and the beautiful Solovetsky Islands, but ultimately he is convinced to write the text by meeting the people who knew Wangenheim’s daughter. It is through these personal exchanges that a connection is established and that a historical individual becomes three dimensional and human rather than a representative victim and one among many.

In an interview with Nathalie Crom as part of a series of meetings organized by the Bibliothèque publique d'information in Paris, Rolin references Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*. He was struck by the scene in which a Red Army Colonel finds himself faced with a line of tanks; rather than seeing the men simply as the enemy, he reminds himself that "au fond, chacun est totalement différent" (7) – that is, one might be thinking of sandwiches, another of birds, and yet another of a girl he fancies. Rolin explains: "Il y a toute une grande page comme ça, sur la prodigieuse diversité des pensées et des émotions. Et finalement, le roman, même un grand roman sur la guerre [...] eh bien c'est sa loi, sa morale que de faire paraître cette prodigieuse diversité, même dans une colonne de chars" (Crom 7). A similar ambition seems to be at work in *Le météorologue*, facilitated by the persistent and sometimes intrusive first person narrator, who draws attention to the diversity of reactions and emotions elicited by a single situation and person. His biography of Wangenheim is not a simple hagiographic account, focusing on a father's love for his daughter, nor does he restrict himself to the role of curator, simply presenting the drawings and letters and suppressing further, possibly uncomfortable, commentary. The narrator instead enters into a dialogue with Wangenheim across time and language. If the drawings are at the physical center of the book, the words of the letters form the structural center of the text, where they are cited, somewhat *à bâtons rompus*, by Rolin. These letters are sometimes dated and sometimes not, occasionally starting at what seems to be the beginning of the letter but more often starting in the middle. Most significant are Rolin's interventions, inserted within the letter itself, sometimes even in the middle of a sentence.

For example, the text reads: “Ma confiance dans le pouvoir soviétique n’est nullement ébranlée, écrit Alexeï Féodossiévitch dans sa lettre du dix-huit juin 1934, alors qu’il vient de débarquer aux Solovki. Il est néanmoins étrange qu’il n’y ait aucune réaction à mes appels depuis cinq mois. Il a écrit à plusieurs reprises à Kalinine et à Staline. Kalinine est une vieille potiche, c’est une affaire entendue” (89). All of this is presented in one paragraph, as the “il” slides from referring to Wangenheim to an impersonal “il” and back again to Wangenheim, but this time from within the context of Rolin’s voice, rather than the meteorologist’s. Rolin’s commentary is sometimes informative and sometimes opinionated and requires attentive reading to separate it from Wangenheim’s words. Indeed, as Rolin often paraphrases the letters, the two voices sometimes overlap. The text reads: “Je garde ce froid dans l’âme. On est passés de l’hiver à l’été, avec des jours très chauds, écrit-il fin juin. Des milliers d’oies sauvages passent dans le ciel, volant vers le nord. Il se plaint de ne pas arriver à avancer ses recherches sur l’influence du temps sur l’organisme humain” (108). The speaker of the sentence about the wild geese is nebulous – it could be a continuation of the letter or it could be the narrator, paraphrasing Wangenheim.³⁴ This technique of commenting directly on the letters creates an exchange between the two men. Although often in disagreement, the narrator nonetheless takes the meteorologist seriously and reads his correspondence attentively. By frequently interrupting the letters, Rolin also engages the reader in dialogue with Wangenheim. The reader cannot simply glance superficially at the letters

³⁴ Of course, even the cited words are not exactly Wangenheim’s, as they have been translated from Russian into French.

and passively move on, as if they were an exhibit behind glass at a museum, but is forced to make sense of them, and more actively read and engage with them.

This dialogue between Wangenheim and the narrator that uses the space of the novel to draw out and present different perspectives is typical of Rolin. In an interview with Gérard Cartier, he explains his conception of the novel genre:

Pour le dire autrement : j'ai d'emblée découvert que le roman 'n'est jamais arrogant, terroriste' (Barthes), qu'il est 'le territoire où personne n'est possesseur de la vérité' (Kundera) parce que, venant de l'arrogance et de la terreur, j'avais besoin du doute et de l'ambiguïté pour réfléchir à cette expérience assez bouleversante en effet [...] La forme romanesque s'est imposée à moi parce qu'elle n'imposait rien, justement – même pas la cohérence. (14)³⁵

While *Le météorologue* is carefully constructed, it is indeed not particularly coherent.

The central, organizing perspective of the narrator is supplemented with archival citations and Wangenheim's words, and the novel itself is divided into four sections of varying lengths, plus an epilogue. The first and third sections combine the narrator's and the meteorologist's stories, the second is wholly devoted to Wangenheim's own words from his letters, and the fourth moves its focus almost exclusively to the narrator. He acknowledges: "Il y a quelque chose d'autre, quelque chose de personnel dont il ne me paraît pas indécent d'essayer de parler maintenant, au terme de ce récit" (168). The fourth section becomes a sort of eulogy, not for the meteorologist himself, but for "la plus grande espérance profane qui fut, et du massacre de cette espérance, la Révolution et la mort sinistre de la Révolution. Quand je parle de Révolution, [...] je parle de ce qu'elle fut dans les rêves de millions d'hommes, le monde changeant de base, la société sans

³⁵ Rolin clarifies: "Inutile de préciser – enfin si, utile tout de même – que ce que je nomme ici 'terreur', soit l'alliage d'une affirmation politique extrême avec un usage limité de la violence, a bien peu de chose à voir avec le sens que ce mot a pris récemment" (Cartier 14).

classes, ‘l’utopie en passe de devenir réalité’” (173). The text, already permeated with the sadness of the tragedy experienced by Wangenheim and his family, becomes melancholic and imbued with nostalgia.

Pierre Schoentjes sees this melancholy in *Veracruz* (2016) as well as in *Le météorologue*, “une même mélancolie, celle d’un Rolin qui au-delà de toute dérision voudrait pouvoir écrire le monde autrement que comme il lui apparaît” (101). The narrator briefly wonders what could have been if the communists in power had not turned into executioners. “L’introuvable ‘socialisme’ que les ‘héros’ s’imaginaient construire, et ceux aussi, comme Alexeï Féodossiévitch Vangenheim, qui n’étaient pas des héros, seulement d’honnêtes citoyens soviétiques, aimant leur travail, pensant servir le peuple en le faisant avec compétence, peut-être aurait-il existé?” (39). But he is confined to writing the world as he observes it and as the historical record reveals it to him. The tragedy underlying *Le météorologue* is not only the violence and death of thousands of individuals, but also the death of the hope of the revolution. Rolin ends his musings by recommitting to the story’s historical facts, writing, “Allons, ne rêvons pas” (39).

Rolin begins the text by saying of Wangenheim: “Ce n’était pas une tête en l’air, pourtant – du moins je ne crois pas” (13). By the conclusion of the text, the narrator is no longer an optimistic dreamer either. Although he writes, “j’ai plus parcouru cet immense pays, en surface, que je n’ai sondé ses profondeurs” (170), he is forced in *Le météorologue* to go below the surface, to uncover the secrets of past tragedies. An investigation that opens with clouds leads to the mass graves dug in the cold earth of Sandarmokh. The latent possibilities of the poetic description of the clouds that opens the novel – “les longues plumes de glace des cirrus, les tours bourgeonnantes des

cumulonimbus, les nippes déchiquetées des stratus, les stratocumulus qui rident le ciel comme les vaguelettes de la mare le sable des plages” (13) – have turned dark, and it is the last description of “les géants cotonneux d’où tombent pluie et neige et foudre” (13) that proves appropriate. As Rolin emphasizes, the Stalinist storm affected not only Wangenheim and the other victims of the Great Terror, but continues to impact people’s lives into the twenty-first century. The sombre epilogue of *Le météorologue* tells the fate of Éléonora, Wangenheim’s daughter, a successful paleontologist, who committed suicide by defenestration on January 9, 2011, seventy-seven years and one day after her father’s arrest. The text, which begins with a description of clouds, images of a whimsical escape into a place of reveries and imagination, ends tragically and unflinchingly in the real.

Unlike a meteorologist who looks to the skies for predictions about the future, Rolin’s narrator turns his gaze to what is hidden under the earth and to the past. The massive killing field at Medvezhyegorsk remained unknown to the general public until it was uncovered in 1997 largely thanks to the work of Memorial, a Russian historical and civil rights society, formed initially by the descendants of those who disappeared in 1937 and 1938. Their search was facilitated by three archivists, Irina Flighe, Yury Dmitriev, and Veniamin Iofe. The operation is described in militaristic terms, the collective energy mobilizing the archivists who shed light on the massacres: “ces noms, ces grades, ces dates, ces paperasses, tous ces ‘détails’ ont été arrachés, par des chercheurs et des militants, des chercheurs militants, comme Irina et Iouri, au secret dans lequel les tueurs voulaient qu’ils demeurent ensevelis. Ce sont des prises de guerre” (145). Rolin makes the comparison to his own militant activities even more explicit, noting that Irina Flighe’s

office reminds him of spaces he had occupied, “où l’on se consacrait à des causes moins avouables” (145). In Irina Flighe, Rolin encounters another passionate revolutionary: “maigre, vive, passionnée, ne lâchant le téléphone que pour griller une clope (encore manie-t-elle très bien les deux à la fois), il émane d’elle cet enthousiasme désintéressé qui fait parfois la beauté de la figure, si dépréciée aujourd’hui, du militant” (145). The semantic field chosen for the description of the archivists reinforces the perspective that their work is indeed that of a militant organization, fighting against totalitarianism.³⁶

The last sentence of *Le météorologue* reads: “Ainsi finit, soixante-quatorze ans après sa mort, l’histoire du météorologue” (182), but the statement is slightly disingenuous, just like the opening phrase, “Il était né en 1881 à Krapivno, un village d’Ukraine...” (14). In an interview, Rolin reflects: “Je pense tout à coup à une phrase de Flaubert (dans une lettre à Louise Colet peut-être) qui dit que l’une des pires maladies de l’humanité est ‘la rage de vouloir conclure’” (Crom 6). The text of *Le météorologue* might end, but the story itself does not conclude. Rolin is fascinated by the library that existed in the Solovki camp; he thinks of people reading *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, itself a text about memory, and marvels at “un jeune homme découvrant les intermittences du cœur de Marcel, Albertine et Andrée dans un camp soviétique!” (85).³⁷

Like the volume of Proust, Rolin hopes that his book too will travel, adding: “Je regrette

³⁶ That the work done by the Memorial and these archivists continues to be relevant was brought home by the stories in July 2017 about the acts of political repression taken against Yuri Dmitriev. See “An outspoken researcher of Stalin’s crimes fights for his own fate and freedom in Russia” in the July 24, 2017 issue of the *Los Angeles Times* (www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-russia-dmitriev-20170724-story.html) or “Gulag Historian Ordered to Undergo Psychiatric Testing in Russia” in *The New York Times*, published on January 11, 2018 (www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/world/europe/russia-historian-psychiatric-testing.html).

³⁷ Olivier Rolin made a documentary on the Solovky library with Elisabeth Kapnist, which played on Arte in 2014. That same year, he also published *Solovki, la bibliothèque perdue*, with photographs by Jean-Luc Bertini.

qu'elle [Éléonora] n'ait pas vécu assez pour savoir que l'album qu'elle avait voué à la mémoire de son père avait eu pour conséquence imprévisible de susciter un autre livre, loin, dans un autre pays, une autre langue" (20). Through his association with the Memorial and his writing of *Le météorologue*, Rolin takes on a different kind of militant role. He writes: "Nous nous alarmons aujourd'hui à bon droit des risques de voir de l'inhumain reparaître en Russie, mais nos alarmes seraient plus crédibles si nous avions prêté attention à ce qui dans l'histoire de ce pays fut humain, et cette humanité fut d'abord celle des victimes" (177). By entering into dialogue and debate with Wangenheim, Rolin brings to the forefront the particular humanity of one individual victim, in an act of immediacy and compassion that extends forward as well as backwards in time, as an active militant agent against totalitarianism.

Conclusion

In *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH*, and *Le météorologue*, Patrick Modiano, Laurent Binet, and Olivier Rolin mix biography with autobiography, exposing their personal process as they discover and engage with the stories of the individuals at the center of their texts. The frequent first-person interjections break the traditional flow of the historical narrative, preventing the readers' passive reception of polished, organized narrative, engaging them in the historical investigative process, and inviting them to respond to the text critically as well as emotionally. All three books include a wide variety of historical documents that foreground their factual nature. The documents are not blindly revered and presented as sacrosanct artifacts distantly removed as though behind glass at a museum, but are questioned and studied. They are actively engaged with, and used not

only as historical proof but also as prompts for an ongoing, vital reimagining and reconfiguration of history.

These texts are written as monuments to the lives of their central figures. However, rather than the static forms of the commemorative plaque or single line or footnote in a list of victims in a historical textbook, they present a sort of moving memorial where the individuals exist, in ghostly three-dimensions, both in the textual space and in the reader's mind. Fleeting, the historical documents, the narrator's commentary, and the reader's imagination combine to create a brief, transitory feeling of eternity. Time is momentarily stopped, like the hands of the clock in the Tuileries.³⁸ This feeling of timelessness, which Modiano compares to the feeling of running away, *faire une fugue*, paradoxically cannot last. The historical record cannot be ignored and intrudes in the form of archival documents to reinforce the real through its stark, cold, historical facts.³⁹

While the writer and reader can embroider the historical record, the outline of the story is fixed and inexorable. *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH*, and *Le météorologue* suggest, however, that while there is a tragic finality in the deaths of Dora Bruder, Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, and Alexey Feodosievich Wangenheim, their stories continue, shadowlike and insubstantial, in the form of these texts and in the minds of the readers. Modiano

³⁸ See Bruno Blanckeman, "Patrick Modiano: l'Occupation en abyme de la fiction," for a detailed study of the recurrent motif of the stopped clock in Modiano's work.

³⁹ Dominique Rabaté uses the figure of Orpheus to describe a similar phenomenon, suggesting that figures from the past are like so many Eurydices, doomed to remain in the underworld. "La figure allégorique serait alors celle d'un Orphée qui se retourne, mais pour ne pas voir. C'est cette prise de conscience paradoxale qui me semble caractéristique de notre époque. Une sorte de double lien s'instaure entre devoir de mémoire et respect de l'oubli, entre archive et silence, entre projection imaginaire et refus de l'identification fallacieuse" ("Figures de la disparition" 72).

opens *Dora Bruder* with the missing persons ad, found in the *d'hier à aujourd'hui* section of the newspaper. Like Dora, Gabčík, Kubiš, and Wangenheim are also lost, victims of totalitarian regimes, and so the words “d'hier à aujourd'hui” are once again programmatic. Even as the investigation moves backwards into the past, the reconstruction of the historical story moves forwards, into the present, and, hopefully, optimistically, into the future.

Chapter Two: The Investigator as Traveler

Un homme qui part brise à lui seul le fil des heures, l'ordre des années et des mondes, il montre que les rangs peuvent se mêler ou se rompre, que la musique du temps est multiple et qu'il est libre de vivre comme il l'entend.
-- Michaël Ferrier

The question of how to write a biography if only a few traces of a person's life remain is central to the novels studied in this chapter, just as it is to *Dora Bruder*, *HHhH*, and *Le Météorologue*. Patrick Deville's trilogy of *Pura Vida: Vie & mort de William Walker* (2004), *Équatoria* (2009), and *Kampuchéa* (2011), united under the title *Sic transit* (2014), narrate, respectively, the lives of William Walker, an American usurper of the presidency of Nicaragua, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, an Italian explorer of Sub-Saharan Africa, and Henri Mouhot, a French lepidopterist known for being the first European traveler to reach the Angkor Wat. In *Mémoires d'outre-mer* (2015), Michaël Ferrier recounts the life of his grandfather, Maxime Ferrier, who left his family in Mauritius to join the circus in Madagascar, the first of many extravagant schemes, including ones that got him both in and out of trouble during the Second World War. Maxime survived to see Madagascar free of French colonial rule in 1960, dying in 1972, the same year that the first Malagasy Republic was overthrown.

The simply stated project of writing a biography of a figure from the past proves complicated, leading these texts to expand their scope to include the investigative process as well as a multitude of accompanying details, ranging from quotidian minutiae to global politics. The narrator-writers of *Sic transit* and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* go to great lengths to gather as much material as possible about their subjects, including visiting archives, collecting newspaper clippings, and reading secondary sources. While this archival work

could already be considered a kind of voyage – according to Arlette Farge, “celui qui travaille en archives se surprend souvent à évoquer ce voyage en termes de plongée, d’immersion, voire de noyade” (10) – the narrators of Deville and Ferrier add another dimension to their research process. They take inspiration from their travelling subjects and leave on a voyage to follow in their travel routes, so as to experience the same physical space as them.

Jonathan Raban wryly notes: “as a literary form, travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house where very different genres are likely to end up in the same bed. It accommodates the private diary, the essay, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished table talk with indiscriminate hospitality” (253). It is, however, generally agreed as being characterized by its non-fictional quality; per Peter Hulme: “All travel writing – because it is writing – is *made* in the sense of being constructed, but travel writing cannot be *made up* without losing its designation. [...] Travel writing is certainly literature, but it is never fiction” (3-4). With their evocation of the travel literature genre, *Sic transit* and *Mémoires d’outre-mer* activate the idea of an authoritative, factual discourse. The narrators present themselves as travelling historians, in a role harking back to Herodotus, when, *histor*, as François Hartog observes, meant witness, “celui qui sait parce qu’il a vu” (*Le miroir* 13). Roland Le Huenen traces this tradition through to Chateaubriand: “Jusqu’à l’époque tardive du Romantisme et même au-delà, la figure de l’*histor* antique, qui appuie son enquête principalement sur le témoignage visuel, continue de hanter la mémoire du voyageur. Chateaubriand, par exemple, fait de celui-ci ‘une espèce d’historien [dont le] devoir est de raconter fidèlement de ce qu’il a vu ou ce

qu'il a entendu dire" (27).⁴⁰ The narrators of *Sic transit* and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* take this role seriously and present what they see and hear on their travels; Ferrier's emulation of Chateaubriand is further reinforced by his titular allusion to *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*.

Although inspired by travelling historian-writers like Herodotus and Chateaubriand, the traveler-narrators of Deville and Ferrier approach their journeys having interiorized pronouncements such as that made by Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes tropiques*:

Je voudrais avoir vécu au temps des *vrais* voyages, quand s'offrait dans toute sa splendeur un spectacle non encore gâché, contaminé et maudit [...]. Mais je connais trop les textes pour ne pas savoir qu'en m'enlevant un siècle, je renonce du même coup à des informations et à des curiosités propres à enrichir ma réflexion. [...] je suis prisonnier d'une alternative: tantôt voyageur ancien, confronté à un prodigieux spectacle dont tout ou presque lui échappait – pire encore inspirait raillerie et dégoût; tantôt voyageur moderne, courant après les vestiges d'une réalité disparue. (42-43)

With the narrators' interest in the past, it is truly a case of searching for the vestiges of a disappeared reality. However, they do not leave on their travels as historical tourists, with expectations of neatly packaged historical sites, complete with interpretive centres and curated memorabilia. Rather, their interest lies in the physical journey and the experience of different geographical spaces. The travel writing in *Sic transit* and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* reflects Thangam Ravindranathan's assessment that "l'écriture de voyage, de nos jours, peut difficilement prétendre apporter un nouveau savoir, elle succède à une bibliothèque trop encombrante pour être dupe de son utilité ou de son innocence" (14). The narrators do not hope to make new discoveries, nor are they interested in collecting curios to take back to Europe, in the vein of Pierre Loti, who recreated in his house in

⁴⁰ Roland Le Huenen is citing Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*.

Rochefort the spaces he visited during his travels. Rather, they are aware of following in the footsteps, not only of the traveler subjects of their biographies, but also of other traveling writers. Among Deville's references, to name only a few, are Céline, Cendrars, Gide, Loti, and Malraux, while Ferrier makes allusions to Césaire, Chateaubriand, Le Clézio, Rousseau, and Proust, as seen already in the epigraph of this chapter.

While these literary precursors inform the travel experience and the writing process of the narrators, *Sic transit* and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* forge their own stylistic path.⁴¹ Neither narrator describes his experiences with aspirations to mimesis, with Deville writing:

Plutôt que de contempler le paysage, je relis Mouhot. 'L'entrée du grand lac du Cambodge est belle est grandiose. Elle ressemble à un vaste détroit, la rive est basse, couverte d'une épaisse forêt à demi submergée...' C'était encore la lenteur d'avant les moteurs. [...] C'était encore la description d'avant la photographie, la confiance depuis Hérodote en la langue écrite pour dire le monde. La syntaxe était celle de Michelet ou de Quinet et sentait encore son latin, son ampleur.
(*Kampuchéa* 78)

Rather than adapting a nineteenth century style of writing, à la Mouhot or Michelet, *Sic transit* and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* adopt a practice of *bricolage*, albeit with each text demonstrating a slightly different technique. The novels collect as much information as possible, including the sensory experience of a particular space, so that the few descriptions that are found in the text, rather than adhering to a sort of prosaic realism, are marked instead by poetic synesthesia, as exemplified by the description in *Mémoires d'outre-mer* of the approach into Antananarivo:

⁴¹ In *French Fiction Today* (2017), Warren Motte contends that "Right now, [Deville] is producing some of the most intriguing writing one might hope to find. His is an agile and ever-changing body of work that insistently asks the question of what the novel is in our embattled cultural present" (121).

Un trajet aléatoire et ondoyant, fait de torsions de phrase et de changements de ton, modulations qui semblent s'adapter à chaque changement du relief et de la sensibilité, musique, partition de briques et de branches, d'églises escarpées comme des falaises, rugueuses, étoilées çà et là d'une touffe de lauriers. Aérienne et volubile, fragile et élancée, une improvisation permanente soutient cette topographie intempestive. (79)⁴²

Deville takes a less exuberant approach to his descriptions, but Isabelle Bernard's comment on *Sic transit* resonates equally with Ferrier's novel: "En effet, le descriptif s'avère l'un des topiques de la fiction où se déploie avec tous ses fastes le style personnel et désinvolte de l'auteur. La visée réaliste demeure éphémère et le narrateur clôt sa description bien avant de l'atteindre" (245). Instead of a complete description, the narrators present a series of impressions, juxtaposed within one descriptive passage, just as past and present, physical and imaginary elements are blended together in the novels.

Sic transit and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* create meaning out of putting disparate people, events, and geographical spaces in relation with each other. The work that the narrators describe themselves doing is that of piecing together fragments of information, mimicking the work done by the authors themselves in what Deville claims as an explicitly literary act: "pour moi le romanesque naît au moment de la construction du récit, de l'écriture. Ça devient de la littérature par la manière non seulement logique mais analogique dont cela est articulé" (Nicolas).

⁴² Proust's influence on Ferrier is explicit in this passage, as he cites Proust almost word for word from *Noms de pays: le nom*: "d'églises escarpées et rugueuses comme des falaises" (p. 523).

Sic transit

“De lui, on sait peu de choses, sinon qu’il voyage beaucoup, qu’il partage des omelettes aux cèpes au restaurant avec son ami Pierre Michon,” writes Nicolas Ungemuth, a journalist for *Le Figaro*, in a profile on Patrick Deville. A similar statement could be made for the first person narrator of the *Sic transit* trilogy: of him, we know little, except that he travels a lot and likes dry white wine, Marlboro Lights, and *The Doors*. For although all three, 250 plus page novels are narrated by the same first-person voice, he gives little directly away in terms of himself. He is French, single – although he shares two brief liaisons with women he meets on his travels – and has a revolutionary past, writing: “au milieu des années soixante-dix, j’ai rêvé des tables rases. On arrête tout, on recommence. Le slogan courait de l’Europe à l’Amérique latine” (*Kampuchéa* 38). As Marc Dambre points out, “Mais ce narrateur apparaît comme un voyageur étrangement proche d’un certain Patrick Deville” (101), and indeed the basic biography of author and narrator are nearly identical. They were born in approximately the same year (Deville in 1957), and shared a commitment to the revolutionary movement of the 1960s and 70s, which lasted in Deville’s case until 1979 and the Iranian Revolution, when he decided to give up on activism (as told to Ungemuth in the *Le Figaro* profile). Deville is quick to confirm these similarities in interviews, noting: “Et cette totalité comprend une dimension autobiographique, sur laquelle je n’appuie pas, mais qui peut se repérer, ça clignote” (Nicolas). He is equally quick to speak of the narrator as a simple literary device; about his move to a third person narration in *Peste & Choléra* (2012) and *Viva* (2014), two novels that are nonetheless part of the same major cycle as *Sic transit*,

Deville admits: “J’étais fatigué de ce ‘je’ qui servait surtout à faire tenir le livre, parce qu’on y trouvait plusieurs strates de temps, de lieux etc.” (Leyris).

In spite of the lack of autobiographical pact and the subtitle “roman,” Deville insists on creating a “pacte de véracité,” a pact supported in part by the use of elements of the travel literature genre, especially the convention that the traveler presents as accurate an eye-witness account as possible. The narrator evokes the idea of a scrupulous observer near the beginning of *Pura Vida*, noting “l’enquêteur scrupuleux peut noter que les gargotes en tôle, au bord du lac, sont surmontées de fumerolles grises et bleues qui glissent devant le volcan Momotombo endormi à l’horizon comme un vieil éléphant” (64). While he does not go so far as to call himself an “enquêteur scrupuleux” – note the use of the definite article – the description he offers is that which an attentive observer might give, and the narrator will refer to himself and his projects in investigative terms at several other moments throughout the trilogy: “au hasard de mes enquêtes de mécréant” (*Kampuchéa* 146) and “J’ai décidé d’enquêter, et acheté à cette fin des lunettes noires et une carte de l’île au trésor” (*Équatoria* 69), to give but a few examples.

The narrator’s decision to delve into the lives of William Walker, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, and Henri Mouhot is catalyzed by modern-day events: the aftermath of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the reburial of Brazza in a newly constructed mausoleum, built in his honour in Brazzaville, and the trial of Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Comrade Duch, a former Khmer Rouge prison chief. The narrator goes back in time to uncover the links between the early North American and European travelers and the violent, contested events of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, noting, for example, about Southeast Asia: “Pendant plus d’un siècle, jusqu’à la fin de la Guerre

froide, se donneront libre cours, dans cette Indochine ravagée, écrasée des bombes, les folies de l'Europe puis de l'Amérique, de la Russie et de la Chine. Les rêves écroulés, les actes d'héroïsme grandiose et les lâchetés immenses, les barbaries" (*Kampuchéa* 62).

These modern-day events that interest the narrator also add to the theme of investigation, as they too involve a process of unearthing information: in the case of Brazza, his body is literally exhumed, while *Kampuchéa* deals with a trial, which, as Motte emphasizes, is "a forensic dynamic, first and foremost, one that is intended to discover the truth" (*French Fiction* 127).

As the narrator proceeds with his inquiries, he shows himself to be not only a careful investigator, but also one who relies on sensory observations. The emphasis on seeing and hearing is introduced in the opening pages of *Pura Vida* with the sound of the song *Managua Nicaragua is a beautiful town* playing, a song that will return, many years and pages later, heard in Le Malraux bar in Siem Reap in *Kampuchéa* (65). The narrator not only listens to the ambient sounds around him, but also listens carefully to the people he meets on his travels, be they drivers, interpreters, fellow drinkers at a bar, archivists, or other authors, such as Honduran poet Robert Sosa. This interest in the stories of other people and their ways of telling them is another overlap between Deville and his narrator; when not writing, Deville is the director of la Maison des écrivains étrangers et traducteurs (MEET) de Saint-Nazaire, whose website reads: "Les lecteurs francophones sont des lecteurs accueillants, et curieux du monde. [...] La possibilité est offerte aux autres de rencontrer, ici ou à Paris, ou ailleurs en France, des lecteurs, des écrivains et des critiques, et à tous est donnée celle de publier, souvent pour la première fois, une œuvre en traduction française." Even if Deville had not confirmed in an interview that his

writing and his work with MEET are fundamentally linked – “Ils sont complètement imbriqués, et se nourrissent l’une l’autre” (Nicolas) – the spirit of MEET seems to permeate the novels. The acronym, of course, is most meaningful when read in English, an effect that makes sense given the translation interest of the organization, and the generative importance of meetings flows through the novels of *Sic transit*.

Not only does the narrator present his encounters with the different people he meets on his travels, but he also imagines encounters with and amongst various historical figures, including the famous one between Stanley and Livingstone, but also ones less easy to presume, such as between Auguste Pavie, a French colonial administrator in what was then called Indochina, and Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza at La Petite Vache in Paris, near the rue Jacob (*Kampuchéa* 172). The narrator writes of his ambition to present these various encounters, real or imagined, in a style modeled on Plutarch’s *Lives*, wanting to put together Simón Bolívar and Francisco Morazán or Albert Schweitzer and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, “[qui] pourraient jouer pour nous la querelle éternelle de l’ange et du démon, de ces couples que Plutarque se plaisait à rassembler pour notre édification morale” (*Équatoria* 29). Over the course of the three novels, the number of potential couples continues to multiply, including lesser known names such as Ernest Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier, the leaders of the Mekong Expedition of 1866-1868 (*Kampuchéa* 82), and each new figure is accompanied by a proliferation of details.

When the narrator takes stock at the end of *Kampuchéa*, he realizes that the project has lasted fourteen years and taken him around the world, following the equator from Nicaragua to the Republic of Congo and on to Cambodia. This “petite entreprise braudélienne” (*Kampuchéa* 144) is truly one of *longue durée*, spanning a time period

from 1860 to the present moment of writing, 1997, 2006, and 2007, respectively, for the different novels. In order to grasp this vast expanse of time, the narrator imagines, in a recurrent scene across the trilogy, setting up a “matériel cinématographique complexe” (*Équatoria* 186) on a major thoroughfare – Rue Didouche Mourad in Algiers, Avenida Simón Bolívar in Managua, and Rue Catinat in Saigon – “un matériel capable de saisir l’espace et aussi la fuite du temps, d’imposer l’histoire à la géographie, capable de resituer en accéléré la piteuse épopée” (*Kampuchéa* 85). Although the narrator is enamored by the idea of a magical time-lapse camera and creating a visual manifestation of the passage of time in space, he does not organize his own account into a similarly smooth chronological passage of time, his narrative instead oscillating between 1860, the present time of writing, and all the years in between.

The narrator also explores the idea of history viewed from above: “Ceux-là sont égarés dans l’Histoire, progressent au ras du sol et dans la jungle. Pour y comprendre quelque chose, il faudrait une vision satellitaire” (*Kampuchéa* 230). Unlike Victor Hugo, however, he does not linger on this vision “vu à vol d’oiseau,” or rather, updated for the twenty-first century, “à vol de satellite.” He instead stays on the ground, both literally and in the colloquial sense of a journalist being in the field. Instead of the organized representations of the time-lapse cinema or the satellite vision, he presents fragments of moments as he explores different regions of the world and different periods in history. Indeed, he frequently finds himself without a map, noting for example, “il est aussi difficile à Brazzaville qu’à Luanda de se procurer un plan de la ville, plan d’ailleurs tout aussi inutile, pour qui ne serait animé d’une réelle passion toponymique” (*Équatoria* 218). Deville’s reader might feel a similar need for a map, as the text jumps from past to

present and from location to location, often without clear transitions. Nor is the table of contents, the map of the text, particularly helpful, providing such chapter titles as “au bords du río Tinto,” “au Morocco,” and “en auto.”

The reader is, however, presented with an abundance of information, painstakingly collected, as the narrator writes in *Pura Vida*: “Je rassemblais [...] des notes prises dans des journaux, ceux du jour et de beaucoup plus anciens achetés sur Internet [...] J’accumulais ainsi des notes pour une histoire du sandinisme ou même du Nicaragua. Ou de l’Amérique centrale dans son ensemble” (172). The vast scope and excess of information in the *Sic transit* trilogy might initially seem like a complete rejection of Deville’s earlier work, published with Les Éditions de Minuit and adhering to the expected minimalist style.⁴³ However, the careful attention to form remains, with Deville insisting that he is still a formalist: “Si je tiens beaucoup à ce que le mot ‘roman’ figure sur le livre, alors que justement il n’y a pas de fiction, c’est que ce qui fait que c’est un roman, c’est la forme” (Nicolas). In the world of Deville’s narrator: “finalement, le journal des explorateurs est toujours un peu monotone. Ça n’est pas *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*” (*Équatoria* 43). The interest lies not only in the travel, but also in the way in which the experiences of the narrator, as both traveler and writer, are articulated. The novels of *Sic transit* are dense and carefully constructed, but two possible organizational schemas can be teased out, namely, the metaphor of the flow of the world’s waterways as a way to orient the narrator’s travels, and the concept of the

⁴³ Of this shift, which was accompanied by a move from Les Éditions de Minuit to Seuil, Warren Motte writes: “Deville’s œuvre is all the more astonishing granted that he seems to have reinvented himself in mid-career” (*French Fiction* 121).

newspaper in both its content and its form as a means of conceptualizing the *mise en scène* of the narrator's writing process.

At a physical level, the narrator's travel is organized by waterways, as he follows the routes of earlier travelers, leaving Granada by boat like a fleeing William Walker, following the Ogouée River like Brazza, and going along the Red River in Asia, like Auguste Pavie. He does not travel in grandeur or in the guise of an explorer, but rather notes, ironically: "Mon vaisseau est constellé de fleurs artificielles en étoffes colorées. Je suis assis sous un parasol jaune dans un fauteuil en plastique bleu, un livre ouvert sur les genoux, une cigarette à la main. J'ai loué pour moi seul l'embarcation supposée accueillir une vingtaine de passagers bruyants et une radio à plein volume" (*Kampuchéa* 78). His choice to embark on the same water routes as the subjects of the biographies is also symptomatic of the writing project; like a rudderless boat, the narrator follows the current, open to the possibility of getting bogged down, lost in the rushes, or stuck in a marsh, like William Walker, who made his last stand after "cette fuite paniquée dans les marais" (*Pura Vida* 195). The narrator happily spends time discussing the travels of Vasco Núñez de Balboa in the sixteenth century – he is known for crossing the Isthmus of Panama in 1513 to reach the Pacific Ocean – and Isabelle Massieu, the first European woman to travel alone through Southeast Asia, before returning to his primary biographical subjects. At other times, the structure mimics a river delta, like that of the Ogouée River. "A l'approche de l'océan, après plus de mille kilomètres de majesté sereine et rougeâtre, au cœur des jungles émeraude, de rapides bouillonnants, l'Ogouée s'éparpille, se fatigue, ralentit, et se perd en une multitude de prairies humides, de bras morts, de mangroves et de lagunes, jamais d'estuaire" (*Équatoria* 19). Like the river

running through its delta, the text slows down and explores a subject in depth, as in the chapter informatively titled “abrégé d’histoire générale de la navigation fluviale congolaise” (*Équatoria* 247). The novels follow the rhythm of gently running water, allowing for a sense of ebb and flow. The narrator occasionally allows himself to change course, both physically and in the organization of the text, writing: “Puis je me suis laissé dérouter, assez facilement, par la survenue d’une coïncidence et la rencontre d’un Viêt Kiêu. Depuis des jours, je repoussais les préparatifs de mon départ vers le delta, passais les fins d’après-midi au bar de l’hôtel Caravelle, sur ce perchoir du Saigon-saigon en attendant la pluie” (*Kampuchéa* 98). Although fragmented, the texts are not frantic; the narrator is not rushing, nor is his route predetermined, letting his discussion be informed by what he finds that is compelling, as he passes by on his travels.

Neither *Pura Vida*, *Équatoria*, nor *Kampuchéa* are structured according to the typical travel narrative schema of departure, travel, and return, but rather begin *in media res*, with the narrator already on the ground in Nicaragua, the Gabonese Republic, and Thailand. Nor do the texts conclude with him returning to France; at the end of *Kampuchéa*, the last novel in the trilogy, he is already looking towards his next voyage, which will become *Peste & Choléra* (2012), a biography of Alexandre Yersin. The ebb and flow of the narrator’s travels therefore continue not only through the trilogy, but also beyond, in a sense of continual movement. Just as one novel leads into the next, so do too the chapters flow into each other in a similar rhythm, with Dambre suggesting of the chapter titles: “Cette suite de localisations géographiques et, peut-être, l’absence de majuscule à l’initiale des titres suggèrent la continuité d’un voyage composé d’autant de séjours” (“Patrick Deville” 92). These lower case chapter titles are sometimes part of the

text, as is the case, for example, of one heading in *Kampuchéa*, “on ne choisit pas son affection,” which then flows immediately into the body of the text, which begins, “Cette phrase avait été prononcée” (14), referring to an exclamation made in 1941 during the Thai attack of what was then Indochina. The link is at other times more subtle – “un loup mathématique,” a chapter on the childhood of Comrade Duch, picks up on the title of the poem cited at the end of the previous chapter, *La Mort du loup* by Alfred de Vigny, which Duch had recited during his trial. And there are still other cases where one chapter seems to be fairly unconnected to the previous one, with the title heading simply offering a geographical location – “à Udomxay” or “au carnaval” – marking the successive stops on the narrator’s investigative journey.

If the narrative of travelling is inspired by the rhythm of a running river, the narrator’s discussion of his writing process is one of stillness and imaginary travel through reading rather than physical movement. In the midst of his perambulations, the narrative is punctuated with scenes of immobility – recurrent moments at mediocre snack-bars and non-descript hotels where the narrator pauses and takes stock, reading the local paper or his collection of newspaper clippings. The printed press, like the flow of the world’s waterways, is a means of connecting people around the world, but does not require physical movement on the part of the reader. The narrator of the *Sic transit* trilogy is a news junky; over the course of the novels, he reads *L’Union*, *Courrier du Vietnam*, *El Nuevo Diario*, *Le Monde*, *Cambodge Soir*, *La Semaine africaine*, *La Nouvelle République*, *The Saigon Times*, and *El Herald*, and mentions many others, both contemporary and historical. He is also particularly interested in the journalist past of his historical subjects, such as William Walker, who worked for *Commercial Advertiser* in

Nicaragua (*Pura Vida* 97) and Henry Morton Stanley, who wrote for *Missouri Democrat* (*Équatoria* 49). The narrator himself carries a press pass in *Équatoria*, giving him media access for the unveiling of De Brazza's Mausoleum.

The newspaper leitmotif that runs through the *Sic transit* trilogy is thematically significant for these novels, set in countries negotiating the aftermath of colonialism and communist uprisings around the world; as the narrator notes, “j’avais ouvert un carnet, et commencé de prendre des notes sur deux siècles de révolution et deux siècles de presse écrite – on sait à quel point ces deux-là furent liées” (*Pura Vida* 45). The recurrent motif of the newspaper also serves to link the three novels together; in the early pages of each text, the narrator describes a quiet moment with a local newspaper, *El Nuevo Diario*, *L’Union*, and *Bangkok Post*, respectively, creating a continuation from novel to novel and from place to place. This not only reaffirms the unnamed narrator as the same first person voice across the three novels, but the impression of continuity also adds a sense of a shared experience across the globe.⁴⁴ As the narrator explains: “Dans n’importe quelle ville du monde, la lecture des quotidiens du matin (depuis disons deux siècles qu’elle constitue le rituel journalier de l’humanité éclairée, avide de surlendemain meilleurs que les avant-veilles) paraît dépendre de la réunion d’un nombre constant de paramètres, au premier rang desquels le goût du premier café, la marque de la première cigarette” (*Pura Vida* 17). It is not simply that the narrator stays the same as he travels the world, but also that similar rituals occur from country to country.

⁴⁴ Deville rarely mentions his travels from earlier novels, although he sometimes references the historical figures, as in *Kampuchéa*, where he mentions William Walker (61) and Brazza (76), both as part of larger discussions about what was going on in the world in 1860 and 1890, respectively.

While the newspaper reading scenes position the narrator in time and space, they also serve to punctuate the trilogy. The *El Nuevo Diario* of 21 February 1997, which opens *Pura Vida*, comes back in the conclusion of *Kampuchéa*, linked this time with the 21 February 2011 edition of the *Courrier du Vietnam*, effectively bookending the trilogy. Yet the newspaper references also evoke continuation; just as the narrator describes travels that will continue beyond the texts as he continues to follow the flow of the world's waterways, so too does the recurrent motif of the printed press emphasize the ever continuous flow of news and events. For Deville, the newspaper signifies a sort of perpetual present: “Le vendredi 21 février 1997, en termes hégéliens, aura *perdu son immédiateté sans être pour cela anéanti*. Le 21 février 1997 aura seulement *perdu son accessibilité aux influences extérieures*” (*Pura Vida* 146). In *La Seconde main*, Antoine Compagnon expresses a similar idea about the newspaper, writing, “Chaque jour ou presque, l'apprentissage de sa lecture est à recommencer” (390). Newspapers provide a continuous stream of knowledge and a permanent influx of new information to be sorted. Deville states in interviews that his novels are about the present – “ce qui m'intéresse avant tout, c'est le présent; mes livres ne sont pas des romans historiques” (Ungemuth) – and indeed the *Sic transit* trilogy could be said to reflect the concept of ‘presentism.’ As François Hartog explains: “Historien m'efforçant d'être attentif à mon temps, j'ai ainsi, comme beaucoup d'autres, observé la montée rapide de la catégorie du présent jusqu'à ce que s'impose l'évidence d'un présent omniprésent” (*Régimes* 18). In Deville's work, this temporal experience is exemplified by the recurrent references to newspapers and the way they intrude with the news of the day: “Et puis toujours le présent vous retrouve, vous rattrape, le soir, sous la forme addictive du papier journal qu'on déplie devant son

verre, sur une table du bar Malraux de Siem Reap, non loin des temples. Que s'est-il passé de si important à Bangkok depuis le passage de Mouhot? La vie suit son cours et les révolutions échouent" (*Kampuchéa* 64). Just as the narrator keeps travelling, so too do newspapers keep being printed, reflecting the continuous changing of the world and the continuing sameness of the change. This is most exemplified in *Équatoria*, where Deville adds, as part of the paratext, a note entitled "dernières nouvelles," in which he informs the reader that, "au moment de quitter ce livre, en cet été 2008, il apparaît qu'une arrière-petite-nièce de Brazza, Idanna Pucci, porte plainte auprès du tribunal de grande instance de Paris contre la République de Congo" (346).

While the newspaper motif exemplifies the "presentism" that permeates *Sic transit*, its form also provides a means of organizing the mass of information collected. For a brief moment, while reading the newspaper, the day's information seems organized and easily apprehended: "Chaque matin nous sommes des dieux olympiens: de la politique internationale jusqu'à la page des sports, la curieuse vie des hommes nous est ainsi offerte en holocauste sur la table, jusqu'en ses moindres détails, mais encore filtrée par les caractères de l'imprimerie, cordonnée par la syntaxe des phrases" (*Pura Vida* 160). The narrator, while not presuming to be an Olympic god, nonetheless turns to the newspaper as a guide for presenting his material; like a newspaper, he presents a wide variety of information, from major political events to minor details. The texts also resemble the form of a newspaper, as described by Compagnon:

La page du journal est un tissu fait de pièces et de morceaux raccrochés, un *patchwork* (selon le mot anglais intraduisible), elle est bigarrée, hétéroclite, sale, elle est lâchement structurée. [...] Mais, tandis que le livre proposait un modèle spatial, structural de l'écriture, une organisation substitutive de la *dispositio* rhétorique, le journal au contraire anticipe la désintégration de tout modèle, rebute

tout système préconçu: il est montagne, juxtaposition, syncope de fragments disjoints et discontinues. (389-390)

Pura Vida, *Équatoria*, and *Kampuchéa* follow this model: they are a series of short chapters, almost like articles, juxtaposed with each other. Just like in *El Nuevo Diario*, where stories of Arnaldo Alemán, the recently elected President of Nicaragua are side by side with notices about a Japanese art exhibit, the different pieces of Deville's research and travel are placed together. The formal link between the novels and the printed press is further reinforced by the title *Pura Vida*, which Deville's narrator explains is also the name of the supplement of *Tiempo*, a newspaper he reads in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He adds, "*Pura Vida* est un idiotisme costaricien, un *ticismo* intraduisible. En deux mots, c'est le plus beau compliment qui se puisse adresser à la vie" (188), and the enthusiasm and interest with which the narrator explores the geography and the history of the world bear out this sense of awe at life.⁴⁵

Compagnon's discussion of the formal elements of a newspaper grows out of Mallarmé's reflection in *Quant au livre*: "J'écris toujours sur une maculature. Quelles sont ses salissures, ses traces ou ses vestiges? C'est l'intertexte lui-même qui refait surface, qui perce à travers l'écriture nouvelle comme le motif sombre du papier peint sous toute couche successive de blanc. La maculature ou la surface sale avec laquelle je compose, c'est l'intertexte que je récris" (391). Deville's use of citations, referring to newspaper clippings, novels and texts by Céline, Gide, Loti, Malraux, Mouhot's diaries,

⁴⁵ Deville explicitly acknowledges the newspaper as a source of formal inspiration in an interview: "*Pura Vida* est celui où c'est le plus clair, parce qu'au bout de tant d'années j'étais tellement perdu que j'ai pris la décision d'inventer une forme à priori. J'ai dit 'je vais arriver un matin, à Managua, acheter le quotidien du jour, - ces quatre livres reposent sur un amour immodéré de la presse écrite' - je ne sais pas ce qu'il y aura dedans et je vais construire le livre autour de ce que je lirai" (Nicolas). And, indeed, in *Pura Vida*, the *El Nuevo Diario* of 21 February 1997 recurs throughout the novel.

and many other textual sources, exemplifies Compagnon's analysis of the citation as related to the newspaper. "La citation y est souillure sur la page jamais blanche, macule que l'écriture révèle, comme dans ce jeu pour enfants où une image en filigrane dans l'épaisseur de la feuille est révélée, produite par le gribouillage quelconque qui la recouvre n'importe comment" (392). The narrator not only travels the same routes as William Walker, Brazza, and Henri Mouhot, but he also visits the same places as Céline, Gide, Loti, and Malraux, after having read their descriptions of their travels. These texts may also be themselves palimpsests, notes the narrator, as he traces the evolution of a citation to arrive at Malraux:

Et à la fin de sa vie, le vieux Malraux confie dans *La Tête d'obsidienne*:
'Bouddhas khmers. Je n'avais pas quinze ans que je lisais Loti: *J'ai vu l'étoile du soir se lever sur Angkor...*' [...] Mais cette phrase que cite Malraux n'est pas de Loti, me dit Loti. Cette phrase que cite Malraux c'est une phrase qu'il cite lui-même, et la littérature est une citation de citations. C'est une phrase de la brochure consacrée à l'exploration de Mouhot, lue par l'enfant Julian Viaud, et que recopie le vieux Loti, lorsqu'il retrouve la brochure dans sa maison de Rochefort-sur-Mer, des dizaines d'années plus tard, longtemps après son voyage à Angkor.
(*Kampuchéa* 125)

Deville's narrator then cites the passage cited by Loti cited by Malraux, adding to the layer of citations. The emphasis on citation and layering, reworking and retravelling is particularly significant for the narrator of *Sic transit*, who is careful to separate his travels from the so-called voyages of discovery of the nineteenth century. While none of the novels dwell on colonialism, it nonetheless haunts the texts as its traumatic scarring effects continue to be observed in the countries the narrator visits, especially in Sub-Saharan African and Southeast Asia. The metaphor of the maculature helps explain the narrator's project: he is writing about his travels, but his experiences and the places he visits are shaped and informed by centuries of history.

“Grand lecteur de journaux, il lui en coûta d’abandonner ces musées de détails éphémères.” These words of Jorge Luis Borges serve as the epigraph of *Pura Vida*, but the narrator is not yet ready to abandon the ephemeral details he has collected over his travels; instead he continues to carry them with him, sometimes quite literally in a simple bag, “mes archives au fond d’un sac” (*Kampuchéa* 101). These archives are predominantly composed of newspaper clippings, culled from “deux catégories de vieux journaux : les très anciens achetés sur Internet, dont je manipule chaque jour des photocopies, et d’un peu moins anciens, que j’ai classés dans une autre chemise, ceux qui ont paru entre l’année 1957 et hier” (*Pura Vida* 206). For the narrator, these clippings have a personal as well as a historical significance. Each story conjures up his own personal memories associated with the events in question, or with the year: “Ouvrir l’un de ces journaux-là, comme déboucher une bouteille de vin millésimée, m’amène toujours à me demander à quel endroit je me trouvais à l’époque des vendanges ou de la parution” (*Pura Vida* 206). In hotel rooms along the Equator, the narrator thinks back to other experiences he has had in France, Nigeria, Mexico, Cuba, Istanbul, and Angola (*Kampuchéa* 242). His reaction to the newspaper clippings reinforces his own subjective point of view; his first response is to go back to the moment in his own life that corresponds to the time of the newspaper clipping. The corollary of this phenomenon, as he acknowledges, is that “cette seconde moitié du XX siècle n’est finalement pas du tout la période qui m’est la plus familière. Avec cette différence, pourtant, que c’est pendant celle-ci que j’aurai été vivant” (*Pura Vida* 208).

The narrator sets out to investigate, to learn more about the second half of the 20th century, delving deep into the Nicaraguan Revolution and the Sandinista National

Liberation Front, the transition from the People's Republic of Congo to the Republic of Congo, and the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian Genocide. He studies different events that have taken place in the same space, from 1860 to the 21st century and also collects his own experiences in this space. Near the end of *Kampuchéa*, the third novel of the trilogy, the narrator muses, "Peut-être convient-il de stocker assez d'images pour les revoir pendant des dizaines d'années sur l'écran de la mémoire. Comme tous ceux qui ont couru la planète ou agi dans l'Histoire" (183). Although the narrator physically collects newspaper clippings and travel notes, he also collects memories as he travels, which he brings with him, along with his bag of archives.

In a recurring scene across the trilogy, the narrator lays out his papers methodically on the table in a non-descript hotel room: "Sont disposés devant moi, sur le bureau, à angles droits, les piles des livres et des carnets, les plans et les cartes, les journaux accumulés" (*Équatoria* 344); "j'avais encore une fois agencé sur la table, comme dans les multiples hôtels où je transporte avec moi ce projet, avec minutie et à angles droits, un matériel assez complet" (*Pura Vida* 26). The last chapter of the trilogy opens with the narrator once again in a hotel room, this time in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, arranging his desk: "Mes archives sont disposées à angles droits sur le bureau, les livres, les vieux journaux" (255). The specific configuration of his materials in the space is a physical manifestation of the narrator's subjectivity, but also establishes a sense of continuity across time and space. The hotel rooms, although not part of transnational hotel chains, could nonetheless be examples of what Marc Augé calls *non-lieux*, except that the narrator makes them his own. His newspaper clippings, notes, and pens are a physical representation of the material he brings into the space, including memories from

all of his travels. In a chapter entitled “immobile,” set in one of these hotel rooms, he imagines himself in a bustling Asian city and then in Vancouver.

It is also from these hotels that the narrator puts together his material, in a writing process nearly identical to that of Deville’s, who explains in an interview: “je procède toujours ainsi: après les recherches et les voyages, je m’enferme dans une chambre d’hôtel à l’étranger. Je ne peux ni retourner, ni en bibliothèque, ni consulter d’autres archives que celles que j’ai emportées... Sans quoi je serais capable de passer dix ans sur chaque livre” (Leyris). The narrator retreads his travels in his mind, as he writes his text from his hotel room. As Michel Butor notes, all reading involves travel, “parce qu’il y a cette issue, cette fuite, ce trait, parce qu’à travers cette lucarne qu’est la page, je me trouve ailleurs, ne serait-ce que dans cette chambre de l’écrivain, ne serait-ce que sur sa page (mais piètre magicien celui qui ne sait nous mener que là)” (5). *Sic transit* brings the reader first to the “chambre de l’écrivain,” to show the writing process, and then moves outwards, following the narrator’s travels, and, in so doing, making the reader a quasi fellow traveler as well.

The motifs of waterways and newspapers are both structurally and thematically significant, and reinforce Deville’s insistence on the importance of the circulation of people and ideas around the world. The scenes of the narrator reading the newspaper in hotel rooms or cafés along the Equator suggest that, even if not physically able to travel, it is still possible to engage with the world through newspapers, or, more generally, reading. For Deville, the world is interconnected. It is impossible to separate it into neat geographical divisions or even to delineate clear historical periodizations – as is clearly evidenced by *Sic transit*, which engages with history from 1860 to the present, with a few

brief detours into the further past, as it follows the narrator around the globe, quite literally, as he travels the Equator. As we read the narrator's observations from his travels, an image emerges of regions still recovering from the ravages of colonialism and failed communist revolutions. Deville does not, however, make any explicit political statement: he weaves these observations with more mundane comments, leaving it up to the readers to follow the clues he includes in the text and to draw their own conclusions.

As is the case for all the investigators studied as part of this project, the initial point of departure for Deville's narrator is France. However, unlike in the other novels, he does not establish his life there before beginning his investigation, but has already been travelling when he arrives in Nicaragua in *Pura Vida*. Unlike *Mémoires d'outre-mer*, as we will see, he does not put the history of the countries he visits in relationship to France, but rather suggests a decentralized, global view of history. With his trilogy, he connects Nicaragua, the Republic of Congo, and Cambodia, linking them because of their position along the Equator, but also because of their revolutionary history. Yet he suggests that other connections could and should be made, his goal being to think history globally rather than along national lines. As he writes: "La planète est un incendie. Il faudrait être partout en même temps. Des qu'on tourne le dos, les flammes repartent de plus belle. On a toujours l'impression qu'on devrait être ailleurs que là où on est" (*Équatoria* 159).

Mémoires d'outre-mer

While Deville's narrator writes from neutral hotel rooms around the world, the narrator in *Mémoires d'outre-mer* carefully establishes himself not only as a Paris-based writer, but as one who frequents literary cafés in the 6th arrondissement such as *Le Pré-aux-clerics*, once a favourite of Hemingway, Breton, and Bataille (32), as he is careful to point out, and still patronized by the Sciences Po crowd. Before beginning the biography of his Mauritius-born, Madagascar-based grandfather, the narrator clearly establishes his Parisian literary credentials. While perhaps a gesture to suggest that he is fully a part of the Pascale Casanovian capital of letters, it is also symptomatic of the narrator's greater project of linking the Hexagon with French overseas territories and former territories. He begins writing about French history from Paris, and then continues to do so in Madagascar. In Paris, he writes from his apartment on the rue du Fer-à-Moulin in the historically permeated 5th arrondissement, where he is literally on top of the past: "Anciennement: la rue des Morts...C'est ici, précisément sous mes fenêtres, [que] se déploya longtemps le cimetière de Clamart. [...] Ce cimetière était fameux pour avoir reçu les restes des condamnés à mort et, en particulier, des guillotins de la Révolution" (34-35). The narrator is writing about France's buried past, but he also announces that, as he moves his focus to Madagascar, a French colony until 1960, he will begin to investigate a different kind of hidden past; he will go beyond that which is publicly commemorated to voice what is metaphorically hidden beneath the streets, ignored, either unknowingly in the French sense of the term, or willfully passed over.

"Il faut ici tenter d'éclaircir un mystère, celui de mon propre nom. En effet, lorsqu'il arrive à Madagascar, Maxime Ferrier ne s'appelle pas Ferrier mais *Février*"

(50). As the narrator explains, his own name is the result of travel, although the reason for the change from Février to Ferrier is unknown. He likes to think: “en dehors de sa portée symbolique – qui est tout simplement celle d’un baptême, Maxime comme Moïse changeant de nom au sortir des eaux –, le changement de Février en *Ferrier* est aussi une belle manière de se désinscrire du calendrier des hommes, de leur temps contracté” (52). The name change occurs when Maxime enters Madagascar as part of the Cirque Bartolini, leaving Mauritius and his family, just as his father, a sailor, did before him. Maxime Ferrier, as the narrator notes, is “un homme qui part” (44), and the reference to water as an element of change resonates throughout the text. While Maxime Ferrier keeps this new name throughout his life, he is a man in constant transformation, always in movement, “un causeur habile, prompt à se défaire de ses liens” (44). His life is lived on the edge of the water and follows the ebb and tide of the ocean. Of Maxime and his friend Arthur, both of whom worked for the circus as acrobats, the narrator writes: “Ce sont des êtres aquatiques, leur vie se déploie par affluents, courants de coraux, roseaux. [...] Boxeurs, plongeurs, ce n’est pas la destination qui leur importe, mais la traversée elle-même, dans sa fureur, dans sa douceur” (163).

The narrator realizes that to tell his grandfather’s story properly, he too must become an “homme qui part” and must leave Paris to follow the physical traces of Maxime and his friends, “retrouver leur piste et dévorer leurs chemins. [...] Il faut affronter physiquement le lieu, sa matérialité, y compris l’état des murs, l’odeur ténue du salpêtre et ses petits cristaux blancs, la raideur de l’escalier” (189). Like any good work of travel literature, *Mémoires d’outre-mer* devotes passages to describing the geographic space as experienced by the narrator, and like any good investigator, the narrator makes

sure to rely on all of his senses. The opening moments of the novel take place in the cemetery of Mahajanga, as the narrator visits the tomb of his grandfather, with descriptions emphasizing his sensorial experience of the space. “Maintenant, le moindre déplacement latéral ouvre un angle supplémentaire dans la vision et donne naissance à une multiplicité de souffles, de corps, d’accents, de personnages qui sont autant de traces ouvertes et qui ne se referment pas” (16). He adds, “J’entends la rumeur du passage et des grandes migrations, l’énorme passade du courant, les voyages, les errances portées par les bras de mer et les épaules du vent. J’écoute” (19). Travelling to Madagascar allows the narrator not only to experience the physical space, but also helps him get a better understanding of the history he is trying to tell; standing in the cemetery, he hears and sees ephemeral glimpses of the past.

For the narrator, then, this departure is essential: “tout départ s’accompagne d’une clarté. Partir, partir très loin, se perdre pour se trouver, passer par l’autre pour s’extraire, la grande plongée aux abysses et le dégagement rêvé...” (55). He physically leaves Paris for Madagascar, but he also prepares to leave on his investigation and follow its path wherever it might lead him. Ferrier glorifies the traveler and praises the courage it takes to leave, especially when “un homme qui part provoque toujours une sorte de frémissement anxieux, entre le désir et la crainte, et suscite généralement la plus unanime des réprobations” (43). While this comment refers to Maxime, it equally applies to the narrator who is himself “un homme qui part.” He not only travels to Madagascar, but also seems to want to provoke a troubled response on the part of his readers, “un frémissement anxieux” perhaps, as they follow him on his travels to shed light on the dark history of the French in Madagascar.

Equipped with his “carnet à spirale” (23), the narrator begins his investigation in Madagascar by leaving the cemetery on the trail of Maxime and his friends, “Il ne me reste plus qu’à les suivre maintenant. Je m’avance sur la route qui descend en pente douce vers la mer” (23). That his path leads him towards the sea is not surprising, given his grandfather’s affinity for the ocean, and indeed the undulating presence of the Indian Ocean is felt throughout the novel. The ocean provides inspiration not only for the content of the novel, but also for its form. Just as Deville’s trilogy is formally influenced by his travels along various rivers, so too does Ferrier’s text reflect the ebbs and swells of the ocean. His research and writing are oriented by the lives of Maxime Ferrier and his friends: “Ils sont comme la mer qui sans cesse revient sur ses traces et, du même mouvement infini, vous emporte au loin. Pour les suivre, il faut procéder par reprises, arrêts, trouées...” (163). The novel follows a similar pattern, moving from a discussion of *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* to a detailed analysis of the Cirque Bartolini in the next chapter, or from an atmospheric description of the intense storm the narrator experienced to an account of the Madagascar Project. Just as the movement of the ocean helps modulate Maxime’s life, so too does it shape the structural schema of the novel. It also provides Ferrier with a metaphor for memory: “La mémoire est comme la mer, obscure et remplie de l’amer des algues. Certaines traces sont perdues, enfouies ou bien volatilisées. D’autres restent, mais elles ne nous parlent pas, ou alors vaguement, confusément, comme le murmure de l’océan dont on ne sait trop s’il s’approche ou s’il s’éteint” (55-56). The narrator becomes not only a traveler on the surface of the water, but also a diver. He delves into the interconnected mass of archives, using a travel lexicon to describe his research process – “je prends mon inspiration, je plonge” (153),

“remonter dans les archives” (56), “descendre dans les bibliothèques et les caves” (56), “j’erre” (50). He brings to the surface different flotsam and jetsam of history, pieces of Maxime’s life as well as information on Madagascar’s past, provided piecemeal, as he discovers it.

Tracing Maxime’s life (1907-1972) brings to the surface of the narrative many major events of the twentieth century, including World War II and the decolonization of Madagascar. In addition to recounting Maxime’s experience of the Second World War, the narrator chooses to add an extensive digression on the Madagascar Plan, the Nazi project to relocate Europe’s Jewish population to Madagascar. “Dans son journal, Eichmann – qui constituera lui-même un dossier intitulé ‘*Madagaskar Projekt*’ en août 1940 – présente ce plan comme une solution ‘humaniste’ au problème juif” (270). Ferrier pauses Maxime’s biography to give a history lesson, making sure to pay attention to the people of Madagascar, who were conveniently ignored in the initial plan: “Quant aux populations malgaches, elles ne sont même pas mentionnées: on évoque juste le sort des vingt-cinq mille Français et les compensations qu’il faudrait leur donner. Juifs et indigènes dans le même sac. *Disposable people*, pourrait-on dire: des gens qu’on peut transporter, colporter, déporter. Et aussi détenir, commander, *aligner*. Dont on peu disposer” (271). Ferrier places Madagascar in the larger context of World War II, reminding readers that it too was under Vichy rule.⁴⁶

Ferrier’s project is not only to tell his grandfather’s life, but to draw links between Metropolitan French history and that of Madagascar. He activates a sort of

⁴⁶ Eric Jennings, in his 2002 book *Vichy in the Tropics*, writes: “that Marshal Philippe Pétain’s collaborationist régime ruled over an empire from 1940-1944 is often overlooked by historians. That it spelled changes in the colonial realm is even less acknowledged” (1).

multidirectional memory, not across time, but rather across space, engaging with the memory of the Second World War, but including former colonies in these memories. By opening up the geographical scope, Ferrier attempts to go against the trend described by Forsdick and Murphy: “Indeed, it was the two European wars that dominated late twentieth-century French memory, so much so that the historian Henry Rousso identified an almost obsessive ‘Vichy syndrome’ (1987) that has been seen by some commentators as the result of an active suppression of colonial memory” (2). Ferrier indicates this attempt to place Madagascar in the context of global history from the beginning of *Mémoires d’outre-mer*, when he provides snapshots of key historical moments of 1922 across the world. “Novembre 1922, la cour internationale de justice vient d’être établie à La Haye, à Gênes ont été définies les grands principes du Gold Exchange Standard [...] En Russie, Staline est élu secrétaire général du Parti communiste [...] À Paris, on pose la première pierre de la Mosquée de Paris, tandis qu’à Marseille on inaugure une exposition coloniale” (23). As the narrator emphasizes, for better, or more likely worse, the history of Madagascar is also French history, and vice versa.

The narrator reminds readers that Vichy laws were also applied to the French colonies, such as the Statut des Juifs, which was implemented in Metropolitan France on 3 October 1940 and the colonies on 15 March 1941. When his girlfriend questions his need to discuss the Madagascar Project, saying, “Mais c’est périmé. Ce n’est même plus de l’histoire, c’est de la préhistoire. Cela remonte à l’âge de la pierre, à l’époque des cavernes!” (248), the narrator insists that it is, sadly, still relevant. *Mémoires d’outre-mer* seems in part to be inspired by the “retour du refoulé,” as studied by Benjamin Stora, the outpouring of memorial work about the Algerian War, which has led to an increase in

interest for the history of other former French colonies as well. However, Ferrier is also very interested in the present. If he devotes time to the Second World War, it is not only to acknowledge its historical significance, but also to draw attention to the ways in which discriminatory prejudices continue to plague France.

The 21st century political and social issues of Metropolitan France are brought into the novel through excerpts from news reports and meetings with journalists. Ferrier, like Deville, also devotes time to the written press. While the narrator is enchanted by the Malagasy horoscopes that are published daily, the other references to the press are used to highlight current racial tensions in France. Near the beginning of the novel, the narrator reads and recopies an entire article published in *Libération* on 30 December 2004. “Dénationaliser l’histoire de France” by historian Suzanne Citron argues that the ‘mythe gaulois,’ forged and spread during the Third Republic, continues to trouble contemporary France, which needs to develop and transmit a history that encompasses its “histoire multiculturelle et polyethnique” (61).⁴⁷ The biography of Maxime Ferrier can be read as one possible way to write this complicated history of global France. The narrator wonders: “Ou bien y a-t-il une autre manière de rendre hommage à cette multiplicité mobile et de lui prêter langue? Et que serait la littérature si elle ne donnait pas une voix aux silences de l’Histoire” (38)?

The narrator sets out to counteract the silence surrounding the history of Madagascar, and makes his political commitment explicit. When his friend, a fellow writer, asks him if he is writing “un roman exotique,” he ripostes, “Non, c’est même très

⁴⁷ Suzanne Citron had already begun her work on the subject of French national history with her 1987 text, *Le Mythe national. L’histoire de la France en question*.

précisément le contraire. Madagascar, Maurice, l'océan Indien font partie intégrante de l'histoire de France: on ne peut la comprendre si on ne passe pas par eux, et par quelques autres encore" (33). The links that the narrator wants to make between France in the 21st century and the history of World War II and decolonization are made abundantly clear, as when he juxtaposes a scene of him watching a television report of election results with the declaration that his novel is not "seulement un pèlerinage familial" (37). Throughout the text, the narrator links the political and the familial, even in his final encounter with a journalist, which occurs in the epilogue of the novel. Mentions of journalism bookend the text, but at the end, the narrator's voice will be included in the article. As the journalist goes through his family tree, finding relatives from Madagascar, Mauritius, India, Portugal, and Alsace, she asks, "Et tout ça fait quoi?" to which the narrator answers, "D'excellents Français" (332). For if the narrator's stated purpose is to write the biography of his grandfather, the novel is equally as much about his own identity in twenty-first century France.

Part of the narrator's identity is being a sophisticated and voracious reader, as he shows with the numerous literary citations and allusions, from writers ranging from Montaigne and Rimbaud to Apollinaire and Perec. He also finds time to think of texts not yet written, which he would like to read, such as a version of *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* (1877), updated to reflect the plurality of twenty-first century France and including its overseas territories. The children of *Le Tour de la France* share the goal of the narrator: "découverte du pays par le sol, par l'air, par la lumière" (65). But for the narrator, the France being explored should be "une France multi-territoriale, aux temporalités qui s'ignorent, se répondent, s'enlacent, se superposent [...]. Topographie

déconcertante, encyclopédie improbable... Surprises à répétition!” (69). He suggests bringing back a sense of plurality, “dans les noms, les lieux et les mémoires” (70). The order of this list immediately brings to mind Pierre Nora’s massive work, *Les lieux de mémoire*, which infamously includes almost no references to French colonialism and its aftermaths. In their introduction to *La fracture coloniale: une crise française*, Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire emphasize this egregious omission. Referencing an interview Nora did with Perry Anderson, where he uses as one of his excuses “le manque de temps [...] des sacrifices qu’il faut consentir” (15), the authors reinforce that “ces ‘sacrifices’ sont nombreux” (15) and include among their list of occulted events “les dizaines de milliers de morts à Madagascar en 1947” (15).

In *Mémoires d’outre-mer*, Ferrier writes to revive these memories, but he also proposes to do so by presenting a more personal *lieu de mémoire*. The novel opens a literal space of memory: “Au cimetière de Mahajanga, il y a trois tombes” (13). For the narrator, the tombstones do not signify that the past has been set in stone, but rather act as a point of departure for his investigation. “La pierre est claire, sûrement enduite et peinte, elle forme une surface plane, nue et dépouillée, d’une matière absorbant la lumière, absolument dénuée de détails” (14). The narrator will project the information that he discovers onto these tombstones and will fill in the details the simple stones do not tell. The cemetery of Mahajanga, as experienced by the narrator, is not a space of stillness and silence, “où viendrait se recueillir toute la moisissure finale de l’existence, comme si nos vies étaient vouées à la déchéance ou, au mieux, au mausolée” (15). It is instead “tout un ramdam” (15), busy with the noise of birds, frogs, crabs, and spiders. This moment is programmatic for the narrator’s work throughout the text; he is interested in what

surrounds the monuments of the past, the living memory that continues to develop, and the ways in which the present continues to resonate with changing understandings of the past.

The three tombs that open *Mémoires d'outre-mer* also close it, a circularity that emphasizes not only the theme of interconnectedness that permeates the text, but also the idea that memorial work is never truly completed. At the beginning of his investigation, the narrator does not know who lies beneath the third tombstone, and discovers at the end that the tomb is empty. It had been built for Pauline, Maxime Ferrier's wife, but she wished to be buried in a different cemetery to be closer to her children. Maxime Ferrier kept the tomb, however, and, as a friend of his explains to the narrator: "l'idée lui plaisait assez. Vous comprenez, il détruisait ainsi le sens même du monument en même temps qu'il le faisait construire: il ne voulait pas d'une mémoire close, achevée, et livrée comme dans un coffre. Il voulait que quelqu'un vienne, se déplace, s'interroge..." (337). The text puts into practice a similar philosophy, emphasizing the importance of investigative travel and continuously questioning what we know of the past. The stone bears an inscription in Malagasy, "*Ho velona fa tsy ho levona... Pourvu qu'elle soit vivante et non anéantie*" (338); as Maxime's friend explains, "Ce n'est pas seulement une épitaphe, c'est une épigraphe [...] celle du livre que vous allez écrire" (336). Indeed, the novel becomes a textual monument, a memorial to Maxime Ferrier but also a commitment to continuing to investigate the shared history of France and Madagascar.

For the narrator, a key element of this memorial work involves travelling and studying the circulation of people and history. The tombstones themselves, although fixed in the ground, are compared to ships, "les trois rectangles de pierre semblent posés

sur la terre comme des navires qui filent sur l'eau. Orientées au sud-ouest, tournées vers la mer, elles sont placées au même niveau" (13). They reflect the nature of the people they commemorate – Arthur and Maxime, in addition to being acrobats were men of the sea – but the link between the tombstones and the sea mimics that between the novel, itself a textual monument, and the ocean. Just as the narrator travels to investigate his grandfather's past, so too will readers travel on metaphorical journeys as they follow his text.

Ferrier writes of the ocean as a symbol for travel and as a metaphor for memory, emphasizing the ocean as a facilitator of the circulation of people, goods, and information. Speaking in 2012, Françoise Lionnet notes that "the Indian Ocean has always been the most 'global' of all oceans. It is the oldest in human history and has enabled contact among travelers, scholars, and merchants of the most diverse origins for more than 5000 years. [...] Yet it remains, among U.S.-based humanists, the least studied of the large bodies of water that link continents, archipelagos, and their inhabitants" ("Shipwrecks" 446). In *Mémoires d'outre-mer*, Ferrier makes a similar argument, citing Kumari R. Issur and Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing who write: "Depuis le XVI^e siècle, on écrit en français sur et dans l'océan Indien: récits de voyages, robinsonnades, utopies, fantasmes en tout genre, puis poésie exotique, romans coloniaux et enfin les littératures autochtones ou d'exil. Cette production riche et diversifiée demeure encore peu connue" (32).⁴⁸ However, while committed to sharing aspects of Madagascar's history, Ferrier does not cite any Malagasy authors but rather limits his intertextual interlocutors to

⁴⁸ Ferrier does not give the exact reference, but the book is the published works of a conference, edited by Kumari R. Issur and Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, entitled *L'Océan Indien dans les littératures francophones: pays réels, pays rêvés, pays révélés*, published in 2001.

traditionally canonical French texts. This is in keeping with the narrator's insistence at the beginning of the novel on establishing himself in literary Paris, perhaps with an aim of emphasizing that Madagascar is part of French history and literature. The narrator's most effective way of creating a sense of global French history is, however, through travel; he physically links Madagascar and France and recounts his travel experiences, emphasizing "le panorama, la plongée, multiple et renouvelée" (68), just as he suggested about the possible rewriting of the classic *Tour de la France par deux enfants*.

Conclusion

As the narrators of the *Sic transit* trilogy and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* conduct their historical investigations into the lives of William Walker, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, Henri Mouhot, and Maxime Ferrier, they also study French global history, to use the turn of phrase of Achille Mbembe, "l'histoire de *sa* [La France] présence au monde et l'histoire de *la* présence du monde en son sein aussi bien avant, pendant, qu'après l'Empire colonial" (139). Their research into these historical figures takes them across the world and is global in scope, yet it is also focused on the level of the individual, both the individual investigator-narrator and their biographical subjects. As they trace the lives of these men, the narrators provide a glimpse of a larger picture of international social, political, and scientific developments; but the focus remains on the ways the individuals experience the particular moment in time in which they were living. The narrators, by recounting their own investigations, do the same thing for themselves, presenting one perspective on the experience of travelling as a French man in the twenty-first century.

Both Ferrier and Deville offer a cosmopolitan vision of the world, as defined by Mbembe, “l’idée d’un *monde commun*, d’une *commune humanité*, d’une histoire et d’un avenir que l’on peut s’offrir en partage” (140). The recurring motif of flowing water that runs through both the *Sic transit* trilogy and *Mémoires d’outre-mer* underscores this concept of an interconnected world. Yet the bodies of water described in the texts both separate continents and connect them; it is the narrators as investigator-travellers who link the physical spaces and who represent a sense of continuity from one geographical place to another. Rather than archivists digging through dusty documents or archaeologists sifting through soil, Deville and Ferrier’s investigators are in some ways like gold panners, looking through swirling water not for gold, but for nuggets of historical information.

The ebb and flow of these recurrent bodies of water also represents the oscillation between past and present at work in these texts. Although the stated goal of the narrators is to write the biography of a person from the past, much of their narrative is preoccupied with their present-day concerns – their travel arrangements, their writing process, their personal lives, and their concerns about current events. Ferrier’s text in particular reflects what Oana Panaité has described as the “tombeau littéraire contemporain,” which provides “la commémoration d’un personnage ou d’une époque, en insistant notamment sur leur effet de présence, à travers la mise en récit et le déploiement discursif de leurs réverbérations ou de leurs conséquences actuelles. Aussi peut-on affirmer, dans le sillage des analyses proposées par François Hartog, que le tombeau narratif contemporain relève d’une approche présentiste, laquelle ‘considère le passé en ayant en vue le présent’” (104). Although Deville too is concerned with the present, his novels move away from

this literary monument model. Indeed, he lightly mocks the concept of a monument: a cenotaph dedicated to Henri Mouhot is rediscovered in 1990, 123 years after it was erected, although “on peut douter bien sûr de la véracité du fait, de ce monument retrouvé” (*Kampuchéa* 167), and the complications surrounding the burial of Brazza in his mausoleum are almost farcical.

While concerned about the present, Deville’s narrator is also looking to the future. He sees himself as a historian in the style of Herodotus, not only because of his commitment to travel and to recording what he observes, but also because of his feelings of urgency to keep an account of a changing world. He writes: “Nous sommes les premiers voyageurs depuis Hérodote à décrire un monde que nous savons fuyant, momentané. Des cartes sur Internet montrent des simulations du changement climatique. Un mètre d’océan de plus et le delta de Mékong disparaît” (*Kampuchéa* 153). The majority of the texts studied in this project are concerned with creating and maintaining records about people from the past, keeping memory alive, and discussing the continued reverberations that past events provoke in the present. Deville’s trilogy engages with these themes, but the narrator also looks beyond his immediate lifetime to a global future and the real risk that the world he is exploring is disappearing. The trilogy title, *Sic transit*, is part of the larger phrase, *Sic transit gloria mundi* – the narrator presents himself therefore as a witness and a travel writer, noting what he sees before the glory of the world passes by.

Chapter Three: The Daily Life of the Investigator

C'est fou le nombre de choses que l'on ne sait pas, que l'on ne voit pas, alors qu'elles font partie de nous, de notre quotidien.

Il y a dans l'affaire une histoire qui fait peur, ce côté métro-boulot-dodo qui nous tient lieu de vie quotidienne en région parisienne.

-- Boualem Sansal

The family becomes the focus of the novels studied in this chapter, as the first person narrators recount their investigations into the lives of their fathers or grandfathers, discovering the dark secret that they collaborated, to varying extents, with the Nazi regime. In *Un roman russe* (2007), Emmanuel Carrère investigates the life of his maternal grandfather, Georges Zourabichvili, a Georgian immigrant to France in the 1920s who, after working a series of odd jobs, became a translator for the German occupying forces. He disappeared during the Liberation, likely a victim of the Purges. The family never received an official confirmation of his death. Fabrice Humbert's novel, *L'Origine de la violence* (2009), tells the story of the fictional first person narrator's family, the Fabres. The narrator discovers that his father is the product of an affair his grandmother had with a Polish Jewish man, David Wagner, who was arrested and deported to Buchenwald, where he died. The narrator is further devastated to learn that it was his great-grandfather who denounced Wagner. In Boualem Sansal's text, *Le village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* (2008), two brothers living in Paris, but born in Algeria to an Algerian mother and a German father, discover that their father worked directly with the Nazi extermination camps as a chemical engineer.

Much has been written about collaboration in France during the Occupation, especially since the outpouring of work on this topic around 1970, including Robert O.

Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (1972), the films *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (1969) and *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), and novels such as Modiano's *La Ronde de nuit* (1969) and *Les Boulevards de ceinture* (1972). The publication of Pascal Jardin's *La Guerre à neuf ans* in 1971 marked the beginning of authors writing about their experience as children of collaborators, followed by Marie Chaix's *Les Lauriers du lac de Constance* (1974).⁴⁹ Katherine Cardin has identified a second wave of writing about collaborationist family members, beginning in the twenty-first century and including texts written by the grandchildren of collaborators, to which Carrère's novel certainly belongs. *L'Origine de la violence* also grapples with many related themes, albeit in a fictional form.⁵⁰ All three novels, with their interest in the lives of perpetrators, also seem to be in the filiation of Jonathan Littell's media sensation and Prix Goncourt winning *Les Bienveillantes* (2006).

Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory can be helpful in understanding the process of the investigative figures as they confront their family history. Initially developed to refer to the experiences of children of Holocaust survivors, Hirsch has broadened the term to include any case of intergenerational transmission. Postmemory is "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were

⁴⁹ For more on these texts by children and grandchildren of collaborators, see: Claire Gorrara, *Women's Representations of the Occupation in Post-'68 France* (1998) and Alan Morris, *Collaboration and Resistance Reviewed: Writers and the Mode Rétro in Post-Gaullist France* (1992). Katherine Cardin also devoted a full-length dissertation to literature by children and grandchildren of collaborators entitled *From Collaboration to Creation: Literature by Descendants of French WWII Collaborators* (2011).

⁵⁰ Marc Dambre does, however, see many similarities between the author and the narrator: "Dans *L'Origine de la violence*, le jeune professeur narrateur semble devoir beaucoup au vécu de l'auteur et à l'exhumation d'un secret de famille" ("Mémoire de fils" 106).

transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right” (5). Hirsch does not differentiate between second and third generations, preferring Eva Hoffman’s term of ‘postgenerations,’ a trend common to other scholars of Holocaust memory, such as Geoffrey Hartman and Efraim Sicher, who use the category ‘generation after’ (3). Although the brothers in Sansal’s text are investigating their father rather than their grandfather, they were raised in France while he remained in Algeria, creating additional personal distance through the geographic separation. Their relationship with their father therefore seems to be closer to the position of the third generation, described by Victoria Aarons as “a generation approaching the Holocaust from a position that is precariously balanced between proximity and distance” (xvii). She adds: “Undeterred by silence and sanctions against such a pursuit, third-generation narratives reveal attempts to comprehend, give voice to, and demystify the ‘unimaginable,’ unrepresentable fracture of the Holocaust, remaking a place for the Shoah’s necessary imprint in the twenty-first century” (xiii).⁵¹

These three novels describe the narrator’s process as he grapples with the family secrets he uncovers and the ways in which these discoveries continue to affect his daily life. The narrators of *Un roman russe*, *L’Origine de la violence*, and *Le village de l’Allemand* spend a lot of the text describing their day-to-day lives in the present; in addition to recounting their investigation process, they also comment on the banal details

⁵¹ The implications of engaging with the history of Holocaust as a member of the third generation are further studied in Esther Jilovsky, *Remembering the Holocaust: Generations. Witnessing and Place* (2015) and the collected volume edited by Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein, and David Slucki, *In the Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and the Third Generation* (2016).

of their life – dinners out at restaurants, their minor housing concerns, sleeping patterns, etc. Ben Highmore sees the return of scholarly interest in the ‘everyday’ in the 1990s as part of the “return to the real,” citing studies of daily life as “an attempt to ground the study of culture more emphatically in concrete phenomena” (29). Focusing on the specific ways in which the investigation into their family past directly influences the daily life of the narrators in these novels can therefore be one way to trace the concrete effects of postmemory.

Although Maurice Blanchot famously wrote, “le quotidien échappe, c’est sa définition” (359), for the purposes of this chapter, I will work from the general definition of daily life proposed by Rita Felski. She writes: “it typically encompasses such commonplace activities as eating, sleeping, getting dressed, working, home-making, and routine forms of travel, as well as the often elaborate rituals, taboos, protocols, performances, and other symbolic activities that encircle and define them” (607). It is the attempt to reconcile or make sense of the juxtaposition between the everyday life of the narrator-investigators and the horrific events that they are uncovering that provides much of the tension of these novels. As Michael Sheringham explains, “While the everyday is not the place of the event (always exceptional) and is therefore in tension with history, it has a historicity that is embodied, shared and everchanging” (*Everyday Life* 360). Derek Schilling, who, like Sheringham, studies the everyday in Perec, sees in *le quotidien* clues to the devastating effects of historical events. In other words, “L’Histoire ouvre des fissures dans le quotidien, travaille le sujet de l’intérieur en lui rappelant à la fois la continuité et l’absolue dislocation qu’apporte le temps” (Schilling 11). In this chapter, I study the ways in which the troubling effects of the past impact the daily lives of the

narrators, be it because of postmemory or because of the disturbing effects of their investigative process, focusing on the interplay between the day-to-day and the cataclysmic.

Un roman russe

“Mais ma mère se doute bien [...] que ce qui m’intéresse c’est ce dont il ne faut pas parler” (86). This commitment to writing that which is taboo or secret is at the heart of Emmanuel Carrère’s autobiographical text *Un roman russe*, which covers the events of his life from 2000 to 2006, centering on a particularly tumultuous 2002. Carrère takes full advantage of the egocentricity of the autobiographical genre.⁵² He quickly establishes an autobiographical pact, referring to himself by name and speaking of his own published work, as well as identifying his mother, the famous Russian historian and académicienne Hélène Carrère d’Encausse.⁵³ He also places himself in the lineage of Montaigne and Rousseau, confessional writers who commit to exposing even their most embarrassing qualities. Like Montaigne, he pledges to paint an honest portrait, where “[l]es défauts s’y liront au vif,” and like Rousseau, he shows not only his good qualities, but also the moments when he is “méprisable et vil” (29).

Carrère does not limit himself to writing about his own faults, but also shares embarrassing or shameful moments from the lives of those around him. The secret about which his mother does not want him to write is her father’s collaborationist past and likely death during the Purges following the Liberation of France, but Carrère does not

⁵² Because of the clear autobiographical pact established, I will use Carrère to refer to the author and the narrator.

⁵³ She was elected “secrétaire perpétuel” in 1999.

restrict himself to voicing only this family secret in his text. In addition to publicly sharing his family history, he also speaks about his intense relationship with the, as is oft emphasized, very attractive Sophie, the semi-pornographic letter to her he publishes in *Le Monde*, and the personal details of their ugly breakup. He exposes his girlfriend's social and intellectual insecurities – as when he snidely tells an anecdote of her thinking the author Saul Bellow is the nonexistent Solbelo (81) – as well as the details of her unplanned pregnancy and abortion. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Carrère reiterates the influence of Montaigne on his work: “Everything you think is worth writing. Not necessarily worth keeping, but worth writing. And fundamentally, that's what a large part of literature attempts do – reproduce the flow of thought. Well at least the literature I love the most – Montaigne, Sterne, Diderot” (Hunnewell). *Un roman russe* attempts to do just this and recounts the flow of Carrère's thoughts and life, mixing mundane worries about his answering machine message with major upheavals in his relationships with his girlfriend and mother, banal scenes at various dinners with learning about his grandfather's collusion with the occupying German forces.

The text begins with Carrère, fresh off his first date with Sophie, on assignment to cover the release of a Hungarian prisoner of war. András Toma, known as the last prisoner of World War II, was forgotten and left to fester in an asylum in Kotelnich, Russia for over fifty years. While the poor Hungarian man is a sort of investigational red herring – Carrère only devotes the first few pages to his story and does not return to it later in the text – the journey proves to be a catalyzing moment, initiating two different projects: a deeper investigation into his grandfather and a documentary to be filmed about modern-day Kotelnich. For Carrère, the story of Toma awakens the impossible dream

that his grandfather might return: “J’ai compris que si l’histoire du Hongrois m’a tellement bouleversé, c’est parce qu’elle donne corps à ce rêve. [...] Car Kotelnitch, pour moi, c’est là où on séjourne quand on a disparu” (71). The prisoner’s release half a century after the end of the war is a physical manifestation of the return of repressed trauma, suggesting that even the most tamped down memories – or forgotten prisoner – will eventually emerge.

Although his grandfather cannot physically return, Carrère nonetheless sets out to ensure that his story returns to preoccupy his family. He begins to investigate Georges’s life, which primarily involves questioning his mother and uncle. While his mother tries to avoid talking about her father, and, if forced to do so, focuses on positive memories, the narrator learns the general outlines of the family history from his uncle, who also gives him a shoe box full of family archives. The narrator’s historical investigation soon resembles a psychoanalytic one; Carrère envisions his writing project as a cathartic voicing of repressed memories, in the hopes that it will free him and his family.⁵⁴ His mother, who tells him at one point, “la psychanalyse t’a vraiment déformé” (137), does not support his project and pleads for him not to make the story public. The narrator, however, insists: “Ce silence, ce déni sont littéralement vitaux pour elle. Les rompre, c’est la tuer, du moins en est-elle persuadée, et je me suis persuadé de mon côté qu’il est, pour elle et moi, indispensable de le faire. Avant sa mort à elle, et avant d’avoir, moi, atteint l’âge du disparu” (71). The return of the repressed might be unavoidable, but

⁵⁴ This link between trauma, memory, history, and psychoanalysis is, of course, explored in depth in contemporary trauma studies; see, for example, Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995); *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (2016); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992).

Carrère's investigation certainly helps it along. He publicly presents the results of his inquiries, against his mother's wishes, in two different media forms, exposing the close-held secret not only in print but also at the end of his documentary *Retour à Kotelnitch*, which premiered in Paris in 2003. Indeed, the way he describes his filmic project is particularly telling, and can be read as a commentary on his writing: "Tel que je l'imagine aujourd'hui, le film devrait être le journal de notre séjour à Kotelnitch, le portrait des gens que nous y rencontrerons, la chronique des relations que nous aurons avec eux – tout cela doublé par l'histoire, plus intime, de mon immersion dans la langue russe" (156). Carrère not only foregrounds his subjectivity, but also ensures that every interaction, including the ghostly one with his grandfather, is presented in relationship to him.

The story of the investigation into his grandfather is also doubled by an "histoire, plus intime" of his relationships with Sophie and his mother. His psychoanalytically inspired investigation into past family history begins to truly resemble a talking cure, as he goes on at length about whatever might be preoccupying him at that moment. Carrère offers a lot of detail about his daily life, which, at least superficially, seems to be quite pleasant: Sophie moving into his apartment on rue Blanche, being "en terrasse rue Lepic," (77), dining at a Thai restaurant near Maubert, having erotically charged outings to the *primeur*, or attending a dinner party in the Marais. To Carrère, however, the assessment that all is sunny in his life would be wrong. He feels that he has inherited the dark secret of his grandfather's collaborationist past, and as a result is imprisoned by an attraction to darkness. This explains his tendency to write violent and pessimistic texts as well as his relationship difficulties: "Ça n'y est jamais avec moi, jamais durablement. Il

suffit qu'un amour soit possible, soit heureux, pour qu'au bout de trois mois j'en découvre l'impossibilité" (78). For him, the way out is to investigate his grandfather and publicly speak the family past: "Je me dis que oui, je vais raconter une dernière histoire d'enfermement, et que ce sera aussi l'histoire de ma libération" (20). He sees the work, filmic and literary, that was catalyzed by the discovery of András Toma as a way to heal and free himself.

The focus of his creative production remains egocentric, however, and what begins as an investigation into Georges, his grandfather, becomes primarily an investigation into himself. If he is guided by psychoanalytic theory, the title, *Un roman russe*, also suggests that Carrère is taking inspiration from the great Russian novels of the nineteenth century. The emphasis on family heritage and the passing on of the sins of the father to his sons brings to mind *The Brothers Karamazov*, especially as Carrère exposes the less salubrious character traits he shares with his grandfather; although of course this fascination for the transmission of hereditary traits also resonates with the Zolaian obsession over a "tare génétique." The portrait of Georges becomes a sort of distorted mirror reflecting back aspects of Carrère. Both men are well-educated and confident in their intellectual abilities. They also tend towards a saturnine disposition and an occasionally fraught relationship with their children. After describing a scene where Georges speaks harshly to his daughter, perhaps because he is ashamed of not being able to buy her new shoes, Carrère explains: "Il parle de sa vie à sa petite fille, avec colère et avec honte. Il a échoué en tout, il est un raté" (105). He then sanctimoniously adds that, "pour ses enfants au moins, il faudrait qu'un homme soit fort, intelligent, respecté. Un petit garçon ou une petite fille qui prononce le mot 'papa' devrait être certain que Papa

est un héros, un preux” (106). Yet Carrère does not seem to take his own words to heart and is not particularly open with his children, at least according to what he writes in *Un roman russe*. He sympathizes with his uncle, a child of eight at the time of his father’s disappearance, who was left confused and in the dark, only to repeat the same mistake with his son. After a particularly intense conversation with his mother about Georges, Carrère notices that his son overheard everything. Instead of profiting from the opportunity to help his son process the family secret, he writes: “Jean-Baptiste [...] a dû entendre toute cette conversation, cette histoire de secret qui empoisonne tout le monde et qui l’empoisonnera à son tour. Je ne trouve à balbutier un pathétique: ça va?, exactement comme lui” (316).

Rather than opening better channels of communication within the family, the narrator’s actions suggest that he has learned nothing from his investigation. He chooses instead to share his own secrets with the world, which includes publishing an exhibitionist text in *Le Monde* under his own name. This venture again parallels his grandfather, in whose papers are found many letters with “correspondants qui étaient surtout des correspondantes: deux ou trois dames de la bonne bourgeoisie française à qui il s’adresse quelquefois sur le ton de l’amoureux transi, quelquefois sur celui du mentor despotique, souvent sur les deux à la fois” (97). Carrère’s salacious correspondence to a woman takes the form of a sexually explicit letter in *Le Monde*, addressed to Sophie, giving her detailed instructions on how to get excited, in all meanings of the term, in the train on the way to meet him in La Rochelle. This letter is placed at the center of *Un Roman russe*, and, given its structural position and the title of the novel, it is difficult to miss the echoes with “The Grand Inquisitor,” placed as it is at the center of *The Brothers*

Karamazov. That text, too, is a reflection on human nature and the ambiguity of people's free will and strength to make wise and discerning choices. In Carrère's case, his choice is to publish an example of lewd male fantasy, down to the thrill of control. He writes: "Je te propose quelque chose. À partir de maintenant, tu vas faire tout ce que je te dirai. À la lettre. Pas à pas. Si je te dis: arrête de lire à la fin de cette phrase et reprends seulement dans dix minutes, tu arrêtes de lire à la fin de cette phrase et tu reprends seulement dans dix minutes" (162). Like his grandfather, Carrère positions himself as a "mentor despotique."

Although the letter is published in *Le Monde* as a "nouvelle," the basic conceit of controlling the actions of a woman through a public text is a troubling display of misogyny, whether presented under the cover of fiction or not.⁵⁵ The letter can also be read as a metacommentary of Carrère's own authorial work; it is a reflection of the uncertainty of an author being able to determine what a reader will take from his text and the possibility of having the opposite effect than expected, as is dramatically the case here. In spite of imagining a series of events wherein Sophie follows his instructions to the letter, ending with a blissfully romantic night in La Rochelle, this dream is shattered. Sophie, much to the annoyance of the narrator, does not get on the train, and their ensuing argument leads to their ultimate break up, a series of events that can be read as a dramatic metaphor for the multitude of potentially unanticipated outcomes a text could provoke. The commentary on the difficulties of predicting the impact of a text is particularly pertinent for *Un roman russe*, which often leaves the reader in an uncertain

⁵⁵ The text, qualified by *Le Monde* as a "nouvelle," was published under the title "L'Usage du 'Monde'" on 22 July 2002.

position, not knowing how to respond, torn between marveling at its audacity, but also horrified by the misogyny.

As Carrère says in an interview with *The Paris Review*, “The story in *Le Monde* was pure madness. But I don’t think any writer would have been able to resist the temptation to write about it. The strange thing was to shove that story in with all the Russian stories” (Hunnewell). Carrère credits Perec’s *W ou le souvenir d’enfance* for this inspiration: “the way he uses these two stories – it’s as if he is trying to harness something he isn’t able to say. I have often used that method, combining things that don’t obviously go together and making the bet that, by doing that, I am going to access something that is in the realm of the unsayable. It’s something that works in psychoanalysis and I think in literature, too” (Hunnewell). Carrère seems, however, to be trying less to say what he does not know or cannot remember than what he cannot know; like “The Grand Inquisitor,” his text is also a meditation on temptation and choice.

The digressions about his daily life, including minutiae about holiday plans and scheduling conflicts, are in fact revealing and suggest how what might seem like a small decision, affecting only the course of a few days, can have major repercussions. He notes, for example, that the decision not to invite Sophie to join him in Russia for the wrap party of his film might have had lasting repercussions: “J’y pense, mais je ne le lui propose pas. Aujourd’hui, je me demande quel chemin aurait pris nos vies si je l’avais fait” (217). In another scene, which encapsulates the tension between the everyday and major political events, Sophie and Carrère discuss Louis Malle’s film *Lacombe Lucien* over dinner. “Elle s’emporte contre les récits qui, comme *Lacombe Lucien*, montrent qu’on peut devenir milicien – ou résistant – par hasard ou par ignorance. Elle dit que ces récits sont faux et

falsificateurs, qu'ils nient la liberté, qu'ils sont de droite. Moi, je les crois justes" (62).

The everyday exchange, talking about a movie while eating, nonetheless hints at a major theme of the novel, namely how a person's day-to-day life, and the routine situations they find themselves in, can prompt them to make choices that will have a determining effect on their life and the lives of those around them.

Carrère, attempting to understand his grandfather's decision to work for the occupying forces, suggests that he found a valorization and respect from the Germans that he had never experienced as an immigrant in France. "Au contraire de tous ses employeurs français, les Allemands lui montraient de la considération. Il ne parlait pas seulement bien l'allemand, mais connaissait les grands écrivains et penseurs allemands. Sa qualité d'homme cultivé qu'il avait pris le pli de considérer comme un handicap dans la société française, éveillait le respect des Allemands" (134). Worn down by the emotional and economic hardships of his day-to-day life, Georges decides to work for the German occupiers, who treat him with consideration and ease the strain of his daily life. Marie-Pascale Huglo rightly notes: "L'auteur se donne le beau rôle – moitié victime moitié justicier – mais sa révélation est *aussi* une réhabilitation de l'aïeul: collaborateur, certes, seulement il n'a jamais participé à des 'interrogations musclées' et ne s'est pas comporté en 'salaud'" ("Tout le monde en parle" 208-9). Yet although Carrère attempts to understand his grandfather's choices, he does not go so far as to excuse his actions: "Il aurait pu partir, changer de camp, rejoindre la Résistance. Il ne l'a pas fait. Alors que ce n'était pas une crapule, j'en suis sûr, il est resté comme pétrifié, comme s'il était coupable, de toute façon, depuis toujours, et n'avait plus à attendre que le moment où le châtement s'abattrait sur lui" (136). The use of the conditional past, followed by the passé

composé tense, both composite tenses, creates a sort of parallel, emphasizing the gap between what might have been and the sad facts of what was.

As he narrates the discoveries he makes about his grandfather, including his more negative personality traits and questionable choices, Carrère also exposes his own flaws, particularly as shown in his relationships with his mother and Sophie. He cheats on his girlfriend, refuses to accompany her during her recovery from a knee operation, and is mean and petty during their arguments, using words to describe himself like “je ricane” (275) and “je souris méchamment” (273). In a particularly mordant passage, he shows his social snobbery as he belittles Sophie’s middle class milieu: “Je l’aime, mais je n’aime pas ses amis, je ne suis pas à l’aise dans son monde, qui est celui du salariat modeste, des gens qui disent ‘sur Paris’ et qui partent à Marrakech avec le comité d’entreprise. J’ai bien conscience que ces jugements me jugent, et qu’ils tracent de moi un portrait déplaisant” (79). Carrère is self-aware enough to recognize that he is painting an unflattering portrait of himself, yet cannot seem to stop making cruel and self-destructive choices.

He is fortunate, however, to be living at a time when France is not under the control of occupying forces. Although his cozy daily life is troubled by his actions, the disruption is on an emotional rather than material level, and he is quickly able to reestablish order and routine in his life, in part due to his very privileged position in society. As Sophie explains to him: “Tout m’a été donné, dit-elle, à la naissance: la culture, l’aisance sociale, la maîtrise des codes, grâce à quoi j’ai pu librement choisir ma voie et vivre en faisant ce qui me plaît, au rythme qui me plaît” (79). By juxtaposing his actions in contemporary France and his grandfather’s during the Occupation, Carrère

illuminates uncomfortable similarities, forcing himself to ask the question of what he might have done during the war. The specific details about his daily life in Paris, and perhaps even his snobby comments about neighborhoods and elite friends, might strike a chord with the reader, just as Jean-Baptiste Clamence in *La Chute* calls out to his listener with an imparfait du subjonctif. By holding a mirror not only up to himself and his grandfather, but also to the readers, Carrère forces them to question not only how to talk about the past, but also to reflect on what choices they might have made had they lived during the Occupation.

At the end of the novel, it is unclear, however, if the talking cure has been effective. Reading the release of András Toma, the so-called last prisoner of the Second World War, as a sort of *mise en abyme* of Carrère's project to bring repressed history into the light, the outcome is likely to be unsatisfactory. Toma's liberation process is slow and uncertain, and he finds little joy in his release from prison, returning home to almost no one whom he had known before. Witnessing this return, the narrator notes: "J'ai l'impression de voir un Kaspar Hauser de soixante-quinze ans. C'est horriblement triste" (60). However, Carrère views his own work as a triumph. After the premiere of his film *Retour à Kotelnitch*, in which he tells his grandfather's story as part of the conclusion, he writes: "c'était la fin du film et cela m'est apparu, sur le moment, comme une victoire. Quelque chose était dit, qui ne l'avait jamais été publiquement. Cet homme était nommé, pleuré et, sinon enterré, enfin déclaré mort. J'avais accompli l'exorcisme, je pouvais commencer à vivre" (386). He also thinks that writing the novel has had a cathartic effect on his life and has indeed worked as a kind of talking cure. Addressing his mother, he asserts: "Ils [les mots] ont servi, cette fois encore. Je n'ai pas sauté par la fenêtre. J'ai

écrit ce livre. Même s'il te fait du mal, tu admettras que c'est mieux" (395). At the end of the novel, Carrère finds a new domestic rhythm and a peaceful day-to-day existence with his new wife and baby daughter. While he may not worry particularly about the effects his book might have had on the lives of those around him – particularly his mother, Sophie, and his children – he is very pleased with the effects on his own life, telling Danielle Laurin, a journalist for *Le Devoir*, “La plupart de mes correspondants veulent savoir si, l’ayant écrit, je suis heureux, et je réponds que, ma foi, oui.”

Yet the reader is forced to wonder if the novel does not end with a false sense of finality. It closes with a letter to the narrator’s mother: “Il est l’heure que je parte. Je vais refermer ce carnet, éteindre la lumière, rendre la clé de la chambre. Demain matin, je serai à Moscou, après-demain à Paris, auprès d’Hélène, de Jeanne, de mes garçons. Je continuerai à vivre et à me battre. Le livre est fini, maintenant. Accepte-le. Il est pour toi” (391). The obvious symbolism of closing the notebook, turning off the light, and leaving Russia to return to France seems final, as if the narrator is literally turning the page on the dark family secret and the corresponding darkness within his personality. Yet one questions if the others in his life feel the same finality or if they continue to be affected by the ripples of his actions in their own daily lives. The readers might also be left without the neat sense of an ending, feeling as if Carrère placed them in the role of untrained psychoanalyst, a silent listener as he confesses his problems. The readers absorb the confession and are left weighed down by Carrère’s domestic and familial drama, the sad, complicated story of Georges and the sordid love story, perhaps so that he now can be “heureux, ma foi, oui.”

Like the other novels studied in this project, Carrère implicates the readers in his historical investigation process, but he also forces them to assume an almost voyeuristic position as he shares the unsavory details of his personal life. Carrère self-consciously draws parallels between himself and his grandfather, but he also implies that the reader might also have some qualities in common with them. Yet if the implied reader of *Un roman russe* seems to be someone who frequents the same social and intellectual circles as Carrère – someone who recognizes the faux pas of thinking Saul Bellow is Solbello – any reader of the text becomes a member of his circle simply by having spent the entirety of the novel in his company. The readers then become, in some small way, complicit in Carrère’s choices, which then forces the more general question: are the readers, like Carrère and his grandfather, guilty of making hurtful decisions.

L’Origine de la violence

The investigation in Fabrice Humbert’s novel, *L’Origine de la violence*, begins when the narrator sees a photo in the interpretive centre at Buchenwald that looks remarkably like his father.⁵⁶ As he inquires further, he discovers that his father was the love child of an affair his grandmother had with a handsome Jewish man, David Wagner, the figure in the photo. Initially unsure what to make of the uncanny resemblance, the narrator contacts the curator of the Buchenwald museum, beginning a complicated process that leads him to discover that his great-grandfather wrote a letter denouncing Wagner to the Vichy authorities. He also learns that his father tracked down the

⁵⁶ The narrator’s first name is never given, and to avoid confusion with the other Fabres in the story, I will refer to him primarily as the narrator.

concentration camp doctor most directly implicated in Wagner's death, in hiding after the war, and threatened to expose his Nazi past, thus provoking the man's suicide. To uncover this sordid family past, the first person narrator consults archives and secondary sources, but also has long conversations with his father, grandfather, and uncle. Although he must uncover much of the information, the narrator also feels that he intrinsically knows the family secret, having inherited it as a kind of postmemory.

Like Carrère, the narrator believes that the shameful secrets of his family caused his fascination with violence: "Depuis toujours, la peur et la violence m'ont hanté. J'ai vécu dans ces ténèbres. J'ai toujours craint qu'on m'entraîne, qu'on m'attache, m'écorche comme un animal nuisible. Des nuits cauchemardesques m'ont fait entrevoir des mâchoires de loups" (15). Carrère's project to learn more about his grandfather's past in an effort to free himself from this attraction to violence appeals to Humbert's narrator, who references *Un roman russe* fairly explicitly.

Un jour, dans un livre, j'ai cru que quelqu'un s'approchait de mes questions. Un écrivain qui affirmait n'écrire que sur la folie, le meurtre et la mort, et qui pensait que ces obsessions avaient pour origine un grand-père russe tué pendant la guerre. J'éprouvai en lisant ces lignes en quatrième de couverture un sentiment de reconnaissance. Je crus avoir trouvé un frère. J'achetai le livre, le lus. Déception. Il était réussi mais il ne parlait pas du grand-père. Pas assez. Il ne recherchait pas assez les origines. [...] J'espérais que cet homme écrirait mes cauchemars – il laissait la porte fermée. Il avait ouvert ses propres portes mais pas la mienne. (17-18)

This passage reflects Tolstoy's famous aphorism – "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" – reinforcing that the narrator needs to pursue his own investigation and learn the particularities of his family tragedies. As evidenced by the grandiose title, Humbert also wants his investigation to go beyond

family history to engage with metaphysical questions, an ambition that he makes clear by opening the novel with the fall of Lucifer.

Yet despite its metaphysical aspirations, Humbert focuses mainly on the details of the Fabre family drama and the day-to-day effects of the buried family secrets. At the beginning of the text, both the narrator and his father seem happily settled with their typical routines, including dinners at a *brasserie* in the 5th arrondissement – “Nous nous trouvions donc dans notre restaurant habituel, avec nos serveurs habituels et notre foie de veau intemporel” (25). The narrator is teaching at a lycée franco-allemand and seems generally well-established and settled. His father’s daily routine provides more of a clue to the repressed family trauma he carries within himself: “Son existence routinière canalisait sa violence, et je retrouvais chez lui bien des traits personnels. Mais sa violence était plus introvertie: toute mon enfance, je l’avais vu enveloppé dans des silences terribles, qui duraient parfois plusieurs jours” (25). But the casual observer would never know that the daily walk he takes around the 5th, “son trajet de la rue des Écoles, du Jardin des Plantes, de la rue Monge, de la place de la Contrescarpe” (338), is in fact a retracing of the daily constitutional the Nazi concentration doctor he threatened took around his small German village. Rather than facing the past, the narrator’s father prefers to repress it and incorporate it into his daily routine.

When his son suggests looking into the story of the man he sees in the photo at Buchenwald and publishing a book about it, his father declares: “Tu renifles les morts. Cette histoire est celle de notre famille. Je t’interdis de l’écrire. Ne te fais pas de publicité sur notre dos. Je ne l’accepterai pas” (81). His (nonbiological) grandfather equally does not want him to speak of it. Marcel Fabre, the family patriarch, raised his wife’s

illegitimate son as if he were his own, and, on his deathbed, names his grandson, the narrator, as his heir as the symbolic head of the family. This transfer of family position mimics the transfer of memory, as Marcel tells his grandson his side of the story. He becomes the keeper of the family secrets, but also of the family honour. The narrator muses: “J’avais aussi le sentiment que mon grand-père me transmettait l’héritage pour mieux me faire taire. L’oubli en contrepartie. [...] Un héritier ne désagrègerait jamais la famille puisque son rôle était de la protéger et de la souder” (257). The same inheritance is a double-edged sword, for if he is the heir to the family, he is also the heir to the repressed memories of violence. Yet if he does not speak, he leaves David Wagner to be an unnamed figure in a photograph in the Buchenwald interpretive centre. In a move that mirrors Emmanuel Carrère’s, Humbert’s narrator chooses to voice the past, moving the memories outwards and taking a different path to the repression practiced by his father. “En même temps, si je songeais à mes cauchemars d’enfant, à ma marginalisation dans le monde, à la vie de mon père, elle même silencieuse, repliée, comme un homme sans droit de cité, sans nom et donc sans parole, je me sentais obligé d’affirmer l’existence des Wagner au sein des Fabre ” (82).

As part of his investigation, the narrator meets Serge Kolb, a Holocaust survivor, an interaction that reinforces his belief in the necessity of sharing David Wagner’s story. He explains to Kolb: “Je représente la troisième génération. Nous n’essayons même pas de comprendre l’histoire de nos pères mais celle de nos grands-pères. Après vous, il n’y aura plus que des documents. Plus aucune conscience vivante n’aura vu l’Ettersberg nazi” (91). The narrator becomes part of the group Geoffrey Hartman calls “witnesses by adoption” (8) and puts in practice Alan L. Berger’s affirmation that “listening to tales of a

witness makes one a witness” (82). Humbert’s narrator engages seriously with this chain of witnessing, but wonders how to write that which an individual has not experienced and cannot truly fathom. The text transmits the information of the camp in part by framing the void, that which was removed from existence, and which no longer exists. “Je ne raconterai pas notre visite de Buchenwald. Je ne décrirai ni la plaine vide, ni les cellules de torture, ni les fours crématoires, ni la salle de la toise, où l’on faisait semblant de mesurer les prisonniers russes avant de leur éclater la tête d’une balle tirée par-derrière” (10). The repetition of negative adverbs emphasizes the emptiness, until it is sharply broken by the sudden and violent affirmative of the shot in the back of the head. The narrator realizes that “Ce n’est rien comparé à l’expérience vécue. Mais je pouvais transmettre une forme d’expérience différente” (91). He offers himself instead as a witness to the process of investigating and uncovering this traumatic past.

One phenomenon that strongly affects the narrator is the often jarring juxtaposition of routine day-to-day life in the twenty-first century and the reminders of the horrors of the Holocaust. He describes, for example, the experience of visiting the Holocaust Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in central Berlin, while chaperoning a school trip:

Nous nous trouvions devant un champ de stèles noires que je n’avais jamais vues, qui pouvaient aussi bien évoquer des cercueils, un labyrinthe ou une prison. Même si des enfants couraient là comme dans un labyrinthe de *Harry Potter*, ces pierres renvoyaient à des événements plus sombres que les aventures du gentil sorcier, parce que sous la terre, lorsqu’on descendait un escalier, se ramifiaient les longs couloirs d’un mémorial, rappelant la politique d’extermination du national-socialisme. (201)⁵⁷

⁵⁷ That Humbert chooses to dismissively reference the Harry Potter series here is slightly ironic, given that the conceit of the conflict of the fantasy series is based on the events of the Third Reich.

The investigator goes down into the mass of historical documents and oral interviews and encourages the reader to symbolically do likewise, to descend into the darkness of the memorial, be it physical or metaphorical, and acknowledge and remember the tragedies of the past.

Yet the narrator also suggests that the interplay between the banal and the horrific is indeed part of life. He describes the shame he feels when, returning from the Buchenwald Memorial, he checks his hair in the rearview mirror: “un camp de concentration oublié pour une mère...L’après-midi fut ensuite banale: une visite dans la ville, quelques magasins, une librairie” (19). The novel is full of these juxtapositions, mixing the day-to-day considerations of the narrator’s life with accounts of the Holocaust, but the attempt to separate the two is shown to be impossible, and indeed, undesirable. As Serge Kolb explains to the narrator: “Un des problèmes de la transmission, cependant, c’est de faire comprendre que Buchenwald était à la fois absolument autre mais aussi assez banal dans ses ressorts. [...] Mais à Buchenwald, nous mangions, si peu que ce soit, nous discussions et nous avons aussi ri. Je n’ai jamais vu un film où des déportés rient. Tout y est gris et sombre. Pourtant, j’ai ri à Buchenwald, j’ai ri en discutant aux latrines, oui j’ai ri en chiant, pour parler net” (92). Part of the narrator’s investigative process involves, therefore, presenting “la coexistence de l’anodin et du tragique” (200), learning to acknowledge and remember past tragedies without being prostrate or paralyzed. The narrator’s ambition for the text he wants to write about his investigation is perhaps to mimic, in textual form, the memorial work accomplished by the city of Berlin: “Ce que les autres capitales jouaient négligemment dans leur rapport à l’Histoire, Berlin l’accomplissait consciemment, avec gravité, tout en maintenant, par ses

constructions permanentes, une vitalité qui l'empêchait de sombrer sous les poids étouffant de la mémoire" (204).⁵⁸

The narrator's family, the Fabres, certainly does not manage this feat, approaching their past with neither gravity nor vitality. If the members of the Fabre family are not like the "bourgeois aveugles et stupides de Flaubert" (29), they nonetheless adhere to tradition and concern for their image, focusing on the values of family and money. "La vie d'une grande famille est rythmée par ses rencontres, ses grands dîners, pour les naissances, baptêmes, anniversaires, mariages, enterrements... Et ma famille ne fait pas exception à la règle. Il est vrai qu'elle ne fait exception à rien. Chez nous, les Fabre, la règle est de règle" (29). As the narrator learns, however, many tragic secrets are hidden behind this placid bourgeois façade. And, in keeping with the family values, it is the introduction of a member of a different social class into the family structure that is at the root of the melodramatic story. "Le commerçant du Sentier entrerait dans les salons du boulevard Saint-Germain." (58). David Wagner, the son of a Jewish-Polish immigrant mother who had worked her way up to owning her own dressmaking establishment, dares to look above his family's social station and court Virginie, the daughter of a haute bourgeoisie family.

The romantic story of David and Virginie is primarily told to the narrator by David's brother, Charles, his musty style reminiscent of early 20th century *romans à l'eau de rose*. Charles intones, for example, after their first meeting: "Lorsqu'il redescendit

⁵⁸ Andreas Huyssen makes a similar comment about Berlin in his book *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. "A mix of the old and the new, the creative and the timid – that does not seem all that bad a constellation for a city that has never had the luster of London or the aura of Paris. [...] Berlin as palimpsest implies voids, illegibilities, and erasures, but it also offers a richness of traces and memories, restorations and new constructions that will mark the city as lived space" (83-84).

l'escalier de l'immeuble, quelques minutes plus tard, il n'était plus le même homme” (55). The narrator interjects to deride the expression as “sommaire et éculée” (55), but the snide comment primarily serves to draw attention to the sweet, sepia tone of the story, as if it were a relic from a bygone era. The novel concludes with the narrator imagining David and Virginie in a hotel room and the words “On était au début du monde, avant la chute” (343). The narrator clearly distinguishes two periods, before and after the cataclysm of the Holocaust. If, at the beginning of their affair, it might seem like the name Virginie, which of course brings to mind Paul and Virginie, was a portent of the possible tragedy of their romance, while David represented the optimistic outcome, winning against the Goliath of the haute bourgeoisie family, in the end, it is the name of David that indicates their doomed future, with its association with the Star of David.

Virginie and David's love story is not the only potentially complicated relationship in the novel. While doing research in Berlin, the narrator meets Sophie, a librarian, whom he begins dating, in spite of the fact that their early conversation was about the Second World War, and “le nazisme n'est pas soluble dans la séduction” (209). Their romance is further hindered by the narrator learning that she is the granddaughter of a Nazi, albeit one who was involved in the 20 July 1944 plot, known as Operation Valkyrie, to assassinate Hitler. As with David Wagner, Sophie's grandfather, Friedrich Lachmann, is a fictional character, although the assassination attempt, like the rest of the historical context, is real. Sophie evokes the word hero to refer to her grandfather and at the narrator's shocked response explains: “Vous ne connaissez pas son histoire. Donc pas de préjugés. Et puis je suppose que les familles allemandes ont bien besoin d'un héros, elles ont suffisamment honte comme cela [...] le mot [héros] est sans doute trop fort.

Mais en tout cas, c'était un homme...intéressant" (212). The narrator, as his relationship with Sophie becomes closer, learns more about Lachmann, whose story is also included in the text. Humbert suggests that as time passes and the third generation becomes older, a tension emerges between moving forward with the future and remembering the past. With Sophie and the narrator's relationship, Humbert seems to suggest that both are possible, encouraging a transnational memory that moves forward across borders and boundaries, while not forgetting the tragedies of the past.

Living in the twenty-first century, the narrator and Sophie, unlike David and Virginie, are able to explore their relationship without serious repercussions. The narrator quickly finds a job in Berlin at the French embassy and easily moves to Germany, taking advantage of the peaceful open borders. His earlier daily routine in Paris is not only troubled by the revelations of his investigation, but it is also literally disrupted – thanks to his investigation, he meets Sophie and decides to move to Germany. His investigation helps him find a new, and, it is implied, happier, day-to-day life. Sophie is his first long-term girlfriend and their relationship signals a change in the narrator's focus from the past to the present, and even the future. He does not, however, abandon his historical research, which proves to be a point of contention with Sophie, who has trouble accepting his continued work on his book about the Holocaust. "D'entrée, et avec une dureté qui m'étonna, elle désapprouva ce projet. La littérature concentrationnaire n'avait pas d'intérêt, elle ennuyait tout le monde, parce qu'elle était d'une époque révolue, sur laquelle on connaissait tout ; du reste, on ne faisait pas de littérature avec la souffrance des gens" (223). The narrator does not agree and continues to maintain the importance of engaging in some way with the tragedy of the Holocaust.

The father's dramatic action of threatening, and essentially killing, the Nazi doctor is not, however, recommended by the narrator or the novel. His father sneers: "Vois-tu, le problème avec les jeunes [...], c'est qu'ils se croient toujours les meilleurs. Tu as fait tes petites recherches, tu as bavardé, tu as parcouru des livres et tu penses qu'avec cela, tu connais tout de David Wagner. Moi, j'ai agi" (321). The novel does not dismiss the narrator's investigation as easily. As is the case with Carrère, the almost talking cure like investigation seems to be successful; while the narrator does not dwell on the potentially disruptive effects his investigation had on his father and grandfather, he himself ends the novel in a happy relationship, living in an apartment he loves – "un immeuble *bourgeois*, un appartement *bourgeois*" (222) – in Berlin. Yet, in spite of the bourgeois apartment, the narrator strives not to become too complacent. He makes time in his day-to-day cozy domesticity to continue to pursue his investigation and his novel, suggesting the need to find a way to remember the horrors of the past as part of daily life, to mix the banal and the horrific. Humbert voices a need to remember and not to present a false front, be it in the family or during a school trip to the town of Weimar, the nearest town to Buchenwald. "Visites tour à tour plaisantes, instructives et aimablement grotesques d'une troupe d'élèves [...] parce qu'il n'était pas difficile de comprendre [...] que la ville aux pavés minutieusement joints et aux promenades littéraires dissimulait une mémoire plus agitée, de la République de Weimar aux marches à pas cadencé du III^e Reich" (9). Just as the narrator delves into the dark secrets of his family, so too is the reader encouraged to investigate the past, to pay attention to history that is both "banale et terrifiante," (342) "sans intérêt et fascinante" (342) rather than accepting a simplified, sanitized version.

Le village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller

In *Le Village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller*, the investigation into the Schiller brothers' father is done twice, a double structure that is already hinted at with the title, divided as it is into two halves. Rachel, the older brother, whose nickname comes from a combination of Rachid and Helmut, two names for his two heritages, is the first to investigate. Upon learning of his parents' death in a GIA (Groupe islamique armé) bombing, he returns to Algeria from Paris where he finds clues in his father's belongings to his life in Germany during the Second World War. As he investigates, Rachel learns that Hans Schiller was a member of the SS and a chemical engineer involved in the Final Solution. He fled to Algeria, where he fought in the Algerian War as a *mujahid* and later converted to Islam and married an Algerian woman. Rachel does not share any of his discoveries with his younger brother Malrich (a portmanteau of Malek and Ulrich), who finds Rachel's diaries after he commits suicide. Using the journal as a guide, Malrich begins his own investigation, writing his own diary about it, into which he intercalates sections of Rachel's. The polyphonic novel therefore presents two different ways of investigating the past and processing and responding to the tragedies unearthed.

Like all the investigators studied in this project, Rachel and Malrich are based in France, and the momentum of their investigation takes them out of the Hexagon. Boualem Sansal, however, writes in an Algerian context: although his novels are written in French and published by Gallimard, he continues to live in Bourmedès in his native Algeria.⁵⁹ As he explains in an interview, the issue of writing about the Holocaust was

⁵⁹ According to a profile in *Bibliobs* published in 2015 on Sansal on the occasion of his winning the Grand Prix du roman de l'Académie française for *2084: la fin du monde*: "Il entretient des rapports très étranges

complicated for him given that it is still a taboo subject in Algeria: “En Algérie, la télévision n’a jamais diffusé le moindre documentaire sur les camps d’extermination. Dans l’histoire on ne trouve pas un mot sur elle. Alors, comment parler de quelque chose qui n’existe pas?” (Rousseau). Knowing this, the choice to have one of his investigators (Malrich) discover the horrors of the Holocaust for the first time makes more sense. By describing Malrich’s investigation process, Sansal provides a model for others who might be learning the terrible details for the first time. He insists, however, that he did not want to write a purely factual novel or a historical novel in the traditional model: “Au début, je me suis posé en narrateur, mais, très vite, je me suis aperçu que ça ne fonctionnait pas. Cela prenait la tournure d’un roman historique. C’était trop factuel. Je ne voulais pas de cela. Il me fallait aller au bout de toutes mes interrogations, notamment autour de la transmission, de la filiation” (Rousseau). History is at the core of the novel, but the driving force is the brothers’ investigations and the ways in which they work through the shock of learning about their father’s past. As the readers follow their inquiries, they too are forced to push their interrogations to the limits.

One of the techniques Sansal uses to show the devastating effects of the discoveries the brothers make is to emphasize the material ways in which their day-to-day lives are forever altered. Unlike the narrators of *Un roman russe* and *L’Origine de la violence*, the Schiller brothers are not living comfortable bourgeois intellectual lives. In the words of Malrich: “Il [Rachel] était cadre dans une grosse boîte américaine, il avait sa

avec le pouvoir, auprès duquel il est en disgrâce, mais qui lui accorde toutefois une grande liberté de parole et de mouvement. Ses prises de position tonitruantes, tant sur la question religieuse que sur le conflit israélo-palestinien, lui valent des critiques virulentes de l’intelligentsia algérienne et une hostilité féroce de ses compatriotes.”

nana, son pavillon, sa bagnole, sa carte de crédit, ses heures étaient minutées, moi je ramais H24 avec les sinistrés de la cité. Elle est classée ZUS-1, zone urbaine sensible de la première catégorie” (12). However, having grown up away from their parents, they are also less suspicious that their family might be harbouring a secret. The brothers therefore go about their daily lives worrying about mundane matters, but not concerned about their family past.

As part of his daily routine, Rachel watches the Algerian news. While television watching has been dismissed as a mind-numbing, time-wasting activity, it is also often the source through which major world events erupt into daily life.⁶⁰ Television is part of banal and quotidian life until, with the reporting of a cataclysmic event, it suddenly disrupts the day-to-day routine. As Sansal shows, however, even reports of major political or historical events do not always have a catalyzing effect on the viewers. He argues that this might be partly because of the tendency for television journalists to create false equivalencies, reporting on genocides and *fait divers* in the same manner (28). Not only does this tendency produce a sort of stupefying effect, as viewers numbly watch images of terrible events flicker before their eyes, but it also risks becoming a generalized way of approaching tragedies and disasters. When a girl is kidnapped and likely killed by the fundamental Islamic faction of the *banlieue*, Malrich is concerned by the way his friends copy the tone of television reporting: “Momo et Raymond sont passés au pavillon et m’en ont raconté une terrible, mais ces salauds en parlaient comme d’un fait divers vu

⁶⁰ See for example Karl Popper, *The Lesson of this Century: With Two Talks on Freedom and the Democratic State* (1997) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision, suivi de L’emprise du journalisme* (1996) for discussions of television as a stupefying and banal mass medium. See Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Échographies de la télévision. Entretiens filmés* (1996) for comments on the ways in which television brings the world into the home.

à la télé” (81).⁶¹ Sansal warns against letting the news reported on the television fade into the background of daily life to become only so much white noise.

Sansal’s novel is itself based on a *fait divers*. When in the region of Sétif on assignment for the Ministry of Industry, he came across a village known as “le village de l’Allemand.” The name came from a prominent former inhabitant, a Nazi who had fled Germany after the war, going first to Egypt and then to Algeria, sent by Nasser’s secret service to act as an advisor to the ALN (Armée de libération nationale). After fighting during the Algerian War, he became a naturalized Algerian citizen and converted to Islam (Rousseau). With his novel, Sansal therefore presents another way of recounting a *fait divers*, one that requires more immediate attention and participation from readers than would watching it scroll past on a television news program. Instead, the readers must follow the complicated chronologies of the two investigations (the discourse now) as well as piece together Hans Schiller’s life (the story now). Following the model of the Schiller brothers, the readers are encouraged to break the *fait divers* into its component parts and consider its possible ramifications into the present day.

In spite of watching the news about the Algerian Civil War every night – Rachel’s investigation begins in 1996 – Rachel is only shaken out of his monotonous routine when he sees a report on the bombing of Aïn Deb, his natal village. He inquires further, learning that his parents were killed in the attack, and leaves for Algeria to visit their old house, the beginning of a series of investigations that will lead him across Europe and North Africa, from Istanbul to Germany, Egypt to Poland. Rachel’s “métro-boulot-dodo”

⁶¹ Because of the social specificity of the Parisian *banlieue*, I will use the French term throughout rather than the more generic “suburb.”

life is abruptly shattered. He finds it impossible to maintain his earlier day-to-day life while investigating the atrocities his father was involved in perpetuating. Not only is his routine literally upset by his investigative travels – he is fired from his job for being absent too frequently – but he is also no longer able to return to the banalities of his quotidian routine. His visceral response to his research keeps him from taking the advice of his boss: “Pour le reste, l’Holocauste et toutes les barbaries de ce monde, prie Dieu que cela ne se reproduise jamais. C’est tout ce que tu peux faire” (107). Rachel vehemently refuses this path, maintaining that to respond to evil by consciously repressing, if not forgetting, it is “le mal absolu” (107). He is left, however, at a loss for how to go on. His wife, Ophélie, kicks him out of their house, saying that she cannot stand to live in the midst of a growing library of books dedicated to the Final Solution and the SS. Rachel admits that he would like to return to his peaceful life, before he began his investigation – “Mon Ophélie, la femme la plus difficile du monde, me manque. Je voudrais tant la regagner et retrouver nos petites habitudes de banlieusards avides de tranquillité” (64) – but he finds it impossible to make small talk and converse about mundane issues.

The name Ophélie of course evokes Hamlet, and the reader might initially be worried about her fate. In *Le village de l’Allemand*, however, she escapes the curse of her name, moving to Canada and starting a new family with a new husband. It is Rachel who is unable to continue living with the weight of his discoveries and commits suicide. He writes in his diary: “Je n’ai rien choisi sinon que de vivre une vie tranquille et laborieuse et me voilà sur un échafaud qui n’a pas été dressé pour moi. Je paie pour un autre. Je veux le sauver, parce que c’est mon père, parce que c’est un homme” (305). Rachel takes on the role of victim, judge, and executioner, condemning himself to death in the place of

his father. For Debarati Sanyal, this is the only possible end for Rachel, who finds himself trapped: “As virtual victim and perpetrator, as well as unwitting accomplice by heredity, Rachel is trapped in the re-enactment of a catastrophic event that will always miss its mark since he was never there. His epistemological quest turns into an insatiable ontological hunger” (249). As Sansal clarifies in an interview, Rachel chooses to align himself with the victims, trying to kill off any part of him that is inherited from Hans Schiller. He adds, however, that the act is not without ambiguity: “il veut payer pour son père comme pour lui témoigner son amour et l’absoudre” (Mégevand 112). What the novel does make clear is that, if Rachel’s actions are understandable, he did not need to provide himself to be condemned in the place of his father – the sons are not held responsible for the sins of their father.

While the situation of the Schiller brothers can certainly be explained in postmemory terms, Sansal prefers to think in chivalric language: “Il [Rachel] était peut-être, comme le lui dit son patron, dans la *fascination du Mal*. Il serait comme Lancelot qui malgré ses échecs successifs et la conviction qu’il n’est pas l’ élu, en raison de son amour coupable pour la reine Guenièvre, reste attaché à la quête du fabuleux Graal. L’essentiel ne serait pas d’arriver mais de prendre le départ. D’autres finiront le travail” (Mégevand 113). Rachel passes on the quest to Malrich, who leaves on his own investigation, although this time he has Rachel’s diary as a guide, a model of one possible approach, to be followed or adapted at will.

Malrich’s emotional shock at his brother’s death is accompanied by a physical upheaval in his day-to-day life; he goes on leave from his job at a garage and moves away from his *banlieue* and his friends to live in Rachel’s house *en banlieue*

pavillonnaire. As he reads the diaries, he withdraws even further from his previous life. Malrich must deal with the double shock of discovering not only that his father was a Nazi War criminal, but of learning about the Holocaust itself. In his words: “C’est bête à dire mais je ne savais rien de cette guerre, de cette affaire d’extermination. Ou vaguement, ce que l’imam en disait dans ses prêches contre les Juifs et des bribes attrapées par-ci, par-là. Dans mon esprit, c’étaient des légendes qui remontaient à des siècles” (58). Malrich begins by following in Rachel’s footsteps and travels to Algeria to visit Aïn Deb. However, instead of carrying on to Poland and the extermination camps, Malrich turns his gaze on the *banlieue*, seeing parallels between the Third Reich and the Islamic fundamentalism taking root in his neighborhood.

The fact that Malrich quickly jumps to simplistic analogies is perhaps not surprising – it is after all common to explain new concepts in relationship to what is already known. Sansal takes advantage of this tendency, however, to have his character make shocking statements; describing the neighborhood before and after his trip to Algeria, Malrich writes: “Je devrais dire on avait, parce que depuis l’arrivée du nouvel imam et du nouvel émir, le Quatrième Reich s’annonce à pas de géant. Quand je suis parti, le décor était planté, la propagande tournait à plein régime, la vigilance de fer se mettait en place et le *Blitzkrieg* était dans l’air” (205). Sansal uses the character’s basic ignorance of history and lack of practice in thinking critically to have him voice overly simplistic parallels. If the character of Com’Dad, the police commissioner of the area and a surrogate father to Malrich, warns him against these easy analogies – “Tu fais un télescope entre hier et aujourd’hui” (96) – Malrich’s words nonetheless remain printed in the text, and have provoked much scholarly debate. For Debarati Sanyal, these

analogies are “disquieting” (246): “If Sansal himself subscribes to the analogy between Nazism and Islamic fundamentalism in a number of interviews, his literary portrayal of these analogies in Malrich’s journal entries underscores their comic erasure of historical and ideological specificity” (Sanyal 255). Mireille Rosello contends that “même si l’on prend soin de distinguer le point de vue de l’auteur de celui d’un protagoniste qu’il présente comme un homme jeune et peu instruit, le parallèle est non seulement inattendu mais stupéfiant” (200). Richard J. Golsan, on the other hand, affirms: “But Malrich’s resolve to fight oppression in his own community does not involve grandiose or misguided distortions of history and gross misunderstandings of the present as a result. [...] It simply and humbly resolves to help and rescue those who are oppressed today, in the name of those annihilated by Nazism and the men – Vichy’s servants – who aided and abetted the Nazis in their crimes” (“Paradoxes” 209).

Malrich’s analogies are perhaps simplistic and even shocking, but that is precisely why they are effective. Golsan states that “It may seem ironic that the most positive and constructive use of the memory of the Holocaust and its victims examined here is offered by a fictional, uneducated Algerian youth living in the slums of present-day Paris” (“Paradoxes” 209), but it may not be so ironic. The character of Malrich does not approach his investigation with critical sophistication nor has he been paying attention to decades of debate over hierarchies of memory. He instead breaks the situation down to the essential: he sees similar tendencies towards extremism in the Third Reich and the Islamic fundamentalism taking root in his *banlieue* and he chooses to do what he can to fight injustice. The basic analogy is enough to motivate Malrich to action.

He has the realization: “Je ne puis refaire l’histoire, je ne ressusciterai personne, ni mes parents, ni Rachel, ni cette pauvre Nadia, ni ces millions de gazés dont je ne sais rien, en pleurant sur moi-même. Je dois réagir. Agir. Mais comment?” (137). Malrich’s choice of action comes from Primo Levi’s poem that serves as an epigraph to *Si c’est un homme*: “A mon avis, la vérité est la vérité, elle doit être sue. Comme le dit [le] poète Primo Levi, il faut tout dire aux enfants” (258). Malrich’s first act is to leave Rachel’s house, where he had been living in isolation, and to reconnect with his friends, telling them about the history he had just learned. He teaches them in his own words (Sansal’s approximation of teen slang): “il a décrété que les Juifs, les étrangers, les émigrés, les malades, les bras cassés comme toi Manchot, les malins comme Togo-au-Lait, les phénomènes comme Cinq-Pouces, les bavards comme Idir-Quoi, les sang-mêlé comme moi, les fils de bouchers halal comme Momo, les mous de la tête comme Raymond devaient disparaître” (145). Once again, Malrich draws analogies, this time as a pedagogical tool to help his friends understand that they too could have been victims of the Holocaust.

Malrich progresses from student to teacher in *Le village de l’Allemand*, following the general trajectory of a *bildungsroman*. His investigation doubles as a pedagogical experience, as he learns not only about history, but also how to process and engage with the facts he is learning. By the end of the novel, he has developed more complex strategies of thinking, takes a more active engagement in his community, and assumes the responsibility of teaching the history he has learned to his friends. The open-ended conclusion suggests that his development is in progress; in spite of reconnecting with his friends and committing to fight injustice, Malrich is still devastated by his experiences,

heartbreakingly without family, and unsure of the future. “Avec les copains, on commence à nous dire qu’il est temps pour nous de lever l’ancre et d’aller mourir ailleurs. On se dit aussi qu’il faut s’accrocher et se battre. Un jour, on se jure que ça vaut le coup et le lendemain on se dit que ça ne vaut pas un crachat” (301). He has not, however, completely given up, and, in fact, it is Malrich’s struggle to make sense of his family past and the way in which it might resonate with his present that provides much of the vitality of the novel. The reader watches him grapple with the tragic facts of the Holocaust and the troubling situation emerging in the *banlieue*, begin to be actively involved in his community, and reforge his bond with his friends. The parallels that he draws between past and present are perhaps simplistic, but they might shock the readers into thinking more critically about their own present-day situation and perhaps consider taking action to combat injustice.

Conclusion

Un roman russe, L’Origine de la violence, and Le village de l’Allemand share the basic structure of a “récit de filiation;” but the typical action that Dominique Viart sets out for this kind of narrative, “restituer” in both senses, to reconstitute and to restore, is problematized by the fact that the relatives in question were all involved, to varying degrees, with the Nazi regime. For Viart, “ici c’est rendre leur existence à ceux qui s’en sont trouvé dépouillés, leur conférer une légitimité perdue, leur retrouver une dignité malmenée” (“Éthique” 210). The narrators of these novels must face the issue of how to write about their fathers and grandfathers knowing that they were either petty collaborators – like Carrère’s grandfather, Georges Zourabichvili, or Humbert’s

grandfather, who was involved in routine Vichy administrative collaboration – or active perpetrators, like Hans Schiller. Laurent Demanze writes: “C’est au miroir de l’autre que se découvre d’individu contemporain, élaborant un récit où la fiction se mêle aux souvenirs, et l’écriture de soi à la fable familiale” (*Encres* 10). Again, these texts follow the literary practices typical of the “récit de filiation,” but the narrators here would prefer not to see a reflection of themselves in their ancestors. All the novels insist that, although the sons and grandsons might suffer from inherited postmemory, they are fundamentally cleared of a more serious inherited responsibility for the actions of their family members.

Still, *Le village de l’Allemand* suggests that they bear with them a more small scale and forward looking responsibility, and that their work is a continued vigilance in their daily lives and a fight against injustice and extremism. The investigation into their family past upsets the day-to-day routines of all of the investigators. While the narrators in Carrère and Humbert’s novels seem content to return to a peaceful, bourgeois quotidian, having exorcised the demons of the past, Sansal, through the character of Malrich, argues against complacency. He does not suggest living in an agitated state of constant upheaval, but advocates in favor of paying closer attention to the everyday and attempting to self-consciously think beyond its “taken-for-grantedness.” Felski notes: “Everyday life thus epitomizes the quintessential quality of taken-for-grantedness; it speaks to aspects of our behavior that seem to take place without our conscious awareness or assent and to mundane events that unfold imperceptibly just below our field of vision” (608). Sansal takes inspiration from Primo Levi’s poem “Si c’est un homme,”

which recommends not only a sense of gratitude for a peaceful quotidian but also a position of wariness when faced with the blind routine of day-to-day life.⁶²

Vous qui vivez en toute quiétude
Bien au chaud dans vos maisons,
Vous qui trouvez le soir en rentrant
La table mise et des visages amis,
Considérez si c'est un homme
Que celui qui peine dans la boue,
Qui ne connaît pas de repos
Qui se bat pour un quignon de pain,
Qui meurt pour un oui ou pour un non.

⁶² This is the translation cited in *Le village de l'Allemand* (p. 78).

Chapter Four: The Investigator as Listener

On entend la voix de la mère.

-- Leïla Sebbar

In *Pas pleurer* (2014) by Lydie Salvayre and *La Seine était rouge* (1999) by Leïla Sebbar, the archive examined is a living one, an individual, as the investigators listen to their mothers speak respectively about their experiences during the Paris massacre of October 17, 1961 and the Spanish Civil War. This oral history, like the original double meaning of *historia*, implies both a process and a product (Abrams 2). The novels present both facets, describing the process of receiving the oral history testimony as well as the act of recording it. While the fundamental activity is the same in both novels – a daughter listens to her mother talk about the past – the texts are structurally distinct (only Salvayre’s novel is told in the first person) and have a different relationship to the real (Salvayre’s novel is based on autobiographical material, while Sebbar’s, though the text is based on careful historical research, presents totally fictional characters). Despite these differences, both novels can be loosely described as “récits de filiation”: “Il y va d’une écriture du scrupule. Car il ne s’agit pas de parler ‘à la place de’, de se proclamer ‘porte parole’ pour des générations trop silencieuses. J’y insiste: la démarche de ces écrivains procède par enquêtes” (Viart, “Éthique” 211). In these novels, the work of the investigators is not to speak for the previous generation but rather to record and present their words. They must, though, rely on investigation to illuminate and integrate the past that is relayed to them. Although their mothers are still alive, the daughters hear a filtered account of the past and, in both cases unable to question their mothers for further details, are still charged with a one-sided historical account. In *Pas pleurer*, the mother, Montse,

is 90, confined to a wheelchair, and suffering from dementia. She remembers certain events of the Spanish Civil War with extreme clarity, but is not able to coherently answer all of her daughter's questions. Noria, the mother in *La Seine était rouge*, refuses to speak directly to her daughter Amel, who instead watches an interview her mother did as part of a documentary film. The daughters must therefore rely on their investigations to learn more about the historical events and to contextualize their mothers' accounts.

As demonstrated by the composition of the corpus studied here, the investigative historical novel is not a genre dominated by women writers, although the disparity might be symptomatic of a larger trend in French publishing. Using the Prix Goncourt as a rough, overly simplified indicator, the numbers are nonetheless striking: since 1997, only 4 prizes have been awarded to novels written by women, one of which was *Pas pleurer*. Although the focus of this paper obviously does not afford the attention or necessary space to enter into a larger discussion of gender and the publishing world, this statistic seems nonetheless pertinent when considered alongside the fact that the two examples studied here of investigative historical novels by female authors use oral history, rather than a reliance on archival documents or a commentary on the ways in which their personal lives are disturbed, as a means to access the past.

These novels instead recount the matrilineal transmission of stories through oral history and privilege the woman's voice. They seem to respond to Luce Irigaray's call to recognize and venerate the mother's voice. She writes: "We must not once more kill the mother who was sacrificed to the origins of our culture. We must give her new life, new life to that mother, to our mother within us and between us [...] We must give her the right to pleasure, to *jouissance*, to passion, restore her right to speech, and sometimes to

cries and anger” (43). Assia Djebar cites this passage in her article, “Anamnesis in the Language of Writing,” and stresses the imperative that women speak and be listened to. “For each of these, for each contemporary Algerian Iphigenia, or for each Antigone with no fiancé to accompany her to the grave, alive, to await her death [...] I know now, I am sure that for each woman who must die in the light of day, for each sacrificed woman, for the loss of each immolated woman, a young girl, a single one, in the neighbourhood close by, loses her voice, for weeks or for months, or longer still, sometimes forever” (183). For every Antigone who speaks, there are multitudes who are dehumanized and whose voices are taken away. In *Pas pleurer* and *La Seine était rouge*, women’s voices are valorized and, although they do not speak for them, represent and cry out in solidarity with the many other unvoiced and devoiced women.

Djebar notes: “Ordinarily, young girls do not haunt tragedies. They remain in the shadows, standing behind the curtain, or at most, in the wings” (183). Montse and Noria were 15 and 7 at the time of the massacres of the Spanish Civil War and October 17, 1961. Years after the curtain fell on these events, they emerge from the wings and speak up, adding another voice, even if couched in fictionalized form, to the accounts of these historical events. Like Antigone, a figure who haunts both novels, the women continue to mourn a past not properly laid to rest. In *Pas pleurer*, the mother mourns the death of her brother, killed in a skirmish involving her husband Diego. In *La Seine était rouge*, Amel, Noria’s daughter, is considering acting in a theatrical production of a modified version of *Antigone*.

Pas pleurer becomes a kind of motto for both Sebbar and Salvarye’s novels. The women in them reject the traditional roles reserved for women during times of war,

which, as Nancy Huston notes, tended to call for the production of tears: “the reaction required of the women who occupy several of these peripheral positions with respect to war is that of weeping” (275). Tears were considered a spoil of war, “as though the drops of tears shed by the damsels in distress were interchangeable with and indistinguishable from the drops of blood shed by knights in shining armour” (Huston 277). In *La Seine était rouge* and *Pas pleurer*, the women choose to speak rather than cry. Of her choice of title, Salvayre explains, “Ce titre m’est venu alors que j’écrivais *Sept femmes*. Dans un texte, Marina Tsvetaïeva se plaint – auprès de Pasternak je crois. Elle dit qu’elle a faim, qu’elle a froid. Et tout à coup, elle s’arrête et elle dit: ‘Pas pleurer’. J’ai trouvé que c’était une belle posture existentielle, littéraire, philosophique” (Sulser). In the novel, Montse refuses to cry, despite being forced to flee to France to escape the war in Spain – “elle dut apprendre une nouvelle langue [...] et de nouvelles façons de vivre et de se comporter, pas pleurer” (220). The women in *La Seine était rouge*, although they are on the brink of it sometimes, also do not cry. Three women in the novel hold back tears: “Son visage surtout. Si elle allait pleurer... Amel a fermé les yeux, un instant. Ne pas pleurer” (23) ; “C’est Lalla. Elle ne pleure pas, mais elle va pleurer” (38) ; “La patronne dit : [...] Enfin. C’est vieux. On va pas pleurer” (80). The motto “Pas pleurer” is also the expression of an orientation that faces towards the present and the future rather than towards the past, and is often used to express a response to a situation that cannot be changed. Like Marina Tsvetaïeva, the mothers in these novels do not cry over what cannot be changed. They approach the present and future steadfastly and pragmatically, heroically holding onto their strength to protect their daughters. While the novels encourage the remembrance of past events, they too adopt a “Pas pleurer” approach: rather than advocating for an

obsessive almost self-indulgent lingering over past tragedies, they draw parallels with the present and encourage positive actions towards the future.

The novels present a hybrid temporality and shift fluidly between the recounting of past events and the contemporary discourse of the daughters' investigations. Françoise Lionnet notes about Sebbar's novels, "the hybridization of the literary text in contact with its other – an oral otherness, internal to the text, from which emerges a muted and obscured cultural context – maps out a narrative strategy that establishes a dialogue between 'high' and 'low' culture, between the written record and popular experience, bringing together disparate, often antagonistic traditions and thus proposing a creative alternative to the polarizing and exclusionary approaches of dialectical thinking" (*Postcolonial* 186). A similar process is at work in *Pas pleurer* and *La Seine était rouge*. Oral and written accounts, together with formal historical documents and casual conversations, are combined in one text. As Sebbar asserts, "On produit du texte où l'oral c'est l'écrit et où l'écrit c'est aussi l'oral. Le mot 'mélange' me gêne, on dirait plus 'symbiose', ce sont deux choses qui se mêlent étroitement, on ne peut distinguer ce qui appartient à tel ou tel registre" (Krouch-Guilhem). These novels mix together a variety of voices, oral and written, male and female, old and young, French and non-French, to provide a polyphonic, multidimensional account not only of the historical events examined, but also of the present-day investigative process of the daughters. *Pas pleurer* and *La Seine était rouge* deliberately leave the joints in their construction uncovered; by describing the process of collecting and putting together their pieces instead of simply presenting a polished, neatly plastered final version as the traditional historical novel

would, the texts present their historical narratives as immediate, dynamic, and unfailingly human.

Pas pleurer

Lydie Salvayre's novel *Pas pleurer* affirms on its opening page, "On est en Espagne en 1936. La guerre civile est sur le point d'éclater" (11). This statement initially seems simple and straightforward, but on closer consideration, it reveals the temporal instability of the novel. Who is narrating? And from what time period is he or she speaking? A few pages later, the "on" is revealed. In addition to the reader, it includes the trio of voices that are featured in the novel: "Dans le récit que j'entreprends, je ne veux introduire, pour l'instant, aucun personnage inventé. Ma mère est ma mère, Bernanos l'écrivain admiré des *Grands Cimetières sous la lune* et l'Église catholique l'infâme institution qu'elle fut en 36" (14). The novel therefore oscillates between the discourse now of the narrator and the story now, Montse's account of the summer of 1936, with the added layer of Bernanos's text, cited by the narrator.

Details about the first person narrator emerge slowly. We know that she – deduced by the pet name "chérie" on the second page – is involved in collecting and collating information and eye-witness accounts of the Spanish Civil War and that she is creating a narrative. It is only near the midpoint of the text that she is addressed by name – "Lidia, sers-moi une anisette, ma chérie" (92) – and she is called by her name twice more in the novel. Lidia, a Spanish version of Lydie, seems to gesture tentatively to the author, and Arjona was Salvayre's last name at birth. The protagonist of her novel *Passage à l'ennemie*, Adrien Arjona, also shares this last name. Salvayre has confirmed

the autobiographical inspiration for *Pas pleurer* in interviews, affirming: “J’ai eu un grand bonheur à seulement citer son nom ‘Montserrat Montclus Arjona’, qui, sans ce livre, était voué à disparaître. Ma mère m’avait raconté la façon dont elle avait vécu la guerre civile espagnole entre 1936 et 1939. Elle m’avait raconté cette parenthèse libertaire par laquelle s’ouvrit la guerre et la ferveur qu’alors elle suscita” (Blondeau).

The narrator shares this objective, noting, “cet été radieux que j’ai mis en sûreté dans ces lignes puisque les livres sont faits, aussi, pour cela” (220). Yet, while the narrator, Lidia, shares much with the author, Salvayre is careful not to establish a clear autobiographical pact and answers the question, “A côté de la part documentaire, il y a une part romanesque?” by saying, “Bien sûr. Tout n’est pas autobiographique, quoi que j’en dise au début du livre. Ma mère, mon père sont devenus des personnages” (Sulser).

The first person narrator also becomes a character, albeit a shadowy one. Although her mother’s story is that of the beginning of her parents’ troubled marriage, Lidia takes a self-effacing position. She emphasizes instead her role as listener and her process of understanding and interpreting. As will be studied, she interjects to clarify and respond but her own reactions are secondary to the eye-witness testimony of Montse, leaving the focus, as is typical of Salvayre’s œuvre, on the voices of those to whom less attention is traditionally paid.⁶³ Salvayre has referenced the prejudices faced by Spanish immigrants in France in earlier novels, although, as *Pas pleurer* affirms, her mother was not taken seriously either in her native Spain.⁶⁴

⁶³ Commenting on her earlier work, Warren Motte notes: “Her fiction puts on center stage characters whom we rarely see in the novels we read – mental patients, secretaries, factory workers, impoverished and alienated women from urban housing projects – and, for once, lets them speak” (“Lydie Salvayre” 1010).

⁶⁴ Motte writes that, “From time to time, Salvayre invokes the kinds of prejudices that Spanish refugees had to bear in French society, often speaking through the very voice of prejudice. In *La Vie commune*, for

Montse is introduced to the reader as follows: “ma mère est une mauvaise pauvre. Une mauvaise pauvre est une pauvre qui ouvre sa gueule. Ma mère, le 18 juillet 1936, ouvre sa gueule pour la première fois de sa vie” (11). *Pas pleurer* is proof that Montse is still voicing her opinion near the end of her life. Now living in a village in Southwest France and speaking what Salvayre calls *fragnol*, “cette langue mixte et transpyrénéenne qui est devenue la sienne” (15), Montse tells her second daughter about the summer when she was 15: “cet été 36 pendant lequel elle découvrit la vie, et qui fut sans aucun doute l’unique aventure de son existence” (15). With her anarchist brother, José, Montse leaves her small village and goes to Barcelona, which is swept up with revolutionary fervour. While excited by the general political enthusiasm, Montse is most enamoured of her newfound liberty and new experiences – going to the cinema, eating butter on bread, and, most significantly, falling in love with a dashing French poet. They spend a glorious night together, but neglect to exchange contact information. In the morning he is gone and she never sees him again. She does, however, become pregnant, and bears a daughter, the older sister of the narrator.

The third major voice is that of Georges Bernanos, a Catholic writer who had been involved in his youth with the Action Française. In Salvayre’s words, he is “héritier des vieilles traditions françaises et plus proche en esprit de l’aristocratie ouvrière que de la bourgeoisie d’argent, qu’il exècre” (11). He moved with his family to Majorca in 1934 and was initially supportive of the Nationalists, as was his son Yves, who briefly joined the Falange. Bernanos turned against the movement with horror after witnessing the

instance, Suzanne opines, ‘I know someone who professes Communist ideas, an excessively vulgar woman: an incredibly ill-bred Anti-Franquist Spaniard, and with such rustic manners!’” (“Voices” 24).

massacres perpetuated against innocent people and condoned by the Catholic Church. He began writing about his experiences in the Catholic newspaper *Sept*, publishing eyewitness accounts from 5 June 1936 to 18 January 1937. Salvayre explains, “le cœur soulevé de dégoût, Bernanos assiste impuissant à cette infâme connivence. Puis, dans un effort éprouvant de lucidité qui l’oblige à rompre avec ses sympathies anciennes, il se décide à écrire ce dont il est le témoin déchiré. Il est l’un des seuls dans son camp à avoir ce courage” (12). He expanded his writings on the Spanish Civil War upon his return to France in March 1937, with excerpts appearing in *Le Figaro* in March 1938 before the full length essay, *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*, was published by Plon in April 1938.

This personal and polemical text goes beyond an account of his experiences in Spain. As Martin Hurcombe writes, “ [the] critique of the Spanish Nationalists, a critique based on the atrocities he witnessed in Majorca [...] acts as a springboard for a much broader critique of the Maurrassians, the young right in France, European fascism and the institution of the Catholic Church” (193). The text is also forward looking, critiquing those in France who supported the Nationalists in Spain and looked to them as a model to emulate, as well as warning against the dangers of becoming a nation fiercely divided along Right and Left political lines. “Il l’écrit. Il a ce courage que ses anciens amis ne lui pardonneront pas, qui verront en lui un dangereux anarchiste” (74). While *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* earned Bernanos the respect of many, including Simone Weil, who wrote him a congratulatory letter, it also irrevocably broke many of his right-leaning

friendships.⁶⁵ As Jacques Chabot writes, “Telle est la contribution politique essentielle des *Grands Cimetières sous la lune*: Bernanos prend le parti de l’honnêteté (politique) à l’instant même où l’intoxication psychologique fait une entrée massive dans la guerre moderne” (1411). Bernanos took his role as witness seriously and spoke publicly, even against his old associates, telling the story of those who could no longer speak. However, Salvayre admits in an interview that she was not initially prepared to listen to his testimony: “J’ai attendu plus de soixante ans pour lire Bernanos. Or, je lis *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* et je suis bouleversée, parce que je sais d’où vient Bernanos – ce qui d’ailleurs, stupidement, m’avait empêchée de le lire. Bernanos est étiqueté écrivain catholique, il vient de l’extrême droite, de l’Action française, etc. [...] Or, ce livre me bouleverse et – je vous assure que c’est vrai –, sa lecture terminée, j’écris immédiatement le début de *Pas pleurer*” (Sulser).

As the narrator describes her process: “Je l’écoute [la mère] me dire ses souvenirs que la lecture parallèle que je fais des *Grands Cimetières sous la lune* de Bernanos assombrit et complète. Et j’essaie de déchiffrer les raisons du trouble que ces deux récits lèvent en moi, un trouble dont je crains qu’il ne m’entraîne là où je n’avais nullement l’intention d’aller” (16). In addition to recording her mother’s words and citing excerpts from Bernanos, the narrator also keeps a record of her own progress, presenting herself as a witness to the witness and showing her attempts to understand and make sense of her mother’s story and inscribe it within a larger historical context. She also explores why

⁶⁵ Salvayre notes: “Simone Weil, jeune agrégée de philosophie, envoya à Bernanos une lettre d’admiration qu’il conserva dans son portefeuille jusqu’à ses derniers jours” (215).

she is so troubled by the two narratives, especially when engaging with them in her contemporary context – France in the 2010s.

While the presence of an investigative figure draws attention to the constructed nature of historical narratives, the narrator in *Pas pleurer* also emphasizes its subjective nature, as well as the affective responses potentially involved – we can think again here of Jablonka’s “je d’émotion.” In *Pas pleurer*, even the historical documents referenced are foregrounded as being filtered through the first person narrator. She sets up her additional historical research academically, explaining: “Afin de ne pas m’égarer dans les récits de Bernanos et dans ceux de ma mère, pleins de méandres et de trous, je suis allée consulter quelques livres d’histoire. J’ai pu ainsi reconstituer, de la manière la plus précise possible, l’enchaînement des faits qui conduisirent à cette guerre. Voici ces faits” (84). What follows, however, belies the clarity and simplicity of the introductory statement. Rather than providing the expected list of dates, places, and political leaders, she lists in a multi-page run-on sentence the myriad of reasons for the acrimonious separation not only between Republicans and Nationalists, but also among the various factions of each group. Each section of the rant is rife with biting adjectives and repetition, as she explains, for example, “la déception du peuple espagnol devant les mesures dilatoires prises par la jeune République et les vacillantes volontés de son président, le dénigrement furieux de cette République par une Église insolemment puissante, pourvue de banques insolemment puissantes et d’entreprises insolemment puissantes” (84). This diatribe ends with the exclamation “VOUS AVEZ FAIM, MANGEZ LA RÉPUBLIQUE” (*her capitalization*, 85). It is only after this eruption that the narrator provides the more standard historical facts, beginning with “le 31 mars 1934,

le monarchiste Antonio Goicoechea, le carliste Antonio Lizarza et le lieutenant-général Barrera avaient signé à Rome, avec Mussolini, un accord par lequel le Duce s'engageait à soutenir leur mouvement pour renverser la République espagnole par des financements et des fournitures d'armes" (85-86). The overblown rant, coming immediately after the statement "voici ces faits," and before the more traditional dates and names, suggests that for Lidia, the outrage and injustice associated with the historical events should equally be part of the historical record.

For the narrator, these eye-witness accounts are the major historical sources of interest and are the ones that are cited at length. She generally refrains from citing archival documents, filtering these instead, like the basic historical facts of the Spanish Civil War, through her subjective lens. When she refers to the *Divini Redemptoris*, the anticommunist encyclical issued in 1937 by Pope Pius XI, she presents excerpts in French, without quotation marks, but stating in parentheses after each declaration "je cite": "afin de rompre le silence sur le péril intrinsèquement pervers qui menaçait le monde (je cite). Ce péril menaçant, ce fléau satanique (je cite), c'était le communisme bolchévique et athée" (189). The "je cite" emphasizes not only the fact that the narrator is referencing a historical document, but also creates an effect of accumulation, drawing attention to her outrage at the contents of the documents. Rather than presenting the words without comment, the "je cite" reinforces that she is not inventing the statements, and perhaps could not even imagine such declarations being published by the Catholic church, except for the fact that they exist in the document.⁶⁶ The lack of quotation marks,

⁶⁶ As historian John Pollard explains, "Divini Redemptoris is, first and foremost, a comprehensive and systematic analysis and refutation of Communist ideology, all the way down to its Hegelian and Darwinian

however, also offers her a degree of citational freedom. While the content of her remarks is expressed in the document, she takes the liberty of paraphrasing some of it, citing primarily the expressions “fléau satanique” and “le communisme bolchevique et athée.” The narrator again uses an archival source to elicit indignation, as well as to provide information, when she copies in full the names of the priests who signed the Collective Letter of the Spanish Bishops in support of and justifying Franco and the Nationalists.⁶⁷ The choice to include all the names reinforces the number of high-ranking Catholic priests complicit in the massacre, and the long list carries in itself a sense of the excess of the violence committed.⁶⁸

The narrator further shows her disinclination to simply cite archival documents or history books with her “Petite leçon d’épuration nationale,” an invented and ironic insert into the novel that mimics a historical document. It is a tragically tongue-in-cheek *bricolage* of a variety of sources, shaped into an eight point guide to a national purge, which also carries many historical details about the atrocities committed by the Nationalists. The narrator cites in full – and in Spanish, without a French translation – the opening lines of the first edition of *Arriba España*, a Falangist daily newspaper, as well as a French summary of a statement made in one of his radio broadcasts by Francoist

roots, then an exposition of the causes of the successful worldwide spread of Communism, and finally a restatement of Catholic social teaching as an answer to it” (271). He adds that it was likely inspired by Stalin’s interventions in Spain and the Communists’ increased power.

⁶⁷ About this letter, historian Julian Casanova states: “From a doctrinal point of view, there was nothing new in this Letter that had not already been said by bishops, priests and others in holy orders in the twelve months since the military rising. But the international impact was so great – it had been published immediately in French, Italian and English – that many people accepted permanently the Manichean and tendentious version transmitted by the Church of the ‘armed plebiscite’: that the National Movement personified the virtues of the best Christian tradition and the republican government all the vices inherent in Russian communism” (61).

⁶⁸ Bernanos too was against the letter, writing in *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*: “Vous lirez dans une future histoire de l’Église que la lettre collective de l’Épiscopat espagnol n’a été qu’un emportement du zèle de Leurs Seigneuries, une maladresse regrettable, qui n’engage nullement les principes” (425).

General Queipo de Llano.⁶⁹ The narrator's own words are marked by an ironic detachment, as when she explains the actions of the "Comité d'épuration nationale": "Excités à l'idée de faire sur des hommes l'essai de leur férocité, ils retroussent patriotiquement leurs manches et affûtent patriotiquement leurs armes afin d'éliminer la racaille qui ne pense pas comme il faut et d'inculquer aux réfractaires, par la même occasion, la grandeur de l'esprit national" (80).

This harsh tone returns when the narrator summarizes and incorporates a series of points on the three phases of *épuration* laid out by Bernanos: "épuration à domicile," "épuration des prisons," and "phase terminale." For the purposes of this faux guide, Bernanos's text is treated as a historical document like the *Arriba* and his words are paraphrased without him being cited. But if compared back to *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*, the narrator seems to make his simple declarations even more cold and clinical. Bernanos writes for example:

À deux heures du matin, on les libérait deux par deux. C'est-à-dire qu'au seuil de la porte, ils se trouvaient dans une ruelle déserte, en face d'un camion parmi des hommes revolver au point. 'Silence! Nous vous ramenons chez vous!' On les emmenait au cimetière. (442)

In the "Petite leçon d'épuration nationale," the narrator reduces it to the essential and brutal facts: "Libérés deux par deux, ils sont abattus dès qu'ils franchissent le seuil de la prison, et leurs cadavres sont conduits au cimetière" (82). The lesson ends with an archival document copied from Bernanos's text and presented in its entirety, a form sent out by the Catholic Church collecting personal information from all individuals. Only

⁶⁹ The text is "¡Camarada! Tienes obligación de perseguir al judaísmo, a la masonería, al marxismo y al separatismo. Destruye y quema sus periódicos, sus libros, sus revistas, sus propagandas. ¡Camarada! ¡Por Dios y por la Patria!" (78), which translated into English means, "Comrade! You have the obligation to persecute Judaism, Masonry, and separatism. Destroy and burn their newspapers, books, magazines, and propaganda. Comrade! For God and Country!"

after the layout of the text indicates that the “Petite leçon d’épuration nationale” is finished does the narrator add, in her own first person voice, which had been absent throughout the inserted ‘document,’ that “je lis *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*, dans lequel figure le document retranscrit ci-dessus” (83).

This mixture of citation and paraphrase is typical of the narrator’s inclusion of Bernanos in her text. She describes her reading process, saying, “pour Bernanos, à Palma, ce n’était pas non plus une vie, c’est ce que j’imagine et qui se laisse deviner à la lecture des *Grands Cimetières sous la lune*” (168). Her discussion of the text reflects both the historical content that she gleans from it as well as the way she imagines and broadens Bernanos’s comments. Although they take up only a small percentage of *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*, which is mostly devoted to political and ethical discussions, Lidia is mainly interested in the accounts of massacres and Bernanos’s reflection on his experiences of the Spanish Civil War as a catalyzing force for his writing. She references every passage in the text where Bernanos describes the atrocities he witnessed, occasionally citing them directly, but more generally adapting them for the text she is crafting. Sometimes, the narrator simply breaks up Bernanos’s statements with an interjection. She writes:

Deux cents habitants de la petite ville de Manacor sont jugés suspects, “tirés de leur lit en pleine nuit, conduits par fournées au cimetière, abattus d’une balle dans la tête, et brûlés en tas un peu plus loin.” L’évêque-archevêque de Palma a délégué là-bas l’un de ses prêtres en jupons qui, ses gros souliers pataugeant dans le sang, distribue les absolutions entre deux décharges, puis trace sur le front des morts à l’huile consacrée la croix qui leur ouvrira les portes du Ciel. Et Bernanos de noter: “J’observe simplement que ce massacre de misérables sans défense ne tira pas un mot de blâme, ni même la plus inoffensive réserve des autorités ecclésiastiques qui se contentèrent d’organiser des processions d’actions de grâce.” (42)

The narrator's addition in between Bernanos's words is inspired by his text: "Le personnage que les convenances m'obligent à qualifier d'évêque-archevêque avait délégué là-bas un de ses prêtres qui, les souliers dans le sang, distribuait les absolutions entre deux décharges" (422). While providing the same information, the version in *Pas pleurer* amplifies the grotesque element of the scene, "les gros souliers" evoking those of a terrifying clown. The use of "jupons," while of course referring to the priest's robes, also invokes other meanings of the word, including the old-fashioned "light skirt," emphasizing the corruption of the Catholic Church and suggesting that its morals are loose.

She also sometimes reworks his text to add a more novelistic tone and deepen the affective power of the anecdotes. Bernanos writes:

On les raflait chaque soir dans les hameaux perdus, à l'heure où ils reviennent des champs; ils partaient pour le dernier voyage, la chemise collée aux épaules par la sueur, les bras encore pleins du travail de la journée, laissant la soupe servie sur la table et une femme qui arrive trop tard au seuil du jardin, tout essoufflée avec le petit baluchon serré dans la serviette neuve." (400)

Salvayre proposes instead:

C'est le déclin du jour. L'air est plus frais sur la route qui conduit au village. Un paysan rentre chez lui, sa besace à l'épaule qui contient la gourde et le quignon de pain. Il est fatigué. Il a faim. Il a hâte d'arriver dans sa maison et de s'asseoir. [...] L'épouse a disposé les écuelles sur la table, et au centre: le pain, le vin et la soupe chaude. Elle allume la lampe à huile et s'assied en attendant son mari dont la présence, aux approches de la nuit, la rassure contre les ombres noires qui s'allongent lentement sur le sol. Elle entend son pas familier qu'elle reconnaît entre mille autres. Mais avant même que son mari n'ait eu le temps de s'asseoir, une équipe d'épilleurs, dont certains n'ont pas seize ans, surgit dans la maison, et le fait monter à l'arrière d'un camion. C'est le dernier voyage. (56)

She paraphrases and shortens Bernanos's sentences to add drama and immediacy, and begins by setting the scene, as if transporting the reader to the country road. The plural

“ils” becomes “un,” an indefinite article, but a singular one, focusing the story on one man and individualizing the victim. Salvayre also develops the figure of the wife, making her part of the scene rather than relegated to the garden, although in each version she is equally helpless.

Just as the narrator manipulates, modifies, and edits Bernanos, adding more novelistic and emotional elements, so too does she shape Montse’s story, smoothing out and clarifying some of the exuberant statements of her mother. Salvayre sometimes cedes the narrative voice to Montse, in a kind of modified *skaz*, the Russian oral form of narrative, “unique because the author speaks through a narrator whose discourse is socially and intellectually removed from his own” (Jones 3). According to Bakhtin, *skaz* is distinguished by its “double-voicedness and by the intertwining of two voices and two accounts” (159), which creates a “dialogic angle where the author’s voice and the narrator’s are juxtaposed and in conversation with each other” (Jones 4). In *Pas pleurer*, the traditional *skaz* is adapted – it is the narrator who is in dialogue with Montse, who becomes from time to time a sort of secondary narrator. This technique allows Lidia to showcase Montse’s linguistic verve, as well as her continued enthusiasm for new expressions – on learning of the term “une peau de chagrin,” for example, Montse exclaims “que cette expression est belle!” (116). Although the narrator lightly complains about “ce français bancal dont elle use, qu’elle estropie serait plus juste, et que je m’évertue constamment à redresser” (89), she also admires her mother, who worked hard to learn French – “elle qui s’était tant évertuée, depuis son arrivée en France, à corriger son accent espagnol, à parler un langage châtié et à soigner sa mise pour être toujours plus conforme à ce qu’elle pensait être le modèle français” (66). Lidia also appreciates

the joy her mother now finds at 90 years old in throwing convention to the wind and using profanity with great gusto: “[elle traite] son épicier de connard, ses filles (Lunita et moi) de culs serrés, sa kiné de salope et [profère] son couille putain et merde dès que l’occasion se présente” (66).

However, while Lidia enjoys and values her mother’s linguistic exuberance and many digressions, she also works to streamline the narration and, for part of Montse’s story, assumes the position of an extradiegetic narrator. In these sections, she uses a fairly traditional storytelling style to recount the tale of Montse and her anarchist brother, José, as well as Diego, José’s rival and Montse’s eventual husband, and their respective families. She makes declarative statements, such as, “le 29 juillet, José annonce à Montse qu’il a pris la décision ferme de quitter la maison” (61) or “Puis un événement va précipiter sa décision” (106), and occasionally adds to this account with narratorial intrusions enclosed in parentheses, offering explanation or context. Speaking of José, inspired by the anarchist discourse, she notes, “dans une éloquence fiévreuse, il dit à son auditoire (lequel se limite pour l’instant à sa mère et à sa sœur) qu’à Lerima une aube splendide s’est levée (il a une propension naturelle au lyrisme), que l’Espagne est enfin devenue espagnole et lui espagnolissime” (20). The narratorial interventions in the sections devoted to Montse and her companions do not tend to divulge the narrator’s emotional response, but rather remain factual, unlike the outrage she showed when discussing the historical facts.

Lidia even remains emotionally removed when reporting her mother’s words about Diego, who says of her spouse, now dead for 5 years: “D’ailleurs je me demande comment j’ai pu, on dit pu?, comment j’ai pu passer avec lui tant de jours, tant de nuits,

tant de cènes, tant d’anniversaires, tant de Noël, tant de soirées télé et tant de tout, année derrière année, sans en conserver le moindre raccord” (96). The next line reads, “Les quatre sortent du café. Montse, qui se sent des ailes, déclare que la vie est un enchantement, un encanto” (96). This textual smash cut, from the present back to Barcelona in the 1930s, from the first person to the third person, is typical of *Pas pleurer*, but in this instance creates a particularly strong juxtaposition between the incandescent joy of the young Montse and her adult endurance of an unhappy marriage, which, as the repetition of “tant de” makes very clear, felt like it lasted forever. Lidia, however, does not implicate herself in her mother’s words, or respond to them. While the reader can imagine how Lidia too might have suffered during her parents’ unhappy marriage, she does not discuss her own feelings, keeping the focus on her mother’s story.

Montse is a colorful, exciting speaker, but her words seem to act particularly powerfully on her daughter, often invading the narrator’s extradiegetic narration, as if the strength of her mother’s voice is such that Lidia cannot help but cede to her. The text reads, for example, “Montse, Rosita, José et Juan arrivent le soir du 1^{er} août dans la grande ville catalane où les milices libertaires se sont emparées du pouvoir. Et c’est la plus grande émotion de leur vie. Des heures inolvidables (me dit ma mère) et dont le raccord, le souvenir ne pourra jamais m’être retiré, nunca nunca nunca” (88). Not only does this passage show the slippage between Montse’s voice and Lidia’s narration, but it also mixes oral and written text without clearly separating the two. It is the explanatory “me dit ma mère,” presumably written like the previous sentence, that is separated out by parenthesis, while Montse’s spoken words and Lidia’s written words remain on the same plane. Sometimes, her mother’s lexical choices slip into the text, before being

commented on: “Elle mange du veurre pour la première fois au petit déjeuner (on dit veurre ou beurre ma chérie? me demande ma mère qui confond les deux sons, je sais jamais), et non du lard comme elle en a l’habitude” (97). The lack of quotation marks or dashes to indicate the beginning of spoken words is typical of *Pas pleurer*, which only uses quotation marks for Bernanos and a few historical documents. Otherwise Montse’s words and Lidia’s merge together, the written version integrated with the spoken word, becoming a kind of *écriture feuilletée*, with the mother’s narrative as an oral history document and Lidia, the historical investigative voice commenting on it.

As is typical of oral history, *Pas pleurer* presents both the process and the final result. Not only does Montse’s story switch from her voice to Lidia’s third person narrative, but it also oscillates between the events of 1936 and the conversation between mother and daughter occurring in 2011. Just as Montse’s words enter into Lidia’s account, so too does she modify her speech based on her daughter’s comments: “Alors quand on se retrouve en la rue, je me mets à griter (moi: à crier), à crier Elle a l’air bien modeste, tu comprends ce que ça veut dire ?” (13). The 15 year old Montse is reacting to being called modest, and once again, the added dialogue is introduced only by a capital letter, allowing the voices of the two Arjona women merge and overlap. This also has the effect of blurring the demarcation between past and present, as with the statement: “Dis-moi que ça ne va pas arrêter, je me disais, me dit ma mère” (91). This set of nested speech indications is a microcosmic example of the temporal *brouillage* at work in *Pas pleurer*, as if the 21st century and 1930s Spain are being experienced simultaneously. For Montse, this means continuing to relive the glory of her love affair with the debonair poet. “Aujourd’hui elle est vieille, le visage ridé, le corps décrépité, la démarche égarée,

vacillante, mais une jeunesse dans le regard que l'évocation de l'Espagne de 36 ravive d'une lumière que je ne lui avais jamais vue" (15). It also means that she continues to wonder, with lingering anguish, even after 70 years, about the fate of her poet. For Lidia, the era of the Spanish Civil War also merges with her present. "Je m'avise du reste, chaque jour davantage, que mon intérêt passionné pour les récits de ma mère et celui de Bernanos tient pour l'essentiel aux échos qu'ils éveillent dans ma vie d'aujourd'hui" (135). This is not the first time that Salvayre voices this opinion, asserting in an interview with Flavia Conti: "Il n'y a pas [...] de frontières étanches entre un passé abject et un présent immunisé, réconcilié, apaisé. Et le désastre, me semble-t-il, se perpétue encore sous la forme de l'amnésie ou sous la forme de la mémoire commémorative, étatisée, fétichisée, figée, bref la mémoire morte" (85). These statements were made in reference to her 1997 novel *La Compagnie des spectres*, but although the history in question in that text is the Nazi Occupation of France, the statement is equally applicable to *Pas pleurer*.

And indeed, the novels have many similarities. The central characters in both texts are mother-daughter duos, who share a penchant for flamboyant Spanish-inflected profanity, the French women of *La Compagnie des spectres* having been taught by Filo, a refugee from the Spanish Civil War. Both mothers also continue to mourn the deaths of their brothers, José during a skirmish involving Diego in his town during the chaos of the Spanish Civil War, and Jean at the hands of collaborators.⁷⁰ While the daughter is the primary narrator in both novels, in *La Compagnie des spectres*, it is Rose-Mélie, the mother, who is the researcher, throwing herself with crazed passion into her investigation into French collaborators, whom she holds responsible for the death of her brother.

⁷⁰ *La Compagnie des spectres* is also dedicated to Montse.

Obsessed with this history, she lives buried under her research documents and adrift between past and present, seeing the ghosts of the Occupation everywhere, including on the news: “Aujourd’hui ils [the spectres] sont à Alger, comme le montre le reportage, demain ils seront en Égypte, ils vont là où la mort pue, et la mort pue en maintes endroits de la planète, il faut bien le reconnaître. (Le speaker annonce la découverte d’un charnier au Rwanda)” (150). As Louisiane, her daughter, explains, “Ma mère, qui a beaucoup souffert, habite synchroniquement le passé et le présent” (29). Yet, as the novel suggests, the parallels Rose-Mélie draws between past and present are not crazy, and the spectres of violence are the same across geographical and temporal boundaries.

In *La Compagnie des spectres*, Rose-Mélie stirs up the past with such fervour that it sweeps her daughter up into an eruption of violence as they attack the bailiff, sent to catalogue their possessions pending their eviction, and kick him down the stairs. Louisiane reports with glee: “Nous le propulsâmes le long de l’étroit couloir avec une énergie dont je ne nous croyais pas capables, mais la joie et la colère, je l’appriis en cet instant, décuplent nos élans. Avant d’ouvrir la porte, maman, doctement, déclara, citant Marcus Caton, Il faut faire avec le méchant comme avec l’ouragan le marin. Et sur ces belles paroles, nous le jetâmes dehors. Dans l’ouragan” (188). The pain and violence of the past have festered to the point where it must explode. Marie-Pascale Huglo contends that, “En jetant l’huissier par (à) la porte, Louisiane rejoint le camp de sa mère et des femmes révoltées pour, symboliquement, venger la mort, l’injustice, et renverser l’ordre établi” (*Le Sens* 42). Published 17 years after *La Compagnie des spectres*, *Pas pleurer* ends on a less cathartic and more stoic note. While Montse keeps her joyful memories of the summer of 1936, she also finds herself living in “un hiver interminable dans un

village du Languedoc” (220), forced to flee Spain as a refugee, and married to a man she finds repulsive and who, if he did not administer the killing blow, was nonetheless involved in the skirmish where her brother died.

Salvayre shows that it is not only the events themselves that stay with people, but also the words associated with them. Montse proudly tells her daughter that, thanks to her experiences in the revolutionary-fevered city, she learned many new words: “j’aurais augmenté mon patrimoine des mots: despotisme, domination, traîtres capitalistes, hypocrisie bourgeoise, cause prolétarienne, peuple saigné à blanc, exploitation de l’homme par l’homme et quelques autres [*sic*]” (62). She also learned about nationalism, as has Lidia herself. In the most political moment of the text, Salvayre, through the voice of Lidia, muses on the implications of the word nationalist:

Il me semble que je commence à savoir ce que le mot national porte en lui de malheur. Il me semble que je commence à savoir que, chaque fois qu’il fut brandi par le passé, et quelle que fût la cause défendue [...] il escorta inéluctablement un enchaînement de violences, en France comme ailleurs. [...] Ce que je sais, c’est que Schopenhauer déclara en son temps que la vérole et le nationalisme étaient les deux maux de son siècle, et que si l’on avait depuis longtemps guéri du premier, le deuxième restait incurable. (76)

In spite of Schopenhauer’s insistence on the impossibility of curing nationalism, Lidia, the narrator, commits to writing about the dual experiences of the Spanish Civil War – her mother’s joyful experience of the libertarian interlude and Bernanos’s terror – as well as her own process of studying it in the context of the early 21st century. She is not, however, without hesitation, and wonders, like Bernanos before her: “Qu’a-t-il à gagner à cette entreprise? Et qu’ai-je moi-même, me dis-je, à gagner à la faire revivre? A quoi bon touiller cette saloperie dont l’univers s’est écœuré? se demandait un autre de mes admirés, Carlo Emilio Gadda, dans les premières pages d’un livre qu’il mena jusqu’au

bout sur l'abjection mussolinienne" (73). Gadda also appears in *La Compagnie des spectres* as the epigraph quote, which contains the answer to the question :

Bon, te dis-je, sois sage, calme-toi, car le passage de la folie à la vie raisonnable ne pourra se faire qu'en dressant l'inventaire des arrêts obscurs qui ont déchainé les pulsions obscures, lesquelles, rompant les liens de tous usages et fuyant dans le jour et le siècle, crurent pouvoir parer des plumes d'autrui et des fastes de leurs mensonges la lumière de la vie, alors que c'étaient ténèbres et perdition.

The passage is taken from Gadda's 1967 satirical pamphlet, *Eros et Priape*, which, based on his experiences in Mussolini's Italy, strongly condemns fascism. Lidia takes her cue from him, attempting to trace the sequence of events calmly and to strip them of their plumage. Unlike neatly ordered historical accounts or shiny memorials, both *Pas pleurer* and *La Compagnie des spectres* suggest that the violent and totalitarian impulses that led to the Spanish Civil War and the Occupation are not laid to rest and buried. She affirms that, "*La Compagnie des spectres* n'est pas un roman historique qui prend la guerre de 40 comme décor complètement séparé des vies des gens, ce que j'ai envie de vous dire là c'est que les questions posées par les désastres de 40 sont les miennes aujourd'hui, que les voisins vigilants c'est ma question aujourd'hui, que l'état de guerre permanent c'est ma question aujourd'hui, et que la menace d'un régime xénophobe et raciste c'est ma question aujourd'hui" (Conti 85). As the discourse on nationalism implies, *Pas pleurer* is equally not a simple historical novel, but rather one that occurs synchronically in the past and the present.

Lidia is herself a representation of the link between past and present, the child of two immigrants to France, who continues to be a living incarnation of their past. Montse and Diego were forced to flee Spain in January 1939 as the Nationalist army neared their village. Separated from her husband, Montse left: "à pied, avec Lunita dans un landau, et

une petite valise noire où elle avait rangé deux draps et des vêtements pour sa fille. Une dizaine de femmes et d'enfants l'accompagnaient" (218). The archetypal image of the refugee mother is a powerful one, echoing back to Mary and Jesus, and forward to the continuing refugee crisis of the 21st century. Montse, with Lunita, her baby, "dormit enveloppée dans une mince couverture marron qui laissait pénétrer l'humidité du sol (ma mère: cette couverture tu la connais, c'est la couverture de repassage" (219). The cloth has been repurposed and reused, but has not disappeared. It becomes in the text a physical symbol of the continuity between past and present. Perhaps not coincidentally, it is now used for ironing, in French – repassage. In 1994, Eric Conan and Henry Rousso famously dubbed "les années noires" of the Occupation, "ce passé qui ne passe pas," a statement that continues to hold true in the 21st century. Salvayre suggests not only that the interest in the past has not passed, but that it will continue to come back, as "ce passé qui repasse." Historical events, both individual and national, continue to resonate and merit, according to Salvayre, continuing to be studied, to be gone over again, "repassé." She also seems to warn against the risk of having to "repasser l'histoire" in the sense of "repasser un examen" – of having not paid sufficient attention to the lessons given and be forced to re-experience the devastation of a nation divided.

Pas pleurer is about darkness and light, the two sides of the moon as represented by Montse and Bernanos. The two accounts of the Spanish Civil War initially seem vastly different, not only in terms of their style, but also their substance, one person having experienced the summer of 1936 with great joy and light and the other with deep darkness and sorrow. Bernanos references the dark side of the moon, its light only illuminating cemeteries. For Montse, it was the best summer, where she met the man who

would be the love of her life and the father of her beloved daughter, named Lunita. Bernanos and Montse's accounts, one written in scholarly French, the other told in riotous *fragnol*, also reflect the two major linguistic traditions of the narrator. She seems to experience a similar dichotomy to Lydie Salvayre herself, who explained in an interview given in 2009 to Paule Constant: "L'espagnol va devenir la langue du dedans, la langue de l'intime, des ripostes intérieures, la langue qui prend en charge tout ce que ne peut porter la langue du dehors. [...] Le français, parallèlement, m'apparaît comme la langue de l'école, la belle langue des livres, la langue contrôlée, parfaite, grammaticale." In addition to reminding readers of the horrors Bernanos saw on Majorca and the dire warnings he gave of the risks associated with a divided France, Salvayre's very act of writing her mother's story and of showing her unique and creative language is also a political act, although not explicitly polemicized in the novel. She admits: "Cela répondait aussi à un désir politique de poser la question suivante: les mots immigrés sont-ils une menace pour la belle langue française? Question à la fois politique et littéraire. Eh bien non. Les mots immigrés, étrangers, revisitent le français et même s'ils l'estropient ou le malmènent, ils y font naître des sens nouveaux. Ils poétisent la langue française" (Sulser). *Pas pleurer* bears out the truth of this statement. Montse's language inspired her daughter's writing, leading even to the Prix Goncourt.⁷¹

If *Pas pleurer* is a warning to be wary of rampant nationalism, it is also an optimistic text. Her mother has kept one of her happiest memories, the summer when she

⁷¹ Not everyone agreed that Spanish influence on Salvayre's text was effective. The President of the Académie Goncourt, Bernard Pivot made the following statement: "Nous avons d'abord couronné un roman d'une grande qualité littéraire, un livre à l'écriture très originale, même si je regrette qu'il y ait parfois trop d'espagnol" (Riou).

fell in love and became a mother, amidst the ravages of dementia, and, by writing her text, the narrator manages to preserve this joyful memory, “cet été radieux que j’ai mis en sûreté dans ces lignes puisque les livres sont faits, aussi, pour cela” (221). For the first person narrator, while there are historical horrors to be investigated, her work also brings her happiness: “Ma mère s’appelle Montserrat Monclus Arjona, un nom que je suis heureuse de faire vivre et de détourner pour un temps du néant auquel il était promis” (14).⁷² Unlike *La compagnie des spectres*, *Pas pleurer* does not end with a cathartic eruption of violence. Instead, it ends with the two women, mother and daughter, enjoying a moment of daily happiness. The novel ends with a dialogue between the two women:

Si tu nous servais une anisette, ma chérie. Ça nous renforcerait la morale. On dit le ou la?
On dit le. Le moral.
Une petite anisette, ma Lidia. Par les temps qui galopent, c’est une précaution qui n’est pas, si j’ose dire, surnuméraire. (221)

If the anisette is to help keep up their morale in troubling times, it is also a reminder of the importance of pausing to appreciate small pleasures, enjoyed in the company of loved ones.

La Seine était rouge

In “La Seine était rouge,” an article published in *Le Maghreb littéraire* in 1998, Sebbar writes about being a student in Aix-en-Provence on October 17, 1961: “J’entends les voix de la radio, les voix dans la rue; et répétés, des mots me parviennent” (95). What the voices were evoking were the violent events in Paris, a massacre that would become

⁷² Salvayre’s mother had passed away 7 years before the publication of *Pas pleurer* (Sulser).

the subject of Sebbar's 1999 novel of the same name. Approximately 30 000 Algerian men, women, and children took part in a peaceful demonstration in Paris. It was organized by the FLN to protest the "spatial segregation that had been reinforced by violent police oppression and, since 5 October, by a discriminatory night-time curfew imposed uniquely on Algerian workers" (House and MacMaster 1). On the orders of the Préfet de Police, Maurice Papon, law enforcement officers attacked the peaceful protesters, making over 11 000 arrests, deporting many to Algeria or interning them in prisoner of war camps, and killing hundreds. Demonstrators were pushed in the Seine, where many drowned, while other bodies were simply dumped in the river or neighbouring woods. It is estimated that there were between 200 and 300 casualties (Einaudi 14), making it "the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history" (House and MacMaster 1).

Although this violence occurred in the heart of Paris – key locations included Concorde, the Grands Boulevards between République and Opéra and the area around Saint-Michel – talk of it was quickly silenced. Papon, a high-level collaborator during the Occupation and already used to obfuscation, denied the deaths and the press did not publish any further reports. Sebbar says, "la journée du 17 octobre 1961 a été évoquée à la radio. Puis oubliée" (Gouëset). For Michel Laronde, this massacre is an 'acte forclos': "c'est-à-dire un acte qui a été consciemment mis hors du lieu de l'histoire officielle par le silence institutionnel; en ce sens, il a été frappé d'exclusion" (147). The events of the massacre were described in a mass-market publication for the first time in 1984 in Didier Daeninckx's novel *Meurtres pour mémoire*, published as part of Gallimard's *Série noire* collection. Another major historical work was published the next year: Michel Levine's

Les Ratonnades d'octobre: Un meurtre collectif à Paris en 1961 was based on detailed research and witness interviews, although the French government continued to refuse access to the official police and judicial records (House and MacMaster 6).⁷³ In 1991, Jean-Luc Einaudi published *La Bataille de Paris, 17 octobre 1961*, a ground-breaking investigation into the events. That same year, young French-Algerians organized a commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the massacre (“À la recherche” Higgins 207).

The second major phase of research and commemoration of the 1961 massacre began in October 1997 with the trial of Maurice Papon for crimes against humanity. Although the trial was primarily about his actions during the Second World War, Jean-Luc Einaudi also gave extensive testimony about Papon’s complicity in the 1961 police violence. In the aftermath of the trial, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin spoke of the “guerre d’Algérie” for the first time and opened the archives of October 17, 1961 (Stora 26). In “La Seine était rouge,” Sebbar stresses the importance of this: “Le 17 octobre, désormais la France sait (on ouvre les Archives, elles ne mentent pas) ce qui s’est passé le 17 octobre à Paris, en 1961. Papon, le préfet de Paris, l’a nié, le tribunal de Bordeaux dira la vérité sur les morts de ce jour-là et que la Seine, fleuve mélancolique de Guillaume Apollinaire, cache en elle des corps algériens” (98). A café waiter in *La Seine était rouge* also references the impact of the Papon trial, explaining, “J’ai voulu témoigner, j’ai pas eu l’occasion et là, à ce comptoir, c’est à vous que je parle, pour la première fois, trente-cinq ans après. J’ai oublié, au cours des années. Il faut travailler, on travaille, on oublie. C’est l’affaire Papon qui a remué tout ça” (79).

⁷³ House and MacMaster explain: “At this time there was still little public interest in the events and Levine was so disillusioned at the lack of response to his findings that he destroyed all his valuable research notes (6).

The Papon trial also coincided with a new generation, the children and grandchildren of the participants in the protest, who began to show a greater interest in the past. As Laronde notes, “Dans *La Seine était rouge*, Leïla Sebbar montre bien la démarche, puisqu’elle part de la génération des petits-enfants issus de l’immigration, qui cherche à préserver l’Histoire, et c’est assez rarement l’initiative de la génération issue de cette immigration, celle qui a été éduquée en France, de dénoncer les silences et les déviations de l’Histoire” (146). In Sebbar’s novel, it is three young people, initially linked by their mothers’ friendship, who engage in an investigation to find out more about the massacre of October 17 and process the information they learn. The daughter of Noria and granddaughter of Lalla, Algerians settled in France, Amel, 16, chafes against their refusal to talk to her about October 17. Louis, a documentary filmmaker, is the son of French *porteurs de valise*, while Omer, at 27 the oldest of the three, is an Algerian journalist, exiled to France. About her motivation to write this novel, Sebbar explains, “Je l’ai écrit, je crois, parce que je voulais comprendre, comme les adolescents que je rencontrais, ce terrible 17 octobre dont je savais si peu” (Gouëset), a sentiment echoed by Amel – “dis-moi Lalla, dis-moi... quand je saurai?” (9), and Louis – “je dois savoir, pas tout, mais comprendre un peu... je ne sais plus ce que ça veut dire être révolutionnaire, aujourd’hui, à la fin des années quatre-vingt-dix, nos années, notre fin de siècle” (18).

The issue of delving into the French-Algerian past recurs throughout Sebbar’s work, particularly in *Shérazade* (1982), which follows a young French-Algerian girl across Paris, from library to library, as she tries to find not only a home in the city but also more about her Algerian heritage. Many years later, with her illustrated *Algéries en France* trilogy (*Mes Algéries en France. Carnet de voyage* (2004), *Journal de mes*

Algéries en France (2005), and *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* (2008)), Sebbar shows her own personal investigative work by exhibiting the various curios, photos, and archives she had collected. About *Shérazade*, Françoise Lionnet writes: “Its objective is a practice of difference that targets not only the fictional domain, the telling of a story and the narration of history [...] but also the cultural context of the narrative, the broad domain of everyday practices, the symbolic realms of our pluralistic, polyphonic, and intertwined societies” (*Postcolonial* 173).

This valorization of plurality, polyphony, and interconnectedness is also foregrounded in *La Seine était rouge*, which is composed of 37 short chapters, dedicated to a multiplicity of different voices. While the sections focused on Amel, Omer, and Louis are primarily composed of their conversations with each other or with their mothers, there is also first person testimony from a variety of witnesses to the events of October 17, including café owners, police officers, and a student, as well as a transcription of Amel’s mother’s testimony, filmed for Louis’s documentary. This sense of capturing spoken testimony is reproduced in the rest of the novel, which reads like the script of a play or a film. The words of the first person witnesses are introduced by the setting of their testimony, given in italics, like the *didascalie* of a play. Omer, Amel, and Louis’s reactions are also primarily transmitted through dialogue, with the extradiegetic narrator giving information only about their physical movements and locations, which read somewhat like stage directions. The text mimics the structure of Louis’s movie, giving the entire novel the feel of a documentary film.

La Seine était rouge begins in *media res*, in the middle of a conversation between Amel and her grandmother, Lalla. The latter is refusing to tell her granddaughter about

something traumatic in the family history, but the specific event is not revealed until the third chapter. “Sa mère ne lui a rien dit ni la mère de sa mère” (9). Like Amel, the reader experiences the unsettling feeling of not knowing what the events in question are, but only knowing that nothing has been told. The chain of communication between the three generations of women has been broken. On Lalla’s part, she is worried about the day when she must share the secret with her granddaughter: “Des secrets, ma fille, des secrets, ce que tu ne dois pas savoir, ce qui doit être caché, ce que tu apprendras, un jour, quand il faudra. Ce jour viendra, ne t’inquiète pas, ce jour viendra et il ne sera pas bienheureux pour toi?” (9). While looking forward to the future, Noria and Lalla omit to consider the present, leaving Amel questioning and confused.

Throughout the novel, dialogues are transcribed without starting a new line for each voice and are instead amalgamated together in one paragraph. In the opening dialogue between Amel and Lalla, this produces an almost claustrophobic effect, as if the voices are covering each other. Every effort of the young woman to push the conversation towards the massacre is blocked by Lalla, giving Amel the sense of being hemmed in, faced with the impenetrable darkness of the past. Blocked by her family’s refusal to talk about the past, Amel is forced to seek out other channels and other companions, primarily finding support in Omer. Amel decides to return Lalla and Noria’s silence with her own. That the situation is fraught for all three generations of women is highlighted by the chapters where the two older women, make frantic and worried phone calls to see if there is news of Amel: “Je te demande rien, mais dis-moi si tu l’as vue... Si tu sais où elle est. Dis-moi qu’elle est vivante, Flora, dis-moi” (61). In some ways, Lalla’s prediction of it being a “jour pas bienheureux” comes to pass, but it is for her and Noria,

who temporarily lose contact with Amel, rather than for the girl herself, who says that she would tell them, “[que] j’ai appris la vérité, pas toute la vérité, que ce jour n’a pas été un jour de Malheur comme le prédisait Lalla” (95). Yet in spite of Amel’s brave words, she too seems to be more troubled by her discoveries than she lets on, and the rest of the novel is about her delving into the reverberating implications of October 17, 1961, for herself, for her family, and for both French and Algerian history, especially given the Algerian Civil War that was raging concurrently to her investigation (the novel is set in 1996).

As she begins to delve further into the events of October 17, 1961, Amel’s investigative process is initially unsure. Like all good students, she goes first to the library, “la bibliothèque Pierre-et-Marie-Curie, l’autre maison d’Amel” (23). But her progress is criticized by Omer for being vague and untargeted: “On cherche ton bidonville sans indice, sans repère, comme ça, à l’aveugle. Va à la mairie, regarde le cadastre, le plan de la ville dans les années soixante, aujourd’hui, relève ce qui peut te servir” (30). Amel responds that she is not interested in following this style of research, and indeed, her further investigation takes her neither to the library nor the archives. Although inspired by the groundbreaking researchers, artists, and witnesses who brought the massacre of October 17, 1961 into the light – Sebbar says in an interview “Par ailleurs, le travail d’Elie Kagan, photographe de ce jour-là, celui des historiens tels que Jean-Luc Einaudi, des témoins comme Paulette Péju, Marcel Péju, René Vautier, François Maspéro, et bien d’autres, ont inspiré *La Seine était rouge*” (Gouëset) – she, and, by extension Amel, is not interested in retracing the work already done. Anne Donadey suggests that Sebbar offers to her readers, “les principales références

nécessaires à ceux ou celles qui désiraient se livrer à des recherches plus poussées sur le 17 octobre” (190); however, the references are not clearly laid out. The novel is dedicated to the key figures involved in bringing attention to October 17, but Sebbar does not explain their individual contributions or provide a bibliography.⁷⁴ The text does have a pedagogical interest and was published by Éditions Thierry Magnier, a publishing house specializing in young adult texts. In keeping with this intended public, the 17 footnotes of the novel are explanatory rather than referential, explaining, for example, the FLN. The echoes of writers, photographers, and filmmakers of October 17, 1961 are present in the novel, but remain shadowy and perhaps not immediately apparent to those readers not already familiar with their work.

Louis’s documentary, for example, is clearly modeled on Jacques Panijel’s 1962 documentary, *Octobre à Paris*, which combines interviews with witnesses, photographs taken by Elie Kagan on October 17, and moments of fictional reconstruction, such as the scene when the workers leave Nanterre to go protest in Paris. The film was immediately censored and could only be viewed clandestinely until its rerelease in October 2011. In *La Seine était rouge*, Louis’s film is described to the reader in moments of cinematic *ekphrasis*, providing, for example, a play-by-play description of Noria’s testimony: “Son visage devient grave, comme ses yeux bruns, sa belle bouche se froisse. Louis n’a pas déplacé la caméra. Le plan reste fixe sur la mère qui poursuit” (33). In addition to describing the shot, information is also given about the sequence of testimony and photos. “La mère cesse de parler. On voit une rue, la nuit. Des images d’archives où des

⁷⁴ *La Seine était rouge* is dedicated to the “victimes algériennes d’octobre 1961 à Paris,” the Comité Maurice-Audin, and Didier Daeninckx, Jean-Luc Einaudi, Elie Kagan, Nacer Kettane, Mehdi Lallaoui, François Maspéro, Georges Mattei, Jacques Panijel, Paulette Péju, and Anne Tristan.

hommes en uniforme frappent d'autres hommes en civil, des Algériens" (35). Like in Panijel's film, the photos included in Louis's documentary are primarily those of Elie Kagan. Michael Rothberg has traced one description in particular to a specific photo, explaining that "the photograph Noria describes is easily identifiable as one of those taken by Elie Kagan" (300). The photo is later described as it is shown in Louis's film: "On voit les photos de la station Concorde. Sur le quai, CONCORDE, en lettres capitales géantes, blanches sur fond bleu, dans un cadre de céramique décorée. Des policiers en képi poussent des Algériens contre les carreaux blancs. Ils ont les mains sur la tête" (67). The reader familiar with Elie Kagan's photos or with their reproduction in Panijel's film or Anne Tristan's 1991 book, *Le silence du fleuve, octobre 1961*, might be able to imagine the images, but Sebbar chooses not to give any explicit photo credit, keeping the focus instead on Noria's testimony.

Sebbar also includes Noria's hesitations and moments when she confers with Louis, saying, for example, "J'ai oublié de te dire... Louis, quand on raconte, on oublie, tout vient dans le désordre" (86). As this exchange reinforces, Louis was involved both in the process of oral history – interviewing witnesses – and in its production – the documentary. Amel, however, only experiences the finished product, her mother's testimony fixed on film. She cannot interject or ask her mother questions or provide direct reactions, her confusion and hurt feelings felt in the statement: "A elle, sa mère n'a rien dit et elle a parlé à Louis. Longtemps. A elle, jamais plus d'une minute et demie... Et là, sa mère parle, parle, parle, elle ne s'arrête plus, et elle regarde Louis qui la filme" (23). The sentences are neatly broken into halves, one negative and one positive, the "et" acting not as a coordinating conjunction but as a divider. Amel receives her mother's

testimony through an intermediary. The chapters devoted to Noria's testimony are announced at the conclusion of the previous section with the statement, "Amel entend sa mère;" she hears her mother, but does not speak to her. The verb 'entendre' reinforces her initial passive position – Amel hears her mother, but needs to decide how to listen to her, and what actions to take based on what she hears.

Sebbar chooses to make the focus of Amel's investigation the individual stories of people and the memory of spaces. Lalla says to her granddaughter, "dans les livres, à la télé... C'est pas pareil ce que je te dirai un jour, au jour dit, et ta mère aussi" (10), and, although Amel does not gain her information directly from her mother or grandmother, she nonetheless follows this dictate and takes to the streets, visiting the locations evoked by Louis's film and asking people questions on her way. For Amel, the historical investigative process is less about specific archives and more about listening to the accounts of other people and trying to absorb its implications for her daily life. She struggles at Place de la République, for example, to reconcile her quotidian experiences with the violence that occurred near the square during the October protest.

Amel experiences the same sense of disconnect between the horror of past events and the calm everydayness of her present when she stops in a café near Bonne-Nouvelle and hears the heartbreaking testimony of a French-Algerian café worker, who, only 16 in October 1961, experienced the events of the massacre on the same corner where he continues to work. She initially entered the café simply for refreshment, but instead encounters Mourad, who tells his story, emphasizing that, "Chez nous, personne n'a provoqué, je suis témoin, personne. Les hommes ont essayé de protéger les femmes et les enfants, ils recevaient des coups, une mêlée indescriptible" (78). *La Seine était rouge*

argues that the investigative process can also involve wandering the streets and travelling, observing different spaces and engaging in conversation with both friends and new acquaintances. Sebbar emphasizes that history is not just what is found in books and libraries, but also in the streets, and that by actively engaging with it, young people can also be involved in creating and commemorating it.

One of Amel's ways of merging past and present is to leave a mark on the monuments that she visits, as she and Omer spray paint their own message beside commemorative plaques on Paris landmarks. Next to a text above the door of La Santé Prison, commemorating the incarceration on 11 November 1940 of students who were among the first to resist the Nazi Occupation, Omer and Amel spray paint a message informing passerbys that between 1954 and 1962, Algerians were guillotined in the prison for resisting the French occupying forces, the parallel between the two situations troublingly evident. They repeat the exercise across Paris. On the fontaine Saint-Michel, Omer stands so as to obstruct some of the memorial plaque:

On peut lire un texte incomplet :
A LA MÉMOIRE
DES SOLDATS DES FORCES FRANÇAISES
DE L'INTÉRIEUR ET DES HABITANTS DES VE ET
ARRONDISSEMENTS QUI SUR CES LIEUX
LA MORT EN COMBATTANT (85)

The obfuscated text is a physical manifestation of the partial history being commemorated around Saint-Michel.⁷⁵ Omer and Amel repair this omission, adding beside the plaque the words, in red paint, the color of the Seine after October 17:

⁷⁵ As Donadey notes, "this graffiti is reminiscent of actual words painted on one of the Paris bridges a few years after the massacre – 'Algerians are drowned here'" (53). Amel and Omer's red spray paint message, as well as the graffiti "Ici on noie les Algériens" on the Pont Saint-Michel, foreshadows the official plaque

ICI DES ALGÉRIENS SONT TOMBÉS
POUR L'INDÉPENDANCE DE L'ALGÉRIE
LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961 (90)

Just as one plaque can only represent a fragment of history, so too can one voice only tell a single story. On his way to Egypt to make a film about Napoleon Bonaparte's *expédition des savants*, Louis tells his mother, "J'emporte les romans sur Alexandrie, 'le quatuor' ... je sais qu'ils sont à toi, que tu y tiens, je ferai attention" (101). Sebbar too seems to be inspired by Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria quartet and, like him, privileges polyphony in her novel. For Donadey, these multiple voices are involved in the process of anamnesis: "In Sebbar's rewriting, anamnesis is shown to be a collective endeavour which occurs across generations, genders, political persuasions and ethnic origins. [...]. Several of her characters insist on the partiality of truth and the unreliability of memory, thus highlighting the need for as many forms of testimony as possible if anamnesis is to take place" ("Anamnesis" 51). Flora, Louis's mother and a *porteuse de valise*, demurs when her son asks her to talk about her experiences of the conflict: "Mais tu n'auras qu'un aspect, minuscule, trop partiel... Plus de trente-cinq ans... Tu imagines. On aura oublié, ce sera flou, approximatif, sans intérêt, je t'assure" (18). With her novel, Sebbar argues the opposite, that each individual testimony is worthy of interest, but that it is by placing multiple testimonies in juxtaposition with other that their true complexities emerge.

that Paris mayor Bertrand Delanoë unveiled in 2001. The plaque, placed on the bridge, reads, "A la mémoire des nombreux Algériens tués lors de la sanglante répression de la manifestation pacifique du 17 octobre 1961."

Sebbar does not deny, however, that different perspectives may lead to discord. Amel, Louis, and Omer often bicker amongst themselves, as when Omer accuses Louis of being like all the French:

C'était une autre guerre...Même si vous parliez des « Événements »... ” “Qui? « Vous »?” Louis hurle. “Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire par là? « Vous...vous... » Explique-toi...” Amel prend Louis par le bras : “Calme-toi, Louis. Omer voulait pas dire...” “Il l'a dit, il a dit « vous, vous les Français... » Tous les Français pour lui...Les parents, on les a traités de traîtres, et c'est tout ce qu'il a à dire...” (21)

Omer, Louis, and Amel assume different perspectives as they approach the past. As *La Seine était rouge* shows, however, individuals cannot be reduced to a category – French, Algerian, FLN, police. Karin Schwerdtner notes about the previously cited text: “Dans ce passage et ailleurs, les paroles échangées entre les jeunes protagonistes s'enchaînent le plus souvent sans verbe introducteur et sans alinéa, de telle sorte qu'elles suggèrent l'existence de liens entre elles, mais aussi la discorde dans ces liens” (paragraph 27). By collecting the discordant voices in the same paragraph, Sebbar stresses the importance not only of listening to all of them, but of listening to them together. The novel more broadly makes the same point with the inclusion of the multiple eye-witness voices. Given the importance of Sophocles's tragedy *Antigone* as an intertext for the novel, the intercalated witness voices could initially seem to suggest a Greek chorus. However, rather than coalescing into one unified voice, each speaker remains separate from the others. In the same way that the voices of Omer, Amel, and Louis are mixed in the same paragraph, so too do all of these voices occupy the same space – but it is as if they share a stage, rather than a single script, stepping forward one at a time into a spotlight.

La Seine était rouge begins with Amel asking Lalla, “Pourquoi un jour de malheur? Pourquoi la vérité c'est le malheur?” (9). But as the novel progresses, the

pertinent question becomes not why truth is misfortune, but rather which truth. The word “vérité” proliferates throughout the text: “ ‘Je veux savoir la vérité sur cette guerre.’ ‘Quelle vérité ? Tu sais, la vérité....C’est difficile...’ ‘Ta vérité, celle de papa’ (18); “Oui, mais la vérité historique? [...] C’est sa vérité historique...” (21); “C’est ta vérité, maintenant, le film de Louis?” (53). By repeating the word so many times, the novel questions the possibility or even the value of defining “la vérité,” a single truth, instead arguing in favour of many voices and many truths.

Yet, because of this very emphasis on plurality, the novel, as Lynn Higgins states, “a du mal à conclure” (“À la recherche” 213). Rather, it implies, there is more investigative and memorial work to be done. In the third to last chapter, a police officer, the final eye-witness, promises that the future will know how many were killed on October 17: “On saura. Dans quelques années peut-être dix, vingt, trente ans...on saura. On finit toujours par savoir” (100). The repeated future tense stresses that all is not yet known. Amel’s investigation seems to be gaining momentum and, with her travels to North Africa, expanding both its geographical and historical scope. There is still work to be done and texts to be written. At the end of the novel, Omer and Louis both describe scripts they would like to write, but have not yet completed. Even the words spray painted on the monuments are only painted on, not etched in stone. Nor is the path of Amel, the novel’s protagonist, clear at the end of the novel. Louis wants her to star in his new film, Omer wants her to act in his play, but, although she dreams of being an actress, she does not commit to either of the roles. She does, however, commit to controlling her own choices and her voice, choosing how and when she wants to take a public role.

The ending, in its very open-endedness, is also optimistic and encouraging. Throughout the text, *La Seine était rouge* proposes many different ways of engaging with the past and sharing it with others – through film, theatre, photography, and graffiti, as a teacher or a journalist, or even through conversation with friends and family. Amel may choose to explore one or many of these avenues, which are, as Sebbar emphasizes, not mutually exclusive but rather the sites of generative interpollination. The text already gestures towards this with the dedication, listing, among others, novelists, historians, filmmakers, and photographers. Within the text itself, Louis’s documentary inspires Omer and Amel’s graffiti, which is then subsequently filmed by Louis, perhaps for another project.

The overlap between Omer and Amel’s stories and Louis’s documentary is particularly marked in some scenes, almost as if the two young people have slipped into his film. While normally Omer and Amel’s activities and the transcription of the film are separated into their own chapters, towards the end of the novel, the two become merged. As Louis films the Concorde metro station after Noria mentions it:

La caméra s’arrête sur L’OUBLI, une lettre par petit carreau, POUVOIR, dans le désordre DROIT, DÉFENDRE. “La Concorde rénovée, humaniste, fin de siècle...”, dit la voix de Louis.
Omer et Amel entrent dans l’hôtel de Crillon. (67)

A similar sequence occurs later:

La caméra s’arrête un moment sur une boutique vide, désaffectée, sur Saint-Séverin, à côté de l’hôtel de l’Europe dont les lettres sont creusées dans la pierre. Au bord de la fontaine, sur l’eau, flottent des boîtes vides : Coca-Cola, Schweppes, bière, des papiers gras, des poches McDo. Sur la place, des motos et des motards, habillés comme des CRS. Amel et Omer marchent vers la rue de la Harpe. (88)

Although the description of trash floating in the fountain begins a new paragraph, there is a moment of uncertainty as to whether the detritus is being filmed by Louis or seen by Amel and Omer. This detritus, left behind by hundreds of people passing by, is also a representation of the lingering trauma, memories of the violence that has occurred near these monuments. Amel and Omer become superimposed on Louis's film as they revisit the locations that he depicts. It is as if they have absorbed his documentary to such an extent that they carry it with them; but it is also as if they too are figures in a documentary, as if *La Seine était rouge* in its entirety was a film, and Louis's own movie a *mise en abyme*.

These moments of *brouillage* between Louis's film and the investigation of Amel suggest that her investigative process is worthy of being documented, and that, as a witness to the witnesses, her testimony should also be recorded. The layering of present and historical scenes occurring near the same physical monuments also reinforces the porosity of the past, and the impossibility of isolating one historical event, in this case, the massacre of October 17, 1961. Amel's research not only takes her to Alexandria, where she might expand her scope to consider Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, but she also begins to pay closer attention to political events occurring in the present. The Algerian Civil War particularly preoccupies Omer, and indeed Sebbar as well, who writes in her article, "La Seine était rouge": "Le sang ne coule plus avec la Seine, mais il coule sur la terre algérienne, rouge, cous coupés, comme la tête d'une bête au sacrifice" (98). Just as Sebbar privileges polyphony, so too does she encourage creating links between different people and historical moments. The results might, like *La Seine était rouge*, be fragmentary. The reader, however, is encouraged to follow the investigative process of

Amel, listening and reassembling the different pieces to reach, if not “la vérité,” at least a moment of clarity.

Conclusion

Speaking (crying out, yelling, tearing the air, rage drove me to this endlessly) doesn't leave traces: you can speak – it evaporates, ears are made for not hearing, voices get lost. But writing! Establishing a contract with time. Noting! Making yourself noticed!” (Cixous 15). *Pas Pleurer* and *La Seine était rouge* operate between the poles of “evaporating” speech, and fixed, “noticed” writing: with the oral tradition encased within the format of the traditional novel, the mother's voice is both liberated and caught, heard and recorded. Although all the women are fictional characters, the novels describe a sense of urgency to record the words of Noria and Lalla and Montse before it is too late, to document their voices that describe both “les petits événements (petits au regard de l'Histoire [...] et les grands” (*Pas pleurer* 216).

The daughters are not passive interlocutors, but also act, recording and transmitting their mothers' words and voices. In Lidia's case, she responds by writing her text that combines Bernanos and Montse's testimony. Amel, still very young, begins by painting graffiti on key Paris monuments, but, as the end of the novel makes clear, that is only the beginning of her work to share information about the October 17 massacre. While these novels are about Montse and Noria's experiences in Spain in the summer of 1936 and Paris in October 1961, they are also about Lidia and Amel's experiences in 2011 and 1996. Both women engage in investigative work to learn more about the historical events their mothers lived through and to contextualize the individual stories.

While this work involves some documentary research, the simple acts of listening and paying close attention are also emphasized.

The novels describe the impact learning about this family past has on the daughters. Leïla Sebbar once explained that “je suis une croisée qui cherche une filiation et qui écris dans une lignée, toujours la même, reliée à l’histoire, à la mémoire, à l’identité, à la tradition et à la transmission, je veux dire à la recherche d’une ascendance et d’une descendance, d’une place dans l’histoire d’une famille, d’une communauté, d’un peuple au regard de l’Histoire et de l’univers” (Sebbar and Huston 138). Lidia and Amel are faced with the same questions and not only learn about the history but also struggle with its implications on their own sense of identity and their understanding of family and community. Their investigations also lead them to reforge links with their mothers. Amel re-establishes the broken matrilineal link and sends a letter to her mother and grandmother at the end of the novel. Lidia spends many hours listening to her mother tell her the story of some of the happiest times of her life, hoping that the act of sharing this story also provides joy to her ailing mother.

Both *Pas pleurer* and *La Seine était rouge* balance light and dark. For while the two investigators immerse themselves in the violence of the massacres in Paris and in Spain, as well as the unsettling echoes with present-day wars and the specter of nationalism, they also experience the everyday joys of shopping at Tati or enjoying an anisette and inventive combinations of profanity. The investigators seek out the past as it lingers in conversational word choices and the cracks of historical monuments and let it speak. But they do not work alone. The investigators in these novels are not solitary, but rather rely on their friendships and family relationships. Both novels argue for the value

of finding connections amongst many different voices – they privilege polyphony but not discord. The daughters work to piece together the fragments and find resonances amongst them, and the reader is encouraged to follow their lead. *Pas pleurer* begins with “On est en Espagne en 1936,” while near the end of *La Seine était rouge*, the refrain “Amel entend sa mère” switches to “On entend la voix de la mère” (95). The “on” subject pronoun is capacious, and invites the reader to be involved, in listening and considering not only the history, but also the present-day implications of the past.

Conclusion

Une autre raison pour se préoccuper du passé est que cela nous permet de nous détourner du présent, tout en nous procurant les bénéfices de la bonne conscience. Qu'on nous rappelle aujourd'hui avec minutie les souffrances passées nous rend peut-être vigilants à l'égard de Hitler et de Pétain, mais nous fait aussi d'autant mieux ignorer les menaces présentes – puisqu'elles n'ont pas les mêmes acteurs ni ne prennent les mêmes formes.
--Tzvetan Todorov

None of the texts studied in this project fall into this trap presented by Tzvetan Todorov in *Les Abus de la mémoire* (54). Although history is the subject of the novels, the investigative structure ensures that the past is always considered in relation to the present, not neatly isolated as an abstract curiosity to be studied, no longer relevant. The novels exemplify what Susan Suleiman calls “the contemporary triad”: “self-recognition, historical awareness, and collective action” (*Risking* 10), respectively associated with the present, past, and future. “Self-recognition can be said to exist most fruitfully in the present; historical awareness emphasizes the importance of the past, both for its own sake and for its role in understanding the present; collective action, like all action, impels us toward the future” (*Risking* 10). These temporalities are layered together in the novels, creating a kind of palimpsestic temporality of the contemporary, as per Lionel Ruffel (20). The novels do not, however, all allocate the same attention to each temporal prong.

Historical awareness is the dominant feature of *Dora Bruder* and *HHhH*, each novel focusing almost exclusively on the reconstruction of the past and, apart from more general, embedded injunctions to remember past atrocities and resist totalitarianism, paying very little attention to specific parallels with the present or advice for the future. *Un roman russe* and *L'Origine de la violence* exemplify self-recognition: the narrators devote most of their energy to worrying about their day-to-day lives and romantic

relationships, the motivation of their examination of the past primarily arising from their hope of freeing themselves from what they consider to be an inherited darkness of character. The narrator of *Le météorologue* provides little specific detail about his daily life, but this novel is also in many ways about self-recognition as, through his biography of Alexey Feodosievich Wangenheim, Rolin mourns the death of his revolutionary hopes. *Le météorologue* does not, however, completely give up on collective action, and argues in favor of groups like Memorial, who are dedicated to uncovering and recording the atrocities committed by authoritarian regimes. A similar kind of forward-looking momentum is felt in *Le village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* as Malrich and his friends, shocked out of the complacency of their day-to-day lives by learning about the Holocaust, commit to trying to fight extremism in their *banlieue*.

Pas pleurer (2014) and *Mémoires d'outre-mer* (2015) are the most overtly political texts of this corpus and use the account of their family history to form a targeted statement about contemporary France and an explicit critique of nationalism. Deville's *Sic transit* trilogy argues in favor of thinking about history globally and of seeing the world as interconnected, rather than as divided by national borders.⁷⁶ The past is discussed in a manner approaching what Todorov calls "exemplary memory": "La mémoire exemplaire généralise, mais de manière limitée; elle ne fait pas disparaître l'identité des faits, elle les met seulement en relation les uns avec les autres, elle établit des comparaisons qui permettent de relever ressemblances et différences" (*Les Abus* 46).

⁷⁶ I chose not to aim my studies at the ways in which these political comments fit with the dominant political and social discussions of the time, keeping instead the focus on the content and the form of the novels themselves and the ways in which they deploy the figure of the historical investigator. However, a different, more sociological study could be done, comparing the statements made in these novels with the contemporary pervading political and social discourse.

The novels studied here are careful to recall the specificity of historical events and individuals and do not neatly argue the old adage that history repeats itself. They do, however, stress that events that happen in one part of the world cannot, or at least certainly should not, be cordoned off and considered as if isolated from the rest of the world. Similarly, without imposing facile parallels, the novels warn against ignoring the ways in which past tragedies resonate with contemporary issues.

In all the novels, memory is mobilized in specific, productive, and complicated ways. Although the texts focus on individuals from the past, they resist subscribing to “le mythe de la mémoire,” as theorized by Rousso; the past tragedies the novels confront do not ever cleanly burn themselves down to an “ère de paix et d’harmonie” (*Face au passé* 27). Even in *Un roman russe* and *L’Origine de la violence*, which adhere most closely to the talking cure model, the narrators are left at the end of the novel unsettled and with worse relationships with their parents. Voicing the past is not shown to be a panacea, a simple way to solve the problems of the present.

Even with the investigative structure’s apparent formal similarity to the detective story, there is no conclusive catharsis, and no moment of revelation when the clues are finally presented as the neat solution to the crime. Like Binet’s narrator, the investigators might take Sherlock Holmes as a model and commit themselves to the pursuit of a careful inquiry and the collection of precise and verifiable facts – but they cannot reach the same conclusive answers as the fictional detective. Not only does the past remain non-specific and ephemeral, but the investigators must also face the realization that the terrible, tragic events they examine, whose repercussions continue to be felt generations later, are often

the product of a series of terrible coincidences; and so thus are fundamentally inexplicable.

Yet the novels are not without hope, much of which is found in the act of writing. All of them, even *La Seine était rouge* with its *écrivains en herbe*, feature writers who insist on the importance of writing. They subscribe to the “vocation du romancier” as stated by Modiano in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: “Mais c’est sans doute la vocation du romancier, devant cette grande page blanche de l’oubli, de faire ressurgir quelques mots à moitié effacés, comme ces icebergs perdus qui dérivent à la surface de l’océan” (22). The writer-investigators write, at least partly, to record the lives of individuals who would otherwise be lost in the depths of this metaphorical ocean of memory: in this respect, these novels are successful. After Anne Frank, Dora Bruder is probably the most well-known teenage victim of the Holocaust, and because of the novels of Salvayre, Ferrier, and Rolin, readers know the names of Montserrat Monclus Arjona, nicknamed Montse, Maxime Ferrier, and Alexey Feodosievich Wangenheim.

This concern for inscribing the names of people no longer alive brings to mind the image of a tombstone. Oana Panaité argues that erecting literary tombstones is a major activity of the contemporary novel: “La qualité ‘cérémonielle’ ou rituelle du geste scriptuaire permet au contemporain d’enterrer vertueusement le passé, de lui consacrer un espace propre et approprié” (104). It is also, as Michel de Certeau asserts, an essential part of historical writing: “là où la recherche effectuait une critique des modèles présents, l’écriture construit un ‘tombeau’ pour le mort,” adding in a footnote, “Le ‘tombeau’ est un genre littéraire ou musical depuis le XVIIe siècle. C’est aussi à ce genre qu’appartient le récit historiographique” (119). I would contend, though, that the *tombeau* is not the

most apt metaphor for the novels analyzed here. The image of a name on a tombstone implies a sense of finality – the name and the story associated with it are, as it were, set in stone. Once in place, the tombstone is left to erode, becoming gradually smaller and smaller over time.

The authors write instead against erosion. Their understanding of history has more in common with Carlo Ginzburg's statement: "What is less apparent is that the historian's questions are always, either directly or indirectly, in narrative forms (emphasizing the plural). Those provisional narratives provide a set of possibilities, which are often modified, and sometimes rejected, during the process of research" (101). For the writer-investigators, the research process is never finished – we can think of the almost limitless mass of information provided by *HHhH*, Deville's narrator leaving at the end of *Kampuchéa* to begin a new investigation, or Modiano rewriting Dora Bruder's story in light of new historical discoveries. The investigators personify Jean-Christophe Bailly's conception of the researcher: "Par définition, le *chercheur* court après quelque chose qu'il n'a pas sous la main, qui échappe, qu'il désire. [...] Cette chose que le chercheur ne capturera, ne maîtrisera bien sûr jamais. Autrement cesserait l'essentiel, la recherche même en tant que mouvement" (9). The past, the object of the investigation, is at its core ephemeral and can never be fully apprehended or finally grasped. The novels describe instead the process of studying the concrete traces and physical manifestations that still exist, and show the attempt of piecing together the fragments in an approximation of what might have happened, a historical reconstruction that is always destabilized, in motion, and changing with each new discovery.

The novels epitomize Bailly's assertion that research is always dynamic. The narrative oscillates between past and present, the investigators restlessly track their historical clues and subjects through cities, in and out of libraries and archives, and sometimes even around the globe, and their understanding of the past and present changes with each new discovery. The reader is also implicated in this movement: confronted by the text's fragmentary form, the reader is forced to become more actively engaged in the narrative, and the work of reading becomes itself a reconstruction of the past. The kind of reading elicited by the novels is described by Todorov in *La littérature en péril*:

En figurant un objet, un événement, un caractère, l'écrivain n'assène pas une thèse, mais incite le lecteur à la formuler: il propose plutôt qu'il n'impose, il laisse donc son lecteur libre et en même temps l'incite à devenir plus actif. Par un usage évocateur des mots, par un recours aux histoires, aux exemples, aux cas particuliers, l'œuvre littéraire produit un tremblement de sens, elle met en branle notre appareil d'interprétation symbolique, réveille nos capacités d'association et provoque un mouvement dont les ondes de choc se poursuivent longtemps après le contact initial. (74)

The novels are about history, but they are also about the "appareil d'interprétation symbolique," which is modelled in the text by the investigators. We as readers follow their investigative process, not only as they start, stop, and backtrack, correct their misapprehensions, and make unexpected discoveries, but also as their interpretation of the historical fragments is influenced by a banal encounter, a random memory of a piece of pop culture, or the sudden recollection of a literary allusion. Although the novels' textual basis is historical, it is the research process itself that is foregrounded, as the reader observes a model of how to approach the past and how to conduct an investigation. The investigators model ways of selecting, organizing, and piecing together seemingly

disparate elements – archives, banal accounts of an outing to a restaurant, imaginary suppositions – and their actions form a sort of *mise en abyme* of the author’s process, which is again fragmentary. The texts then encourage the readers to explore their own “capacités d’association” and to carry on the momentum of the novel’s investigation.

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