

MODIANO, PATRICK. *Un Cirque passe*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992. ISBN 2-07-072771-8.
Pp. 153. 88 F.

Once again Modiano delves into the past to narrate his fifteenth novel. This time the narrator goes back to 1963 when he was eighteen in Paris. The narrator is Lucien, now a 45-year-old male who remembers meeting a 21-year-old woman as they are both giving depositions at a police station. The tale is masterfully told as the narrator remembers his strong feelings for the young woman with whom he hoped to escape the recent past and flee to Rome. Her name appears to be Gisèle. She is separated from her husband and is on the run. She is nervous and does not easily reveal her troubles with the narrator but constantly asks for favors from him. Lucien accompanies her in encounters with some of her acquaintances and probably participates in a crime with her.

Modiano's mastery of the topography of Paris is part of the puzzle. His knowledge of the geographical detail of the city gives the reader confidence that the details of the story are all part of a master plan. This is a detective story of sorts. The reader follows Lucien into the amoral sections of Paris, wondering what kind of crime(s) Gisèle will seduce the narrator to commit because of his naive attraction to her. Meanwhile, the narrator is constantly worried that Gisèle will leave him. The possibility of his securing a bookstore position in Rome provides both of them with the opportunity to escape their intersections with the police and to begin anew together. They even have a car and a considerable amount of cash amassed from their adventures.

Pieces of the puzzle begin to fit together as the story moves along at a reassuring pace. Lucien weaves into the story pieces of his family's past so that we are witnessing a re-creation of his father's and mother's stories as he himself tries to work out a future with this mysterious Gisèle. Both of them build a relationship

on lies. Lucien deliberately misleads her about his age and what he learns about her from others. Then they both pretend to others that they are brother and sister. Their relationship grows as they act out this fantasy of being in the same family, yet they both lie to each other about their immediate past. The reader is guided into thinking that the mythical magic of the circus is the basis for their relationship.

There are some unforgettable characters just as one would meet in a circus. Masks and feints are everywhere. People act according to rules unknown to the narrator. It is a world with its own codes which Lucien once inhabited and is reliving to try and give it some coherence. The lives of his parents and Gisèle form concentric circles around his own life with distracting, sometimes helpful, clues linking one life to another. The reader is spellbound by the dazzling narrative style like a circus spectator watching three rings of feinting activity simultaneously while wondering which one should be the most engaging.