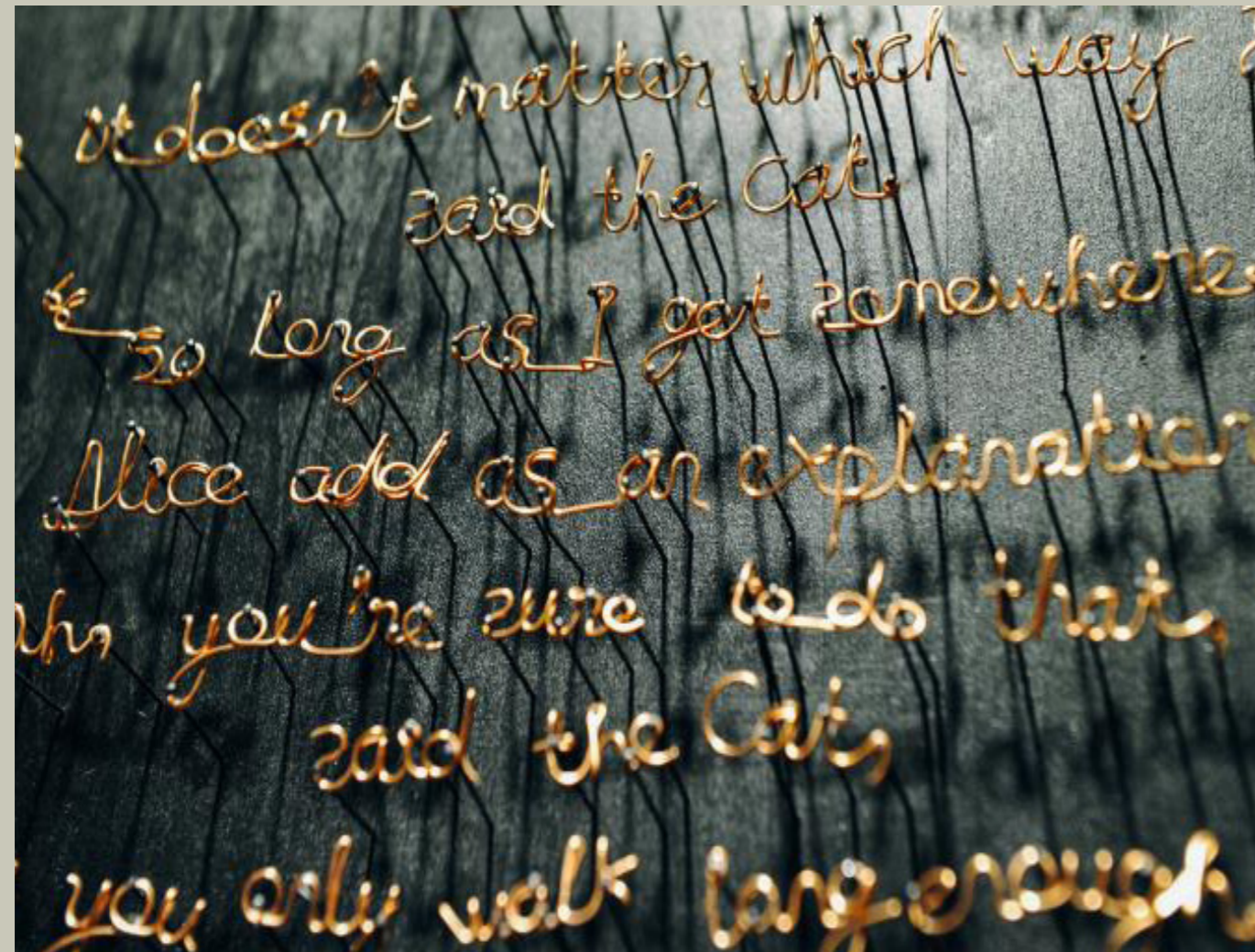


A Letter to Mr. Guy Roland

Book Review – *Missing Person* by Patrick Modiano

Regina Zeng

**Guy Roland: a private detective in *Missing Person*, who suffers from amnesia after World War II in France, sets out to track down his lost memory and identity after his employer Hutte closed down the detective agency. However, he does not manage to find his past identity.*



Photograph from Yang Ni, Shanghai, China, Feb., 2016

Dear Mr. Guy Roland,

Do not get me wrong. I am not someone who knew you before. I am just an undergraduate who is honored to read and discuss your story in my literature class. I have found that your quest to find your past memories and identity is quite unique, interesting and attractive. I got some inspiration from the seminar discussion as well. Therefore, I would like to share my thoughts about your story with you.

First, your story is quite unique and interesting. *Missing Person*, the title of your story, hooks me at first because it sounds like a detective novel with intense and twisted plots though in fact it is not. Usually narratives of stories can clearly know who they are. Nevertheless, what surprises me is that you know nothing about yourself in the past. Suffering from amnesia, you track down your identity through pieces of scattered information. Additionally, you narrate the story in first person, which makes readers feel more related to the story.

I consider that the reason why you suffer from amnesia may be that you initially choose to forget your identity. German occupation of France was a great shame for France and even nowadays French people are unwilling to talk about it. You probably experienced serious trauma that the war and the occupation brought to you.

Our identities and memories actually do not belong to ourselves. They belong to others' comments and fragmented pieces of items. When you try to find the clues of your past, you need to ask others about yourself and sometimes they are going to show you some items in biscuit or cigar boxes, which could be regarded as keepsakes for many people. This clue reminds me that everyone does not know themselves. We always listen to others' words to define ourselves and our own value.

When people cannot feel the connection to the world, it will be so hard to find the past memories and identity. To some extent, our original social circle shapes our identity and lives. Every time someone shows you some photographs or describes a person to you, you will consider that the particular person is yourself or someone who has certain connection with you. For instance, you mistakenly consider that Gay Orlov is your girlfriend and even start to imagine yourself living with her. You cannot combine the fragmented and scattered pieces of information into a clear and complete clue due to the fact that your emotions are totally blank with them. Therefore, you doubt your identity and the existence of other people all the time even at the end of the story.

Your boss Hutte used to quote the case of "the beach man." The beach man spent forty years chatting with people on beaches. However, "no one knows his name or why he was there" (Modiano 47). No one notices that he just vanished one day. You even consider that "the beach man" is yourself. Even people talk with each other; they do not know each other well, included myself. People are isolated and alienated in the contemporary society. We are so busy, which easily put others on the edges of our memories, and they become passengers in our life. Then we forget things in life. You say "I AM NOTHING" at the beginning of the story (Modiano 1). In fact, all of us are nothing. People are just visitors of the world. One day we will leave with pieces of information related to ourselves disappearing completely.

People tend to look for something permanent; however, nothing can last permanently. Sometimes people are afraid of changes and feel like embracing the eternity. Unfortunately, we cannot find something to hold on to. For example, Eiffel Tower is the landmark of Paris,