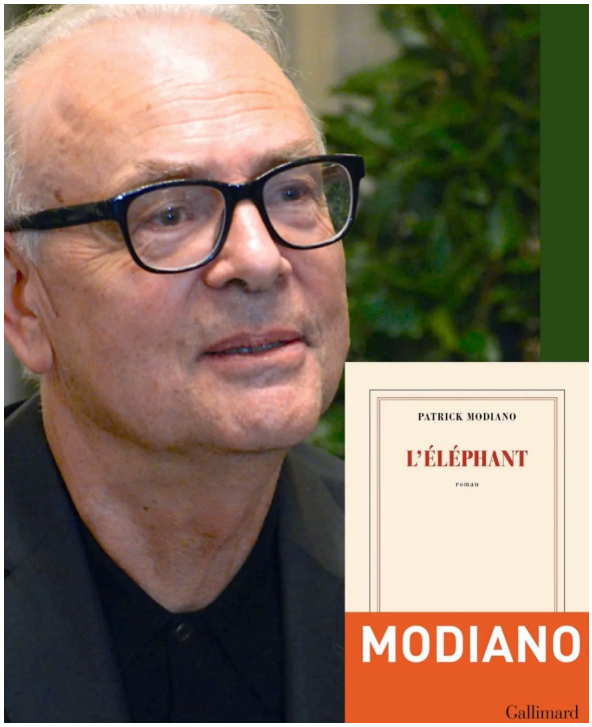
REVIEW

L'Éléphant, by Patrick Modiano

by Nicolas Becard

October 20, 2026 · On *L'Éléphant (Gallimard)*

In L'Éléphant, Patrick Modiano fits a whole life into a short text, haunted by passing time and what is gone.



A short text that holds an entire life.

With *L'Éléphant*, the iconic Patrick Modiano returns with a short text in which he pulls off the feat of fitting in a whole life, along with his gentle obsession with time passing and with what is gone.

Paris, as always. Van Walle lives and drags his carcass around a small corner of the capital, a few streets that let him come and go between his home and Éditions du Sablier (Hourglass Books), a Franco-Swiss publisher sweetly named after time trickling away, where he delivers his work. Like a prisoner of space and time, he cannot cross the borders of his neighborhood without risking discouraging bodily symptoms.

In the jail of his apartment, he develops a fixation: watching the neighbors in the building opposite. A life by proxy, the windows like so many screens on which everyday life plays out.

He struggles with a memory that refuses itself. From this watching arise strange sensations: the impression of knowing these people, or at least an inconceivable version of them, faces from the past unchanged while he witnesses the slow disintegration of his own body, to the point of comparing himself to the title's pachyderm, though it is famous for its excellent memory.

Having mislaid the keys to his memory palace, he has unknowingly broken in through the windows. And we readers realize that from the start we have been watching two timelines, in which palimpsest lives play out.

It is only by tricking his way into meeting these three ghosts, by facing the painful dazzle of the past, that memories, sometimes terrible ones, resurface.

Isn't growing old a way of replaying one's life?

Here the master of melancholy gives us a kind of reckoning, the way one settles accounts before a great departure. An intimate reconciliation.

And even if, for my part, there will never be any question of farewell, I must accept an elegant goodbye here.

Thank you, Monsieur.

— Nicolas Becard

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE (MLA)

Becard, Nicolas. "L'Éléphant, by Patrick Modiano." French Press, October 20, 2026, https://frenchpress.media/publications/l-elephant-patrick-modiano.