How to Be a French Jew: Proust, Lazare, Glissant

Paul J. Fadoul

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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HOW TO BE A FRENCH JEW:
PROUST, LAZARE, GLISSANT

by

Paul Joseph Fadoul

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in French, The City University of New York

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Evelyne Ender

Date  Chair of Examining Committee

Julia Przybos

Date  Executive Officer

Antoinette Blum

Marlene Barsoum

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York
Abstract

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by

Paul Joseph Fadoul

Adviser: Evelyne Ender

In my dissertation I use Auerbach's insights developed in his *Mimesis* to demonstrate that in *A la recherche*, Proust captures the political and racial concerns of his times, proposing as a solution a heterogeneous French society where cultural, ethnic, and religious groups live together in mutual respect and understanding. In his novel, Proust echoes ideas developed by Bernard Lazare in *Le Nationalisme Juif* (1897) as well as in the literary output of the first French Jewish Renaissance (early 1900’s to the mid 1930’s). These authors responded to the portentous mix of Nationalist and anti-Semitic politics by urging the creation of a separate French Jewish identity. This identity construction project was in contradiction with the policy of assimilation that French Jews had adhered to since their emancipation in 1791. I argue that Proust experiments with three models of Jewishness, illustrating in his fiction that these models are not stable but fluid. Through his representation of the actress Rachel, Albert Bloch, and Charles Swann, who becomes a Dreyfusard and a leader of the Jewish community, Proust anticipates the notions of difference and relation that have been developed by the Martiniquais Edouard Glissant, a major thinker of difference. Proust’s portrayal of a Jewish community in making whose consciousness enables its being in relation with all other groups in France adumbrates the works of contemporary French Jewish writers. Similarly, in their writings about the Jewish experience, Albert Memmi, Helene Cixous and Jacques Derrida portray Jews aware of their Jewishness who desire to know other communities and, in Glissant’s terms, "to live Relation".
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Introduction

On August 10, 2007, a family filled the benches arranged in rows, on either side of a casket set in the open air on the Ile Saint-Louis, the historic heart of Paris. Among the party, in a yarmulke and well-cut suit, a solemn adolescent holds the bag of soil that was brought in from the Holy Land, from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The young man carefully proceeds to pour the whitish dust into the bowl that was placed on the coffin. Once he is done, members of the assistance arise and gather about their departed friend and relative to recite the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead. The oration over, in all solemnity, the body is carried across the parvis to the Temple, to the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris that soars against an unseasonably gloomy Parisian sky. In step with the great organ, the pallbearers make their way into the Church where the President of France, former first lady Bernadette Chirac, French and foreign dignitaries, seventy bishops, five-hundred priests, representatives of the Orthodox Church, of Islam, of Judaism and countless guests and faithful have assembled to await the remains of Jean-Marie Aaron Lustiger, his Eminence, the Cardinal, the Prince of the Church, the Archbishop of Paris, the Bishop of Orleans, the parish priest, the convert, the Jew.

As can be expected, it was not long before Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger’s unusual career and life inspired a movie. In 2013, the French-German TV station produced the Lustiger biopic that coined his popular pseudonyms for French and English speakers. Lustiger is now also known by the title of the biographical movie “The Jewish Cardinal” in the English translation but “Le Métis de Dieu”, or “God’s Hybrid”, in the original version. The film’s English name apposes ‘Jewish’ and ‘Cardinal’ to render the two different spiritual aspects of Lustiger who maintained that he was a Jew and a French prelate. The French title, however, makes the man more universal since it captures his duality and insists on a mixed, unspecified, ethnic heritage to
transcend the Judaic/Catholic or ‘Aryan/Semite’ oppositions. While ‘Jewish Cardinal’ underlines the religious for an AmeFrican audience, ‘Métis de Dieu’ targets a secularized French public with a substantial portion that belongs to non-European or African, Asian and Middle-Eastern ethnicities. “Métis” traditionally means someone of mixed racial heritage but it also means one who has two cultures, two identities in modern parlance. The French title communicates that Cardinal Lustiger had both French and Jewish cultures, identities, ethnicities.

Referencing the presence of a Jewish culture, ethnicity and consciousness in France gauges the country’s progress toward or regression from racial tolerance. It was in relation to Jews that France passionately debated cultural, ethnic and identity notions to decide the place or non-place of the ‘non-European’ within the nation at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth-century. In spite of the impassioned debate, or because of it, aside of Cardinal Lustiger, there is but one other famous account of the French Church and State coming together to reward an embodiment of métissage or ‘hybridity’, an acknowledged symbol of difference. This one is fictional, and takes the form of an anecdote located in A la recherche du temps perdu, Marcel Proust’s seven-volume novel that recreates the France of the 1880s to the early-1920s. Marcel Proust (1871-1922) was indeed among those who considered how the ‘racially’ different could achieve full inclusion in French society at the dawn of the twentieth-century and the scene of Charles Swann’s burial in, Sodome et Gomorrhe, attests to this vision.

Marcel Proust situates the scene around the case of Jewish Captain Alfred Dreyfus (1894-1906) who had been unjustly convicted of being a traitor. His use of the Dreyfus tragedy demonstrates his interest and awareness of the situation of France’s ‘non-Europeans’. In the book, Charles Swann is a leader of the movement that eventually obliges the aligned forces of the French military, government and Church to revise Dreyfus’ wrongful trial and conviction.
And yet, Proust gives Swann a burial ceremony that adumbrates, a century earlier, Cardinal Lustiger’s state funeral. At the town of Combray or the novel’s very heart of France, the authentically French Swann receives a Catholic funeral with full national and military honors though he claims and is acknowledged to be also a Jew, with a Semitic lineage and a separate tradition. To construct Swann, Proust identifies and taps into core cultural beliefs that define the French and the non-French and cross centuries to remain valid.

Indeed, in twenty-first century reality, Jean-Marie Lustiger reflects issues that Marcel Proust had identified and included in the construct of his Jewish protagonists in the twentieth-century. Meanwhile, the concerns that contribute to the representations of Charles Swann, Rachel and Bloch, the principal Jews in A la recherche, are those that France had discussed and defined throughout the nineteenth-century, beginning with their emancipation in 1791 during the Revolution. Proust’s book captures the interrelated questions about the French nation, State, race, assimilation, ‘passing’, multiculturalism, religion(s), culture(s), identity that the Cardinal’s two superposed funerary ceremonies symbolized within the narrow compound of Notre Dame de Paris. Proust’s ability to anticipate in his novel a multicultural scene that unfolds a century later with Cardinal Lustiger in real life illustrates an important role of literature.

One result, and maybe even one of the reasons for the existence of fictional works, is to imagine and articulate actual the tensions in a society as well as propositions for their possible resolutions. This dissertation makes the claim that A la recherche proposes multiculturalism and tolerance of the non-European as an ethical solution for France. But what are these French or Western situations that need to be resolved? This is one of the questions that arise from this study of Proust’s ‘Recherche’, a study which is inspired by contemporary reflections on the place of literature with regards to gender, race and postcolonial theory. By locating its protagonists in
the last decades of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century, *A la recherche* unveils how at the height of the French Empire universalist France experienced and negotiated the creation of a race, of Nationalism and anti-Semitism at their inception. In the Post-Empire, Proust’s novel raises questions that are still valid for women and for non-Westerners, of either gender, presently integrating a Western society and it brings them to ask: How is a ‘race’ created and what are its characteristics? Are members of a race ‘essencialized’ by its ‘soul’? Is a ‘race’ an amalgam of a people’s historic, religious and cultural experiences? Is ‘race’ a fixed category or can a member of a ‘racial group’ become accepted as that of another? How can the member of a racial group ‘migrate’ to another ‘race’? How is ‘Woman’ perceived in a French racial context? Does a racialized Western society perceive and assign a different role to non-Western and/or non-Christian ‘Woman’? Do discourses about history and the nation mean and contribute to create ‘a nation within the nation’? Is assimilation a solution to questions of difference? Which conditions determine that monoculturalism or multiculturalism is the better solution to social tensions? On what terms is multiculturalism more beneficial than assimilation? How does a group become excluded from the ‘nation’? Does a minority group aspire to assimilation or to be on equal terms with other groups? What is the fate of the minority member who is forced to assimilate? These are some of the questions that the following four chapters attempt to answer through a study of each of Proust’s main Jewish protagonists as they face and come to terms with assimilation, exclusion, nationalism, anti-Semitism.

Because the Jewish community is the prototype of France’s non-European communities Chapter One, titled “Bernard Lazare and Marcel Proust or the French Jews in History”, demonstrates how Marcel Proust’s representation of Jews reflects their historic reality in France.
When it comes to placing the long history of French Jews in a broader ethical perspective, the dissertation refers to Edouard Glissant as the twentieth-century thinker who was the first perhaps to articulate in powerful ways the importance of acknowledging group consciousness to arrive at true equality between diverse communities. But to appreciate how ‘power’ shapes an individual into the ‘subject’ of a group Judith Butler’s work proves to be indispensable. And finally, Michel Foucault’s thought helps demonstrate how society, in this instance France, manufactures an ‘Other’ to oppose to and further define the ‘subject’. In the second part of Chapter One, Proust’s ideas on the ‘Other’ are put in parallel with those of Bernard Lazare. Lazare was the writer who first proclaimed Dreyfus’ innocence and began the campaign for his defense. In response to the anti-Semitism that fed the passions around the officer’s case to the brink of civil war, the assimilated Lazare developed a Jewish identity, penned and delivered in 1897 *Le Nationalisme Juif*. In this way, he becomes the first theoretician of Jewish nationalism from France. In his writings that include *Le Fumier de Job, La Situation actuelle* and even a thorough history of anti-Semitism and its causes, Lazare calls on Jews to stop being ‘assimilated Israelites’ and henceforth assume a Jewish identity because a common ancient history, tradition and culture have shaped them into a nation. The fate that Proust assigns to his fictional creations - Bloch, Rachel and Swann - demonstrates that, with and following the Captain Dreyfus tragedy, claiming a Jewish identity with its glorious heritage is more ‘French’ than assimilation. The parallels between Lazare’s and Proust’s thoughts on the Jewish condition lend credibility to the latter’s knowledge and portrayal of the ‘Other’ in France.

Marcel Proust’s understanding of the core issues that concern the ‘Other’ in France allows Chapter Two, “Rachel or the Subversion of Gender and Race in *A la recherche*”, to be a study that deconstructs racial and gender notions. The second chapter demonstrates how Proust
unveils the West’s use of the literary trope of ‘the Jewess’, or ‘la belle Juive’. It also illustrates how a historic, pseudo-scientific discourse on ‘hysteria’ constructs ‘Woman’ and the ‘Jew’ in a powerful, influential analogy. Proust creates with Rachel a female protagonist who is ambitious, professionally and sexually independent. In addition, Rachel’s intelligence allows her to understand as well as appropriate the nineteenth-century discourses on ‘hysteria’ to transgress racial borders and become a Jew. The chapter relies on the contributions of Judith Butler to the field of ‘subjection’, and Sanders Gillman’s to Jewish Studies, to conclude that Proust combines ‘hysteria’ and ‘the Jewess’ and makes Rachel the ‘ultimate Jew’ and, at the same time, he exposes and subverts the existence and use of the two discourses.

As its title “The Silencing of the ‘Other’ or Albert Bloch as the Subaltern in A la recherche” indicates, Chapter Three demonstrates Bloch’s quandary in A la recherche. Bloch represents the minority member who is ostracized and thus silenced. However, throughout the book, Proust ensures that Bloch or the ‘Other’ always returns honorably, no matter the number of times he is rejected or excluded because of his ethnicity. Hence, Bloch also symbolizes the fact that the ‘Other’ always has a place in Proust’s conception of France. Bloch is emblematic for a type of “Other” who trades his self for the assimilation that brings social inclusion and advancement. In Proust’s work, Bloch embodies the character that makes the wrong choice since the development of a distinct consciousness enriches rather than fragments the social space. In the last volume of A la recherche, Le Temps retrouvé, Bloch’s determination and success in remodeling his body and mind to look and sound European finally open for him the doors of Paris’ most exclusive salons but at a cost. Bloch’s writings and utterances become commonplace to match the upper middle class French looks he has acquired.
Chapter Four, titled “Charles Swann or the Journey from Inclusion to Relation”, illustrates how in *A la recherche*, Swann illustrates more than the other mentioned protagonists the absurdity of race by crossing racial lines in both directions. Swann is a Jew who becomes perfectly French and repeats the journey in the opposite direction. The chapter refers to Sander Gilman’s indispensable contributions to the field of Jewish Studies to demonstrate how Proust achieves a reinterpretation of the protagonist’s features and psyche. In the last volume, Swann is seen and heard as a Jew though until the end of the previous tome his mind and body reflected Frenchness. Unlike Rachel’s and Bloch’s metamorphoses, which are opportunistic, the character’s claim to a Jewish identity comes at the risk of great costs for himself and his family. In the novel, Swann’s stand makes France a multicultural place where the presence and the rights of the ‘Other’ have to be acknowledged. With the meeting between Swann and the Prince de Guermantes, a leader of the traditionalist party, *A la recherche* imagines a France where the morally honorable members from the different communities exchange their group’s perspective fashioned by their historic experience. Through the irreproachable Swann, it becomes clear that in *A la recherche* the ideal situation is one where the ‘Other’ comes to live on equal terms with all other groups.

Finally, the Conclusion parallels Marcel Proust’s ideas on the ‘Other’ with those of his French Jewish contemporaries, such as André Spire, Raymond Fleg and Jean-Richard Bloch, as well as with those of French Jewish writers from the second-half of the twentieth-century to date, namely Albert Memmi, Jacques Derrida (d. 2004) and Helene Cixous. Spire, Fleg and Bloch spearheaded the ‘French Jewish Renaissance’ in response to the Captain Dreyfus case which is the manner that Proust portrays in *A la recherche*. Each developed a Jewish identity and contributed to Jewish culture by exploring Jewish themes similar to those that Proust explored.
As for contemporary French Jewish writers, their thoughts also meet that of Proust. Each upholds the importance of a Jewish identity and their concern that France’s Jews engage all other French groups on equal terms in the social struggles for a more egalitarian society. Proust’s exact reading of the forces that shape modern French society is echoed in this century in two major figures. From a biographical perspective, Proust’s multicultural, multi-ethnic protagonist Charles Swann announces Jean-Marie Lustiger, a cultural and ethnic Jew and a French Catholic at once. From a philosophical and ethical perspective, Proust’s thoughts on difference, identity and community meet those of Sartre, who insists that every individual is free to find his ‘authenticity’, and of Edouard Glissant who calls for every society to see all of its communities as equals so that they may ‘live Relation’. The thesis I defend in the chapters that follow invite us to see how Proust, in imagining the fate of his characters, portrays a France that is plural, a France where every voice is expressed and heard.
Chapter One

Bernard Lazare and Marcel Proust and the French Jews in History

In spite of the rights and privileges that a liberal democracy extends to the individual, Western countries face the challenge of integrating communities irrevocably settled in their midst and that they historically colonized, marginalized or disenfranchised. Many from within these groups still feel oppressed, a fact that leads to social strife. The salient question becomes how to bring estranged ethnic and cultural entities to coexist harmoniously within a common space. For the Martiniquais Edouard Glissant, a foremost thinker on the modern condition of the French Caribbean people within contemporary or postcolonial France, individuals attain equality only once their group is brought and allowed to ‘live Relation’:

   Just as the first uprooting was not marked by any defiance, in the same way the prescience and actual experience of Relation have nothing to do with vanity. Peoples who have been to the abyss do not brag of their being chosen. They do not believe they are giving birth to the modern force. They live Relation and clear the way for it, to the extent that the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and that, consequently, their memory intensifies.

   For though this experience made you, original victim floating toward the sea’s abysses, an exception, it became something shared and made us, the descendants, one people among others. Peoples do not live on exception. Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange (The Poetics of Relation 8).

Edouard Glissant concludes and proclaims that the uprooted, expelled, re-routed, re-rooted, inheritors of the Caribbean have now coalesced into a people. The history of woes that shapes their identity includes the Middle Passage, famed for the innumerable African lives it sacrificed to the ocean’s abyss. In the postcolonial era, the Caribbean consciousness, intertwined with the ocean, literally arises from its depths to allow the French West-Indies to ‘live Relation’ or, in Glissant’s words, to discover and engage in “what I call the poetics of Relation, in which each...
and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (Glissant 11). For a group to ‘live Relation’, therefore, they must have eschewed assimilation and acquired a separate consciousness that the other, mutually acknowledged communities recognize as on par with their own.

In ‘Relation’, the different identities equally get to know each other, engage in exchanges and hierarchy among groups is abolished to create a truly egalitarian society. To withhold recognition from an identity transforms a people into the ultimate pariah, the group who is ignored and unknown. All communities must be equal before each individual can sidestep assimilation, respect each other’s difference and enjoy a genuine equality. Only then can a people’s experience become that of all, as, for example, the Middle Passage has come to permeate the consciousness of those acquainted with it. To ‘live Relation’ leads to a tolerant rather than to an imposed universalism.

The condition of the French Antilles that inspired Glissant’s pertinent appraisal of ‘Relation’ helps interpret the history of other communities in France, particularly that of the Jews, the country’s oldest non-French group. A century earlier, French Jewish writers had represented their community, confronted with similar issues of historical rupture, of racism and of identity, trying and attaining solutions, that now, following Glissant, can be said to have been inspired by the need to ‘live Relation’. Furthermore, to apply Glissant’s theory to French Jews contributes a spiritual and literary ‘Relation’ between the differing and different peoples of France, one that furthers the Caribbean bard’s call to ‘live Relation’. Applying Glissant’s concept of ‘Relation’ to French Jews is, therefore, no futile literary or historic exercise. The notion identifies and represents the goal of the Jewish community’s struggle more accurately which is to be recognized as a group that wants to know and be known by other communities in
order ‘to live Relation’. And since France’s Jewish community is the prototype French ‘Other’, their path to reconciliation with the Republic can inspire other French groups still searching for the way to an integration that recognizes their difference.

However, an appreciation of the history of French Jews within that of France is necessary to understand a conflict so intriguing that it even appears in a novel by Marcel Proust. At the turn of the twentieth-century, some French Jews came to identify as such while others resisted the identity necessary to ‘live Relation’. Indeed, two opposing historic notions that fashion modern France, ‘universalism’ and ‘the nation’, engendered both the lure and rejection the country’s Jews encountered in their trajectory from French to Jewish ‘subject’. For the purpose of this study on French Jewry in history, the terms ‘subject’ and ‘Other’, the different from the ‘subject’, are defined according to the contributions of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault to the field of ‘subjection’.

**Judith Butler and Michel Foucault: Definition of ‘subject’, ‘Other’ and ‘subjection’**

Salient questions that occur when considering any group include ‘why’ and ‘when’ did a community develop a separate consciousness but, also, ‘how’ does each member become culturally and functionally attuned to the group. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler provides answers to these questions by highlighting the innate desire of the individual to interplay with ‘power’ to become a ‘subject’:

But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. The customary model … follows: power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize and accept its terms. What such an account fails to note, however, is that “we” who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on such terms for “our” existence. Are there not discursive conditions for any articulation of any “we”?
Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency (2).

In addition to ‘subject’ and ‘subjection’, the key words in Butler’s presentation, are ‘power’, ‘forming’, ‘desire’, ‘existence’, ‘dependency’, ‘discursive’, ‘discourse’ and ‘agency’. In this context, power belongs to no one or no group but is a manifestation of current and ambient conditions. Power and the individual engage each other to remake a human being into a ‘subject’. Nonetheless, power alone inspires and provides the discourses that create the subject. But, on the other hand, the individual desires the rule or the law that power articulates for him/her and which provides the frame necessary to function as an agent rather than as an aimless being. The outcome of the process provides the cultural framework within which the ‘subject’ can ‘exist’ or have aspirations, set goals, and be an agent with desires and choices. In other words, the individual has an innate desire to know and submit to power’s set of rules, to a process of ‘subjection’, in order to become the subject of or within a culture. However, it is to be expected that as conditions evolve, and since no system lives in autarchy, power adapts itself and provides new discourses to reshape the subject which explains why the expression ‘French Jew’, for example, means a completely different ‘subject’ in the twentieth century than it did in the nineteenth.

Regardless of time and place, one essential element that sharpens rather than furthers the definition of the subject is absent from the above Butler quotation. For subjects to appreciate their difference, it is helpful that they be able to contrast their particularity with the notion of the ‘Other’ as defined by Michel Foucault in his article The Subject and Power: “[A] power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are indispensable…: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that… a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and
possible inventions may open up” (789). According to Foucault, ‘Power’ acts to distinguish permanently the empowered ‘subject’ from the dependent ‘Other’. Social discourses are devised and used to define the boundaries of a field, where, within their own real or conceptual but permanent space, the different exercise agency. Beyond the borders, the different can engage freely in all activities, as for example marriage, sexuality, literature, religion etc. Nonetheless, all the while, the ‘Other’ is aware that their experience can only be considered exotic by the subject, that there are no exchanges on par until they ‘live Relation’.

The process that enables ‘Power’ to create and tolerate alterity, even when claiming that only sameness exists in the society, is particularly well illustrated in Marcel Proust’s novel, A la recherche du temps perdu. Two of the book’s Jewish characters, the well integrated Charles Swann, studied in Chapter Four, and the outsider Albert Bloch, discussed in Chapter Three, are ideally suited to illustrate how ‘Power’ manufactures and maintains the ‘subject’ and the ‘Other’ in opposition. In the early portrayals of both Swann and Bloch, Proust includes symptoms that betray the characters’ unspoken knowledge that all their endeavors further their difference. A third, equally important protagonist, Rachel, or Rachel quand du Seigneur, the subject of Chapter Two, demonstrates no uneasiness about being the ‘Other’ and for good reason. The character originates beyond the boundaries that the fictional society establishes to distinguish the respectable from the disgraced, the included from the marginalized. And it is within the marginal space that Rachel selects the discourses that enable the Jewish ‘subjection’ that best befits her problematical social ascension. In the novel, Rachel’s choice to be a Jew rather than a Frenchwoman marks her as different and ensures that, to the end, her success ultimately represents that of the exotic French ‘Other’.
Besides furthering ‘Otherness’, power’s grant of agency to the ‘Other’ serves another of its purposes that Foucault delineates. As power evolves in time and reinvents its subject, the ‘Other’ must evolve in kind. Granting agency to the ‘Other’ allows those beyond the borders to undergo their own transformation, by their own choice. However, since the metamorphosis of the ‘Other’ is in reaction to the discourses that craft the subject they continue to contrast with each other. Hence, *A la recherche* represents a historic French Jewish phenomenon when it stages Israelite protagonists who reinvent themselves into ethnic Jews in response to nationalism and universalism, two discourses of power.

**French universalism, French nationalism and the Jewish community**

French universalism, which every French minority member must come to terms with, presupposes that no prior identity, no loyalty, no rule precedes or takes precedence over those that the State provides to the individual for his/her subjection into a *français* or *française*. The implications of universalism for minorities in France have been analyzed by Naomi Schor:

Achieving French identity requires as the wages of assimilation the renunciation of public cultural particularism in the name of France’s vaunted particularity, its “singularity,” in short, its universalism. Assimilation does not signify tolerance; indeed it may be viewed as merely the most common form of intolerance of otherness, or rather of the otherness of the other… Thus Dominique Schnapper remarks: “The universal is assimilated to the culture of the “I.”… It is not a matter of excluding the Other, but of including it to the extent that one renders it like oneself.” Forged in the throes of the French Revolution – the universal revolution par excellence – the identification of France and universalism was initially applied in exemplary fashion to the Jews, whose emancipation was purchased at a price… Only the abstract individual could be granted the rights of man and citizen (50-51).

In other words, France supposes the existence of a non-cultural being, with no identity, who comes to the State to be modeled into a French subject. Any ties, be they religious, linguistic,
ethnic, regional etc. are secondary, essentially belong to the private sphere, and cannot even remotely be imagined as on par with the duties and privileges that construct every French person. France, therefore, can be said to be universal because, and as long as, its nationals commune only with its own universal values. French universalism, fashioned by the 1789 Revolution from the inherently French Enlightenment philosophical discourses of “Rousseau’s and Voltaire’s” (Schor 43), provides the unity, the exceptional ‘singularity’ of that Western democracy. Though, broadly speaking, the philosophers’ revolutionary intentions were to unite all citizens in working for the common good, and to entitle each and every one of them to the same rights and privileges, their side-effect, or their intolerance, becomes obvious in a multicultural society.

‘Passing’ and ‘coming out’ inherent phenomena to 19th century French universalism

Universalism, when introduced and imposed by a ruling class, albeit a revolutionary one, may befit a homogeneous population but becomes impracticable once heterogeneity has been introduced. France’s attitude demonstrates a belief in a purported ‘universal human nature’ that explains its refusal to admit cultural, ethnic or religious difference and abrogates ‘Otherness’. France’s universalism forces the different to submit to the universalizing discourse and to thus suppress their specificity, to ‘self-oppress’, for a French ‘essence’. The French approach makes it almost inevitable that the history of the country’s Jews, or that of any other minority, would include ‘passing’ followed by ‘coming out’. The minority member in France has no choice but to ‘pass’, a practice normally associated with American society. Having to pass leaves scars that Adrian Piper describes in an essay:

Obviously, they [those who chose to pass] believe they will be happier in the white community than in the black one… I [at least accept] their conception of happiness as involving higher social status, entrenchment within the white community and corresponding isolation from the black one, and greater access to the rights, liberties, and
privileges the white community takes for granted. What is harder for me to grasp is how they would want these things enough to sacrifice their history, wisdom, connectedness, and moral solidarity with their family and community in order to get them. It seems to require so much severing and forgetting, so much disowning and distancing, not simply from one’s shared past, but from one’s former self – as though one had cauterized one’s long-term memory at the moment of entry into the white community (244).

Considering power’s success in implementing its sole, egalitarian, universalist ideology, nineteenth-century Jews had no alternative but to assimilate and ‘pass’ in French society. As will be demonstrated, two of Proust’s main Jewish protagonists, Swann and Bloch, illustrate the traumatic cost of the ‘racial passing’ that Piper describes and that they must undergo in exchange for ‘rights, liberties, and privileges’. In *A la recherche*, even Rachel who is born French but ‘passes’ for a Jew, has no family name or ties or relatives in the novel.

Indeed, it is because power implemented the Universalist discourse of reason during France’s revolutionary upheaval (Evelyn Gould 24) that it encountered little resistance in ‘forming’ (to return to Butler’s above term) Jews into Frenchmen. At the time, being French was a completely new experience for Jews and, without a separate historical experience, they could not justify a separate identity. Within a France that the 1789 *tabula rasa* had newly refashioned, the Hebraic community, as a French group, had no history apart from its enfranchisement by the recent Revolution. Such a contemporary situation made into unquestioned norms ‘assimilation’ and ‘passing’, with its bottled up instincts, aspirations and the accompanying uneasiness.

The assimilating project could have continued unchallenged and indefinitely but for the unexpected. Prussia’s acquisition of a first-rate military and its annexation of historic French provinces, would, by century’s end, inspire the rise of Nationalism which would contradict the country’s professed universalism (Zeev Sternhell 61-62). By the late nineteenth-century, nationalist sentiment had come to exacerbate “exclusivist concepts of national identity thus
encouraging anti-Semitism and xenophobia” (Evelyn Gould 24). The anti-Semitic and xenophobic feelings became objectified in the case of Captain Dreyfus. As Proust represents through Swann in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the Dreyfus affair served as a catalyst for a French Jewish subjection because it provided the community with a particular tragedy.

How the Dreyfus case became the Affair and a turning point in the history of French Jews

The facts around the French Jewish officer’s catastrophe precede by almost four years the evolution of Captain Alfred Dreyfus’ case into the Dreyfus affair or ‘the Affair’. In September 1894, evidence of spying for Germany was detected at the Army’s general staff. Captain Dreyfus was charged and condemned to perpetual banishment to *l’île du Diable* (the Devil’s Island). His trial and ceremony of degradation, as noted by Poliakov, turned into those of the Jewish community: “They were not shouting “Down with Dreyfus!” but “Down with the Jews!”… The French, for once quasi-unanimous were shouting thus… excited by the media, itself manipulated to that end by the armed forces headquarters”.¹ In 1896, Colonel Georges Picquart, head of the Intelligence Services, discovered and presented evidence that the Jewish captain was innocent. A Christian officer, Major Ferdinand Esterhazy, was actually the spy.

At first, the army had very likely charged and condemned Dreyfus through a combination of incompetence and mistake. However, once Picquart communicated the proof of Dreyfus’ innocence the evidence was suppressed because he was a Jew. The claim that the Semite had betrayed the French nation had so incensed public opinion that the army would not admit its error. In 1897, the press published the news that Dreyfus was innocent and Esterhazy guilty. This development further divided the country between the Dreyfusards who demanded a fair

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retrial and the nationalistic *anti-Dreyfusards* loyal to any army stance.

To make matters more volatile, on January 10, 1898 a closed court judged that Esterhazy had been falsely accused and was innocent. On January 13, 1898 Emile Zola addressed to Felix Faure, the President of France, an open letter titled *J’accuse…!* published in the newspaper *L’Aurore*. In his missive, Zola included every point and person involved in the case and convincingly argued that Dreyfus was innocent. Zola’s action brought the already impassioned French public to such frenzy that the publication of *J’Accuse…!* marks the moment when the Dreyfus affair turns into simply ‘l’Affaire’ and reveals the breadth of the schism between the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards.

A month later, in an open letter dated February 15 1898 to the leading nationalist Maurice Barrès, and published in *La revue blanche*, Lucien Herr\(^2\) sums up and denounces the heart of the matter, the idea that even an unjustly condemned Dreyfus: “devait revendiquer le crime et la peine, pour éviter qu’un honneur et un intérêt plus précieux ne fussent sacrifiés à son honneur et à son intérêt” (Lucien Herr 26). The nation had experienced a sense of depression after the catastrophic defeat of 1870 and its chiefs feared its return if the people lost confidence in the army. Callous civil and military authorities, as well a large number of the population, felt that national ‘honor’ and interest demanded that the ‘Semite’ Dreyfus pay the price for a crime he did not commit. However, at least an equal number of French people and their leaders agreed with Herr that the individual’s rights supersede a supposed common good and that the Jewish officer

\(^2\) Lucien Herr is a French socialist whose contributions to the cause of Captain Dreyfus in particular deserve to be better known. Herr, born in 1867 came from an Alsatian Catholic family according to Antoinette Blum who also explains that “we know very little about him even today… Lucien Herr [the librarian at the Ecole Normale a post he held for life] was one of the first Dreyfusards, and it was he who organized the support at the Ecole Normale Supérieure… All his contemporaries, friends as well as enemies, acknowledged his importance in the intellectual life of France at the turn of the century” (A. Blum 196).
must not be unjustly sacrificed. The ‘Affair’ and their convictions so inflamed the two groups that violence seemed likely to erupt and soon.

Faced with almost uncontrollable civil tensions, the Government promptly reacted to Zola’s *J’Accuse…!*, suing him for libel and condemning him to a year in prison and a fine of 3,000 Francs. Zola chose to escape to England rather than go to jail but, before the sentence, his scandalous trial had already served as a site where the evident discrepancies in the ex-Captain’s condemnation were revealed and discussed. The inconsistencies in the Dreyfus case that were thus publicized left the general staff no choice. In 1899, five years after the beginning of the case against him, the ex-officer had a retrial. To his supporters’ dismay and to his enemies’ satisfaction, the Court found the ex-Captain guilty once again in spite of new evidence to the contrary. Civil war now seemed certain.

In order to avert this outcome, the government took a cowardly stand: rather than having Dreyfus declared innocent they granted him a presidential pardon on September 19, 1899, nine days after his second condemnation. The Affair officially ended in 1906 when the *cour de cassation* [France’s highest court of appeal] found Alfred Dreyfus innocent. He was reintegrated into the army with the rank of *commandant* [major] and fought for France in World War I.

**The Affair or a turning point in French Jewish history**

The turn-of-the-century Affair marked for French Jews an unexpected need to re-conceptualize their community. The groundless arrest and relentless pursuit of the innocent Captain Dreyfus, the exhibitions of hatred toward Jews, the acts of violence that erupted once the case became the Affair, forced many Israelites to wonder whether France’s practice of assimilation was genuine. French Jews experienced a traumatic historical fracture which
Jacqueline Rose evokes in *Proust Among the Nations*: “Nonetheless, one way of thinking about such moments of historical rupture – for Leon Blum, the Dreyfus affair was as violent a crisis as the French Revolution and the Great War - might be the collapse which they precipitate in our most cherished distinctions: between the highest, reasoned principles of the world and the innermost call of the deep” (Jacqueline Rose 5). As Rose points out, the Dreyfus case marked a historical watershed for Jews in France. It splintered the French Jews’ core beliefs that the rationality of their enlightened State - the universalism of 1789 in the case of France - could rein in base ethnic instincts and emotions, could secure for them a stable national relationship with France. The Affair ruptured the Jews’ history in France, creating two epochs, a pre-Dreyfus period and a post-Dreyfus-arrest era where the meaning of French Jew would necessarily differ. The Dreyfus tragedy caused such damage to the French Jews self-perception that the experience could not be repressed, causing a Jewish consciousness to develop in reaction. At the turn of the twentieth-century, ‘power’ suddenly provided an alternative to ‘passing’. Some French would operate their ‘coming out’ as Jews.

**Passing and ‘coming out’ in a French Jewish context**

The determining role that ‘coming out’ plays in forming the turn of the century French Jewish subject is represented by a contemporary first-hand witness, namely Marcel Proust. In *À la recherche*, Proust will represent through Swann the assimilated ‘Israelite’ who ‘comes out’ as a Jew in response to the Dreyfus case. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick interprets Swann’s ‘coming out’ as part of a Jewish historical narrative:

Proust, in fact, insistently suggests as a sort of limit-case of one kind of coming out precisely the drama of Jewish self-identification, embodied in the Book of Esther and in Racine’s recasting of it that is quoted throughout the “Sodom and Gomorrah” books of *À la recherche*. The story of Esther seems a model for a certain simplified but highly
potent imagining of coming out and its transformative potential… Essentially at the instant she [Esther] names herself, both her ruler and Aman see that the anti-Semites are lost… Revelation of identity in the space of intimate love effortlessly overturns an entire public systematic of the natural and the unnatural, the pure and the impure. The peculiar strike that the story makes to the heart is that Esther’s small, individual ability to risk losing the love and countenance of her master has the power to save not only her own space in life but her people (75-76).

According to Sedgwick, the two stories of Esther, the biblical one and its retelling by Racine in Esther, represent in A la recherche the perfect example of a reclaimed Jewish consciousness that motivates a Jew’s ‘coming out’ or the revelation of their true self. Like the biblical Esther, or the Esther of Racine’s play, Proust’s protagonist Swann understands and accepts that rejecting assimilation and revealing his Jewishness causes him to face actual risks. Swann has the same courage that the character Esther demonstrates in Esther, which determines that his choice of ‘coming out’ affects positively his reclaimed community. Swann’s action has the power to transform the anti-Semitic surroundings into a place of tolerance. As will be demonstrated in chapter four, Proust’s portrayal of Swann’s exit from the ‘French closet’ mirrors that of Esther at her husband’s court and illustrates the value of a personal choice. Indeed, in Proust’s novel, as in Esther, the hero’s emergence as a Jew occurs at a princely palace and puts at risk his considerable privileges and his social standing as a favorite of the Prince. ‘Power’, which had determined Swann’s assimilation, inspires him to ‘come out’ when social conditions and discourses evolved into Nationalism.

The Nation, Nationalism and Universalism

In the last two decades of the nineteenth-century the French Jewish community found itself in a quandary. The ‘French Nation’ was re-questioning the Jews’ place, not within geographical France, but within the national body. Suddenly, the nation was declaring its
‘Israelites’, its citizens who practiced Judaism, to be the racial Jewish ‘Other’. At the heart of the French State since 1789, universalism had made Israelites equal citizens by law but, in Naomi Schor’s word, for a ‘price’ (51): the Jews’ eradication of any of their Jewish characteristics. Hence, if assimilated Israelites, in response to nationalism, accepted to become ‘Jews’, or Israelites with Jewish characteristics, they would defy the country’s Universalist credo and return to their earlier, pre-revolutionary status as outsiders. On the other hand, France’s Jews could not go on being the assimilated ‘French Israelite subjects’ if that status were discontinued.

The dilemma that French Jews faced arose from the century’s preoccupation with the concept of the ‘nation’. The need the era experienced to understand the notion of ‘the nation’, a people united and acting as a common will, is identified by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*: “It [the nation] is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm…” (6-7). As the quote infers, the ‘nation’ conceiving of its right to displace the king and appropriate his power and role as legitimate ruler of the state was a novelty in the nineteenth-century. By the end of the century, the concept of the nation as the sovereign was novel enough to require an answer to the question *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*, *What is a nation?*, which Ernest Renan addressed in a still famous lecture en Sorbonne. However, a century later, in the definition that Benedict Anderson pens in 1983, the nation’s main characteristic resides in its being ‘imagined, a quality emphasized in the title of his influential book. Imagination provides all the aspects of the concept, from the links that tie the members together in a proclaimed brotherhood to the nation’s usurpation of the monarch’s role.
The role that imagination plays in the concept of the ‘Nation’ is at the root of the situation that French Jews came to encounter in the last decades of the nineteenth-century. Certainly, anything that can be imagined can become unimagined. Since Jewish inclusion depended on their being imagined as part of the nation nothing prevented their being re-imagined as excluded. In Renan’s definition of the nation of 1882, during the period that questioned the ‘imagining’ of Jews as French, the famed linguist and Orientalist put the accent on the will of the people to live in community:

Une nation est donc une grande solidarité, constituée par le sentiment des sacrifices qu’on a faits et de ceux qu’on est disposé à faire encore. Elle suppose un passé ; elle se résume pourtant dans le présent par un fait tangible : le consentement, le désir clairement exprimé de continuer la vie commune. L’existence d’une nation est… un plébiscite de tous les jours, comme l’existence de l’individu est une affirmation perpétuelle de la vie (27).

In Renan’s characterization both the history and the future of the ‘nation’ depend on ‘feelings’ for sacrifices achieved by and on behalf of the group. However, such ‘feelings’ are subject to reinterpretation or may even evaporate. In Renan, the ‘nation’ is in the present, for every current moment not only reaffirms or negates the community’s past choice(s) but also its willingness to continue their association. A nation can therefore, at any moment, review its history to exclude one of its groups and/or decide on a future that does not include one of its communities. By the end of the 1800’s, the French Jewish community realized that membership within a nation is not necessarily permanent. Not only can certain groups become excluded but, as Renan points out, the nation can choose to dissolve. French Jews had to take the threat of exclusion seriously. Their claim as part of the nation was tenuous, their common past with other Frenchmen was recent, less than a hundred years, no earlier than the Revolution where and when the people imagined they would all rule in lieu of the King.
It is paradoxical that Nationalism can both lead oppressed communities to freedom and, at times, constitute the most serious threat to their inclusion or continuity. One definition of nationalism, offered by Ernest Gellner, highlights the links between ethnicity, political power and the state: “a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state… should not separate the power-holders from the rest” (1). In Gellner’s description, nationalism demands that the ethnicity of a state’s rulers reflects that of the ruled. In addition, each ethnic group should rule its own political realm and not infringe on that of another. To sum it up, multi-ethnic empires became impossible with the spread of nationalist ideology. In fact, none of the European, multinational Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian Empires would survive the heyday of Nationalism. Nations wished not only to rule in place of the sovereign but also that no foreign group rule over or with them. Ideally, each nation should have its geographical state over which it exercises its sovereignty and become a nation-state. These concepts of nationalism, by inspiring countries to gain independence or to develop nationalist sentiments, redrew the world’s political map in the nineteenth-century. Nationalist ideology affected not only Europe but spread to the Americas, the Caribbean, Egypt and Mount Lebanon. Hence, in some contexts, the nineteenth-century is referred to as the Age of Nationalism.

Unlike France’s universalism, which considers the individual to be an abstraction in its lack of specificity, nationalism insists on ethnicity. Nationalism came to claim Jews at best as a nation and at worse as members of a ‘Semitic race’ and French Jews violated the prevailing theory’s dictates on both counts. As a nation, Jews, by being present in every country, broke nationalism’s rule that a community should be contained within the borders of its state. But, as importantly, as French Jews integrated, they achieved success in every field and reinforced the
myth that they meant to rule France. But the transformation of the Israelites, or French people who practiced Judaism rather than Catholicism, into ethnic Jews leads one to ask how the change could come about. Nationalism’s insistence on ethnicity contributed to Western interest in the study of races and of their hierarchy. And it was not long into the nineteenth-century before the West ‘discovered’ a new extra-European race, the Semitic, whose members the Semites included the Jews. The ‘discovery’ of the Semitic race made possible a new form of racism, anti-Semitism, which scientifically determined that Jews were foreign and belonged in the East. The population came to believe that if that ‘foreign ethnic group’, until recently the French Israelites, were not yet ruling them they soon would be.

**Summary of French Jewish history or the distinction between “Israelite” and “Jew”**

Throughout the Old Regime, Jewish communities existed in and around Bordeaux and Nîmes but most were found in Alsace. Although long established, their position was tenuous, not very influential. Jews, theoretically banned from the Kingdom, were merely tolerated. It is under the Empire that Napoleon made official the emancipation of Jews in the hope that they would become assimilated. The Emperor granted to France’s Jews all the rights of the citizens but one: they could not be reformed from military service. Unlike other Frenchmen, a Jew was not allowed to hire a replacement to serve the duration of his national duty. However, the Empire’s demise returned the Bourbons to the throne and Louis XVIII removed Napoleon’s last restriction. The King’s move brings Léon Poliakov to conclude that: “à partir de la Restauration, toutes les discriminations légales contre les Juifs disparurent effectivement” (136). Napoleon’s policy of Jewish emancipation and integration, perfected by Louis XVIII, made France, where Jews were concerned, Europe’s most progressive country.
France’s model of early nineteenth-century open-handedness and tolerance toward its Jews, considered by its beneficiaries a magnanimity extended to them and that they gratefully welcomed, is a fact that Jean Denis Bredin underlines: “the acquisition of equality and social fusion which they welcomed enthusiastically might serve as an example for the rest of Europe” (24). Bredin’s quote alludes to an inclusive France but hints that even in its heyday, Jewish integration, an example of bourgeois liberalism, functioned mostly on the surface. The French Jews eagerly welcomed the ‘social fusion’ and the ‘equality’ rather than demanded those rights. The Jewish community did not perceive their acquisition of equality as their act of appropriation but as power’s bequest upon them. The passivity that Bredin perceives from his research, and which he transmits, is not coincidental: In spite of the call and eagerness for assimilation, the Jews remained the ‘Other’, power having made them well aware that it was handing them a bounty.

Indeed, integration provided countless prospects for group and individual advancement in the arts, in finance or the professions. But, the opportunities did not materialize from transactions or negotiations between equal parties. Instead, since they were offered, imposed and accepted as benevolence, each opportunity was provided by power acting to prove Foucault’s above-assertion that ‘the other’ must remain a ‘person who acts’. The tint of the ‘Other’ would remain attached to France’s Jews who would be assimilated only as long as power so willed it, only as long as its discourses preached their assimilation. To become anyone but a French subject in France was impossible to fathom in the nineteenth-century. For the first three quarters of the century power derived from French universalism only the discourses of assimilation that it propagated.
As late as the 1880’s, it was not immediately apparent to an observer of France that the country would know a reaction against Jewish integration. Throughout most of the nineteenth-century, French Jews continued to assimilate into French society, with every generation shedding more signs of Jewish difference. And France welcomed their efforts and progress. The integration of French Jews seemed so seamless, so effortless, that Jews persecuted elsewhere during the 1800’s abandoned their countries to find refuge in Paris. But, in the last three decades of the century, when Nationalism and anti-Semitism had upended French universalism to become national French discourses, the immigrants’ numbers would help propagate the myth of a Jewish invasion of France: “Ought a partial explanation for this growing intolerance in France after 1882 be sought in … the “Jewish invasion”, … the settling… especially in Paris, of an increasing number of Jews in flight from persecution?… That small community [Jews of French origin including Alsace] gradually swelled with the arrival of German, Polish and Russian Jews – quite often to Paris. Jews without resources…” (Bredin 26). Undoubtedly, the arrival of Jewish immigrants fleeing pogroms and other forms of persecution in Central and Eastern Europe contributed some credence to the myth of a ‘Jewish invasion’ of France. But Bredin’s quote, though it may not be his intention, contrasts the indigenous petite communauté to a possibly bottomless pool of foreign Jews from those impossible cultures beyond the West, from beyond the Occident. In any case, Bredin captures the perception of the Israelites of France, caught between their French selves and their ‘Oriental’ coreligionists persecuted for being, well, simply Jews.

As can be expected, tension developed between the long settled Jews of France and the Central and Eastern European Jewish immigrants who were mostly refugees. By the 1870’s, the French Jewish community had enjoyed well over half a century of equal rights and opportunities.
Culturally, French Jews had little in common with their coreligionists from East-Europe. The latter, marginalized, underwent a subjection that fashioned Jews to be apart, to be persecuted and denied the most basic rights, and as a result, to be seen and in turn to see themselves as a different ‘race’.

Following the work of Michael Marrus, and to illustrate the influence of discourses in shaping social groups that create the subjects, two terms ‘Israelite’ and ‘Jew’ will be used in opposition. The ‘Israelite’ identifies the assimilated French Jew whose identity is French because “mostly it was made possible by the cultural ideals which Jews had built for themselves, following a pattern drawn by French culture; having emphasized for so long that they were French, they could scarcely assert their right to be Jews. In this, as in everything else they did, they showed themselves truly to be the Frenchmen they claimed to be” (M. Marrus 284). The seemingly complete identification of French Jews with France and its culture that Marrus describes, both from their perspective and that of the observer, will be the standard that qualifies the Israelite in this study. However, the symbiosis between France and its Jewish community would end with the arrest of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in 1894. By the late 1890’s, once the Dreyfus case had mutated into the still infamous Dreyfus affair (henceforth also the Affair), French Jews had to face a fact: anti-Semitism and Nationalism had introduced a degree of estrangement between the country and them. Israelites started realizing that, after all, they were French but also Jews and the two identities were reconcilable. To suppress the Jew and their experience within oneself, to reject a Jewish identity after the Affair, no longer guaranteed even inclusion but denied the opportunity ‘to live Relation’, a much more rewarding experience.

Before proceeding further, it is important to make clear that the opposition between ‘Israelite’ to ‘Jew’ is not meant to reflect an absolute reality that existed in French society.
Though Israelite assimilation is a nineteenth-century historical phenomenon described by many contemporaries, for example by Bernard Lazare an assimilated Israelite who developed a Jewish consciousness and who is mentioned in the following quote, it is unlikely that a Jewish identity was either absent or present within every French Jew. A critique of Marrus in a recent work by Joan Harris implies that the lines between Israelite and Jew were not as clearly delineated as Marrus’ book implies:

The first great study of Jews during the Dreyfus Affair, written by Michael Marrus in 1971, argued that the community practiced a self-defeating ‘politics of assimilation’. Rather than asserting their Jewish identity when accused of subversion, the Consistory (the state institution that regulated Jewish Affairs) sought to avoid provoking anti-Semitism by constantly asserting their patriotism. Since Marrus’s (sic.) work, the political and historiographical climate has changed. Few now endorse his vision of Lazare’s Zionist eschatology and instead stress French Jews’ continued sense of marginality, especially after the return of anti-Semitism in the 1880’s. Nor can the notion of ‘assimilation’ comprehend the complexity of the politics of identity that troubled Jewish psyches and communities in France. Most did not seek to erase their identity as Jews, even though they sought a place in the mainstream of French society. Lucie and Alfred married within their Judeo-Alsatian world, and, while Alfred embraced secularism, Lucie retained her Jewish religious sensibility… The family’s private culture was still marked by Jewish practice, no matter how attenuated (Ruth Harris 66-67).

Joan Harris does not dispute that, in France, the Israelite was a Frenchman who saw his coreligionist with a Jewish identity as irremediably foreign and, hence, the categorization Israelite vs. Jew still applies. Harris mostly takes Marrus to task for overlooking the Israelites’ ‘attenuated’ Judaism. However, Marrus does mention that religion continued to offer a modicum of identity: “For these Jews [of the highest social strata] their religion was the mark of a part of their [patrimony and family prestige]. This feeling, however, also existed elsewhere, among Jews of the middle class who, despite the rational perspective of unbelievers, continued at least nominal practice of Judaism as one necessary point of identity” (Marrus 62). Marrus clearly
states, unlike what Harris claims, that the Jewish religion formed an essential important part of the French Israelites’ identity.

Indeed, as this dissertation’s chapter on Swann will demonstrate, the attenuation of a French Jewish identity must have caused some tension within the individual. Marcel Proust represents an Israelite who, in spite of a successful assimilation, betrays signs of discomfort with himself and French society that evaporate only once he claims the Jewish consciousness that allows him to ‘live Relation’.

Modern anti-Semitism in the Age of Nationalism

According to Jean Denis Bredin, in the late nineteenth century, anti-Semitism was a new phenomenon that had recently evolved from the anti-Judaism or anti-Jewish sentiments of former times: “it is around 1880 that in France this traditional anti-Judaism began to change into anti-Semitism” (32). Traditional anti-Judaism, directed at the Jewish religion, consisted at best of a mistrust and at worse of hatred toward Judaism and its adherents. Until the nineteenth century, the belief that the Jews had had the Messiah crucified had fanned the anti-Judaic sentiments and had forced the European Jews to live in ghettos.

However, ‘around 1880’, as mentioned by Bredin, anti-Judaism gave rise to anti-Semitism, a term that Wilhelm Marr infamously coined in 1873, at Berne in Switzerland. With the advent of this latest terminology, the hatred of the Jews became racial. This new aspect is highlighted by Seth L. Wolitz in *The Proustian Community*: “Race theories were growing popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the Jews were coming to be seen less as a religious denomination and more distinctly as a race, an alien race” (Seth L. Wolitz 149). Toward the end of the nineteenth-century, Jews were hated because they belonged to the Semitic
race, an ‘Oriental’ race rather than the superior ‘Aryan’ race of Europe. It is interesting to note that both *Aryan* and *Semite*, the root word for anti-Semite, were new words in the nineteenth century since, according to Ron J. Bigalke, Ludwig von Schläzer introduced the term *Semite* in 1781 (1). *Aryan* was adopted at around the same time for North Indian Languages.

The origin of these two terms demonstrates no filiations with race. They were specifically adopted to categorize and classify the ever expending Western knowledge of Oriental languages. By the end of the eighteenth century, linguists had understood enough about language structure to encounter the necessity to systemize their discoveries. The linguistic knowledge created a need for new labels and, in turn, allowed and actualized racial divisions that would have dire consequences in Europe. At the same time, the spread of ideas and knowledge during the nineteenth-century began to weaken the religious perspective of the French and allowed some of the first definite moves toward secularism.

During prior religious centuries the Jews had fulfilled, within French society, the need for the non-Christian ‘Other’ that defined the Christian Frenchman. Under the Catholic Old Regime, conversion to Catholicism effectively ended anti-Jewish antagonism since the animosity was directed, not at the Jews, but at their religion. But, once Western ‘science’ had established the existence of a Semitic race, the rules of the game changed. The nineteenth-century scientific Westerner, as Gil Anidjar points out, had ‘discovered’ the perfect ‘Other’: “The Semites constitute the clearest site of a distinction produced by the only century that genuinely believed itself “secularized”” (32). Reassuringly for a century who prized its rationality that distinguished it from earlier ‘superstitious’ periods, ‘Reason’ or ‘Science’, and not faith, now determined the presence of racial differences between the Semites and the Europeans. No amount of praying or of aspersion with holy water could wash away the stigma that nature, as
determined by science, had inscribed on the Semitic body. Indeed, the West had come to accept that a ‘natural’, specific mistake was attached to every Jewish body which results in: “the anti-Semitic view of history [which] portrays the Jew as a satanic force, as virtually the root of all evil in the world… engaged in an eternal and universal conspiracy, to infiltrate, corrupt and ultimately rule the gentile world…” (Bernard Lewis 23). In modern anti-Semitism, Jews were irremediably foreign, not simply because of an Eastern origin, but because their very constitution contained non-European characteristics such as the innate desire to conspire, to harm, to corrupt and to dominate Western people. In the Age of Nationalism, the indelible traits power assigned to Jews transformed French Israelites into beings who had a specific Jewish body and mental characteristics.

The representation of the French Israelite and Jew by Lazare and Proust

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, France witnessed an upsurge of the new, virulent anti-Semitism described in the last paragraph. The manifestations of this ‘scientific’ form of Jewish hatred forced the Jews of France to ponder over and question their identity anew. Two authors, Bernard Lazare (Nîmes, 1865 - Paris, 1903) and Marcel Proust (Paris, 1871 – Paris, 1922), in parallel, independently of each other, in spite of their very different personality and methods, captured the French Jewish community’s new consciousness as it crystallized. This project will give no further biographical information. Rather, it will leave it to the texts presented below to represent the two French Jewish conditions, the Israelite and the Jew, and to reveal the history and transformations from “Israelites” to “Jews” that these two authors noted.

The interest in studying the evolution of the French Israelite ‘subject’ to Jewish ‘subject’ in Lazare and Proust, for the purpose of this project, resides in the fact that their experience was
not isolated. As will be demonstrated in the pages on “The First French Jewish Renaissance”, where Proust is put in relation with Jean-Richard Bloch, Edmond Fleg and André Spire, the observations of Lazare and Proust mirrored those of a large number from the Jewish community. Furthermore, the result of the study establishes the similarity between Marcel Proust’s thoughts on Jews and that of Bernard Lazare. The parallel will be used to demonstrate that Proust’s three main Jewish protagonists are constructed in a manner that rewards Charles Swann for choosing to become a morally upright Jew but portrays Rachel and Albert Bloch in a negative manner for selecting to embody Jewish difference in a pejorative form. Finally, Proust’s capacity to reach on the ‘Jewish question’ conclusions similar to those of Lazare who, as shown below, is the first French theorist of a Jewish consciousness and Zionism; his care in validating the Jewish representation of Charles Swann by favorably contrasting the hero to the novel’s aristocrats and less conscientious Jews; his representation that a separate minority subjection, by enabling Relation, strengthens the French nation; are among the main points presented to argue that Marcel Proust, buried a Catholic, was himself multicultural. Proust is a wholly French author with a Jewish identity as well.

The identity that Lazare and Proust offer from a Jewish perspective for the Jews, for a people often visited and threatened with their own abyss, resembles that articulated by Glissant for the postcolonial Caribbean. Both Lazare and Proust voiced a Nationalism of freedom and dignity for the Jews, opened to exchanges with the ‘Other’ and in line with their history as social pariahs. Taking into consideration the historic plight of the Jews in the West, Lazare would come to find the Zionism championed by Theodor Herzl unrepresentative, for too glorious. He would break with it while Proust, for the same reason and for finding it too confining, would never embrace it.
Together, Lazare and Proust illustrate a mode of being for the Jews confronted with a hatred unleashed by the racialist anti-Semitic discourse. Lazare’s polemical or journalistic approach is in opposition with Proust’s creative intuition but the similarities of their answers to the ‘Jewish Question’ confirm the vision each had of the matter. Their differences, rather than contradict, complement the picture that each offers. Although they both represent Jews throughout their work, Lazare’s view on a newly necessary and particular Jewish order is condensed in *Le Nationalisme juif*. To paraphrase Jean-Marie Delmaire, Lazare’s personal contribution to the early period of political Zionism is “surtout le *Nationalisme juif* en 1897” (Philippe Oriol 160). Proust reveals his contribution in *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, a prelude to *Sodome et Gomorrhe II* that he deliberately set apart within *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, a title that refers the names of two cities (in)famously mentioned in the Jewish Bible. The concern and interest for the French Jews’ experience shown by these two authors were inspired by the case that objectified anti-Semitism, the infamous miscarriage of justice against the French Jewish military officer Captain Alfred Dreyfus (1894-1906).

The efforts of the two writers on behalf of justice for the Captain contributed to their self-perception but also to how they were perceived and/or wanted others to perceive them. Both Lazare and Proust earned the right to use the title “The First Dreyfusard” because of their active engagement in the struggle to exonerate Dreyfus. In a 1910 essay titled *Notre Jeunesse*, Charles Péguy coined the term ‘le premier Dreyfusard’ to lionize his close friend and literary collaborator Bernard Lazare, the first to have believed in Dreyfus’s innocence and argued and, as early as November 1896, published about that belief. Coming seven years after Lazare’s death, Péguy’s apologia reaffirms his unfailing loyalty and affection for his comrade and also for the principles that had determined the early engagement on Dreyfus’ behalf. From Péguy’s perspective, Lazare
and the cause of Dreyfus were indivisible as Matthieu Giroux points out: “The faithfulness that Péguy demonstrates toward Lazare is equivalent to being faithful to Dreyfusism. Bernard Lazare is synonymous with Dreyfusism. If one is faithful to the former he is faithful to the latter” (1). Giroux also explains that *Notre Jeunesse* serves Péguy “pour répondre aux nationalistes qui remettent en question l’authenticité de son dreyfusisme” (1). Péguy’s simple reminder of his Dreyfusism and of his faith in Lazare communicated to the French Nationalists that they could never claim him as one of their own because of their will to exclude or oppress those they identified as non-Europeans in France. The wholehearted conviction and tireless labor that Lazare brought to the struggle for the persecuted Jew’s acquittal made him the spokesperson for the rights of the different in France.

Nine years after Péguy’s publication of *Notre Jeunesse*, Proust received the 1919 ‘prix Goncourt’ for *A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, and wrote to Paul Souday, the most authoritative critique at the time, to thank him. In the letter, Proust mentions that other reviewers attributed the selection of his novel for the literary prize to his being a ‘reactionary’ and a ‘clerical’. The puzzled Proust denied the accusations especially since, he wrote to Souday: “Je crois bien avoir été le premier Dreyfusard, puisque c’est moi qui suis allé demander sa signature à Anatole France” (537). For Proust writing about himself, as for Péguy writing about Lazare:

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3 “Cette fidélité de Péguy envers Bernard Lazare équivaut à une fidélité envers le dreyfusisme. Bernard Lazare est synonyme de dreyfusisme. Qui est fidèle au premier est fidèle au second” (Giroux 1)

4 In 1898, two years after Lazare’s convictions had already convinced him to enter the fray on behalf of Dreyfus, the intellectuals in favor of a retrial for Dreyfus organized a petition. Proust volunteered to gather signatures and took the list first to Anatole France whose signature appears on top of the list with that of Zola.

5 Proust was familiar with the works and contributions of both Péguy and Lazare. Proust’s appropriation of the designation ‘le premier Dreyfusard’ implies that he knew that *Notre Jeunesse* had consecrated Lazare as the ‘first Dreyfusard’, a rank that meant much to him and that he felt he deserved. Proust disliked Péguy’s work but knew it well enough to borrow, in addition to ‘le premier Dreyfusard’, another of his ideas: “Proust, qui n’aimait pas Péguy, a pourtant fait sien cet avertissement de son contemporain : « Avant tout, il ne faut pas ressembler à Leconte de Lisle” (Marie Miguet-Ollanier 45). As for Lazare, Proust forcibly knew the famous journalist’s work and fully appreciated what Dreyfus’ fate meant to that ‘other’ premier Dreyfusard and polemist. In Volume IV of the 1989 Gallimard Edition, Esquisse IV shows that Proust meant to mention that it was unfortunate that so many died “avant
as long as one remains loyal to the Dreyfusard principles, broadly speaking the sacrosanct rights of the individual and the right to be different, an early involvement in the defense of Dreyfus establishes one’s credentials as a progressive. Péguy’s attribution of the title ‘premier Dreyfusard’ to Lazare, and its reclaiming by Proust, reveals not only their appreciation of the ‘Affair’ as a defining moment in their personal history but also in that of France. Proust’s and Lazare’s identification with the Dreyfusard movement reflects their understanding of the forces that were reshaping French society and would include these ideas in their texts that define the newly racialized Jew of the turn of the nineteenth-century.

Bernard Lazare and Marcel Proust and the new French Jewish subjection

Indeed, as a reminder, until the historical rupture between France and its Israelites that the Dreyfus case occasioned, rational, enlightened France had not Jews but assimilated French Israelites. Maurice Samuels, in *Inventing the Israelite*, his seminal work on nineteenth-century French Jewry, confronts the “charges that French Jews completely abandoned their communal affiliations or made their Judaism a matter of private confession only” (Maurice Samuels 4). To many observers of the time, Judaism had become another French religion along Catholicism and Protestantism, the French Israelite an innocuous alternative to the French Christian. However, in

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Proust attaches a price to betraying the ideals of the Dreyfusards’ cause. Proust offers a positive portrayal of the protagonist Albert Bloch up to and including the scenes where the protagonist is a Dreyfusard who attends every session of Zola’s trials. As Chapter Three demonstrates, Bloch betrays the rights to be different when he chooses to assimilate. Bloch’s betrayal of the values that he had championed during the Affair causes him to become a sycophant and second rate writer who wastes his talents in the salons of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

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post-Dreyfus-arrest France, the genteel Israelite found himself outcast and recast a racialized Jew. He needed, suddenly, a new mold, a new mirror to adjust his self-image to the new definition imposed upon him from the outside. In late nineteenth-century France, a religious difference no longer suited a ‘scientific’ epoch and a convincing alterity had to be defined in term of the time’s racial science. It also meant that the French Jew needed to theorize his new racial self for both himself and for the country or be defined by anti-Semitic discourse. Lazare willingly, and Proust maybe inadvertently, took on the task and staged the new consciousness that redefined French Jewry and brought them in Relation. Their form and style so differ - Lazare’s academic approach vs. Proust’s fictional realism, Proust’s serpentine articulation vs. Lazare’s directness - that the similarities in their ideas are escapable. Their writings reveal the objectives that ‘Power’ had for the scientific era. They also divulge the array of thoughts and arguments that, partly in response to nationalism and anti-Semitism, the French Jewish community had developed for self-representation.

The literary works by Bernard Lazare and Marcel Proust, particularly the ones studied below, undertake the urgent self-articulation of the Jew suddenly subjected to modern anti-Semitism in France. The need for the Jews to re-appropriate their own image is communicated by Lazare: “Hence if we correct the idea of the Jewish race as philo- and anti-Semites have conceived it…” (Jewish Nationalism 56). Lazare’s intent to rearticulate ‘what and who is a Jew from a Jew’s perspective’ systemizes, or articulates as a system, the successive notions of Jewish assimilation, of Jewish solidarity and nationhood developed by the community. The same ideas reappear in Proust’s A la recherche but staged through and by his protagonists. In the novel, as befits a mimetic project, no theoretician explains the principles and conflicts for the new Jewish

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7 “Si donc nous rectifions l’idée que philo et antisémites se font de la race juive…” (Le Nationalisme juif 108)
subject that, nonetheless, determine at times certain characters’ behavior and conversations. The contemporary Jewish concepts are difficult to recognize once they become embodied in Proust’s lifelike protagonists performing under both sympathetic and unsympathetic gazes. The ideas that are clearly presented in an essay by Lazare can become unrecognizable in Proust where they are proffered by protagonists in a multi-layered reconstructed France. It is not only difficult to identify a Jewish perspective in *A la recherche*, but it is not clear at first sight whether the book satirizes the gentile, the aristocrat, the self-hating Jew, or the Israelite.

Proust, as quoted by Jean-Yves Tadié in the first volume of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, believed it impossible to retrace a historical reality from its literary reconstruction: “Un livre est un grand cimetière où sur la plupart des tombes on ne peut plus lire les noms effacés” (Jean-Yves Tadié LXXXIV). As Proust points out, it is impossible to link protagonists to people that may have inspired them. In addition, such an exercise adds nothing to the understanding of a text since, at best, it serves to lionize or immortalize an imagined individual. However, identifying contemporary social concepts that determine and explain the motives and consequences of a character’s existence and actions in a literary work affords depths of interpretation. To that end, Lazare’s clear exposition of the contemporary Jews’ situation in the West proves itself indispensable. The work of Lazare makes possible a reading that identifies, in the world of literary art and fiction of *A la recherche*, the condition that brought French Jews to develop an identity and assert their place and right to ‘live Relation’ as defined by Glissant.

Indeed, a parallel reading of Lazare and Proust deciphers the portrayal of the Israelite experiencing with the ways and means to become and be a French Jew. Furthermore, the method helps shed new light on an important aspect of Proust’s work and, bypassing biography, his

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8 A book is a giant burial ground where, on most tombstones, the faded names can no longer be read.
identity. Indeed, while Proust reconstructs contemporary France in *A la recherche* he also deconstructs its social organization, and, particularly, the pejorative myths that affect the Jew. Proust’s exercise in deconstruction owes its success from his situating himself both as a Jew and a Frenchman, a feat that proves him a hybrid who owns two distinct identities. To strengthen this argument, the present study turns to *Mimesis*, where Erich Auerbach argues that literature mirrors the reality of a specific culture at a specific time and place. Applied to Proust’s most famous work, this concept will show the novel to be the product of its author’s capacity to situate his fictional narrator perfectly within the French and French Jewish cultures of his time. Proust’s identification with French Jews allowed him to grasp and represent that, in response to anti-Semitism, two very different modes of subjection, the Israelite and the Jew, were competing over the Hebraic community’s future.

**Bernard Lazare from Israelite to French Jew and Zionist**

The competition between a rising Jewish identity and the established Israelite norm of assimilation is as traceable in Lazare’s writing as it is represented in Proust’s novel. The following overview of Lazare’s most influential publications shows a chronological progression in three steps, each reflecting a stage in the French Israelite’s trajectory towards Jewishness.

Lazare’s first reaction to anti-Semitism, recorded in the articles published in *Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires* in 1890, show an undiluted Israelite stance, France’s Jews’ certainties in their *Frenchness*, their non-Jewishness. They lived according to their belief that there are no Jews in France but Israelites, that French Judaism is one of the country’s monotheist religions alongside Catholicism and Protestantism. In 1894, Lazare published *L’Antisémitisme, son histoire et ses causes*, a work expressed from the assimilated Israelite’s standpoint rather than
from that of the Jew’s. But Lazare’s book bears witness to modern anti-Semitism’s pernicious success two decades after the coinage of the term. Anti-Semitism forces Lazare to trace its history, to look for its causes and, as a result, brings him to affirm the existence of a Jewish nation in 1894. Within a short lapse of time the theory of a racial hatred for Jews was forcing upon the Israelite community, which still considered itself wholly French, a Jewish identity. Finally, in an ultimate transformation, Lazare ascended to Zionism and presented in March 1897 *Le Nationalisme Juif*, at the conference of the *Association des Etudiants Israélites russes*. As the title indicates Bernard Lazare had fully embraced and delineated the Zionist principles by which a French Jew, or any self-aware Jew, should function in an anti-Semitic world.

In effect, the polemist and essayist theorized the three successive situations, each with its own different consciousness, which defined French Jewry and that *A la recherche* reflects. Lazare’s writings show that the initial ‘Israelite’ phase knows two distinct stages (1890 and 1894), while the wholly Jewish phase, titled *Le Nationalisme Juif* or *Jewish Nationalism*, becomes articulated in 1897. Through his studies of the Jewish condition(s) in France discussed below, Lazare exemplifies how the discourses of ‘Power’ created, in rapid succession, differing layers of consciousness within the French Jew.

**Lazare enunciates French Zionism: A trans-national nation**

Lazare’s seminar, *Jewish Nationalism*, delivered in March 1897 to the *Association des Etudiants Israélites russes*, can be seen as his conclusions on the Jewish condition. With this piece, Bernard Lazare, a French Jew until recently a French Israelite, articulates in the era that begins with the arrest of Dreyfus a Jewish mode of being that ignores European national borders. His understanding of Zionism demands liberty for the Jews as a Nation but does not necessarily
include nor exclude a separate political Jewish state: “Que signifie pour le Juif le mot nationalisme…? Il doit signifier liberté. Le Juif qui aujourd’hui dira: “Je suis un nationaliste”, ne dira pas d’une façon spéciale, précise et nette, je suis un homme qui veut reconstituer un État Juif en Palestine… Il dira : « Je veux être un homme pleinement libre… échapper à l’oppression… à l’outrage… au mépris…” (Bernard Lazare 155-156). As this quotation demonstrates, this is a manifesto to further the recognition of a Jewish nation, one that will ensure the Jew’s freedom and development as a Jew regardless of time and place. Lazare reaffirms in 1897 the existence of the Jewish nation that he had come to accept only in his history of anti-Semitism of 1894. However, in 1897, three years after Dreyfus’ unjust banishment, Lazare clearly states a purpose for the trans-national Jewish nation, which is to guarantee freedom, respect and even admiration for the Jews. In addition, members of the Jewish nation are entitled and should demand, should engage in a struggle for their full rights as Jewish citizens in their home countries.

Bernard Lazare and the Jewish race

Nonetheless, Lazare’s 1897 layered construct, specific for a Jewish racial being, incorporates the earlier French Israelite consciousnesses. The construction is a Jewish subject who is self-possessed Jew but unmistakably French, a French Jew who is revealed to himself by an outside gaze. The layered subjection includes Jewish religion and assimilation, the cores of the two earlier French Israelite consciousnesses, but as submerged strata in the new construction. In their stead, Lazare emphasizes Jewish race, history, customs and traditions that inspire the philosophy and literature that materialize the separate, assertive Jewish nation and subject.
The place that Lazare assigns to race in *Le Nationalisme juif* sheds light on many aspects of racial construction. Through his construct one can deconstruct race. Race is always claimed, discovered or invented to legitimize a project. But no foolproof evidence is presented to prove the links between ethnicity and character. Lazare is no exception: he reclaims the Jewish race to reinforce further the self-articulation of the Jewish Nation in the Age of Nationalism:

Nous n’avons d’ailleurs à considérer que le présent, et le présent nous commande de chercher les moyens les plus propres à assurer la liberté aux hommes. Or, actuellement, c’est en vertu de principes traditionnels, que les hommes veulent s’agréger. Ils invoquent pour cela certaines identités d’origine, leur commun passé, des façons semblables d’envisager les phénomènes, les êtres et les choses ; une histoire, une philosophie commune (Lazare 105).

This passage lists the elements that construct Nationalism which consists of a common origin and past, a similar outlook on life as well as a common history, philosophy. Clearly, the rise of the nationalist movement determined Lazare’s pragmatic decision to articulate a Jewish nationalism. In order to function along peoples who had adopted the principles of Nationalism Jews had to adopt a similar organization. Among communities who defined themselves in reference to the myth of a single origin, of a common history and culture, Jews had to do the same. Lazare understood that to be respected and treated equal terms, and arrive at what Glissant would later term ‘la Relation’, Jews had to make the claim for their own nation, with its own identity, where its members could blossom within their own culture and history. By the 1890’s, a tenet of the Nation was the myth of the race that had a common origin and that aspect of the discourse found its way in Lazare’s writings.

Lazare’s acceptance of ‘race’ confirms the words of Ta-Nehisi Coates: “Race is the child of racism, not the father” (7). Westerners’ hatred of Jews brought them to create the new ‘race’
that Lazare came to accept on behalf of Jews. The action of racism becomes evident when Lazare cites an outside hostile gaze as proof that Jews are a race with physical characteristics:

In this particular case, the anti-Semites are right. True enough, they do not know why, and it is merely their hatred which has given them a confused perspicacity, but they have truth on their side… To these questions an identical answer is given by the philo-Semites and the anti-Semites: What unites among themselves all the world’s Jews is that they are of the same race… The Russian Jew with his flat nose… the Spanish Jew with his curved nose… the small brown-haired Jew with his straight nose, the small, red-haired German Jew… you may discover their likenesses both on the bas-reliefs of the Hittites and on the frescos which adorn the tombs of the Pharaohs… we may say that an identity of origin… does constitute a link among the Jews. (Jewish Nationalism: 55-56)

Lazare transmits his affirmation of the existence of a Jewish race that knows diverse physical characteristics with a literary flourish. The polemist waxes lyrical and creates an anaphor that starts with a nationality and the description of a nose. The word ‘nose’ marks a chant that celebrates a Jewish physical race, not a cultural and psychological one. As a Jew, and no longer a mere practitioner of Judaism, Lazare appropriates the affirmation of his anti-Semitic contemporaries that a Jewish race exists and justifies it with a reference to Jewish history in Antiquity. His appropriation argues that, already in Antiquity, the artists of the Egyptian and Hittite civilizations noticed the Jews’ difference and immortalized them with their specificity in their celebrated frescoes and bas-reliefs. Lazare uses the West’s Jewish racial discourse to establish a pedigree which he validates with the history and art of Antiquity. The technique brings an immediate cachet to the concept of a ‘Jewish race’ that anti-Semites had introduced to

\[\text{[Ce] sont les antisémites qui ont raison. Ils ne savent pas pourquoi, certes, et c’est simplement leur haine qui leur a donné une confuse clair voyance (sic.), mais ils sont dans la vérité… [U]ne réponse est faite à la fois par les philosémites et les antisémites. Ce qui unit entre eux tous les Juifs du monde, c’est qu’ils sont de même race. Le Juif russe au nez écrasé… le Juif espagnol au nez recourbé… le petit Juif brun au nez droit… le petit Juif roux d’Allemagne… on retrouve leur effigie sur les bas-reliefs des Hittites et sur les fresques qui ornent les tombeaux des Pharaons… on peut dire que l’identité des origines… constitue déjà un lien entre les Juifs… (Le Nationalisme juif)}\]
denigrate the Jews. As will be demonstrated, Proust will use a very similar technique to ennoble Charles Swann and Albert Bloch when he represents these two Jewish protagonists under the anti-Semitic gaze at the time of the Affair.

It is impossible to affirm whether Lazare truly came to believe that a ‘Jewish race’ exists or whether expediency led to his decision. In any case, appropriating the claim enabled him to define for Jews their ‘race’ and denied the opportunity to Jew haters. According to Lazare, denial is futile when the passion of both Philo-Semites and anti-Semites brings them to devise a Jewish race rooted in a mythical Orient of Antiquity. To sustain the racial argument, Bernard Lazare uses and assigns a three-fold role to the temporal distance between the Jews’ legendary root and late nineteenth-century Europe. He locates the Jewish common origin in a period distant enough to be nebulous, it legitimizes with allusions to historical references, and it establishes the permanence of the Jewish race so that ‘we may say that an identity of origin… does constitute a link among the Jews’. The myth of a common origin in a fictional Orient is conveniently located in a remote time and space that allows it to escape a too close inspection. The distance that can be measured only in millennia serves the allusion to the Ancients’ engravings which, in the manner of nineteenth-century anti-Semites, insisted on the nose of the Jew, the anti-Semitic physical identifier of Jewishness par excellence.

A Jewish identity upends religious practice as a Jewish marker

In his definition of the nationalist Jew, Lazare not only affirms the common origin of all Jews but he also represses the two cornerstones of Israelite doctrine: Judaism as mere faith and emancipation to assimilate.  

Le Nationalisme Juif mercilessly suppresses the Israelites’ views of their religion and of their role in history: “First of all in a common past, and a very recent past.
The emancipated Jew most often behaves like an upstart… Whereas most people go out of the way to find themselves ancestors, he wants to forget that he ever had one… generally he was a poor devil… whose right to life was barely recognized…” (Jewish Nationalism 56). From Lazare’s perspective, the Israelites’ ideology of total integration causes their alienation from their condition as the historic pariah of the West, an essential part of the uninterrupted Jewish history that is still unfolding and will continue to unfold. Lazare also observes that integration also alienates assimilated Jews from those who have kept a Jewish identity, from Jews who are still disenfranchised. Assimilation divides the Jewish Nation and transforms the defiant Jew, ‘the grain rebelle’ (p. 92), “the refractory seed” (Jewish Nationalism 58) into the possibly arriviste Israelite who bends to his tormentors, not just his head but ‘mème l’échine’ (Lazare 99), an image that also qualifies the Israelite parvenu in A la recherche du temps perdu.

A community, whose purpose is continuity through the generations, needs to encourage the voicing of the different perspectives that exist within its ranks to withstand assimilation. Diversity makes it more difficult to impose a pejorative, reductive label on a community but, as importantly, it is more difficult to create the conditions that will convince or lead all its energized subgroups to assimilate. Bernard Lazare, in Le Nationalisme Juif, is harsh with Israelites because they reduce the Jewish people to the practicing of their religion, to Judaism: “Especially in those countries where the Jews can take solace for the contempt shown them in the very fact that their emancipation has been sanctioned, it is common that one wants to find in Judaism no more than a religious confession” (Jewish Nationalism 55). To Bernard Lazare, the student of Jewish

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10 “D'abord dans un passé commun, et un passé bien récent. Le Juif émancipé se conduit le plus souvent comme un parvenu… Alors que chacun s’ingénie à se chercher des ancêtres, il veut oublier qu’il en a eu un… c’était généralement un pauvre hère… auquel on reconnaissait à peine le droit à la vie…” (Bernard Lazare 91)

11 “C’est surtout dans les pays où les Juifs se consolent du mépris qui leur est témoigné par le fait qu’on a consacré leur émancipation, c’est surtout dans ces pays qu’on ne veut voir dans le judaïsme qu’une confession religieuse” (Bernard Lazare 90).
condition of 1897, to confine Judaism to the religious sphere reduces a historical, political, cultural tradition to submissiveness to bourgeois values. The ‘integral Israelite’ who simply practices a monotheist religion is assimilated with other monotheisms and has no alternative ideology to contribute to society. He also reneges on his role which is the search and struggle for social justice: “Never forget that you have been the people, as Renan said, which brought justice into the world, and earn yourself forgiveness for having given a god to men by being for ever (sic.) the soldiers of justice and of human brotherhood” (Jewish Nationalism 79)\textsuperscript{12}. Those last sentences of Le Nationalisme Juif, define the ideal and the purpose of the Jewish nation. Jews, unlike Israelites who identify with the center, must permanently question the status-quo, must constantly look out to redress social inequity and abuses. To Bernard Lazare, the Jews took on a mantle with their revelation of a god of justice to mankind. Such a historical heritage demands of Jews that they constantly discover and get to know other groups on equal terms to ‘live Relation’, that Jews stand shoulder to shoulder with all downtrodden in a continuous presence in the struggle to improve the human condition.

To understand Lazare’s recoil from the two Israelite positions, assimilation and Judaism as another French religion, one must remember that they had been an integral part of his own earlier consciousness. He had advocated the first in L’Antisémitisme, son histoire et ses causes, published the latter in articles. In the history of anti-Semitism released in 1894, Bernard Lazare, still a believer in assimilation for Jews, had categorically rejected the notion of a Jewish race: “La race est d’ailleurs une fiction” (Lazare 78). “In any case, race is a fiction.” He had further argued that Aryan and Semite races were mixed, that the ‘Oriental’ people had contributed much

\textsuperscript{12} “N’oubliez jamais que vous avez été le peuple qui a introduit, comme l’a dit Renan, la justice dans le monde, et faites-vous pardonner d’avoir donné un dieu aux hommes, en étant toujours les soldats de la justice et de la fraternité humaine » (Bernard Lazare 109)
to Western civilization: “Les Grecs, avec leur sens merveilleux de l’harmonie, de la beauté… malaxèrent ces idées orientales, les épurèrent… mais le peuple grec n’en fut pas moins un amalgam de races bien diverses… et c’est à d’autres causes qu’à la noblesse et à la pureté de son origine qu’il dut son génie” (Lazare 91). Before 1897, it was not just the ethnic purity of the pseudo-Aryan race that Lazare denounced as a myth. All aspects of European civilizations, the spiritual as well as the plastic, are offshoots of the so-called Semitic race’s achievements. Even classical Greece, the supposed founder of Western reason, reached its cultural and mechanical heights thanks to Semitic contributions in all aspects.

Not all French intellectuals embraced the notion of an ‘Aryan’ race or of the ‘Jewish’ one that Lazare articulates in Jewish Nationalism of 1897. Lucien Herr, for example, is a thinker who challenged Maurice Barrès, a proponent of racial ideology in France. In La Revue blanche, on February 15, 1898, Herr addressed directly to Barrès arguments very similar to the above general affirmation by Lazare that Europeans descend from a number of mixed races: “Soyez convaincu que, si le mot race a un sens, vous êtes, comme nous tous, non pas l’homme d’une race, mais le produit de trois, de six, de douze races fondues en vous et indissolublement mêlées” (Lucien Herr 41). For Lucien Herr, a very private man who had emancipated himself from his Catholic heritage, belief in the notion of race was irrational. As Herr states in his open letter, everyone, including Barrès, the apologist of a national French specificity and exclusive difference, comes from a largely heterogeneous ethnic, cultural pool. Herr would not join Barrès or Lazare in propagating a theory of races that he intellectually disapproved of. However, by the late nineteenth-century, the racial concept had become so well accepted that using reason to question its validity helped determine how society perceived the individual. In her article on

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13 Lucien Herr was an Alsatian of Catholic origin as discussed on page 24.
Herr’s role as an intellectual Antoinette Blum notes that “Barrès (sic.) sole reaction to the letter was: “Je ne savais pas qu’il fût Juif” (207)\textsuperscript{14}. Barrès’ repartee is ambiguous since there is no hint as to his sincerity or spitefulness. However, whether Barrès’ remark is sincere or insulting, it remains that Herr’s rational stance against belief in a ‘race culture’ and anti-Semitism allowed the nationalist leader to align him with the Jews.

The nationalist stand that Lazare adopted denotes the strong influence Barrès’ ideas exercised and the atmosphere their preponderance created. In *L’Antisémitisme, son histoire et ses causes* Lazare had specifically rejected the ‘Barrésian’ racial ideology and the existence of a Jewish race but had affirmed the reality of their nation: “Néanmoins, si les Juifs ne sont pas une race, ils ont été jusqu’à nos jours une nation. Ils se sont perpétués avec leurs caractéristiques propres, leur type confessionnel, leur code théologique qui fut en même temps un code social” (Lazare 265). Lazare had written the book from an Israelite perspective. From that viewpoint, the rejection of race and the subversion of racial purity were understood to be primordial but to be a nation within the State was no more stigmatic than being a Breton within France. For the Israelites to allow the belief that Jews belonged to a foreign race to spread meant they could not enjoy the rights and privileges that come with being French.

The denial of the right to assimilate because of the insurmountable racial difference had consequences at the end of the nineteenth-century: “Si ces éléments hétérogènes ne se laissent pas absorber, il y a lutte, lutte souvent violente, et qui se manifeste de multiples façons : depuis la persécution jusqu’à parfois l’expulsion… [E]t l’antisémitisme fut une des manifestations de cet effort que firent les peuples pour réduire les individualités étrangères” (Bernard Lazare

\textsuperscript{14} In a private exchange with Dr. Blum she informs me that she believes Barrès was well aware that Herr came from a Catholic family but wished to disparage him by calling him Jewish. However, whether Barrès’ statement is an insult or not, it remains that Herr’s rational stand against racism and anti-Semitism aligns him with the Jews in the average Frenchman’s mind of the time.
Anti-Semitism was to Lazare an indication that, in his time, there would be violence against the Jews. Lazare’s prediction proved to be correct unfortunately. The constant threat against the Jewish communities, the ongoing pogroms of Eastern Europe as *L’Antisémitisme, son histoire et ses causes* was nearing publication explain the second stage of the Israelite ideology of assimilation. In the first place, the consciousness of being part of a Jewish nation already exists but, in the second place, the impending risks of persecutions seemed to demand that French Jews assimilate as other groups had done in France: “les Basques, les Bretons, les Provençaux, quoique étant fort différents anthropologiquement, appartient quand même tous à la nation française” (115). To Lazare, as late as 1894, assimilation had been the answer to the pressing issues facing the Jews. Integration had seemed the only avenue for the Jews to be included in society, to not be isolated beyond borders and deprived of exchanges with the ‘Others’. By 1897, however, the rise of anti-Semitism and development of the infamous Dreyfus case brought Lazare to reject completely the Israelites’ ideology and demanded that Jews embrace their own specific ethnic and cultural traits and that they interact as such, on an equal plane, with Europeans and other groups.

**Notions of Jewish identity in Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche***

The discourses of Jewish subjection in the 1890’s, as opposed to ideology of assimilation for Israelites of the nine previous decades, strike with the speed of their transformations over a mere seven years. From 1890 to 1897, they evolved quickly, from one of assimilation in response to universalism, to one of Jewish consciousness and eventually, for large numbers, to Zionism in response to Nationalism. The evolutions succeeded each other so quickly that it is unlikely that any single one of the three could have captured the loyalty of the community, or that of any individual Jew, at any time. However, in Lazare’s work, the chronological order of
the publications helps reveal an evolutionary process that can be traced in a linear manner. The same does not hold in Marcel Proust’s fiction with its aspirations to verisimilitude. In such a work, a novel that attempts to recreate a reality that spans half a century, the consecutive manners of being a French Jew are shown to exist in both Bloch and Swann. Lazare’s theories help explain and interpret puzzling aspects that occur in the representation of the French Jewish world of A la recherche.

Sodome et Gomorrhe I, though identifying French Jewish discourses of subjection is not an intention that can be attributed to its author, shows them coexisting. In that section of A la recherche, Proust convincingly calls for the recognition, acceptance, respect and inclusion of all communities. The author, rather than argue a cause, has his novel’s fictional narrator establish a parallel relation between the plight of homosexuals and the Jews’ predicament. The metaphor compares two conditions, the Jew and the ‘Sodomite’, to reveal the existence of a third, or of what is commonly known as a ‘minority group’. As seen above with Lazare, Proust demonstrates how a hostile outside gaze, its discourses that provide materiality, the mythical place of origin for a pseudo-race, the history of pathos in exile, a reclaimed abjection, the desire for freedom and the call for tolerance and acceptance construct the different. However, unlike Lazare, Proust’s principles of subjection include and prioritize an inner communal and individual gaze. Sodome et Gomorrhe I does emphasize the situation of the transsexual or of the inverti rather than that of the Jew in society. But this study’s attempt to unveil the history of the French Jews’ subjectivity requires that the analysis reverses the order of priority, that it extracts from the metaphor between Jews and transsexuals what can be learned of the Jewish community in the late nineteenth-century.
The outer gaze that confirms one’s ‘otherness’ in Lazare, is as present and nefarious in *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*. In that section of the novel, the narrator wants to cross the inner courtyard of his building to spy on two men, the aristocratic and famously snobbish Baron de Charlus and the concierge and tailor Jupien, who have just met but experience the urgent and irresistible need to retire behind the closed door of the latter’s store: “‘It would be a fine thing,’ I thought to myself, ‘if I were to show less courage… when the only steel that I… have to fear is that of the eyes of the neighbours…’” (*Cities of the Plain* 630-631)\(^\text{15}\). The look from the neighbor can be as harmful as an enemy’s blade, it can objectify one, but it must be ignored, be made irrelevant. More importantly, the outsider’s gaze is superseded by an inner gaze: “But the gods are immediately perceptible to one another, like as quickly to like…” (*Cities of the Plain* 636)\(^\text{16}\). Hence, for Marcel Proust, one’s identity depends foremost on similar characteristics that belong to each member of a community that allow them to recognize one another instantly. Every subject of a same culture has innate affinities that bring them to master its intricacies.

The subject is therefore one who possesses his or her culture, with all its intricacies, that allows them to understand promptly what remains hidden to the outsider. The most sensitive and well meaning outsider’s gaze can gather much but never capture a foreign community’s full truth: “The Baron and Jupien, they’re just the same sort of person”\(^\text{17}\) (*Cities of the Plain*: 654) claims Francoise the simple, well meaning narrator’s family’s cook. Her simplicity allows her to comprehend that class disparities aside, Jupien and Charlus are similar. But the essence of their similarity will remain foreign to Françoise unless it is revealed to her as it is to the narrator.

However, the French Jewish minority, or any other minority encountered in *A la recherche*, does

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\(^{15}\) “Il ferait beau voir… que je fusse plus pusillanime… quand le seul fer que j’aie à craindre est le regard des voisins…” (*Sodome et Gomorrhe, I*: 10).

\(^{16}\) “Mais les dieux sont immédiatement perceptibles aux dieux, le semblable aussi vite au semblable…” (15).

\(^{17}\) “Le baron et Jupien, c’est bien le même genre de personnes” (32).
not owe its existence to an outside gaze that situates them beyond the boundaries. Each group existed with all their characteristics prior to being ‘discovered’ by the outsider.

The world of Proust, as represented in *A la recherche*, consists of a plethora of clearly defined communities. The text clearly states that each group owns traits that nurturing or breeding cannot always explain and each community must be accepted with its ‘natural’ characteristics: “Peut-être l’exemple des Juifs, d’une colonie différente, n’est-il même pas assez fort pour expliquer combien l’éducation a peu de prise sur eux [les invertis]… Peut-être, pour les peindre, faut-il penser… aux noirs¹⁸, que l’existence des blancs désespère et qui préfèrent les risques de la vie sauvage et ses incompréhensibles joies” (26). Three widely different human groups, summoned into proximity in this passage, stand shoulder to shoulder. *A la recherche* recognizes full agency for every group, with the right for each to select the lifestyle best suited for the natural inclination. The text acknowledges Africans’ conscious embrace of their freedom, of their lifestyle suited to their own environment, which bring them to reject Western civilization and engage in *marronnage*. The same understanding is extended to homosexuals, to Jews, equal to Blacks in their difference, who like them will not be subjected to any identity but their own. Indeed, individuals from these communities can suppress their true selves and live a life of assimilation but, in the spirit of *A la recherche*, many more will come to associate according to their *penchant* and form a community, even a ‘closeted’ one. In Proust, each

¹⁸ Lucie C. Paul-Austin tackles in her doctoral thesis, now a book, the phenomenon of *marronnage*, historically the moment when a slave or an African flees the plantation to live in accordance with their own culture. Proust’s allusion to Blacks who flee the ‘white world’ demonstrates a knowledge of, and sympathy for, the phenomenon of ‘marronage’. Proust’s words capture the very moment that defines the ‘marron’, or in Paul-Austin’s words, when ‘marron’ : “évoque l’individu et son étroite dépendance à la phénoménologie : « partir marron ». Le moment de crise, la décharge en est le point culminant ; sa liberté ne peut se matérialiser que par la rupture physique avec ce lieu d’[enfer]mement”. Proust understands that Blacks choose liberty in the unknown over stability or a modicum of comfort in a hellish white world.
identity enjoys the same recognition which enables its participation in Relation on equal terms as prescribed by Glissant.

Marcel Proust’s treatment of race in *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, subverts the ethnic dictates of the West: “Ces descendants des Sodomistes, si nombreux qu’on peut leur appliquer l’autre verset de la Genèse: « Si quelqu’un peut compter la poussière de la terre, il pourra aussi compter cette postérité », se sont fixés sur toute la terre, ils ont eu accès à toutes les professions, et entrent si bien dans les clubs les plus fermés… ” (33). With this passage, *A la recherche* applies to the *invertis* a prophecy that the Bible reserves for Abraham and his descendants. Applying the biblical verse to homosexuals is a denial of a pure race since the text implies that from a point of origin they have ‘settled the whole earth’ and ‘entered every profession’. In other words, the ‘Semitic’ *invertis* have married and reproduced with every people on earth and, in so doing, ensured that every nation inherits characteristics from their ancestors. Only the Semitic origins of two Frenchmen from as different milieus as Charlus, of the ducal house of Guermantes, and Jupien, from the wholesome working class, could bring them to exchange a look that summons “le ciel, non pas de Zurich, mais de quelque cité orientale…” The description of two Frenchmen experiencing in Paris a banal sensual encounter, but that the West assigns to the East, to ‘an oriental city’, is an invitation to imagine that the same characteristics and behavior belong to all people, under every sky. In *A la recherche*, as for Coates and for Lazare, no race exists without racism.

*Sodome et Gomorrhe I* does not articulate but illustrates through its protagonists the materiality of the modern French Jew. The novel covers the themes of Jewish subjection enunciated by Bernard Lazare succinctly because it summons pictures with words, it paints: it brings the reader to see rather than explain. In that section of *A la recherche*, Proust, like
Lazare, praises Jewish solidarity, describes the opprobrium born of a history of anti-Jewish sentiments and castigates the Israelite who flatters the Gentile. These parcels of late nineteenth-century French Jewish subjectivity are revealed through metaphors (since the analogies release a third truth) between the Jewish and transsexual (inverti) conditions:

[The inverts] excluded even, save on the day of general misfortune when the majority rally around the victim as the Jews rallied round Dreyfus...; like the Jews again (save some who will associate only with those of their race and have always on their lips the ritual words and the accepted pleasantries), shunning one another, seeking out those who are most directly their opposite, who do not want their company, forgiving their rebuffs, enraptured by their condescensions; but also brought into the company of their own kind by the ostracism to which they are subjected, the opprobrium into which they have fallen, having finally been invested, by a persecution similar to that of Israel, with the physical and moral characteristics of a race, sometimes beautiful, often hideous, finding... a relief in frequenting the society of their kind, and even a support in their existence...¹⁹ (*Cities of the Plain* 638-639).

In this passage from *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, the text offers the perspective of an insider who is familiar with and understands the feelings and inner working of an oppressed community. The artist paints the complete truth of the maligned group that is intrinsic to him, as a fellow member for whom “But the gods are immediately perceptible to one another, like as quickly to like...” Only among the same can one drop the mask, only then the superfluity of words is recognized, done away with. Jewish solidarity necessarily exists as the only possible succor extended to the minority member made into a scapegoat by a hostile surrounding.

¹⁹ [Les invertis] exclus même, hors les jours de grande infortune où le plus grand nombre se rallie autour de la victime, comme les Juifs autour de Dreyfus...; comme les Juifs encore (sauf quelques-uns qui ne veulent fréquenter que ceux de leur race, ont toujours à la bouche les mots rituels et les plaisanteries consacrées) se fuyant les uns les autres, recherchant ceux qui leur sont le plus opposés qui ne veulent pas d’eux, pardonnant leurs rebuffades, s’enivrant de leurs complaisances; mais aussi rassemblés à leurs pareils par l’ostracisme qui les frappe, l’opprobre ou ils sont tombés, ayant fini par prendre, par une persécution semblable à celle d’Israël, les caractères physiques et moraux d’une race, parfois beaux, souvent affreux... trouvant... une détente dans la fréquentation de leurs semblables, et même un appui dans leur existence... (*Sodome et Gomorrhe* :17)
Proust’s novel portrays the history of the Jews in a manner similar to the one that Lazare offers. Jewish history is too often the product of an irrational opprobrium that condemned them to isolation. Predictably, as in Bernard Lazare, the internalized, reclaimed abjection eventually combines with an isolated condition to shape a race with its own particularities. Bernard Lazare noted, as Proust does in the above quote, that some within the race prized their isolation and rejected all outsiders: “Beaucoup de ces misérables chérissaient leur abaissement… et l’effort du plus grand nombre tendit à rester soi-même au milieu des étrangers…” And Proust, like Lazare, notes that there are Jews who come to be partisans of ‘assimilationism’ and who shun other Jews, who seek: “out those who are most directly their opposite, who do not want their company, forgiving their rebuffs, enraptured by their condescensions”. The integral ‘assimilationist’ becomes, as Lazare had also decried, alienated from their community and seeks to assimilate at cost of pride and self-respect. The Israelite who seeks to integrate Gentile society, who debases himself to that end finds understanding in A la recherche but is not upheld as a model.

Political Zionism

Proust and Lazare came to a similar conclusion on the issue of political Zionism. Both dismissed the need for contemporary Jews to replicate the West’s policies of colonial expansion. The two authors concluded that Jewish behavior and outlook needed to remain in line with the community’s separate history of persecution, a history of the downtrodden. Hence, an aggressive, confidant, conquering form of Jewish Nationalism would be unappealing to the two writers. In the letter of resignation to the Zionist Congress, dated June 24, 1901, that Lazare addressed to Haim Weizmann he explains that:

Israel cosmopolite a souffert en tout temps de l’exclusivisme, du protectionnisme et du nationalisme. Il doit s’en garder et aider s’il le peut le monde à se débarrasser de ce
fléau. Culture juive ne doit donc pas signifier culture propre à développer ou à exaspérer des sentiments de chauvinisme, bien au contraire, cela doit signifier culture propre à développer des tendances juives qui sont des tendances humaines dans le plus haut sens de ce mot (Philippe Oriol 14).

Lazare’s letter offers ideas that are strikingly similar to those Edouard Glissant professed for the French Caribbean. Like Glissant, Lazare calls for his nation to adopt attitudes of humility and openness towards the ‘Other’, in line with its historical experiences. Bernard Lazare had devised, like Glissant, that a people shaped by the abyss should shun glory, remain faithful to its history in Relation with the ‘Other’.

Lazare feared that Herzl’s brand of Zionism, as he makes clear in the same letter to Weizmann, had deviated too far from the Jews’ heritage of oppression. To Lazare, Theodore Herzl, founder of political Zionism, had selected for the Jews a path scattered with too many and too high risks of failure and he claimed that: “le Sionisme politico-diplomatique, capitaliste et bourgeois qui occupe la scène… fera des Juifs la risée de tous s’il ne les conduit pas à la catastrophe” (14). Lazare found that Herzl’s project, which included the creation of a territorial homeland for Jews in what was then Palestine, overly ambitious and necessarily dependent on the wealthiest members of the community and their interests. Herzl also negotiated and compromised with the Sultan in Constantinople since Palestine was then a province of the Ottoman Empire. However, the Ottoman massacres of Armenians from 1894 to 1896 had appalled Lazare who had actively taken up their cause in the French press. Herzl’s visits and services to the Sultan in the hope that the Sublime Porte would grant him territory in Palestine scandalized Lazare who denounced those efforts20. Ideological considerations aside, the risk

20 Bernard Lazare publie un article dans le numéro du 10 janvier 1902 de la revue Pro Armenia un article intitulé : "Le Congrès sioniste et le Sultan" où il écrit notamment : "Les représentants -ou ceux qui se disent tels- du plus
existed that the attempt to secure Palestine or part of it for Jews would end in a fiasco for Western Jews already facing persecution in diverse parts of Europe.

In *A la recherche*, the attitude toward Herzl’s Palestinian project was equally dismissive, a view expressed in an ironic manner. Zionism is mentioned twice in *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, and on both occasions, it is projected as impractical: “and, when they wish to share their taste with others, seek out... those who seem to them to be worthy of it, from apostolic zeal, just as others preach Zionism, conscientious objection, Saint-Simonianism, vegetarianism or anarchy”21 (*Cities of the Plain*: 643). Proust mentions the Zionist movement among a succession of associations of zealots, none of which could or would know a successful future. In other words, Zionism is impractical and spells disaster for those who listen to its preachers. As will be seen in the chapters on his protagonists Rachel, Charles Swann and Albert Bloch, Proust would be a proponent of a separate Jewish identity but he would not propose for French Jews to move from their country.

Proust’s second mention of Zionism exhibits as much, if not more, skepticism: “but I have thought it as well to utter here a provisional warning against the lamentable error of proposing (just as people have encouraged a Zionist movement) to create a Sodomist movement and to rebuild Sodom. For, no sooner had they arrived there than the Sodomites would leave the

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21 “et quand ils cherchent à faire partager leur goût, le font... qu’à ceux qui leur en semblent dignes, par zèle d’apostolat, comme d’autres prêchent le sionisme, le refus du service militaire, le saint-simonisme, le végétarisme, et l’anarchie” (*Sodome et Gomorrhe I* 22).
In the world of *A la recherche*, Zionism is impractical and even if a nation-state is secured for Jews only, no Jew will accept to stay. The reason offered, or at least implied, is that identification with such a place reduces the subject to a single identity. Zionism would corral the Jews as abjectly as the ghettos had done and prevent them from living Relation. Zionism would also reduce the Jews to one identity, would impede on individual talent, on one’s aspirations. Indeed, Bernard Lazare had mentioned the Jewish impulse toward sociability, their need and right of every Jew to pursue their every talent in *Contre L’Antisémitisme*: “J’ai établi que le reproche que l’antisémitisme moderne fait aux Juifs modernes… [c’est] d’être trop sociables… de porter leurs activités sur d’autres points et de se mêler à toutes les manifestations de la vie contemporaine” (Bernard Lazare: 129). For both Proust and Lazare, the creation of a state for Jews contradicted the need of the people who would become estranged from the centers of creativity and disallow their usual participation. The establishment of Jewish country also served the purpose of the anti-Semites since Jews would leave the West to relocate in an Oriental ghetto, where they would not contribute and influence Western development and ideas or be influenced by them.

**Conclusion**

Lazare’s and Proust’s rejection of a Jewish nation-state, or a geographical state for a Jewish people only, is another indication that, as discussed in the first page, they anticipated by a century Glissant’s thought on human relations. At the turn of the twenty-first century, Glissant proposed for peoples a rhizomatic system rather than one where a nation attempts to exclude all others from its geographical area:

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22 “mais on a voulu provisoirement prévenir l’erreur funeste qui constituerait, de même qu’on a encouragé un mouvement sioniste, à créer un mouvement sodomiste et à rebâti Sodome. Or, à peine arrivés, les sodomistes quitteraient la ville pour ne pas avoir l’air d’en être…” (33).
Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari ont critiqué les notions de racine et peut-être d’enracinement. La racine est unique, c’est une souche qui prend tout sur elle et tue autour ; ils lui opposent le rhizome qui est une racine démultipliée, étendue en réseaux dans la terre ou dans l’air, sans qu’aucune souche y intervienne en prédateur irrémédiable. La notion de rhizome maintiendrait donc le fait de l’enracinement, mais récuse l’idée d’une racine totalitaire (23).

Glissant returns to the work of Deleuze and Guattari to signal the role that the image of the deep rooted tree plays in the West. The single root represents the Western model of the nation who identifies with a specific history that unfolds in a determined space and cannot welcome any other group. In lieu of a nation who pictures itself as a tree with branches that feed from its single root and that tolerates no other growth in its vicinity, Glissant proposes that a people model their cultural and national outlook on the ‘rhizome’, a concept very close to the notion of genuine tolerance that Proust and Lazare had of the Jewish people.

Unlike the tree and its hegemonic single root, the rhizome consists of countless roots that multiply and go in every direction toward different ones that they embrace. In a rhizomatic system, the roots respect each other’s difference and do not attempt in their proximity to alter the characteristics of another root. A community who adopts a rhizomatic approach has, and benefits from, its own cultural and historic roots but welcome other rhizomes in its space. Furthermore, the rhizome can easily be transplanted to start another ‘rhizomatic culture’ in any area that offers adequate conditions. The rhizome differs from the tree which, not only monopolizes and absorbs all the sap of an area with its root, but which also kills all within the shade of its branches. The rhizome welcomes and flourishes with different plants. A rhizomatic space is one where communities live together and respect difference.
The condition of Jews as a different people, with their separate history and culture, informs the writings of Bernard Lazare and Marcel Proust in response to the Dreyfus affair, symbol of the anti-Semitic and nationalist discourses. Lazare’s considerations on the ‘Jewish Question’ brought him to adopt a Zionism that argued the existence a separate Jewish nation whose members are entitled to the same rights, respect, duties and privileges that their non-Jewish citizens enjoy. Nonetheless, Lazare rejected Theodore Herzl’s political Zionism and its call for European Jews to immigrate and create their own exclusive state.

Lazare understood Zionism as the identity or consciousness of a Jewish people who live with other nations and who are rated or berated according to the same values of justice, authenticity, pride, tolerance and integrity that inform the Jewish protagonists of Proust’s novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In the works of Proust and Lazare, the principles for the Jewish nation include the same ‘imaginary’ characteristics common to all nations, or the idea that all members share a single origin, culture and history. Nonetheless, as the present and coming chapters demonstrate, both Lazare and Proust conceived of the Jewish nation as ‘rhizomatic’, or one with a sense of its difference that provides the identity that enables them to live with other nations, in a same space, as equals, and acknowledge, discover and know each other as they ‘live Relation’.
Chapter Two

Rachel, The Transgressor of Race in *A la recherche*

The invention of race in the West that the previous chapter discussed continues to affect, and even deteriorate if not prevent at times, relations between communities in contemporary societies. Among the accomplishments of Marcel Proust’s novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*, is its portrayal of the racial concept as a construct which reveals its arbitrariness while explaining its endurance. ‘Race’ furthers the interests or goals of a group or of an individual. In the gallery of Jewish portraits that he paints for *A la recherche*, Proust includes a particularly striking figure. The protagonist Rachel, or ‘Rachel when from the Lord’, embodies the ‘Other’ as defined according to Michel Foucault in the first and previous chapter. Rachel remains permanently within society’s margins and, thus, constantly demonstrates the agency that enables her successive self-reinventions. Like Charles Swann and Albert Bloch, the other two important Jewish protagonists in Proust’s novel, Rachel exhibits a fluid body able to cross racial lines. But it is through the female character, more than through the two male ones, that Proust’s text isolates each element that constructs the French ‘Other’. The representation of Rachel serves, not to demonstrate a life in Relation, but to deconstruct the French minority construct and expose its artificiality as she adopts deliberate steps to become the member of another ‘race’.

Rachel’s distinctive characteristic, the trait that makes her the character of *A la recherche* most apt to help ponder racial, ethnic or gender implications, is her transformation from gentile to Jew. Through the protagonist’s subtle progression, from a European-French to a Jewish figure, the novel proposes categories of race and ethnicity as perceptions resulting from repeated performance. Such an affirmation follows Judith Butler’s argument that performativity
configures the body along the lines of a gender: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal overtime to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (J. Butler Gender Trouble 25). In the manner described by Butler, Proust’s Rachel represents a female protagonist who stylizes her body to produce the ‘appearance of a natural Jew’ instead of a gendered ‘natural sort of being’. In other words, the novel’s protagonists and its readers come to accept Rachel as ethnically Jewish because, of her own volition and repetitively throughout her lifespan in the book, she aligns her words and actions with the cultural and ‘medical’ discourses that affect French Jews.

The relation that exists between aligning one’s performances to racial discourses and the creation of race is no mere novelistic stratagem. In fact, Jonathan Xavier Inda has relied on the work of Judith Butler to describe how utterance brings into reality a racialized being:

Following Butler... just as the gendered body does not exist as a simple biological fact, neither does the racial body. It thus proposes that we think of “race” as an effect of discourse, that is, as being performatively constituted. In speech act theory, the performative refers to those acts of speech that bring into being or enact that which they name (Austin, 1975). It is that aspect of discourse that, in the act of uttering, also performs the action to which it refers. From this perspective, it means that while “race” may have a foundation in biology since “it” divides populations on the basis of national characteristics, it is really just a name, albeit a very powerful one, that retroactively constitutes and naturalizes the groupings to which it refers (Jonathan Inda 74-75).

As Inda maintains, the human mind sorts, categorizes and labels to group people in accordance with characteristics that the body inherits from lineage. Since nature does not create race, it cannot impose it on bodies. Rather, human reason produces racial discourses that play a dual role in the production of race. While the ‘Discourse’ provides a human being with the tool to ‘perform’ a race and become thereby the member of a group, it also gives the observer, not only the means to evaluate and interpret the performance, but also to identify and certify the existence of the racially different. Race, therefore, cannot be exclusive; it is necessarily porous since its
existence depends on interpreting and performing discourses that are at everyone’s disposal. It is
the opposition between the roles of nature and discourses around the Jew that Proust exposes
with his representation of Rachel’s transformation into a ‘Semite’.

Better than any other word, “Semitic” illustrates the rapport between discourse and race
invention. As discussed in Chapter One, the term coined around 1800 to classify a group of
languages allowed, almost instantaneously, the production of a discourse that, within decades,
‘uttered’ and ‘naturalized’ the Jewish race. Once created by nineteenth-century discourses, the
‘race’ could be imposed ‘retroactively’ to interpret bodies as Jewish, as if nature had intended the
racial difference. At its core, Rachel’s representation is that of a brilliant female character of the
1890’s to the 1920’s who wills the eventual imposition of the ‘Jewish race’ on her body. For the
most part, during those decades, Western patriarchal institutions that denied women the rights to
vote, to travel or to transact business without a male kin’s permission went unquestioned. With
Rachel, Proust represents the countless women who, in spite of the obstacles, prior to the
feminist movement, always forged their way and realized their aspirations. The heroine thinks
and plans abstractly to become a Jew, and realizes her ambitions thanks to her intelligence that
allows her to best or equal any man in the book. Rachel’s representation is also that of a woman
willing and able to challenge the racial boundaries that male ‘scientists’ devised in the
nineteenth-century. As Rachel progresses through the novel’s different volumes, the character
demonstrates that society and not nature devises the quintessential discourses on ‘Women’ and
race that she embodies.

Marcel, the narrator, introduces the protagonist in Within a Budding Grove, the novel’s
second volume, as a gentile prostitute passing as a Jew. In that first appearance, a procuress at a
brothel utters the word Jew in relation to Rachel and sets off the ‘retroactive imprint’ of
Jewishness on the character. At that stage of Rachel’s transformation into a Semite, the literary discourse of ‘the Jewess’, or ‘la belle Juive’, that non-Jews elaborated initiates her metamorphosis. The result is a negative representation of the Jew that leaves the novel’s narrator unconvinced of Rachel’s Jewishness. Rachel reappears in Guermantes’ Way, the third volume, a bona-fide Jew, the kept mistress of Lieutenant Robert de Saint-Loup, an officer who belongs to the high nobility. In that tome, the pseudo-medical discourse on ‘hysteria’ that historically targeted women, but that the last decades of the nineteenth-century came to associate with Jews as well, intervenes to help perfect Rachel’s Jewish persona. In addition, Rachel is shown perfecting her subjection as a Jew by demonstrating Jewish solidarity, a principle that Bernard Lazare lauds in Jewish Nationalism. Rachel’s empathy for the wronged Captain Dreyfus brings Saint-Loup and his entourage, and even the narrator, to see her as belonging to the Jewish community. In the last and seventh volume, Le Temps retrouvé, Rachel, now old and hideous, has undergone a final metamorphosis. She is at the apex of society, a famed stage actress who entertains the tout-Paris at the home of the Princess de Guermantes. Rachel’s career has reached its peak in Le Temps retrouvé, where she appears to be Jewish, even to protagonists of Jewish origin, without need to mention her ethnicity. Her self-engendered transformation is therefore complete. But, nonetheless, because Rachel’s acquiring of a Jewish identity is wholly self-serving, devoid of any active commitment to a cause or a group, there is no inkling in the novel that she is representative of the community. Unlike the protagonist Charles Swann, who loses his looks as he adopts a Jewish identity, the heroine’s unattractiveness is not redeemed by a will to sacrifice on behalf of Jews and she does not ‘live Relation’ for having acquired racial Jewish stereotypes.
In *A la recherche*, Rachel’s ability to change her ‘race’, to morph into a Jew, is another credit to her intellect. The character selects and combines two contemporary discourses to achieve her transformation: one literary, ‘the Jewess’ or *la belle Juive* in French, and another, ‘hysteria’, pseudo-medical. The existence of ‘the Jewess’ as a literary trope that originates with *Ivanhoe*, Walter Scott’s 1820 novel, has been well documented by scholars some of whose works are quoted and discussed below. But, during the 1890’s, as will be demonstrated through Sander Gilman’s work, ‘hysteria’ came to be associated with the Jew irrelevant of whether the Jewish individual demonstrated the symptoms of the disease or not. Gilman’s contribution to the field of Jewish studies, particularly his focus on the representation of the ‘Jew’s body’, is central to understand Rachel’s reinvention in the novel. It is the contemporary assumption that hysteria - a sickness medical discourse had attached from time immemorial to the female body - affected or could affect any Jewish person that informs Rachel’s transformation in the novel. The following discussion of ‘hysteria’ and *la belle Juive* will show how their dissemination and acceptance in the nineteenth-century allow Rachel to rely, in each of her appearances in *A la Recherche*, on a store of false knowledge to advance her metamorphosis.

‘The Jewess’ or *la belle Juive*.

Proust’s representation of Rachel reveals his awareness of the power of *la belle Juive*, and neutralizes its effect by exposing its hidden mechanisms. The discourse, a nineteenth-century literary construct, originates in British literature, as mentioned above, with Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, a work that left readers convinced of the reality of ‘the Jewess’: “Readers truly come to believe that Scott reproduces a past reality. At once, ‘The Jewess’ establishes itself much more
as tangible evidence rather than as a literary construct” (Eric Fournier 26). Scott’s novel engendered a ‘suspension of disbelief’ that is multiplied tenfold when his success inspires countless writers to adopt the trope. Indeed, though Fournier’s book *La « Belle Juive »* studies two-hundred works of literature inspired by ‘the Jewess’ in France alone, he admits that his “selected corpus” is far from exhaustive (11). Nonetheless, his effort is sufficient to identify the characteristics of ‘the Jewess’:

Evidently, she is beautiful and Jewish. The interaction of these two elements that is wholly responsible for the fascination that the figure inspires also presides over the spreading of the motif in multiple variations. Thus, her beauty can be typically Jewish or reflect the entire feminine population; extraordinarily beautiful or merely pretty; be ideally graceful or obscenely seductive; radiant for having grieved over Christ or attractive in order to subjugate Christians; to embody the lost paradise or the sordidness of the ghetto. But her allure is never anodyne for this imagined beauty is often the starting point for lengthy interrogations as to the supposed mysteries of feminity or Jewishness (Eric Fournier 8-9).

In other words, articulated by non-Jewish male writers (Fournier 11), ‘the Jewess’ manufactures alterity or the ‘Other’ as Woman and Jew. Fournier identifies contradictions that, inbuilt within the discourse, define how a Jewess was perceived regardless of the person she is. Her established good looks could be seen as ethnic vs. universal, gorgeous vs. pretty, pure vs. seductive, Christian like vs. domineering etc. In short, the discourse proposed the Jewess as a plain sheet upon which cultured Europeans could project their fantasies.

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23 All subsequent translations in this chapter are my own, unless otherwise specified. Translations from Proust are from the Scott-Moncrieff, 1987, Random House edition of *Remembrance of Things Past.*

24 [Les] lecteurs sont persuadés que Scott restitue une réalité passée. La “belle Juive”, s’impose d’emblée comme une évidence tangible, bien plus que comme une création littéraire (Eric Fournier 26).

25 Elle est, évidemment, belle et Juive. Toute la fascination que suscite la figure réside précisément dans l’interaction de ces deux éléments qui préside au déploiement du motif en de multiples variations. Elle peut ainsi être d’une beauté typiquement juive ou refléter l’humanité féminine entière ; extraordinairement belle ou simplement jolie ; d’une grâce pure ou d’une obscène séduction ; rayonnante d’avoir pleuré le Christ ou attirante de vouloir asservir les chrétiens ; être l’émotion d’un éden perdu ou de la misère du ghetto. Mais son charme n’est jamais anodin, car cette beauté imaginée est souvent le point de départ d’amples interrogations sur les mystères supposés de la féminité ou de la judéité (Éric Fournier 8-9).
Another aspect of ‘the Jewess’ that Fournier broaches, one that deserves mention, is the goal or role of that literary discourse. Behind the fascination with and the elaboration of a fictitious Jewish feminine was a questioning of universalism. The State, since the Revolution, claimed that in France there were none but Frenchmen. However, the emergence and propagation of ‘the Jewess’ intimate that, in spite of proclaimed ideology and official policy, there was under the surface some resistance to the claim that France equally embraced all its citizens. For how else can it be explained that *la belle Juive* imagines the Jewish alterity which the Jews themselves did not seem to explore or voice. The need to ponder Jewish alterity, to pierce the ‘mystery’ that makes the Jew a Jew, implies that the French suspected the existence of a ‘Jewish difference’. And as Fournier infers in the above quotation, ‘the Jewess’ was but an exploration for a mean that could ‘enlighten’ Jews into assimilating. The Jewish males were considered hermetically sealed to both reason and feeling in opposition to the Jewess who, amenable to rationality and feelings, could change and lead the community to assimilate, to do away with their ‘Otherness’ (see Nadia Valman and Fournier).

The West’s attempt at defining the nineteenth-century Jewish female transcends its literary production. A famous example is the opera *La Juive*, with a libretto by Eugene Scribe and music by Fromental Halevy, which knew six-hundred performances between 1835 and 1934. The public so favored the work that two of its acts were selected for the inaugural performance of the Palais Garnier in 1875. Nadia Valman offers in her discussion of *La Juive*, a view similar to Fournier’s, where stereotypes are garnered from the field of literature to construct and to interpret what was to become an iconic representation of the Jewess:

*The Jewess* was a paradigmatic dramatization of the key motifs that recur in literary representations of the Jewish woman. Composed by a Jew and written by a gentile, the opera suggested the extent to which a complex response to Jewishness was shared by
both… The tragic force – and liberal message – of *La Juive* turns on the fact that the truth of Rachel’s self is invisible… even to herself: the Jewess is an empty signifier onto which fantasies of desire or vengeance are arbitrarily projected” (2-3).

Halevy and Scribe created the opera at a time when, as discussed in the previous chapter, universalism was the sole concept existing in France. As Valman explains, *La Juive*, even with a composer of Jewish origins, represents a heroine, Rachel, the title’s Jewess, constructed according to the literary stereotypes circulated by *la belle Juive*. Prior to a definition of a Jewish identity by French Jews, ‘the Jewess’ embodied a set of cultural fantasies that prevented a Jewess from being seen as she is. By the same token, France’s Jews only saw themselves through the model(s) that non-Jewish writers proposed and imposed since no tools existed to express or explore individual and communal yearnings or aspirations to difference. Until Bernard Lazare articulated a French Jewish nationalism, France’s Jews were forced to ‘pass’ in order to function under the imposed universalism. Such a situation confirms Glissant’s premise that, to be truly egalitarian, a society needs to recognize its different communities, listen to their discourses of self-representation which brings all groups to ‘live Relation’ while eschewing the unifying and simplifying categories that usually affect the traditional universalist framework.

*La Juive* from French opera to the novel and from ‘passing’ to exclusion

From a contemporary perspective, the opera *La Juive* is about social passing. It is important to consider the heroine of the popular opera, whom Proust uses as armature for the Rachel in his novel, to understand his subversion of ‘the Jewess’.

The action in Scribe’s and Halevy’s opera is set in Constance, Switzerland, during the 1414 religious council that Emperor Sigismond had convoked in his tireless attempts at reunifying Western Christendom. The town of Constance is giving a feast in honor of the Emperor to celebrate Prince Leopold’s victory over the Hussites and their heresy. During the *Te
Deum, the Jewish jeweler Eleazar carries on the work in his shop. Eleazar’s anvil causes a disturbance that upsets the townspeople. Eleazar retorts to the crowd that he owes nothing to Christian laws because the Church had burned his sons as heretics when he and his family lived in Rome. Eleazar and his daughter Rachel are put to death for his answer. Fortunately, Cardinal de Brogni, before he became a priest, had known Eleazar in Rome and he intervenes to save their lives. In addition, Act I unveils a gentile with sinister motives who pretends to be a Jew. Prince Leopold, hero of the moment and husband to Eudoxie, the Emperor’s niece, pretends to be a Jewish student in order to seduce Rachel. The success of his enterprise can have dire consequences. If found out, Rachel would be killed and Leopold excommunicated. Act II takes place in Eleazar’s home where he celebrates Passover and he includes Leopold among his guests. Rachel notices the devious Prince disposing of the unleavened bread and, though disturbed by the scene, allows him later in her room. Eleazar discovers the couple, attempts to kill Leopold but finally agrees to their marriage at which point the nobleman flees. Act III finds Rachel working for Eudoxie at the palace and uttering what she believes is her abject condition as a Jew. In front of the whole Court, assembled to celebrate Leopold’s victory, she denounces his forbidden relations with her, “une maudite,/ une Juive, une Israelite”26. In Act IV, Following Eudoxie’s visit to Rachel in her prison cell the latter changes her testimony because she still loves Leopold. Rachel claims full responsibility for having seduced the Christian and thus saves him. As for the Cardinal, he intervenes once more to rescue Rachel and offers their lives to Eleazar in exchange for their conversion. Eleazar refuses and reveals to the Cardinal that, during the riots in Rome, which saw Brogni’s family die in a fire, an event that led the then military man to enter the ranks of the Church, a Jew saved his daughter. Nonetheless, in spite of Brogni’s injunctions, Eleazar refuses to reveal to him his daughter’s whereabouts. Left alone in his cell,

26 “a cursed one/a Jewess, an Israelite”
Eleazar sings *Rachel quand du Seigneur*, ‘Rachel when from the Lord’, the opera’s famous aria which reveals that Rachel is adopted and not Jewish. In Act V, Eleazar, who feels guilty about Rachel’s fate, enjoins her to abandon Judaism and to become a Christian in order that she may live. Though it would save her life, Rachel categorically refuses to abjure her religion and prefers to undergo her martyrdom. For one last time, the desperate Cardinal beseeches Eleazar to tell him his daughter’s identity. The jeweler, as he joins his daughter in the fire, points to Rachel and shouts “La voilà!”

In the 1835 opera *La Juive*, the heroine embodies the figure of ‘the Jewess’ and has all its characteristics that Proust will use and/or subvert when he constructs his protagonist Rachel. In addition to beauty and pathos, Halevy’s Rachel demonstrates the agency that eventually determines that she is Jewish and establishes a parallel with Proust’s protagonist. In an article for *Romantisme*, Olivier Bara explains that it is at the end of the opera that Rachel becomes a Jewess and is no longer Christian: “Rachel, as befits a Jewish heroine, selects the path that leads to her death. Her rejection of the cardinal’s Catholicism signals her choice of Eleazar as her father; it must matter little to her that, thereby, she is being faithful to a memory that she adopts. Impossible to redeem, her sacrifice belongs to a subverted story” (85). Bara brings a contemporary perspective to the study of the opera’s main character since it counterbalances the traditional interpretation that ‘confiscates’ Rachel’s story to attribute her martyrdom to her finally revealed Christian hidden self. Bara’s italicization of ‘adopte’ underlines that in the opera, the moment Rachel opts for the ultimate sacrifice she also chooses her adopted Jewish father’s heritage of persecution over her gentile biological inheritance. In line with Bara, it is

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27 Rachel, en héroïne juive, accepte d’aller vers la mort. Refusant le catholicisme du cardinal, elle choisit pour père Eléazar; peu lui importe d’être ainsi fidèle à une mémoire qu’elle adopte. Son sacrifice, que rien ne rachètera, s’inscrira dans une histoire confisquée (85).
Rachel’s conscious choice to prefer and identify with the Jews that makes her in the final scene the Jew that she had unwittingly been ‘passing’ for during the whole opera. And a century later, when Proust uses the heroine of La Juive to inform the character of Rachel in his novel, he represents a protagonist who, in her last appearance, is unequivocally Jewish for having chosen to become a Jew but whose vile appearance mirrors a selfishness that puts her in opposition with the opera’s ‘belle Juive’.

In Marcel Proust’s novel, ‘the Jewess’ Rachel loses the purity and beauty that had characterized the figure of the French ‘Jewess’ for most of the nineteenth-century. In a further ironical twist that Proust includes in A la recherche, Rachel gains fame and fortune rather than lose a life. It is the ritual of pathos, of Christian self-sacrifice, of the interpretation of a woman’s looks as either a symbol of purity and innocence, or of carnality and greed, that ‘the Jewess’ embodied that Proust’s novel mocks with the protagonist Rachel. As the century progressed, it shifted its concerns about Jews from the religious to the racial. The satire of the notion of a ‘Jewish race’ through Rachel was both timely and necessary since in France, as Fournier explains, the trope of ‘the Jewess’ became suddenly unmistakably hostile:

The period of pondering, characterized by the will to understand, gave way to one of suspicion and condemnation inaugurated in 1867 with Manette Salomon, the Goncourt brothers’ novel… That stubbornly anti-Semitic book constitutes a rupture. The hardening of the discourse is also identifiable in Le Juif, le judaïsme et la judaïcisation, the 1869 essay and referential work of the trend by Roger Gougenot de Mousseaux. It

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28 In the opera, the centrality of the element of choice in Rachel’s transformation into a Jewess illustrates Judith Butler’s concept that utterance, accompanied by a series of repeated actions, eventually bring to fruition a ‘natural’ being. Brought up as a Jewess since an infant by Eleazar, the jeweler who loves his adopted daughter, Rachel has always identified with the Jews and sings her awareness of being (une maudite, une Juive, une Israélite) for being part of the Jewish condition. The repeated experiences of Halevy’s Rachel determine that she becomes a Jewess and, within the logic of the storyline, she dies as one. As will be demonstrated, the intertextual connection that Proust establishes, between Halevy’s Jewess and his own, is a clear indication that he constructs the Rachel of A la recherche with the same elements: ‘passing’, choice of identity and transformation through reiterated performance.

29 However, the shift in the portrayal of ‘the Jewess’ that occurred in France, did not prevent the continuing of philo-Semitic representations of ‘the Jewess’ in British literature (Valman 7).
presents Jewesses as genitaly lustful, a fact that explains that they populate all the brothels of Europe (36). With the century about to enter its third part, France began to represent the Jewess with racially inherent negative traits. Chronologically, the period of the re-articulation of ‘the Jewess’ follows almost immediately the transfer of ‘Semite’ from the linguistic field to that of race - a development that enabled the transformation of the French Israelite into a Jew. After decades of including the Jewish community, France operated a sharp re-orientation that signaled a new intention to exclude the Jews. The dichotomy between the pre-1867 idealized representation of ‘the Jewess’, and the version that racializes and ‘Orientalizes’ the same trope, is visible in *A la recherche*. To construct Rachel, Proust includes the early and the later accounts of *la belle Juive*, and shows their opposition to expose their artificiality and that of his protagonist’s ‘Jewish race’.

**Hysteria**

While literature created and spread ‘the Jewess’, the trope’s transfer to a popular opera further familiarized the public with its stereotypes that enable Rachel’s (re)construction as a Jew in *A la recherche*. The literary clichés associated with *la belle Juive* functioned as an insider’s language, greatly reducing the need for descriptions of Rachel’s personality. Indeed, Proust can rely for his depiction of Rachel on the recognizable, familiar figure of *la belle Juive*. However, an equally gendered medical discourse informs, as much as ‘the Jewess’, the protagonist’s

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30 Après le temps des interrogations, marqué par une volonté de comprendre, vient celui de la suspicion et de la condamnation inauguré en 1867 par le roman *Manette Salomon* des frères Goncourt… Ce livre opiniâtrement antisémite constitue une rupture…. Ce durcissement du discours est aussi perceptible dans l’essai antisémite de Roger Gougenot de Mousseaux *Le Juif, le judaïsme et la judaïcisation* paru en 1869, l’ouvrage de référence de cette mouvance avant *La France Juive*. Les Juives y sont présentées comme des femmes congénitalement lubriques, ce qui explique qu’elles peuplent les bordels de toute l’Europe (36).
membership in the book’s Jewish community. The manner in which hysteria came to be associated with the Jew is explained by Sander Gilman:

The view that all Jews were especially prone to hysteria and neurasthenia through inbred weakening of the nervous system appeared in canonical form in Jean-Martin Charcot’s Tuesday Lesson for October 23, 1888. Charcot… described a case of hysterical dyspnie… his twenty-year old patient is a Jewess… “I… stress that nervous illnesses… are innumerablemore frequent among Jews than among other groups.”… By 1890 Charcot’s view had become commonplace in… psychiatry (288).

Beginning in the 1880’s, Professor Charcot (1825 - 1893), the Director of the psychiatric ward at Paris’ La Salpêtrière teaching hospital, was approaching in Ruth Harris’ words: “the zenith of his powers, fame and influence. Charcot had at this time an international influence; esteemed by the leading lights of Parisian medicine, he was to become a virtual dictator with his own neurological specialty [hysteria]… Charcot had scientific as well as political credibility and knew how to exploit both” (xii). Harris, editor of the 1991 edition of Charcot’s clinical lectures, makes clear in her “Introduction” to the work, that Charcot combined his medical position and political acumen to establish his reputation as the world’s foremost authority on hysteria. Charcot’s repute brought him students as talented as Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet (philosopher/psychologist/practitioner)31, Joseph Babinski (practitioner/neurologist), and Gilles de la Tourette (practitioner/neurologist) whose own later fame and success further enhanced that of the master. Charcot secured for himself an exalted position that made it possible for his bizarre view that Jews were particularly prone to hysteria to become ‘commonplace’ within a short time (two years) as Gilman mentions. Attaching the supposed disease to Jews made it a factor in the construction of the Jewish race, one that participates in A la recherche remaking Rachel into a Jewess.

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31 Freud and Janet would publish about Charcot after his death in 1893.
In addition to Charcot’s authority, his “Tuesday Lessons”, famously opened to the public, did much to reinforce and spread the association of the feminine and/or the Jew with hysteria, a connection that informs Rachel’s metamorphosis into a member of the Jewish race. Rachel’s different aspects parallel the notions that hinted at Jewishness and raised, around the Jewish female, questions about the possibility for Jewish integration or estrangement, an idea that Valman supports: “In the figure of the Jewess converge the period’s deepest and most intensely debated controversies over religion, sexuality, race and nationality” (2). Gilman underlines in his above discussion of the Tuesday class of October 23 1888, the fact that the attractive female performing the hysteric for Charcot is Jewish. On that evening at the Salpêtrière, the patient embodies both ‘the Jewess’ and ‘hysteria’, the two umbrella discourses and their components (race, Woman, nation, exclusion etc.) that the novel has Rachel interpret for her racial transformation. The lecture that Gilman describes is the moment when the teaching doctor, his assistants and the audience, all Europeans, observe, interpret and conclude from a Western, male ‘scientific perspective’, an ‘irrational’ female Jewish body and incorporate within her the two discourses. It is at that Tuesday lesson when Charcot engineers the meeting of ‘the Jewess’, the Jewish body and ‘hysteria’ that Rachel’s transformation is rooted in A la recherche.

Hysteria: from Woman’s sickness to Jewish identifier

Through Rachel, Proust’s work illustrates an agent who selects to undergo a complete, step by step process, to become the legitimate member of a different ethnic group. The fact that the protagonist is career-minded, sexually liberated and ambitious put her at odds with the period’s idea on ‘Woman’ as devoted wife, self-sacrificing mother, nurturing, selfless etc. On her path to glory and independence Rachel works as a prostitute, and later as an actress, two roles that contradict what her time considered the proper role of ‘Woman’. It so happens that in
late nineteenth-century, the medical discourse had come to include within hysteria, alongside the Jew and a woman’s body, ‘prostitution’ and ‘acting’. The representation of the French Jewess through Rachel satirizes not the Jewish identity Jewess, but the European male’s creation of discourses that create the ‘Other’ and his belief in his arbitrary construct. With Rachel, A la recherche, offers a satire of the literary trope ‘the Jewess’ that debunks the myths of characteristics that first opposed a dehumanized Jew to his redeemable female counterpart and, later (post-1867 according to Fournier), served to dehumanize both.

In A la recherche du temps perdu, a medical discourse underlies Rachel’s representation as the ‘Other’. From Antiquity to modern times, hysteria, a neuro-somatic sickness that literally used to define Woman as a possible emotional neurotic because of a capacity for a “wandering uterus” (Philip R. Slavney 14), grew exponentially as of the second half of the nineteenth-century. In Proust’s time, the disease permeated France and appears in his novel as Donald Wright explains: “Nonetheless, the sickness [hysteria] manifested itself in all the social classes… of the Gilded Age… The same goes for the fictional world of A la recherche du temps perdu… One can say that the symptoms are meant to give depth to the psychology of the protagonists that are concerned…” (35). 32 No character in A la recherche is ever evidently a hysteric as Wright states. However, familiarity with the many aspects of the discourse on hysteria allows a reader to recognize its symptoms, its effects on a protagonist, on their actions, on their desires and on their relations with other characters. Though hysteria affected all classes, the perspective on the disease from the center, the self-styled rational Catholic, Protestant, Israelite heterosexual male, was more nuanced. Lisa Appignanesi explains that “In France… hysteria was a condition of the

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32 Et pourtant, la maladie [l’hystérie] se manifeste dans toutes les classes sociales… de la Belle Epoque… Il en va de même du monde fictif représenté dans A la recherche du temps perdu… On pourrait dire que les symptômes ont pour but d’approfondir la psychologie des personnages en question…(35).
poor – not… of the neurasthenic rich” (124). In fact, it will be demonstrated that hysteria did not distinguish only the haves from the have not. Sander Gilman and Jann Matlock, in their work on the discourse on hysteria, have shown that the sickness was understood to threaten anyone who challenged or did not fit into the social borders, anyone not entitled to the privileges of the French male.

Indeed, as this study will illustrate, hysteria was so pervasive and insidious that, one of the great feats that *A la recherche* manages, is to capture and render its insidiousness and pervasiveness without naming the disease and its discourse. In Proust’s novel, the disease is the link, seen but unspoken, that provides unity for Rachel the stage performer, the Jew, the woman, the prostitute. As already mentioned, Professor Charcot’s prestige and authority helped to propagate ‘knowledge’ about his specialty. From 1882 to 1893, Charcot opened to the lay public his Tuesday lectures on hysteria, the famed *Les Leçons du mardi* mentioned in Gilman’s quote. Charcot’s fame as the time’s foremost neurologist (Richard L. Kradin, 18), and his lessons on hysteria to a heterogeneous public, inspired countless articles by laymen and scientists alike. They vulgarized his teachings on the sickness, including his association of Jews with the purported female disease, and disseminated that idea.

**Hysteria and the professions of acting and prostitution**

The banalization of hysteria spread the concept that, besides women and the Jewish community, the sickness targeted members of two professions: Acting and prostitution. Rachel’s career as an actress, as well as her work as a prostitute, makes it realistic that the protagonist can recreate herself as a Jew, as one whose ‘hysteric’ Jewish identity places him/her within society’s margins with the actor and prostitute. Both her professions were linked to Charcot and his
staging of hysteria. Actors and actresses visited Professor Charcot’s hysteric patients to study their poses and copy them on the stage: “What is arresting is the precise resemblance between the gestures and poses of hysteric and… gestures and poses of performers in … the theater…” Sarah Bernhardt visited the Salpêtrière wards… [as she] prepared for the mad scene…” (Rae Beth Gordon 29). Hence, the very gestures, contortion and attitudes demonstrated by the hysteric were exactly reproduced on stage. Even the spectator who had never come across the victims of hysteria became familiarized with their pauses while watching actors perform.

The vulgarization of the hysteric’s body language, its transfer from La Salpêtrière psychiatric wards to the streets and stage, was not without tension. The medical discourse on hysteria taught that the sickness contaminated those who imitated the hysteric, an unspoken but present implication that A la recherche associates with the Jewess. After all, it was not only the actors mimicking the hysteric’s movements and expressions who were believed to be endangered but every one of their spectators as well: “Hysteric, thus, are not the only ones whose bodies mime what they see: all our bodies do… Fear of contagion is the crucial link between hysteria and popular entertainment. Contagion occurs through transmission of the electric shock or “jolts” (secousses) from performer to spectator, and this is achieved through the miming of hysteria” (Rae Beth Gordon 46). Spectators, it was believed, were at risk for watching the miming of the hysteric’s mannerisms. As will be demonstrated, Rachel’s persona as a prostitute, and her acting technique, as described in the novel, involved mimicking those affected with the disease. As an actress, the protagonist’s professional proximity to the sickness also made her a contaminated agent likely to contaminate her spectators. The discourse on hysteria that came to embrace the Jews, the prostitutes, the actors and actresses helps determine Rachel’s
transformation into the novel’s subversive, ambitious French Jewish actress in *Le Temps retrouvé*.

During the period that the novel represents, prostitution, Rachel’s occupation when introduced in *A la recherche*, held class implications that extended into racial ones during the period represented in the novel. Jann Matlock cites Briquet, a nineteenth-century specialist of hysteria, to illustrate the belief that prostitutes were particularly prone to the illness: “In reflecting on the life led by these women [prostitutes and working class women] and on the multiplicity of painful experiences and sensations… one will not be surprised that hysteria is so common among them” (159). To Matlock, the disease that supposedly affected women also served a class delineator in the nineteenth-century. But, as already seen, since Charcot’s lecture that linked the disease to Jews, hysteria had come to fulfill a racial delineator as well: “For the Jew is contaminated by hysteria whether it is the result of the trauma of infection or of heredity” (Sander Gilman 102). Charcot’s contributions to neurology conflated hysteria, the ‘traditional disease of ‘Woman’, with the Jew and, even if indirectly, with acting and with prostitution, the two professions that Rachel practices in *A la recherche* and that help her transformation into a Semite.

The conflation of Jews with prostitution reinforced traditional racist anti-Semitic stereotypes that Jews ignored all values except the basest materialism: “The Jew takes money as does the prostitute, as a substitute for higher values, for love and beauty… And thus the Jew becomes the representative of the deviant genitalia, the genitalia not under the control of the moral, rational conscience” (Sander Gilman 102). It is from the center of society, a space that contained all right thinking French(men), and included the Israelite, that the ‘moral and rational’ discourses emanated. As Gilman correctly infers, those deplorable discourses, assigned to the
ethnic Jew and groups that belonged in the social margins, away from the center, the sensual, emotional domain that tradition considered as belonging to women. The so called feminine domain comprises the ennobling domestic occupations or the shallow, materialistic and even nurturing pursuits that demand little reasoning and immediate gratification. Clearly, the discourse on hysteria included at once misogyny and anti-Semitism to combine into one the Jews, prostitutes, women and bohemians who peopled the social margins and, in Proust’s fictional world, into Rachel. Thus is explained the unity Rachel achieves in *A la recherche*, a unity that ensures her realism.

**The discourse of ‘the Jewess’ in Rachel’s introduction in *Within a Budding Grove***

In *Within a Budding Grove*, the two umbrella discourses, the Jewess and hysteria, intertwine to create Rachel as early as her first introduction. In *La “belle Juive”*, his seminal study of the trope, Eric Fournier validates studying ‘the Jewess’ through nineteenth-century discourses because: “That approach also allows one to come closer to the multitude of possible reactions that were generally in agreement in spite of their number, and to the appropriation of these discourses by the cultured public” (Fournier 40). To introduce the Jewess, Proust’s cultured narrator locates himself within the very approach that Fournier describes. And from that location, Marcel compiles the well-known clichés that the discourses disseminated to define

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33 Fournier studies the effect of the globalizing ‘Discourse’ rather than a chronological study of the texts on the Jewess: “Les discours sur la « belle Juive », qui s’influencent et se répondent mutuellement, participent pleinement de cette tendance [mélange de description clinique et de rêverie poétique propre au premier dix-neuvième siècle]. Dans ces conditions, l’approche chronologique révèle ses limites et il est plus efficace ici de regrouper les textes et de les considérer comme un discours global qui permet de saisir la figure a son apothéose, au milieu du siècle” (39). “The discourses on ‘the Jewess’, that influence and answer one another, are fully engaged in that movement [mixture of clinical description and poetic reverie particular to the first part of the nineteenth century]. Under such conditions, the chronological approach reveals its limitations and in this context it is more efficient to gather the texts and study them as a globalizing discourse that allows one to grasp the figure at its apotheosis, in the middle of the century” (Fournier 39).

34 Cette approche permet également de mieux s’approcher de la multitude des réceptions possibles, de l’appropriation de ces discours nombreux mais globalement concordants par le public cultivé (40).
the Jew and Jewess in fin-de-siècle France. The narrator of A la recherche and his audience assemble within a page a succession of cultural signs that function as an esoteric language to construct Rachel. Though mocked with an incantation-like presentation, the clichés still fashion Rachel, a character that subverts but pretends to represent ‘the Jewess’.

The following passage, taken from Within a Budding Grove, introduces Rachel in A la recherche. Her introduction coincides with the late adolescence of Marcel, the fictional narrator, and is inserted in between aspects of his milieu. ‘The world’ starts to notice and invite the protagonist who calls on and lunches with the Swanns together with his favorite writer Bergotte. At that stage Marcel’s life, Charles Swann and his family represent the height of elegant sophistication. For Marcel’s parents and their close circle, the great question is the career he is to embrace. Albert Bloch, the unassimilated Jew who failed to win over Swann and Marcel’s family, is the narrator’s childhood friend who takes him to a brothel where he will see Rachel for the first time. At this point, Rachel’s life seems unconnected to that of the narrator who, nonetheless, identifies her as a non-Jew:

But the house to which Bloch took me (and which he himself in fact had long ceased to visit) was of too inferior a grade and its personnel too mediocre… The mistress of this house knew none of the women with whom one asked her to negotiate, and was always suggesting others whom one did not want. She boasted to me of one in particular, of whom, with a smile full of promise (as though this was a great rarity and a special treat), she would say: “She’s Jewish. How about that?” (It was doubtless for this reason that she called her Rachel.) And with an inane affectation of excitement which she hoped would prove contagious, and which ended in a hoarse gurgle, almost of sensual satisfaction: “Think of that, my boy, a Jewess! Wouldn’t that be thrilling? Rrrr!)… Every evening I promised the madame… that I would not fail to come some day on purpose to make the acquaintance of Rachel, whom I had nicknamed “Rachel when the Lord.”… The
madame, who was not familiar with Halevy’s opera, did not know why I always called the girl “Rachel when from the Lord” 35 (Marcel Proust 620-621).  

In this quotation, a burlesque tone translates Marcel’s eagerness to display his ability to recognize and ‘out’ the gentile masquerading as a Jew. However, the jocular tone of the passage, and Marcel’s joke on the opera La Juive, contribute to reveal how the France that A la recherche represents fashions the ‘Other’.

The quote superposes two phantasms: the idealized Jewess and the carnal, vilified one. As discussed above, Fournier ascertains the date (1867) and the nature of the dichotomy that took place in French literature and is illustrated in A la recherche. As to be expected, a crude and rapacious madame who is thinking the Jewess refers to the ideology of the latter part of the century and her Rachel is an exotic creature of the senses. To answer the procuress, the narrator also uses ‘the Jewess’ but refers to Halevy’s opera that, prior to 1867, staged the idealized version of the Jewish woman. The novel uses and opposes the two aspects of the French discourse on the Jewess to construct Rachel and to illustrate, thereby, their arbitrariness and unreliability. The language of the quotation, and the inter-textual link to Halevy’s opera, demonstrate that, not only did the author know the trope, but he was also aware of its effects and evolution. If in the opera Eleazar is the paternal figure who instigates a protagonist’s ‘passing’ until she becomes a self-sacrificing Jewess, in the novel it is a non-Jewish female who represents

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35 Mais la maison où Bloch me conduisit et où il n’allait plus d’ailleurs lui-même depuis longtemps était d’un rang trop inférieur… La patronne de cette maison ne connaissait aucune des femmes qu’on lui demandait et en proposait toujours dont on n’aurait pas voulu. Elle m’en vantait surtout une, une dont, avec un sourire plein de promesses (comme si c’avait été une rareté et un régal), elle disait : « C’est une Juive ! Ca ne vous dit rien ? » (C’est sans doute à cause de cela qu’elle l’appelait Rachel.)… Chaque fois je promettais à la patronne qui me la proposait avec une insistance particulière en vantant sa grande intelligence et son instruction, que je ne manquerai pas un jour de venir… faire la connaissance de Rachel, surnommée par moi, « Rachel quand du Seigneur ». La patronne qui ne connaissait pas l’opéra d’Halévy ignorait pourquoi j’avais pris l’habitude de dire « Rachel quand du Seigneur ».
and is the tool of ‘Power’. The *madame*, the negative representation of matriarchy in a patriarchal century, brings a marginalized woman to begin ‘passing’ for an eventual rapacious ‘Jew’. In both of the texts, the opera and the novel, a protagonist in a position of authority utters the concept of Jewishness in relation to Rachel and initiates her transformation into a Semite.

Rachel’s introduction in the novel contains clues to her being a gentile that contradict the procuress’ naïve assertion that she is a Jewess. As expressed by Marcel’s cultural allusion to *La Juive*, Rachel is as Jewish as the heroine of the fiction that Fromental Halevy and Eugene Scribe staged in their opera. Proust’s narrator’s intertextual reference to Halevy’s opera *La Juive*, or *The Jewess*, confirms what the novel’s language already indicated: Rachel’s gentile extraction is no mere detail. Rachel’s origin is paramount to understand how *A la recherche* identifies and represents the cultural forces that provided the principles to shape a Jew in France in the late nineteenth-century. In *Inventing the Israelite* Maurice Samuels refers to Proust’s above quotation and explains:

On a trip to a brothel with his friend Robert de Saint-Loup, the narrator encounters a madam who tries to sell him on a certain prostitute named Rachel by billing her as a Jewess. “She’s Jewish! How about that?” (It was doubtless for this reason that she called her Rachel.)…” Here we find the attribution of the quintessential Jewish name, Rachel, revealed as a marketing scheme aimed at arousing fantasmatic desire for the mythological *belle juive*. But although the aristocratic Saint-Loup falls for Rachel’s Jewish masquerade, the narrator does not. By nicknaming her “Rachel when from the Lord”, in reference to the famous aria from the Scribe and Halevy opera *La Juive*, the narrator mocks the stereotype of the beautiful Jewess. His refusal to become aroused signals an end to the long tradition of viewing the Jewess as modernity’s erotic plaything (248-249).

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36 See the definition of ‘power’ and its role in Chapter One.
37 According to Marcel Proust’s text, it is Albert Bloch, and not Saint-Loup as Samuels writes, who accompanies the narrator to the brothel where Rachel meets her clients.
38 In *A la Recherche du temps perdu* the narrator explains that Saint-Loup knows nothing of Rachel’s work at the bordello.
Maurice Samuels correctly notes that the ‘madame’ attributes the forename to the prostitute. However, to illustrate properly the role of literary and stage art in Rachel’s eventual transformation into a ‘racial Jew’ the means and purpose by which ‘the narrator mocks the stereotype’ must be clarified. An element of ambiguity remains in that particular sentence where the novel implies that the ‘madame’ assigns the name ‘Rachel’ to her collaborator. Rachel could still be a Jewess whose given name is not Rachel, a possibility that is brushed aside only when the narrator renames the prostitute and she becomes also known as “Rachel when from the Lord”. The cultural reference confirms that the novel’s protagonist is a gentile for, in Act IV of Halevy’s opera *La Juive*, as mentioned above, Rachel’ Jewish father reveals with the aria ‘Rachel when from the Lord’ that his daughter was in fact born a European Christian, she is not Jewish and he is not her biological father. The passage insinuates that just as in the opera, the novel’s Rachel might choose to and become Jewish, a materiality that the arts provide and spread with the stereotyping discourses on the Jew.

In his above quote, Maurice Samuel operates a ‘re-plotting’ of the anecdote from *A la recherche*. Samuels substitutes Saint-Loup for Albert Bloch as the narrator’s companion and, in so doing, disproves what he intends to prove, namely that: “[The narrator’s] refusal… of viewing the Jewess as modernity’s erotic plaything”. The critique’s action narrows the interpretation of Proust’s representation of ‘the Jewess’, creating an issue that must be addressed. According to Samuels’ scenario from his above quotation, Rachel would have become Saint-Loup’s kept mistress when introduced to him as a Jewess at the brothel because she is a Jewess. The Jewess then, in Samuels’ retelling, and contrary to his claim, does become an ‘erotic plaything’ even if she is Saint-Loup’s sex object and not the narrator’s. On the other hand, by making Marcel the only witness to Rachel’s early proclivities, Proust illustrates his understanding of what Samuels
correctly identifies as ‘fantasmatic desire for the mythological belle juive’. The cultured Saint-Loup falls in love, not with Rachel, but with his idealized ‘Jewess’ whom he constructs with the positive images and stereotypes that literature and Halevy’s opera had propagated for nearly the first seven decades of the nineteenth-century. Furthermore, Samuels’ rewriting of the plot reduces the effect of that first scene of Rachel at the brothel. Proust uses that moment in *Within a Budding Grove* to juxtapose the two versions of ‘the Jewess’ that France elaborated to construct the Jewess during the early and the late nineteenth-century respectively. The process demonstrates how each version of *la belle Juive* is a shallow, artificial construction, each in contradiction with the other.

In Proust’s novel, the narrator’s reference to the opera *La Juive* to rename the Jewess ‘Rachel when from the Lord’ is a facetious act of subversion. The hero denies the procuress the power to define the Jewess a carnal entity and counteracts by giving Rachel the name of the famed aria from an opera where the Jewish female represents idealized femininity. Marcel’s action also underlines the fact that the pseudo-Jewess Rachel embodies the myths that the cultured classes created, acknowledged, shared and propagated and assembled in *La Juive*. To Marcel, in her condition ‘Jewess’, Rachel is a ‘clean canvas’ upon which either idealist or carnal fantasy may be projected. In other words, as Valman also points out, the female Jew of literature functions ‘as a ‘blank’’ (Valman 3). In *A la recherche*, because of Lieutenant de Saint-Loup’s cultural and intellectual pretentions, because the officer does not and will not know Rachel’s stint at the brothel, he will fall in love with a Rachel upon whom he projects the ideal characteristics that a cultured man of his age associated with the main character of *La Juive*. On the other hand, the brothel’s mistress, present in the house of ill repute with Marcel and Rachel, interprets the Jewess with the myths of her own station.
In the discussion about an absent Rachel that takes place at the brothel between Marcel and the procuress, Marcel’s reference to the opera cannot but escape the ‘madame’. The coarseness associated with her trade and class dooms her to paint the ‘blank’ Jewess with discourses that mirror her own condition. Unlike Saint-Loup, whose access to cultural works shaped his perception of ‘the Jewess’, the mistress of a ‘house… too inferior…’, and the customers of such a brothel, replace their lack of cultural and moral values with money, project their shortcomings upon the Jewess: “The Jew takes money as does the prostitute, as a substitute for higher values, for love and beauty…” in Gilman’s words quoted earlier in this chapter. It is therefore not surprising that Rachel’s transformation into a Jew will combine the two opposing aspects of the same discourse. Rachel’s metamorphosis that begins at a procuress’ suggestion and during her visits to a maison de passe, concludes with her being a negative representation of the Jew. However, Rachel’s reappearance as an intelligent actress in the following volumes of *A la recherche*, demonstrates that, at times when she is with Saint-Loup, she borrows from the positive aspects of the *belle Juive* discourse which contributes to her mutation.

“The Jewess” and hysteria in *Within a Budding Grove*

In *A la recherche*, the disease that was the believed to affect woman, Jew, homosexual or all those who differed from the heterosexual European male, namely hysteria, informs even the first stages of Rachel’s transformation into the Jewish ‘Other’. Didi-Huberman highlights the turn of the twentieth century’s association of the hysterical with sex and desire: “In a certain sense, the hysterical foments the desire of the Other… She has an almost scientific experience with the *given-to-be-seen*; she seems to know the art of weaving the evidence of her body’s spectacle into… her call to be a whole-yes, *the whole object of another’s desire*. She knows the science of objectifying herself to another” (Georges Didi-Huberman 169-170). As Didi-Huberman points
out, the so-called hysteric developed the ability to stage a specific performance to awaken a yet unexpressed desire from the ‘Other’. The hysteric’s potency derives from her capacity to make herself into the ‘image’ of a subject’s unspoken need, whether that of the psychiatrist for a medical performance or the passerby’s unidentified sexual fantasy. At Paris’ Hôpital de la Salpêtrière, Charcot’s female patients’ proclivity to adopt ‘hysteric’ postures of objectification that embody a need is immortalized in a still extant collection of portraiture that Prof. Charcot and his assistants methodically cataloged for study and demonstration.

_A la recherche_ never labels Rachel a hysteric but, nonetheless, during her introduction, her behavior reproduces the description that Didi-Huberman offers: “This Rachel, of whom I caught a glimpse without her seeing me, was dark, not pretty, but intelligent-looking, and would pass the tip of her tongue over her lips as she smiled with a look of boundless impertinence at the customers” (Marcel Proust 620). In appendix are pictures of Charcot’s young females patients at La Salpêtrière. The tongue over the lips and the provocative smile construct a hysteric’s gesture that closely resembles the image conveyed in Proust’s above quotation. Reproduced in Proust’s novel, it suggests the extent to which hysteria became familiar to the public because of Charcot’s photographic work and of his open to the public Tuesday Lessons.

In the narration of his first encounters with Rachel, the narrator adopts and maintains a clinical gaze reminiscent of that of a detached scientist observing mores beyond the patriarchal boundaries. Marcel’s attitude toward Rachel becomes similar to that of Charcot observing a hysteric patient, as she performs her particular symptom that will unleash her prospective client’s desire. Rachel enacts an unequivocal gesture that ignites, captures and accepts the desire of the

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‘Other’, transforming herself into a sexual object that revels under the gaze of the client, the
madame, the narrator, the reader. The ‘Othering’ of Rachel, achieved with her pantomime and
profession, distances her from the European and Israelite center, anchors her within the realm of
the usual suspects of hysteria and begins to explain her transformation as a Jew.

In addition to hysteria, the infamous stereotype of Jewish greed helps construct Rachel’s
Jewish persona but it is also mitigated by the fact that she is not Jewish. Clearly, the novel’s
association of the moral flaw with Rachel contributes to persuade the public of her Jewishness.
However, since greediness belongs to Rachel’s non-Jewish colleagues as well, the book also
illustrates that the linking of the defect with Jews is against reason:

And these words had prevented me from recognizing her as a person because they had
made me classify her at once in a general category of women whose habit, common to all
of them, was to come there in the evening to see whether there might not be a louis or
two to be earned. She would simply vary her formula, saying indifferently: “If you need
me” or “If you need anybody” (Marcel Proust 621).

In a context where a prostitute is being transformed into a Jew, meantime ‘passing’ for a Jew, the
anti-Semitic stereotype that links Rachel’s words to the Jew and lucre is evident. Nonetheless,
Proust’s narrator specifies that selling oneself for a coin is not particular to the ‘house’ Jewess
but a practice common to all the women who work at the brothel, irrelevant of their religion or
ethnicity.

In its concern to represent correctly the attraction to gold as a universal phenomenon, and
not a Jewish racial characteristic, Proust’s work meets that of Bernard Lazare, the first French
Jewish nationalist and polemist, once again. The two authors’ meeting point occurs this time in
the literary achievement that Evelyn Gould, discussing Lazare’s short story Or in an article, calls
‘cleansing Jewish gold’ or reclaiming the respectability of Jewish money: “Far from being a
peculiarly Jewish commodity, then, Lazare's "Or" focuses on the capacity of gold to shape social
and class relations (as the images of God and King suppose) rather than cultural, religious, or ethnic specificity. Gold dispenses advantages and privileges among the wealthy who know its "réelle splendeur," and the miserable and wretched who are merely destroyed by its "toute puissante image" (Evelyn Gould 321). Just as Lazare’s “Or” tackles the issue of money to demonstrate that the desire for gold affects every community and not only that of Jews, Proust’s protagonist Rachel illustrates that gold’s appeal is unanimous, that the gentile is as interested in money as anyone else. Rachel’s attitude to money is no different than that of her non-Jewish colleagues and, in addition, no Jew benefits from the house of prostitution, even Bloch decamped long ago. Paradoxically, though the anti-Semitic idea that Jews do anything for money comes in to add a Jewish layer to Rachel, the ‘cleansing Jewish gold’ in Proust uses the anti-Jewish cliché and exposes it as such.

Proust’s portrait of a low-end bordello, with its would be Jewess, recreates a fixture of the Belle Époque discourse on the venal, exotic female Jew that was put in practice in reality:

A single brothel, the exception, suggests that the Jewish woman can feed one’s phantasms. Paradoxically, it is a very modest neighborhood house of prostitution… That two-story bordello, administered by Mathilde Ladonne from 1911 to 1916, can rely on only two women with a trick at three francs. She calls her house “Madame Rachel”… According to the police, unlike its two boarders Laure and Leontine, “the clientele is almost exclusively Jewish”… As in all the other brothels on that street, its prostitutes are not Jews, a further clue as to the low number of Israelite prostitutes… (Eric Fournier 258).  

Quoting Fournier here is not meant to pinpoint the house of prostitution that Proust depicts in A la recherche. The name “Rachel”, the conceivable dinginess, the French prostitutes passing as

40 Un seul bordel fait exception et suggère que la femme juive peut alimenter des fantasmes. C’est paradoxalement une très modeste maison de quartier… Ce bordel de deux étages, ne comptant que deux femmes a trois francs la passe, est tenu par Mathilde Ladonne de 1911 a 1916. Elle appelle sa maison « Madame Rachel »… Selon la police, « la clientèle est presque uniquement juive », à la différence de ses deux pensionnaires, Laure et Léontine… Ses prostituées, comme toutes celles des autres maisons de passe de cette rue, ne sont pas juives, indice supplémentaire quant au faible nombre de prostituées israélites… (Eric Fournier 258).
Jewesses, the predominantly Jewish clientele, which leaves Bloch the narrator’s only plausible introducer to that house, all are reflected in Proust’s novel. However, the availability of these details illustrates how Proust’s novel, rather than simply describe, expertly recreates reality through discourses that affected the Jewish community. They also demonstrate Proust’s interest and knowledge in every aspect of Jewish life and in every attempt at defaming the community. As Rachel is introduced in *Within a Budding Grove*, the volume ridicules the premises of a very pernicious libel. Indeed, a police report exists that totally contradicts the anti-Semites’ ranting as to the importance of Jewish prostitution⁴¹ (Eric Fournier 259)⁴². With the protagonist Rachel, Proust, through laughter, deliberately illustrates and exposes a myth, elaborated by anti-Semites, which purported a prevalence of Jews in French prostitution.

Rachel Two

Rachel’s progress as a Jew in *Guermantes’ Way I*

Following Rachel’s introduction in *Within a Budding Grove*, the second volume of *A la recherche*, the heroine reappears only in the third volume, *Guermantes’ Way I*. Broadly, Rachel’s reappearance as an actress occupies a tenth of the three-hundred-page *Guermantes’ Way, I*. Those thirty pages are but the first of the multiple sections that, in the third book, constitute the hundred-page reconstruction of a day in the narrator’s life. Unlike most parts of *A la recherche*, the spring in question can be identified in relation to real time. It must be the spring of 1898 since, at a social event in the fourth and last section of the fictitious day, it becomes apparent that Emile Zola’s infamous trial of February 1898, which officially transformed the Dreyfus case into the Dreyfus affair or “the Affair”, has already taken place. At

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⁴² De plus, l’analyse de la surveillance policière contredit totalement les élucubrations antisémites sur l’importance de la prostitution juive. Furthermore, an analysis of police surveillance records contradicts completely the fanciful anti-Semitic tales about the importance of Jewish prostitution (Eric Fournier 259). Paul Fadoul translator
the same gathering in *Guermantes’ Way*, I the guests discuss the historical Lieutenant-Colonel Henry who is still alive. Henry’s actual suicide will occur in August of that same year upon his admission that, in November 1896, he had fabricated a letter between a German diplomat and the Italian military attaché to incriminate Captain Dreyfus. It is important to identify the historical markers of that section of *Guermantes’ Way*, because, in order to resume a realistic subjection of a Jew, the author sensibly stages Rachel, Swann and Bloch with, as an interactive backdrop, the Dreyfus affair. The Affair never takes center stage, but its presence influences the protagonists’ interaction, determines their attitudes and actions. In these hundred pages, the Jewess who had seemed completely disconnected from Marcel’s world becomes a central character within the represented society. Rachel, who develops links to protagonists like Bloch, the Guermantes and their set, plays a core role in the formation of alterity in the France that *A la recherche* represents. An attentive reading reveals that her construction includes the principles that will shape a separate Jewish identity.

In *Guermantes’ Way*, I, Proust’s literary skills allow for the representation of a France whose French Jewish community is still coalescing. At that stage, the assimilationist ideology of France and of its Israelites still appeared to be the norm, a separate consciousness a betrayal, an anomaly. Such a situation, even as ‘the Affair’ acted as a catalyst for the formation of a specific Jewish identity, led Bernard Lazare to exclaim as late as 1897: “Let us leave French Jews aside if you don’t mind. They are the best agents of anti-Semitism… But for a few among them, they do their utmost to develop at once their passive acceptance of that evil and their cowardice”\(^\text{43}\)

\(^{43}\) Paul Fadoul translator.
Though too slow for Lazare’s sense of urgency, though still in the shadow of French Israelite ‘assimilationism’, Jewish identity was developing in France as the Dreyfus Affair unfolded. For instance, *Guermantes’ Way, I*, has a supposedly non-Jewish narrator who offers arguments that defy and ridicule the hatred of Jews and promote Jewish pride.

In *Guermantes’ Way, I*, the novel represents through its main Jewish protagonists the very complex reality that French Jews experienced at that point of their history. In the context of Jewish representation, a passing allusion to the assimilated Charles Swann communicates the impression that he is still the norm for French Jewry because the Dreyfus Affair has yet to reach its climax. But the reference to the Parisian Israelite Swann, and to his famous countryside property that integrates him in ‘deep’ France, is only in passing and serves to contrast him with the ‘new’ Jews. Two brash Jewish protagonists, the assertive and energetic Albert Bloch and Rachel, very unlike the very gentlemanly Swann, occupy the limelight during the course of that spring day of 1898 in the novel. However, *Guermantes’ Way, I*, portrays how France excluded the Jews but not the Israelites from the mythical bond between the people and their land in accordance with the principles of the then prevailing Nationalist doctrine: *la terre, le sang et les morts* or the national, common heritage that consists of the ancestral territory for which the ancestors gave their lives and where they are buried. As this study will demonstrate, the narrator’s attempt to exclude Rachel from idealized French space that he recreates contributes to her eventually being perceived as Jewish.

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44 Laissons si vous le voulez bien les Juifs de France. Ils sont les meilleurs agents de l’antisémitisme… [Ils] s’évertuent – à de rares exceptions près – à développer leur acceptation passive du mal et leur lâcheté (Nationalisme Juif 100).
Guermantes’ Way, I presents the arbitrary motives for Jewish exclusion, but ‘assimilated Israelite inclusion’, an unfortunate principle of the Jewish condition, in a succession of images that revolve around Rachel. The successive parts construct the passage and paint a Frenchman, Marcel or the novel’s narrator, who callously resorts to anti-Semitism to justify or camouflage his desires and opportunism. However, in contrast, the same Marcel’s words express two polemical ideas that help shape the new Jewish subject. The gentiles, and the narrator at times, own the negative traits that they attribute to the Jews. In addition, charity and disinterestedness, qualities that the novel’s Christians claim as their own, belong more often than not to Jews. The representation of Rachel at that stage of her career in A la recherche also demonstrates the role the Dreyfus Affair played in helping shape a separate French Jewish identity. For example, Rachel reinforces her Jewish persona with her proclaimed identification with Dreyfus’ cause. The heroine’s reaffirmation of her ethnic choice perfects her Jewishness with its implication that Rachel is a threat to the French family or to the very established order. Guermantes’ Way, I accurately identifies and represents the principles of a specifically French Jewish and the moment of their genesis.

The Jewess on a spring day in Ile de France

Proust locates the section of Guermantes’ Way that directly concerns Rachel within a busy spring day in the narrator’s life. Each of its three sections is divided into sub-sections. In the early part of the day, the narrator and his friend Lieutenant Robert de Saint-Loup take the train to a village outside Paris to meet Rachel, now the officer’s mistress. In the second part, the three of them continue to a restaurant for lunch and move on to the theater where the gentlemen watch Rachel’s rehearsal. Finally, without Rachel, the narrator and Saint-Loup attend an evening gathering at the home of the Marquise de Villeparisis, Saint-Loup’s great-aunt. The day
ends with the narrator accompanying the baron de Charlus to his townhouse. The recreation of that day is strategically inserted between, on the one hand, successive representations of the upper classes, the military, the emergence of the telephone as technological wonder and, on the other, the beating that Saint-Loup inflicts on a homosexual, the depiction of Madame de Villeparisis’ salon, where Albert Bloch, an unknown Jew can still be entertained, in spite of the ubiquitous Dreyfus Affair. The result is evident: the novel’s Jewess is an agent in the world and no longer an object ‘passing for Jewish’ in a brothel.

The telling of the day starts with the narrator meeting a family friend, the falsely bohemian bourgeois but confirmed snob Legrandin. This event is typical of the sequence in that it appears to be unrelated to the unfolding events. But Legrandin’s reappearance in the last part of the day at the Marquise’s home reinforces the unity of the piece, explains the purpose of the early morning meeting and is a reminder that every segment, including the boxing demonstration upon the hapless homosexual, is calculated and contributes to Rachel’s transformation into a Jewess. As in *The Budding Grove*, Rachel is absent but present at the gathering at the Marquise’s in *Guermantes’ Way, I* where she will be discussed in the evening, but the representation will be passive since she will not speak for herself.

The first segment of the day, so momentous that the narrator in the novel recreates its entirety decades later, counts no less than four parts. In each sub-section, Marcel paints a succession of slightly differing tableaux that quickly culminates in the estrangement of the tainted Jew(ess) from the idealized French landscape. In the narrator’s first painting he and Saint-Loup appear in a rustic setting. It is followed by one that portrays, in the same background, Saint-Loup’s preoccupation with Rachel. In the next view, the narrator is abandoned physically as well as mentally within that pristine but sterile nature. The series ends
with the return of Saint-Loup accompanied by Rachel. Rachel’s intrusion within the narrator’s inner world generates images of her that stupefy, they intimate that the Jew(ess) and the spotless surrounding do not belong together.

The artifices of the unreliable narrator in *A la recherche du temps perdu*

When confronted with a fictional Western narrator who fashions minority characters, the challenge is how to question his account. In a late sixteenth-century essay titled “Of Cannibals” that Montaigne wrote in defense of an ‘Other’, an indigenous Brazilian people, he defined and opposed a bad witness to a good witness, a still helpful method to a approach a Western hegemonic voice:

[C]lever people observe more things and more curiously, but they interpret them… They never show you things as they are, but bend and disguise them according to the way they have seen them; and to give credence to their judgment and attract you to it, they are prone to add something to their matter, to stretch it out and amplify it. We need a man either very honest, or so simple that he has not the stuff to build up false inventions and give them plausibility; and wedded to no theory” (152).

To Montaigne, reliable witnesses distance themselves from any discourse and theory that creates prejudices. In *Guermantes’ Way, I*, far from being ‘wedded to no theory’, the worldly narrator demonstrates a subjectivity that consists of literary, ‘scientific’ and social theories of his times such as class structures, ‘the Jewess’, ‘anti-Semitism’, ‘hysteria’. Montaigne would dismiss Marcel as an unreliable witness because of his ‘theories’ and cleverness that turn nature into a tool to serve his purpose: banish the Jewess because of jealousy. *A la recherche* represents a narrator, a middle-class Frenchman, who is influenced by his emotions, adept at suppressing and camouflaging his true motives and desires from himself and the audience. Following Montaigne’s approach, it is not the accuracy of the facts – in this case as fictional as the narrator – that can or must be questioned but Marcel’s use of language. The narrator structures the
passage and make cultural, nationalist allusions to, at once, express and hide his homosexual desire and to expulse Rachel. Marcel’s artful dissemblance sensibly furthers Rachel’s transformation into a ‘racialized Jew’.

From transcendence in Emerson to the poetics of Jewish expulsion

An analysis of the passage, with its cascading constructs, reveals the distance between the author and the first-person narrator he stages. In the following extract, Marcel represents the unreliable educated Frenchman whose subjectivity, well garnished with theories that include anti-Semitism, provides at will constructions that express the stunning depiction of the Jewess but disguise the jealousy and sexual competition at its root:

After coming out of a Paris in which, although spring had begun, the trees on the boulevards had hardly put on their first leaves, it was a marvel to Saint-Loup and myself, when the circle train had set us down at the suburban village in which his mistress was living, to see each little garden decked with the huge festal altars of the fruit-trees in blossom…. The blossom of the cherry tree is stuck so close to its branches, like a white sheath, that from a distance, among the other trees… one might have taken it for snow that had remained clinging there… But the tall pear-trees enveloped each house… in a more dazzling whiteness, as if all the dwellings… were on their way to make their first communion on the same solemn day… [T]hree tall pear trees were elegantly beflagged with white satin… Laid out in quincunxes, these pear-trees… formed great quadrilaterals… of white blossom, so that all these airy roofless chambers seemed to belong to a Palace of the Sun, such as one might find in Crete (157-158).

The background that welcomes Marcel and Robert is a poem in prose, an inference that from the narrator’s perspective at least, their relationship deserves to transcend the material world to reach an ideal setting. To accept transcendence as a simple poetic exercise in Proust’s A la recherche is, as Joshua Landy explains, reductive: “Far from giving access to a single, transcendent realm shared, at moments of ecstasy, by all human beings indiscriminately, compositions and paintings [in A la recherche] provide a passport to many, infinitely many universes, each consisting in the
perspective of the relevant creator. About this view... there is nothing particularly... Platonic” (5). In line with Landy’s statement, the scene that the fictional Marcel ‘creates’ reveals his very earthy perspective with an element of desire. Even if the narrator’s depiction excludes consummation, a non-platonic desire is present to unlock the protagonist’s subjectivity and inner world\textsuperscript{45}. In the above ‘proustian’ passage, the allusions to Catholicism (festal altars, first communion) encompass the seen and the unseen to convey the ethereal flowery world that envelops the two friends. Together with the sterile whiteness, they immortalize the love for Robert repressed for being hopeless. The foraging bumblebee that will miraculously wander into the Duchess’ courtyard to fertilize her houseplants in \textit{Sodom and Gomorrah, I}, as Charlus and Jupien consummate their desire, does not appear in the sterile orchards. The ‘branches’ will remain in their ‘white sheath’, idealized Greek love will not fill once again the deserted ‘roofless chambers’ of the abandoned ‘Palace of the Sun… in Crete’, the site of famed homosexual love. The section ends, not with the transposition of two intimate friends from Ile-de-France to ancient Crete, but with the equally evocative “branches, the foaming whiteness of a creamy, sunlit flower” (Proust 158).

\textbf{The Jew(ess) as rival}

The following paragraph, which launches a new part, passes without transition from Crete, part of the narrator’s subjectivity, to Saint-Loup’s state of mind: “Never had Robert

\textsuperscript{45} In order to comprehend how in Proust transcendentalism has a worldly purpose, is not a link, reflection or glimpse of the absolute, it is necessary to consider Ralph W. Emerson. Emerson’s influence on Proust, as Everett Carter makes clear, is established: “\textit{A la Recherche} shows that the basic elements of Emersonian transcendental idealism, which stressed the quotidian material world, formed the philosophical underpinning for Proust’s devotion to the common place world…” (40). However, Carter highlights another similarity: “Proust… was not, any more than was Emerson, a believer in art for art’s sake. Instead, theirs was the devotion to the… capacity of art to enable us to perceive a preexistent reality and beauty…” (43). Proust’s poem cannot be reduced to an artistic exercise or the portrait of a fine day outside Paris. Every which one of the narrator’s cultural or material allusions to his surrounding is a key to the world in his mind and must be deciphered and reassembled to unlock his true meaning.
spoken to me so tenderly of his mistress as he did during this journey. I sensed that she alone had taken root in his heart; [all else] counted for nothing beside the smallest thing that concerned his mistress” (Proust 158). Robert’s evident absorption with Rachel leaves Marcel no hope that his feeling may be reciprocated.

The assertion that Marcel must repress his desire for Robert is reinforced with a scene that occurs eighteen pages later, in the second part of the day:

I saw that a somewhat shabbily attired gentleman appeared to be talking to him confidentially… suddenly… I saw a number of ovoid bodies… But this elaborate display was nothing more than a pummeling which Saint-Loup was administering… My friend could not get over the audacity of this “clique”… and spoke of the proposition with the same indignation as the newspapers use in reporting an armed assault and robbery in broad daylight in the center of Paris. And yet the recipient of his blows was excusable in one respect… And that Saint-Loup was beautiful was beyond dispute… And so… all such punishments… are powerless to bring uniformity to morals. (Proust 186-187).

A la recherche, according to its plot, is Marcel’s memoirs. He therefore knows all that will unfold, knew of the afternoon ‘gay bashing’ when he was re-creating the morning. The narrator’s feelings are repressed and come out simply outlined in the structure. Therefore, the foreknowledge of Saint-Loup’s extreme violence toward males who make unsound advances informs the narration of the morning. Jealousy, resentment toward Rachel and desire for her lover are exacerbated with Saint-Loup’s dismissive and impatient words in the second section of the first part of the morning: “I can see you’d rather stop and look at all that and feel poetical about it… so don’t budge from here… [Rachel]’s house is quite close, and I’ll go and fetch her” (Proust 119). Robert’s clear impatience to be with Rachel, the ‘Other’, rather than with the effete though male Marcel, leaves the latter the orchard with, for sole company, the words that end the second section of the morning: “the cold wind that swept through it”.
The third part of the morning occasions an ultimate celebratory painting in white of the French landscape. Suddenly, the protagonist and the idealized garden in bloom become links to the Israelite Swann and his property: “I recognised in them [clusters of young lilas] the purple-clad platoons posted at the entrance to M. Swann’s park in the warm spring afternoons, like an enchanting rustic tapestry” (Proust 159-160). The inclusion and the rooting of the Israelite Swann within the idyllic French countryside end the third segment. The landscape of virginal flowers prepares the ground for the coup-de-théâtre that begins the fourth part of the first part of the day, Rachel’s reentry in A la recherche:

Suddenly Saint-Loup appeared, accompanied by his mistress, and then, in this woman who was for him the epitome of love, of all the sweet things of life… whom he felt that he would never really know… in this woman I recognized instantaneously “Rachel when from the Lord,” she who, but a few years since… used to say to the procuress: “To-morrow evening, then, if you want me for someone, you’ll send round for me, won’t you?

And when they had “come round” for her, and she found herself alone in the room with the “someone,” she knew so well what was required of her that after locking the door, as a womanly precaution or a ritual gesture, she would quickly remove all her clothes, as one does before the doctor who is going to examine one, and did not pause in the process unless the “someone,” not caring for nudity, told her that she might keep on her shift, as specialists do sometimes, who, having and extremely fine ear and being afraid of their patient’s catching a chill, are satisfied with listening to his breathing and the beating of his heart through his shirt (Proust 160).

The purpose of the lengthy ode to nature in France becomes clear: from the seemingly innocent setting for homosexual longing one is transposed, without preparation, to the heart of venality. The narrator’s unrestrained voyeurism stuns. The four rapidly succeeding portraits, or the armature of the first part of the day, attain the effect they were reaching for: the nobleman Saint-Loup, the French Israelite landowner Swann and the bourgeois narrator belong in the pure French landscape. The passage stages a nationalist representation of Rachel who is all at once
the abject Jew(ess), that materialistic métèque, and the immodest hysteric female prostitute and contrasts her with the responsible Frenchmen whose reason prizes modesty, and aligns them with a Western medical science that prioritizes health over sensual pleasure. In line with the anti-Jewish ideology of the times, the rootless Rachel is displaced to the social margins to be the eternal ‘Other’ while the narrator masquerades his unrequited same-sex love as a rational France that the hysterical Jewess attempts to seduce and conquer.

The excluded, racialized belle Juive of the time of the Dreyfus affair

As Rachel continues to perfect her Jewishness in Guermantes’ Way, I, her lack of reserve hints at the hysteria that placed her in the brothel and on the path to Jewishness. Marcel’s description of Rachel’s eagerness to undress creates and leaves the visual impression of her (un)dressed in her shift. Her garment is a clue to the hysteria practiced at La Salpêtrière for in the video interview titled “Mystère, la preuve par l’image”, Didi-Huberman explains that “L’hystérie sollicite la visualité… elle sollicite l’Art… Moi, je suis arrivé a la conclusion qu’il [Charcot] a fait des images non pas pour illustrer son idée de l’hystérie mais pour fabriquer son

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46 The late nineteenth and early twentieth century considered it very unlikely that women of Rachel’s background would fall prey to hysteria. An alternative description of Rachel, delivered by a protagonist close to the Guermantes family, is included in the Notes et variantes section of the 1987 edition of La Pléiade. The excluded version offers details that allow a further understanding of Proust’s conception of the protagonist: “Et [M. de Bréauté] se rappelant une plaisanterie qu’elle lui avait faite en la rencontrant dans l’allée des Cavaliers ou leurs chevaux s’étaient croisés…[sur] l’histoire… qui était le fort de Rachel…: « C’est une fille instruite qui a beaucoup lu pour une personne de sa condition… » Et comme le génie de la famille de Guermantes l’animaït : « N’importe, dit-il, on sent un bon fond, je ne sais pas qui elle est, mais elle doit être la fille de gens bien » ” (Sodome et Gomorrhe 1353). In this esquisse, Rachel owns traits associated with the wives and daughters of well-to-do, upright citizens. The character is at ease horseback riding, is educated, well read in history and, according to the Marquis de Bréauté, she obviously comes from a middle-class background. The causes of Rachel’s life choice and estrangement from her family come across as mysterious. However, contemporary medical discourse explained why a woman with so many advantages embraced prostitution.

46 Hysteria solicits visuality… it solicits Art… As for me, I came to the conclusion that Charcot made images not to illustrate his idea of hysteria but to manufacture his idea of hysteria and even to manufacture hysteria (stephanielehu.com/-la-belle-indifference-html).
idée de l’hystérie et même pour fabriquer de l’hystérie”47 (stephanielehu.com/-la-belle-indifference-html.). Indeed, a perfunctory glance at the collection of pictures that Charcot took of his female patients to ‘manufacture’ hysteria irreversibly links their ‘chemise’ or shift that they invariably wear to their disease. Charcot’s photos come to associate the ‘shift’ with ‘his’ hysterics who crave to perform their symptoms, to be ‘visualized’ and ‘solicit Art’ under the gaze of the doctor, of the painter and of the camera. The professor’s widely disseminated pictures irretrievably made the clothing item a prop of the hysterics’ mise-en-scène.

Furthermore, in the same above-mentioned video as Didi-Huberman, in an interview about the movie Augustine (2012) which narrates the life of one of Charcot’s most famous ‘stars’, its photographer Stephanie Lehu elaborates on the chemise’s aesthetic contribution to the La Salpêtrière photographs and her own technical efforts to reproduce its role in the film. Both Rachel’s power to rivet Marcel’s gaze, turning him into a voyeur, and her theatrical need to dress down to her shift associate her performance at the brothel with that of Charcot’s hysterics.

Indeed, Marcel portrays Rachel as lacking the mean that the medical discourse on hysteria proposed to protect women from falling beyond the social boundaries and into the margins with the Jew, the homosexual, the prostitute. Based on contemporaneous teachings, Rachel’s fall into an abject lifestyle can only be explained from her lack of ‘modesty’, of a virtue that all decent women shared. Evelyne Ender explains that:

For in truth the hysteric does have a mind, and moreover she is, according to our doctors, endowed with a set of qualities and abilities that might enable her to avoid hysteria, even when her “whole nature” makes her prone to incur its ravages. It is her innate or acquired modesty (la pudeur) which gives woman the ability to keep at bay the excesses that her feminine nature is liable to incur. Armed with her modesty, she holds promises other than the mere passivity of a victim under the sway of her female condition. For the
nineteenth-century doctor, modesty represents then the natural antidote to hysteria… (50).

In her allusion to ‘our doctors’, Ender puts the accent on the prestige attached to medicine, then a wholly masculine profession. Medical practitioners had concluded and taught that modesty prevented hysteria in women. As A la recherche re-visits its introduction of Rachel, the heroine lacks the very virtue that would protect her from giving in to the sickness inherent to her feminine condition. Rachel’s immodesty that fascinates the narrator infers that she is a victim of hysteria, the traditional sickness that Charcot, in his lecture discussed earlier, attributed to Jews in an 1888 Tuesday lecture. Charcot’s scientific authority blurs the lines between ‘Woman’ and Jewish ethnicity through hysteria and enables Rachel’s transformation into a Jewess. The professor’s widely advertised work makes it possible to ask whether Rachel is hysteric because of her condition as a Jew, because she is a woman or because of both of her conditions.

**Rachel performs Jewish solidarity**

In the first part of the spring day in 1898, French political and medical discourses that targeted Jews contribute to the impression that Rachel is Jewish. However, the second segment portrays the Jew(ess) with Marcel and Saint-Loup at a restaurant where she aligns her behavior along a principle that Jews devised for their modern Jewish identity. The notion of communal solidarity excludes the negative labeling of Jews present in hysteria, the ‘Jewess’ or Nationalism namely because it was articulated for Jews from within their community and not by outsiders. As discussed in Chapter One, Jewish solidarity became a notion of French Jewish ‘subjectification’ with the development of the Dreyfus affair and, at the restaurant, to further her Jewishness, Rachel performs the ‘Jewess’ who empathizes with Alfred Dreyfus’ sufferings:
And she began to abuse his family to me in terms which seemed to me highly justified, and with which Saint-Loup…concurred… Tears sprang to the young woman’s eyes when I was rash enough to mention Dreyfus. “The poor martyr!” she almost sobbed; “it will be the death of him in that dreadful place… And would you believe that Robert’s mother, a pious woman, says that he ought to be left on Devil’s Island even if he’s innocent. Isn’t that appalling?” “Yes, it’s absolutely true… She’s my mother, I can’t contradict her, but its’ quite clear she hasn’t got a sensitive nature like Zezette” (167).

In the above extract, Rachel’s unapologetic, aggressive multi-layered speech illustrates how the tearful empathy that she performs and proclaims for Captain Dreyfus’ cause reinforces her identity, her being seen and recognized as a Jew. Her defiant profession of a Jewish attitude alters Marcel’s perspective on her, establishes a common ground between them though he has just finished denigrating her. Through its main Jewish protagonists, Rachel, Swann and Bloch, A la recherche represents how, in response to the Affair, assertiveness, dignity, defiance and solidarity shape the new French Jewish subject who shuns hysteria, assimilation and the belle Juive and other negative discourses that originate outside of the group48.

In the above passage, the Jewess’ outspokenness meets a Jewish experience that Bernard Lazare describes in Les Causes économiques de l’antisémitisme: “S’ils [les Juifs] ne détruisirent pas le christianisme, s’ils n’organisèrent pas une ténébreuse conspiration contre Jésus, ils donnèrent des armes à ceux qui le combattirent et, dans les assauts donnés à l’Eglise, ils se trouvèrent toujours au premier rang”49 (L’Antisémitisme et ses causes p. 392). Lazare’s studies

48 At the beginning of Guermantes’ Way, Rachel demonstrates solidarity and assertiveness, elements that are part of the new French Jewish consciousness but were absent from the Israelites’ ideology of assimilation. For example, at the end of the same volume, Charles Swann, as respectful of Catholicism as the narrator, still represents the assimilated Israelite who contributes to an unquestioning, hegemonic Christian history in France, with an article on the coins that the medieval Order of the Knights of St John Hospitaliers had minted at Rhodes. Moreover, Swann has all the images of the headmasters of the Order specifically assembled in a lavish, oversized print. The charming Swann then visits the Duke and Duchess de Guermantes to present them with the work in its custom-made giant envelope. Swann accomplishes both actions all the while believing and deploring that the Guermantes and their class are all anti-Semites. The etiquette of the French upper-class conditions Swann’s courtly behavior as an Israelite which contrasts with Rachel’s confrontational attitude as a Jew.

49 If they [the Jews] did not destroy Christianity… they provided the arms to those who fought and, in the assaults against the Church, they also found themselves in the first ranks (392). Paul Fadoul translator.
on the origin and causes of anti-Semitism lead him to conclude that, though the Jewish community never conspired to undermine the Christian religion, they actively led the assaults against Rome. In line with the purpose of his essay, Lazare explains on the next page that contemporary anti-Jewish feelings originate with the teachings that the Church propagated from the Medieval era onward: “car l’antisémitisme moderne est l’héritier de l’antijudaïsme du moyen-âge” (393). In Lazare’s view, the aggression that Catholics directed at Jews bring a reaction in kind from the latter. In the late nineteenth-century, the anti-Dreyfus movement that led great numbers of French Catholics to embrace Barrès’s brand of xenophobic, intolerant nationalism signaled that the period would find Jews at odds with the Church in France.

The Belle Époque amalgamation of religion and politics explains that in Guermantes’ Way, as part of her transformation into a Jew, Rachel targets Mme de Marsantes’ piety and her lover’s family with an oblique assault. As a politically engaged Jewish subject, when Rachel targets the politico-religious attitude that Mme de Marsantes proffers she is line with Lazare’s affirmation that the Jewish community only returns Catholic aggression. An acknowledged, proselytizing member of la Patrie française⁵⁰ (Le Côté de Guermantes 533), the political organization that promoted stability at all costs, Saint-Loup’s mother subjects reason to nationalism, and hence Dreyfus’s individual rights to the prestige of the national army, even

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⁵⁰ The reception at the Marquise de Villeparisis’ home must be taking place in mid-1898 since the narrator states that it occurs during the initial stage of the Dreyfus affair and her guests refer to Colonel Henry as if he is still alive and since his suicide occurs on August 31, 1898. The Colonel’s suicide marks the apex of the Affair. At the fictional gathering, the Duchess de Guermantes complains that Mme de Marsantes, her sister-in-law, bores everyone with la Patrie française. However, in reality, prestigious rightist intellectuals created the anti-Dreyfusist movement la Patrie française on December 31, 1898. Mme de Marsantes cannot bore ‘society’ with an organization that does not yet exist but the liberty that the work of fiction takes with the dates serves to attach her name to the “Ligue” and immediately summarize and satirize her political beliefs.
when it erred\textsuperscript{51}. On the other hand, as a Jewess, Rachel positions herself as an advocate of justice for the individual.

Rachel decries Mme de Marsantes’ belief that the individual, even if innocent of all charges, could and should accept to be sacrificed for the common good. In Mme de Marsantes’ view which she shares with her party, Captain Dreyfus still belonged on Devil’s Island to protect confidence in the army and the order that it represents. In \textit{Guermantes’ Way, I}, Rachel’s denunciation of Mme de Marsantes’ position implies that, unlike the conservative aristocrats and bourgeois, she, as the Jew, is in agreement with the liberal principles of the Revolution. Rachel’s choice of becoming a Jew brings her to voice opinions in a tradition alien to the assimilated Israelite. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four dedicated to Charles Swann, Swann will adopt Rachel’s irreverent tone only when he assumes a Jewish identity in lieu of the French Israelite ideology of assimilation.

In its representation of the early stage of a separate Jewish identity, \textit{Guermantes’ Way} opposes Jewish disinterest to ‘Aryan’ petty calculation and manipulation. However, Marcel’s sympathy for the Jewess materializes only once her speech on Dreyfus has finalized her transformation as a Jew. To vindicate the Jewess, throughout every part of the fictional day, a certain necklace from Boucheron keeps reappearing. In the first part of the day Saint-Loup casually mentions that: “To-day, (sic.) if she’s nice,” he confided to me, “I’m going to give her a...

\textsuperscript{51}The nationalist leader Maurice Barrès was both a founding member of ‘La Patrice Française’ and its leading intellectual voice. As Zeev Sternhell explains, Barrès made Catholicism ‘without the element of faith’, ‘\textit{une sorte d’athéïsme catholique}’ (306) an integral part of French nationalism. Sternhell highlights the fact that for Barrès, the leading French agnostic nationalist, France and Catholicism were indivisible “Barrès defend... l’Eglise parce que la France non catholique ne serait plus la France” (309). The fictional Mme de Marsantes represents the many French Catholics, parishioners as well as clergy, who adopted ‘La Patrice Française’ and partook in its anti-Jewish attitude which put them in conflict with the Jewish community but also with the higher French clergy and the Vatican even. It was not only a matter of subjecting Catholicism to French politics or the party’s estranging faith and religion but, as J.-D. Durand and Paul Duclos explain Pope Leo XIII disapproved of anti-Semitism on both moral and political grounds. Mme de Marsantes demonstrates during the Affair an uncharitable, false piety that Rachel denounces as a Jewess in the novel and that the Vatican disapproved of in real life.

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present that will make her very happy. It’s a necklace she saw at Boucheron’s” (Proust 159). In
the second part of the day, during the luncheon, a dispute develops between the lovers and the
motif of the necklace unexpectedly resurfaces:

“Look here, I promised you the necklace if you behaved nicely to me, but since you treat
me like this… No one else can possibly give it to you. I’ve told Boucheron he’s to keep
it for me, and I have his promise not to sell it to anyone else.” “So that’s it! You wanted
to blackmail me, so you took all your precautions in advance. It’s just what they say:
Marsantes, Mater Semita, it smells of the race,” retorted Rachel, quoting an etymology
which was founded on a wild misinterpretation, for Semita means “path” and not
“Semite,” but one which the Nationalists applied to Saint-Loup on account of the
Dreyfusard views for which, as it happened, he was indebted to the actress. (She was less
justified than anyone in applying the appellation of Jewess to Mme de Marsantes…)
Robert was in the right a hundred times over. But…I could not help recalling the
unpleasant and yet quite innocent remark he had made at Balbec: “In that way I keep a
hold over her” (Proust 182-183).

In that section of the novel, Rachel communicates her completed Jewish condition through the
confidence of her tone as a Jew. Rachel is so confident in her Jewish identity that she uses an
anti-Semitic slur to label Saint-Loup a racial Jew, the son of a ‘Mater Semita’, thereby asserting
that as a Semite she can’t be an anti-Semite. Rachel’s positioning affects the narrator who,
hereafter, recognizes her as Jewish. Marcel’s aside confirms Rachel’s evolution as he
underlines the irony of the situation. The Jewess who turned Saint-Loup into a Dreyfusard now
accuses him and his mother, Mme de Marsantes, of being calculating, manipulative Jews.
Rachel’s metamorphosis into a Jewess meets with success for her having wisely selected and
aligned her behavior to the successive discourses that in the West defined the Jew, from the
literary belle Juive to solidarity with Captain Dreyfus. Rachel represents how ‘The Affair’, the
objectification of ostracism against Jews, and identification with Dreyfus’ cause contributed
immeasurably in the shaping of a specific Jewish subject independent of the traditional French
Israelite.
Rachel’s convincing performance of loyalty to and solidarity with her fellow Jew, the fallen Captain Dreyfus, marks the moment when she projects the Jewish identity she has assumed and the narrator comes to see her as a Jewess. In Marcel Proust’s recreation of France, once Rachel becomes the Semite ‘Other’, her representation becomes markedly more positive. The improvement of Rachel’s image occurs around the ‘affair of the necklace’ which is narrated in the third part of the day when Saint-Loup and the narrator have left Rachel to go on to Mme de Villeparisis’ evening: “Robert went to his mistress, taking with him the splendid ornament which… he ought not to have given her. But it came to the same thing, for she would not look at it, and even after their reconciliation he could never persuade her to accept it… she was not greedy for money, except perhaps to be able to spend it freely” (Proust 291). As the passage demonstrates, once Rachel’s discourse around the Affair convinces Marcel that she truly is Jewish he begins to redeem her. The Jewess who earlier sold herself for twenty francs is now a disinterested woman far removed from materialistic concern while Saint-Loup is the weak lover who betrays his firm resolution to offer Rachel the necklace only under certain conditions. Rachel’s disinterest is further heightened in contrast with her aristocratic lover who is crass and self-serving. Indeed, while Rachel is ennobled, the Marquis de Saint-Loup becomes a calculator who, for long now, attempts to turn Rachel into an object by using his financial means to keep ‘a hold on her’ as he claims in the earlier quote (p. 46). When at the beginning of the day Marcel was still unconvinced that Rachel was Jewish he had described her cruelly. However, once the narrator accepts her as a Jew he subverts the anti-Semitic stereotypes. It is now the European aristocrat who is represented as lacking principles and for whom money is a tool to manipulate even one he claims to love. On the other hand, in A la recherche, as will occur with Swann, once the protagonist is the Jew(ess), he/she lives by his/her decision and gives no value to money.
The post World War I French Jewess as represented in *Le Temps retrouvé*

The last representation of Rachel occurs in *Le Temps retrouvé*, or in French *Le Temps retrouvé*, the last tome of the seven-volume *A la recherche*. Rachel and Marcel meet again at a Guermantes reception taking place more than twenty years after the one that Mme de Villeparisis gave in 1898. In that final appearance, Rachel is a confident French Jewish subject. Her Jewish identity differs from the French Israelite one in that it is unapologetic of its difference. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, because the Jewess’ representation occurs from the French narrator’s perspective, it includes once again ‘the Jewess’ and ‘hysteria’ with the positive artistic and historical discourses around the Jew. Nonetheless, in *Le Temps retrouvé*, Rachel represents the French Jewish subject who is the unabashed sum of the discourses, who is comfortable as such and is gleefully unconcerned with the gazes that emanate from the philo-Semite or the anti-Semite.

In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the narrator depicts Rachel as an unattractive, cruel and vain woman, it comes through that she owes her faults to her personality and her professional environment and not to her ‘race’ or ethnicity. In this last volume of *A la recherche*, at the Prince de Guermantes’ reception, Rachel is a central, captivating figure, a Jewish actress who exudes the confidence she derives from her identity. Rachel’s final portrait depends on her rivalry with La Berma, the novel’s celebrated representative of the classic *tragédienne*. The competition relates the place and role that real French Jewish artists occupy in the history of the country’s art. In those last scenes, the narrator implies that Rachel’s innovative approach to the interpretation and performance of a literary piece betrays her failure to understand the French
classics as well as Berma. And since ‘hystera’ and ‘la belle Juive’ inform Rachel’s ‘innovations’ to acting, the two discourses link the artist’s differences to her Jewishness, a ‘handicap’ that leaves her the ‘outsider’ unable to equal Berma’s appreciation of France’s national masterpieces. Through Rachel and Berma, A la recherche represents the privileged place that the theater holds in the Arts: a space where the artists stage their ‘Difference’ and that can either transmit a new perspective on the ‘Other’ or reinforce ethnic stereotypes.

A ‘theater’ for rivalry between the Israelite and Jews of France

In Le Temps retrouvé, Proust recreates an aristocratic gathering where a Jewish comedienne not only reigns on the Guermantes’ princely salon but dethrones La Berma, the actress who embodies classical French tradition throughout A la recherche. The fictional scene recreates a real life situation that furthers the understanding of Rachel as a Jewess in the novel’s last volume. In spite of nationalism and anti-Semitism, two real life actresses, Mademoiselle Rachel or Rachel Félix (1821-1858) and Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), both born Jewish, reached the apex of society not as mere actresses but as the embodiment of the French stage cultural tradition. With minor digressions, the situation that pits Rachel vs. Berma in the novel reflects the historic moment when Sarah Bernhardt, the younger, more modern French Jewish actress, appropriates the foremost position that Mlle Rachel formerly occupied in the theater. Marcel, the novel’s narrator, finds the new order distasteful and would prefer that La Berma’s primacy continues to the detriment of the younger Rachel. Nonetheless, through Rachel’s unusual interpretation of one of Jean de La Fontaine’s (1621-1695) best known fables, the concluding volume of A la recherche portrays and suggests a role for France’s ‘Other’. The French with

52 Only Marcel the narrator appears immune from the literary stereotypes that prevent the onlooker from seeing the Jewess as she truly is. Marcel seems to be the sole spectator able to notice the truth that ‘the Jewess’ in the room is old, mean and ugly and not beautiful, graceful and virtuous.
also a non-French identity, renew, participate and find inclusion with their non-traditional interpretation and reading that they bring to the priceless literary canon that can and does become staid without the contribution of the ‘Other.

In *A la recherche*, Rachel’s social progress also represents the salient role that theatrical art occupied in early twentieth-century society. Theater is a nation’s self-representation, the forum where its playwrights and their associates capture and represent the national angst, emotions, concerns, aspirations and follies. As a result, the art form occupied extensive intellectual and physical space in nineteenth-century Paris and London. In that time and in those places, Theater represented in Beynon John’s words: “a kind of secular cathedral in which the prosperous middle classes performed one of their favorite social rituals… And these stages [lavish, sumptuous, elaborate]… foster the cult of star performers” (S. Beynon John 244). As Beynon explains, the financially comfortable, who came to the theater to self-perform and watch performances that mirrored their lives, extended to its stars the prestige they that bestowed upon the institution. Hence, as early as in its first pages, in the first volume or *Swann’s Way*, *A la recherche* transmits the theater’s influence through the barely teenaged narrator and his classmates whose first obsessions are for stage actors: “Toutes mes conversations avec mes camarades portaient sur ces acteurs dont l’art, bien qu’il me fut encore inconnu, était la première forme, entre toutes celles qu’il revêt, sous laquelle se laissait pressentir par moi, l’Art” (73). Though their guardians are yet to allow them to attend a play, the young protagonists are already conditioned to yield to the theater’s powers of seduction. *A la recherche* replicates in its fictional France the situation that reality ascribed to the stage. Beynon John’s above discussion of a then actual ‘cult of star performers’ in ‘secular cathedrals’ contextualizes the rivalry
between Rachel and the traditionalist La Berma, a rivalry that reinforces the sense of Rachel’s Jewishness in the novel.

Marcel’s proclaimed concern for the future of an art form that is so intertwined with his bourgeois identity can come as no surprise: “Time, as it passes, does not necessarily bring progress in the arts… So Berma was, as the phrase goes, head and shoulders above Rachel” (Le Temps retrouvé 1055). As often happens with the narrator, Marcel’s conclusion that Berma surpasses Rachel as an actress is subjective. After all, Proust draws the protagonist Berma from a very real French assimilated Israelite actress as her biographers affirm: “In Remembrance of Things Past, he [Proust] examined the art of Bernhardt, or Berma, as he named her…” (Arthur Gold 251). Though unmentioned in the novel, Sarah Bernhardt’s personality underlines that of the fictional Berma. Not only are the surnames ‘Bernhardt’ and ‘Berma’ strikingly similar, but as Gold points out, the fictional actress owes her style, repertoire, diction, technique to the Israelite Bernhardt who converted to Catholicism. Except for an arbitrary exclusion, Bernhardt’s conversion to Catholicism is one of the characteristics that she lends novel’s great tragedienne, and an important one that contributed to her assimilation, to her public perception, and to her persona. In the novel, the narrator, an unreliable witness, claims that the present and future state of the theater determines his judgment that Berma is a greater artist than Rachel. But, when Marcel favors the assimilated Berma over Rachel, he is disparaging the innovations that the ‘Other’ brings to the theater and thereby defining and confirming the latter’s Jewishness.

Through the fictional competition between Rachel and Berma, Proust’s novel also represents the extent of Jewish contribution to French arts. The situation, whereby, upon her death, the reigning French actress succeeds a fellow Jewess, began with the Jewish star Rachel Félix or Mademoiselle (Mlle) Rachel. In the 1840’s and until her death, Mlle Rachel became an
idolized star of the theater who remained faithful to Judaism unlike Sarah Bernhardt. Mlle Rachel’s interpretation of Racine’s, Corneille’s and even Voltaire’s plays returned relevancy to France’s classics. Following Mlle Rachel’s death, her stature as France’s most sought after tragédienne passed to Sarah Bernhardt “who always kept a portrait of Rachel on her walls, and nothing was to give her greater pleasures than to hear that she had equaled - or surpassed – her idol” (Arthur Gold 38). Though the christened Israelite Bernhardt ‘idolized’ the unrepentantly Jewish Mlle Rachel, she still competed against her professionally, she still desired to outshine her predecessor. The sense of competition between the two stars in Le Temps retrouvé reflects one aspect of the professional condition in reality.

Indeed, Bernhardt’s aspirations and competitive attitude are not out of the ordinary. A new crop of eager artists strives to impose their style of acting that is better attuned to the sensibilities of their generation. In the case of Bernhardt, who for five decades so embodied the French theater that Jean Cocteau coined the term monstre sacré to describe her, Eric Salmon notes that the younger generations grew particularly impatient:

Just as neo-classicism in decay had tended toward mannerism, empty formalism and an over-emphasis on artistic decorums, so romanticism in decay tends to… emotionalism, vulgarity, empty spectacle and an over-emphasis on narrative, especially sensational narrative… [A]longside the acknowledged witchcraft of personality and the superbly-controlled technique there was an unmistakable streak of coarseness and triviality. It was this aspect of her work… that pushed the nineteenth-century’s theater spirit of romanticism into new and deeper channels; and it is in this sense that Bernhardt unwittingly helped provoke reactions (in both senses of that word) which would finally have the effect of bringing to an end the kind and style of theater she represented (Eric Salmon 7).

As Eric Salmon explains, the decay of both neo-classicism and romanticism is a natural effect of evolution in taste and time. Sarah Bernhardt’s strength of personality and mastery of her craft, or any other star, as represented through Berma in the novel, could only delay the inevitable for as
long as possible. Just as romanticism displaced neo-classicism, one school of acting must develop, prosper and be replaced by another. In the last passage quoted from *Le Temps retrouvé*, Marcel states that ‘Time, as it passes, does not necessarily bring progress in the arts’. Indeed, time allows nothing to be stagnant and knows nothing of human values such as progress or regress. But, when Marcel asserts that ‘Berma was, as the phrase goes, head and shoulders above Rachel’, he is expressing a personal opinion where others may find Rachel’s play inspired and adapted to fit the times. The narrator seems to be rationalizing his decision to side with the wholly assimilated baptized Israelite Berma against the Jewess Rachel. But one thing is certain. Historically, Bernhardt, the Israelite, succeeded the proudly Jewish Mlle Rachel. In Proust’s novel, the order is inverted and it is the Jewess Rachel who succeeds Berma the Israelite as the foremost actress. In Proust’s re-creation of French society, the Jewess forges ahead with the reinterpretation of French culture. In spite of anti-Semitic opinions, the ‘Other’ participates in French society.

Rachel in the new world of the postwar

In the last volume of *A la recherche*, Rachel is the sought after artist who has little in common with the constrained, unidentifiable sex object she represented in the first tome. For Rachel’s ultimate incarnation of the Jew, *Le Temps retrouvé* incorporates her history, the social beyond whence she comes. At that late stage in the novel, Marcel comments that he and Rachel meet again after he has been away at “a new sanatorium… and many years passed before I came away” (Proust 885). The absence must have lasted more than a decade. As Marcel explains, he returns to Paris a few years after the hostilities, having visited the capital from the clinic but twice, very briefly, in 1914 and in 1916. One of the striking changes that occurred while he was away centers around ‘The Affair’ and the liberalism the Captain’s cause had come to embody:
“Dreyfusism had incarnated: anti-patriotism, irreligion, anarchy, etc.” (*Le Temps retrouvé* 748). However, in the intervening years, the passions that had flamed around the Jew’s body had cooled to the extent that: “Dreyfusism was now integrated in a scheme of respectable and familiar things” (Proust 747). As *A la recherche* represents the French Jew(ess) who evolved from the Israelite in reaction to the Dreyfus Affair, its last volume takes into consideration the comparative drop in anti-Jewish sentiments that occurred in post-Great War France.

As Marcel tells it, his return to Paris is the equivalent of an awakening from a long and deep slumber: “At home awaited an invitation card “with the name of Guermantes… to reawaken a ray of my attention, to draw up from the depths of my memory a sort of section of the past…” (*Le Temps retrouvé* 888). The narrator’s ‘reawakening’ to the world, to *le monde*, reintroduces him to his past life, takes him to accept the invitation to the reception given by the Prince de Guermantes and his wife the Princess, formerly the tactless, hopelessly *bourgeoise* Mme Verdurin: “In this group was the Duchess de Guermantes, deep in conversation with a hideous old woman whom I studied without being able to guess in the least who she was… It was in fact Rachel” (*Le Temps retrouvé* 1041). By the end of *A la recherche*, Rachel has climbed the highest echelon of the social ladder, she is a close friend of the exclusive Duchess de Guermantes, sought after by the Princess de Guermantes and her crowd. Though the narrator claims Rachel to be unrecognizable for being ‘old and hideous’ (*Le Temps retrouvé* 1052), the actress’ social triumph is so spectacular that she is hosting the party at the Princess de Guermantes’ mansion where she will recite verses:

But when the actress, before beginning to speak, was seen to shoot searching and bewildered glances in every direction, to lift her hands with an air of supplication and then to utter each word as though it were a groan, the general reaction was to feel embarrassed, almost shocked by this display of sentiment… Nevertheless the audience was amazed to see this woman, before she had emitted a single sound, bend her knees,
stretch out her arms to cradle an invisible body and then, to recite some very well-known lines of poetry, start to speak in a voice of entreaty (Le Temps retrouvé 1050-1051).

As the novel represents, in the post-First World War years, French society did allow Jews with a specific Jewish identity to reach its highest pinnacle. Nonetheless, Rachel’s Jewishness is made self-evident and conveyed through cultural references rooted in literature as well as in medicine through hysteria. Marcel’s description of Rachel’s acting bears a striking similarity to the gestures of Augustine, a hysterical patient at La Salpêtrière, as per the records of the intern and future neurologist Bourneville that Didi-Huberman comments in his seminal book on hysteria:

“Appels, prières peut-être: mains se joignent vers celui qu’elle ne peut presser… « [Augustine] est assise à demi, voit un amant imaginaire qu’elle appelle »… Elle ferme les yeux… les bras sont croisés… Quelquefois, on observe de légers mouvements de bercement… Puis, petites plaintes…” (146-147). The association of Rachel’s movements with those of Charcot’s patient Augustine marks her as an actress tinted by hysteria. Rachel’s acting style implies that she brings in with her into the Faubourg the sickness that, since Charcot’s “Tuesday Lessons”, had become associated with Jews but also with their ‘different’ perspective.

In Le Temps retrouvé, the aging narrator Marcel comes across as the cultured, refined and typical upper middle-class Frenchman with a gaze that, at times, betrays hostility toward the ‘Other’. Le Temps retrouvé depicts a period where a threat to France’s Israelites and Jews was relatively low. Nonetheless, even though the novel’s reconstructed France allows its Jewish subjects to reach the highest political, artistic and financial positions, Jews ignore repressed anti-Jewish passions at their own risk. In the last section of the novel, Marcel attributes to Rachel’s lack of acting talent the hostile gaze that he directs upon her. However, in the last volume, the

53 The role that Charcot’s la Salpêtrière played in associating Jews with hysteria comes across in Le Juif-errant à la Salpêtrière, an essay by Henry Meige, a French neurologist and collaborator of Charcot. In his essay, Meige establishes a direct ‘scientific’ link between the symptoms of the male Jewish patients and the legend of the Wandering Jew (Henry Meige 191-194).
narrator’s criticism denotes a return to the Israeliite/Jew dichotomy that perfects Rachel’s Jewishness. While the other French guests celebrate the Guermantes’ Jewess, Marcel and Gilberte de Saint-Loup, daughter of the Israeliite Swann, reassert for one last time the social cleavage between France’s Jews and its Israelites. The rise of Rachel’s star, at the expense of La Berma’s, illustrates both the Israeliite/Jew schism and the role of French Jews in the representation of France’s culture on stage. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, Rachel is comfortable with her identity as a French Jew and, as such, she interacts with *le tout-Paris* of artists, intellectuals, aristocrats, writers, idle rich etc. Marcel, on the other hand, appears as a creature of habit who instinctively reintegrates the Guermantes’ social set after a lengthy hiatus, one who holds onto the literary ‘Jewess’ discourse and hysteria to mark the Jew’s difference.

**From Baudelaire to Proust, the literary convention of *la belle Juive* as the figure of materialism**

In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the narrator transmits of the *belle Juive* the negative impression that the trope acquired in France in 1867, with the Goncourt brothers’ *Manette Salomon* as Eric Fournier points out in *La Belle Juive*. More than ever, Marcel comes across as influenced by the literary ideas and images, especially ‘the Jewess’, that the country’s literature spread. Of all the representations of the figure by French authors, one of the best known remains *Une nuit que j’étais près d’une affreuse Juive*, the title and verse of a poem by Baudelaire that inspired Eric Fournier’s exploration of ‘the Jewess’. Baudelaire’s poem, titled *One Night I Lay with a Frightful Jewess* in William Aggeler’s translation, depicts a situation similar to the one the narrator describes at the Prince and Princess’ reception:

One night I lay with a frightful Jewess,
Like a cadaver stretched out beside a cadaver,

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54 Fournier, Éric. *La Belle Juive: D’îvanhoé À La Shoah.*
And I began to muse by that peddled body,  
About the sad beauty my desire forgoes.  

In the two quotations above, the one from Baudelaire and the one from Proust, the narrators are ‘awaken’ to the disturbing presence of ‘the Jewess’ in their company. Neither author offers a physical description of his Jewess that explains the repulsion she engenders. Nonetheless, Baudelaire’s words, ‘peddled body’, elicit an answer. The Jewess embodies the most sordid materialism which can only beget the decay associated with a ‘cadaver’. Familiarity with French literature, and in this context Baudelaire’s poem, informs Rachel’s description. A general ugliness of the Jewess, defined and agreed upon by a literary convention, spares Proust and Baudelaire the task of having Marcel detail Rachel’s appearance.

Hysteria makes the Jewess, the actress, the acting technique into one

As can be expected, the narrator’s bias toward the novel’s Jewess influences his description of her acting style. Hysteria and its influence on the stage of the Belle Époque link Rachel’s professional technique to the conundrum that consists of hysteria, woman, the abject and whose sum is the Jew of the imaginary: “[The songs]... had « gesticulatory hysteria »... it is nevertheless an original art form proper to... the last thirty years of the nineteenth century... “The room, immobilized with stupor, forgets to applaud...” Stupor is a symptom of imbecility or idiocy... The state of stupor is associated with epilepsy in the period...” (Rae Beth Gordon 93). Gordon’s descriptions of a stage performance and of its audience’s reaction meet Marcel’s depiction of Rachel’s acting quoted above. As on a stage of the Belle Époque, the movements of the novel’s actress replicate those from the hysterics’ wards at La Salpêtrière, leaving the Prince de Guermantes’ guests stupefied.

55 Une nuit que j’étais près d’une affreuse Juive, / Comme au long d’un cadavre un cadavre étendu, / Je me pris à songer près de ce corps vendu, /A la triste beauté dont mon désir se prive.
Before Rachel began her recital, her hysteric-like gestures included ‘bewildered glances’, hands lifted in ‘supplication’, bent knees, arms held ‘to cradle an invisible body’. And once Rachel starts the actual telling of La Fontaine’s too well-known fable, each sound is a ‘groan’. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Rachel’s spectators react as Gordon describes that real audiences did when they watched performers who mimicked the hysterics: “The audience was amazed… People looked at one another, not knowing what expression to put on their faces… everyone glanced at his neighbor” (Le Temps retrouvé 1051). Once again, the narrator associates Rachel with the positions of the hysteric, describing her acting techniques, sounds and movements to appear learned from the women who performed hysteria for Professor Charcot at his leçons du mardi. Rachel, a priori a hysteric and/or a woman, and/or a Jew and/or an actress contaminates an audience who is ‘immobilized with stupor, forgets to applaud’.

The Jewish identity that Rachel assumes allows her self-reinvention as a socially vindicated actress in a society that now casts her the equivalent of Baudelaire’s ‘Frightful Jewess’, maintaining her in the tolerant post-War era in the role of the ultimate ‘Other’. As the ‘Other’, Rachel remains permanently in opposition to the French and the Israelite. Besides Marcel, Gilberte de Saint-Loup, the daughter of the Israelite Charles Swann and now Robert de Saint-Loup’s widow, is the only guest openly hostile to the Jewess rather than insinuating: “Mme de Morienval came up to Mme de Saint-Loup… ‘That is La Fontaine’s fable, isn’t it?’ she asked… Gilberte [who] disliking Rachel [answered] “One quarter is the invention of the actress, a second is lunacy, a third is meaningless and the rest is La Fontaine…” (Le Temps retrouvé 1054). The narrator carefully underlines that Gilberte had answered “in the over-subtle manner.

56 The translator, C. K. Scott Moncrieff offers ‘the audience was amazed’ as a translation for ‘les auditeurs furent stupéfaits’. The original meaning is closer to ‘the audience was stunned’ or even ‘immobilized with stupor’ to use Gordon’s expression.
which had been her father’s” (Le Temps retrouvé 1054). Gilberte’s dismissal of Rachel’s performance includes the terms ‘invention’, ‘lunacy’, ‘meaningless’ that label the actress the irrational ‘Other’, the emotional ‘Oriental’ in opposition with the rational Westerner. In effect, Gilberte’s repartee betrays the ‘reasoned’ perspective of the French Israelite clan which she inherits from her father Charles Swann with his ‘over-subtle manner’. Gilberte, the novel’s Israelite, exists in opposition to the Jewess Rachel’s since their opposite choices determine their present place in the fictional society. An heiress of Israelite fortunes, Gilberte reneges on her Jewish cultural heritage, but not on the gold, to reach the inner sanctum of the Faubourg Saint-Germain with her marriage to the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Self-made Rachel, formerly Saint-Loup’s mistress, never marries and acquires a Jewish identity that is not her birthright. For those who choose to be or stay within society’s established norms Rachel, the non-conformist Jewess, is at best an exotic guest from within its margins. Gilberte represents the privileges of assimilation that she purchased with her marriage to an aristocrat, a bargain that entitles her to determine and pronounce on the interpretation of a French work by an obtuse ‘Other’.

At the Guermantes’ reception, the lines of opposition are drawn between the French Israelite and ‘Christian’ on one hand and the Jews on the other. On one side are the Israelite Gilberte, who disowned her biological father, and Marcel. The allusion to Charles Swann, which makes him responsible for Gilberte’s quick and original wit, reaffirms her Israelite origin and may hint at those of the narrator since their families have been linked and associating for many generations. On the other side are Rachel and Albert Bloch, the narrator’s childhood friend identified as a Jew since the inaugural pages of A la recherche:

But fortunately, if throughout one of La Fontaine’s finest poems this woman who was reciting it with such conviction had, whether from good nature or stupidity or embarrassment, thought of nothing but the difficulty of saying good-afternoon to me,
throughout this same beautiful poem Bloch had been wondering only how to manoeuvre (sic) himself… to leap from his seat and… arrive and congratulate the reciter, perhaps from an erroneous conception of duty, perhaps merely from a desire to make people look at him… “You were wonderful,” Bloch said to Rachel… (Le Temps retrouvé 1053).

From the French point of view, the Jews remain foreign to France. In Guermantes’ Way, I, Marcel had accomplished a montage that excluded the Jew from the French countryside. In Le Temps retrouvé, Marcel accuses the Jews to be incompatible with the culture of France as well. He and Gilberte claim to suffer the actress’ massacre of ‘one of La Fontaine’s finest poems’ and imply that Rachel and Bloch, foreigners, only have a materialistic relation with the national literature57.

According to the picture that Marcel paints, during the recitation, both Rachel and Bloch are concerned with furthering useful social contacts rather than with the beauty and meaning of the verses. In other words, to the narrator, Rachel and Bloch reduce La Fontaine (whose very name evokes France’s Grand Siècle but also alludes, in a literal sense, to running water, village square and fields) to a tool for social advancement. To Marcel, the Jews’ refusal to assimilate alienates them from the multi-level communion with France that includes an innate feeling for the national literature and its links to the land, its history and its people. In effect, the text does define the French Jews in opposition to Marcel’s sentimentality and universalism. Rachel offers a non-traditional and personal interpretation of La Fontaine’s fable that Bloch appreciates. There is no reason to assign a greater value to the words assigned to Marcel than to those that Bloch proffers. In the world of A la recherche, French Jews bring an innovative, refreshing perspective to France’s arts and help argue that multiple identities within a nation enrich the national culture.

57 See page 19 for Sander Gilman’s quotation on the anti-Semites’ association of materialism and the Jew. That anti-Semitic lore teaches that Jews cannot understand art properly because they are materialistic.
Conclusion

In *A la recherche*, Rachel’s resolution to exit her ‘Aryan race’ and identify as a female member of the ‘Semitic race’ meets with total success. The novel’s approach to the protagonist’s transformation explains the credibility of her metamorphosis. The text does not describe Rachel’s method to actualize her Jewishness but, instead, portrays a woman who repetitively aligns her words and actions with the discourses that define ‘Jew’ and ‘Woman’ until she is reconfigured into a Jewess. Rachel relies on pseudo-scientific discourses that define ‘the Jew’ and ‘Woman’ to metamorphose into a racial Jew in order to fulfill her ambitions.

With Rachel, Proust creates a female character who somehow conceives of the commonality between the anti-Jewish and anti-Woman motifs instrumental to her metamorphosis and which Jean-Paul Sartre describes thus “It [Anti-Semitism] is first of all a passion… It is an involvement of the mind, but one so deep-seated and complete that it extends to the physiological realm, as happens in hysteria”\(^\text{59}\) (10-11). The quotation from the philosopher demonstrates the rapport that exists between anti-Semitism and hysteria. The two are manifestations of a ‘passion’ that brings the subject to put his or her reason aside and give in to a mechanical obsession. Sartre understands that both conditions depend on the unreasonable belief that a human body is naturally, irreversibly defective. Anti-Semites believe that the Jew’s body is inherently evil, while misogyny teaches that any female body is either latently or actively hysteric, uncontrollable, because it differs from the masculine. Rachel’s ‘performances’ rely on the two irrational ‘scientific’ discourses, which she combines with the literary trope of ‘*la belle*

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\(^{58}\) See the discussion on the notion of ‘performativity’ in Judith Butler on page two (2) of this chapter.

\(^{59}\) The above translation of the following quote is by George Becker which I amended to be closer to Sartre’s original text. I inserted ‘hysteria’ to replace ‘cases of hysteria’ because that’s a more faithful translation of the following: “C’est tout d’abord une passion… c’est un engagement de l’âme, mais si profond et si total qu’il s’étend au physiologique, comme c’est le cas dans l’hystérie” (11-12).
juive’, to achieve her race change in A la recherche. The irrationality of discourses provides the materiality of Rachel’s Jewishness.

With its representation of Rachel, A la recherche unveils an actual, social situation in contemporary, multi-ethnic communities. ‘Race’ is a construct of cultural and ‘scientific’ discourses and practices that distinguish a group of people as the norm and another as the ‘Other’. Also contributing to Rachel’s construction are the gazes that the discourses manufacture. Indeed, the discourses enable the subjects that they create to sort, label and interpret themselves in opposition to the ‘outsiders’ whom the ‘normal ones’ also sort, label and interpret. Without the discourses, it is impossible for a group or its individuals to internalize and know their normalcy or their ‘foreignness’, to become a ‘subject or the ‘Other’. Because race’s existence depends on social discourses rather than on physical characteristics Proust can portray Rachel’s credible metamorphosis into a Jewess.
Chapter Three

The Silencing of the ‘Other’ or Albert Bloch as the Subaltern in A la recherche

Edouard Glissant’s inspiration to define a distinction or “une "catégorisation des cultures" qui m'est propre, d’une division des cultures en cultures ataviques et cultures composites” (Introduction À Une Poétique Du Divers 59-60) comes from the present need of some Western countries to tolerate cultural differences. Glissant terms ‘composites’, cultures that know no myth of a single origin or root that excludes the different. Instead, those tolerant communities exhibit the ‘rhizomatic’ quality, a system discussed at the conclusion of Chapter One. Glissant credits the work of Deleuze and Guattari for the image of the ‘rhizome’, a multi-root system that originates from any number of places and can only encourage tolerance. By opposition, Glissant designates as ‘atavique’ or atavistic a community whose identity depends on the notion that one group of ancestors is responsible for its history and culture. In such communities, the atavistic reflex is a constant reference and return to the mythical origin that excludes difference or, at best, imposes absolute conformity to the newcomers who must ‘pass’ for a Westerner.

The propensity for a Western culture to demonstrate a reactionary atavism is not a new phenomenon and a historical experience validates Glissant’s categorization. At the turn of the last century for example, in a scenario reminiscent of the situation that non-European, non-Christian immigrants currently face in France, segments of a democratic, republican French society attempted a return to the imaginary, exclusive, unique root of the nation. Indeed, Marcel Proust uses the very term ‘atavism’ to describe the behavior of the protagonists who represent the French people in his novel A la recherche du temps perdu that recreates Belle Époque France. The character Charles Swann, the subject of the next study or Chapter Four, operates in
Cities of the Plain an atavistic return to his Jewish origins, to “la race”, to “la solidarité morale avec les autres Juifs” (89) that “l’affaire Dreyfus, la propagande anti-Semite” have awakened in him (89). Swann, who demonstrates atavism because of ‘the Affair’, blames others for behaving according to that same rule under the same circumstances:

Swann oubliait que dans l’après-midi, il m’avait dit au contraire que les opinions en cette affaire Dreyfus étaient commandées par l’atavisme. Tout au plus avait-il fait exception pour l’intelligence, parce que chez Saint-Loup elle était arrivée à vaincre l’atavisme et à faire de lui un dreyfusard. Or il venait de voir que cette victoire avait été de courte durée et Saint-Loup avait passé dans l’autre camp (110).

In A la recherche, anti-Semitism and its symbol ‘the Affair’ come across as the tools that Power uses to activate the ‘atavism’ that brings the subject to reject the ‘Other’. Swann’s Jewishness comes to the surface in reaction to the Dreyfus tragedy but he also interprets the unfolding of the scandal as determined by atavism. In the novel, the pull of atavism seems to surpass the power of culture, education and even love in shaping behavior toward the different. Swann had been of the opinion that intelligence alone can bring individuals to become their own persons and overcome the weight of racial and cultural heritage. But Saint-Loup’s defection to the anti-Dreyfusard camp raises the possibility that atavism has no counterbalance.

The works of Proust and Glissant describe an atavism that determines a return to a ‘natural’, ancestral way of being which brings about the exclusion of the outsider. In Proust, the phenomenon proceeds at the individual level and concerns not only a protagonist’s race and culture but also their class and sexuality. In spite of his love affairs with women, in Le Temps retrouvé, Saint-Loup cannot escape the homosexuality that he inherits from his aristocratic uncle Charlus. Glissant, on the other hand, makes the term the attribute of a culture that alienates the stranger because it is founded on the myth of a single origin. Glissant’s adaptation and use of

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60 See Chapter One for the definition of ‘Power’ in relation to the works of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault.
‘atavism’ provides a theoretical frame suitable to study the marginalization of the different on the basis of culture, race, class or sexuality. Today however, because French culture generally targets for exclusion those who differ on religious and ethnic grounds, the present study will be concerned with these two aspects. Turning to a Jewish protagonist from Marcel Proust’s novel who confronts an unexpected rejection from France’s single, hegemonic culture helps identify the issues, concerns and solutions that the French historically imagined and understood to be those of and for a minority member.

In its portrayal of the French Gilded Age, *A la recherche* includes the nationalist movement that surged and targeted the Jews whose ‘rhizomatic’ culture had sprouted a genuinely integrated community in France. The book introduces the character Albert Bloch as a talented, promising French Jew but he must forego the rich Jewish heritage and environment that could have inspired his writing because of the antagonism that the period visits upon Jews. At the end of the book, society comes to include Bloch who, by then, is a physically and intellectually very average Frenchman and an inconsequential man of letters. To appreciate Bloch’s quandary that engenders his failure as a writer and as a Jew, indivisible from his transformation from a ‘Semitic’ to an ‘Aryan’, the protagonist’s major appearances in *Swann’s Way*, in *Within a Budding Grove*, in *Guermantes’ Way*, and in *Le Temps retrouvé* have to be interpreted chronologically.

**Marcel Proust’s Jewish humor and the construction of Albert Bloch**

From Bloch’s youth in *Swann’s Way* to his middle age years in *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust makes humor the dominant element in the character’s construction. When Bloch first appears in the novel, he demonstrates his Jewish identity through his ethnic humor which casts
him as the clever Jew whose antics highlight the shortcomings and narrow conformism of the French bourgeoisie or middle classes. The French protagonists that Bloch visits early in Swann’s Way disapprove of him because his facetious repartees clearly belong to a different culture that he owns. Bloch’s humor marks his difference and his capacity to make the community more diverse. However, the refusal of Bloch’s hosts to laugh with him echoes Alain Openheim’s commentary in L’Humour juif that humor represents an identity, a specific outlook on life even: “Causing the disappearance of humor, of the desire to laugh, of the pleasure of laughing is to always want to make disappear identity, hope, life itself” (Alain Oppenheim XX). In the novel, Marcel’s family’s dismissal of Bloch’s jokes at Combray represents the rejection of his Jewish identity, personality and culture by ‘deep’ France. Hence, in later volumes, as Bloch begins to attempt to ‘pass’, and does come ‘to pass’ for French, his Jewish laughter begins to disappear to be overcome by French ‘humour’. As the hero’s assimilation progresses and he loses his personality, he becomes defenseless under the cruel ironic gaze of the Parisian salon. The progressive disappearance of Bloch’s humoristic perspective signals that he is succumbing to the lure of assimilation, that Jewish culture is not tolerated in a France that is becoming atavistic. Hence, in the end, Bloch’s entry into high society denotes failure rather than success because he sacrifices his heritage to empower further a single, atavistic, intolerant French perspective. In A la recherche, the construction of the Jewish character Bloch illustrates that the presence of ethnic humor in a society is a sign of cultural diversity, of inclusion and tolerance.

61 All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise specified.
62 “Faire disparaître l’humour, l’envie de rire, le plaisir de rire, c’est toujours vouloir faire disparaître l’identité, l’espoir, la vie elle-même”. (Alain Oppenheim XX).
Claiming that Proust grants and then deprives Bloch of Jewish humor to promote tolerance of the ‘Other’ implies that the canonical French author not only knew and appreciated ‘Semitic’ culture but could and did represent it in his work. Two essays, “L’Humour juif” and “Marcel Proust”, from Quelques Juifs et demi-Juifs, a book by Proust’s contemporary André Spire, a pillar of the First French Jewish Renaissance discussed in the conclusion, provide the argument for the assertion. In the preface to the 1928 edition of the book, which includes the above-mentioned piece on Marcel Proust, Spire asserts that the work is concerned with French Jewish writers who have come or returned to a Jewish consciousness: “la jeunesse juive a repris conscience d’elle-même” (André Spire XII). Spire’s inclusion of Proust in the book implies that, though he characterizes Proust as a demi-Juif, he finds that the celebrated author has a Jewish perspective as well as a French one.

In the essay titled “L’Humour juif”, in Volume I of the collection, Spire describes Jewish humor and the key role that the work of the English Jewish writer Israel Zangwill (1864 - 1926) played in its propagation among integrated Jews. In Volume II, the essay “Marcel Proust”, dated 4 décembre 1922, directly links Proust to Zangwill, the seminal Jewish author: “For since Zangwill’s work has become known in France, French writers have stopped presenting the Jew of their books as a conventional being upon whom, in accordance with the author’s antipathy or sympathies, every vice or every virtue must accumulate”63 (André Spire 54). Spire not only includes a profile of Proust among that of noted French Jewish writers but, more importantly, places Proust’s Jewish protagonists in A la recherche, within the Jewish tradition that Zangwill introduced. Following Spire, it can be affirmed that anti-Semitism is not the inspiration for the

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63 “Car depuis que l’œuvre de Zangwill a pénétré en France, les écrivains français ont cessé de présenter le Juif dans leurs livres comme un être conventionnel sur qui, selon les antipathies ou les sympathies de l’auteur, doivent s’accumuler tous les vices ou toutes les vertus” (Andre Spire 54).
imperfections and qualities that Proust includes in Bloch’s portrait. Rather, in Zangwill’s manner, Proust does not project his emotions towards Jews upon his protagonist but concentrates on creating a personalized, realistic figure.

Spire is instrumental not only to understand that Proust makes his Jewish protagonists imperfect to achieve verisimilitude but also to appreciate his understanding of Jewish humor and its incorporation in his work. Spire’s chapter titled “L’Humour juif” defines Jewish humor and illustrates what its literary form owes to Israel Zangwill: “That’s because Zangwill… is a ghetto prankster. A layer of English culture comes to rest atop the Jewish layer … and joining English culture to Jewish thought gives rise to a new plant: Jewish humor”64 (41). Indeed, like Zangwill, who Spire largely credits for the Jewish humor found in the Jewish literature of the West, Proust constructs Bloch with ‘ghetto’ humor and, forcibly, substitutes his own French culture for his colleague’s English culture. Nonetheless, Proust’s construction of Bloch includes the elements of Spire’s definition of Jewish humor: “A sharp sense of life’s ironies; that all is in vain and yet necessary; the ability to look at the world, at times, from a broad perspective and, at other times, in its most minute details; wit, buffoonery, tragedy; a great self-assurance and the incalculable pleasure in shaking up the shackles of common, mediocre thought”65 (André Spire 50). As will be demonstrated, the humor that underlines Proust’s representation of Bloch shows the moralizing, tragic, ironic Jewish perspective on the absurdity of the world as well as the wit and the farcical that Spire presents here. Even the scathing, satirical French gaze that contributes

64 “C’est parce que Zangwill… est un farceur de ghetto. Sur ce fond juif s’est déposée la culture anglaise… et la culture anglaise unie au génie juif a donné naissance a une plante nouvelle : l’humour juif” (41).
65 Un sens aigu de l’ironie des choses; que tout est vain et cependant nécessaire; le don de regarder le monde tantôt du point de vue le plus général, tantôt dans ses détails les plus menus; l’esprit, la bouffonnerie, le tragique; une grande sûreté de soi et un immense plaisir à briser les tables étroites où sont inscrites les lois de la pensée moyenne (50).
to make Proust’s protagonist into an object of ridicule once he decides to assimilate illustrates the tragedy that visits the Jew who contemplates betraying or betrays his identity.

To understand how *A la recherche* creates Bloch’s ethnic personality Jewish humor must be taken into consideration. Even when the hilarity causes Bloch to appear a ‘buffoon’, or ‘over confident’, it is important to consider that Proust is constructing a Jewish protagonist with comic elements of the kind shared in Jewish culture. In other words, Bloch represents an invitation to appreciate, from a Jewish perspective, a Jewish character able at times, in a literal translation of Spire, ‘to break the tables of the law of average thought’.

*The historical context of Proust’s Jewish humor*

In *A la recherche*, Bloch’s comic aspect serves to illustrate the quandaries that French Jews faced in the late nineteenth-century. The Hebraic community confronted an unexpected, absurd situation that owed much of its existence to reactionary politics. The crisis came as the mood developed for the reversal, or at least the reduction of the comparatively liberal gains made from the Revolution to the Third Republic. As often happens, an economic recession spurred the anti-Jewish reaction which Peter Vaclav Zima describes as follows: “An economic crisis that threatens at once the petty bourgeois and the workers is at the origin of an anti-democratic anti-liberal campaign that large numbers from the petty bourgeoisie… from the discontented working class (artisans) and from the upper nobility reinforce. The radical party and radical socialist is nationalistic, even racist…”66 (272). As Zima explains, a time of economic uncertainty cut across and exasperated all social classes and served to renew such nationalist themes as which groups belong to the nation and/or the racial criteria for belonging. In that context, from

66 “Une crise économique qui menace à la fois la petite bourgeoisie et les ouvriers déclenche une campagne anti-démocratique et anti-libérale appuyée par une partie importante de la petite bourgeoisie… des ouvriers (artisans) mécontents et par les grands seigneurs…Le parti radical et radical socialiste est nationaliste, voire raciste…” (272).
nationalism sprung the anti-Semitic ideology whereby Jews were foreign to France’s historically single Gallic root, and, as Semites, they are rooted in the East. Or, to meet Glissant’s theory quoted above, a France turning ‘atavistic’ imposed ‘atavism’ on its Jews and forced Israelites, like Swann, to develop an ‘Oriental’ Jewish identity.

The measure of Proust’s genius is revealed with his ability to conceive what must have seemed improbable a century ago. Proust’s use of Jewish humor, from a Jewish perspective, contributes to make and represent French as a culture composite. In addition, Proust’s approach greatly heightens the realist aspect of his protagonist as it succeeds in making Bloch’s ‘foreignness’ seem simply immanent. Bloch’s oddity is apparent though the reason is not at all evident. To conceive of creating through ethnic humor the effect of immanence is a tour de force. Obviously, to merely state that a protagonist is ‘exotic’ or ‘Other’ will not transcribe the figure as inexplicably, uncannily foreign. Proust uses his sense of the Jewish tragicomic to portray, in a non-Jewish novel, a Jewish character confronted with a new, puzzling situation: France has created more than one type of French Jew. The country that throughout the nineteenth-century acknowledged only the existence of Israelites was by the 1890’s suddenly encouraging its Jews to claim an atavistic Jewish consciousness. Albert Bloch is a comic figure for unfailingly, for repetitively selecting to be the wrong Jewish subject at every place and time. He is a Jew during the period that precedes Captain Dreyfus’ arrest when, theoretically, there is no Jew in France and only assimilated Israelites. However, decades later, in the post-Dreyfus affair, post-WWI era, when a separate Jewish identity in France becomes widespread, Bloch undergoes a makeover to become an assimilated Israelite.

67French citizens without a Jewish consciousness who practiced Judaism as others practiced Catholicism or Protestantism as discussed in Chapter One.
In *A la recherche*, Bloch faces a dilemma with a possible tragic outcome. He represents French Jews at a time when, in spite of assimilation, they seemed at risk of losing their citizenship, their livelihood and becoming pariahs. The book mitigates Bloch’s potentially tragic situation with the help of the particular humor that Spire defined. The character grapples with tensions that force him to choose an identity. The wrong selection puts the protagonist at odds with his environment and creates the comic situations around him. The outside imposes upon Bloch the ridiculousness that affects him at times, a preposterousness that France creates when it reneges on the social contract it passed with its Jews in the early nineteenth-century. Hence, the laughter that the fictional Bloch inspires is aimed at a genuine European society whose irrational prejudices create his impasse.

**Subverting the French Israelite norm with humor**

The novel introduces Bloch very early, on page ninety of what is a three-thousand page book. In the 1987 edition of *La Pléiade* a note explains that: “Bloch est l’un des rares personnages de Combray qui accompagnera le héros jusqu’au Temps Retrouvé, traversant les mêmes lieux et les mêmes milieux que lui et toujours opposé à lui”\(^{68}\) (1144). The lifetime opposition that *La Pléiade* signals begins with the first mention of Bloch in the book. The novel represents Marcel, his family, their servants and friends, all firmly anchored in the town of Combray, in the French countryside, where each one knows his/her place, fulfills a traditional position and serves a function within an immemorial lifestyle. Bloch’s role, at first, is to be the outsider who, by contrast, highlights the privileges, the cultural values, prejudices that belong to Marcel, to his household and all those recognized as included in the French nation. But even

\(^{68}\) Bloch is one of the few characters from Combray who accompanies the hero up to *Le Temps retrouvè*, always in opposition to him as their paths cross at the same places and in the same milieux (1144).
early in *Swann's Way* Jewish humor comes in to reevaluate a situation where the Jew, Bloch, is the ‘Other’.

As Spire described, the Hebraic humorist can approach a topic either from the general viewpoint or from the details. In *Swann’s Way*, Bloch plays a central role in three humoristic portraits of life in Combray that depict the times’ social divisions and the included Israelite vs. the excluded Jew. Taken together, the scenes from the lifestyle in the province paint a whole process that leads to the exclusion of the ‘Other’. A detailed analysis will show that in the first picture, the narrator’s instant affection for Bloch demonstrates humorously that the Israelite/Jew dichotomy is not inborn to Marcel but taught and learned from his family’s Israeliite circle. However, in reaction to the friendship, the narrator’s family, who shares his instinctive but unexplainable affinity for Israelites, initiates the ‘Othering’ of Bloch, differentiating him not as a Jew but as the wrong sort of Jew, one whose character is non-French. In the third scene, Charles Swann, the Israeliite family friend, completes Bloch’s estrangement, identifies him as the foreign Semite ‘Other’. With a jocular reference to a Bellini portrait, Swann highlights the ‘Oriental’ characteristics of the Jew’s non-European body.

The present study of Bloch in *Swann’s Way*, will also illustrate how Proust uses Jewish humor to represent how the narrator’s Christian clan allies with the Israeliite Swann family join to marginalize the Jew, to ‘Other’ Bloch. The ethnic laughter that Bloch directs at his bourgeois hosts allows him to retain his agency and prevents his becoming an object that anti-Semitism victimizes. In that first tome, Bloch demonstrates self-assurance, the attitude that Spire characterizes as that of the Jew in Jewish humor. He meets the attitude and the literary taste of Marcel’s family with the incredulous hilarity and sarcastic replies that categorize the didactic function of the French Jew in French society. Throughout his appearances in *Swann’s Way*,
Block contributes to a reinterpretation of French literary values and questions the limitations of a community ruled by bourgeois opinions and behavior.

Initiating ‘Othering’ at Combray

Marcel Proust initially presents Bloch in Combray as a self-assured young scholar whom an inexperienced Marcel fancies to be of the avant-garde. However, a few paragraphs suffice for the protagonist Charles Swann to engineer Bloch’s symbolic displacement from deep France, from the nation’s inner circle to a place in the margins. The virtual distance Bloch covers in his downward socio-geographical readjustment, from Combray or the heart of France, to the ‘Orient’, is equivalent to the actual geographical relocation Captain Dreyfus experienced: from Paris Headquarters to Devil’s Island. The height and speed of Bloch’s fall, or the Captain’s, reflects the fate that threatened the French Israelite if he is turned into a racialized Jew. Nonetheless, at that stage in the narrator’s life, he is still unaware of the artificial borders that order social relations to determine which and whose views are implemented:

J’avais entendu parler de Bergotte pour la première fois par un de mes camarades plus âgé que moi et pour qui j’avais une grande admiration, Bloch. En m’entendant lui avouer mon admiration pour la Nuit d’octobre il avait fait éclater un rire bruyant comme une trompette et m’avait dit : « Défie-toi de ta dilection assez basse pour le sieur de Musset. C’est un coco des plus malfaisants et une assez sinistre brute… Malheureusement, je ne pus apaiser en causant avec Bloch et en lui demandant des explications, le trouble où il m’avait jeté quand il m’avait dit que les beaux vers (à moi qui n’attendais d’eux rien moins que la révélation de la vérité) étaient d’autant plus beaux qu’ils ne signifiaient rien du tout (Du côté de chez Swann 89-90).

The self-assurance Bloch demonstrates, his cacophonous laugh similar to a horn blowing in Jewish Antiquity to announce a new law or prophecy, locate the passage in what was before the

69The association between the trumpet and an imminent, capital revelation dates from the earliest days of Jewish history. The narrator’s jocular allusion to a trumpet in relation to Bloch implies that the Jew is about to reveal a salient information: “And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake,
rise of anti-Semitism and Nationalism, before the Dreyfus case, the manifestation of a traditional Jewish humor unapologetic of its non-French ghetto roots. It is a moment in *A la recherche* where Bloch feels no pressure to conform, feels confident of his right and ability to pronounce on authors who were unanimously lionized, adulated even. The blaring laughter that the ‘ghetto prankster’ directs at the literary taste of the French establishment signals his readiness to participate in a renewal of French literature and of its interpretation.

However, because for a few pages Proust is writing from a Jewish comic point of view, Bloch’s roaring laughter also expresses astonishment at the effectiveness of France’s practice of Universalism. The hero’s hilarity mocks the French Christians and Israelites who uphold or stay within society’s norms and unquestioningly accept a universal opinion. Unbeknownst to Bloch, he is laughing at the stultifying conformism that he will achieve in *Le Temps retrouvé* once he becomes assimilated. For the moment however, Bloch is guffawing at Marcel’s literary tastes and interpretations that are determined by convention. Bloch’s laugh marks him as the character willing to ‘break the Tables of the law of conventional thinking’ mentioned in Spire’s above description.

Bloch’s willingness to shock the bourgeois and be irreverent toward the narrow premises that rule middle-class life questions the social hierarchy. As Marcel states above, his friend Bloch shakes his inner world with the affirmation that poetry reveals no truth, that the greatest French verses mean nothing. Bloch’s authority is anchored in his knowledge of French literature, including contemporary culture, and he is responsible for introducing his younger friend to Bergotte described as an “espèce si rare alors, aujourd’hui universellement répandue”

and God answered him by a voice” (Exodus 19:19 KJV). In the Bible, “the trumpet of God” famously resonates on Mount Sinai to herald the moment when God is about to grant to Moses and his people the Tables of the law, the Ten Commandments.
The introduction of the adolescent to Bergotte and to the new ways of seeing and feeling brings him to discover modern thought and aesthetics and away from the family conservative views. Bloch’s willingness to accept and impose new interpretations represents one of the nationalists’ fears: the Semite’s different perspective that allows him to question authority and the hierarchy power establishes. The offhandedness Bloch adopts to discuss revered figures such as Musset\(^{70}\) and ‘*le nommé Racine*’ (89), can be extended to the social and academic pyramids as well. From the nationalist viewpoint, Bloch, the ‘Jewish stranger’, approaches France and its literature only with a reason that sentimental attachment mitigates. The irreverence that Bloch exhibits for bourgeois cultural aesthetics extends to established social privileges and injustice which leave the middle-classes even more uncomfortable.

In *Swann’s Way*, Bloch’s willingness to question the *bourgeoisie*’s social order has greater implications for the French Israelis who identify with the establishment. Nineteenth-century French Jews belonged to and functioned in a conformist society. In an era that predates Captain Dreyfus’ case, a time when French universalism seemed to meet its promises to its Jews, the need to conform in order to be ‘Jewish-French’ determined the estrangement of Bloch the non-conformist, disturbing, unbroken Jew.

The Othering of Bloch in French culture

As early as his introduction in the novel, Bloch embodies an awareness of Jewish alterity in France prior even to the Captain Dreyfus affair. Bloch’s mere presence represents a

\(^{70}\) In *Swann’s Way*, before telling about Bloch’s visit, the narrator recounts the esteem in which the adults in his family held Musset and that they communicated to him. While staying in Combray, the grandmother had selected and purchased Musset’s works for Marcel’s birthday because she found her grandson’s mind and style would benefit from the quality of the verses and style. The father however complained that Musset was beyond his son, a reproach that brought the matriarch to travel in the afternoon sun to the main town where the bookstore was located to exchange the book. Bloch’s dismissal of Musset puts in doubt the bourgeois tastes, feelings and values that the bourgeois family are instilling in Marcel. Bloch is effectively taking a swipe at the smug, secure middle-class edifice, the backbone of nineteenth-century France since the Revolution.
challenge to the universal, national identity that even the French Israelites upheld. *Swann’s Way* reveals a genuine interest and concern for the non-French ’ by staging a narrator’s family who judges the French Jew according to the standards of Jewishness that the Israelites set:

Clearly, the patriarch immediately and unfailingly identifies a Jew, even when the latter would be undetected by anyone else. Such ability illustrates the slogan ‘the gods are immediately perceptible to one another’. The young Marcel shares his grandfather’s propensity to discover any Jew who may be in the vicinity, but he does so without trying, because of the automatic attraction that Jews inspire in him. The still naïve Marcel does not differ between the assimilated Israelite and the Jew. However, the family teaches him to turn the Jew into a non-French for mocking and antagonizing, a skill with a social purpose in nineteenth-century France. Marcel’s grandfather teaches him that a Jew must be recognized and, worse, that he harbors a family moral blemish and he must be ‘outed’.

The ‘outing’ of a Jew is a multi-step process with, as an introductory phase, the ability to identify a Jew from an Israelite. *Swann’s Way* stages the episode around a multi-layered lesson that a patriarch teaches his scion. The grandson must first be aware that the Jew exists so that he
may subtly differentiate the Israelite from the Jew. And in the third and final step, Marcel learns to ‘essentialize’ the Jew with the discovery of the shameful secrets that Semites invariably conceal. In addition to teaching how to tell the Jew from the rest, the grandfather has an Israelite or Charles Swann on hand to illustrate the difference between the two kinds of Jews. The patriarch’s lifetime friend, the epitome of the Israelite Frenchman proves that in universal and inclusive France one can be a Jew as long as he remains unassailably, unquestionably bourgeois. On the other hand, as Marcel learns from the home, the Jews that he cannot or will not tell from Swann are a problematic lot. Already, in the previous quote, Bloch’s assertions that Musset is more a boor than a poet, or that the best French verses are meaningless had left Marcel feeling shaken for a long time. Unlike the gentlemanly Swann who upholds the established social order Bloch is a Jew who must be excluded for irreverence and lack of deference.

Bloch’s capacity for subversion, for questioning well established clichés is not the reason that the family gives for his exclusion. An intertext that links Swann’s Way and Fromental Halévy’s La Juive, the opera already summarized and commented in the chapter on Rachel, informs the group’s idea of Jewishness. Ô Dieu de nos Pères, the chorus from the opera, is used by the grandfather to confirm that Bloch is a Jew while his grandson and pupil will later use the aria, Rachel Quand du Seigneur, to deny that Rachel is Jewish. In the above quotation, as the grandparent identifies the new friend as a Jew he loudly hums the tune of Ô Dieu de nos Pères to broadcast the fact. Besides alerting the family to the presence of a Jew in their midst, the patriarch’s humming from La Juive serves two other purposes.

By the means of the opera, the grandfather delineates between the Israelite, familiar with high culture, and the Jew who does not know Halévy’s work. The grandfather’s behavior and action parallel the most widespread anti-Semitic belief which, in The Jew’s Body, Sander Gilman
denounces as “the oldest, and most basic, calumny against the Jew, his avarice, for the possession of “things”, of “money”, which signals his inability to understand (and produce) anything of transcendent aesthetic value” (124). The conviction that the Jews’ obsession with ‘money’ and ‘things’ prevents them from appreciating, let alone create, art informs the test that the grandfather imposes on every Jewish guest. He fearlessly sings from the chorus to demonstrate, once again a theory: Jews will not know the opera because they are materialistic and not interested in the arts.

The chorus Ô Dieu de nos Pères, which serves as the codeword in the family for a Jew and what he stands for, describes the materialism anti-Semites attribute to Jews. The following extract from the chorus are the lines assigned to Eléazar, the opera’s Jewish patriarch, and they propagate the worst Jewish stereotypes:

Je tremblais que cette femme  
Ne surprit tous nos secrets  
Et je maudissais dans l’âme  
Tous ces chrétiens que je hais,  
Mais pour moi plaisir extrême  
Et quel heureux avenir  
Ces bons écus d’or que j’aime  
Chez moi vont donc revenir !  
Chez moi, chez moi des écus, des ducats,  
Des sequins, des florins, des écus, des ducats,  
Chez moi vont revenir, oui, chez moi…

In Swann’s Way, the family’s allusions assign to the Jew the array of negative traits listed in the quotation. The Jews’ construct incorporates clannish secrecy, hatred for their fellow Christian citizens, and a love for money that verges on the obscene. Halévy’s opera imagines and shows the Jew proclaiming his inherent xenophobia, materialism, obsession with the possession of gold and, obviously, no time to develop an interest for the abstract.
In the above extract from *La Juive*, Eléazar’s enumeration of precious coins, the returning tune of that particular chorus, creates the impression of a passion for or obsession with gold which makes the Jewish patriarch sound irrational and infantile. In relation to Bloch, the intertext in *Swann’s Way* illustrates how clichés from an anti-Jewish discourse were propagated by art from the center, in this instance by an Israelite composer and a Christian librettist. A simple allusion to the opera, from a figure of authority, identifies for Marcel the Jew as the character who consists of passionate materialism and other defects. Familiarity with *La Juive* creates a circle of French people in the know, humorously labeling and constructing a culture for the different who belong in the margins because of their crassness. Ironically, no Jewish protagonist in *A la recherche* will fit the racist criteria that belong to the family’s vision of the Jew. In fact, cruelty, hatred, xenophobia, avarice etc. belong to the books’ gentiles.

**Assigning a Jewish body to the Jewish character**

In *Swann’s Way*, once Marcel has learned to distinguish the Jews’ specific, despicable personality he learns of their body, highly adapted to house such a soul. Once again, the pedagogue includes an example from Western art to illustrate the concept and provide the illustration. A celebrated Renaissance painting demonstrates the physical traits that identify Bloch’s physique as non-European, as ‘Oriental’. The physiological demonstration is assigned to Charles Swann who, on a Sunday, walks in on the young man engrossed in a book by Bergotte:

Un dimanche, pendant ma lecture au jardin, je fus dérangé par Swann qui venait voir mes parents. « Qu’est-ce que vous lisez, on peut regarder? Tiens, du Bergotte? Qui donc vous a indiqué ses ouvrages? » Je lui dis que c’était Bloch. « Ah! oui, ce garçon que j’ai vu une fois ici, qui ressemble tellement au portrait de Mahomet II par Bellini. Oh! c’est frappant, il a les mêmes sourcils circonflexes, le même nez recourbé, les mêmes
pommettes saillantes. Quand il aura une barbiche ce sera la même personne. En tous cas il a du goût, car Bergotte est un charmant esprit (96).

The setting of the scene, a symbolic garden where an absent Jew will suffer an expulsion from the French imaginary, announces the narrator’s very similar eviction of Bloch, in Within a Budding Grove, and of Rachel in Guermantes’ Way. But early in the novel, it is not the narrator who expulses Bloch but Swann. The family friend teaches the adolescent the technique of mentally banishing the Jew from a French Eden. To compare Bloch’s features to those of Mahomet II is to underline that he does not belong in the West but with the people in the East that he looks like. The gaze that the Israeli Swann directs upon the Jew identifies the latter as the ‘stranger’ to the West. Even Swann’s admission that Bloch has taste comes across as condescending. Swann’s choice of words ‘En tous cas il a du goût…’ implies that Bloch has good taste ‘in spite of the fact that he is a Jew, an ‘Oriental’…”

The reference to Mahomet II and its implications that the West considers Bloch foreign cannot have escaped Marcel. From his inception, A la recherche fashions the main protagonist as cultured and bookish even as a youth. At any rate, while the grandfather used Swann as the specimen to illustrate the perfect French Israeliite, Swann uses the portrait by Bellini to make a point. He impresses onto Marcel the physical markers that differentiate the Jew from the Western Israeliite. Bellini’s painting is proof that Bloch’s facial traits belong to the Orient, to an enemy of the West: the hooked nose, the eyebrows, the high cheekbones are a reproduction of Mahomet II as determined by the work of the Renaissance Master. The features form a fitting envelope for the Semite’s personality. The enemy is within the walls and must be expelled.

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71 Mahomet II (1432-1481), the sultan who conquered Constantinople in 1453, turned once and for all the remnants of the Roman Empire into the center of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, transformed a Christian metropolis into a Muslim one. Mahomet II is also a reminder of a Western Christendom case of bad conscience: no European state agreed to send help to the last Roman Emperor in the East, sealing the fate of Constantinople and of Christianity in the Levant.
The results of the family’s lessons

The lessons that the grandfather and Swann teach Marcel soon show their effect. Swann’s expulsion of Bloch had been figurative. However, in spite of his affection for Bloch, the narrator can’t help but to put in practice what he has learned and he engineers a real banishment of his friend from Combray:

Mais j’aimais Bloch, mes parents voulaient me faire plaisir, les problèmes insolubles que je me posais à propos de la beauté dénuée de signification de la fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé me fatiguaient davantage et me rendaient plus souffrant que n’auraient fait de nouvelles conversations avec lui, bien que ma mère les jugeât pernicieuses. Et on l’aurait encore reçu à Combray, si, après ce dîner, comme il venait de m’apprendre… que toutes les femmes ne pensaient qu’à l’amour et qu’il n’y en a pas dont on ne pût vaincre les résistances, il ne m’avait assuré avoir entendu dire de la façon la plus certaine que ma grand-tante avait eue une jeunesse orageuse et avait été publiquement entretenu. Je ne pus me tenir de répéter ces propos à mes parents, on le mit à la porte quand il revint, et quand je l’abordai ensuite dans la rue il fût extrêmement froid pour moi (92).

Marcel loudly protests and proclaims his love for Bloch and as the “Mais…” that begins the passage implies, he remains Bloch’s friends in spite of his family’s entreaties. Nonetheless, out of youthful naiveté maybe, Marcel can’t resist taking the steps that will lead to Bloch’s banishment. Bloch’s role as the Jew who shatters the ‘Tables of average thought’ continues to be discussed. However, Marcel’s mother finds Bloch’s conversational topics ‘pernicious’, that is insidious or destructive but they upset Marcel less than his friend’s revelations about the role of literature. The family drama comes to a conclusion when Marcel reveals that Bloch questions the family’s belonging within the bourgeois order: the matriarch at Combray was a kept woman. The fact is that, with his revelations, Marcel chooses the restoration of bourgeois order over the questioning of established values. As he gathered from the theories his family and Swann taught him, Marcel has his Jewish friend expelled. Peace is restored to the narrator and Combray when Bloch demonstrates a *froideur*, a coldness rather than affection.
Jewish humor allows Bloch to save face

Though Bloch is dismissed from the Combray house, his interaction with Marcel’s family does not end in complete failure. However, Bloch keeps his dignity because the narration proceeds from a humoristic Jewish perspective. The comic tone that narrates the Jew’s exclusion is in line with Jewish humor which, according to Spire, deals with the irony of the world, with the fact that ‘things’ are not as they appear. In his dealings with a family from the establishment in Swann’s Way, Bloch is therefore as flippant, as self-assured, as tragic, and as ironic as any hero in a Zangwill story.

During his first outings to Combray to visit Marcel’s home, Bloch seems to expect an unmitigated welcome and tolerance. Bloch’s expectations bring forth a humorous exchange with Marcel’s father who’d asked the drenched young visitor if it were raining: « Monsieur, je ne puis absolument vous dire s’il a plu. Je vis si résolument en dehors des contingences physiques que mes sens ne prennent pas la peine de me les notifier. - Mais, mon pauvre fils, il est idiot ton ami… Comment ! il ne peut même pas me dire le temps qu’il fait !... C’est un imbécile » (91).

In the exchange with the narrator’s father, Bloch exudes the self-assurance necessary to make a joke at his own expense. In essence, because Bloch is dripping wet, he is clearly laughing at his getting caught unprepared in the rain. His interlocutor is invited to laugh at Bloch and at his own self for asking the obvious. But the father pretends to not understand that he is joking and imposes on Bloch’s answer a single, literal interpretation to affirm that the guest is an imbecile. The reaction rejects any culture, any perspective but the French one in Combray. The father’s attitude reflects the opposition between an ‘atavistic culture’ and ‘composite cultures’ that Glissant proposed. In his encounter with the narrator’s family, the literary Bloch is as
socially inexperienced as his friend. His innocence leads him to approach his hosts confident that they will accept his ideas on literature and a brand of humor that springs from a Jewish identity.

In *Swann’s Way*, the introduction of Jewish humor helps illustrate Bloch’s condition. He is a Jew in France when and where Jews must be assimilated Israelites and Bloch’s ideas and humor clash with the environment. However, Proust’s adoption of the humorous ‘ghetto prankster’ tone for the passage allows the protagonist to display his understanding of literature, to destabilize the *bourgeois*’ smugness, and demonstrate a non-French culture in France. At that stage in the novel, Jewish humor allows the Jew to express his cultural perspective even when facing a monolithic, intolerant French culture.

**A Belle Époque Friendship in the social perspective of Within a Budding Grove**

The relationship between the narrator and Bloch continues and develops in *Within a Budding Grove I* and *II* in spite of Marcel’s family’s opposition. In the first part, subtitled *Autour de Mme Swann*, Proust anchors Marcel in the intimacy of the Swann family, with descriptions of the Swanns’ connections to high society and to the middle class. Bloch is notoriously absent from the social scene, and seems unlikely to be ever one of the fashionable set. In Bloch’s single appearance in *Within a Budding Grove I* he introduces Marcel to a low class brothel where the latter meets Rachel who will become a star of the theater. In the second part, Marcel summers in Balbec, a fashionable sea town, where he is introduced to Lieutenant Marquis Robert de Saint-Loup and to his great-aunt, the Marquise de Villeparisis. The Lieutenant and his aunt give Marcel access to the upper echelons of the aristocracy. Throughout *Within a Budding Grove*, humor from a mainstream or Jewish perspective is a constant in the
representation of the friendship. In the relationship, Marcel represents assimilation while Bloch stands for the foreign Semite. As the two friends vie for social recognition the question arises as to which of the two identities can provide its champion with entry into the exclusive Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Indeed, in the France that Proust represents, the inhabitants of the Faubourg still constitute the apex of French society and their desire to be admitted within that group sets Marcel and Bloch as competitors. However, the two young bourgeois’ decision to make acceptance into the aristocracy a career goal sets them on a course to failure. Long before the Gilded Age, Chateaubriand had concluded and stated that the institution was derelict: “L’aristocratie a trois âges successifs : l’âge des supériorités, l’âge des privilèges, l’âge des vanités ; sortie du premier, elle dégénère dans le second et s’éteint dans le dernier” (François-René de Chateaubriand 49). By the early twentieth-century the aristocracy was well advanced in its last stage and Proust portrays the aristocrats as idle, weak, vain members of a group in decay. The irony that two intelligent young men of means disdain worthwhile careers to conquer a place among those dedicated to the pursuit of futility appears in Proust’s novel. The book gives free rein to the French and Jewish senses of the comic as it recreates their furious efforts at social climbing to nothingness. Examples of the tragicomic Jewish gaze on Bloch occur in Within a Budding Grove, at moments when vanity brings the protagonist to initiate the betrayal of his self, and he instigates the repression of his Jewish identity.

Marcel’s and Bloch’s single-minded resolve to be of the Faubourg arises from the atavism French society experienced at the turn of the century. Exacerbated nationalistic feelings were bent on (re)turning France into a mono-cultural country, an effort directed at excluding Jews and their ‘Semite culture’. The fact that Within a Budding Grove is set during a reactionary
moment in history explains that the Faubourg looms so large in its protagonists’ imaginary or imaginaire.

In A la recherche, the aristocracy retains its last identifiable role as the purveyor of social validation, which brings Zima to write in his sociological reading of the novel that: “In the universe of the novel, the faubourg is therefore ‘the group of reference’ whose ideology is accepted by the other milieus as the one that holds the undisputable, natural, moral and aesthetic authority, the one that contains the reliable criteria which everyone uses to ‘place’ inferior groups on the scale of social hierarchy.”72 (P.-V. Zima 34). As Zima explains, the aristocrats continued to enjoy a cultural deference that allowed their influence on the social pecking order. Indeed, fin de siècle aristocracy exercised no influence on State affairs though its longstanding status as ‘the referential group’ afforded it an illusion of power. The aura that still surrounded the nobility allowed its role as the arbiter of French taste, breeding, fashion, and as art connoisseurs, to continue unabated. Hence, metaphorically speaking, the Faubourg’s acknowledgement and inclusion supposedly stamped an outsider to the aristocracy a French subject, one who is steeped in the culture and who functions according to its principles.

Bloch’s and Marcel’s decision to conquer the Faubourg at any cost illustrates the belief that the aristocracy has the legitimate power to confirm, de facto, their adhesion to values that determine who belongs to the nation, who meets the necessary aesthetics and moral criteria to be French. Marcel owes his eventual success to his realizing in time that life in high society prevents the realization of one’s potential. Unfortunately for Bloch, his entry into the aristocracy

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72 “Le faubourg est donc le ‘groupe de référence’ dont l’idéologie est acceptée par les autres milieux de l’univers romanesque comme douée d’une autorité morale et esthétique indiscutable, naturelle, contenant des critères sûrs dont chacun se sert pour ‘placer’ les groupes inférieurs sur l’échelle de la hiérarchie sociale” (P.-V. Zima 34).
comes too late for him to realize that it offers nothing but vanity and he is a failure for having sacrificed his identity and talents to chase a mirage.

From confidant to the racial ‘Other’ or Bloch in Within a Budding Grove, I

In Within a Budding Grove, I, Marcel’s and Bloch’s reunion occurs before they begin to compete for social advancement. In that scene, Marcel narrates his first sexual escapade from his perspective only even though he has Bloch accompany him. The hero uses a light, humorous tone to recount the anecdote but, since Bloch is silent at that point, Jewish humor is absent from the narrative. From the sole French middle class viewpoint that the narrator expresses, Bloch continues to introduce Marcel to ideas foreign to his traditional home:

It was at this period that Bloch overthrew my conception of the world and opened for me fresh possibilities of happiness [or possibilities of unhappiness later on] by assuring me that contrary to all that I had believed at the time of my walks along the Méséglise way, women never asked for anything better than to make love. He added to the service a second…: It was he who took me for the first time into a house of assignation.

The passage highlights the close bond between Bloch and Marcel in late adolescence. Marcel’s decision to explore his sexuality brings him to turn to Bloch as a matter of course. The hero’s Jewish friend replaces what his conservative milieu had taught him of female sexuality with the notion that women are as much a sexual being as men. As a result, Marcel now conceives of women as beings who embrace sexuality for its own sake rather than as a conjugal duty or for reproductive purposes.

Certainly, the incident can be read on the surface as a moment of youthful complicity between two young men of the Belle Époque. However, in the context of the widespread anti-Semitism of the time, the Semite Bloch plays once again a destabilizing role. In his telling of the above anecdote, the tone of Gallic ribaldry that Marcel adopts is not as innocuous as it may
appear. The French lightheartedness may be appropriate but is not balanced with Bloch’s voice. The absence of Bloch’s humor allows the fictional narrator to create a self-deprecatory representation of the stereotypically conventional young Frenchman whom a friend, who happens to be the corrupt foreigner, leads astray. The narrator is eager for the experience but the passage retains an important implication. The Jewish friend informs Marcel about a different aspect of the sexual world, a reality that differs from the norms of Combray and Méséglise, one in which women are willing and active participants. In France’s Eden, Bloch the tempter provides the narrator with an alternative knowledge to question the sexual, social and literary dictates and embrace individual freedom.

In Swann’s Way and in Within a Budding Grove I, Bloch’s very transgressions of established bourgeois order cause him to be a dynamic, intelligent and promising protagonist. In the following volumes, A la recherche contrasts the Jewish Bloch with the Bloch who gives in to France’s pressure to assimilate and the consequences of his transformation into a non-Jew.

In Within a Budding Grove, II, the hostility that Marcel starts at times to demonstrate toward his Jewish friend accompanies the beginning of Bloch’s metamorphosis into a European. The character Marcel evolves from the naïve, guileless Frenchman to a persona whose construction of Bloch depends on his desires and emotions rather than on reason. One source of desire and emotion that influences Marcel’s treatment of Bloch is his new acquaintance Robert de Saint-Loup and his aristocratic entourage. In the second part of Within a Budding Grove, a pattern emerges. It reproduces both Swann’s treatment of Bloch in Swann’s Way that was described earlier in this chapter and the narrator’s handling of Rachel in Guermantes’ Way discussed in Chapter Two or the chapter on Rachel.
Within a paragraph, as Swann taught him to do in the family garden at Combray, and just as he did for Rachel, the novel’s narrating protagonist takes a series of steps. Marcel establishes a close bond between he and Saint-Loup, he then notes that Saint-Loup expresses interest for the Jew and he reacts with a virtual ejection of the Jewish protagonist from the circle. The novel never has Marcel state antagonistic feelings openly to Bloch but shows the latter transforming as anti-Jewish antagonism progresses in the book. However, though when convenient the novel’s hero behaves as an anti-Semite or a Nationalist who excludes the Jew, A la recherche ensures that the Jewish protagonist always returns and is never excluded for long. In Proust’s representation of France the ‘Other’ has a place in spite of the racists’ best efforts.

In Within a Budding Grove, II, the influence of Nationalism and anti-Semitism on the narrator brings him to behave as if his rightful enjoyment of a birthright were endangered by the outsider Bloch. The first object of contention is the Lieutenant de Saint-Loup who symbolizes the Faubourg Saint-Germain. According to the quotes from Zima discussed earlier in this chapter, at the turn of the twentieth-century, the French middle classes allowed the Faubourg a mythical authority to determine idle society’s pyramidal order in agreement with its criteria for ‘Frenchness’. Therefore, ideologically speaking, if the officer treats Marcel and Bloch equally, or if he marks a preference for Bloch, he infers that there is really no difference between the Jew and a French subject from the middle-class, that they are equally French. As he embarks on his career as a mondain who sees in Bloch a competitor for a place in the Faubourg Marcel can rely on the lessons learned in the family circle in Swann’s Way: the critical gaze to identify the Jew, the suppression or reinterpretation of Bloch’s words and some humor for his ‘Othering’ and his final exclusion.
Marcel’s attraction to Saint-Loup is indivisible from his aspirations to be of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The narrator demonstrates intense feelings for the Marquis before they are even introduced, an interest linked to the aristocratic stereotypes attached to Mme de Villeparisis’ nephew and which allude to the lifestyle of the Faubourg:

Madame de Villeparisis nous prévint que bientôt… [un] jeune neveu qui préparait Saumur… devait venir passer auprès d’elle quelques semaines… déjà je me figurais qu’il allait se prendre de sympathie pour moi, que je serais son ami préféré, et quand avant son arrivée, sa tante laissa entendre à ma grand-mère qu’il était malheureusement tombé dans les griffes d’une mauvaise femme dont il était fou et qui ne le lâcherait pas, comme j’étais persuadé que ce genre d’amour finissait fatalement par l’aliénation mentale, le crime et le suicide, pensant au temps si court qui était réservé à notre amitié, déjà si grande en mon cœur sans que je l’eusse encore vu, je pleurai sur elle et sur les malheurs qui l’attendaient comme sur un être cher dont on vient de nous apprendre qu’il est gravement atteint et que ses jours sont comptés (87-88).73

In addition to lineage, Robert de Saint-Loup has all the stereotypical qualifications that identify an authentic ‘lord’ of the Faubourg to the middle-class. Robert attends the most prestigious school for career officers, a tradition for nobles, and he is embroiled in a melodramatic love affair with a ruinous actress who is no less than Rachel, the novel’s Jewess. In the passage, Marcel’s supposed affection for Saint-Loup, immediately upon hearing of him, cannot be disputed. However, as discussed in Chapter Two on Rachel, Marcel is an unreliable witness whom Montaigne would find too educated, ‘too clever to not disguise things’74. The desire to be Saint-Loup’s ‘favorite’ is the desire to be loved by the aristocracy, the true object of Marcel’s love. As Marcel very well knows, Saint-Loup is at the epicenter of the establishment and his entourage benefits from his privileged status: “sa présence à côté de la beauté en renom… ne la mettait pas seulement tout à fait en vedette, mais attirait les regards sur lui autant que sur elle” (88). Winning Saint-Loup’s friendship, to be chosen, recognized and known as his closest friend

73 “À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs” ; “À la recherche du temps perdu” (87-88)
74 See Chapter Two, for the discussion on how, when it comes to Saint-Loup, the narrator dissembles his true feelings and becomes a ‘false witness’ according to Montaigne’s definition in “Of Cannibals”.
will make Marcel a fixture within the most prestigious section of society. Not to doubt the tears that the passage attributes to Marcel upon imagining Saint-Loup’s demise, but they are shed because the untimely event denies the young nobleman the time to realize Marcel’s ambition of being imposed on the Faubourg.

Saint-Loup owns another attribute besides being the key that unlocks the doors of the great salons for Marcel. The Marquis’ good looks strike the narrator and are among the elements that motivate his expulsion of Bloch that will occur in a few pages:

Une après-midi de grande chaleur… je vis, grand, mince, le cou dégagé, la tête haute et fièrement portée, passer un jeune homme aux yeux pénétrants et dont la peau était aussi blonde et les cheveux aussi dorés que s’ils avaient absorbé tous les rayons du soleil. Vêtu d’une étoffe souple et blanchâtre comme je n’aurais jamais cru qu’un homme eût osé en porter… il marchait vite. Il semblait que la qualité si particulière de ses cheveux, des ses yeux, de sa peau, de sa tournure, qui l’eussent distingué au milieu d’une foule comme un filon précieux d’opale azurée et lumineuse, engainé dans une matière grossière, devait correspondre à une vie différente de celle des autres hommes… A cause de son « chic », de son impertinence de jeune « lion », à cause de son extraordinaire beauté surtout, certains lui trouvaient même un air efféminé, mais sans le lui reprocher, car on savait combien il était viril et qu’il aimait passionnément les femmes (88-89).

The physical description of Saint-Loup is multi-faceted with an attempt to explain, to justify his privileges with his physical superiority, with his looks that come with special rights denied to the masses made of rougher stuff. Marcel’s gaze betrays his desire for Saint-Loup and comes across in the portrait. The narrator dares not call his love for the officer by its name but it surfaces through a choice of words. Marcel’s eyes caress the whole and the details of Robert: the hair, the neck, the eyes, the clothes, the skin, the air, the attitude, the stride even. He soaks in Robert’s appearance that ‘absorbs all the rays of the sun’. As the narrator takes in Saint-Loup he shyly probes the officer’s sexual orientation. Twice Marcel voices his hopes that Robert’s clothes

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75 « A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs » ; « A la recherche du temps perdu » (88)
mark him as effeminate, that his looks denote a feminine nature. Each time, the hero suppresses his wish as hopeless due to Robert’s reputation as a ladies’ man.

The seed for Bloch’s transformation in *Within a Budding Grove, II*

In *Within a Budding Grove, II*, Marcel comes to bask in Robert’s friendship. Soon after his description of Robert, Mme de Villeparisis introduces him to Marcel whose fantasy of having Saint-Loup as best friend comes true. According to Marcel, it is not long before Robert comes to: “avouer sans aucun détour la sympathie qu’il avait pour moi” (94) and to proclaim their friendship “il disait “notre amitié” comme s’il eût parlé de quelque chose d’important et de délicieux qui eût existé en dehors de nous-mêmes” (95). Marcel’s close relations with Robert will enable his quick climb into the Faubourg. His spectacular ascent will confirm that he is seen to own and practice the characteristics that make a Frenchman. As Marcel makes his first forays into idle society, Bloch takes strides toward a career. Jewish humor reappears in his representation to portray the frustrations of a Jew who plays by the rules in an anti-Semitic society. In *Within a Budding Grove, I*, he was “attaché au Cabinet du ministre” (534), in *II*, he has successfully defended his *agrégation* (134) and, as quoted below, he won the laureate prize at a public university:

Un jour que nous étions assis sur le sable Saint-Loup et moi, nous entendimes d’une tente de toile contre laquelle nous étions, sortir des imprécations contre le fourmillement d’Israélites qui infestait Balbec. On ne peut pas faire deux pas sans en rencontrer, disait la voix. Je ne suis pas par principe irréductiblement hostile à la nationalité juive, mais ici il y a pléthore. On n’entend que : « Dis donc, Apraham, chai fu Chakop. » On se croirait rue d’Aboukir. » L’homme qui tonnait ainsi contre Israël sortit enfin de la tente, nous levâmes les yeux sur cet antisémite. C’était mon camarade Bloch. Saint-Loup me
demanda immédiatement de rappeler à celui-ci qu’ils s’étaient rencontrés au Concours général où Bloch avait eu le prix d’honneur, puis dans une université populaire.

This passage illustrates both Bloch’s use of Jewish humor to express through the French language the dilemma of the French minority who wants to transcend communal boundaries and Marcel’s attempt at excluding the Jew. But, coup de théâtre, Saint-Loup intervenes and the ‘Other’ is included once again. The successive steps reproduce those already witnessed when Swann de-Europeanized Bloch at Combray and that the narrator takes when he expels Rachel in Guermantes’ Way, I. In the France that Proust re-creates in his novel the French ‘Other’ cannot and will not be ignored in spite of the society’s repeated attempts to exclude them from the French imaginaire.

Saint-Loup’s temporary openness toward the ‘Semite’ defies the anti-Semitism and Nationalism pervasive in Belle Époque France’s social scene, the two discourses that inspire Bloch’s recourse to Jewish humor. In the near future, in City of the Plains, Saint-Loup will return to his group’s prejudices. In spite of Bloch’s achievements and efforts, the prevailing anti-Jewish atmosphere maintains him within Jewish circles whose Yiddish accent is that of the rue d’Aboukir. The above-quoted passage is crucial to understand that Bloch’s condition at that moment depends on the forces that engineer his transformation and that F. C. Green notes in the following manner:

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76 “A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, II”, “À la recherche du temps perdu” (97)
77 The scene with Bloch at the beach that Marcel describes takes on its full value within a paradigm that exists in A la recherche. The incident anticipates the later reappearance of Rachel When from the Lord in Guermantes’ Way. Both times a Jew disrupts the narrator’s exclusive, bonding moment with Saint-Loup. In both anecdotes, the possession and jealousy that motivate the protagonist’s anti-Jewish feelings come across. In Guermantes’ Way, Marcel’s relationship with Saint-Loup is threatened by the officer’s heterosexual liaison with a Jewess. In the volume being discussed, Marcel’s competitiveness is directed at a person of his own sex who, like Rachel, is a Jew. Proust’s inclusion of the paradigmatic structure illustrates the causes at the root of French exclusion of Jews who, nonetheless, always make a comeback. The French protagonists aim to protect their interests from Jews of either sex.
Bloch, the renegade Jew who we now overhear at the beach, loudly complaining that Balbec is a second rue d’Aboukir… But, since none of Proust’s important characters is quite static Bloch is a Jew in process of physical transformation. By the end of the novel he will have become that anonymous Semitic type which in Paris is almost indistinguishable from the Frenchman… At Balbec, however, Bloch is still in the chrysalis stage (102). Green identifies the fact that Bloch undergoes in A la recherche a racial transformation and, at the resort town, he is at the earliest stage of the ‘renegade’ process. However, the metamorphosis has not started and is not at its earliest stage. Bloch’s use of Jewish humor at the beach places him within a wholly Jewish dimension where he positions himself as a Jew who can make Jewish jokes to describe the Jewish situation. Bloch adopts the voice of the ‘ghetto-prankster’ who is confronted with anti-Semitism and expresses the irony of his world as he seeks to integrate the gentiles’ world. Bloch instinctively vacations in Balbec where many from his Parisian Jewish Marais community summer and “where they compose a homogeneous group avoided by the French visitors” (Green 102). Bloch’s Jewish humor voices the futility of his efforts to transcend his ethnic group and integrate an atavistic society.

Bloch’s Yiddish-accented French words, a cultural sign, capture a moment when he measures fully his and his community’s marginalization because they also possess a non-French culture. The passage marks the last instance in the novel when Bloch will use Jewish humor since he will soon begin to assimilate.79

Immediately after Bloch’s outburst on the beach, his wish for acceptance and inclusion

78 I use the 2013 edition of the book but I find it interesting that in 1949 Green had already appreciated Bloch’s racial transformation. 79 See the beginning of Chapter One for the discussion on Judith Butler and Jonathan Inga who argue that the subject stylizes his/her body to produce the appearance of a ‘natural’ being. While Rachel comes to be accepted as ethnically Jewish because she aligns her words and actions with the cultural and ‘medical’ discourses that affect French Jews Bloch will come to be seen as French for constantly acting and behaving according to the cultural discourses that describe who is French.
by society starts to actualize. Saint-Loup and Marcel accept Bloch’s invitation to dine at his family’s (rented) villa in Balbec. Along with Bloch’s father and sisters, the dinner scene in *Within a Budding Grove* introduces the wealthy Nissim Bernard, Bloch’s bachelor great-uncle whose munificence underwrites the family’s lifestyle and who is a “personnage inoffensif et doux dont le nom de Bernard eût peut-être à lui seul éveillé les dons de diagnostic de mon grand-père… avec un visage qui semblait rapporté du palais de Darius” (132). This passage shows Marcel engaging in the cultural practice of ‘Othering’ that Swann and his grandfather taught him: he first sees the Jew and then confirms the Jewishness of the ‘Bernard’ surname. Marcel is so faithful to the technique that, as Swann compared Bloch’s features to a Bellini painting, he refers to art to confirm Nissim Bernard’s ‘Oriental’ looks. The comparison that ties the uncle in the East is entirely positive, and is in line with Lazare’s and Proust’s use of history to ennoble the Jewish nation, an approach discussed in Chapter One.

The novel’s allusion to the court of Darius adds to Bloch’s uncle an immemorial pedigree combined with refinement and glory. At the dinner, Marcel admits Bloch’s qualities as well: “[Bloch] pouvait avoir de grandes gentillesses…”, in addition to being a charming, understanding lifetime friend (105). Even Albert Bloch’s father is “instruit, fin, affectueux” (130). The ‘typical middle class Frenchman’ hero can appreciate and admit to the individual Jew’s qualities when his interests are not threatened.

*Bloch’s visit to Madame de Villeparisis and Proust’s paradigm of Jewish exclusion*

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80 ‘Bernard’ is the family name of Bernard Lazare who was born Lazare Marcus Manassé Bernard and who later made his last name into his first name. In any case, as discussed in Chapter One, Proust removes in the final version of *À la recherche* any mention of Bernard Lazare that he had included in the drafts. The inclusion of Lazare’s family name at birth, for a Jewish character, indicates that the author knew of the other writer whom Péguy named ‘le premier Dreyfusard’.

Assigning and underlining such a family name in the 1890’s, following the work and engagement of Bernard Lazare on behalf of Dreyfus and of Jews has many implications. Proust can be implying that Bernard Lazare owes his positions to his origins rather than to reason. Proust can also be hinting that in a Jewish milieu the ideas of Bernard Lazare are present.
Following the dinner at Balbec in 1897, the hero and Bloch reunite the following spring. They meet again at Mme de Villeparisis’ home in Paris, almost a year later, in *Guermantes Way, II*. It must be mid-1898 since two historic events that occurred earlier in the year are discussed as still recent at the Marquise’s home. The first incident concerns the novelist Emile Zola whom the State brings to trial for the agitation his public engagement on behalf of Dreyfus caused. During Zola’s trial it is revealed that Colonel Henry had forged a document to entrap the Jewish Captain. These two developments transformed the already infamous case into the Affair. In *Guermantes’ Way, I*, the Israelites’ perfect assimilation comes undone, as Green describes, by the “social or political cataclysm like the Dreyfus case [that] directs attention to racial attributes that the Jew himself has forgotten or discarded” (103).

In Marcel’s re-creation of the Villeparisis reception, the usual elements that construct a layer in the paradigm of Jewish exclusion are all present: A Jew is in a French space where the narrator and Saint-Loup engage other aristocrats. Jewish humor does not contribute to Bloch’s representation in *Guermantes’ Way* since the protagonist appears to have decided to suppress his Jewishness and assimilate. The protagonist can no longer rely on the resources of Jewish culture to provide him with face saving assertiveness as in Combray. Bloch’s decision leaves him vulnerable to the Faubourg’s inhabitants’ facetious cruelty toward those they reject. In *Guermantes’ Way, I*, Bloch’s lack of pride in what the other visitors see as is Jewish characteristics allow the *salonnards*’ stinging irony to fustigate him. However, Bloch’s Semitic features serve to wax into allusions to the Orient glorify Jewish history. As usual in Proust’s paradigm of Jewish exclusion, there is a positive reaffirmation of the Jew’s continuous presence in France.
In *Guermantes’ Way*, to the Jewish/Israelite and genteel/arriviste dichotomies is added a professional competition. Marcel wants to be a writer and Bloch is now already a playwright. To conquer the Faubourg remains their common goal, another factor that affects Marcel’s perception and rendering of Bloch. As Marcel describes Bloch ambling through Mme de Villeparisis’ rooms, it is important to identify which layer of the relationship inspires Marcel at each moment.

Bloch’s and Marcel’s reunion occurs in the Faubourg in the third part of an eventful day discussed in this work’s study of Rachel. As a reminder, in the first two parts of that day, the narrator and Robert de Saint-Loup traveled out of Paris to meet Rachel and, secondly, to spend the afternoon with the actress. In the third part, which concerns this chapter, Bloch, Saint-Loup and Marcel meet without Rachel at the Marquise de Villeparisis’ late afternoon reception. In the fourth part, the narrator and M. de Charlus, Robert’s uncle, leave together. Their departure allows for a discussion that confronts different views on Jews and their place in French society.

Bloch’s visit at Mme de Villeparisis’ can be divided in three parts. The first section explains Bloch’s presence as a Jew in the aristocratic home as the Dreyfus affair inflames nationalist passion. It contains a digression where Bloch serves as the model to illustrate the body of the Jew. Though presented as non-Western, the Jewish body is now redeemed and ennobled by a timeless ‘Jewish soul’. The second part of the description of Bloch’s visit to Mme de Villeparisis begins and illustrates the importance of the Affair which inspires Bloch to corner and monopolize the Marquis de Norpois, a prestigious diplomat and the hostess’ devoted companion. The third section describes Bloch’s departure and return to Mme de Villeparisis.
The visit to Mme de Villeparisis brings Marcel and Bloch closer to their goal of becoming fixtures of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The Marquise was born a Guermantes, and in the novel she belongs by birth to the Faubourg’s most eminent family. She is the aunt of Basin, Duke de Guermantes, of his wife Oriane the Duchess, of Mme de Marsantes the mother of Robert de Saint-Loup, and of the Baron de Charlus who, besides being the Duke’s and Mme de Marsantes’ brother, is the most feared snob of fictional Paris. The guests gathered in the Marquise’s salon do not form a heterogeneous group:

A cette première visite qu’en quittant Saint-Loup j’allai faire à Mme de Villeparisis, suivant le conseil que M. de Norpois avait donné à mon père, je la trouvai dans son salon… [II] y avait, parmi les personnes présentes quand j’arrivai, un archiviste avec qui Mme de Villeparisis avait classé le matin des lettres… et un historien solennel et intimidé… visiteurs auxquels vint se joindre mon ancien camarade Bloch, maintenant jeune auteur dramatique, sur qui elle comptait pour lui procurer à l’œil des artistes qui joueraient à ses prochaines matinées. Il est vrai que le kaléidoscope social était en train de tourner et que l’affaire Dreyfus allait précipiter les Juifs au dernier rang de l’échelle sociale. Mais, d’une part, le cyclone dreyfusiste avait beau faire rage, ce n’est pas au début d’une tempête que les vagues atteignent leur plus grand courroux. Puis Mme de Villeparisis, laissant toute une partie de sa famille tonner contre les Juifs, était restée entièrement étrangère à l’Affaire… Enfin un jeune homme comme Bloch, que personne ne connaissait, pouvait passer inaperçu, alors que les grands Juifs représentatifs de leur parti étaient déjà menacés (486-487).

This passage provides both a historic and a social context to Mme de Villeparisis’ reception. Marcel underlines the presence of two classes in the de Villeparisis salon. Among the guests are personnes or ‘people’, authentic products of French culture they have a social value. Their birthright or marriage to a well-born legitimates their attendance. And there are ‘non-people’ who stand out because of the unexpectedness of their presence which must be explained. They are professionals, devoid of an intrinsic worth at birth but they have acquired an education to earn a living and are invited to come in and barter their skill. Marcel immediately categorizes Bloch as belonging to that utilitarian second class, with the historian, the archivist and such. He,
on the other hand, the narrator can boast of the aristocratic Saint-Loup that he has just left, of his father’s own friend M. de Norpois, another Marquis and Ambassador, and the hostess, the Marquise de Villeparisis who studied and boarded at a convent with his grandmother.

Marcel also places the evening at a historic juncture that reveals the arbitrariness of a world that uses the Affair to make social pariahs of all Jews, especially the most prominent of the community. The Dreyfus affair had newly evolved into simply ‘l’Affaire’ in January to February 1898\(^1\), and, in the spring, it still targets only prominent Jews for ostracism. Marcel shows an acute awareness that the threat can become communal and affect the Jews collectively as the Affair makes ‘stronger waves’. The absurd situation will come to threaten even inconsequent ‘little Jews’ like Bloch. Another interesting aspect resides in the reversal of the ethnic stereotypes. It is the noble woman rather than the Jew who is mean with money. Mme de Villeparisis opens her salon to Bloch in order to not pay the playwright and actors who will perform at her next entertainment.

However, upon entering the Marquise’s salon, Marcel demonstrates a more complex, analytical view of his Jewish friend than usual. ‘Now a young playwright’ is added to Bloch’s litany of diplomas, of prizes and position in a state ministry, the ‘now’ implying that he lacks focus. Bloch’s presence invites Marcel to behave not as in a salon but as a theatergoer at a play in which the Jewish character performs the foreigner who must be correctly interpreted with cultural theories and references. At the gathering, Marcel dissects, interprets and imposes his order on the Jew’s career but also on his posture, clothes, and period of history. In this section, A

\(^1\) Opinions vary as to the date when the Dreyfus case becomes Dreyfus affair. In the opinion of Michel Winock, the case becomes the Affaire at the beginning of 1898: “L’affaire Dreyfus, qui éclate véritablement au début de l’année 1898, va enfin lui donner ce sceau de légende qui lui faisait tant défaut”(131).
la recherche offers a remarkable example of an ‘atavistic culture’ re-packaging Bloch as the stranger from the ‘Orient’ who has no say in his own role and must submit to his ‘orientalization’.

With Bloch’s objectification and Marcel’s empowerment to impose his observation on the ‘Oriental’ as the difference between East and the West, A la recherche stages a process that Edouard Said described in Orientalism: “The Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe” (Edward Said 63). As Said explains, because the ‘Orient’ is a concept and not a geographical area for the West, Westerners are empowered to provide theories and discourses to interpret ‘Oriental’ or non-Western characters’ articulations and actions. Even the peoples of the East act and interpret their own words and acts according to Western theory or discourse.

The description of Bloch at the Faubourg in 1898, a time when France is turning inward and reaffirming its single historic European ‘root’, illustrates the method that the West practices to materialize difference. The passage demonstrates how discourses from the fields of religion, art and history meet at the level of the painter Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps to create at a venue a reality for the ‘Semite’, one that he is unaware of:

Il [Bloch] avait maintenant le menton ponctué d’un « bouc », il portait un binocle, une longue redingote, un gant, comme un rouleau de papyrus à la main. Les Roumains, les Egyptiens et les Turcs peuvent détester les Juifs. Mais dans un salon français les différences entre ces peuples ne sont pas si perceptibles et un Israélite faisant son entrée comme s’il sortait du fond du désert, le corps penché comme une hyène, la nuque obliquement inclinée et se répandant en grands « salams », contente parfaitement un goût d’orientalisme. Seulement il faut pour cela que le Juif n’appartienne pas au « monde »,

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sans quoi il prend facilement l’aspect d’un lord, et ses façons sont tellement francisées que chez lui un nez rebelle, poussant, comme les capucines, dans des directions imprévues, fait penser au nez de Mascarille plutôt qu’à celui de Salomon. Mais Bloch n’ayant pas été assoupli par la gymnastique du « Faubourg », ni ennobli par un croisement avec l’Angleterre ou l’Espagne, restait pour un amateur d’exotisme aussi étrange et savoureux à regarder, malgré son costume européen, qu’un Juif de Decamps (488).

In this passage two gazes, the French and the Jewish, each emanating from its own tradition, combine to shape the protagonist. To render Bloch as he makes his grand entrance into the Faubourg, Marcel compares him to ‘a hyena’, an image that is particularly potent because it summarizes and embodies contempt from both the European and Jewish perspectives. The comparison describes the obsequious body posture that Bloch adopts to endear himself with the company he meets and greets at Mme de Villeparisis’ home. The scene occurs in 1898, at the time when Bernard Lazare is defining a Jewish identity. In La Situation actuelle, Lazare repetitively describes assimilated Jews in terms that describe a scavenger and that are very similar to the novel’s description of the same Jewish group. Similarly, in A la recherche, the inclusion of the substantive ‘hyena’ to describe ‘Israelites’ does not connote anti-Semitism but, as in Lazare, Jews who will stop at no platitude to ‘pass’.

As already discussed in Chapter One, the late nineteenth-century upsurge of anti-Semitism and nationalism in France had convinced Lazare that Jews urgently needed to claim their own separate nation. In addition, Lazare is aware of the Western practice of interpreting specific appearance and behavior and imposing it as a Jewish, foreign and/or ‘Oriental’

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82 See the discussion in Chapter One of Benard Lazare, the French assimilated Israelite, who develops a Jewish identity in response to anti-Semitism and the Dreyfus affair. Lazare articulates the principles of a French Jewish consciousness and French Zionism.

83 To understand Lazare’s understanding that the West defines the ‘Oriental’ see Chapter One where Lazare credits the anti-Semites’ hatred for having made it clear to them that Jews are a separate ‘race’, a knowledge that they arrived at before Jews even. Lazare also calls for to Jews to re-appropriate their own definition as a people rather than leave it to the anti-Semites and for Jews to organize as a ‘Nation’ when all other Western peoples have already organized themselves according to nationalist principles.
characteristic. The need to pre-empt a pejorative definition of the Jewish national by the West brings to the author of *Le Nationalisme juif* a sense of urgency that translates into vexing language particularly for assimilated Jewry. Lazare castigates French Israelites of the 1890’s for the extent they go to assimilate: “vous… tendez l’échine” he tells them, a language very similar to the “la nuque obliquement inclinée” found in the above quote from Proust. Bernard Lazare uses the same image in *Contre l’antisémitisme* when he talks of Jews who have learned to “plier l’échine” while in *Le Nationalisme juif*, Lazare finds “Le Juif émancipé… un parvenu… l’humilité de l’aïeul est devenue chez lui de la platitude, sa résignation de la lâcheté…” In this passage, Lazare mentions the ‘juifs émancipés’ who, once secure in their civil rights, will even sacrifice their dignity to their natural desire to enjoy all social privileges. As a literary and social critique, and as the author of a seminal history of anti-Semitism, Lazare is familiar with the representations that stereotype the French ‘Other’ and groveling and cowardice must not be included.

The same scolding tone transpires in the text of *A la recherche* which differentiates between Marcel’s pejorative comparison of Bloch to a hyena and the lauding of dignified Jews whose manners are a credit to any *salon* that they visit. The dignity of such Jews shows on their features so that their traits come to evoke those of characters from French literature and history instead of the anti-Semitic ‘Jewish nose’. Unfortunately, to ingratiate himself with the Faubourg, Bloch adopts the over deferential posture which can bring an observer to associate the Jewish nation with a scavenger. Bloch’s efforts earn him the harsh epithet ‘hyena’ when the novel has the narrator’s fictional mainstream voice very briefly switch over to that of a moralizing,

84 “La Situation actuelle” ; “Le Fumier de Job” 77
85 “Contre l’antisémitisme” ; “Le Fumier de Job” 101
86 “Le Nationalisme juif” ; “Le Fumier de Job” 91-92
contemptuous Jew for the ‘Juif émancipé’ Bloch, as he begins his racial transformation for social privileges.

Beside and around the Jewish viewpoint that castigates Bloch for jeopardizing the consciousness and pride that resist exclusion, a French voice, as circumlocutory as the Jewish one is direct describes Bloch at his *entrée dans le monde*. The circumlocution showcases the French language and culture of ‘Power’ which provide the tools to decide the Jew’s alterity. The Jewish difference is a construct that consists of the influence of body language, already discussed, but also of costume associated with historical time periods. However, to grasp fully how the narrator interprets Bloch’s posture, clothes and history to make his friend into a Jew, so ‘savoureux à regarder’, and painted by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803-1860), one must take the clue that the passage provides and consider French paintings of Oriental subjects.

Known as ‘l’inventeur de l’Orient’ for the subject matter of his paintings, a title he created and bestowed upon himself and that no one disputes him, Decamps’ work perfects and vulgarizes the imagined opposition between a timeless East and an evolving West. The painter’s oeuvre is an ideal illustration for Edward Said’s notion that the ‘Orient is a stage… affixed to Europe’. Decamps’ artistic production plays such an instrumental role in creating an imaginary Orient for Westerners that *A la recherche* makes him the narrator’s reference for the nineteenth-century Orientalist art movement. As the ‘inventor of the Orient’, Decamps’ canvases propagated in the West the impression that time has no hold over the *Orient* and the *Orientaux*. With Decamps’ paintings, the French audience discovers that in their day, people, scenery, cloths, clothes, movements and animals of the East, painted in their nineteenth-century garbs, equally represent their Antiquity; all has remained static. Another hallmark of Decamps’ technique his use of light and shadows that melt his strong lines into the paintings’ background,
that dissolve figures into their environment and provide their otherworldliness. With a Decamps painting as a model, Marcel can imagine an ‘otherworldly’ Bloch morphing into a distant ancestor, his glove morphing into a parchment and his overcoat into an Assyrian scribe’s robe. Decamps’ standing as an Orientalist and his techniques explain that A la recherche has one of his portraits come to Marcel’s mind when he wants to make a contemporary into an Oriental Semite. Decamps’ style and innovations teach and inspire to see the middle-class Frenchman, Bloch in this case, in a nineteenth-century outfit as a Semite of Antiquity in antique outfits.

However, one must turn to an ‘Orientalist’ painter other than Decamps to illustrate how the Western cultural association between a body in an outdated outfit, in an over-deferential position, and the disenfranchised ‘Asian’ helps the West transform even a Westerner into an ‘Oriental’. In a painting that is presently at the Chateau de Versailles and dates from the era of the Sun King, the artist’s brush captures a Western Embassy. In Claude-Guy Hallé’s “La Réparation faite à Louis XIV par le doge de Gênes” (1710), the posture and the clothes of the doge of Genoa and of his courtiers in front of Louis and his Court transform the Italians into the exotic, the foreign. In that portrait, the doge, in his long, red tunic bends deeply to the French monarch while his entourage, behind him in black robes from head to toe, follows suite. The bent Genoese’s flowing black and red robes, whose classical folds allude and connect them to Antiquity, clash with the straight, brocaded, ‘modern’ redingote of the King who stands upright, as do his equally fashionably attired French nobility. To transmit to the French the foreignness of Bloch and of the Italians’, the painter or writer gives them clothes and posture that can be

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87 For fear of copyright laws I removed the pictures but reproductions of Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps’ paintings are available online to observe the effect of his light and shadows technique, as well as his use of contemporary “Orientals” dressed in their nineteenth-century clothes but represent their ancestors. “Joseph sold by his Brethren” is a good example.

88 Many reproductions of the painting are available online.
interpreted as *démoté* and as bent spines, the identifiers of the ‘Oriental’ non-Western in portraits.

Just as in the French paintings, Bloch’s clothing and ‘neck inclined’ for his deep ‘salams’ allow Marcel to transform him into the ‘Oriental’. From his French perspective, the narrator interprets historical references so that Bloch’s modern clothes fit the norms in the paintings discussed above. As Marcel tells it above, Bloch has now a ‘long reedingote’, a sartorial item not unlike the long black coat of the Genoese at the French Courts. Bloch’s outfit becomes unfashionable, relocates him in the past when Marcel reinterprets the ‘yellow gloves’ that he carries, rolled in his hand, into ‘a roll of papyrus’. Bloch’s appearance as the obsequious ‘Other’ dressed in a long outdated fashion makes him the ‘Oriental’ and Jew. Once the narrator has made Bloch into a Jew, once Bloch’s stranger status is established and he is no longer a competition, Marcel can afford to lend him positive Jewish cultural characteristics. The papyrus alludes to an uninterrupted learning, to the political and civil administrations and to the religious revelations that originated in Near-Eastern Antiquity. As the text points out, the discourses of Orientalism and their *modus operandi* do not affect the Jew only but also the Turks, the Romanians and the Egyptians though they may be anti-Semitic.

In *A la recherche*, Bloch is a character who lacks the will to affirm the difference that he embodies and brings to the Western ‘amateur’ to attain his goals. Assimilation, in the novel, implies that the Semite, like a prized pet or livestock, has benefited from a ‘croisement’ to return to the quote, that he has been cross-bred into acceptance. Unlike the narrator, Bloch will be a mediocre man of letters because he will relinquish his Jewish difference to assimilate. By the end of the book, Bloch acquires a Western posture and appearance to match his Western outfit, a
necessity to perfect his assimilation. To remain realistic, however, the novel must have Bloch
tone down his difference or the key to his success.

**From Bloch’s body to the ‘Jewish race’ in the excursus**

At Mme de Villeparisis’s reception, during ‘the Affair’ the nationalist presence is
pervasive to the extent that Mme de Villeparisis fears some of her guests and finds herself:

“Tremblant devant l’archiviste et faisant l’antidreyfusarde devant lui”\(^8^9\). The Marquise is neither
an anti-Dreyfusard nor an anti-Semite but she considers the pressures from the nationalist camp.
It is in that context that, in the quote below, the narrator affirms, even celebrates the racial
diversity that France harbors. In Proust’s novel, there is a Jewish ‘race’ and ‘soul’ two principles
that Lazare includes in call for a Jewish nation in 1897. Marcel rejoices in the fact that France
is not simply home to Jewish individuals but to a ‘Jewish race’, whose biological, cultural and
historical heritage has its origins outside of Europe:

Admirable puissance de la race qui du fond des siècles pousse en avant jusque dans le
Paris moderne, dans les couloirs de nos théâtres, derrière les guichets de nos bureaux, à
un enterrement, dans la rue, une phalange intacte, stylisant la coiffure moderne,
absorbant, faisant oublier, disciplinant la redingote, demeurée en somme toute pareille à
celle des scribes assyriens peints en costume de cérémonie qui à la frise d’un monument
de Suse défend les portes du palais de Darius (488).

As Bloch’s description transcends the individual to become that of the ‘race’ the tone becomes
celebratory. The quotation celebrates the presence of the Semite throughout the ages in Paris.
The narrator literally admires that Jews are everywhere, from the corridors of the theater to those
of power, from the office space to the public. And the tone of the passage makes it clear that the
speaker wishes the Semites’ will continue to participate in and contribute to French life in the
future.

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\(^8^9\) Le Côté de Guermantes, I” ; “A la rechreche du temps perdu” 534
The above extract establishes the staying power of the Jews in France and, with its reference to history to illustrate their racial strength, its parallels become even closer to Lazare’s claims. In Chapter One, this work discussed Lazare’s assertion that paintings and sculpture from Antiquity illustrate the diverse racial characteristics that still belong to contemporary Jews. Similarly, in *A la recherche*, the same claim is found in the above quotation which argues that the Jews’ racial identity is such that it has crossed the ages and allows for a strange, fanciful even, phenomenon. Contemporary Western clothes do not transform Jews into Westerners, in fact, the reverse is true. Marcel the narrator asserts that the clothes become ‘orientalized’ because they existed in the Orient millennia ago. The overcoat, the quote states, has not changed since it was worn by the Assyrians at Susa. The reference to scribes at Susa valorizes the ‘Jewish race’ since it is a reminder of its antiquity, of its presence and participation in History at a time when but for Greece Europe was outside History.

**The Jewish soul**

In the last section of the excursus, Proust mentions ‘the Jewish soul’. Unlike Swann, Bloch fails to become a French leader, a representative figure of French Jewry because he betrays his Jewish soul. To understand the notion it is helpful to turn once again to Bernard Lazare:

Accumulation des impressions dans l’âme juive. Quelles choses de l’histoire le Juif n’a-t-il pas ressenties ? Que n’a-t-il pas éprouvé ? Quelles hontes n’a-t-il subies ? Quelles douleurs supportées ? Quels triomphes n’a-t-il pas connus ? Quelles défaites n’a-t-il pas acceptées ? Quelle résignation n’a-t-il pas montrée ? Quel orgueil n’a-t-il pas étalé ? Et tout cela a laissé dans son âme des traces profondes, comme les eaux du déluge laissèrent leurs sédiments au fond des vallées.\(^{90}\)

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\(^{90}\) “L’Esprit juif, la tristesse acquise, les outrages, insultes et vexations”; “Le Fumier de Job” 44
It can be gathered from Lazare that the Jewish soul consists of a sensibility specific to the Jewish people and it determines their view of the world and of their place in it. According to the quotation, the Jewish soul is a layered construction, centuries in the making. It consists of the layers of shames, of defeats, of sufferings and resignation, but also of glory, that have shaped the consciousness of a people with at least three millennia of history. For Lazare, these historical strata shape the consciousness that animates and determines the behavior of the Jew. And of course, just for any other nation, the totality of the Jewish people’s experiences in History that shape their soul inspires their aspirations and achievements.

The Jewish soul summoned in the Faubourg at the time of the Affair

Lazare’s definition of the Jewish soul helps understand Marcel’s allusion to Jewish souls in *A la recherche* and how the concept differs in the works of the two authors. The third and last section of the digression attempts to illustrate the extent to which the Jewish soul defines Bloch. The end segment of the excursus is also a call for tolerance since the quotation admits that each people have a soul:

Mais, au reste, parler de permanence des races rend inexactement l’impression que nous recevons des Juifs, des Grecs, des Persans, de tous ces peuples auxquels il vaut mieux laisser leur variété… La jeune dame grecque, fille d’un riche banquier, et à la mode en ce moment, a l’air d’une de ces figurantes qui, dans un ballet historique et esthétique à la fois symbolisent, en chair et en os, l’art hellénique… au contraire\(^1\), le spectacle auquel l’entrée dans un salon d’une Turque, d’un Juif, nous fait assister, en animant les figures, les rend plus étranges, comme s’il s’agissait en effet d’êtres évoqués par un effort médiurninimique. C’est l’âme… l’âme des Grecs anciens, des anciens Juifs, arrachée à une vie tout à la fois insignifiante et transcendantale, qui semble exécuter devant nous cette mimique déconcertante... Il me semblait que si j’avais dans la lumière du salon de Mme de Villeparisis pris des clichés d’après Bloch, ils eussent donné d’Israël cette même image, si troublante parce qu’elle ne paraît pas émaner de l’humanité, si décevante parce que tout de même elle ressemble trop à l’humanité, que nous montrent les photographies

\(^1\) Italics added for emphasis.
This elaborate passage of *A la recherche* reveals its idea of what is at the core of who is a Jew and what makes a Jew. To determine the principles that enable one to become a Jewish subject the quote first establishes a binary between the ‘Greek/Western soul’ and the ‘Jewish soul’.

In the world of the novel, a ‘race’ owes its characteristics and its duration through time to its specific ‘soul’. But a major difference exists between the ‘souls’ of each race. Hence, it is the contemporary graceful female Greek dancer who invokes for the aesthete the timeless ‘soul’ of the West. Therefore, the Western soul depends both on reason, which creates all arts including dance, and the intellectual effort necessary to associate today’s performer to Classical Greece, to les ‘anciens Grecs’. But, in the case of the Jews, and other peoples of the East, the unexplainable durability of their ‘races’ comes from the fact that, for example, the ‘Jewish soul’ is inalterable. Even time or any other vicissitude cannot change the essence of the Jewish ‘soul’ which implies a major difference with Lazare on the topic. For Lazare, the ‘soul’ is the sum of successive experiences which means the soul evolves and there is no Jewish ‘essence’.

However, in the world of *A la recherche*, there is an ‘essentialisation’ of the Jew since inalterability of the Jewish soul determines that Bloch’s real and contemporary self immediately summons that of the ‘ancient Jews’, the *anciens Juifs* who had the same ‘soul’. Bloch can represent at once the contemporary and ancient Jews until he vulgarly calls for his hat which ends the illusion.

**Greek soul, Jewish soul in Relation**

92 “Le Côté de Guermantes, I” ; “A la recherche du temps perdu” 489
The narrator’s concern with a Jewish soul does not occur in *A la recherche* until the Dreyfus case mutates into the Affair. Because of the historical context, the quotation reflects the development of a French Jewish identity which affirms the equality between the Semite soul and the Aryan soul. The quotation subverts a traditional Western binary between the West and the Rest. Bloch’s entry in the Villeparisis’ home provides Proust the opportunity to mention the Jews and Greeks of Antiquity, side by side and twice within a paragraph: “l’impression que nous recevons des Juifs, des Grecs, des Persans” and “l’âme des Grecs anciens, des anciens Juifs”. The narrator, in this extract, equates the ancient Jews, Greeks and Persians. Marcel, as a first step, reestablishes the plurality of the Ancients. The Greeks were but one of the civilizations of the Ancient World.

Secondly, the narrator’s equating Jews and Classical Greece during the Dreyfus affair denotes his intellectual and political engagement on behalf of Jews. Proust shows, as on a scale, that the Western heritage is Judeo-Greek, not simply Greek, not Judeo-Christian. Other Jewish intellectuals had the same concern. In his influential book, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Auerbach asserts that the Western Tradition results equally from “the two styles, the Homeric and the Old Testament” (Auerbach 20). Once again, Lazare announces Proust’s Marcel in the novel:

[Sémites] et aryens se sont mêlés d’une façon continuelle et… l’apport sémitique dans toutes les civilisations dites aryennes est considérable. Dix siècles avant l’ère chrétienne, les villes phéniciennes… colonisèrent la Grèce que les envahisseurs aryens trouvèrent peuplés d’aborigènes jaunes et de colons sémites, à tel point qu’Athènes fut une ville toute sémitique. Il en fut de même en Italie, en Espagne, en France… Ces éléments divers s’amalgamèrent plus tard et… l’imagerie phénicienne aida beaucoup la mythologie iconologique grecque.  

93 “Le Côté de Guermantes, I”; “A la recherche du temps perdu” (488-489).
94 Ibid, 90
Clearly, anti-Semitism objectified in the Affair brought Jews to remind Europeans that their Semitic heritage was second to none. The vocal pride in Semitic history seen in Proust, Auerbach, and Lazare becomes part of the new French Jewish identity in the late 1890’s. Furthermore, in all three authors, there is the notion of multiculturalism, that more than one culture fashioned the West. Lazare’s quote shows that Europe’s roots are ethnically as well as culturally diverse and the atavistic movement that means to exclude Jews makes no sense. In *A la recherche*, Bloch’s falling for the lure of assimilation makes him lose his voice as his eventual transformation into a European cuts him off from his Jewish heritage. Considering that Bloch embodies the Semite soul, his decision to amputate ‘his Jewish soul’ effectively denies him of the vision and sensibility necessary to fulfill his early literary promises.

**Bloch’s wrong selection of identity causes dismay in the Faubourg**

Following the digression that served to define the Jewish ‘race’, ‘soul’ and history Marcel resumes the narration of the evening at Mme de Villeparisis’ home. Bloch’s behavior proves to be as foreign to the Faubourg’s aesthetics as his physical appearance, and yet he expects no resistance to his acceptance. In this part, Bloch’s exclusion from the Faubourg is not virtual but real and, as he did early in *Swann’s Way*, he adopts a non-French cultural behavior that antagonizes his hostess. During his visit to the Marquise, Bloch’s Jewish subjectivity inspires a series of faux-pas in relation to M. de Norpois, the Affair, Saint-Loup and the hostess.

Nonetheless, as in *Swann’s Way*, Bloch’s banishment remains true to the paradigm in *A la"

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95 Bloch’s visit will end with his temporary banishment which Julia Kristeva attributes to: “l’ostracisme de Mme de Villeparisis… au dreyfusisme de Bloch, pas à sa grossièreté. Elle ne lui tendra pas la main” (Julia Kristeva 63). Unlike what Kristeva claims, the Marquise is not involved in the politics around the Affair and Bloch is not a Dreyfusist but a Dreyfusard. A Dreyfusard correctly believed that Captain Dreyfus had been unjustly condemned and his conviction should be annulled. On the other hand, a Dreyfusist fought for the abolition of all power structures including the Army and the Church. There is no evidence in *A la recherche* that Bloch practices such extreme politics.
recherche since, as will be seen, Mme de Villeparisis welcomes him back and very soon. And it is within that logic that Bloch’s antagonistic behavior, added to his Semitic aspect, bring the xenophobic salon to conclude that the hero must be marginalized.

Bloch’s visit to the Marquise shows his ignorance of the world that he decides to conquer and the extent he will have to travel from his Jewish self to become French. As can be expected, the perspective and the humor in Mme de Villeparisis’ home are French, and neither she nor her guests are aware of or prepared to entertain a different cultural viewpoint. In the following scenes, Guermantes’ Way, I never presents Bloch’s perspective and the reason for his actions remains unknown so that Bloch simply represents the ill bred Jewish guest:

Mme de Villeparisis dit qu’il était impossible d’ouvrir, qu’elle était enrhumée… Et se mettant à rire, il fit faire à ses regards qui tournèrent autour de l’assistance une quête qui réclamait appui contre Mme de Villeparisis. Il ne la rencontra pas, parmi ces gens bien élevés. Ses yeux allumés, qui n’avaient pu débaucher personne, reprirent avec résignation leur sérieux » (516).

In this scene, a stern, judgmental European gaze leaves room for no other interpretation. Bloch’s assurance harms rather than helps the representation of the French Jew. At this point in the novel, Bloch’s boorishness only serves to highlight the contrast between him and the Europeans’ perfect manners. The absence of a Jewish perspective from this scene, and the following ones, creates the single impression that Bloch is ill bred and attempts to deny his hostess the deference and privileges that she enjoys in her own home.

The two following anecdotes contain elements of defiance toward the Faubourg’s cultural hegemony but Bloch comes across simply as crude in both. Among the more striking of Bloch’s pronouncements are those concerning the Marquis de Norpois and Saint-Loup. Bloch, laughing, speaks to Mme de Villeparisis of her life companion in the following manner: “N’ai-je pas lu de lui une savante étude où il démontrait pour quelles raisons irréfutables la guerre russo-japonaise
devait se terminer par la victoire des Russes et la défaite des Japonais ? Et n’est-il pas un peu gâteux ? The Russo-Japanese War ended with the defeat of the European power and the undisputed victory of the ‘Yellow race’ over the ‘White race’. Bloch underlines the reversal of the racial order, that whites are not superior to non-Europeans. But the polemical tone, and the use of the label ‘gâteux’, deny the passage its transgressive potential and it strikes as a gaffe.

Finally the protagonist denounces an absent Saint-Loup and says about him: “un mal épouvantable que tout le monde en fut révolté. Il commençait à avoir des haines, et on sentait que pour les assouvir il ne reculerait devant rien”. The narrator later explains that Bloch is angry at Saint-Loup for not answering his letters but, once again, he comes across as irrational and as not belonging in society. The book treats differently the Bloch of Guermantes’ Way and the one of Swann’s Way discussed early in this chapter. In the novel’s first volume, the character is comfortable with his Jewishness and his irreverence shocks his hosts but he retains the allure of the dissenter. In Guermantes’ Way, Bloch becomes impatient with the Jewish heritage that cuts him from the wider social gratifications and, when he visits the Faubourg, he believes he has left behind his Jewish self. The novel leaves him his bad manners but they appear gratuitous and self-destructive in the third volume. A rejection of assimilation and a protagonist’s pride in their Jewish identity are important in the world of A la recherche to protect the Jew from the slurs that an ‘atavistic’ culture inspires.

The insult

By the time of the Dreyfus affair, social antagonism against Jews had turned the word ‘Jew’ into an insult that could be hurled at a member of that community at any time to cause

96 Ibid, 517
97 Ibid, 525
distress. For those concerned with Jewish welfare, Jews needed to reclaim the term and make it an identifier that instilled pride rather than shame and hurt. Proust includes in Bloch’s representation in the Faubourg the trauma a Jew experienced when called a ‘Jew’ in the late 1890’s. The word ‘Jew’ could cause such grief and humiliation that Bernard Lazare had no need to name it when he described the pain it inflicted. To capture the pejorative power of the word Lazare listed only the symptoms that it caused which also identified the cursed ‘J word” for everyone:

LA CRAINTE DE L’INSULTE  La peur dans le monde, dans la rue, au spectacle, au restaurant, d’entendre le mot qui est devenu une insulte, de se l’entendre jeter à la face ; le tressaillement devant un regard railleur ou haineux, dans lequel se lit l’injure qu’on redoute d’entendre sortir de la bouche. Et tout cela un peu chaque jour effleurant l’épiderme, faisant du Juif un animal neurasthénique, dont le cœur s’use s’il est un sensitif, dont le mépris s’aiguise s’il est un intellectuel, dont le désir de violence ou de vengeance s’éveille s’il est un sanguin.98

For Lazare, the epithet ‘Jew’ had become a potent psychological tool in the hands of Jew haters. Even assimilated Israelites harbored the fear of the ‘J word’. Anti-Semites had the satisfaction of knowing that even the most accomplished Jew could be made to feel degraded by being called Jewish. The situation that Lazare describes is recreated in Guermantes’ Way to remind Bloch that he is a pariah.

The occasion to call Bloch a Jew arises around the Dreyfus affair, a topic that Bloch tactlessly imposes on a reluctant M. de Norpois. In order to counter a point made by M. de Norpois, Bloch turns to the Marquis d’Argencourt a Belgian aristocrat presently in Paris:

- Vous, monsieur… vous êtes certainement dreyfusard: à l’étranger tout le monde l’est. - C’est une affaire qui ne regarde que les Français entre eux, n’est-ce pas ? » répondit M. d’Argencourt avec cette insolence particulière… Bloch rougit ; M. d’Argencourt sourit… et si ce sourire fut malveillant pour Bloch, il le tempéra de cordialité en l’arrêtant

98 “L’Esprit juif, La Tristesse acquise, Les Outrages, insultes et vexations” ; “Le Fumier de Job”45
finalement sur mon ami afin d’ôter à celui-ci le prétexte de se fâcher des mots… qui n’en restaient pas moins cruels pour lui… Pour se rattraper Bloch se tourna vers le duc de Châtellerault : « Vous, Monsieur, qui êtes français, vous savez certainement qu’on est dreyfusard à l’étranger… » Mais le jeune duc… qui était lâche… : « Excusez-moi, monsieur, de ne pas discuter de Dreyfus avec vous, mais c’est une affaire dont j’ai pour principe de ne parler qu’entre Japhétiques. » Tout le monde sourit, excepté Bloch… Et on ne put recueillir que ceci : « Mais comment avez-vous pu savoir ? Qui vous a dit ? » comme s’il avait été le fils d’un forçat. D’autre part, étant donné son nom, qui ne passe pas précisément pour chrétien, et son visage, son étonnement montrait quelque naïveté. Ce que lui avait dit M. de Norpois ne l’ayant pas complètement satisfait, il s’approcha de l’archiviste et lui demanda si on ne voyait pas quelquefois chez Mme de Villeparisis M. du Paty de Clam ou M. Joseph Reinach (544).

M. d’Argencourt’s answer is perfidiously wicked since on the surface he sounds as if he is referring to himself, the Belgian who should stay out of French national matters. However, d’Argencourt’s malevolent smile accompanies ‘le regard railleur’ that Lazare mentions in his definition of the insult that every Jew fears. Indeed, the Marquis means that as a Belgian he abstains from commenting on a French matter and that Bloch, as a Jew, should follow his lead. D’Argencourt’s answer reminds all those present that his direct interlocutor is a Semite and, therefore, even more foreign in France than he the Belgian.

If d’Argencourt’s words remind Bloch that he is subject to geographical relocation, those of Châtellerault add the racial dimension. The Duke multiplies the impression that Bloch is a stranger when he highlights the fact that he is the only ‘Semite’, or descendant of Seth, among the assembly who all belong to the Japhetic race, or the descendants of Japheth another son of the Prophet Noah. The irony is that Bloch ignores that the Faubourg’s inhabitants would classify him as marginal because of his facial and patronymic features.

The invectives from d’Argencourt and Châtellerault, the mystifying speech by Norpois on the Affair do not revive Bloch’s pride. He simply moves on to question the archivist. However, though the moment when Bloch is ‘outed’ as a Jew represents the lowest point of his career in A la recherche, the narrator does not desert his friend. Marcel stands in solidarity with
the Jew against the mob visiting the Marquise. The narrator’s empathy for Bloch contrasts with
the harsh gaze he directs upon the aristocratic anti-Semites. Marcel denounces the Marquis as
hypocritical, spiteful and cruel. The narrator judges Châtellerault as harshly as he does
d’Argencourt. The Duke is judged a coward. Bloch’s pitiful reaction causes the narrator to
adopt a Jewish perspective briefly once again. Marcel sadly notes that the ‘outed’ Jew is brought
to react as if he were the son of a convict.

Proust’s paradigm of Jewish expulsion and return reconfirmed

Bloch’s leave taking allows for role playing by Mme de Villeparisis. To be a great lady
demands that the Marquise performs the great lady at least for the edification of her court. Mme
de Villeparisis reaffirms her position in the Faubourg with a performance of the privileged
banishing the unmasked Jew:

Elle [Mme de Villeparisis] voulût signaler à Bloch qu’il eût à ne pas revenir et elle trouva
tout naturellement dans son répertoire mondain la scène par laquelle une grande dame
met quelqu’une à la porte de chez elle… Les adieux de Bloch… ne lui arrachèrent pas
une parole, et elle ne lui tendit pas la main. Cette scène mit Bloch au comble de
l’étonnement… et pour forcer la marquise, la main qu’on ne venait pas lui prendre, de
lui-même il la tendit. Mme de Villeparisis en fut choquée. Mais sans doute, tout en
tenant à donner satisfaction à l’archiviste et au clan antidreyfusard, voulait-elle pourtant
ménager l’avenir, elle se contenta d’abaisser les paupières et de fermer à demi les yeux.

« Je crois qu’elle dort », dit Bloch à l’archiviste qui, se sentant soutenu par la marquise,
prit un air indigné. « Adieu, madame » cria-t-il… Plein de curiosité et du dessein
d’éclairer un incident si étrange, il revint la voir quelques jours après. Elle le reçut très
bien parce qu’elle était bonne femme, que l’archiviste n’était pas là, qu’elle tenait à la
saynète que Bloch devait faire jouer chez elle, et qu’enfin elle avait fait le jeu de grande
dame qu’elle désirait, lequel fut universellement admiré et commenté le soir même dans
divers salons, mais d’après une version qui n’avait déjà plus aucun rapport avec la vérité
(545-546).

In this passage, Bloch regains the advantage because he is allowed to perform the assertive
‘ghetto-prankster’ opposite the Faubourg’s *grande dame*. The Jewish humor depicts a Bloch, a man of the theater, an aspiring man of the world, who can’t understand the scene the Marquise selected from her repertory. Mme de Villeparisis’ act is too subtle for Bloch which explains his astonishment, his *comble de l’étonnement*, that brings him to react according to his own code of manners. The ‘ghetto’ inspires him to break French etiquette and he extends his hand rather than wait for the woman to offer hers first. It is Mme de Villeparisis’ turn to feel astonished. Bloch’s parting words bring further turmoil to the anti-Dreyfus camp. The archivist who attempts to convert Mme de Villeparisis to Nationalism is left furious and speechless. As the above quotation explains, soon after Bloch’s quite honorable retreat he openly returns to Mme de Villeparisis’ salon who welcomes him back ‘parce qu’elle était bonne femme… qu’elle tenait à la saynète que Bloch devait faire jouer chez elle, et qu’enfin elle avait fait le jeu de grande dame qu’elle désirait’. The existence of the paradigm of Jewish exclusion makes it predictable that the Jew will reintegrate the space whence the anti-Semites attempt to banish him. The welcome that the Marquise extends to Bloch once again cannot be to the anti-Semites’ liking.

**Nationalist madness**

Following Mme de Villeparisis’ reception, the narrator and the baron de Charlus leave her home together. The togetherness of the hero and a French nobleman signals that the scene belongs to the paradigm of Jewish exclusion and reinsertion. And indeed, their walk is the occasion for Charlus to develop the notions that nationalists offer to banish French Jews from France. The hero takes the Jews’ defense and calmly refutes the Baron’s arguments. More importantly, once again, Proust exposes the root cause of anti-Semitism to be repressed desire. However, whereas in the earlier scenes the narrator’s latent desire for the aristocratic Saint-Loup
instigated his expulsion of the Jew, in the following anecdote the aristocrat courts Marcel but also expels the Jew whom he desires:

M. de Charlus s’interrompit pour me poser des questions sur Bloch dont on avait parlé sans qu’il eût l’air d’entendre, chez Mme de Villeparisis. Et de cet accent qu’il savait si bien détacher de ce qu’il disait qu’il avait l’air de penser a tout autre chose et de parler machinalement par simple politesse, il me demanda si mon camarade était jeune, était beau etc. « Vous n’avez pas tort, si vous voulez vous instruire, me dit M. de Charlus après m’avoir posé ces questions sur Bloch, d’avoir parmi vos amis quelques étrangers.» Je répondis que Bloch était français. « Ah ! dit M. de Charlus, j’avais cru qu’il était Juif. » … Il protesta au contraire contre l’accusation de trahison portée contre Dreyfus. Mais ce fut sous cette forme : « Je crois que les journaux disent que Dreyfus a commis un crime contre sa patrie, je crois qu’on le dit, je ne fais pas attention aux journaux… En tout cas le crime est inexistant, le compatriote de votre ami aurait commis un crime contre sa patrie s’il avait trahi la Judée, mais qu’est-ce qu’il a à voir avec la France ? » J’objectai que, s’il y avait jamais une guerre, les Juifs seraient aussi bien mobilisés que les autres. « Peut-être, et il n’est pas certain que ce ne soit pas une imprudence… Votre Dreyfus pourrait plutôt être condamné pour infraction aux règles de l’hospitalité. Peut-être pourriez-vous demander à votre ami de… louer une salle… et arranger une lutte entre votre ami et son père où il le blesserait comme David et Goliath… Il pourrait même pendant qu’il y est frapper à coups redoublés sur sa charogne, ou comme dirait ma vieille bonne, su sa carogne de mère… nous aimons les spectacles exotiques et que frapper cette créature extra-européenne, ce serait donner une correction méritée à un vieux chameau. » En disant ces mots affreux et presque fous M. de Charlus me serrait le bras à me faire mal… Je l’avertis qu’en tout cas Mme Bloch n’existant plus, et que quant à M. Bloch je me demandais jusqu’à quel point il se plairait à un jeu qui pourrait parfaitement lui crever les yeux… (Guermantes’ Way 584-585).

Bloch clearly captured the baron’s attention during the visit to Mme de Villeparisis. However, though Charlus pretends to be indifferent to the young man that caught his eye he yearns to talk about Bloch, to go over his looks and his youth. Charlus’ habit of dissembling brings him to present the nationalists’ arguments that, as a Semite, Bloch is a foreigner in France. Though the narrator needs Charlus to climb the social ladder he challenges the baron’s opinion and insists that Bloch is French. And when Charlus affirms that Bloch is not French, and at most, he could be considered a traitor to Judea but never to France Marcel retorts that Jews are conscripted in
cases of war. In *A la recherche*, the reasons the nationalists offer for the exclusion of the ‘Other’ hide a French fear, abject desire, or greed.

Marcel’s own rationality becomes more evident as the nationalist Charlus’ words become more insane. To have a protagonist who is mentally deranged argue the ideas of Nationalism makes them to be appropriately farfetched. In the above passage, Nationalism becomes intertwined with Charlus’ aberrant specific sexual needs. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the narrator reveals that Charlus most enjoys his elaborate masochistic tortures when they are inflicted upon him by *apaches* or thugs. In the quote, the baron’s expressed desires for Bloch to whip his mother, and to fight with his father almost to the death, are Charlus’ fantasies for himself which he projects on the Jew. Indeed, in *A la recherche*, if anyone should be expelled from France to preserve its morals it is the French aristocrat Charlus and not the Jews. The Faubourg’s most glamorous member is the ‘Other’ that threatens the established order.

**The assimilated Israelite is an alienated individual**

The last Guermantes invitation in *A la recherche*, discussed in the previous chapter on Rachel, takes place in *Le Temps retrouvé*. At that reception, given by the Prince de Guermantes and his new Princess, the former Mme Verdurin, a transformed Bloch reunites with Marcel, Swann’s daughter Gilberte and Rachel. Almost two decades and a half have elapsed since Mme de Villeparisis’ reception in 1898. In the intervening years, the protagonist seems to have tamed his Jewishness. Bloch has acquired the European physique and name whose lack identified him as a Jewish pariah and caused him to be insulted at Mme de Villeparisis’. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, Bloch is a writer with a literary output that delights the Faubourg and explains the author’s
physical transformation. The narrator directs a stern gaze on Bloch who has bowed to the aristocracy’s dictates:

Bloch était entré en sautant comme une hyène. Je pensais : « Il vient dans des salons où il n’eût pas pénétré il y a vingt ans. » Mais il avait vingt ans de plus. Il était plus près de la mort. A quoi cela l’avancait-il ? De près, dans la transudicité d’un visage où, de plus loin et mal éclairé, je ne voyais que la jeunesse gaie (soit qu’elle y survécût, soit que je l’y évoquasse), se tenait le visage presque effrayant, tout anxieux d’un vieux Shylock attendant, tout grimé, dans la coulisse, le moment d’entrer en scène, récitant déjà le premier vers à mi-voix. Dans dix ans, dans ces salons où leur veulerie l’aurait imposé, il entrerait en béquillant, devenu « maître », trouvant une corvée d’être obligé d’aller chez les La Trémoïlle. A quoi cela l’avancerait-il?

The Faubourg has Bloch wait for decades before issuing him another invitation to a reception. Nonetheless, the protagonist eagerly accepts and enters offering obsequious greetings to the Prince’s aristocratic guests as if he is a spineless hyena. The man Bloch has become and the aristocracy that now receives him form a perfect match. The Faubourg is ‘veule’ meaning cowardly, treacherous, villainous etc. Bloch is equally base since he is eager, ‘already made up’, to play Shylock, or the most famous cliché representation of the Jew that the idle aristocrats expect. Bloch has dedicated a lifetime, sacrificed worthwhile careers to make a too tardy reentry in the degraded Faubourg.

Le Temps retrouvé represents the aristocracy of the 1920’s as a greater anachronism than at the turn of the century. Therefore, it can be expected that Bloch’s dedication to conform to the Faubourg’s aesthetics and dictates will be sterile: “Car ce qui caractérisait le plus cette société, c’était sa prodigieuse aptitude au déclassement”

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99 Ibid, 545
100 Ibid, 535
the remains of its cachet is disappearing fast for the Faubourg lacks the will to maintain even a
minimum of standards. Unfortunately for Bloch, he continues to tailor his work to the taste of
the moribund Faubourg that he courts: “Bloch, pendant la guerre…n’avait cessé de publier de
ces ouvrages dont je m’efforçais aujourd’hui, pour ne pas être entravé par elle, de détruire
l’absurde sophistique, ouvrages sans originalité mais qui donnaient aux jeunes gens et à
beaucoup de femmes du monde l’impression d’une hauteur intellectuelle peu commune, d’une
sorte de génie.”101 To attract an idle and easily fooled public, Bloch’s books emphasize form at
the expense of depth. The fictional narrator has read Bloch’s fictional corpus. Marcel concludes
that the author mainly repackages for the Faubourg, in a contemporary style, the trite ideas that it
is familiar with and meet its approval. Bloch’s repression of his Jewish identity brings him to
‘pass’ for European but condemns him to pander falsehood, to be a sophist.

Bloch’s sophistic literary production reflects the appearance he comes to acquire in the
post-World War period. Indeed, the character is accepted among the ‘Japhetic’ in Le Temps
retrouvé, but, as the following quote mentions, it takes a constant effort of will, of à la volonté,
to keep Bloch’s English look together. One gets the impression that a single moment of
distraction will suffice for Bloch to revert to his natural Semitic appearance. As Marcel
witnesses Bloch’s second attempt to enter high society even he cannot recognize his friend from
adolescence:

J’eus de la peine à reconnaître mon camarade Bloch, lequel d’ailleurs avait pris non
seulement le pseudonyme, mais le nom Jacques du Rozier, sous lequel il eût fallu le flair
de mon grand-père pour reconnaître la « douce vallée » de l’Hébron et les « chaînes
d’Israël » que mon ami semblait avoir définitivement rompues. Un chic anglais avait en
effet complètement transformé sa figure et passé au rabot tout ce qui se pouvait effacer.
Les cheveux, jadis bouclés, coiffés à plat avec une raie au milieu, brillait de

101 Ibid, 536-537
cosmétique. Son nez restait fort et rouge, mais semblait plutôt tuméfié par une sorte de rhume permanent qui pouvait expliquer l’accent nasal dont il débitait paresseusement ses phrases, car il avait trouvé, de même qu’une coiffure appropriée à son teint, une voix à sa prononciation, où le nasonnement d’autrefois prenait un air de dédain d’articuler qui allait avec les ailes enflammées de son nez. Et grâce à la coiffure, grâce à la suppression des moustaches, à l’élégance, au type, à la volonté, ce nez juif disparaissait comme semble presque droite une bosse bien arrangée. Mais surtout, dès que Bloch apparaissait, la signification de sa physionomie était changée par un redoutable monocle. La part de machinerie que ce monocle introduisait dans la figure de Bloch la dispensait de tous ces devoirs difficiles auxquels une figure humaine est soumise, devoir d’être belle, d’exprimer l’esprit, la bienveillance, l’effort. La seule présence de ce monocle dans la figure de Bloch la dispensait d’abord de se demander si elle était jolie ou non, comme devant ces objets anglais dont un garçon dit dans un magasin que « c’est le grand chic », après quoi on n’ose plus demander si cela vous plaît. D’autre part, il s’installait derrière la glace de ce monocle dans une position aussi hautaine, distante et confortable que si ç’avait été la glace d’un huit-ressorts, et pour assortir la figure aux cheveux plats et au monocle, ses traits n’exprimaient plus jamais rien.  

The family name Bloch now bears, du Rozier, marks his break with his Jewish origins. The name comes from the rue des Rosiers, at the heart of the Jewish neighborhood in Paris. The ‘z’ Bloch has slipped in lieu of the middle ‘s’ rips the name in two exact halves to symbolize the protagonist’s rejection of his Judaic lineage. Nonetheless, the homophony that links the two names signals Bloch’s difficulty in burying his Jewishness. The ‘z’ looks like an indelible scar that identifies all that is artificially foreign and added in Bloch’s new European appearance.

In Le Temps retrouvé, Bloch’s monocle absorbs much attention from the straightened hair, the nasal voice, the mumbling to redefine his aspect. The monocle unifies all other elements and translates for the Faubourg that Bloch’s European nose is suffering from a cold but is not Semitic. However, while cosmetically indispensable, the addition of the ‘formidable’ eyepiece turns Bloch into a non-human, since he is at least now ‘part machine’. The price Bloch pays for assimilation is a complete alienation from his different environments, for between him

102 “Le Temps retrouvé” ; “A la recherche du temps perdu” 530-531
and reality there is a layer of glass. The protagonist can no more relate to the Jewish than to the French. The character is no longer a human and not a machine either. Bloch even comes to transcend such human notions as good looks, kindness, intelligence etc. The monocle makes Bloch machinelike and no one expects emotions from the robot-like. Assimilation excuses Bloch from demonstrating feelings which he may no longer have and he is perfectly impassive.

The cost the individual pays for assimilation includes more than alienation. Bloch’s profession is to be a writer. Bloch’s choice to alienate himself from his Jewishness cuts him off from the identity that provides the distinctive personality and humor he demonstrates in Swann’s Way. Integration leaves Bloch bereft of inspiration and originality and he is reduced to stealing ideas: “Et Bloch se donnait un alibi rétrospectif en me disant, chaque fois que je lui avais esquissé quelque chose qu’il trouvait bien : « Tiens, c’est curieux, j’ai fait quelque chose de presque pareil, il faudra que je te lise cela. (Il n’aurait pas pu me le lire encore, mais allait l’écrire le soir même) ».103 Bloch’s situation as a plagiarizer is not what would have been expected from his beginnings in the novel. In the first volume, he steers the assimilated Marcel away from stereotyped interpretations and introduces him to contemporary literature. In the last volume the loop is closed. Bloch’s assimilation leaves him nothing to say and he now copies from Marcel. Assimilation comes at a high price which Proust illustrates through Bloch.

Conclusion

A la recherche represents with Bloch a French Jew who faces the racism and bigotry that come the way of the member of a religious and/or ethnic minority and decides to assimilate. The decision to suppress his non-French, non-Christian traits has portentous results for the

103 Ibid, 611.
character who demonstrated talent and initiative as a young man. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, Bloch’s suppression of his true self has turned him into a society writer who publishes commonplace articles with no hint of the originality that the protagonist used to demonstrate. In addition to illustrating a negative outcome of assimilation, Bloch’s failure has a didactic function not because it illustrates the specific Jewish situation that inspires Jews to integrate and which Jean-Paul Sartre defines in the following manner:

And the Jew does not escape this rule: authenticity for him is to live to the full his condition as Jew; inauthenticity is to deny it or to attempt to escape from it. Inauthenticity is no doubt more tempting for him than for other men, because the situation which he as to lay claim to and live in is quite simply that of a martyr. What the least favored of men ordinarily discover in their situation is a bond of concrete solidarity with other men [economic condition, revolution, spiritual interests]… The sole tie that binds them [the Jews] is the hostility and disdain of the societies which surround them. Thus the authentic Jew is the one who asserts his claim in the face of the disdain shown toward him^104 (91).

The French philosopher’s definition of the condition of the Jew helps explain Bloch’s fate in *A la recherche*. Bloch’s Jewish tradition and culture that are the source of his talent and original perspective identify him as a pariah in France. To be true to his Jewish self, Bloch would have to accept the common lot of Jews, or ‘the hostility and disdain’ that the West imposed on their community. However, in the novel, the role of the ‘authentic Jew’, or a Jew’s appreciation of Jewish persecution and a life of resisting it from within the persecuted community, belongs to a different protagonist. Though the fictional French society offers Charles Swann great privileges, he trades them for ostracism and loss of social standing to defend the Jewish community. Bloch, on the other hand, refuses a life of insults and contempt and rejects solidarity with Jews for

\[104\] “Et l’inauthenticité est sans doute plus tentante pour lui que pour les autres hommes parce que la situation qu’il a à revendiquer et à vivre est tout simplement celle de martyr. Ce que les hommes les moins favorisés découvrent à l’ordinaire dans leur situation, c’est un lien de solidarité concrète avec d’autres hommes [condition économique, révolution, intérêts spirituels]… Le seul lien qui les unisse, c’est le mépris hostile où les tiennent les sociétés qui les entourent. Ainsi le Juif authentique est celui qui se revendique dans et par le mépris qu’on leur porte…” (111).
social inclusion. Hence the novel presents Swann as a venerable leader at the end of his life while the ‘inauthentic’ Bloch will publish platitudes.

Bloch owes his dilemma and consequent failure to the fact that, as a member of a minority, he confronts a French culture that Glissant defines as ‘atavistic’, a term discussed at the beginning of this chapter. A society whose culture demands a constant return to its myth of single origin cannot be plural or tolerate more than one identity. Hence the pressure France exercised on Bloch to assimilate. The protagonist illustrates the relation that exists between an ethnicity’s culture and its history from its origins. Bloch’s assimilation silences him since it denies him access to the culture that he was born into which is the source of his different, innovative ideas. France’s intolerance causes Bloch to adopt a form of unimaginative mimicry as the price of his inclusion into the mainstream.

Edouard Glissant offers an alternative model to forced assimilation. Glissant calls for a ‘rhizomatic system’ that recognizes, respects and tolerates every people within the country. Acknowledging and respecting each community as equal allows all individuals to develop their self-esteem. As a result, the groups can exchange ideas, perspective and experience on a basis of equality or what Glissant calls to ‘live Relation.’ To create a situation where all are called ‘to live Relation’ is the best guarantee that all will equally enjoy the same rights, privileges and opportunities. A society that becomes multicultural has not betrayed its ancestral history, nor has it decayed and disappeared. On the contrary, it becomes stronger and culturally richer not only because it receives and benefits from a wide array of ideas and inputs but also because so many have a stake in its continuity.
Chapter Four

Charles Swann or the Journey from Inclusion to Relation

In the first part of the twenty-first century, societies that already guarantee equality to the individual confront demands for the recognition of communal identities. Groups that formerly acquiesced to a single, historic, universal identity now demand equal treatment for the various consciousnesses present in the shared common place. Edward Glissant describes the reason for their disaffection in all its complexity:

La dualité de la pensée de soi (il y a le citoyen, et il y a l’étranger) retentit sur l’idée qu’on se fait de l’Autre (il y a le visiteur, et le visité ; celui qui part et celui qui demeure ; le conquérant et sa conquête). La pensée de l’Autre ne cessera d’être duelle qu’à ce moment où les différences auront été reconnues. La pensée de l’Autre « comprend » dès lors la multiplicité, mais d’une matièr e mécanique qui ménage encore les subtiles hiérarchies de l’universel généralisant. Reconnaître les différences n’oblige pas à s’impliquer dans la dialectique de leur totalité. A la limite, « je peux reconnaitre ta différence et penser qu’elle constitue dommage pour toi. Je peux penser que ma force est dans le Voyage (je fais l’Histoire) et que ta différence est immobile et muette ». Un pas est à franchir avant qu’on entre vraiment dans la dialectique de la totalité. Il apparaît ici qu’à l’encontre de la mécanique du Voyage, cette dialectique est mue par la pensée de l’errance (Glissant 29-30)

The existence of groups, often the products of a different perspective on the same history, is a given for Glissant who notes that, within a same community, some are seen as the citizen, the visitor and even the conqueror and the conquered. Given such a reality, l’universel généralisant is to impose the notion that one formative history produces all citizens who are abstract beings with the same aspirations. However, an individual may benefit from every right and privilege and suffer because his or her religious or ethnic group is oppressed.

To overcome an intrinsic inequality between privileged and oppressed groups, the acknowledgement of a separate consciousness is but a first step for Glissant. After all, the recognition of the different can be pejorative since it is possible to find that ‘your difference is

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your misfortune’. As a remedy against inequality, Glissant proposes the concept of ‘wandering’ or ‘errantry’.

In Glissant’s thought, the notion of the ‘wanderer’ is close to the positioning that Kwame Anthony Appiah promotes in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*:

“Loyalties and local allegiances determine more than what we want; they determine who we are… A creed [cosmopolitanism] that disdains the partialities of kinfolk and community may have a past, but it has no future” (Kwame A. Appiah: xviii). For Appiah, even the cosmopolitans, citizens of the world par excellence, need to nurture and retain the natural attachment that binds them to kin and community of origin. Similarly, Glissant understands ‘wandering’ as seeking and getting to know the ‘stranger’ while maintaining the ties that keep one’s group together.

Glissant’s call for the subject to ‘wander’ is, therefore, essentially a moral attitude. Secure in their identity, those at the ‘wandering’ stage acknowledge and respect every difference they encounter, and forego the impulse to impose the myth of an exclusive, single origin on all communities within the state. In this sense, ‘wandering’ occurs between and toward identities and can be engaged in within established borders. It is as spiritual as it can be ambulatory and creates a place that is the sum of its communities, where multiple identities prosper and interact equally. Glissant’s ‘wanderer’ ambulates by choice toward the ‘different’ and, as a concept, opposes and denounces the notion of the ‘Wandering Jew’ imposed on Jews from the outside. In the anti-Semitic tale, Ahasuerus\textsuperscript{105} represents an actual physical and permanent wandering that an intolerant outside world imposes on Jews.

\textsuperscript{105} R. Edelmann assigns the origin of the modern literary figure of “Ahasuerus the Wandering Jew” in the West to a German pamphlet printed in 1602 (3). S. Hurwitz notes that there are “very few occasions when Jewish authors
A definition of the social role of the legend illustrates why Ahasuerus cannot be part of the Jewish identity that brings Jews to wander toward other groups to know one another: “In the last third of the nineteenth-century that mythical figure [the Wandering Jew] that was isolated because it had been detached from all Christian concepts was incorporated into a newly evolving mythology, the mythology of so-called “modern” anti-Semitism. Thus the figure gained a new meaning... that portended evil” (Adolf L. Leschnitzer 234). It can be understood from Leschnitzer that the trope had originated as anti-Judaic, became racial once the West favored ‘scientific’ reason over faith and, at the same time, attached ‘evil’ to the Western representation of the Jew. The metamorphosis of the motif heralds a “world in which there was room neither for Jews nor for Christianity (234). The ‘Wandering Jew’ remains the quintessential symbol of Jewish exclusion and exemplifies nationalist intolerance that wants no relation with the ‘stranger’.

The issues that arise when a single identity defines the nation may have remained unspoken in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but they were part of the national consciousness. These concerns can be detected in Marcel Proust’s novel A la recherche du temps perdu where they are imagined and resolved through the protagonist Charles Swann’s ‘errantry’. ‘Wandering’, the rejection of any absolute, of any anchoring – including a single national root - furthers the interpretation of Swann’s dual-identity in A la recherche du temps perdu. Edouard Glissant, pondering the fate of the Caribbean ‘Other’ in France, provides tools to also conceptualize Marcel Proust’s French Jewish protagonist, Charles Swann. This chapter intends to demonstrate how Marcel Proust, with his creation of a ‘wandering’ Swann, both anticipated and confirmed Glissant’s theory of ‘wandering’. Indeed, Swann represents a French

have treated the material” and, indeed, the Conclusion discusses Jean-Richard Bloch as French Jewish author who re-appropriates the term ‘Wanderer’ for Jews.
protagonist who develops a Jewish consciousness in the Age of Nationalism. The protagonist asserts and succeeds in maintaining both of his identities rather than to simply replace the French one that has become unsuitable. To opt for a single, mythical, reductive, atavistic Jewish identity would be to confirm the anti-Semitic and Nationalistic argument that Jews could not be French. Such a choice would also fulfill the Anti-Semites’ and Nationalists’ project which aimed to place Jews, if not beyond geographic borders, at least beyond social borders. In Proust’s novel, the acquisition of a Jewish identity enables Swann to shed his status as an assimilated Israelite and become a ‘wanderer’ who ‘lives Relation’, Glissant’s concept defined in the introduction to this work.

To illustrate how Swann comes to Relation, this chapter opposes Proust’s representation of Swann, the Israelite, in volumes one through four of *A la recherche* to the Swann who exhibits a Jewish identity in the fourth tome, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. The contrast reveals that Proust portrays the shortcomings of Israelite inclusion in society. Swann may have been included but, without a consciousness of his own, he cannot live Relation since he has no communal experience that brings him to engage with others. Once the limitations of assimilation through the depiction of Swann, the Israelite, have been made evident, each section of the development will illustrate how the novelist represents a later, definitely Hebraic Swann at a high society function. The Prince and Princess de Guermantes host the gathering at their palatial residence in Paris.

The Guermantes’ party seems to be, at the outset, a gathering of staunch conservatives and anti-Semites intent on witnessing Swann’s marginalization or his banishment from Relation

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106 Reminder: “Israelite” is defined in the Introduction as one who considers himself a Frenchman or woman who happens to practice Judaism rather than Catholicism or Protestantism. A “Jew” is defined as one who, in addition to being French, has a separate Jewish identity.
because of the Jewish identity he suddenly exhibits. Proust shows the physical and moral reasons that bring the guests to see Swann as a Jew. However, the Prince’s *soirée* for the cream of society serves to put in contrast Swann and the other guests, and the ensuing comparison is all in his favor. Swann appears as the leader of the Jewish community at that mostly anti-Semitic gathering that meets its climax with an ultimate vindication of French Jews. The Prince, famously infatuated with his royal blood and connections, makes an admission to Swann. Gilbert de Guermantes has come to believe that the French Army’s banishment and relentless persecution of the innocent Captain Alfred Dreyfus was an injustice against the country’s Jewish community and, by implication, that Jews do have a place in France.

Proust, in his recreation of a princely reception, inserts the narration of the Jewish Swann’s future funeral in a country church. Swann’s Catholic burial drives further the point that in modern France many identities coexist equally, without contradiction, in the same space and even within the same individual. Proust’s capacity to conceive and render a character whose embrace of an identity reinforces his inclusion and his wandering toward the ‘Other’ illustrate Glissant’s notion of ‘wandering’. Furthermore, the story of Swann shows that *A la recherche* is in part the novel of a minority member determined to withstand marginalization in order to live Relation. Indeed, Proust’s novel portrays through Swann that assimilation was the only existing option to not be marginalized in France. But as it becomes apparent, the representation of Swann’s life as a highly assimilated Israeliite, though gratifying, contains two flaws that put his integration into question. Swann’s social life, which he constructs as a series of irreconcilable pieces of a puzzle, reflects a complete lack of unity. In addition, until the protagonist claims a Jewish consciousness, he voices no opinion. The fact that both symptoms are resolved once the hero adopts a Jewish identity proves that Proust understood that assimilation has its limitations.
It is important to note that it is Swann’s acquisition of a separate consciousness that brings him
the unity absent from his representation as an Israelite. In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Proust
represents the protagonist as a Jewish leader who exhibits his Semite characteristics to the Gotha,
who no longer needs to compartmentalize his existence to the extent that, as the narrator tells it,
Swann comes to notice: “mon camarade Bloch qu’il avait tenu à l’écart jusque-là, et qu’il invita
à déjeuner” (*S&G* 110).

**The Limitations of Assimilation**

Charles Swann, from his introduction in the early pages of *Swann’s Way*, to the last pages
of *Guermantes’ Way*, is a credit to France’s ideology of universalism that posits French as the
sole ethnicity or race available to the French population. In other words, the State is blind to
creed, color or race and, at least in theory, the population effortlessly identifies with universal
French values. The reward for Swann’s assimilation is measured by his inclusion in all walks of
life in the France recreated in *A la recherche*. Swann’s circle of friends ranges, at least, from the
narrator’s middle class family to the Duke and Duchess de Guermantes, the book’s most
prestigious aristocrats and the Prince de Guermantes’ cousins. One indication of Swann’s
inclusion in society as an Israelite is that he calls on the ducal couple. The visit occurs in the
last pages of *Guermantes’ Way* and Swann, who coincidentally meets the narrator in the Duke’s
study, still appears a French dilettante to his hosts and Marcel. The visit to the Duke and
Duchess takes place before all four protagonists attend the Prince’s reception that opens the
fourth volume, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, where Swann is suddenly seen as a Jew. One explanation
for the unexpected discovery of Swann’s Jewishness lies in the fact that to perfect his integration
as an Israelite, before he developed a Jewish identity, Swann keeps apart the different groups that
he socializes with.
Swann’s propensity to keep separate the circle he interacts with is noted by the narrator very early on in *Swann’s Way*: “Swann… avait, comme en cachette, une vie toute différente; qu’en sortant de chez nous, à Paris, après nous avoir dit qu’il rentrait se coucher, il… se rendait dans tel salon que jamais l’œil d’aucun agent ou associé d’agent ne contempla…” (*Côté Swann* 17). Swann, in the first pages of *A la recherche* where Proust introduces him, demonstrates an aptitude to divide his life into non-communicating compartments. The narrator and his family have no clue that Swann, their Israelite friend, is an *habitué* of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. On the other hand, the most exclusive mansions in the Faubourg who ban all *agents* - those who work in finance and their associates – welcome the assimilated hero but are unaware that he has a life that includes Marcel and his family. The two groups, the narrator’s family and the aristocratic salons where he is an *habitué* are unaware that Swann is a common friend, hence a link between them, but that he also keeps them apart.

**Life as an Assimilated: Compartmentalization and Silence**

Swann’s social acceptance resides, therefore, in the manner he organizes his life which consists of a series of insulated social cells. Such a system hints at the lack of a coherent personal identity. He mixes with all classes but shows no preference for any. The bourgeois narrator, who seems to be in awe of Swann’s aristocratic contacts, could imagine that Swann prefers to mingle with the aristocrats. But the latter, upon learning of Swann’s middle-class friendships, could also fathom that Swann prefers his milieu of origin. The answer, obviously, is that Swann enjoys all groups equally since he identifies with none. While the assimilated Israelite Swann charms his way into any number of social circles none know him truly. Moreover, Swann doesn’t seem to know his true self either.
In effect, Proust portrays the assimilated Israelite as a virtuoso of ‘passing’. Indeed, Charles Swann is the scion of money traders, of the very agent that, in A la recherche, the Faubourg prides itself on excluding: “M. Swann, le père, était agent de change; « le fils Swann »… ayant toujours eu une « toquade » d’objets anciens et de peinture, il demeurait maintenant dans un vieil hôtel où il entassait ses collections… situé quai d’Orléans quartier que ma grand-tante trouvait infamant d’habiter” (Côté Swann 16). The narrator’s great-aunt may disapprove of Swann’s choice of residential address but an old mansion on a quai of the île de la Cité, decorated with antique collector’s items, signals to the Faubourg that the hero is one of them. In return, the aristocrats reciprocate Swann’s efforts by feigning to ignore the origin of the fortune that allows him to emulate their lifestyle. The worldly game of truncated facts and knowledge allows those involved to perpetrate the myth that, to paraphrase the above quote, ‘no money trader’s eye ever rested on that salon’. But, more importantly, Swann’s worldliness facilitates the sidestepping of a core issue in the novel: the identity, or lack thereof, of the protagonist.

Assimilation, intrinsic in a society where universalism is unquestioned, denies even the possibility of minority identity. In the nineteenth-century, identification with France’s values and traditions solely shaped by its history, as told from the perspective of its Christian, European population, was the only possible identity possible to imagine. In such a context, assimilation means that, to become French, it suffices for the non-French to adopt the culture constituted as unified. However, those who feel unease with the terms of their assimilation, those who fail to identify fully with conditions that they did not contribute in shaping, those who recall the abuses the dominant group visited upon their kin cannot express their doubts. In addition, no discourse exists to contest the prevailing view since there is no valid group that can provide an alternative
perspective on the society. For lack of a legitimate ‘Other’ group, any contesting voice can easily be marginalized and dismissed as that of the discontented, of deranged individuals or that of isolated bohemians, dreamers, utopists et al. The result of such a policy is silence since the language of contestation does not exist. A silence that could convince even the late nineteenth-century ‘mute Other’ that he is assimilated.

Surely, the striking image of the ‘Other, gagged into assimilation for lack of an appropriate language, or that of the ‘Other’ who cannot diagnose his ‘Otherness’ for dearth of a discourse, would be represented if it existed. Indeed, the silence of the ‘mute Other’ afflicts Marcel Proust’s protagonist Charles Swann who is the representation of a fin-de-siècle assimilated Israelite. Swann’s incapacity to offer an opinion struck the narrator as a boy in the first volume of A la recherche where he found in the family friend: “cette horreur d’exprimer sérieusement son opinion… [il] avait l’air de ne pas oser avoir une opinion et de n’être tranquille que quand il pouvait donner méticuleusement des renseignements précis” (Côté Swann 97). Swann’s refusal to pronounce on any issue, great or small, signals a kind of unwillingness, of uneasiness to opine on contemporary French society. This makes one question whether in Proust’s novel even the most perfect case of assimilation, as that of Swann, always retains a sense of ‘Otherness’, of alienation. Swann adopts the posture of too well-bred strangers who tactfully dodge judging the hosts’ culture or history, even at their request, offering instead detailed information.

Swann’s dedication to idle pursuits, to the accumulation of trivia, puzzles Marcel very early on: “Pour quelle autre vie réservait-il de dire enfin ce qu’il pensait sérieusement des choses, de formuler des jugements qu’il pût ne pas mettre entre guillemets, et de ne plus se livrer avec une politesse pointilleuse à des occupations dont il professait en même temps qu’elles sont
ridicules?” (Côté Swann 97). The answer to the question that the narrator formulates early in *A la recherche*, will be answered, as is to be expected, later in the novel. In the last years of the nineteenth-century, the threats to French Jews, symbolized by Captain Dreyfus’ case, will be for Swann the catalyst that brings him to develop a Jewish identity which grants him, not only a voice, but a humanitarian endeavor on behalf of Jews. Swann’s dilettantish pursuits will give way to a life of political engagement. In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Swann will uncover an assertive personality fueled by the Jewish identity that he embraces and which replaces his assimilated Israelite self.

A Voice, a Name, a Physique for a Problematic Transformation from Dilettante to Leader

Swann’s trajectory from Israelite to Jew depends on both the mystery he cultivates - for example the bourgeois ignore his entries in the Faubourg – and on his metamorphosis that includes the patronymic, the spiritual and the physical. In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the fourth volume of *A la recherche*, the protagonist’s last name comes to evoke a Jewish leader rather than the dashing man of the world it brought to mind in the earlier tomes. In addition, his perspective comes to reflect a Jewish consciousness while his features adopt non-European characteristics. The interweaving of these three categories constructs both the younger Israelite Swann of *Swann’s Way* and the mature Jewish Swann of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. A comparison between the traits of a younger Swann in *A la recherche*, and those he acquires in maturity, reveals that, in his youth, they emulated the aesthetic dictates of the Faubourg. However, the protagonist’s characteristics evolve to become unmistakably Semitic as Swann, confronted with anti-Semitism and its symbol, the Dreyfus Affair, developed a Jewish identity. Hence, the princes’ fête, a coup-de-théâtre where the Faubourg extends a final embrace to Swann unmistakably renewed into a Hebrew, reveals that Proust’s thoughts on the ‘Other’ parallel those of Glissant, and that he goes
beyond the recognition of differences and the acceptance of multiplicity. In *A la recherche*, France becomes the sum of the communities that it acknowledges and that come to Relation, which is what Glissant considers the accomplishment of an inclusive society.

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe, II*, the scene of the Jewish figure interred as a Catholic resembles little the assimilated Swann who, in the novel’s three earlier tomes, compartmentalized his existence. As has already been discussed in this chapter, as early as *Swann’s Way*, Swann is shown to maintain a social compartmentalization that contributes to his construct as a character in many ways. First and foremost, the enigma around Swann establishes a contrast between, on the one hand, his social inclusion as an Israelite with a single French identity, and, on the other, his ‘living Relation’ as a Jew with multiple identities in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. Until the moment of revelation of Swann’s true self, Proust allows the character a level of privacy denied Bloch and Rachel, the other main Jewish protagonists who are exteriorized. In their case, as demonstrated in the chapter this work dedicates to Bloch and Rachel, exteriorization reveals their frailties, magnifies their peccadilloes, disqualifying their possible reinvention as selfless leaders. In Swann’s case, however, the text treats the character differently. The secrecy that Swann practices to keep his different groups of acquaintances separate from each other reduces familiarity, inspires the narrator’s respect which he transmits in his narrative. The aura of mystery that the protagonist Swann cultivates has an added function besides maintaining a respectful distance between him and the other characters: it is in fact a literary technique that enables the dandy’s sudden, plausible transformation into a leader of the Dreyfusard movement in Proust’s novel.
The representation of a French Jew, in the post-Dreyfus arrest era, operates through Swann at an event extensively narrated in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, II, the reception at the Prince and Princess de Guermantes’ palace in Paris. The gala takes place at the end of the 1890’s, at a time when the aristocracy seems to be still relevant, when the Royalist party appears able to engineer the return of the Monarchy in France. Therefore, Swann’s attendance of the festivity differs from those of Bloch and Rachel attending the two other Guermantes gatherings already studied. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, Rachel is the guest of honor of the very same prince de Guermantes who entertains Swann. However, by then, his first wife, born a duchess of Bavaria and a close relative of the Austro-Hungarian monarchs, has died and been replaced by the novel’s relentless social climber, Mme Verdurin, for her wealth. The former Verdurin’s integration into the Faubourg symbolizes the demise of its social principles and pretentions. Rachel’s apotheosis occurs at the new princess’ home in the 1920’s when the nobility has not only lost its cachet, but the notion of its re-empowerment has become hopelessly anachronistic. Aristocratic decay also pervaded Bloch’s presence at the Marquise de Villeparisis’ afternoon in *Guermantes’ Way*. Her salon attracts only the middle-class. Eager to mix with her relatives from the high nobility and intellectuals the bourgeois cause the cream of the Faubourg to flee the Marquise’s home. Swann, however, at the Prince de Guermantes’ gala, is invited with - besides the narrator and a few exceptions to confirm the rule - the flower of a still very relevant Gotha. Unlike Bloch and Rachel, the faubourg Saint-Germain finds him fit to be included with their finest.

Proust’s portrayal of a lone Jewish guest at the multi-throng soirée of a prince whose “antisémitisme étant de principe ne fléchissait devant aucune élégance, si accréditée fut-elle” (*S&G* 68) illustrates ‘the rhizome’ that Deleuze and Guattari inspired to Glissant. At the
Guermantes’, Swann exhibits his Jewish ‘identity’ or ‘root’ that wanders toward other identities that also recognize and accept his difference\(^\text{107}\). Thus he ambles through the palace and its gardens, assertive, as a Jew, attracting or repelling but always in Relation or exchanging on par with the ‘Other’. Proust’s text transforms - through Swann’s wandering from the palace to its grounds and, once again, through its gilded rooms – his princely protagonist’s single-root space into a plural French one. The novel organizes Swann’s roaming visit to the prince and princess into three parts whose sum is the character’s recognition as Jewish leader and prophet.

Swann’s transformation into the representative of a nation is problematic. It is expected from a work of fiction that an outcome is the logical consequence of the causes included in that fictional world. A striking contradiction exists within the portrayal of the protagonist whom Proust portrays from his introduction in Swann’s Way until Sodome et Gomorrhe, II, as a French Israelite dilettante. To provide credibility to a metamorphosis into a suddenly Jewish, responsible, prominent, political Swann at the Prince’s reception the author adopts the technique Roland Barthes describes in S/Z. The hermeneutic code, according to Barthes, consists of “les différents termes (formels), au gré desquels une énigme se centre, se pose, se formule, puis se retarde et enfin se dévoile” (Roland Barthes 26). The guests’ unanswered questions, their sustained interest in Swann’s supposedly true, formerly hidden but finally unveiled nature, create a tension around the protagonist that propels the narration of the Guermantes party toward a climax and conclusion. At the same time, the enigma that causes the Prince to take Swann outside into the garden puts the Jewish hero in the limelight, justifies his ambulation through the premises, engineers and stages his being in Relation as a French Jew. In addition, Proust’s adoption of a hermeneutic code enables the novel to reflect, as suddenly as they occurred in

\(^{107}\) See the conclusion of Chapter One for a more in-depth conclusion of Glissant’s concept of the ‘rhizome’. 

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reality, the unexpected changes that anti-Semitism, objectified with the Affair, occasioned in the subjection of French Jews.

Part II- To Live Relation Beyond Inclusion

Swann’s metamorphosis, unsettling for his upper-class circle, can be understood only within the discursive forces that brought the French Israelite subject to adopt, unexpectedly, a Jewish consciousness. The representation of minority identity through Swann, during and after the Faubourg reception, infers that the Jewish condition calls for the communities of France to be in Relation through ‘errantry’ in an era that ‘the Affair’ introduces. The representation of ‘errantry’ during the reception depicted in Sodome et Gomorrhe, II occurs mostly through Swann and the prince of Guermantes. Each of the two protagonists operates as the conscious representative of a group identity. Enclosed within a common perimeter, they navigate toward the ‘Other’, engage each ‘Other’ in Relation in their difference.

The first section of the party’s description begins with all attention oddly focused upon a still absent Swann and ends with his entrance. Two questions arise around his absence: Did the prince have him dismissed from his palace and, if so, why? In the first section, the alleged rumors that preoccupy the aristocratic guests illustrate the social abyss that anti-Semitism held, as befits the Sword of Damocles, especially over the heads of the most powerful, the best-positioned Jew. Only the still-inexperienced narrator pipes in to link the absent Swann to an aristocrat-Dreyfusard, Prince Von, and keep him included. The second part of the Guermantes reception sees Swann ambling through the palatial rooms with the narrator for sole support. A new question arises around Swann: what did Gilbert de Guermantes have to tell him? The third part finds Swann relating to Marcel the prince’s confession, an event which is in itself a final
victory further perfected when it is the Duke de Guermantes who comes over to address Swann seated with the narrator. The Guermantes confessing to Swann remains Proust’s most striking subversion on behalf of Jews: to obtain absolution and reconciliation a staunchly Catholic prince, in his home, confesses to a Jew his belief that an officer is persecuted for being Jewish. The two religions, each now at the core of a French identity (the French Nationalist vs. the French Jewish), are put on the same level. Coming on the heels of Swann’s victorious tour of the palace meant to show him imposing a Jewish presence on anti-Semites intent on excluding Jews, Proust narrates the protagonist’s last action and funeral. These three steps in Proust’s organization of the scene demonstrate how A la recherche displays as story that, from a theoretical point of view, as articulated by Glissant, amounts to a ‘pensée de l’errance’.

In part one of the Prince de Guermantes’ reception, the guests who gather around Basin and Oriane, duc and duchesse de Guermantes, include the narrator. The couple’s prestige reflects upon the group allowed to approach them, to remain and socially benefit from their social aura. The clique’s preoccupation, especially Oriane’s, with Swann’s whereabouts, as to his presence or absence at the palace, illustrates the role of their contemporary discourses in their ‘Othering’ of the Jew. Prior to the propagation of Nationalism and anti-Semitism, Oriane in particular always welcomed Swann. Her cutting Swann in Sodome et Gomorrhe, will be juxtaposed with a scene from Swann’s Way, set prior to the rise of the ideology of Jewish hatred. In that scene, Oriane ridiculed an anti-Semitic relative in defense of the Jewish hero. But, by the time of the Prince de Guermantes’ gala, the Duchess’ change of attitude toward Swann gives a measure of the progress accomplished by anti-Jewish propaganda. Indeed, at Gilbert de Guermantes’ house, the Duchess’ circle believes the home of Gilbert de Guermantes to be the inner sanctum of the anti-Semitic party, a place where, a priori and de facto, they are welcomed
as part of a pre-staged event that will lead, the reader imagines, to Swann’s ultimate rejection as a pariah for betraying their values. The group’s sentence seems unanimous: Swann is an outcast, the ‘Other’, the striking figure of a seditious anti-French identity. In other words, the chattering circle intends to keep France a place with a single identity, with a single Gallic root.

To Ban an Alternative Identity in France

By all accounts, as Swann’s friends discuss his situation at the beginning of the party, they sound as if they have successfully banished him for ‘having become’ a Jew. As the curtain, so to speak, prepares to fall on the first act, Proust signals Swann’s transformation into a Jew via a literary device. The author establishes a textual echo between Bloch at Mme de Villeparisis, in Guermantes’ Way, I, and Swann at the prince de Guermantes’ palace. The technique instantly bridges time and space in order to bring Swann and Bloch side by side and compare them in their condition as Jews. As will be shown below, to link Bloch and Swann, as each is preoccupied with the politics of the Dreyfus affair while attending a different Guermantes party, serves to illustrate that all Jews, regardless of class and fortune, faced a common threat. In addition, their concern with the Affair is a reminder that Jewish solidarity had become an element in a new Jewish subjection that differs from the French Israelite tradition.

Part II-B- Oriane de Guermantes, a Measure of the Power of Social Discourses

The extent to which society comes to alienate Swann as the Affair progresses can be measured by Oriane’s attitude. The duchess comes to dread having to greet a close friend in the Faubourg:

par quelque crainte à l’égard du nationalism [quelle] méprisait au point de vue mondain… mais auquel pourtant, comme elle se savait cotée mal pensante, elle faisait de larges concessions, jusqu’à redouter d’avoir à tendre la main à Swann dans ce milieu
antisémite. A cet égard elle fut vite rassurée, ayant appris que le prince n’avait pas laissé entrer Swann et avait eu avec lui « une espèce d’altercation ». Elle ne risquait pas d’avoir à faire la conversation avec « pauvre Charles » qu’elle préférerait chérir dans le privé (S&G 72).

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe, II*, Proust’s portrayal of Oriane fearing to be with Swann in public intimates the power acquired by Nationalism. Nationalism forces the Duchess, the novel’s undisputed queen of society, famously irreverent and non-anti-Semitic, to close rank. She must, at least, appear to condone Swann’s banishment. The Nationalists’ assertion that the French of European origin developed traits specific to the French Nation excludes any non-European minority, negates Israelite assimilation. At the height of the Affair, it appears to have replaced French Universalism or the idea that the mastery of certain precepts of French civilization allows the individual or group to join the Nation. Proust, through his construction of a mature Swann, imagines and presents a possible existential solution for the French who, when France’s Universalist principles falter, become the ‘Other’.

A glimpse at Oriane’s attitude toward her Jewish friend before the rise of Nationalism and anti-Semitism reflects the measure of ostracism visited upon Jews. In *Sodome et Gomorrhe, II*, the duchess’ pusillanimity contrasts with the bold sarcasm she adopted in *Swann’s Way* when still the princess des Laumes. Oriane’s sarcastic answers, directed even at her cousin the Marquise de Gallardon, ridiculed the anti-Semites:

- Oh! Je sais qu’il est intelligent, ajouta-t-elle [Mme de Gallardon] en voulant dire par là intrigant, mais cela ne fait rien, un Juif chez la sœur et la belle-sœur de deux archevêques !
- J’avoue a ma honte que je n’en suis pas choquée, dit la princesse des Laumes.
- Je sais qu’il est converti, et même déjà ses parents et ses grands-parents. Mais on dit que les convertis restent plus attachés à leur religion que les autres, que c’est une frime, est-ce vrai ?
- Je suis sans lumières à ce sujet (*Côté Swann* 329).
A la recherche represents Oriane in her youth, when the princesse des Laumes, as having had an openness that Julia Kristeva communicates in Le Temps sensible: “Juif élégant et assimilé, Swann éveille seulement l’arrogance des personnages mesquins… La bonne société est au contraire subjuguée, et la princesse des Laumes lui voue une complicité protectrice” (Julia Kristeva 47). Anti-Semitism, when it belonged to the petty, to the less fashionable, encouraged the then princess to exhibit her lack of anti-Jewish feeling. However, it is once Oriane reaches the apex of power as duchesse de Guermantes, as the most sought after and feared grande dame of the Faubourg that she recalibrates the protection she extends to her Jewish friends.

The tension that the mere thought of Swann’s presence causes Oriane is shared by her husband the Duke, their friends M. de Bréauté, Colonel de Froberville and others. Their concern with the protagonist before his entrance indicates that he is no longer a mere socialite, purveyor of trivial information. Clearly, Messrs. de Bréauté and de Froberville have been gossiping about Swann and each is ready to explain his absence: Bréauté claims that Swann, at a reception at his home, had an actor entertain his guests by imitating and ridiculing the prince. No, enjoins the informed Colonel, the prince de Guermantes barred his door to Swann for being a Dreyfusard. But their lame explanations are outdone by Basin’s tirade:

Je ne discuterai pas politique avec vous, Froberville, dit M. de Guermantes, mais pour ce qui concerne Swann, je peux dire franchement que sa conduite à notre égard a été inqualifiable. Patronné jadis dans le monde par nous, par le duc de Chartres, on me dit qu’il est ouvertement dreyfusard. Jamais je n’aurais cru cela de lui, de lui un fin gourmet, un esprit positif, un collectionneur, un amateur de vieux livres, membre du Jockey, un homme entouré de la considération générale, un connaisseur de bonnes adresses qui nous envoyait le meilleur porto qu’on puisse boire, un dilettante, un père de famille… mais rien que pour Oriane… il aurait dû désavouer ouvertement les Juifs et les sectateurs du condamné (S&G 75).
Proust, through the words he assigns the Duke, caricatures the Nationalist anti-Dreyfusard and the aesthetics of the Faubourg. Basin is articulating the values that all Frenchmen share, the common bonds that hold together the members of the Nation. But, rather than uplifting or ennobling, the Nationalist duke’s litany is prosaic and materialist. Basin’s concept is of familiarity with good food and wine, the possession of expensive books, of other collections, of a family and belonging to an exclusive club.

To be, like Froberville unable to afford the Duke’s criteria for a ‘man of the world’, or one who knows and appreciates the markers that include him among the select, is both understandable and forgivable. On the other hand, to know and own these markers and subject them, as does Swann, to one’s principles such as Justice, loyalty to kith and kin, communal brotherhood is the height of perversion. To Basin de Guermantes, the voice of authority among the reactionary nobility, Swann’s subjecting the futile pursuits of the upper classes to timeless social concerns proves him an irreducible alien, a non-French, a member of the Semite race or simply a Jew.

_Solidarity: a tenet of Jewish subjection puts Swann in the novel’s Jewish context_

Basin’s opinion can meet no contradiction in the group that formed around him and his wife. Only the narrator offers a reply in solidarity with Swann: “A propos de dreyfusards, dis-je, il paraît que le prince Von l’est.- Ah !... Mais… cela m’est parfaitement égal puisqu’il est étranger… Pour un Français, c’est autre chose. Il est vrai que Swann est juif. Mais jusqu’à ce jour... j’avais eu la faiblesse de croire qu’un Juif peut être français... je me suis trompé puisqu’il prend parti pour ce Dreyfus…” (S&G 77). The narrator, to keep the absentee included, links Swann to a prince who is at once a ‘man of the world’ and a Dreyfusard. But, to Basin, since
the Affair, a Jew is as foreign as the German prince and their shared foreignness determines their Dreyfusard position. On the surface, Marcel’s remark seems meant to help clarify Swann’s situation in the post-Dreyfus arrest era. In reality, Proust shows the Duke, none too clever, missing that the actual ‘sameness’ - French, Dreyfusard and Jewish - is shared by Marcel and Swann and not by the latter and prince Von.

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe, II*, Proust represents the principles of Jewish subjection made necessary by the demise of universalism. One of the key tenets is solidarity in the face of adversity. Both the narrator and Swann are Dreyfusards who advocate the Captain’s right to a fair retrial. It is in the spirit of solidarity that Marcel alone contradicts the Duke on behalf of Swann, proposes in his defense that a European aristocrat can also be convinced of Dreyfus’ innocence. In addition, only the narrator, throughout most of the evening at the prince de Guermantes’, will stand by a Swann who not only proclaims his Jewishness but somehow now looks the part. And it is only with Marcel, and later with Bloch, another Jewish protagonist, that Swann will share the secret the prince de Guermantes confesses to him. Proust, with the bonds that bind the narrator, Bloch and Swann, particularly around Dreyfus, demonstrates that Marcel is as Jewish as his older friend, also a convert to Catholicism.

To signal his reinvention of Swann as a Jew, his return to the fold as their champion, the author establishes a textual link between the character and Bloch. The association with Rachel, which will occur in the next section, will illustrate the outsider’s power to interpret, and thus create the Jew’s features. However, Swann’s connection with Bloch, which appears at the end of the first part, emphasizes his newfound moral solidarity with Jews, irrelevant of social class, which causes the antagonism he experiences. The indignation Swann inspires as a Jew in Basin de Guermantes at his cousin’s gala-reception reflects a social phenomenon : “Il est vrai que M.
de Guermantes n’avait pas manifesté un étonnement aussi douloureux quand il avait appris que Saint-Loup était dreyfusard… C’était maintenant une question de militarisme, de patriotisme, et les vagues de colère soulevées dans la société avaient eu le temps de prendre cette force qu’elles n’ont jamais au début d’une tempête” (S&G 79). In this quotation, time, which marks a heightened threat to Jews, is layered. The quote contains a clear reminder that the ire the Affair inspires in French society has reached its full force, a condition that did not exist at an earlier time in the novel.

The author puts in parallel two society gatherings that the Duke attends at different periods. Swann’s presence at the social event in Sodome et Gomorrhe, II happens when patriotism and militarism have brought anti-Jewish passions to a broil. By attending the reception, the Jewish hero reaffirms that his community is part of the fabric of society, that they have the right to be present anywhere in France.

The Duke, however, without Swann but with Bloch and the narrator, had attended a tea at Mme de Villeparisis’ home described in Guermantes’ Way. Conditions for Jews had then been less ominous. Basin had learned at his aunt’s, that his nephew, like Swann, was an avowed partisan of Dreyfus. The narrator had found it necessary to explain Bloch’s presence in the Faubourg as the Affair, though far from full blown, had made heady progress:

Il est vrai que le kaléidoscope social était en train de tourner et que l’affaire Dreyfus allait précipiter les Juifs au dernier rang de l’échelle sociale. Mais d’une part le cyclone dreyfusiste avait beau faire rage, ce n’est pas au début d’une tempête que les vagues atteignent leur plus grand courroux…. [Un] jeune homme comme Bloch que personne ne connaissait pouvait passer inaperçu, alors que de grands Juifs représentatifs de leur parti étaient déjà menacés (Côté Guermantes 487).
There exist between this quotation and the one on the previous page, starting with ‘il est vrai’, striking similarities of syntax and vocabulary around the Dreyfus affair and the French Jewish condition. The parallels indicate the author’s intent to unite Swann and Bloch. The inter-volume links established between the protagonists abbreviate instantly all distances between the protagonists and submit them immediately to a common Jewish condition that must take anti-Semitism in account. Proust, by means of a semantic chain, captures and represents the common dilemma that threatens all Jews regardless of social standing. Neither Bloch, an active middle-class foot soldier in the tragedy, nor the aristocratic Swann, as hinted in Guermantes’ Way, I, an early target for being a Jewish leader, are spared. As Swann is about to walk on stage in the second part of the princes’ reception in Sodome et Gomorrhe, II, Proust, in the first segment, lowers the curtain on the dilettante Swann to reveal the protagonist’s political engagement on behalf of his now fellow Jews and the antagonism he must overcome as a Jew to maintain his community in Relation even in a hostile environment.

To assert a Jewish presence and Swann’s nose as marker of Jewishness

The second part of Swann’s attendance of the Guermantes reception begins when Marcel notices Swann’s entrance. The guests’ constant discussions of Swann, before his entry, heighten interest in the protagonist. Even the narrator’s curiosity contributes to the character’s aura: “j’avais grande envie de savoir ce qui s’était exactement passé entre le prince et Swann” and Marcel grabs the first opportunity to ‘aller vers le fumoir m’informer de Swann’ (S&G 85). Their exacerbated interest is finally satisfied. The Jew walks onto the stage that is high society especially when, for a gala occasion, each guest attempts to project their self-identity and standing through appearance:
J’eus enfin le plaisir que Swann entrât dans cette pièce… Et c’est avec une stupéfaction presque désobligeante, où entrait de la curiosité indiscrète, de la cruauté… que tous les regards s’attachèrent à ce visage duquel la maladie avait si bien rongé les joues, comme une lune décroissante,… elles tournaient court comme un décor insistant… Soit à cause de ces joues qui n’étaient plus là pour le diminuer, soit que l’artériosclérose… le rougit… le nez de polichinelle de Swann, longtemps résorbé dans un visage agréable, semblait maintenant énorme, tuméfié, cramoisi, plutôt celui d’un vieil Hébreu que d’un curieux Valois. D’ailleurs peut-être chez lui en ces derniers jours la race faisait-elle reparaitre plus accusé le type physique qui la caractérise, en même temps que le sentiment d’une solidarité morale avec les autres Juifs, solidarité que Swann semblait avoir oubliée toute sa vie, et que greffées les unes sur les autres, la maladie mortelle, l’affaire Dreyfus, la propagande antisémite avaient réveillée. Il y a certains Israélites, très fins pourtant et mondains délicats, chez lesquels restent en réserve et dans la coulisse, afin de faire leur entrée à une heure donnée de leur vie, comme dans une pièce, un mufle et un prophète. Swann était arrivé à l’âge du prophète (S&G 89).

Through the description of Swann’s appearance, A la recherche illustrates the gentile’s harsh gaze that reads and interprets the various traits of the Jew. Swann’s Jewish identity predominates in Sodome et Gomorrhe, II. Swann’s now manifest Jewishness is a lesser issue than the interpretation of his transformation. The inassimilable subverts the norms that the center establishes and its members see him necessarily as ‘a mufle’, a boor. The narrator, however, is blessed with a Jewish perspective which enables him to interpret Swann’s transformed appearance into that of a prophet.

In the above description of Swann, Proust’s treatment of the protagonist’s nose is a deconstruction of a famed anti-Semitic marker of Jewishness. As Swann ambles through the princes’ formal garden and majestic rooms he exposes that unfailing turn of the century Jewish identifier which, to Sander Gilman is the nose: “The Jew’s nose could not be ‘reformed’… And it was also associated with the Jew’s nature… Shape also carried here a specific meaning: ‘It indicates considerable shrewdness in worldly matters; a deep insight into character, and facility of turning that insight to profitable account’ (179). To the anti-Semites Swann encounters in
Swann’s Jewish identity predominates, his physiognomy reveals his character as a Jew or the ‘Other’ ready to undermine French values, causing irreparable damage to the unsuspecting Westerner. Furthermore, as Gilman also underlines, during the Belle Époque, the ‘Jewish nose’ was a “basic sign of atavism” (Sander Gilman 188), of a physical shortcoming: “The link between the Jew’s sexuality and the Jew’s nose was a similarly well-established one at century’s end, but here that traditional pattern was reversed. The specific shape of the Jew’s nose indicated the damaged nature, the shortened form of his penis” (Sander Gilman 189). According to Gilman’s research, Swann’s nose advertises to onlookers, in addition to his innate untrustworthiness, a puny male organ. It is thus endowed that Proust’s hero subverts an anti-Semitic space and, methodically, each negative stereotype attached to the Jewish appearance. Swann, who in Sodome et Gomorrhe embodies a Jewish champion, wins acceptance for French Jews as Jews. Swann’s ‘errantry’ affects the personal and the interpersonal. The protagonist evolves from the Israelite to the Jew and, as the latter, transforms the single identity of the Guermantes mansion, aligned with the hegemonic center, into a plural one.

In Marcel Proust’s novel, the subversion of the Guermantes’ palace rests on his deconstructing the stereotype of the Jewish nose. Proust undermines the favored anti-Semitic trope on two fronts. At the reception, Swann whose Jewish nose betrays a lack of virility will demonstrate his capacity to be a better, more potent seducer than any of the aristocrats present. In addition, Proust creates a parallel between Swann’s nose and that of Rachel, the female Jewish actress who has just ended her relationship with Robert de Saint-Loup, the Duke’s nephew. While Swann’s nose is reinterpreted negatively because of bigotry Rachel’s nose, whom her aristocratic lover believed to be Jewish, had been idealized by Robert de Saint-Loup. The above description of Swann at the Prince de Guermantes’ reception utilizes a wording very close
to the depiction of Rachel on stage in *Guermantes’ Way*. The similarities between the two portraits cannot be coincidental but an invitation to compare the two in order to conclude that a physical feature has no intrinsic meaning or characteristic. Indeed, as Proust shows, it is the onlookers who project either their positive or negative perspective onto the object.

To interpret the Jew’s features

Indeed, the linkage to Rachel illustrates the functioning of the gaze of the observer upon the Jew, the outsider’s role in determining the interpretation of the Jew. The following quotation from *Guermantes’ Way* utilizes vocabulary and themes that anticipate the one cited above from *Sodome et Gomorrhe*:

Mais vue ainsi, c’était une autre femme. Rachel avait un de ces visages que l’éloignement – et pas seulement celui de la salle à la scène, le monde n’étant pour cela qu’un plus grand théâtre – dessine et qui, vus de près, retombent en poussière. À une distance convenable… des joues effacées, résorbées, se levait comme un croissant de lune, un nez si fin, si pur, qu’on aurait souhaité être l’objet de l’attention de Rachel, la revoir autant qu’on aurait voulu, la posséder auprès de soi, si jamais on ne l’avait vue autrement et de près (*Côté Guermantes* 472).

The wording from this quotation that describes Rachel echoes closely the quoted description of Swann that precedes it. Both Jewish protagonists, Swann and Rachel, are painted when on a stage at a moment when the spectators have come to believe they are Jews: Rachel’s stage is located in a theater while Swann’s is ‘society’. In both portraits, the cheeks crumble to emphasize the shape of the arched nose, a faultless, delicate crescent in Rachel’s case. Swann’s nose also overshadows the cheeks but, instead of ennobling, derogates. The factor that determines Rachel’s idealization, her physical assimilation to the quartered moon, is Saint-Loup’s enamored, charmed gaze. Similarly, when the ‘Frenchified’ Israelite dazzled the Faubourg they found him resembling a Valois. However, once the same Swann develops a
Jewish identity, society no longer finds his nose aristocratic but ‘enormous, tumefied, crimson rather that of an old Hebrew.’ The hostility anti-Semitism inspires toward Swann causes the interpretation of his nose to evolve.

Marcel Proust accompanies the metamorphosis of Swann’s self-image with a transformation of the protagonist’s perception by others. As Swann comes to see himself as a Jew and the world from a Jewish perspective, the other characters attach Jewish characteristics to features that, until recently, reminded them of those of a Valois. It is with this Swann, the incarnation of Jewishness, that the narrator identifies, that he ambulates with through the palace, seeing, evaluating all they encounter from an outsider’s, from a Jewish perspective. The second part of the narrative of Swann at the prince de Guermantes’ reception conveys the intention to dramatize the unveiling of his Jewishness and the narrator’s identification with Swann as a Jew:

Cet homme excellent, cultivé, que j’étais bien loin d’être ennuyé de rencontrer, je ne pouvais arriver à comprendre comment j’avais pu l’ensemencer autrefois d’un mystère tel que son apparition dans les Champs-Elysées me faisait battre le cœur au point que j’avais honte de m’approcher de sa pèlerine doublée de soie, qu’à la porte de l’appartement où vivait un tel être, je ne pouvais sonner sans être saisi d’un trouble et d’un effroi infinis; tout cela avait disparu non seulement de sa demeure mais de sa personne, et l’idée de causer avec lui pouvait m’être agréable ou non, mais n’affectait en quoi que ce fut mon système nerveux. Et de plus combien il était changé depuis cet après-midi même où je l’avais rencontré – en somme quelques heures auparavant – dans le cabinet du duc de Guermantes (S&G 89-90).

As the hero makes his appearance at the palace, the scales fall off the eyes of the assembled Faubourg Saint-Germain - Swann is and was a Jew. Swann’s true self is suddenly revealed to the public and to the narrator. Only such trappings as Swann’s sartorial refinement and his prestigious address had kept his friends and acquaintances from seeing an intimate part of his self. *Sodome et Gomorrhe, II* harmonizes Swann’s Jewish identity to his appearance and allays the narrator’s trepidation in his presence. The incomprehensible excitement that Marcel used to
experience upon seeing Swann disappears once he discovers the source of his friend’s enigma. Swann is a Jew.

**The seductive Swann as an outspoken Jew**

Proust, in the second segment of Swann at the Guermantes gala, has the narration progress along the lines of the hermeneutic code. Swann’s decision to satisfy Marcel’s curiosity as to his private conversation with the prince keeps getting postponed. First Robert de Saint-Loup, then Charlus, impose their presence, maintaining the secret nature of the conversation: “(Swann ne tenait pas à ce qu’on entendit son récit)” (*S&G* 89-90), delaying the narrator’s desire from being satisfied. The delay that maintains Swann as the focus of interest provides Proust the opportunity to subvert anti-Jewish stereotypes. The author reaffirms Swann’s membership to a historic, immemorial Jewish race contrasted to the fickle, opportunistic French aristocracy. The second of the narrative ends with a much reduced Jewish leader able to provoke the desire of the Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc, mistress of the Duke de Guermantes, the Nationalists’ alpha male. In fact, much of the second section serves to represent the Jews more positively than the nobles.

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Swann’s presence at the Guermantes palace challenges the aesthetics of the aristocracy. Indeed, the protagonist’s interest for the aristocrats has dimmed and he now finds that: « les relations républicaines de sa femme devenaient plus intéressantes depuis que l’affaire Dreyfus était le centre de ses préoccupations » (*S&G* 97). Both his physique and speech appear designed to shock the gathering, to influence the assembled guests negatively: “Sa figure se marquait de petits points bleu de Prusse, qui avaient l’air de ne pas appartenir au monde vivant, et dégageait ce genre d’odeur qui, au lycée, après les « expériences », rend si
Swann, formerly seductive, seems to have lost his looks and be already at an advanced stage of decomposition. But in spite of appearances the hero retains much vital energy and the narrator catches his glances directed at Mme de Surgis: “Swann ne put s’empêcher d’attacher sur le corsage de celle-ci de longs regards de connaisseur dilatés et concupiscents” (S&G 103). Swann’s strong libido appears to contradict his apparent decrepitude. But to Proust, the contradiction is easily explained: Swann owes his masculinity to his Jewishness.

Proust, as he unveils Swann’s Jewish identity, refashions the protagonist into a scarecrow. But rather than an anti-Semitic purpose the transformation serves to boast of the virtues Swann owes to being a Jew. In the narrative of Swann at the Guermantes party, the second section finds the apparently diminished hero mingling with glamorous aristocrats but it is the Jew that the narrator lauds:

Mais Swann appartenait à cette forte race juive, à l’énergie vitale, à la résistance à la mort de qui les individus eux-mêmes semblent participer. Frappés chacun de maladies particulières, comme elle l’est elle-même, par la persécution, ils se débattent indéfiniment dans des agonies terribles qui peuvent se prolonger au-delà de tout terme vraisemblable, quand déjà on ne voit plus qu’une barbe de prophète surmontée d’un nez immense qui se dilate pour aspirer les derniers souffles, avant l’heure des prières rituelles et que commence le défilé ponctuel des parents éloignés s’avancant avec des mouvements mécaniques, comme sur une frise assyrienne (S&G 103).

This quote contains and summarizes the three principal arguments, namely a Jewish race, Jewish solidarity and History that Bernard Lazare had presented in Le Nationalisme juif. Lazare, when confronted with anti-Semitism and the Dreyfus case, its byproduct, argued that these tangible concepts proved the existence of a Jewish nation with a separate consciousness.
Indeed, Proust’s Swann, as can be determined by the quotation, meets the three concepts that Lazare evoked to determine the Jew of the post-Dreyfus arrest era. Swann, as a post-Dreyfus arrest French Jewish subject, according to the quote, belongs not to a community, or even to a people, but to a ‘race’ with its inherited characteristics. An inherited racial trait determines the protagonist’s power to resist decay and his indefatigable virility. In addition, the race inherits a history famed for resisting persecution and oppression but also for its antiquity. The reference to the Assyrian friezes associates Jews to a historical, artistic and ancient civilization, ennobles the Hebrews by placing them within a tradition that is thousands of years old. History acts as a rejoinder to the anti-Semites that the Jews they claim to be inferior were civilized and part of history millennia before Europeans. In the quotation, historical continuity and solidarity are conveyed through the dutiful relatives whose movements and traditions have not varied since the Assyrians. Swann’s metamorphosis may be unflattering on the surface but it endows him with racial virtues lacking in the gentiles who surround him.

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Swann becomes capable of self-expression as he comes to terms with his Jewish self. The character, formerly too discreet to offer even a simple opinion, loses his inhibitions. Once the ideology of assimilation becomes discredited, Swann stops repressing the Jew in him and his voice rings out, affecting the environment:

Swann m’ayant aperçu s’approcha de Saint-Loup et de moi. La gaité juive était chez Swann moins fine que les plaisanteries de l’homme du monde. « Bonsoir, nous dit-il. Mon Dieu! Tous trois ensemble, on va croire à une réunion du Syndicat. Pour un peu on va chercher où est la caisse! » Il ne s’était pas aperçu que M. de Beaucerfeuil était dans son dos et l’entendait. Le général fronça involontairement les sourcils… “Il paraît que Loubet est en plein pour nous, de source tout à fait sure”, [Swann] dit à Saint-Loup, mais cette fois à voix plus basse pour ne pas être entendu du général… « Je vous dis cela parce que je sais que vous marchez à fond avec nous.
As the narrator notes, Swann’s joke lacks subtlety and plainly targets almost all the guests. They are supposed to be gullible enough to believe in the existence of a Jewish Syndicate that pulls strings to have Captain Dreyfus freed. Nonetheless, the Jewish humor silences and vexes representatives of the army and the nobility at the Prince de Guermantes’ palace.

Swann’s voice subverts the balance of power that previously existed in A la recherche. In the book’s previous volumes, society’s epicenter defined and imposed norms that even those at the periphery attempted to uphold. In Guermantes’ Way for example, at the marquise de Villeparisis’ reception, the characteristically Jewish Bloch attempts to remake himself into an assimilated Israelite. The protagonist earns only the aristocrats’ cruel jokes for his trouble. In Sodome et Gomorrhe however, there is a reversal of roles.

While General de Beaucerfeuil must weather Swann mocking his group, Saint-Loup’s reaction is unexpectedly defiant. Saint-Loup’s political U-turn represents the decadence of the aristocracy that Charlus laments on the same page: “Autrefois, reprit le baron, aristocrates voulait dire les meilleurs, par l’intelligence, par le cœur” (S&G 97). Saint-Loup, unlike former aristocrats, unlike the contemporary Jewish Swann, lacks the principles of the heart and mind that his uncle Charlus misses: “Mais l’amour de Robert pour les Lettres n’avait rien de profond, n’émânait pas de sa vraie nature, il n’était qu’un dérivé de son amour pour Rachel, et il s’était effacé avec celui-ci, en même temps que son horreur des gens de plaisir et que son respect religieux pour la vertu des femmes” (S&G 95). Swann’s jest leads to a revelation. The privileges of the French upper class are unjustified. Birth, fortune, breeding, valor, generosity, looks – the traits Western imagination assigns to its heroes - have not made Saint-Loup any more principled,
any stronger. Rachel, his beloved ‘Jewess’, finds him wanting and leaves him in spite of his social rank and other advantages. Unlike Swann, whose embrace of justice and arts is genuine, Saint-Loup’s proclaimed interests rationalize his desire for Rachel.

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the superiority that Swann enjoys over the members of the French aristocracy contains a physical aspect in addition to the moral one. In spite of his deteriorated figure, seen and accepted as that of the Jewish ‘Other’, Swann exudes power of seduction. As he and the narrator stroll through the palace their path crosses that of Mme de Surgis and Charlus:

La marquise se retournant adressa un sourire et tendit la main à Swann qui s’était soulevé pour la saluer. Mais presque sans dissimulation… dès que Swann eut, en serrant la main de la marquise, vu sa gorge de tout près et de haut, il plongea un regard attentif, sérieux, absorbé, presque soucieux, dans les profondeurs du corsage, et ses narines que le parfum de la femme grisait, palpitèrent comme un papillon prêt à aller se poser sur la fleur entrevue. Brusquement il s’arracha au vertige qui l’avait saisi, et Mme de Surgis elle-même, quoique gênée, étouffa une respiration profonde, tant le désir est parfois contagieux (*S&G* 106).

Proust peoples the princes’ gala with prominent members of the Faubourg who gravitate around Swann. Their number, and the fact that they all compare negatively to Swann, cannot be coincidental. The last quotation alone contains Mme de Surgis and Charlus whose close ties to the Duke and Duchess de Guermantes infer their presence as well. The marquise is the Duke’s mistress, hence Oriane’s rival, while Charlus, Basin’s self-serving brother, breaks his sister-in-law’s trust. The foursome represents the apex of the social order that Swann undermines when his blatant desire for the French Duke’s paramour is welcomed. Neither can Basin’s admitted virility, or his looks, or his fortune, or his prestige, prevent Mme de Surgis from succumbing to the Jew’s seductive allure. Proust conceives and stages a contemporary Jewish leader who, like
the aged Biblical patriarchs, miraculously outperforms any man, including the most prestigious French duke.

**Swann’s immovable Swann presence highlights decay of aristocracy**

The second segment, besides offering a positive portrayal of the Jew through a contrast with the aristocracy, explains, through Charlus, the mental process of first ‘Othering’, then excluding the Jew from the West. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the narrator had used the technique to banish Rachel, in *Guermantes’ Way*, and Bloch in *Swann’s Way*, but all so deftly as to be surreptitious. However, in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Marcel reveals every aspect of Charlus’ act:

« Comme ces deux jeunes gens ont un air étrange! Regardez cette curieuse passion du jeu, marquise », dit M. de Charlus, en désignant à Mme de Surgis ses deux fils, comme s’il ignorait qui ils étaient. « Ce doivent être deux Orientaux, ils ont certains traits caractéristiques, ce sont peut-être des Turcs », ajouta-t-il à la fois pour confirmer encore sa feinte innocence, témoigner d’une vague antipathie, qui quand elle ferait place ensuite à l’amabilité, prouverait que celle-ci s’adresserait seulement à la qualité de fils de Mme de Surgis, n’ayant commencé que quand le baron avait appris qui ils étaient (S&G 95).

The ‘orientalization’ and virtual banishment of the two young Surgis to the Orient involves, as demonstrated in the chapter on Rachel, the repression and camouflage of a homosexual desire. As seen earlier, the pseudo-informed Western gaze identifies, articulates and assigns characteristics of the East. The Surgis men’s transformation into unsavory gambling Turks who belong beyond European borders parallels Bloch’s assimilation with Sultan Mahomet II discussed in Chapter Three. The quotation illustrates that for *A la recherche*, racism serves to dissimulate a more authentic motive or desire. In the world of the novel, the Orient is a myth that fulfills the Westerners’ phantasm of a place that tolerates the desires and behaviors that the West frowns upon.

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Nevertheless, in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, it is two young noblemen, and not the Jewish Swann, that Charlus metamorphoses into Levantines, relocating them to Turkey to render his desire legitimate. On the other hand, the Jew remains firmly entrenched in the Prince de Guermantes palace that their cousin the Duchess describes as “c’est vraiment Versailles dans Paris” (*Côté Guermantes* 872). Swann remains in Relation, in spite of his outspoken Dreyfusist convictions, because of his reclaimed Jewish identity: “D’ailleurs arrivé au terme de sa vie, comme une bête fatiguée qu’on harcèle, il exécrait ces persécutions et rentrait au bercail religieux de ses pères… ce nouveau déclassement eût été mieux appelé reclassement et n’était qu’honorable pour lui, puisqu’il le faisait rentrer dans la voie par laquelle étaient venus les siens et d’où l’avaient dévié ses fréquentations aristocratiques” (*Côté Guermantes* 868-870). Proust establishes a direct relation between the anti-Semitic persecutions Swann witnesses and experiences and his return to Judaism. Furthermore, the renewed identification with the Jews is lauded for its authenticity, presented as a welcome reaction to the aristocracy’s pervasive and corrupting influence. But, whatever its source, Swann’s Jewish identity brings him to live Relation.

**Confession and reconciliation**

In Proust, the acceptance of one’s true self is paramount. The respect the prince de Guermantes comes to extend to Swann is to the Jew. To both his cousin Basin and their friend Swann, the prince is an acknowledged anti-Semite whose prejudices spare no Jew, not even Swann: “Gilbert l’aime beaucoup, parce qu’il le croit petit-fils naturel du duc de Berri, c’est toute une histoire. (Sans ça, vous pensez! mon cousin qui tombe en attaque quand il voit un juif à cent mètres.) Mais enfin maintenant ça s’aggrave de l’affaire Dreyfus, Swann aurait dû
comprendre qu’il devait, plus que tout autre, couper tout câble avec ces gens-là ; or, tout au contraire, il tient des propos fâcheux” (Côté Guermantes 865). The prince, in other words, has such anti-Jewish feelings that he will have no relation even with the assimilated Israelite. To accept Swann among his friends he chooses to believe the myth that Swann is the illegitimate descendant of the legitimate Bourbon line.

Since the Affair, Swann’s assertion of his Jewishness complicates Gilbert’s capacity to hold onto the legend that claims his friend to be a Bourbon. Swann is aware that his attitude endangers his socially rewarding place within the intransigent prince’s circle since, to the narrator who mentions anti-Semitism among the Guermantes, he answers with two anecdotes about Gilbert: “Oh! Celui-là… C’est au point que quand il était officier, ayant une rage de dents épouvantable, il a préféré rester souffrir plutôt que de consulter le seul dentiste de la région qui était juif, et que plus tard il a laissé brûler une aile de son château où le feu avait pris, parce qu’il aurait fallu demander des pompes au château voisin qui est aux Rothschild » (Côté Guermantes 869). Gilbert de Guermantes’ racist principles are so extreme that he becomes the caricature of anti-Semitism. Yet, it is this prince, the epitome of the anti-Semite, who, not only invites Swann to a gala reception, but sends him a reminder: “Il m’a envoyé un pneumatique pour me prévenir qu’il avait quelque chose à me dire” (Côté Guermantes 86). The prince’s communication to Swann takes place at the beginning of the party and, as already noted, intrigues the guests. Swann reveals the content of this bona fide confession, of a Catholic prince to a Jew, in the third segment.

Marcel Proust’s staging of a staunch Catholic royal, who seeks a Jew to confess to, continues, subverts and expands, all at once, one of the oldest and best established tenets of
Western thought. The role confession occupies in Western thought and subjection is summarized by Peter Brooks:

Reflecting on the value we attach on the spoken confession of sin, crime, and error, we may become aware of how close we are to the year 1215, when the Roman Catholic Church, in the Fourth Lateran Council, made annual confession obligatory for all the faithful… [Confession] offers articulation of hidden acts and thoughts in a form that reveals – perhaps in a sense creates – the inwardness of the person confessing, and allows the person’s punishment, absolution, rehabilitation, reintegration. The confessional model is so powerful in Western culture, I believe, that even those whose religion or nonreligion has no place for the Roman Catholic practice of confession are nonetheless deeply influenced by the model (Peter Brooks 2).

Through revolutions and changes of regime, according to Brooks, the institutionalization of confession has been the permanent tool that fashions the Westerner. The institution inspires a soul-searching that leads to the confessants’ inner self-concretization when, at the confessional moment, they articulate who they were, are and aspire to be. Their exteriorization is validated because of the confessor, power’s representative, who witnesses, evaluates, questions, corrects, understands, approves. In effect, a confessant acknowledges personal imperfection and the unlikelihood of attaining the ideal self. The knowledge that one is flawed makes for a realist, humbler self, more tolerant towards oneself and all ‘Others’ imperfect in their own way. At one level, Swann’s role as confessor represents a schism with the traditional order where a center unquestionably imposed social norms. The nation-state’s persecution of Captain Dreyfus leads both the prince and princess to an inner examination and the implicit admission, to a Jew, that France needs to be pluralistic.

Marcel Proust, with the scene of a reformed anti-Dreyfusard confessing to a Dreyfus partisan, communicates more through the confession’s symbolic value than through its content.
What one finds in the prince’s speech is a prophecy to the narrator and the documented errors that prove the scheming against the Jewish officer. The admission of a national wrong against the Captain, and through him his community, is necessary to forgive, restore trust and a new order in France. As Swann retells the prince’s words, guests interrupt him. The interruptions, in addition to increasing the interest in his narration by extending the wait for the full revelation, illustrate the general unworthiness of French society: “Malheureusement, dans le monde, comme dans le monde politique, les victimes sont si lâches qu’on ne peut pas en vouloir bien longtemps aux bourreaux” (S&G 100). Not to say that the Jewish nation have no faults of their own, but the core of French anti-Jewish opinions consists of a number of bullies or persecutors and their spineless victims. One might be tempted to think that the center does the Jews a favor by marginalizing, or actually excluding them.

**Destabilizing the myth of one racial origin**

Before studying the prince’s confession, it is important to note that, in this second segment, some ambiguities exist as to Marcel the narrator’s origins. These must be explored to demonstrate the complex society that the novel creates. The aim is not to make the impossible claim that Marcel is Jewish or has Semitic origins, but to highlight the clues that the text offers in order to appreciate the heterogeneity of the world that *A la recherche* paints. The book presents a France that destabilizes the concept of a ‘pure race and culture’ and, thereby, eschews the notion of the ‘single root and identity’. In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Swann treats the narrator as a younger version of himself, as the only person with whom he can share an important secret regarding an avowed aristocratic leader of the anti-Dreyfusard party and the Dreyfus affair. In addition, Swann also intimates to Marcel that, with maturity, he too will return to his roots which
should be Jewish according to a conversation that occurred between the two protagonists before the Guermantes reception, at the end of Guermantes’ Way.

In Sodome et Gomorrhe, Swann expresses twice his predilection for the narrator. The conversations occur at a reception where Swann is the only Jewish guest in a crowd that he believes to be anti-Semitic. In the first instance, as Swann starts sharing the Prince’s words, he insists that Marcel will be his sole confident: “Mais venons à l’entretien avec le prince, je ne le raconterai qu’à une seule personne, et cette personne, cela va être vous” (S&G 102). Following an interruption, when Swann restarts the narration, he insists on the narrator’s role as the only trusted friend: “Voici mot pour mot, me dit-il quand nous fûmes assis, ma conversation avec le prince, et si vous vous rappelez ce que je vous ai dit tantôt108, vous verrez pourquoi je vous choisis pour confident. Et puis aussi, pour une autre raison que vous saurez un jour” (S&G 103). Swann’s insistence that only Marcel and he will be privy to the prince’s revelation already hints at a special bond, that the narrator, who appears typically French, may be like him of Jewish origin. More importantly, as he begins to narrate the Prince’s words, Swann returns to a conversation that he and the narrator had had before the gathering. Once Swann finishes relating the Prince’s confession, Marcel returns to the earlier exchange that he and Swann had at the Duke’s home. The multiple referrals to a dialogue that belongs in another volume highlights its importance.

In the afternoon, before the prince’s reception, Swann, who had met with the narrator by coincidence at the Duke de Guermantes’ home, had explained to him the following: “Swann … dans l’après-midi… m’avait dit… que les opinions en cette affaire Dreyfus étaient commandées

108 Italics added for emphasis.
According to the logic within the text, Swann believes that the narrator, like everyone else, is a Dreyfusard or anti-Dreyfusard by ‘atavism’, or that belief or disbelief in Dreyfus’ innocence is determined by one’s ethnic ancestry. Essentially, Swann, in light of his words in the early evening, explains that he selects Marcel because he’s atavistically Jewish. And, the ‘other reason which Marcel will know some day’, is one that Marcel will comprehend once he experiences it in life: the return to the fold is inescapable. The accent Swann places on atavism represents a disillusion with integral assimilation as an ideology. The representation of Swann and Marcel at the prince’s reception implies that in France, after Dreyfus’ arrest, an Israelite will have to take on a Jewish identity in addition to the French one to be a subject.

The prince’s confession contains, firstly, the prince admitting that he fled Swann once he learned of his Dreyfusard ideas. The evidence that proves the Jewish Captain’s innocence follows. Finally, the confessant, true to the model of confession that Peter Brooks proposes, ‘creates a new’ prince de Guermantes who spurns his medieval image for a modern self who admits the Jew as a Frenchman, who admits the place of the ‘Other’ in the modern nation. It is only then that forgiveness and reconciliation become possible.

The exchange between the prince and Swann owes its felicitous outcome to their acknowledgement that the latter is Jewish. With the rise of the racial modern anti-Semitism, the model of the assimilated Israelite shunning any hint of Jewishness about his person becomes obsolete. Swann’s situation in the post-Dreyfus arrest era, as portrayed by Proust in Sodome et Gomorrhe, is surmised by Jean-Paul Sartre’s affirmation that: “Le Juif est un homme que les autres hommes tiennent pour Juif: voilà la vérite simple d’où il faut partir” (Jean-Paul Sartre 84).

109 Atavism is discussed in Chapter Three on Bloch.
Indeed, Sartre’s perspective is that of a gentile who claims no knowledge of Jewish consciousness or even of its existence. Sartre’s standpoint can be faulted for crediting the non-Jew with too much influence on the existence of the Jew. But, nonetheless, in the book, the prince – but not Swann who believes in atavism - happens to be in the exact situation of the gentile that Sartre depicts: “Mon cher Swann, m’a dit le prince de Guermantes, vous m’excuserez si j’ai paru vous éviter depuis quelque temps… D’abord, j’avais entendu dire, et je prévoyais bien, que vous aviez dans la malheureuse affaire qui divise le pays, des opinions entièrement opposées aux miennes…” (S&G 103-104). According to the passage, Gilbert admits and sees that Swann is a Jew because society has defined him as such. The prince, aligned with the center, considers and expects his friend’s opinions on the Affair to be so abject as to belong only to the ‘Other’. Swann, entering the Guermantes palace reception, was seen to have the ‘Jewish nose, the marker of the Jew par excellence. The prince, in the last quotation, now states that his guest is said to own the inner traits as well. The novel makes the unity that Swann achieves depend on his being seen and heard as a Jew. Consequently, the prince’s reaction was to recalibrate his behavior toward Swann by relocating him beyond the borders. The prince, once he realizes that his own view on the Affair rests on false premises, calls back the now indubitably Jewish Swann.

Eventually, the Prince’s banishment of Swann, who ironically fails to notice let alone care, serves to vindicate the Jew in A la recherche. Gilbert has to admit, to a Jewish leader whose concerns and political stand are little affected by the Prince’s opinion, that in the Dreyfus tragedy the Jew represents the honorable party. The Army has not simply made a mistake: “Or, mon cher Swann, il y a environ un an et demi, une conversation que j’eus avec le général de Beaurserfeuil me donna le soupçon, que non pas une erreur, mais de graves illégalités avaient été
commises dans la conduite du procès” (S&G 104). Proust attributes to the prince the admission that the Army did not simply err in condemning Dreyfus. Instead, the military tribunal that judged the Captain chose to take illegal steps and banish him to Devil’s Island.

In the fourth volume of A la recherche, Proust not only reconstructs the Dreyfus tragedy with reminders of the army’s guilt, he has them voiced by one whose sympathies lie with the armed forces: “Mais je suis d’une famille de militaires, je ne voulais pas croire que des officiers puissent se tromper. Je reparlai encore à Beuserfeuil, il m’avoua que des machinations coupables avaient été ourdies, que le bordereau n’était peut-être pas de Dreyfus, mais que la preuve éclatante de sa culpabilité existait. C’était la pièce Henry. Et quelques jours après, on apprenait que c’était un faux” (S&G 107). The armed forces not only committed illegal acts but even fabricated blatantly fake documents to condemn a model officer guilty of Jewish origins. Gilbert’s military tradition, aligned with his lineage, adds credibility to his confession of the military’s guilt. The prince’s revisiting and correcting his most firmly held beliefs as to the exclusion of the Jew represent the moral courage necessary for the nation to overcome the Affair.

The lucid personal reappraisal that Gilbert de Guermantes undergoes in the above quotations enables him to appreciate the Jewish citizen. The prince’s self-reevaluation leads him to an appreciation of Swann’s patriotism: “Plus je crois qu’une erreur, que même des crimes ont été commis, plus je saigne dans mon amour de l’armée. J’aurais pensé que des opinions semblables aux miennes étaient loin de vous inspirer la même douleur, quand on m’a dit l’autre jour que vous réprouviez avec force les injures à l’armée et que les dreyfusistes acceptassent de s’allier à ses insulteurs” (S&G 109). The Prince’s words admit that Swann is no less concerned with the national army than he is. Hence, the Jewish identity that accompanies Swann’s French one makes him, rather than a lesser Frenchman, a better one. On the other hand, when it comes
to complex national issues such as the Affair, the Prince’s all-absorbing single French consciousness, which allows him only one viewpoint, can foment prejudices that either mislead him or leave him despondent. In contrast, a dual-national identity allows Swann to empathize with both communities. Swann’s engagement on behalf of the persecuted Captain is not synonymous with a fanatical resentment or hatred of the Nation’s forces. Rather, he takes a firm stand against those who blindly attack the French army behind the injustice visited upon a fellow Jew. Swann demands that even members of his Dreyfusist party respect his country’s armed services and refrain from insulting the national institution.

The anti-Dreyfusards surrender

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the representation of reconciliation within France’s estranged communities operates at many levels. Proust, though the confession necessarily gives center stage to the prince and Swann, remains mindful of the protagonists who, at the beginning of the reception, proclaimed the Jew’s exclusion. During the third section of the narration of Swann at the Guermantes’, the Duke de Guermantes, the leading figure of the group, reappears: “« Allons, bon! » s’écria Swann à mi-voix en s’interrompant. Je vis le duc de Guermantes qui venait à nous. « Pardon de vous déranger mes enfants »” (*S&G* 107). The scene in this quotation is a complete reversal of the same space when represented in the first part of the reception. It is now Swann and the narrator who are engrossed in a conversational cluster with the Duke as an unwelcome intruder. Even more telling, Proust shows the representative of the Jewish party impatient rather than flattered by the interruption of the prestigious Duke, his reactionary counterpart. The irony and symbolism are blatant within the space of the Prince’s palace that stands as a symbol of traditional France in *A la recherche*. The French Jews do not
need to court the favor of other French communities, the Duke and his set must share the space with other groups and, indeed, Swann is as welcome at the Prince and Princess de Guermantes’ mansion as they are.

**To Live Relation**

In *A la recherche*, France becomes a multicultural society that recognizes diversity and brings its ethnic communities to ‘live Relation’. Hence, in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Swann becomes a hybrid character or one with the capacity to have two separate identities rather than a synthesis of both. To that end, an epilogue to the prince’s confession appears as an excursus within the narrative of the reception in the fourth volume. The digression projects into the future to tell of Swann’s last days, of his funeral and also conveys, literally through the last name Swann, the extent of his transformation as he metamorphosed from Israelite into a Jew. At the same time, a name which now stamps the identity ‘French Jew’, rather than ‘French’, on the protagonist enhances Swann’s dedication to France through the respect he demonstrates for the country’s symbols of military and civil merits:

Bien plus, Swann refusa son propre nom. Il le trouvait trop hébraïque pour ne pas faire mauvais effet. Et puis, s’il approuvait tout ce qui touchait à la révision, il ne voulait être mêlé en rien à la campagne antimilitariste. Il portait, ce qu’il n’avait jamais fait jusque-là, la décoration qu’il avait gagnée comme tout jeune mobile, en 70, et ajouta à son testament un codicille pour demander que, contrairement à ses dispositions précédentes, des honneurs militaires fussent rendus à son grade de chevalier de la Légion d’honneur. Ce qui assembla autour de l’église de Combray tout un escadron de ces cavaliers sur l’avenir desquels pleurait autrefois Françoise, quand elle envisageait la perspective d’une guerre. Bref Swann refusa de signer la circulaire de Bloch de sorte que s’il passait pour un dreyfusard enragé aux yeux de beaucoup, mon camarade le trouva tiède, infecté de nationalisme, et cocardier (*S&G* 111).

In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Swann’s metamorphosis is reflected even in his name which has
become too ‘Hebraic’. The passage presents a familiar polarization in *A la recherche* where Bloch does not or cannot understand Swann’s motives which are clear to Marcel.

For example, the book gives Swann a Jewish identity at the end of his life and he becomes a leader of the community who stands in solidarity with other Jews, particularly one who is being persecuted by the state. However, the hero also respects his French consciousness since he decides to be buried in a French country Church, to wear his war decoration and to have military honors at his funeral. Swann’s hybridity allows him to give to the Jewish community and the State all that is owed to each but it is not appreciated by everyone. Hence, Swann and Marcel rightly find that the name ‘Swann’ has become irretrievably linked to the Jewish cause. But to Bloch, Swann’s refusal to adhere to all Dreyfusist manifestations, whether the signing of a petition or the vilification of the army, can mean only one thing: the supposedly ‘Jewish leader’ is at heart a Nationalist.

Bloch’s role, however, never varies and he is a French Jew when the predominant ideology is Israelite assimilation but aspires to be an Israelite as Jewish consciousness develops. True to himself, Bloch embraces Dreyfusism when Swann is above narrow, antagonistic party politics that, not only cannot reflect the values of a community, but also put them at odds with every other community.

Swann’s cachet, throughout his progress in *A la recherche*, is attached to the protagonist from his very first appearance in the book. Swann’s name, foreign sounding, alludes to his mobile identity, his ability to exist between worlds, namely to what can be defined as his “wandering,” while it also reflects the distinctive elegance he shares with the swan. The surname, however, regardless of its original meaning, symbol or national origin will transform
into a Jewish one. Henri Raczymow links the last name Swann to the swan as early as the title of his book *Le Cygne de Proust*\(^{110}\). To Raczymow, the resemblance in English between swan/Swann is meaningful, an allusion to the grace that suffuses “*le très british* Swann” (Henri Raczymow 26). Raczymow’s is correct about the English association contained in the name and which points to its semantic evolution as a patronymic sign:

C’est que Gilberte était devenue très snob. C’est ainsi qu’une jeune fille ayant un jour soit méchamment, soit maladroitement demandé quel était le nom de son père, non pas adoptif mais véritable, dans son trouble et pour dénaturer un peu ce qu’elle avait à dire, elle avait prononcé au lieu de Souann, Svann, changement qu’elle s’aperçut un peu après être péjoratif, puisque cela faisait de ce nom d’origine anglaise un nom allemand. Et même elle ajouta, s’avalissant pour se rehausser : « On a raconté beaucoup de choses très différentes sur ma naissance, moi je dois tout ignorer» (*La Fugitive* 165).

The quotation confirms Raczymow’s intuition as to the last name’s English origin. But Raczymow leaves unmentioned a relation between the name Swann and its homonym swan. Swann, as in the myth of the swan, finds his voice to sing but once, just before he dies. Swann’s song, as demonstrated, is a defense of the Jew, a call to respect a non-French identity in France. In the world of *A la recherche*, once Swann’s voice is heard it irrevocably marks his name as Jewish.

In the era of Nationalism, to have a foreign sounding name in France, especially Jewish, causes, in some circles, embarrassment. Gilberte, Swann’s only child, in her haste to disguise the alien sound of the surname she inherited from her legal and biological father, inadvertently reveals to the Nationalists the single truth about her origins most detrimental, in their view, to her standing. By denaturing her name, she inadvertently confesses her hidden identity, her Jewish origins, since she alters ‘Swann’ from an English sound to a German-Jewish one. Proust infers

\(^{110}\) *Proust’s Swan.*
that one’s true identity cannot be hidden and must be revealed. Assimilation becomes obsolete, impracticable, once Nationalism dominates and excludes those who fail to meet its criteria for inclusion.

Gilberte’s impulse to disassociate herself from the name ‘Swann’ can be traced to the fear of exclusion. Her father, before his death in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, had remade ‘Swann’ not simply into a Semitic surname but into that of a Jewish leader. Hence Gilberte’s claim to be of an unknown father – to prefer the aberration, for the time, of multiple men having a claim to fathering her – rather than admit the legitimate one who identified as a Jew. Gilberte’s unwitting self-debasement reflects the quandary the Dreyfus Affair revealed to the French Israelites. In France, the legitimacy anti-Semitism acquired in the last decades of the nineteenth-century transformed, overnight, the country’s integrated Israelites into pariahs to be disowned by their offspring. The implications of abjection, as illustrated through Gilberte, explains how Nationalism, seconded by the anti-Semitism it fomented, served as a catalyst for the development of a separate French Jewish identity.

Gilberte’s concern that “Swann” had evolved from English to Jewish, thereby threatening her social aspirations, is illustrated in *Sodome et Gomorrhe, II*. As already discussed, shortly before his death Swann refused to sign a petition being circulated by his party, the Dreyfusist because he found his ‘name too Hebraic’ (*S&G* 115). The protagonist, as he prepares to die in the novel, comes to see and claim his name to be plainly a Jewish one. The originally English surname evolves as Swann makes existential choices, as he chooses to stray from the path of assimilation to one of solidarity with Dreyfus and French Jews. Eventually, the name becomes so associated with Jewishness that the hero worries that, on a Dreyfusist list, ‘Swann’ may hinder rather than help, may indicate partiality, Jewish solidarity rather than an impartial call on behalf
of social justice. In the novel, the transformation of ‘Swann’, from a name that identifies a member of the ‘European race’, to one that identifies a Jew, accompanies and emblematizes the complex trajectory that leads the protagonist from assimilation to the recognition of this Jewish identity.

Conclusion

In *A la recherche*, Swann is the representation of the ‘authentic Jew’\textsuperscript{111}, who embodies the Jewish dilemma in France. Swann can continue enjoying his French assimilation which demands that the ‘stranger’ suppresses any ethnic characteristic to become a Frenchman, or, he can assume a Jewish identity to stand in solidarity with a community that anti-Semitism threatens. *A la recherche* portrays the protagonist’s confrontation with anti-Semitism, at the end of the nineteenth-century, as the catalyst to his development of a Jewish identity and his return to the Jewish community. The fictional development adumbrates a reality that Sartre describes in *La Question juive*: “Le véritable adversaire de l’assimilation… ce n’est pas le Juif, c’est l’antisémite” (144). For Sartre, anti-Semites are the permanent threat to Jews that reminds them of their Jewishness and prevents their assimilation. Under such a menace, to be free and authentic and not self-oppress, the Jew has no choice but to eschew assimilating, make one with the Jewish community and resist the outside, anti-Semitic threat.

This is not to say that the disappearance of anti-Semitism allows the French Jews to assimilate since, as Sartre puts it, in France’s democracy, the purpose of assimilation is to simply and completely erase: “the Jew for the sake of the man”\textsuperscript{112}. But the man does not exist; there are

\textsuperscript{111}See the conclusion of Chapter Three or the chapter on Bloch for the definition of the terms ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity,’ especially as applied to Jews by Jean-Paul Sartre.

\textsuperscript{112}George J. Becker’s translation that I use translates ‘l’homme’ as ‘the man’ where I feel ‘man’ without ‘the’ would be clearer and more accurate.
Jews, Protestants, Catholics; there are Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans; there are whites, blacks, yellows.”¹¹³ (175). From Sartre’s perspective, the abstract, universal ‘man’ who is a ‘blank’ and eager to embrace French civilization does not exist. Jews, whites, Englishmen etc. do exist however, meaning that every person has his or her own identity shaped by a specific culture. In the passage, the philosopher is protesting France’s approach to nationality which forces the ‘foreigner’ to renege any identity but the French in order to be a citizen of France¹¹⁴. In this view, assimilation brings about the disappearance of the Jew which answers the wish of the anti-Semites.

The shortcomings of assimilation even appear in A la recherche. This chapter on Swann and the one on Bloch demonstrate that the two characters lose their voices when they represent the ‘unauthentic’ Israelites suppressing their Jewish selves. To resolve Swann’s alienation as an Israelite, the novel proposes the same solution that Sartre considers for real life.

This means, then, that the Jews – and likewise the Arabs and the Negroes – from the moment that they are participants in the national enterprise, have a right in that enterprise; they are citizens. But they have these rights as Jews, Negroes, or Arabs – that is, as concrete persons¹¹⁵ (146).

To resolve the French Jews’ dilemma, Sartre sees but one solution which France needs to apply to all its minorities. The French need to allow all communities to integrate society while keeping their identities of origin. Arabs, Jews and Africans contribute as such and as much as the French

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¹¹³ The ‘il’ that begins the Sartre’s original version is abstract and does not represent a person: « il représente poussée a l’extrême, la tendance que nous avons notée chez le democrat, a suprimer tout simplement le Juif au profit de l’homme. Mais l’homme n’existe pas : il y a des juifs, des protestants, des catholiques ; il y a des Français, des Anglais, des Allemands ; il y a des blancs, des noirs, des jaunes ”(175). For the sake of context, I provide here a longer quote than from the translation in the main text.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter One for the discussion of Naomi Schor’s views on France’s approach to ‘universalism’ and ‘nationality’.

¹¹⁵ Cela signifie que les Juifs, comme aussi bien les Arabes ou les Noirs, dès lors qu’ils sont solidaires de l’entreprise nationale, ont droit de regard sur cette entreprise ; ils sont citoyens. Mais ils ont ces droits à titre de Juifs, de Noirs, ou d’Arabes, c’est-à-dire comme personnes concrètes (177).
to the nation and they must speak their groups’ viewpoint in the public sphere. To demand that they ‘pass’ for French is equivalent to asking them to ‘pass’ for French. In *A la recherche*, Swann reclaims a Jewish identity which brings him and Gilbert de Guermantes to share their different perspectives on the Dreyfus Affair. The exchange between the Prince and Swann is on terms of equality though, at this point, Swann represents the ‘foreign, Semitic race’. The multicultural France that Proust’s novel depicts is in alignment not only with Sartre’s conception of a multicultural France but also with Glissant concept of plural space where all the communities ‘live Relation’.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation argues that, through its protagonists Charles Swann, Albert Bloch and Rachel, *A la recherche* represents individuals who refashion themselves in response to the West’s reliance on its literary, linguistic and pseudo-scientific discourses to invent a ‘Semitic race’ during the nineteenth-century. In France, the creation of the ‘Semite’, a people foreign to Europe, redefined the Hebraic community from one that consisted of assimilated ‘Israelites’, or French who practiced Judaism, to Jews deemed, by the turn of the century, ‘inassimilable’ because of their alleged non-European origins. The non-religious but racialist configuration of modern anti-Semitism explains how, from 1894 to 1906, France would convict and persecute the loyal Captain Alfred Dreyfus, and accuse him of espionage because he belonged to the ‘Jewish race’. In real life, the Dreyfus case brought French Jews, forced them even, to develop a Jewish identity. In Marcel Proust’s novel, the protagonist Swann embodies the new meaning of the qualifier ‘French Jew’ as discussed. In the novel, the Jewish consciousness that Swann acquires provides him with a sense of community that enables various groups to meet and exchange their experiences on an equal plane.

With the representation of Swann as a subject who is equally French and Jewish and who seeks to relate to others, *A la recherche* adumbrates the multicultural position that two major thinkers of difference, Jacques Derrida and Edouard Glissant, propose for the twenty-first century. In their view, once a people have acquired a consciousness of their own, every other group must recognize their identity and welcome their aspiration which is to enter, in Derrida’s words: “l’espace de la relation. Entendons « relation » au sens de la narration, mais aussi, plus généralement, au sens que Edouard Glissant imprime à ce terme quand il parle de Poétique de la Relation, comme on pourrait aussi parler d’une politique de la relation” (39). Both the French
Algerian-Jewish Derrida and the French Afro-Caribbean Glissant underscore a society’s need to be a place of ‘Relation’. For Glissant, the apprehension and delight of being discovered by and of discovering another identity is a challenge that must become a way of life or a ‘poetic of relation’. And since the long history of France’s Jews make them the prototype French ‘Other’, it is only fitting that what Derrida, in turn, terms a ‘politic of Relation’, or a willful, methodical approach to Relation, belongs to their narratives. In *A la recherche du temps perdu*, because Charles Swann adopts an ethos of inter-relationships between different identities, Proust’s novel anticipates the contemporary non-European French writers’ calls for a France that ensures equality between its diverse identities so that they may know one another as equals and ‘live Relation’.

The book that makes Proust a hallmark of the French canon creates a paradox as it reveals one of his main concerns, namely the role and place for and of the ‘Other’ in society. Proust’s novel earns him entry into a literary pantheon along such luminaries as Montaigne, Mme de Sévigné, Saint-Simon, Victor Hugo and Chateaubriand whose perspectives mirror the ‘root’ or the single Gallic Tradition that, for the most part, combines Catholicism and deep roots in the French countryside. Proust, on the other hand, is from Paris and has strong ties to the Hebraic community because of his Jewish mother. However, Proust sidesteps the reductive and marginalizing label ‘minority or Jewish author’ even though *A la recherche* anticipates the Caribbean Glissant’s conclusions on multiculturalism and the viewpoint of writers from two Jewish movements. Proust’s representation of the Jewish community in France offers similarities with the specifically Jewish movement known as the ‘First French Jewish Renaissance’ (early 1900’s –mid 1930’s) and foreshadows ideas that appear from the middle of the century onward in the writings of Jewish authors such as Albert Memmi (born in 1920,
Tunis), Jacques Derrida (born in 1930, Algiers) and Helen Cixous (born in 1937, Oran). From various places and of different periods, these French writers, who later became also known as ‘Jewish authors’, express their concern about alterity with ideas and methods that fulfill the same purpose as that of *A la recherche* which is considered a ‘classic’.

Marcel Proust’s *magnus opus* portrays the nineteenth-century French Jewish experience as one of smooth and progressive assimilation, with a sudden interruption and reappraisal because of the nationalist and racist discourses that engendered the Captain Dreyfus case (1894 – 1906). In Proust’s *œuvre*, the Dreyfus affair represents the historic rupture or the catalyst for the shaping of a separate group consciousness, a concept useful to France at large and to newer French communities as they consider their then current and future role. Over a century ago, a portentous mixture of Nationalism and anti-Jewish racism made possible the persecution of Captain Alfred Dreyfus for being Jewish. The infamous case, especially its 1898 emergence as the full blown Dreyfus affair, or “the Affair”, brought France to the brink of civil war and signaled a newfound will to exclude the ‘Semite’ from the national body.

From 1808 to the Dreyfus affair, France’s Jews enjoyed almost a century of unhindered assimilation. However, the case that unfolded around the Jewish officer fractured the French Jews’ absolute identification with France, forced a re-questioning of their identity and, ultimately, brought them to develop and accept a Jewish consciousness. The works of Marcel Proust and of his contemporaries of the ‘First Jewish Renaissance’, namely André Spire (1868-1966), Jean-Richard Bloch116 (1884-1947) and Edmond Fleg (1874-1963) reveal the interdependency of Nationalism, of anti-Semitism, of the Affair and its paradoxical effect on the

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116 To prevent any confusion between the writer Jean-Richard Bloch and Proust’s protagonist “Bloch” I will use either the author’s full name or the abbreviation “J-R Bloch” when I refer to the writer.
Jewish community. In the early 1940’s, under the Vichy regime, France, once again nationalist, imposed upon its Jews de-naturalization and policies of racial exclusion. This second rupture in the history of the French nation and its Jews helped determine the inclusive attitudes that Memmi, Derrida, and Cixous share with Proust. In France’s modern history, the combination of nationalist and racial feelings constitutes a threat to its well established universalist ethos. The ominous mixture of nationalism and racism recurs commonly enough to have been experienced by every generation since the turn of the nineteenth-century. Its influence on the work of Proust links him to the French Jewish writers of different periods and movements who also ponder the place of the historical Jewish ‘Other’ in France and, more recently, of the non-Western groups presently seeking to integrate French society.

The French Jewish Renaissance

Marcel Proust echoes a historical reality when he represents a late nineteenth-century Israelite community which developed a separate Jewish identity once the Dreyfus affair underscored the dangers of Nationalism. The impact of ‘the Affair’ on the history of French Jews is noted by Nadia Malinovich who offers a socio-historical context: “It is following the Dreyfus affair that some Jewish intellectuals, such as André Spire, Edmond Fleg and Jean-Richard Bloch, began to explore [different aspects of Jewish life] in their poetry, essays and fiction including the Jews’ own ambiguity toward their heritage (Nadia Malinovich 91-92). The generation that experienced their Jewish ‘awakening’ at the dawn of the century would express their communal identity fully only in the 1920’s when the community put into circulation a number of specifically Jewish periodicals to explore Jewish subjects. The Jewish magazines bore witness to

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117 This translation and all subsequent translations in this chapter are my own, unless otherwise specified.
the strength of the time’s ‘réveil juif’ in France; but one, *Menorah* (1922 – 1933), in particular, stands out because of its content and because it was the first and the longest to be continuously published.

The ‘Jewish Renaissance’ meant to bring every aspect of the Jewish condition to the public space, to Jews as much as to non-Jews, and accepted contributions from both Jewish and non-Jewish writers from diverse fields and styles (Catherine Fhima 29, 36). Even when the movement came to have Jewish magazines at its disposal, it did not publish a manifesto to define an aesthetic goal or include a spokesperson. The acquisition of a separate consciousness provided French Jews with a social confidence that allowed them to include in Jewish magazines articles by non-Jews on Jewish life and historic experience. As mentioned earlier, Marcel Proust’s novel reflects the relation that exists in reality between a society’s acceptance of a group’s specific identity and the self-assurance of its members ‘in the world’.

Through Rachel, Albert Bloch and Charles Swann *A la recherche* represents alterity in France with themes that are similar to those found in the works of Spire, Fleg and Bloch, three regular contributors to *Menorah*. Marcel Proust’s three main Jewish protagonists successfully integrate in French society but each must choose to either claim or to reject a Jewish identity. As demonstrated in the three previous chapters, each of the three characters’ choice determines his or her final physical appearance since, according to the West’s racial theories, developed in the nineteenth-century, which came to associate specific mental traits with physical features. The resulting combinations were assigned to the Semite. Motivated by the Affair and the racist atmosphere it generated, Proust’s three protagonists embrace or reject assimilation and metamorphose into a racialized Jew or non-Jew. Nineteenth-century discourses that assign to Jews distinctive physical characteristics such as a ‘Jewish’ gait and nose, the literary *belle Juive*
that defines the feminine, and the history of Jews in Antiquity enable the racial transformation of
Proust’s protagonists. Finally, the reclaiming of a Jewish appearance and identity provides
Swann with the self-knowledge and confidence to bring the Jewish experience to others. The
writers of the réveil juif explored the situation of France’s Jews with those same themes and, in
so doing, they validate the complexity and accuracy of Proust’s thought on the position of French
Jewry.

A striking example of commonality is the Captain Dreyfus case. The Jewish officer’s
tragedy finds a similar interpretation in the works of Proust and in those of the writers of the
“First French Jewish Renaissance”. In the 1959 prologue to his Poèmes Juifs, André Spire\textsuperscript{119}
describes the seminal role ‘the Affair’ played in his development as a Jew, a description that is
echoed in A la recherche where Dreyfus’ misfortune inspires Swann’s Jewish consciousness.
Another similarity of views occurs with Spire’s poem “Assimilation” that captures the dangers of
integration as Proust depicted through his protagonist Bloch. Proust had also explored the
dilemma that French universalism poses for atypical French groups, a theme that surfaces in
works by Edmond Fleg, namely his essay Pourquoi je suis Juif and the novel L’Enfant prophète.
With Ecoute Israël, Fleg attempts to recapture in verse the glory of Jewish History from
Antiquity through the centuries and offers a historical perspective similar to some allusions
found in Proust’s novel. In addition, Jean-Richard Bloch’s pondering of the French Jewish
condition brings him to consider themes that Proust presented through his protagonists Rachel
and Swann. The literary figure of ‘the Jewess’ reappears in J-R Bloch’s novel ... Et Compagnie,

\textsuperscript{119}In Chapter Three of the dissertation, which is on the protagonist Albert Bloch, “L’Humour juif” and “Marcel
Proust”, two chapters from Spire’s book Quelques Juifs et demi-Juifs (1928), help contextualize Proust’s use of
Jewish humor to construct the protagonist Bloch in A la recherche. In Spire’s chapters that I quote, his description
of Jewish humor and his insightful pages on Proust highlight the similarities in thought between the latter and the
“Jewish Renaissance”. Spire was born in July 1868 and is a contemporary of Proust who, born in July 1871, is
younger by a mere three years month for month.
and the mythical ‘Orient’ in the novel La Nuit kurde but the image of the Jew as a spiritual ‘wanderer’ is also present.

The first three decades of the twentieth-century saw France’s first generation of Jewish writers revisit the myth of the ‘Wandering Jew’ condemned to wander from country to country until the return of the Christian Messiah. The reclaiming of that pejorative traditional tale allows these authors to reconcile their identification with their home countries and, according to Jean-Richard Bloch, their natural propensity for drifting: “The Jewish writer can acquire the culture, the language, the taste, the ideologies of the country to which he belongs but he cannot acquire its past… He is born emancipated and Wanderer120* (Michel Trebitsch 56). Trebitsch quotes an unpublished work by Jean-Richard Bloch in which the latter specifically qualifies the Jewish writer and intellectual as ‘wandering’ and ‘affranchi’ or emancipated. In the above quote, Jean-Richard Bloch alludes to the reclaiming and revalidating the myth of the ‘Wandering Jew’; in order to emphasize the notion, he capitalizes the English word ‘wanderer’ in a French text.

The concept of the ‘Wandering Jew’121 that Jean-Richard Bloch re-appropriates is a racist construct that combines the myth that Jews are nomads because they are Semites and the anti-Judaic Christian belief that Jews cannot be sedentary because they killed Christ. However, in the above quote, J-R Bloch appropriates the concept to assert that Jews inherit and contribute to both the culture of their birthplace and to their own separate cultural tradition, the product of the

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120 L’écritain juif peut acquérir la culture, la langue, le goût, les idéologies du pays où il est enraciné, il ne peut acquérir son passé… Il est né affranchi et Wanderer” (Michel Trebitsch 56)
121 J-R Bloch’s allusion to the anti-Semitic trope of the ‘Wandering Jew’ situates him within a Jewish literary tradition that re-appropriates the theme for Jews at moments of Jewish enfranchisement (or affranchi, the very word that J-R Bloch uses in the original French version) as Galit Hasan-Rokem explains: “Jewish culture never accepted the legend of the Wandering Jew as historical information. However, within the distribution area of the legend, Jews have frequently used the figure of the Wandering Jew, although not in its narrative form or in a referential mode, but rather symbolically and allegorically. The image or symbol of the Wandering Jew appears in Jewish culture, both geographically and chronologically, in conjunction with emancipatory tendencies” (189).
history of Jewish communities. The additional identity that Jews own as such, and in parallel to
the one that they share with their fellow citizens, frees them from an exclusive, too narrow
identification with a locality. For Proust, J-R Bloch and his fellow contributors to the ‘Jewish
Renaissance’, a separate Jewish consciousness makes natural *Wanderers* of its subjects,
providing them with the communal pride and belonging that enable them to engage every ‘Other’
on equal footing and to ‘live Relation’. And like Proust, J-R Bloch, Spire and Fleg anticipate
‘*politique de la Relation*’ that Edouard Glissant and Jacques Derrida call for.

J.-R. Bloch’s work meets that of Proust once again at the level of the Jewess. The
nineteenth-century literary trope of the *belle Juive*, ‘the Jewess’, popularized the Jewish female
as a construct that consists of beauty, pathos, Christian virtues and an unreasonable, tyrannical
Jewish father (see Chapter Two). Proust’s novel counters the trope with a Jewess who has
neither beauty, nor virtue, nor father. And Rachel wisely uses the discourses on ‘the Jewess’ and
around the Affair to become Jewish and realize her ambitions as an actress. Proust’s
representation of the character Rachel also contradicts the traditional role that the times assigned
to women as dependent on men for their living and status. Rachel reaches the top of the social
ladder thanks to her wits and talent. Unlike Proust, in … *Et Compagnie* for exemple, Jean-
Richard Bloch represents the ‘Semite females’ in traditional roles of mothers, wives, daughters
even though they are strong, capable and intelligent. Nonetheless, Bloch’s books tackle not only
the discourse of ‘the Jewess’ but also another concept that appears in Proust -- the *Orient*, the
mythical place of the Jews’ origin. In *La Nuit kurde* J-R Bloch imagines the mythical East as a
place where local passions are uninhibited by Western reason, a space that functions in
opposition to the over-rationality that rules the West.
In ... *Et Compagnie*, J-R Bloch’s novel that unfurls in France, beauty, pathos and virtue belong to the French female character who, nevertheless, loses the hero to the unattractive Jewess whose only advantage is her sense of entitlement and unwavering confidence that she will win the Jewish groom of her choice. In *La Nuit kurde* as well, the stereotypical traits of the ‘Jewess’ become those of the Christian. Bloch sets that novel in the East, in an *Orient* that appears as the reversed mirror image of the West and where there is no sign of a Jew, of a Jewess or of any character from any Semitic group. In that work of fiction, the heroine belongs to a Greek, Christian family that is mercantile, materialistic and dogmatic, characteristics that the West usually associates with the Semites. Even her lover, the male protagonist Saad, a nomad, a brigand who, in a surrealistic erotic Marquis de Sade-like scene, seduces his beloved’s mother and feasts on her, belongs to the Kurdish Indo-European group. In both novels, the characteristics of the *belle Juive* come to belong to European Christian female protagonists who are either anchored in the *Orient* (*La Nuit kurde*) or orbit in a French town around an extended Semitic family (*... Et Compagnie*). *La Nuit kurde* in particular offers a different take on the West’s mythical East, the place where Westerners can momentarily escape for a taste of Semitic exoticism or passions. Only members of ‘Aryan’ groups, Greeks and Kurds populate the ‘Orient’ of J-R Bloch’s novel and engage in its transgressive acts.

Like Jean-Richard Bloch, Edmond Fleg represents the ‘Semite’ asserting his place in French society. Fleg’s literary efforts bring him to confront themes that Proust explored, such as the Jews’ illustrious history and the lure of assimilation. In both his poetry and prose, Fleg illustrates the Jews’ immemorial tradition which culminates, according to Joseph Sungolowsky, with: “l’*Anthologie juive* (1921), somme impressionnante de textes qui traduisent la pensée juive depuis la Bible jusqu’à l’époque moderne et qui n’a rien perdu de son actualité” (17). Fleg’s
anthology of Jewish thought serves as a reminder of the major contributions that Jews brought to Western civilization. Both the Jew and the non-Jew benefit from a reminder that Jews helped shape Western thought, and not only with the foundational Bible. Fleg’s anthology reminds the Westerner that the ‘Semites’ in their midst have always contributed spiritually and materially to the community and continue to do so. Similarly, and for the same purpose and result, in *A la recherche*, Proust alludes to architectural works from Antiquity, to scenes from the Bible and to Western masterpieces that Jews have inspired. Fleg’s work brings Jews to identify with a cultural edifice that their community helped erect. In addition to enhancing their self-confidence, it makes them realize their stake in the present and the future of a Western society in which so much has already been invested.

However, a too close identification between Jews and their country may lead to their assimilation which constitutes the most serious threat to the future of the Jewish tradition. Indeed, survival is the purpose of the Jewish people according to Jean-Richard Bloch: “Dieu ne connaît pas le Juif; il ne connaît que le peuple juif. Cette promesse ne consiste qu’en ceci: durer” 122(268). In other words, a Jew’s goal and hope should not be individual salvation or after-life but the continuity of the nation down the generations. To assimilate or to convert jeopardizes the survival of the tradition. Fleg’s awareness of the risk that assimilation presents comes across in his novel *L’Enfant prophète* and in his seminal essay *Pourquoi je suis Juif*. The hero of *L’Enfant prophète*, the scion of a perfectly assimilated, upper middle class Parisian Jewish family, tells his story. While still a boy, his love for a Christian girl introduces him to Catholicism and sparks in him the wish to convert. However, he rejects assimilation and returns to his ancestral faith when, as a teenager, he discovers the magnificence of Judaism and its embrace of reason. In

122 “God does not know the Jew; he only knows the Jewish people. This promise means nothing more than the following: to last”. This translation and all following translations are my own unless otherwise specified.
Pourquoi je suis Juif, Fleg’s concern and hope for the continuity of the Jewish nation explains why he dedicates the book to his future, yet unborn grandsons rather than to his teenage sons. The book betrays Fleg’s awareness that assimilation may interfere with the Jews’ survival through future generations but, reassuringly, predicts a constant return to the fold. And as will be recalled, assimilation and the return to the fold are two themes that Proust explored. In *A la recherche*, Bloch’s choice to assimilate ruins his talent while Charles Swann’s decision to reclaim a Jewish identity enhances his standing since he becomes a leader of a community.

Charles Swann’s stature depends in *A la recherche* on his ability to transcend his position as communal leader rather than on his leadership position per se. Therefore, the novel’s true purpose for the protagonist is to represent the hybrid French subject who owns two distinct identities, the French and the Jewish for example. Hence, Swann’s funeral is held at the Church of Combray, the village that, with its timeless French values, embodies ‘deep France’ in the novel though by then, the character claims to be a Jew and he is acknowledged to be one. Hybridity is identifiable as well in the work of André Spire, a leading figure of the ‘First French Jewish Renaissance’. To this day, Spire remains crucial to understand the ideas and forces that shape the French ‘Other’. Indeed, “L’Humour juif” and “Marcel Proust”, two chapters from his book *Quelques Juifs et demi-Juifs*, help demonstrate in “Chapter Three” how Proust uses Jewish humor to construct the protagonist Albert Bloch in *A la recherche*.

In addition to *Quelques Juifs et demi-Juifs*, Spire published at the end of December 1905, in Charles Péguy’s *Cahier*, under the title *ET VOUS RIEZ!*, a collection of some of the earliest, specifically Jewish poems by a French poet. In a preface that Spire penned for a 1919 edition of *Poèmes Juifs*, a book of poetry that includes *ET VOUS RIEZ!*, he explains that: “Nos poèmes ne sont pas juifs par le sujet; ils les sont par le sentiment” (André Spire 24). In other words,
irrelevant of their topics, the poems are Jewish because Jewish identity provides the perspective that inspires the feeling behind each poem. In the 1959 prologue to a new edition of Poèmes Juifs, Spire highlights how his engagement in the defense of Captain Dreyfus caused what he describes as his “mutation” (12): “J’étais redevenu Juif avec un grand J. Et poète français, poète juif aussi. Cela se traduisit d’abord par la composition de poèmes où l’expression de sentiments de mon âme française et de mon âme juive retrouvée alternaient, se mêlaient” (14). As Spire describes, he had acquired a Jewish ‘soul’, the ability to feel and see the world in line with the Jewish experience, but he continued to enjoy his French ‘soul’ as well. As Proust demonstrated with Swann, to be the ‘Other’ and to be ‘French’ are not mutually exclusive propositions.

Charles Swann is not the only Proust protagonist to echo Spire’s definition of the French Jewish condition in the first decades of the twentieth-century. However, while Swann is the positive representation of a formerly assimilated Jew who chooses to be hybrid, Bloch’s ‘bad faith’ condemnns him in A la recherche to a fate that befits the description of ‘inauthentic’ French Jews that Spire describes in his 1959 prologue:

Peut-être nous saura-t-on gré d’avoir osé exprimer cette qualité particulière de sentiments depuis 1905, c’est-à-dire dans un temps où la plupart des littérateurs juifs essayaient de se faire pardonner leur origine en étouffant ce qu’il y avait en eux de plus profond, et peut-être de meilleur, et en ne laissant vibrer que la pellicule française qu’avaient posée sur leur cœur quelques années d’études classiques et de papotage parisien (24).

Spire’s quotation describes accurately Albert Bloch’s path in Proust’s novel. Indeed, with Bloch, Proust paints the picture of a writer who begins life as a bright and promising young man with a talent informed by his Jewishness. However, following the Affair, Bloch gradually suppresses...
or ‘suffocates’ his authentic Jewish identity that provides him with a perspective different than that of his peers. By the end of the novel, the protagonist succeeds in ‘passing’ for French but produces mediocre literary pieces devoid of originality.

In a final note, the protagonist Bloch of *A la recherche* enables another comparison between the representations of the ‘Other’ in France by Proust and Spire. Proust’s narrator satirizes Bloch for arranging his physique to appear European rather than Semitic. In one of Spire’s poems from *Poèmes Juifs*, aptly titled “Assimilation”, Spire satirizes Jews who, like Proust’s Bloch, are ashamed of the physical characteristics that betray their Jewish origins:

Tu es content! tu es content!
Ton nez est presque droit, ma foi!
Et puis tant de Chrétiens ont le nez un peu courbe!

Tu es content! tu es content!
Tes cheveux frisent à peine, ma foi!
...
Tu tiens ton visage presque impassible!...

Et chasse donc ta brave vieille âme
Qui jusqu’ici vient te chercher.

Spire’s satirical poem ridicules the members of a distinct group who are overly eager to achieve the appearance of the dominant ethnic group or class. In such a situation, the ‘Other’ spends an inordinate amount of time obsessing about futilities such as the meaning of a facial feature. The poem’s last verse decries those who choose to ‘pass’ and to suppress their ‘soul’ or the ‘authenticity’ that they inherited from their environment and tradition. For Spire as for Proust, the suppression of one’s true self leads to alienation and a false assimilation. Spire’s cruel gaze on the assimilated Israelite echoes the sometimes acerbic descriptions of Bloch in *A la recherche*, an echo that reinforces an idea that I develop in Chapter Three. In Proust’s novel, the narrator’s tone becomes satirical when he adopts the position of an insider who, from within the
Jewish community, witnesses Bloch’s *mauvaise foi* and satirizes his efforts to repress his Jewish self to become an *inauthentic* ‘European’.

The pressure to assimilate that France imposes on its non-Western members brought Jean-Richard Bloch, Raymond Fleg and André Spire to explore the same themes and ideas that *A la recherche* uses to construct its three main Jewish protagonists. The similarity demonstrates that Proust’s reflection upon the condition, the role and the space of the Jews in French society is aligned with that of the writers of the *réveil juif*. Like Glissant and Derrida, Proust and the three-discussed members of the ‘Jewish Renaissance’ call for a contemporary France that recognizes difference so that all groups may ‘live Relation’ in authenticity.

**Proust and the anticolonial and postcolonial French Jewish writers from the Maghreb**

As can be expected, the publications of the First French Jewish Renaissance came to halt during the 1930’s as Nationalism and anti-Semitism reemerged in Europe. *Menorah* outlasted the other French Jewish magazines only to stop publication in 1933. Nonetheless, the crucial work that Proust and the writers of the Jewish Renaissance had accomplished could not be erased and the manifestations of a French Jewish identity resumed in the post-WW II era:

However, the French Jewish discourse on identity that began in the 1920’s would find a second wind after the Second World War. After the Shoah, the problems of Jewish identity that had inspired such passion to religious and communal leaders during the 20’s, become pertinent once again. The 50’s and 60’s witnessed the writing of the history of the persecutions, of the birth of the State of Israel, and the arrival of the flood of immigrants from North Africa; these are the developments that, just as in the beginning of the twentieth-century, will encourage French Jews to return, once more, to their work of self-analysis (Nadia Malinovich 94).  

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As Malinovich points out, the aftermath of WWII saw French Jews confronting the genocide and experiencing a historical rupture as significant as the one the Dreyfus case had caused a half a century before the 1940 war. For a second time, hatred and persecution of Jews fractured the relationship between France and its Jewish community and caused, once again, a re-articulation of the French Jewish identity. In addition to WWII, two other factors influenced the post-War Jewish consciousness. Decolonization and the creation of Israel forced Jews from the Maghreb to leave the now former colonies and immigrate to France. The writings of North African Jews contributed to the refashioning of the attitudes of the French Jewish subject. Among their more salient works are *La Statue de sel* by Albert Memmi (Tunisia, b. 1920), *Rêveries de la femme sauvage* by Hélène Cixous (Algeria, b. 1937) and *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre* by Jacques Derrida (Algeria 1930- France 2004).

To compare the early twentieth century Jewish condition that Proust represents in *A la recherche* to contemporary ones in France presents two challenges, one temporal and the other geographical. Proust’s novel recreates life in Paris and its adjacent provinces during the Belle Époque until the early 1920’s. In all three works noted above, the autobiographical aspect unfolds mostly in the Maghreb and no earlier than the mid 1920’s. However, as the protagonist Swann discovers in *A la recherche*, Cixous, Derrida and Memmi learn firsthand, the precariously of the inclusion that France extends to historically non-French groups. Under the Vichy regime, France terminated the citizenship of Jews, an indignity that Ronnie Scharfman describes as: “that painful and cruel moment when, in 1940, the Jews of Algeria were stripped of their citizenship by Vichy’s anti-Jewish laws… Both [Cixous and Derrida] were indelibly marked by this experience and claim its trace as constitutive of the very stuff of their writing”
(88). Indeed, the rejection and marginalization that Vichy visited upon Memmi¹²⁵, Derrida and Cixous spurred them to attempt to widen the parameters of French history with the inclusion of the formerly colonized. Being from the Maghreb, they relate not only the Jewish viewpoint, but that of the North African as well.

The works of Memmi, Derrida and Cixous reveal that contemporary French Jewish subjects are concerned not only with their group’s inclusion in France but also with that of all communities of non-European origin. The ‘French Jew’ brings into the French public sphere the different viewpoints now present in France. For example, Jacques Derrida highlights the complex relationship that the ‘Other’ maintains with the French language, the language of Relation but historically the language of colonization, hence, at some level, the language of fracture. Hélène Cixous represents the desire to wander toward the non-Jewish ‘Other’ while Albert Memmi illustrates the costs of assimilation into French society for the non-Westerner.

**Rupture and hybridity in Memmi’s *La Statue de sel***

As a solution to France’s need to integrate non-Westerners, Albert Memmi’s novel *The Pillar of Salt* offers the recognition and acceptance of difference. Memmi’s Jewish protagonist, Alexandre Mordekhai Bennilouche embodies a number of identities and confronts their challenges, making the Jewish character a figure that can speak to and for many non-Western

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¹²⁵ Scharfman’s quote refers directly to Cixous and Derrida but it also describes the fracture that the Franco-Tunisian writer also experienced under Vichy. Albert Memmi is from Tunisia but he explains in “The Pillar of Salt” how the anti-Jewish laws denied the most basic rights to Tunisian Jews, including the ability to hold a teaching position. Alexandre Bennilouche, the hero of Memmi’s autobiographical novel, endures forced labor with the other Tunisian Jews at a camp. At the camp, Bennilouche witnesses and experiences a cruelty toward Jews, and their dehumanization, that ruptures his identification with France and its proclaimed rule of reason. The experience brings the hero to reconcile with and reclaim his Jewish and North-African identities at the end of the novel. The last pages of the book portray Bennilouche as having lost his illusions on and beliefs in French humanism and he turns his back on France and the West and sails to Argentina. The character retains the atheism that he learned at French schools. But, when he regains a Jewish consciousness, he finds a serenity and confidence that parallel those that Proust’s protagonist Swann encounters when he claims a Jewish identity in reaction to the Dreyfus affair.
communities in France who search for inclusion. The protagonist’s plural identity puts him in a quandary, a situation that Bruno Chaouat describes in the following manner: “the protagonist of *The Pillar of Salt* meets a rebuke twice: neither Europe nor Africa is there for the call of the “Arab-Jew”… The shame results from the disappointed expectation, the shame of having dared hope to be welcomed by the European ‘Other’, which is clearly expressed at the moment when the narrator evokes the period of the anti-Semitic laws that were applied late to Tunisian Jews (88-89). The quote from Chaouat’s article alludes to the ambiguous condition in which Bennilouche, a Jewish *Maghrebin*, finds himself in Tunisia under French colonization.

Memmi’s character is at once and separately a Tunisian, a Jew, an Arab, an African, and a colonized subject who, because of his French schooling, acquired a European subjectivity and the wish to assimilate into the ‘superior’ dominant group.

The indigenous Bennilouche suffers from alienation since, as Chaouat points out, as a Westernized Jew he no longer belongs to the Maghreb and does not belong to France either as an African, Arab or Jew. It is France’s involvement in North-Africa that alienates the character. Western indoctrination at the *lycée* seduces Bennilouche who imagines he could enjoy a Western lifestyle away from what he comes to consider Arab and Jewish superstitions. However, when Vichy’s racial laws reveal that France’s promise of welcoming the acculturated is but a sham, the ‘native’ is left with the shame, *la honte* of having imagined that he is or could be French. In *The Pillar of Salt*, the Vichy regime brings the metropole’s racism to light, causing Bennilouche to abandon the dream of assimilation through acculturation. The protagonist’s reaction to Vichy’s racist laws echoes the one that Jews find in the works of Proust and of the *réveil juif* in

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126 *[Le] protagoniste de La statue de sel (sic.) se heurtait deux fois à un refus : ni l’Afrique ni l’Europe n’y sont, pour le « Juif-Arabe »… [La] honte résulte bien d’une attente déçue, honte d’avoir osé espérer être accueilli de l’autre européen, cela est clairement exprimé au moment où le narrateur évoque la période des lois antisémites appliquées avec retard aux Juifs de Tunisie” (Bruno Chaouat 88-89)
response to the Dreyfus affair. Bennilouche’s solution to the social dilemma depends on the acceptance of difference, a proposition that also recalls the one that Proust and the writers of the Jewish Renaissance offer in their writings.

Using Alexandre Bennilouche as a vehicle, Albert Memmi renders the confrontation of the difficult choice by a subject to belong to the rational progressive West or to the emotional, conservative East. Memmi’s *La Statue de sel* is comprised of four parts, the Prologue and three sections (L’Epreuve) (L’Impasse) et (Le monde). The novel’s structure reflects the ruptures that the intrusion of France causes in the life of the protagonist, of his Jewish family and of their Tunisian society. Indeed, each part can be read as a novel unto itself; this discontinuity is emblematic of the loss of a sense of unity caused by French colonization in the protagonist’s life. Constant rupture with a past self becomes the means to escape a life that passively accepts imposed, reductive labels such as ‘Jew’, ‘assimilated’, ‘Maghrebin’ or ‘Arab’: “Bizarre ce même sentiment de soulagement après chaque rupture… Ma destinée est d’être en perpétuelle rupture. Sans jamais pouvoir retourner car mon passé me ferme la porte à la figure” (362). Bennilouche’s empowerment comes with his welcoming each successive rupture as the key that opens onto a new life that will also be left behind. The hero of the novel speaks from the perspective of a colonized subject whose life depends on the whims and decisions of a foreign power. Under such conditions, a predictable future within an inherited tradition becomes impossible, a thing of the mythical past. The individual must therefore choose to constantly adapt in order to counter the influence of the powerful. Longing for an idealized, past condition the group or individual runs the risk of having the fate of Lot’s wife, or turn into a ‘Pillar of Salt’.
Rather than look back to a state of being that is impossible to recapture, the novel’s final scene finds the protagonist sailing away from Tunisia to Argentina, an occasion to illustrate that he accepts his situation as the ‘Other’:

Nous devions quitter le port à cinq heures, mais les opérations d’embarquement furent interminables et l’ancre ne fut levée qu’au crépuscule… Je restai appuyé au bastingage jusqu’à la pleine mer. Je perdis de vue la ligne des côtes lorsque la nuit naquit au cœur du bateau. Elle déborda des cales, emplit les écoutilles et teignit de gris le ciel bleu. Une étoile perla puis deux, puis des milliers. Comme je me trouvais mal à l’aise à regarder la mer violette, qui me faisait des grâces de sorcière, se creusant puis se haussant, me tendant les bras, je descendis dormir dans la cale.

With the last paragraph, through the perspective of an immigrant sailing away, Memmi transmits a sense of calm, a return to normalcy with the consecutive steps and unexpected delays that ordinarily accompany a boat’s departure. The protagonist’s inner peace comes from the distance he has learned to take from his ‘Oriental’ and Western selves. The East still exercises its pull on Bennilouche with the sea’s call that he associates with the bewitching seduction of a sensuous belly dance. But the protagonist resists the pull and continues his journey to the South. Bennilouche can ‘live Relation’ and exchange the experience of the colonized under French rule for as he explains before his departure ‘je suis de culture française mais Tunisien” (364). In effect, Memmi’s protagonist becomes a hybrid, inhabits more than one culture separately and not as a synthesis, a situation similar to that of Charles Swann when he speaks in A la recherche on behalf of the ‘Other’.

Hélène Cixous and the desire for the presence of the ‘Other’

In Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage, Hélène Cixous recreates colonial Algeria, her birthplace and the country of her youth. Cixous’ unwavering, unquestioned Jewish identity makes her book a continuity of the work that the réveil juif had accomplished on behalf of the French ‘Other’. In the autobiography, the author is a Jew who never considers assimilation and,
like every member of her family, respects and reaches out to the other identities that exist in multiethnic pre-independence Algeria. In her graphic style, Cixous describes the moment that her wandering begins, an intellectual posture that cannot be separated from the physical: “c’est à nos pieds que l’on voit clairement la parenté… la même façon, - mon frère – mon père, de prendre l’Algérie par la terre… moi au contraire ayant un jour lâché prise et allongé les orteils – et nos pieds nus sentent rouler les muscles séismés de cette terre continuellement agitée” (20). Cixous’ image of a Jewish family’s feet and toes that anchor the clan in the ground recalls the theme of ‘wandering’ that Proust and his Jewish contemporaries explored. Cixous’ symbolic uncurling of her toes begins her errantry toward other groups, the readiness to acknowledge the existence of other identities, the first step to live what Glissant and Derrida call a poetics or a politics of relation.

Cixous’ constant motion in search of alterity depends on her Jewish consciousness, a situation that is reflected in the words that both open and close her narration of Algeria: “Tout le temps où je vivais en Algérie je rêvais d’arriver un jour en Algérie” (168). Cixous’ lifelong longing to know Algeria as the indigenous Algerians do or, as she puts it, her desire ‘d’arriver un jour en Algérie’ explains her motivation to ‘wander’. The author’s aim to reach the Algeria of the Algerians is no small undertaking in a French colony where artificial boundaries keep Arabs, Jews and Europeans apart. In that setting, the precariousness of the Jew’s French citizenship comes home when “Quand il y a eu Vichy à Oran… on a dit à ton père (sic.) vous ne pouvez plus travailler comme médecin” (62). Vichy’s policies end the father’s medical career and his life, make him “très juif (sic.) à partir de Vichy” (100) and have later repercussions on Cixous’ life when her father fleeing Oran for Algiers enrolls her by mistake in a “lycée de filles qui depuis Vichy évite les juives” (122). Cixous’ experience of being a French Jew, who is ‘un-Frenched’
by Vichy, to be ‘re-Frenched’ after WWII connects her with the ‘Other’, makes her vie to explore her Jewish alterity which leads her to be, in her neologism, ‘inseparab’ (45) or ‘indisarab’ from the Algerians’ condition vis-à-vis France. Cixous offers a Jewish viewpoint of Algeria in French history that highlights the differences between the French, Jewish and Muslim communities. The three groups must come to know each other in order to reconcile their histories and dispense with racial and cultural hierarchies.

The desire of contemporary French Jews to be in relation with France’s communities, particularly with its minorities, transpires again in Le Monolinguisme de l’autre. In that study, Jacques Derrida’s self-description expresses his hybridity: “petit Juif français d’Algérie à se sentir, et parfois à oser se dire en public… plus et moins français mais aussi plus et moins juif que tous les Français, tous les Juifs et tous les Juifs de France. Et ici encore, que tous les Maghrébins francophones” (83). During his childhood, Derrida was assimilated, or had no Jewish culture, since he considered himself a little French Jewish boy in Algeria. However, Derrida’s French identity came to an abrupt end because, overnight, the State deprived his group and him of their citizenship: “j’ai perdu puis recouvré la citoyenneté française… Et puis, un jour… [l’]Etat qui n’était plus l’État français de Pétain, me reconnaissait de nouveau” (34). The French nation’s inclusion, expulsion and reintegration bring Derrida to realize that the more recent a group’s citizenship the more it suffers from “artifice” and “précarité” (34). Nationality can be awarded, withdrawn and re-imposed, a fact that tarnishes its mystique, revealing that it truly is an artificial construct that serves to exclude groups or individuals.

Proust, as well as Derrida, Cixous, Memmi, and their predecessors of the réveil juif who helped launch that movement in reaction to the Dreyfus affair, are in alignment with Glissant’s concept of the ‘rhizome’ discussed in the conclusion of Chapter One. Glissant’s rhizomatic
model calls on the French to know the different identities in the country and to refrain from imposing their concepts as universal. Glissant also encourages the different groups in France to know the French culture and to assert their own voices and traditions in order to resist the imposition of a single Western culture:

It is not because the relation-identities are open that they are not rooted. But the root is no longer a pin, sharp-like, it no longer kills all around it, it is drawn (whether one wants it or not, whether it is enclosed or directed) to meet other roots with whom it shares the sap of the earth. Just as there have been Nation-states, there will be relation-nations. Just as there were borders to separate and distinguish, there will be borders to distinguish and connect, and that will distinguish only to connect (Edouard Glissant).  

The cultural impoverishment that enforced assimilation imposes through acculturation makes it detrimental to both the dominant group and to minorities. In Glissant’s view, the future belongs to the state that harbors more than one ‘relation-identity’, or identities that depend on being in relation with others that they seek and welcome. The model of the nation-state with a xenophobic, single history and cultural identity is becoming outmoded. In what Glissant terms the ‘nation-relation’, each identity recognizes and engages other identities with their differences in order to create a people of many nations and cultures.

The proud Afro-Caribbean’s concept of the rhizome helps realize that a literary and intellectual Relation already exists in France. The ‘rhizomatic system’ does not appear only in the works of Glissant and Proust. Its elements connect also the writings of Lazare with those of the authors of the ‘First Jewish Renaissance’ (1900s to 1930s), as well as those of Albert

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127 Ce n’est pas parce que les identités-relation sont ouvertes qu’elles ne sont pas enracinées. Mais la racine n’est plus une fiche, an chouk, elle ne tue plus autour d’elle, elle trace (qu’on le veuille ou non, qu’on l’emmuraille ou qu’on la conditionne) à la rencontre d’autres racines avec qui elle partage le suc de la terre. Comme il y a eu des États-nations, il y aura des nations-relation. Comme il y a eu des frontières qui séparent et distinguent, il y aura des frontières qui distinguent et relient, et qui ne distingueront que pour relier (Edouard Glissant).
Memmi, Jacques Derrida and Helene Cixous who are among the most influential French Jewish writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
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