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### Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism

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# 3

## Proust as a Witness of Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century France

Quand les systèmes philosophiques qui contiennent le plus de vérité sont dictés à leurs auteurs, en dernière analyse, par une raison de sentiment, comment supposer que, dans une simple affaire politique comme l'affaire Dreyfus, des raisons de ce genre ne puissent, à l'insu du raisonneur, gouverner sa raison? (Proust 1989: II, 593)

[When we find that the systems of philosophy which contain the most truths were dictated to their authors, in the last analysis, by reasons of sentiment, how are we to suppose that in a simple affair of politics like the Dreyfus affair reasons of that sort may not, unbeknown to the reasoner, have ruled his reason? (Proust 1996: III, 340)]

### 3.1 A grandfather's hum

In the first volume of the *Recherche*, the first part of which is called *Combray* after the village where the protagonist's family has a country house and spends its holidays, the narrator tells us about his friendship as an adolescent with his schoolmate Alfred Bloch.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I read the narrator's account of

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<sup>1</sup> As I explained in *Transit I*, I write 'Marcel' when referring to the protagonist at the moment of experience, and 'narrator' when alluding to the protagonist writing his *memoires/memories*.

Bloch's visits to his family, and contextualise it as a literary reflection on crucial elements in the process of Jewish assimilation in France.

The first thing we learn about the friendship between Marcel and Bloch is that it is founded on long and high-flown discussions about their favourite topic: literature. The young Marcel raves about the enigmatic certainties that Bloch holds about difficult aesthetic questions, such as, for example, his view that poetry is all the more beautiful when it signifies less. However, after some time, there is not much time available for their discussions any longer, since Bloch is not invited to the house again, although he was heartily received at first. In order to explain why his family's attitude towards Bloch changed, the narrator first recounts how his grandfather usually displayed some peculiar behaviour upon receiving his friends. The grandfather in fact subscribed to the theory that whenever Marcel wanted to bring home a friend,

c'était toujours un juif, ce qui ne lui eût pas déplu en principe—même son ami Swann était d'origine juive—s'il n'avait trouvé que ce n'était pas d'habitude parmi les meilleurs que je le choisissais (1987: I, 90).

[that friend was invariably a Jew; to which he [the grandfather] would not have objected on principle—indeed his own friend Swann was of Jewish extraction—had he not found that the Jews whom I chose as friends were not usually of the best type (1996: I, 107)].

The narrator does not explain what the grandfather found objectionable about these friends, but we may learn something about his expectations and norms by scrutinising the short performance with which he confronts the visitor in front of Marcel. The narrator describes how, whenever a new friend entered the house, the grandfather would nearly always strike up

'Ô Dieu de nos Pères' de *La Juive* ou bien: 'Israël romps ta chaîne', ne chantant que l'air naturellement (Ti la lam ta lam, talim), mais j'avais peur que mon camarade ne le connût et ne rétablît les paroles (1987: I, 90).

[ 'Oh God of our fathers' from *La Juive*, or else 'Israel break thy chains', singing the tune alone, of course, to an "um-ti-tum-ti tum, tra-la", but I used to be afraid that my friend would recognise it and be able to reconstruct the words (1996: I, 107).] <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *La Juive* (1835) was a popular opera at the time, composed by Jacques Fromental Halévy to a libretto of Eugène Scribe, while the line 'Israel romps ta chaîne' is from the opera *Samson et Dalila* (1877) by Camille Saint-Saëns (*Éditions GF* 1987).

By humming these tunes upon the visitor's entrance, the grandfather instantly creates an atmosphere of 'hidden difference' around Jewishness, which is simultaneously shared by both Marcel and the guest. The words of the arias themselves make it even more justifiable that Marcel fears his guests recognising them, as they recall a Christian, medieval representation of the Jews. The remainder of the verse from *La Juive* goes as follows:

O Dieu de nos Pères,  
 Toi qui nous éclaires,  
 Parmi nous descends!  
 O Dieu de nos Pères,  
 Cache nos mystères  
 À l'oeil des méchants. (Acte I, scène 1).

[O God of our Fathers,  
 Thou who illuminates us  
 Please come down to us again!  
 Oh God of our Fathers,  
 Hide our mysteries  
 From the eyes of the wicked men! (my translation)]<sup>3</sup>

The verse clearly broaches a cultural memory of self-separation and enmity. The prayer asks that the mysteries of the people of Israel be hidden from the view of 'outsiders', the *méchants*, and the outsiders connoted in the opera are mediaeval Christians. Humming precisely *this* aria from *this* opera adds several layers to the grandfather's performance, to the point of making it impossible to distinguish his intentions from the web of references that he brings up.<sup>4</sup> As a first layer, the grandfather hums an aria intended for a Jewish voice, which points to his fascination, even identification, with Jewish mystery. His performance recalls Julia Kristeva's (1989) explanation for the projection of our own 'foreignness' to ourselves onto those we perceive as 'strangers'.

A second, ironic layer is added upon considering that the story of the opera portrays medieval Catholicism as the crueller faction in comparison with the

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<sup>3</sup> I have quoted these verses from (*Éditions GF* 1987: I: 593). The last part of the translation is quoted from (1996: II, 847), where these verses reappear.

<sup>4</sup> Ieme van der Poel greatly encouraged my analysis of the layeredness of the grandfather's hums. Edward Hughes (2004) has further explored the intertextual references to the opera, and traces them throughout the novel. For example, Proust refers to the 'hide our mysteries' phrase again when narrating the homosexual desires of Bloch's great-uncle Nissim Bernard (1996: II, 874). We will encounter Mr. Nissim Bernard in chapter four.

Jews.<sup>5</sup> Deploying this story, set in a medieval Austrian setting, for an opera-libretto after the French Revolution in Paris, might be interpreted as a portrayal of Christian cruelty toward the Jews which had been overcome after the Revolution, or even as a criticism of its heritage. Yet, even as the opera portrays Christians as the crueler and more hypocritical party, it revives stereotypes of the Jews as stubbornly different, as policing their daughters, and as unwilling to 'integrate'. The grandfather hums precisely those arias in which this stereotypical portrayal, suggesting a Jewish mystery inspired by religious belief, is central.<sup>6</sup>

With his performance, the grandfather creates an audible but non-discursive and non-public boundary between the house and the Jewish guest, which contrasts with the professed openness of the house and the family. This openness is symbolised by the fact that, after all, Marcel's friends are welcomed and, if they recognise the tune, need not necessarily demonstrate that they do so. The openness is qualified from the beginning, however, by the fact that the grandfather determines the rules of the game of entry. On the one hand, he does this by making it difficult for the friend who might indeed recognise the tunes to react, and, on the other, by making it impossible for Marcel to approach this friend in an uncomplicated manner from then onwards.

The narrator goes on to tell that the grandfather would 'divine' (1996: I, 107) immediately when Marcel was talking about a Jewish friend, no matter whether or not this could be easily discerned from the name.

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<sup>5</sup> The opera is situated in early fifteenth-century Switzerland, which was then dominated by the Austrians. It narrates a struggle around intermarriage between a Jewish father, called Eléazar, his adopted daughter Rachele, whom he saved as a baby, a Catholic King, and a Cardinal. The (married) king is in love with Rachele and when this becomes public, severe laws threaten to punish both of them. Rachele lets herself be convinced (by the king's wife) to declare that the king is innocent. Rachele and her father can avoid punishment by converting, but they refuse to do so. When Rachele is killed by being thrown into a cauldron with burning oil, Eléazar first tells the Cardinal that Rachele is his lost daughter, and then follows her into the cauldron.

<sup>6</sup> The rest of the verse from *Samson et Dalila*, the other aria hummed by the grandfather, brings up the same association of self-separation and distrust. It goes:

Israel! Romps ta chaîne

O peuple, lève-toi! Viens assouvir ta haine!

Le Seigneur est en moi!

O toi, dieu de lumière,

Comme aux jours autrefois,

Exauce ma prière

Et combats pour tes lois! (quoted from *Éditions GF* 1987: I: 593).

It associates Israel with a hatred that should be appeased. The last phrase in particular is important, for it suggests that the cause of the hatred lies in the struggle to adhere to the group's proper laws.

Et comment s'appelle-t-il ton ami qui vient ce soir?  
 Dumont, grand-père.  
 Dumont? Oh! Je me méfie.  
 Et il chantait :  
 Archers, faites bonne garde!  
 Veillez sans trêve et sans bruit (1987: I, 90).

['And what's the name of this friend of yours who is coming this evening?'  
 'Dumont, grand-papa.'  
 'Dumont! Oh, I don't like the sound of that.'<sup>7</sup>  
 And he would sing:  
 'Archers, be on your guard  
 Watch without rest, without sound' (1996: I, 107).]

Here again, the atmosphere of *méfiance* and the fascination for uncovering something hidden is immediately connected with the entering friend. Once the friend has arrived and has been 'unmasked' by means of some clever questions, the grandfather, in order to demonstrate that there were no doubts left, would start to hum the air of

'De ce timide Israélite  
 Quoi! Vous guidez ici les pas!  
 (...) ou encore  
 'Oui je suis de la race élue' (1987: I, 90).

['What! Do you hither guide the feet  
 Of this timid Israelite?'  
 (...) or, perhaps, of  
 'Yes, I am of the chosen race' (1996: I, 108).]<sup>8</sup>

This last verse epitomises the old myth of the Jewish people as being 'chosen'. Humming it on the occasion of a visit from a Jewish friend suggests that modern Jews may have inherited an underlying sense of distinction, or indeed, superiority, at least in religious matters, which nevertheless remains hidden under modernity's practices of admixture and equality. All the verses thus

<sup>7</sup> The English translation is a little inadequate here. The French original says 'Oh, je me méfie', which also means 'Oh, I distrust that'.

<sup>8</sup> The first verses are from the opéra comique *Joseph* (1807), by Étienne-Nicolas Méhul which was performed in 1899 at the Opéra in Paris (*Editions GF* 1987: I: 593). It is not clear to which opera Proust refers with the last phrase, the *Pléiade* edition tells us. This might suggest that Proust himself unconsciously invented this phrase, which, in a certain sense, summarises the others.

impute a self-chosen 'otherness' to the Jews, and the fact that they are only hummed and not spoken makes it implausible that the visitor would choose to overtly deny it. Whatever the guest would say, he would always have to deny something that the grandfather already knew would never be admitted openly.

The narrator refers to the hums of the grandfather as 'petites manies' (1987: I, 91) ['little eccentricities'] (1996: I, 108), but a more malign reading could suggest that his subtle anti-Semitic performance is actually quite shrewdly planned. It causes an unspeakable barrier between Marcel and his friend, and at the same time it involuntarily involves Marcel in a game with the friend, the rules of which are determined by the grandfather. Playing this game will reveal whether or not the visiting friend is 'of the best type'. To win the game, the friend first has to demonstrate that he is refined and French enough to acknowledge this high cultural product that fuses Jewish and French culture. In this sense, if Marcel's hope that the friend will not recognise the tune is realised, this friend will also partly have lost the game. In the eventuality that the friend shows some sign of recognition, he would have to show that he is assimilated enough to abstain from an explicit reaction based on an immediate identification as a Jew, for such a reaction would shatter the unspoken rule that, at least after having passed the threshold of a Catholic house, a Jew should prefer to appear as a 'neutral' citizen of France.

### 3.2 Contextualising the performance

With his performance, the grandfather causes at least three persons to be suspended in a cultural space that is neither public nor private, a space creating a 'cultural difference' that is sensible and undeniable, but that cannot possibly be made explicit. Let us now try to trace some of the political mechanisms that played a role in the creation of such a specific cultural space.

The grandfather's malignity stands within a late nineteenth-century French context in which Catholics and Republicans were extremely divided in their struggles for centralised state power, the so-called *guerres franco-françaises*, which had been going on throughout the nineteenth century. They reached their peak in the competition between (clerical/Jesuit) Catholics and anti-clerical laïcist Republicans after the installation of the Third Republic in 1870 (see Birnbaum 1998; 1988; Baubérot 2000). The struggles between a 'Catholicisme intransigent' and anti-clerical laïcism resulted in a general 'haine des minorités' ['hatred of minorities'] (Baubérot 2000: 69).<sup>2</sup> Catholic traditionalists

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<sup>2</sup> See also Birnbaum (1998), who dedicates a chapter to De Tocqueville's analysis of the diverse 'hatreds' (Catholic, Revolutionary) surrounding the advent of modernity in France. In the Third Republic, Freemasons, Jews and Protestants were all accused of anti-clericalism, in part rightly

blamed the Revolution on Jews, protestants, metics and free-masons, as these groups were considered to have ruined the 'cultural identity' of France as the eldest daughter of the Catholic Church. After the Dreyfus Affair, however, the Jews became the most visible minority and became the subsequent victims of an increasingly anti-Semitic hate-press. We have already seen how common the association of Jews with the Republic was at the time when we scrutinised Proust's comparison of society to a kaleidoscope in *Transit I*.

I could suggest that the grandfather's performance merely reflects the explicit anti-Semitism of the Catholic Reaction. However, Proust presents the family in which the scene takes place from within the realm of a hesitantly accepted republicanism and moderately secular Catholicism. The narrator's family belongs to the middle class, which has a quite conservative worldview, but is also too moderately bourgeois to be fiercely anti-republican or anti-Semitic. It conveys an atmosphere of hesitant inclusion rather than one of explicit exclusion. This is also clear from the grandfather's friendship with Swann, which is based on the fact that he is the family's neighbour in the village of Combray and is not hampered by Swann's Jewish descent.<sup>10</sup>

The family does criticise Swann, but this criticism is, at first sight, class-related. The family knows Swann as the son of Marcel's grandfather's best friend, a stockbroker. When they find out that Swann has friends among the highest ranks of France, they discuss this as something morally objectionable, but suggest that this is not because Swann is Jewish, but because he transgresses the well-defined boundaries of his inherited *class*. The grand-aunt, in particular, does not like Swann's social mobility because she sees it as a proof of snobbery: 'quelqu'un qui choisissait ses fréquentations en dehors de la caste où il était né (...) subissait à ses yeux un fâcheux déclassement' (1987: I, 21) ['anyone who chose his associates outside the caste in which he had been born and bred, (...) automatically lowered himself in her eyes'] (1996: I, 22). Such a person would leave his respectable position for that of adventurers, upstart footmen, and other social climbers. In reflecting on the family's mentality, the narrator writes that 'les bourgeois d'alors se faisaient de la société une idée un peu hindoue et la considéraient comme composée de castes fermées' (1987: I, 16) ['middle class people in those days took what was almost a Hindu view of society, which they held to consist of sharply defined castes'] (1996: I: 16). However, it is not impossible that their reaction to Swann has something to do with his Jewish background after all: the family probably once felt it had been a generous gesture on their part to receive Swann ('despite' his being Jewish),

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so. Many Catholics, for example, were fired from their public offices and relatively many Freemasons took their place (Baubérot 2000).

<sup>10</sup> The family refers to Swann as 'Jewish' in *Combray*. Later in the novel the narrator writes that Swann had one Jewish grandfather, who was married to a Protestant (1996: IV, 79).

and older family members such as the grand-aunt may have resented Swann's subsequent ability to climb to ranks that they themselves could not have reached.

An explanation of the grandfather's performance in terms of purely reactionary anti-Semitism fails to account for the specificity of the cultural space created by it, a space in which there is intimate, private contact between the members of 'cultural groups', while the sense of their different origins is not something that is explicitly talked about, even though it is palpably present 'in the air'. Exploring the further portrayal of this cultural space in Proust makes it possible to uncover the specifically Proustian contribution to the insight into the ambivalence of Jewish assimilation.

### *The Revolution's conditions of emancipation*

We can understand the grandfather's 'little eccentricities' performed at the threshold of the bourgeois family, which render Marcel's friends' welcome conditional on their ability and wish to play the grandfather's game, as a literary exploration of the long-term effects of the conditions under which the Jews were given citizenship rights in 1791. From the late 1820s onwards, this event has been called the 'emancipation' of the Jews.<sup>11</sup> Recalling these conditions will clarify that, to obtain an 'exit visa from the ghetto', which Heinrich Heine thought required conversion in Germany, also had its price in the context of French republican modernity. Here, it did not require conversion but full secularisation (in the sense of the privatisation of religion) instead, accompanied by a complete cultural and political identification with the *État-nation*. These requirements were only later summarised under the heading of assimilation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This term was borrowed from the movement for Catholic Emancipation in Britain (Schechter 2003: 263, following Katz 1964).

<sup>12</sup> There is no systematic study of the history of the concept of assimilation in nineteenth-century France. The French historian Marie-France Piguet is planning to take up earlier work on this history, as she informed me via e-mail in the autumn of 2004. Assimilation as a social concept came to be used only gradually over the course of the nineteenth century, while concepts like 'fusion' and 'amalgamation' were used more frequently at the beginning (see Birnbaum 1998; Berkovitz 1989). Schechter locates the first use of the word in its sociological meaning with regard to the Jews—referring to the ARTFL database of French literature—in the *Journal* of the brothers de Concourt. In 1878 they recorded a conversation in which Ernest Renan offered 'a wordy dissertation (...) on the faculties of assimilation of the Judaic races' (Schechter 2003: 250). In Proust's work we find the use of the term '(non) assimilés' ['(un-)assimilated'] in several places, and it was obviously quite common to use the term in the 1910s (1988: II, 98 [1996 II: 368] and (1988: III, 702) [1996: III, 472]). I will return to Proust's specific use of the concept in chapter four.

The acquisition of citizenship rights was a major achievement in Franco-Jewish history. In the course of the nineteenth century, praise for overcoming ages of exclusion and religious persecution, or, at best, periods of being tolerated just because Jews had proven to be economically useful or even indispensable, came from many sides. A particularly eloquent Jewish person captured the feelings of many by talking of 'these generous French to whom we owe the first example of justice that the world has given to our unfortunate Nation. Yes, my children, this is your fatherland, your Jerusalem, the land that God promised to our ancestors' (quoted from Burns 1992: 12).

However, emancipation was also an ambivalent event, for it created new problems caused by the homogenising, assimilatory tendencies within Revolutionary thinking and practices, particularly within Jacobinism. The Revolution gradually developed a distrust of all privileges and particularisms, which led to an attempt to not only do away with the absolutist monarchy and the privileges of the Catholic nobility, but with religious and regional institutions in general.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the Revolution inherited the unitarian dream from the absolute monarchy, leading to the attempt to eliminate cultural and political diversity and to the 'immediatisation' of the relation between the citizen and the state.<sup>14</sup> This tendency in the Revolution becomes very tangible, for example, in the project for a 'furious campaign of assimilation' (Birnbaum 2001: 47) designed by the Revolutionary Abbé Henri-Baptiste Grégoire (1750-1831) that tried to eliminate all *patois* and even accents:

The language of a great nation needs to be standardized so that all the citizens who compose it can communicate their thoughts without hindrance. This enterprise, which has not been fully achieved by any people, is worthy of the French people, who centralise all branches of social organisation and who must jealously consecrate as soon as possible, in a single and indivisible republic, the unique and invariable usage of the language of liberty (Grégoire 1788; quoted from Birnbaum 2001: 48).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The most extreme examples are from Robespierre's arsenal of the instalment of a new calendar and public holidays. The teaching of the principles of the Revolution as if they were new religious, fundamental principles combined with Jacobinism. This practice was already criticised by Condorcet and other more moderate thinkers just after the Revolution.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter two, section four.

<sup>15</sup> The Abbé wrote this in a text with the ambitious title: 'Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française' ['Report on the necessity and means of destroying the regional vernaculars and universalising the use of the French language' (my translation)]. The French Britons sensed the heritage of this programme up until the attempt to destruct Breton within one generation during the 1950s (see chapter one).

Grégoire summarises two intimately intertwined layers of Revolutionary thinking about how to make the Enlightenment 'work'. The first is an idealistic, metaphysical layer, explaining freedom as closely connected to unity and uniformity, and as opposed to difference, plurality or diversity. The second is an affective layer, which involves jealousy, anxiety, and the wish to control. This desire produces a phantasmagoria of a centralised and fully transparent social organisation and communication.<sup>16</sup> The French historian Mona Ozouf clarifies this tendency in the Revolution as follows:

The essence of Jacobinism lies in the impossibility of conceiving a divided popular will, the boundary between minority and majority, between the public and private sphere. The world of Jacobinism is one (...) where one's innermost thoughts are themselves criminal. This ideal of perfect social and psychological visibility is the basis of Jacobinism (Ozouf 1984: 83; quoted from Birnbaum 2001: 64).

Thus, the Jacobinic tendency in the Revolution not only implied the fantasy of unifying the public sphere and its equalisation with the domain of the visible. It also implied, following Ozouf, the desire to extend control into the private realm, and even into subjectivity. The domain of visibility itself should be extended to the psychological.<sup>17</sup>

In the nineteenth century the Jacobinic tendency in the Revolution was already being criticised for reasons other than the wish to restore the Catholic past. Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first to criticise the systematic institutional implications of the Jacobinic tendency in the Revolution when he wrote in 1836 that:

Revolution pronounced at the same time against royalty and against provincial institutions. Revolutionary hatred was directed indiscriminately against all that had gone before, both the absolute power and those elements which could temper its rigors (de Tocqueville 1836; quoted from Birnbaum 1998: 48).

De Tocqueville captures, first, a hugely important transition in the self-interpretation of the Revolutionaries. They did not just understand the

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<sup>16</sup> For a radical and somewhat over-systematised interpretation of these layers of Enlightenment thought, see Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002) critique of Enlightenment, which they developed by drawing analogies between Kant's concept of freedom as a purely rational principle for determining our actions, and the Marquis de Sade's ethics of pure control over sexuality.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault (1976) marvellously analyses the diversifying and therefore contradictory discursive effects of this desire for control and unification.

Revolution as the abolition of the absolute monarchy and the privileges of the nobility. They went one step further and understood these institutions as the epitome of the past, and then turned the Revolution against 'the past' in general—declaring the post-Revolutionary Republic 'modern'. De Tocqueville also captures the political consequences of this translation of a political hatred against a Catholic distribution of power into a hatred of religion in general (in the sense of 'the past', of 'tradition'), when he writes that this hatred then directed itself also against those institutions that could have 'tempered the rigours' of centralised power, such as provincial or regional institutions, be they religious ones or not.

Emancipation occurred in this context of the Revolutionary unification of the entire French nation. Protestants and Jews were only gradually admitted to citizenship. The rich and quite assimilated Sephardic Jews from Southern France were the first, in 1790, while the poorer and more traditional Alsatian Ashkenazim, who had some autonomous legal-religious institutions and some of whom usually spoke Judeo-German, only acquired citizenship rights in 1791, after long debates in the Assembly.<sup>18</sup>

Though the Revolution was shaped by the struggle with centralised Catholicism, the Revolutionaries' theories about the Jews seemed to epitomise the rage against diversity.<sup>19</sup> In 1788, a competition was organised by the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences of Metz (in Eastern France), which asked the contributors for essays on ways to 'make the Jews more useful and happier in France' (quoted from Birnbaum 2001: 46). Abbé Grégoire sent in his *Essay on the Physical, Moral and Political Regeneration of the Jews* (1788). Together with, among others, Mirabeau, Duport and the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre, he was among the great proponents of citizenship rights for the Jews, and a friend of Jewish

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<sup>18</sup> The name Bloch recalls this Ashkenazim background. 'Judeo-German' is one of the occidental versions of Yiddish (Schechter 2003: 13). Benbassa calls it 'un idiome judéo-allemand transcrit en caractères hébraïques' ['a Judeo-German idiom transcribed in Hebrew characters'] (2000: 103, my translation).

<sup>19</sup> Some of the most rigorous theorists of the Revolution were very preoccupied with the Jews, though only few Jews lived in France. Birnbaum interprets their symbolic place within Revolutionary discourse as an echo of their earlier position: 'The symbolic place occupied by the Jews in this forced rebirth of the French nation was linked with the place they had occupied several centuries earlier, when their expulsion prefigured the imminent unification of Catholic France. This France, eldest daughter of the Church, had been unified and given its *raison d'être* by rejecting first its Jews, then its heretics and Protestants' (Birnbaum 2001: 47). Perhaps the fact that the Jews were legally, religiously and linguistically 'different', instead of manifesting difference only with respect to one or two of these factors, partly determined the systematic place that the Jews occupied within the symbolism of assimilation. Schechter also mentions that referring to Jewish people as a 'nation within the nation', or variations of this view, had been common for several decades before the Revolution, and that Jews were considered obstinate for not wanting to convert to Christianity (Schechter 2003).

spokesmen like Berr Isaac Berr. His arguments were not put forward in order to exclude the Jews from citizenship, but to include them instead.<sup>20</sup>

In his essay, Grégoire analysed what constituted in his eyes the 'profound moral deprivation' of the Jews. In order to overcome this deprivation, Grégoire proposed '*to melt them, so to speak, into the national mass, to the point of making them citizens in the fullest sense of the term*' (quoted from Birnbaum 2001: 47).<sup>21</sup>

During the debates in the Assembly, Grégoire gave arguments for citizenship rights which were based on his idea that the 'vices' of the Jews were caused by their exclusion from citizenship and from the possession of land. 'C'est toujours un État dans l'État, parce qu'il n'est jamais traité comme un fils de la patrie. (...) Et vous exigez qu'il aime une patrie? Donnez-lui en une!' ['The Jews always form a State within the State, because they are never treated as the sons of the country (...) And you require them to love a country? Then give them one']. Explaining his point, Grégoire argued that the Jews' exclusion led to their being 'répandu partout, et fixé nulle part' ['dispersed everywhere, home nowhere'], to their having only an 'esprit de corps' instead of an 'esprit national'; to their not being French in France, English in England, or Dutch in Holland. The responsibility for their 'vices' is entirely lifted from them: 'Le comble de l'inconséquence serait de leur reprocher des crimes après les avoir forcés de les commettre' ['the epitome of inconsistency would be to blame them for their crimes after forcing them to commit them'] (quoted from Bernet 2004: 4, my translations).

From Grégoire's arguments, we sense that he conflates the crimes imputed to the Jews with how he perceives their self-organisation: either as too strong or as not strong enough. On the one hand, he considers that they form a strong separate 'corps/body' (the State within the State), yet on the other hand, he regards them as being 'at home nowhere'. Arguing that the Jews themselves are not responsible for their 'vices' may seem a generous explanation, but its consequence is that no agency or responsibility is ascribed to the Jews until they are French citizens and, moreover, that the empirical justification of the judgment about the Jews' 'vices' is not questioned in the first place. The combination of these elements in Grégoire's reasoning are a crucial aspect of the

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<sup>20</sup> Some of the quotes I will discuss are repeated in every history of the Jews in France and I apologise for choosing such almost clichés. However, I think that they are relevant to our discussion because they are practically absent from any discourse on multiculturalism in the context of immigration, which nearly always only deals with the twentieth century.

<sup>21</sup> This Jacobin use of the concept of 'melting' is an important connotation of the concept of 'assimilation'. The expression 'melting pot', which was used to denote the American interpretation of immigrant assimilation before the rise of multiculturalism and which is now coming back into fashion, is a reminder of this origin (see introduction and chapter six).

patterns in early assimilationism that I would like us to recall: the association of illegality and irresponsibility not with the content of people's actions, but with the level at which they associate themselves (also politically); and the exaggerated imagery around these associations.

Grégoire's arguments for giving the Jews citizenship rights had consequences for his view of the future of their ethno-religious difference. Firstly, to achieve the aim of melting, their 'tudesco-ebraico jargon' should be eliminated.<sup>22</sup> Another difficulty, according to Grégoire, was that 'leur religion englobe tous les détails de la vie, par des règlements que nos constitutions politiques n'adopteront jamais' ['their religion encompasses all the details of life by means of rules that our political constitutions will never adopt'] (quoted from Benbassa 2003: 136, my translation). Grégoire explicitly makes clear that a choice will have to be made between either following Jewish religious rules and laws or political belonging (to France). Thus, the right to French citizenship for the Jews was linked to the idea that something else, namely that which was considered Jewish particularism, had to be uprooted.<sup>23</sup>

Not all those who pleaded for Jewish citizenship held such extreme views about the new, exclusively national boundaries to be drawn. Options more open to pluralism had been considered during the Revolution: before De Tocqueville, Mirabeau had already criticised the Jacobinic rage against syndics and community structures, defending, to use Birnbaum's words, 'small private societies' (quoted from Lerner 2001). Some Revolutionaries had proposed a model that was more akin to the American Constitution. In December 1789, during one of the debates in the Assemblée, Duport, one of the speakers proposed that the Jews should only do what the French State obliged them to do, but could retain their own laws as long as they did not contradict the French ones:

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<sup>22</sup> This is a reference to Judeo-German.

<sup>23</sup> Though a self-confessed Revolutionary at the time he made these speeches and essays, the young Grégoire had been educated as a priest by Jansenists. For more than a century before the Revolution, the Jansenists had proposed kinder treatment of the Jews, in preparation for their conversion (Hertzberg 1968: 9). Hertzberg extrapolates the position of the Jews in early Revolutionary France into the twentieth-century future by arguing that the Revolution showed its totalitarian face (albeit, in Jacob Talmon's words, a 'totalitarian democracy') in its dealing with the Jewish question. The Jacobinic attitude toward the Jews was epitomised by Robespierre when he proposed to 'restore them to happiness, by restoring to them the dignity of human beings and citizens' (quoted from Burns 1991: 11). Emancipation meant protection by the state and legal recognition, but it was also the result of a longstanding tradition in which the Jews had been depicted by Catholics, *philosophes*, and even some Enlightened Jewish thinkers, as a yet to become dignified people, whose ethno-religious practices were problematic, if not borderline criminal. The difference between emancipators and exclusionary thinkers at this point was their answer to the question of whether the 'Jewish problem' should be blamed on their circumstances or on their 'character'.

What if the Jews are faithful to their own laws? For France as a whole it should be enough that they accept their obligations under the civil code of the state. There are, certainly, prejudices against the Jews and they have their own separatist tendencies, but the law can take no notice of either; it must simply give them citizenship in return for their agreement to perform their civic duty (quoted from Hertzberg 1968: 364).

There were also contradictory Jewish voices. Some pleaded for the inclusion of the Jews at the expense of their own institutions, such as, for example, a group addressing the *Assemblée Nationale* during one of the debates about emancipation on 26 of August 1789:

Nous demandons à être soumis comme tous les Français, à la même jurisprudence, à la même police, aux mêmes tribunaux et nous renonçons en conséquence, pour la chose publique et pour notre propre avantage, toujours subordonné à l'intérêt général, au privilège qui nous avait été accordé d'avoir des chefs particuliers tirés de notre sein et nommés par le gouvernement (quoted from Birnbaum 1988: 44).

[We want to be subjected to the same jurisprudence, the same police, the same tribunals as all French people and we consequently renounce, for the public case and for our own advantage, which is always subordinated to the general interest, the privilege that had been accorded to us to have leaders taken from our midst and appointed by the government (my translation).]

Others, however, like the Ashkenazim politician Isaac Cerf Berr from Metz, wanted to keep some of the autonomous legal-religious structures intact (see Hertzberg 1968; Lerner 2001). Cerf Berr did not succeed in the end, partly because he was accused by several lawyers of dissembling taxes for his personal gain and of behaving like a 'king'.<sup>24</sup>

It is difficult to evaluate whether pluralist options like those proposed by Duport and Cerf Berr could have worked in France if only different choices had been made at the time of the Revolution. Birnbaum does not present his critique of the Jacobinic turn in the Revolution as a 'wrong choice':

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<sup>24</sup> Hertzberg presents these lawyers as basically anti-Jewish: 'The Alsatian enemies of the Jewish communal bodies were not moved by a humane regard for the masses of the Jews, who were supposedly groaning under the oppressive yoke of their leaders. The purpose of men like Hell and Jacquot was to try to destroy the community structures in order to remove the prime protector of the Jews' (Hertzberg 1968: 227). Perhaps Hertzberg's judgment is one-sided, but we might keep in mind that the problematisation of the function of 'minority elites' has one of its origins in the context of the strong centralisation of the nation-state in Revolutionary France.

If a more liberal interpretation like that of Mirabeau had been adopted by the revolutionary assemblies, the multiple cultures and traditions inherent in the history of French society would perhaps have remained more alive. Such a hypothesis, however, is hardly compatible with the centralising tendencies which have long emerged as the specific means of moving beyond a particularly accentuated feudalism (Birnbaum 1989: 170; translation quoted from Lerner 2001: 201).

It seems that Birnbaum chooses the rhetorical path of leaving undecided whether we should criticise Jacobinism as a moral and institutional error, or interpret its centralising tendencies as inevitable in the face of the heritage of the absolutist feudalism preceding the Revolution; he even seems to think the latter option is more realistic. In any case, it seems advisable to rethink this heritage at a time of pluralisation and globalisation.

During the debates in the *Assemblée*, some of the arguments for inclusion clearly followed from a wish to control the population and 'civilise' it. This, like the arguments of those who wanted to expel the Jews, had much to do with security, but the tactics differed. It was a tactics not of exclusion, but of inclusion to the point of 'melting' – the concept used by Grégoire. The dynamics of this process can be read from a famous remark made by one of the discussants in the final debate on citizenship rights, the count of Clermont-Tonnerre:

(...) il faut tout refuser aux juifs comme nation et tout accorder aux juifs comme individus... il faut qu'ils ne fassent plus dans l'État ni corps politique, ni ordre; il faut qu'ils soient individuellement citoyens... Il répugne qu'il y ait dans l'État une société de non-citoyens et une nation dans la nation. (...) S'ils ne veulent pas l'être qu'ils le disent et alors qu'on les bannisse (quoted in Noiriel 1992: 278).

[(...) We have to refuse the Jews everything as a nation and to give the Jews everything as individuals ... they should no more constitute a political body or an order within the State; they must be citizens individually (...) It is an abhorrent thought that within the State there would be a society of non-citizens and a nation within the nation. (...) If they don't want to be this [individual citizens] they have to say it so that we can expel them (my translation).]<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The quote is very famous, but usually only its beginning is cited, which refers to refusing Jews everything as a nation and giving them everything as individual citizens. The alternative of expulsion is quoted less frequently.

Clermont-Tonnerre's concept of a nation within the nation is a reference to earlier, similarly conceptualised fears of separate organisations by Protestants and Jesuits.<sup>26</sup> The count's argument is linked to the general process of modernisation and centralisation, and to the decreasing legitimacy and public visibility of associations other than the state. Yet, as we have already noticed, around the time of the Revolution the Jews had been made into the epitome of minorities in general. Consequently, the demands were most systematically made of them.

If we now recall Mona Ozouf's interpretation of Jacobinism as the wish to unify the public sphere, at least within the domain of the visible, we can understand the significance of a proposal made by another speaker in the debate on citizenship, when he argued that: 'we have to begin by destroying all the humiliating signs which designate them as Jews, so that their garb, their outward appearance, shows us that they are fellow citizens' (quoted from Burns 1992: 11).<sup>27</sup> The speaker proposes to put an official end to the old practices of forced distinction imposed on the Jews. For him, however, this also means that their distinctive dress has to be generally abolished, and he fails to address the complexity of the actual practices of distinctive dress.

Forced distinction was common in many European countries before the Revolution. In France, the situation was complicated: forced distinction had been imposed for a long time (since the Middle Ages) but the control of these practices had become less rigid over time.<sup>28</sup> Rules were partly determined

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<sup>26</sup> Voltaire was the first to ascribe to the Jews a desire to form a 'state within the state' (Birnbaum 1988; Katz 1972). Later on, Malesherbes, when commanded to do so by Louis XVI in 1787, studied the position of the Jews in France, after having previously composed a report on the Protestants. He concluded that the Jews did not so much constitute a State within the State, but an *imperium in imperiis* (Poliakov 1981: 64), and that they were in that sense comparable to the Jesuits.

<sup>27</sup> I have not been able to trace the precise source of this quote and for that reason I cannot quote it in French. Burns is unclear about the source and merely mentions that it was one of the arguments made during the debates about the accordance of citizenship rights to the Jews. I never encountered the quote elsewhere. If it were not for this somewhat uncertain origin, the quote would seem to epitomise the Revolutionary origins of the ban on headscarves in public places because of their being 'conspicuous signs' of politico-religious belonging. Exchange 'Jews' for 'Muslims' and the phrase might appear as a quote from those present-day neo-Republicans strongly opposing the scarf, to be discussed in chapter six. For a daring comparison of Jacobinic sources and the remarks of contemporary French politicians such as Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac in their attitude towards Muslims, see Benbassa (2003), who wittily calls her chapters: 'Napoléon version Sarkozy' and 'Le président Chirac en nouvel abbé Grégoire'. The source of the interpretation of religious dress as a possible sign of non-belonging hails from the Jacobinic equation of the public sphere with the visible and its interpretation of religious expression as an indication with regard to citizenship (see also Asad 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Forced distinction had been invented by king Saint-Louis (1226-1270).

locally: in the seventeenth century, for example, the Jews from Metz were forced to wear yellow capes for a certain time, but this practice gradually disappeared. However, because up until the Revolution Jews in Metz were not allowed to copy non-Jewish fashions, most of them dressed in black coats known as 'manteaux juifs'. Only towards the end of the eighteenth century, members of the elite gradually took over majority habits and started to wear wigs and shave off their beards. Yet some aspects of the Jews' distinctive dress were not forced by the majority but prescribed by religion, such as, for example, the beards and the wearing of a 'couvre-chef' for the men. Not all Jews wanted to give up these distinctive marks, and religious authorities in particular protested against their gradual disappearance (Benbassa 2000: 103).

The speaker in the *Assemblée* does not take this ambivalence into account and interprets the Jews' particular dress *only* in terms of their humiliating *signification* in the eyes of the majority. By suggesting that only the wearing of modern dress could *prove* they were fellow-citizens, he seems to create room for suspicion of their solidarity if they stick to their religious dress. Moreover, it is the elite 'we' who have to destroy the signs covering 'their' bodies—which decentres the internal dynamics between the diverse groups within the Jewish community that had already led to the partial disappearance of religious dress. It turns the struggle about dress once again into an issue of minority-majority relations. This proposal anticipates the present-day Republic's thesis that it has the right to determine the meaning of the dress of its citizens.

Arguments for inclusion such as those discussed above, highlight the ambivalences of the accordance of citizenship rights. Just below the surface was a fear that the Jews might not want to belong entirely, a fear of treason, of a loss of control, or, in Grégoire's terms, of jealousy. The desire to neutralise this fear is discernible in many arguments for inclusion. In summary, the result of emancipation—as conceived by the Revolutionaries—should be that Judaism, which had been allowed to exist in the open only for a few centuries after the heritage of *marranisme* had been overcome, would eliminate the traces of what appeared to be its 'national' aspects, which were equalised with what was visible.<sup>29</sup> In the next chapter, I will further scrutinise how this process came to be understood in the course of the nineteenth century as the transformation of Judaism from a 'nation' into a privatised, secularised, 'pure' 'religion', by the abolishment of the connection between Judaism and its particularising law,

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<sup>29</sup> The heritage of *marranisme* had only been overcome gradually not long before the Revolution. For example, it was only from 1686 onwards that Jewish people refrained from presenting their new-borns for baptism, and even in 1753 some Jewish marriages were still being registered at parishes (see Hertzberg 1968: 25; Schechter 2003).

language and cultural practices (Birnbaum 1998; Benbassa 2003).<sup>30</sup> But let us first return to Marcel, Alfred and the grandfather.

### *Back to the grandfather*

Proust's oeuvre was written more than a century after these events took place. Yet the 'rough' form of Jacobinic distrust of Jewish particularity had a strong echo after 1870-71, when the fear of treason had been encouraged once again by the Franco-German war. After the loss of this war, the nationalist meaning of Grégoire's desire to eliminate the 'tudesco-ebraico jargon' was once again in the air.<sup>31</sup> I interpret the grandfather's humming about the need to be on guard when a Jew enters the house while he is officially welcomed at the same time, as an echo of Clermont's argument that the Jews are welcome, but that the nation within the nation will not be accepted. The specific cultural space that Bloch encounters at his arrival in the family, of being visibly welcome on the one hand, and of being audibly distrusted and 'othered' on the other, is a reflection of the fact that Bloch enters as a citizen, but has to prove first that he has no 'trace' of difference around him that could be judged incompatible with this citizenship: a proof of his full allegiance to Frenchness will have to be provided, and also one of the acceptance of inherited hierarchies about who sets the rules of the game.

The irony of the situation is that the one who sets the rule of the game imputes the 'difference' to Bloch before he has had time to deny it, and Bloch will therefore not be able to 'prove' anything. This is the short circuit in the promise of assimilation, which Bauman (1988) considers central with regard to assimilation as 'individual adaptation to the social order' in the nineteenth-century context of nation-state formation.<sup>32</sup> I return to Bauman's view in the next chapter. Let us now first turn to the question of how Bloch carries out the assignment to assimilate.

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<sup>30</sup> Asad (1993) demonstrates more generally that the concept of religion as we know it today only emerged in the nineteenth century.

<sup>31</sup> Misread by Burns as 'judesco-ebraico', which misses Grégoire's association of the Alsatian Jews with Germany (Burns 1992: 11). One of the aspects that made Dreyfus extra suspicious in the eyes of the anti-Semites was the fact that his family stemmed from Alsace.

<sup>32</sup> In chapter two, I have explained that the liberal assimilationists (and Bauman himself in 1988) assume that individual assimilation has lost this ambivalence because the cultural homogenisation accompanying the processes of nation-state formation has been overcome in postmodern times. I contest this claim. The ambivalence may not have vanished entirely and it has to be remembered at a time when we risk producing similar effects.

### 3.3 Bloch's reply: 'Sir, I am absolutely incapable of telling you whether it has rained'

What about the reaction of the others who participate in the cultural space that is created, or rather, made explicit, by the grandfather—most notably Marcel and Bloch, but also the rest of Marcel's family? First of all, what about Bloch? Will Bloch prove able and willing to boldly transgress the boundary of this Catholic household, something that Swann's family had obviously done a generation before?

We read no report of what actually happened when the grandfather hummed his arias on Bloch's first visit to the family, but the narrator does speak of various of Bloch's visits in immediate connection with the passage on his humming grandfather. And it turns out that not only the grandfather, but the whole family dislikes Bloch. During one of Bloch's visits, when Marcel's father amicably asks him why he is wet and whether it has been raining, Bloch replies:

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 (1987: I, 91).

[Sir, I am absolutely incapable of telling you whether it has rained. I live so resolutely apart from physical contingencies that my senses no longer trouble to inform me of them (1996: I, 108).]

We may interpret this reaction as a subtle reply to the grandfather: if one does not sense physical contingencies, one also does not (have to) hear or have to react to humming grandfathers. Moreover, such a person lives in the independent realm of the conceptual, of that which has continued its existence without fear or shame for a long time already. The family does not interpret Bloch's insensibility to contingencies in these terms, however. The father's judgement is clear, for he says to Marcel: 'il ne peut même pas me dire le temps qu'il fait! (...) C'est un imbécile' (1987: I, 91) ['he couldn't even tell me what the weather was like. (...) He's an imbecile' (1996: I, 108)].

The father's fascination with Bloch's reply about the weather is demonstrated by the fact that the whole scene is repeated once again, as if Bloch has to be reminded once more of the possibility of being touched or at least made to feel uneasy. But after the father's second question about the weather, the young man strikes back, adding an irritating aestheticist sociology to his earlier 'insensitivity':

Je ne me laisse jamais influencer par les perturbations de l'atmosphère ni par les divisions conventionnelles du temps. (...) J'ignore [l'usage] de ces instruments (...) pernicious et d'ailleurs platement bourgeois, la montre et la parapluie (1987: I, 91).

[I never allow myself to be influenced in the smallest degree either by atmospheric disturbances or by the arbitrary divisions of what is known as time. (...) I know nothing about those (...) pernicious and moreover flatly bourgeois implements, the umbrella and the watch (1996: I, 109).]

Bloch will react in similar ways many times throughout the novel. He at least partly consciously dis-identifies with the kind of 'acceptable friend' the family and others want him to be, by producing 'unadapted' behaviour. He does want to be admitted to society, but at least to some extent on his own terms. I am not sure that we can interpret his irritating, unsubtle remarks as social mistakes [*gaffes*] stemming from the fact that this *nouveau venu* simply does not know how to behave. The narrator often suggests this—also later in the novel—and distinguishes himself from Bloch on this point. Kristeva follows the narrator here, although she does 'defend' Bloch as a parvenu activist.<sup>33</sup> Yet if Bloch is partly deliberate in choosing to make his gaffes, are they still gaffes? After all, Bloch will not become a poet, but a playwright, and a convinced and strong Dreyfusard. The narrator's judgements, then, should not be taken too seriously here.

Voluntarily unprotected from meteorological disturbances by rejecting the umbrella and trusting that these disturbances will not hurt him, Bloch declares the world of appearances to be only relevant to bourgeois society and identifies with something higher, though this may be a little airy. With his simultaneous rejection of the watch he also takes a distance from the body disciplined by modern techniques of time control. He seems to identify as a romantic young man announcing Bergsonian metaphysics, but Bloch's ideal of transcending contingencies can also be read as an ironic, absurdly consequent identification with the neo-Kantian, Republican, *laïcist* philosophy of morality.<sup>34</sup> Scrutinising this connection can teach us more about the ambivalence of assimilation, insofar

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<sup>33</sup> Kristeva generously identifies with him by writing that Bloch, the *nouveau venu*, would probably have studied something like linguistics or psychoanalysis were he closer to our times (as Kristeva, who came from Bulgaria to Paris as a student, did herself) (Kristeva 1994: 55).

<sup>34</sup> Proust himself had been influenced by the neo-Kantian professor of philosophy Alphonse Darlu, whose lessons he described quite realistically in his earlier novel *Jean Santeuil*. M. Beulier, Jean's teacher at the lycée Henry IV, in many respects resembles Darlu. Quite conceivably, the portrait of Bloch and Marcel as adolescent friends is partially based on Marcel Proust's own friendship, at the lycée Condorcet, with Daniel Halévy, Robert Dreyfus and Jacques Bizet. Halévy was the grandson of the composer whose arias the grandfather hums (see Tadić 1996).

as it was produced by the way the Jews were identified with one of the 'poles' of the dichotomous relationship between reason and contingencies (whether they be natural or historical), established in neo-Kantianism.

Neo-Kantian Republicanism, which influenced Proust, advocated a free rational moral judgement 'untainted' by the prejudices caused by contingencies in the sense of religious beliefs and traditional moralities. It proposed understanding 'tradition' as a past from which we have to escape into modernity by stepping 'outside' and determining 'ourselves' after freeing ourselves from the shackles of (religious) tradition.<sup>35</sup> This implied that we can determine morality and law not by transforming habits and institutions handed down from the past, but by judging 'purely' on the basis of reason.

Such a view of morality was not appreciated by right-wing conservatives such as Maurice Barrès, who stressed the 'rootedness' of morality, the weight of the past, and the value of the Catholic nation. Yet the conservatives did not deconstruct the Republican divide between reason and tradition; they even enhanced it by using a strictly naturalistic and deterministic conception of race, which came to replace more dynamic and historical views of tradition and belonging. For example, in his description of the philosophy lessons at public schools, Barrès writes that the professor would 'hausser ces enfants admiratifs au-dessus des passions de leur race, jusqu'à la raison, jusqu'à l'humanité' ['lift those admiring children above the passions of their race, toward reason, toward humanity'] (quoted from Tadié 1996: 152, my translation).<sup>36</sup> The Republican

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<sup>35</sup> In the neo-Kantian view, this does not imply the overcoming of religion, but rather its interiorisation, and with it the purification of religion from its specificities, from religious practices (see also chapter five).

<sup>36</sup> As we will see in chapter five, the heritage of a strict opposition between tradition/determination on the one hand, and reason/self-determination on the other, appears to underlie many contemporary intransigent laïcist standpoints within public debates about particularity in France. When someone takes a distance from rationalism and recognises the weight and significance of the religious past or the embodied character of morality, he or she may expect to be accused of defending *communautarisme* or even racism, or of undermining the Republic's neutrality. The heritage of the neo-Kantian divide between reason and nature/religion/tradition has also been inherited by both structuralist *and* constructivist sociology when they abstractly distinguish between structure and agency. We can trace it in discourses of assimilation such as Noiriel's (see chapter one). In chapter six, we will see that both Kant and Durkheim held views more complicated than the distinction between reason and 'race' suggests.

It is impossible to further unravel the complexities of the early twentieth century use of the concept of 'race' at this point. But it returns quite frequently in Proust, so it is useful to give some basic information on its historical use. The concept derives from the Latin 'ratio' (order of things, category, species; hence, ironically, it has the same root as 'reason'). From 1512 onwards, it appears in France. Three meanings of the concept were used at the end of the nineteenth century without being neatly distinguished. The first links race with family, but it does so mainly in relation to noble families whose descent determines their (high) social position: '(a)

assignment to transcend 'the passions' linking one both to the past and to a specific group, either biologically or historically, was thus summarised as transcending one's 'race'. The result, according to Barrès, was in the end not morality but 'uprootedness', which was one of the major charges laid against Republicans in general and against the Jews in particular.<sup>37</sup>

When Bloch suggests that time and space are irrelevant to him, he identifies with the Republic's universalistic culture and turns it into a joke by exaggerating its validity as a weapon against racialisation. For, in a climate of strict divides, doing what the Republic asked from you led to new aversions; not only on the part of the explicit Reaction, but also on the part of the quite moderate Catholic bourgeoisie. Why do Marcel's parents not like Bloch? Precisely because of the fact that Bloch, by not subscribing to a more continuous, habitual form of morality, might not be able to offer Marcel the certainty of a stable friendship:

Mais ils savaient d'instinct ou par expérience que (...) le respect des obligations morales, la fidélité aux amis, l'exécution d'une oeuvre, l'observance d'un régime, ont un fondement plus sûr dans des *habitudes aveugles* que dans ces transports momentanés, ardents et stériles (1987: I, 91-2).

[...] they knew, either instinctively or from experience, that (...) regard for moral obligations, loyalty to friends, patience in finishing our work, obedience to a rule of life, have a surer foundation in *habits solidly formed and blindly followed* than in *these momentary transports, ardent but sterile* (1996: I, 109).]

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family, considered in terms of the continuation of generations and the continuity of its characteristics (only said of prominent families, reigning families, etc.); (b) ascendancy, lineage, origin; (c) line of descent, children, posterity'. The second, biological meaning, has been used from 1648 onwards: 'Ethnic group which differentiates itself from others by an ensemble of hereditary physical characteristics (skin colour, shape of the head ...) representing the variations within the species'. The third meaning is derived from the biological one and started to be deployed in the nineteenth century. It metaphorises the biological meaning into a cultural one: 'natural group of men that have similar characteristics (physical, psychological, social, linguistic or cultural) originating in a shared past' (summary and quotes from the article 'race' in *Le Grand Robert* 1985: VII, 989-91, my translations.).

<sup>37</sup> Barrès also denounces the power of the State when criticising republican education. In *Les déracinés* [*The Uprooted*], he writes that 'L'université est un puissant instrument d'État pour former des cerveaux (...). Dans les lycées, on est républicain' ['The university is a powerful State instrument for forming minds (...). In the public schools, one is republican'] (quoted from Tadié 1996: 152).

What Bloch understands as an identification with the world of ideas and deep sentiments is understood by the parents, instead, as a sign of a lack of solidly formed habits, and as a tendency to be transported by emotions. As good conservative bourgeois, they prefer the combined traditional-modern values of habit and self-discipline to Bloch's metaphysics.<sup>38</sup> They may even find him a little 'uprooted'.

But here Bloch is caught in a double bind which he cannot transcend. As far as he has consciously shed 'solidly-formed habits' or refused to develop them, he may at least partly have done so because he identified with the Republican ideal of transcending one's origins—and because he needed an alternative to umbrellas and watches. But it is also possible that Bloch conceals certain habits because they might make it possible to identify him as a Jew instead of as a 'neutral' citizen. Whatever he does, he will not be liked by the family, for they apply more 'universal' standards to him than they do to themselves. In summary, rejection could be expected not only of explicit anti-Semites, but also, as we learn from the reaction of Marcel's family to Bloch, of those who did want to include the Jews, but who required them to fully assimilate and secularise on the one hand, and judged that they had no solid 'habits' on the other. What they were forgetting is that they themselves had only recently assimilated and secularised, and in much more modest ways.

At this point it is worthwhile reflecting again on the specific position in which Bloch is introduced in the novel, namely at the threshold of the house of his friend's family. Proust has often been 'accused' of being only interested in society and private situations, and not in politics. Yet it is precisely here, at the threshold of the 'private' life of the majority, that problems arise for the one who assimilates. These problems appear within civil society in general and pass into politics. We will see that it is only on the basis of the contestable idea of a strong boundary between the social and the political that we can allow ourselves to believe that they do not interfere with each other.

### 3.4 Representing Bloch

And Marcel? Or the narrator? Or Proust? What about their role in this somewhat caricatural portrait of Bloch? Does it make sense to interpret the novel as slightly anti-Semitic or at least steeped in assimilationism, as stereotyping Jews that were squeezed between the many requirements imposed

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<sup>38</sup> Analogous to Edmund Burke's critique of the French Revolution.

upon them?<sup>39</sup> In what sense can we see Proust's novel as a valid testimony to the experience of assimilation? Without falling back on biographism, reflecting on the relationship between the different stages in Proust's work and some aspects of his life might be illuminating here. It has been established quite thoroughly how some of the major experiences of his life bled into his oeuvre – in complicated ways and without making use of any 'literal translation' (see for example Brun 1988; Kristeva 1994).

Proust's parents formed a mixed couple: his mother was Jewish, his father was a Catholic. His mother was born Jeanne Weil, and she married Adrien Proust in 1870. Although mixed marriages were rare at the time, this was less so within the context of the rich bourgeois elite to which she belonged, and which had been secularised to a large extent. She encountered no obstacles to her marriage to Adrien Proust and although she did not want to convert herself, she did not actively practice the Jewish religion and consented to baptising her children. Her father had been the last generation to actively practice the Jewish religion, and in a very modest manner only: Nathé Weil observed the grand religious holidays and went to temple on Yom Kippur, but this was the only time in the year that he did so (Tadié 1996: 45).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> As is suggested, for example, by the novelist Henci Raczymow, in his *Bloom et Bloch* (see Schulte Nordholt 2002). Raczymow 'extracts' Bloch from the *Recherche* (and Bloom from *Ulysses*) and places them at the end of the twentieth century.

<sup>40</sup> It was the milieu also of Mme Straus, one of Proust's models for Mme de Guermantes. She was born G n vieve Hal vy, daughter of Fromental Hal vy, the composer of the opera *La Juive*. She was the mother of Proust's friend Jacques Bizet and the aunt of his other friend Daniel Hal vy. She famously answered the question of why she did not convert to Christianity by saying: 'J'ai trop peu de religion pour en changer' ['I do not have enough religion to change it'] (quoted in Marrus 1971: 61, my translation). Although, for Mme Straus, secularisation had transformed into a 'natural' secular feeling, there had been some historical events that may have precipitated the process of the family's secularisation.  lie Hal vy, the father of the composer and grandfather to G n vieve, had come to France from a village in Bavaria after the Declaration of Human Rights and the establishment of citizenship rights for the Jews. He was confronted with the combined homogenising power of the State and the Catholic majority culture when he wanted to register his new-born daughter at the Mairie de Paris in 1813. In the following letter, he complained about what happened there:

'Paris, le 10 ao t 1813

  Messieurs les membres du Consistoire central,  
'Messieurs,

Il y a un mois lors de la naissance de ma derni re fille, m' tant pr sent    la mairie du 7e arrondissement afin de la faire porter sur le registre de l' tat civil, un des employ s de cette administration refusa de l'inscrire sous le nom de Sara, parce que ce nom ne se trouve pas dans le calendrier. J'objectai vainement, qu'en ma qualit  d'isra lite, je n' tais pas soumis   reconnaitre des saintes et que l'Ancien Testament devait  tre pour mon culte ce que la l gende

For Proust, his mother's Jewish background constituted a complicated social and psychological issue in face of the historical situation of the Third Republic and the Dreyfus Affair. He was involved in the Dreyfus Affair himself, in that he was one of the first to start a petition for colonel Picquart, who had defended Dreyfus. Since Proust did not live in Jewish surroundings but among the elite, which was mainly fully secular or Catholic, he was often confronted with openly professed anti-Semitism. In 1896, he wrote a letter to his anti-Dreyfusard friend Robert de Montesquiou, to explain why, at a party, he had not replied to a question about Jews in the context of the Dreyfus Affair:

C'est pour cette raison très simple: si je suis catholique comme mon père et mon frère, par contre, ma mère est juive. Vous comprenez que c'est une raison assez forte pour que je m'abstienne de ce genre de discussions (*Correspondance* II, 66; quoted from Fraisse 1996: 318).

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est pour le culte catholique: l'on persista et je me vis contraint de remplacer le nom de Sara par celui de Mélanie. J'ignore s'il existe une loi qui autorise ce refus, ou si c'est par un excès de zèle mal entendu qu'on s'est opposé à l'admission d'un nom qui se trouve dans le Pentateuque. Comme tout ce qui a rapport à la religion est du ressort de votre ministère, j'ai cru nécessaire, Messieurs, de vous en donner connaissance, afin que vous daigniez faire ce que vous croyez convenable dans cette occurrence. J'ai l'honneur d'être avec le plus profond respect, Messieurs, votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur.

Élie Halévy'

(quoted in Loyrette 1996: 54).

[Paris, 10 August 1813

To the gentlemen members of the Consistoire central,  
Gentlemen,

It was a month ago, just after the birth of my youngest daughter, when I presented myself at the town hall of the seventh arrondissement in order to register her with the civil state, that one of the employees of this administration refused to register her under the name Sara, because this name is not found on the calendar. I objected in vain that because I am an Israelite, I am not obliged to recognise saints, and that the Old Testament should be for my religion what la 'légende' is for the Catholic one: but the officer insisted and I found myself forced to replace the name of Sara by that of Mélanie. I do not know whether there is a law which authorises this refusal or whether it was by an excess of misunderstood zealotry that the town hall employees were opposed to registering a name which is in the Torah. Because everything pertaining to religion falls under your ministry, I have considered it necessary, gentlemen, to inform you of this so that you can take whatever action you consider appropriate in this situation. I have the honour to be, most respectfully, gentlemen, your very humble and veryobéisant servant,

Élie Halévy'

(my translation).]

[It is for this very simple reason: while I am Catholic like my father and my brother, my mother, on the contrary, is Jewish. You understand that this is quite a strong reason for me to abstain from these kinds of discussions (my translation).]

Proust's explanation makes clear to what extent having a Jewish background was a private matter which one did not share with Catholic friends until an emergency made it necessary to speak out about it. It also makes clear what 'genre de discussions' this must have been, if one had to appeal to a loyalty to one's mother's religious origins in order to be exempted from pronouncing a judgement.<sup>41</sup>

Although loyalty to the Republic, while remaining religiously Jewish, had proven sufficient for inclusion in larger society, this was not the case, Proust suggests, with respect to inclusion in culturally dominant high society. Admission there required strong forms of assimilation and great skill in handling humiliation and prejudice. In the Proustian world we constantly encounter characters, often Catholic aristocrats, who are, for instance, convinced that a Jew cannot also be French.<sup>42</sup> Although this point of view was held only by reactionaries among the French, it obviously entered Proust's experience with quite some force, as we witness from another letter, written in 1915 during World War I. One evening, Proust was addressed by a foreign guest at a party. Proust recounts that he had been very moved by this guests' admiration for France, which he had expressed by saying 'vous avez chassé les Allemands, vous les avez forcés, etc.' ['you chased away the Germans, you defeated them, etc.']. On the one hand, Proust had been embarrassed by this 'vous' since he himself was not fighting, but, on the other hand, 'je sentais que cela voulait dire que j'étais Français, et c'était justement ce qui faisait mon émotion' ['I felt that this meant that I was French, and it was precisely this which produced my emotion'] (*Correspondance* XIV, 175; quoted from Fraisse 1996: 323, my translation).

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<sup>41</sup> Later, in 1905, when the anti-Semitic newspaper *La libre parole* wrote that Proust was one among a certain group of Jews who had criticised the anti-Dreyfusard Maurice Barrès, Proust wrote to his friend Robert Dreyfus: 'Pour rectifier il aurait fallu dire que je n'étais pas juif et je ne le voulais pas' ['To rectify, it would have been necessary to say that I am not a Jew and I did not want to do that'] (*Correspondance* V, 180-81, quoted from Fraisse 1996: 322, my translation).

<sup>42</sup> For example, the baron de Charlus, at a certain moment tells Marcel while talking about Bloch: 'Vous n'avez pas tort, si vous voulez vous instruire, (...) d'avoir parmi vos amis quelques étrangers' ['It is not a bad idea, if you wish to learn about life, ... to have a few foreigners among your friends]. Marcel answers that Bloch is French: 'Ah! Dit M. de Charlus, j'avais cru qu'il était juif' ['Indeed', said M. de Charlus, 'I took him to be a Jew'] (1988, II: 584) (1996: III, 330).

### *The impact of the Dreyfus Affair*

The Dreyfus Affair confronted the French (and particularly the Jews) with the political actuality of group identity—specifically in the eyes of those who belonged to other groups—at a time when many had expected that group identities and identifications had become unimportant outside of the private sphere. We can trace Proust's early reflections on the relation between belonging and political judgement in a passage from *Jean Santeuil*, Proust's first project for a novel. This novel was written in a more realistic, more documentary style than the *Recherche*. A narrator relates a third person narrative about a boy called Jean, who, like Proust himself, grows up in upper-class Paris and attends one of the famous public schools. Jean's parents are Catholic, but politically they are rather on the Republican and Dreyfusard side. *Jean Santeuil* contains quite a few accounts of the court cases during the Affair, which Proust himself attended regularly. They contain minute descriptions of the appearances of those who were called as witnesses, such as, for example, general Picquart, who risked his own career and eventually ruined it by maintaining that Dreyfus was innocent. The passage to be discussed forms part of a section called 'La vérité et les opinions' [(The) truth and (the) opinions].

The passage is anticipated by the narrator's account of one of the court sessions. In this session, a scientist is asked for his opinion on whether the handwriting of the famous *bordereau*, the piece of paper on which Dreyfus was suggested to have written the information he transmitted to the Germans, could actually have been that of Dreyfus. Against the judgement of all the military experts and at considerable risk to his career, the scientist testifies that the handwriting cannot possibly be that of Dreyfus. His testimony greatly impresses Jean. After recording Jean's thoughts, the narrator goes on to praise the judgement of the Scientist in general, who transcends his sympathies and simply tells the 'truth' because he knows it. The episode ends as follows:

Et si c'est le nom d'un illustre avocat monarchiste et chrétien qu'on lit dans la liste de protestations de *l'Aurore*, l'émotion qu'on éprouve est plus grande encore, en sentant à tout cet écart ce que c'est que la vérité. Et c'est aussi un plaisir très grand que de voir une certaine hardiesse et licence en de tels esprits qui légitiment d'un mot les opinions que nous aurions voulu avoir et que nous avons repoussées, car dans notre effort de sincérité perpétuelle (je parle pour des natures comme Jean) nous n'osons pas nous fier à notre opinion et nous nous rangeons à l'opinion qui nous est le moins favorable. Et, juif, nous comprenons l'antisémitisme, et partisan de Dreyfus, nous comprenons le jury d'avoir condamné Zola et les pouvoirs publics de flétrir les Scheurer-Kestner. Aussi est-ce une violente et agréable secousse dans

notre esprit où se trouve désormais joyeusement installée en haut rang telle idée chassée et humiliée pour n'avoir pas assez de respect pour notre propre sentiment, quand nous lisons une lettre de M. Boutroux que l'antisémitisme est abominable, que les juifs sont autant que les chrétiens (...) (Proust 1971: 651).

[If among the signatories of the protest in *L'Aurore* we see the name of an illustrious advocate, who is known to be a monarchist and a Christian, the emotion we feel is the more intense, because by reason of this deviation in his behaviour, we are made to see what truth really is. It is a pleasure too—and a very great pleasure—to find ourselves confronted by a certain form of courage, a certain air of intellectual freedom, in such men who by a word can justify opinions which we ourselves should have liked to express, but have rejected because, in our constant effort to be sincere (I am talking now of natures like Jean's) we feel that we ought not to rely on our own opinions and range ourselves on the side of those whose opinions are the least favourable to our own attitude. If we happen to be Jews, we make a point of trying to understand the anti-Semite point of view: if believers in Dreyfus, we try to see precisely why it was that the jury found against Zola, and the civil authorities cast a slur on the good name of the Scheurer-Kestner. It comes to us therefore as a pleasurable shock to be able to enthrone henceforward an idea previously expelled and humiliated because we lacked respect for what we genuinely felt, when we read a letter written by Monsieur Boutroux in which he states that anti-Semitism is abominable, and that Jews are just as good as Christians (...) (Proust 1985: 352-53).]<sup>43</sup>

This passage is not about a scientist 'transcending' opinion by means of knowledge, but about an advocate contradicting the received opinion within his party with another opinion, owing to his courage and intellectual freedom. The narrator at first explains Mr. Boutroux' step in terms of the classical distinction between *independent* judgement and *received* opinion or prejudice. Yet the passage also problematises the metaphysical idea that we can reach the truth by transcending opinion and by sincerely judging from a neutral position. Understanding intellectual freedom in this way can push us in the direction of *not* supporting truth: this is what happens to Jean himself, and the narrator identifies with him in his reflections on the 'us' attempting to reach a neutral position from where we can judge impartially.

Proust himself goes out of his way to avoid being possibly accused of partiality. In solidarity with his Jewish mother, he invents a Catholic boy trying

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<sup>43</sup> *L'Aurore* was the newspaper in which the writer Émile Zola published his famous '*J'accuse*', in which he publicly asserted Dreyfus's innocence.

to find a neutral standpoint, who is then focalised by a narrator contemplating neutrality in general, in order to address the most painful issues surrounding belonging. In addition to inventing these two intermediaries, the narrator dresses up as a casual example that which we might consider the central problem that is being addressed: the fear of being accused of partiality upon defending Dreyfus as a Jew; the necessity of presenting oneself as 'neutral'; and, lastly, perhaps, the partial interiorisation of the anti-Semitic judgement that follows the attempt to be sincere and to judge the two parties alike: 'we' reproduce, within ourselves, the majority's judgement about Dreyfus; 'our' multidirectional mind humiliates and disrespects our feelings, just like the anti-Semites disrespect the Jews, and we become dependent on the judgement of an authoritative person like Mr. Boutroux.

The awkwardness of this position can be sensed from the physical relief that ensues when someone from outside breaks the ban and tells the truth. The passage thus uncovers the distinction between neutrality and truthfulness: truth is not dependent on 'our' neutral position but on constellations of facts, and we will have to initiate conflict or a debate in order to have it recognised.

The *Recherche* can be read as an exploration of the complicated field between independent judgement and partial, received opinion. The narrator (and Marcel) are always bodily and historically involved in their judgements, which, at least partly, depend on their position in the social field. The narrator may sometimes emulate the objective perspective of the 'scientist', but the novel suggests that this is usually impossible with regard to political and social judgement. Through its narrative structure, all views are always put into perspective by means of specific viewpoints which change over time.<sup>44</sup>

This general perspectivist tendency of the *Recherche* is conveyed to the reader by means of a reflection on Marcel's family's one-sided view of Swann as a neighbour and son of a stockbroker rather than as the classy, worldly man that he also is:

Mais même aux point de vue des plus insignifiantes choses de la vie, nous ne sommes pas un tout matériellement constitué, identique pour tout le monde, (...); notre personnalité sociale est une création de la pensée des autres. Même l'acte si simple que nous appelons 'voir une personne que nous connaissons', est en partie un acte intellectuel (1987: I, 18-19).

[But then, even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone,

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<sup>44</sup> Descombes (1996) has extensively elaborated on this theme by linking Proust's perspectivism with Wittgenstein's concept of language games.

(...); our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people. Even the simple act which we describe as 'seeing someone we know' is to some extent an intellectual process (1996: I, 20).]

By 'intellectual' process, the narrator appears to mean a process that contains elements of interpretation, of social meaning. This principle thoroughly individualises experience; every individual experiences every other individual in a different way than does a third individual. Moreover, every individual experiences every other individual in a way that is different from the way in which she experienced this individual in the past. The constructive work implicated in our perception of other people is crucial to Proust's novel. Throughout it, we are confronted with Marcel's constructions of characters at certain specific moments, based on memories, expectations, fantasies, lies, and with the ways in which these constructions are subsequently transformed over the course of his experiences, while they are being remembered by the narrator. There is no final revelation of truth: the narrator always remains implied in his socialised habits with regard to perceiving others. We can also detect this perspectivism in the portrait of Bloch. He is introduced into the situation the grandfather has created; from this point onwards Marcel clearly perceives his friend with his grandfather's and father's judgements 'in mind', as we can read, for example, in his explanation of why his parents disapprove of Bloch being his friend.

*'Il les recevait du reste très bien' ['He received them well overall']*

Yet perspectivism also knows degrees, depending on *who* tries to know *whom*, and in which context. We can trace a deeper layer of complexity within the portrait of Jewish characters by noting the writer's own choices about what should be published in the novel and what should be protected from being made public, perhaps because it was too harsh, too mythical, or too painful. The changes Proust made to his first versions are sometimes breathtaking, specifically when they concern the relation between Catholics and Jews. The passage on Bloch exists in an earlier version where the visiting friend is not yet identified as Bloch, who did not exist as a character at the time. Instead, Swann is the one who is confronted by the grand-uncle's (instead of the grand-father's) now explicit anti-Semitism:<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> I have not copied the entire quote, which is full of corrections, additions and erasures, nor do I quote a third existing version. Compare Brun (1988) for the entire quote and an example of the 'critique génétique' of the Proustian novel, which analyses the transitions between different versions. Kristeva (1994) restates the major findings of the 'critique génétique'.

M. Swann quoique beaucoup plus jeune que lui était le meilleur ami de mon grand oncle. Et c'est assez bizarre pour plusieurs raisons dont l'une était que M. Swann était juif et que mon grand oncle n'aimait pas les juifs. C'était chez lui une de ces petites faiblesses, de ces préjugés absurdes comme il y en chez les natures les plus droites, les plus fermes pour le bien. Cette sorte d'antipathie d'ailleurs légère, était un peu aggravée de ce que prétendait mon grand oncle, chaque fois que nous nous liions avec un de nos camarades plus qu'avec les autres et que nous l'amenions dîner à la maison c'était toujours un juif. Il les recevait du reste très bien mais ne cessait de fredonner : « O Dieu de nos Pères » de la Juive que pour entamer « Israel, romps ta chaîne! » de Samson et Dalila, ne chantant que l'air naturellement <(ti la lam, tam ta lam, ta lam ta lam, ta lam, talam, talim talilalam, tim talam) (...) Mais quand l'israélite présent était M. Swann il ne se gênait pas pour chanter franchement ces airs et prononcer distinctement les mots du livret, sachant bien que M. Swann ne s'en fâchait pas et il disait : « Avec Swann ce n'est pas la peine de supprimer les paroles, il connaît tout mon répertoire. » « Oui n'est-ce pas Swann » et Swann répondait en riant « Oui et je ne vous en veux pas. Et plus gravement: Vous apprendrez un jour que tout ce que vous respectez et dont vous croyez les juifs généralement dépourvus, la générosité, la charité, la solidarité, le pardon des injures sont précisément des vertus juives par excellence. » Et mon grand oncle devait l'apprendre en effet. (...) L'ignorance où nous étions de l'« élégance » de Swann tenait évidemment en partie à la délicatesse et à la discrétion de son caractère; mais aussi à ce que la bourgeoisie française d'alors—et peut-être encore d'aujourd'hui se faisait de la société une idée qui ne différait pas beaucoup de la conception hindoue, et la considérait comme composée de castes fermées (...) Le père de Swann étant associé d'agent de change (le fait qu'il fut juif n'entraînait pas en ligne de compte, parce qu'il ne fréquentait que des catholiques, et cela donnait tout au plus envie aux femmes curieuses de lui demander s'il était forcé de manger à certains jours de la chair d'enfant chrétien, question que leurs maris avec quelque mauvaise humeur les déconseillaient de poser) (...) (Cahier 8 [N.A. Fr. 16 648], quoted from Brun 1988: 118-19, 123).

M. Swann, although much younger than my grand-uncle, was my grand-uncle's best friend. This was bizarre for several reasons, one of which was that M. Swann was Jewish and that my grand-uncle did not like Jews. This was one of those small weaknesses or absurd prejudices in him as exist even in the natures of the most righteous persons, those who are firmest in their service to the good. This sort of antipathy, which by the way was only slight, was a little aggravated by my grand-uncle's claim that every time we [Marcel

and his brother, Y]] connected ourselves strongly with one of our friends more than with others and brought this friend to our house for dinner, it was always a Jew. He received them well overall, but never stopped humming 'O God of our Fathers' from La Juive, changing to 'Israel, break thy chains' from Samson and Delilah, humming only the melody of course (ti la lam, tam ta lam, ta lam ta lam, ta lam, talam talim talilalam, tim talam) (...) But when the Israelite visiting us was M. Swann, he did not hesitate to sing these airs openly and to distinctly pronounce the words of the libretto, knowing very well that M. Swann would not get angry, saying that: 'With Swann it is no use leaving out the words, he knows my entire repertoire.' 'Yes, isn't that so, Swann', and Swann would answer with a laugh: 'Yes and I do not blame you for it.' And more seriously: 'You will learn one day that everything you respect and of which you consider the Jews to be deprived, such as generosity, charity, solidarity, and the forgiveness of sins are precisely Jewish virtues par excellence.' And my grand-uncle would indeed learn this. (...) Our ignorance of Swann's 'elegance' was indeed partly dependent on the delicacy and discretion of his character; but also on the way the French bourgeoisie of the time—and perhaps still today—had a notion of society that did not differ much from the Hindu conception, considering it as composed of closed castes (...) Swann's father was an associate banker (the fact that he was Jewish was not considered relevant because he only frequented Catholics, and at most it incited curious wives to ask him whether on certain days he was forced to eat the flesh of a Christian child, a question their husbands, with somewhat of a bad temper, advised them not to ask) (...) (my translation).]

This early version is ruder and less literary than the one eventually published. The '*nous*' probably refers to Proust's brother, who was later 'written out' of the novel. Swann explicitly contradicts the grand-uncle's negative opinion on the Jews and claims Christian values for them, which makes the conflict explicit and thus misses the ways in which the published version renders its unspeakability palpable. This early version also makes more apparent than the published one why the family had no problems with Swann's Jewish background; namely because Swann's father already '*ne fréquentait que des Catholiques*' ['only frequented Catholics'].<sup>46</sup> The supposition that certain

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<sup>46</sup> It was in the act of rewriting this passage that Bloch was created. Julia Kristeva believes that separating Bloch from Swann ('*sorti d'une cuisse de Swann*' ['emerged from Swann's thigh']) had the function, for Proust, of creating, on the one hand, in Swann, '*un alter ego positif*' ['a positive alter ego'], while, on the other hand, '*Bloch se charge des aspects négatifs du judaïsme, non sans conserver quelques complicités et affinités avec le narrateur, issu qu'il est d'une variante initiale de Swann*' ['Bloch takes on the negative aspects of Judaism, though not without

curious wives were tempted to ask Swann whether he was forced, at any time, to eat the flesh of a Christian child, reveals Proust's early experience of anti-Semitism as something deeply hidden within privatised Christian cultural memory. The husbands, less secluded within private spheres, know that these myths should not escape from the boundary of the Catholic home. This passage ties the narrator's reflections on the family's very limited knowledge about Swann's social position to their limited knowledge of Jewish private life in general, which caused them to remain bound to myths that they knew were foolish but nevertheless found fascinating. Yet it does so in a very loose manner, without considering the possibility that their lack of knowledge about Swann could be associated with this general ignorance; instead, as we saw in the beginning of the chapter, the narrator blames it on the 'Hindu' caste prejudice.

In his reading of the changes made by Proust, Bernard Brun (1988) interprets the transition from *brouillons* [draft-versions] to public versions that are partly *brouillages* [radio interference], as the result of mixed motives, impossible to unravel. On the one hand, Proust is led by a wish to adapt his story to the narrative structure he projected, which should demonstrate that we only have perspectival knowledge of our social surroundings. Therefore, he eliminates those elements of the story that determine the backgrounds of his characters too clearly from the beginning, such as, for example, a clear, objectifying determination of 'who Swann was'. On the other hand, the operations are also led by a wish to hide the most painful and incomprehensible associations around anti-Semitism and racialised desire from the public.

Brun might have added a reflection on the question of why the perspectivist poetics, which entirely contradicts the family's expectation of fixed social places, is explicitly introduced for the first time when Swann enters the familial territory. After all, the reader has received a much more detailed and coloured picture of the family than of Swann, in spite of remaining perspectival. Perhaps

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retaining some complexities and affinities with the narrator, born as he is from an initial version of Swann'] (Kristeva 1994: 54). However, Proust may have had other reasons for creating two Jewish characters instead of a single one. He may have created Bloch's character because he needed to formalise and narrate the historical problems of assimilation that he encountered and that varied across different generations and classes. Bloch does not function as a negative portrayal of 'Judaism' in general, but as a portrayal of the 'coincé' (trapped) position in which those Jews that had not yet assimilated as fully as Swann had, found themselves. As we will see in chapter seven, Swann will only get into trouble after the Dreyfus Affair, when he starts identifying himself as a Jew. In addition, as we will see in the next chapter, Proust needed Bloch for his portrayal of the structures of judgement exhibited by (some) members of the Catholic majority and by (some) assimilated Jews towards those who were less assimilated.

we may suggest that, by emphasising the family's perspectival knowledge of Swann as they keep speculating on his identity, Proust explores the ways in which Judaism, which had become more or less private and invisible in the nineteenth century, experienced a second life in a semi-public memorial space without being admitted in a more explicit sense. The Republic guaranteed equal entry into the public sphere for Jews, but only as neutral citizens; it produced full inequality at the point of their equal visibility as private persons *and* as the producers of a specific culture. Instead of leading to actual immateriality at the public level, this lead to speculation. Hence, while Proust's perspectivism is a general narrative procedure, Swann (and Bloch) will always remain less graspable than the other characters because the novel reflects the structure of assimilation. The entire cultural space is Catholic-secular, and Swann and Bloch only appear in the context of their confrontation with it. This not only ensures that they will be scrutinised according to how well they have adapted, but also that this lack of visibility is projected onto their behaviour as demonstrating a propensity for incomprehensibility and 'excessive' social mobility. In the next chapter, I analyse Proust's metaphorical style as an ambivalent reflection and partial critique of this exclusion of Jewish culture from the public sphere at a discursive level.