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Stuck in a Revolving Door: Religion, Cultural Memory and Politics

Introduction

In this chapter, I propose to read Proust's metaphorical style as an exploration of the changing relationship between religion and culture once it has been suggested that a group's ethno-religious traditions should become private in the course of a process of secularisation. More precisely, I propose that Proust's metaphors can be read as a specific problematisation of the idea that we can transform an ethno-religious culture into a religion in such a way that it can be relegated to a putatively 'private' sphere. In this context, I read Proustian metaphor as a further exploration of the semi-public, semi-private cultural realm of unspeakable 'otherness' introduced in chapter three. I argue that this realm is itself produced by the attempt to establish a strict separation of private and public, of religion and politics, that is to say, by a secularist interpretation of modernity. This cultural realm hosts a specific kind of ethno-religious difference in which othering and secrecy, shame and the objective cultural memory of religious and cultural difference, intermingle and sometimes clash.

My interpretation will take shape as we follow our friends, Marcel and Bloch, in their confrontation with their new friend, the Marquis Robert de Saint-Loup-en-Bray. Saint-Loup only features in the second volume of the *Recherche*, entitled *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* [*Within a Budding Grove*]. Marcel and Bloch meet Saint-Loup for the first time in Balbec, the small, luxurious Normandy seaside resort where they spend their summer holidays. In section

one, I address Marcel's perceptions of Bloch and his family in Balbec. Here, I elaborate in greater detail on the nineteenth-century concept of assimilation as secularisation by discussing Théodore Reinach's 1901 definition of assimilation. As a second step, I address Esther Benbassa's, Hannah Arendt's, and Zygmunt Bauman's analyses of the paradoxes of assimilation, while reading Proust's metaphorical style as a powerful reflection and original critique of these paradoxes. Proust's style demonstrates the cultural effects of the habitual conceptual network in nineteenth-century liberal-Republican thought that connects, on the one hand, politics, the French nation, and the public, and, on the other, religion, other "nations"—in particular the Jewish one—and privacy.

In section three, I extend my reading beyond the specificities of Jewish assimilation and concentrate on reading Proustian metaphor as a problematisation of the secular Republic's basic premise of realising equality by relegating social belonging to a sphere separate from politics. I propose to read Proust's metaphors as carriers of a cultural memory of hierarchy and power distribution over diverse societal groups *and* of this cultural memory's agency in the present; as literary devices that recall layers of identities and their interwovenness, cutting through the Republican divide between politics on the one hand, and religious and social belonging on the other.

Analysing metaphors when we want to learn something about assimilation and secularisation compels us to develop a sociological concept of metaphor that is unusual in the existing literature, which mostly occupies itself with inquiries into the rhetorical and metaphysical functions of metaphor, particularly when dealing with the *Recherche*.¹ Roland Barthes, however, has proposed a reading of Proustian metaphor in sociological terms. For him, Proust's novel presents an exploration of social mobility, with metaphor functioning as the vehicle for exploring this characteristic of modern society. Barthes first suggests that there exists a *grammar* of modern societal life, the essential formal characteristic of which is *reversal*:

Une permutation incessante anime, bouleverse le jeu social (l'oeuvre de Proust est beaucoup plus sociologique qu'on ne dit : elle décrit avec exactitude la grammaire de la promotion, de la mobilité des classes), au point que la mondanité peut se définir par une forme : le renversement (des situations, des opinions, des valeurs, des sentiments, des langages (Barthes 1980 [1971]: 37).

¹ See for example Deleuze (1964) and Genette (1966; 1972). I return to the 'metaphysics' of metaphor in chapter seven.

[A ceaseless permutation animates, shatters the social interplay (Proust's work is much more sociological than people say: it describes the grammar of social advancement, of social mobility, in an exact manner), up to the point that society life can be defined by a form: reversal (of situations, opinions, values, feelings, languages) (my translation).]

This reversal, Barthes argues, is figured through metaphor in the Proustian novel. In his elaboration of this idea, Barthes opposes Proust's syntax of modern societal life to a classical social syntax. In Proust's universe, characters are able to radically change roles. They can, for example, be vulgar one moment and most distinguished the next, without being the one in truth and the other only in appearance. Barthes takes the princess Sherbatoff as an example: she is a Russian princess, who at one time appears to Marcel as a brothel keeper. In classical syntax, such as the moralistic one represented by the famous French writer La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), the princess would be 'deciphered' as 'nothing but' a brothel keeper (Barthes 1980 [1971]: 35-36). Proust replaces this syntax of 'nothing but' by a 'concomitant syntax' in which the woman can be both a princess *and* a brothel keeper. This new syntax should be called 'metaphorical', Barthes suggests, because metaphor, notwithstanding the long-standing tradition of rhetorics, indicates a work of language without any 'vectorisation: it passes from one term to another in a circular and infinite way' (38).

Barthes's interpretation of metaphor stresses the relaxing of fixed semiotic categories in Proust's modern universe, but it neglects a different aspect of this universe's mobility, which is also explored through metaphors, this time more vectorised. I propose to read the Proustian metaphor as an attempt to configure—to localise at a textual level, and with it, to situate in a culture that can be shared and is public—the heritage of class distinctions, of social and religious belonging. Thus, we will read Proust's metaphorical style as an exploration of the complex relationship between public inequality and difference. Specifically, the metaphors bring to light the ways in which group belonging, though officially only privately relevant, in many complex ways saturates the different layers of a public, shared culture: as visible traces, as cultural practices, as ways to organise specific groups, as shared cultural memories, as persistent prejudices, as shared hopes and expectations, and as something transformative as well.

4.1 Picturesque rather than pleasing in Balbec

The second part of the *Recherche* narrates the adolescent Marcel's holidays in Balbec. There, he befriends Robert de Saint-Loup, nephew of Combray's Duchess of Guermantes. Marcel has admired the Duchess from his early youth and when the opportunity to meet Saint-Loup presents itself in Balbec, he is very eager to gain his friendship. This turns out to be more difficult than befriending Bloch: at first sight, Saint-Loup appears arrogant and unapproachable. Yet once Saint-Loup shows an interest in becoming his friend, Marcel starts to admire him practically without reserve. Saint-Loup will remain Marcel's best friend until his untimely death on a battlefield during World War I. The narrator ascribes to Saint-Loup a nearly absolute 'sincérité' and 'désintéressement', which is also reflected in the fact that Saint-Loup, as a nobleman, is a Republican. According to the narrator, Saint-Loup's inability to find satisfaction in egocentric sentiments such as love makes him capable of true friendship, unlike Marcel (and Bloch) (1988: II, 416). In sum, Saint-Loup is exactly the kind of friend Marcel's parents would have wished for him.

Not long after their first acquaintance, Marcel discovers that Robert, mixing curiosity with his Republican ideals, wants to get to know people that Marcel's parents, following the 'sociological theories of Combray,' would never expect him to be interested in (1988: II, 367). Immediately after this remark, the narrator writes how one day, sitting on the beach with Saint-Loup, they hear the following words coming from a tent not far from their own:

On ne peut faire deux pas sans en rencontrer (...). Je ne suis pas par principe hostile à la nationalité juive, mais ici il y a pléthore. On n'entend que: Dis donc, Apraham, chai fu Chakop. On se croirait Rue d'Aboukir (1988: II, 97).

[You can't go a yard without meeting them (...). I am not irremediably hostile to the Jewish race, but here there is a plethora of them. You hear nothing but, 'I thay, Apraham, I've chust then Chacop.' You would think you were in the Rue d'Aboukir (1996: II, 367).]²

To Marcel's astonishment, it turns out that the person speaking is 'his old friend Bloch' (1996: II, 367). We may explain Bloch's remark as self-irony, but we have to acknowledge that he also distinguishes himself from the 'plethora' as a more assimilated person by imitating a Yiddish accent which he himself does not have. The next astonishment follows when Saint-Loup tells Marcel that he has

² Rue d'Aboukir is a street in Ménilmontant in Paris which has housed immigrants for more than two centuries, including Jews in the nineteenth century and Muslims today.

met Bloch at the *concours général*, and that he would like to be introduced to him.

It turns out Bloch is not the only one to have problems with the Jewish presence in Balbec, for Marcel himself 'was not particularly anxious that Bloch should come to the hotel' (367). This is because Marcel includes Bloch in the undesirable 'plethora'. He notes that Bloch is not alone but with his sisters, who, in turn, have 'innumerable relatives and friends' staying in Balbec (367). Thus, in Marcel's eyes, the category of 'other Jews' from whom Bloch distinguishes himself includes Bloch, and they all form part of a single group connected through private links of family or friendship. The narrator then provides the following comment on this group:

Or cette colonie juive était plus pittoresque qu'agréable. Il en était de Balbec comme de certains pays, la Russie ou la Roumanie, où les cours de géographie nous enseignent que la population israélite n'y jouit point de la même faveur et n'y est pas parvenue au même degré d'assimilation qu'à Paris par exemple. Toujours ensemble, sans mélange d'aucun autre élément, quand les cousines et les oncles de Bloch, ou leurs coreligionnaires mâles ou femelles se rendaient au Casino, les unes pour le «bal», les autres bifurquant vers le baccara, ils formaient un cortège homogène en soi et entièrement dissemblable des gens qui les regardaient passer et les retrouvaient là tous les ans sans échanger un salut avec eux, que ce fût la société des Cambremer, le clan du premier président, ou des grands et petits bourgeois, ou même de simples grainetiers de Paris, dont les filles, belles, fières, moqueuses et françaises comme les statues de Reims, n'auraient pas voulu se mêler à cette horde de fillasses mal élevées, poussant le souci des modes de «bains de mer» jusqu'à toujours avoir l'air de revenir de pêcher la crevette ou d'être en train de danser le tango. Quant aux hommes, malgré l'éclat des smokings et des souliers vernis, l'exagération de leur type faisait penser à ces recherches dites «intelligentes» des peintres qui ayant à illustrer les Évangiles ou les *Mille et Une Nuits*, pensent au pays où la scène se passe et donnent à saint Pierre ou à Ali-Baba précisément la figure qu'avait le plus gros «ponte» de Balbec (1988: II, 98).

[Now this Jewish colony was more picturesque than pleasing. Balbec was in this respect like such countries as Russia or Romania, where the geography books teach us that the Jewish population does not enjoy the same esteem and has not reached the same stage of assimilation as, for instance, in Paris. Always together, with no admixture of any other element, when the cousins and uncles of Bloch or their co-religionists male or female repaired to the Casino, the ladies to dance, the gentlemen branching off towards the

baccarat-tables, they formed a solid troop, homogeneous within itself, and utterly dissimilar to the people who watched them go by and found them there again every year without ever exchanging a word or a greeting, whether these were the Cambremer set, or the senior judge's little group, professional or 'business' people, or even simple cornhandlers from Paris, whose daughters, handsome, proud, mocking and French as the statues at Rheims, would not care to mix with that horde of ill-bred sluts who carried their zeal for 'seaside fashions' so far as to be always apparently on their way home from shrimping or out to dance the tango. As for the men, despite the brilliance of their dinner-jackets and patent-leather shoes, the exaggeration of their type made one think of the so-called 'bright ideas' of those painters who, having to illustrate the Gospels or the Arabian Nights, consider the country in which the scenes are laid, and give to St Peter or to Ali-Baba the identical features of the heaviest 'punter' at the Balbec tables (1996: II, 367-68).]

This passage raises a number of questions and I will proceed slowly; rather than reading it in terms of a typically nineteenth-century example of anti-Semitism, I propose to read it as an exploration of the effects of assimilationism in the context of a cultural memory of difference. An introductory question could be why being 'picturesque' and being 'pleasing' are opposed by the narrator as qualifiers of what is perceived as a 'Jewish colony'. Why is this colony picturesque? Because the appearance of the Jews gives rise to visual abstraction and unity, to clear contours and colours. The women are dressed fashionably and perhaps a little indecently, as the narrator's allusions to swimming and dancing suggest, while the men wear brilliant clothes and seem to be 'exaggerated' underneath them. Thus, the 'colony' is qualified as picturesque because it stands out. This is linked to its not being pleasing: it appears as a very (or even overly) big group of not-us. The images used to designate the Jews in Balbec shift from 'plethora' to 'colony', to 'the cousins and uncles of Bloch or their coreligionists', to a 'solid troop, homogeneous within itself'. The suggestion that there are very many Jews is linked to the perception that they are indistinguishable and members of a single family. This family quality derives from the impression that there is no 'admixture of any other element'.

Here, in a space of shared leisure, the Jews are suddenly perceived as a family, an *ethnos*, instead of the 'public individuals' whose Jewishness was officially declared irrelevant to their public functioning. The passage suggests that for all their access to French society, the Jews live completely separated from the other French in their private time; and this separation itself stimulates the perception of them as a unified group. This recalls Jakob Katz' view that social emancipation remained

a far cry from the vision that had sustained Jews when they first started to leave behind the boundaries of their traditional society (...) Jews, even in countries where they had obtained political freedom, were economically advanced, and assimilated culturally, remained separate, even conspicuously so (Katz 1973: 201-02 quoted from Bauman 1988: 55).

And while the narrator perceives the Jews as a united family, he divides the French, by contrast, into classes and professions, ranging from nobility (*les Cambremer*) to the judge's *little group*, to professional or 'business' people, and finally to the petty bourgeois (simple cornhandlers).

The metaphors used should make us aware that there is something peculiar about this perception. Underlining the differences between the groups, the metaphors contrast greatly with what the narrator actually *sees*. Why do the Jews stand out? What the narrator sees is that they dress fashionably. The girls are qualified as 'ill-bred sluts' because they show a certain zeal for doing what is hip: dancing or shrimping. They are colourful and picturesque, whereas the daughters of the Christian bourgeoisie are statuesque ('like the statues in Rheims') and probably quite prim and prissy. This fashionable appearance is then ingeniously *associated, through metaphor*, with what makes these 'co-religionists' into an ethnically and religiously separate group: not the fact that they share a religious culture—on the contrary, reference to a shared religious practice is conspicuously absent—but a metaphorical association of their modern appearance, firstly, with what the geography books teach us about the lives of ghettoised Russian and Rumanian Jews, and secondly, with classical religious narratives from the Orient.

The narrator establishes these associations in a perfectly circular way: from the brilliance of the *baccarat* players we make a detour to the Orient as a geographical place, then to the mythical Orient of the origins of Christianity and Islam, only to return to the (Jewish) model for these cultural memories found at the *baccarat* table. The narrator recalls the pervasiveness of these associations by seeking the cause for his own in the stereotypes used by popular painters. Thus, the Jews' modern appearance is itself associated with religious origins and with their unity as a group. What is missing is a reference to social differentiations within the group, such as those with regard to class or profession that the narrator makes with regard to the other French.³

The narrator judges that his perception of the Jews in Balbec is produced by their 'stage of assimilation'. An indication of the irony and self-contradictoriness of this analysis follows immediately, when he writes that Balbec is like Russia and unlike Paris—even though they all come from Paris.

³ Except for the important gender distinction, to which I will return.

But while the narrator associates the Jews in Balbec with Russia and Romania, Bloch, by contrast, links the group to the Rue d'Aboukir in Paris.⁴ This distinction subtly indicates that neither Marcel nor the narrator knows much about actual Jewish life in Paris, except for that of the long-time resident elite.

I propose that we now address Théodore Reinach's definition of assimilation in order to get a better grasp on the precise setting in which the narrator's view should be understood—not in order to merely localise and contextualise the passage, but in order to enable us to understand the *memorial agency* of similar notions of assimilation at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Théodore Reinach's definition of assimilation

In order to grasp how the process of assimilation was generally understood in Proust's environment, we may follow the view of the Jewish French historian Reinach, one of the early historians of Judaism (Benbassa 2000). His older brother Joseph Reinach was among the most important Dreyfusards. Proust refers to Joseph Reinach several times in the *Recherche* (1996: III, 276, 283; in 1996: IV, 169, he visits Mme Verdurin's salon). Théodore Reinach was the librarian in a library often visited by Proust (Tadié 1996 I: 688). In his history of the Jews, Reinach proposed the following transformation of Jewish identity after emancipation, which he called 'assimilation':

⁴ The difference between Marcel's and Bloch's comparison proves the closeness of the narrator to Marcel. His voice does not represent Proust's, which is at least, if perhaps unconsciously, divided between the narrator's, Marcel's and Bloch's. For this reason, I have difficulties with a characterisation of this passage like Malcolm Bowie's, who writes that 'it would be unsatisfactory to say of such writing simply that it represents one voice in a polyphony of voices in the book as a whole, and that its venom is amply neutralised by the narrator's sympathetic accounts elsewhere of Bloch and his family, and of the beleaguered Jewish community at large. The extremity of this writing deserves to be heard, and its searing aggression felt, before the problem of its presence in Proust's book is 'solved' (Bowie 1998: 144). After this, Bowie provides a relativist interpretation of the function of anti-Semitism in the narrative: 'One value system is used to expose another to ridicule, but the relation is a reversible one: the instrument of ridicule may become its object as the satirical text presses manically ahead. One of the hallmarks of the Proustian political vision is to be found in this extreme instability, in this resistance to all principles of social order and continuity. And this instability is jealously protected by Proust's text, even if this means giving room from time to time to reprehensible views' (1998: 148). In contrast with this interpretation, I think that it is vital to analyse, perhaps even almost dissect, literary voices and not ascribe them to an 'author' and his or her intentions (see Bal 1998). The embedding of reprehensible views is too significant to be just one 'voice' among others that hold each other in a sort of balance. Rather, following Proust's own account of the embodiment of political judgment, we could argue that because of the ubiquity of assimilationism, the passage has to be interpreted in its own inconsistencies as a critique of the assimilationism it professes at the explicit level.

La Révolution française ouvre une ère nouvelle dans l'histoire du Judaïsme, comme dans celle de l'Europe occidentale. À l'antique notion de l'État de droit divin et historique, fondé sur des distinctions de caste et de race, elle substitue celle de l'État purement humain et laïque, où l'on ne demande compte aux hommes ni du sang qui coule dans leurs veines, ni de leurs croyances intimes, ni de leur manière d'adorer Dieu, mais où tous les citoyens ont les mêmes droits, à la condition de remplir les mêmes devoirs. La conséquence de ce principe, c'est, d'une part, que les juifs, comme les catholiques, les protestants, les mahométans, les libres penseurs, doivent jouir dans un État civilisé, sans aucune restriction, de tous les droits civils et politiques; c'est, d'autre part, que les juifs, dès qu'ils ont cessé d'être traités en parias, doivent s'identifier, de coeur et de fait, avec les nations qui les ont adoptés, renoncer aux pratiques, aux aspirations, aux particularités de costume ou de langage qui tendraient à les isoler de leurs concitoyens, en un mot, cesser d'être une nation dispersée, pour ne plus se considérer que comme une confession religieuse (...). *L'émancipation* et *l'assimilation* des Israélites restent un idéal, aux trois quarts réalisé dans certaines contrées, à moitié dans d'autres, et qui ailleurs peut encore sembler une lointaine utopie (Reinach 1901 [1884]: 305-06).

[The French Revolution heralded a new era in the history of Judaism, as well as in that of Western Europe. For the old notion of the State of divine and historical right, founded on distinctions of caste and race, the Revolution substituted that of the purely human and secular State, where one does not make people accountable of the blood that flows through their veins, not of their intimate beliefs, not of their way of adoring God, but where all citizens have the same rights, on the condition that they fulfil the same obligations. The consequence of this principle is that, on the one hand, the Jews, like the Catholics, the Protestants, the Muslims, and the freethinkers, can partake within a civilised State, without any restriction, of all civil and political rights; and that, on the other hand, the Jews, after they have ceased to be treated as pariahs, must identify themselves, in heart and in fact, with the nations which have accepted them, renounce the practices, the aspirations, the peculiarities of costume or language which would tend to isolate them from their fellow citizens, in a word cease to be a dispersed nation, and henceforth consider themselves only a religious denomination (...). The *emancipation* and *assimilation* of the Israelites remains an ideal, realised by three-quarters in certain parts, by half in others, and which elsewhere still

remains a faraway utopia (Translation partly quoted from Marrus 1971: 92, partly my own).]⁵

Reinach's view reflects a great trust in emancipation when he writes of the nations that have 'accepted' the Jews, where they were first treated as 'pariahs'. The crucial point in his understanding of the meaning of emancipation for Judaism is that he thinks that, in return for their participation as citizens, Judaism can and should be transformed from a specific 'dispersed nation' into 'a religious denomination'. This is what he understands by assimilation.

Following this interpretation, assimilation does not imply the loss of all traces of particularity: Reinach envisions the possibility of Judaism as a particular religious denomination which has 'merely' shed all its non-religious traces. Emancipation no longer implies an implicit rejection of particularity, as had been the case in Enlightenment philosophies and under Jacobinism.⁶ The new option is based on the assumption that we can separate a private religious domain, governed by a specifically Jewish ethical-moral-religious concept of the Good, from a religiously neutral political and public sphere. But what does this particularity entail? What precisely remains of a 'dispersed nation' when it

⁵ Reinach's definition of assimilation occupies a somewhat mythical status in histories of the Jews in France. Usually, only the part ranging from 'the Jews, since they have ceased' to 'religious denomination' is quoted. I copied this part of the translation from Marrus (1971: 92); the rest is my own. Zygmunt Bauman copies the phrase from Marrus, but he misreads 'dispersed' for 'despised' (Bauman 1988: 57; see section 2). Birnbaum ascribes the passage to H. Prague, editor of the *Archives Israélites*, but this is an error (see Birnbaum 1988: 47).

⁶ The necessity of separating religion from (linguistic, visible and/or juridical) culture had been proposed in relation to the Jews from Spinoza and Voltaire onward. This separation had started to be realised in France after the Revolution. At the time of the Revolution, Berr Isaac Berr and others advocated the citizenship rights to their coreligionists by assuring them that the French State would protect religious Judaism (see also chapter three). In early Enlightenment thought, it had often been suggested that Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism represented different 'stages' in the development of religion toward a universal religion which, in the end, would imply the discovery of universal moral laws and a 'natural religion'. Spinoza, among others, also argued that Judaism was a more ritualistic and exterior religion than the 'already' more universalist (Protestant) Christianity and therefore less proximate to such a universal religion. This view was inherited by Enlightenment thinkers, and in particular by Kant, who suggested that Protestantism was the last, perhaps necessary, stage before religion could become a 'purely' interiorised, universal moral religion that would leave all naturalistic particularising practices behind (see for example Kal 2000). Reinach's idea that Judaism could subsist as an equally valid religious denomination next to others departs from the notion that one universal, naturalised religion should result from the Enlightenment. Hence, from the point of view of earlier Enlightenment conceptions of the future of Judaism, Reinach's view represents *progress* in its pluralism, and in its assignment of a place for (particular) religions within modernity. However, his view of assimilation as secularisation does not depart from the idea that religions have to shed particularising practices as much as possible and move toward their interiorisation (privatisation) and universalisation (see my introduction).

becomes 'just' a religion? And what does it mean when we conceive of public traces of religion as 'national' traces?

Reinach's definition of assimilation requires full identification with the French nation-state at a public, civil level on the part of the Jews. To stop being a 'dispersed nation' means to stop identifying in any way with a 'national' group other than the French.⁷ For Reinach, this implies that Jews should avoid giving any sign of belonging to a different 'group', because this will be associated with belonging to a different nation.⁸

Here, one senses the lack of mediating concepts that would prevent the conflation of the 'visible', the 'particular', and the 'national'. It is the discursive function of the use of concepts of culture and ethnicity to provide a network for the appearance of (religious) difference. Without these concepts, all forms of communal belonging are encompassed by the single term 'nation', which leads to competition between the Jewish and the French nation in the sphere of the visible. Religion is relegated to a realm which can only be the negative of the visible. It needs to remain outside the visible, and all its specific practices and particularities are in fact associated with self-isolation. The demand to 'de-particularise' religion, then, brings Reinach's definition close to the myth of interiority: a myth developed as an understanding of Protestantism as a belief or even as a pure experience without the need for a Church or any other institutional organisation, in line with the Enlightenment concept of secularism that I discussed in the introduction.

Before returning to the passage from Proust, I will contrast Reinach's concept of assimilation with the findings of recent historical research into actual nineteenth-century French Judaism. Our understanding of the problematic of assimilation will be enhanced when we see that it functioned, also in the nineteenth century, as a normative ideal, instead of representing a historical reality.

⁷ This transition was indicated by the distinction between 'Juifs' and 'Israélites'.

⁸ This recalls the quote analysed in chapter three, in which one of the speakers in the national assembly proposed 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).

Brief historical critique of the use of the concept of assimilation

The French historian Esther Benbassa insists that the understanding of assimilation as privatisation does not grasp what actually occurred in the nineteenth century. She strongly emphasises that assimilation in the sense of a 'fusion' and 'amalgamation' of the Jews with the French citizenry, which Reinach translates as the deculturalisation of Judaism and its transformation into a pure religion, is a myth far removed from the reality of nineteenth-century France.

Instead of the privatisation of religion, what took place was an *étatisation* of religion; religion was brought under the control of the state and *institutionalised* (Benbassa 2000).⁹ Within the confines of this institutionalisation, Judaism officially developed into a recognised minority religion over the course of the nineteenth century. Jews were generally able to gain access to French society without having to renounce their religion. During the Second Empire, synagogues were built and members of the Jewish community could obtain high posts in French society while remaining religiously active.¹⁰

⁹ Napoléon institutionalised four official religions. For Judaism, in 1806-07, he founded the Grand Sanhédrin, the first official Jewish Court after the Diaspora, later changed into the 'Consistoire'. In the nineteenth century, this gesture was interpreted by Jews and progressive Gentiles in the redemptionist terms they also deployed with regard to citizenship rights. However, the same ambivalences play a role here: Benbassa describes the controlling, repressive aspects to which this institution was subjected from the beginning (2000: 138-140). She quotes Napoléon, who uses the same terminology as the regenerators: 'il y aurait de la faiblesse à chasser les Juifs; [il vaut mieux qu'il y aura de la force à les corriger]' ['it would be weak to chase the Jews away; it would be better to use force to correct them'] (quoted in Benbassa 2000: 140). Ironically, fifteen years after the Revolution, this institutionalisation of Judaism realised a similar kind of centralised representation by a state-appointed religious elite that some of the Jewish representatives had asked to have abolished at the time of the Revolution (see chapter three). Benbassa argues that the creation of such a state-appointed and centralised elite is implicit in French minority politics and recognisable in today's policies concerning Muslims. An important difference according to her, however, is that while the Consistoires consisted partly of a secular elite of non-practicing but also non-assimilated business people, the contemporary Muslim elites empowered by the secular state are mostly composed of conservative religious persons (Benbassa 2003: 53; for a differentiated view of Muslim organisations today, see Bowen 2004). The Napoleonic institutionalisation and official 'recognition' of Judaism by the state was abolished together with that of the other three recognised religions as a result of the introduction of the state's official *laïcité* in 1905 (Bauberot 2000). I will explain this in more detail in chapter five.

¹⁰ A good example is Adolphe Crémieux, who was a witness at the marriage of Proust's parents. He served as minister of Justice in the Second Republic and, in 1870, managed to extend the citizenship rights of Jews to those living in Algeria.

However, Benbassa argues, while Jewish particularism was tolerated by the French State because Judaism was officially 'purely' a religion, this did not mean, in practice, that all 'cultural' or 'communal' aspects of Judaism reminiscent of a Jewish people—'à savoir d'une culture et d'une identité collectives dépassant le cadre des rites et croyances religieuses [that is to say a collective culture and identity that surpasses the frame of rites and religious beliefs] (Benbassa 2003: 66, my translation)—disappeared. A subtle indication of resistance to the full religionisation of Judaism was the way many Jews insisted on referring to themselves as 'Juifs' instead of as 'israélites' (Benbassa 2003: 67).¹¹ A significant detail is also that a Jewish hospital was founded in Paris during the Second Empire (Benbassa 2000). Another collective trait of Judaism, for example, was the fact that, even though intermarriage was quite frequent in the small Parisian elite Proust formed part of, the large majority of Jews did not intermarry. It would be difficult to establish whether this was the result of segregation by the majority, of a personal choice, or of something in between.¹² Lastly, many French Jews expressed solidarity with Jewish immigrants in France and with those living in other European countries. Reinach himself wrote one of the first histories of Judaism in Europe and even though, as we have seen, he professed full assimilation, his work breathes a solidarity with the Jewish people in Europe everywhere, and he writes from the perspective of a strong concern with emerging nationalisms and anti-Semitism around the time of the Dreyfus Affair.

Anticipating the future of assimilation

Benbassa argues that we should interpret the process of incorporating the French Jews after emancipation as not terribly distinct from contemporary integration (Benbassa 2000: 12, 194), and that we should no longer call it assimilation.¹³ Contrary to this last proposal, I suggest we go the opposite way

¹¹ 'Dans 'Juif', l'affiliation à un peuple et le religieux se confondent, mais toujours à l'intérieur de la citoyenneté française' [In the word 'Jew' the affiliation to a community and to the religious merge, but always within the French citizenry] (Benbassa 2003: 67, my translation).

¹² The question of whether the representatives of the Jews would consent to intermarriage was the central question directed at the rabbis upon the formation of the Grand Sanhédrin (Benbassa 2000).

¹³ Benbassa sounds a critical note about the use of the concept of assimilation in discussing the history of the French Jews when she writes: 'Cette insistance sur l'assimilation supposée des Juifs français ne devait-elle pas quelque chose à la vision des idéologues et des historiographes sionistes, pour qui la vie en diaspora mène inéluctablement à l'effacement de l'identité juive?' ['Did this insistence on the supposed assimilation of French Jews not owe something to the vision of the Zionist ideologues and historiographers, for whom life in the diaspora inevitably

and analyse the ways in which contemporary concepts and policies of integration are reminiscent of assimilation, but assimilation understood specifically as the expectation that all cultural, visible aspects of religion will disappear. As an assignment, assimilation *was* an actuality in the nineteenth century and I think it continues to determine secularist expectations with regard to ethno-religious groups.

The assignment of assimilation had great effects at the level of the social imaginary and with regard to the perceived legitimacy of ethno-religious institutions. Even though, as a religion, Judaism may have been respected and institutionalised, the idea that all traits of peoplehood had to disappear invalidated all the 'older' aspects of Judaism which 'still' marked it as a particular culture. It is precisely this mechanism which I think should be analysed, because its memory can teach us much about today's expectations with regard to 'religion' in a liberal society, if only as an asymptote. To anticipate my further argument in *Transit II*, such a definition of assimilation can reveal to us the forgotten, assimilationist element of contemporary concepts of 'integration' and liberal assimilation. Such assimilationism does not imply a repression of religion 'itself', but represents an attempt to actively encourage the fading away of publicly visible cultural and practical aspects of religion. This points to the contemporary use of the concepts of secularism or *laïcité*, to be discussed in chapters five and six. What will be most important to analyse is what it means to delegitimise the visibility of a religion when its invisibility is neither practically realised nor could be realised, for reasons to be examined later.¹⁴

led to the effacement of Jewish identity?' (my translation)] (Benbassa 2003: 12). I think she is being a little too severe here on those who think that assimilation is an important (and potentially very exclusionary) normative concept relevant to nineteenth-century French Judaism. If not at a concrete level, it was so at an ideological one, and it determined, to a large extent, interpretations of public traces of Judaism and their construction through ascription (see below). Benbassa also does not address the problem which Birnbaum, in the footsteps of Tocqueville, makes explicit as a critique of Franco-Judaism: 'Aux États-Unis par exemple, pays à État faible et où les formes multiples d'auto-organisation de la vie collective ont toujours été très denses grâce à l'instauration très précoce d'une démocratie politique aux fondements essentiellement pluralistes, la vie associative propre aux juifs n'a jamais fait problème car elle est semblable à celle de toutes les autres communautés; mieux encore, elle est tout aussi légitime' [In the United States, for example, a country with a weak State where multiple forms of the auto-organisation of collective life have always been very dense thanks to the early installation of a political democracy which, in its foundation, was essentially pluralistic, the community life specific to the Jews has never caused any problems because it is similar to that of the other communities; even better, it is also equally legitimate' (my translation)] (Birnbaum 1988: 18-19).

¹⁴ As I already mentioned, Benbassa (2003) reads the history of Jewish assimilation in the nineteenth century and the 'integration' of Islam in contemporary France in a stereoscopic

Reinach's liberal-Republican interpretation of the future of Judaism still contains the essential problem of liberal secularist views. In the first place, these views advocate a liberal integration that safeguards a 'free' private realm, yet they also produce the suggestion that it is illegitimate to form an ethno-religious or even a religious association that is visible in the public sphere. Thus, separating religion from culture in the strong sense that Reinach suggests produces a delegitimation of religious practices that involve contact with other citizens; even walking from one's house to the synagogue with a kippah, or with a scarf from home to school, may irritate those intent on interpreting this as a sign of isolation. And even if some people may wish to assimilate to the extent required by Reinach, it invalidates the standpoint of those who conceive of their religion in different, more practical or more orthodox ways, as well as the practices and habits of those only lately arrived, who have simply not yet been able (or willing) to shed all of their traditional cultural practices.

A framework of expected assimilation suggests that religion should become private, with the particularising cultural heritage fading away within a few generations. I do not want to suggest that this process is of itself reprehensible.¹⁵ Rather, we should address the oblique result of assimilation as a fixed expectation. Assimilationism, also in its liberal version, produces the Otherness it fears by relegating difference to a private realm, not recognising that it is impossible to realise this fully, and tending to distrust those traces and constructions of belonging it itself produces. We have already seen this in our interpretation of the Proustian passage about the holidaymakers in Balbec (and in chapter three), but we can now outline some further ramifications of this understanding.

Back to Balbec

If we now return to the passage from Proust, we can bring up something that adds to our understanding of the unintended effects of expectations about assimilation. We have seen that the narrator projects the association with biblical origins onto the modern, secular outfits worn by the Jews in Balbec. Although the narrator perceives no cultural practices distinguishing the Jews

manner, drawing very precise analogies. I delay a further comparison until the following chapters.

¹⁵ In chapter two, I already argued that it is not reprehensible as such, but that we have to recognise that a neutral public sphere into which one could insert oneself as a neutral citizen does not actually exist. History will always produce majorities and long-time residing cultures with advantages in terms of visibility and representation, and we have to find ways to make subtle provisions for remedying the ensuing inequalities.

from the others, the metaphors he produces 'fill in' this absence by, first, an association with religious origins and second, book knowledge about Eastern European ghettoised Jews. Thus, a reified image of the Balbec Jews as 'copies' of the two stereotypical 'originals' is inescapably linked to their modern appearance. Clearly, the presentation of the Jews as a group is a fantasy, a fantasy that exists independently of the actual communality of lower-class and less-assimilated Jews described by Benbassa, with which Bloch is but the narrator is not familiar.

The relevance of this web of associations for our scrutiny of the relation between religion and culture in a process of secularisation becomes apparent when we read it in terms of Jan Assmann's ideal-typical distinction between 'communicative' and 'cultural' memory (1999). Communicative memory is the memory transmitted across three to four generations through mainly oral communication – but also through folk tales, journalism, pictures (and, increasingly, through photographs and films). These three to four generations share some of their memories and together, Assmann reminds us, form a *sacculum*, as the Romans called it (1999: 50). Cultural memory, on the other hand, is a memory of origins that has been processed into reified, ritualised objectifications. According to Assmann, cultural memory is usually understood as memory derived from 'ancient' times. By means of 'institutionalised mnemotechnics', a mythologisation through which memory acquires normative and formative power, it establishes mythical backgrounds to official religions. Hence, while communicative memory is linked to the secular, cultural memory is connected to the sacred.

On the basis of the Proustian passage, we may suggest that the distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory can also play a role in the dynamics of intercultural perception. The passage suggests that a reified, mythical image of Jewishness tends to replace precisely those practices of cultural difference which the assimilants have been told to make invisible. The fact that the Jews of Balbec do not in any particular sense distinguish themselves from the other guests does not help them to overcome their isolation, since the absence of visible culturally distinctive practices leads to an absence of a shared communicative memory of (the very limited) differences these practices might actually entail, while leading observers to 'fill in' their inevitable idea of Jewishness with reified images from an age-old cultural memory of religious difference.¹⁶

¹⁶ I only endorse Assmann's definition of cultural memory as myth here because it helps to clarify this specific Proustian metaphor. In the rest of this book, I follow the track of those critics who use 'cultural memory' in order to distinguish it from collective memory, precisely because mediation produces a pluralisation and interpretability that frees memory from representing an un-refracted collectivity or past, and links it to the present. See, for example, Mieke Bal, who

The metaphors used by the narrator suggest that Jewishness as a visible culture linked to certain practices is absent, also in his imagination, but that this does not lead to a forgetfulness about the Jewish background of the guests in Balbec. Instead, this background is imposed on the Jews in the form of a reified cultural memory in Assmann's sense, not by the group itself, but by those perceiving them. We do not know about each other's religious or cultural practices, but we do have stereotypical ideas about each other's religions. The replacement of a communicative memory of religious practice by these 'originary' religious references explains how modern difference turns into myth.¹⁷ These associations are only imaginary, but they do form part of an inescapable public culture that transmits intercultural memories of religion as mythical.

I will now consider the political consequences of the different ways of constructing otherness analysed in this section, by turning to Hannah Arendt's reading of Proust's work in the context of the Dreyfus Affair.

4.2 Hannah Arendt reads Proust; projection and construction

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt draws out the political consequences from Proust's presentation of the modern construction of difference: she posits that modernity itself produced Christian anti-Semitism's transformation into racism. Following a similar definition of assimilation to Reinach, and presenting Proust as her witness, she thinks that Judaism as a distinct collective life with socially objective distinguishing marks of affiliation, such as its adherence to a specific religion, language, law, and nationality, had been abolished at the time

defines 'cultural memorization as an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future' (Bal 1999: vii, see also Transit I).

¹⁷ One of the ways Proust deals with this reification is by pushing reified images to the ironic point of their total imbrication and mixture. Let us consider, for example, Bloch's translation of Jewishness from a dynamic cultural-religious practice into a reference to a reified religious 'origin' in his explanation of his own sentimentality. Bloch ascribes this sentimentality to his Jewish background, which the narrator immediately extends into an association with the origins of Christianity. At a certain point, when discussing Marcel's sickly condition, Bloch says to Marcel: 'You cannot imagine my grief when I think of you', Bloch went on. 'Actually, I suppose it's a rather Jewish side of my nature coming out', he added ironically, contracting his pupils as though measuring out under the microscope an infinitesimal quantity of 'Jewish blood', as a French noble might (but never would) have said who among his exclusively Christian ancestry nevertheless numbered Samuel Bernard, or further back still, the Blessed Virgin from whom, it is said, the Lévy family claim descent. 'I rather like', he continued, 'to take into account the element of my feelings (slight though it is) which may be ascribed to my Jewish origin' (1988: II, 377). This mixes Christian and Jewish origins without turning one into the origin of the other.

of the Dreyfus Affair, and that religion had been relegated to an ever smaller private, even subjective, realm. However, contrary to the idea that assimilation implies 'dejudaisation', Arendt contends that assimilation's 'result was that [the Jews'] private lives, their decisions and sentiments, became the very centre of their "Jewishness"' (Arendt 1979 [1948]: 84). This resulted in the naturalisation of Judaism into Jewishness, implying its definition in terms of character, race, and innate qualities.

Among the supposed innate qualities of Jewishness, especially after the start of the Dreyfus Affair, was 'traitorousness' (86). Arendt thinks that it was from a fascination with 'vice' that high society began to be interested in the Jews; hence, the Jews were admitted to society not *despite* the fact that they were associated with Dreyfus, but precisely *because* of this. Arendt motivates this argument by using the example of Bloch's social ascendance at the time of the Dreyfus Affair.

While there was no longer any objective difference between Jews and Gentiles, Proust demonstrated, in Arendt's view, how Jewishness became a trait of a purely constructed, 'different' identity. She suggests that while equality was established in the political realm, distinction became ever more important in the social realm once the 'bourgeois' took over from the 'citoyen'. Hence, she suggests that there existed an intricate link between political equality and citizenship on the one hand, and the emergence of social inequality, expressed in naturalistic terms as a difference between races, on the other.

On the basis of my previous analysis of Proust's representation of the paradoxes of assimilation, I would suggest that certain aspects should be interpreted a little differently from Arendt. Her interpretation is overly dialectical, exaggerating the subjectivation of Judaism in Proust's work. Elements of self-construction, ascription, and a (dynamic) heritage of objective difference are all inextricably intertwined in the novel. This is precisely what analysing the Proustian metaphors enables us to see. Also, Bloch's social ascendance does not occur because of a fascination with vice or, more particularly, traitorousness. The narrator provides a different, less awkward explanation. Bloch's ascendance (which, by the way, does not go very far in the beginning because he is teased and disrespected by many other characters) is possible only because he was from 'the lowest rung of the social ladder' and 'might go unnoticed' (1996: III, 214), whereas more well-known, classy Jews such as Swann are gradually excluded from society as a result of the Dreyfus Affair (see chapter seven).

Arendt takes the concept of assimilation as a historical instead of a normative one, and therefore sees remaining aspects of Judaism *only* as pure constructions—thinking that a Judaism with objectively distinctive cultural practices had vanished, she forgets, at the very least, the class differentiations.

This does not mean, however, that her interpretation does not remain acute in its problematisation of the relation between political equality and the production of difference or group thinking. She rightly evokes the words of Saint-Loup, who complains about the people forming 'a tribe, a religious order, a chapel' amidst the Republican context of official political non-belonging: 'La question n'est pas, comme pour Hamlet d'être ou ne pas être, mais d'en être ou de ne pas en être' (1988: III, 410) ['The question is not, as for Hamlet, to be or not to be, but to belong or not to belong (1932: II, 299).']¹⁸

With her analysis of Jewishness as a social construction effected by modernity, Arendt adds a layer of understanding which escapes the Republican Saint-Loup, namely that there is an intrinsic relation between political equality and social distinction. However, I think we should consider this relation in a different constellation, understanding it not as the collapse of the citizen into the bourgeois, of the Republican principle of public equality into one of private distinction, but rather as a by-product of this principle itself. Political equality understood as public 'sameness' produces inequality.

We can understand this when we turn to the Dreyfus Affair as Proust explores it in the following passage. (We have to diverge a little from our three friends here and introduce some other characters.) The passage explains why the love of the Princesse de Guermantes for the Baron de Charlus puts into perspective the Dreyfusism of her very French husband, the Prince de Guermantes. At a certain point during the Affair, this Prince, an anti-Semite by principle—who had only accepted Swann as his friend because he imagined Swann was the grandson of the Catholic Duc de Berry, Swann's Protestant grandmother's lover, rather than the grandson of the Jewish man she had married (1996: IV, 79)—becomes convinced of Dreyfus' innocence (see chapter seven). Because of the credibility of his standpoint—as a convinced anti-Semite and Christian French aristocrat with deep roots in French soil—his view is a threat to those still convinced, for pragmatic or other reasons, of Dreyfus' guilt. However, what aids these anti-Dreyfusards is that the Prince's closest affiliates, namely his wife, the Princesse de Guermantes, and his cousin, the Baron de Charlus, both have a peculiarity. The Princesse comes from an aristocratic Bavarian background and the Baron is a homosexual, a practice he gradually, over the course of the novel, ceases to hide, but which is still surrounded with taboos in larger society. These particularities give rise to the suspicion that the two do not fully belong to the French nation but to separate groups or communities. The following quote gives us the opportunity to scrutinise the finer aspects of this suspicion:

¹⁸ This translation is drawn from the previous English translation, since the relevant pages are missing in the 1981 edition (*Remembrance of Things Past*, New York: Random House, 1932, quoted from Hassine 1996: 122).

Et le dreyfusisme du prince avait beau ne pas lui avoir été suggéré par sa femme et n'avoir pas de rapports avec les moeurs du baron, l'antidreyfusard *philosophe* concluait: 'Vous voyez bien! C'est peut-être de la meilleure foi du monde que le prince de Guermantes est dreyfusiste. L'influence étrangère a pu s'exercer sur lui d'une façon occulte. C'est le mode le plus grave. Mais un bon conseil. Chaque fois que vous trouverez un dreyfusard, grattez un peu. Vous ne trouverez pas bien loin le ghetto, l'étranger, l'inversion ou la wagnéromanie.' Et lâchement on cessait la conversation, car il aurait fallu avouer que la princesse était une wagnérienne passionnée (1988: III, 1390).

[(...) And in spite of the fact that the Prince's Dreyfusism had not been prompted by his wife and had no connection with the Baron's sexual proclivities, the *philosophical* anti-Dreyfusard would conclude: 'there, you see! The Prince de Guermantes may be Dreyfusist in the best of good faith; but foreign influence may have been brought to bear on him by occult means. That's the most dangerous way. But let me give you a piece of advice. Whenever you come across a Dreyfusard, *just scratch a bit*. Not far underneath you'll find the ghetto, foreign blood, inversion or Wagneromania.' And cravenly the subject would be dropped, for it had to be admitted that the princess was a passionate Wagnerian (1996: IV, 623, my italics).]

Let us address the metaphor of scratching here. Scratching the surface is necessary with everyone who has a particularity, no matter of which kind. These particularities are perceived as absolutely deterministic. The Prince's belief imposes itself 'by occult means'. The required separation of political judgment from belonging leads to the perception of divergence as something archaic. This underlines the acuity of Arendt's interpretation, for it is indeed inner nature that is made into a determinant of the Prince's judgment. By scratching, as we always suspected, we find a member of another nation or another clan. The delegitimisation of visibly different practices and backgrounds leads to the suspicion, on the part of anyone seeking to denounce a politically divergent opinion, that something is being covered up instead of replaced, hidden instead of removed. In short, replacing a 'different' belonging with citizenship, rather than combining the two from the beginning, leads to a fascination with 'otherness' instead of its disappearance.

Under the regime of assimilation, both foreignness and homosexuality have to be turned into secrets, into the business of 'isolated individuals', as Walter Benjamin once suggested (see chapter seven). Paradoxically, although Jewishness and homosexuality are abstractly conceptualised as 'private', they only exist if they are shared. Thus, to a certain extent, they have to be made

public. This means that the assignment of assimilation can never be fulfilled. We have seen that Arendt explains the fact that Jews came to be associated with treacherousness as a result of the Dreyfus Affair and of a social fascination with the Jews, who were seen as a 'race of traitors'. Yet Proust suggests that the damage had been done long before. It is not a strange social fascination for vice that leads to the suspicion of treason, but *citoyenneté* itself, in as far as it delegitimises other identifications. The suspicion arose from assimilationism itself, with its focus on destroying any appearance of otherness.¹⁹

4.3 'The Christians at the surface'; class, gender and ethnicity

Bloch (...) supportait comme au fond des mers les incalculables pressions que faisaient peser sur lui non seulement les chrétiens de la surface, mais les couches superposées des castes juives supérieures à la sienne, chacun accablant de son mépris celle qui lui était immédiatement inférieure (1988: II, 103).

[Bloch (...) had to support, as on the floor of the ocean, the incalculable pressures imposed on him not only by the Christians at the surface but by all the intervening layers of Jewish castes superior to his own, each of them crushing with its contempt the one that was immediately beneath it (1996: II, 374).]²⁰

The assimilation-induced shame of one's own unreformed identity was displaced at the embarrassment felt at the sight of the close kin's otherness. Ever renewed embarrassment did not allow the shame to die out, but it deflected the most painful assimilatory pressures and indefinitely postponed the moment of truth (Bauman 1998: 326).

We have to add one more layer to our analysis of the problematic of assimilation. According to the above quotes from the *Recherche* and from Zygmunt Bauman, the always-impending possibility of the gesture of scratching led to a powerful internal dynamics among the assimilating Jews,

¹⁹ For an interpretation of contemporary 'conspiracy theories' referring to Arendt's and Proust's interpretation of 'belonging' in modernity, see Kitlinski, Leszkowicz and Locker (1999).

²⁰ Annelise Schulte Nordholt has pointed to the irony in Henri Raczymov's *Bloom et Bloch*, in which Bloch is lifted out of Proust's novel and transported to the end of the twentieth century, where he complains about the invasion of the (then less esteemed) immigrant Sephardic Jews on the beach of Cabourg. Bloch has not frequented this beach since the Sephardim occupied it and he views it as 'un autre monde, méconnaissable' ['another world, unrecognisable'] (Raczymov 1993: 31, quoted in Schulte Nordholt 2002: 372).

who were pushed to differentiate themselves from those who were more easily distinguishable as 'others'. I will trace this mechanism through the narrative about our three friends in Balbec, making use of Bauman's analysis of the paradoxes of assimilation as it emerges at the intersection of class and (ascribed) ethnicity, while adding a gender perspective to his analysis.

Not long after our three friends meet on the beach and the narrator reflects on the Jews in Balbec, he comes up with the following explanation for the Jews' segregation:

Bloch me présenta ses soeurs, auxquelles il fermait le bec avec la dernière brusquerie et qui riaient aux éclats des moindres boutades de leur frère, leur admiration et leur idole. De sorte qu'il est probable que ce milieu devait renfermer comme tout autre, peut-être plus que tout autre, beaucoup d'agréments, de qualités et de vertus. Mais pour les éprouver, il eût fallu y pénétrer. Or, il ne plaisait pas, le sentait, voyait là la preuve d'un antisémitisme contre lequel il faisait front en une phalange compacte et close où personne d'ailleurs ne songeait à se frayer un chemin (1988: II, 99).

[Bloch introduced his sisters, who, though he silenced their chatter with the utmost rudeness, screamed with laughter at the mildest sallies of this brother who was their blindly worshipped idol. Although it is probable that this set of people contained, like every other, perhaps more than any other, plenty of attractions, qualities and virtues, in order to experience these one would first have had to penetrate it. But it was not popular, it sensed this, and saw there the mark of an anti-Semitism to which it presented a bold front in a compact and closed phalanx into which, as it happened, no one dreamed of trying to force his way (1996: II, 368).]

This reflection sheds a perspectivising light on the narrator's earlier observations. Again, Proust uses the technique of circular reasoning to represent assimilationist expectations. At first, the narrator admits that he does not know any members of the group as individuals, from personal experience. Then he retreats, adding a second cause for the group's homogeneity that is located in the outside world: Jewish homogeneity is a reaction to, and serves as a protection against, the anti-Semitism of the surroundings. The narrator's assimilationist mistake lies in the fact that he does not write that the Jews sense the anti-Semitism surrounding them, but instead translates their experience of being excluded into the 'real' cause of their exclusion, which is that they are a closed group. Thus, he presents the act of isolation on the part of the Jews themselves as the ultimate reason for their exclusion: the Jews appear as an unpleasant, closed-off group and this causes others to react to them with

hostility. This hostility then leads the Jews to segregate themselves even further to protect themselves from the anti-Semitism produced by their original isolation.

The English translation fails to bring out a couple of clues pointing to the fact that the narrator does not really know anything about the Jews. He links this to Bloch's behaviour: although Bloch presents his sisters to Marcel, he immediately makes them shut up. At this point, in the French text, we read: 'de sorte qu'il est probable que', suggesting that the narrator's speculation on the group's unknown virtues results from the fact that Bloch keeps them away from non-family males. From Bloch's action, the narrator makes a subtle transition to the general remark that 'this set of people' may have many virtues. Only from there he goes on to explain that 'one' would not have wished to 'penetrate' or 'force one's way into the group' anyway. Hence, he suggests an interaction between, on the one hand, their isolation as a group because they fear anti-Semitism and, on the other, the imaginary of aggression and penetration, suggesting that the only imaginable way to break the group's solidity would be violence. We could interpret this as a reminder of certain not so pleasant, mythical roots for majorities' interests in intermarriage. This helps to explain Bloch's possessive behaviour towards his sisters not as a matter of group protection alone, but also as a reaction to aggression towards the group as a whole.

Dining at Bloch's

At this point, it emerges that Saint-Loup does wish to penetrate the 'group', and he and Marcel accept an invitation to dine with Bloch's family. At the dinner, we witness a *mise en abyme* of intra-cultural shame about the lingering traces of Jewish culture. While Saint-Loup and Marcel discuss the people they know and the salons they frequent—a discussion during which, the narrator suggests, it is quite obvious to them that a Jewish family like Bloch's will not have been admitted to the highest circles—the two friends are highly aware of the family's Jewishness. The narrator partakes of this shame and condescends to the family, portraying them as yearning for recognition to the point of humiliating themselves.

All this occurs while some family members try not to identify as Jewish. When Nissim Bernard says of the writer Bergotte that he makes one think of 'Schlemihl', the narrator traces the father's irritation about this remark to the fact that the epithet made one think of the 'dialecte mi-allemand, mi-juif' (1988: II, 132) ['half-German, half-Jewish dialect' (1996: II, 408)]. Although the father loves this way of talking 'dans l'intimité' (132) ['in the family circle' (408)], he

finds it 'vulgaire et déplacé devant des étrangers' (132) ['vulgar and out of place in front of strangers' (408)]. Later on, Nissim Bernard murmurs a phrase of which Marcel only understands 'quand les Méschorès sont là' (133) ['when the Meschores are in the room' (409)]. In the Bible, Meschores stands for the 'servant of God' and the Bloch family uses the term to talk about their servants. The father, the narrator again explains, loves this expression, as it reminds him of the double particularity of being both masters and Jews, and because neither Christians nor the servants are able to understand it. However, when this reference to difference is made publicly, in the presence of Marcel and Saint-Loup, Bloch turns 'very red' and his father reacts furiously to the 'embarrassment' caused by Bernard, suggesting that the great-uncle would be the first 'à lécher les pieds' (133) ['to lick the boots' (410)] of Bergotte.

Only Bloch's sisters continue to laugh. They not only laugh at the condescending jokes of their brother, who calls them 'chiennes' [literally: 'bitches'] in front of Saint-Loup and Marcel, but also at the spectacle of father and son red with shame and anger at the great-uncle (1988: II, 133). It is clear that the sisters are outside the circle of social pressure—excluded from social participation and full agency in the larger society—yet they seem to be the only ones to grasp the irony of the situation, which gives them, in a sense, exceptional moral force in comparison to all others. Here again, the narrator's voice, suggesting that they are just naïve, is unreliable: let us not forget that only just before he had described the same type of girls as 'ill-bred sluts'.

The narrator suggests that while outsiders may perceive the Jews as a unified group, even as a family, within the group there exists an important hierarchy. It is important to notice here that this hierarchy is not determined by class alone. Those occupying the highest ranks have relatively deep roots in central France. It is the great-uncle who understands least of these combined assimilationist-class pressures and who falls victim to the disrespect of all. Bloch and his father are mainly judged by the narrator, who projects his judgment, partially, onto Saint-Loup. The latter is considered, on the one hand, to be afraid of underestimating his 'adversary' (the Bloch family) and, on the other hand, to be all the more fascinated by Nissim Bernard as the great-uncle demonstrates his obsessive social falsifications (1988: II, 134).

Yet why does this internal hierarchy become so prominent; even more prominent, perhaps, than the general hierarchy between classes? Bauman offers the following explanation. He interprets the rise of modern anti-Semitism in line with Arendt's reading of Proust, insofar as he, too, suggests that the overcoming of the religious and national boundaries between Jews and gentiles in post-Revolutionary France did not lead to actual assimilation, but rather to the development of new principles of segregation, with the introduction of the category of race as its most exclusionary form. But, instead of blaming this

development on bourgeois society's drive to social distinction and holding up against it the ideal of a Republic of citizens, he ascribes it to the more general social-anthropological process accompanying the modern project of the nation-state, which led to boundaries being drawn and blurred, as well as to the specific forms these processes took in relation to Jewish assimilation in European countries.

For Bauman, then, the strategy of assimilation in the sense of 'individual adaptation to the social order' (1988: 65) was a failure not because the idea of amalgamation itself was flawed, but because the strategy resulted in different outcomes from the ones promised. While those individuals who had embarked upon the path of assimilation and who had shed most references to Judaic religion and culture, especially the use of Yiddish, did not expect to remain 'other' in the eyes of many members of the majority, they discovered that this was indeed the case in many respects. The very possibility of social mobility resulted not in being welcomed and blending in, but was instead perceived, at least by some, as a 'Judaification' of specific social fields such as science, high culture, and the free professions. It was cause for resentment.²¹ This resulted in a society where a principle of segregation remained intact, even though full acculturation had taken place. Political and legal emancipation led, in Katz' words, to 'a semi-neutral society', 'where the inferior status of the Jews was ignored by conscious effort rather than eliminated by actual equality' (Katz 1972: 201, quoted in Bauman 1988: 55).

Hence, once the Jews had done everything on their side to level the boundaries, they discovered that new ones had been drawn by the members of majorities, precisely as a result of the fact that the old ones had been blurred. This meant that the 'rules' of the game established at the outset of the emancipation process were being changed by members of the majority while the game was still going on, resulting in an exclusion that was no longer based on objective criteria but on subjective, purely differentiating ones. This is why Bauman argues that 'without control over the rules, it was impossible to win'

²¹ To mention an example from the German context, we can see this in Heidegger when we consider the apt phrase he used in a letter from 2 October 1929 to a high official in the ministry of education discovered in 1989: 'Es geht um die unabsehbare Besinnung darauf, dass wir vor der Wahl stehen, unserem deutschen Geistesleben wieder echte bodenständige Kräfte und Erzieher zuzuführen oder es der wachsenden Verjudung im weiteren und engeren Sinne auszuliefern' (quoted in Safranski 1994: 299) [The matter concerns no less than an urgent recognition that we are confronted with a choice—either we will replenish our German spiritual life with genuine native forces and educators or we will once and for all surrender it to the growing Judaisation in a broader and narrower sense (translation quoted from Elsbeth Ettinger 1995: 36-37)]. That is a good private reason for a philosophy of *Entschlossenheit*. With *Verjudung* 'in the broader sense', he probably meant *intellectualis*, and targets critical modernist thinking, and 'in the narrower sense', he targets the Jews in person.

(1988: 56). We have explored this mechanism in chapter three when analysing Marcel's grandfather's humming upon Bloch's arrival.

The continuing rejection of the Jews by the majority led to a mechanism producing an internal hierarchy and control. The elusiveness of the goal of being accepted as 'one of us' by the members of the majority was usually not thought to result from the impossibility of individual adaptation to a set of rules imposed and reinterpreted by a majority. This insight was kept at bay by the idea that the fault lay with those less assimilated. For this reason, the pressures on individuals to assimilate on the conditions of the majority—which were impossible to satisfy—led minority elites to insist that their less assimilated members would adapt and leave behind the remainders of their distinctiveness. Often, this caused hierarchical distinctions to be drawn between those persons of Jewish descent who had been born in countries where they had already acquired citizenship rights, and those immigrants, usually from the East, who had been living in much more rigidly separated religious communities.²² Consider a final quote from Bauman:

The host majority is extremely difficult to satisfy. It would be quick to point out that the ostensibly assimilated citizen of Jewish origin wears a mask too thin to be trusted; that, when *scratched*, the mask readily reveals the unprepossessing likeness of the uncivilised being the assimilants swore to have left behind. By far the most expedient way to divert the hosts'

²² This mechanism had been in place since shortly after emancipation. In 1841, Michel Berr wrote that 'what must be obtained for the Jewish population is assimilation, the complete fusion of this population into the bosom of the population of the country' (Report de la Société de Metz, *Archives Israélites de France* 2 1841: 240, quoted from Berkovitz 1989: 110). Berr, who was a prominent Jewish leader from Nancy, writes this in the context of his refusal to accept that only a few Jewish persons, namely members of the elite, had integrated into French society. However, he does not argue primarily for a greater openness on the part of French society, but wants the Jews themselves to change: he writes that all the 'customs' and 'traces of the deep separation' from the past of the Jewish proletariat should be rejected, so that the 'class apart' made up by the Jewish proletariat will cease to exist. Berr internalises the view of the Jews originally coined by the Enlightenment thinkers who turned the Jews into a standard imaginary object of their emancipatory discourse. Another aspect of Berr's thought also makes clear that a division among Jews existed. He does not write about the Jews in general, as had been done so extensively at the time of the Revolution, but already makes the distinction between the 'integrated' Jews from the elite and the proletarian class which should still combat the traces of separation, their alienation and 'repulsions'. Translated into today's terminology, we might say that Berr conceives of part of the Jewish population as an 'ethnic underclass' to which he does not belong. He goes along, albeit in careful and sympathetic terms, with the idea that there is an inherent link between the Jews' problems as a class and the fact that their ethnic background is different; consequently, their problems as members of a class are not addressed in those terms, but in terms of their ethnicity.

suspicious was to compete in casting aspersions on one's own discredited past (Bauman 1988: 57; my italics).

Here we see the return of the gesture of scratching. The relation between, on the one hand, the majority's distrust and low esteem of Jewish identity lurking beneath the official equality of citizenship, and, on the other, the internal pressures to assimilate as quickly as possible, becomes clearer. When the majority retains the assumption that people have to assimilate before being worthy of respect, equality, and their own associations, and when it continues to associate a minority's religious and cultural practices with a lack of 'integration', not because of their content but because of their sheer existence as particularising practices, then the process of assimilation will always lead to hierarchies and disrespect, first of all between majorities and minorities and second, within minorities themselves. And, as we can surmise in what perhaps seems a precocious move here but of which other examples may be imagined, women usually are not the ones who profit from these types of pressures. Also, it does not seem likely to me that a moral theory of recognition would be able to remedy any of the deeply anchored structures of assimilation laid bare here. At best, it can morally de-legitimise them. What we need instead are institutional options and a thorough revision of majorities' expectations around citizenship.

4.4 'A consubstantial malaise of republican society'²³

I will now proceed to explore Proust's representation of the social imaginaries that efface the boundaries between political equality and social distinction in a more general sense, related to the ways in which Noiriél explained the process of 'national assimilation', or homogenisation, that we discussed in chapter one. Here again, I will focus on Proust's specific ways of deploying metaphor to scrutinise the cultural, public memory of hierarchy and its effects on political judgment. For this, I concentrate on the relation between Marcel and Saint-Loup, studying how the metaphors that figure their relation dislocate the old class hierarchies between the bourgeoisie and the nobility. Bloch, however, will also reappear.

Elisheva Rosen has argued that the Proustian salons were the places where the meanings of the social relations between nobility and bourgeoisie, and hence, between Catholic and Republican elites, were renegotiated. In the decades between 1870 and 1918, the salons were dedicated to maintaining the

²³ An earlier version of this section was published as an article under the title 'Stuck in a Revolving Door'. (Jansen 2002; reprinted in Jansen 2003b).

nobility's inherited social distinction, but in actuality they turned out to be places where everyone could change positions; where bourgeois women could turn into princesses, as happens to the at first very bourgeois Mme Verdurin, who, at the end of Proust's long novel, turns into the 'Princesse de Guermantes'. Rosen argues that, by studying the social mechanisms of salon culture, Proust uncovers the mechanisms of snobbery, i.e. the logic of social distinction:

(...) le snobisme fait écran et masque un malaise consubstantiel à la société républicaine, celui des difficultés qu'elle éprouve à s'accomoder d'un passé qu'elle renie et adore tout à la fois. Dans l'idéologie républicaine à vocation démocratique, il n'y a aucune place pour un fantasme hiérarchique hérité précisément de l'Ancien Régime (Rosen 1995: 79).

[snobbery screens and masks a consubstantial malaise of republican society, that of the difficulties it experiences in accommodating itself to a past which it renounces and worships at the same time. In the republican ideology with a vocation to democracy, there is no room for a hierarchical phantasm inherited precisely from the Ancien Régime (my translation).]

We have already seen that Proust's use of metaphor is an important literary device for him to uncover cultural memories in diverse shapes. Now, I will try to show how Proust can make us aware that not only 'les noblesses vivent de leur mémoire' ['the nobilities live by their memory'] (Marc Bloch, quoted in Brelot 1994: 347), but that this memory is also shared by others and that it suggests a sort of afterlife for power in the cultural imaginary. Here again we will see that the metaphors are not quite as egalitarian and without vectorisation as Barthes suggested (see my introduction to this chapter).

Sharing a carriage on a foggy night

The passage I want to discuss starts with the sudden appearance of Saint-Loup in Marcel's room, some time after the episode in Balbec. He invites Marcel to dine in a café where he often goes, and Marcel accepts. We have seen that Marcel greatly admires Saint-Loup, and the *naïveté* of his admiration is confirmed by the following anecdote.

Françoise, Marcel's family's servant, initially has some doubts about Saint-Loup because he is a Republican. She cannot understand this of an aristocrat who, in her eyes, should love rural Catholic France and be a Royalist like her (1996: II, 415). She only forgives Saint-Loup his Republicanism when she concludes from her observations of how brusquely he treats his coachman, that

he is only hypothetically a Republican. To her, his behaviour proves that he scorns the people after all (as he should, in her mind).

However, when Marcel reproaches him for his treatment of the coachman, Saint-Loup answers that getting angry with the coachman means treating him as an equal, whereas it would be to follow the detestable habits of the aristocracy to treat a servant with *égards*, while at the same time considering him as irreparably belonging to a different class. Marcel takes Saint-Loup's argument seriously and connects his attitude of moral purity, which is linked to Saint-Loup's dismissal of his aristocratic status, precisely to his nobility: sometimes his '*pensée démêlait en Saint-Loup un être plus général que lui-même, le "noble" (...)*' (1988: II, 96) [*mind distinguished in Saint-Loup a personality more generalised than his own, that of the "nobleman" (...)*] (1996: II, 365)]. In these moments, Marcel discovers this '*être antérieur, séculaire, cet aristocrate que Robert aspirait justement à ne pas être*' (96) [*pre-existent, this immemorial being, this aristocrat who was precisely what Robert aspired not to be*] (365)].

In the passage to be discussed here, the narrator recounts Marcel and Saint-Loup's journey to the café, as well as the dinner itself. Marcel's perception of Saint-Loup and the judgments he infers from it, differ greatly in each situation. The contrast between his judgments is expressed by the metaphors and comparisons employed: Marcel compares Saint-Loup to contrasting *comparants*, and through these comparisons Saint-Loup appears in such different lights that he nearly undergoes a metamorphosis.

Marcel and Saint-Loup travel to the café in a carriage. Because outside there looms a terrible fog, they are completely isolated for some time. Inside the carriage, Marcel is confronted with an unexpected statement by Saint-Loup. Marcel knows Saint-Loup as an honest person who would never betray somebody or gossip, but all of a sudden Saint-Loup begins to talk about Bloch.

'Tu sais, j'ai raconté à Bloch, me dit Saint-Loup, que tu ne l'aimais pas du tout tant que ça, que tu lui trouvais des vulgarités. Voilà comme je suis, j'aime les situations tranchées' (...). J'étais stupéfait. (...) sa figure était stigmatisée pendant qu'il me disait ces paroles vulgaires par une affreuse sinuosité que je ne lui ai vu qu'une fois ou deux dans la vie, et qui, suivant d'abord à peu près le milieu de la figure, une fois arrivée aux lèvres les tordait, leur donnait une expression hideuse de bassesse, presque de bestialité toute passagère et sans doute ancestrale. Il devait y avoir dans ces moments-là (...) éclipse partielle de son propre moi, par le passage sur lui de la personnalité d'un aïeul qui s'y reflétait (1988: II, 693).

['You know,' Saint-Loup suddenly said to me, 'I told Bloch that you didn't like him all that much, that you found him rather vulgar at times. I'm like that, you see, I like clear-cut situations' (...). I was astounded. (...) his face was seared, while he uttered these vulgar words, by a frightful sinuosity which I saw on it once or twice only in all the time I knew him, and which, beginning by running more or less down the middle of his face, when it came to his lips twisted them, gave them a hideous expression of baseness, almost of bestiality, quite transitory and no doubt inherited. There must have been at such moments (...) a partial eclipse of his true self by the passage across it of the personality of some ancestor reflecting itself upon him (1996: III, 460-61).]

This passage establishes a radical opposition between Saint-Loup and Marcel in several regards. At the very moment Saint-Loup states that his words about Bloch reveal him 'as he is', Marcel has the impression that Saint-Loup's identity is being taken away from him: Saint-Loup's face is violently torn apart and a natural ancestor takes his place.

Metaphor is the site of this contrast. It is important to note the difference between the 'clear-cut' aspect by which Saint-Loup identifies himself and the sinuosity, searing, and twisting of his face perceived by Marcel. 'Clear-cut' is a particularly happy translation of the French *tranchées*. It recalls Descartes's 'jugements clairs et distincts'. By his own words, Saint-Loup identifies himself as a representative of Enlightened French rationalism, while Marcel discerns the opposite in his face, namely raw and transitory forms. Extending this interpretation further, one might say that Saint-Loup identifies himself as a representative of modern French *civilisation* at the very moment Marcel sees *nature* shining through his manners. The fact that Saint-Loup is of noble descent is relevant in this context: while Saint-Loup identifies himself as a descendant of modernity, Marcel associates him with natural heredity and pre-modernity. In what follows, the narrator plays on these divergent associations.

'Meanwhile I looked at Robert and my thoughts ran as follows'

In the dinner episode itself, Marcel's view of Saint-Loup is directed by that of the people surrounding him: the other guests, the proprietor of the café, and the servants. The narrator introduces their arrival at the café with a description of the habitual clientele, which is divided into two groups: the company of Bloch and his friends (Dreyfusard intellectuals who often have a Jewish background), and a party of young noblemen, who look down on Dreyfus and consider the

Dreyfusards traitors.²⁴

This introductory account of the separation between the two groups of visitors refers back to Saint-Loup's words about Bloch in the carriage, giving them an extra dimension that makes them exceed the vicissitudes of a relationship between three friends. By calling Bloch 'vulgar' and excluding him from the friendship between himself and Marcel, Saint-Loup stresses a class division that probably contains not only economic and social aspects, but also an important political one: Saint-Loup sees himself as the representative of the Republic, but excludes the Dreyfusard Bloch. The importance of this judgment is stressed by the narrator, for he mirrors it immediately in his description of Saint-Loup's words, which he, too, calls 'vulgar'. In doing so, the narrator places Saint-Loup at the same level as Bloch, judging him by a criterion that was perhaps only conceivable in the enclosed private space of the carriage.

Upon arriving at the public space of the café, Marcel enters first, because Saint-Loup has to tell the driver of the carriage when he is to come back. While entering the café, Marcel gets stuck in the revolving doors. The proprietor witnesses Marcel's clumsiness, and this teaches him not only a personal but also a sociological fact about this '*inconnu qui ne savait pas se dégager des volants de verre*' (1988: II, 695) ['stranger incapable of disengaging himself from the rotating sheets of glass'] (1996: III, 463). This '*marque flagrante d'ignorance*' (695) ['flagrant sign of ignorance' (463)] leads the proprietor of the café to frown as if he were an examiner who plans not to utter the formula '*dignus est entrare*' (463). The footnote in the Pléiade edition informs us that this formula was used by Molière in his play *Le malade imaginaire*, which parodies university rituals. The reference to this comedy places Marcel's mistake in the context of having to know how to behave in a surrounding according to hierarchical and ritualised behavioural patterns.

On top of Marcel's first demonstration that he does not belong to the habitual clientele of the café, he ends up taking a seat in 'the wrong room'. The café is divided into two parts: a big room and a smaller one. The smaller room is reserved for the aristocrats, and when Marcel takes a seat there he is instantly removed by the proprietor to be seated in the big room, occupied by the Dreyfusards. To make matters worse, he is seated on a bench opposite '*la porte réservée aux Hébreux qui non tournante celle-là, s'ouvrant et se fermant à chaque instant m'envoyait un froid horrible*' (695) ['the door reserved for the Hebrews which, since it did not revolve, opened and closed every other minute and kept me in a horrible draught' (464)].

Still waiting for Saint-Loup, Marcel feels humiliated and excluded from both groups. Between these groups, because they braved the fog, there reigned 'une

²⁴ For a historical analysis of the aristocracy's attitude towards Dreyfus, see Brelot (1994).

familiarité dont j'étais seul exclu, et à laquelle devait ressembler celle qui régnait dans l'arche de Noé' (700) [a familiarity from which I alone was excluded and which was not unlike the spirit that must have prevailed in Noah's Ark' (470)]. Then Saint-Loup arrives. He is an esteemed client and the proprietor immediately caters to all his wishes. Saint-Loup saves Marcel from further humiliation, and from catching a cold, by complaining about Marcel's bad seat and about the open door. Saint-Loup furiously addresses the proprietor, who puts the blame for the open door on his staff: 'Je leur dis toujours de la tenir fermée' (700) ['I am always telling them to keep it shut' (470)]. The proprietor, of course, immediately starts to behave in an entirely different manner towards Marcel.

Following this carnivalesque scene, the narrator recounts Marcel's thoughts after Saint-Loup has saved him. He introduces this passage as follows: 'Cependant je regardais Robert et je songeais à ceci' (702) ['Meanwhile I looked at Robert, and my thoughts ran as follows' (471)]. By means of this introduction, the narrator draws the reader's attention to the object of Marcel's gaze, Saint-Loup. Marcel's thoughts, however, only arrive at his friend after taking a detour via the Dreyfusards. Rendering his thoughts at this moment, the narrator does not refer to the Dreyfus Affair itself, but writes that there were in this café 'bien des étrangers, intellectuels' (702) [plenty of foreigners, intellectuals (471)], who excited laughter by 'leur cape prétentieuse, leurs cravates 1830 et bien plus encore leurs mouvements maladroits' (702) ['their pretentious capes, their 1830 ties and by the clumsiness of their movements' (471)], a clumsiness which they even actively demonstrated in order to show that they did not care that they were being laughed at.

The narrator adds that these intellectuals were disliked, 'les Juifs principalement, les Juifs non assimilés bien attendu, il ne saurait être question des autres (702) [the Jews among them principally, the unassimilated Jews, that is to say, for with the other kind we are not concerned' (471)] by people 'qui ne peuvent souffrir un aspect étrange, loufoque' [who could not endure any oddity or eccentricity of appearance (471)]. He gives the example of his future girlfriend Albertine's dislike of Bloch. The narrator himself adds that, though '(ils avaient) les cheveux trop longs, le nez et les yeux trop grands, des gestes théâtraux et saccadés' (471) ['their hairs were too long, their noses and eyes were too big, their gestures abrupt and theatrical' (472)], they were men of real intellectual and moral worth and also of a profound sensibility. At this point, the reader may well ask whether Marcel's clumsy entrée to the café also demonstrated his affiliation with Bloch.

The rest of the passage traces the interplay between Marcel's perception of and his thoughts about cultural difference. The narrator goes on to compare 'la religiosité superficielle' (702) ['superficial religiosity' (472)] of Saint-Loup's

mother and other aristocrats to the 'générosité de cœur, une largeur d'esprit, une sincérité (702) [‘warmth of heart, the breadth of mind, and the sincerity’ (472)] of many Jewish parents he knows. Suddenly, by way of this social contrast, the narrator is back with Saint-Loup, this time in his thoughts. He contrasts Saint-Loup with his parents, ascribing to him ‘la plus charmante ouverture d’esprit et de cœur’ (702) [‘the most charming openness of mind and heart’ (472)]. This time, however, this openness is not contrasted with physical appearance, as in the case of the Dreyfusards. Quite the contrary,

quand ces qualités-là se trouvent chez un pur Français, qu’il soit de l’aristocratie ou du peuple, elles fleurissent avec une grâce que l’étranger, si estimable soit-il, ne nous offre pas (702).

[whenever these qualities are found in a man who is purely French, whether he belongs to the aristocracy or the people, they flower (...) with a grace which the foreigner, however estimable he may be, does not present to us (472).]

Throughout the entire paragraph, the narrator continues to write in the general mode, as if the thoughts he developed while looking at Saint-Loup represented general knowledge rather than being dependent on the situation. The quote below, with which the narrator concludes his argument, further develops this confusion between general judgment and specifically located perception:

Les qualités intellectuelles et morales, certes les autres les possèdent aussi, et s’il faut d’abord traverser ce qui déplaît et ce qui choque et ce qui fait sourire, elles ne sont pas moins précieuses. Mais c’est tout de même une jolie chose et qui est peut-être exclusivement française, que ce qui est beau au jugement de l’équité, ce qui vaut selon l’esprit et le cœur soit d’abord charmant aux yeux, coloré avec grâce, ciselé avec justesses, réalise aussi dans sa matière et dans sa forme la perfection intérieure. Je regardais Saint-Loup, et je me disais que c’est une jolie chose quand il n’y a pas de disgrâce physique pour servir de vestibule aux grâces intérieures, et que les ailes du nez sont délicates et d’un dessin parfait comme celles des petits papillons qui se posent sur les fleurs des prairies autour de Combray ; et que le vrai *opus francigenum*, dont le secret n’a pas été perdu depuis le XIIIe siècle, et qui ne périrait pas avec nos églises, ce ne sont pas tant les anges de pierre de Saint-André-des-Champs que les petits Français, nobles, bourgeois ou paysans, au visage sculpté avec cette délicatesse et cette franchise restées aussi traditionnelles qu’au porche fameux mais encore créatrices (702-03).

[Of these intellectual and moral qualities others undoubtedly have their share, and, if we have first to overcome what repels us (and what shocks us, YJ) and what makes us smile, they remain no less precious. But it is all the same a pleasant thing, and one which is perhaps exclusively French, that what is fine in all equity of judgment, what is admirable to the mind and heart, should be first of all attractive to the eyes, pleasingly coloured, consummately chiselled, should express as well in substance as in form an inner perfection. I looked at Saint-Loup, and I said to myself that it is a thing to be glad of when there is no lack of physical grace to serve as vestibule to the graces within, and when the curves of the nostrils are as delicate and as perfectly designed as the wings of the little butterflies that hover over the field flowers round Combray; and that the true *opus francigenum*, the secret of which was not lost in the thirteenth century, and would not perish with our churches, consists not so much in the stone angels of Saint-André des Champs as in the young sons of France, noble, bourgeois or peasant, whose faces are carved with that delicacy and boldness which have remained as traditional as on the famous porch, but are creative still (473).]

This time, Saint-Loup's face appears more 'clear-cut' than it did in the carriage. The narrator suggests that it is 'perfectly designed', even though he restricts himself to describing the curves of Saint-Loup's nostrils. This aesthetic judgment echoes the 'pleasingly coloured, consummately chiselled' of the previous sentence, which contains no details and appears to be suspended between a general reflection on 'Frenchness' and an aesthetic judgment of Saint-Loup.

This suspension is important for our understanding of cultural memory as a driving force of our intercultural imagination. The sentence just recalled sums up the stream of thoughts about the differences between Jewish intellectuals and 'purely French' men. It is only after his general statements distinguishing the harmony between substance and form as an exclusively French quality, that the narrator writes: 'I looked at Saint-Loup, and I said to myself (...)'. With these words, the narrator leaves the general mode and suggests that he will now represent what he was thinking at that precise moment in reaction to what he actually saw of Saint-Loup. The foregrounding of the act of focalisation (I looked ... and ...) introduces a narrativity into the passage that suggests the transition from general to specific.

However, although the narrator writes that Marcel looked at Saint-Loup, Marcel repeats to himself what he had said in general terms before: that it is a beautiful thing when one's physical grace represents one's inner grace. The reader may want to ask how carefully Marcel looked and at what precise moment he began talking to himself. The narrator makes only one concrete

reference to Saint-Loup's body and this immediately draws him away from the classical image of harmony between (the whole) body and the soul, since it focuses on such a small detail: he poetically evokes Saint-Loup's 'curves of the nostrils [that are] as delicate as the wings of the little butterflies in Combray'. Why do the nostrils remind him of the butterflies in Combray? Perhaps the curves refer to a culturally pre-formed image of Saint-Loup connecting him to his aunt, the Duchesse de Guermantes. The latter, as we have seen, owns a large and beautiful castle in Combray and is bound up with Marcel's childhood there. This connotation gives the praise for Saint-Loup's beauty, expressed through his nostrils, an ironic aspect, for the first and only time Marcel looked carefully at Saint-Loup's aunt, as recounted in *Combray*, he also focused on *her* nose, perceiving it as big with a button on it. There is little reason to think, as Vincent Descombes seems to do, that butterflies, for the narrator, evoke a 'sensation detached from any terrestrial ambition' (1987: 226). Rather, the passage shows that even the slightest perceptual details can be infused with imaginative social meaning.

The final part of the sentence in the passage under discussion no longer refers exclusively to Saint-Loup. It includes all of France's young sons, whether noble, bourgeois, or peasants. Saint-Loup is made to represent not only his own class, but France, or rather, the *opus francigenum*. A note in the Pléiade edition shows us the irony of Proust's use of this term: it was used in a nationalist nineteenth-century discussion on the origins of Gothic art, called *opus francigenum*, during the Middle Ages. It had first been claimed by German historians as German art, but in the course of the nineteenth century it was ascribed to France, as French historians claimed the Franks as France's ancestors. This irony is further reinforced by the evocation of the stone angels of St. André des Champs. In *Combray*, in an elaborate description of these stone angels, the narrator states that they expressed the French nation as Françoise would see it: in a sentimental, slightly naive way. The narrator recounts how Françoise would speak of Saint-Louis (King Louis XI) as if she knew him personally, and adds that she did this especially to stress how much less 'righteous' Marcel's bourgeois grandparents were than Saint-Louis (1996: I, 180). Could there be a connection between Marcel's Saint-Loup and Françoise's Saint-Louis?²⁵

Saint-Loup has now come to represent France. However, it would be wrong to contend that Marcel sees Saint-Loup as an allegory of France. Marcel does not look at Saint-Loup first to then conclude that he resembles the image of

²⁵ Saint-Loup, the inheritor, in his *habitus*, of the aristocracy and, in his explicit political stance, of the Revolution, reminds the narrator of Saint-Louis, who, ironically, was the zealous king who first forced the Jews to wear distinguishing marks on their clothing (see Benbassa 2000 and chapter three).

France represented by the sculptures of St. André des Champs. Rather, and conversely, this image of France seems to determine how Saint-Loup is seen by Marcel. The textual play with general statements and suggestive, yet never clearly developed perceptions, illustrates the subtle interplay, through metaphor, of perception and cultural memory. Cultural memory determines which associations come to Marcel's mind in the moment he looks at Saint-Loup. Its importance is expressed by the screen of metaphors which these associations raise between him and Saint-Loup. This is how the Guermantes family works for the bourgeois 'soif de distinction' [thirst for distinction] which cannot be quenched by republican ideology: 'fétichisé, il est semblable à un écran, sur lequel se projette l'imaginaire social' ['fetichised, it resembles a screen on which the social imaginary projects itself'] (Rosen 1995: 78, my translation). The abundance of different images and metaphors suggests the need to revise the comparison of Saint-Loup to the fixed, long-lasting sculptures from the thirteenth century. The rest of the passage emphasizes his fugacity by making his sculptural image move and by the accelerated speed with which comparisons between Saint-Loup and different images of fast movement replace each other: the narrator invokes, for example, a steeplechaser, an acrobat and a knight. Here, the narrator refers to heredity, as he did earlier in the carriage, but this time to fit Saint-Loup both into his image of the aristocracy *and* into his image of the morally autonomous modern individual:

Telles étaient les qualités, toutes essentielles à l'aristocratie, qui derrière ce corps non pas opaque et obscur comme eût été le mien, mais significatif et limpide, transparaisaient comme à travers une oeuvre d'art la puissance industrielle, efficiente qui l'a créée, et rendaient les mouvements de cette course légère que Robert avait déroulée le long du mur, intelligibles et charmants ainsi que ceux de cavaliers sculptés sur une frise (...) Et je savais bien aussi que ce n'était pas qu'une oeuvre d'art que j'admirais en ce jeune cavalier déroulant le long du mur la frise de sa course ; [mais aussi] un choix que l'on ne peut faire que dans les hauteurs de l'intelligence, avec cette liberté souveraine dont les mouvements de Robert étaient l'image et dans laquelle se réalise la parfaite amitié (1988: II, 707-08).

{(...) such were the quintessentially aristocratic qualities that shone through the husk of this body (...) and rendered the movements of that light-footed course which Robert had pursued along the wall as intelligible and charming as those of horsemen on a marble frieze. (...) And I was well aware, too, that it was not merely a work of art that I was admiring in this young man unfolding along the wall the frieze of his flying course; (...) [but also] a choice that can be made only in the loftiest places of the mind, with that

sovereign liberty of which Robert's movements were the image and the symbol and in which perfect friendship is enshrined (1996: III, 478-79).]

With this development, Robert comes to represent the opposite of what he had represented in the carriage. He appears to have lost the natural heaviness of the sculpture, moving close to the self-description which had so shocked Marcel: 'that's how I am, I like clear-cut situations'. Now the frieze is unfolded and the young man is flying, flattened like a movie star. Could the repetition of this image, which first forces Saint-Loup into a standstill by turning him into a marble frieze and then makes this frieze move and unfold, indicate Marcel's awareness of the projected quality of this image of Saint-Loup?

In conclusion, Proust's metaphoric style can be read as a subtle critique of the divide between politics and society in the 'Two Frances' that had come into existence in the Third Republic. It provides a literary form for exploring the simultaneous increase of possibilities for social mobility and the lasting heritage of social distinction. We have been able to trace how, although the struggle for universal citizenship should have resulted in the irrelevance of 'backgrounds' or, in the terms of the time, 'race', it actually produced, for a long time, the contrary: a secrecy surrounding belonging and a violence perpetrated on the basis of a semi-public memory of difference.

This exploration of semi-public cultural memory also teaches us that 'modernity' may seek to overcome the divisions and privileges produced by the traditional links between religion and power, but that, to achieve this, it will have to deal with the heritage of this distribution of power more intensively than simply by driving it into a private sphere. Proust invented a literary way to subtly critique liberal/republican conceptualisations of the divide between private and public. The dimension added by the *Recherche* is to show that it is not the attitude of the majority alone, but also the basic demands of citizenship itself, which cause problems when we refuse to take into account the role of historically and culturally transmitted inequalities in those differences we perceive as 'merely religious'. This leads me to suggest that we should now make the transition to considering secularism and *laïcité* in detail.

