

The Good Distance: Proust and Sociability

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Abstract

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Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* has been studied more than any other in French literature. Scholars have analyzed it from specific perspectives such as the relation between the artist and his art, class dynamics, sexual preference, and biographical issues, to mention just a few. Yet the novel purposefully intertwines these various threads. The novelty of this dissertation's approach consists in bringing together these themes to examine them in their interactivity, as the author has conceived them. The main questions addressed are why and how aestheticism, nationalism and xenophobia, sociability in the salons of the bourgeoisie and the nobility, and the budding artist, come together to become the material and the story for the genesis of a novel. First and foremost a man of his day and age, Proust is preoccupied by the issues of the time. By establishing a dialog between the novel and pertinent contemporary texts by Maurice Barrès, Julien Benda, Gabriel de Tarde, Auguste Rodin, and Georg Simmel, this dissertation illumines aspects of the text relevant to its analysis. In the process, the nationalistic and anti-Semitic climate dominating France during *la Belle Epoque*, the political configurations it engendered, as well as the particularity of Proust's subject position as a gay Jewish writer increasingly isolated by his illness, come to the foreground. Furthermore, a close examination of

the contrast *La recherche* makes between the cosmopolitanism and inclusion of noble salons and the insistence on the separation between insider and outsider dominating their bourgeois counterparts, highlights features of the *Belle Epoque*'s sociability. It intimates that the dynamics at play in French society at the time were grounded in the fundamental distinction between Frenchness and foreignness. Notwithstanding aforementioned differences between the noble and bourgeois environments, in final analysis sociability fails in the novel. As a result, particular aspects of the Proustian aesthetics, such as his attention to details and rejection of masterpieces become relevant in an art that intends to move away from the group and its dangerous collective pursuits that lead to persecution and exclusion. As a conclusion, this dissertation proposes that Proustian aesthetics, conceived as interiorized individual contemplation whose goal and reward are in itself, foster non-confrontational social interactions grounded in a limited emotional involvement as a means to social harmony.

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Introduction

Why one more? “More books have been written about Proust than any other French writer, including those who lived centuries before him” (Gans, 37). Is there a new angle yet to be discovered or a subject left untouched? Proust’s work has already been analyzed from the perspective of the relation between the artist and his art (Anne Henry, Leo Bersani), class dynamics (Walter Benjamin, Michael Sprinker, Catherine Bidou-Zachariassen, Edward Hughes), sexual preference (Elisabeth Ladenson, Erin Carlston), as well as other biographical issues (Jean-Yves Tadié), to mention just a few. Yet *La recherche* purposefully intertwines these various threads. The novelty of this dissertation’s approach consists in bringing together these themes to examine them in their interactivity, as the author has conceived them. Why and how do aestheticism, nationalism and xenophobia, sociability in the salons of the bourgeoisie and the nobility, and the budding artist, come together to become the material for and the story of the genesis of a novel? This is what this essay will address. The rest of this introduction is a brief survey of this approach.

Throughout *la Belle Epoque*, an obsession with the motherland in danger haunts the French intellectual and political elite, eventually engulfing the entire society. No one expresses it more eloquently than Charles Morice in his 1914 preface to the first edition of Auguste Rodin’s *Les Cathédrales de France*. There he exhorts all Frenchmen to dedicate themselves “à la constitution d’un nouvel état collectif des consciences”, yet in the same breath he admits that “personne ne sait sur quelles bases le pacte d’union pourra se conclure.” Nonetheless, “personne n’a droit au repos tant qu’elles n’auront pas été trouvées” exactly because unless “[c]e pacte sera l’œuvre des générations vivantes, . . . leur jour n’aura pas de lendemain” (Morice LXXXIX). His

apprehensions announce what will be the main objective of the *Collège de sociologie* in the two years preceding World War II, between 1937 and 1939, namely what Georges Bataille terms “la sociologie sacrée étudiant le mouvement communiel de la société, c’est-à-dire toutes les activités humaines en tant qu’elles sont créatrices d’unité” (*Le collège de sociologie* 139). Yet such concerns started as early as 1871 with the Prussian defeat and the civil war of the Parisian Commune, reaching a popular pitch with the publication of Maurice Barrès’s *Les déracinés* (1897) and *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (1902).

Analyses of historically anchored oeuvres such as *A la recherche du temps perdu* must take into account the nationalistically charged context of the period. The thesis of this essay is that Proust responded to calls of duty such as that of Morice insisting that “[i]l n’est permis à personne de s’y dérober, par la modestie non plus que par l’indifférence” (Morice LXXXIX). The primary endeavor of French intellectuals – a figure significantly born from the clash of the Dreyfus affair which enthralled the young Proust to the point of getting actively involved in it – is to solve the question of the nation. *La recherche* constitutes his answer. Specifically pertinent to readings of the work is the writer’s insistence that “il ne peut y avoir d’interprétation des chefs-d’œuvre du passé que si on les considère du point de vue de celui qui les écrivait” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 266). Without attempting to establish authorial intent – a glaringly impossible task – this dissertation will open up a dialogue between the novel and Proust’s other writings. Relevant passages from his correspondence are pertinent not only as testimonies to the contemporaneous historical context, but also as an indication of the author’s beliefs on particular issues and an expression of his writerly goals and ideals. This approach takes into account Proust’s particular subject position in French society at that time. As a Jew facing an atmosphere of strident anti-Semitism and a gay man living in a society obsessed with recovering its

manliness in the wake of the Franco-Prussian defeat, he found himself on the margins of society both as citizen and writer. Yet as his biography and correspondence equally reflect, he identified himself as a French patriot. Like his Jewish contemporaries, Proust believed in French liberalism and in its politics of assimilation as the actual support of the rights of man. His loyalties unwaveringly remained with the country in which he was born and raised, expressly attached to the culture which he so well knew and loved. In this respect, Proust shared the political leanings of the vast majority of the French middle class, which throughout the duration of the Third Republic supported the *Parti radical*. At the same time, the writer was increasingly aware that a latent social violence, with its tangible apex in the Dreyfus affair, constituted a constant threat to Israelites. The French majority did not deem him a patriot, nor did it believe he actually belonged with them. It is in this context that the often underestimated popularity of French Radicalism will further come into focus as an increasingly counterbalancing force to nationalism, despite its own brand of anti-Semitism. Its central position in *La recherche* results not only from its widespread social influence, but also from the responses it proposes to the problem of the nation – both complex aspects this dissertation will examine.

In the context of the exclusion of the French Jewish minority, the place nobility occupies in the novel naturally comes to the forefront. As Hannah Arendt shows, Jewish intellectuals like Proust aspired and increasingly received admittance into aristocratic society. At the heart of such ambitions was a feeling that the acknowledgement of their spiritual achievements transcended the rules of discrimination. Thus, the intrinsically cosmopolitan aristocratic society became representative of an environment in which national prejudices no longer seemed valid. It was the only one that recognized the assimilation of French Jews (Arendt 53). The participation of

Israelite intellectuals in such subgroups allowed for their continued belief in the possibility of integration despite popular anti-Semitism (Graetz 248).

This essay's approach is that Proust was, first and foremost, a man of his day and age. At the heart of his oeuvre lie the main themes and issues of the period. In order to highlight the complex historical situation of the Third Republic, the specific issues confronting someone in Proust's subject position, as well as the ideas expressed in his novel, this dissertation will directly engage with pertinent *Belle Epoque* texts. One of them is Julien Benda's (1867-1956) writing, significant as a critique of nationalism emanating from a French Jewish intellectual of that epoch, directly condemning nationalistic strategies to which *La recherche* only alludes. The work of the sociologist Gabriel de Tarde (1843-1904) is another such text. It is directly relevant to Proust's attempt to universalize difference as not conflictual, which in turn constitutes a vital aspect of his opus in its effort to offer a response to the crisis of contemporary France. Consequently, I will argue that the Tardist influence extends beyond sociology and into the novel's attitude towards the nation. I will use the ideas of the German philosopher Georg Simmel (1858-1918) to illumine various aspects of the Proustian cycle, most pertinently its tactics of conflict avoidance. Though Simmel originates from a different culture, referencing him is not fortuitous as he is not only Proust's contemporary, but also the product of a similar milieu. Originating from the urban environment at the peak of the industrialization crisis, both are Israelites living in societies animated by intense anti-Semitism. Yet as heirs to fortunes allowing them a leisurely existence, they dedicate their lives to studying what brings together seemingly unlikely individuals or classes without generating social conflict.

Last but not least, the figure of Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) is central not only to *la Belle Epoque* in its entirety, but also to this study. In the century of the nation-state, he is the

spokesman for the major crisis in French consciousness that originates in the 1871 Franco-Prussian War defeat, compounded by the civil unrest of the Paris Commune. He consequently issues the mobilizing call to rescue *la patrie en danger*. Significantly, French nationalism is born from his physical representation of the motherland as “la Terre et les Morts” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 8). By blaming all the ills of France on the Jews, he fuels a pre-existent popular anti-Semitism with the goal of creating national solidarity by sacrificing the few for the many. A central topic in Barrèsian rhetoric is a shared Frenchness, conceived as a holistic determinism meant to buttress national unity. The following passage exemplifies it: “Nous nous recommandons de la France éternelle ; nous sommes des Français qui avons été formés à travers les siècles. Tout ce que nous sommes naît des conditions historiques et géographiques de notre pays” (*Scènes et doctrines* 124). In this dissertation, I will analyze how, in response to it, *La recherche* takes up this same topic and preemptively displaces it into an aesthetic category, with its balancing counterpart founded in the concept of foreignness.

Ostensibly mutually exclusive, Frenchness and foreignness nonetheless coexist at the heart of old nobility. Uniquely able to materialize Frenchness as an idealized continuity of the nation in their long lineage, the Guermantes unavoidably manifest their foreignness. Along with most noblemen in the novel, they are veritable hybrids, living examples of what the oldest of Frenchmen actually are. Despite having a notoriously foreign ancestress in Geneviève de Brabant and numerous other foreign relations, as well as leading a cosmopolitan existence, neither Basile nor Oriane, the purest of the Guermantes, would ever dream of considering themselves anything other than French. Their family’s extended presence within the realm, their long lineage with undeniably French ties, and their immersion and participation in French culture, make their claims incontrovertible. It parallels the condition of Israelites such as Proust,

who felt an intrinsic part of the nation despite a foreign heritage, which in turn highlights the particular role the Guermantes play in the text.

The ethnical hybridity of the aristocracy is compounded by its very diversity. Suzanne Fiette's study suggests that nobility during *la Belle Epoque* is a particular yet diverse milieu growing through alliances, encompassed by friends and family, and manifesting both similarities and differences with the rest of society (Fiette 12). To an atmosphere of division and social conflict seemingly able to split the nation up at the time of the Dreyfus affair, *La recherche* counter poses a group in which competing political tendencies coexist without it breaking apart from within. While the majority of aristocrats opposed Dreyfus's acquittal, many nobles, like Edmond and Camille de Polignac, or the count Mathieu de Noailles from most ancient French stock, supported it. However, most of the aristocrats with pro-Dreyfus tendencies were of foreign descent, such as the Bibesco and the Brancovan Romanian families (Kahan 100). Indeed, Barrès insisted on the link between internationalism, betrayal, and the support of Dreyfus (*Scènes et doctrines* 54, 66). While their support of Dreyfus was assigned to their outsider status – political opinions explained through foreignness abound in *La recherche* – the fact remains that groups belonging to the old nobility continued to gather despite political divergences, thus displaying a more inclusive social dynamic that overcomes conflict and welcomes diversity.

Further into it factors the nobility's ability to adapt and survive as a minority group facing the hostility of the social mass – a situation not without parallel with that of the French Jews who were in a particularly precarious position during *la Belle Epoque* despite their will to melt into the nation. Throughout her study, Fiette insists on the nobility's success in adjusting to the radical change of 1789, a fact of which Proust was aware. Far from becoming a declining social class, the aristocracy was able to maintain, at least until 1870, the largest part of its

property (Fiette 8) – proof of its successful survival strategies. I propose that *La recherche* finds the answer to the issue of adaptability not in particular political strategies and attitudes – indeed, *la Belle Époque* is characterized by the political eclipse of the high nobility (Fiette 206) – but rather in the kind of social ties it promotes. Indeed, the superiority of the social over the political is one of the trademarks of the aristocracy (Fiette 267), which is also reflected in the novel.

This opens up another topic this dissertation will examine, namely Proust’s choice to express his view of the nation in the artistic rather than political field. This move is prompted at least in part by what the role of politics was commonly thought to be at the time. As Barrès explains, the role of politics “n'est pas d'agir d'une façon qui satisfasse l'esthéticien ou le moraliste : elle a son objet propre qui est la vie de la collectivité” (*Les déracinés* 280). This position is highly problematic for Proust because in the nationalists’ perspective collective existence must put the so-called common good above that of its individual members. While Proust believed that the welfare of society cannot override the inviolability of an individual’s right founded in justice – the Jacobin view of the state in which liberals, Jews, and Radicals, still trusted – he was aware that his voice had little chance to carry in the violent controversies surrounding the crises of the Third Republic. Moreover, the increasingly important role aesthetics played in contemporary intellectual debates legitimated the shift from politics to art. Indeed, Benda underscored art’s function as antidote to the uniformity promoted by both the extreme right and left in the name of the motherland, race, or class. Yet I argue that Proust’s recourse to art in response to the problem of the nation results primarily from his awareness of the ambiguity of artistic production, open to several interpretations¹. Works of art attract

¹ In this respect, I propose that Proust rejected the idea that his novel was a *roman à clef* exactly because in that case the audience would have had standard responses to it based on a predefined key rather than individually appropriating it in contradictory ways.

consumers precisely because their enjoyment propels them beyond what Mary Douglas terms “explicit structures of . . . normal experience” (37). In the process, the ambiguity of aesthetics surreptitiously challenges collective representations that impose a selective principle of interpretations, thus escaping the patterns largely based on accepted cultural norms through which the world is normally perceived (Douglas 37). Hence, art allows Proust to express his concern without worrying about the consequences of what could otherwise be perceived as an attack on popular nationalistic views. The following discussion between Proust and his friend Armand de Guiche, reported by Elisabeth de Gramont, further supports this complex outlook on what art actually is: “Pourquoi voulez-vous que la littérature soit un jardin à part et non pas une fouille un peu profonde dans les divers jardins des autres ? Ainsi un spécialiste peut ne pas s’intéresser à la littérature et le littérateur s’intéresser au spécialiste” (*Marcel Proust* 73). Literature is the synthesis of various fields, and is thus able to respond to larger civilizational issues such as the problem of the nation.

Yet this rapprochement between art and nation does not constitute a new French cultural phenomenon. Aware of the propagandistic potential of literature, Barrès insists that “Hugo, mieux que Grévy, aurait servi la République à l’Élysée” (*Les déracinés* 429). The artist best serves the motherland by subordinating his aesthetics to nationalistic ideals which should inform every human activity: “le nationalisme net, ce n'est rien autre que de savoir l'existence de ce point [d'où toutes choses se disposent à la mesure d'un Français], de le chercher et, l'ayant atteint, de nous y tenir pour prendre de là notre art, notre politique et toutes nos activités” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 13). In the eyes of many of Proust’s contemporaries, France was in a state of decadence which derived from the rise of individualism. Indeed, as Marc Fumaroli suggests, the mystical transparency fusing organic society presupposes the demise of individualism, of egoist

literature and art in general. Nationalistic culture must fight against bourgeois art breaking down social cohesion (Fumaroli 127). Great art is embodied by the vast collective works of the Gothic period, pertinently presented in the pages of *La recherche* as the embodiment of Frenchness, which disappeared with the Renaissance. As a consequence, modern aesthetics and artists are aimless and lost:

Les artistes . . . se sentent diminués jusque dans leur vie intérieure par cet émiettement des pensées et des forces, qui réduit chacun à ses propres ressources. D'où ce désir, plus ou moins raisonné, mais universel, de réunion, d'unité, que nous notions plus haut ; . . . c'est à l'avenir de la société, dans toutes les voies de son activité, qu'elle importe : mais en art, surtout, il faudrait fermer les yeux aux clartés de l'évidence pour ne pas voir le bénéfice immense de la réunion. (Morice LXXXVIII)

Art must again become a means to achieving French solidarity by opposing individualism, as Wagner so successfully did when he provided to German nationalism the Bayreuth festivals. So did Rousseau on the other side of the Rhine. As a convinced adversary of Italian theater that corrupted society, he gave both leftist and rightist totalitarianism the dream of huge unanimous festivals that sealed the common will and reinforced virtue (Fumaroli 111).

To the imposing art of the Gothic cathedral and grandiose Wagnerian epic, Proust counterposes an art of the detail. Indeed, André Gide already commented on this when he remarked how “Lorsque nous lisons Proust, nous commençons de percevoir brusquement du détail où ne nous apparaissait jusqu'alors qu'une masse” (*Autour de la Recherche* 41). The opposition between the two styles, namely the holistic art promoted by the Gothic style and nationalism, versus the aforementioned detailed-oriented aesthetics, is made explicit by intellectuals of that period in no

uncertain terms: “Il n’y a pas réellement d’écart, on le sent, entre cette culture de la beauté du détail en soi, sans souci de l’unité générale, qu’il rompt, et l’esprit individualiste de la Renaissance” (Morice LXX). This individualism constitutes “ le signe symptomatique de sa ruine certaine : c’est l’excessive importance qu’il accorde au détail, dans l’oubli de l’harmonie de l’ensemble” (Morice LXX).

This tactical attention to detail is doubled by the narrator’s aspirations towards a modest aesthetic, seeing that he explicitly attempts to develop his oeuvre as one would stitch together a dress rather than build a cathedral (*RTP4: TR 610*). Thus, instead of an art that crushes the individual in order to subdue him and bring him back to the fold of the group, *La recherche* conceives aesthetics as an activity that has its goal and reward in itself. The novel is saturated with Marcel’s individual joy in artistic contemplation that takes him away from the collective. Using Simmel’s contemporaneous terminology which contrasts subjective to objective culture, this dissertation will examine the implications of Proust’s approach to art and argue that the aesthetical immersion it favors the participatory rather than normative aspect of culture. Significantly, this viewpoint is in line with the local involvement promoted by French Radicalism which is based on cultural rather than ethnic or social criteria (Guilluy 126). From this perspective, Frenchness becomes participation in a shared culture, based on its effective knowledge and understanding. Consequently, *La recherche* restates national identity on a cultural basis.

There are pertinent social implications to the text’s focus on aesthetics as interiorized individual contemplation, as it indirectly prompts a distancing from the group and its dangerous collective pursuits. It thus fosters non-confrontational social interactions grounded in a limited emotional involvement as a means to social harmony. Similar to the sociation of the noble salon,

it allows for the unimpeded proliferation of singularities, in contrast with the restrictive dynamic of the Verdurin salon which, like the nationalistic doctrine, promotes homogeneity predicated on the insider versus outsider segregation.

Proust agrees with de Tarde's heterogeneous vision of humankind as "la réalisation d'une multitude de virtualités élémentaires, chacune caractérisée et ambitieuse, chacune portant en soi son univers distinct, son univers à soi et en rêve" (Tarde, *Les lois sociales* 69). His interview with Élie-Joseph Bois, published in *Le Temps* on November 13 1913, confirms this, as the author states that each one of us has his "univers particulier que chacun de nous voit, et que ne voient pas les autres" (Proust, *Choix de Lettres* 280). Yet in final analysis no form of social interaction is able to successfully foster the aforementioned proliferation of singularities. The very existence of the social realm is predicated on the limitation of individualities, a fundamental condition that this essay dubs the Proustian failure of sociation. Consequently, direct manifestations of individual heterogeneity are precluded in the social arena. In this context, aesthetics comes to the forefront as the field in which the artist is able to manifest his inner difference through the medium of his work. This is why "[l]e plaisir que nous donne un artiste, c'est de nous faire connaître un univers de plus" (*Choix de Lettres* 280). Yet his gift remains the modest privilege of a translator, special only in so far as it allows for the existence of art – the realm of individual heterogeneity made manifest.

According to the 19th century historian Gabriel Monod, in 1842 Jules Michelet wrote thus about the crowd of anonymous dead that still lament their incomprehensible demise throughout the centuries, and are theretofore unable to find eternal rest: "Il leur faut un Œdipe qui leur explique leur propre énigme dont ils n'ont pas eu le sens, qui leur apprenne ce que voulaient dire leurs paroles, leurs actes, qu'ils n'ont pas compris" (Monod 73). At the end of the century,

Barrès fulfills the role of this much expected Oedipus to explain the actual purpose of the endless line of unwilling and uncomprehended sacrifices, namely the birth of the French nation. Yet he does so not for the benefit of the unhearing dead, but for that of the unwitting living still unaware of the goal of their lives. He then endeavors to reveal the siren call of the race to his fellow citizens, who like him can only act in accordance to their roots: “Il n’y a pas même de liberté de penser. Je ne puis vivre que selon mes morts. Eux et ma terre me commandent une certaine activité. . . . Epouventé de ma dépendance, impuissant à me créer, je voulus du moins contempler face à face les puissances qui me gouvernent” (*Scènes et doctrines* 12). Knowingly or not they all walk in the steps of their ancestors, so in order to understand the future it is enough to look back at the past. Proust himself responds to this summon of looking back, yet according to a letter addressed to Reynaldo Hahn in August 1896, what he finds is entirely different: “À tous les moments de notre vie nous sommes les descendants de nous-mêmes et l’atavisme qui pèse sur nous c’est notre passé, conservé par l’habitude” (*Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn* 66). From this perspective, the entire novel becomes the narrative of that journey backwards through which Marcel, and the reader along with him, is granted the innocent enjoyment of self-discovery in an inner-bound contemplation that constitutes an alternative path to social harmony, as it takes him away from dangerous mass endeavors. *La recherche* thus constitutes an innovative approach to the traditional quest for the past that, in the age of nationalism, ostensibly attested to French coherence and continuity.

Nationalism during *la Belle Époque*

Throughout its modern history, France has been preoccupied with the concept of the nation. Political and popular debate has typically centered on “a certain idea of France”, an apt formulation used by Charles de Gaulle in his *Mémoires de guerre* to express competing definitions of French identity. Yet while Proust’s work has been analyzed from the perspective of the relation between the artist and his art (Anne Henry, Leo Bersani), class dynamics (Walter Benjamin, Michael Sprinker, Catherine Bidou-Zachariassen, Edward Hughes), sexual preference (Elisabeth Ladenson, Erin Carlston), as well as other biographical issues (Jean-Yves Tadié), there has been less focus on the issue of the nation in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Given the rise of nationalism in this period and the French inferiority complex after the defeat of 1871, contemporary intellectual debates concentrated on the cohesive and coherent nature of the French nation-state. “Si la France devait succomber, c'est-à-dire perdre le sentiment d'elle-même” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* 274) was the obsession during *la Belle Époque*, as it was so eloquently expressed by Proust’s contemporary, the nationalist anti-Dreyfusard politician and popular writer Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) in his book *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*. This fear of losing national identity was at the forefront of the political rhetoric, subsequently generating a defensive popular reaction against all foreigners: “[l]a France ne se sauvera que par une fièvre française” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 274). Thus, chauvinism and anti-Semitism were at an apex from the beginning of the Dreyfus affair (1894) until the end of the Great War (1918), threatening all those who, like Proust, belonged to an ethnic minority or did not conform to the French norm. I argue that a focus on the topic of the

nation will bring awareness to connections that cannot be highlighted without reference to this at once obvious yet neglected matter.

French Identity

What is a French name? Is there even such a thing? The narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* thinks so. However, some French names are so generic as to provoke suspicion. The reaction of Marcel's grandfather – “Dumont ! Oh ! je me méfie” (*RTP1*² : CS 90) – speaks volumes in his assumption that behind such a name lays hidden a foreign ancestry. The wink to M. Durand or M. Dupont as the prototypical man in the street is relevant: they designate anonymous people in the big city that no one really knows. By contrast, Larivière is “un nom si français” (*RTP4* : TR 424). Meaning literally *the river*, such a name has deep links to the land: in many a parish there is only a waterway designated simply as ‘the river’, while everyone well knows all the families living in the vicinity. In fact, in the last volume of his opus, Proust introduces the Larivière and uncharacteristically warns the reader that they are the only real people in his story. The only extradiegetic intervention in the whole cycle warrants close attention:

Dans ce livre, où il n’y a pas un seul fait qui ne soit fictif, où il n’y a pas un seul personnage « à clefs », où tout a été inventé par moi selon les besoins de ma démonstration, je dois dire, à la louange de mon pays, que seuls les parents millionnaires

² Throughout this essay, the abbreviation *RTP* will stand for the four volume 1987-1989 Pléiade edition of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, while the number immediately following it indicates the volume number. The abbreviation of the volume name from which the citation actually originates is next, as follows: *CS* (*Du côté de chez Swann*), *JF* (*A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*), *CG* (*Le côté de Guermantes*), *SG* (*Sodome et Gomorrhe*), *LP* (*La prisonnière*), *AD* (*Albertine disparue*), and *TR* (*Le temps retrouvé*).

de Françoise ayant quitté leur retraite pour aider leur nièce sans appui, que seuls ceux-là sont des gens réels, qui existent. (*RTP4* : *TR* 424)

Indeed, according to Proust's housekeeper Céleste Albaret, Larivière is the married name of her husband's sister – a very energetic lady who, having selflessly raised her orphaned brothers, owns and runs a small shop rue Montmartre (Albaret 12). But does the Larivière's Frenchness lie in the etymology of their name or in their behavior? And why does Proust insist on their actual existence? In the novel, their short story runs thus: during the Great War, a young soldier is killed on the battlefield, leaving his young widow to run the modest family café on her own. In circumstances this tragic, the Larivière, Françoise's millionaire cousins, come back from retirement to help her, donning the traditional apron and assuming custody of their nephew's establishment. While no menial task is too much for them, they steadily refuse any compensation, suggesting that “la grandeur de la France, . . . sa grandeur d'âme” lies in these modest folk. Through them, Proust redefines patriotism to include the little people behind the front; the true French heroes are “tous les soldats sublimes auxquels j'égale les Larivière” (*RTP4* : *TR* 425). The sacrifice of soldiers recruited to die on the battlefield for their motherland is on par with the mercy shown to someone in dire straits. The Larivière's unrequited kindness gives primacy to the local by positing them as saviors of the fabric of French society: private acts of generosity are redeeming France as much as communal deeds of violence on the front. The actual existence of this family makes the example all the more poignant, suggesting individual generosity and tolerance are the real motor of social cohesion. This opens up the question of the meaning and role of patriotism in French society, and more specifically its place in Proust's

writings – the subject this chapter proposes to explore. Though *La recherche* is a realistic³ depiction of French society, I argue that Proust does not refer to nationalism and patriotism just for historical color. Instead, at a time when the question of how to save a decadent France from perdition was at the national forefront, his opus proposes an approach different from nationalism to rescue his country from internal and external strife. In doing so, he implicitly refers to an older French ideal dubbed by François Furet “the goal to end the Revolution”. Avowed by Léon Gambetta (1838-1882), this aspiration was at the heart of the French liberal tradition, particularly the *Parti radical*, and has been constantly opposed by the Jacobin desire to continue it (Furet 100). Ending the Revolution meant pinning it down in 1789, while rooting French institutions to its principles. Thus, the point of national consensus was the advent of political citizenship and civil equality (Furet 95). It is relevant that the nationalist perspective directly opposes it in a diatribe directed against Radicals: “Il est désormais puéril, sauf pour les radicaux qui voient encore l'univers à travers les Droits de l'homme, de nier l'existence des races, leurs déchirements et leurs conflit” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 447). The nationalist attack is due to the fact that Radicalism promoted, at least in theory, a society accommodating a diversity of individuals coexisting peacefully rather than a racially coherent nation (Nordmann 493).

In this context, a brief account of the history and importance of the French Radical movement, to which this essay will subsequently refer, is appropriate. The term *radicalisme* dates as far back as 1832, when at the beginning of the July French Monarchy the interdiction of political propaganda forbids Republicans to proclaim themselves as such. Consequently, they use the Radical label instead, declaring themselves the real heirs of the French Revolution and its

³ Derwent May suggests that, without being a traditionally realistic novel, *A la recherche* respects most of the conventions of realism: credible, consistent characters evolving in an authentic social environment (May 68).

tradition (Lefranc 138). At the end of the 19th century, Radicals are the advanced wing of the Republican Party (Baal 11). Though Theodore Zeldin dubs it one of the pillars of the Third Republic (Zeldin 2: 319), Kate Auspitz's research underlines the influential and continuing importance of the movement, concluding it has not received an attention proportionate to its widespread popularity (Auspitz 8). Indeed, the *Parti radical* was the principal party of the Third Republic from 1906, on the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair, until the 1940 debacle – a longevity those outside of French society find hard to understand, particularly as Radicalism was first synonymous to extremism before incarnating the virtues of moderation, common sense, and even opportunism. Its popularity was due to two separate factors. On the one hand, it represents a majority of the middle classes – the little bourgeoisie, owners of small enterprises, small shopkeepers, small rural landowners, various employees and functionaries (Baal 40). The specific nature of French industrialization provided its wide base as

France remained in the 19th century, and well into the 20th, a nation of small-holding farmers. Small shopkeepers and an artisanry persisted, too: . . . the process of 'proletarianization' was obscured by a proliferation of *petites fonctions* – clerical and supervisory – and by the institution of the *équipe* The real ambiguity of the work task combined with the plenitude of consumer goods, made *embourgeoisement* as likely an experience as proletarianization. (Auspitz 167)

On the other hand, for a long time French Radicalism consisted of a rather nebulous group instead of a party, properly formed only in 1901, and as such it escaped precise categorizations. Yet it is exactly because of this that Radicalism appealed to broad categories of French people, as its contradictions – internal squabbles of various factions – were often a consequence of its larger inclusiveness. The *Parti radical* benefited from the fact that its ideology reflects general

and diffuse notions close to French stereotypes and Frenchmen's sense of national consciousness (Nordmann 7-10). In fact, its longstanding claim to authentic Republican roots meant it to be a tradition rather than a persuasion, and as such it accommodated many tendencies, having the power to appeal to people originating from diverse environments (Auspitz 9-10). Thus "radicals were, at once or alternately, skeptical and enthusiastic, rational and mystic, libertarian and solidarist, nationalist and cosmopolitan, egalitarian and meritocratic, . . . opportunistic and incorruptible" (Auspitz 10). It allows for a majority of Proustian characters to manifest, at one time or another, Radical tendencies or beliefs.

Furthermore, Radicalism is relevant in connection with the Larivière family. As owners of a modest coffeeshop, together with their relatives, retired gentrified shopkeepers, they all had likely Radical leanings. Indeed, Ferdinand Buisson (1841-1932), an important Radical-Socialist depute, declares that

[l]es radicaux-socialistes sont un parti bourgeois qui à l'âme d'un parti du peuple. Ils réalisent ce paradoxe de réconcilier en eux-mêmes les deux termes de l'antinomie sociale. Ils sont cette chose rare dans l'histoire des démocraties, une classe qui aspire à se confondre avec la nation. Ils sont une classe de propriétaires qui travaillent et travailleurs qui possèdent, un groupe de petites gens qui ne sont pas des parvenus. (Baal 40)

As such, this is ostensibly the party of modest, common men who do not aspire for power or individual success, but for a decent life for themselves and their families. Their unrequited generosity emphasizes the importance family life and local community ties have for them to the detriment of heroic nationalistic endeavors.

Along with the obscure but worthy Larivière, Proust mentions many of his famous contemporaries, amongst them Wagner, whose musical project was trying to answer the question of the German nation⁴. Brian Vickers brings forward the point that the *madeleine* arousing the narrator's reminiscences was, in early drafts, only a *biscotte* akin to Wagner's dry biscuit – the *Zwieback*. Indeed, in his preface to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust refers to it as “la biscotte ramollie dans le thé” (57). Wagner's dry biscuit is mentioned in a letter published in France in 1905, which Proust might well have read. Its attribute is to magically restore the inspiration of the composer on condition it really comes from home. In this context, Wagner conceives it as the genealogically founded motherland, origin to the German spirit. Similarly, the narrator's inspiration for his future oeuvre is triggered by a *madeleine* dipped in French tea⁵, reminding him of the original cookie he tasted in Combray during his childhood. However, this is a chance event that cannot be replicated. And Combray, while seeming to embody a quest for rootedness and continuity, symbolizes in fact the origin that can never be recovered: it is not Marcel's true birthplace, but a village “à la campagne chez mon grand-père” (*RTPI* : CS 6), a projection of home due to happy childhood memories. It is only an imagined link with the land and the past – there is no ancestral tie. Nonetheless, the parallel remains: the appropriate *Zwieback*, just as the right *madeleine*, allows the national cultural project to be developed. Remembrance is the mechanism at the heart of it, and the Proustian cycle is a response to the Wagnerian one. Proust's oeuvre is not Wagner's grandiose epic of forefathers buttressing the glorious continuity of the German people, but a pastiche of French society that atomizes any claims of cohesion by

⁴ Wagner's nationalism is coupled with intolerance. His 1850 essay “Judaism in Music” remains a landmark of anti-Semitism, and his homophobia is well documented.

⁵ Tante Léonie drinks an “infusion de thé ou de tilleul” (*RTPI* : CS 46), but the narrator best remembers “le goût du morceau de madeleine trempé dans le tilleul” (*RTPI* : CS 47).

foregrounding the local over the national. Here is a heretofore unexplored link between the Proustian and Wagnerian projects emphasizing the riddle of the nation in *La recherche*.

Yet Proust's novel is not just a response to German nationalism, as its most thorough statement on art occurs in the context of French patriotism, the keyword of the period. Indeed, a constant outpouring of nationalist feeling had inundate the rhetoric of every political group in what had literally become a contest of patriotism, made particularly evident by the opposing claims of right-wing nationalists and Republican Radicals. Between the two there were important ideological differences. Reactionary patriotism posited the primacy of the nation over any other considerations, including its individual citizens, and was constantly pushing for defense measure against all outsiders. Contrastively, Radical patriotism rooted in the 19th century was traditionally republican. It equated the motherland with the republic and thus insisted on the importance of its citizens. Nonetheless, prominent Radical politicians often resorted to a nationalistic rhetoric extolling the link with the native soil of the motherland and the debt of blood generations of Frenchmen paid to it (Stone 310-311). Furthermore, by the eve of the Great War, the drive to conform to the most extreme nationalism was overwhelming (Stone 396). In the aforementioned passage the narrator directly responds to his contemporary, the nationalist writer Barrès best known for his novel *Les déracinés* (1897). The relevance of a passage warrants full citation:

Dès le début de la guerre, M. Barrès avait dit que l'artiste (en l'espèce le Titien) doit avant tout servir la gloire de sa patrie. Mais il ne peut la servir qu'en étant artiste, c'est-à-dire qu'à condition, au moment où il étudie les lois de l'Art, institue ses expériences et fait ses découvertes, aussi délicates que celles de la Science, de ne pas penser à autre chose — fût-ce à la patrie — qu'à la vérité qui est devant lui. (*RTP4 : TR 467*)

Whereas Barrès asserts that the artist should explicitly glorify his nation, Proust believes the country is best served not by thinking of it, but by endeavoring to describe the truth in front of him. Thus, he must pay attention to the local and its details. At the root of the debate is the motherland, referring us back to the Larivière and the concept of patriotism. In Proust's view, the artist should not bow down to ideologies or group allegiances, but rely on his originality to express his personal perspective. Thus the patriotism of the artist consists in his effort to safeguard art as the arena where the individual point of view reigns supreme. It should be the land of manifest heterogeneity, with the Kantian *Sapere aude* – dare think for thyself – as its motto. Subsequently, art would manifest an infinite multiplicity of points of view balancing each other out rather than a dangerous unanimity based on a collective adoration. In resorting to literature as the field from which to voice his concerns, Proust was aware of its dispersive effect. Indeed, as Maurice Blanchot suggests, “the public [created from the very act of publishing a literary oeuvre] is the indeterminacy that ruins every group and every class” (*The Book to Come* 249). Contrastively, for Barrès the individual is subordinate to the collectivity and his finality rests in the service to his country. In his literary oeuvre, he strives to speak to the French nation. Zeev Sternhell describes Barrèsian nationalism as an ideology opposing all that separates, all that differentiates, and all that maintains diversity. It advocates a homogenization ostensibly leading to unanimity and unity. It requires the will of all rather than the general will of liberalism. It thus opposes democracy and parliamentarism. Consequently, any sectarian activity, as well as any expression of particularism, must be forbidden to avoid any risk of disintegration (Sternhell 90-100). The nation is the whole that each member must serve and glorify.

I argue that throughout *La recherche* there are numerous references to the Barrèsian doctrine pointing to dangerous consequences. For a start, the nationalistic dogma creates a mass

effect which drowns individual judgement. During the Great War, the narrator bears witness to this when he unwittingly adopts the view of the group. He comes to understand that “[s]i j’avais été moi-même dénué de patriotisme, au lieu de me sentir une des cellules du corps-France, il me semble que ma façon de juger la querelle n’eût pas été la même qu’elle eût pu être autrefois” (*RTP4 : TR 353*). Patriotism engenders a blind xenophobia which casts Germany beyond the pale of humanity because of its intrinsic perversity that the narrator will come to doubt (*RTP4 : TR 491*). At the same time, the direct identification of the narrator with France as simply one of its cells evokes Barrès, who, as Vajda shows, voluntarily confuses France and the Self: France becomes the syntax in which the self is inscribed for the common good (Vajda 173). This identification of the self to the body of the nation is equally manifested by Mme Verdurin when commenting on the latest war news: “Dans la conversation, M^{me} Verdurin, pour communiquer les nouvelles, disait : « nous » en parlant de la France. « Hé bien, voici : nous exigeons du roi de Grèce qu’il se retire du Péloponnèse, etc. ; nous lui envoyons, etc. »” (*RTP4 : TR 307*).

Furthermore, she will reproach Brichot for the frequent use of the pronoun *je* in his patriotic war articles, upon which he will switch to *on*: “Brichot remplaça *je* par *on*, mais *on* n’empêchait pas le lecteur de voir que l’auteur parlait de lui et permit à l’auteur de ne plus cesser de parler de lui, de commenter la moindre de ses phrases, de faire un article sur une seule négation, toujours à l’abri de *on*” (*RTP4 : TR 371*). The anonymity of the group allows Brichot to aggrandize with impunity a self melted with the whole. Nationalism during the war causes a dangerous transition from the individualism of a *je* taking responsibility for personal opinions and actions to a communal yet impersonal *nous* or *on*, behind which any deed can be justified in the name of the common good. As Louis Dumont explains, while individualism makes the man the measure of all things, holism valorizes the social collectivity over individuals (Dumont 268). The question

remains who the speaking *us* actually is. Pericles Louis responds that the nation-state is “the particular form of the fiction ‘we’ that claims to define the self through and through” (Lewis 152). Behind this *us* there is everyone, and thus no one.

While there were countless contemporaneous French writers amongst whom he could choose, Proust expressly designated Barrès as his counterpart in art. What stands behind his choice? What connects and what separates the two writers? Barrès (1862-1923) and Proust (1871-1921) were contemporaries exposed to the same historical events at similar periods of their lives. However, because of their particular circumstances their perceptions diverged. Both were victims of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), albeit in different ways. Being born in the East of France, a region exposed to recurrent foreign assaults, Barrès is the result of a historical moment of national disaster. The Prussian invasion, the defeat, and the occupation of his Lorraine village, mark his entire oeuvre. In his view, every French citizen should have sacrificed himself in order to save Alsace and Lorraine, the two provinces France should never have abandoned to Germany. His lifelong goal has been the annihilation of the Self for the benefit of an Us (Vajda 27). He wants to show the way to his contemporaries, men born lost and defeated in a threatened nation. The Great War is the key event of his life, hailed as “la grande revanche”, the moment when France could be made whole again (Vajda 188).

On the other hand, three catastrophic events mark Proust’s life. The first is the 1871 Parisian Commune which, though not mentioned in *La recherche*, terrified his mother throughout her pregnancy with him (Bloch-Dano 89); as a result, he was hindered his whole life by frailty and disease. The second is the Dreyfus Affair. It forced Proust to come to terms with his Jewish heritage – a wake-up call for many Jews like him that considered themselves Frenchmen only to be rejected by society at large as foreigners. Born from a Jewish mother and

French father, Proust was a Jew both in the Hebrew tradition and in the eye of his contemporaries, though he proudly considered himself a Catholic and implicitly a Frenchman, as a letter to the Count of Montesquiou, dated May 19th 1896, attests. In it, Proust explains why he refused to answer an offensive question on Jews: “si je suis catholique comme mon père et mon frère, par contre, ma mère est juive ” (*Choix de Lettres* 59). During the Affair, Proust is confronted with a wave of intolerance and hatred uniting the many against the few. His Jewish heritage was not a secret. In a letter to Robert Dreyfus written in June 1905, Proust recalls that “*La Libre Parole* avait dit qu’un certain nombre de jeunes juifs, entre lesquels M. Marcel Proust, etc., honnissaient Barrès.” He had to either publicly deny or tacitly accept both accusations, since in that anti-Semitic climate all Jews were unpatriotic and thus opponents of Barrès, the upholder of nationalism. His choice was clear: “Pour rectifier il aurait fallu dire que je n’étais pas juif et ne le voulais pas” (Dreyfus 176-177). Being unpatriotic according to the nationalistic standards and perceptions, while certainly dangerous, was more acceptable to him than denying his Jewish origins. Finally, the third event marking Proust’s life is the Great War, with its renewed chauvinism manifested mainly as Germanophobia. While the numerous sacrifices of Jewish soldiers on the battlefield made even Barrès admit their Frenchness⁶, Proust decries the same phenomenon in another guise: communal violence found its newest victim in all those having German ties. As the narrator explains, newer generations can “réhabiliter une partie des exclus, la cause de l’exclusivisme ayant changé” (*RTP3 : LP* 740). Overall, the French obsession with the concept of the nation was never more intense than in the interval between the Franco-Prussian War and the Great War, marking the span of Proust’s life with a nationalism that had

⁶ This was the age Pierre Assouline dubbed the Sacred Union of the nation, coinciding with the rehabilitation of Jews after the dark years of the Dreyfus Affair: there were 40,000 soldiers of Jewish origin fighting in the French army (Assouline 261).

reached its climax. During the troubled period of the Third Republic (1870-1940), scandals and political crisis dominated political life. From the 1880s to the 1920s, Boulangism, the Panama Scandal, the crash of the *Union Générale*, the Dreyfus Affair, the parliamentary controversy over the separation of church and state, and finally the Great War, each fed an increasing xenophobia and anti-Semitism throughout French society. Indeed, Barrès specifically indicates “boulangisme, affaire de Panama, affaire Dreyfus” as the crucial nationalistic battles of the period preceding the Great War (*Scènes et doctrines* 7).

Throughout his life, Proust has carried the mark of social conflict on his body as his illness. It was a constant reminder of the direct consequences group confrontation has not only on those directly involved, but on all civilians. This is one of the reasons why, at critical historical junctions, main Proustian characters fall ill or die. While nationalism glorifies the suffering of innocents as sacrifice on the altar of the motherland, I suggest Proust redefines patriotism as a concern for the suffering of his compatriots. He highlights the influence historical events have on individual destinies, in particular those belonging to persecuted minorities. Thus, the Jewish character of Charles Swann falls gravely ill at the apex of the Dreyfus Affair, as if his body breaks down in proportion with the intensification of anti-Semitism. “[C]omme une bête fatiguée qu’on harcèle” (*RTP2 : CG 868*), he is no longer able to handle the amount of opprobrium hurled at him by society at large. The link is explicit: “greffées les unes sur les autres, la maladie mortelle, l’affaire Dreyfus, la propagande antisémite” managed to awaken in Swann the bond with his Jewish origin (*RTP3 : SG 89*). Now, “il exécrait ces persécutions et rentrait au bercail religieux de ses pères” (*RTP2 : CG 868*). Having gone through the gamut of social rejection because of his Jewish heritage, Swann will eventually die without even knowing the final outcome of the Affair: “j’avoue que ce serait bien agaçant de mourir avant la fin de

l'affaire Dreyfus. . . . Je voudrais bien vivre assez pour voir Dreyfus réhabilité et Picquart colonel" (*RTP3 : SG 112*). Similarly, the baron de Charlus, a Germanophile proud of his Prussian heritage, is excluded from the Verdurin salon just when the anti-German sentiment is at its pitch at the outbreak of the Great War. While his ostracism is not due to chauvinism, Mme Verdurin will subsequently justify the expulsion by his ethnicity: "il est prussien. . . . Rien ne m'enlèvera de l'idée que pendant deux ans Charlus n'a pas cessé d'espionner chez moi" (*RTP4 : TR 344*).

The accusation is ludicrous; nonetheless, its constant repetition in the press alongside allegations of homosexuality paints the image of a debauched foreigner devoid of patriotism. He will feel increasingly marginalized in the milieu that he used to rule: humiliated, he will give up and descend into the pits of masochism and prostitution. He will reach his lowest point, ill, decrepit, and socially rejected, at the end of the Great War. By the end of the novel, Charlus is an old man convalescing from an apoplexy attack. Finally, Robert de Saint-Loup, a Guermantes whose German heritage is less touted but still acknowledged, is suspected of treason: "Saint-Loup avait été injustement mêlé à une affaire d'espionnage parce qu'on avait trouvé son nom dans les lettres saisies sur un officier allemand" (*RTP4 : TR 389*). Though it is likely that his involvement is due to homosexual preference rather than ethnic heritage, war Germanophobia makes all those with foreign ties suspicious of German loyalties. While the novel does not get into details on how the incident affected Saint-Loup, his name is cleared of suspicion upon his ultimate sacrifice on the battlefield. We are confronted by the death of a hero during an international conflict that not only marks, but also ends his life. Both the Dreyfus Affair and the Great War are events centered on the motherland in danger; both ultimately lead to the demise of innocents. Pertinently, the narrator establishes a parallel between nationalism and his writerly practices. He blames himself for the objectification of his friends and acquaintances: "j'avais une pitié infinie même d'être

moins chers, même d'indifférents, et de tant de destinées dont ma pensée en essayant de les comprendre avait, en somme, utilisé la souffrance . . ." (*RTP4 : TR 481*). Objects of the narrator's research, they are observed in connection with a problematic of which they are unaware. Is this an abuse of trust? The narrator seems to think so since he confesses that "[j]e n'étais pas loin de me faire horreur comme se le ferait peut-être à lui-même quelque parti nationaliste au nom duquel des hostilités se seraient poursuivies, et à qui seul aurait servi une guerre où tant de nobles victimes auraient souffert et succombé sans même savoir . . . l'issue de la lutte" (*RTP4 : TR 481*). In the context of a novel with imaginary characters, as Proust insists (*RTP4 : TR 424*), the passage indicts nationalism for knowingly using people's insecurities and fears to achieve a political goal regardless of the consequences. In fact, many of its victims, like Swann or Charlus, die in service of a cause for which they never enlisted, simply because they are cast on the losing side of the national rift. Proust anticipates Amartya Sen's affirmation that "group violence cultivates a single line of prioritized divisiveness" (Amartya Sen 35): the violence against the Jews surrounding the Dreyfus Affair and the anti-German sentiment at the time of the Great War highlight the consequences of jingoistic group dynamics. As we will later see, nationalism can be defined only through opposition, and French nationalism at the turn of the 19th century finds in racism and anti-Semitism the way to identify its outsiders. The Jews symbolize the anti-nation, the cosmopolitan against which national sentiment can be outlined: they are the fundamental element of this search of identity that is nationalism (Sternhell 275). This is why, even while living in international Paris, Proust was directly affected by the xenophobic atmosphere surrounding the Dreyfus Affair and permeating the years preceding the conflict with Germany.

Though marginalized as a Jew, Proust considered himself a French citizen and patriot. He lived at a time when the French army was the symbol of the nation and military service a mark of patriotism. Therefore, despite his debilitating illness, Proust wanted to serve – he had already proudly performed his military service from 1889 to 1890, a time he remembered fondly. In July or August 1912, he wrote to Reynaldo Hahn that the military career was “cet état que j’aurais voulu embrasser. Et je regrette que je ne l’ai pas fait” (*Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn* 244). Charles Swann shares this love of the army. While he is a Jewish Dreyfusard, he is also a patriot who had bravely fought during the Franco-Prussian war, being awarded a medal that he actually never wore. He was taking both his Frenchness and his patriotism for granted. But at the time of the Affair, Swann needs to prove his loyalty to France. Thus, “[i]l portait, ce qu’il n’avait jamais fait jusque-là, la décoration qu’il avait gagnée comme tout jeune mobile, en 70, et ajouta à son testament un codicille pour demander que, contrairement à ses dispositions précédentes, des honneurs militaires fussent rendus à son grade de chevalier de la Légion d’honneur” (*RTP3 : SG* 111). This is precisely because, as Michael Marrus explains, all Dreyfusards were cast as enemies of justice, the army, and the motherland (203). With this gesture, Swann affirms that, despite being a Jew and a Dreyfusard, he is a loyal French citizen. His patriotism is manifest in his respect for the army as fulcrum of the nation: “s’il approuvait tout ce qui touchait à la révision, il ne voulait être mêlé en rien à la campagne antimilitariste” (*RTP3 : SG* 111).

Proust’s patriotism, however, went beyond his respect for the army: it is precisely his Jewish heritage that fueled his loyalty to France. French Jews were always grateful for their political emancipation by the First Republic, believing it would warrant, for centuries to come, their prosperity and peace. During the Third Republic, Jewish intellectuals strove to express their patriotism. And, unlike Proust, French Jews shared almost as much in the popular nationalist

doctrines that exalted roots and the motherland as French society at large (Marrus 117). As a Jewish scientist, Durkheim illustrates this attitude. According to Ivan Strenski, his organicist theory was an ideology seeking a common spiritual basis for the nation. Thus, Durkheimian societism ought to be read against the backdrop of the French nationalist revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: when Durkheim uses the term ‘society’, he also means ‘nation’. Social harmony is its main concern (Strenski 79-154). Along with Durkheim, French nationalistic thinkers at the turn of the century cast individualism as the cause of national decadence. The entire political spectrum believed France needed a centripetal force to counter egoism and intellectual nihilism, providing national unity and morale. Both the Left and the Right ascribed the sin of individualism to foreigners, particularly to the Jewish minority: outsiders and newcomers could not be as invested as autochthones in the fate of the motherland. They had come for the bounty and, if things went badly, they would simply move elsewhere. French Jews thus felt they had to constantly prove their patriotism to counter the anti-Semitic propaganda and popular feeling. Their massive sacrifice on the battlefields of the Great War speaks to that, changing even the opinion of Barrès: in 1917 he enrolls French Jews in his *Les Diverses familles spirituelles de la France* as loyal French citizens (Vajda 293). In fact, the patriotism of French Jews had been exclusively French all along.

Proust felt the rift in a society already divided by the Parisian Commune, when civil war seemed to have forever broken the social bond, and further split by other political issues: destructive confrontation between various social groups seemed the rule. In a country marked by a series of bloody revolutions (1789, 1831, 1848, and 1871), the spectrum of internal strife and violence loomed very close – an apprehension most of the political spectrum shared. The Right, the Left, French intellectuals of that time, and historians looking back, all agree: France was a

divided people during *la Belle Epoque*. In this respect, it is important to remember that French liberalism, Radicalism, and nationalism, shared the desire to end not only the division between rich and poor, but also the rift created by the French Revolution and lingering in the opposition between pre-Revolutionary traditions and more modern mores (Auspitz 100). The question remaining for all who cared was how to heal a broken nation – and both Barrès and Proust did care. Notwithstanding their different perspectives on contemporary events, here are two men belonging to the same generation, united in their love for their country and in the worry for its future. In this regard, Jean-Claude Michéa’s view that the goal of any social or political organization is not to implement a certain philosophical ideal, but rather to prevent the return to ideological civil war is relevant (37). Thus, Proust is aware that through their art both he and Barrès are equally committed to mend the rift in the fabric of French society, though they drastically diverge in their approach. This is why, when framing his view on how the artist should serve his nation, Proust refers to Barrès as his antithesis: Barrès was the promoter of the most popular and reactionary contemporary response to France’s problems – nationalism. In fact, he was its originator. Declaring himself a “patriote lorrain” instead of a French writer, forever marked by the Prussian invasion of his province, Barrès founds modern French nationalism by initiating a descent into the tombs of his ancestors. To him, this is the means to reconstruct a concrete idea to which lost modern men can anchor their existence and overcome individualism. Convinced that all was rotten in the French Republic and obsessed by the recovery of the nation, Barrès believes that Frenchmen needed dogmas to cherish and utopias to build (Vajda 65-75). This goal requires “[d]es efforts méthodiques pour créer une discipline nationale, pour nous rattacher à notre terre et à nos morts, pour nous initier au point de vue de race et aux conséquences qu’il embrasse . . .” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 308). Thus, while firmly believing

nationalism is a doctrine vital for French resurgence, he remains aware he artificially constructed it from top to bottom.

Proust is equally discerning of the constructed nature of nationalism, making it a central theme of *La recherche*: most of its last volume, *Le temps retrouvé*, takes place during the Great War and contemplates the patriotic phenomenon. The rival states present the organicist structures commended by nationalism: rather than a collection of individuals, each nation is a collective individual confronting many others (Taguieff 327). The group is akin to a person: “l’immense Être humain appelé France . . . s’était affronté en une gigantesque querelle collective avec cet autre immense conglomérat d’individus qu’est l’Allemagne” (*RTP4 : TR 1222*nna).

Contemporary readers would have been able to recognize the Barrèsian influence comparing “une nation à ces puddings de pierres . . . que l’on nomme conglomérats” (*Scènes et doctrines* 20). However, in the case of the “corps France”, the narrator is still able to distinguish the small polygons of various shapes that are agglutinated to form the whole: “la cohésion des millions d’individus qui comme des cellules aux formes variées remplissent, comme autant de petits polygones intérieurs, jusqu’au bord extreme, son périmètre” (*RTP4 : TR 1222*nna). This passage continues to echo the Barrèsian model which proffers that “si chaque élément de la couche externe garde à l’œil sa personnalité, il est pourtant solidaire, relativement aux actions physiques, de toutes les couches et de tous les éléments . . . attachés à son premier noyau” (*Scènes et doctrines* 20). In both cases, social heterogeneity is not entirely lost, but individuals are tightly bound together by the imitation of the nationalistic model. Yet the Proustian narrator qualifies patriotism as blindness: “Pour rester aveugle sur ce qu’a d’injuste la cause de l’individu Allemagne, pour reconnaître à tout instant ce qu’a de juste la cause de l’individu France, le plus sûr n’était pas pour un Allemand de n’avoir pas de jugement, pour un Français d’en avoir, le plus

sûr pour l'un ou pour l'autre c'était d'avoir du patriotisme" (*RTP4 : TR 353*). Again, the reference to Barrès and his followers in *l'Action Française* is implicit since in their view a patriot is someone asserting his country is always right, even when it obviously is in the wrong – patriotism requires lying. The conceptual dialogue with Barrès does not stop here but moves onto the dynamics of confrontation at the core of nationalism. The narrator explains that coalescence at the level of a people can be actuated only by hatred: "le peuple est volontiers pacifiste ; s'il est guerrier, c'est instinctivement, par haine, par rancune, non par les raisons qui ont décidé les chefs d'État . . ." (*RTP2 : CG 557*). The French aggregate can be defined solely in opposition to a German foe – the perception of the outsider, the enemy at the gates, is required for the miracle of unity to happen. Few individuals are able to escape that mass effect. Barrès expresses the same view in his discourse in front of the French Assembly on August 14 1914: "Even if it involves the awful lessons of battle, I've wanted nothing more than for Frenchmen to unite around the great ideas of our race" (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 21). The age of the political, starting at the end of the 19th century, is that of confrontation between intolerant mass-group identities. For Barrès, fighting a common enemy would unite the country around a collective conviction, fusing France into the organic society it should be. From this perspective, the fact that the anti-Semitism of that period reconciles "la pensée contre-révolutionnaire, la tradition catholique, et un anticapitalisme populiste et socialisant" (Bredin 35) makes apparent its purpose of dissolving class conflict and preventing future revolutions. In their desire for political and social stability, other political organization contributed to it – for instance Radicalism through its distrust of financial accumulation and their brand of pre-Marxist Socialism. Indeed, according to Judith Stone the anti-Jewish sentiment ran deep among Radicals (Stone 163).

Contrastively, engendered by hatred and promoted by blindness, nationalism is a grim perspective for Proust. In this regard, the baron de Charlus plays a crucial role in *La recherche*. His mixed heritage allows him to elude nationalism: “Il était, par conséquent, du corps-France comme du corps-Allemagne” (*RTP4 : TR 353*). Because he is simultaneously exposed to the French and German mediations, he remains a spectator. Without curing him of patriotism, the sight of Charlus’s detachment removes the scales from the narrator’s eyes, enabling him to shift to a different model of interaction between the individual and the motherland. He acknowledges that he belongs not to “le corps France” but to “l’acteur France”, that he is simply an actor in the Great War play (*RTP4 : TR 353*). Hence, the narrator underlines the performative dimension of nationalism: its group dynamics are based on the mimesis of a single model, leading to conformity. In this respect, Gabriel de Tarde, the philosopher who, according to Anne Henry, mostly influenced Proust’s sociology (“Le Kaléidoscope” 32), has a theory relevant to the dangers of uniformity. Imitation of a sole social model leads to a rigid conformism that will suffocate mankind, leading to its extinction. Even the society most desiring of social order must tolerate, even search for dissidence and opposition so as to remain strong. To maintain its vitality, it requires a constant influx of discoveries and new initiatives that sting and wake her with their strangeness. The elimination of all contradiction between distributed beliefs and desires stops their renewal and halts all productive activity. The antidote consists in simultaneous currents of imitation based on a diversity of models. Thus, the salvation of mankind requires social heterogeneity: the meeting of various currents of imitation will cause interferences generating diversity. Unanimity is bad, since it denotes a dangerous unidirectional imitative movement, with no counter model to balance it (Millet 229-335). Subsequent chapters of this thesis will endeavor to highlight the numerous convergences between Proust’s views and de

Tarde's theory, most particularly their attempt to universalize difference as not conflictual. Thus, it is important to underline the actual link between the two thinkers. According to Henry, Proust knew of de Tarde's writings and used his sociology to structure the communities he describes⁷. His knowledge of de Tarde's theories is confirmed by a note to his translation of *La bible d'Amiens*, where he remarks that Ruskin has "une sorte de don historique ou sociologique qui sait découvrir dans des actions en apparence identiques une intention morale différente, selon le temps et la civilisation, et apparenter les formes extrêmement diverses que revêt une même moralité ou immoralité à travers les âges." To this he adds the comment referencing de Tarde directly, maintaining that this gift "existe aussi chez M. Tarde" (*La Bible d'Amiens* 183nn1). Behind synchronous uniformity often lays hidden difference, while behind asynchronous difference there is sometimes sameness: this is a theory central to *La recherche*, as subsequent chapters of this thesis will endeavor to highlight. Here Proust attributes this vision to Ruskin and, more importantly, to de Tarde. This suggests that the latter's influence extends beyond sociology, into Proust's view of the nation. In this context, de Tarde's perspective on uniformity is relevant: through imitation, humanity risks to someday become a levelled mass. Motivated by a desire for continuity and stability, nationalism enforces a single model of mimesis that can only speed up the homogenizing process and seal its disastrous outcome: social stagnation and eventual extinction of the human race.

De Tarde's coextensive currents of imitation can thwart the workings of nationalism.

Thus, Charlus is devoid of patriotism because he is homeopathically protected by the two

⁷ According to Henry, Proust had reread de Tarde as late as 1913, as particular social developments he made at that time in his oeuvre bear de Tarde's mark (*Marcel Proust: Théorie pour une esthétique*, 346). She points to the possibility of a physical encounter between the writer and the philosopher in the early 1890s, as de Tarde was an intimate of the Faure, as were Proust's parents (*La tentation de Marcel Proust*, 141).

concurrent models he is prone to imitate: “M. de Charlus . . . , pour des raisons diverses – parmi lesquelles celle d’avoir eu une mère duchesse de Bavière pouvait jouer un rôle – n’avait pas de patriotisme” (*RTP4 : TR 353*). The simultaneity of the French and German mediations interferes with ideological indoctrination. Proust heralds Stuart Hall’s theory of encoding-decoding.

According to it, no person passively accepts indoctrination – any ideological message must first be appropriated as meaningful by being decoded. While the encoder expects the individual to decipher the message using identical meaning structures, thus getting the intended point and being subjected to its dogma, many people actually use a negotiated meaning structure. This is not to say that they intentionally resist ideology, but rather that personal position and interests prevail over hegemonic systems of belief (Hall 138-143). This is Charlus’s case: when interpreting nationalistic rhetoric, he decodes it based on his multi-cultural heritage exposing the similarity of its inner working. He notices that the speeches of the two rival leaders are indistinguishable: “l’Allemagne emploie tellement les mêmes expressions que la France que c’est à croire qu’elle la cite, . . . je ne sais pas si cette phrase est de l’empereur Guillaume ou de M. Poincaré . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 377*). Therefore, nationalistic patterns lead to the dangerous uniformity de Tarde decries: the actor France and the actor Germany, though opposing one another, are practically identical. The opponents have reached the climax of aggression, or what René Girard terms the “sacrificial crisis”: the homogenous stage of reciprocal violence defined as a mimesis of hatred erasing every difference. Manifested as perfect uniformity, it threatens the annihilation of all those involved (*La Violence et le sacré 79*). The imperative destruction of the other represented as mortal enemy compels both sides to use the rhetoric David Bell dubbed total war (Bell 3), waged in the name of peace: “Nous luttons contre un ennemi implacable et cruel jusqu’à ce que nous ayons obtenu une paix qui nous garantisse à l’avenir de toute agression . .

.” (*RTP4 : TR 377*). Thus, the war against war perpetuates violence in good conscience, and Charlus is able to see that “la vérité c’est que chaque matin on déclare à nouveau la guerre” (*RTP4 : TR 375*). Proust prefigures Emmanuel Lévinas in his belief that non-violence is crucial, since in war “celui qui veut la continuer est aussi coupable que celui qui l’a commencée . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 375*). What is most needed is a new reflection on passivity, on the patience required to stop preaching to others (Lévinas, *Difficile liberté* 239). And, as we shall see, this is part of the Proustian message. Nonetheless, nationalism does not leave room for such detachment, since its dynamics consist in a clear separation between allies and foes: “Qui n’est pas pour nous est contre nous”, as aptly remarks Charlus (*RTP4 : TR 377*).

This drastic separation between insiders and outsiders, leading to a unanimity on which a strong state should be built, is exactly the enterprise of Barrèsian nationalism. Julien Benda labelled it the divinization of the political (Benda 218). The age of nationalistic politics, as described by Carl Schmitt, has begun and has no end in sight; under its reign, every political action is based on the distinction between friend and enemy (Schmitt 26). In such a dual exclusionary structure, the full annihilation of one’s antagonists is the only hope of stability. Thus, nationalists can only be extremists: “nos nationalistes sont les plus germanophobes, les plus jusqu’aboutistes des hommes. . . . En fait, ils poussent bien à la continuation de la guerre. Mais ce n’est que pour exterminer une race belliqueuse et par amour de la paix” (*RTP4 : TR 377*). Their harshness is a complete disregard for human life. Charlus criticizes the disastrous French tactics of continuing the war just to punish a defeated Germany, causing needless bloodshed on both sides: “la France qui est la France juste . . . est aussi la douce France et devrait faire entendre des paroles de pitié, fût-ce seulement pour ses propres enfants et pour qu’au printemps les fleurs qui renaîtront aient à éclairer autres choses que des tombes” (*RTP4 : TR*

375). Moving beyond group identities, he insists on the value of individual life in an implied dialogue with Barrès. The narrator's plea against the sacrifice of soldiers to protect a France personified by historical monuments reiterates it: "Ne sacrifiez pas des hommes à des pierres dont la beauté vient justement d'avoir un moment fixé des vérités humaines" (*RTP4 : TR 374*). His attitude echoes the Radicalism of interwar years which rejects the German sacrifice of individual elements (Nordmann 194). Charlus agrees, framing his response thus: "Je comprends ce que vous voulez dire, me répondit M. de Charlus, et M. Barrès, qui nous a fait, hélas, trop faire de pèlerinages à la statue de Strasbourg et au tombeau de M. Déroulède, a été touchant et gracieux quand il a écrit que la cathédrale de Reims elle-même nous était moins chère que la vie de nos fantassins" (*RTP4 : TR 374*). There is an implicit irony in Charlus's formulation: Barrès graciously concedes that a soldier's life is more valuable than a French cathedral. However, through patriotic pilgrimages so dutiful as to become boring, he had ardently promoted a war of reunification, regardless of the ensuing bloodshed.

Both aforementioned sites honored by Barrèsian pilgrimages were connected to the lost province of Alsace. Paul Déroulède (1846-1914) was an intransigent nationalist animated by a revanchism akin to that of Barrès. According to Philippe Landru, Déroulède's tomb, located close to Paris in the cemetery of la Celle-Saint-Cloud, had a German boundary pole from the new 1871 Alsatian border installed on it in 1915. As to the statue of Strasbourg, it is an allegory of the Alsatian city representing a woman seated atop a cannon with sword in hand. It has been displayed in Paris's Place de la Concorde since 1836 and thus had no link to the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. However, as Rachel Chrastil shows, after the Franco-Prussian war it came to symbolize the pain of defeat and the hope of future reunification and became a favored locale for nationalist rallies (Chrastil 232-233). From the cathedrals soldiers must die to defend, to the pilgrimages to

symbolic sites, place functions as a crucial referent for nationalism: starting from cultural myths, it transforms various parts of the environment in *lieux de mémoire* to support its ideological or political purposes. Barrès in particular believes man is rooted to his proper place: he can only find purposefulness in an extension of selfhood including the nation through “la terre et les morts” (Marrus 173). Michel de Certeau offers a conceptual framework for understanding the ideological recourse of collectivities to strategies favoring place over time, in contrast to the tactics individuals are forced to use (*L'invention du quotidien 1* 59-62). Based on his research, I propose that nationalism is a strategy centered on the exclusive ownership of a place circumscribed through the Barrèsian motto “la terre et ses morts”. The homeland and its borders manifest the physical separation between a proper and its exterior, founding an autonomous realm. Based on it, history is extolled through myth and legend. The past becomes an eternal present, marking the victory of place over time. This is why nineteenth century nationalism conceives the French community as eternal.

Conversely, the narrator believes French monuments matter because of the human truth they temporarily capture. The essence of beauty is transience – the narrator well knows that “la durée éternelle n’est pas plus promise aux œuvres qu’aux hommes” (*RTP4 : TR* 621). Therefore human lives should not be sacrificed to prevent their inevitable destruction. According to Lévinas, in the Jewish tradition man lives free from landscapes and architectures, all these heavy sedentary things that he would be tempted to prefer to his brethren (*Difficile liberté* 41). Proust echoes this position in his letter to Mme Strauss dated May 31 1918. In it, he expresses his devotion for France, mentioning places he particularly loves: Amiens, Reims, and Laon. But he will give a different slant to this attachment: “Laon c’était avec Emmanuel Bibesco. Il est mort maintenant” (*Lettres à madame Strauss* 222-223). Laon is thus not remembered through a

national monument, nor through the death of a French hero, but simply because of the time spent there with Emmanuel Bibesco, his Romanian friend who killed himself in London in 1917.

Authentic connections with a place can only happen at personal level, through intimate impressions and shared memories, rather than roots and heritage. Furthermore, individuals cannot rely on a proper place, exclusively owned as a visible totality. Functioning in places he shares with others, a human being never has full spatial control or autonomy. This is why his only recourse is to what de Certeau defines as a tactic, striving to catch the favorable opportunity to establish a personal rapport with a place (*L'invention du quotidien I* XLVI). The chance aspect of meaningful memories attached to places underlines the pertinence of time in individual tactics. In this respect, the narrator's visit to Venice, a city he had for long ardently desired to see, is significant because it reveals the nature of his connection to it. For a while, his delight in the town's architecture and art seems complete. However, upon a major disagreement with his mother and her ensuing decision to depart at once for France, leaving him behind all alone, he ceases to perceive any of the charms in which he reveled before: "La ville que j'avais devant moi avait cessé d'être Venise" (*RTP4 : AD 231*). He finds himself lost in an unknown and hostile place: "ce lieu quelconque était étrange comme un lieu où on vient d'arriver, qui ne vous connaît pas encore. . . ." His bond with the city is broken: "Je ne pouvais plus rien lui dire de moi, je ne pouvais rien laisser de moi se poser sur lui . . ." (*RTP4 : AD 231*). Venice seems to disintegrate. The magical soul that kept the city together, in which he took so much delight, was in fact the presence of his mother:

Ma mère devait être arrivée à la gare. Bientôt elle serait partie. J'étais étreint par l'angoisse que me causait, avec la vue du canal devenu tout petit depuis que l'âme de Venise s'en était échappée, de ce Rialto banal qui n'était plus le Rialto, – par ce chant de

désespoir que devenait *Sole mio* et qui, ainsi clamé devant les palais inconsistants, achevait de les mettre en miettes et consommait la ruine de Venise. . . . (RTP4 : AD 233)

De Certeau makes a critical difference between place as a stable configuration of instantaneous positions and space as the individual experience of a place in time. The Proustian novel favors the latter (*L'invention du quotidien I* 173-174). The cited passage is just an example of how the narrator transforms the settings he visits in spaces he practices. As such, Venice reflects the narrator's individual perspective. It has no stability since it varies depending on the actual perception and interpretation of the environment. Contrastively, though there are as many spaces as there are spatial experiences as Elstir's original paintings illustrate, nationalism manages to transform them all in places. The law of place is the always already there of an object marking a location, very much like Barrèsian tombs. This emphasis on the homeland as territory is furthered by the fundamental definition of national identity as the political union of a place with a people, to which the Third Republic gave democratic, civic, and popular sanction by the marriage of history and geography (Nora, "Introduction" X). It is a strategy that focuses on that which is fixed and permanent, favoring place over time. As a consequence, at the end of the 19th century, identity, memory and patrimony form a stable cultural totality serving the nation conceived simultaneously as heritage and project (Nora, "The Era of Commemoration" 634). In this perspective, art functions as a symbol for something outside itself: it reflects and extols the overriding national project. Charlus echoes this view by dubbing France "[t]out ce mélange d'histoire survivante et d'art" (RTP4 : TR 374). In it, "[l]e château expliquait l'église qui, elle-même, parce qu'elle avait été un lieu de pèlerinage, expliquait la chanson de geste" (RTP4 : TR 374). The church placed in its natural setting, alongside the seigneurial manor, demonstrates the role of art: the glorification of the cultural ensemble. Only in its totality can it escape time and

hold to an eternal meaning intrinsically linked to the place to which it belongs. This is why Charlus decries the uprooted work of art, such as the many masterpieces Americans have bought and moved to the United States. The reference to Barrès is direct: “Mais précisément cet art déraciné, comme dirait M. Barrès, est tout le contraire de ce qui faisait l’agrément délicieux de la France” (*RTP4 : TR 374*). The “art déracinée”, the isolated object of art, is meaningless. But, according to Adorno, this is exactly the view Proust opposes. When art is displayed in its original setting, the whole prevents the parts from speaking. Thus, rather than experiencing his own impressions, the viewer will hear *l’air du temps* with its canons and doctrinal beliefs. For the individual perception of the artist to be made visible, its intention, as well as the determining environment in which it was created, must disappear. Thus, the work of art must be severed from its time and its place, and displayed in a museum (Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum” 181-182). Adorno reminds us that works of art have the potential to dwarf the spectator, enlisting him in a dangerous common admiration for something greater than himself. Proust is wary of the masterpiece, or of what Georg Simmel would term “the objectification of representations, with their appearance in a form of existence that stands over and against us” (Simmel 73), which dominates the beholder and will eventually evince a resentful awareness of its superiority. Consequently, the bliss of aesthetical contemplation soon turns into a grudge that desires its demise. Unawares, the beholder aspires to a violence that threatens with downfall any potential forms of greatness, albeit his own. This pattern always generates dangerous group dynamics of the many against the one or the few – a pattern shared by nationalism. To avoid this, Adorno suggests, the work of art must become an element of the observer’s subjective stream of consciousness, detached from any cultic prerogative or heroic usurpation (“Valéry Proust Museum” 184). This is why Proust prefers the object of art in a museum, where the visitor can

favor time over place, casually strolling at his own pace from one piece to the next. He will briefly stop in front of the painting that would catch his fancy, gather his own impressions, then, quickly move on to the next one: happiness is achieved on condition he is never caught into the perfection of the piece, nor reminded of his own limits. It is a tactic that allows the visitor to develop his own sensibility – a source of inspiration, not a model to be imitated, as Proust, in his preface to Ruskin's *Sésame et lys*, reminds us that art should always be (33). The secret lies in the quasi-simultaneity of identification and dis-identification with the masterpiece, preventing any dangerous attachment or overwhelming of the viewer.

It is relevant that, in this process, art can no longer be recuperated in the service of nationalism, or of any doctrine for that matter. This is why the character of Brichot, a self-professed nationalist, decries art for art's sake, or what he terms "l'art, avec un grand A" (*RTP3* : *SG* 346). Sylvia Kahan explains that in the prewar years, unconventional works of art were labeled "Art with a capital A" and were considered a deliberate attempt to insult traditional patriotic values. Their authors were labeled Boche or cultural anarchists (Kahan 207). Indeed Brichot criticizes Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Zola; under their influence, Frenchmen are literally anesthetized and consequently "ne seraient plus capables de l'effort viril que la patrie peut un jour ou l'autre leur demander . . ." (*RTP3* : *SG* 346). What his compatriots need instead is an all-absorbing art capable of mobilizing them in a common devotion to the motherland. Patriotic art requires the total immersion of the viewer in the cultural totality rooted in the homeland and presented as eternal. This approach inevitably dwarfs the spectator, forcing him to admit his worthlessness, and associate with the greatness of the nation. This is why a patriotic art is downright dangerous for Proust: "L'idée d'un art populaire comme d'un art patriotique, si même elle n'avait pas été dangereuse, me semblait ridicule" (*RTP4* : *TR* 466). Artists should stop

fueling nationalistic illusions – Proust directly admonishes Daniel Halévy for patriotic declamations in his own work. In a letter written shortly after December 11 1921, he implores him “de ne plus te mentir ainsi à toi-même, de ne plus exhorter les autres aux mensonges.” He should stop urging writers to create noble images of the motherland but instead encourage them to “chercher eux aussi, penchés sur leur microscope, les infiniment petits – des mondes – dont on meurt” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 148). The imagery Proust uses here is akin to that of the scientist discovering dangerous microbes to cure diseases. Instead of supporting nationalism, art must help the individual, and consequently the nation, heal. Furthermore, in the preface to his translation of *La bible d’Amiens*, Proust criticizes Ruskin for valuing exegetic criteria that are external to art, and thus subordinating it to an extraneous purpose: “Les doctrines qu’il professait étaient des doctrines morales et non des doctrines esthétiques, et pourtant il les choisissait pour leur beauté. Et comme il ne voulait pas les présenter comme belles mais comme vraies, il était obligé de se mentir à lui-même sur la nature des raisons qui les lui faisaient adopter” (*La bible d’Amiens* 80). In fact, Barrès makes the same mistake since, while acknowledging the constructed nature of nationalism, he continues to promote it as the goal of a goalless life. In this sense, Proust’s cycle can be seen as a response to Barrès’s entire oeuvre: to the Barrèsian affirmation that the artist’s mission is to serve the glory of his country by creating much needed myths, in *Le temps retrouvé* the narrator responds that, as an artist, he can only think about the truth before him.

In hindsight, we are now fully aware of the disastrous consequences of the Barrèsian theories that Proust had intuited: as Sarah Vajda so cogently demonstrated in her biography of the writer, Barrès is responsible for the birth, on French soil, of the earliest brand of Fascism –

National Socialism⁸ (Vajda 119). Any group allegiance functions based on an opposite that it rejects. Barrèsian nationalism excluded the heterogeneous Jewish element against which it defined an ethnically homogenous France. It thus anticipated Fascism, for which the mystical idea of race, incarnated in the person of the Führer and his followers, was the fusion principle. As Georges Bataille suggests, the hatred of the homogenous group is directed exclusively towards those external or internal elements hostile to homogeneity. But this common hatred is only a tendentious fact in need of an external principle of unification: a charismatic leader (Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism” 74-83). Fascism is centered on a narcissistic concept grounded on the fact that society is weak in its homogeneity and thus “stops being an existence for itself (which makes him an existence for something other than himself)” (Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism” 66). It cannot find a reason for being nor the power to act without the recourse to an identification with that which seems superior, yet is exterior to it. Compensating for its perceived impotence, it bonds with the charismatic. Barrèsian nationalism follows a similar this sequence: it claims the decadence and nihilism of modernity are its precursors. Thus its role is to provide discipline, certainty, and purposefulness, to generations of aimless Frenchmen. Their individual inadequacy and perceived failure predispose them to associate with the strength of the nation – as Vajda shows, Barrèsian nationalism requires that the atomized self acknowledge its powerlessness before joining the national fold (Vajda 203). Since individualism was blamed, during *la Belle Epoque*, for the decadence of France and the disintegration of the social fabric, admitting to its weakness had to lead to social cohesion. A single, organic voice would end the fractiousness of the Third Republic, primarily manifested in

⁸ Barrès was the first, in the 1890s, to declare that Socialism and nationalism must unite to save the motherland. Then on May 12 1898, he launched the term “nationalist socialism” in his article “Que faut-il faire?” published in *Le Courier de l’Est* (Sternhell 18-19).

parliamentary squabbling. The motherland needed *action* and *energy*, and Barrès was bent on providing them (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 100). Lévinas has remarked that exaltation of sacrifice in the name of sacrifice, of faith in the name of faith, of energy in the name of energy, of fidelity in the name of fidelity, of ardor for the heat it generates, the call for the gratuitous, or rather the heroic act, are at the origin of Hitlerism (*Difficile liberté* 211). I argue that long before that, they were the foundation of nationalism – the two terms of the Barrèsian equation being the temptation of action and the awareness of its nothingness, or what he termed, according to Vajda, *le service inutile* (19).

The same mechanism of identification with the charismatic figure that does not seem to comply, in compensation for perceived individual inadequacies, was at the heart of Boulangism. Barrès saw its potential early on and resolutely lined up with a movement representing the beginning of mass politics that promoted class harmony and national cohesion (Sternhell 50-69). In the fall of 1889, he even ran for office on the Boulangist platform, as the official candidate of the *Comité National* (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 47). As Gérard Noiriel shows, Boulangism was the first major political movement to make systematic use of popular hostility toward foreigners for electoral purposes (“French and Foreigners” 154), so its orientation conformed to the tenets of the Barrèsian doctrine. While General Boulanger is never mentioned in *La recherche*, Proust intuited early on the danger such a leader would pose. Georges Boulanger (1837-1891) was a decorated French officer nicknamed General Revenge. In the eyes of public opinion during the last two decades of the 19th century, he represented the nation bold and triumphant at a time when the memory of the German defeat was still throbbing fresh. Yet his claim to fame came from the anti-parliamentary agitation he generated, attracting large crowds hoping for “a nationalist Second Coming” (Brown, *For the soul of France* 95-98).

Indeed, the Boulangist movement thrived on the belief that France needed a saving hero which it found in the charismatic figure of the General. Barrès concurred, dubbing him “le cerveau de la nation”, able to “diriger ce que sollicite l’instinct national” (*Scènes et doctrines* 97). Crucially, Boulangism was able to gain the paradoxical support of Radicals, Monarchists, and Socialists, in a movement that threatened the stability of the Third Republic.

Indeed, by its denigration of the successes of opportunist Republicanism, Radicalism paved the way to Boulangism by positing the revision of the constitution as the panacea, the indispensable preamble to the reforms French society required (Baal 19). Supporters of universal suffrage, Radicals were amongst the most ardent critics of French parliamentarism, characterized by the permanent negotiation between the Chamber of Deputies, an organism democratically elected, and government (Mollenhauer 602). As such, though their position drastically differed from that of nationalists who explicitly opposed Parliament and required a strong executive protected against any legislative immixing, to neophytes, unaware of divergences between their respective visions as to the system that should have replaced the current one, their rhetorics appeared similar (Mollenhauer 603). Consequently, their attitude contributed to the popular hostility against the Senate and distrust of the institution of the president characteristic to the Boulangist movement. Furthermore, given that at first Boulangism was an insistent affirmation of the revanchist patriotism professed by many Radicals, they took the general for a thorough Republican and successfully recommended him to participate in government (Nordmann 101). Eventually, Radical leaders understood that the conventional republic of their dreams had nothing in common with the Caesarism promoted by Boulangism (Baal 19). It finally dawned on them that a lawful Republic was not enough to guarantee social peace. A shared hostility to Boulangism encouraged the union of the Left, with the crucial aide of Freemasonry, as

opportunists, Radicals, and some Socialists, formed in 1888 the *Société des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* to denounce its authoritarian and plebiscitary tendencies (Nordmann 99). The impact the Boulangist movement had on Radicalism was an increase of its respect for republican institutions, particularly the parliament it previously opposed. From now on, the Radical Republic is not only that of the French Revolution, but also a parliamentary regime. As Jean-Thomas Nordmann so eloquently puts it, “[l]es radicaux ont choisi la Chambre contre la rue” (102).

In the end Boulangism was a political failure, sputtering out after its leader fled to Belgium in 1889 to avoid trial for conspiracy for subverting the legally constituted French government (Brown, *For the soul of France* 117-118). Yet the young Proust was able to understand early on the threat Boulanger posed. In a letter written to his grandmother in 1885 or 1886, he qualified him as “très commun et un vulgaire batteur de grosse caisse”, around whom nonetheless the multitude coalesces because he is able to arouse them to an enthusiasm that “remue dans le cœur tout ce qu’il y a de primitif, d’indompté, de belliqueux” (*Choix de Lettres* 26). Partisan loyalties activate dangerous, primitive, and violent instincts in the mob. The Proustian scene of the privileged few dining in an expensive restaurant in Balbec illustrate this. The view of the narcissistically wealthy deriving freedom and pleasure from their money draws admiring crowds to watch them, illustrating Bataille’s belief that the fusion of homogeneity requires the spark of heterogeneity (*Le collège de sociologie* 194). But awe has the potential to turn to envy and violence. Such is the psychological phenomenon of admiration turned sour – group violence against the narcissistic few is always brewing, leading to “une grande question sociale, de savoir si la paroi de verre protégera toujours le festin des bêtes merveilleuses et si les gens obscurs qui regardent avidement dans la nuit ne viendront pas les cueillir dans leur

aquarium et les manger” (*RTP2 : JF 42*). How to protect the heterogeneity around which the mass has coalesced? Keeping it in a glass aquarium is akin to its glorification, or to what Bataille defines as the sacred heterogeneous nucleus that stands outside the communal fold and ensures collective cohesion (Bataille, *Le collègue de sociologie* 194). However, the homogeneous mass remains a lethal threat to the exposed alterity of any minority. No sacrality can ensure its protection. The mob mentality of anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus Affair is a manifestation of the phenomenon striving to eliminate those who do not conform, who are different. By their mere existence, heterogeneous elements challenge the superiority of the group and thus must be eradicated. In this, no matter how small or weak, the different and indifferent individual remains a charismatic figure, first generating curiosity for its independence, then envy for its happiness. Eventually its destruction is required as a condition for the restoration of the self-love of the group. Thus, the victim is an object of envy before sacrifice and of horror afterwards: such is the functioning of anti-Semitism, where the imagined power of the Jewish minority requires that France be purged of Jews. No advanced society could function on such basis: the reversibility of group violence suggests that, upon eliminating one group of undesirables, a new target will be found in another divergence. Either as a result of social uniformity or of reciprocal violence, the outcome is the demise of society decried by both de Tarde and Proust.

Subsequent chapters propose that Proust’s response to the homogenizing doctrine of nationalism is to place heterogeneity at the core of every individual – an innate feature of human nature that only culture and habit are able to efface thus allowing for the national group. Individualism and social fragmentation were always already there. Proust shares this respect for individualism not only with moderate liberals, but also with Radicals as the prominent politician Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929) declares in 1905 that individualism is the basis of the Radical

doctrine (Baal 51). Indeed, at least in theory Radicals consider social progress a non-sense in the absence of individual progress and they strive to distinguish the human framework from social organization (Nordmann 93-160). Furthermore, seeing that a considerable percentage of their supporters is afraid of social upheaval, Radicals defend the right of society such as it is to life. They accordingly aspire to end class hatred.

Similarly, Proust proclaims heterogeneity universal in order to protect divergences otherwise at once threatened by the homogenous production of mass. Hence Proust's interest in all those deviating from the norm or perceived as such: foreigners, provincials displaced to Paris, aristocrats, or people with a different sexual orientation. Consequently, in his novel Proust will be raising the question: what does it actually mean to be French? His Franco-Jewish heritage has put him in a vulnerable position made obvious by the history and politics of the period. Dumont argues that the cultural dimension of any oeuvre should not be ignored (Dumont 53). Proust has written as both French and Jewish, and should be read as such: the obliteration of the Jewish facet would obscure particular propositions of his work. Instead, this aspect must be treated as a supplemental tool that gives the text its dynamic dimension. *A la recherche du temps perdu*, as a canonical work, has been duly praised for its power to interpret its own historicity, its deep grasp of perennial features of human experience, as well as for the compelling human ideals it offers. However, as Charles Altieri insists, in order to fully comprehend any of these facets of the work "we must try to state the author's probable intended action in history in terms of the most abstract problems and responses" (Altieri 46). In practical terms, it would mean finding the implicit intentions of the author not based solely on the text, but rather by taking into account the complexities of his social position in terms of the issues he has to face and of the ideals which animate him. In this view, Proust's Jewish heritage informs both the attention given to

nationalism as well as the position he supports. This is reinforced by Julia Kristeva's suggestion that the most pertinent question Proust asked himself when writing his oeuvre was how to be both Jewish and French during and after the Dreyfus Affair (*Proust : Questions d'identité* 13). While *La Recherche* responds to it indirectly, the writer's correspondence is a direct testimony of his reactions. It is in this capacity that this essay will resort to the latter in order to establish a dialogue with the novel meant to illumine aspects relevant to this topic.

Proust's opposition to ideology does not stop at nationalism or Socialism. In his eyes, any communal belief is dangerous. Thus, Dreyfusism will sway Swann in every aspect of his life: "Mais, dépassant les jugements politiques, la vague [de dreyfusisme] renversait chez Swann les jugements littéraires et jusqu'à la façon de les exprimer" (*RTP2 : CG 870*). It is revealing that the target of his prejudice will be the nationalist leader himself: "Barrès avait perdu tout talent, et même ses ouvrages de jeunesse étaient faiblaris, pouvaient à peine se relire" (*RTP2 : CG 870*). He is blinded to the point of attributing more literary talent to the Dreyfusard politician Clemenceau than to the talented writer Barrès actually was: "Essayez, vous ne pourrez pas aller jusqu'au bout. Quelle différence avec Clemenceau ! Personnellement je ne suis pas anticlérical, mais comme, à côté de lui, on se rend compte que Barrès n'a pas d'os !" (*RTP2 : CG 870*). As Vajda shows, in 1918 the young Jewish writers at *La Revue Blanche*, as well as important intellectuals like Blum and Herr, still believed Barrès was the greatest living French writer (Vajda 150). Notwithstanding their admiration, Barrès dubs their circle "ce monde à la fois si cultivé et si barbare, si anarchique" (*Scènes et doctrines* 88), wishing that "[d]es jeunes volontés de talent pussent se grouper dans quelque publication et opposer leurs instincts héréditaires français aux impulsions ataviques dont on trouve l'expression parfois singulièrement forte dans . . . la *Revue blanche*" (*Scènes et doctrines* 98). Despite this, Proust understood that Barrès acted

from a sincere desire to save France, a wish he shared. He fully appreciated the difference between the political writings of Clemenceau and art. As we already know, for him art cannot be subordinated to a political creed, and all of Clemenceau's texts are dogmatic. Contrastively, some of Barrès's writings have no ideological purpose or support – his travel impressions, for instance. Proust, in a *Contre Sainte-Beuve* manner, is able to reject Barrès the politician and still celebrate the writer.

Politics and Politicians

Collectivist creeds smother individual opinion and fuel the coalescence of rival groups. In this section, I argue the same applies to politics. Even in his childhood, the Proustian narrator was weary of political affairs, an attitude his father equates with worthlessness: “Mon père disait que je ne m'intéressais à rien parce que je n'écoutais pas quand on parlait des conséquences politiques que pouvait avoir la visite du roi Théodose, en ce moment l'hôte de la France et, prétendait-on, son allié” (*RTPI* : CS 407). In the eyes of a father serving in the government, this detachment from the affairs of the Republic denotes a lack of community spirit. Does not a citizen's duty consist in political involvement as a manifestation of responsible patriotism? Though, as we shall see, Marcel's father is a moderate Republican, his attitude is reminiscent of Radicalism with its hope in the civic responsibility of French citizens, who would, with the help of education, be able to eventually govern themselves. Its ideal remains direct democracy by favoring referendums to decide over any issues crucial for the nation (Mollenhauer 603-610). However, the narrator's disinterest in politics is total. He is downright bored, particularly after meeting a politician serving on the same commission as his father, the marquis of Norpois. Upon listening to him, he is shocked to find that politics promotes conformity: “Je démêlai seulement que répéter ce que tout le monde pensait n'était pas en politique une marque d'infériorité mais de

supériorité” (*RTP1 : JF 450*). The similar rhetoric of political opponents draws attention to the remark made by Marrus that, during *la Belle Epoque*, the entire political spectrum resorted to the same patriotic speeches, using national history and French tradition, to make the point that they wanted to unite a divided nation. Thus, even during the Dreyfus Affair, while each side had a drastically different concept of what France should be, they still shared a *volonté de paix*. Paradoxically, in politics that could be only reached through confrontation (Marrus 202-203).

What are the benefits of politics then? Norpois reveals the inability of political tenets to resolve actual problems: “les maximes de sa sagesse politique . . . étaient aussi impuissantes à résoudre les questions de fond qu’en philosophie la pure logique l’est à trancher les questions d’existence . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 538*). Furthermore, political progress cannot change social mentalities since “le dreyfusisme triomphait politiquement, mais non pas mondainement” (*RTP3 : SG 278*). Politics is not a science, but rather a ritual system dealing with approximations: “la vérité politique, quand on se rapproche des hommes renseignés et qu’on croit l’atteindre, se dérobe” (*RTP2 : CG 538*). Yet the public at large believes that “la vérité politique . . . habite toujours, indiscutable et matérielle, le dossier secret du président de la République et du président du Conseil, lesquels en donnent connaissance aux ministres” (*RTP2 : CG 538*). Similarly Barrès, while admitting that “[la] vérité absolue . . . , aucune institution ne la fournit et personne ne la possède”, expects from politics the much needed truth that will unite the nation. Thus, the Dreyfus war council “nous fournira une vérité” (*Scènes et doctrine 35*) able to settle the matter – an attitude representative of confrontational politics in which only one side is in the right. Modern partisan party-politics functions based on rival doctrines and is thus highly antagonistic. It promotes factional distinctions between friends and enemies whereas the issue of contention is never in actuality a Gordian knot: eventually, “l’adversaire politique qui, malgré

tous les raisonnements et toutes les preuves, tenait le sectateur de la doctrine opposée pour un traître, partage lui-même la conviction détestée à laquelle celui qui cherchait inutilement à la répandre ne tient plus” (*RTP1 : JF 601-602*). In the end, adversaries always agree, but only long after the controversial topic ceases to be socially divisive. Thus, there is an intrinsic dichotomy at the heart of politics: on the one hand, it promotes conformity by trying to convince as many followers of the validity of a particular doctrine, on the other it stimulates conflict by casting rival ideologies as inimical. According to Millet, de Tarde believed politics is the main generator of hatred in society (Millet 263-279), and Proust agrees with him. As a political phenomenon, the Dreyfus Affair speaks to this. The rift between Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards spreads through the community and threatens to rent the entire social fabric: “Les vérités et contre-vérités qui s’opposaient en haut chez les intellectuels de la Ligue de la Patrie française et celle des Droits de l’homme se propageaient en effet jusque dans les profondeurs du peuple” (*RTP2 : CG 592*). The daily confrontation between the two butlers, that of the Guermantes’ and that of the narrator’s family, derives from the political argument and awakens feelings of “méchanceté et âpreté au jeu” in both (*RTP2 : CG 593*).

Therefore, politics has the potential to transform individuals in spiteful and hostile beings. The example of the narrator’s former classmate suggests that political men are more drastically affected. Become a politician, he is changed beyond recognition. His defining feature – a pair of searching and smiling blue eyes – has vanished: “devenu homme politique influent, capable, despotique, ces yeux bleus qui, d’ailleurs, n’avaient pas trouvé ce qu’ils cherchaient, s’étaient immobilisés, ce qui leur donnait un regard pointu, comme sous un sourcil froncé. Aussi l’expression de gaîté, d’abandon, d’innocence s’était-elle changée en une expression de ruse et de dissimulation” (*RTP4 : TR 523*). Politics entails dishonesty, while political power corrupts

and hardens. Proust echoes this belief in a letter to Mme Straus from March 18 1914: “je regrettais que la politique et même le patriotisme inclinassent à la dureté un homme aussi bon que Calmette” (*Lettres à madame Straus* 192). This passage explicitly associates patriotism with politics, pointing to the danger posed by both: partisan positions incline people to harshness. The narrator’s former classmate establishes a link between politics and deceit during *la Belle Époque*. The end of the 19th century is a period marked by intense speculation in the disastrous Panama, Catholic Bank, and Reinach affairs, all exposing the extended corruption of the government and politicians. Nonetheless, Proust claims this is not a new phenomenon and the link between venality and politics is intrinsic to the latter: “À quelle époque n’y a-t-il pas eu d’homme public, cru un saint par ses amis, et qui soit découvert avoir fait des faux, volé l’État, trahi sa patrie ?” (*RTP4 : AD* 197). This is why “les vieilles canailles de la politique . . . sont toujours réélues” (*RTP4 : TR* 432). To the average citizen, “croyant tous les hommes politiques véreux, le crime de concussion lui paraissait moins grave que le plus léger délit de vol” (*RTP2 : CG* 327). Consequently, no honest man can ever become a politician. For instance, Robert de Saint-Loup, who has proven his dedication to France at the cost of his life on the battlefield, could never have stooped to the moral compromises required by politics, as many so-called heroes had done after the war: “il m’était impossible d’imaginer Saint-Loup . . . prononçant une des phrases les plus éloquentes que peut dire le Ministre le plus sympathique aux députés debout et enthousiastes” (*RTP4 : TR* 321). In final analysis, even the main architect of Dreyfus’s acquittal, the Radical Joseph Reinach (1856-1921), is only a “manœuvreur de foules” (*RTP2 : CG* 593). Like all politicians, his political prowess was that “[il] manœuvrait par le sentiment des gens qui ne l’avaient jamais vu . . .” (*RTP2 : CG* 592). Therefore, political orientation offers no guarantee for the worth of politicians. Having internalized the political paradox, they are able on the one

hand to mesmerize people into following them, and on the other to encourage violence based on the friend versus enemy pattern. Thus, “de même que les anciens communards avaient été antirévissionnistes, les plus grands dreyfusards voulaient faire fusiller tout le monde et avaient l’appui des généraux . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 309*).

The narrator’s lack of trust in political men is a Radical attitude. Essentially, Radicalism mistrusts politicians, regardless of affiliation (Mollenhauer 603). Indeed, at the core of the doctrine lies the dichotomy between the necessity of government and its malignity. While the requirement of liberty opposes political power in all its forms, civic duty requires obedience to it. The Radical answer consists in “obéir en résistant”, as obedience is consent rather than renunciation. The true citizen “ne s’en laisse pas conter” (Nordmann 138-139). As such, Radicalism posits “la liberté-résistance” as the prerequisite of “la liberté-participation” (Nordmann 494). Hence true democracy requires a continuous challenge from its citizens in order to function properly (Nordmann 140), which cannot but be linked to the political instability characteristic of France in general, and more particularly during *la Belle Epoque*.

While Proust, like Radicals, distrusts politics without actively opposing its power, the unreliability and corruption of the political arena during the early Third Republic determined many a talented writer to turn against parliamentary democracy in a misguided belief of remedying the situation. Scandal, political crisis, racketeering, and money conjuration, fed an obsession with decadence and national disintegration. Barrès was the first in a long line of ardent patriots bent upon saving the motherland, soon followed by Charles Maurras, Edouard Drumont, Léon Daudet, Paul Bourget, and many more. Proust was familiar with them all, personally [acquainted](#) with some, and at least in his youth in awe of several of them. For instance, Daniel Halévy notes in his diary that in their high school years Bourget and Barrès were amongst his

and Proust's favorite writers (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 168). This admiration diminished as time passed, at least in part because of their anti-Semitism. All these aforementioned intellectuals blamed the failures of the Third Republic on a French state controlled by Jews, immigrants and Franc masons. Bodies foreign to the nation had taken command of it, trying to achieve its downfall. Amongst them, the Jewish minority was blamed as the main factor in the disintegration and division of French society; in this view, any reconciliation of a divided French nation was possible only around the elimination of the Jewish problem. As a consequence of their deleterious social impact, *La recherche* goes beyond a broad condemnation of politics and casts certain brands of politics as more dangerous than others, but it does this in a subtle way. We will start from the observation that the Proustian oeuvre functions like a kaleidoscope: it generates unexpected arrangements based on a multitude of characters, events, and circumstances. Each turn of the kaleidoscope engenders new connections between different pieces based on which the pattern forms. Crucially, this process is driven by unforeseen links between various fragments. It is only by a close examination of these fragments, in this case more or less famous names of the day in often surprising contexts, that the implications of the full configuration can be understood.

The novel references not only Barrès, but all the other figures mentioned above. In *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, there is a passage which asserts that people are brought together by what the narrator calls "la consanguinité des esprits" (*RTP1 : JF 427*). The narrator defines this notion as an analogous way of perceiving the world, which could translate into similar literary genres but remains foreign to politics. Based on it, a link between Barrès, Maurras, and Daudet, is established. Consequently, only "quelques illettrés du peuple et du monde" imagine that having the same political opinions matters (*RTP1 : JF 427*). They

erroneously believe that the nationalism Barrès shares with Georges Berry connects him to all those with a similar political credo. Yet Proust's contemporaries would have known that amongst these ignoramuses they can count Barrès himself, who is convinced that "nos partis sont des Français groupés selon leurs tempéraments plutôt que sur des programmes" (*Les déracinés* 316). Contrastively, in *La recherche* Barrès's colleagues at the Academy manifest, despite their nationalism, a spiritual affinity with liberals like Antoine Ribot and Paul Deschanel, as do fervent monarchists who prefer them to nationalistic royalists like Maurras and Daudet. The relevance of the passage warrants its full citation:

Un même nationalisme suffit à rapprocher Barrès de ses électeurs qui ne doivent pas faire grande différence entre lui et M. Georges Berry, mais non de ceux de ses collègues de l'Académie qui, ayant ses opinions politiques mais un autre genre d'esprit, lui préféreront même des adversaires comme MM. Ribot et Deschanel, dont à leur tour de fidèles monarchistes se sentent beaucoup plus près que de Maurras et de Léon Daudet qui souhaitent cependant aussi le retour du Roi. (*RTP1 : JF 428*)

To them all, sociability has nothing to do with politics. The passage also points to the emergence of parliamentary groups outside organized political parties which further complicated French politics at *la Belle Epoque*. As Stone shows, "the relations among the deputies, their parliamentary political groups, and their political parties were complex, and highly individualistic" (Stone 234). While it would be erroneous to consider that ideology was entirely absent from these interactions, as common political goals were an important part of it, a shared social background⁹ often played an important role. Nationalists such as Barrès criticized these

⁹ This common social background often consisted of frequenting the same salons which constituted a semiprivate space allowing for private and public interests to intersect (Stone 250).

fluid groups that, in his view, promoted individualistic advantages and personal relations to the detriment of doctrinal positions. The constant negotiations made possible by these personal relationships interfered with the primary concern of politics: the nation (Stone 234-235).

The political link between Barrès and the obscure anti-Dreyfusard conservative deputy Georges Berry (1855-1915), described by Judith Stone as “an astute representative of the strident nationalism in the capital, [who] received the warm endorsement of the influential *Libre Parole* and its editor, Edouard Drumont” (Stone 364), cannot be doubted. Yet at its heart there is a contradiction: while Barrès, a great admirer of Napoleon, was a staunch Republican, Berry was a monarchist subsequently rallied to the Republic. His claim to fame came from his 1904 involvement in the persecution of Amédée Thalamas, history professor at the *Lycée Condorcet*¹⁰. According to Frederick Brown, in his teachings Thalamas analyzed the Battle of Orléans in the context of the fifteenth century, casting doubt on divine intercession and denying England’s intrinsically evil nature. Having found out about this, Berry notified Pierre Chaumié, minister of public instruction at the time. The complaint was made public, provoking a political scandal that led to public demonstrations and a press campaign against the professor, culminating into his physical thrashing by Charles Maurras’s henchmen from *L’Action Française* (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 85). Proust’s contemporary readers would have automatically associated Berry with the Thalamas affair. They would thus have been able to see the parallel between the history professor and the narrator: while Thalamas overcame his patriotic bias in a desire to scientifically analyze historical events, exposure to Charlus’s Germanophilia enabled the narrator to mentally reevaluate the nature of French patriotism during the Great War. The results were

¹⁰ Between 1882 and 1889, Proust was a student at that institution, so the Thalamas affair must have particularly caught his attention.

similar: right and wrong are relative terms, and it is only by taking sides that France can be cast as eternally virtuous and pure. Pierre Nora reminds us that, at the end of the 19th century, history was primarily dispensed by the schools as a vast and homogenous recitative designed to penetrate the social fabric (Nora, “The Era of Commemoration” 632-633). Barrès strategically speculates it by upholding the unitary nature of national history. Thus, the rift of the revolution was mended and the entire French historical heritage could be revered as holy and righteous. Thalamas’s approach contradicted this view. Since this common history, embodied in an antique cemetery, is one of the pillars of the nation (Vajda 184-188), he implicitly attacked the motherland. This suggests that the France of nationalists is an entirely symbolic reality. In a tactic akin to that of Thalamas, Proust attempts to look at the nation without nationalism and at France without any ideological a priori.

In the previously cited passage, *La recherche* contrasts the nationalists Barrès, Maurras, and Daudet, with Ribot and Deschanel – two well-known liberal politicians of the Third Republic – suggesting that amongst their peers from the Academy, as well as in the fashionable world, the latter were better liked despite their political opinions. Given the nationalist obsession with decadence and loss of community ties during *la Belle Epoque*, their popularity opens up the crucial question uttered by Albert Hirschman: how much community spirit does a liberal society require? (Hirschman 231). The liberal conservatism of Ribot and Deschanel, embodied in the novel by the characters of Norpois and the narrator’s father, is relevant as one possible answer. A closer examination of their political careers will reveal why that is. Alexandre Ribot (1842-1923) is a prominent figure of the opportunist wing of the Republican Party, serving as President of the Council five times. Nowadays, he would be dubbed a moderate Liberal Republican. According to Martin Schmidt, he was a conservative liberal of Tocquevillian inspiration, a defender of

individual liberty, the rule of the law, and parliamentary supremacy. Ribot connected liberalism with political compromise, and thus was seeking conciliation on the divisive issues that plagued France at that time: he was against Boulangism, Syndicalism, Socialism, and the two waves of educational and religious anti-clericalism. Paul Deschanel (1855-1922) is of roughly the same orientation and equally prominent: he was the 11th President of France and served twice as President of the Chamber. He was a member of the *Alliance républicaine démocratique*, the main liberal and secular political formation which, together with the *Parti radical*, constituted the pillar of most governments between 1901 and 1940. In the biography dedicated to the politician, Thierry Billard describes Deschanel as “la tête pensante d’une démocratie modérée et progressiste, adversaire du radicalisme et du socialisme, mais adepte d’une politique sociale et humaine” (Billard 11). As a progressive Republican, heir to the opportunists to which belonged Ribot, he promotes “le repos, la tolérance et les réformes pratiques” in a stable French Republic (Billard 73). Norpois echoes their liberal conservative position in the primacy given to order and to the goodwill of all social classes, best expressed in his belief that “la France dans son immense majorité désire le travail, dans l’ordre ! Là-dessus ma religion est faite” (*RTP2 : CG 543*). Deschanel shares with Ribot and other moderates the belief in the motto: “Ni réaction, ni révolution” – a slogan also central to French Radicalism, as after the instauration of the Third Republic stability became their main priority, and they strive to maintain the republican status-quo (Hawkins 129). Moderates like Deschanel and Ribot represent the aristocratic and bourgeois nationalism defined primarily in opposition to Socialism and which, as Sternhell shows, is very different from the plebeian one promoted by Barrès, Drumont or Déroulède (Sternhell 165). Thus, Deschanel sits at the center of the political spectrum and, particularly after the Dreyfus Affair, is a staunch supporter of the moderate wing. Privileging conciliation and persuasion

through tolerance, he promotes political dialogue over open confrontation. This attitude made him popular among his colleagues. The ideal common to all moderates, and thus to Deschanel and Ribot, is the defense of liberty. Deschanel is a defender of the freedom of individual movement and choice, namely the liberty to think and speak one's mind freely without being labeled either a conservative or a Socialist. He is firmly opposed to illegality and violence, and a firm defender of the well-being and dignity of human beings. A true liberal humanist, he is wary of any form of collectivism: his goal is to reconcile individualism with the community (Billard 63-106). Norpois mirrors the political credo of his real life counterparts. While he displays the empty rhetoric of all politicians and is unable to offer any real solution to the problems France faces, he nonetheless believes in the democratic process. Furthermore, the narrator's father is cast as an "ami de M. Méline" (*RTP2* : CG 450). Jules Méline (1838-1925) is best remembered for his politics of resistance to change, both as secretary of agriculture and prime minister between 1896 and 1898. According to Theodore Zeldin, "Méline typified the petty bourgeois in a static society" (2: 286), bringing him close to the middle class Radical base. Though he is indeed a moderate Republican, his politics of resistance to change bring to mind the definition of the true Radical as an elite republican first and foremost opposed to change (Nordmann 77). His system of protection, known as the Méline tariff, was meant to slow down industrialization, while he simultaneously attempted to revive agriculture. As such, it prefigures the French "État-providence" in its support of state interventionism, heir to Radicalism, with the purpose of protecting small enterprises (Baal 39). Méline aimed to restore the traditional France, and thus ensure its stability and economic prosperity (Zeldin 2: 286). Yet Barrès claimed the Mèline government was culpable of treason during both the Panama and the Dreyfus affairs (*Scènes et doctrines*, 23). In my view this is because, as a prime minister, Méline's cabinet was formed

entirely of moderates, explicitly opposed to every kind of Socialism (Zeldin 2: 288). Relevantly, by association, this is the political orientation of the narrator's father: a Republican moderate with Radical undertones.

During the Dreyfus Affair, both Ribot and Deschanel adopted the same political strategy. They were unable to see beyond parliament and the law for guidance: it was the pitfall of their political careers (Schmidt 173-175). In the case of Ribot, private speculations cast him as sympathetic to the revisionist effort, and he was thus approached by the Dreyfusards; however, respectful of the army and repulsed by the divisive atmosphere surrounding the Affair, he withdrew from any commitment. Similarly, Méline, and implicitly the narrator's father, took a defensive stance: the case must be quietly buried as attacks on the army by the left could only produce the dangerous reaction of a nationalistic movement (Zeldin 2: 285-289). It can thus be seen that the association of Marcel's father with Méline discredits Mme Sazerat's accusations of nationalism elicited by his antidreyfusism (*RTP2 : CG 450*) – if nationalism there is, it is indeed not of the Barrèsian kind, but rather typically bourgeois. As Sprinker suggest, “[n]o one with political instincts in 1894 wished to be associated with a movement that sought to discredit the army, hence the nation” (Sprinker 110). The same position is mirrored by Norpois, in his belief that legality should take its course since “c’est au gouvernement qu’il appartient de dire le droit et de clore la liste trop longue des crimes impunis, non, certes, en obéissant aux excitations socialistes ni de je ne sais quelle soldatesque . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 543*). His attitude announces the eventual shift of most moderate and Radical politicians abandoning anti-Dreyfusism in favor of the defense of the Republic. From the center of the political spectrum, Norpois promotes legality and opposes reactionary positions rallying under the flag of nationalism. According to Eugen Weber, this was a phenomenon typical of that era of French politics: the Right that did not accept

the political order and the Left that refused the social one were uniting, drawing together royalists, anti-Semites, reactionaries, and fervent patriots (Weber, *L'Action Française* 61).

Together with the Dreyfusards, in the opposite camp, this is what Norpois termed “les agitateurs de profession” that had to be stopped to maintain social peace (*RTP2 : CG* 543). As to the real Ribot, nominated minister of Justice in 1898, at the height of the Affair, he was soon attacked by the nationalist press that dubbed him a Dreyfusard and a lackey of England. Nonetheless, from his new powerful position, Ribot outlined correct legal procedures, just like Norpois insisted that “mettre en mouvement Dame Justice” is the only possible solution to the Affair (*RTP2 : CG* 543). However, Ribot was opposed by other members of the government. Though he publicly advocated judicial revision, he completely alienated the Dreyfusards by not acting any further to support the acquittal of the captain (Schmidt 78-84), emerging from the Affair an isolated political figure. Similarly, Deschanel, president of the chamber at the time, refused to get involved and take sides. He took the position of the defender of civil stability and national unity. As a consequence, he was attacked in the press by both Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards. Nonetheless, unlike Ribot, he was intimately convinced of Dreyfus’s guilt, but never expressed this in public. His political speeches never partook in anti-Semitic attacks; on the contrary, he advocated reconciliation and deplored the violence of political quarrels. This refusal to take sides is parodied by Norpois’s answers to the Dreyfusard Bloch who attempted to discover the politician’s convictions. Norpois so masterfully evades his questions that “Bloch ne put arriver à le faire parler de la question de la culpabilité de Dreyfus ni donner un pronostic sur le jugement qui interviendrait dans l’affaire civile actuellement en cours” (*RTP2 : CG* 539). Ribot’s and Deschanel’s openness to political compromise is mirrored by Norpois’s strategy of talking to Bloch as if they agreed, and subsequently ridiculed as “l’instinct qu’ont tous les conservateurs de

se ménager des appuis dans le camp adverse” (*RTP2 : CG 543*). Nonetheless, the aristocratic patriotism animating Norpois enables him to see through nationalistic rhetoric and accuse “ceux des éléments de droite qui, au lieu de servir l’idée patriotique, songent à s’en servir” (*RTP2 : CG 539*). It implies that Barrès and his followers do not serve the interests of France, but rather make political capital of a divisive nationalism.

Even so, Deschanel’s and Ribot’s liberalism and tolerance were unpopular in the political realm and thus inconsequential (Billard 122-130). Their irrelevance in public affairs becomes evident in 1906 when Ribot is admitted to the French Academy and Deschanel is nominated to respond to his discourse – a pairing reflecting their common political misfortune. The journalist Jacques Bainville, cited by Billard, dubs the two discourses thus: “les débris du libéralisme et du parlementarisme de bonne tenue se consolait entre eux d’être exilés d’un théâtre où les premiers rôles leur sont désormais interdits” (Billard 163). Indeed, one of the consequences of the Dreyfus affair is the victory of Radicalism, at the expense of moderate Republicans who held the power in both chambers since 1879. The 1902 elections mark the beginning of what is known as la *République radicale*, with the Combes Cabinet which is considered the archetype of French governmental Radicalism. It inaugurates the golden age of the Radical party, which lasts until 1914, though some historians consider their political preeminence wanes around 1909 (Baal 13-32). In the end, Deschanel’s political career is symptomatic of that era of French politics: no reform or idea remains attached to his name, as a sign of the fact that an ambitious and conciliatory progressive liberal could only play a small role in the nation’s public affairs in the early Third Republic (Billard 263). While many parliamentarians admire his eloquence, Barrès criticizes him for “un manque de sonorité profonde, de sincérité, d’âme, d’excès” (Billard 264). This lack of excess is precisely the tolerance he shares with Ribot, and that Proust promoted in

his oeuvre. Jaurès characterizes Deschanel as unclassifiable: “être au-dessus des partis, c’est encore être hors des partis” (Billard 265). His relevance in connection with the novel resides in his rejection of the communal identities that Barrès, Maurras, and Daudet, advocated.

While liberal politicians were ineffective and their voices seemed lost in an overwhelmingly nationalistic rhetoric, liberalism remains the only alternative in the face of the rise of various communal movements. As Michéa shows, it is the only political doctrine concentrating on the problem of governing rather than aspiring to institute a good society, as collectivist ideologies do (43-45). Its principle is the respect of the legal system as the unique protection of individual citizens in a free democracy, while its goal is the pacification of society. Heir to Enlightenment principles, it believed that France’s honor was contingent on justice and truth; during the Dreyfus Affair, this meant exonerating an innocent individual, albeit a Jew, as proof of the respect for the rights of every citizen, even if the price to be paid was the image of a glorious army. Thus, according to Marrus, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair most French Jews understood that their best protection came from the liberalism supported by moderates, which provided an atmosphere of tolerance, mutual respect, order, and social peace (134). Nonetheless, the intolerance of French society suggests that liberalism was in recession: it was attacked by both ends of the political spectrum. As Weber indicates, the Third Republic, founded on unwilling compromise, is marked by “the cooperation of the ends against the center” (*The Nationalist Revival in France*, 19). In this context, the actual position of Radicalism in the French political field is relevant. As previously observed, both nationalism and Radicalism shared the desire to heal not only the divisions generated by class, but those stemming from divergences between Republican and *Ancien Régime* mores as well. Both Barrèsian nationalism and Radicalism have Socialist and Republican beliefs at their core, as the basis of the *Parti*

radical lies in the osmosis of pre-Marxist Socialism and advanced Republicanism dating from the 1840s that is a compromise between Proudhonian Socialism and the Republican refusal to return to the monarchy (Baal 6). Furthermore, at the heart of Radicalism lies a solidarism that is not far removed from nationalistic ideals. It reconciles Christian traditions with Socialist ideals by secularizing morality. It aims to establish social peace and fraternity amongst classes based on their interdependency. It is a philosophy of appeasement (Nordmann 136), just as nationalism aspires to be. The pre-Marxist dimension is relevant in that French Radicalism opposes collectivism: individual property remains the guarantee of each citizens, and should be transformed from a privilege into a right (Baal 7). From it stems on the one hand a distrust of any form of capital concentration shared by nationalists, as the accumulation of property is an instrument of domination crushing the little man (Nordmann 157). On the other it results in a declared resistance to collectivism (Baal 29). Proclaiming that the dogma of class struggle is false, as a democratic regime is able to reunite all its citizen in equal political participation, Radicalism aspires to be both a reconciliation of doctrines and of social classes (Nordmann 92-157). The Republican failure of 1848 added to these principles the hatred not only of Bonapartism, but of any personalization of power (Baal 8), and thus a distrust of charismatic figures attempting to take control of the masses. Consequently, while Radicals hoped for a faithful representation of the popular vote, they remained wary of the actual possibility of the current government's take-over by coalitions supported by the streets (Molenhauer 603). This form of anti-populism is in sharp contrast with nationalistic dynamics, as the declared goal of Radicalism is to fight any group that threatens a coup d'état against the Republic (Baal 29). The *Parti radical* proclaims a fundamental opposition to violence and hatred of any kind, promoting the rule of law, social order and peace. Individual liberty is one of its central tenets. It abhors war

and wishes for peace amongst peoples, explicitly opposing both nationalism and anti-patriotism (Nordmann 166-167). Thus, whereas reactionary doctrines saw conflict between groups and peoples, at least in theory Republican moderates and Radicals saw complementarity (Auspitz 171), hence their importance in the Proustian cycle. Furthermore, the *Parti radical* formed under the pressure of the progress of Socialism, and was consequently pushed towards the center from its inception, to eventually take the place formerly occupied by liberals during Restoration and the July Monarchy (Lefranc 165). Indeed, as early as 1871 Gambetta referred to his program as “radical yet truly conservative” (Hawkins 122), situating his political party at the center of the political specter, a position it certainly reaches after 1902 when already in power. In addition, as previously seen the *Parti radical* is that of the middle classes, particularly the small bourgeoisie (Baal 40), rather than that of the lower masses targeted by nationalists and Socialists.

Thus, the attack of the ends against the center, led by nationalists equating liberalism with materialism, was aimed at Radicalism as well. Indeed, as early as the 1880s, right-wing nationalists started a barrage of public and vociferous attacks against Radical politicians, accusing them of lack of patriotism and corruption. According to Stone, at the heart of their vindictiveness were shared political and cultural origins, as many prominent Radicals and nationalists had frequented in their youth the Hugo salon, a Republican stronghold during the Second Empire and early years of the Third Republic¹¹ (Stone 339-358). This speaks to the common roots of the main French political ideologies of *la Belle Epoque*. By labeling materialism the source of all evil, nationalists attack both economic liberalism and bourgeois society for promoting material values, branding them as deeply corrupted. The Panama scandal –

¹¹ Prominent radicals like Camille Pelletan, together with nationalists and anti-Semites like Edouard Drumont, were regular visitors there (Stone 358).

a long series of swindles of the small saver, in which Jewish finance accepted to disgrace itself in order to spare any humiliation to French parliamentarians and the upper middle class, following the Middle Ages and Renaissance model (Vajda 206) – was just one proof of this. Consequently, in his book on this subject, Barrès denounces the most prominent liberal politicians of the day. Barrès explicitly mentions Ribot amongst the corrupted Republican officials involved in covering up illegal monetary transactions (*Leurs figures* 36, 73, 161, 162, 170, 177, 261), and singles him out as despicable for his cold political calculations (*Leurs figures* 36, 73, 161, 162, 170, 175). The Panama scandal confirmed that financial interests could influence political decisions while elected politicians gave priority to their personal interests over those of the community they represented. This moral inversion of private gain versus public good came to be symbolized by the modern Jew as the individual lacking a national identity, and thus easily bought as well as willing to corrupt (Stone 151). Consequently, though the scandal evinced the universality of greed, Barrès's book and the nationalist political campaign attack Jewish capital (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 57), claiming liberalism is intrinsically connected with it. Though, with the exception of Clemenceau, the Panama scandal compromises Radicals less than it does moderate Republicans (Nordmann 106), the connection between money and politics will persistently plague Radical politicians. Yet this does not stop them from contributing to the anti-Semitic rhetoric, as they made frequent anti-Jewish assertions to explain electoral losses¹². In line with the Radical opposition to financial accumulation of capital, these attacks slipped into a populist, nationalistic, and chauvinistic rhetoric (Stone 152).

¹² The example of Clemenceau in 1893 is relevant, as he claimed he lost the election because a conspiracy of nefarious interests bought citizens votes to undermine universal suffrage (Stone 152).

Despite the rise of nationalism and the discredit of liberalism, Proust suggests that both Deschanel and Ribot were popular amongst Academicians and in the salons of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. This was not due to their political convictions, since as Charlus says “si une opinion politique donnait droit à une qualification sociale” social clans would be obliterated (*RTP2 : CG 586*). Rather, it is the result of Ribot’s and Deschanel’s “genre d’esprit”. I argue that their tolerance and openness goes beyond politics: they constitute spiritual traits, a way of perceiving and treating the world. As such, they promote positive social interactions of the kind practiced and appreciated in salons, as well as in other intellectual or fashionable gatherings. This is why they were potential guests of the Guermantes, in contrast with Barrès, Maurras, or Daudet, never mentioned in the novel in such a capacity. For instance, at the reception they gave for the King and Queen of England, “M^{me} de Courvoisier prétendait qu’il y avait aussi M. Ribot, mais c’était une invention . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 722*).

However, the novel mentions Deschanel as an actual guest of the Doudeauvilles, and qualifies him as “un homme en vue” because of the special attention the duchesse de Guermantes accorded him: “elle avait d’un côté d’elle M. Deschanel, de l’autre l’ambassadeur d’Allemagne: elle leur tenait tête sur la Chine . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 510*). Furthermore, the narrator believes that, though Deschanel was not a regular guest of aristocratic salons, society women trusted him politically more than they would the legitimists: “elles mettaient tout leur espoir politique en certains républicains bon teint comme M. Doumer et M. Deschanel tandis qu’elles voyaient la France aux abîmes si elle était confiée au personnel monarchiste qu’elles recevaient à dîner, aux Charette, aux Doudeauville, etc.” (*RTP3 : SG 143*). In this context, the figure of Paul Doumer (1857-1932) becomes relevant. He is a prominent Radical politician, later turned moderate, with a very long career. Its highlights are a brief term as Minister of Finance under Léon Bourgeois

when he brings forward a proposal for the introduction of a French income tax, subsequently rejected by the Chamber. This is an important Radical political project, anticipating the ratification of that measure by Joseph Caillaux fifteen years later. As a deputy in 1902, Doumer opposes the anti-clerical policy of the Combes Government, already demonstrating a more moderate political attitude. In 1905 he is designated President of the Chamber, a position he holds until 1906 when he candidates for the presidency only to be defeated by the more Radical Armand Fallières. He is elected Senator in 1912, a position he holds until 1917 when he becomes a Minister without portfolio in the Government Painlevé, and then again Finance Minister in the Briand Government in 1921 (“Career of Paul Doumer”, *The Observer* 18). Furthermore, the association between the moderate Deschanel and the Radical Doumer is not fortuitous.

According to Stone their paths did in fact converge socially in the Humbert salon, a prominent political gathering at the end of the 19th century. It cultivated a moderate Republicanism and had Deschanel and Méline as welcomed guests. While Radicals were rarer, those that came were leaning towards the center, such as Doumer who also frequented their meetings (Stone 252-253). Thus, Proustian aristocratic women have Republican leanings, going as far as to trust a Radical. Yet this does not mean they have leftist propensities. On the one hand, this is because Doumer had centrist predilections bringing him close to the moderates. On the other, as previously mentioned Radicals saw themselves as conservatives in their commitment to maintain the social order and defend traditional liberties and institutions, such as the family, the army, and private property. Early on in the history of Radicalism, Gambetta insists on a politics of moderation and concord, as well as a politics of opportunity (Hawkins 126-19), pointing to the continuous link between Republican moderates and Radicals.

In his book *L'Etat culturel*, Marc Fumaroli explains Frenchness as participation in a culture (Fumaroli 31). Proustian society anticipates him, since cultural participation is its glue. One is a Frenchman if he understands and joins in the cultural life of the nation. Without going as far as to see a positive function in conflict as builder of communities, the numerous private debates around the Dreyfus Affair or the war constitute what Hirschman would term “the activity of politics itself” (Hirschman 239). It is because various people and groups have recognized that their antagonisms cannot be solved through confrontation that there is a real necessity for accommodation – all the liberal politicians and characters mentioned above are crucial in this respect. However, Hirschman insists that not all social conflicts share this pattern, distinguishing two fundamental types: essentially those rising from newly emerging economic inequalities versus those derived from ethnicity, race, gender, or religion. While economic conflicts are highly divisible, and thus open to negotiation and compromise ultimately leading to a solution, those due to race or gender are non-divisible and split an entire society along a clear fracture line. For as long as they last, there is a risk that one group will eliminate the smaller contending one (Hirschman 243-245). Although the nationalist movement, its xenophobia, and anti-Semitism, were primarily derived from the various crisis of French capitalism in this period, the community spirit with which nationalists approached it was what Hirschman would have termed the ‘*deus ex machina*’ strategy in face of a problem with no known solutions (Hirschman 248). It only aggravated a preexisting crisis and Proust decries and fears the racial component proposed as its answer. While certain brands of politics are less harmful than others, nationalism in all of its forms is always dangerous.

Hirschman notes the danger posed by a group of people intoxicated with too much passion for community spirit: the rise of the Nazi movement was motivated by such a need for a

mission. Well before it, Barrès together with other French nationalists were already on the same quest of edifying a France without civil society. Proust was only too familiar with this, as well as with the popular compact that started to threaten all forms of difference present in France – it cannot be emphasized enough how personal a menace this must have felt for the writer, a homosexual and a Jew, in face of the nationalist doctrine and its practical consequences. As a response, *La recherche* proposes an alternate form of patriotism: a new and minimalist kind, similar to that manifested in Western Germany after World War II. Hirschman describes it as a “patriotism grounded in the Constitution”, by which he means a pride in the fact that their country was now built on a liberal constitution that guaranteed their human and civil rights (Hirschman 232). Without equating the nightmare of Nazi Germany with the Third Republic during the Dreyfus Affair and the Great War, I argue nonetheless that persecuted French minorities developed similar views: as already discussed, Jewish patriotism revered the Republic precisely as the defender of human rights. In the French Enlightenment tradition, the individual serves his nation as a citizen. And it is as a citizen as well that his rights are protected by the Constitution. This guarantee of social justice, equally applied to all French citizens, was the only protection Jewish intellectuals like Proust expected and indeed demanded during the Dreyfus Affair – only it was slow in coming. By contrast, nationalists denied the Jewish captain justice of any kind: the Army and the nation were more important than an individual, and a foreigner at that. Social cohesion came from a homogeneity based on shared symbols. Alternatively, the minimalist community spirit present in liberal society is the only way to avoid massive movements of hatred against a targeted minority. Social conflict and change are facets of a continual process, and Proust’s solution is to never approach these phenomena armed with too much community spirit. The atomistic society that *La recherche* proposes is one in which every

individual is able to find innocent pastimes – activities that take one away from the aggrandizement of the nation or the self, and thus diminish the risk of confrontation. This is a community in which the ties and mutual obligations of its members are primarily driven by pity and generosity, a kindness that he agrees with de Tarde is equally present in all of us. This subject will be explored in more details in subsequent chapters.

As already seen, liberalism during *la Belle Epoque* was the only political alternative to dangerous collectivist movements on the rise – mainly nationalism and Socialism. However, I argue that its importance in *La recherche* goes further. According to Michéa, the liberal doctrine, foreign to any ideology, institutes a power that is religiously, morally, and philosophically, neutral, and is thus able to guarantee personal freedom (37). This moral and philosophical neutrality creates the space individuals need in order to use their own understanding and escape the authority of others – a practice the novel upholds. Yet most of its characters do not seem to think for themselves, but rather copy the ready-made beliefs of others. Thus, the narrator suspects atavistic motivations behind most political opinions, such as “tel dreyfusisme, tel cléricisme soudain, imprévu, fatal, tel héroïsme nationaliste et féodal, soudainement issus à l’appel des circonstances d’une nature antérieure à l’individu lui-même” (*RTP2 : JF 245*). In this view, uncritical Dreyfusards or Germanophiles function on the same principle as their counterparts. They simply share in a preconceived idea, unable to question the premise of their cause: from Jewish Dreyfusards to French anti-Dreyfusards, from German to French patriots, all believe that there is no justice to their opponents’ cause. Yet the Dreyfusism of the narrator – underlined by the affirmation: “moi qui me suis battu plusieurs fois en duel sans aucune crainte, au moment de l’affaire Dreyfus” (*RTP3 : SG 10*) – is not a consequence of his heredity. Contrastively, the narrator’s father and grandfather are representative of their milieu: the father is

an anti-Dreyfusard “convaincu de la culpabilité de Dreyfus” for which “[o]n n’était pas loin de le traiter de nationaliste” (*RTP2 : CG 450*), while his grandfather’s adoration of the army put him on the same side (*RTP2 : CG 450*). Divergent political positions drive a wedge between father and son. As the narrator indicates, having refused to sign a revisionist petition, his father “ne me reparla pas de huit jours quand il apprit que j’avais suivi une ligne de conduite différente” (*RTP2 : CG 450*). Proust had had the same experience: “papa était anti-dreyfusard ; nous nous sommes brouillés ; je suis resté huit jours sans lui adresser la parole” (Albaret 250). Hence, his concern with how the Affair was tearing the nation apart: “C’était terrible. . . . Toute la France était coupée en deux. D’un côté, l’énorme majorité de ceux qui voulaient croire au mensonge, et de l’autre, une poignée qui se battait” (Albaret 250). If fixed hereditary laws governed the mind of the French people, there would be no solution out of this quagmire other than the sacrifice of the few for the benefit of the many: for rational considerations to prevail, everyone must think for himself, a nod to the Kantian *Sapere aude* as principle of liberal politics.

This is why Proust focuses on divergences from the average, as well as on critically aware positions regardless of ideological convictions. For instance, shortly before August 13 1919, he wrote to Daniel Halévy praising the writer Francis Jammes, a fervent Catholic, for having overcome his prejudices: “Une admirable lettre qu’il m’a écrite il y a quelques années, vaut au contraire parce qu’elle est *malgré* ses idées” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 143). Similarly, the narrator is fascinated by those characters whose opinions differ from their group. By contradicting his atavistic thesis, they revive hope in the future of France. Such is Mme Sazerat, who, “seule de son espèce à Combray, était dreyfusarde” (*RTP2 : CG 450*). What is

more, she is an anti-Semitic Dreyfusarde, suggestive of Radical leanings¹³. She embodies a paradox that provokes the admiration of Bloch's father: "[il] était particulièrement flatté de l'antisémitisme de cette dame qu'il trouvait une preuve de la sincérité de sa foi et de la vérité de ses opinions dreyfusardes . . ." (*RTP2 : CG 586*). However illogically, she is going against her own preconceptions and the predominant beliefs of her environment. Whereas before the start of the Affair, "elle avait été indignée que mes parents eussent reçu le jeune Bloch, tant elle était antisémite" (*RTP2 : CG 585*), she now has ceased any social intercourse with them because they are anti-Dreyfusards; instead, she is friendly with Bloch's father. She has changed her opinions. Mme Sazerat's attitude is important because she believes in the innocence of Dreyfus despite her anti-Semitism, that is notwithstanding that Dreyfus is Jewish. Hers is an individual position reached, however mysteriously, by her own intelligence, even if it contravenes to the interests and prejudices of her social cast. The example of the prince of Guermantes is more eloquent. His doubts regarding the Affair suggest he has rationally reached his position. Having closely followed its evolution, he starts suspecting that "non pas une erreur, mais de graves illégalités, avaient été commises dans la conduite du procès" (*RTP3 : SG 104*), which in turn led him to "des doutes, cette fois non plus sur l'illégalité mais sur l'innocence" (*RTP3 : SG 107*). Able to see beyond his beliefs and principles, the prince admits out loud that "je ne pouvais plus désirer qu'une chose, la réparation de l'erreur" (*RTP3 : SG 110*). Liberalism grants the freedom of the individual, but gaining autonomy is a personal quest: through the exercise of reason, man now has the opportunity to elude the pressure of his peers and the weight of his community's

¹³ Despite declared anti-Semitic sentiments, most radical politicians turned Dreyfusards once Henry's forgery is exposed as Dreyfusism became synonymous with the defense of the Republic (Baal 25-27).

preconceived ideas. In fact, as we shall subsequently see, that is the essence of the narrator's journey of apprenticeship.

Indeed, if all characters in the novel would escape the influence of their environment and reach an individual opinion on all matters social and political, a myriad of differing and often conflicting views would ensue. As a consequence, would not France become even more divided and unstable? Hirschman mentions Anthony Downs's view, in *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1956), on the importance of political parties: these had the advantage of offering citizens ready-made, firm opinions on the options of the day (Hirschman 80). Ideologically informed stances would thus appear not only time-saving, but also stabilizing social factors. The narrator seems to extend Down's precept to everything he encounters. At the beginning of the novel in Combray, he is but a child, an outsider in an adult world. As a consequence, he misinterprets most of what he sees and, in his confusion, desperately searches for the one key that would make everything intelligible, only to fail in each attempt. This is akin to what Daniel Halévy wrote on the young Proust and himself in his journal, both on the lookout for the best system able to explain the world: "Ce défilé de systèmes, c'était comme des robes compliquées, qu'on eût essayées l'une après l'autre sur le dos de l'indifférent univers. Par malheur, elles n'allaient jamais ; quand les plis étaient effacés sur le dos, c'est devant que cela n'allait plus. Et l'univers, libre de tout système, était si étonnant !" (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 168). Throughout most of *La recherche*, the narrator searches for answers in the ready-made opinions of others: in Bergotte's exuberant literary style, in the link between a name and what it designates, in the articles on la Berma explaining her performance on stage, in the relevance of medieval art, or in the link between the race or social origin of people and the nature of their being. But each predetermined view of the world not only fails, but also makes him unhappy. Contrastively, Barrès blames the

disarray of his young Lorrain characters in *Les déracinés* on the various philosophical systems studied at school: “la loi des choses . . . variait chaque semaine selon le philosophe de la leçon” (*Les déracinés* 22). While Proust and his young friend delight at the diversity and freedom of the universe, the Barrèsian heroes “devenaient éperdus devant la multiplicité, la splendeur et la contradiction des systèmes” (*Les déracinés* 14). In such a view, given systems protect individuals from “[d]es pénibles vertiges de la conscience”: “Celui qui se laisse façonner par la société, qui adopte pour règle de ses jugements l’opinion, pour limite de ses actes la coutume, se maintient à mi-côte des grandes vertus et des grandes fautes . . .” (*Les déracinés* 427). Such a practice requires a given worldview to be accepted as trustworthy and safe, consequently unquestioningly followed by the entire collectivity. Proust, on the other hand, considers any system the starting point of an individual quest – an attitude Barrès derides as “la pénible situation d’un Robinson Crusoé recréant toute la civilisation dans son île” (*Les déracinés* 427). In the preface to *Sésame et Lys*, Proust does indeed explain why literature is good to stimulate individual thinking, but not to be taken for a master: “c’est là . . . un des grands et merveilleux caractères des beaux livres . . . que pour l’auteur ils pourraient s’appeler « Conclusions » et pour le lecteur « Incitations ». Nous sentons très bien que notre sagesse commence où celle de l’auteur finit, et nous voudrions qu’il nous donnât des réponses, quand tout ce qu’il peut faire est de nous donner des désirs” (*Sésame et lys* 33). Hirschman confirms this view: “it can be just as much a denial of individuality, personhood, and self – a sort of damaging ‘escape from freedom’ – to be outfitted with a full set of strong opinions on all the issues of the day . . .” (Hirschman 80). The measure of autonomy in reaching an opinion is in this view crucial, a point on which both Proust and Hirschman insist. Why would that be? Hirschman suggests that the role of deliberation in a democracy is at stake here: opinions should not be fully formed before the process of

deliberation begins. Most critics have noted that the narrator has an amazing bent for changing his view on everything, all the time. He will, at the end of his book, reach a more definitive view of the world, but throughout his quest he maintained openness in his opinions allowing him to alter them in the light of new information. This, Hirschman would tell us, is a very liberal attitude, in opposition to the nationalistic mindset that misrepresents facts to force-fit them into their ready-made views. The functioning of a real democracy, Hirschman argues, depends equally on having individual opinions and keeping an open mind. He also insists on the utility of personal rather than collective points of view. Opinions resulting from the wholesale embracing of an ideology are less effective (Hirschman 81-83). Proust goes further. For him, doctrines are downright dangerous, as they create a mass effect that will soon turn against those who dare think for themselves. Thus the writer launches the Kantian call *sapere aude* to the world at large – the antidote for persecution and the only guarantee of diversity. Only he would probably rather put it as *videre aude*: dare see the world through your own eyes, thus turning the reader into a liberal. In his essay, Hirschman establishes a clear link between flexible, individual opinions, the ability to accept new information to change one's views, the public democratic process, and the private interest in forming opinions in a way that allows for personal happiness (Hirschman 82-83). Proust has written a book on this more than half a century before: from this perspective, the political dimension of his book is vital.

The excessive community spirit and immutable collective beliefs Proust decries are both manifest in French nationalism. Why, then, does Proust dedicate the first edition of *Le Côté de Guermantes*, published by Gallimard in 1921, to the nationalist writer and politician Léon Daudet (1867-1942), great admirer of Drumont and collaborator of Maurras? Was it because he saw in him the incarnation of Frenchness, as Kristeva suggests, a Frenchness for which he so

admired Saint-Simon? His goal would thus have been to overcome Jewish suffering and attain the aesthetic of Saint-Simon, despite its attendant cruelties and exclusions (Kristeva, *Proust: Questions d'identité* 16). However, according to Herbert de Ley, Saint-Simon felt he was different from those surrounding him and stood mostly apart at court. The son of one of Louis XIII's favorites long retired from court, Saint-Simon was there alone, lacking friends, relatives, or protectors, and feeling abandoned. Except for his title, he was like Proust an outsider of sorts, with whom he also had in common the trouble of intermittent suffocations (Ley 100-103). Thus, I argue that the significance of the dedication to Daudet lays elsewhere. I propose to examine this dedication in the context in which it appears, a practice of which Proust was not only aware, but that he also respected, as a passage in *Contre Saint-Beuve* suggests. According to it, only by reading things in their proper literary context can the opening paragraph of Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie* be properly understood. This is why he disagrees with critics on their traditional reading: "Traditionnel, bien français ? Je ne le trouve pas du tout. Il faut remettre cette phrase où elle est, dans son éclairage. C'est dans une sorte de rêve" (*Contre Sainte-Beuve* 185).

The dream quality of the passage discards, most interestingly, the patriotic pathos attributed to it. To see it for what it is, it must be read along all the other information the author provided, including the overall plan of the text. Relevantly, in his correspondence, Proust asserts the intentionality of his oeuvre and is dismayed at the blindness of his critics. For instance, in a letter to Halévy written shortly after February 6 1914, he complains: "croire que c'est écrit au hasard des souvenirs!" (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 130-132). He further expounds on this in his letter to Jacques Rivière from February 7 1914, by explaining that his oeuvre is a search for the truth, but "[c]e n'est qu'à la fin du livre, et une fois les leçons de la vie comprises, que ma pensée se dévoilera." Gradually understanding the lessons of life, in order to reveal the

truth, constitutes the perfect definition of a journey of apprenticeship. The whole cycle is the dynamic depiction of “cette evolution d’une pensée” rather than its abstract analysis. To this purpose, “[j]e suis forcé de peindre les erreurs, sans croire devoir dire que je les tiens pour des erreurs . . .” (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière* 2-3). Thus, in the course of his opus, the conjectures of opening volumes will be contradicted by his final conclusion. In this context, it is useful to remember that, according to a letter Proust wrote to Rivière on 23 or 24 July 1920, the first volume of the cycle was supposed to be called *Le Temps perdu* (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière* 122). I argue that early ill-advised attempts to find overarching principles, ostensibly making sense of the multiplicity of the world, wasted precious moments of the narrator’s life. Since *Le Côté de Guermantes* is only the third volume in the cycle, in it the narrator is still relying on outside mediation for guidance. More specifically, at this stage names, later discarded as a source of confusion, reveal to him the essence of the universe: “les Noms, . . . ce n’est pas seulement l’univers physique qu’ils diaprent de différences, qu’ils peuplent de merveilleux, c’est aussi l’univers social . . .” (*RTP2 : CG* 310-311). Names fuel his obsession with the Guermantes’ *Francité*, manifested in their uninterrupted lineage reaching far into the French past. In the evolution of the entire oeuvre as a journey of apprenticeship, this volume corresponds to the aspirations of Daudet’s royalist group, attributing great value to continuity and lineage. Thus, in this volume the narrator cherishes Mme de Guermantes because she is “le reflet d’un verre de lanterne magique et d’un vitrail d’église” (*RTP2 : CG* 311) from an immemorial Combray. Furthermore, the narrator is fascinated by her name because it emerges from the dawn of time: “ma nourrice — qui sans doute ignorait, autant que moi-même aujourd’hui, en l’honneur de qui elle avait été composée — me berçait de cette vieille chanson : *Gloire à la Marquise de Guermantes . . .*” (*RTP2 : CG* 312-313). Therefore, the dedication to Daudet reflects a precise

stage in the evolution of the narrator: the time when he believed in the physical existence of *la Francité*.

In this respect, the figure of Charles Maurras (1868-1952) is also relevant. A well-known writer, he is the principal philosopher of *l'Action Française*. According to Weber, the importance of Maurras was that, starting from a critique of democracy, liberalism, and capital, he was preaching a traditionalism based on a manifold aristocracy, glorified by a historical mythology. Racial purity and discipline were his watchwords, and hereditary kings were the best way of reuniting and stabilizing a divided France (Weber, *L'Action Française* 566-572). It is Charlus who exposes the duplicitous nature of the Maurassian doctrine. At the beginning of the war, he reminds the narrator of his encouragements to read “l’admirable Aimée de Coigny de Maurras” (*RTP4 : TR* 376). According to Michael Sutton, the allegorical narrative dedicated to Aimée de Coigny is entitled “Mademoiselle Monk” and is the last essay in Maurras’s first successful book – *L’Avenir de l’Intelligence*, published in 1905 (Sutton 650). Maurice Weyembergh describes it as the account of Aimée’s claim to have been persuaded by her lover, de Boisgelin, to support the monarchy, and to then in turn having persuaded Talleyrand to favor the return of Louis XVIII. Thus, Maurras was proving to his followers that dedicated individuals have been able to restore the monarchical order, and consequently convince them that attempting to overturn the Republic is a realistic endeavor (Weyembergh 86). This act would save the French nation and the perpetrators of the coup would become national heroes. Nonetheless, Charlus portrays it in a different light: “Je serais fort surpris que quelque Aimée de Coigny n’attendît pas du développement de la guerre que fait la République ce qu’en 1812 Aimée de Coigny attendit de la guerre que faisait l’Empire” (*RTP4 : TR* 376). The attitude of a modern Aimée de Coigny, hoping for the defeat of France in order to see the restoration of monarchy, is consistent with

treason. By extension, it is a reasonable assumption that this is the Maurrasians' hidden desire. Presented in this light, the nature of betrayal becomes relative – it depends on individual ideological beliefs. Fomenting the overturn of the Third Republic and of its democracy, which is what *l'Action Française* and its supporters wanted, is betraying the nation either at peace or at war. The danger of nationalism becomes multiform.

Beside the dedication of *Le Côté de Guermantes*, Léon Daudet is mentioned once more in *La prisonnière* – this time in the text of the novel. The character of Brichot, a nationalistic historian and journalist, admiringly casts both Daudet and Barrès as “ces rares voyants d’une vérité que personne ne soupçonnait autour d’eux” (RTP3 : LP 801). Inspired by patriotic zeal, “Léon Daudet écrit au jour le jour un prodigieux conte de fées qui se trouve être la réalité même”, “[s]ur la franc-maçonnerie, l’espionnage allemand, la morphinomanie” (RTP3 : LP 802). He astonishes Brichot with his revelations. A nationalistic writer, journalist and politician, Daudet was the profoundly anti-Semitic voice of *l'Action Française* – having joined very early on Drumont’s *Ligue Antisémite*, he started writing vitriolic anti-Dreyfusard articles (Weber, *L'Action Française* 63). During the pre-war years, he was calling attention to the omnipresence of spies and set out to expose subversion, by casting suspicion on naturalized foreigners, Jews, and left-wing Russian exiles. These allegations appeared in articles published in *L'Action Française* (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 111), a journal that according to Weber Proust regularly read (*L'Action Française* 132). While the accusations were, for the most part, never proven, they shed suspicion on foreigners and caused much personal grief to those accused – hence the label of ‘fairytale’ for the series of articles Brichot mistakes for the truth finally exposed. Aware of the absurdity of the accusations and their ideologically chauvinistic capital, the narrator mockingly points to the newspaper’s insistence that the accusations were proven true

– miraculously true, as only fairytales can be despite their fantastic nature and absence of actual proofs. The ironic light cast on Daudet is relevant – the journey of apprenticeship reaches its fifth volume of the cycle, making for a less gullible narrator. While he abstains from expressing his opinion, he lets the indoctrinated Brichot utter both admiration and amazement. Dubbed the masters of 1910, Maurras and Barrès were considered humanists, when in fact their ideology fueled controversy and confrontation under the pretense of fusing a broken nation. Julien Benda identifies them as prime examples of what he dubs “the treason of the clerks”: a mobilization, in the name of the nation, against democracy and the ideals of the Declaration of Human Rights (Benda 49-52).

Indeed, they were part of the reason why the political arena of the early Third Republic was in turmoil. The press, capitalizing on scandal and contentious issues, was spreading this dissension throughout the entire society, thus deepening the already existing French conflicts and divisions. Furthermore, as already argued, political solutions were ineffective in tackling the actual difficulties France was facing at this time. Rather, collectivist ideologies, such as nationalism and Socialism, appealed to the insecurity of popular masses during economic and social crises, attempting to mobilize them against other sections of the state. In fact, the ‘friends versus enemies’ dynamics of partisan politics was deepening the rift of French discord. This raises the question of the stance adopted by *La recherche* in relation to political and social activism. In his study on Proust, Bataille admires the political passion of his early work *Jean Santeuil*, implicitly arguing that in his later years, when writing *La recherche*, he had lapsed into political indifference (“Proust” 152). Indeed, the young Proust had been politically engaged in the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906) from the start, even though “les antipatriotes avaient alors le nom de dreyfusards” (*RTP4 : TR* 305). Together with his friends he had organized the *Manifeste*

des Cent quatre: actively committed to social justice, he collected signatures for a petition to the government endorsing the review of the Dreyfus case (Kristeva, *Proust : Questions d'identité* 14). The action required conviction and courage, as even signing this “protestation des ‘Intellectuels’” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 45) was interpreted by nationalists as an act of treason. Thus, Barrès brands all its signatories estranged from the national spirit: “[i]ls ne se sentent plus spontanément d'accord avec leur groupe naturel . . .” (*Scènes et doctrines* 46). Once the revision was successful, however, Kristeva suggests that Proust was increasingly disappointed in the political process, at least in part because supporting Dreyfus had become a way to gain political capital (*Proust : Questions d'identité* 15). The novel corroborates this view. As the Affair progresses and the acquittal is foreseeable, all politicians hoping to participate in government become Dreyfusards: “dans la politique, . . . tous à un moment l’avaient été s’ils voulaient être du Gouvernement, même ceux qui représentaient le contraire de ce que le dreyfusisme, dans sa choquante nouveauté, avait incarné . . .” (*RTP4 : TR* 306). This points to the failure of most political groups to get involved in the defense of Dreyfus until the affair became a political confrontation rather than a simple question of justice and respect for the basic human rights of an individual or a minority – an indictment directed not only at moderate Republicans, but at Radicals and Socialists as well. Indeed, while the Dreyfus affair promoted the *Parti radical* to its dominant position during the Third Republic, at first it weakened its position in favor of reactionary nationalists who took center stage in the scandal. Initially, most Radicals opposed Dreyfus’s acquittal, as they saw in the Army a Holy Grail above politics. Furthermore, many of its prominent members had declared anti-Semitic leanings – merging anticapitalism and anti-Semitism was a left-wing tradition in which Radicalism shared (Stone 353) – and thus had an anti-Dreyfusard bent (Baal 23-25). However, with the discovery of Henry’s forgery the anti-

Dreyfusards, seemingly defenders of national institutions, now appeared as the actual troublemakers: henceforth, Dreyfusism and the defense of the Republic converged.

Consequently, the Radical-Socialist group in the Chamber excluded from its membership the nationalist and anti-Semitic deputies that were still a part of it (Nordmann 116). Thus, only when the threat of a coup fomented by the clerical and military alliance became clear, “authentic” Republicans, from the moderate Waldeck Rousseau to Radicals to the Socialist Millerand, formed a Republican coalition to oppose the reactionary anti-Dreyfusard group (Baal 27). As a result, from a justice requirement, Dreyfusism becomes synonymous with the defense of the Republic (Nordmann 117). Thanks to this political shift, from 1899, with Waldeck Rousseau’s accession to the prime-minister position, to 1905, Radicals together with moderate Socialists control the government. Indeed, the new government reestablishes order, by granting the pardon of Dreyfus, convicting the nationalists, and bringing to heel rebellious officers (Baal 27-27). The promotion of Picard, the official rehabilitation of Dreyfus and the transfer of Zola’s ashes to the *Panthéon* mark the official end of the affair (Nordmann 162). Yet just as important as the political credit gained by the *Parti radical* for reestablishing order and justice in France, it allowed for its anticlerical offensive – cornerstone of the *Bloc des gauches* – against the plot concocted by clericals and nationalists which threatens the Republic (Baal 27). It suggests that in fact the Dreyfus affair benefited Radicalism by allowing it to establish a link between its anticlericalism and its opposition to nationalists, thus strengthening its political identity, position, and program – a situation that can indeed be dubbed as a form of political opportunism.

The narrator uses the example of Bontemps as a culmination of unscrupulous speculation, so skilled that he switches to the winning side exactly at the appropriate moment: “le dreyfusisme de M. Bontemps, invisible et contemplatif comme celui de tous les hommes

politiques, ne se voyait pas plus que les os sous la peau” (*RTP4 : TR 306*). In what follows, I propose using Hirschman’s framework of *exit* and *voice* to shed light on Proust’s stance on political activism. Hirschman introduces these concepts as two contrasting responses of the members of an organization to what they sense is a decline in the quality of the services they receive. Thus, exit is the act of leaving, presumably because there is a better service provided elsewhere. Voice, on the other hand, is an act of active protest, with the intention of achieving direct change (Hirschman 12). Looking at the situation from this perspective, I suggest Proust uses an exit tactic: disappointed in the activist approach to social problems, inevitably mired with private interests and abuses of power, he will express his concerns elsewhere. Instead of the political arena, he will voice his dissent in the aesthetical field. No longer believing in collective solutions, he attempts to reach individuals through his art, while avoiding divisive dogmatic positions. I argue this is representative of what Schmitt terms “the negation of the political”: an attitude specific to individualism, manifesting itself as a distrust towards all political forces (Schmitt 70).

Besides his disappointment with politics, Proust’s modesty and distaste for public visibility equally motivated his choice. As an activist, Proust would have been in the political limelight, a central figure around which a mass effect would coalesce, fueling further confrontation. In conformity with the bourgeois tradition of his family, attracting attention is not only dangerous, but in poor taste. For instance, women moving far above or below their milieu are perceived as striving to “[f]aire parler d’elle” (*RTP4 : TR 533*). Furthermore, the narrator openly admires the quiet generosity of his mother and grandmother, the good they can do to those they come in contact with, without associating with any support organization. He is keen to follow “l’exemple de ma mère que M^{me} de Cambremer et M^{me} de Guermantes n’ont jamais pu

décider à faire partie d'aucune œuvre philanthropique, d'aucun patriotique ouvroir, à être jamais vendeuse ou patronnesse”, toiling to do good far from the public eye. Acting primarily from the private sphere, her attitude consists in “réserver à sa famille, à ses domestiques, aux malheureux que le hasard mit sur son chemin, ses richesses d'amour et de générosité.” Motivated by personal concern, and expecting nothing in return, the narrator believes that his mother's and grandmother's love and generosity “furent inépuisables et dépassèrent de bien loin tout ce que parent et firent jamais M^{me} de Guermantes ou de Cambremer” (*RTP3 : LP 825*). As the final chapter of this essay will further argue, this private pity and kindness, unconditionally reaching towards another human being, is what Proust proposes as the only form of sociability able to mend and maintain the social fabric. Mindful that collective associations selectively decide towards whom generosity should be applied, he places the burden of responsibility on the individual and his spontaneous, small, and private, acts of compassion. As previously mentioned, putting the duty of governance on the individual citizen is the trademark of Radicalism. Yet Proust goes beyond politics in what is in essence a personal and private responsibility towards others.

Thus, individual initiative should prevail over communal solutions. Upon writing to Jacques Rivière on September 1919 to congratulate him on his article criticizing the Soviet Union, he is particularly impressed by its insistence on “la décadence de la liberté” (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière: Correspondance 50*). Proust worries that the progress of Socialism and its collectivist model would eventually affect the entire world. Communal identities are dangerous because of their clannishness, as attested by the Affair: “si on avait failli ne pas réviser le Procès Dreyfus c'est parce [que] des gens avaient, de cette façon, donné leur adhésion à des assertions qu'ils trouvaient fausses, mais qui émanaient de nos plus grands chefs militaires,

lesquels avaient plus de sens moral que les anarchistes, etc.” (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière: Correspondance* 51). This is why, in that same letter, Proust criticizes Daniel Halévy for endorsing the right-wing *Parti de l'Intelligence* in a manifesto published in *Le Figaro* in response to a previously broadcasted Bolshevik declaration – one form of collectivism cannot effectively counteract another.

On July 19 1919, or shortly thereafter, Proust conveys directly to Halévy his objections to the manifesto. In the period of increased nationalism following the war, Proust enlarges on the argument used against Barrès in *La recherche*. He protests the use of literature as an expression of the nation since “on ôte sa valeur générale et même nationale à une œuvre en cherchant à la nationaliser” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 139-140). Subordinating the individuality of the artist to a totality which it allegedly represents reduces its originality to the conformity of the group. Similarly, removing an oeuvre from its cultural context on pretext of it being the expression of the entire humanity, makes it not only incomprehensible, but also banal: “on fait perdre sa valeur universelle à une œuvre en la dénationalisant, et . . . c’est à la cime même du particulier qu’éclot le général” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 139-140). Proust rejects here what Hughes terms “collectivist” identities (“On the Nation and its Culture” 133), albeit nationalistic as with Halévy or internationalist as with the Bolshevik manifesto, avoiding all forms of ideological narrowness. He disapproves of great ideas; all his life, he will protest when exposed to a humanitarian, social, national, or patriotic, art. So Proust chooses to voice his criticism in an ironic, subdued voice, from the familiarity of his make-believe world, and the quiet of his cork-lined room; however, this is not a sign of political indifference.

Rather than relying on the authority of a proper place in the political spectrum, Proust transitions to the field of literature where he can use a narrator whose point of view evolves in

time, before the reader's eyes, to palliate his criticism. His novel, a pastiche of numerous issues of social injustice, takes advantage of the opportune moment to express its concerns. Lucky for us he did so: had he asserted his criticism through activism, it would have been lost to us today, whereas his voice can still be heard loud and clear a hundred years later through his oeuvre.

Therefore, the political dimension of the work is still very much alive; it has simply been displaced to a different field, that of the aesthetic, where its questions can still make one wonder, and think, but from which direct conflict has been removed. Its avowed purpose is to help the reader better know himself: "L'ouvrage de l'écrivain n'est qu'une espèce d'instrument optique qu'il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n'eût peut-être pas vu en soi-même" (*RTP4* : TR 489-490). I argue self-knowledge is the premise for independent thinking, and thus the novel's goal is to encourage the reader to think for himself, a very liberal enterprise indeed.

In this respect, the literary genre chosen by the writer is relevant: he set up his novel as a sort of private memoirs. According to Nora, memoirs have traditionally been considered a legitimate historical source, and thus have the ability to record history. This view is confirmed by the narrator. He remarks the power the memoirs of Mme de Villeparisis have to retain one particular point of view to the detriment of others, in this case that of the more popular and elegant Mme Leroi: "personne ne sait plus guère aujourd'hui qui était M^{me} Leroi, son jugement s'est évanoui, et c'est le salon de M^{me} de Villeparisis . . . qui sera considéré comme un des plus brillants du xix^e siècle par cette postérité . . . D'ailleurs les salons des M^{me} de Villeparisis peuvent seuls passer à la postérité parce que les M^{me} Leroi ne savent pas écrire . . ." (*RTP2* : CG 492). I suggest the rapport the genre of memoirs maintains with history is pertinent in the context of *la Belle Epoque*: the 19th century invented France by putting the basis of national French

memory. Taught in schools as French history, shared memory, alongside a cohesive society and a common territory, were constitutive parts of the nation (Nora, "Introduction" xii). As Nora suggests, this relatively new phenomenon, become fully manifest during Proust's lifetime, considered the biographical, and implicitly memoirs, together with political, military, and diplomatic writings, pillars of national continuity. Historical archives had for long favored the memoirs of powerful men due to their presumptive legitimacy and firsthand account of big events. However, their main drawback is a lack of objectivity: being both witness and actor, the author's motivations remain highly questionable (Nora, "Memoirs of Men of State" 429). Identifying himself with the state, the writer offers a unique point of view endowed with the authority of a leader with the best interests of the nation at heart. Implicitly, readers who disagree are disloyal to the motherland and stand outside its fold. Thus, private lives and individual points of view are elided in military and political histories. Built on archives that do not memorialize individual destinies, collective memory functions like a single, disembodied voice rather than a blend of group and individual recollections.

In this context, the role of private memoirs is crucial. Standing at the opposite end of state-memoirs, Nora characterizes them as "memoirs of public opinion" ("Memoirs of Men of State" 426). While no biography can ever be truly objective, personal perceptions and motivations being deeply encoded in the text, memoirs-chronicles benefit of the advantage of distance. A passive or critical author accurately notes all the details, just as the Proustian narrator does. Indeed, as Adorno suggests, "Proust's 'search for lost time'¹⁴ [is] a body of research into the way it really was, as opposed to the way everyone says it was" ("Short commentaries on Proust" 176). I suggest Adorno's description equally applies to the internal mechanisms of

¹⁴ This is how the French title literally reads.

memoirs as described by Nora: an attempt to record the real story of the past (“Memoirs of Men of State” 416-417). As such, they are first and foremost antihistories. As already seen, the nationalistic rhetoric of the Third Republic insisted on the cohesive and coherent nature of the French nation-state. It strategically made use of a univocal high history as scientific proof of French continuity: homogeneity is presented as a historical given. In this context, I argue that Proust tactically casts *La recherche* as a private memoirs made public, recording an anti-history. In fact, the novel often refers to journal-memoirs: the duke of Saint-Simon is a favorite of both Swann and the narrator, while the narrator’s grandmother and subsequently his mother are partial to Mme de Sévigné and the fictitious Mme de Beauseigneur. Indeed, the grandmother “ne voyageait jamais sans un tome de l’une et de l’autre. C’était ses deux auteurs de prédilection” (*RTP2 : JF 13*). I suggest that there are parallels between the Proustian cycle and both of these texts. For instance, the narrator establishes a link between journal-memoirs and the oeuvre he aspires to create by explaining how the writing of Mme de Sévigné influenced his style: “Madame de Sévigné est une grande artiste de la même famille qu’un peintre que j’allais rencontrer à Balbec et qui eut une influence si profonde sur ma vision des choses, Elstir” (*RTP2 : JF 14*). Since “elle nous présente les choses . . . dans l’ordre de nos perceptions, au lieu de les expliquer d’abord par leur cause” (*RTP2 : JF 14*), her memoirs adopt the same tactic as Proust’s novel: they function as a journey of discovery. The last volume of the cycle develops this idea by associating Mme de Sévigné with Elstir and Dostoïevski because of their similar approach to art (*RTP3 : LP 880*). Starting from Elstir’s vision, it subsequently expounds on the disillusionment structure of these artists’ works, an aspect they share with *La recherche*: “Elstir peignait la mer par l’autre sens, à partir des illusions, des croyances qu’on rectifie peu à peu, comme Dostoïevski raconterait une vie” (*RTP4 : TR 560*).

The parallels between *La recherche* and the memoirs of the duke de Saint-Simon are more explicit. Between the duke and the narrator, as well as Proust for that matter, there are similarities of a personal nature, such as an isolated position in their respective social circles, or recurring asthma attacks. In fact, the narrator hints to one aspect Saint-Simon's memoirs have in common with his future novel: they were "écrits eux aussi la nuit" (*RTP4 : TR 620*). However, despite personal affinities and his admiration for the duke's writing, the narrator does not intend to imitate him, though Kristeva has noticed that Proust's faubourg Saint-Germain is a "tableau vivant" using the memoirs of Saint-Simon as a starting point (*Proust : Questions d'identité 9*). As already seen, in his preface to *Sésame et lys*, Proust insists that "nous ne pouvons recevoir la vérité de personne, et que nous devons la créer nous-mêmes" (33). Preexistent works of art cannot serve as models to another artist as "le terme de leur sagesse ne nous apparaît que comme le commencement de la nôtre" (33). Thus, the memoirs of Saint-Simon are a source of inspiration only in so far as they prompt the narrator to think, allowing him to reach "une vérité qui ne nous demande pas nos préférences." It is on condition of renouncing the duke's memoirs that the narrator is able to write his own œuvre, only to realize that "on se trouve parfois rencontrer ce qu'on a abandonné, et avoir écrit, en les oubliant, . . . les Mémoires de Saint-Simon d'une autre époque" (*RTP4 : TR 621*). The narrator's creation is admittedly a memoirs.

Furthermore, memoirs are mentioned, as well as expounded upon, numerous times throughout the cycle. I argue that this is because, as chronicles of society life, they parallel *La recherche* itself in a different age – they are the living proof of the fact that, in its essence, French social life embodies the saying "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." However, contemporaneous artists misguidedly attempt to attain historical authenticity by copying Saint-Simon's superficial patterns. Thus, they believe they accurately portray a king "en se fabriquant

une généalogie qui le fait descendre d'une famille historique ou en entretenant une correspondance avec un des souverains actuels de l'Europe . . ." (*RTPI : CS 117*). Such a writer mistakingly "tourne précisément le dos à ce qu'il a le tort de chercher sous des formes identiques et par conséquent mortes . . ." (*RTPI : CS 117*). Contrastingly, the narrator considers that the timelessness of Saint-Simon's memoirs lays hidden in its substantive patterns, as exemplified by tante Léonie. Unbeknownst to her, the lonely daily life she leads is akin to "ce que Saint-Simon appelait la « mécanique » de la vie à Versailles", in that her servant Françoise treated her slightest whims the same way a courtesan those of Louis XIV (*RTPI : CS 117*). This contrast between constancy and flux is a fundamental feature of the *perpetuum mobile* of the Proustian world. On the one hand, the actual elements composing it are in constant motion. On the other, there are certain substantive patterns that persist through time and keep old memoirs still relevant. This allows Swann to propose the Saint-Simon's writings as an alternative to the pernicious newspapers *La recherche* condemns. Indeed, early in the first volume, Swann lauds it for its lack of importance – "ce n'est guère qu'un journal, mais du moins un journal merveilleusement écrit" (*RTPI : CS 25*) – but herein lays its value. Speaking from the distant past on issues that have ceased to be contentious, it no longer creates partisan divisions, nor does it influence through imitation the ideas of its reader. The obsolete dissensions it describes are transferred, by the means of a masterful style, to the field of aesthetics, in contrast with "les assommants journaux que nous nous croyons obligés de lire matin et soir" (*RTPI : CS 25*). Yet for the attentive reader its patterns are still recurring. Linked with the political realm, but away from the burning issues of the day, memoirs talk of French culture and traditions, French society, history, and politics, in a way that detaches the reader from any conflictual loyalties – the historical referent is important as long as it is not a source of disagreement. In this, journal-

memoirs establish the same connection between literature, history, and politics as does *La recherche*.

The parallels between *La recherche* and memoirs, in particular those of Saint-Simon, do not stop here. Saint-Simon and Proust equally oppose centralization and homogenization at different epochs. Unidirectional imitation of a single model inevitably leads to a uniformity that can be easily manipulated by the political realm. For this reason, both Proust and Saint-Simon castigate the idealization of an archetype – the authentic Frenchman in the first case, the accomplished courtier serving the perfect king in the second. This is why Proust uses the genre of pastiche parodying social dynamics as an alternative source of history, just as the memoirs of Saint-Simon are a narrative of detail that contradicts official biographers manufacturing the glory of kings. As Nora argues, “memoirs are history personified, the embodiment of a multiple, multiform France” (“Memoirs of Men of State” 413). By incorporating such memoirs into archives, the siren voice of high history becomes the polyphony of various points of view, thus losing its nationalistic dimension. According to Ley, Proust brings to his novel the special perspective of the memorialist at a new pitch, through the subjectivity of a narrator that slowly discovers the world he lives in (Ley 98). De Certeau has remarked that modern novels recount individual practices, marking the transition from history lived to history retold (*L’invention du quotidien I* 120). I suggest the private memoirs dimension of *La recherche* reminds the reader that history has been individually lived before being officially recorded. As subsequent chapters will further argue, the novel chronicles the atomization of the social continuum, giving priority to discrete routines and conflicting opinions, and thus indirectly questions partisan or poetic accounts of a coherent national history.

There is a final note to be made regarding memoirs. Minorities were not, until recently, part of the history of France. As Pierre Birnbaum has noted, the national myth paid no attention to the representation of any particular group (381). As a homosexual and a Jew, Proust stood outside dominant currents of French literature; hence, he pretends his novel is a sort of private memoir in which he expresses an anonymous individual point of view. There is heretofore no surprise in Birnbaum's comment that "[b]ecause Jews were assimilated into the Republic, official history avoided any mention of their origins, almost as though there were something unseemly about the topic" (Birnbaum 398). To this day, the importance given by the majority of French critics to the Jewish dimension of *La recherche* remains negligible. This is what allows such a famous critic as Antoine Compagnon to affirm that the novel is "a magical *lieu de mémoire*, . . . a compendium of [French] culture" (Compagnon 242). If indeed history lives in *La recherche* (Compagnon 246), it is neither the official version of the history of the nation, nor that of nationalists. For the latter, French solidarity will blossom when men will think collectively, united in a common hatred of all foreigners. By contrast, Proust chooses an itinerary of flight, wandering from the center of things towards the outer reaches of the nation. However, the journey getting him there starts from the provincial little town of Combray, with a confused narrator unable to understand who, let alone where and when, he actually is.

The Combray Opening

What is the role of Combray in *La recherche*? I argue that part of the response lies in a fundamental difference between the writer and his main character. While Proust, due to his ethnicity and sexual orientation, stood outside the norm of the national collective, his narrator represents the average citizen of the Third Republic. He speaks from the position of a heterosexual gentile Frenchman. Proust was aware that, for his point of view to be even

considered, he needed to speak with a voice perceived as representative of French society by his contemporaries. But in the nationalistic early Third Republic, every Frenchman belonged because he had his ancestral proper place in the national territory. Indeed, the link with the land was relevant not only for actual nationalists, but for the popular Radical tradition as well. The latter favored decentralization and local autonomy. It accorded an increasing importance to rural France, emphasizing the importance of small local communities and fighting to keep peasants on their land as the main form of agricultural protection (Baal 16). Thus, only a recognizable and valued cultural referent, such as rural French extraction, would endow the Proustian voice with authority. In contrast, a homosexual Jewish narrator would have been discarded as irrelevant to the nation. As Birnbaum suggests, minorities lack memories rooted in a particular region, as well as a privileged relation to a specific place (Birnbaum 381), and thus stand outside the nation. To contemporaneous readers of the novel, the narrator's background in Combray, suggesting local roots and a link with the French soil, echoes the ideology of Barrès, so popular at that time. As Vajda explains, the architecture of Barrèsian nationalism depends on the double concept of rootedness and rootlessness. Every man needs roots in his land, in this case France, and the fuel of his civilization to thrive. But there is only a people incapable of this, condemned to the nomadic model: the Jews. Herein lies the key to the Jewish threat and to Barrèsian anti-Semitism (Vajda 162). Jews have no link to the land, to the rural life which is the ideal and imaginary basis of the nation. As Marion Schmid shows, Proust was very much aware of the expectations of his audience – he frequently changed his original script in order to make it less offensive to the sensibilities of the day. Part of this tactic consists in removing those explicit fragments that would alienate the reader (Schmid, "Ideology and Discourse in Proust" 966). He well knew that he could only reach his audience on condition people do not stop reading the book. Aware of the

prevalent anti-Semitism of the time, he tactically constructed his narrator as French. He thus addresses his audience from the position of the majority: his experiences are ubiquitous to them. In this sense, familiarity with the provincial life is a pervasive experience amongst Frenchmen. As Armand Frémont indicates, the land is the most profound of all French realms of memory. Lawrence Kritzman defines the concept as “a polyreferential entity that can draw on a multiplicity of cultural myths that are appropriated for different ideological or political purposes” (X). It is the result of an imaginary process, and I argue Proust uses it to his advantage. His heritage and sexual orientation place him on the margins of French society. According to de Certeau, those that lack a proper place must resort to time (*L'invention du quotidien I* 130). I thus suggest that Proust tactically seizes opportunities allowing him to express his individual point of view in the language of the majority. This is why he takes advantage of the rural Combray as a realm of memory. Furthermore, a narrator that is an average representative of his environment, sharing into French prejudices, allows him to speak on patriotism and foreigners with the authority of a Frenchman¹⁵. Therefore, any of the narrator's subsequent changes of perspective cannot be suspected of being uncritically motivated by foreign group loyalties. Significantly, Charlus uses a similar tactic: before disparaging France on its unmerciful attitude

¹⁵ However it is important to emphasize that the relation between the narrator and Proust is complex. While the writer constructed Marcel to effectively deliver his ideas to a *Belle Epoque* audience, tactically making him different from him in the process, the two share biographically documented similarities. They suffer from the same illness, they are equally attached to the mother figure, they are interested in medieval religious art, they have writerly aspirations, to mention just a few. This certainly does not mean that the narrator is Proust's spokesman, as the writer admittedly loathed ideological works because they invariably represent “une faillite des intentions de l'auteur” (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière 2*). He consequently presents the narrator's apprenticeship journey as a series of errors “sans croire devoir dire . . . [qu'il les tient] pour des erreurs” (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière 2*). Nonetheless, in final analysis Marcel remains his tactical construction. Therefore, throughout the novel he will unwittingly or intentionally utter the author's points of view – something that this essay will illumine by establishing a dialogue between relevant parts of the text and Proust's correspondence.

towards a practically defeated Germany, he will underline his family's ancient link to Combray as symbol of his French heritage: "Combray n'était qu'une toute petite ville comme il y en a tant. Mais nos ancêtres étaient représentés en donateurs dans certains vitraux, dans d'autres étaient inscrites nos armoiries. Nous y avons notre chapelle, nos tombeaux" (*RTP : TR 374*).

A proven French heritage is required before convincingly speaking against France. Moreover, as Frémont shows, "the land was for two centuries the cradle of French conservatism" (Frémont 32-35). Nonetheless, it is important to mention that also popular in the countryside is Radicalism. The May 13 elections of 1849 revealed solid rural Radical strongholds already in existence. As early as 1851, the democratic and anticlerical Left is predominantly provincial (Lefranc 143-144). The countryside feared a return to *Ancien Régime* structures just as much as it did Socialist collectivist leanings. Consequently, the popularity of Radicalism was at least in part due to its image respectful of the established order and willingness to maintain the Republican status-quo. At the same time, historically urban Radicalism is gradually replaced by the rural one (Nordmann 72-112). Furthermore, French Radicalism represents the middle ground between conservatism, either Republican or royalist, and social revolution (Mollenhauer 613). As such, paradoxically Radicals are both progressive and conservative. The centrality of the latter must be underlined. Thus, the link with Combray is politically relevant, since, as already seen, the narrator's father has a conservative liberal position with Radical undertones. It should be remembered that, while the narrator does not share Proust's ethnic heritage and sexual orientation, he belongs to the same social class: the rich bourgeoisie. Proust felt that a French narrator from a conservative environment would best carry his message to contemporaneous readers.

However, the French origins of the narrator's family could have been established indirectly. Instead, the Proustian cycle starts in the little town of Combray, during the childhood of the narrator. I argue that several considerations are behind it. Primarily, as demonstrated by Thierry Gasnier, with the advent of the Third Republic, France was defined based on the local (Gasnier 271). At the same time, the rural has always been a basic referent for a conservative French identity. Thus, *La recherche* as a pastiche of the French nation starts in a provincial town reflecting those cultural values. Furthermore, as Frémont shows, immediate rural ancestry is common in France. Even today, “there is scarcely a family in France without roots in the soil, roots that are not only deep but also relatively recent, attested perhaps by wedding or holiday photographs of a still familiar grandparent or great-grand-parent, stored away in the bottom of a drawer” (Frémont 4-5). Honoring the familial roots in the countryside consists in both remembering the relatives still living there, and returning there for vacations – a French tradition that Marcel's family respects. Furthermore, Anne Henry suggests the summers successively spent by the narrator in the countryside in his childhood faithfully reenact the trend of rootedness recently launched by Barrès (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 27). Since contemporaneous readers of the novel would have had similar childhood experiences, they would feel close to Marcel, assuming as a consequence that his point of view is akin to theirs. However, as already discussed, the narrator was not born in Combray, nor was he ever a permanent resident of the town. Rather, Combray is akin to a *lieu de villégiature*, the vacationing spot of a well-to-do bourgeois family in the house of his great-aunt, where his parents had a pavilion built to this purpose. The inhabitants of the town know and accept them as family relations of aunt Léonie: nonetheless, they will remain visitors, meaning strangers, there. This is why Combray is mentioned along with Balbec, Doncières and Venice (*RTPI : CS 9*) – all places which the

narrator visited at a certain point in his life. No mention of the cradle of his kinfolk, nor of the old ancestral home, singles out Combray as the place where he and his family belong.

Furthermore, the importance of the rural as a cultural referent is underlined by the noblemen that the narrator later frequents, the Guermantes and all their friends: they emphasize their social status through references to their provincial estates. Thus, the auto-representations of the aristocratic elite in *La recherche* follows the model evidenced by Cyril Grange for the *Bottin Mondain*: a link to the soil and roots in the countryside are crucial (89), something that Proust well understood. The nobility strategically presents their lineage through uninterrupted presence on and ownership of a rural estate, emphasizing place over time as a sign of continuity manifested in stability. From this perspective, Combray stands for a vestige of the *Ancien Régime*, a reminder of the original hierarchical unity of old. Its importance in the Proustian cycle points to the French recycling of old traditions, what Nora describes as “the degree to which age-old monarchical, Christian, and agrarian traditions had been reinvested in the democratic, secular and capitalist society” (“Generation” 520). In fact, the expressed goal of Radicalism is the republicanization of France, which consisted in setting up a political regime which, without categorically cutting all ties with the monarchical heritage, was able to integrate the Republic in the continuity of the French state (Mollenhauer 581). As such, it aimed at integrating *Ancien Régime* traditions into modern mores. Combray speaks to it, as a heavy cultural heritage and rigid social conventions dominate communal life there, making any social mobility inconceivable: “les bourgeois d’alors se faisaient de la société une idée un peu hindoue, et la considéraient comme composée de castes fermées où chacun, dès sa naissance, se trouvait placé dans le rang qu’occupaient ses parents, et d’où rien . . . ne pouvait vous tirer pour vous faire pénétrer dans une caste supérieure” (*RTPI* : *CS* 16). I suggest that the endurance of a cast system

points to what Nora terms the continuity of aristocratic values in bourgeois practices. Thus, upward social mobility is reprieveable. Upon finding out that Swann frequents *le vrai gratin*, the narrator's great-aunt becomes critical of him: "quelqu'un qui choisissait ses fréquentations en dehors de la caste où il était né, en dehors de sa « classe » sociale, subissait à ses yeux un fâcheux déclassement" (*RTP1 : CS 21*). This opposition to social mobility reflects the other two manifestations of continuity between the *Ancien Régime* and the Third Republic Nora mentions: passive resistance to the egalitarian procedures of democracy and the preference for security over liberty ("Generation" 521). This idea is strengthened by the narrator's remark that "[i]l y avait un « esprit de Combray » si réfractaire qu'il faudra des siècles . . . de théories égalitaires, pour arriver à le dissoudre" (*RTP3 : SG 415*). Furthermore, Combray exemplifies another continuity between aristocratic and bourgeois values: the importance given to family life. Indeed, "la famille joue . . . un rôle important dans les milieux immobiles comme la petite bourgeoisie et comme l'aristocratie princière . . ." (*RTP2 : CG 671*). This is because traditional French provincial life is not communal, not even at the village level. It is familial. And the life of Marcel's family in Combray follows exactly this pattern, since there "[l]e monde se bornait habituellement à M. Swann, qui . . . était à peu près la seule personne qui vînt chez nous à Combray, quelquefois pour dîner en voisin . . ." (*RTP1 : CS 13*). This is further illustrated by the rhetorical question the family members, gathered in the garden after dinner, asks themselves whenever the doorbell rang: "« Une visite, qui cela peut-il être ? » mais on savait bien que cela ne pouvait être que M. Swann" (*RTP1 : CS 14*).

The value French culture attributes to family life cannot be overstated. Radicalism attempted to establish the prettified Republic of the golden age, familial, provincial, and pacifist (Nordmann 144). De Tarde decries that in the modern world, family-based society is replaced by

what he terms “crowd-society”. He thus attributes the stability of rural France to the predominance of family oriented life, whereas cities are notoriously volatile because of the rush of people detached from their hearth and gathered in confusion (Millet 259). Proust, however, remains wary even of a small group of individuals coming together. He never forgets that group loyalties function based on exclusion, and the family’s ubiquitous early Saturday lunch illustrates it. Mere knowledge of the habit separates insiders from outsiders, cast as foreigners to be kindly joked upon. Such innocent banter is sufficient to generate community spirit: “ces petits événements intérieurs, locaux, presque civiques . . . dans les vies tranquilles et les sociétés fermés, créent une sorte de lien national . . .” (*RTPI* : CS 109). The echoing passage in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is more explicit. The nationalistic aspect of the jokes “nous aidaient à nous différencier fortement des étrangers, des barbares, c’est-à-dire de tous ceux qui déjeunaient le samedi à la même heure que de coutume.” Any innocent collective routine can degenerate into “un sentiment de patriotisme . . . exclusif autour d’une coutume locale” (*Contre Sainte-Beuve* 120). However, it is only in the context of the restrictive subcultures of the Guermantes or Verdurin circle that the link between clannism and exclusion becomes dangerous, revealing the full potential of “familial nationalism”. Such phenomena of artificial separation are specific to the mob-centric large cities, most particularly Paris. There, groups that no longer share the same values are brought together while refusing to respect a common hierarchy that would regulate the relationship between them. Contrastively, “[r]ien, moins que notre société de Combray, ne ressemblait au monde” (*RTPI* : JF 561). The difference resides in the fact that the provincial town is a closed community. For as long as it remains such, local patriotism is without peril. This is because the interdependence of the community’s members invalidates the concept of stranger: the residents know, or imagine knowing, everyone else. Thus in Combray, “une personne

« qu'on ne connaissait point » était un être aussi peu croyable qu'un dieu de la mythologie . . .” (*RTPI : CS 56*). When coming upon an unknown person, the locals always end “par réduire le personnage fabuleux aux proportions d'une « personne qu'on connaissait », soit personnellement, soit abstraitement, dans son état civil, en tant qu'ayant tel degré de parenté avec des gens de Combray” (*RTPI : CS 56-57*). In this *Ancien Régime* bubble, an unfamiliar face is always reducible to his own cast and clan, and thus never remains a stranger for long. This is a world that gives primacy to classical order: general categories, either prescribed or real, establish and maintain a stable society. Using perceived or imagined differences and similitudes, the inhabitants of Combray eliminate uncertainty and classify newcomers to the village. Funnily enough, using this method even passing dogs could be attributed a master on sight. Indeed, this sheltered world lives in an illusion, but in ignorance lays bliss. As long as no one knows of Swann's grand Parisian connections, no one has reason to envy him. Thus, the narrator's family were hosting “avec la parfaite innocence d'honnêtes hôteliers qui ont chez eux, sans le savoir, un célèbre brigand — un des membres les plus élégants du Jockey-Club, ami préféré du comte de Paris et du prince de Galles, un des hommes les plus choyés de la haute société du faubourg Saint-Germain” (*RTPI : CS 15*). To them all he remained the son of a local stockbroker. The hostility of a group coalesces around that which threatens or unsettles its collective narcissism. But if any stranger is someone's acquaintance or relative, there are no strangers and every individual lives in his proper place determined by the cast and clan of which he is a member: the settled life of Combray should go on forever. The eternal France to which Françoise seemed to belong, with its medieval associations and its unchangeable cast system, exists on condition of its seclusion.

The isolation of the provincial town can only be guaranteed by its modesty. This is why “Combray, . . . ce n’était qu’une église résumant la ville, . . . tenant serrés autour de sa haute mante sombre, en plein champ, contre le vent, comme une pastoure ses brebis, les dos laineux et gris des maisons rassemblées qu’un reste de remparts du moyen âge cernait çà et là . . .” (*RTP1* : CS 47). Why would anyone, other than friends and relatives of the locals, would want to live there? There is no danger of an invasion, if life there is no different than in other little French towns. In fact, Combray idealizes the modest life of the parish, of what Philippe Boutry described as the human coherence of a people gathered around the same steeple. Communal feeling is derived from belonging to a group of families, living in neighboring houses, and respecting the same traditions (Boutry 53-54). Altieri suggests that, in order to grasp what an outdated institution offered as valuable, we must understand the constitutive forces within a tradition (Altieri 44). From such a perspective, the *Ancien Régime* model of the parish matters because it stabilizes communities. In Combray, there is no social conflict and no feeling of collective hostility towards the outsider. Qualified by Philippe Boutry as the “minimal geography of human space” (Boutry 53-54), the village seems a place outside time, functioning in a continuous present: it makes strategical use of the resistance a proper place has against the wear and tear of time. However, the narrator knows the order human mind perceives in chaos is just a pattern that reason, unable to handle constant change, subsequently applies to it. This is why Combray seems immutable and eternal to those operating under this illusion: “l’immobilité des choses autour de nous leur est-elle imposée par notre certitude que ce sont elles et non pas d’autres, par l’immobilité de notre pensée en face d’elles” (*RTP1* : CS 6). But for the narrator the little town is a time modulated experience, manifest through his memories. It consists in “les personnes que j’y avais connues, ce que j’avais vu d’elles, ce qu’on m’en avait raconté”

(*RTPI* : *CS* 9). Rather than a fixed place defined by hereditary filiations, Combray is a practiced space significant through individual experiences developed in time. It is significant that, before the madeleine episode, the narrator recalls Combray only in relation to his nightly anguish of being separated from his mother. The place is an artificial stage design, outside of real time, a memory of recurring misery “comme si Combray n’avait consisté qu’en deux étages reliés par un mince escalier et comme s’il n’y avait jamais été que sept heures du soir” (*RTPI* : *CS* 43). In this space fragment, there is no Barrèsian link with the ancestral land. Combray was “ce pan tronqué que seul j’avais revu jusque-là.” Lacking both permanence and continuity, it is not the origin, but the creation of the narrator’s mind: “tout Combray . . . est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé” (*RTPI* : *CS* 47). It remains nonetheless significant that the madeleine episode evokes Combray: it poses the countryside childhood memory as a common referent that French readers would have recognized, thus empathizing with the narrator. But how absurd would it be to use this creation as a stable signifier for group identity and exclusion? The materialization of Combray, in which the narrator has a divine role, highlights its subjective and contrived nature: “aussitôt la vieille maison grise sur la rue, où était sa chambre, vint comme un décor de théâtre s’appliquer au petit pavillon donnant sur le jardin, qu’on avait construit pour mes parents sur ses derrières . . .” (*RTPI* : *CS* 47). A cardboard theater decor, this is not a real town but rather a special space the narrator experienced in his childhood. Each of its locations is remembered through direct interaction: “la Place où on m’envoyait avant déjeuner, les rues où j’allais faire des courses depuis le matin jusqu’au soir et par tous les temps, les chemins qu’on prenait si le temps était beau” (*RTPI* : *CS* 47). Through his individual practice of Combray, fragments come to replace its spatial totality: details are amplified and the ensemble is miniaturized. The town is atomized and removed from the readily identifiable realm of memory one would expect to find

there. This is the first intimation the novel gives of the subjectively constructed nature of place; and while Proust develops it in time, based on his memories, Barrès uses it strategically as the stable origin on which he bases his nationalistic doctrine. In this context, the conceptual distinction Nora makes between *souvenir* and *mémoire* is relevant (“Introduction” XI). For the narrator, Combray is a *souvenir* recalling a time and a place even as they fade away. It is personal and thus of the order of the living. Contrastively, Barrès uses local roots as the national *mémoire* based on an entirely different relationship of the past. Based on the tombs of the ancestors, it is a separation from the living that leads to a reappropriation of symbolic and historical order. I suggest that, throughout the novel, Proust is cautious of traditions that have become aware of themselves and can thus be reappropriated for ideological purposes. The dying rural world, to which Combray belongs, is a prime candidate for this strategy. The narrator’s tactic is to keep the little town alive through his *souvenirs*, thus favoring it as a personal space rather than a meaningful place.

In fact, Proust initiates the tactic that favors time over place in the opening pages of the novel, where he describes the instability of place during sleep. While in that state, the narrator can no longer remember “le plan du lieu où je m’étais endormi”, nor can he separate time from space, his mind “s’agitant pour chercher, sans y réussir, à savoir où j’étais, tout tournait autour de moi dans l’obscurité, les choses, les pays, les années” (*RTPI* : *CS* 6). Thus, no fixed location is a stable referent for the narrator’s identity since he confesses that, even in Combray, “quand je m’éveillais au milieu de la nuit, comme j’ignorais où je me trouvais, je ne savais même pas au premier instant qui j’étais . . .” (*RTPI* : *CS* 5). At first he believes he was “dans [s]a chambre à coucher de Combray, chez [s]es grands-parents” (*RTPI* : *CS* 6) when in fact upon waking he realizes that “j’étais dans ma chambre chez M^{me} de Saint-Loup, à la campagne” (*RTPI* : *CS* 7) in

Tansonville. For the narrator, either in Combray or elsewhere, individual experience has primacy. Thus, the whole novel chronicles Marcel's journey of self-discovery in which he simultaneously is "le chercheur" and "le pays obscur où il doit chercher" (*RTP1 : CS 45*). While the wording hints to a return to origins and the native soil, an attributed obscurity precludes them from acting as basis for a stable and purposeful identity. In fact, the analogy between the self and a "pays obscure" suggests personal history and origins are inescapable and their effects unexpected and uncontrollable. The narrator is aware of the impact the individual milieu and heritage have on people: "Quand nous avons dépassé un certain âge, l'âme de l'enfant que nous fûmes et l'âme des morts dont nous sommes sortis viennent nous jeter à poignée leurs richesses et leurs mauvais sorts, demandant à coopérer aux nouveaux sentiments que nous éprouvons et dans lesquels, effaçant leur ancienne effigie, nous les refondons en une création originale" (*RTP3 : LP 587*).

The passage reveals how Proust gives some credence to Barrèsian roots, but with a twist. While admitting to influential elements in the environment that the subject cannot entirely overcome, human beings remain free: it is the soul of the innocent child, metaphor for untainted individual perceptions, which has primacy. The spirit of deceased relatives stands for the culture of the familial subgroup – an aspect I will further analyze in subsequent chapters. Furthermore, the passage suggests these two components – innate heterogeneity and cultural influence – melted into a new and original creation to ultimately form what the narrator will term "le livre intérieur de ces signes inconnus" (*RTP4 : TR 458*). In this respect, the role of art is central: each writer has the duty to analyze their personal experience, in order to make manifest human heterogeneity to their readers. This stands in stark contrast with Barrès, for whom the individual is a continuation of his predecessors who think and speak in him. Rootedness is tangible, and the

determinism of heritage is so absolute that man walks unawares in the steps of his predecessors (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 62). Yet separating individual experience from current social credos is a painstaking endeavor even for the Proustian artist. Intellectuals dedicated to a superior cause get caught up in the corresponding doctrine. Unable to think for themselves, they no longer have an individual point of view: “Chaque événement, que ce fût l’affaire Dreyfus, que ce fût la guerre, avait fourni d’autres excuses aux écrivains pour ne pas déchiffrer ce livre-là ; ils voulaient assurer le triomphe du droit, refaire l’unité morale de la nation, n’avaient pas le temps de penser à la littérature” (*RTP4 : TR* 458).

In the end, neither Combray nor a return to traditional rural life are the solution to the divisions of the Third Republic. For Proust, no particular place can offer a stability able to stop time from passing or changes from happening. *La recherche* realistically gives pertinence to time. As de Certeau suggests, time obeys its proper laws and unexpectedly steals away something from the fixed distribution of space. It is thus able to transgress the law of the land (*L’invention du quotidien I* 129). Similarly, in time the illusions that gave Combray its stability are debunked. Upon growing up, the narrator understands that there are foreigners in the world. In fact, the narrator himself, as well as his parents and his grandmother, are a negation of the stable and isolated life of Combray: their regular lives are in Paris, where Swann also lives. Furthermore, Combray itself is slowly crumbling. According to Gasnier, this is the period, starting with the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, of an increased awareness of the disintegration of rural communities brought about by rural exodus (Gasnier 271). The characters of Françoise, Legrandin, or Vinteuil’s daughter, exemplify this phenomenon: they leave Combray for the opportunities and excitement of big cities. Combray is slowly emptying out, and the Great War will almost obliterate it. Going back is always already impossible: the destruction of the little

provincial town was embedded in it from the start, just as death is the natural destiny of every human being. The glorification of a proper place or of a traditional way of life is not the response to the problems of the present. Yet Combray embodies the persistence, at empirical level, of old rituals. As such, it lies at the root of the French dialectic, as explained by Dumont: while overall the principles of Enlightenment have ideologically dominated intellectual life, practically traditions have persisted, determining the turbulent political life of France (Dumont 259). The Dreyfus affair is one manifestation of this opposition: the inviolability of the rights of man, heir to Enlightenment individualism, are pitted against nationalism, religion of the motherland. Inasmuch as Combray is dying, the rural in *La recherche* is a tradition become aware of itself. Any such ritual is, as Nora observes, in danger of reappropriation by the symbolic and historical order (“Introduction” XI). Barrèsian rootedness, effective in each individual after actual urban migration, is a suchlike assumption. Aware of its potential to fuel the nationalistic dream, I suggest Proust sublates tradition, at once preserving and canceling it. As Robert Denham explains, sublation is the Hegelian concept embodying the idea that oppositions can be transcended without abolishing their constitutive terms (Denham 789). Thus, though Combray is fading in a world moving away from tradition, it survives in the conscience of those having lived there in order to reveal a truth of a different order. The result is the expanded vision of the narrator at the end of the cycle, when he can see how opposites mirror each other: the two fundamental sides of Combray, *le côté de Guermantes* and *le côté de chez Swann*, are preserved as different while their antithesis is overcome. As such, Combray is at once the traditional world where there are no foreigners, and also that of the Parisians Swann, Odette, Charlus, Gilberte, or of Marcel’s family.

Frenchness and Foreignness

During *la Belle Epoque*, Frenchness was the prescribed category of national belonging. Nationalists made effective use of it and of foreignness – its opposite – to separate an inside from its outside, and to exclude those that were different from this norm or opposed to their doctrine. Two faces of the same coin, Frenchness and foreignness were popular amongst common people who believed in their potential of defining French identity. Proust is aware of the pernicious potential and cultural prestige attached to these concepts, but is also cognizant of the antagonistic mass effect he would generate by confronting them directly, not to mention the rejection his opus would entail. Consequently, *La recherche* approaches this contentious topic, along with the others mentioned in the previous chapter, indirectly by displacing it from the political to the literary field. Furthermore, the narrator, who takes Frenchness and foreignness for granted at the beginning of the cycle, unwittingly renders them ineffective by transforming them from categories of belonging into aesthetic criteria, seeing that a precondition for art is its lack of usability. This tactical move meant to diffuse nationalistic strategies is the subject of this chapter.

La France profonde

The prevalence of Frenchness is a burning topic of Proust's time. While nationalists exalt it, some intellectuals, such as Julien Benda, decry it. He specifically criticizes his contemporaries for striving to attest to a national soul, ostensibly manifest in a French sensibility and intelligence (Benda 180). This issue impacts all French artists: while their main activity consists in the affirmation of their individuality as a precondition of originality, the nationalistic doctrine requires of them feelings expressing the collective French soul (Benda 181). This manifested

inner Frenchness puts them into the untenable position of either betraying their individual vision or be branded unpatriotic, or even treasonous.

Frenchness is a notion central to Barrèsian nationalism. As discussed in the previous chapter, not only nationalism, but also Radicalism conceived of the Republic as provincial and familial, yet unified. The local became the basis for defining France. Thus, as Gasnier shows, the fragmentary and the local were the foundation for a history of unity. The motherland came to be “completely and at the same time, one and infinitely divisible” (Gasnier 240-286). This systematic opposition of two complementary poles, the totality of the nation as a rationally built project, and a fragmented local given by nature, led to the intellectual contradiction of the time. Frenchness is the basis on which Barrès attempts to reconcile this dichotomy and establish a continuity meant to create a seamless, homogenous nation manifested in the French Republic. In *Les déracinés* he posits “la substance française” as the main factor of national unity by claiming that “[l]e véritable fonds du Français est une nature commune” (*Les déracinés* 262). He thus echoes the popular idea, broadcasted at the beginning of the 20th century, that a hereditary national character, reflected in both psychological and physical peculiarities, is the basis for national identity. The length of time that a particular people had been settled on the territory they occupy is the determining factor – the connection to this land is what allegedly shaped their collective identity and characteristics (Pomian 72).

Since Frenchness is pitched as central to both nationalism and art, I propose that the Proustian approach to it constitutes a response to Barrès. Throughout the novel, and most particularly in the first volume, the narrator is obsessed with the Frenchness of other characters. The Larivière family is just one example. As already discussed, their Frenchness is primarily manifested by “un nom si français” (*RTP4 : TR* 424) suggestive of deep roots in their ancestors’

land. As relatives of Françoise, they originate from the rural Combray area. However, the narrator insists that they belong to “la foule innombrable de tous les Français de Saint-André-des-Champs” (*RTP4* : TR 424) – the name of an abbey located near the village of Champieu, towards Méséglise (*RTP1* : CS 144). This association becomes relevant when we consider that, according to André Vauchez, every French cathedral functions as embodiment of the particular history of the city and diocese in which it stands (Vauchez 45). Yet taken together French cathedrals bear out the contemporary theme of “variété dans l’unité” (Rodin 93). Thus Saint-André-des-Champs, though only a church, represents the specificity of the local as the only possible incarnation of Frenchness. This view is supported by the equivalence the text establishes between “profondément français de Saint-André-des-Champs” and “les Français de Saint-André-des-Champs” (*RTP4* : TR 317). It intimates that one is French only if he has a link to a specific province, to the rural land of his ancestors, or to what Barrès has dubbed “l’esprit de chaque petite patrie” (*Les déracinés* 41). This local spirit’s unbroken continuity is manifested by contemporaneous French peasant girls which, through centuries, embody the same model – that of a statue from Saint-André-des-Champs (*RTP2* : CG 662). Therefore, when this particular abbey is mentioned, it oftentimes stands as a cognomen for the *Francité* of various characters in the novel. Furthermore, the narrator recognizes Frenchness preponderantly in the little people, such as Françoise, Théodore, or the Albaret sisters. Thus, like every other French church that stands at the root of *la France profonde* (Compagnon 225), Saint-André-des-Champs was modeled on the faithful French people praying in it, while in turn their descendants unconsciously re-embody the models represented there. This dualism of the church, personifying the Frenchness of the past while simultaneously revealing its continuity in the local masses of the present was a popular contemporary idea. Charles Morice expressly argues so in his preface to

the first edition of Auguste Rodin's *Les Cathédrales de France* (1914) when describing the statues of Gothic cathedrals: "les modèles de ces chefs-d'œuvre partagent la vie des artistes qui les ont taillés, ce sont les hommes et les femmes qui vivent sous leurs yeux : . . . ils gardent les traits spécifiques de la race . . ." (Morice XLVIII). This in turn allows Rodin to recognize in "une procession de jeunes filles" the very statues of the cathedral they frequent: "Elles sont descendues des murs pour s'agenouiller dans la nef. Quel air de parenté entre elles et ces enfants ! C'est du même sang. . . Les saintes de pierre, qui nous racontent leurs douleurs et leurs espérances anciennes, sont de ce coin de France, et d'aujourd'hui" (Rodin 115-116). Both echo Barrès who attributes "une autorité prépondérante aux masses profondes en qui se conserve la France. Ces populations . . . gardent le sang de la nation . . ." (*Scènes et doctrines* 102).

From all the characters in the novel, none is more French than Françoise. As her name suggests, she is the prototype of the Frenchness of the rural masses. The narrator distinctly perceives this upon seeing her "immobile et debout dans l'encadrement de la petite porte du corridor", a setting which reveals her resemblance to a statue from Saint-André-des-Champs: "comme une statue de sainte dans sa niche" (*RTP1 : CS* 52). In fact, she is a "paysanne médiévale (survivant au XIX^e siècle)" (*RTP1 : CS* 149), tracing a French continuity from the Middle Ages to his day. Upon moving to Paris with the narrator's family, Françoise brings to their urban apartment "l'air de la campagne et la vie sociale dans une ferme, il y a cinquante ans" (*RTP2 : CG* 363). In the cosmopolitan French capital, it is her link to the rural world that substantiates her Frenchness since she remains "la demoiselle de village dont les parents « étaient bien de chez eux » mais, ruinés, avaient été obligés de la mettre en condition" (*RTP2 : CG* 363). However, it is exactly this attachment to her village that makes her feel, despite her Frenchness, a stranger in the big city: "Ah ! Combray, quand est-ce que je te reverrai, pauvre

terre ! . . . Hélas ! pauvre Combray ! peut-être que je ne te reverrai que morte, quand on me jettera comme une pierre dans le trou de la tombe” (*RTP2 : CG 318*).

In Barrèsian parlance, she is “une déracinée”, forced to urban migration for economic reasons, but maintaining her connection to the land of her ancestors whom she hopes to rejoin upon her demise. In fact, even after years of living in Paris, she still “voyait tout de Combray, dans un vague lointain” (*RTP2 : CG 322*), which prevents her from properly understanding the intimations and jokes of those around her. It suggests that Françoise’s case is indeed tragic: her Frenchness, conceived as organic wholeness, can be reintegrated only in death. Since “[l]a nationalité française est faite des nationalités provinciales” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 75), the opposition between the national and the regional transforms a Frenchwoman into a foreigner upon moving to another part of France, speaking to Barrès’s dilemma. This is why, for him, nationalism is mainly the fixity perceptible in the totality of a landscape or a people (Vajda 103-126), a fixity that he struggles to conceptualize. While the narrator seems to effortlessly recognize the Frenchness of Françoise as the physical manifestation of a type present in religious works of art bearing a link to local tradition, he will unwittingly unravel the identity of the regional model he had so carefully constructed. Thus, while resembling a statue in Saint-André-des-Champs, Françoise looks and speaks like a Southerner: “le ton presque chanté sur lequel elle déclamaait cette invocation eût pu, chez Françoise, autant que l’arlésienne pureté de son visage, faire soupçonner une origine méridionale . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 318*).

Since Combray is situated in the North of France, near Laon, while Arles is in the far South, the confusion is intentionally excessive. As Vajda shows, Barrès dithered between rootedness as loyalty to the local and the celebration of an indivisible Republic, resorting to Frenchness as a common element to all Frenchmen (Vajda 126). It represents that elusive feature

shared by types as different as the Arlesian and the Picard one, which in turn makes possible the melting of a regional stereotype into another based on their collective *Francité*. All this allows the narrator to conclude that, for Françoise, “la patrie perdue qu’elle pleurait n’était qu’une patrie d’adoption” (*RTP : CG* 318). It in turn implies that every individual adopts his motherland upon birth in a process subsequently perfected through education. Anticipating Jacques Derrida’s approach to maternal language, Proust seems to say “je n’ai qu’un pays, mais ce n’est pas le mien”¹⁶, indicating how both language and motherland form the individual more than the individual can ever hope to inform others through and about them. In fact, language functions as another indicator of Frenchness for the narrator. In this he echoes Barrès, for whom Frenchness is embodied in “[les] vieux Français” and their traditions (*Scènes et doctrines* 96). Through them the old France persists. They keep the torch of the past alight in the future and thus are “[l]es hommes de la continuité française” (*Scènes et doctrines* 120). Françoise is one of “ces Français de jadis” (*RTP2 : CG* 324) speaking exactly like Mme de Sévigné “le français le plus pur” (*RTP4 : TR* 329). But exposed to the argotic French of her Parisian entourage, her speech is soon corrupted. The narrator decries her linguistic blunders. However, upon further consideration, he admits there is no pure French language since “ces mots français que nous sommes si fiers de prononcer exactement ne sont eux-mêmes que des « cuirs » faits par des bouches gauloises qui prononçaient de travers le latin ou le saxon, notre langue n’étant que la prononciation défectueuse de quelques autres” (*RTP3 : SG* 134).

Thus the narrator gives an intimation of the hybrid nature of Frenchness, the dynamic result of various heritages and traditions. This is why “[l]e génie linguistique à l’état vivant, l’avenir et le passé du français” (*RTP3 : SG* 134) lies exactly in these errors Françoise makes,

¹⁶ “Je n’ai qu’une langue, ce n’est pas la mienne” (*Le monolinguisme de l’autre* 13).

that is in her propensity to adapt the French language to her concrete needs rather than in the immobilism of an antiquated idiom. Furthermore, her pure 18th century French is doubled by her mastery of a patois to which she has recourse whenever she wants to have a private conversation with her daughter, the irony of which is that it renders the narrator an uncomprehending foreigner in his own house, in the company of two French women (*RTP3 : LP 661*). Thus, the Frenchness of the local is destabilized by the preponderance of various idioms which separate rather than unite Frenchmen from different regions. This issue worried Radicals dismayed at finding Frenchmen mutually unintelligible, hence the centrality their program accorded school reform supposedly able to remedy the problem by enforcing language uniformity throughout France (Auspitz 35). Nonetheless, in a funny episode Françoise discovers she speaks a similar dialect with another servant originating from a region far away from Méséglise. Since “elles se comprenaient presque”, Françoise indulges in long conversations, delighting in memories from her homeland as well as in the exclusion of the narrator confronted with “cette langue étrangère” he is unable to comprehend (*RTP3 : SG 126*). As Eugen Weber shows, even in the eve of the Great War the inhabitants of many provinces were still speaking local dialects instead of standard French (*Peasants into Frenchmen 282*). Thus, measuring Frenchness through language proficiency is a faulty endeavor of which Proust was well aware. A Breton soldier, “ayant appris le français aussi difficilement que s’il eût été Anglais ou Allemand”, finds himself into the position of a stranger as he struggles to express himself in French (*RTP2 : CG 437*). Yet his *Francité* could not be questioned without endangering the current geography of France. The mention of the name of his village, Penguern-Stereden, contrasting with Combray endowed with “un nom si français” further destabilizes his Frenchness.

Thus Françoise's Frenchness does not consist in her language skills, raising the question of what it actually entails. Barrès insists that it arises from "les vérités de la France éternelle" (*Scènes et doctrines* 19), but fails to explain what those are beyond a connection to the past – a continuity based on "un élément plus inconscient et moins volontaire" (*Scènes et doctrines* 85). Searching for this unconscious element in Françoise allows us to quickly discard her moral qualities. In the same paragraph where she is likened to "une statue de sainte dans sa niche", the narrator promptly discerns at the basis of her love of humanity and respect for higher classes "l'espoir des étrennes" (*RTP1 : CS* 52). There is no saintly facet to Françoise since she manifests an unusual degree of cruelty upon killing a chicken (*RTP1 : CS* 120), as well as in her incessant persecution of the pregnant kitchen maid to the point of making her ill (*RTP1 : CS* 122). In fact, Françoise is akin to a predator – "la guêpe fouisseuse" – whose motivation is limited to the protection and furtherance of her own family (*RTP1 : CS* 122), rather than that of her community or of France. Her selfishness drives her to invent cruel tricks to get rid of any rivals in the house of her masters. The code of conduct from her village, "tel qu'il est illustré dans les bas-reliefs de Saint-André-des-Champs" (*RTP3 : LP* 526), allows her not only to desire the death of her enemies but even to commit the deed herself, while explicitly preventing her from disrespecting local traditions or being rude to one of her equals (*RTP3 : LP* 526). Françoise's *Francité* echoes what Robert Darnton terms the Frenchness of *la France profonde* during *la longue durée* of immobile history. He describes it as "a distinct cultural style" which

conveys a particular view of the world – a sense that life is hard, that you had better not have any illusions about selflessness in your fellow men, that clear-headedness and quick wit are necessary to protect what little you can extract from your surroundings, and that moral nicety will get you nowhere. Frenchness makes for ironic detachment. It tends to

be negative and disabused. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon opposite, the Protestant ethic, it offers no formula for conquering the world. It is a defense strategy. . . . (Darnton 61-62)

In this context, a further examination of the purpose of Barrèsian Frenchness should provide a clue. What Barrès terms “[l]’appel . . . au Français-type” (*Les déracinés* 335) is meant to allow France to “retrouver un lien social religieux en dehors des religions révélées” (*Les déracinés* 339). This social link of a different order is reminiscent of the fraternity originally embodied in the very spirit of Christianity. But it would henceforward be limited only to Frenchmen, implying the privilege of those that belong to the detriment of the rest. As Mona Ozouf shows, fraternity was a popular concept amongst Christian socialists (“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” 94) to which Barrès is in a sense a successor. And Barrès indeed mentions “cette fraternité, . . . cette communion” between Frenchmen (*Les déracinés* 467) as the principle of action that will save the motherland. Thus, at the basis of Frenchness as fraternity lies Barrès’s obsession with “la question des rapports avec la collectivité” (*Les déracinés* 444). Indeed, Barrès was always bent on “montrer le caractère fatal, inévitable de l’évolution collectiviste” (*Scènes et doctrines* 442). However, the *Francité* of Françoise lacks exactly such a collectivist spirit, just as she fails to manifest any fraternal stirrings in the face of the Great War. Indeed, Barrès was desirous of “une guerre peut-être bienfaisante”, the benefit of which would be that “la souffrance nous referait frères” (*Scènes et doctrines* 101-102). Yet as the war became imminent “Françoise . . . avait fait depuis longtemps tous ses efforts pour que son neveu fût réformé”, going as far as to request, through the Guermantes, the support of a General. Her attitude is reflective of *la France profonde* in her unconditional refusal of war that the narrator dubs “son pacifisme de Combray” (*RTP4 : TR* 423), notwithstanding her attachment to her “petite patrie”. Nor is she the only representative of the little people set against a war that would glorify the nation, despite all the

faith Barrès put in the French masses. Thus, the Combray gardener “n’admettait pas que la guerre ne fût pas une espèce de mauvais tour que l’État essayait de jouer au peuple et que, si on avait eu le moyen de le faire, il n’est pas une seule personne qui n’eût filé” (*RTP1* : CS 88). This brand of pacifism is suggestive of a Radicalism condemning the wide spreading of the nationalistic sentiment started by the international conflicts of 1905 – a sentiment extending beyond the nationalistic camp proper – and which explains the overwhelming success of *l’Union sacrée* in 1914. In an attempt to oppose this new revanchist wave, Radicalism becomes synonymous with pacifism. Yet it is of a different brand than that of Jaurès and the socialists, driven as it is by local rather than class interests. This attitude is similar with that of classic liberalism, closely associating peace with prosperity (Nordmann 168-181). Nationalists equate this pacifism with a lack of community spirit when it comes to sacrificing personal interest to duty and decry it as the common attitude during that period, since “[l]a vérité est que personne ne veut se gêner, personne ne veut sacrifier son avantage immédiat ou sa fantaisie, personne ne veut faire son devoir” (Drumont 361).

However, the theme of fraternity in Barrèsian Frenchness remains relevant for Proust. Of the three terms that form the French Republican motto – *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* – Ozouf suggests that liberty and equality were paired together early on to signify the universality of the law collapsing liberty with equality. This identity was based on a negative definition of freedom as protection from arbitrary rule. Fraternity, added later on, had the role of diminishing the conflicts between liberty and equality, purging liberty of the individualistic stain (“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” 79). Ozouf will go on to question the efficacy of this method: “Could fraternity be wedded to the individualistic values of liberty and equality? To the extent that one conceives of fraternity as the realization of a happy, conflict-free community and the very

antithesis of selfishness, it tends to discredit individual autonomy” (Ozouf, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” 89). While it is true that, at least theoretically, Radicals believed in individualism and the autonomy of citizens (Mollenhauer 610), even for them equality trumps liberty (Lefranc 146). Nationalists go further, as in the late 19th and early 20th century they will vehemently attack liberty, insisting that fraternity alone should be kept as the guarantee of national unity (Ozouf, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” 111). This is exactly the pattern manifested by Barrès: while giving a central role to fraternity, he also rejects individualism, and consequently liberty. The subject disappears to the benefit of the collectivity to which he belongs, while personal experience lacks any relevance: “Il n’y a pas même de liberté de penser. Je ne puis vivre que selon mes morts. Eux et ma terre me commandent une certaine activité. Epouvanté de ma dépendance, impuissant à me créer, je voulus du moins contempler face à face les puissances qui me gouvernent” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 12). The individual is subjugated by “la voix du sang et l’instinct du terroir” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 88), and this view of Frenchness is equivalent to a homogeneity manifesting the actual equality of all Frenchmen. As Hannah Arendt explains, such a context perverts political equality into a social concept manifested as an innate quality of “normal” people, if they fall within accepted social norms, or “abnormal” if they happen to be different. The danger of it lies in the fact that this social model “leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the more conspicuous” (Arendt 54). The narrator avows his youthful Barrèsian illusions according to which each person he meets, particularly women, is “un produit nécessaire et naturel de ce sol”. And his statement that “la terre et les êtres, je ne les séparais pas” (*RTPI* : CS 155), which he will denounce later, constitutes a ploy – “une de ces données première contre lesquelles, précisément, s’édifie sa pensée dernière” (Genette 46).

Taking up on the importance of the aforementioned innate equality of all Frenchmen, Proust's perspective can be illuminated by that of the German philosopher Georg Simmel (1858-1918). This parallel is not fortuitous but a consequence of the fact that they share important common characteristics. While it is true that they originate from different cultures, they are not only contemporaries, but also products of the urban environment at a time when industrialization and the crisis it generated were at their peak in both France and Germany. Both witness firsthand the effects of the rapid development of a mature money economy and intense urbanization in a European metropolitan context. Furthermore, both are Jewish and heir to fortunes allowing them a leisurely existence dedicated to social studies with an attention to the mysterious causes that bring together seemingly unlikely individuals or classes. On the subject of equality, Simmel qualifies its principles as the culmination of the discrepancy between form and content characteristic of modern life (Simmel 479).

I suggest Barrèsian Frenchness, as exposed in *La recherche*, manifests the same gap between form and content. Designed as an affinity between those originating from the same stock, it favors the national bond to the detriment of those that do not really belong. It thus offers the advantage of an exclusion that can be indiscriminately applied to anyone who does not comply with the tenets of the current ideology. All that contradicts the nationalistic doctrine is not consistent with the French spirit. Frenchness's complete indifference to individual qualities conforms with the pattern of equality Simmel describes it as "extract[ing] from the concrete totality of the streams of life one abstract, general factor which develops according to its own independent norms and which intervenes in the totality of existential interests and imposes itself upon them" (Simmel 479). As resemblance to ancestors, it attempts to impose a homogenous form over heterogeneous contents to create a formal uniformity: it is a weapon that, by serving

anyone, may actually be used against everyone. Yet as a side effect that I will subsequently analyze, it ends up by revealing human differences most pointedly.

Vajda has already remarked that, for Barrès, ideas instead of people incarnate the nation (Vajda 173). What Vidal de la Blache and his contemporaries called the “*je ne sais quoi* that transcends regional differences”, the unscientific foundation of France in the positivist era, was a popular form of Frenchness independent of Barrèsian ideology (Guiomar 204). Barrès adds to it a link to the past making all individuals “*les prolongements directs de nos ancêtres*” (*Scènes et doctrines* 109), but fails to define Frenchness beyond “*certain aspects insaisissables, indéfinissables, de notre esprit national*” mainly visible to foreigners (*Scènes et doctrines* 103). It thus remains an abstract essentialism. Ultimately, Barrèsian Frenchness is an illusion based on large numbers, with no qualitative element at its basis. In it is manifest what Simmel dubs “the tragedy of human concept formation” which is that “the higher concept, which through its breadth embraces a growing number of details, must count upon increasing loss of content” (Simmel 237).

The narrator identifies Frenchness through a similar process postulating the immediate recognition of essences: constructed on an illusion of familiarity with the real, it creates the impression that the description takes into account all possible elements when in fact it is based on narrow choices that evade reality. Nonetheless, Marcel’s journey of apprenticeship, which starts under the spell of *la Francité*, displays early on what Simmel terms “the modern naturalistic spirit” tending to dethrone universal concepts by concentrating on singular instances as the only legitimate content of conceptions (Simmel 217): he searches for the manifestation of Frenchness in individuals he already knows. This tactic exposes how Barrèsian Frenchness, which rises above its manifestation in individual instances, actually exhibits a void. The narrator

thus seems to understand that Frenchness is something abstract that can attain its concrete meaning only in tangible instances embodied in material persons. Accordingly, upon a close examination of Françoise, he identifies her Frenchness as the rural charm she brings to the Parisian apartment of his parents. However, this attribute she now has does not bring him any closer to understanding her or her relationship to him – what he terms “l'impossibilité de savoir d'une manière directe et certaine si Françoise m'aimait ou me détestait” (*RTP2 : CG 367*). The successive facets she reveals to him in different circumstances are diametrically opposed, as she is in turn very kind to him only to declare to others that she considers him worthless and mean (*RTP2 : CG 366*). At this point, Marcel still fails to see the function of Frenchness, the transformation it operates, or the relations it makes possible. Confronted by Françoise's irreducible personality, the reader gets a glimpse of the difference between the purposes of Frenchness as a formal operator in contrast to the content to which it is applied. By attempting to derive the particular from the prescribed general, Marcel sacrifices the reality of the individual whose content is concrete. The formalism of Frenchness is evinced upon comparing its different forms: on the one hand that of Françoise as a “sainte dans sa niche” which obscured “des tragédies d'arrière cuisine” (*RTP1 : CS 120*), and on the other “des Rois et des Reines qui sont représentés les mains jointes dans les vitraux des églises” eclipsing the bloody incidents marking their reign (*RTP1 : CS 121*). In that they favor form over a content that actually contradicts and obscures it, the dynamics of Frenchness are similar to both that of aesthetics and ideology. Its latter dimension conforms to the model Michel de Certeau ascribes to any doctrinal perspective: its advantage is lost in ordinary life, where its verities are invalidated since there is no privileged position from which they could be stated. What remains thus are simple facts that dismantle any

system. In daily life, individuals are simultaneously the actors and the authors of acts based on conjuncture (Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien I* 39). Such is the case of Françoise.

However, the aesthetical dynamics continue to operate, and it is noteworthy to mention that the aestheticism of Frenchness is also a Barrèssian feature, of which the following citation is but an example: “Les bataillons hérissés de fusils avec leurs jolies figures françaises, défilent” (*Scènes et doctrines* 136). Beyond the grimness of the setting, the unity of the army preparing for battle is further intensified through an insistence on a homogeneity at all physical levels which presumably reveal the interiority of the common purpose of the nation – a generalization explaining France and war. Nor is this association between Frenchness and aestheticism a Barrèssian invention. Proust points to such a practice amongst various writers who serve their country in their art, as the following citation suggests: “ils aiment à se borner dans leurs articles, leurs poèmes ou leurs romans à décrire une beauté française « modérée, avec de claires architectures, sous un ciel aimable, avec des coteaux et des églises comme celles de Dammartin et d’Ermenonville »” (*Contre Sainte-Beuve* 188).

The irony towards the superficiality of such a description of Frenchness and its clear link to aesthetics do speak for themselves. Furthermore, the previous citation associates Frenchness with religious art, just as the narrator links it to the church of Saint-André-des-Champs. Cathedrals and churches were conceived as a unique opportunity to travel back in time, by reinforcing a sense of unbroken historical continuity (Vauchez 42). Rodin attests to this: “pendant les instants que je passe dans cette église, je me sens plein des siècles de jadis, des siècles vénérables qui ont produit ces merveilles . . .” (Rodin 86). This aesthetical form of Frenchness tightly connected with places of worship was a frequent pattern of this period. An essentialist propensity characterizes it, as further exemplified by Rodin’s testimony: “Les

Cathédrales, c'est la France. Tandis que je les contemple, je sens nos ascendants qui montent et qui descendent en moi, comme sur une autre échelle de Jacob" (Rodin 43). The passage echoes Barrès's aforementioned realization that his dead ancestors govern his every action (*Scènes et doctrines* 12). Proust is distinctly aware the stance assumed by his contemporaries represents an oversimplification. This is relevant in relation to his continued attentiveness to what Simmel terms "the sense of the significance of universals", meaning that human beings can feel they have attained a satisfying relation with the world only when its every singular instance is reconciled with the depth and scope of a formal universality (Simmel 217).

The temptation of imposing a rigid formalism over a heterogeneous content is part of human nature and is constantly manifested by the narrator, while also being extensively practiced by most of Proust's contemporaries. His response to this universal tendency, of which nationalism makes effective use through the concept of Frenchness, is to take advantage of its preexisting artistic dimension and innocuously displace it in the aesthetical field. This move is relevant at two different levels. On the one hand, it intentionally deprives it from any useful purpose, either social or political since, as Simmel shows, a basic quality of the aesthetic is its lack of utility (Simmel 77). As already seen, the Frenchness manifested by Françoise has no moral correlate nor any real benefit for the life of the community. On the other hand, the retreat into aesthetics is the rejection of social violence. Inasmuch as Frenchness becomes a supra-individual form of art, manifested both in medieval statues and in visually pleasing people, or in the literary style of 18th century books and in the Old French certain dialects still exhibit, it is akin to what Simmel terms "the manifestation of life in conceptual and aesthetic images". It displays an innocuous social dynamics because "all this may be enjoyed without any one depriving any other" (Simmel 313-314).

Thus, Proustian Frenchness is an aestheticism exhibited by various characters and enjoyed by the narrator. In the case of Françoise, for instance, her language skills seem a physical artistic manifestation – “ses lèvres où j’avais vu fleurir . . . le français le plus” (*RTP4* : *TR* 329) – that delight Marcel by the poesy of her expression. The narrator further emphasizes its aesthetical dimension: her way of speaking adorns the Parisian apartment of his parents “[c]omme la vitrine d’un musée régional l’est par ces curieux ouvrages que les paysannes exécutent et passementent encore dans certaines provinces” (*RTP2* : *CG* 363). The same artistic dimension is displayed by her exquisite taste upon refurbishing a second hand outfit, made worthy of a portrait of Chardin or Whistler. Upon donning it

Françoise, dans le drap cerise mais passé de son manteau et les poils sans rudesse de son collet de fourrure, faisait penser à quelqu’une de ces images d’Anne de Bretagne peintes dans des livres d’Heures par un vieux maître, et dans lesquelles tout est si bien en place, le sentiment de l’ensemble s’est si également répandu dans toutes les parties que la riche et désuète singularité du costume exprime la même gravité pieuse que les yeux, les lèvres et les mains. (*RTP2* : *JF* 10)

Françoise’s Frenchness has the aesthetical quality of a medieval book of hours. Furthermore, it lies in what is perceived at first sight: “la clarté de son regard, . . . les lignes délicates de ce nez, de ces lèvres” (*RTP2* : *JF* 10) or in the paleness of her skin (*RTP2* : *CG* 363). In this she mirrors contemporary portrayals of idealized peasant women, such as that glimpsed by Rodin in front of a cathedral and described as “[c]ette enfant de la race, assise sur les marches de la porte, figure paysanne et fine” (Rodin 29).

In fact, Françoise is not the only Combray character whose Frenchness consists in aesthetical physical attributes. There is also the young Théodore who is the spitting image of a

gothic sculpture at Saint-André-des-Champs in that “il avait pour soulever la tête de ma tante sur son oreiller la mine naïve et zélée des petits anges des bas-reliefs” (*RTP1 : CS 149*). His beauty, unwittingly emphasized years later by Gilberte’s exclamation: “Théodore . . . , il faut l’avouer, était bien gentil (Dieu qu’il était bien !) . . .” (*RTP4 : AD 269*), is doubled by his bad character. Yet not only was the narrator aware of it at the time of the identification of his resemblance with the angels – “ce garçon, qui passait et avec raison pour si mauvais sujet” (*RTP1 : CS 149*) – but also Gilberte who portrays him as immoral when commenting on his escapades with all the young girls in Combray (*RTP4 : AD 269*), as well as Charlus who mentions his homosexual adventures (*RTP3 : LP 811*). Again, there is no correlation between his Frenchness and his morality, but rather an ambivalence making him flit between vice in reality and virtue in form. Furthermore, later in life Gilberte insists that “[il] est devenu très laid” (*RTP4 : AD 269*), raising the question if his *Francité* has dissolved at the same time as his beauty.

In fact, Frenchness as a parallel with medieval statues is extended to groups of people beyond the vicinity of Combray. For instance, the fascinating little group of girls to which the then unknown Albertine belongs is a sample demonstrating “combien la bourgeoisie française était un atelier merveilleux de sculpture la plus généreuse et la plus variée” (*RTP2 : JF 200*). The French qualities they exhibit are confined to physical attributes: “quelle décision, quelle fraîcheur, quelle naïveté dans les traits !” (*RTP2 : JF 200*). Thus, their decisiveness and naïveté are an appearance displayed only as a group, and not individual qualities later manifested by each separately. The aesthetical quality of their Frenchness can be further refined by comparing it with the passage on the art of Giotto, in which the narrator becomes aware of “la grande place que le symbole y occupait, et . . . le fait qu’il fût présenté . . . comme réel . . .” (*RTP1 : CS 81*). Such a parallel allows us to see how the narrator perceives “cette non-participation . . . de l’âme

d'un être à la vertu qui agit par lui" (*RTPI* : CS 81). Consequently, estheticized Frenchness is the sublation of nationalism simultaneously preserved and denied.

The *Francité* of Françoise and Théodore consists in the prevalent symbols of what it meant to be French at the time. It functions as a dichotomy located between art and natural beauty, having "en dehors de sa valeur esthétique une réalité . . . physiognomonique" (*RTPI* : CS 81). It mimics the mechanism at play in contemporary practices locating Frenchness in works of art. In this respect, Rodin's comment on "[u]ne petite Française vue à l'église" is relevant: "Si cette jeune fille savait regarder et voir, elle reconnaîtrait son portrait dans tous les portails de nos églises gothiques, car elle est l'incarnation de notre style, de notre art, de notre France" (Rodin 27). The young girl no longer resembles a specific statue in a particular church from her autochthonous region, but is alike any feminine representation in a French Gothic cathedral – a feat possible only on condition of indistinctness. The physical aspect of the majority becomes the foundation of Frenchness, revealing how its quality is reduced to a purely quantitative significance. It institutes an equalization which, despite its apparent non-partisan stance, is biased towards formalism and against actual content. By contrast, real virtue has no aesthetical connotations, being what the narrator dubs "le visage antipathique et sublime de la vraie bonté" (*RTPI* : CS 81).

Proustian Frenchness is an aestheticism which relies on the Saint-André-des-Champs abbey to manifest the particularity of the local. However, people and groups from beyond Combray, sharing similar characteristics with the statues represented there, destabilize this sense of local particularity. Such is Albertine who, even at a first glance when the narrator knows nothing of her, is "la jeune Picarde, qu'aurait pu sculpter à son porche l'imagier de Saint-André-des-Champs" (*RTP2* : CG 665). And yet, by basing it on a connection to Combray which in turn

is conceived as so unique as to be incongruous with France as a whole, the narrator prevents its generalization to the scale of the nation: “Mais Combray avait pour moi une forme si à part, si impossible à confondre avec le reste, que c’était un puzzle que je ne pouvais jamais arriver à faire rentrer dans la carte de France” (*RTP4 : TR 532*). Thus, Proust sublimes Frenchness in its foundation, as its roots are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Whereas Barrèsian *Francité* is a construct imposing a regular form over a heterogeneous population meant to unite a country that is one yet infinitely divisible, the narrator transforms it into an artistic exercise justified by an instinctive need for order in a chaotic universe. In the process, nationalism is surreptitiously dumbed down into aestheticism.

While the medieval church of Saint-André-des-Champs remains the symbol of Frenchness, there are references to other oeuvres from the Middle Ages in relation to it, from Anne de Bretagne and the book of hours in which the narrator recognizes Françoise (*RTP2 : JF 10*), to the Reims statues signifying the unsophisticated Frenchness of the daughters of some Parisian seed merchants vacationing in Balbec (*RTP2 : JF 98*). In the context of France at the turn of the century, this medieval dimension of Frenchness is significant. According to Sophie Duval, the 19th century has fabricated the Middle Ages to subsequently use it for cultural, political, and social purposes (“Une oeuvre-kathédralch” 16). Indeed, the 19th century witnesses a French revival of Gothic art to which many public figures attribute a patriotic dimension: “avec le sentiment de la beauté gothique ils [les Français] viennent de retrouver leur patrie. Il y a du patriotisme, en effet, dans le sentiment qui les anime. . . . [O]n datera de leur initiative le retour du génie français à lui-même : en nous rendant nos titres de gloire, ils nous ont rendu la confiance en nous” (Morice LXXVI). Rodin underlines its importance: “Il faut revivre dans le passé, remonter aux principes, pour recouvrer la force. Le goût a régné, autrefois, dans notre

pays : il faut redevenir Français ! L'initiation à la beauté gothique, c'est l'initiation à la vérité de notre race, de notre ciel, de nos paysages..." (Rodin 12). Both Barrès and Maurras were obsessed with medieval French art, conceived as uncorrupted through foreign influence and proof of the continuous lineage of the French race. Proust makes explicit this link between medieval art and Frenchness in the case of Morel. He exhibits "le privilège de la race dans le visage si ouvert de ce Morel au cœur si fermé, ce visage paré de la grâce néo-hellénique qui fleurit aux basiliques champenoises" (*RTP3* : SG 448). The prerogative of race manifests the same aesthetical formalism behind which there are no tangible moral qualities, to the point that physical appearance is not only misleading but in contradiction with Morel's personality: "le génie de l'homme du peuple de France dessinait pour Morel, lui faisait revêtir des formes charmantes de simplicité, de franchise apparente, même d'une indépendante fierté qui semblait inspirée par le désintéressement. Cela était faux . . ." (*RTP3* : SG 448).

The connections Proust establishes between Frenchness and the Middle Ages echo Barrès who claims that it is "depuis les bégaiements du douzième siècle, que se sont composées les formules où notre race a pris conscience . . ." (*Les déracinés* 462). Needing to conceptualize a convincing basis for national unity, Barrès strives to "distinguer que nous avons une conscience commune et sur quoi elle se fonde" (*Scènes et doctrines* 94). This common conscience lies in "la force qui sommeillait dans le premier germe et qui successivement les fait apparaître identiques à leurs prédécesseurs et à ceux qui viendront" (*Les déracinés* 214). Yet as early as 1893 Gabriel de Tarde ridicules such an approach for its faulty premise: "Partir de l'identité primordiale, c'est supposer à l'origine une singularité prodigieusement improbable, une coïncidence impossible d'êtres multiples, à la fois distincts et semblables, ou bien l'inexplicable mystère d'un seul être simple et ultérieurement divisé on ne sait pourquoi" (*Monadologie* 34). Despite this, Barrès

perseveres in his aspirations to “créer un homme national” (*Les déracinés* 331). Frenchness is its keystone. It is the project he labors to construct using as starting point the Middle Ages in order to prove to all Frenchmen “que la race de leur pays existe” (*Les déracinés* 41). Proust directly opposes such an approach in a letter addressed to Daniel Halévy on or shortly after July 19 1919, in which he writes apropos of “[l]e caractère de « notre race »” only to question it thus: “est-il d’un bien bon français, de parler de « race » française?” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 139-140). In this, he echoes de Tarde’s position on the issue of Frenchness as race or spirit of a people: “Il n’est plus permis, par suite, d’entendre cette expression dont on a tant abusé, le *génie d’un peuple ou d’une race*, et aussi bien le *génie d’une langue*. . . . A ces génies collectifs, entités ou idoles métaphysiques, on prêtait une originalité imaginaire, d’ailleurs assez mal définie . . .” (*Les lois sociales* 22).

Barrèsian nationalism strives to impose Frenchness as a predefined form over the heterogeneous content of French society. Its consequence is a dangerous mass effect explained by Simmel thus: “wherever a number of people and objects exist as a unit through whatever connection, the sense of value derived from a single element is also transmitted by the common root of the system to the others, which by themselves do not provoke such a feeling” (Simmel 245). A shared *Francité* grants all Frenchmen, regardless of their individuality, vital French characteristics and values. Embodying the aesthetical type of the race, they are all perceptibly French in their physique. Consequently, all Frenchmen should be alike, a feat that Proust deliberately decries in a letter addressed to Georges de Lauris on July 29 1903. While he avoids criticizing the patriotic dream consisting in “faire *une* France”, he has recourse to reverse psychology in attributing to Lauris the intent of constructing a unity in diversity: “je ne pense pas que vous souhaitez tous les Français pareils, rêve heureusement irréalisable puisqu’il est stupide”

(*Choix de Lettres* 97). In his novel he will use a different tactic – the naïveté of Marcel – to the same effect.

This is why a shared Frenchness emerging from the Middle Ages fascinates the narrator, only to eventually back away from it as his journey of apprenticeship advances. Yet even while he seemingly takes it for granted, he unwittingly chips away at it. And he does so by resorting to another medieval church – that of Balbec. According to Yasue Kato, the description of the porch of the Balbec church is marked by the influence of Émile Mâle's *L'art religieux du XIII^{ème} siècle en France* (1898) (Kato 197). Proust was not only familiar with Mâle's work, but fascinated by it, the two having exchanged numerous letters (Kato 202). It also makes it probable that Proust read Mâle's article, published in September 1895 in *La Revue de Paris* and entitled "Les origines de la sculpture française du Moyen âge", in which he shows how 13th century French sculptors frequently copied foreign works of art, such as Anglo-Saxon miniatures or oriental art coming via Constantinople (Kato 208). Such readings reveal the inaccuracy of the Barrèsian view on the purity of medieval French art, conceived as uncorrupted through foreign influence, and thus a valid basis for Frenchness. The theme of orientalism, which prompts the narrator to visit Balbec for its medieval church, originates with Mâle (Kato 208) and stands for a first hint at the miscellaneous heritage of medieval art. The presupposed primordial French identity to be found there is in fact a mixed foreign one: "Certaines parties sont tout orientales ; un chapiteau reproduit si exactement un sujet persan que la persistance des traditions orientales ne suffit pas à l'expliquer. Le sculpteur a dû copier quelque coffret apporté par des navigateurs" (*RTP2 : JF* 198). Yet in a move akin to that of Rodin in *Les Cathédrales de France*, Saint-André-des-Champs remains the quintessential symbol of Frenchness in *La recherche*. Indeed, Rodin also recognizes foreign influences in the French Gothic style. For instance, he comments

on “[c]ette troisième porte . . . presque byzantine” in the Mantes Cathedral, in which “[l]es anges sont assyriens” (Rodin 71). He also admits that “je reconnus la beauté cambodgienne à Chartres, dans cette attitude du grand Ange” (Rodin 121). His clearest testimony of inexplicable foreign influences comes during a visit to the Reims Cathedral at night: “Je sens palpiter autour de ces étranges figures une âme qui n’est pas de chez nous. . . . Elles ne sont plus du temps qui les vit sculpter, leur aspect change sans cesse, et ces figures ont pour moi un accent singulièrement nouveau, étranger : je pense à l’Hindoustan, au Cambodge...” (Rodin 105). Nonetheless, every time he finds himself in a cathedral he still exclaims: “Âme française, je te retrouve !” (Rodin 107). Thus, the narrator mirrors an attitude which, despite all contradictions, claims that “La Cathédrale [c]’est le génie français et son image. . . . L’art gothique, c’est l’âme sensible, tangible, de la France . . .” (Rodin 33-34).

What the narrator recalls most clearly about Saint-André-des-Champs are its “deux clochers ciselés et rustiques . . . effilés, écaillés, imbriqués d’alvéoles, guillochés, jaunissants et grumeleux, comme deux épis” (*RTPI* : CS 144), suggestive of the intricate work characteristic of the Gothic style also reflected in its porch. In *La recherche*, the Gothic design is implicitly contrasted with the church of Saint-Hilaire whose early Romanesque style is still visible through later Gothic additions (*RTPI* : CS 61). Its specificity consists in an “austère simplicité” (Rodin 54), given its minimal ornamentation consisting of “de[s] motifs très simples, de[s] dessins presque enfantins” (Rodin 57). Besides its modesty, its most important attribute from the Proustian view is that “[i]l n’y a pas de sujet” (Rodin 55). Thus, “[p]our presque tout le monde c’est sans intérêt, négligeable, grossier” (Rodin 55). Yet the grandmother expressly admires it for its “absence de vulgarité, de prétention, de mesquinerie” (*RTPI* : CS 63). Its simplicity diverges from the complexity of Gothic models: “il n’est peut-être pas beau dans les règles, mais sa vieille

figure bizarre me plaît. Je suis sûre que s'il jouait du piano, il ne jouerait pas *sec*" (*RTPI* : CS 63).

The pertinence of Gothic art is revealed when put in relation to its grandiose dimensions that purposefully overwhelm the viewer, as Ruskin suggests in a passage cited by Proust in his preface to *La bible d'Amiens*: "l'abside pourrait presque paraître trop grande à un spectateur irrévérent" (*La bible d'Amiens* 85). Put more plainly, the Gothic cathedral was built with the goal of eliciting "l'admiration muette de ces foules" (Rodin 8), its main characteristic being "une majesté terrible" (Rodin 112). By contrast, the apse of the church of Saint-Hilaire "était si grossière, si dénuée de beauté artistique et même d'élan religieux" that it "n'avait rien de particulièrement ecclésiastique" and "le tout avait plus l'air d'un mur de prison que d'église", leading the narrator to exclaim that "quand je me rappelais toutes les glorieuses absides que j'ai vues, il ne me serait jamais venu à la pensée de rapprocher d'elles l'abside de Combray" (*RTPI* : CS 61). Indeed, grandeur is a trait Gothic art has in common with Frenchness conceived as a manifestation of the whole that dwarfs the individual and its specificity. This is why both Ruskin and Proust admire the purposeless diminutive figure, lost amongst the wealth of details. In its size and anonymity, it follows the same pattern as that of visitors stunted by the immensity of the cathedral and its enormous statues of saints and kings (Ruskin, *La bible d'Amiens* 71-72). The little figure stands for the artist driven by pleasure in his craft without any ulterior motive of indoctrinating or intimidating the viewer. This same attitude is mirrored by the narrator who clearly states that what he admires most in Gothic art are those details demonstrating the gratuity of the artistic effort of its craftsmen:

ces sculptures gothiques d'une cathédrale dissimulées au revers d'une balustrade à quatre-vingts pieds de hauteur, aussi parfaites que les bas-reliefs du grand porche, mais

que personne n'avait jamais vues avant qu'au hasard d'un voyage, un artiste n'eût obtenu de monter se promener en plein ciel, pour dominer toute la ville, entre les deux tours.

(RTP1 : JF 627)

Furthermore, it is relevant to notice that, while the church of Saint-Hilaire is at the center of life in Combray, with its clock marking the important moments of the day, its country priest an important local figure, and its religious ritual still respected by the village inhabitants, the portal of Saint-André-des-Champs seems to be the only thing left standing of that very French church. Having seen from a distance its thin Gothic towers, the narrator never enters it, as if the rest is no longer there. It is significant that this abandoned, empty church stands for the basis of Proustian Frenchness. There is no priest, no parishioner, no religious service, and no village alive around it. Pertinently, Proust had criticized Ruskin for what he terms his “idôlatric” defined as “l'importance excessive que Ruskin attache dans ses études d'art à la lettre des oeuvres” (*La bible d'Amiens* 85). For Proust there is a clear separation between the religious and the aesthetic. However, the religious aspect of a Gothic church is harder to ignore than that of a modest Romanesque one such as Saint-Hilaire. He testifies to this in his preface to *La bible d'Amiens* by insisting that the porch of the Gothic Amiens Cathedral is precisely “« la Bible » en pierre” (*La bible d'Amiens* 32). The Balbec church parallels it by being “la plus belle Bible historiée que le peuple ait jamais pu lire”. However, for the narrator this aspect remains inconsequential since he confesses that “[c]ette vaste vision céleste . . . , ce gigantesque poème théologique que je comprenais avoir été écrit là, pourtant, ce n'est pas eux que j'avais vus” (RTP2 : JF 197). Indeed, despite the proliferation of these *clochers de village*, symbols of the importance of the local, their presence consists in what Gérard Genette terms the “topos du clocher-caméléon” as they metonymically assume the circumstances of the observer, or his state of mind. In turn “clocher-

épi (église-meule) en plein champ, clocher-poisson à la mer, clocher pourpre au-dessus des vignobles, clocher-brioche à l'heure des pâtisseries, clocher-coussin à la nuit tombante" (Genette 44). The text emphasizes their aesthetical dimension and the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder enjoying it. Specifically speaking of religious art, Proust himself insists his own aestheticism is devoid of "un culte exclusive qui s'attacherait . . . à autre chose qu'à la joie qu'elles [les oeuvres d'art] nous donnent . . ." (Ruskin, *La bible d'Amiens* 89). The beauty of a painting is independent of what is represented in it. Even without its religious dimension, a church persists as an aesthetical form just as the concept of Frenchness does without its ideological attributes.

Yet by dubbing *opus francigenum* both Frenchness and the Gothic church of Saint-André-des Champs – the term Mâle uses to designate the specifically French Gothic style – the narrator expressly links their aesthetic quality and French specificity to a continuity alive through the centuries:

le véritable *opus francigenum*, dont le secret n'a pas été perdu depuis le xiii^e 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. (*RTP2 : CG 703*)

By the term *opus francigenum* Mâle designates France as the cradle of Gothic art, demonstrating its creative genius rather than follow in the footsteps of the Italian masters (Kato 208).

Therefore Proust's passage points to French superiority through an implicit comparison with the ethnic other, while it equally reminds an informed reader of the oriental elements in the Balbec church as a direct contradiction of this statement. The former approach to Frenchness

echoes Barrès who defines “[les] gens du type français” as the opposite “des protestants et des juifs dont beaucoup possèdent encore des habitudes héréditaires opposées à la tradition nationale” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 320). The Barrèsian project is to expressly force “bien des jeunes gens à se différencier des Barbares (c'est-à-dire des étrangers), à reconnaître leur véritable nature” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 15). According to Weber, this insistence on the issue of foreigners was the expression of a profound, more general uneasiness: lacking any defined, visible goal, French nationalism was disoriented and French politics lacked cohesion (*L'Action Française* 30).

I propose Barrèsian Frenchness is conceived as an absolute concept that does not reflect actual experience, and as such it follows the pattern proposed by Simmel in that it needs to be qualified by opposing notions in order to receive an empirical form (Simmel 179). In the case of Frenchness, this opposing notion is foreignness since “[n]ous n'avons qu'à réagir contre les étrangers qui nous envahissent et qui déforment notre raison naturelle” in order to accede to its manifestation in “l'instinct sûr de nos masses” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 109). The Proustian characters of Marie Gineste and Céleste Albaret reflect this attitude. On the one hand they have a close link to the rural land being born “au pied des hautes montagnes du centre de la France, au bord de ruisseaux et de torrents” in a house that is also a mill, while on the other hand “sans savoir l'histoire ni la géographie, elles détestaient de confiance les Anglais, les Allemands, les Russes, les Italiens, la « vermine » des étrangers et n'aimaient, avec des exceptions, que les Français” (*RTP3 : SG* 243).

The names Proust uses here are real¹⁷ though the text does not indicate this. I argue that, as in the case of the patriotism manifested by the Larivière family, the reference to actual persons describes a form of instinctive xenophobia factually exhibited by the masses in that period and of which Barrèsian nationalism makes ready use. In keeping with the Proustian approach, the Frenchness of the Gineste sisters retains an aesthetic dimension manifested by their faces likened to “admirables masques de théâtre” inherited from “l’humidité de la glaise malléable de leurs rivières” which they constantly use to mock the foreigners they see in the Balbec hotel (*RTP3 : SG 243*). Yet despite their chauvinism, Céleste and Marie are employed as chambermaids by a rich foreign lady, a circumstance the narrator qualifies as miraculous (*RTP3 : SG 240*). In this he ironically refers to Barrès’s awareness of the fact that in France everybody aspires to be rich, but no one aspires to become a stranger. It explains why he conceives national-socialism as a new form of collectivism that discards socialistic class hatred and replaces it with xenophobia as a newfound basis of French unity.

This contrast between Frenchness and foreignness permeates *La recherche*, as exemplified by the colony of Jewish vacationers in Balbec who provide the necessary background to bring out the Frenchness of the most modest of people: “ils [les Juifs] formaient un cortège homogène en soi et entièrement dissemblable des gens qui les regardaient passer . . . , que ce fût . . . 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” (*RTP2 : JF 98*). This contrastive approach reveals the process through which the narrator traces Frenchness, which in turn reflects the strategy of Barrès. Both construct a stable

¹⁷ Céleste Gineste, married Albaret, is the real name of Proust’s faithful housekeeper (Albaret 12), while Marie Gineste is the sister of the former (Albaret 80).

concept that takes precedence over qualitative content as individual manifestation of Frenchness, in order to fully focus on quantitative relations revealing that the majority is “genuinely” French. In turn, this mechanism displays what Simmel labels the symbolic treatment of things specific to modernity: since those that differ in substance may coincide with respect to quantity, the characteristic of any one of them may be used as valid representation of any other (Simmel 160). I argue this mechanism is at play in the case of Céleste and Marie. Their hatred of foreigners allows them to instinctively detect the Frenchness of the narrator in “ces traits si fins” that culminate in a birdlike appearance – “vous avez tout d’un oiseau” – which is a recurring characteristic of the Guermantes heritage. Through an insistence on the bird analogy – “Regarde, Marie, est-ce qu’on ne dirait pas qu’il se lisse ses plumes, et tourne son cou avec une souplesse, il a l’air tout léger, on dirait qu’il est en train d’apprendre à voler” (RTP3 : SG 240) –, followed by a wonderment at his distinction – “il peut faire les choses les plus insignifiantes, on dirait que toute la noblesse de France, jusqu’aux Pyrénées, se déplace dans chacun de ses mouvements” (RTP3 : SG 242) –, the narrator becomes a stand-in for Robert de Saint-Loup, a Guermantes repeatedly described as a bird. Since the two do not have the same bloodline, nor does the narrator have a noble lineage, their perceived aesthetical similitude can only originate in a shared Frenchness. Indeed, Saint-Loup is described elsewhere as the epitome of Frenchness, highlighted by the contrast with Jewish customers in a café: he is “un pur Français”, endowed “avec une grâce que l’étranger, si estimable soit-il, ne nous offre pas”, “une jolie chose et qui est peut-être exclusivement française”, “charmant aux yeux, coloré avec grâce, ciselé avec justesse”, “le véritable *opus francigenum*” (RTP2 : CG 703). Though Céleste depicts the narrator as having dark hair and jet-black eyes, while Robert de Saint-Loup is fair-haired and blue eyed, their shared birdlike appearance manifests the miracle performed by the emphasis of quantity over

quality, which is the equivalent of the priority of form over content specific to Frenchness: in this regard, each can stand for the other. Consequently, individual perceptions no longer rely on specific sensory impressions, but on predefined abstractions: people judge based on artificial criteria of separation akin to that between friend and enemy, in which the outsider and the different are a potential threat. I suggest that Proust's tactically blurs the line separating Frenchness from foreignness, and that in this approach nobility plays a crucial role.

The Nobility

The narrator's obsession with nobility starts back in his childhood in Combray with the mysterious projections of the magical lantern to which the pater of his great-aunt provides the background story (*RTPI : CS 9*). It continues with the fascination for Merovingian relics in the church of Saint-Hilaire (*RTPI : CS 60-61*). And it culminates with magical trips he takes with his parents towards "le côté de Guermantes" from which materializes a name standing for it all. It is that of "le duc et la duchesse de Guermantes" whose magnificent residence he knowingly approaches but never gets to see, rendering it even more enthralling. While the Guermantes belong from the very beginning to the aesthetical world of medieval art and legends that form the mythical past of Combray, the narrator is increasingly aware that "le duc et la duchesse de Guermantes . . . étaient des personnages réels et actuellement existants . . ." (*RTPI : CS 169*). Thus the Guermantes represent a material link with that imaginary world of the past which mesmerizes him, the sublimation of Combray and its surroundings since "ils ne portaient pas seulement le titre de duc et de duchesse de Guermantes, mais . . . depuis le XIV^e siècle . . . ils étaient comtes de Combray . . . , possédant Combray au milieu de leur nom, de leur personne, et sans doute ayant effectivement en eux cette étrange et pieuse tristesse qui était spéciale à Combray . . ." (*RTPI : CS 170*). This bond with their ancestral estate evidences part of the

Barrèsian approach that constructs nationalism through local sentiment, leading Frenchmen through “la petite patrie” to “la grande patrie” (*Scènes et doctrines* 75). In his admiration for “la sève locale qu’il y a dans les vieilles familles aristocratiques” to which the Guermantes seem to have a continued access (*RTP3 : LP* 544), Marcel echoes the idea that “[l]a nationalité française est faite des nationalités provinciales” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 75). At first sight the Guermantes seem to have remained rooted in their traditional fief as members of the regional nobility: “Demeurée en contact avec les terres où elle était souveraine, une certaine aristocratie reste régionale, de sorte que le propos le plus simple fait se dérouler devant nos yeux toute une carte historique et géographique de l’histoire de France” (*RTP3 : LP* 545). As such, they demonstrate “comment se constitue le patriotisme, par quelles voies il s’élargit de la famille à la cité, à la province, à la nation” (Barres, *Scènes et doctrines* 75). Indeed, as the previous chapter of this essay briefly discussed, the narrator’s fascination with the Guermantes’ *Francité* is fueled by their uninterrupted lineage reaching back into the French past, with strong roots in the rural Combray. At first sight, this obsession with the past parallels Barrèsian Frenchness in its aspiration to allow “l’individu et . . . la nation . . . de se conserver tels que les siècles les prédestinèrent” (*Scènes et doctrines* 8). Barrès believes the present is only a repetition of the past: “nous repassons dans les pas et dans les pensées de nos prédécesseurs” (*Scènes et doctrines* 112). Yet in this view Frenchness, conceived as temporal deployment, can be fully exhibited only as genealogy, rendering any commoner its imperfect incarnation. What could be dubbed “Frenchness as lineage” is an idea cherished not only by Barrès, but also by Maurras and Drumont. But only old nobility can ever embody it. As such, “[l]’aristocratie n’a pas complètement perdu tout son prestige dans ce siècle qui se croit si profondément démocratique” (Drumont 266). The man able to prove a long family heritage is a “personnage représentatif”,

“l’incarnation de la haute aristocratie, le représentant des idées de chevalerie, d’honneur et de foi” (Drumont 327). “[U]n grand seigneur authentique” is equated with “le français de race” (Drumont 17). Indeed, Barrès expresses the same belief when he grounds the Frenchness of youth in aristocratic values: “ce sont de jeunes Français. Des animaux d'une espèce particulière; non pas des Slaves, ni des Anglo-Saxons : des chevaliers, des gentilshommes, des amateurs d'aventures glorieuses engagées avec frivolité” (*Les déracinés* 250).

I argue Proust tactically integrates this dimension of Frenchness in the narrator’s account of it. It allows him not only to portray Robert de Saint-Loup as its most authentic incarnation, but also to make Mme de Guermantes another of its personifications: Oriane is the equivalent of Françoise in terms of her *Francité*. They seem two faces of the same coin: while the latter is the epitome of the Frenchness of *la France profonde*, the former is that of the old aristocracy. The parallel between the two is explicit. Upon listening to Oriane’s speech, the narrator notices “cette grâce française si pure qu’on ne trouve plus, ni dans le parler, ni dans les écrits du temps présent”, an aestheticism that he can only enjoy “en causant avec une M^{me} de Guermantes ou une Françoise” (*RTP3 : LP* 544). Furthermore, Oriane de Guermantes remains for a long time the prototype of Frenchness not only in the eyes of the narrator, but also in those of high society given that the countess d’Argencourt describes her as “la dix-huitième Oriane de Guermantes sans une mésalliance, c’est le sang le plus pur, le plus vieux de France” (*RTP2 : CG* 739). However, such a statement remains questionable throughout the novel since the true fascination the Guermantes exert on the narrator is due to their ancestress, Geneviève de Brabant (*RTP1 : CS* 9-10). She is the main character of the legend his great-aunt recounts upon projecting the lamp’s enthralling images, full of “des reflets d’histoire si anciens” emanating from “un passé mérovingien” (*RTP1 : CS* 10). Interestingly, however, he associates Geneviève de Brabant with

his mother rather than with Combray or with the history of France, as the culmination of the projection show allows him to “tomber dans les bras de maman que les malheurs de Geneviève de Brabant me rendaient plus chère . . .” (*RTPI* : CS 10).

So who is Geneviève de Brabant and how did Proust come by her story? She is the main character of Offenbach’s 1859 opera bouffe bearing the same name. Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880), a German composer of Jewish extraction who immigrated to Paris in 1833, was famous for his music throughout the Second Empire. Characterized by Siegfried Kracauer as “a mockingbird piping from the rooftops at the perceptible eccentricities below” (Kracauer 186), in his works “he burlesqued the heroes of medieval romance, though his satire did not strip his victims bare of all nobility; his method was not to slay by satire but to dissolve through laughter” (Kracauer 187). This particular operetta was his first court satire, showcasing “the stupid Prince Sifrois, the intriguer Golo, and the furious warrior Charles Martel” (Kracauer 213). This approach is pertinent to Geneviève’s role in the Proustian opus where, as ancestress of the Guermantes’, she is at the core of the sublation of the old nobility’s Frenchness and foreignness, which is paralleled by the simultaneity of their greatness and nothingness – a subject that this essay will subsequently discuss.

Offenbach’s *Geneviève de Brabant* was still performed in Paris as late as 1908, giving Proust the opportunity to attend one of its performances. Nonetheless, there is no indication that he ever did so (Yoshikawa 105). It is however very likely he had heard the story of Geneviève in his early childhood given that, according to Marie-Dominique Leclerc, during the 19th century the story was popular not only in France, but also in Germany and Belgium, as far as Wissembourg in the east and Lille in the North (Leclerc 91). Interestingly, the legend is specifically mentioned by Barrès as “une tradition mosellane de 724”, thus originating in Alsace-

Lorraine, close to the German border. Yet he names Pfalzel as the place “où se déroula l'aventure, fameuse chez les petits enfants, de Geneviève de Brabant et de l'infâme Golo . . .” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrine* 412). While Pfalzel, an abbey in the German town of Trier, is undeniably on the border of the Moselle River, it is however on the other side of the Franco-German border. Part of the Holy Roman Empire until 1794, it was then incorporated into France for a brief twenty years until the end of the Napoleonic wars when it went back to the Kingdom of Prussia. Indeed, according to Françoise Lautman, the most ancient text mentioning her is the *Laacher Codex* from the 14th century, written by a monk in the Laach Abbey situated in the German Rhineland-Palatinate, the same region as the town of Trèves in which the abbey of Pfalzel is situated. The events described there ostensibly happened in the 8th century, during the reign of Charles Martel in the Merovingian period, though written down much later (Lautman 247). While Geneviève is a legendary figure whose actual existence has not been proven, it remains that not only the origination of the story but also its content make her descendants German rather than French: Geneviève is the daughter of the duke de Brabant and wife to Siegfried (Sigefroi or Sifroy), palatine count of Trèves, which is the German Trier (Yoshikawa 106). In fact, the father of her son is the palatine count of Trèves, of whom Gilbert le Mauvais, the sire de Guermantes represented in the Saint-Hilaire stained glass window, is the direct descendant (*RTPI : CS* 103).

At the same time, Proust explicitly makes Geneviève de Brabant “une demoiselle de Guermantes” (*RTPI : CS* 103). Given that French noble lineage is passed on through the father's bloodline, Geneviève's descendants are of the Rhineland-Palatinate lineage, landgraves of the Holy Roman Empire rather than French noblemen. Laure Hillerin corroborates this view, albeit from a different angle: “[l]’illustre famille de Guermantes est née d’une rêverie sur la famille de

Riquet de Caraman-Chimay, princes du Saint-Empire” (Hillerin 355). Thus, even “la duchesse de Guermantes qui descendait de Geneviève de Brabant” (*RTP4 : TR 568*), of the oldest and purest French lineage, has German blood in her heritage. I suggest Proust uses the legendary figure of Geneviève de Brabant as a *détournement* which allows him to conflate the oldest, most noble French line with its opposite – a German heritage. Furthermore, while the Guermantes descend from the dukes de Brabant, “le titre de duc de Brabant est passé dans la famille royale de Belgique” (*RTP2 : CG 877*). In the era of the national state, a Brabant heritage is Belgian rather than French – a distinction Oriane underlines in the case of M. d’Argencourt (*RTP2 : CG 546*).

Indeed, all of Brabant, a region of the Low Countries, has been part of the Holy Roman Empire until 1581 and the South belonged to it until the dissolution of the empire in 1794. It became a province of Belgium in 1830 (Strikwerda 199), a fact also mentioned by Oriane: “c’est le roi des Belges qui l’a conquis” (*RTP2 : CG 879*). If Hillerin is right in her assumption that Mme Greffulhe was one of the models of Oriane de Guermantes, that Belgian connection is indeed present since Mme de Greffulhe was born Riquet de Caraman-Chimay, a family that belongs to both the French and Belgian nobility (Hillerin 193-194). According to Suzanne Fiette, the aristocratic genealogical obsession, so prominent in the Guermantes’ behavior, conjugates the paradox of nobility of fact and of existence: there were not only foreign ancestors, but also fabricated homonymies, alliances that were best kept secret, in other words a selective forgetfulness of the shadows of the past. In this context, the Caraman-Chimay have further relevance, since they are descended from the Mirabeau lineage who contrived their aristocratic origin during the Renaissance: their real ancestor was Riquet, an ennobled merchant-manufacturer of the 16th century who transformed his name in Riquetti to render believable his claim of being a cousin of the Medici (Fiette 22). In the case of the Guermantes, the skeleton in

their closet is an alliance with the nobility of the First Empire, suggested by the *Premier Empire* furniture in their possession of which they are very proud (*RTP2 : CG 811*), while also refusing to mingle with its nobility. Indeed, they do not even deign to recognize such titles since the Iéna must be some people with the name of a bridge, rather than of a battle (*RTP1 : CS 332*).

The narrator's insistence on Geneviève de Brabant as ancestress of the Guermantes bloodline echoes the 18th century theory of Henri de Boullainvilliers claiming that only French commoners descended from the Gauls, while the nobility descended from the conquering Franks and thus remained a "foreign body" in the nation because of their distinctly Germanic roots (Pomian 53). Pertinently, Boullainvilliers's medievalist revival was a channel for attacking arbitrary government as he locates in the Merovingian Franks, and in their aristocratic descendants, a legitimate alternative to the authority of the king and his centralized court. He is thus the initiator of a different approach to history, which at that time was conceived as the epic recounting of the heroism of an absolute, God-given monarch (Jones 26). However, during the French Revolution, his ideas justified the exclusion of nobility from the national body, as only the descendants of Gauls were truly French, exposing another myth of origins and continuity. Indeed, the narrator declares that the Guermantes were "[g]lorieux dès avant Charlemagne" (*RTP1 : CS 173*), having a lineage that goes back to the beginning of the Holy Roman Empire. In this context, the dual significance of Charlemagne is deeply relevant: Robert Morrissey suggests that he is seen as one of the founding fathers of the country, "a figure situated at the origins of the 'nation', at the point where its history begins", while his story is the closest to myth and legend (Morrissey 135). Thus, the reference to Charlemagne imparts its mythical dimension to the Guermantes, and at the same time guarantees their genuinely noble status since, as Theodore

Zeldin shows, for all their exclusiveness, aristocratic titles could for a long time be bought, even more so after the Revolution (Zeldin 2: 38).

While at the end of the 19th century, having survived the Revolution despite severe trials and loss of feudal privileges, the nobility was still very present in French society given that the richest amongst them had survived with remarkable success (Zeldin 2: 178), only a fraction could trace their titles to the 15th century or earlier to prove their truly aristocratic status (Zeldin 2: 38). Charlus de Guermantes points to this phenomenon by exclaiming that “[a]ujourd’hui . . . tout le monde est prince” (*RTP2 : JF* 114), as princely titles were very popular and often of recent date being financially acquired. Yet the contradiction between the ancientness of the line and the prestige of the title is not a modern French phenomenon. In as early as 1610, Charles Loyseau’s *Traité des ordres et simples dignitez* remarks that the more recent a princely title is, the greater its prestige as the latter is proportional with the degree of its kinship to the reigning monarch: “la Principauté . . . tient rang selon qu’elle plus récente, et qu’elle approche plus près de sa tige” (Loyseau 35). Thus the princely nobility relies on its line in a manner opposite to simple noblemen. While “Gentilhommes et Ecuyers” are less prestigious titles than the princes which hold the aristocracy “du suprême degré”, “la simple Noblesse affecte le sang, et passe en la postérité, de telle sorte, que plus elle est ancienne, plus elle est honorable” (Loyseau 35). Consequently, instead of using his rightful title of Prince de Laumes, Charlus resorts to that of Baron. He does so not only because a barony appears less prestigious in the eyes of arrivistes, and is thus less tempting to buy or usurp, but mainly as, originating from an earlier historical period, it demonstrates its authenticity through a longer lineage. However, a long authentic ancestry is no guarantee of Frenchness: it should be remembered that what is known as Charlemagne’s crown was worn by more than twenty-seven Holy Roman emperors, right until

the French Revolution (Morrissey 137). Thus, “Charlemagne as the symbol of the French nation may seem odd today, since Karl der Grosse was not French but German” (Morrissey 134).

This conclusion dawned on Frenchmen at the time of the Franco-Prussian war, marking the moment when Charlemagne’s close identification with France, as well as his French identity, were increasingly challenged: an ideologically compromised figure, Charlemagne comes to be seen in this period both as an absolutist – thus an enemy of the Republic – and as a foreigner – hence an outsider (Morrissey 169-173) – a fact of which Proust was likely aware. The parallel between the Guermantes and Charlemagne is crucial, pointing to the nobility’s ethnic hybridity, as well as its peripheral position in the French Republic because of its mixed loyalties. Consequently, by placing the origin and model of *la Francité* in the Middle Ages, Proust transfers to it the mythical dimension of Charlemagne, while at the same time developing a hidden counter-narrative undermining the primacy of pure lineage¹⁸. As part of this tactic, the Combray church houses “le tombeau des fils de Louis le Germanique” (*RTP1 : CS 60*), grandsons of Charlemagne and sons of the king of Bavaria, which was the first king of Germany after the split of Charlemagne’s empire. The figure of Louis le Germanique is explicitly linked not only to Combray, but also to a German *ville d’eau* Marcel has visited as a child with his grandmother, of which he remembers “le vieux Burg qui garde le souvenir de Luther et de Louis le Germanique . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 554*).

The same figure stands as a symbol on either side of the border. Ultimately, the narrator’s obsession with the Frenchness of medieval art and its sites he shares with Barrès and Maurras is

¹⁸ Proust uses a similar tactic in the case of de Forcheville, who is celebrated as an authentic aristocrat in the Verdurin circle, yet whose family has been only recently ennobled during the Second Empire. Swann’s dream suggests this by making a rapprochement between the physique of Napoléon III and that of Forcheville (*RTP1 : CS 373*).

based on an erroneous premise: that there existed a medieval French racial purity, passed on both to *la France profonde* and to the *noblesse d'épée*. In fact, according to Françoise Leriche, the reactionary ideology of *l'Action Française* makes use of an idealized image of the Middle Ages as the golden age of Christianity and France, whereas the writings of Augustin Thierry, familiar both to Proust and to the narrator who reads him in his walks (*RTP3 : SG 230*), argued that in fact it was exactly during that time that the Frankish and Germanic aristocracy subjugated the Gaelic population by imposing the rule of feudalism (Leriche 288).

The Frenchness of the aristocracy, or its lack thereof, warrants further attention. For the Guermantes, foreign dynastic ties symbolized authenticity and status: tracing their origins to Geneviève de Brabant and Charlemagne, hence to times preceding the formation of the European nation-states, also meant highlighting subnational and supranational structures of belonging and kinship. The oldest noble families had ties all-over Europe, having inter-married for centuries. This is why, according to Fiette, many of Proust's contemporaries viewed the old nobility as internationalized and hostile to the country that took away its privileges (269). Yet such foreign connections are an intrinsic part of the Guermantes identity as manifested by their armories whose "quartiers s'étaient remplis, siècle par siècle, de toutes les seigneuries que, par mariages ou acquisitions, cette illustre maison avait fait voler à elle de tous les coins de l'Allemagne, de l'Italie et de la France . . . venues se rejoindre et se composer en Guermantes . . ." (*RTP2 : CG 314*). According to Elisabeth de Gramont, the high French nobility is kindred to the European one, but none like the Castellane which she proposes as the model of the Guermantes. Of ancient Provençal stalk, the Castellane allied themselves through marriage to the Talleyrand-Périgord and the Sagan. As Gramont explains "[p]ar ce mariage, le congrès de Vienne s'installe au cœur des Castellane et ils continuent à traiter l'Europe chez eux. Alliés aux Hatzfeld, aux Courlande,

aux Radziwill, aux Potocki, nulle famille française n'est plus cosmopolite. L'Europe Centrale est leur cousine" (*Les marronniers en fleurs* 64). It points to their tight connection with the Holy Roman Empire and its nobility. This pattern is mirrored by the alliances of the Guermantes, seeing as Oriane specifically mentions "ma tante Sagan", as well as "ma tante Radziwill" (*RTP2* : *CG* 815).

This ethnic hybridity of old French nobility in general and of the Guermantes in particular is reflected in Charlus's claim that "en Allemagne, princes médiatisés, nous sommes *Durchlaucht*, et qu'en France notre rang d'Altesse était publiquement reconnu" (*RTP3* : *SG* 338). Pointing to the immediacy of their German princely title, he claims the Guermantes were ruling one of the many territories forming the federation of the Holy Roman Empire; as such, they were considered a sovereign house, subject only to the direct authority of the Emperor. However, upon the dissolution of the Empire (1806), the majority of its states were mediatized by their incorporation into larger territories, while their rulers lost imperial immediacy. As part of the compensation plan, the Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria granted the title of *Durchlaucht* to all families formerly holding a princely title in the Empire. These mediatized houses were considered equal to royal families, a status underlined by the Highness appellation, thus allowing for royal marriages. Consequently, many European monarchs traditionally married various German princesses, which in turn explains why the Guermantes family is related to most European ruling houses. The examples of such alliances abound in *La recherche*, so here are just a few : "le roi de Pologne et le roi d'Angleterre" are Charlus's uncles (*RTP2* : *CG* 850), a duchess of Guermantes "était par sa mère nièce de la Reine de Pologne, de la Reine d'Hongrie, de l'Électeur Palatin, du prince de Savoie-Carignan et du prince d'Hanovre, ensuite Roi

d'Angleterre" (*RTP3* : *SG* 342), and the Bulgarian prince is a cousin of the Guermantes (*RTP2* : *CG* 817).

In this context, it is also relevant that the conflict over precedence at the French court recounted by Charlus involves the duchess of Guermantes and the princess of Croy, one of the mediatized houses of the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, when talking about the importance of his rank, Charlus reminds everyone that "[n]ous avons le pas sur tous les princes étrangers" (*RTP3* : *SG* 342). This determines Herbert de Ley to question their actual rank in the *maison de France*. Comparing Charlus's various affirmation on this subject with the position of Saint-Simon in his memoirs, he concludes that they are at the top of the foreign princes at the court of French kings. They closely resemble the dukes de Lorraine, which were half-German like the Guermantes and had numerous alliances with French royalty (Ley 62). In fact, these Lorraine dukes constitute an important point of convergence between Frenchness and foreignness in Proust, Saint-Simon, and Barrès. Indeed, Proust not only makes the descendants of the dukes of Lorraine characters in his novel – the queen of Naples, Marie Sophie Amélie of Wittelsbach, in exile since Garibaldi invaded the two Sicilies, is an important figure in *La recherche*, while her sisters Elisabeth, empress of Austria, and the duchess d'Alençon are equally mentioned – but also relatives of the Guermantes family, linking them to the house of Lorraine and to that of Habsburg. Though contemporaneous readers of the novel must have been aware of their identity, this intricate kinship is made explicit: "la reine de Naples, comme la duchesse d'Alençon, . . . les nobles sœurs bavaroises" are Oriane's cousins (*RTP2* : *CG* 801), while the queen of Naples is "la sœur de l'impératrice Élisabeth et de la duchesse d'Alençon" (*RTP3* : *SG* 813). In this context, it is important to remember that, in his memoirs, Saint-Simon decries the presence and precedence of many foreign princes at the French Court, to the detriment of autochthonous

noblemen (Ley, 62) – a fact to which Proust points by referring to Saint-Simon as “cet autre duc, excellent mais terrible” that was “impitoyable de tout élément étranger” (*RTP2 : CG 750*).

Furthermore, these Lorraine dukes play a key role in the Frenchness of Lorraine, and implicitly in that of Barrès, since “nos ducs, n'ayant pas su nous organiser, manquaient à nous défendre, et qu'après les atrocités dont nous avaient accablés les Français, il nous fallait de l'ordre et de la paix” (*Scènes et doctrines 83*).

Indeed, Barrès admits Lorraine has become French only a century ago out of necessity: “Nous ne sommes pas entrés dans la patrie française parce que c'était notre goût ; en vérité nous y sommes venus parce que nous étions piétinés tantôt par la France, tantôt par l'Allemagne En fait, nous sommes venus à la France parce que nous avons besoin d'ordre et de paix et que nous ne pouvions en trouver ailleurs” (*Scènes et doctrines 83-84*). Deserting their subjects, “notre maison ducale de Lorraine . . . règne aujourd'hui en Autriche” (*Scènes et doctrine, 127*): Elisabeth de Bavière, the Austrian empress, is the descendent of these Lorraine dukes. Barrès recounts in detail her incognito trip to Lorraine. Though local inhabitants had forgotten the history of their province, the empress has an intimate knowledge of it, reflecting her attempt to reconnect with the true origin of her family through the land to which she still belongs (*Scènes et doctrines 127*). Yet Saint-Simon considered these dukes of Lorraine foreigners, implicitly suggesting that Lorrainers were not French either, and as such were unwelcomed in France. All this does not prevent Barrès from claiming “les racines lorraines de mon nationalisme français” (*Scènes et doctrines 126*). Through the mention of Saint-Simon, Proust reminded his readers that neither xenophobia nor the continuous foreign presence in France are new phenomena.

The importance of the Holy Roman Empire in the architecture of *La recherche* cannot be overly emphasized, as is to be expected in a novel focused on history, tradition, and lineage.

Proust was aware of the influence its imperial neighbor had had on the development of France. As Wilson shows, the Holy Roman Empire defined the organization of central Europe for over a millennium. I argue, however, that the relevance of the Empire goes beyond the genealogical hybridity or prestige of French nobility. The eighteenth century multi-ethnic Empire embodies a cosmopolitan ideal associated with universal Christendom, in contrast with the nascent nationalist movement promoting a national identity based on a distinct language, ethnicity, and culture (Wilson 710). Charlus in particular takes seriously its uniting principle, the Christian ideal: he still sees Catholicism in medieval terms and maintains a personal relationship with “les archanges Michel, Gabriel et Raphaël” (*RTP3 : SG 427-428*). In this context it is pertinent that the dissolution of the Empire was partly triggered by a decline of the religious sentiment and a disregard for its import. As John Gagliardo shows, the Imperial equilibrium was ensured by the opposing powers of the Catholic states of Austria and Bavaria balancing each other out.

However, secularization allowed the establishment of the Protestant German hegemony in the hands of the Prussian kings, leading to the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, an evolution that, as history showed, was detrimental to French interests (Gagliardo 219). The organization of the Empire represents an outmoded, yet valid alternative to the modern statehood model promoting nationalism as its basis. Its scattered structure, consisting of a federation of small, unconsolidated princely states in which the Emperor held the prerogatives of a feudal overlord, embodied the nobility’s ideal of local independence based on an allegiance to the emperor (Wilson 720-734). This is why its organization, anachronistic for modern politics, was still celebrated by nobles like Charlus or the prince de Guermantes: this fragmented structure prevented centralization, the nightmare of French nobility since Louis XIV, a decried tradition continued by the Republic. Gagliardo suggests that the Empire stood for the limitation and

dispersal of power rather than for its acquisition and centralization. Its use of political authority represented a negative view of freedom, meant as protection of the local from any form of infringement (Gagliardo 290-291). As Gagliardo explains, Germans were freer in direct correlation with the Empire's segmentation into small civil societies and states (Gagliardo 58), a view shared by French nobility and clearly articulated by Alexis de Tocqueville¹⁹ as foundation of *Ancien Régime* stability. Once the French kings disregarded it by absolutist and centralizing policies, they triggered a de facto social leveling doubled by an atomization consequent to divergent interests.

The Revolution and downfall of France were its direct consequences. In this context, Charlus's Germanophilia is at least partly fueled by an idealization of the Holy Roman Empire as a haven respectful of tradition, liberty, and stability. As Sabine Parmentier suggests, this ideal Germany, which ceased to effectively exist upon Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion in 1806, stirred the imagination of many Frenchmen as the disinterested land of cosmopolitanism, the motherland of arts and science, in other world the modern Hellas (Parmentier 170). This explains why, out of all the Guermantes' noble relatives, Charlus is most proud of "l'empereur d'Autriche, qui m'a toujours honoré de sa bienveillance et veut bien entretenir avec moi des relations de cousinage" (*RTP2 : CG* 583). In the Austrian emperor he celebrates the successor to the Holy Roman Imperial title since, on the one hand, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the closest continuator, though a shell of its former glory, of the empire dismembered by Napoleon. On the other hand, the Austrian Emperor belongs to the House of Habsburg to which the Holy Roman Imperial title traditionally went since the mid-fifteenth century (Wilson 709). The prestige of such a lineage is

¹⁹ These views constitute the thesis of his book *L'ancien régime et la Révolution*.

not lost on M. de Charlus aware that, as Wilson shows, the Holy Roman Emperor was often given precedence over any other ruler, including the French king (Wilson 709).

Mme de Villeparisis echoes this supremacy by dubbing the House of France inferior to the Guermantes, and thus to the Habsburgs, since “dans ces chapitres où nos grand’tantes étaient souvent abbesses, les filles du roi de France n’eussent pas été admises . . . parce que la Maison de France n’avait plus assez de quartiers depuis qu’elle s’était mésalliée . . . en s’alliant aux Médicis . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 496*). Furthermore, Charlus contrasts the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph I, “chef d’une des maisons les plus anciennes et les plus illustres d’Europe” with the German emperor Wilhelm II of Hohenzolern which he dubs “un simple parvenu” (*RTP4 : TR 365*). He develops an explicit parallel between “[ce] seigneur de dernier ordre comme ce Hohenzollern, de plus protestant” (*RTP3 : SG 337*) and Louis XIV, implicitly based on their centralizing tendencies and expansionists aspirations. He begins with the lack of artistic taste they had in common and culminates with the superior organizational skills of the German Emperor: “Encore Guillaume II a-t-il armé son pays, au point de vue militaire et naval, comme Louis XIV n’avait pas fait, et j’espère que son règne ne connaîtra jamais les revers qui ont assombri, sur la fin, le règne de celui qu’on appelle banalement le Roi Soleil” (*RTP3 : SG 338*).

Overall, Charlus’s Germanophilia points to a different conception of patriotism as loyalty to his feudal lord and respect for his noble ancestors. This is why, when the narrator warns him during the Great War that his explicit defeatism and German sentiments put them both in danger, Charlus proudly equates himself with his uncle shot during the Revolution for monarchist leanings: “En somme, pourquoi ne serais-je pas fusillé dans les fossés de Vincennes ? La même chose est bien arrivée à mon grand-oncle le duc d’Enghien” (*RTP4 : TR 378*). As devotion to the monarch, conceived as loyalty to the feudal suzerain, patriotism is ancient, and Charlus sees

himself as a worthy continuator of such a tradition. As a consequence, his nephew Saint-Loup qualifies him as “un monarchiste impénitent” (*RTP4 : TR* 339). However, in the context of the Third Republic, this attitude makes him a traitor since “[p]ar haine du drapeau tricolore, je crois qu’il se rangerait plutôt sous le torchon du Bonnet rouge, qu’il prendrait de bonne foi pour le Drapeau blanc” (*RTP4 : TR* 340). His monarchical propensities result in hatred for the Republic that has marred traditional values, and consequently imbue Charlus with Barrèsian leanings. While it is true that at that time Germany was conceived as the antithesis of France, the humiliation of the 1871 defeat and the obsession with revenge also made it into the ever-present image that held the nation together by giving it a purpose – simultaneously a lesson and an example (Nora, “Lavisse, the Nation’s Teacher” 152-160).

Therefore, the link between Charlus’s monarchism and Barrèsian nationalism is not fortuitous: despite its Germanophobia, the Barrèsian doctrine is explicitly animated by an admiration for a Germany “déjà avancée très loin dans la voie du socialisme pratique”, equated with “[le] nationalisme et la seconde étape fatale du protectionnisme” (*Scènes et doctrines* 299). Consequently, the admonishment Proust addresses to Daniel Halévy could have been directed at Barrès as well: “à vouloir être à toute force français, vous avez pris un ton germanique” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 140). Indeed, Barrès proposes as a model “la puissante raison qui préside au développement de la nation allemande” in direct contrast with “l’anarchie qui désorganise notre France” (*Scènes et doctrines* 298-299).

At first sight, it seems that a common Germanophilia animates both Barrès and Charlus, giving the baron the centrality he merits. However, each refers to a different stage in the evolution of the German Empire. Barrès unambiguously takes the Prussian prototype as basis for his French nationalism, recommending that his followers read “un bon manuel de l’organisation

des pouvoirs dans le royaume de Prusse pendant ces derniers cinquante ans” (*Scènes et doctrines* 75). Neither is his suggestion casual, since he is aware of the current orientation of German civilization, as attested by “la discipline donnée par la Prusse à l'Allemagne et qui fait l'esprit allemand actuel” (*Scènes et doctrines* 293). Contrastively, Charlus abhors the Prussian values of Wilhelm II. Rather, as previously discussed, his Germanophilia stands for the traditional values of the Holy Roman Empire, values that are continued by the Austro-Hungarian Emperor rather than by the German Prussian one. These diverging attitudes reflect the ways in which individualism, dubbed by Dumont as the fundamental French value, has always been associated with its opposite (Dumont 29-30). In fact, not only Barrès but de Tocqueville together with the old nobility felt that individualism was not enough to stimulate a society. As a first step, both had recourse to the link to the local preventing the degeneration of the French people in a “poussière d'individus” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 252). However, for Barrès this tie alone cannot stand against both an internal dissolution and an external German threat: thus, he contrives a hybrid form combining local values characteristic to the *Parti radical* with a holism of precisely German inspiration, which is an explicit adaptation to a modernity that resulted exactly from the disappearance of the cosmopolitan Holy German Empire. In this, however, he chooses to forget the pre-existing connection between France and Germany, born from a continuous mixing doubled by a permanent confrontation. The nobility in *La recherche* stands for a reminder of it.

Ultimately, I propose that, for Proust, the value of the Holy Roman Empire lies in its heterogeneity and fragmentation, manifested by the multiplicity of its territories and diversity of their internal constitutions. These very divisions were a guarantee against mass effects, preventing the imposition of a unique model of imitation. Furthermore, such a structure restricted the sentiments of patriotism almost exclusively to the local level (Gagliardo 135), as Combray

also does. And just as Combray is a dying medieval village emptying out through urban migration, the great empire started its decline when its nobility left its rural estates. The parallel is telling: corresponding to the Guermantes who were “les premiers des citoyens de Combray . . . et pourtant les seuls qui n’y habitassent pas” (*RTP1* : CS 169), the German prince Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen, of Holy Roman provenance, has left his rural lands and uses their revenues to lead a luxurious existence in Paris and London (*RTP2* : CG 554). Both the *Ancien Régime* and the Holy Roman Empire died from similar causes: a destruction of local communities started by the nobility leaving its rural estates. Weaved into the countryside the nobility would have been indestructible, but by losing its role in the community it signed its own fate, as well as that of its country. Nonetheless, the Holy Roman Empire stands for the true land of cosmopolitanism, meant to separate the great powers of Europe and avoid the bloody conflicts that would ensue from their direct confrontation – its presence was a vital factor of social and political stability. I propose that, just as in the case of Combray, the Holy Roman Empire is an anachronism for the modern world, but the value of its model still stands in contrast to the problems posed by European politics in the context of the nation-states. It represents a tradition at once negated and preserved: another case of Proustian sublation.

As already seen, Frenchness is a concept best defined by its opposite. In simple terms, it follows that an individual is a Frenchman if he is not a foreigner. Thus, for Proust French nobility is a good case study because it has always already been infiltrated by its foreign other. In the aristocratic society, foreign presence is a constant. The most notable have Holy Roman titles, such as the princess of Parme or that of Luxembourg who, belonging to the house of Bourbon-Parme (“Maison de Bourbon-Parme”, *Wikipédia*), descend from Marie-Louise, duchess of Parme, the eldest daughter of Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor as Francis II (Morby), a lineage

belonging to the house of Habsburg-Lorraine (“Austrian Empire”, *Oxford Reference*). Even the nobility *Premier Empire* has a German lineage, since “la princesse Mathilde, animée de sentiments si français, les éprouvait avec une honnête rudesse comme en avait l’Allemagne d’autrefois et qu’elle avait hérités sans doute de sa mère wurtembergeoise” (*RTP1 : JF 532*), the Wurtemberg title being of Holy Roman Imperial provenance. Upon meeting the princess, the narrator experiences “la surprise qu’on a en ouvrant la correspondance de la duchesse d’Orléans, née princesse Palatine” (*RTP1 : JF 532*), suggesting that if indeed continuity there is, it includes a traditional German presence and lineage throughout all the different French regimes.

Furthermore, the Guermantes’ friends and guests share in that same lineage, like the prince of Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen who is explicitly designated as “prince du Saint-Empire . . . , rhingrave et électeur palatin” (*RTP2 : CG 553*), as well as “la princesse de Hesse, . . . la duchesse d’Arenberg” (*RTP : SG 107*), or the prince of Croy (*RTP3 : LP 559*) – all on the list of German mediatised houses (“Médiatisation (feodalité)”, *Wikipédia*). However, no other old noble French family has a German lineage as prominently featured as the Guermantes. Indeed, since M. de Charlus “eu une mère duchesse de Bavière” (*RTP4 : TR 353*), all of the three Guermantes brothers, as well as their sister and mother to Robert de Saint-Loup, are half-German. Their title has long been that of dukes of Brabant and “par le mariage d’un Brabant, en 1241, avec la fille du dernier landgrave de Thuringe et de Hesse, . . . ce titre de prince de Hesse . . . est entré dans la maison de Brabant . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 879*). As a consequence, the duke of Guermantes is proud of being “du même sang que les Hesse, et de la branche aînée²⁰” (*RTP2 : CG 877*), and thus allied

²⁰ Proust is accurate in that the junior branch of the Brabant-Hesse house has continued as a landgraviate in the Holy Roman Empire, to eventually become the Great Duchy of Hesse (“Landgraviate of Hesse-Darmstadt”, *Wikipedia*), still existing today. It still exists through its uninterrupted male lineage nowadays (“House of Hesse”, *Wikipedia*).

to a large Landgraviate of the Holy Roman Empire. However, their French heritage is no less pertinent, if more recent, dating from the time when they chose to exchange “les armes des Brabant contre celles des Guermantes” (*RTP2 : CG 879*), while also replacing their war cry from “Limbourg à qui l’a conquis” (*RTP2 : CG 879*), with “Combraysis” to finally settle on “Passavant” (*RTP2 : JF 113*). This traces an evolution starting from the Holy Roman Empire, moving to the Limbourg²¹ duchy as a transition to France and Combray, and culminating with the edifying “Passavant” that stands for the preeminence of their house over any other, French or foreign. Continuing the process of mediatization and separating their title, and thus their origin, from direct possession of or settlement in the territory to which it corresponds, the Guermantes claim to remain the real dukes of Brabant due to their ancient roots there since “il y a des titres de prétention qui subsistent parfaitement si le territoire est occupé par un usurpateur” (*RTP2 : CG 879*).

Thus, in a trajectory inverse, yet parallel, to that of French nobility during Revolutionary emigration, who leave France without losing their title, the Guermantes leave Brabant and take their title with them. There results from such a move a different kind of patriotism, which multiplies the distinctions opposing motherland as regime, law, and morality, to homeland as country, simple birth accident. The accent remains on the prestige of a lineage and familial memories rather than on national allegiance as such. In this context, the Guermantes take equal pride in their old French and German titles which add to the nobility of their house. Thus, the duke of Guermantes reminds everyone that “[n]ous avons été ducs d’Aumale, duché qui a passé . . . régulièrement dans la maison de France” (*RTP2 : CG 879*), or that Condé is the duchess’s

²¹ From 1288, the dukes of Brabant became also dukes of Limbourg. The Limbourg duchy was stretching from Liège in Belgium to Maastricht in the Netherlands and Aix-La Chapelle in Germany (“Liste des ducs et duchesses de Brabant”, *Wikipédia*).

uncle (*RTP2 : CG 880*). As Fiette shows, the fundamental noble quality is a longer lineage, something that time, through heredity as well as strategical alliances, can only enhance (21). Furthermore, from the perspective of the Faubourg Saint-Germain where the Guermantes, as well as la crème de la crème of nobility live, the hereditary titles and dignities of the great aristocratic families meant everything. All the other meant nothing at all. The Empire was simply an accident. Foreign titles, Prussian, Italian, or pontifical, were equally looked down upon, while the nobility particle was irrelevant in the absence of an ancient fief (*Assouline 203-204*). By insisting on the precedence of his lineage, Charlus also reveals the level at which it is interwoven with that of the house of France:

Il y a un certain nombre de familles prépondérantes . . . , avant tout les Guermantes, qui comptent quatorze alliances avec la Maison de France, ce qui est d'ailleurs surtout flatteur pour la Maison de France, car c'était à Aldonce de Guermantes et non à Louis le Gros, son frère consanguin mais puîné, qu'aurait dû revenir le trône de France. Sous Louis XIV, nous drapâmes à la mort de Monsieur, comme ayant la même grand'mère que le Roi. . . . (*RTP3 : SG 475*)

Indeed, from this perspective the Guermantes embody eternal France, or rather the only France there is, one that gradually took shape in time through constant mixing with its neighbors. Legitimacy is acquired through assimilation. The Guermantes are able to perceive this because of their privileged access to history as familial memory. Thus, in the case of every aristocrat, “sa mère, ses oncles, ses grand'tantes le mettent en rapport . . . avec ce que pouvait être une vie presque inconnue aujourd'hui” (*RTP2 : CG 839*). The past becomes an everyday experience. The case of the Guermantes is telling: a constant stream of their ancestor's biographical memories, devoid of any nostalgia, makes an important part of their conversation. This is why Proust dubs

them “les aimables et bénévoles conservateurs du passé” (*RTP2 : CG 840*), reminding his readers that nobility, along with the church and the state, were the main sources of historical archives (Nora, “Between Memory and History” 9). Nonetheless, their approach to the past offers a different perspective from official history:

un grand événement historique n’apparaissait au passage que masqué, dénaturé, restreint, dans le nom d’une propriété, dans les prénoms d’une femme, choisis tels parce qu’elle est la petite-fille de Louis-Philippe et Marie-Amélie considérés non plus comme roi et reine de France, mais seulement dans la mesure où, en tant que grands-parents, ils laissèrent un héritage. (*RTP2 : CG 826*)

It breaks the mold that fits the pattern of the nationalistic reverence for auld lang syne by dwelling on temporal continuities, and in which any detail is subordinate to a superior whole. Barrès speaks to this latter model when he glorifies the motherland’s history, in which “[i]l y a des instants ignobles, mais leur somme fait une éternité noble” (*Les déracinés* 468). Contrastively, the nobility’s approach to history is akin to memoirs and literature. Their attitude echoes the distinction made by de Certeau between the two ways of apprehending a past event: while official history conceives it as authorized by an institution, nobility makes it relative to a trifle (*Histoire et psychanalyse* 136) – a trivial familial event. From such a perspective, history ceases to be a monument that overwhelms the individual, subjecting him to the grandeur of the nation of which he is only an insignificant part, to become more of a homely abode to ubiquitous traces of the past: “M. de Guermantes se trouvait posséder des souvenirs qui donnaient à sa conversation un bel air d’ancienne demeure dépourvue de chefs-d’œuvre véritables, mais pleine de tableaux authentiques, médiocres et majestueux . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 825*).

This tactic echoes that of the *mémoires d'épée* of their ancestors: as Nora suggest, “[t]he memoirs of these feudal lords became the last bastion and citadel of the past against the artisans and courtesans of the glory of kings” (“Memoirs of Men of State” 415). Just as the memoirs of Saint-Simon, such familial recollections allow the move from great history to a history of the detail, escaping the vaster narrative of the nation. This atomization of memory, marking the transition from the collective to the individual, escapes Barrèsian history already invested with an ideology: national unity requires of all Frenchmen “à nous confondre avec toutes les heures de l'histoire de France, à vivre avec tous ses morts, à ne nous mettre en dehors d'aucune de ses expériences”, which in turn implies that “la France consulaire, la France monarchique, la France de 1830, la France de 1818, la France de l'Empire autoritaire, la France de l'Empire libéral, toutes ces Frances enfin . . . , procèdent du même fonds et tendent au même but . . .” (*Scènes et doctrines* 82-83). Indeed, this overhaul of the past for political purposes shows how, from the traces left by previous periods, every age constructs the hybrid past that suits it best (Baudrillard, *Figures de l'altérité* 50). It is to this simulacrum of the past through the lens of the present, subsequently used for political purposes, that most of the Third Republic's society is exposed. Furthermore, as Benda shows, nationalism is reinforced through an imagined past, through ambitions that go back to the ancestors, animated by secular aspirations and the attachment to historical rights. Such a sentiment was started by the German pretense of embodying the soul of the Holy German Empire (150), a pretense that could have been equally raised by French nobility. However, the nobility subverts this mystical adoration of the nation which strategically ignores intervening historical changes: “l'aristocratie, en sa construction lourde, percée de rares fenêtres, laissant entrer peu de jour, montrant le même manque d'envolée,

mais aussi la même puissance massive et aveuglée que l'architecture romane, enferme toute l'histoire, l'emmure, la renfrogne" (*RTP2 : CG 826*).

This massive representation of history can no longer be used to highlight the past as a justification of the present: it is the aristocracy that remembers and what it remembers is itself. Having no other purpose than its own, it can no longer be the basis and teleology of the nation. In contrast with official history, which, as de Certeau shows, has already eliminated any form of alterity with its ensuing danger (*L'écriture de l'histoire 339*), it keeps including its other. Thus, to explain his parentage with Mme d'Arpajon, the duke de Guermantes had to "remonter, par la chaîne et les mains unies de trois ou de cinq aïeules, à Marie-Louise ou à Colbert" (*RTP2 : CG 826*). Since Marie-Louise²² is of Habsburg blood, while the Colbert were "simples bourgeois alors" (*RTP4 : TR 546*), such an approach to history supports de Certeau's view of history in general: "Il y a toujours, ob-scène, un parvenu dans la place du noble, un étranger dans la place de l'autochtone pur-sang" (*L'écriture de l'histoire 402*). Thus, Proust refers to the patrimony of national history only to put forward an alternative view of the past. Aware that memories are the anti-ideological field par excellence (Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien I 162*), he tactically uses the nobility's biographical perspective,

Nonetheless, the narrator remains wary of history since it is "[l]a Muse qui a recueilli . . . tout ce qui n'est pas fondé en vérité, tout ce qui est contingent . . ." (*RTP4 : AD 254*). This echoes de Tarde's belief that history feeds on illogic and incoherence, yet the 'National Credo'

²² Marie-Louise is either the Marie Louise d'Autriche ("Index des noms de personnes", *RTP4 1594*), and thus daughter of Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor ("Marie Louise", *Oxford Reference*). Or she is the daughter of the last king of France, Louis-Philippe de Bourbon and his wife Marie-Amélie de Bourbon-Siciles, to which the text refers on the same page. In which case she also descends from the same line as grand granddaughter of Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor ("Marie Amélie de Bourbon-Siciles", *Wikipédia*).

integrates these random events in an a-posteriori systematization he dubs the progressive “logification” of history (Millet 335). If the past is considered sacred, anything pertaining to it participates in this superior essence. Consequently, the artist “risque de croire que les choses du passé ont un charme par elles-mêmes” (*RTP2 : CG 840*), while his art would be “mort-née” like any form of aesthetics with a purpose exterior to it. To escape this contrived nature of history, those enjoying historical vestiges should reenchant them through their own perceptions, as when proceeding “à déchiffrer, imaginant peut-être l’image d’une fraîche paroissienne, sur la plaque de cuivre du prie-Dieu de bois, les noms des filles du hobereau ou du notable” (*RTP4 : AD 254*). Thus, the narrator reminds us that our aesthetic pleasure is derived from the imaginative faculties of the artist, his unique insight, as well as from the style of his descriptions: in itself, history is not a form of art. This is why, in his contemplation of the Guermantes genealogy, the narrator emphasizes that “ma curiosité historique était faible en comparaison du plaisir esthétique” (*RTP2 : CG 831*). Yet Marcel perceives their family tree as a reliquary in which some of his contemporaries feature along with historical figures long deceased (*RTP2 : CG 826*), so much so that they all become simple names moving at the whim of a newfound prestige deriving from a theretofore unknown alliance: “Les noms cités avaient pour effet de désincarner les invités de la duchesse” (*RTP2 : CG 831*). Like Frenchness, history and lineage participate in a process of depersonalization. Even so this development is actually required for the poetical effect the narrator seeks, as only then

ces faces . . . n’étaient empâtées pour moi d’aucun résidu d’expérience matérielle [...], elles restaient . . . homogènes à ces noms, qui, à intervalles réguliers, chacun d’une couleur différente, se détachaient de l’arbre généalogique de Guermantes, et ne

troublaient d'aucune matière étrangère et opaque les bourgeons translucides, qui . . .
fleurissaient de l'un et l'autre côté de l'arbre de verre. (*RTP2 : CG 832*)

The nationalistic potential of the nobility is neutralized through the recourse to aesthetic, as the narrator refers to the aristocracy in flesh only to murder it through representation.

Pertinently, a similar process is at play when the fascination of the Guermantes name takes hold of Marcel's imagination. While he is aware "qu'ils étaient des personnages réels et actuellement existants", not having actually met them allows the narrator to imagine them "tout à fait impalpables comme l'image de Geneviève de Brabant, ancêtre de la famille de Guermantes" (*RTP1 : CS 169*). It is only during this stage that they are identical to the essence of their name, but as its prerequisite "leur personne ducale se distendait démesurément, s'immatérialisait, pour pouvoir contenir en elle ce Guermantes dont ils étaient duc et duchesse . . ." (*RTP1 : CS 169*). The consequence of their name having taken over their individual existence is that they can no longer reside in the realm which they symbolize. Their connection with the local becomes purely formal: "propriétaires de la ville, mais non d'une maison particulière, demeurant sans doute dehors, dans la rue entre ciel et terre, comme ce Gilbert de Guermantes, dont je ne voyais aux vitraux de l'abside de Saint-Hilaire que l'envers de laque noire, si je levais la tête quand j'allais chercher du sel chez Camus" (*RTP1 : CS 170*).

This dematerialization explains why, upon first seeing the actual duchess of Guermantes, the narrator is shocked by the incongruity between her personal appearance and the image he projected from her illustrious name. This jolt dawns on him that concepts and individuals have a different order of existence, as Mme de Guermantes "n'était pas colorable à volonté comme elles qui se laissaient imbiber de la teinte orangée d'une syllabe, mais était . . . réelle . . ." (*RTP1 : CS 173*). Indeed, the individual and his name are "deux disques séparés par un intervalle" (*RTP1 :*

CS 173), which can only coincide upon death. As such, the Guermantes become pure form only when interred “dans l’église de Combray, où chaque membre de la famille n’était plus qu’un Guermantes, avec une privation d’individualité et de prénoms qu’attestait sur les grandes tentures noires le seul G... de pourpre, surmonté de la couronne ducale” (*RTP2 : CG 742-743*). Thus, the narrator uses the model against itself to destabilize the prevalence of form over content, as the transcendence of a noble name annihilates the aristocracy in person.

Similarly, death deprives Robert de Saint-Loup not only of his hobbies, his books, and his individual particularities, but even of his father’s name, yet it allows him to reach the essence preordained by his lineage: “il n’était plus qu’un Guermantes . . . , comme ce fut symboliquement visible à son enterrement dans l’église Saint-Hilaire de Combray, toute tendue de tentures noires où se détachait en rouge, sous la couronne fermée, sans initiales de prénoms ni titres, le G du Guermantes que par la mort il était redevenu” (*RTP4 : TR 429*). This phenomenon is most prominent in the illusory *princesse de Guermantes*, unique, unchanging, and immortal, which hides from view the succession of actual women who had historically held that title. It explains how Mme Verdurin, lacking any noble lineage, can supplant the former princess Marie-Gilbert de Guermantes, sister of the duc de Bavière (*RTP1 : JF 510*), now deceased, despite the incongruous disparities between them. “[L]e nom refermant sur celles qui sombrent de temps à autre sa toujours pareille et immémoriale placidité” (*RTP4 : TR 534*) allows time to make any middle-class woman one with her newly acquired title. Lost in a long line of shadows bearing the same name, all will meld in memory in the illustrious sonority of a noble house (*RTP4 : TR 533-534*). While all titles have this particularity, as “c’est d’une façon anonyme, sans distinction d’individualité, qu’on demeure le duc d’Uzès” (*RTP3 : LP 704*), this phenomenon does not stop with the aristocracy. The accession of the individual to the category to which he is assigned has

the same dynamics. Swann becomes a Jew only in death, when “on ne voit plus qu’une barbe de prophète surmontée d’un nez immense qui se dilate pour aspirer les derniers souffles, avant l’heure des prières rituelles, et que commence le défilé ponctuel des parents éloignés s’avançant avec des mouvements mécaniques, comme sur une frise assyrienne” (*RTP3* : *SG* 103).

This transcendence of form over content, manifested in the aristocratic name dominating the individual that has it, or the racial characteristic defining the person to which it is assigned, seems to bring order over a chaotic, ever-changing universe. It reflects the similar aspiration of the Barrèsian ideology towards immobilism to make sense of the world, given that “[n]otre caractère national . . . se maintiendra d’autant mieux que les conditions où nous vivrons demeureront pareilles aux conditions qui formèrent nos ascendants” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 61). Yet in *La recherche* the dominance of form over content allows the narrator to reenchant the world with a charm that is otherwise absent from daily life. Marcel is animated by the same hope as the narrator in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, namely that “sous ces noms-là trouverais-je quelque chose de si différent de moi qu’à la vérité cela serait presque de même matière qu’un Nom” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 335). Such an attitude corresponds to the search for stimuli as a consequence of the blasé attitude characteristic of a modernity in which natural excitement is disappearing coetaneous with the fading of all specific value into a common mediating one (Simmel 277). Deriving from the weariness of a life enslaved to set forms and formulae, such as the conformity to Barrèsian Frenchness, the narrator fabricates differences and produces value as rarity. However, this mindset poses the danger of the charismatic, with its ensuing potential of violence so eloquently described by Serres: “la passion mimétique de la rareté pousse la population au goulot d’étranglement devant le guichet, où elle s’écrase, où elle se bat, se piétine et se hait avec allégresse” (272). This is why one of the outcomes of the narrator’s journey of

apprenticeship is his escape from the temptation of subordinating feeling to naming, as in the last volume of the cycle he remarks that “les noms avaient perdu pour moi de leur individualité” (*RTP4 : TR* 510).

On the other hand, according to the narrator in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, promoting naming over feeling works on condition of detaching the category from its actual manifestation because only a pure name can remain “plein de ses belles images qu’aucun souvenir terrestre n’abaissait” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 293). Indeed, Marcel is aware that names “répondent toujours à une notion de l’intelligence, étrangère à nos impressions véritables, et qui nous force à éliminer d’elles tout ce qui ne se rapporte pas à cette notion” (*RTP2 : JF* 191). Names and categories function by imposing a form over an actual content, echoing de Tarde’s conception of structure defined as that which is imagined to fill the gaps caused by a deficit of information regarding the links between elements belonging to the same system (Latour, “Tarde’s Idea of Quantification” 153). While in the case of predefined categories, such as Frenchness, foreignness or races, the prerequisite is depersonalization, for noble names it is death. This is why “les beaux noms éteints” were in consequence “d’autant plus ardemment rallumés” (*RTP2 : CG* 832). The deleterious effects of this phenomenon can be countered only by displacing it to the aesthetical field. Subsequently, the enjoyment derived from such practices will be located at a personal, rather than collective, level. Concurrently, utility has to be evacuated from such forms. In fact, the transition from formalism²³ to aestheticism is natural, since both form and art are autonomous realms, operating apart from reality. Between the two, the narrator makes an explicit

²³ Formalism is used here according to the Merriam-Webster definition as “method, style, way of thinking, etc., that shows very careful attention to traditional forms and rules”, based on a “strict adherence to prescribed or external forms” and which corresponds to a “de-emphasis of content” (“Formalism”).

distinction: names are either “le signe mathématique ou esthétique” which affects the perception of a person.

When systematically used with ‘mathematical’ precision to the purpose of categorizing individuals, both Frenchness and naming contribute to the nationalistic project: though unable to change reality, they create a perception of reality that conforms to a separation akin to that between friends and enemies, echoing Barrès who admits that “[n]ous n'avons pas réussi à faire la France telle que nous la voudrions, mais nous avons réussi à faire la France dans nous-mêmes” (*Scènes et doctrines* 120). Thus extracting timeless forms from historical contexts is a dangerous and misleading practice, yet it remains innocuous in the smallest fragments of everyday life as initially practiced by the narrator in the case of names and Frenchness. Inasmuch as they reenchant the ordinary world, Marcel is not ready to entirely give up on their imaginative potential: upon looking back at his youth, he treasures it as “l’âge où les Noms . . . nous offr[ent] l’image de l’inconnaissable que nous avons versé en eux” (*RTP2 : CG* 310). The question remains on how to reconnect these eternal forms removed from life with life itself: that is the role of the artist. Since, as Simmel shows, art raises the individual above the immediacy of the relation to the world and to others, its merit lies in a distancing and release from emotion (Simmel 164). An aesthetical attitude eliminates the danger of acting based on the primacy of form, while the process of beautification is conditioned by the fading of the actual object itself which thus loses its charismatic potential: favoring form over content remains harmless on condition of circumscribing it to the aesthetical field. This is why, in the case of noble names, such a practice requires “ce détachement intellectuel assez complet de l’aristocratie pour lui trouver, comme à une chose étrangère, inutile et morte, un charme esthétique” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 290-291).

While the gradual fading of nobility is a process developing throughout *La recherche* and epitomized by the exclamation “Oh ! aujourd’hui, il n’y a plus de princes”, there remains nonetheless a newfound inspirational value that the narrator still grants it: “Assurément, il n’y en eut jamais. Mais dans le seul sens imaginatif où il peut y en avoir, il n’y a qu’aujourd’hui qu’un long passé a rempli les noms de rêves” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 326), but only through a process of sublation that evidences its simultaneous greatness and nothingness. At a prima facie level, this echoes Barrès’s remark on “quelques noms historiques qui gardent justement une force sur les imaginations” (*Les déracinés* 250). Yet Barrèsian rhetoric was intent on using such names to magnify the glory of the nation which would consequently overwhelm individual consciousness. Proust was aware of the danger of such a strategy. Consequently, I argue that in *La recherche* names participate in the same process as Frenchness. Both are a continuation of ideas, manifesting an essence imposed upon individuals regardless of their particularities, which are subsequently erased. However, as we shall see, in both cases the irrepressible heterogeneity of individual personalities always ends up having the upper hand to the detriment of predetermined structures: in Proust, life protests against any forms that solidify too much in it because they oppose transitional phenomena that manifest the richness of life. Consequently, both are evacuated and rendered innocuous through a recourse to aesthetics which makes them useless.

Yet names play a further role in *La recherche*. While accrediting separate identities hierarchically organized, the narrator inadvertently shows their imbrication: never in a box, but in several at the same time because of the added time dimension. Names expose the stranger in residence: “[p]arfois plusieurs [familles] restaient en compétition pour une même coquille ; pour la principauté d’Orange, la famille royale des Pays-Bas et MM. de Mailly-Nesle ; pour le duché

de Brabant, le baron de Charlus et la famille royale de Belgique ; tant d'autres pour les titres de prince de Naples, de duc de Parme, de duc de Reggio" (*RTP2 : CG* 830). This newfound mobility of a title disregards ethnicity and national borders. It shows how autochthones and foreigners, akin to Serres's hosts and parasites, are constantly crossing each other, solitary wanderers going back and forth (Serres 39). It is their manifestation that effects the changes history unwittingly records, though this actual dynamics is never remembered. As Renan shows, history systematically practices a selective forgetting required for the forging of a nation (Renan 13). Like the memory of a people, official history transforms past events into heroic deeds, always discarding what cannot be transformed into a good cause or contradicts the teleology of its continuity. Contrastively, *La Recherche* remembers exactly the biographical history of details which allows "cette statuette en porcelaine de Saxe qu'était M^{me} de Guermantes" (*RTP2 : CG* 315) to also embody the Frenchness of her estates "comme des personnages sculptés au linteau d'un portail tiennent dans leur main la cathédrale qu'ils ont construite, ou la cité qu'ils ont défendue" (*RTP3 : LP* 540).

Consequently, Frenchness and foreignness cease to be mutually exclusive not only in the case of Oriane, but of all the Guermantes. For instance, the narrator sees Saint-Loup as the perfect embodiment of Mâle's *opus francigenum*. In the view of Compagnon, this concept manifests the priority of French over German Gothic (Compagnon 225), yet Robert himself continues to appreciate all things German and remains proud of his heritage. In fact, his Frenchness does not prevent him from delighting in German music even during the Great War when a frantic Germanophobia was rejecting its culture and its language:

Saint-Loup me parlait-il d'une mélodie de Schumann, il n'en donnait le titre qu'en allemand et ne prenait aucune circonlocution pour me dire que quand, à l'aube, il avait

entendu un premier gazouillement à la lisière d'une forêt, il avait été enivré comme si lui avait parlé l'oiseau de ce « sublime Siegfried » qu'il espérait bien entendre après la guerre. (*RTP4 : TR 334*)

However, their German propinquity and lineage give the Guermantes a dubious reputation in some circles. Mme de Cambremer, knowing that they are half-German, takes them all to be Dreyfusards as all foreigners are. Indeed, at a time when every German was considered “forcément un menteur, une bête féroce, un imbécile” (*RTP4 : TR 492*), the Guermantes were at the periphery of France. Defined as someone who does not belong to the nation, the foreigner becomes the traitor whenever the nation is in danger – albeit at war or in an economic crisis. Though the French revolution declared all philosophers and freedom fighters honorary French citizens, during the Terror all troubles were attributed to a political conspiracy hatched abroad, with foreigners acting as spies to destabilize the country. Thus, as Gérard Noiriel shows, “[f]oreigners were . . . among the first victims of the Terror. . . . The greatest champion of universal values, Anacharsis Cloots, was executed as a Prussian agent. Thomas Paine was thrown in prison. Even though most of these measures were abandoned after the Terror, they demonstrated the implacable logic of the forms of exclusion inherent in societies built upon national foundations” (Noiriel 151). Similarly, after the Affair, hostilities continued not for or against Dreyfus, but rather for a certain idea of France that refused the sacrifice of foreigners (Vajda 177). This Barrèsian position is echoed by Charlus who claims that in case of war “si on fait venir des Sénégalais et des Malgaches, je ne pense pas qu'ils mettront grand cœur à défendre la France , et c'est bien naturel” (*RTP2 : CG 584*). Furthermore, during 1914 and 1915, Weber shows that *l'Action Française* was on the offensive against the tendency of all foreigners to betray France. Recently naturalized French citizens, particularly those of German descent, were a

preferred target, as were Russian exiles and Russian Jews. Anyone of German, Swiss, or Dutch, descent automatically became a potential spy. *L'Action française* requested the stop of naturalization during the war and broader internment for foreigners. (Weber, *L'Action Française* 115).

Yet this suspicion does not extend to Saint-Loup who “a beau avoir toute une parenté allemande, son père revendiquait avant tout son titre de grand seigneur français, il a repris du service en 1871 et a été tué pendant la guerre de la plus belle façon” (*RTP3 : SG* 480). Since his father has paid the “impôt du sang” based on which Barrès makes the final distinction between autochthones and foreigners (*Scènes et doctrines* 468), Robert de Saint-Loup is French. The narrator’s corollary to the indictment placing Germany beyond the pale of humanity consists of “l’exception faite des Allemands qui avaient embrassé la cause française” (*RTP4 : TR* 492) and moves Frenchness from lineage to loyalty – a question of choice, echoing Renan’s theory of the nation which defines national belonging as “un plébiscite de tous les jours” (Renan 32). Thus, inasmuch as its loyalties are French, the nobility is part of the nation despite a hybrid heritage. Theretofore, its centrality in *La recherche* is tactical, as by extension it allows the many foreigners living in France at any given time to become a part of the French nation too. It should be remembered that upon the start of the Great War, in the streets of Paris, Ottomans, Russians, and Romanians, marched in support of their host country. Five thousand foreign and Jewish voluntaries were integrated in the French Army: Ottomans, Italians, Czechs, and many others (Assouline 259-260). This overwhelming foreign presence is manifested by “les brillants uniformes qui passaient . . . et qui faisaient de Paris une ville aussi cosmopolite qu’un port . . .” (*RTP4 : TR* 379). The reader can choose to see it as the symbol “soit de cette invasion que prédisait le défaitisme de M. de Charlus, soit de la coopération de nos frères musulmans avec les

armées de la France . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 387*). Regardless of this, admission into Barrès’s “familles spirituelles de la France” was only granted through martyrdom.

Social “Haussmannization”

I argue that *La recherche* tactically draws attention to the fact that the “Haussmannization” of French society has begun from the upper echelon of society, which in turn grants to the aristocracy primacy in a novel concerned with the state of the nation. As already seen, old French nobility is of hybrid ethnic lineage. Furthermore, urban migration started with the nobility’s desire to lead a leisurely existence at court, giving up local responsibilities and even disposing of their estates. Nonetheless, as Fiette suggests, noblemen forced to sell their family land despised greedy, often aristocratic, bargain hunters always on the look-out for sellers: Parisian or Norman noblemen are dubbed either Jews or Arabs because of their drive for profit (Fiette 222). Yet these were often purchasers of large rural estates on the market. Thus, the aristocrats’ link to the local is frequently illusory: even for those still living in the rural area, monetary interests incited them to purchase properties in various parts of France, abandoning their fief in favor of a new acquisition. Significantly, the narrator will find out that the Guermantes family “avait résidé jusque-là dans le voisinage, et son titre ne venait pas de cette région”, while “le château ne s’appelait Guermantes que depuis le XVII^e siècle où sa famille l’avait acquis” (*RTP2 : CG 324*). Even the village has received the name from the castle itself, having been built after the Guermantes’ arrival. Their link to Combray is more recent than it had appeared, as is their patrimony: the tapestries the narrator had long fantasized about “étaient de Boucher, achetées au XIX^e siècle par un Guermantes amateur, et étaient placées à côté de tableaux de chasse médiocres qu’il avait peints lui-même . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 315*).

As Fiette demonstrates, particularly in the wake of Napoleon's Empire and the end of Emigration, the opposition between a modern capitalist bourgeoisie and a passive, less greedy nobility, living from land income, cannot be generalized (Fiette 165): pragmatism becomes a must for the reconstruction of the patrimony of noble families. Strategic misalliances, motivated by financial gain, are part of this process of reconstruction. In fact, such misalliances abounded even during *l'Ancien Régime* not only between the *noblesse d'épée* and that of robe, but also as marriages with the daughters of rich financiers (Fiette 27). Indeed, "le trisaïeul [de Mme de Guermantes] avait épousé . . . une fille de Louvois²⁴ . . ." (*RTP2 : CG 824*). This process accelerates during *la Belle Époque*, when, as Assouline explains, the trend was towards Jewish and American marriages (Assouline 188), prompting Drumont's comment that "[I]'Américanisme a envahi Paris presque autant que le Sémitisme" (Drumont 367). Thus, an American heiress has married a Guermantes, giving her the right not only to visit the duchess, but also to call her "ma tante" – something Oriane tolerates with great stoicism (*RTP2 : CG 825*), while "une nièce de M^{me} de Guermantes avait épousé un Américain du nom de Charles Crécy . . ." (*RTP3 : SG 471*). Furthermore, Saint-Loup's mother, as well as her brother the duke, are obsessed by "un colossal mariage d'argent" for Robert (*RTP2 : CG 702*), which they will indeed achieve when he weds Gilberte, Swann's daughter of half Jewish blood. It meant that upstart money made acceptable the alliance between the faubourg Saint-Germain and the faubourg Saint-Honoré, and even the park Monceau. While the faubourg Saint-Germain was the heart of the oldest French aristocracy, le faubourg Saint-Honoré was the residence of choice of Jewish financial aristocracy, and the park Monceau the newest destination attracting some of the

²⁴ François Michel Le Tellier de Louvois (1641-1691) was the Secretary of State for War during a significant period of Louis XIV's reign ("Louvois, François-Michel le Tellier, marquis de", *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*).

faubourg Saint-Germain, as well as Saint-Honoré: the milieu of the Judeo-Gotha cosmopolitanism (Assouline 183-185). This development prompts Barrès to consider that nobility “ne subsiste à l'état d'apparence mondaine que par les expédients du rastaquouérisme” (*Les déracinés* 250).

By its alliance with Jewish and American heiresses, French aristocracy becomes the newest upstart put in a paradoxical position: simultaneously at the center of society as the oldest lineage symbolic of Frenchness, and at its periphery as useless since “elle ne rend aucun service particulier, ne jouit d'aucun privilège” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 250). As such, it mirrors the condition of foreigners. On the one hand, they constitute the central repulsive nucleus around which the nation can coalesce: the mechanism of nationalism consists in “s'opposer . . . aux étrangers de l'intérieur” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 100). On the other, they are at the periphery as a minority incompatible with the rest of the social body: “des étrangers ne peuvent rien ressentir de profond qui leur soit commun avec nous” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 204). This Judeo-Gotha rapprochement taking place at the periphery of the nation, but occupying the center stage of its preoccupation, is also brought to light by the narrator's comment: “c'était le moment où des suites de l'affaire Dreyfus était né un mouvement antisémite parallèle à un mouvement plus abondant de pénétration du monde par les Israélites” (*RTP4 : AD* 155).

Consequently, despite an intensification of social anti-Semitism, M^{me} Alphonse de Rothschild becomes the intimate friend not only of M^{me} de la Trémoille and M^{me} de Sagan, but of Oriane herself, being a frequent guest of her salon. Furthermore, the baron de Hirsch, brought over by le prince de Galles, is also a habitual visitor (*RTP3 : SG* 68). Maurice de Hirsch (1831-1896), an Austrian Jewish financier, was reputed to be one of the wealthiest men of that time, close friend of many princes, potentates, diplomats and statesmen, a thorough cosmopolitan speaking several languages and dividing his life between Paris, London, and his estate in

Hungary (Lee 10). Nonetheless, there were suspicions of a conspiracy between him and Paul Eugène Bontoux (1820-1904), president of the board of directors of *l'Union Générale* at the moment of its crash in 1882²⁵ (Grunwald 56). The *Union Générale* was an investment fund presuming to consolidate the financial strength of Catholics to the detriment of Jewish and Protestant bankers, thus safeguarding French religion and society (Brown, *For the Soul of France* 61-62). Its crash, which not only ruined scores of small private investors, but also contributed to a recession which affected France for years, was blamed on the machinations of a group of German Jews, hostile to the country's interests (Brown, *For the Soul of France* 71): Hirsch was now allegedly one of them, but remained nonetheless one of the favored guests of duchesse de Guermantes.

Yet Hirsch's name was best known for his philanthropy and dedication to the Jewish cause: he spent most of his life and fortune in an effort to save the lives and relieve the sufferings of Russian and Near-Eastern Jews (Lee 13), a fact of which Proust was likely aware. These illustrious Jewish guests are preparatory steps for the end of the cycle, when Bloch has become a familiar of the prince de Guermantes' salon, together with the American "charmante amie de Bloch et de la duchesse de Guermantes" (*RTP4 : TR 539*) and another American "mariée au comte de Farcy, parent obscur des Forcheville" (*RTP4 : TR 538*). The Parisian upper crust is renewed not in depth but rather in girth (Fiette 215), resulting in social mixing and homogenization. There are those, however, who decry such a phenomenon. Their protestation, more or less sincere, culminates in the exclusion of M. de Guermantes from the presidency of the Jockey Club in favor of the intentionally modest and unfashionable M. de Chaussepierre. The

²⁵ These rumors were spread by the anti-Semitic writer Auguste Chirac in his book *L'Agiotage sous la IIIe République* (Grunwald 56).

narrator explains the duke's failure by the fact that "la duchesse . . . recevait les Rothschild", while an increased chauvinism felt that "on favorisait trop depuis quelque temps de grands potentats internationaux comme était le duc de Guermantes, à moitié allemand" (*RTP3 : LP 548*). Indeed, this outcome reflects a common perception of the times, blaming the old aristocracy for having substituted its authentic values by those of democracy and by a love of gain, having thus disposed of the precious inheritance eternal France had entrusted it (Assouline 190). Drumont's accusation is explicit: "tout l'armorial de France . . . [est] accouru pour adorer le Veau d'or et pour proclamer à la face de l'Europe que la richesse est la seule royauté qui existe encore" (Drumont 296).

This process of "Haussmannization" favors the foreign invasion of French society through the cosmopolitanism of the oldest nobility's salons, which, according to Fiette, bring together lineage, dilettantism, artistic, intellectual, and political celebrities, as well as cultivated Jews (Fiette 206). Foreign potentates, aristocrats, and high ranking diplomats, are a constant presence. To give just a few examples, the duke and duchess de Guermantes are hosts to "le roi et la reine d'Angleterre" (*RTP2 : CG 722*) and "la reine de Suède" (*RTP2 : CG 800*), the prince de Guermantes receives "le frère du roi Théodose, l'infante Marie-Conception" (*RTP2 : CG 863*), "[un] grand d'Espagne" (*RTP3 : SG 40*), "le grand-duc Wladimir" (*RTP3 : SG 57*), the entire "légation de X..." (*RTP3 : SG 64*), "l'ambassadrice d'Espagne" (*RTP3 : SG 36*), "l'ambassadeur d'Allemagne" (*RTP3 : SG 48*), "l'ambassadrice de Turquie" (*RTP3 : SG 59*), while the salon of the princesse de Parme is open "d'une façon générale à toute la grande aristocratie française et étrangère" (*RTP2 : CG 745*). The prestige of salons is enhanced by its pretensions at intellectual life which facilitates the infiltration of foreign culture. According to de Gramont, at the turn of the century foreign artists were the most popular in France: the world of

the salon assiduously read, or pretended to read, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Tolstoy, while Wagnerian music could be heard everywhere (*Les marronniers en fleurs* 64). Barrès decries this practice, dubbing “Nordic” such writers as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Ibsen, in opposition to the Roman school he considers more appropriate for the French spirit (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 100). This attitude is mirrored by Bergotte who “détestait Tolstoï, George Eliot, Ibsen et Dostoïewski”, a matter in which “[il] restait du reste fort exclusivement de son pays” (*RTP1 : JF* 546). As far as actual foreign artistic presence goes, the princesse de Guermantes can only boast the presence of her personal protégé, “un musicien bavarois à grands cheveux” (*RTP3 : SG* 81).

This cosmopolitanism trickles down to the aspiring bourgeoisie. In order to heighten the prestige of her salon, Mme Verdurin has recourse to the regular presence of the Polish sculptor Ski (*RTP3 : SG* 266), the Russian princess Sherbatoff (*RTP3 : SG* 269), as well as the occasional attendance of a Norwegian philosopher (*RTP3 : SG* 321). She boosts her status of patron of the arts through the acquaintance with the princess Yourbeletieff with whom she supports the Russian artistic avant-garde visiting Paris: Bakst, Nijinski, Stravinski, and Diaghilew (*RTP3 : SG* 140). Paradoxically, as de Gramont remarks, “c’est au moment où cette noble invasion étrangère nous pénétrait de toutes parts que le nationalisme battait son plein” (*Les marronniers en fleurs* 42). Benda (1867-1956), one of Proust’s contemporaries, explains it by the increased uniformity of social groups at that time, which are further homogenized by shared feelings of hatred against outsiders. Nationalism provides the much needed lift to a waning sense of personal identity, while modern politics uses it to draw up large groups of men against others through racial, national, or class attachments (Benda 136-137). More optimistic, de Tarde considers a successful heterogeneity making conspicuous the remnants of a static homogeneity lies at the root of this rise of nationalism, as “plus les adaptations sont multiples et précises, plus des inadaptations

sociales se révèlent, douloureuses, énigmatiques, justification de tant de plaintes” (*Les lois sociales* 64-65). Theretofore, Proust’s answer to this dangerous group dynamics is in the vein of de Tarde. In *La recherche*, a general hybridization, manifested as rampant foreignness, increases social fragmentation and blurs the predefined manifestations of Frenchness, thus resolving aesthetically that which cannot occur historically.

As already suggested, this foreignness starts from the upper echelon of society, from the Guermantes who, echoing the dialect of Françoise, use “[un] baragouin voulu, . . . aussi difficile à comprendre que le vieux français ou un moderne patois” (*RTP3 : SG* 213). Such unexpected manner of speech and behavior infiltrate the lower strata of society, raising questions about the actual substance of various Proustian characters’ *Francité*. The example of Albertine is eloquent. Just like Françoise and the duchess de Guermantes, she starts as the personification of Frenchness. The narrator unwittingly falls in love with her because she seemed “une des incarnations de la petite paysanne française dont le modèle est en pierre à Saint-André-des-Champs” (*RTP2 : CG* 662). In this, as in his attraction for Mme de Guermantes, the narrator is actuated by the mechanism of Tardian beliefs: any desire has always a belief as its object (Millet 198). Thus, Albertine’s fascination is on account of her presumed Frenchness, while Oriane mesmerizes him through the prestige of old French aristocracy. The initial simplistic view Marcel has of people is caused by what Simmel qualifies as the general tendency of social relations of that time. The modern division of labor increases the number of personal dependencies while simultaneously making the corresponding personalities fade behind their attributed functions (Simmel 320). At the outset, only one side of other people seems to operate, at the expense of all the other parts of their personality.

A priori for the narrator, the most prominent facet is a predetermined Frenchness, which unveils the widespread social routine, fanned by nationalism, of looking out for shared commonalities and conspicuous differences. According to Simmel, this practice was prevalent in both the political and scientific field, and it consisted in erecting “above the world of personalities, a world of objective forms of social action which would restrict and limit the impulses of individual personalities to very precisely and objectively determined expressions” (Simmel 320). In the Barrèsian doctrine, this enforcement of forms, exerted through what it meant to be French, is bestowed upon individuals as a rigid demand that would prevent them from manifesting their personalities. As a consequence, the nation becomes, or at least seems, homogeneous. Strikingly, Simmel describes the relationship between the world of form and that of actual content as “the relationship of geometric figures to empirical bodies” (Simmel 320), an expression similar to that used by the narrator when describing the citizens of a nation as “des cellules aux formes variées . . . , comme autant de petits polygones intérieurs” (*RTP4 : TR* 1222nna). The intrinsic heterogeneity individuals keep even in mass contexts foretells the outcome of Proustian Frenchness. As an example, “la mine décidée et française d’Albertine” (*RTP : CS* 282) soon dissolves in “plusieurs Albertine” (*RTP3 : LP* 580). From every different angle, her face appears altered, as that of a multiform God from an Oriental religion (*RTP2 : JF* 269-270). Whereas a priori he reveled in her Frenchness, soon he discovers that “des atavismes, des vices reposaient sur son visage” (*RTP3 : LP* 580). In the end, from “la jeune Picarde, qu’aurait pu sculpter à son porche l’imagier de Saint-André-des-Champs” (*RTP2 : CG* 665), there arises an absolute stranger, worse than a foreign spy. While the latter would have only hidden her nationality, Albertine lies about her very nature since “elle n’appartenait pas à

l'humanité commune, mais à une race étrange qui s'y mêle, s'y cache et ne s'y fond jamais”
(*RTP4 : AD* 108).

While in this sense Albertine epitomizes otherness, she is no exception in the sense that predetermined ethnic stereotypes are systematically eroded in *La recherche*. Charlus closely follows in her footsteps with his Janusian visage. Caught unawares without his fashionable mask, he reveals both his lineage – “[p]âle comme un marbre . . . , plus rien qu’un Guermantes, il semblait déjà sculpté, lui Palamède XV, dans la chapelle de Combray” – and his sexual orientation, through his womanly demeanor (*RTP3 : SG* 5). Contrastively, in his social hypostasis, he becomes “le prince allemand qu’était M de Charlus”, best embodying his Holy Roman Empire lineage as the projection of the *Tannhäuser* Margrave, “ayant, à l’entrée de la Warburg, une bonne parole condescendante pour chacun des invités . . .” (*RTP3 : SG* 49). All these personifications are expected since the reader knows him as noble, inverted, and German. Yet his most arresting avatar blurs all these predetermined identities: he appears with “ses cils noircis qui, contrastant avec ses joues poudrerizées, le faisaient ressembler à un grand inquisiteur peint par le Greco” (*RTP3 : LP* 712). Due to this appearance, his closest relative becomes a Guermantes’ servant, “vieux ou poudré, je ne sais, l’air d’un ministre espagnol . . .” (*RTP2 : CG* 715). This Proustian exercise in identity becomes relevant in the context of *la Belle Epoque* when the national bond was reduced to a matter of race or, rather, blood – a word often used by Barrès. As Pomian shows, such a political rhetoric opened the door for all kind of abuses (Pomian 75). Contrastively, the characters of *La recherche* cannot be differentiated based on ethnic criteria, in turn dissolving any illusion about the efficacy of a French prototype. The examples extend into the lower classes, starting with Aimé, the Balbec maître d’hôtel delighting visitors with his “genre étrusque roux”. While his ethnic origins are never discussed, his

appearance is enough to assign him to “une race plus ancienne que celle du prince [de Guermantes], donc plus noble” (*RTP3 : SG 379*).

Exercises in resemblance, tactically replacing judgements of value about Frenchness, or lack thereof, with judgements of fact noting a similitude, extend to foreigners. Swann resembles the “charmant roi mage, au nez busqué, aux cheveux blonds” from Luini’s fresco (*RTP1 : JF 563*). The choice of a religious painting hints to the fact that these holy Christian figures were in fact all Jewish, and thus it should come as no surprise that Swann looks like one of them. However, his hooked nose brings to mind that of “un curieux Valois” (*RTP3 : SG 89*), and together with his blond hair he seems a golden-haired Guermantes, “incurvant le nez busqué” (*RTP3 : LP 731*). Such an appearance makes credible the prince de Guermantes’ belief that Swann’s father was the result of a well-known love affair between the duc de Berri and his protestant grandmother, married to a Jew: “Dans cette hypothèse, laquelle était d’ailleurs fausse, Swann, fils d’un catholique, fils lui-même d’un Bourbon et d’une catholique, n’avait rien que de chrétien” (*RTP3 : SG 68*). None of Swann’s physical or mental characteristics make such a possibility any less credible, except for the actual knowledge of the narrator. Racial markers are absent.

The case of the young fashionable Greek lady visiting Paris appears different. She fascinates the narrator because she seems “une de ces figurantes qui, dans un ballet historique et esthétique à la fois, symbolisent, en chair et en os, l’art hellénique” (*RTP2 : CG 488*). Her ethnic origins are manifest since she closely resembles “une figure jadis admirée aux flancs d’un vase” in a museum full of ancient artifacts (*RTP2 : CG 489*). Thus, while Frenchness dissolves into aestheticism, foreignness too maintains ties with the arts. However, the latter is often manifested as an ugliness contrasted with the beauty of the French type. In the scene in which the gracious

Frenchness of Saint-Loup is most exalted by the narrator, he contrasts him with “bien des étrangers, intellectuels, rapins de toute sorte, résignés au rire qu’excitaient . . . leurs mouvements maladroit . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 702*). The dislike they excite is explicitly blamed on “un aspect étrange, loufoque”, due to “les cheveux trop longs, le nez et les yeux trop grands, des gestes théâtraux et saccadés . . .” (*RTP2 CG 702*). They are rejected not because of xenophobia, but rather as an aesthetical reaction to their unusual, non-conformist aspect. This scene echoes a similar fragment in Barrès, in which a Jewish family offers “un spectacle beau et touchant” in the dedication to their family. There is, nonetheless, a reservation to this seeming admiration: “ces gens-là eussent été magnifiques dans leur ghetto de Francfort. . . .” Yet, living in France, “ceci restait que, ruisselant d’une certaine intelligence, ils étaient laids tout de même, avec leur mimique étrangère, sous le porche d’une vieille maison de Neufchâteau” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 319-320). There is a certain symmetry between the two fragments, given that the narrator too insists on the moral qualities of the foreigners from the café. Despite their off-putting exterior, he describes them as having “beaucoup d’esprit, de cœur”, and being “des gens qu’on pouvait profondément aimer.” Thus, as in the case of Frenchness, foreignness has no predetermined moral implications. Yet in ethical terms the balance hangs in the latter’s favor, since

[p]our les Juifs en particulier, il en était peu dont les parents n’eussent une générosité de cœur, une largeur d’esprit, une sincérité, à côté desquelles la mère de Saint-Loup et le duc de Guermantes ne fissent piètre figure morale par leur sécheresse, leur religiosité superficielle qui ne flétrissait que les scandales, et leur apologie d’un christianisme aboutissant infailliblement . . . à un colossal mariage d’argent. (*RTP2 : CG 702*)

Thus, the superficial symmetry between the Proustian and Barrèsian scenes is limited to the repelling aspect of the foreigners. In spiritual terms, however, they are at polar opposites, with the narrator's description explicitly favoring the outsiders over the insiders.

In this context, it should also be remembered that an aesthetic dimension remains attached to the shockingly different, even if it is seemingly ugly. Though “un Israélite faisant son entrée” in a Parisian salon resembles “une hyène”, he still perfectly satisfies “un goût d’orientalisme.” Thus, in “notre pauvre monde de tous les jours”, the presence of the most manifestly Jewish Proustian character Albert Bloch has an artistic dimension exactly because of an ugliness due to his ethnicity. The mechanism at play here is central to the whole cycle. It consists in detoxifying difference by aestheticizing it. Upon entering the salon of Mme de Villeparisis, the narrator describes Bloch as “un Juif de Decamps²⁶”, manifesting the “[a]dmirable puissance de la race qui du fond des siècles pousse en avant jusque dans le Paris moderne. . . .” However, a *détournement* has already taken place because the race manifested in him is “celle des scribes assyriens peints en costume de cérémonie à la frise d’un monument de Suse qui défend les portes du palais de Darius” (*RTP2* : CG 488). Since “dans un salon français les différences entre ces peuples [les Roumains, les Egyptiens et les Turcs] ne sont pas si perceptibles, . . . un Israélite . . . contente parfaitement un goût d’orientalisme” on condition he has not been “assoupli par la gymnastique du « Faubourg », ni ennobli par un croisement avec l’Angleterre ou l’Espagne . . .” (*RTP2* : CG 488). Jews are thus Orientals, as are Turks and Egyptians. At the same time, Drumont insists on the incompatibility of Arabs, and thus of

²⁶ Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803-1863) is a painter famous for his authentic Oriental representations of the bible. However, having only experienced the Orient of Greece and Turkey, and just for a brief time, coupled with the Rembrandtesque influence in his paintings, and with what Ana-Joel Falcon terms “his own sentiment of being a failed artist” (Falcon ii), suggests that the authenticity of his representations of a Biblical Jew remains questionable.

Muslims, and Jews (Drumont 237), whereas Barrès dubs the Germans “Orientals” (Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason* 22). This racial mix-up, as actually manifested in French society at the time, is the ugly face of xenophobia, which consists in applying “a uniform label to individuals whose histories may in fact be quite different and who may not even see themselves as members of the same group” (Noiriel 166). Swann is a good example of such dynamics. As previously seen, his Jewish origins are on his father’s side: only his grandfather is a Jew, while the rest of his ancestors are Christian. According to rabbinic law, an individual is Jewish when and only if his mother is a Jewess. However, French society at large ignores this tradition: Swann is Jewish because Frenchmen deem him such, irrespective of the considerations of the Jewish community or of his own beliefs on the subject. The tragic results of the racial confusion dominant in France at the time are manifest in the fate of the director of the Grand Hôtel in Balbec. Though he is of Romanian descent and naturalized Monegasque (*RTP2 : JF* 26), he will be branded German by French authorities who “ayant appris qu’il l’était lui-même [boche] on l’eût mis dans un camp de concentration” (*RTP4 : TR* 325).

Overall, however, rather than addressing xenophobia and its consequences directly, Proust puts to good use the period’s confusion regarding ethnicity and race: it allows him to blur its predetermined manifestations. For instance, Swann comments how well Bloch resembles Bellini’s portrait of Mahomet II: “les mêmes sourcils circonflexes, le même nez recourbé, les mêmes pommettes saillantes” (*RTP1 : CS* 96), while Charlus inquires if he is Jewish simply by “curiosité esthétique” (*RTP2 : CG* 488), obviously attracted by his physic. Nonetheless, it is upon him showing up at the narrator’s home that the grandfather utters for the first time his famous “À la garde !” (*RTP1 : CS* 90), through which he unerringly identifies his Jewish friends. Subsequently, the same ditty will be applied to Mme Blatin by the narrator’s mother, to indicate

her Jewish origins (*RTP1* : *CS* 406). However, she also has a very distinctive appearance that is anything but Jewish: she is “exactement le portrait de Savonarole par Fra Bartolomeo” (*RTP1* : *JF* 525), referring to a famous Italian Dominican friar. The case of Rachel, the Jewish actress who is Saint-Loup’s mistress, is even more interesting. Her ethnicity is unraveling in the nickname unwittingly given her by the narrator: “Rachel quand du seigneur” (*RTP1* : *JF* 567). This is actually the name of an aria from Fromental Halévy’s opera *La Juive*, which recounts the story of the abandoned daughter of an Italian Count, subsequently become Cardinal. Adopted by a Jew and ignorant of her actual heritage, she is condemned to be burnt at the stake as a heretic. Though she finds the truth in time to save herself, she chooses to die for the religion that has now become hers (Lustig 20), in a striking parallel with French Jews dying on the battlefield though the nation denies their Frenchness. This story concealed in the novel is a first indication of the importance of culture in the separation between autochthones and foreigners – an aspect which I will further analyze in the next chapter.

In this context, the narrator’s painting references point to the similitude between certain characters and famous artworks, regardless of, or even contradicting, their actual ethnic background. They constitute unwitting counterpoints to his deliberate musings on the Frenchness and foreignness of those around him: the contrast between the spontaneity of the former and the latter’s recourse to ideologically informed modes of perception is telling. Proust tactically resorts to the naiveté of Marcel when making suggestions that go counter to the nationalistic grain, thus eluding a direct confrontation of his readers’ beliefs. Part of this approach consists in constructing an image of France from the narrator’s everyday experiences, which allows him to use paradoxes, ironies, aesthetic delight, and thus assemble a mosaic of unfettered

heterogeneities which contrast with the ethnically coherent nation preconceived by popular ideologies.

Doubling the pervasive foreignness and ethnic blurring that takes place throughout the novel, there is a parallel movement of displaced people roaming around Paris and even France. The example of the narrator visiting Balbec and feeling a complete stranger there is correlated with that of Françoise mourning her lost Combray, or of the Guermantes having left their family estate. We have already seen that this is the period when rural France is emptying out. As Weber shows, migration for work in the metropolis created tight homogenous communities which evolved in Parisian ghettos of French provincial immigrants that were perceived and perceived themselves as strangers, while their Frenchness could not be contested (*Peasants into Frenchmen* 282). The foreignness of displaced provincials is decried by Barrès in the person of the young Lorrainers, unrooted and lost in a foreign Paris: “Les voilà, comme les Orientaux du désert, qui cherchent un prophète!” (*Les déracinés* 214). However, the orphaned chambermaid from Balbec brings the foreignness of a Frenchwoman to a different level: “la petite femme de chambre qui était orpheline et avait été élevée chez des étrangers auprès desquels elle allait parfois passer quelques jours . . . excitait la pitié de Françoise et aussi son dédain bienveillant” (*RTP2 : JF* 53).

The fact that the young girl has never known “ce que c’est que d’avoir un chez soi” (*RTP2 : JF* 53) justifies such pity. Françoise is able to appreciate the privilege of having a family and a small property inherited from her parents. This is indeed the ideal of Radicalism, in which every family owning a little home and patch of land had ostensibly escaped the humiliation of the proletarian predicament (Baal 39). As previously mentioned, during *la Belle Epoque* Radicalism was popular in the rural area. While few agricultural workers were Radicals, a majority of small landowners were (Baal 44). Furthermore, as Frémont shows the land was *le*

bien off of which the rural family lived, allowing it to survive and reproduce, while also providing an identity and a history that everyone in the village understood and respected. Without land no peasant family could expect to remain a good family for very long (Frémont 32-33). This is why Françoise identifies her rural roots with landed property, making it an essential part of her identity. At the same time, land gave those owning it a feeling of superiority, thanks to which Françoise “ne pouvait pas considérer comme son égale une déracinée” (RTP2 : JF 53), a feeling in direct contradiction with the Barrèsian “magnifique sentiment égalitaire du paysan français” (*Les déracinés* 19) allegedly alive even in unrooted Frenchmen. This superiority a proper place gives Françoise, combined with her contempt for the chambermaid lacking it, captures the foundation of the social interaction between autochthones and foreigners. Furthermore, every character in *La recherche* is someone else’s foreigner: the orphan maid that of Françoise, the narrator that of the Comte de Bréauté-Consalvi in the salon of Mme de Guermantes (RTP2 : CG 724), Albertine that of the narrator because of her sexual orientation (RTP4 : AD 108), the duke de Guermantes that of his peasants that take him for an Englishman (RTP4 : AD 164), Charlus that of Mme Cottard who takes him for a Jew (RTP3 : SG 427), to give just a few examples. The substance of every Frenchman and foreigner is dissolved into unpredictable social interactions and connections. Thus, it seems that the situation of the young Lorrainers who complain that “Paris n’est pas un univers saisissable pour nous; c’est un désordre” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 224) is, in a certain measure, a general situation in *La recherche*. From the “Hausmanization” of French society indeed results “ce Paris nouveau, monstrueux, invraisemblable; . . . ce monde renversé” (Drumont 471).

But the resemblances stop here. For nationalists, Paris is a dangerous place “où les gens de bien sont maintenant à la merci des criminels de tous les pays” (Drumont 471). Barrès blames

the ills of France on a foreign invasion. Out of a population he estimates at “38 millions 343 mille Français et 36 millions 809 mille coloniaux” (*Les déracinés* 268), “treize cent mille étrangers sont installés en France, ils jouissent de notre pays sans en supporter les charges, et soixante-cinq mille seulement vivent de leurs revenus, c'est-à-dire nous apportent de l'argent” (*Scènes et doctrines* 458). Though they represent a mere 3.4 percent of the metropolitan French population, they allegedly provide the majority of criminals in France, as well as the paupers preventing poorer Frenchmen from getting much needed help: “les vingt mille étrangers condamnés chaque année par nos tribunaux; l'œuvre de l'Hospitalité de nuit recueillant dix mille étrangers à Paris, tandis que tant de malheureux, nos compatriotes, demeurent sur le trottoir faute de lits” (*Scènes et doctrines* 459).

This foreign invasion represents “[le] flot qui s'apprête à submerger notre race” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 460). For Proust, this way lies in wait an impending disaster. Proustian “Hausmanization” is a general phenomenon that has always already engulfed the whole of society. The line of demarcation between Frenchmen and foreigners is blurred because it has never been clear to begin with. Theretofore, through characters representing various levels of foreignness, Proust simultaneously reflects on the widespread chauvinistic rhetoric circulated at the time and throws off preconceived images of the French nation as ethnically and sexually coherent, making the exclusions prescribed by the phantasms of a French normative citizenship extremely hard to practice.

A Pervasive Innocuousness

In the first chapter I have briefly discussed how the spectacle of the privileged few dining in a fine restaurant draws an admiring crowd around them. I propose the aquarium setting emphasizes the narcissistic behavior of the wealthy diners: they single themselves out as special

by displaying a luxurious lifestyle in front of the less fortunate. This lack of modesty results in a mass of regular folks gathering around them to contemplate “la vie luxueuse de ces gens, aussi extraordinaire pour les pauvres que celle de poissons et de mollusques étranges . . .” (*RTP2 : JF* 42). At first sight, weird oral implements account for the privilege of the diners: their obvious alterity allows for the consumption of refined and abundant fare. Yet behind the awe at their opulence, their different appearance further fuels the hostility already brewing against their privileged lifestyle. The whole restaurant scene remains intentionally blurry with regards to the customers. Presented from the perspective of the crowd, they all appear as another species living in a separate space: incomprehensible sea monsters in an inaccessible aquarium. Still, one individual is singled out – an old Serbian lady (*RTP2 : JF* 42). A monster amongst others, no physical characteristic sets her apart, except for the Serbian label. Thus, it is exactly her foreignness that is capitalized. A formal exteriority makes her the natural scapegoat in a stabilizing ritual allowing for the return of social concord. As René Girard shows, the outlying position of the scapegoat circumvents the spread of destabilizing violence as no part of the community would demand retaliation for its sacrifice (*La violence et le sacré* 26-28). Hence, in a Barrèsian move, the old Serbian lady stands in for all the members of the rich group, becoming the potential target of the fury of the crowd. Yet in *La recherche*, with the exception of the Great War taking place behind the scenes, the point of violence is never reached despite the constant presence of its threat. Nonetheless, according to a letter Proust addressed to Paul Morand, the Great War affected him deeply:

Je ne vous parle pas de la guerre. Je l’ai, hélas, assimilée si complètement que je ne peux pas l’isoler. Je ne peux pas plus parler des espérances et des craintes qu’elle m’inspire qu’on ne peut parler des sentiments qu’on éprouve si profondément qu’on ne les

distingue pas de soi-même. Elle est moins, pour moi, un objet, au sens philosophique du mot, qu'une substance interposée entre moi-même et les objets. Comme on aimait Dieu, je vis dans la guerre. (Morand, "Notes" 82)

This intentional avoidance of open violence in the novel, which goes so far as to refer to the effects of war only indirectly, is at least in part due to Proust's answer to the Tardian "dilemme . . . de la paix perpétuelle" (Tarde, *Les lois sociales* 40). De Tarde had openly wondered if a society is better off divided between opposing religious sects and political parties, and at war with its neighbors, or when its citizens, plagued by individual inner struggles, are too self-involved, irresolute, and even discouraged, for outward fighting: "Vaut-il mieux cette paix de surface qui recouvre l'état de guerre sourd et continu des âmes aux prises avec elles-mêmes, ou dirons-nous que les guerres les plus meurtrières, les guerres religieuses même et tous les accès du délire politique dans les révolutions les plus sanglantes sont préférables à cette torpeur?" (*Les lois sociales* 39-40). The choice between external war and individual inner struggle is stark. Yet de Tarde, an optimist writing before the Great War, felt that he did not need to make it. He was convinced history was proof to the gradual extinction of conflict making unnecessary such a dialectic. The future of humanity held in its store perpetual peace (*Les lois sociales* 39-40).

Less optimistic, Proust cuts the Gordian knot in favor of social peace, choosing individual self-correction through the internalization of violence. He did not, however, want to achieve this at the price of universal unhappiness. Though Barrès chose the former path, believing a state of constant belligerency with foreigners was the only way to stabilize a teetering France, there is a paradoxical meeting point between him and the author of *La recherche*. Both agree on the importance of foreigners, and thus of heterogeneity, for the equilibrium of the group. But while Barrès, and Bataille after him, posit difference outside the community as a

means of coalescence against and around it, Proust puts it at the heart of each and every individual. His approach starts from the simple observation that, like any form of otherness, foreignness is tolerated on condition it is perceived as non-threatening. To this purpose, in *La recherche* foreignness pervades the entire French society to reveal its diversity. Yet, by itself the prevalence of heterogeneity is not able to prevent the sequence of wonder followed by anger at its presence. It also requires a mechanism to protect it from the envy elicited by its unicity. To this purpose, Proust subtracts temporality from its charismatic effect by always already afflicting it from within. He inoculates it from the start with a weakness that renders it unprovocative.

As already discussed, Françoise – the epitome of Frenchness – is actually as flawed as everyone else. So is Robert de Saint-Loup, become “un objet de risée par les folles dépenses qu’il faisait pour une femme de la dernière catégorie . . .” (*RTP3 : SG 91*). Yet even his mistress Rachel is simply “un paravent” (*RTP4 : AD 260*) for his real sexual orientation kept hidden as a shortcoming. Furthermore, having considered him a paragon of virtue, “si pitoyable aux malheureux”, the narrator is taken aback upon hearing the voice of Saint-Loup pronounce “[d]es paroles machiavéliques et cruelles” (*RTP4 : AD 53*) – a gratuitous meanness akin to that he had already discovered in Françoise. Thus, no character is perfect or worthy of unconditional admiration: there are countless similar examples. Here are just a few. Swann “avait en lui, rachetée par de rares délicatesses, une certaine muflerie” (*RTP1 : CS 190*). Though Odette had seemingly attained the top of fashionable life after her marriage with Swann, as displayed by “le murmure indistinct de la célébrité” surrounding her upon her ceremonial walks in Bois de Boulogne (*RTP1 : CS 413*), she still remains “une ancienne grue” in the eyes of those knowing her closely (*RTP2 : CG 560*). Similarly, behind his glorious lineage and proud appearance, the baron de Charlus “cherchait à cacher . . . une vie crapuleuse racontée par la déchéance morale”

(RTP3 : LP 712). Finally, despite her heredity and social prestige, from up close the duchess of Guermantes is no different from other people. She is just “une dame blonde avec un grand nez”, sporting not only “une figure rouge” and “un petit bouton au coin du nez”, but also “une cravate mauve comme M^{me} Sazerat”. Most importantly, “l’ovale de ses joues” reminds the narrator of members of his own family, allowing him to conclude that “son corps, ignorant du nom qu’on lui appliquait, appartenait à un certain type féminin, qui comprenait aussi des femmes de médecins et de commerçants” (RTP1 : CS 172).

Such personal failings are, first and foremost, the trademark of the narrator himself. From the beginning of the novel he appears often sick, weak, and purposeless. Such frailty, coupled with the novel’s disillusionment plot structure, precludes the readers from putting too much stock in his opinions. On account of it, *La recherche* participates in what Adorno terms the transition from the moral stand for or against characters, typical to a *roman à thèse*, to the exposure of the lie of representation. As such, the narrator’s journey of apprenticeship is a constant adjustment to successive misapprehensions in his proceedings (Adorno, “The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel” 34). Furthermore, a lack of will power, historically linked to the Prussian defeat and to the decadence vehemently decried by Barrès (*Scènes et doctrines* 37), compounds the narrator’s flaws. At the end of the 19th century, virility was increasingly pitched as central to French identity as an offset to its military failure and France’s falling birthrates (Martin 99). Yet throughout the novel the narrator revels in his impotence despite his parents’, particularly his father’s, disapproval. The prolonged episode in the opening pages of young Marcel’s obsession with his mother and his unending suffering at being away from her at night are prime examples, culminating with her giving up on making a real man out of him. Upon her concession, he understands the gravity of her capitulation: “c’était une première abdication de sa part devant

l'idéal qu'elle avait conçu pour moi, et que pour la première fois, elle, si courageuse, s'avouait vaincue" (*RTPI : CS 38*).

In final analysis, this decried "manque de volonté" consists in a reliance on outside support, one that the narrator also manifests in his desperate search for a system that would give meaning to his life and to the universe. All characters in the novel suffer from it. I propose this is the Proustian disease par excellence and its proper name is mediation. Nationalism is just a form of it – the one that Barrès approves of. From this perspective, *La recherche* is a quest on how to get away with what would otherwise be a cause of violence. Consequently, rather than creating a mass effect, this epidemic of mediation gradually reveals the powerlessness of every character, in an echo of the Tardian belief that "[s]e heurter à sa limite, à son impuissance constatée : quel choc affreux pour tout homme et, avant tout, quelle surprise !" (Tarde, *Monadologie* 51). Hence, each is in desperate need of some form of external support. Individually, none of them are a threat to anyone else since "[I]ivrée à elle-même . . . , une monade ne peut rien" (*Monadologie*, 28). And if they occasionally seem menacing, it is because "notre personnalité sociale est une création de la pensée des autres" (*RTPI : CS 19*). For Proust, danger always comes from mass groupings coalescing around that which differs. Thus, the diffusion of alterity makes it ubiquitous and hence side-steps the presupposed risk differences pose. Only such an innocuous and prevalent heterogeneity, constantly threatened by dissolution through imitation, allows for social peace.

In conclusion, *La recherche* blurs the line separating a prescribed category of belonging – Frenchness – and its opposite – foreignness – by dissolving them into a harmless aestheticism. Furthermore, it enhances this pacifying effect with a rampant individual innocuousness thus rendering defensive nationalistic measures needless for governing, as they actually boost

dangerous mass effects rather than controlling them. In the Proustian world where countless opposing movements cancel each other in their overwhelming diversity, social upheaval becomes obsolete.

Frivolity, Clannism and Culture

Though the Proustian cycle blurs the line between Frenchness and foreignness, those not conforming to the norm still stick out from the social tapestry. This in turns allows reactionary doctrines to allot them the blame for the ills of the motherland. *La recherche* tactically responds to this threat by insisting on the cultural nature of their difference. It conceptualizes culture based on *colere*, the Latin term from which it originates. In its initial sense, the verb described the active process of inhabiting and tilling a place (“Colo”, *Wiktionary*). Yet in the Proustian text this act of cultivating no longer refers to a place, but rather to practicing a particular tradition and way of life. It brings to the forefront the idea of cultural assimilation, purposefully questioning the popular definition of foreignness and sending us back to what it actually means to be French. Indeed, assimilation was a topic of nationalistic rhetoric during *la Belle Epoque*. By favoring a definition of Frenchness based on the simultaneity of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, it dismisses the very possibility of integration. Contrastively, *La recherche* posits collective belonging on cultural fluency, or what could be termed *jus culti*. If Frenchness is a matter of cultural identity, assimilation as adaptation to a particular environment remains always possible. Yet responses to such an option vary throughout the social spectrum of the Proustian universe. By comparing the dynamics at play in various clans, the text evinces the mechanics of intolerance and assimilation at a level that goes beyond the superficial differences between autochthones and foreigners. In the process, it reveals how a separation between insiders and outsiders is pervasive. This is the subject of this chapter.

Foreignness and Culture

At the end of the 19th century rural areas, such as the fictional Combray, are vestiges of the Old Regime protected by an agrarian economy based on the identity between consumption and production. An aversion to change has kept things the same for generations. The organization of such closed worlds relies on “le principe des castes” expressing the immutability of social hierarchies: everyone dies in the social group in which they were born, while marrying above one’s station rather than elevating that person’s status brands the spouse an impostor (*RTP4 : TR 533*). Social mobility is an oxymoron. The drastic separation of social groups prevents the narrator’s grandmother from maintaining her childhood friendship with Mme de Villeparisis “avec laquelle, à cause de notre conception des castes, elle n’avait pas voulu rester en relations malgré une sympathie réciproque . . .” (*RTP1 : CS 20*). Yet “[r]ien, moins que notre société de Combray, ne ressemblait au monde” (*RTP1 : JF 561*). French society, particularly in large cities, is in the middle of a process of “Hausmannization”. The nationalistic, anti-Semitic journalist and politician Edouard Drumont (1844-1917), along with Barrès and Maurras, lament the demise of the ancient order: “Les liens qui rattachaient l’homme d’autrefois à cette église où il avait été baptisé, où les dernières prières avaient été dites sur les siens, au patron qui avait été l’ami de son père, aux bons Frères qui l’avaient élevé, sont brisés depuis longtemps” (Drumont 392). In its wake only chaos is left, primarily manifested as a dangerous dedifferentiation: “L’être qui est là, est un moderne, un nihiliste: il ne tient à rien; il n’est guère plus patriote que les trois cent mille étrangers, que l’aveuglement de nos gouvernants a laissés s’entasser dans ce Paris dont ils seront les maîtres quand ils voudront . . .” (Drumont 392).

In this new world, individuals are no longer defined by the place they occupy by virtue of birth, yet there is no other criterion for social order to take its place. As both the objective

stability and the subjective understanding of the world seemed annihilated by the fading of the old social structure (Simmel 181), those bewildered in the face of change felt the existence of France itself was threatened. Turning towards nationalism's promise to reinstate order was their instinctive response. Yet it is not so much urbanization and subsequent rural uprooting that Barrès condemns, as it is French mediocrity (Vajda 118), which he conceives as a form of decadence manifested by “[l]e décroissement de notre natalité, l'épuisement de notre énergie depuis cent ans que nos compatriotes les plus actifs se sont détruits dans les guerres et les révolutions . . .” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 96). As a republican and a socialist, Barrès well understood that the hierarchy of birth is just as arbitrary a factor for order, yet in its absence lies the spread of reciprocal violence.

It is relevant that this is the period when *l'Action Française* launches an appeal for the study of the conditions allowing for the existence of human civilization, that is “l'étude des moyens par lesquels l'humanité a quelquefois réussi à apaiser en elle la violence des conflits élémentaires” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy* 137). Theretofore, Barrès is searching for an alternative model of social differentiation, able to canalize discontent and put a stop to internal division. Since in his view French decadence is brought by “l'envahissement de notre territoire et de notre sang par des éléments étrangers qui travaillent à nous soumettre” (*Scènes et doctrines* 96), foreigners bear the blame. Barrèsian nationalism proposes an alternative world organization established through the sacralization of a new formal difference ostensibly able to prevent social order from crumbling from within, evidencing what Jean Baudrillard terms the need of difference for the purpose of group cohesion (*Figures de l'altérité* 174). This difference is foreignness, the target against which French unity should reform. Consequently, nationalities affirm themselves “[p]ar la haine du voisin” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 474). However it is not

so much at other countries as such that nationalism aims, but rather at the stranger within the gates. Made responsible for all of France's ills, he represents the ideal sacrificial victim precisely because he is unable to retaliate and would thus miraculously bring domestic strife to a halt. As sameness can be constructed only through the difference of the other (Bourdillat, *Figures de l'altérité* 174), nationalism's cornerstone is a presupposed insurmountable discrepancy between autochthones and the foreigners always already there. Proust's oeuvre responds to this nationalist solution not only because the author was under its threat, but also because he was well aware of its consequences, best explained as follows: "Interdire les violences contre ceux qui sont capables de représailles, c'est rendre plus probables que jamais les violences contre ceux qui en sont incapables et qui risquent fort, de ce fait, de servir de victimes émissaires" (Girard, *Des choses cachées* 443). Thus, the text counters the nationalist strategy by blurring the line which separates Frenchmen from foreigners. But insofar as this difference remains perceptible, I propose the novel deems it of cultural nature and surmountable as such. Contrastively, nationalists conceive the separation between autochthones and foreigners as ethnic or racial, which makes it insuperable. This is the subject examined in the following section.

As a first step in establishing national specificity, Barrès claims that the French language "forme tout le trésor et toute l'âme de la race" (*Les déracinés* 464). He strategically posits its mastery as the primary separator between foreigners and natives. Furthermore, since in the view of nationalists French language can only be inherited by birth rather than acquired through learning, this line of demarcation is inexpugnable (Drumont 19). Yet, as the narrator in *La recherche* discovers through his own experience, "la langue la plus inconnue finit par s'apprendre quand on l'entend toujours parler" (*RTP3 : LP* 661), allowing him to understand the dialect Françoise and her daughter use in his presence. His only regret is that he was not exposed

to another language, as he would not have learned it any less “si Françoise avait eu l’habitude de s’exprimer en persan” (*RTP3 : LP 661*). Therefore he unwittingly emphasizes the interpersonal and cultural dimension of language. The lived world is made intelligible thanks to a common idiom that links individuals and makes social interaction, the communicational activity by excellence, possible (Taguieff 441). As such, languages are meant to be acquired, and, as a social being, the narrator has no choice but to learn whatever dialect allowed him to understand Françoise and his daughter. Despite exceptionalist aspirations, French language and culture are no exception: they have the natural function to connect French citizens by allowing them to meaningfully communicate (Fumaroli 172), an affirmation that postulates the cultural dimension of language. Yet upon realizing that Marcel understands her dialect, Françoise is downright upset, and not because the secret code allowing her to communicate with her daughter is rendered useless. Rather she is displeased by the loss of a constitutive difference between her Parisian young master and herself, as “aucune joie ne mélangea la tristesse que, même le prononçant mal, je le compris bien” (*RTP3 : LP 661*). The only upside to it is his faulty accent eliciting her mockery, which corresponds to the laughter that excludes: “bien que j’eusse fini par le prononcer à peu près comme elle, elle trouvait entre nos deux prononciations des abîmes qui la ravissaient et se mit à regretter de ne plus voir des gens de son pays . . . qui, paraît-il, se seraient tordus d’un rire qu’elle eût voulu entendre, en m’écoutant parler si mal le patois” (*RTP3 : LP 661*). Inasmuch as the narrator is able to learn Françoise’s dialect, yet unable to pronounce it properly, he still seems to reenact the nationalistic conviction that in order to speak French properly “[i]l faut avoir sucé en naissant le vin de la patrie, être vraiment sorti du sol” (Drumont 19). It is then and only then that the French one speaks has the strong flavor of the local soil. Yet it is exactly because she uses the exquisite antiquated French of Henri IV that Mme de

Guermantes is unable to either understand Kant's ideas or feel Baudelaire's nostalgia – a cultural problem. Thus “la pureté même du langage de la duchesse était un signe de limitation, et . . . en elle, et l'intelligence et la sensibilité étaient restées fermées à toutes les nouveautés” (*RTP2 : CG* 792). Indeed, since “elle n'usait guère que du pur vocabulaire dont eût pu se servir un vieil auteur français” (*RTP2 : CG* 785), the artistic archaism of her manner of speech is redolent of *préciosité*. And it is precisely because of its aesthetical dimension that Frenchness in all of its forms constitutes a limitation as aesthetics precludes utility.

Nonetheless, locating foreignness at the level of speech has the advantage of making it an obvious difference that any Frenchman, regardless of social stratum, perceives at the first contact with his interlocutor. Just like the accent of the narrator in patois, that of the Armenian Astiné Aravian, a Barrèsian character, will always betray her foreign origins despite the many years she had spent in Paris (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 103). The situation seems similar for many foreigners in *La recherche*, from the princess Sherbatoff who speaks “d'une voix rapide où le roulement des *r*, de l'accent russe, était doucement marmonné au fond de la gorge, comme si c'étaient non des *r* mais des *l*” (*RTP3 : SG* 286), and the Romanian director of the Balbec hotel “à la voix pleines de cicatrices (qu'avait laissées l'extirpation . . . des divers accents dus à des origines lointaines et à une enfance cosmopolite)” (*RTP2 : JF* 23), to the German princess Marie-Gilbert, “sœur du duc de Bavière” (*RTP1 : JF* 510) and wife to the prince de Guermantes, who so annoys Oriane: “Rien que sa prononciation m'énerve” (*RTP2 : CG* 872). Yet their accent is nowhere as shocking to the narrator as that of the prince Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen. Having dreamt about his poetical origins in the idyllic land of gnomes and water sprites, the spell is broken upon hearing him speak “avec le même accent qu'un concierge alsacien” (*RTP2 : CG* 560). The *Rheingraf* title, “rhingrave” in French (*RTP2 : CG* 553), situates the prince's fiefdom on the German side of

the Rhine River. As such, he is German rather than Alsatian. The distinction is crucial according to Barrès who insists that “[I]es gens d’Alsace ne sont pas des Allemands, mais des Alsaciens-Lorrains” (*Scènes et doctrines* 292). Yet not only does the prince speak like an Alsatian, he also sounds exactly like “la mère Moser”, Swann’s Jewish grandmother. Her trademark was “Ponchour Mezieurs” (*RTP4 : AD 237*), whereas the prince is heard saying “Ponchour, Matame la marquise” (*RTP2 : CG 560*). In this respect, the belief that Jews cannot speak French properly, considered a proof they are unassimilable to the nation (Drumont 19), becomes relevant. A Jew and a German both speaking like an Alsatian suggest that French Alsations cannot assimilate, and neither can any foreigners for that fact. Thus, this separation based on linguistic proficiency, or lack thereof, marks a sharp division between Frenchmen and foreigners, generating a homogeneous, yet imaginary, community of the excluded. In this respect, Proust’s letter addressed to Reynaldo Hahn at the end of October 1911, constitutes a historical testimony as to the actual efficiency of linguistic barriers. There the writer muses that “Si les Rothschild sont les seuls gens qui ne savent pas prononcer le français, les aristocrates sont les seuls qui ne peuvent ni le parler ni l’écrire” (*Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn* 232), which in turn suggests, in his own words, “l’équivalence intellectuelle de l’extrême culture et de l’extrême inculture chez les gens du monde” (*Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn* 232). Foreigners are not the only people in France unable to properly use the language. In final analysis, as I will subsequently discuss, the distinction between insiders and outsiders is reduced, at all social levels in *La recherche*, to a cultural problem. Foreignness is a question of social identity and as such, Pierre-André Taguieff explains, it is correlative to social classification which functions in relation to predefined and culturally relevant categories (Taguieff 281).

Pronunciation, however, is not an infallible impediment for foreigners speaking French. There is a workaround for it. The Breton soldier the narrator met at Doncières uses a limited vocabulary and speaks very slowly as a precaution “contre son manque d’habitude de la prononciation” (*RTP2 : CG 437*). The Norwegian philosopher, a passing guest in the Verdurin salon, “qui parlait le français très bien mais très lentement, pour la double raison, d’abord que, l’ayant appris depuis peu et ne voulant pas faire de fautes” (*RTP3 : SG 321*), uses a similar strategy. Yet he cannot avoid making an improper use of the language itself. While the end result was rendered comical by the halting rhythm and repetitive nature of his speech, the nonsensical remarks that pepper it further amuse the audience. It thus evidences de Certeau’s belief that “l’exclu produi[t] la fiction qui le raconte en une « manière de parler » comique ou tragique” (*L’écriture de l’histoire 417*). Yet the Proustian novel emphasizes its humorous rather than tragic aspect. The same pattern holds for the prince Faffenheim’s rhetoric which incorrectly uses “périphérie” to mean “à proximité” or “le centre” (*RTP2 : CG 800*), or the hotel director saying “défectuosités” for “défections” (*RTP4 : TR 325*) and affirms his “originalité roumaine” when he intended to convey “origine” (*RTP2 : JF 26*). The outlandishness of the director’s comments is derived from the fact “qu’il employait toujours des expressions qu’il croyait distinguées, sans s’apercevoir qu’elles étaient vicieuses . . .” (*RTP2 : JF 26*). This manner of speech provokes the laughter that excludes, in which the reader, inasmuch as he is fluent in French, shares. Yet “[p]our partager le type de rire dont il est question ici, pour se mettre du côté des rieurs, il faut s’associer à leur violence” (Girard, *Des choses cachées 409*). This suggests Proust uses the tacit complicity of his amused audience to better evince the mechanism at play, fundamental in separating insiders from outsiders. It is for this reason that the novel focuses on general foreignness rather than Jewishness, though anti-Semitism was more prevalent at that time than

xenophobia. Proust well knew assimilated, converted Jews were the main target for their dissimulation under a borrowed surname and religion (Assouline 138). In the nationalistic and popular view, they represented the dissolution of the fundamental distinction that kept the nation together, which is that between insider and outsider. These assimilated Jews, having retained no traces of their origin, were impossible to separate from the general population other than by random methods, such as a name that is too French or not French enough. In this respect, the attitude and treatment of “l'étranger de passage”, the cosmopolitan visitor, is more able to expose the cultural process at play, though in his case laughter preempts further hostility. At the heart of this amusement lies an auto-mitigation of excentricity able to protect the unique, foreign figures proliferating in the universe of *La recherche*. Knowingly or not, Proust resorts himself to this protective method, as Gaston Gallimard's account suggests:

C'est à Bénerville que je rencontrai pour la première fois Marcel Proust, il y a une vingtaine d'années. Je sortais avec R.G. de la villa qu'il avait louée cet été . . . , lorsque je vis venir à nous un homme d'aspect incongru et charmant. . . . J'ignorais alors jusqu'à son nom. Mais je fus frappé de l'extrême tendresse de son regard, et aujourd'hui encore je le revois tel qu'il m'avait aparu avec ses vêtements noirs étriqués et mal boutonnés, sa longue cape doublée de velours, son col droit empesé, son chapeau de paille défraîchi et trop petit, . . . ses escarpins vernis couverts de poussière. Cet habillement pouvait être ridicule sous ce soleil ; il ne marquait pas pourtant d'une certaine grâce touchante.

(Gallimard, 56-57)²⁷

²⁷ Marthe Bibesco bears witness to a similar attitude in her memoirs. She recollects the bizarre figure the writer cuts at a high society ball, amongst visitors in formal evening wear. Though she is shocked to see him “dans ce bal comme dans une gare, en manteau de voyage et le col relevé” (*Au bal avec Marcel Proust* 82), she does not question his presence there, moved as

In fact, Proust is aware that the alternative to this laughter is the violence that injures and kills, such as that displayed against foreign workers at the end of the nineteenth century. In the context of an increased foreign immigration to France, first Flemish Belgians in 1892, and later Italians in 1893, were the victims of uprisings that left many people injured and several dead. Both Belgians and Italians were eventually forced to flee France in order to save their lives (Noiriel 153-154). Pertinently, Barrès had contributed to this outcome through his campaigns against foreigners working in France (Vajda 141). He similarly promoted the anti-Jewish sentiment during the Dreyfuss Affair, when beyond the arrest, trial, and deportation, of an innocent Jewish captain, a hostile anti-Semitic literature inundated the entire country. Notably, in 1898 there were several hundred anti-Semitic riots throughout France as “[c]rowds of thousands, drawn from all social classes, gathered to shout ‘Kill the Jews!’ . Sometimes they attacked synagogues or destroyed Jewish homes and stores” (Birnbaum 406). Thus while Proust was mindful that the violence that expels has two faces, that of laughter and that of crime, clearly laughter remains its less dangerous manifestation. An amused reaction is linked to the innocuousness of the person provoking it, as opposed to a danger that must be immediately suppressed. On this subject, in a 1904 letter to Antoine Bibesco Proust likens M. Vaschide, a Romanian psychologist visiting Paris he qualifies as charming, to “un Parsifal difficile à engager à l’Opéra, parce qu’il a trop d’accent et parle trop vite, et si désireux d’accroître le champ de sa

she is by his modesty and the kindness he shows her. Similarly, the recently discovered 1904 film of the Guiche-Greffulhe marriage, shows the singularly clad writer in the traditional English morning wear, “redingote gris pâle, chapeau melon foncé sur la tête”, amongst the sea of traditional “jaquette noire” wore by the other men. His incongruous appearance prompts Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan to wonder if he does so out of bravado, given that at the preceding engagement party held in a countryside setting, he felt humiliated because he presented himself in full evening wear whereas all the other guests wore the relaxed ensembles typical of country gatherings (Sirois-Trahan 21-22).

spécialité que, à tout moment il dit : « C'est nelveux. »” (*Lettres à Bibesco* 90). The comparison becomes relevant in the context of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Conte du Graal* which recounts the French legend of Perceval. According to it, Perceval is a pure hearted innocent, as misguided as he might be by his lack of knowledge. Yet as his quest progresses, he will eventually learn all the chivalric codes. It follows that it is cultural incomprehension that makes not only the foreigner, but also the outsider.

The inability to speak proper French is not the specific mark of the foreigner. The instances of French characters unable to express themselves clearly and correctly in the national language abound, such as the aunt of the pianist regularly playing in the Verdurin salon in the early pages of the novel. “Comme elle n’avait aucune instruction et avait peur de faire des fautes de français, elle prononçait exprès d’une manière confuse . . .” (*RTP1 : CS* 201). Her resulting conversation – “un grailonnement indistinct duquel émergeaient de temps à autre les rares vocables dont elle se sentait sûre” – is more incomprehensible than that of the foreigners Marcel encounters throughout the novel (*RTP1 : CS* 201). Similarly, the lift operator at the Balbec hotel shocks the narrator by the terms he uses – “tunique” instead of “livrée” and “traitement” instead of “gages” – yet he attributes the discrepancy in vocabulary to a social, that is cultural, difference. Nonetheless, the end result is the same: “je comprenais toujours mal ce que me disait le lift” (*RTP2 : JF* 158).

Language, however, remains the ultimate nationalistic delineator since, in the eyes of Barrès, Victor Hugo’s Frenchness resides in his being “le maître des mots français” (*Les déracinés* 464). His wielded words make him “le chef mystique” of France as “leur force mythique agit sur notre organisme” (*Les déracinés* 467). It follows that no foreigner should be able to write like him, let alone achieve such a miracle of national unity. Yet such an assumption

is directly contradicted by the Oriental princess married to a cousin of Saint-Loup who “faisait des vers aussi beaux que ceux de Victor Hugo ou d’Alfred de Vigny . . .” (*RTP2* : *CG* 406). The critical consensus is that the then famous poetess Anna de Noailles (1876-1933), an important figure in both Proust’s and Barrès’s life, is her real life counterpart (*RTP2* : *CG* 1572nn4). I suggest that the specific way in which each of them perceives and portrays her exposes the drastic difference between their approaches to foreignness. Though she was born in Paris, boulevard de Latour-Maubourg in the exclusive VII arrondissement (Masson 5), her parents were both of noble foreign descent: her father was the Wallachian prince Grégoire Bibesco Bassarabe de Bracovan, and her mother the Grecian Raluca Musurus. One of her *Belle Epoque* biographers wonders at her mixed noble heritage that should explain her personality: “Le mélange en Madame de Noailles des sangs des Bibesco, des Musurus et des Mavrocordato peut expliquer, ou au moins symboliser, la diversité de son génie âpre et viril, mol, pliant et passionné, amoureux pourtant de raison et de mesure” (Gillonin 6). Yet he immediately records that Anna divided her childhood between Paris and the Haute-Savoie on the border of Lake Geneva, receiving a private French education to which the oeuvres of Rousseau, Pascal, Racine, Hugo, Musset, and Anatole France, were central (Gillonin 6-9). The recognition of her work at the time was impressive for a woman writer, as she received a seat in the Belgian Academy of Language and Literature, a prize for poetry from the French Academy, and the rank of Commander of the Legion of Honor (Engelking 95). Nonetheless all this does not make her a French writer in the eyes of nationalists. The case of Emile Zola speaks to it. Born and raised in Paris from a French mother and an Italian father, Zola “n’est pas un Français. . . . Parce que son père et la série de ses ancêtres sont des Vénitiens, Emile Zola pense tout naturellement en Vénitien déraciné” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 40-41). Yes, he is a famous writer, but any

perspicacious spirit feels “ce qu'il y a d'étranger, voire d'anti-français dans le talent de Zola. . . . Son immense notoriété demeure de mauvais aloi” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 41-42). Similarly, in the eyes of Barrès, Anna de Noailles represents the exotic land of Oriental kings. He accordingly writes *Un Jardin sur l'Oronte* to record their love (Vajda 228-240). As a result, “Barrès métamorphose ce poète d'Île-de-France . . . en « Orientale »” (Vajda 230). *Un Jardin sur l'Oronte* recounts the passionate affair between a young French knight and a beautiful infidel. From the perspective of this study, the impossibility of cultural integration is its most relevant aspect. Come very young to Syria, sir Guillaume “connaissait profondément la langue et les mœurs des païens” (Barrès, *Un Jardin sur l'Oronte* 136). Despite this, after years spent there, he remains a foreigner to such an extreme that the Emir who received and befriended him exhibits him to his wives “afin qu'elles eussent l'amusement de voir un si curieux personnage” (Barrès, *Un Jardin sur l'Oronte* 54). The moral of the novel is “chacun agit selon sa race” (Barrès, *Un Jardin sur l'Oronte* 105). Notwithstanding his cultural fluency, Guillaume is not only unable to adopt his new community, but can never understand the woman he loves. Accordingly, Barrès's long love affair with Anna was to him both an enchantment and a curse: the champion of Frenchness was fascinated by the Oriental princess with whom he will eventually betray his wife. The relation with the foreigner is intrinsically seditious.

Proust's perception is different and illumines the relevance of Anna's avatar in the novel. His correspondence with the countess de Noailles reflects a genuine admiration for her work. By his own account, her oeuvre inspired him. In a 1904 letter congratulating her for the recent publication of her novel *Le Visage émerveillé*, he reiterates how struck he is by her plastic expression of the drastically different vision each person has of the universe. According to him, after reading this sentence from the book – “je vois la vie bleu, jaune et violet” – he is able to see

“cette vérité géniale de la couleur qui fait de vous le plus grand des impressionnistes.” As “cette idée me vient pour la première fois et je ne sais comment l’exprimer” – a concept he subsequently labels “le Vernis des Maîtres” (*Lettres À La Comtesse De Noailles* 85-87) – it is plausible these lines inspired the most drastic demonstration of heterogeneity in his novel expressed as “la différence qualitative qu’il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde, différence qui, s’il n’y avait pas l’art, resterait le secret éternel de chacun” (*RTP4 : TR* 474). Thus, while calling Noailles “notre plus grand écrivain” (*Choix de Lettres* 165) in a letter written to her in November or December 1908 might exaggerate his admiration, he respected her enough as a writer to compare her with the great Hugo. Going back to her *La recherche* avatar, the narrator comments that, despite her marvelous French poetry, in view of her ancestry she was attributed “un esprit de princesse d’Orient recluse dans un palais des *Mille et une Nuits*” (*RTP2 : CG* 406).

Was Proust aware that some of his close friends perceived and later described him as an exotic, Oriental figure? Indeed, in his testimony Jacques-Emile Blanche remembers “l’étrange combinaison de sa chevelure, du pur ovale de sa face de jeune assyrien” (Blanche 46-47), while Fernand Gregh evokes “ses yeux hérités de son admirable mère, des yeux noirs et coulants à la lourde paupière brune qui se baissait comme un beau voile de chair sur un foyer oriental de lumière et de rêve” (Gregh 36). Proust reminds him of a Neapolitan prince from one of Paul Bourget’s books (Gregh 35), with his “deep black eyes, very brilliant, very mobile” and a “shaven chin show[ing] blue shades” (Bourget, *Cosmopolis* 88). Yet on closer inspection the latter analogy is not entirely flattering if we think of the Italian prince Peppino Ardea, Bourget’s character in his novel *Cosmopolis* (1892): “The prince wore too many rings, too big a flower at his button-hole, he gesticulated too often and too much to allow one for a moment, after looking

at his brown complexion, to cherish any illusions as to his nationality” (88). In final analysis, “[h]e is not bad for an Italian” (Bourget, *Cosmopolis* 94), except that he has bad taste and talks too much. Furthermore, only five years after Proust’s death, Albert Thibaudet compares the literary style of the author with that of Michel de Montaigne precisely because of their Semitic origin:

Ces analogies entre Proust et Montaigne, leur singulier mobilisme à tous deux, ne seraient-elle pas en liaison avec un autre genre de parenté ? Il est certain que la mère de Montaigne, une Lopez, était juive. Montaigne, voilà le seul de nos grands écrivain chez qui soit présent le sang juif. On connaît l’hérédité mixte du grand philosophe, que je viens de nommer, et d’utiliser le fondateur de cette philosophie de la mobilité qu’il a exprimé en des images de mobiliste, de visuel-moteur, si analogues à celles de Montaigne et de Proust. (Thibaudet 126)

Pertinently, in the same passage he makes reference to Anna de Noailles, an Oriental in the eyes of Barrès, whose praise he cites: “Obscur frisson, fièvre royale, quelle histoire on écrirait avec une goutte de sang grec !”. On account of their heritage, he immediately parallels her achievements as an author to that of Proust: “Instructive histoire, ici, d’une goutte de sang juif dans notre courant littéraire” (Thibaudet, 126).

Such views were popular at the time and I propose that it is in response to them that de Noailles’ avatar is presented as heir to major national authors: “Aux écrivains qui eurent le privilège de l’approcher fut réservée la déception, ou plutôt la joie, d’entendre une conversation qui donnait l’idée non de Schéhérazade, mais d’un être de génie du genre d’Alfred de Vigny ou de Victor Hugo” (*RTP2 : CG* 406). Dubbing her the greatest French writer of the day, while

twice comparing her literary incarnation with both Hugo and Vigny, suggests ethnic origin has nothing to do with Frenchness in Proust's view. Rather, being French is a cultural mastery which, being born and brought up in France, Anna de Noailles certainly has. This perspective is further supported by the fact that Proust incorporates the following anecdote on a relative of Anna's disparaging her artistic and intellectual tendencies: "Elle entre en récitant du Plutarque, je ne veux pas de ça chez moi !" (Gramont, *Les marronniers en fleurs* 217). Yet he modifies it slightly and attributes it to Mme de Gallardon scolding Oriane: "Il paraît qu'elle récite de l'Aristote (elle voulait dire de l'Aristophane) dans le monde. Je ne tolère pas ça chez moi !" (*RTP2 : CG 739*). As Mme de Gallardon is a Courvoisier, a less brilliant but stricter branch of the Guermantes able to maintain "l'intégrité de la noblesse à la fois grâce à l'étroitesse de leur esprit et à la méchanceté de leur cœur" (*RTP2 : CG 734*), the transposition of Anna and her avatar into Oriane not only further underlines her Frenchness, but also equates the exclusion of the foreigner with the dynamic insider-outsider on which regular forms of clannism are based. Indeed, as "[l]es Courvoisier se faisaient de l'intelligence une idée moins favorable et . . . être intelligent n'était pas loin de signifier « avoir probablement assassiné père et mère »" (*RTP2 : CG 734*), this passage evinces subcultural codes based on which anyone, regardless of ethnicity or social standing, can be excluded from a social group.

While by birth and education Anna de Noailles is French despite her foreign ancestry, other characters are culturally assimilated though being born abroad. The most eloquent example is that of the Serbian lady in the aquarium-like scene. As previously discussed, to the onlookers she seems a monster amongst others until she is singled out by her putative, yet invisible, foreignness. The text signals that her exteriority remains purely formal. While their "caractères innés" make those surrounding her ostensibly French, there are also "ces caractères acquis qui

font qu'une vieille dame serbe . . . , parce que depuis son enfance elle vit dans les eaux douces du faubourg Saint-Germain, mange la salade comme une La Rochefoucauld" (*RTP2 : JF* 42). For all intents and purposes, this Serbian lady has the behavior and beliefs of her French entourage. In examining the various aspects of what is commonly understood by the term "culture", de Certeau underlines "l'acquis, en tant qu'il se distingue de l'inné" inasmuch as it is an operational acquisition opposed to, yet working with, what is allegedly natural (*La culture au pluriel* 168). As such, I suggest the previous passage is a statement to the efficacy of cultural assimilation. In his correspondence, Proust further supports this view. For instance in a letter dated December 9 1921 and addressed to Walter Berry, an American diplomat he befriended in Paris, he dubs him "si parisien" that his cultural comprehension equals his own. Contrastively, "[v]otre compatriote . . . ne me semble pas très parisiennisée" because in the same breath she names as the greatest French writers France, Baudelaire, Loti, Renan, and the anonymous G[.], who is actually "un littérateur pour M. Constant" (*Choix de Lettres* 269). Similarly, writing in 1917 to his Romanian friend Antoine Bibesco (1878-1951) to ask about their Romanian estate during the Great War, Proust affirms: "Je t'ai toujours considéré comme le plus intelligent des Français. . . ." Though his parents are Romanian aristocrats, Bibesco was born and raised in Paris – a profile very similar to his cousin's Anna de Noailles. Yet, unlike her, he regularly spent his childhood vacations in Romania ("Antoine Bibesco", *Wikipédia*). As in the case of Anna, Proust considers him thoroughly French. But the most relevant statement from Proust comes next: "je te prie de me croire maintenant un peu Roumain" (*Lettres à Bibesco* 92). Knowing that, throughout their friendship, Bibesco has often discussed Romanian society and politics with him²⁸, Proust was

²⁸ In a 1916 letter, having already met several other Romanian aristocrats, scientists, and diplomats in Paris, Proust asks Bibesco details on prominent political figures, as well as on the inner workings of society in Romania (*Lettres à Bibesco* 150). He was also familiar with the

familiar with its various cultural aspects. Thus, his position is akin to the Republican view of citizenship as understanding of, and participating in, a culture. According to it, Marc Fumaroli explains, it was not enough to be born French to be a Frenchman, but know its grammar, its authors, and its history. But whoever did, even without being born French, had France as his second homeland by participating in its culture (Fumaroli 31). Furthermore, according to Marrus, Jews were faithful to the Republic as “a culture which recognized . . . men’s right to be French” (Marrus 284), that is the acknowledgement of cultural assimilation originating from Haussmann’s political strategy during the Second Empire. Thus, it is not surprising that Proust writes in 1904 to Bibesco that upon perusing the membership list of a club he contemplated joining “je n’ai reconnu des noms d’amis parmi les Français que Loche R., qui est Polonais d’origine mais Français et a fait son service militaire”, while their common friend Eugène Fould, soon to marry an Austrian woman and move to Vienna, “a dû devenir plus ou moins Autrichien” (*Lettres à Bibesco* 92). Thus, cultural rather than ethnic criteria determine the Frenchness of individuals, and cultural assimilation is not only possible, but often involuntary. As such, though she only temporarily resided in Austria where her uncle has been an embassy advisor, the narrator can find the traces its culture has left “dans les manières d’Albertine” (*RTP3 : SG* 504), and thus “retrouver en elle le pays où elle avait vécu auparavant . . .” (*RTP2 : CG* 659).

Contrastively, the nationalistic view dubs assimilation impossible, a fact Barrès categorically affirms: “Nous ne tenons pas nos idées et nos raisonnements de la nationalité que nous adoptons, et quand je me ferais naturaliser Chinois . . . , je ne cesserais pas d’élaborer des idées françaises et de les associer en Français” (*Scènes et doctrines* 41). A foreigner remains

name and situation of Corcova, the Bibesco estate, which he planned to visit with his friend in the spring or summer of 1903 (*Lettres à Bibesco* 65). He was unable to do so because of his health.

“insensible à nos vénérationes que son âme étrangère ne peut même pas imaginer; excité par un atavisme que notre âme nationale ignore . . .” (*Scènes et doctrines* 43). While Barrès and Proust were in agreement with Simmel’s view that the starting point of any social formation is the interaction between individuals (Simmel 186), Barrès places its origin in distant ancestors whose traits Frenchmen inherit and who still dictate current interactions in their present form. The difference between foreigners and autochthones actually resides at a deep, spiritual level, suggesting nationalism did not conceive foreignness in cultural terms (Noiriel 158), but rather in insurmountable ethnic or racial ones. At first sight, this seems true of Proustian characters as well. For instance, from “son point de vue spirituellement français et tout modéré”, Oriane dubs the princesse de Guermantes “nébuleuse.” Her “poésie et . . . enthousiasme germaniques” are exaggerations incompatible with the good French taste (*RTP2 : CG* 872). Oriane attributes them to her being “Hesse-Darmstadt, Saint-Empire et gnan gnan” (*RTPP : CG* 872). Yet Mme de Guermantes is the only character mentioning the princess speaks with an accent, or has foreign manners. The princess herself, upon being reminded of her foreign origins by the royal prince of Sweden who calls her “bavaroise”, claims her full assimilation: “je ne suis plus qu’une princesse française, et je pense comme tous mes compatriotes” (*RTP3 : SG* 104). Furthermore, her husband the prince is convinced of “la foi française de ma chère femme”, believing that “elle est devenue aussi Française que moi” (*RTP3 : SG* 109). Inasmuch as she has been living amongst French aristocrats for years, acquiring their views and their culture, she is assimilated. This interpretation of culture coincides with one of de Certeau’s definitions as “l’image, la perception ou la compréhension du monde propre à un milieu ou à un temps” (*La culture au pluriel* 167-168), or what Marcel terms “la mentalité” of her social group. Indeed, such a perspective goes as far back as de Tocqueville who affirms that a common culture is the prerequisite of a social

group, as “il n’y a de société que quand des hommes considèrent un grand nombre d’objets sous le même aspect ; lorsque, sur un grand nombre de sujets, ils ont les mêmes opinions ; quand enfin les mêmes faits font naître en eux les mêmes impressions et les mêmes pensées” (*De la Démocratie en Amérique I* 492). Furthermore, French Radicalism adopts this same view. According to Katherine Auspitz, most Radicals believed that sharing the same culture in the aforementioned Tocquevillian sense is the main requirement for social life (Auspitz 4). From this perspective, even the prince Faffenheim is not a complete foreigner in the Faubourg Saint-Germain he assiduously cultivates, as he has “leur culture, leur idéal”, his one ambition being “d’être élu membre correspondant de l’Académie des Sciences morales et politiques” (*RTP2 : CG* 554). Such an approach allows de Gramont, after a comprehensive list of what the reader can find in *La recherche*, to strikingly conclude: “et pas un étranger, je le répète, pas un étranger” (*Les marronniers en fleurs* 247).

Contrastively, Astiné Aravian²⁹, though she masters the language and is familiar with the culture, can never become French, nor does she want to. She underlines the differences separating her from a Frenchwoman thus: “je ne suis pas une bonne petite fille de ta province française, je suis des plus vieux pays du monde, où l’on gouverne selon de très anciennes traditions” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 112). She dresses “en poupée française” simply to avoid scaring the autochthones (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 103). Consequently, Astiné continues to live as an Oriental in Paris and as thus endeavors “à multiplier autour d’elles les mauvaises occasions et à se créer autant de risques qu’en présente la vallée de l’Euphrate où campa sa famille.” Her death is its tragic, yet logical conclusion: “Il est naturel qu’une Astiné Aravian meure assassinée”

²⁹ Astiné Aravian is a character from Barrès’s *Les déracinés*. The personification of exoticism, she is a cosmopolitan Oriental lady visiting Paris.

(Barrès, *Les déracinés* 424). A similar end seems to threaten Charlus. According to Mme Verdurin, he risks, because of his lifestyle, “[de] finir comme tous ses pareils, assassiné par des apaches . . .” (*RTP3 : LP* 814). While the purpose of her story is to separate Morel, a familiar of her salon, from her enemy Charlus, her intimation of a tragic fate would not be simply the result of his immoral propensities, but also of his foreignness on which she capitalizes. She claims he is either Austrian or Prussian and feigns disbelief in his Frenchness (*RTP4 : TR* 344). However in *La recherche* no one takes her claims seriously. Furthermore, this is not the end awaiting the baron. Nonetheless, the harmful potential of exclusion consequent on such claims is looming and Charlus will eventually be banished from the Verdurin salon.

In this context, the drastic separation between strangers and autochthones nationalism predicates cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Even a drop of foreign blood is dangerous enough to erase a glorious French heredity. Such is the case of the Barrèsian character of Portalis, descendant of a celebrated line of French Napoleonic politicians, in whom “le type anglo-saxon matine fortement l'hérédité napoléonienne” simply because “son grand-père, né à Aix, épousa en Saxe une comtesse de Holck.” Consequently, “il est parmi nous un étranger” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 158). We are in the presence here of what Taguieff terms the commandment to preserve the ethnic blood identity of a community: differences are natural, unsurmountable, and eternal (Taguieff 422). Pertinently, Portalis’s depiction is similar to that of Charlus: both have a mixed heritage, speak the language of both parents, and have lived both in France and abroad. At a larger scale, as discussed in the previous chapter, most French aristocrats fit this profile and share in a foreignness thus conceptualized. Contrastively though, while “[o]utre-mer, [Portalis,] ce jeune Anglo-Saxon, qui dans son enfance pensait en langue anglaise, se retrouva parmi ses pareils” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 160), Charlus would be a stranger upholding the French cause in

Germany and is a foreigner defending Germany in France. Charlus is in such a paradoxical position because he directly participates in French cultural life by reading newspapers and interacting with the members of his clan. His entire Germanophilia is ultimately on account of a familiarity with current French culture: “nul doute que, vivant en Allemagne, les sots d’Allemagne défendant avec sottise et passion une cause injuste ne l’eussent irrité ; mais vivant en France, les sots français défendant avec sottise et passion une cause juste ne l’irritaient pas moins” (*RTP4* : *TR* 354). It is not a German cultural fluency that alimentes his pro-German feelings, as “[s]es souvenirs de l’Allemagne étaient malgré tout lointains. . . .” Rather, his cultural French participation exposes the personal sins of those providing anti-German arguments, as “les Français qui parlaient de l’écrasement de l’Allemagne avec une joie qui lui déplaisait, c’étaient des gens dont les défauts lui étaient connus, la figure antipathique” (*RTP4* : *TR* 354). As paradoxical as it may seem, his position is supported by the subculture of the clan to which he belongs, rather than by a weak cultural foreignness.

In final analysis, nationalism denies the possibility of cultural participation to foreigners. Since “on n’a constaté chez personne l’énergie de faire de l’unité avec des éléments dissemblables” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 117), there is an absolute difference between categories of belonging, which in turn creates an insurmountable distance between races, and thus cultures. As Taguieff suggests, it follows not only that individuals from one race cannot assimilate to another, but also that different human types are unable to communicate with each other. This thesis of incommunicability posits the impossibility of a human community beyond the closure of race (Taguieff 318-319). Thus, it is notable that Barrèsian foreign characters, besides being unable to understand and hence participate in French social dynamics, are downright indifferent to it. For instance, a visiting English guest is not only “incompréhensible comme tous les étrangers” to the

Frenchmen around him, but is also uninterested in his surroundings, “n'essayant même pas de comprendre ce milieu, pens[ant] à ses intérêts d'Angleterre . . .” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 259).

Another one, a Jewish financier, “ne s'intéresse pas aux détails de la politique intérieure, mais seulement aux rapports des États entre eux”, engrossed as he is in his monetary interests (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 271). This is in stark contrast with the general participation of all Proustian foreigners to the life of the salons they frequent. They are all driven by curiosity and a desire to know more about the environment they live in: a cultural investment. Such are the prince Faffenheim, the Turkish Ambassadors, or Bloch's American friend from the final pages of the cycle.

However, not even in *La recherche* are all foreigners successfully assimilated. The Turkish ambassador, despite being “[d]évorée d'ambition mondaine et douée d'une réelle intelligence assimilatrice”, remains “une femme dangereuse à écouter, car, perpétuellement dans l'erreur . . .” (*RTP2 : CG* 823). In the eyes of the narrator, one of her most shocking misapprehensions is about the duc de Guermantes whom she terms “un homme à qui on pourrait confier sans danger sa fille, mais non son fils” (*RTP2 : CG* 828), which is pertinently false. As such, she seems to personify the traditional view of the foreigner as “une parole qui « ne sait pas » ce qu'elle dit” (Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien I* 233). Nonetheless she is not completely off track on this subject. The narrator does not yet know it, but both Charlus and the prince de Guermantes are gay. The ambassador simply gets the wrong Guermantes brother. Consequently, in the eyes of the misinformed narrator she seems “l'imbécile ambassadrice de Turquie” for whom “l'erreur, la contre-vérité naïvement crue étaient pour l'ambassadrice comme un milieu vital hors duquel elle ne pouvait se mouvoir” (*RTP2 : CG* 828). Upon closer examination, however, she is simply an outsider peering in, being at that time “peu reçue”: the

subcultural codes of this environment are unfamiliar to her. Thus, when the narrator tells her he knows better the duchess than the princess de Guermantes, she exclaims: “Mais il n’y a aucun rapport. . . . Oriane est une charmante femme du monde qui tire son esprit de Mémé et de Babal, tandis que Marie-Gilbert, c’est *quelqu’un*” (*RTP3 : SG 59*). Her lack of social connections seem to validate the narrator’s feelings that “il n’y avait aucune raison pour que l’ambassadrice de Turquie eût sur la valeur de la duchesse de Guermantes un jugement plus sûr que le mien” (*RTP3 : SG 59*). Nonetheless, the ambassadress’s conclusion coincides with that of Charlus, the ultimate insider of that social circle. To him, “la duchesse de Guermantes et la princesse de Guermantes c’est juste le contraire” (*RTP3 : LP 739*). Proust’s correspondence shares this view, as in a letter addressed to the duke of Guiche he frames his perspective in the following terms: “The Duchesse de Guermantes is exactly the contrary of the Princesse de Guermantes. With the exception that the Duchesse de Guermantes was virtuous, she resembled a little leathery hen I had long mistaken for a bird of paradise . . .” (Bibesco, *The veiled wanderer* 82).

Thus, the foreigner is sometimes able to see further than the native, despite a lack of cultural prowess, or maybe precisely because he is unencumbered by it. Indeed, it does not take long for the narrator to admit that the main cause of his frustration with the ambassadress is unjust. At its roots is “une instruction trop rapide qui lui faisait nommer ces nobles seigneurs selon ce qu’elle croyait la coutume du pays. Elle avait fait ses classes en quelques mois et n’avait pas suivi la filière” (*RTP3 : SG 60*). It follows that time is of the essence for a successful assimilation. As such, the charming and intelligent American friend of Bloch and Oriane that the narrator meets in the final pages of the novel, having only recently come to France, is still learning: “Les dîners, les fêtes mondaines, étaient pour l’Américaine une sorte d’École Berlitz. Elle entendait les noms et les répétait sans avoir connu préalablement leur valeur, leur portée

exacte” (*RTP4 : TR 539*). It remains that frequenting society is like attending a school: cultural assimilation remains an attainable goal.

Yet when considered in its totality assimilation remains imperfect in the Proustian cycle. In the case of the Balbec hotel director, his cosmopolitan culture has no authentic link with any particular language as “au fur et à mesure qu’il apprenait de nouvelles langues, il parlait plus mal les anciennes” (*RTP3 : SG 148*) and it remains superficial in its very diversity. The case of M. d’Argencourt is more interesting. Though as a Belgian he speaks perfect French, “n’étant pas tout à fait français, [il] cherchait à se donner l’air parisien” (*RTP2 : CG 512*). It is exactly in this effort that he remains a foreigner: he misses the link with the local, as the cosmopolitan Paris is not genuinely French in the eyes of the natives. In the Barrèsian perspective, “un langage un peu cru, trop parisien, comme il arrive aux cosmopolites qui abusent de l’argot des petits théâtres” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 101) unmistakably exposes the best integrated foreigner living in France as a stranger.

The most striking example of a failed assimilation in the whole cycle is represented by Bloch. Of Jewish extraction, though presumably born in France and certainly educated there, he seems to conform to the view that Jews are unassimilable to the nation (Drumont 19). Desirous to start a discussion on the subject of the Dreyfus affair with the duc de Châtellerauld, Bloch is taken aback not by the other’s refusal, but by its motivation: “c’est une affaire dont j’ai pour principe de ne parler qu’entre Japhétiques” (*RTP2 : CG 544*). He is unable to understand how the duke was able to guess his Jewish heritage, yet “étant donné son nom qui ne passe pas précisément pour chrétien, et son visage, son étonnement montrait quelque naïveté” (*RTP2 : CG 544*). It appears that belonging to “une colonie différente”, which the narrator meets in Balbec, determines Bloch’s manners and ways of thinking. As such, he personifies unassimilated Jews,

ostensibly cut off from the rest of society because “l’éducation a peu de prise sur eux . . .” (*RTP3* : *SG* 25). However, as another passage suggests, Bloch’s conspicuousness owes more to the fact that he has not yet been “assoupli par la gymnastique du « Faubourg » . . .” (*RTP2* : *CG* 488). This points to a lack of cultural assimilation into the environment he aspires to frequent – that of the old nobility. As such, he will eventually acquire the cultural mastery he needs in order to fit there. Indeed, upon meeting him years later in the salon of the prince de Guermantes, the narrator is surprised to find Bloch is completely changed. He has even managed to suppress his Jewish look, primarily manifested by his nose: “grâce à la coiffure, à la suppression des moustaches, à l’élégance du type, à la volonté, ce nez juif disparaissait comme semble presque droite une bossue bien arrangée” (*RTP4* : *TR* 531). Yet he exchanges a foreign appearance for another, seeing that “[u]n chic anglais avait, en effet, complètement transformé sa figure et passé au rabot tout ce qui se pouvait effacer” (*RTP4* : *TR* 530).

Insofar as he has copied the manners of his noble entourage, having become a regular of the Guermantes salon, his assimilation there is successful. He no longer cuts a conspicuous, exotic figure, and all regulars take him for a genuine insider. Indeed, as de Gramont shows, at the turn of the century the French conservative elite was predominantly anglophile as a sign of aristocratic esprit de corps, of conformity, and of marked defiance to the republic (*Les marronniers en fleurs* 18). However, both before and after the Great War England was as hated as Germany. Thus, in 1898, due to the Fachoda affair, anti-British sentiment ran so high as to make even an understanding with Germany seem possible in the spring of 1899 (Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France* 26). By 1921, a period close to the final scenes in the prince de Guermantes’ salon, the anti-British trend was up again. In the eyes of many Frenchmen, the Versailles Treaty (1919) is proof that the Republic had forfeited her own national interests and

future independence for an alliance with the British. By acceding to English interests, which opposed a Europe dominated by the Hexagon and consequently did not want Germany entirely ruined, France has given up (Weber, *L'Action Française* 141-143). Thus all things English provoked popular hostility, and with his British looks Bloch would as well. His is not a successful French assimilation. Furthermore, Bloch not only alters his appearance but goes as far as to change his name. He becomes Jacques du Rozier, a name under which “il eût fallu le flair de mon grand’père pour reconnaître la douce vallée de l’Hébron et les chaînes d’Israël que mon ami semblait avoir définitivement rompues” (*RTP4 : TR* 530). However, contemporaneous readers would have made the connection between Bloch’s assumed name and the Rue des Rosiers in the Marais quarter, well known as the area where unassimilated Jews primarily lived. As Marrus shows, the poor, isolated Jewish community, made of recent immigrants and having little to no contact with the rest of French society used to reside “in a section of the fourth *arrondissement*, on either side of Rue de Rivoli, particularly along the Rue des Rosiers, Rue Saint-Paul, and other streets nearby where a virtual ghetto was formed in the center of Paris” (Marrus 46).

So the question remains as to why would Bloch change his name into one that would still keep clear traces of his origins. I suggest that the answer to this question lies in the particular position Jews occupied in French society at the time. As mentioned previously, the primary target of anti-Semitism were not the newcomers in traditional garb, but assimilated Israelites. This situation exposes the inextricable bind in which any foreigner finds himself as soon as he copies his target model too closely (Girard, *Des choses cachées* 315). While the host culture expressly invites him to imitate it as precondition to his integration, perfect mimesis will turn the autochthones against the imitator: keeping a clear means of differentiation from the outsider is

the prerequisite of French homogeneity, and for nationalists it is imperative to preserve it as such. Aware of the dynamic at play, a selective failure of the mimetic keeps the assimilation of Proustian characters imperfect as to minimize mass effects against the intruder. Furthermore, as Vajda shows, Israelites had long believed that anti-Semitism was reserved for the traditional Jew respecting the religion of his forefathers, only to discover with dismay how much the assimilated Israelites were equally, if not more, hated (Vajda 96). This distinction between Jew and Israelite, with the Jew being a newcomer and the Israelite assimilated into French society, and having settled for a long time in the place in which he lived, was particularly important for French Israelites. In their view, French Jews were generally Israelites, while German and Eastern-European ones were Jews. The Jews will be fully accepted by French citizens only when completely assimilated in the mass of the nation, and some believed this to be only a matter of time (Marrus 169-171). Indeed, the narrator echoes this position when talking about the Jews that were generally disliked by Frenchmen as being “les Juifs non assimilés bien entendu, il ne saurait être question des autres . . .” (*RTP2* : *CG* 702). Inasmuch as Bloch is imperfectly assimilated, the traces that would expose him as such can only be those reminding Frenchmen of the traditional Jew that they would unmistakably meet in the Marais quarter. The neighborhood had the looks and feel of an Eastern European *shtetl*: there were signs in Hebrew in the shop windows, Yiddish was spoken in the streets, and people were wearing traditional caftans and fur hats (Marrus 162).

Nonetheless, notwithstanding the echoes of this environment evoked by his name, the narrator finds Bloch’s manners changed for the better:

La discrétion, discrétion dans les actions, dans les paroles, lui était venue avec la situation sociale et l’âge, avec une sorte d’âge social, si l’on peut dire. Sans doute Bloch était jadis

indiscret autant qu'incapable de bienveillance et de conseils. Mais certains défauts, certaines qualités sont moins attachés à tel individu, à tel autre, qu'à tel ou tel moment de l'existence considéré au point de vue social. Ils sont presque extérieurs aux individus. . . .

(RTP4 : TR 548)

Cultural assimilation is ultimately a form of social integration in a particular circle – in Bloch's case, that of the Guermantes. And Bloch has come a long way in proving assimilation of different ethnic origins is possible. While “Bloch n'en était peut-être pas encore là”, “les petits-enfants de Bloch seraient bons et discrets presque de naissance” (RTP4 : TR 548). This suggests the dynamic insider-outsider is not only crucial at all social levels, but is also determined by a particular subcultural code.

As already mentioned, during *la Belle Epoque* national identity was conceived less in cultural terms, but rather as “a hereditary national character” (Pomian 72) as “[l]e fait d'être de même race . . . forme un déterminisme psychologique” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 16). Yet nationalistic rhetoric makes frequent and implicit references to culture, such as “un fonds de légendes . . . communes” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 444), “une tradition commune”, founding “une même conscience” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 334), or shared ideas “qui étaient universellement acceptés comme bon[ne]s dans toute l'étendue de notre territoire” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 96). Together, they constitute the basis of the community spirit ensuring French cohesion, in contrast with the ideas and opinions of “un grand nombre de nouveaux colons, . . . qui ne sont peut-être pas assimilables, . . . et qui veulent nous imposer leur façon de sentir” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 96). This accent on shared traditions and conceptions opposed to that of other peoples suggests a definition of culture as “les comportements, institutions, idéologies et mythes qui composent des cadres de référence et dont l'ensemble, cohérent ou non, caractérise une

société à la différence des autres” (Certeau, *La culture au pluriel* 167). It allows Benda to note the crucial shift in nationalistic rhetoric: patriotism has become the affirmation of a national soul in face of another, in a friend versus foe stance. According to it, a people conceives of itself in its moral being, opposing to others its language, its art, its literature, its civilization, its culture (Benda 174). Such a massive and uniform view of culture is, according to Fumaroli, a German importation originating from Otto von Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* initiative: culture is conceived as the natural development of the spirit of a nation (Fumaroli 59-61). It is the collective objective of a community that, upon threatening to break up, fully engages its citizens in the shared opinions of the nation (Fumaroli 101). For Barrès, this becomes a new basis for Frenchness allowing for cohesive education, customs, manners, and even popular consciousness: one people and one culture fully merged. He theretofore defines the nation as “l’union de ceux qui parlent une même langue et que rapprochent des légendes communes” (*Scènes et doctrines* 445), while elsewhere he posits that “[l]es groupements naturels des Français doivent se faire autour du commun élément national” defined as “leur foi française” (*Scènes et doctrines* 99). In response to the German threat, he postulates a cohesive and coherent French culture which he equates with patriotic faith.

Yet in *La recherche* national essence is lacking in substance, and not only in the case of Frenchness. Thus, Françoise expresses her doubt as to the actual existence of Germanness. For her the assumption that Germans could be “des Boches” is “presque invraisemblable à cause de son énormité”, making the narrator wonder about the “sens mystérieusement effroyable [que] Françoise donnait au mot de Boche.” At first sight, her doubt seems illogical: “comment douter qu’ils fussent des Boches, puisque ce mot, dans la langue populaire, veut dire précisément Allemand” (*RTP4 : TR* 423). But if we put together the category “Boches” with what it meant in

the popular subconscious, what Françoise questions is the French definition of Germans and their culture as a uniform block, drastically different from France, yet defined in opposition to it. She unconsciously rejects the *en masse* cultural indictment condemning all Germans as “des assassins, des brigands, de vrais bandits”, or in her words “des Boches.” She starts by wondering “si nous ne sommes pas aussi fripons comme eux”, only to conclude that “[n]ous ne valons pas mieux qu’eux. Si nous étions en Allemagne, nous en ferions autant” (*RTP4 : TR 424*). The antagonism between the German and French positions means they are symmetrical and consequently interchangeable. The illusory differences defined on such basis actually dissolve into violent reciprocity.

Yet culture is not only implicitly present in nationalistic rhetoric, but is also a traditionally explicit component of French patriotism. Thus, the Proustian cycle cites a passage from Chateaubriand’s *Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe* in which the “vent sauvage de Terre-Neuve” is reminiscent of “une brise de la patrie” described as “ce parfum chargé d’aurore, de culture et de monde . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 498*). The parallel the narrator makes between the Newfoundland wind and his madeleine hints that the attachment to the native soil and its culture is rooted in involuntary memory. As such, it is not only unconscious, but deeply personal as well. It suggests a subjective view of culture – an aspect that will be subsequently examined in further detail. At first sight, Barrès offers a similar definition of patriotism : “Ce qui nous attache à la France, presque inconsciemment et quel que soit l’état de ses affaires, c’est sa culture” (*Scènes et doctrines 309*). However, while Chateaubriand’s previous citation hints to the French concept of civilization, sophisticated and inclusive, that of Barrès alludes to the German definition of culture. As Fumaroli explains, this difference is crucial. *Kultur* is a centripetal, interiorized movement which keeps a nation together yet separates it from its neighbors. French *civilisation*

is its opposite, extrovert and centrifugal. Whereas civilization means French Enlightenment, cosmopolitan and contagious, liberal and aristocratic, gay and hospitable since it lacks indigenous roots, nationalist culture strives to include collective and impersonal miscellanea of traditions, beliefs, often disjunctive historical figures and events, masterpieces and monuments, obliterating individualities and values in the name of national transcendence (Fumaroli 172). In the Barrèsian view, Napoleon Bonaparte, “en son âme d'étranger”, could not have reformed France in conformity with the French spirit. It required the miracle of *Kultur* for it to happen, as “Napoléon à toutes les minutes eut un sentiment très vif de . . . sa culture!” (*Les deracinés* 247), which makes him an authentic Frenchman. Thus, nationalists use the French patrimony as a propaganda argument. Cultural inheritance, which must be perpetuated as a block in its entirety, becomes the common denominator of all Frenchmen. Nonetheless, the drawback of this state of affairs is not lost even on Barrès. Mouchefrin, one of his Lorrain characters, remains indifferent to the greatest of French poets: “Hugo! ses grandes flatteries à Paris ne me touchent pas : je ne suis pas d'ici” (*Les deracinés* 436) – a subcultural distantiation. Similarly, Oriane contradicts the nationalistic view of culture when the Belgian M. d'Argencourt prides himself on Maeterlinck and his oeuvre, in the glory of which he shares by national association. The duchess, who dislikes Maeterlinck, explicitly dissociates him from the artist:

Non, nous ne vous accusons pas d'être pour quoi que ce soit dans les *Sept Princesses*.

Heureusement pour vous et pour vos compatriotes, vous ne ressemblez pas à l'auteur de cette ineptie. Je connais des Belges très aimables, vous, votre Roi qui est un peu timide mais plein d'esprit, mes cousins Ligne et bien d'autres, mais heureusement vous ne parlez pas le même langage que l'auteur des *Sept Princesses*. (RTP2 : CG 546)

As no common artistic spirit speaks through all Belgians, there is not a unique and cohesive Belgian culture. Individual differences persist because of local primacy, manifested in the subculture of each social subgroup. This view reflects the Proustian understanding of culture as an evolving image and comprehension of the world characteristic to a particular period and environment.

Barrès is aware of the concept of subculture. On its basis, Alsations are so different from Germans as “au particularisme alsacien se joint une longue culture française.” Yet in this situation, he attributes to education the fundamental role. “Les gens d'Alsace ne sont pas des Allemands, mais des Alsaciens-Lorrains ” because “ils pensent et agissent en Alsaciens cultivés à la française.” It is “la culture qui les fit tels qu'ils sont” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 292). Education as cultural acquisition is able to separate Alsatian from German subculture, rendering Alsations “absolument réfractaires” to “l'esprit allemand actuel” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 293). Exposed to French culture through their education, they are naturalized Frenchmen. In fact education, the foundation of French coherence and cohesion, is central to both Republican and nationalistic rhetoric: “une nation, c'est la résultat d'une éducation commune. Avec une chaire d'enseignement et un cimetière, on a l'essentiel d'une patrie” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 111). Proust agrees with the importance of education, but sees it in a different light. Whereas Barrès insists on a common education that levels in order to unify, Proust believes the quality of instruction determines its outcome. A letter addressed to the count Georges de Lauris, dated July 29 1903, contrasts the different results an education by “le journal ou la société qui . . . alimente et forme les conversations, les idées” to that by “le Maître en Sorbonne.” In the latest case, “qu'il soit né Fénelon, Radziwill, Lauris, Gabriel de La Rochefoucauld, Guiche ou simplement Marcel Proust, les idées sont pareils.” Regardless of social class or ethnic origin, instruction is equally

effective in opening individual minds and combating the mass effect of a unique point of view, which is “l’esprit de Parti que nous voulons détruire.” Yet the writer knows that inasmuch as this anti-partisanship stance strives to eliminate all partisan points of view, it ends up by imitating the friends versus enemy dynamics as “l’esprit de Parti que nous voulons détruire (et que nous copions).” In what is one of Proust’s clearest affirmations of his belief in what Schmitt terms Romantic politics, he further underlies that “le fait d’exiger la licence ès lettres pour le service militaire fait plus pour la cause de la République libérale avancée que toutes les expulsions des moines” (*Choix de Lettres* 100-101).

The crucial point Proust makes is that different forms of education lead to the contrast between what he terms “les intelligences qui ne s’ouvriront pas” and “l’intelligence qui s’ouvre”. At the heart of this argument lies the distinction between what Simmel designates as objective culture, defined as “the objectification of the mind in words and works, organizations and traditions” (Simmel 491) and subjective culture as the specific part that comes alive in a certain individual at a given moment. Nationalism concentrates on objective culture for two reasons. On the one hand, objective culture is the only actual form of hereditary transmission through instruction manifested historically from one generation to the next, and as such ostensibly supports the thesis of the separation between peoples. On the other hand, objective culture is absorbed in form rather than content allowing education to perform a consistent levelling of the minds. On the basis of both these aspects, Barrès categorically affirms the existence of “des vérités françaises”, insisting these are “non pas des vérités qu'on invente, mais des vérités que l'on constate” (*Scènes et doctrines* 119). Objective culture manifests these French verities, allowing the nationalist strategy to establish a correspondence between accepted cultural judgements and the doctrine it attempts to promote. During the 19th century, the pedagogical

ideal, focusing on the formation of the individual at an internal level, is replaced by the concept of education defined as “a body of objective knowledge and behavioral patterns” (Simmel 487). While it is true that in any institutionalized state education there exists a tension between what Auspitz terms “vocational training for individual advancement and ideological instruction to strengthen a common identity and purpose” (Auspitz 112), the nationalistic doctrine takes advantage of the fact that citizens are trained to conform. It insists on the importance of objective French culture, conceived as a homogenous block, meant to build a national specificity which would simultaneously unite insiders and isolate outsiders. Contrastively, by insisting on “l’intelligence qui s’ouvre”, Proust’s position is akin to that of Simmel for whom the value of culture consists in the degree to which it actually comes alive in individuals as subjective culture, allowing for their own understanding of the world (Simmel 488). Thus, in a letter predicated on the idea that people are “tolérables exactement dans la mesure où ils sont tolérants” (*Choix de Lettres* 99), open-mindedness, accessible through proper instruction, is commensurable with tolerance.

Culture and Clannism

In this context, it must be noted that *La recherche* does not downplay the importance of objective culture. Being French means participating in a culture and, as Simmel shows, objective culture is the condition of existence of any community because it provides the only medium of its interactions (Simmel 488). As mentioned in the first chapter of this essay, Proustian society embodies the idea of the nation as cultural participation, a Tardian informed approach in which social life comes down to direct exchanges between individuals (Millet 250). Yet such interpersonal exchanges take place neither at national level – an imaginary community – nor in a void, but rather in the private sphere of small groups. The concept of the social, in de Tarde’s

view, should be replaced by that of association. Social dynamics are enacted by the agency of individuals who are constantly under the influence of faith and imitation, each of them striving for his private goals rather than being animated by a superior design. If they ally with each other, they do so in little groups based on affinities and interests (Latour, “Gabriel Tarde and the End of Social” 1-4). As no member can personify or transcend the group, the collective self can only be a metaphor (Latour, “Gabriel Tarde and the End of Social” 6) which, at the national level, is embodied in the concept of Frenchness. It is exactly its figural dimension which allows Proust to seamlessly transition it to the aesthetical field, while at the same time foregrounding its imaginative dimension which simultaneously contradicts its actuality and is the precondition of the aggregation of individuals.

Furthermore, the specificity of human societies does not consist in an arbitrarily imposed symbolic order, but rather in the privilege of seeing them from the inside out (Latour, “Gabriel Tarde and the End of Social” 5). Thus the immersion of both Proust and his narrator into society, a life apparently dedicated to *le gratin*, is a prerequisite of his oeuvre. Yet during his life Proust was dubbed a social butterfly and ridiculed for his snobbism. Albert Flament, for instance, comments in his 1895 *Journal* that the *faubourg* made fun of the writer for “son goût effréné du monde, et ses capacités incomparables d’assimilation . . . , dans un manque total de personnalité” (Hillerin 363). Armand de Guiche, Proust’s close friend, counters this by asking: “Pourquoi alors qualifier de snobisme le fait d’étudier vers 1900 une société qui constituait par ses cloisons étanches, par ses divers étages, un édifice compliqué et si différent non seulement de l’époque actuelle, mais même des décades précédentes ?” (Hillerin 406). He understood what none of his contemporaries did, and which Adorno so cogently explained years later, namely that “only someone who has succumbed to social relationships in his own way instead of denying them

with the resentment of one who has been excluded can reflect them back” (“Short commentaries on Proust” 180). Thus following de Tarde, Proust believes that one must take advantage of being always already an insider for any social observation to be meaningful. As such, his social analysis is based on direct experience. It contains only relatively few places – Paris, Combray, Balbec, Doncières, and Venice – and is limited to the social environments familiar to him – his father’s family, the modest Catholic bourgeoisie, and his mother’s, the rich Jewish Parisian bourgeoisie –, to which are added aristocrats, artists, and domestic staff. The Proustian œuvre refers to these small communities using various expressions, such as “la colonie juive” of Balbec, “la société des Cambremer” (*RTP2 : JF* 98), “la petite coterie qui se retrouvait [dans un café] pour tâcher . . . d’approfondir, les émotions fugitives du procès Zola” (*RTP2, CG*, 694). But the most relevant term to this analysis is that of clan: “le clan du premier président”, “des grands et petits bourgeois”, “de simples grainetiers de Paris” (*RTP2 : JF* 98), and most importantly the exclusive “clan de Guermantes” (*RTP4 : AD*, 237) as well as “cet organisme social qu’était le petit « clan » [des Verdurin]” (*RTP1 : CS*, 223). Just as in de Tarde, outside “those tiny networks” there is no society (Latour, “Gabriel Tarde and the End of Social” 10).

At first approach, the Barrèsian social model seems to coincide with the Proustian one. Indeed, Rœmerspacher, a Parisian character from *Les deracinés* originating in the small Lorrain town of Nomeny, still has there “une sorte de famille, sinon une parenté, . . . un clan” determined by “les milieux, les professions, les circonstances.” The ability to recognize and respect the differences between these categories and environments are what Barres dubs the essence of “l’homme sociable” (Barrès, *Les deracinés* 207). Yet the social separation they provoke is a curse rather than a blessing, as “[n]otre mal profond, c’est d’être divisés, troublés par mille volonté particulières” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrine* 80). Barrès solves this quandary thanks to the

socialist dimension of his doctrine. As Simmel shows, “[s]ocialism has found its inspiring ideal in the ancient clanhood with its communistic equality” which “appeals to all the innermost and enthusiastic sympathies for the group that may lie dormant in the individual” (Simmel 374). This explains the fundamental illusion of nationalism, which consists in taking a society for a community. At its core is a form of clannism based on the obsession with a unidimensional collective determination – that of national belonging. Contrastively, Proustian characters are members of various clans, either simultaneously or in succession. The examples are numerous, so here are just a few: Nissim Bernard, Bloch’s uncle, is both a member of the Jewish colony in Balbec (*RTP2 : JF 132*) and a friend of the marquis de Marsantes (*RTP2 : CG 573*), Cottard is a faithful member of the Verdurin salon, a respected member of the medical community, and also a host when “on faisait de la musique chez M^{me} Cottard, aux soirées où elle recevait . . . les collègues et les élèves de son mari” (*RTP1 : JF 425*), and finally Swann is “le fils Swann” visiting the narrator’s parents in Combray, a member of the Jockey Club (*RTP1 : CS 15*) and of the Guermantes salon, a temporary visitor of the Verdurin’s clan, as well as a member of Odette’s salon as “les relations républicaines de sa femme devenaient plus intéressantes depuis que l’affaire Dreyfus était le centre de ses préoccupations” (*RTP3 : SG 97*). While admitting this state of affairs in which the same man “peut-être au même moment, engagé dans des groupements distincts”, Barrès considers different affiliations, inasmuch as they are potentially antagonistic, dangerous for the individual which ends up “en contradiction intérieure, et par là diminué, sinon annulé” (*Les déracinés 253*). Yet these multiple affiliations are fundamental in social pluralism, in which people simultaneously belong to several groups that sometimes collaborate, while other times oppose each other (Taguieff 278). As Fumaroli suggest, the more these small groups are different and alive, the more they cut into the mob, balancing its opacity

and weight, while everything increasing its size pushes liberal democracy towards its opposite by stifling individuals and the minority groupings which enable it to exist (Fumaroli 221).

I propose small social dynamics are a Proustian tactic responding to the mass strategy of nationalism. As Graetz shows, within small groups “the dialectic of forces did not act in the same way as it did in society at large. Harmony could reign there” (Graetz 10) despite the conflicts looming in society at large. This is why in *La recherche* the bourgeoisie, just like the nobility and the working classes, is divided into competing fractions, each functioning according to its own subculture. Thus, whereas nationalism concentrates on the macrocosm of the nation and a dynamics of opposition, the Proustian novel resorts to the microcosm of small groups which displays what Agulhon terms “the dynamics of ‘sociability’” (Graetz 11).

Furthermore, *La recherche* emphasizes the divisibility of the personalities of the composing elements of any clan, which “n'appartiennent jamais que par un côté de leur être, et par d'autres côtés échappent, au monde qu'ils constituent” (Tarde, *Monadologie* 39), rendering multiple affiliations possible. Thus each character exceeds the formal being he appears to be at first encounter, when the narrator perceives him based on the particular group in which they meet. This is because there he only presents the front he has constructed for that particular setting, which is only a side of himself. It follows that every group “n'est qu'un être artificiel, composé de côtés et de façades d'êtres” (Tarde, *Monadologie* 39), while its members – “soldats de ces divers régiments” – are “[l']incarnation temporaire de leurs lois” (Tarde, *Monadologie* 39). As Anne Henry shows, Proust follows de Tarde and rejects the idea of a collective becoming which secretly controls individual acts. Personal interests prevail over group considerations, putting an end to so-called political ideals (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 140). In social life as played out in clans, each member is free to join or leave the group at will, on condition he

respects the affiliation responsibilities, expressed as restrictions, agreements, and prohibitions he has accepted more or less consciously upon joining up³⁰. In other words, upon entering a community, the individual will adopt the “grammar for valuing action sustained by the specific community from which an agent seeks identity. Agents choose communities, but then they accept as a substitute for universals the principles of judgement that observers construct as plausible within a community” (Altieri 249). Thus, “dans la « société », on juge les gens d’après un étalon, d’ailleurs absurde, et selon des règles fausses mais fixes”, while in a bourgeois environment “on les remplace par des distinctions plus folles encore” (*RTP2 : JF* 130). The laws of this grammar – the structural basis of every social group – are akin to the concept of objective culture and constitute the subculture of that particular subgroup. Indeed, subculture is at the foundation of any social environment, as every small circle has its rites – such as the narrator’s family early lunch on Saturday in Combray (*RTP1 : CS* 109), or their walks that alternate between Méséglise and Combray, but can never go towards both in the same day (*RTP1 : CS* 133) – and its hierarchies – exemplified by the family in Combray where tante Léonie occupies the place of the absolute monarch for Françoise (*RTP1 : CS* 117), whereas the kitchen maid remains at the bottom of the ladder as an intruder barely tolerated (*RTP1 : CS* 122). It gives its members a formal identity and unity, allowing them to seamlessly communicate within a given set of presupposed parameters.

Barrès recognizes not only the existence but also importance of the subcultures of various groups: “Quand il s’agit de prendre une décision, ce que nous appelons « la vérité », c’est une façon de voir que nous tenons de nos parents, de notre petite enfance, de notre maîtresse . . .”

³⁰ Pertinently, the prominent Radical politician Émile Combes legalizes “le droit des associations” in 1901.

(*Les déracinés* 441). In the Proustian cycle the examples of formalisms governing the different clans abound, ranging from “l’emploi de ces expressions toutes faites et que les « petits clans » artistiques favorisent” (*RTP3 : SG* 432) to the “clichés dans les offices aussi bien que dans les cénacles” (*RTP4 : TR* 428). It can be something as innocent as a certain way of speaking as in the case of Charlus whose “diction ressemblait à celle de Swann” (*RTP2 : CG* 582), or of Mme de Guermantes’ turns of phrase when she detaches “ironiquement cette épithète choisie, comme eût fait Swann” (*RTP2 : CG* 508). It culminates with a particular way of thinking, such as in “les cénacles littéraires, où tout le monde a une même manière de prononcer, d’énoncer, et par voie de conséquence de penser . . .” (*RTP2 : CG* 752). It follows that various subcultures do separate the members of different clans, giving credence at least in part to the Barrèsian fear of fragmentation, as “les différences de milieu, d’éducation . . . se retrouvent . . . pour diriger les actes de chacun d’un point de vue si opposé qu’il n’y a pas de véritable rencontre possible” (*RTP4 : AD* 198). A pervasive clannism – the basic form of social interaction in *La recherche* – parallels the dynamic separating Frenchmen from foreigners with that of insider-outsider, extending it to all levels of society: “La princesse de Luxembourg n’a qu’une situation de cocotte pour la femme du Premier Président, ce qui, du reste, est de peu de conséquence ; . . . ce qui en a encore davantage, les Français ne rêvent que la revanche aux yeux des Allemands” (*RTP4 : AD* 154). It enables Kristeva to suggest clannism is a substitute for nationalism (*Proust : Questions d’identité* 26). In this sense, it could be said that *La recherche* uses clannishness homeopathically: the ironical portrayal of a weak, volatile mingling is employed against a coalescence at the national scale, predicated on a shared Frenchness.

Paralleling the Tardian model, each Proustian clan is “un monde énigmatique et indéchiffrable du dehors, où l’on se passe des mots d’ordre mystérieux, connus des seuls fidèles .

. .” (de Tarde, *Monadologie* 54). Thus, upon visiting Odette’s salon for the first time, the narrator is stumped by a small envelope the butler hands him: “Je ne savais pas plus ce que j’en devais faire qu’un étranger d’un de ces petits instruments que l’on donne aux convives dans les dîners chinois” (*RTP1 : JF* 537). The analogy between the dynamic autochthone-foreigner and insider-outsider is culturally expounded: unable to understand the codes of Odette’s coterie, the narrator finds himself in the position of an inept foreigner. As Altieri explains, “seeing whether a person can go on to make the desired connections by initiating or continuing a practice that produces the desired results or degrees of mutual understanding” (Altieri 92) constitutes the actual test that, if passed, makes one an insider. Failure to make the expected connections in a given context engenders laughter as exclusion. Thus, Proust’s preoccupation with the milieu is relevant because it explains differences between groups through socio-cultural factors, foregrounding Lévinas’s view that the importance of a common civilization consists in offering an objective ground for coexistence and collaboration (Lévinas 245). The narrator concurs with this theoretical view as “le kaléidoscope”, the epitome of French society at any given moment, “n’est pas composé seulement par les groupes mondains, mais par les idées sociales, politiques, religieuses qui prennent une ampleur momentanée grâce à leur réfraction dans les masses étendues . . .” (*RTP4 : TR* 472). He experiences it at a practical level upon finally acceding to the long thought after Guermantes salon, where to his surprise he hears “les noms, familiers ailleurs, de Victor Hugo, de Frans Hals et, hélas, de Vibert”, which allow him to understand the conversation between the familiars. This manifestation of objective culture in a world that he had thought so alien to him, engenders

le même étonnement qu’un voyageur, après avoir tenu compte, pour imaginer la singularité des mœurs dans un vallon sauvage de l’Amérique Centrale ou de l’Afrique du

Nord, de l'éloignement géographique, de l'étrangeté des dénominations de la flore, éprouve à découvrir, une fois traversé un rideau d'aloès géants ou de mancenilliers, des habitants qui . . . sont en train de lire *Mérope* ou *Alzire*. (RTP2 : CG 814-815)

Yet the violence of exclusion can be provoked by something as banal as the inability of “se dégager des volants de verre” at the entrance of a café. The consequence the narrator faces due to “cette marque flagrante d'ignorance” is that he is not declared “dignus es entrare”, which in turn means facing a terrible cold – not of rejection, but of actual air-drafts (RTP2 : CG 695).

Despite the link afforded by objective culture, the distance between the various clans remains considerable. It is primarily manifested by failed social classifications of people belonging to a different group, as such categorization is primarily based on subcultural criteria leading to diverging assertions. For instance, knowing Mme de Villeparisis from his childhood as the friend of his grandmother who gifted him a box of chocolate, Marcel perceives her not as the Guermantes that she is, but as “moins brillante, moins haut située par moi que l'opticien de Combray” (RTP2 : JF 113). Similarly, the rank of M. de Cambremer is misread by most in the Balbec hotel because “[n]on seulement il n'était pas habillé en flanelle blanche, mais par vieille manière française et ignorance de la vie des Palaces, entrant dans un hall où il y avait des femmes, il avait ôté son chapeau dès la porte. . . .” It is only the wife of a provincial notary who places him correctly. Thanks to her husband's professional dealings with local nobility, for her “la première société du Mans n'a pas de secrets . . .” (RTP2 : JF 43). By the same token, upon first meeting the narrator in the Guermantes salon, the count de Bréauté-Consalvi, though convinced he is not faced with an aristocrat, is so lost in placing him that he thought to be “en présence de quelqu'un des « naturels » d'une terre inconnue où aurait atterri son radeau et avec lesquels . . . il tâcherait, tout en observant curieusement leurs coutumes et sans interrompre les

démonstrations d'amitié ni pousser comme eux de grands cris, de troquer des œufs d'autruche et des épices contre des verroteries" (*RTP2 : CG 724*).

Faulty assumptions made by outsiders peeking in increase this separation. Such is the case for those who believe "la vie mondaine consiste seulement à lire le compte rendu des matinées et soirées, dans le *Gaulois* ou le *Figaro*, sans être jamais allés à aucune." To them, "l'énumération des ambassadrices d'Angleterre, d'Autriche, etc. ; des duchesses d'Uzès, de La Trémoille, etc., etc., suffisait pour qu'ils s'imaginassent volontiers le salon Saint-Euverte comme le premier de Paris, alors qu'il était un des derniers" (*RTP3 : SG 70*). Thus, misunderstandings between bourgeoisie and nobility abound to the point that "[l]es trois quarts des hommes du faubourg Saint-Germain passent aux yeux d'une bonne partie de la bourgeoisie pour des décavés crapuleux . . . que, par conséquent, personne ne reçoit", when in fact "leurs tares ne les empêcheraient nullement d'être reçus avec la plus grande faveur là où elle ne le sera jamais" (*RTP2 : JF 63*). There is an insuperable distance between any two social groups:

les deux mondes ont l'un de l'autre une vue aussi chimérique que les habitants d'une plage située à une des extrémités de la baie de Balbec ont de la plage située à l'autre extrémité : de Rivebelle on voit un peu Marcouville l'Orgueilleuse ; mais cela même trompe, car on croit qu'on est vu de Marcouville d'où au contraire les splendeurs de Rivebelle sont en grande partie invisibles. (*RTP2 : JF 64*)

Based on this, social mobility appears as impossible as for the cast system ruling Combray, giving credence to Charlus's belief that "le monde . . . forme un tout relativement homogène et clos" (*RTP3 : SG 326*). Clans are as far removed from one another as are two nations separated by their respective cultures. Furthermore, the dynamic insider-outsider favors the exclusion of the intruder, as his difference provokes hostility rather than curiosity. Thus, upon hearing a

comment on the religion of Bloch whom she encounters in her aunt's salon, Oriane's facial expression displays "la gaieté curieuse et malveillante qu'inspire un groupement humain auquel nous nous sentons radicalement étrangers" (*RTP2* : CG 544). Theretofore the conception "un peu hindoue" that the bourgeoisie of the time had of the entire society as being "composée de castes fermées" (*RTP1* : CS 16) has some basis in reality.

Despite this, there are two competing models of sociation in the Proustian universe: that of the noble salon of the Guermantes and that of the Verdurin coterie. The next section will analyze the differences between them, proposing that the noble salon aspires to an internationalist, open environment exemplified by Enlightenment ideals, and as such is the less pernicious of the two. Contrastively, the dynamic of the Verdurin clan parallels the restrictions and exclusions of nationalistic dogmas.

Two Models of Sociability

After 1789, the aristocracy has had to adapt to different conditions in order to survive. As Fiette shows, the old nobility successfully managed to do so despite its repugnance for business, mainly through instruction and financial restraint, but also through a new conception of individual merit, built on the preexisting association between worth and lineage. The prestige of a name has always been linked to individual conduct, yet the question remained as to what avenues were open for personal affirmation when disdain for money and vulgar pursuits were central tenets of the aristocracy (Fiette 10-40). During *la Belle Epoque*, the attitude of the nobility towards work and profit differs from that of the bourgeoisie. Aristocratic endeavors allow a generous giving of personal time that does not exclude domain and family duties, an individual availability, notability, and social paternalism. As for paid jobs, already conditioned

by political choices, they must confer prestige, like the army, the judiciary system, or the diplomacy: not specialized, not very absorbing or durable, nor too profitable (Fiette 201).

Inasmuch as they support the honor of a name, individual pursuits remain compatible with familial solidarity. Indeed, during *la Belle Epoque* such pursuits become a must, as Mme de Villeparisis emphasizes: “Pour moi, un homme qui ne travaille pas, ce n’est rien” (*RTP2 : JF* 69). Even M. de Guermantes agrees with this point of view: “J’aime qu’on fasse quelque chose de ses dix doigts. Je n’aime pas les inutiles” (*RTP4 : AD* 169). A real man must “s’occuper.” Both Saint-Loup, serving in the military, and Norpois, working in the diplomacy, exemplify two different careers of service, compatible with their rank. Other noblemen in *La recherche* remain simple dilettantes like M. de Bréauté, a botanical expert on the vanilla plant (*RTP2 : CG* 806) and “auteur d’une étude sur les Mormons, parue dans la *Revue des Deux-Mondes*” (*RTP2 : CG* 793). M. de Guermantes has tried his hand at politics as “autrefois . . . [il] siégeait à la Chambre” where “il joua un assez grand rôle . . . et où on songeait à lui pour un ministère ou une ambassade . . .” (*RTP2 : CG* 766). Finally, there are those noblemen who, being extremely rich, have “la présidence des plus importantes sociétés financières” (*RTP2 : JF* 63). The nobility consists of a diversity of individuals adjusting to a typology that conjugates familial memory with the force of events by adapting to current social mentalities while still respecting the taboos of their class. Thus, the Proustian universe illustrates Fiette’s view that it is hard to define the class consciousness of nobility other than by the feeling of being different (Fiette 221).

This point is emphasized by the discrepant political attitudes of its members. Mme de Villeparisis goes as far as to openly tolerate Radicalism, as the following passaging focusing on its anticlerical central tenet, confirms: “elle défendait la République à laquelle elle ne reprochait son anti-cléricalisme que dans cette mesure : « Je trouverais tout aussi mauvais qu’on

m'empêchât d'aller à la messe si j'en ai envie que d'être forcée d'y aller si je ne le veux pas »” (RTP2 : JF 69). Such tempered attitude towards religion was shared by many Radicals. As Auspitz shows, during *la Belle Epoque* the political nuances of anticlericalism varied vastly amongst Radicals, ranging from those who opposed the influence of the Catholic Church without discarding the importance of individual religion, to those who were absolutely opposed to both Church and religion (Auspitz 47). Oftentimes, Radicals were neither atheists, nor materialists, nor even positivists, as was the case of Combes (Baal 34). Lefranc insists that some Radicals were actually religious (Lefranc 136). Taken together with her conviction that “un homme qui ne travaille pas, ce n'est rien” (RTP2 : JF 69), it could be said that Mme Villeparisis's republican leanings are tinged with a Radicalism that posits work as its fundamental principle (Baal 43). The Radical belief was that “the man of the Revolution was a citizen, a worker, and the father of a family” (Auspitz 19). By slightly changing their order, translated as family, motherland, and work, these priorities were equally those of the nobility. Yet in a ghastly irony, “travail, famille, patrie” will become the motto of the Vichy government several decades later (Auspitz 32). A Radicalism representing the middle ground between conservative and reactionary positions (Mollenhauer 613) is thus in agreement with both the traditionalism of nobility and the Guermantes' progressivism. Indeed, Radicals are both progressive and conservative, just as the Guermantes are. The main benefit Radicalism offered its supporters consisted in allowing Frenchmen to vote for the Left while having the security of a Centrist government (Nordmann 9).

Mme de Villeparisis is not the only Guermantes demonstrating at least an interest in Radicalism, if not Radical Republican propensities. Saint-Loup admires Commander Duroc not only for his Dreyfusism, but also because “il est non seulement sublime d'intelligence, mais

radical-socialiste et franc-maçon” (*RTP2 : CG 407*). Norpois, despite having served in the Second Empire’s administration, has been “chargé plusieurs fois, depuis, de représenter la France dans des missions extraordinaires . . . par des cabinets radicaux qu’un simple bourgeois réactionnaire se fût refusé à servir” (*RTP1 : JF 426*), which can be equally indicative of his opportunism, patriotism, or Radical affinities. In final analysis this is a political collaboration rendered possible exactly because of his aristocratic status, as it guarantees both his political open-mindedness and his loyalty. Even Mme de Guermantes shows an interest in Radicalism given that she confesses her admiration for Gambetta’s memoirs “pour montrer qu’elle ne craignait pas de s’intéresser à un prolétaire et à un radical” (*RTP2 : CG 780*). Indeed, according to Daniel Mollenhauer Radicalism remained for a long time a current of thought rather than a party in the modern sense of the word (Mollenhauer 599), hence its extreme popularity in various social strata as it remained essentially an idealism.

In order to survive, old aristocrats tap exactly into this inner difference which allows them to be the opposite of what they appear. The examples abound. Mme de Villeparisis is “plus « libérale » que même la plus grande partie de la bourgeoisie”, and expresses very advanced ideas where most people expected the most conservative principles from her (*RTP2 : JF 70*). Though *la Belle Epoque* is a period marked by a reduction of tolerance due to the recession of Enlightenment, retreated into liberalism, the nobility remained faithful to it the longest. It is in line to its principles that the moral values they promote are a disinterested comportment, self-sacrifice, gratuitous service, and independence (Fiette 10). In *La recherche*, the accent falls on this intellectual freedom. In accordance to it, rather than being monarchists, many of them, such as M. de Guermantes (*RTP2 : CG 819*), Mme de Villeparisis (*RTP2 : JF 70*), and Robert de Saint-Loup (*RTP2 : JF 137*), are Republicans. Saint-Loup goes as far as to be a Socialist (*RTP2 :*

JF 92), as is Mme de Guermantes (*RTP2 : CG 732*). Many of them are Dreyfusards, at a time when most of the aristocracy was in the opposite camp: Saint-Loup remains for the longest time a “partisan enragé de Dreyfus” (*RTP2 : CG 531*), as does Mme de Guermantes (*RTP2 : CG 767*), the prince de Guermantes and his wife (*RTP3 : SG 110*). Even M. de Guermantes is temporarily swayed towards the innocence of Dreyfus by three charming foreign ladies (*RTP3 : SG 138*). Ostensibly, these attitudes reveal the limit of group identification, yet they are the deepest manifestation of fidelity to their oldest values: a strong belief in themselves actuated by the idea that nobility resides mainly in feeling noble, which in turn grants them freedom of choice. As a natural aristocracy, the nobility has a duty to itself to maintain its status – the ultimate obligation remains to its name. It follows that welcoming new wealth to strengthen themselves does not affect either their lineage or rank. As Fiette shows, the question of the fusion of elites becomes, in this view, secondary or consequent (Fiette 16). And as discussed in the previous chapter, *la Belle Epoque* is indeed the time of Jewish and American marriages.

Yet at the end of the 19th century, the political eclipse of high nobility displaces individual merit towards the intellectual field. As Fiette suggest, a psychology of continuity authorizes nobility to play on successive illustrations, and thus give itself new heredities (Fiette 267) – a strategy rendering possible an intellectually manifested aristocratic identity. Marked by the predominant belief in the value of intelligence, this move reveals itself by “cet état d’esprit du faubourg Saint-Germain” consisting in “ce respect des hommes intelligents pas nés (qui ne fleurit vraiment que dans la noblesse et rend les révolutions si injustes)” doubled by a “curiosité d’esprit acquise”, which renders both Charlus and Saint-Loup “des intellectuels que toute idée nouvelle intéresse” (*RTP4 : TR 340*). Thus, this new conception of the merit of intellectual pursuits pushes the nobility towards the avant-garde of both art and science as innovation

becomes the only way to illustrate a noble name, as exemplified by the career of Mme Greffulhe (Hillerin). The individualism of intellectual pursuits does not exclude familial primacy as it promotes the prestige of a name. It is this newfound value of intelligence that is the basis of the noble salon, as it ostensibly gathers together an aristocracy of the intellect. The duchess de Guermantes, its prototypical hostess, expresses it thus: “ce que la duchesse de Guermantes plaçait au-dessus de tout, ce n’était pas l’intelligence, c’était, selon elle, cette forme supérieure, plus exquise, de l’intelligence élevée jusqu’à une variété verbale de talent — l’esprit” (*RTP2 : CG 752*). Consequently, most of its members at least pretended to concur that “les privilèges de la pensée n’étaient pas moins dignes de respect que ceux de la naissance . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 723*). The noble salon is the embodiment of this new perception of individual merit, based on an aristocratic prestige at once preserved and overcome as in their leisure time most aristocrats prefer individual notoriety to a collective renown fixed in the past. Women do this by hosting a salon, an action that can be equally interpreted as being at the level of their lineage or rising to maintain the honor of their name.

Nonetheless, this merit does not need the glory of the limelight in order to shine. At its pinnacle, the keyword of ancient nobility is simplicity, as “[ê]tre grande dame, c’est . . . , pour une part, jouer la simplicité.” Yet the narrator underlines the fact that “[c]’est un jeu qui coûte extrêmement cher, d’autant plus que la simplicité ne ravit qu’à la condition que les autres sachent que vous pourriez ne pas être simples, c’est-à-dire que vous êtes très riches” (*RTP2 : CG 549*). A discrete ostentation turned inwards is the ultimate form of sophistication. It successfully avoids the violence of mass formation, as in the countryside “M^{me} de Marsantes était adorée . . . parce que la pureté d’un sang où depuis plusieurs générations on ne rencontrait que ce qu’il y a de plus grand dans l’histoire de France avait ôté à sa manière d’être tout ce que les gens du peuple

appellent « des manières » et lui avait donné la parfaite simplicité” (*RTP2 : CG 549*).

Contrastively, the crushing luxury of the parvenu creates the gasping adoration that could turn against her at the drop of a dime, seeing that “entre M^{me} Swann et la foule, celle-ci sentait ces barrières d’une certaine sorte de richesse, lesquelles lui semblent plus infranchissables de toutes”, whereas regular people “auprès d’une grande dame plus simple, plus facile à confondre avec une petite bourgeoise, moins éloignée du peuple, n’éprouveront pas ce sentiment de leur inégalité, presque de leur indignité, qu’ils ont devant une M^{me} Swann” (*RTP1 : JF 627*). History has made the old nobility aware of the risks to which they expose themselves through the public display of their wealth. Mme de Guermantes does not forget this lesson even in the middle of her peers. Upon leaving the party of the princess of Guermantes, she is fully aware of the attention she stirs in the other guests, as “[d]roite, isolée, [la duchesse était] dévorée des yeux par des femmes, des hommes, qui cherchaient à surprendre le secret de son élégance et de sa beauté.” Instead of basking in it, she remains alert to any movement of hostility, which is not late in coming from Mme de Gaillardon who touts that “elle commence à vieillir ; il paraît qu’elle ne peut pas s’y faire . . . parce que, comme elle n’est pas intelligente, qu’elle est méchante comme une teigne et qu’elle a mauvaise façon, elle sent bien que, quand elle ne sera plus belle, il ne lui restera rien du tout” (*RTP3 : SG 117*). Without giving any signs of having heard any of this, Oriane placates this resentment by ostensibly singling her out by the friendly attention she bestows on her for all to see.

Avoiding similar negative effects, the prince of Saxe, nephew of the Austrian Emperor and close friend of the Guermantes, manifests his high rank through his modest garb and humble manners with the theater usher. Contrastively, a rich financier or industrial would have taken a haughty and cutting tone with such a lowly employee. An authentic “grand seigneur” is not only

“doux, souriant”, but also exercises “l’affectation de l’humilité et de la patience, la feinte d’être l’un quelconque des spectateurs, comme un privilège de sa bonne éducation”, thus “dissimulant sous un sourire plein de bonhomie le seuil infranchissable du petit univers spécial qu’il portait en lui . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 337*). This same modesty marks the appearance and behavior of M. de Cambremer, manifested in the “terne aspect de quelqu’un qui n’avait rien d’intimidant”. Rather than generating an alienating respect, it allows a provincial notary’s wife to make a favorable judgement of him because “elle avait reconnu dans ce gentilhomme-fermier à allure de sacristain les signes maçonniques de son propre cléricisme” (*RTP2 : JF 43*). This recourse to discretion and the avoidance of what Marcel terms “l’orgueil plébéien” (*RTP2 : JF 109*) is a survival tactic, yet one that has positive consequences in the type of socialization it engenders. Whereas the “coterie du monde de l’argent” humiliates its outsiders, “les cruelles distances de l’argent, du luxe, de l’élégance ne sont nulle part supprimées aussi complètement que dans l’aristocratie” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 89). Conceived as a web based on the aristocracy of the intelligence and the parity of names, the Guermantes world “n’attachait aucune importance à la fortune et . . . la pauvreté [y] était considérée comme aussi désagréable, mais nullement plus diminuante et n’affectant pas plus la situation sociale, qu’une maladie d’estomac” (*RTP4 : AD 219*).

Furthermore, a special type of sociability reigns in their circles thanks to an impeccable politeness, manifested particularly towards outsiders. In the case of Saint-Loup, “son amabilité” is due to “la certitude ou l’illusion qu’avaient eu ces grands seigneurs d’être « plus que les autres » . . .” (*RTP2 : JF 96*). This attitude extends to other members of the Guermantes salon. It is thus not surprising that what the narrator particularly values in the *faubourg* is aristocratic self-confidence, which in turn allows for an ease of manner, kindness, and affability, particular to

their clan. Manifested as “un . . . sentiment de politesse instinctive et atavique envers des inconnus” (*RTP3 : SG 299*), it promotes harmonious social dynamics. In the case of Saint-Loup, the narrator explicitly attributes it to “l’éducation [qu’il] avait héritée de sa race” (*RTP2 : CG 706*), which makes it part of the subculture of their social group. Marcel does not ascribe this congenial sociability to ancestral qualities owed to Robert’s ancient lineage, as nationalists equating “un grand seigneur authentique” with “le français de race” (Drumont 17) would do. Instead he echoes a much older view – that expressed by the prominent legal scholar Charles Loyseau’s (1564-1627) in his *Traité des ordres and simples dignitez* (1610), which gives a systematic account of the moral and legal principles governing the *Ancien Régime*’s social order. Loyseau attributes the honor and esteem old aristocracy enjoys to its education. Explicitly discarding any definition of nobility as a “vertu de race”, which “ne vient pas de la génération, qui ne contribue rien aux âmes”, he ascribes it to “l’éducation, en laquelle, à la vérité, les enfants des gens de bien ont beaucoup d’avantage à la vertu : et à cause de la soigneuse instruction qu’on leur donne, et par le moyen de l’exemple continuel et prégnant, qu’ils ont de leurs pères” (Loyseau 29). And in *La recherche* its power is considerable. “[L]a vieille éducation française faisait mouvoir, soulevait” the duke of Guermantes himself who politely stands in front of the narrator, his guest, when he is making his farewell (*RTP2 : CG 580*). Its main attribute is its particular form of inclusion, as “du moment que quelqu’un, comme c’était mon cas, paraissait susceptible d’être agrégé au milieu Guermantes, cette politesse découvrait des trésors de simplicité hospitalière plus magnifiques encore s’il est possible que ces vieux salons, ces merveilleux meubles restés là” (*RTP2 : CG 728*). With his guests, “M. de Guermantes était porté par cette autre force, la politesse aristocratique la plus vraie” (*RTP2 : CG 728*). Inclusion of the selected members of its coterie is not its only consequence, but also the avoidance of violent

exclusions, as suggests “la scène par laquelle une grande dame met quelqu’un à la porte de chez elle, scène qui ne comporte nullement le doigt levé et les yeux flambants que l’on se figure” (*RTP2 : CG 545*). Rather than hostility, politeness and discretion govern even this situation.

Nonetheless, the narrator understands the limits of this attitude, which requires “qu’on démêlât le caractère fictif de cette amabilité, . . . ce qu’ils appelaient être bien élevés” by keeping one’s proper rank. The appropriate distance of a public greeting is appreciated exactly because Marcel “avait été discret” (*RTP3 : SG 63*). Yet he is still able to grasp its social benefits, knowing that “l’amabilité aristocratique” is “[une] amabilité heureuse de verser un baume sur le sentiment d’infériorité de ceux à l’égard desquels elle s’exerce” (*RTP3 : SG 62*). Saint-Loup brings it to its pinnacle: “Habitué par une bonne éducation suprême à émonder sa conduite de toute apologie, de toute invective, de toute phrase, il avait évité devant l’ennemi, comme au moment de la mobilisation, ce qui aurait pu assurer sa vie, par cet effacement de soi devant les actes que symbolisaient toutes ses manières . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 425*). This self-effacement allows not only for the generosity and fairness he so often shows the narrator and his mother, but more importantly avoids the friends versus foes attitude. Thus, though he valiantly dies on the battlefield for France, “[j]amais homme n’avait eu moins que lui la haine d’un peuple” (*RTP4 : TR 425*) – a patriotic attitude able to counter the destructive nationalist group dynamics positing the outsider as the enemy.

Discretion, simplicity, and politeness, are hallmarks of the old nobility’s subculture. Consequently, they avoid the limelight even when displaying individual merit. Just like Saint-Loup who strives to quietly die with his *poilus*, the gatherings of the real gratin happen away from the public eye, in the discretion of the private sphere. The illustration of a name as cultural participation in the salon activity matters only in the eyes of one’s peers, as the women of the

upper crust, “méconnaissant ou dédaignant le pouvoir qu’a pris aujourd’hui la publicité, sont-elles élégantes pour la reine d’Espagne, mais, méconnues de la foule, parce que la première sait et que la seconde ignore qui elles sont” (*RTP3 : SG 70*). As Fiette explains, during *la Belle Époque* the political downturn of old aristocracy is balanced by the superb summit of its fashionable life, in which self-representation and cultural patronage embody the aristocratic duality of contempt for public opinion and respect for clan rules (Fiette 203-206). The salon world of the Guermantes remains isolated in the space of the faubourg Saint-Germain, and thus faithful to the principle of the local. It displays a pre-Versailles type of sociability. Simmel insists on “the relatively narrow circle of people upon whom man was dependent in an undeveloped or under-developed money economy” (Simmel 321), such as the *Ancien Régime*, in which interpersonal relations were established on a more personal basis. Noble salons are rural autarkies forcefully displaced into the metropolitan space, and as such they strive to remain small worlds unto themselves. The Faubourg Saint-Germain is primarily formed by great families, the only ones that matter being enumerated by Charlus as “les Guermantes, . . . les La Trémoille, . . . les d’Uzès, les Luynes, . . . les Choiseul, les Harcourt, les La Rochefoucauld, . . . les Noailles, . . . les Castellane et sauf oubli, c’est tout” (*RTP3 : SG 475*). The family – smallest of clans – continues to play a central role in the old nobility: “Désertée dans les milieux mondains intermédiaires qui sont livrés à un mouvement perpétuel d’ascension, la famille joue au contraire un rôle important dans les milieu immobile comme l’aristocratie princière . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 671*). It is the basis of the noble salon membership, both reflecting and overcoming its own familial insider-outsider dynamic. Paradoxically, the importance of the family cell is marked by the lack of attention the hostess gives her relatives when, as is often the case, they are present in her salon. Her civility is lavished upon other guests rather than her kinsfolk, given that “[i]l ne lui eût

servi à rien de chercher à briller vis-à-vis d’eux . . . qui mieux que personne connaissaient son histoire et respectaient la race illustre dont elle était issue.” Hence Mme de Villeparisis “n’avait avec ses parents princiers . . . aucune de ces amabilités qu’elle avait avec l’historien, avec Cottard, avec Bloch, avec moi, et ils semblaient n’avoir pour elle d’autre intérêt que de les offrir en pâture à notre curiosité” (*RTP2* : *CG* 513). Nonetheless, this is where they feel at home – the natural environment for their socialization, even when the hostess does not take any steps they feel welcome. Thus, “sous ces modestes espèces, la communion sociale n’avait pas moins lieu”, despite “un accueil souvent assez peu aimable.” They do not go to the duchesse de Guermantes out of snobbism, nor for the luxury of the surroundings, as they often refuse more splendid entertainments in order to visit her, not even for opinions conforming to their own, as “[i]ls n’étaient même pas certains de trouver là des opinions absolument conformes aux leurs . . .” (*RTP2* : *CG* 803). They do so because they remain faithful to an exclusive sociability reflecting the social web of the old aristocracy.

Seeing as the old nobility is akin to all “corps fortement constitués” characterized by “la rigueur des préjugés” and an attachment to noble principles as a protection against exterior corruption, one would expect each of its members to be as “impitoyable pour tout élément étranger” as a professor in the electoral college of a university. Yet their sociability does not parallel the “sectarisme fermé” of such closed circles which reduce themselves to “la survivance purement extérieure d’un passé aux idées étroites” (*RTP2* : *CG* 750). Instead of it, their coterie adopts the same definition of the social group as that described by Grange for the gratin of the *Bottin Mondain*. Disregarding economic divisions and functional separations, they do not reunite based on their financial worth or professional status, nor as the elite of a particular sphere. Rather, they are recognizing each other as belonging to the same cultural community (Grange

85). The noble salon is a relatively closed circle reuniting the oldest nobility with intellectual, artistic, and sometime political, stars of the day, in a belief that all belong to an aristocracy of the spirit: “un « salon » . . . ajoutait parfois aux gens de son monde quelque notabilité que venait de mettre en vue la découverte d’un remède ou la production d’un chef-d’œuvre” (*RTP2 : CG 722*). As Sylvia Kahan suggests, the intellectual pursuits animating salon gatherings do not aim “to open and broaden the world of culture, but to fill a self-referential private sphere of action and influence” (Kahan 90). Their purpose is to further illustrate the glory of a name through the merit of its hostess and her guests. Such activities function as a form of self-promotion in the nobility’s own eyes rather than in those of the public, seeing as the old nobility is already at the pinnacle of society. Contrastively, the musical soirées offered by Mme Verdurin, her support of the Russian ballet, or of modernist painters, were forms of self-promotion. Her purpose is an accretion of prestige that would hopefully lead to upward social mobility: “Mme Verdurin se proposait bien le « monde » comme objectif . . .” (*RTP1 : JF 590*). “Le petit clan” is the means by which she can hope to attain objectives for which her personal standing and abilities would not suffice, and artistic gatherings – an aristocratic fashion – the model she copies and perfects to further her goals.

This fashion of musical soirées was prompted awhile back by Charlus who “avait eu envie de réentendre certains quatuors de Beethoven . . . et avait fait venir des artistes pour les jouer chaque semaine, pour lui et quelques amis. La grande élégance fut cette année-là de donner des réunions peu nombreuses où on entendait de la musique de chambre” (*RTP2 : JF 110*). The point of such intimate musical gatherings was aesthetical enjoyment. It reflected the core of noble sociability, which was to meet for no goal other than the sharing of pleasure. When his feelings for Morel transform Charlus into a regular of the Verdurin salon, what he misses most

from the noble salon is precisely that disinterested pleasure, reminiscent of aesthetical contemplation: “[il] devait se rappeler avec quelque nostalgie les gracieux tourbillons multicolores des réunions mondaines où les femmes et les hommes les plus charmants ne le recherchaient que pour le plaisir désintéressé qu’il leur donnait” (*RTP3* : *SG* 461). Mme de Guermantes makes such sociability one of the tenets of her salon. Its actualization requires open-mindedness, akin to the one she displayed upon hosting a party in the honor of the king of England. In the vein of musical soirées, she invites the musician Gaston Lemaire (1854-1928) together with the poet and librettist Grandmougin (1859-1930). Though there is no mention of music being played, “le roi d’Angleterre s’était plu mieux que nulle part ailleurs” at her party (*RTP2* : *CG* 744). Yet she reaches the pinnacle of her broadmindedness in the interests of entertaining her guests when inviting the princess Mathilde, the niece of Napoleon Bonaparte. She summons “le plus riche bouquet de toutes les beautés, de toutes les valeurs, de toutes les célébrités . . . même quand elles étaient de la propre famille du roi”, with the result that the princess “n’avait jamais passé une meilleure journée ni assisté à une fête plus réussie.” Such success was rendered possible exactly because her approach was made “sans raisonnements *a priori* sur le bonapartisme” (*RTP2* : *CG* 760), meaning apolitically. Its ultimate result is that, having met at the Guermantes, “le duc d’Aumale et la princesse Mathilde . . . étaient ensuite allés l’un chez l’autre, avec cette faculté d’oublier le passé que témoigna Louis XVIII quand il prit pour ministre Fouché qui avait voté la mort de son frère” (*RTP2* : *CG* 808). Overcoming political divisions³¹, rather than deepening them, is the trademark of the noble salon. According to Kahan, Proust himself respected these rules when organizing his own gatherings with no little success,

³¹ As son of Louis Phillippe Ier, Henri d’Orléans, duc d’Aumale (1822-1897) is the prototypical monarchist.

judging by how much his guests enjoyed them. Thus, he arranged an elegant dinner to celebrate the successful reception of Anna de Noailles's new collection of poems *Le Coeur innombrable*, to which he invited Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards alike. As a consequence Léon Daudet, the anti-Semitic anti-revisionist writer, found himself seated by the daughter of a well-known Jewish banker, but having overcome this shocking discovery he had to admit that good-will and understanding reigned at a party full of cordiality between guests that were ostensibly political enemies (Kahan 117-118).

While meeting for pleasure is the motto of the noble salon, Mme Verdurin keeps foremost in her mind that her "petit clan" is a tool at the service of upward mobility. As Simmel suggests, in purposive association "the individual possesses a collectively established tool that multiplies his own powers, extends their effectiveness and secures their ends" (Simmel 225). Thus, from time to time she gives one of her "grandes soirées", to which she conveys brilliant outsiders with the precise goal of "amuser le peintre ou faire connaître le musicien" (*RTPI : CS* 186). Reciprocal support in view of a common goal – social advancement – is what M Verdurin's formula stands for: "Tout pour les amis, vivent les camarades !" (*RTPI : CS* 185). Yet as Simmel shows any association based on a common goal, albeit a shared arrivism, must eliminate fortuitous elements as to insure the homogeneity of its interests and thus increase the service it can render its members (Simmel 225). An eloquent instance of this dynamic comes from another salon that aspires to rise in the public eye through its musical soirées: that of Mme de Saint-Euverte. We assist there at the progressive exclusion of heterogeneous elements, particularly those guests whose presence is motivated by an authentic love of music – those who are there for pleasure:

M^{me} de Saint-Euverte avait d'année en année réduit le nombre des personnes inconnues au monde élégant. . . . [D]ans les dernières années on ne distingua plus, mêlées au beau monde, que deux personnes hétérogènes : la vieille M^{me} de Cambremer et la femme à belle voix d'un architecte à laquelle on était souvent obligé de demander de chanter. . . . Aussi l'année suivante ne furent-elles pas invitées. (*RTP3 : SG 69*)

Indeed, “M^{me} de Franquetot tenta une démarche en faveur de sa cousine qui aimait tant la musique”, but her request is in vain. We are thus faced with musical gatherings from which musical aficionados are excluded. In the case of the Verdurin salon, bans are instituted for a different reason. Mutual satisfaction in the social advancement and personal importance of its members is the key to the “petit-clan” in a subculture that dubs as “ennuyeux” equally those that are not worthy enough to frequent their group, and those which do not condescend to do so. This is why their gatherings are “entre soi, en ne mêlant aucun étranger au petit « noyau »” (*RTP1 : CS 186*), thus being stricter than those of the exclusive Guermantes themselves. Swann, with his brilliant acquaintances, outshines the prestige of the Verdurin and their guests. His misstep consist not only in divulging his upcoming lunch at the *Elysée* with the French president, M. Grévy (*RTP1 : CS 213*), or that he still frequents “chez les La Trémoille, chez les Laumes” (*RTP1 : CS 254*), but also in the patent impossibility that such exceptional figures would ever frequent the “petit noyau”. To Mme Verdurin the French president appears a threat to her salon, “un ennuyeux particulièrement redoutable parce qu’il disposait de moyens de séduction et de contrainte qui, employées à l’égard des fidèles, eussent été capables de les faire lâcher” (*RTP1 : CS 213*). Thus Swann on the one hand exposes the actual social standing of the Verdurin salon, while on the other does not contribute to “the junctions of countless individual teleological sequences and provide an efficient tool for otherwise unattainable purposes” (Simmel 225) by

bringing members of the upper crust there. The Verdurin's distinction can survive only in a self-imposed isolation. Such are the downsides of an advancement-centered sociability.

Conversely, the favorable consequence of an enjoyment-centered sociability ruling the noble salon cannot be overstated. Simmel dubs it “one of the most effective social formation, namely the possibility of the individual participating in associations, the objective purpose of which he wants to promote and enjoy, without that connection implying any commitment on his part” (Simmel 371). Its direct result is “cette grande liberté qui régnait dans le monde des Guermantes”, so unexpected to the eyes of the world from Combray (*RTP4 : AD 219*) still conforming to medieval forms of unification which, according to Simmel, did not distinguish between man as an individual and as a member of an association (Simmel 371). The noble salon has adapted its *Ancien Régime* sociability to “the jostling crowdedness and the motley disorder of metropolitan communication.” This move from intensive to extensive social relations characteristic to the modern urban environment requires “an invisible functional barrier between people” as “protection and neutralization against the crowded proximity and friction of . . . cultural life” (Simmel 518). In the noble salon, it is embodied by a newfound inner boundary and reserve of which the aforementioned tenets of discretion, simplicity, and politeness, are a symptom. Consequently, the noble salon grants its members the inviolability of their personal space. Individual distantiation is the key ingredient ensuring harmonious social interactions. This is why in this closed world there are few rules and obligations – the emphasis is on formal liberty. It allows Mme de Guermantes to take a cruise to the Norwegian fjords at the top of the Parisian season without losing her social status. It rather increases it. Thus, “on découvre qu’au-dessus du monde de la nécessité il y a celui de la liberté” (*RTP2 : CG 768*), which extends to everyone in the Guermantes circle. It not only allows its members to have other affiliations and

frequent different salons, but even encourages them to do so. Oriane exemplifies this by prompting the princess de Parme to call on Empire nobility if she feels like it, without a second thought to the opinion of her peers:

Si cela vous amuse d'aller chez les Iéna, vous avez trop d'esprit pour faire dépendre vos actes de ce que peut penser ce pauvre homme [le prince de Guermantes], qui est une chère créature innocente, mais enfin qui a des idées de l'autre monde. . . . Cette pierre vivante a beau être mon cousin, elle me fait peur et je n'ai qu'une idée, c'est de la laisser dans son moyen âge. (*RTP2 : CG 812*)

As Simmel shows, more freedom in social life is in turn reflected in the transition from the stability and invariability of the *Ancien Régime* hierarchies to the liability and interchangeability of persons in the modern world (Simmel 324), as manifested in the noble salon. There are no social interdictions for those affiliated with the Guermantes coterie. The various clans forming the Saint-Germain world, functioning simultaneously yet independently of each other, reflect a belief in the value of local independence, an isolation that still remains permeable to the newest ideas and forms of entertainment that can be enjoyed in the privacy of the group. This permeability goes as far as to allow the simultaneous frequentation of other clans, inasmuch as none requires an exclusive fidelity to it.

Subjection rather than freedom characterizes Mme Verdurin's salon, yet "sa prétention était que le régime sous lequel elle faisait vivre les fidèles, la tyrannie, fût appelé liberté" (*RTP3 : SG 363*). And whereas Oriane encourages the princess de Parme to visit whomever she pleases, "le petit noyau" penalizes those frequenting other social circles by banishing them, as Swann's example suggests. Rather than the forward looking modern sociability of the noble salon, the

social dynamics of the “petit clan” are those of medieval times when “[t]he relationships of the individual to the association stood under the banner of ‘all or nothing’: it did not tolerate a divisibility by which only a small particle of the otherwise independent personality might enter into it” (Simmel 372). Thus, Mme Verdurin has a particular bond with “les fidèles du petit clan”: “elle les voulait tout à leur Patronne.” She fosters the indiscretions of her “habitues”, conceding “aux hommes d’avoir une maîtresse, un amant”, not from a particular open-mindedness, but rather to completely bind them to her salon, in other words “à condition que tout cela n’eût aucune conséquence sociale hors de chez elle” (*RTP3 : LP 782*). The narrator likens the centripetal machine that is “le petit clan” to a cult of which Mme Verdurin is the leader: “[c]omme tout pouvoir ecclésiastique, elle jugeait les faiblesses humaines moins graves que ce qui pouvait affaiblir le principe d’autorité, nuire à l’orthodoxie, modifier l’antique credo, dans sa petite Église” (*RTP3 : LP 749*). Yet this strategy is not failsafe, as the most faithful of her guests still drop her sometimes, “[l]es plus casaniers se laissaient tenter par un voyage ; les plus continents avaient eu une bonne fortune ; les plus robustes pouvaient attraper la grippe, les plus oisifs être pris par leurs vingt-huit jours, les plus indifférents aller fermer les yeux à leur mère mourante” (*RTP3 : SG 270*).

“[C]omme le Christ ou le Kaiser”, Mme Verdurin requires devotedness from each member of the “petit noyau” (*RTP3 : SG 270*). Her salon is a highly centralized organism, tightly grouped around its leader, as suggested by the fact that Mme Verdurin “n’aimait pas qu’on fit bande à part dans leur petit clan” (*RTP3 : LP 782*). In the interest of this centralization, M. Verdurin resorts to a *divide et impera* strategy. Like the most exacting nationalist requiring complete dedication to the cause of the motherland, he strives to “rompre entre les fidèles les liens qui n’avaient pas pour but exclusif le renforcement du petit groupe” (*RTP3 : LP 830*). The

devotion to the clan is so absolute as to require the casting off of personal endeavors which are not serving its cause. Thus, “celui qui aimait son père et sa mère autant qu’elle et n’était pas prêt à les quitter pour la suivre n’était pas digne d’elle” (*RTP3 : SG 270*). This is why “la fidèle type . . . enfin incarné en cette nouvelle recrue féminine” is the princess Sherbatoff. “[B]rouillée avec sa famille, exilée de son pays” (*RTP3 : SG 270*), she is always there because she has nowhere else to be. I propose the princess embodies the paradox of the perfect nationalist, who can be a Frenchman only because of his local roots, yet is required to drop them to serve the higher interest of the motherland. The nation is his family, just as the princess confides to Mme Verdurin: “vous êtes ma famille” (*RTP3 : SG 270*).

The tragedy of this type of relationship is revealed when Mme Verdurin confesses to her clan that the recent death of the princess did not affect her at all: “je ne la détestais pas, mais elle m’était tellement indifférente . . .” (*RTP3 : LP 744*). A simple means to the goal of enhancing the appearance of social prestige of her salon, she has never enjoyed her presence. The enforced tight bond linking the “habituéés” of the “petit clan” has further drawbacks. For the Verdurin, “l’assiduité aux mercredis” (*RTP3 : LP 734*) hides behind the pretense of interest and enjoyment an insuperable boredom with the same faces and the same subjects of discussions. Consequently, “M^{me} Verdurin et son mari avaient contracté dans l’oisiveté des instincts cruels” (*RTP3 : SG 293*) in which the guests with the least social prestige are mistreated. Ridiculed for his timidity and a speech impediment, “Saniette leur offrait un souffre-douleur quotidien” (*RTP3 : SG 293*), while Brichot, fallen from the rank of brilliant academician to that of a pedant, “était . . . maltraité par les Verdurin” (*RTP4 : TR 368*). The name of the game is the persecution of the weak by the strong, as “M. Verdurin . . . [s’]ingéniait à prendre quelqu’un en faute, à tendre des toiles où il pût passer à l’araignée sa compagne quelque mouche innocente. Faute de griefs, on inventait des

ridicules” (*RTP3 : LP 734*). The other guests join in the harassment, grouped around the victim as “une bande d’anthropophages chez qui une blessure faite à un blanc a réveillé le goût du sang” (*RTP3 : SG 325*). Tedium and lack of distanciation make the Verdurin salon a machine of persecution. It mistreats its weakest link, before banishing it from the “petit salon” as no longer desirable.

Like any religious order, its apparent exclusivity does not prevent it to actively look for new recruits, particularly if they already have “une « situation » qui pouvait faire de lui une recrue brillante pour le petit clan” (*RTP3 : LP 734*). Any friend or flirt of the salon’s habitués is a candidate to be plumbed “s’il était susceptible d’être agrégé au « petit clan ». S’il ne l’était pas, on prenait à part le fidèle qui l’avait présenté et on lui rendait le service de le brouiller avec son ami ou avec sa maîtresse. Dans le cas contraire, le « nouveau » devenait à son tour un fidèle” (*RTP1 : CS 187*). Mme Swann, who also aspires to build a brilliant salon able to propel her to the gratin, mirrors this active recruiting of new clan members. Her clumsy social offensives prompts the narrator mother to compare “la façon un peu sommaire, rapide et violente dont M^{me} Swann conquérait ses relations à une guerre coloniale” (*RTP1 : JF 506*). While de Tarde describes any clan as “un monde fermé aux groupes rivaux, et cependant hospitalier, avide de nouvelles recrues” (*Monadologie 54*), there remains a disparity between the aforementioned salons and the aristocracy’s laidback manner. Seemingly content with her lot, the noble hostess displays a masterful politeness and tact when considering someone worthy of being invited to the *faubourg*. The prospective guest should be flattered by the invitation, but most of all pleased by the social interaction and entertainment offered by the salon he will join. Furthermore, no mutual obligation ensues either from the proffered invitation, or from its acceptance.

Contrastively, each member of the Verdurin coterie is expected to renounce all preexisting ties in favor of the “petit clan”, on penalty of exclusion. As its premise is that all those who do not belong to the group are intolerable bores, transgressions in this regard cannot be withstood. Yet to enforce such a rule is a hard task, forcing its leader to a constant vigilance in the surveillance of her guests. Thus, the connections between the “fidèles” and “la patronne” must be reinforced and upkeep before being inevitably destroyed by the activity of its members, as each follows individual interests and aspirations. Starting from Simmel’s observation that “money establishes relationships between elements that otherwise would have no connection whatsoever”, which it accomplishes on condition of destroying many antecedent relationships (Simmel 374), it can be said that through the means of her considerable fortune Mme Verdurin has brought together heterogeneous and disconnected individuals, required to drop all prior social ties, with the purpose to create a salon and socially advance. Yet to keep them together, she must resort to “[l]es Arts du Néant” (*RTP1 : JF 591*), a Sisyphean effort in bringing and holding together that which is destined to fall apart. Her constant “mise en relation” remains a means, but never the final goal, of her advance, as any of her salon’s achievements constitutes an intermediary stage towards a greater, but always unpredictable goal. Thus, more than any other character in *La recherche*, “la patronne” personifies “l’art (pour une maîtresse de maison) de savoir « réunir », de s’entendre à « grouper », de « mettre en valeur », de « s’effacer », de servir de « trait d’union ».” By her ability to connect any two people, no matter how far apart socially, she ostensibly achieves the ultimate form of socialization: lacking any common ground other than objective culture, communication between such elements must by necessity remain impersonal. In this regard, “bien qu’ils ne fassent que nuancer l’inexistant, sculpter le vide” (*RTP1 : JF 591*), these “Arts du Néant” remain crucial.

Thus, it is precisely because it groups individuals not linked by any common ties that the “petit clan” requires a common dogma: “Pour faire partie du « petit noyau », du « petit groupe », du « petit clan » des Verdurin, une condition était suffisante mais elle était nécessaire : il fallait adhérer tacitement à un Credo” (*RTP* : *CS* 185). Part of it is the superficial agreement of neophytes that “le jeune pianiste, protégé par M^{me} Verdurin cette année-là . . . « enfonçait » à la fois Planté et Rubinstein et que le docteur Cottard avait plus de diagnostic que Potain” (*RTPI* : *CS* 185). At its core however is the required conviction that “les soirées des gens qui n’allaient pas chez eux étaient ennuyeuses comme la pluie” (*RTPI* : *CS* 185), which cannot be doubted on penalty of expulsion. Disallowing individual beliefs, it fully engages the “fidèles” in the shared opinion of the clan, and as such parallels nationalistic ideology. Complete faith in this credo is the actual foundation of the little group, as it is only on its basis that its core identifies itself as different from the rest of society. As Saint-Loup summarizes, salons such as the Verdurin’s “sont des milieux . . . où on fait tribu Tu ne me diras pas que ce n’est pas une petite secte ; on est tout miel pour les gens qui en sont, on n’a pas assez de dédain pour les gens qui n’en sont pas” (*RTP3* : *SG* 410). Anyone willing to form his own opinion on the enjoyments proffered by other salons manifests “[un] esprit d’examen et [un] démon de frivolité [qui] pouvaient par contagion devenir fatal à l’orthodoxie de la petite église . . .” (*RTPI* : *CS* 185). Such an endeavor risks exposing the distance between what the “petit clan” aspires to be and what it actually is. The person attempting it becomes the enemy fixing the group in a position differing from its aspirations and projections, and consequently must be repudiated. The dynamics of the Verdurin salon make it a machine of exclusion echoing Barrèsian chauvinism.

Contrastively, there is no credo to which members of a noble salon must explicitly adhere. However there emerges from the definition of the spirit of nobility and its intrinsic

politeness, opposed “à tout « corps » tant soit peu centralisé” (*RTP2 : CG 751*), their fundamental principle of sociation: an aversion to any form of centralization. Crucially, on this same basis the narrator rejects the Zionist nationalist movement which advocates for a Jewish state. He insists on the necessity to “prévenir l’erreur funeste” of supporting “un mouvement sioniste” (*RTP3 : SG 33*). The mass effect of a coherent community, regardless of its foundation, is always dangerous. I propose *La recherche* in its entirety warns off gregariousness and favors the proliferation of irreducible singularities. In fact, the original French view on assimilation central to Radicalism, as reflected by the discourse given by the count of Clermont-Tonnerre at the Constitutional Assembly on December 23 1789, is germane to this approach: “Il faut refuser tout aux Juifs comme Nation et accorder tout aux Juifs comme individus... Il faut qu’ils ne fassent dans l’État ni un corps politique, ni un ordre; il faut qu’ils soient individuellement citoyens . . .” (Assouline 110). Furthermore, as Samuel Lee shows, the Rothschild and the baron de Hirsch had an assimilationist approach to the Jewish problem, a fact of which Proust was likely aware as he made both the baron de Hirsch and the Rothschild family regular visitors of the Guermantes salon (*RTP3 : SG 68; RTP3: LP 548*). They believed a Jewish state would intensify pre-existing anti-Semitism, further endangering the welfare of all Jews as nationalists all over Europe would clamor for the Jews’ return to their own homeland (Lee 284-286). The emancipation of Jewry required them to move away from petty trading, taking to agriculture: the farmer in this view was a free man. Living in the ghetto, apart from the rest of the population, maintained them in the same degraded position attributed to them for centuries. The answer consisted in educating them for assimilation into the general population, allowing them to keep their religion but dropping the customs of the ghetto (Lee 302-303). While French Jews were torn between the forces of assimilation and the nationalists that reminded them they stood

outside the pale of the nation, Marrus shows that despite anti-Semitism, or maybe because of it, they very much aspired to melt into the French nation (Marrus 122) – an attitude Proust himself shared.

The organization of the noble salon reflects this rejection of centralization and uniformity. It does not align itself along exclusive lines of any kind, albeit intellectual, religious, or political, but rather bases its activity on its members' shared interests leading to mutual enjoyment. A professed respect for intellectual merits remains at its core. Yet as discussed in the first chapter of this essay, nationalism imagines spiritual affinities consistently lead up to political association. It follows that any salon, willingly or not, is attributed an a priori political dimension, manifested as soon as it poses as ideologically united in front of another (Dumont 257). As such, it would be automatically implicated in a dangerous friends versus enemy dynamic. According to Schmitt, the only way an association can avoid this is to remain strictly nonpolitical, regardless of its cultural, social, or otherwise more ambitious goals (Schmitt 57) – it must remain a simple interest group in French society. This is why the Proustian noble salon rejects politics in toto, as “[l]es mondains qui ne veulent pas laisser la politique s’introduire dans le monde sont aussi prévoyants que les militaires qui ne veulent pas laisser la politique pénétrer dans l’armée” (*RTP3 : LP 740*). Consequently, Mme de Guermantes protests political manifestations and gatherings in noble salons either “en restant assise quand toutes les dames s’étaient levées à l’entrée du général Mercier” or “en se levant et en demandant ostensiblement ses gens quand un orateur nationaliste avait commencé une conférence” as “elle ne trouvait pas que le monde fût fait pour parler politique” (*RTP2 : CG 767*). As de Gramont explains, “un salon, s’il veut garder son essence, ne doit pas être une tribune politique ou une succursale de l’affaire Dreyfus” (*Marcel Proust 154*).

In this context, the frivolity of the political position of its guests becomes a requirement, such as Oriane who “avant personne” was “convaincue de l’innocence de Dreyfus” (*RTP2 : CG 560*) yet never goes as far as to claim her Dreyfusism. Her political convictions are not of the enthusiastic kind. Thus, though the Guermantes’ mentality is opposed to nationalism, “comme elle se savait cotée mal pensante, elle faisait de larges concessions, jusqu’à redouter d’avoir à tendre la main à Swann dans ce milieu antisémite” (*RTP3 : SG 72*). More than a lack of courage of her convictions, Oriane acts from an awareness of the hostile mass-effects a more open position would entail. Dreyfusism and an opposition to nationalism were not causes that she could have taken up without serious consequences for her social standing. As such, she tries to keep her opinions private, just as the prince and princess de Guermantes do with their newly acquired Dreyfusism. It is Saint-Loup’s cousin, the duchesse de Poitiers, who epitomizes the proper degree of conviction in her Dreyfusism, which consists in the exclamation “S’il était innocent quelle horreur ce serait qu’il fût à l’île du Diable.” Aptly, Saint-Loup explains to the narrator that “il faut . . . tenir compte de son milieu” when judging her political affiliations (*RTP2 : CG 445*). Similarly, confronted with the aggressive Dreyfusism of her guest Bloch, Mme de Villeparisis “tout en tenant à donner une satisfaction immédiate à l’archiviste et au clan antidreyfusard, voulait-elle pourtant ménager l’avenir, elle se contenta d’abaisser les paupières et de fermer à demi les yeux” (*RTP2 : CG 545*). She thus manifests the trademark of the noble salon, which is “la modération diplomatique du mondain” (*RTP3 : SG 110*). In the same way M. de Cambremer has recourse to the subculture of nobility, combining “courtoisie pour un ennemi” with moderation, to circumvent possible conflict. Thus, having concluded the narrator is a Dreyfusard while he himself is a staunch supporter of the opposite camp, he extolls the merits of his supposed adversaries: “il se mit à me faire l’éloge d’un colonel juif, qui avait toujours été très

juste pour un cousin des Chevrigny et lui avait fait donner l'avancement qu'il méritait" (*RTP3* : SG 356), while also emphasizing their political antagonism. Despite the ironic undertones of this episode, its amicable overtones remain relevant for the social dynamics of the gratin.

This determination to avoid conflict, particularly at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, goes further, as exemplified by Mme de Greffulhe³²'s sister who takes the drastic step of interdicting group political discussions at her social gatherings³³: "J'ai institué que deux personnes pouvaient se donner rendez-vous dans le salon d'à côté pour discuter quand le silence sur ce sujet est devenu trop pénible. Mais jamais plus de deux et pas de harangue publique" (Hillerin 65). A paradoxical form of group harmony is achieved by the interdiction of political interaction, supporting Fiette's view that for the nobility there is a vital superiority of the social over the political, as its economic, social and cultural capital implies a network of alliances and solidarities that go beyond political alignment (Fiette 267-271). Long-term interpersonal relationships, particularly when divergences are present, establish reciprocities transcending ideologies. I propose the noble salon occupies a prominent place in *La recherche* because its social dynamics put a damper on the propagation of harmful doctrines, particularly those emanating from the "demi-esprits" who "ont besoin de se compléter dans l'action. . . ." Hinting at Barrèsian nationalists, which are proponents of purposeful action fighting against the decadence and nihilism of modernity (Marrus 173), Marcel dubs such politicians dangerous because they "attirent à eux la foule et créent autour d'eux non seulement les réputations surfaites et les dédains injustifiés mais les guerres civiles et les guerres extérieures. . . ." (*RTP4* :

³² As previously mentioned, Mme de Greffulhe is one of the models for Mme de Guermantes.

³³ It is relevant that the interdictions of open political discussions at such gatherings is a feature inherited from early Enlightenment salons. However, the custom stemmed from fear of royal repression rather than desire for harmony (Jones 179).

TR 473). Rather than magnify mass effects with their ensuing social rifts, the sociability of old nobility follows de Tarde's conviction that "la discussion verbale est possible entre deux hommes qui ont résolu la question différemment" (*Les lois sociales* 44). Contrastively, Barrès condemns this attitude – "ce ton de libertinage politique familial à des hommes de partis divers quand ils sont liés par des intérêts privés" (*Les déracinés* 281) – exactly because, rising above political conflicts, it overcomes the divisions fueling nationalistic dynamics. As a gathering dedicated to non-confrontational conversation, the noble salon displaces the concept of battle into intellectual discussion, typifying what Schmitt terms "the essentially liberal attitude." At its pinnacle, the dynamic of perpetual discussion reduces the state to its society, replacing a politically united people with a culturally interested public (Schmitt 71-72). The Guermantes salon epitomizes the death of confrontational politics. Proust knows that in times of crisis the state is divorced from society, giving nationalism the opportunity to recast the nation as the unifying framework allowing for a collective consciousness. His antidote for this is fragmentation into heterogeneous clans – a model which supplants the nation. In this perspective, without any necessary definition, France appears as a given.

We are faced with two fundamental attitudes towards the political realm: the subdued internationalism of old nobility and the bellicose Barrèsian nationalism predominant in French society. At first sight it would appear "le petit noyau" aligns with the liberalism of the former as it openly supports Dreyfus's innocence: "Le petit clan était en effet le centre actif d'une longue crise politique arrivée à son maximum d'intensité : le dreyfusisme" (*RTP3 : SG* 141). However, this means its *raison d'être* is first and foremost political, as reflected by "ces véritables séances de salut public . . . où chez M^{me} Verdurin se réunissaient Picquart, Clemenceau, Zola, Reinach et Labori" (*RTP3 : SG* 144). Yet at the beginning of the Affair "un antisémitisme bourgeois et

latent s'était réveillé et avait atteint une véritable exaspération" (*RTP2 : CG 549*) in Mme Verdurin, paralleling the attitude of the vast majority of French society, and most closely that of Radicals. As discussed in the first chapter, though the Radicals' anti-Semitism ran deep at the start of the Affair, their involvement in it remained limited. Eventually, they switched sides, yet their support of Dreyfus was not in defense of an innocent whose human rights were trampled, but rather because the affair was quickly turning into a public scandal threatening the stability of the Republic. Its political potential was undeniable. Similarly, the Verdurin's choice of hosting a political salon does not follow from strong convictions, but rather from the Affair's charisma: "Mme Verdurin . . . eût . . . voulu trouver dans la prépondérance de son salon dreyfusiste une récompense mondaine" (*RTP3 : SG 278*). In her contest with other bourgeois salons, this strategy is successful, as "le petit clan des Verdurin avait actuellement un intérêt autrement vivant que le salon légèrement nationaliste, plus encore littéraire, et avant tout bergottique, de M^{me} Swann" (*RTP3 : SG 141*). Dreyfusism offers the kind of unconventional, if controversial, visibility able to promote Mme Verdurin social standing, since at that time "un salon dreyfusien semblait quelque chose d'aussi impossible qu'à une autre époque un salon communard" (*RTP3 : SG 141*). And she was very astute in identifying Radicalism as a potential boost to her social standing, aware of what Stone terms "the influential and shifting interconnections of politics, culture, and leisure in the early 20th century" (Stone 366). A specific aspect of the French elite during *la Belle Epoque*, differentiating it from other major European states, was that a broader range of the educated bourgeoisie had access to political power which was no longer the monopoly of the aristocracy and the rich bourgeoisie, indeed due in no small measure to Radicalism's prominence (Stone 399). Nonetheless, Dreyfusism and Radicalism are not enough to propel her to the top echelons of society, a feat it could not accomplish for Radical politicians either. Though by the

20th century they had become the new political elite pledged to lead, they were still uncertain of their status (Stone 219-220). The vulnerability of their position, as they were committed to break yet branded vulgar arrivists because of this, is indeed parallel to that of the Verdurin.

Furthermore, regardless of its orientation, the Verdurin salon's political nature reflects the friends against foes dynamics of Barrèsian nationalism. A clan in which most, if not all, of its members must have the same political opinions and in which private discussions of any kind are forbidden promotes an "us versus them" mentality leading to divisions and confrontation. The narrator remarks "à quel point le petit clan ayant façonné tous les « habitués » sur le même type" (*RTP3 : SG 259*), reflecting its enforced unanimity.

This same political model gradually penetrates the noble salon despite all measures taken against it. Politics eventually becomes the new criterion for membership, "comme si une opinion politique donnait droit à une qualification sociale" (*RTP2 : CG 586*). This new state of affairs prompts Oriane to complain:

je trouve insupportable que, sous prétexte qu'elles sont bien pensantes, qu'elles n'achètent rien aux marchands juifs ou qu'elles ont « Mort aux Juifs » écrit sur leur ombrelle, une quantité de dames Durand ou Dubois, que nous n'aurions jamais connues, nous soient imposées par Marie-Aynard ou par Victurnienne. Je suis allée chez Marie-Aynard avant-hier. C'était charmant autrefois. Maintenant on y trouve toutes les personnes qu'on a passé sa vie à éviter, sous prétexte qu'elles sont contre Dreyfus, et d'autres dont on n'a pas idée qui c'est. (*RTP2 : CG 535*)

Invitations impelled by political affiliations replace the gatherings for pleasure in the isolation of the *faubourg*, as many gratin hostesses, "subordonnant tout à l'Affaire, excluait des femmes élégantes et en recevaient qui ne l'étaient pas, pour cause de révisionnisme ou

d'antirévisionnisme . . ." (*RTP3 : LP 739*). This fashion becomes so prominent that Oriane herself is soon criticized "comme tiède, mal pensante et subordonnant aux étiquettes mondaines les intérêts de la Patrie" (*RTP3 : LP 740*). Thus Charlus observes that "cette affaire Dreyfus . . . n'a qu'un inconvéniant : c'est qu'elle détruit la société" (*RTP2 : CG 586*). This apparently superficial comment brings to light the intolerance brought over by the Affair which corrupts the exclusive yet inclusive sociability specific to the nobility. When nationalism is all the fashion, the gratin admits more than its fair share of bourgeois anti-Semitic ladies simply in virtue of their anti-Semitism, while shunning gentlewomen that fail to show enough patriotic spirit. In a movement paralleling the intolerance which imperils France from within, the novel suggests high society is threatened not by too much tolerance, but by the lack of it.

Crucially, it is the inconsequentiality of the noble salon pursuits, chosen to the detriment of political interests, which for so long ensured its harmonious sociability. While appearing to protect just "les règles mondaines", in hindsight of the Dreyfus Affair and of the Great War Charlus contends that "malgré leur frivolité apparente, elles eussent peut-être empêché bien des excès. J'ai toujours honoré ceux qui défendent la grammaire, ou la logique. On se rend compte cinquante ans après qu'ils ont conjuré de grands périls" (*RTP4 : TR 376*). In his protest against the increasing predominance of nationalists in high society, he tactically resorts to his obsession with noble lineage as an antidote to dangerous pursuits, manifesting a "frivolité . . . si systématique, que la naissance unie à la beauté et à d'autres prestiges était la chose durable — et la guerre, comme l'affaire Dreyfus, des modes vulgaires et fugitives" (*RTP4 : TR 379*). The focus on frivolity is worth noting. As Keynes cited by Hirschman explains, "[d]angerous human proclivities can be canalized into comparatively harmless channels . . . , which . . . may otherwise find their outlet in cruelty, the reckless pursuit of personal power and authority, and other forms

of self-aggrandizement” (Hirschman 217). Innocent individual pastimes, albeit superficial mundanities, artistic, or scientific dilettantism, divert man from disastrous endeavors and thus keep society out of mischief. Consequently, the fact that “dès qu’il se replaçait au point de vue nobiliaire, qui pour lui au fond dominait tout, M. de Charlus arrivait à d’extraordinaires enfantillages” (*RTP4 : TR 365*) is an asset rather than a liability for the sociability of the noble salon. Such a naïve attitudes allows for an alternative form of social cohesion evading confrontation. Proust reiterates this approach in a letter addressed to Robert Dreyfus in July 1909 which praises the *Figaro* newspaper precisely for its superficiality:

je trouve *le Figaro* un excellent journal. On peut sourire de la facilité qu’il a de croire que, quand « l’élite de Paris » va à un bal costumé, elle obéit à un « magnifique élan de solidarité ». Mais, illusion pour illusion, cela vaut bien celle de *l’Humanité*, qui pense que des gens qui en torturent et en massacrent d’autres affirment les droits du prolétariat. La première illusion n’est pas plus niaise et elle est plus innocente. (Dreyfus 257-258)

Contrastively, nationalists decry individual pursuits which distract the individual from contributing to the glory of the nation, as “tout ami des arts était accusé de s’occuper de choses funestes à la patrie . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 376*). Brichot, a stand-in for Barrès, likens the noble salon to “des antimilitaristes socialisés [qui] discutent gravement sur les vertus cardinales du vers libre”, an attitude which is so frivolous that it cannot be “d’un bon Français” (*RTP3 : SG 346*). At their soirées, “a fascinating cross-section of the avant-garde and the descendants of the *Ancien Régime* met, conversed, and united through music” (Kahan 168). The recourse of the noble salon to aesthetic dilettantism is meant to counter dangerous political interests. As such, the most important characteristic of the art promoted there is its non-representational dimension: “Dans ce grand monde-là, celui des Guermantes, . . . les modes intellectuelles nouvelles ne s’incarnaient

pas en divertissements à leur image, comme en ces bluettes de Bergotte écrites pour Mme Swann, comme en ces véritables séances de salut public . . . chez Mme Verdurin . . .” (*RTP3* : *SG* 144). On the other hand, the narrator suggests that revering aestheticism magnifies the charismatic just as much as Dreyfusism did: art or gatherings with a purpose unite the participants in a shared enjoyment or a common opinion which isolates them from the outside. Contrastively, the gratin gathers around artistic pursuits of a particular kind: the aesthetic is the small used against the big in an essentially private enterprise for enjoyment of the local. The music promoted there encourages the comingling of socially heterogeneous elements as its very modernity consisted in “the little skillfully colored atoms of kaleidoscopically shifting rhythms and orchestral textures” (Kahan 170). Such a description is akin to Vinteuil’s sonata whose obsessive “petite phrase”, “flottant en lambeaux dans les motifs suivants qui déjà avaient pris sa place” (*RTPI* : *CS* 347), cannot be pinned down. And in a 1918 letter to Antoine Bibesco Proust indeed describes his fictional piece of music as a mixture of heterogeneous styles and works inspiring it: “la « petite phrase » est une phrase d’une sonate de piano et violon de Saint-Saëns que je te chanterai (tremble), l’agitation des tremolos au-dessus d’elle est dans ce prélude de Wagner, son début gémissant et alterné est de la sonate de Franck, ses mouvement espacés de Fauré, etc.” (*Lettres à Bibesco* 153). This music, instead of following a particular text too closely, gives only an impression of its theme or atmosphere, intentionally distancing itself from “the Wagnerian drama of ideas and organizational use of leitmotifs” (Kahan 175). In opposition to the nationalistic art devoted to the raising of consciences and the stirring of souls, it relies on each audience member to use his own imaginative powers. There is no correct response to it, detached as it is from any practical intentionality. What matters instead is its ability to evoke the personal feelings of the individual. Mme de Guermantes goes so far in her repression of the

charismatic as to avoid the subject of aesthetics altogether, confining her salon to the mere allusion to the art of a particular artist manifested simply in his presence. Thus,

elle mettait une sorte d'élégance quand elle était avec un poète ou un musicien à ne parler que des plats qu'on mangeait ou de la partie de cartes qu'on allait faire. . . . Et bientôt le déjeuner était fini et on se disait adieu, sans avoir dit un mot de la poésie, que tout le monde pourtant aimait, mais dont, par une réserve analogue à celle dont Swann m'avait donné l'avant-goût, personne ne parlait. (*RTP2 : CG 505*)

Hers are artistic reunions in which the guests individually think of the art of the same artist, in the absolute privacy of their own mind. The art of the noble salon is akin to what Brichot terms “un symbolisme d'une fumerie d'opium”, as Vinteuil's music anesthetizes its audience just as much as “la grande névrose littéraire” does (*RTP3 : SG 346*). For Proust, its greatest merit is that it is unable to unite its audience through the common discovery of a predefined meaning enclosed in it. Furthermore, inasmuch as it is able to bring into contact remote social elements for the gossip of innocent snobbishness, allowing them to mingle without completely mixing together, such art effects social pacification.

The importance of aesthetic pursuits in the noble salon eventually dawns on Mme Verdurin. Avid of social advancement, she becomes aware that her political salon is not the appropriate means for achieving it as “le dreyfusisme triomphait politiquement, mais non pas mondainement.” Consequently, “après cette incursion dans la politique, M^{me} Verdurin tenait-elle à rentrer dans l'art” (*RTP3 : SG 278*), and she will henceforth cultivate music in her salon. As a newfound means of upward mobility, art must be taken seriously. “La patronne” advertises that “ce n'est pas de la musiquette qu'on fait ici” (*RTP3 : SG 319*). She promotes the newest musical

styles to advertise the sophistication and intellectualism of her salon: “Tous les ans ça va un peu plus loin. . . .” The “fidèles” themselves embody the same courageous spirit in their craving for novelty, abandoning the newest style as soon as it becomes popular elsewhere: “c’est effrayant ce qu’ils sont avancés” (*RTP3* : *SG* 320). Through music, Mme Verdurin has designed a challenge meant to affirm the superiority of the little circle, its yet unrecognized superior status. Pertinent to this strategy, Benda affirms that political war as cultural war is the new invention of *la Belle Epoque* (Benda 149). The recourse to art as contest with other salons parallels the nationalist trend promoting culture as confrontation between two peoples.

In the form proposed by the Verdurin salon, art has the same destructive potential as politics. Indeed, Mme de Cambremer observes that “la littérature . . . avait procédé à un chambardement parallèle [à l’affaire Dreyfus]” (*RTP3* : *LP* 740). This is because there remains an intrinsic contradiction in the nobility’s recourse to the aesthetic that the narrator terms “le mensonge de cette conception bâtarde, de cet ambigu d’aristocratie, de générosité et d’art, mais aussi sa séduction” (*RTP2* : *JF* 117). At the core of the subculture of the nobility is a particular notion of intellectualism and art having the purpose to create and maintain the kind of sociability previously described, yet noblemen seduced by it end up in believing in its intrinsic purpose. Already “le goût de ce qu’elle croyait les Arts” (*RTP2* : *CG* 354) is the new aristocratic hubris of prominent aristocratic figures, such as the princess of Parme. The nobility thus easily falls prey to the Verdurins soirées around cutting-edge music. The ability to appreciate artistic innovation is taken for a commendable intellectualism in opposition to the aspirations of the dilettante. Consequently, “[l]e salon Verdurin passait pour un Temple de la Musique” and “[l]e monde était . . . tout préparé à aller vers eux” (*RTP3* : *SG* 263) as indeed they soon will: “Le goût de nouveauté . . . porte les hommes du monde plus ou moins sincèrement avides de se renseigner

sur l'évolution intellectuelle à fréquenter les milieux où ils peuvent suivre celle-ci . . ." (*RTP3* : *SG* 140). In a strategy paralleling her recourse to the Affair, Mme Verdurin replaces politics with art, aiming to attract by shocking and unite through polarization. Thus, what actually drives the gratin there is "une fièvre de curiosité moins âpre, plus purement esthétique, mais peut-être aussi vive que l'affaire Dreyfus" (*RTP3* : *LP* 741). However, the Verdurins never give up on the divisive potential of politics. On the eve of the Great War,

les duchesses qui fréquentaient maintenant chez M^{me} Verdurin, elles venaient y chercher, sans qu'elles s'en doutassent, exactement la même chose que les dreyfusards autrefois, c'est-à-dire un plaisir mondain composé de telle manière que sa dégustation assouvît les curiosités politiques et rassasiât le besoin de commenter entre soi les incidents lus dans les journaux. (*RTP4* : *TR* 308)

Politics and aesthetics are used as a polarizing force that separates an inside from the outside, while simultaneously creating an interior unanimity as basis of cohesion. The most severe criticism of Mme Verdurin's use of music comes from Swann in a sweeping condemnation not only of "la patronne" he dubs "maquerelle, entremetteuse", but of music as a whole:

"« Entremetteuse », c'était le nom qu'il donnait aussi à la musique qui les convierait à se taire, à rêver ensemble, à se regarder, à se prendre la main. Il trouvait du bon à la sévérité contre les arts, de Platon, de Bossuet, et de la vieille éducation française" (*RTP1* : *CS* 283). Whereas aesthetics should be an individual form of contemplation, in the Verdurin salon art is put to the same task as *les Arts du Néant*. Those brought in contact in this manner are united in a conspiracy that actually debases them – a phenomenon that appears to extend to the entire *faubourg* through its increasing bourgeois penetration.

Regardless of where it originates, in final analysis art has a socially dangerous potential. Mme Cambremer-Legrandin, a snobbish parvenu, unexpectedly completes Swanns's condemnation of art, summing up the situation thus: "Il en est du monde comme du goût sexuel, où l'on ne sait pas jusqu'à quelles perversions il peut arriver quand une fois on a laissé des raisons esthétiques dicter son choix" (*RTP3 : LP 740*). Indeed, the decline of her salon is effected "chez M^{me} de Guermantes [par] un goût de nouveauté et d'art" (*RTP4 : TR 596*). This is a continuous phenomenon, as Oriane, "sacrifiant sans doute à ce besoin héréditaire de nourriture spirituelle qui avait fait la décadence sociale de M^{me} de Villeparisis, elle était devenue elle-même une M^{me} de Villeparisis", that is "une Guermantes déclassée" (*RTP4 : TR 582*). As a trend characterizing the Guermantes, it can be traced back to their ancestress Geneviève de Brabant since, as Leclerc remarks, the most salient point of all iconographical representations is her social decline (Leclerc 93). It prompts the narrator's revealing comment that "ce qui caractérisait le plus cette société, c'était sa prodigieuse aptitude au déclassement" (*RTP4 : TR 535*). This trend can be ascribed to traditional aristocratic elitism, manifested during *la Belle Epoque* in its aesthetic and intellectual pursuits, since for the purpose of socialization art simultaneously effects both a unification and a disintegration.

Bidou-Zachariasen has argued that the different *faubourg* which confronts the reader at the end of the cycle extends the victory of the bourgeoisie over the nobility, already accomplished in the economic field, into the social space. This in turn reflects the ascension of the former, manifested by the Verdurins, at the expense of the latter, embodied by the Guermantes' decline ("Le jet d'eau d'Hubert Robert" 36-38). Yet the Verdurin clan is not without historical precedent, and *La recherche* parallels it in turn with Mme Tallien's and with the Helvétius salon. Thus, "[l]es dames du Premier Directoire avaient une reine qui était jeune et

belle et s'appelait Madame Tallien. Celles du second en avaient deux qui étaient vieilles et laides et qui s'appelaient Mme Verdurin et Mme Bontemps" (*RTP4 : TR* 305). This comparison has at its core an implicit analogy between *le Directoire* (1795-1799), a putatively Republican regime, and the Third Republic. Following the traumatic periods of the Terror and the Commune, they share a bad reputation for political unrest and widespread corruption. Furthermore, they are equally marked by a distrust in centralization, as well as a recourse to various forms of entertainment to avoid facing economic and political problems, with their potential to further social conflict. Finally, both are times when the nouveaux riches ape the old nobility, whose members mark their distance by a modest appearance and simple manner (Adams 617). Thérésia Cabarrus (1773-1835), better known by the name of her second husband as Mme Tallien, comes from a nouveaux riches family, as does Sidonie Verdurin. Both are foreigners³⁴ (Adams 623) – Spanish immigrants in the first case, Jewish in the second, the Verdurin salon being described as “un milieu qui n’aurait pas plu à mon grand-père et lui eût fait crier : « À la garde »” (*RTP3 : SG* 318). At the beginning of their career as socialites, both manifest an interest in major political causes, the unrest sweeping the country at the beginning of the Revolution for Mme Tallien who attended the liberal salons of the time (Adams 605), and respectively the Dreyfus Affair for “la patronne”. The Tallien circle, one of the first opening at the end of the Terror, manifests aristocratic aspirations similar to those of the “petit clan”, and has recourse to politics for social visibility: its initial propulsion is due to its links with the members of the Directory (Adams 601). In further building their social networks, both women will mix culture and politics to create the desired social networks. Significantly, the difference between the strategy of the Directory

³⁴ Her father, Francisco Cabarrus is Spanish and founder of the Banco de San Carlos, the future bank of Spain, opening up questions as to her political loyalties and the shadowy sources of her fortune (Adams 623).

salonnières and those of the *Ancien Régime* is analogous to those between the bourgeois and aristocratic hostesses: while the former resorted to politics and politicians to build the appeal of their salon, the latter derived their prestige primarily from artistic and intellectual pursuits (Adams 603). Finally, the fashionable career of both *salonnières* culminates with their ascension to the pinnacle of the gratin. While Sydonie marries the prince de Guermantes, in 1805 Mme Tallien marries a member of the oldest nobility, François-Joseph-Philippe de Riquet, comte de Caraman and prince de Chimay (Adams 625). Having fulfilled through marriage their aristocratic aspirations of entering the top echelon of society, their salons lost their very *raison d'être* and were subsequently closed.

The analogy of the Verdurin circle with the Helvétius salon is more intriguing. The doctrine of Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771) is in itself relevant to *La recherche*. His two most important treatises – *De l'Esprit* (1758) and *De l'Homme* (1773) – study the issue of the responsibility of natural disposition versus acquired education in the vices and virtues of men. In their view, the customs of a nation are determined by its laws: morals and education are intrinsically linked. The differences between men are not the consequence of heredity but of the education they received (Lagrave 115). Indeed, this is a position long preceding and clearly opposed to Barrèsian nationalism, in that it bases the nation on culture instead of heredity – a position at the heart of the entire Proustian opus. Furthermore, this take is at the center of political Radicalism, as it has long been its conviction the republic must become the pedagogue of the masses (Baal 8).

Moving on to the salon itself, to which the text actually refers, it was held by Helvétius together with his wife Anne-Catherine (1722-1800), and was one of the most celebrated Enlightenment salons. It brought together the most brilliant conversationalists of the 18th century,

bold thinkers that paved the fall of their world (Lagrave 75-107), proving once more that intellectual and artistic endeavors can unwittingly lead not only to the social changes witnessed by Marcel, but also to bloody revolutions. Its prominence is partly due to its remarkable continuity: it was the only *Ancien Régime* salon that continued its activities during the Revolution until the end of the Terror (Lagrave 1), paralleling the longevity of the Verdurin salon from the beginning of the Third Republic to the end of the Great War³⁵. The convergences between the two salons are numerous. Both hostesses are the heart and soul of their respective gatherings, which continue to operate after they are widowed. Both offer potential career benefits to their regulars: while the Verdurin soirées propel the artists frequenting “le petit clan”, the Helvétius salon offered to new and upcoming artists and scientists the opportunity of a continued contact with the consecrated world of literature and philosophy to which they aspired (Lagrave 19). Helvétius, as farmer-general of Louis XVI – a tax-collecting post – has a financial fortune, just as M. Verdurin does. Furthermore, Helvétius is of foreign descent: his forefathers were immigrants from the Dutch Palatinate, via Switzerland, changing their name several times (Lagrave 75). Pertinent to a foreign heritage, M. Verdurin uses in a domestic scene a sentence incomprehensible to all but Mme Verdurin. As such an expression is “un reliquat contemporain d’un état antérieur de la famille”, it reveals the roots of his family. The family being “maintenant francisée”, its actual origin, either Spanish, Jewish, or German, can no longer be determined (*RTP3* : LP 829). Furthermore, Mme Helvétius herself, born Anne-Catherine de Ligniville

³⁵ The Verdurin salon is already in existence during the Jules Grévy presidency (1879-1887), when Swann starts to frequent it (*RTP1* : CS 213). In 1916, upon returning to Paris from a sanatorium, the narrator visits Mme Verdurin in her salon (*RTP4* : TR 301). In 1919, however, the “petit clan” is no more, as “la patronne” is now the new princesse de Guermantes. Thus, the Verdurin salon has an impressive span of approximately 35 years.

d'Autricourt, comes from an old Lorraine family. Yet, unlike “la patronne”, she is issued from ancient noble lineage.

The actual parallel between the two salons comes at a point in the plot when Mme Verdurin’s enthusiastic support of the Russian ballet in Paris breaches the resistance of the gratin. Thus,

comme après les émotions du Palais de Justice on avait été le soir chez M^{me} Verdurin voir de près Picquart ou Labori, . . . de même, peu disposé à aller se coucher après l’enthousiasme déchaîné par Shéhérazade ou les danses du prince Igor, on allait chez M^{me} Verdurin, où . . . des soupers exquis réunissaient, chaque soir, les danseurs, . . . leur directeur, leurs décorateurs, les grands compositeurs Igor Stravinski et Richard Strauss, petit noyau immuable, autour duquel, comme aux soupers de M. et M^{me} Helvétius, les plus grandes dames de Paris et les Altesses étrangères ne dédaignèrent pas de se mêler.
(RTP3 : LP 742)

This particular moment in time makes the analogy multidimensional. The Helvétius salon was a center of cosmopolitanism. Foreigners of distinction visiting Paris never missed the opportunity of going to one of Mme Helvétius famous Tuesdays (Guillois 15). It is paralleled by the up and coming “petit clan” which brings together foreign princes, the gratin, artists and members of the Russian ballet. Yet it cannot fail to bring to the mind of the attentive reader the prominence of the Guermantes circle, where top echelon European nobility passing through Paris never neglected to make a stop. The examples range from “le roi et la reine d’Angleterre” (RTP2 : CG 722) to “la reine de Suède” (RTP2 : CG 800) in Oriane’s salon, to “le frère du roi Théodose, l’infante Marie-Conception” (RTP2 : CG 863), “[un] grand d’Espagne” (RTP3 : SG 40), “le grand-duc Wladimir” (RTP3 : SG 57) in that of the princesse de Guermantes.

Another pertinent aspect to *La recherche* and its mention of Radicalism is that a distinctive mark of the Helvétius salon was the assiduity of freemasons: one of its goals, promoted and fulfilled after the death of the philosopher by his wife, has been the creation of a masonic lodge grouping scientists and artists of all disciplines (Lagrave 2). The long-lasting influence of Helvétius on the Radical Republican approach to education has been previously discussed: the Radical belief that education can solve social problems, as its reform and secularization would lower if not entirely remove the social barriers between classes, is reflective of the philosopher's work (Nordmann 147). Auspitz underlines the value freemasonry accorded to a good education and the involvement of French loges in projects supporting proper schooling even before the instauration of the Third Republic (Auspitz 46, 78, 88, 118), while lay education has traditionally been fundamental to the Radical doctrine (Stone 198). Subsequently, Freemasonry will play an important role in the development and activity of Radicalism. In concrete terms, until the formation proper of the *Parti republicain radical et radical-socialiste* (1901), the absence of any national Radical organization was partly supplanted by the political role of Freemasonry: the web of loges allowed militants to create solidarity ties, while the convents' debates clarified the Radical doctrine. In fact, the first Radical ministry of Léon Bourgeois (November 1895-April 1896), was a team with a strong Freemasonic bend (Baal 14-22). Proust was likely aware of this state of affairs, as the condemnation of Freemasonry by *La Libre Parole* (Baal 28) is a disguised attack against Radicalism. As during *la Belle Epoque* Freemasonry manifests predominantly Radical leanings (Baal 14), I propose the parallel between the Helvétius and the Verdurin salon points to the political Radicalism of the latter. Indeed, Mme Verdurin "agissait en farouche radicale" (*RTP2 : CG 870*). As such, she follows the Radical doctrine to which anticlericalism is central (Stone 198), declaring herself "contre les

« calotins »” (*RTP2 : CG 870*). In fashionable settings, she works hard to “faire taire son anticléricalisme blessé” (*RTP3 : SG 347*) because it can damage her social contacts. Yet Saint-Loup, to the confusion of the narrator, dubs the Verdurin salon “ce genre de milieux cléricaux exaspérants.” He subsequently explains that it is precisely its anticlericalism that makes it an environment “où on fait congrégation et chapelle” (*RTP3 : SG 410*) in a required unanimity of opinion.

Yet traditionally universalistic and progressive (Auspitz 78), French Freemasonry was tolerant of many spiritual beliefs. As local organizations weary of centralizing tendencies and promoting liberal Enlightenment ideals (Allen 878), the sociability of the loges and of salons affiliated with them brings to mind that of the *faubourg* rather than the “petit clan”. Indeed, Mme Helvétius required her guests’ respect of tacit rules of behavior, most particularly avoiding confrontation or being a bore. The goal of the salon was social rather than intellectual, with the hostess striving to set a tone of discussion that never became overly serious (Lagrave 24). The Helvétius salon was the gathering place of old nobility and the intellectual aristocracy (Guillois 34), mirroring the get-together of innovative artists with the gratin of the *faubourg* at the soirées given by “la patronne” in the latter part of the cycle, as well as the close intellectual gatherings of the Guermantes. As Lagrave puts it, the diversity of Mme Helvétius’s guests makes doubtful the existence of a salon unifying credo – a trait suggesting a sociability akin to that of noble gatherings. Indeed, great Enlightenment intellectuals of both worlds met there: those with ties to the Court, such as Talleyrand, Turgot, Holbach, and Condillac, and those opposed to it, like Franklin and Jefferson, were equally welcome (Lagrave 55).

Nonetheless, the political dimension of the Helvétius salon cannot be discarded. It is the meeting place of the Ideologues, whose philosophy will have political implications. Furthermore,

the regular guests of Mme Helvétius are passionate actors and spectators of the revolutionary movement, meeting in the morning at Mirabeau, at the assembly during the day and in the evening in Mme Helvétius's salon (Lagrave 108), in a pattern that parallels the activities of the "petit clan" during the Affair. The exclusionary nature of Mme Helvétius political convictions, despite the aristocratic tenets of her salon, is reflected in a dramatic episode. On the eve of the Revolution, André Morellet (1727-1829), one of the Encyclopedists and a longtime friend, is excluded for his lack of revolutionary enthusiasm, equated with a lack of patriotism. Thus, his expulsion is due to partisan intolerance (Lagrave 110). Both the Verdurin and the Helvétius salons operates at a point when political crises had reached their apex, yet neither will be faithful to its political credo. At first sight, the pattern through which the "petit clan" moves from a Dreyfusard salon, promotor of social justice and peace, to a xenophobic one during the Great War, as the Verdurin "étaient chauvins" (*RTP4 : TR 368*), is mirrored by that of the Ideologues who end up supporting Napoleon and thus absolutism rather than the Republic. While it is true that the habitual guests of Mme Helvétius supported Bonaparte's Brumaire coup, manifesting the politicians' habitual treason of initial proclaimed objectives followed by a change in their political base, what they actually championed was the victory of a peaceful liberty over a constant state of warfare – an objective achieved by the Third Republic. The philosophy of Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis (1757-1808), a permanent fixture of the Helvétius salon, provides the basic pattern of the Radical doctrine of the Third Republic (Lagrave 66-70), further emphasizing the aforementioned parallel between the Verdurin and this political orientation. Nor is the nobility far removed from certain aspects of Radicalism, as the mark of their sociability reflects a shared aspiration for the autonomy of the local. Thus, the Helvétius salon is a mix between the Verdurin and the Guermantes one, the middle point between two clans that seem on the brink of

implosion. Yet while the Verdurin coterie attracts noble guests, even ending up by infiltrating the top echelons of society, not only the Guermantes salon continues to operate, but the entire cycle closes on its contemplation.

I propose the prominent place old nobility occupies in *La recherche* is at least partly due to the particularity of its social position: “l’aristocratie princière . . . ne peut chercher à s’élever puisque, au-dessus d’elle, à son point de vue spécial, il n’y a rien” (*RTP2 : CG 671*). In virtue of this self-confidence rather than any special merit, this group is most prone to tolerance. It displays it at the moment of the Revolution, when a number of democratic noblemen, like de Noailles, Duport, Clairmont-Tonnerre, joined abbé Grégoire and pushed for civic equality for the Jews (Fiette 101). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the old aristocracy is situated at the periphery of French society, in a social space revealing hidden aspects of the relationship with foreigners. The lesser known friendship between M. de Marsantes and Bloch’s uncle, M. Nissim Bernard, constitutes such an example (*RTP2 : CG 573*). Graetz insists on the importance of small-group dynamics which escape the larger, conflictual trends of society. Acting like a secondary social structure, such groups display a “framework of sociability” (Graetz 113). In evaluating the social inclusivity of the noble salon, one should keep in mind that “[n]ous ne répondons jamais par oui ou par non aux questions de l’appartenance.” Between exclusion and inclusion there is a continuous spectrum, ruled by what Serres dubs the logic of blurred subsets (Serres 106-107). The noble salon manifests a considerable power of integration, as the Guermantes clan, “considéré comme un ensemble de tous les noms qu’il admettait en lui, autour de lui, subissait des déperditions, recrutait des éléments nouveaux” (*RTP4 : TR 548*). It could be argued that the same holds true for the Verdurin salon, as “au fur et à mesure qu’augmenta le nombre des gens brillants qui firent des avances à M^{me} Verdurin, le nombre de ceux qu’elle

appelait les « ennuyeux » diminua”: every fashionable “ennuyeux” visiting her is automatically dubbed worthy of her group. Yet there is a vital difference in that its design of social progression intrinsically makes it a machine of exclusion. Thus, “au fur et à mesure que, . . . par la rapide cristallisation d’une élégance si longtemps retardée, . . . le salon des Verdurin . . . s’était ouvert à un monde nouveau, . . . les fidèles, appâts d’abord de ce monde nouveau, avaient fini par être de moins en moins invités . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 308*). Those whose social status no longer corresponds to the current stage of evolution of her salon are banned, while the essential category of bores is kept alive because “Mme Verdurin . . . avait . . . remplacé ceux qui ne l’étaient plus par d’autres recrutés parmi les anciens fidèles” (*RTP4 : TR 308*). The dynamic insider-outsider as means of upward social mobility, with its ensuing exclusion marking the progress made by “la patronne”, is the only *raison d’être* of the “petit clan”.

Contrastively, the losses of the Guermantes salon are minimal, marked mainly by illness and death. Even after his unsuitable marriage with Odette and at the height of the Affair, Swann is not banned from the Guermantes salon, but rather chooses to spread out his visits. Similarly, Charlus never formally quits the *faubourg*. He simply prefers the company of Morel, and thus becomes an “habitué” of the Verdurin. Its additions, on the other hand, are considerable, as by the end of the cycle not only Odette, the Cambremer, Legrandin, and Rachel, are welcomed guests there, but its hostess herself, the new Princesse de Guermantes, is Mme de Verdurin. Furthermore Bloch, the epitome of the excluded, is one of its most representative members. It reflects the Tardian model of small group sociability, as it simultaneously is “un monde conservateur où l’on se conforme scrupuleusement et indéfiniment, avec une admirable abnégation, aux rites traditionnels” and “un monde à la fois très actif et très réglé, très tenace et très souple, habile à se plier aux circonstances nouvelles et persévérant dans ses vues séculaires .

..” (Tarde, *Monadologie* 54). The Guermantes salon sublates isolation and inclusion, culminating in the feast of swallowing whole its opposite – the Verdurin “petit clan” – with the price of its own ostensible disappearance. Yet it only changes its appearance to adapt to these multiple assimilation as at any moment of its existence someone contemplating it from the outside would take “comme faisant partie intégrante de ce milieu, des éléments absolument différents, agrégés depuis peu et qui paraissaient étrangement nouveaux à de plus anciens . . . et qui eux-mêmes, crus, par les ducs d’alors, membres de tout temps du faubourg, y avaient, eux, ou leurs pères, ou leurs grands-pères, été jadis des parvenus” (*RTP4 : TR* 545). This process has perpetuated itself through centuries, as “ces changements produits dans la société . . . n’étaient nullement . . . particuliers à notre époque”, and “sous Louis XIV . . . le phénomène que je remarquais en ce moment se produisait de même” (*RTP4 : TR* 546). It embodies the sublation of constancy and flux of the Proustian universe, which Simmel describes as characteristic of *la Belle Epoque*: “If we observe the image of the world as it immediately presents itself to us, there are certain forms that do persist through time, whereas the real elements of which they are composed are in continuous motion” (Simmel 552-553). As such, the Proustian world conforms to de Tarde’s account of society as the “[e]xtraordinary picture of a social order constantly threatened by his own decomposition because no component is fully part of it” (Latour, “End of Social” 9). Yet in final analysis the Guermantes salon remains the prototype of the successful assimilation, seeing that “ce n’était pas la qualité d’hommes du grand monde qui rendait cette société si brillante, mais le fait d’avoir été assimilés plus ou moins complètement par cette société qui faisait, de gens qui cinquante ans plus tard paraissaient tous pareils, des gens du grand monde” (*RTP4 : TR* 545). Given that “[I]’absurdité, c’est le tiers inclus dans le monde où domine

le tiers exclu” (Serres 391), the noble salon’s centrality in *La recherche* is due precisely to its incongruity in the social universe of the Third Republic³⁶.

³⁶ While it is true that Radicalism relies on the principle of “the included third” to ensure France’s unity in diversity, its model is fundamentally undynamic. Frenchness, conceived as a common roof accomodating varied manifestations of the local, does not welcome foreigners. Contrastively, the noble salon does, as it practices an inclusiveness that equates cosmopolitanism with an Enlightenment view of French civilization.

Art and Sociability

“[C]ette phrase synthétique qui semble indéfiniment extensible, et où déjà entre . . . toute la complexité du livre” (Thibaudet, 128) is the trademark of Proustian style. Anyone familiar with *La recherche* will unmistakably recognize it from all others, as it seemingly subsumes its author’s skillfulness and the universe he engendered. Yet the importance Proust attributes to both art and style goes well beyond intended enjoyable effects. Indeed, the recourse to aesthetics resolves most of the topics discussed. It dissolves the nationalistic aspect of both Frenchness and its opposite by emphasizing their artistic dimension, while resorting to literature constitutes the alternative to politics. After the Dreyfus affair, Proust withdrew from direct political activism and increasingly focused on artistic endeavors, a course of action significantly mirrored by his protagonist. Both Marcel’s projected novel and the cycle of *La recherche* trace an overwhelming, yet hidden heterogeneity, which starts with that of the narrator and extends to everyone else. From it follows the importance the text accords to the concept of style. Yet the aesthetical dimension of the Proustian project does not reside merely in its literary technique or construction. Anne Henry corroborates this view when she insists the structure of *La recherche*, taken in its entirety, does not aim at aesthetical effects, but serves a different goal (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 200). I propose the centrality the subject of aesthetics occupies in the text comes from its ability to expose individual ipseity, from which follows a preordained social atomization. This constitutes the response the Proustian cycle offers to the problem raised by nationalism, and that this chapter proposes to analyze.

Distantiation and Sociability

The role of aesthetics comes into full relief only in the context of socialization, or rather its failure. For Proust, the struggle of modern man is for securing a modicum of subjectivity in his privacy. This he can hope to achieve only when the web of social relations is large but nonetheless quite loose, as is the case in the cosmopolitan environment. There, a certain distance and indifference is the gatekeeper of a personal sphere which can then develop according to individual rules, without much external opposition. Nonetheless, no form of inter-individual association can provide an environment beneficial for personal fulfilment. This is the subject of the following section.

It is only when individualities cancel one another “par la résistance que chacune apport[e] à l’expansion des autres” (*RTP2 : JF 271*) that a semblance of social harmony is reached. The locus of sociability is the noble salon where direct conversational exchange connects a circle of people. Communication there is possible on condition every person, acting as a link in-between others, takes his turn into the spotlight in what is essentially a game of substitutions. This dynamic is epitomized by the French children’s game of *le furet*³⁷, a metaphor Serres uses without reference to the Proustian cycle to describe collective interactions: “Qui sommes-nous? Ceux qui font passer le furet, ceux qui ne l’ont pas. Ce quasi-objet, en courant, fait du collectif : s’il s’arrête, il fait l’individu. Si celui-ci est découvert, il est mort” (Serres 403). The moving ring, inconspicuously gliding from one player to the next, personifies the homogeneity of a group that exists through social interaction. Yet as soon as it stops, it evinces the particular, always

³⁷ Several players form a circle by keeping in their hands, behind their back, a long piece of string on which the players pass along a ring dubbed “le furet”. In the middle of the circle there is another player called “le mort” who must discover which hand hides the ring. When he succeeds, he takes the place of the person holding the ring, who in turn becomes “le nouveau mort”.

already unlike the anonymous “us”. Thus, the crucial, but dangerous, act of taking hold of the ring in order to pass it further along brings the individual to center stage. Once there, he must handle himself with modesty, without retaining the attention of the group for too long in order to avoid the risk of disclosure. However the persecution incurred by Saniette and Brichot upon contributing to the ongoing conversation in the Verdurin coterie suggests that restraint and good-naturedness do not always suffice in protecting the exposed personal heterogeneity against the hostility of the group. Rather the solution, so effectively applied in the noble salon, lies in the speed of the transfer. The transience of the limelight indefinitely postpones coalescing effects of all against one as the next substitution diverts the attention of the group and as such minimizes the danger of individuation hovering over each of its members. The patter of conversation in a Guermantes gathering – the phatic communion par excellence – is akin to the rapid and inconspicuous ring which, passing through all the social players, “tisse la collectivité en mettant à mort virtuellement chaque individu” (Serres 406). Its miracle lies in the virtuality of this “mise à mort”: while all against one remains the law of the group, functioning below the threshold of the obvious minimizes the chances of harassment and exclusion.

Yet Marcel’s heterogeneity in the noble salon remains obvious. The Guermantes “[l]e croyaient en effet d’une race autre, mais qui excitait leur envie” because of his intellectual merits for which they professed a deep admiration. Paradoxically, their saving grace is that “chez eux le dédain . . . coexistaient avec l’admiration et l’envie” (*RTP2* : CG 731). As such, they echo Serres’s aphorism that “[l]a tolérance est la panoplie de l’intolérance” (Serres 126). To the normative exclusionary system of the little clan, they oppose the dialectics of a structure encompassing the norm and its counter-norm: the simultaneity of scorn and admiration. While admiration invites the presence of difference, scorn protects self-esteem from reactionary

feelings of inferiority. Aristocratic disdain is the shield protecting the Guermantes' guests from the intrinsically dangerous mechanism of social life: resentment followed by persecution. In turn, Marcel mirrors their attitude in that he is the outsider unaffected by his own exteriority because he is emotionally detached from the noble salon.

Contrastively, a lack of distance in social circumstances results in the pain and suffering of exclusion, as suggested by the Proustian *furet* episode proper. One fine afternoon, the narrator and his friends, “les jeunes filles en fleurs”, play *le furet* to Marcel's delight. Engrossed in his budding passion for Albertine, he is oblivious of the game and fails to take hold of the ring when it comes his way, incurring her wrath: “Étourdi de chagrin, je lâchai la ficelle, le furet aperçut la bague, se jeta sur elle, je dus me remettre au milieu, désespéré, regardant la ronde effrénée qui continuait autour de moi, interpellé par les moqueries de toutes les joueuses, obligé, pour y répondre, de rire quand j'en avais si peu envie . . .” (*RTP2 : JF 274*). Much like Saniette in the Verdurin salon, the narrator unwittingly draws the attention of the group through his lack of social skills. He is the pitiful, naïve group member standing out because of his inability to follow the rules of the game and perform his part: his mortification derives from a social incompetence that is no threat to the collective being. Yet his inferiority does not protect him from the jeers of the group and he finds himself on its fringes, waiting for a chance to get back in. Thus, always already unlike the anonymous ‘us’, anyone who takes the risk of speaking is a difference under threat of exposure. Every clan is a web of transfers in which is embedded the potential for exclusion. Nonetheless, Marcel's distress stems less from the excluding laughter of the group than from his humiliation in the eyes of Albertine.

While loose social ties protect the individual from a mass effect in social settings, there is no panacea for it as even in the closest of families gratuitous cruelty is directed towards those

that do not conform. The narrator's great-mother, for instance, "avait apporté dans la famille de mon père un esprit si différent que tout le monde la plaisantait et la tourmentait . . ." (*RTP1 : CS 11*). The great-aunt's harassment in particular, with its ensuing "spectacle des vaines prières de ma grand'mère et de sa faiblesse, vaincue d'avance, essayant inutilement d'ôter à mon grand-père le verre à liqueur" (*RTP1 : CS 12*), so disheartens Marcel. The same holds true for Bloch's family, as the elder M. Bloch persecutes the "inoffensive et doux" M. Nissim Bernard, his brother in law, different from the rest of his family in his "bonhomie sans défense", generosity, and wealth (*RTP2 : JF 132*). The victim's distress is commensurate to the attachment he feels for his Jewish family, particularly in the Balbec isolation where he cannot frequent anyone else. Many characters are treated like outcasts at some point, while the suffering they derive from it is proportional with the level of their social bondage. Charlus's distress when excluded from "le petit clan" stems from his separation from Morel (*RTP3 : LP 823*), whereas Swann smarts from the Verdurin's dismissal because it keeps him apart from Odette (*RTP1 : CS 284*). Even Marcel's early inability to infiltrate the Guermantes circle is painful mainly because at that stage he is in love with Oriane (*RTP2 : CG 369*). In final analysis, no superior sociability can completely prevent mass formations as persecution is an intrinsic feature of clannism in *La recherche*. Rather, remoteness is the only possible protection, as suggested by Françoise, for whom, "en dehors de ceux de sa parenté, les humains excitaient d'autant plus sa pitié par leurs malheurs, qu'ils vivaient plus éloignés d'elle" (*RTP1 : CS 121*).

Considering society is the general name for a collection of diverse interactions and relationships, Proust's sociology is that of an aesthete. His aesthetization of reality is based on a distantiation from the material world. Pertinently, the temporal remove of the present allows the narrator to evoke the delights of the Guermantes salon of yesteryear, making Bloch's eyes shine

with excitement “en pensant à ce que pouvait être la conversation de ces personnages merveilleux. . . .” Yet Marcel realizes that any pleasure he had found there exists only in retrospect. His actual enjoyment requires the physical isolation of his loneliness, as “je pensais que je lui exagérais le plaisir que j’avais eu à me trouver avec eux, n’en ayant jamais ressenti que quand j’étais seul . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 532*). While the narrator appreciates the courteous sociability and conversation offered by the noble salon, he remains aware that “les histoires que j’avais entendues chez M^{me} de Guermantes m’étaient étrangères” as they are “de nature sociale, et non individuelle” (*RTP2 : CG 840*). Marcel aspires instead to “un plaisir intérieur, spirituel, solitaire, qu’eux [les Guermantes] ne pouvaient me donner et que je pouvais trouver non en causant avec eux, mais en écrivant loin d’eux . . .” (*RTP4 : AD 152*). The inadequacy of sociality in terms of personal fulfilment, epitomized by “le néant de la vie de salon” (*RTP2 : CG 709*), hints to the necessity of a remove in time and space. The only enjoyment to be derived from frequenting the Guermantes is that of reminiscing. Yet such a pleasure, as signaled by Marcel’s delight in writing, has already an aesthetic dimension in that it is a contemplation from a distance which affords the beholder happiness, with no active interest in the object as such. Indeed, according to Henry the narrator is not actuated by snobbism, as he lacks any form of ambition. All he aspires to is seeing beyond the magical doorstep of the Guermantes salon, whose attraction is due solely to the old patina of their name. As such, it is a purely mental process in which reality intervenes only in the final act of meeting them (Henry, *La tentation de Marcel Proust* 126), an attitude prefiguring the modesty and passivity of Marcel’s artistic project.

The dialectics of individual pleasure in the context of distantiation long puzzle the narrator who mistakenly takes the mystery of the life of another for a joy that can be appropriated. As this “sentiment du mystère avait pu s’appliquer successivement à Gilberte, à la

duchesse de Guermantes, à Albertine, à tant d'autres" (*RTP4 : TR 566*), he makes his happiness contingent on other women, even on a milkmaid he glimpses from his train compartment.

Though he has barely seen her, she provides him with "le goût d'un certain bonheur, . . . d'un bonheur qui se réaliserait en vivant auprès d'elle" (*RTP2 : JF 17*). Yet, it is the opposite of the happiness Marcel anticipated that stems from such attachments. As Simmel suggests, "[i]t is the fact that we need a particular single object that makes us acutely aware that we need an object at all" (Simmel 73).

When satisfaction can only be offered by a specific object, there occurs a reorientation from inward subject to outward object which will dominate the individual, as loss of self-sufficiency is loss of self-esteem engendering depression. From it derives resentment against the charismatic figure of the beloved. It follows that, for as long as he is in love with Mme de Guermantes, the narrator wishes for her destitution: "Le plus grand bonheur que j'eusse pu demander à Dieu eût été de faire fondre sur elle toutes les calamités, et que ruinée, déconsidérée, dépouillée de tous les privilèges qui me séparaient d'elle, n'ayant plus de maison où habiter ni de gens qui consentissent à la saluer, elle vînt me demander asile" (*RTP2 : CG 367*). Nor is Marcel the only character undergoing this fate. Swann reaches a relative harmony in his marriage only when his passion for Odette subsides into an indulgent indifference (*RTP1 : JF 463*). In *La recherche*, attachment brings about suffering and resentment, just as proximity does persecution.

Paradoxically, even fascination with the other is contingent upon distantiation, as "[n]ous sommes attirés par toute vie qui nous représente quelque chose d'inconnu" which upon closing in reveals itself to have been "une dernière illusion à détruire" (*RTP2 : CG 855*). In hindsight, his successive infatuations provided him a thrill only for as long as their mystery remains intact, that is when they are contemplated from afar. Upon getting closer, by his own admission Marcel

submits to “[le] besoin de réduire par l’expérience à des éléments mesquinement semblables à ceux de notre « moi » le mystère de tout être” (*RTP4 : AD* 81). He exemplifies thus de Tarde’s suggestion that “[t]out être veut, non pas s'approprier *aux* êtres extérieurs, mais se *les* approprier” (*Monadologie* 46). As the narrator eventually understands, distant contemplation is the only protection against destructive homogenization: “plutôt que de demander à Gilberte de me faire connaître des jeunes filles, j’aurais mieux fait d’aller dans ces lieux où rien ne nous rattache à elles, où entre elles et soi on sent quelque chose d’infranchissable, où, à deux pas, sur la plage, allant au bain, on se sent séparé d’elles par l’impossible” (*RTP4 : TR* 566). The only process through which Marcel’s exhilaration could have been kept alive metamorphoses young girls into images to be contemplated from afar, and is thus emulating literature itself, as it is through it that “things have become infinitely distanced from themselves, have recovered the inalienable distance of the image” (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 207). Distantiation makes the transient encounter with the milkmaid less ill-fated than his love for Albertine. As the beginning of his attraction coincides with its end, there is no storyline, and thus no room for disappointment and suffering. Yet the brevity and randomness of chance encounters cannot in and of themselves provide the narrator with the autonomous source of joy he so much desires.

In final analysis happiness, the opposite of boredom, requires the ego to be engrossed in something other than itself without giving the object any value beyond that of mere enjoyment. Proust is aware unhappiness results from “the desiring, consuming, valuing subject and the valued object” (Simmel 68). The individual must stand in a disinterested, that is dispassionate, relation to the object, one in which he cannot expect any use or advantage other than that derived from its remote beholding. Thus, it is only when his infatuation with Albertine ends that Marcel is able to find pleasure in his reminiscences of her. Consequently, the narrator learns how to

remove dangerous proximities through abstraction: “Chaque personne qui nous fait souffrir peut être rattachée par nous à une divinité dont elle n’est qu’un reflet fragmentaire et le dernier degré, divinité (Idée) dont la contemplation en tant qu’idée nous donne aussitôt de la joie au lieu de la peine que nous avons” (*RTP4 : TR 477*).

In an effort akin to the artist displacing his innermost obsessions into the field of aesthetics, he performs the transmutation of the subject of his passion into the object of his contemplation. The parallel is not fortuitous as aesthetics bring a distancing from the immediacy of things (Simmel 513). Such freeing experience is the path leading to individual happiness: “Tout l’art de vivre, c’est de ne nous servir des personnes qui nous font souffrir que comme d’un degré permettant d’accéder à leur forme divine et de peupler ainsi joyeusement notre vie de divinités” (*RTP4 : TR 477*). Happy living is an art, which neutralizes the charismatic through dissociation and achieves freedom from mediation. At its core is the aesthetic endeavor par excellence, as “[t]he sublimation and objectification of such feelings [that originally inspired the work of art] is the aesthetic function in both the production and the consumption of art” (Simmel 217). Theretofore the narrator’s artistic aspirations are inseparable from his search for individual happiness. Yet happiness eludes his direct quest. As Hirschmann suggests, “it can only be obtained as a *by-product* of activities whose proclaimed and conscious aims are quite extraneous to that objective” (Hirschmann 112). The following passage from Proust’s preface to *La bible d’Amiens* suggests that he was fully aware of this: “Et, de même que la recherche du Bonheur pour lui-même n’atteint que l’ennui, et qu’il faut pour le trouver chercher autre chose que lui, de même le plaisir esthétique nous est donné par surcroît si nous aimons la beauté pour elle-même, comme quelque chose de réel existant en dehors de nous et infiniment plus important que la joie qu’elle nous donne” (54-55). Equally relevant is the recourse to art in this particular context,

foreshadowing the fact that in the Proustian universe aesthetic endeavors are the only such activities unwittingly conducive of personal bliss.

In *La recherche*, individuals can find joy only in what the narrator terms “la partie seule réelle . . . de nous-même” (*RTP2 : CG* 689) – the inner self. This ability to find happiness within oneself is a crucial Proustian concept. Yet all those lacking “le sens artistique, c’est-à-dire la soumission à la réalité intérieure” are unable to accede to it (*RTP4 : TR* 461). This is because this inner reality, or what Simmel terms “the subjectivism of modern times”, is intrinsically connected with the aesthetic stance as it stems from the same basic motive as art (Simmel 516). It consists in a contemplation in which “the notion of the objects unfolds so easily, effortlessly and harmoniously as if they were solely determined by the basic laws of the self, [leading to] the expansion of the joyful and free self into things, the reality of which usually oppresses it” (Simmel 354). Yet in as far as this “inner reality” is synonymous with the concept of personality, its precondition is freedom as “‘personality’ actually means independence from and exclusion of all extraneous factors, and development exclusively according to the laws of one’s own being . . .” (Simmel 326). It consists in an emphasis on the inner nature of the individual achieved through a dissociation from others by the withdrawal of the soul into itself. Proustian inner-joy is reached through self-sufficiency as absence of dangerous external dependencies. The narrator accomplishes this separation by asserting that “il y a entre nous et les êtres un liséré de contingences . . .” (*RTP4 : TR* 553). Mme de Guermantes puts it more bluntly: “l’on a entre soi et chaque personne le mur d’une langue étrangère” (*RTP2 : CG* 812). While such statements can be interpreted as testimonies to the drama of modern man, they effectively prevent the formation of nationalistic bonds based on “des affinités entre gens nés de la même terre et des mêmes morts” (Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines* 449). In *La recherche*, lax and random social ties are most favorable

for individual happiness. As Simmel shows, “[i]f freedom means the development of individuality, the convictions to unfold the core of our being with all its individual desires and feelings, then this category implies not a mere absence of relationships but rather a very specific relation to others. These others have to be there and to be experienced as there in order to become irrelevant” (Simmel 322). This brings us back to the topic of innocuousness already mentioned at the end of the previous chapter: the others have to be harmless, or at least be perceived as such, to allow for the development of individual heterogeneity. This explains why “le plaisir de jouer avec des jeunes filles [est] moins funeste à la vie spirituelle, à laquelle du moins il reste étranger, que l’amitié . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 689*). Contrastively, tight social interactions interfere with the inner reality of the individual, seeing that “tout l’effort [de l’amitié] est de nous faire sacrifier la partie seule réelle et incommunicable . . . de nous-même, à un moi superficiel, qui ne trouve pas comme l’autre de joie en lui-même . . .” (*RTP2 : CG 689*). As Simmel suggests, the most favorable concrete formation for personal independence occur “when, although extensive relations to other people exist, all genuinely individual elements have been removed from them” (Simmel 322).

As we shall see, the Proustian view posits that engrossing artistic pursuits favor social peace. The distantiation of an inner contemplation akin to the aesthetic stance reduces the violence resulting from conflicting individual desires, or what Simmel terms “the human tragedy of competition” (Simmel 312). Lax social interactions become a personal choice in which there is nothing at stake, making meaningless the insider-outsider dynamic. This tactic is the literal opposite of the Barrèsian doctrine in which harmonious communal rapports are achieved based on “la position humble et dépendante de l’individu dans le temps et dans l’espace, dans la collectivité et dans la suite des êtres” (*Les déracinés 214*). This dependency must be doubled by

the awareness of individual powerlessness, expressed in the dictum: “Que les pauvres aient le sentiment de leur impuissance, voilà une condition première de la paix sociale” (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 197). In the pessimistic view of nationalists, social order requires the absolute subjection of the individual to the whole, as those who do not serve the collectivity contribute to its dissociation. The ever present possibility of internal conflict, which, as French history shows, often takes the form of civil war, remains their main concern. In this, Barrès prefigures Schmitt for whom anyone antagonizing the community is automatically a public enemy, seeing that anything related to the collectivity, most particularly the nation, becomes public in virtue of this rapport (Schmitt 28). At the core of the opposition between the Proustian and Barrèsian approaches to social interaction lies the age-old question of the nature of man: is the individual intrinsically evil or not? To it Barrès answers in the affirmative, obsessed as he is with how dangerous man can be, particularly when he finds himself under dire circumstances: “Le malheur fait ainsi sortir du civilisé, comme le loup du bois, le bandit, celui des pays de famine, de Sicile ou de Lorraine, la Bête de proie universelle” (*Les déracinés* 389). Such a *homo homini lupus* outlook puts the community under the constant threat of dissolution, unless each of its members is kept under strict control – a monumental task the law of large numbers renders impossible. To it, *La recherche* counter poses the assessment that “[a]utruï nous est indifférent et l’indifférence n’invite pas à la méchanceté” (*RTP3 : LP* 618). Without being overly optimistic, it contests the pessimistic Hobbesian view on human nature. Interpersonal indifference is key to individual distantiation. Pertinently, it is correlative to the preservation of private space specific to democracy, an organization in which the state’s only function is to correct in real time the mimetic rivalries resulting from the exercise of egotistical freedoms (Michéa 213). Given that the

novel discards ethnic ties as the precondition to human social existence, the question as to what allows for its preservation remains open and will be the subject of the following section.

Sociability and Kindness

Society is able to function because of the general trust people have in each other, given that “very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation” (Simmel 191). Yet this implicit trust is passive, being founded on the presumption of the others’ honesty and benevolence. Consequently, the Proustian universe compounds it with an unconditional individual generosity, such as that of the anonymous Larivière that make up the real motor of French national cohesion. The kindness of Marcel’s mother and grandmother is its epitome. Its private nature is crucial in that it protects its recipients from humiliating dependency and gratitude. There are numerous instances of it in *La recherche*, sometimes coming from the most unexpected quarters. Such are the egotistical Verdurins helping the pitiful Saniette, a man they persecute and despise but still help when in he is in distress. Having found out he is dangerously ill as well as financially ruined, they discreetly set up “une petite rente pour qu’il ne s’aperçoive pas trop de sa ruine, qu’il puisse se soigner chez lui” (*RTP3 : LP 828*). Whereas Drumont complains of his fellow-countrymen’s lack of patriotism, as “personne ne veut se gêner, personne ne veut sacrifier son avantage immédiat ou sa fantaisie, personne ne veut faire son devoir” (Drumont 361), the Verdurins rent a less expensive summer residence than what they are accustomed to in order to assist their acquaintance – a modest sacrifice indeed, but a sacrifice nonetheless. What is more, they do their utmost to keep secret their support, ostensibly to avoid “l’embêtement des scènes de remerciements, des manifestations, des phrases” (*RTP3 : LP 829*). Consequently, the narrator

understands that M. Verdurin, a person he had long taken for “le plus méchant des hommes”, is in fact “un homme capable de désintéressement, de générosités sans ostentation. . . .” While “cela ne veut pas dire forcément un homme sensible, ni un homme sympathique, ni scrupuleux, ni véridique, ni toujours bon” (*RTP3 : LP 830*), this “bonté partielle” (*RTP3 : LP 830*) is vital.

Most Proustian characters demonstrate in the course of the novel such imperfect kindness. The list is quite long. On it are the queen of Naples, “aussi bonne qu’elle s’était jadis montrée brave” (*RTP3 : LP 752*), Mme de Villeparisis who, after Bloch’s disastrous first visit to her salon, on his second one “le reçut très bien parce qu’elle était bonne femme” (*RTP2 : CG 545*), the princesse de Guermantes who is “en effet très bonne” (*RTP3 : LP 860*), Mme de Marsantes who “[à] la campagne . . . était adorée pour le bien qu’elle faisait” (*RTP2 : CG 548*), Jupien who “avait de la bonté, de la pitié, les sentiments les plus délicats, les plus généreux” (*RTP2 : CG 321*), Saint-Loup who impresses the narrator “par la bonté incessante qu’il s’ingéniait à nous témoigner” (*RTP2 : JF 93*), M. Cottard who remains “bon garçon” along with “la charitable” Mme Cottard – they both pity M. de Charlus and strive to make him feel included in the little clan (*RTP3 : SG 428*) – , Swann with “sa gentillesse pour chacun, . . . sa délicatesse” (*RTP1 : CS 238*), Bloch who “pouvait avoir de grandes gentillesse” (*RTP2 : JF 105*), and the marquise de Cambremer characterized by “sa bonté et sa simplicité parfaites” (*RTP3 : SG 162*). Even Bergotte, the celebrated writer, “vivait si simplement qu’on ne soupçonnait pas à quel point il était riche, et l’eût-on su qu’on se fût trompé encore, l’ayant cru alors avare, alors que personne ne fut jamais si généreux” (*RTP3 : LP 688*). Yet it is exactly for his goodness that he will be best remembered, as “[i]l arrive en effet souvent . . . pour un savant, pour un artiste . . . que celui de leurs sentiments qui prouve que la supériorité de son intelligence s’est imposée à eux, ce n’est

pas leur admiration pour ses idées, car elles leur échappent, mais leur respect pour sa bonté”
(*RTP1 : CS 238*).

Furthermore, there are those who go beyond this “bonté partielle” and surprise the narrator through unexpected acts of kindness. The snobish Legrandin unselfishly sacrifices his times and energies to help Marcel’s mother care for a sick relative he barely knows:

Tout, là-bas, lui fut rendu facile, grâce à la bonté, au dévouement de Legrandin qui, ne reculant devant aucune peine, ajourna de semaine en semaine son retour à Paris, sans connaître beaucoup ma tante, simplement d’abord parce qu’elle avait été une amie de sa mère, puis parce qu’il sentit que la malade, condamnée, aimait ses soins et ne pouvait se passer de lui. (*RTP3 : LP 524*)

Similarly, Oriane, though she always acted freely towards the Russian Imperial family to the point of seemingly lacking both tact and respect, shows them the most disinterested kindness at the time of their fall from grace as “[elle] fut peut-être seule, après la Révolution russe, à faire preuve à l’égard des grandes-duchesses et des grands-ducs d’un dévouement sans bornes” (*RTP4 : TR 431*). She pesters the French ambassador in Petersburg for news about the grand-duchess Marie-Pavlovna, at whom she often poked jokes during that lady’s former glory. What is more, “pendant longtemps les seules marques de sympathie et de respect que reçut sans cesse cette princesse lui vinrent exclusivement de M^{me} de Guermantes” (*RTP4 : TR 431*). Consequently, generosity and kindness are wider spread in the Proustian cycle than it would appear at first sight. Indeed, the narrator believes that “la bonté . . . est aussi répandue que [l]e sentiment de la justice . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 548*). In the context of the Dreyfus affair, it could be argued that at the heart of such a statement lies irony, as then proofs of both kindheartedness and justice were rather scarce. Yet Marcel insists that “ce n’est pas le bon sens qui est « la chose du monde la plus

répandue », c'est la bonté" (*RTP : JF 100*), emphasizing the importance of the Larivière's unrequited generosity. Inasmuch as the French nation can be considered a community, its harmony derives from the pity and goodness each of its members shows to the others. As Taguieff suggests, an unconditional and genuine kindness without second thoughts towards fellow men is more important than a theoretical tolerance (Taguieff 468). An innate generosity located at the core of individuals relaxes the heedfully tight social bonds in the *homo homini lupus* scenario.

Pertinently, it is the German defeatist's mercifulness who follows the closest in the footsteps of the narrator's grandmother and mother model generosity (*RTP3 : LP 825*), as "M. de Charlus était pitoyable, . . . , il était toujours pour le faible . . ." (*RTP4 : TR 354*). To put the baron's role in its proper context, the importance Proust accorded pity in his own correspondence must be reemphasized. In a letter to Mme Straus dated March 18 1914, he insists on "mon amour de la bonté et de la pitié avant tout" to explain his reserve regarding Gaston Calmette's campaign against the minister of finance Joseph Caillaux in the *Figaro* (*Lettres à madame Strauss* 192). And in his epistle of July 16 1906, he describes to the comtesse de Noailles his reaction upon reading the account of the anti-revisionist discourse General Auguste Mercier³⁸ gave in front of the Senate on July 13 1906. He starts by reminding the countess about his own Dreyfusist convictions, concluding that "malgré ma grande pitié pour le général Mercier, c'est une fameuse canaille." Yet, knowing how the increasingly revisionist members of the Senate "insultent à le faire mourir à la tribune ce vieillard de soixante-quinze ans qui avait eu le courage d'y monter", he adds that "[c]'est horrible à lire, car dans l'homme le plus méchant il y a un pauvre cheval

³⁸ As Minister of War during the first part of the Dreyfus Affairs, Auguste Mercier (1833-1921) played a decisive role in the accusation and persecution of the Jewish captain, as he knowingly fostered the nascent conspiracy against him (Brown, *For the Soul of France* 177).

innocent qui peine, un cœur, un foie, des artères où il n’y a point de malice et qui souffrent. Et l’heure des plus beaux triomphent est gâtée parce qu’il y a toujours quelqu’un qui souffre” (*Choix de Lettres* 136-137). Proust denies the reciprocity of violence by refusing to respond to hostility through hostility, as any partisan engagement is the mimetic double of what it opposes. The moralistic approach denounces and condemns, preaches the reparation of injustice, the punishment of the guilty, or requires radical change – in all cases furthering violence. Revisionism and anti-revisionism are two opposed and symmetrical discourses that share what Taguieff would term a negative passion (262). The writer is aware of the intrinsic drama of any anti-nationalistic stance, as its “anti” prefix has hostile connotations. It follows that mercy is the only human experience on which an authentic humanism can be based (Taguieff 430), a position echoed by the exhortation: “Ne subordonnons jamais à un devoir obscur, lointain et incertain, un devoir précis, immédiat, de justice et de charité” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 366). To bypass confrontational doctrinal attitudes, *La recherche* tactically displaces the onus of kindness and mercy from collective to personal level.

Charlus epitomizes this rising above politics. Despite his pro-German tendencies, upon the start of the war “il avait transformé son hôtel en hôpital militaire, cédant . . . aux besoins . . . de son bon cœur” (*RTP4 : TR* 387). He thus demonstrates how goodness is disconnected from patriotism: “M. de Charlus, qui avait de rares qualités morales, qui était accessible à la pitié, généreux, capable d’affection, de dévouement, en revanche . . . n’avait pas de patriotisme” (*RTP4 : TR* 353). The gardener of Mme de Cambremer shares this view with regard to his mistress, since “[il] la vénérât pour sa bonté et accédait qu’elle se fût rendue coupable de trahison” (*RTP3 : SG* 310). While *La recherche* demonstrates respect for all those fighting for the motherland, such as the young men the narrator meets in Jupien’s brothel who are “à la

guerre des soldats merveilleux, d'incomparables « braves »», it focuses on the fact they are “de bons cœurs sinon tout à fait de braves gens” (*RTP4 : TR 415*). Dedication to the national cause does not require a good heart, but in social interactions generosity remains paramount.

However, Charlus’s “profonde bonté” is exceptional in that not only Marcel, but also Saint-Loup (*RTP2 : JF 110*), and Jupien (*RTP4 : TR 409*), acknowledge it. And so does his tormentor Morel, as

M. de Charlus avait été avec le violoniste d’une telle générosité, d’une telle délicatesse, lui avait montré de tels scrupules de ne pas manquer à sa parole, qu’en le quittant l’idée que Charlie avait emportée de lui n’était nullement l’idée d’un homme vicieux . . . mais de l’homme ayant le plus d’idées élevées qu’il eût jamais connu, un homme d’une sensibilité extraordinaire, une manière de saint. . . . Aussi quand il cherchait par ses articles à le faire souffrir, dans sa pensée ce qu’il bafouait en lui ce n’était pas le vice, c’était la vertu. (*RTP4 : TR 346*)

Generally, the kindness demonstrated by most characters in *La recherche* remains hidden to the eyes of others; it is only the narrator who eventually becomes aware of it, to thus be able to relay it to the reader. This emphasis on the acknowledged moral qualities of the baron suggests his social ego, compromised by his infamous Germanophilia and homosexuality, is disconnected from the goodness of his soul. This is because kindness emanates from the same true self as that from which individual joy also springs:

il n’y a aucune raison, dans nos conditions de vie sur cette terre, pour que nous nous croyions obligés à faire le bien . . . , ni pour l’artiste cultivé à ce qu’il se croie obligé de recommencer vingt fois un morceau dont l’admiration qu’il excitera importera peu à son

corps mangé par les vers Toutes ces obligations, qui n'ont pas leur sanction dans la vie présente, semblent appartenir à un monde différent, fondé sur la bonté, le scrupule, le sacrifice, un monde entièrement différent de celui-ci, et dont nous sortons pour naître à cette terre. . . . (RTP3 : LP 693)

The previous passage explicitly brings together aesthetic preoccupations – the centrifugal force closing the soul unto itself – and kindheartedness – the centripetal force dissipating interpersonal tensions – by the means of human nature. It thus solves the nationalistic dilemma of unending social conflicts at the individual rather than group level. It is in the coming together of the tight social interactions promoted by Barrèsian nationalism, when the social self takes over the individual ego, that these fundamental human traits are unavoidably weakened.

Kindheartedness remains the most prevalent of human virtues regardless of personal circumstances, or societal and political conflicts and configurations: “Même si cette bonté, paralysée par l'intérêt, ne s'exerce pas, elle existe pourtant, et chaque fois qu'aucun mobile égoïste ne l'empêche de le faire . . . elle s'épanouit, se tourne . . . vers le faible, vers le juste et le persécuté” (RTP2 : JF 100). It is this disjunction between the social and the inner self which maintains intact the fundamental concept of individual kindness in *La recherche*, in opposition to the common good promoted by nationalism. Whereas the latter is predetermined by a political doctrine and subsequently infused into the masses, Proustian goodness originates from “[d]es lois inconnues auxquelles nous avons obéi parce que nous en portions l'enseignement en nous, sans savoir qui les y avait tracées . . .” (RTP3 : LP 693). As such, it is innate rather than acquired through education. Andrée epitomizes this as “sa troisième nature, . . . la vraie, . . . tendait vers la bonté et l'amour du prochain” (RTP4 : AD 183). Consequently, in *La recherche* there is no greater good, only “la bonne action pure et simple, qui ne dit rien” (RTP4 : TR 460). It can spring

from any human being, regardless of ethnicity, social class, or political beliefs. Crucially, this tactic effectively opposes nationalism while also evading the indignant denunciation characteristic to moralistic rituals, all the more dangerous when based on the conviction it operates in the name of the common good.

Sociability and Culture

In contrast to the autonomy of the inner-self, the Proustian social self “trouve un attendrissement confus à se sentir soutenu sur des étais extérieurs, hospitalisé dans une individualité étrangère, où, heureux de la protection qu’on lui donne, il fait rayonner son bien-être en approbation et s’émerveille de qualités qu’il appellerait défauts et chercherait à corriger chez soi-même” (*RTP2 : CG 689*). Purposefully constructed to fit in with those around him, the social self represents the superficial adaptation of the actual personality to communal life. Being in the company of others requires the mediation between two world views which entails an alteration of individual perceptions to allow for a togetherness. A shared objective culture, the medium for participation and involvement in an aggregate based on predetermined and generally accepted norms, makes this mediation possible. Both precondition and manifestation of group cohesion, objective culture is the sublation of the regulations required for peaceful interpersonal interactions allowing for group formation and the constraint they effect on individual development. In final analysis, objective culture limits the growth of the individual as to increase the harmony of the whole (Simmel 213). While Proust decries this downgrading of personal autonomy, Barrès, convinced that “l’individu n’est rien, la société tout” (*Les déracinés 245*), posits it as basis for national unity. Nationalism aspires to reach the pinnacle of objective culture, manifested in “le retentissement de la vie française totale sur chaque vie individuelle” (*Scènes et doctrines 449*).

Yet culture is central to *La recherche*, first and foremost in the sense of “un patrimoine des œuvres à préserver, à répandre ou par rapport auquel se situer” (Certeau, *La culture au pluriel* 167), as mentions of various artworks abound in the text. Henry intimates Proust resorts to respected scientific and artistic works to guarantee the validity and professionalism of his own literary explorations, an attitude pertinent to his outsider position in French society. He thus strives to put forward references which contemporaneous readers would have recognized and tacitly accepted (Henry, *La tentation de Marcel Proust* 145). In order to follow the author’s point, a familiarity with and understanding of these oeuvres is necessary, suggesting the novel’s intended audience is the *Belle Epoque* cultivated man. As the aforementioned artistic heritage represents the realm of objective culture, while an actual familiarity with and understanding of it constitutes its subjective side, culture in the fullest sense of the concept is at the core of the novel. Proust shared Simmel’s view that culture “shapes people’s relationships to one another and to themselves” (Simmel 484). Yet as Henry suggests, while conveying an entire culture, *La recherche* fundamentally mistrusts culture (*Marcel Proust : Théories pour une esthétique* 10). On the one hand, this wariness reflects an opposition to nationalism and its reliance on a conformism stemming from objective culture. On the other, it responds to an increased aggregation at the expense of the complexity of individual components. Its scope goes beyond nationalism’s solidarity ethos. Rather it is a generalized social phenomenon developing throughout the 19th century and extending well into the 20th, manifested in the multiplication of the intricacies of daily life to the point where a generalized system is required for their handling: “The multitude of factors – of powers, substances and events – that operate in modern life demand a concentration of comprehensive symbols which can be manipulated with the assurance that they will lead to the same result as if all the details had been taken into account, so that the

result will be applicable and valid for all particulars” (Simmel 159). This simplification modern man needs in the face of complex urban environments backfires: it replaces the heterogeneity of subjective points of view with the homogeneity of a unique system, forcing individuals into conformity. The narrator acknowledges the overwhelming power of objective culture, of which even language is a part, to alienate human beings from themselves: “Les noms qui désignent les choses répondent toujours à une notion de l’intelligence, étrangère à nos impressions véritables, et qui nous force à éliminer d’elles tout ce qui ne se rapporte pas à cette notion” (*RTP2* : *JF* 191).

The aforementioned passage speaks to Adorno’s statement that since the 18th century the true subject matter of the novel is the conflict between living human beings and rigidified conditions (“The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel” 32). The dialectic between objective and subjective culture central to the Proustian cycle reflects this pattern. Furthermore, the same period marks an increase in material knowledge unmatched by individual powers of assimilation, which in turn “enforces the use of expressions that pass from hand to hand like sealed containers” (Simmel 487). This preponderance of objective over subjective culture parallels that of form over content, allowing for the effectiveness of stereotypes and a tendency towards imitation. In its face, the only possible individual response is a retreat into the self to escape cultural effects of homogenization: “Every day, the wealth of objective culture increases, but the individual mind can enrich the forms and contents of its own development only by distancing itself still further from that culture and developing its own at a slower pace” (Simmel 487). Given this, Barrès’s belief that “[i]l n’y a pas d’idées personnelles ; les idées même les plus rares . . . sont des façons de sentir générales et se retrouvent chez tous les êtres de même organisme assiégés par les mêmes images” (*Scènes et doctrine* 17) gains its proper context. While to him this fading of individuality demonstrates the superiority of the whole over its parts,

he is in fact responding to objective social phenomena of homogenization. From this perspective, Barrès accurately perceived that “[l]e nationalisme, c’est l’acceptation d’un déterminisme” (*Scènes et doctrine* 8). Yet it is not that of race or ethnicity, but rather of objective culture taken as a self-limiting ideal – a fact that he unwittingly admits, as “[u]n nationaliste, c’est un Français qui a pris conscience de sa formation” (*Scènes et doctrine* 10).

This discrepancy between subjective and objective culture and its effect on the individual is at the center of the intellectual problematic of *la Belle Epoque*. De Tarde expresses it as “ces unanimités partielles, ces conspirations des cœurs, ces communions des esprits [qui] . . . , une fois formées et perpétuées par la tradition, l’imitation des ancêtres, exercent une pression si souvent tyrannique, encore plus souvent salutaire, sur l’individu” (*Les lois sociales* 21). As reader of de Tarde, Proust agrees with Barrès that an individual cannot escape the influence of objective culture, nor that it is entirely desirable he would do so, yet he remains primarily concerned with its oppressive dimension. The dilemma of the day is whether the individual takes the objective cultural whole as superior to him, as nationalism does, or, to quote Simmel, “he consider[s] his personal value to be higher than that of all reified mind” (Simmel 507). *La recherche* aspires to escape from the determinism of objective culture by resorting to personal subjectivity, in a move which parallels its distantiating from the collectivity. To paraphrase Simmel, the soul remains master in its own house in opposition to culture, which in turn allows it to turn to the stimulation of culture by combining the multiplicity of its styles in new and original ways (Simmel 507). Indeed, as Adorno suggests, “it is only this subjectivism that enables [Proust] to break through the immanence of culture”, and he achieves this “[i]n opposition to culture and through culture” (“Valéry Proust Museum” 183). The recourse to art is its consequence, as aesthetic contemplation consists in the transposition of the artistic object “dans

le domaine de la seule réalité pour chacun, dans le domaine de sa propre sensibilité” (*RTP4 : TR* 463). In doing so, the narrator exploits what Maurice Blanchot terms the “acultural aspect” of art and literature (“Ars Nova” 186) which allows him to convert objective into subjective culture. Marcel’s artistic interests reflect this same attitude, as at their core lies the rapport between aesthetics and the inner life of the individual. This is why throughout the novel the narrator is attracted by various artworks approached exclusively for personal enjoyment, without any desire for cultural insertion. As Henry intimates, despite developing an impressive system of cultural and artistic references, the Proustian cycle focuses on individual impressions and their expression rather than on art as such (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 224).

The Recourse to Aesthetics

However, overcoming the influence of objective culture is not an easy task, as “[t]hought is free when it only follows its own inner motives and has detached itself from its involvement with emotions and volitions that influence it in a direction that is alien to it” (Simmel 338). The unimpaired development of subjectivism, as lack of mediation, requires a withdrawal from outside influences. This brings us back to the detrimental effect of friendship, or of any close social ties for that matter. The social, in all its forms, is the realm of objective culture. At its core lies what Simmel terms “the objectivation of the subjective”, consisting in a standardization of value which converts the qualitative into the quantitative. This process is coeval with the social self taking over the inner ego. Through it, value becomes a counterpart of being contrary to individual joy, as enjoyment of any kind remains subjective in so far as there is no awareness or interest in the object as such (Simmel 62-80). The contradiction between individual subjectivity and cultural formation perceived as objective leads to the dialectics of life or content versus form or culture – an opposition equally at play in Proustian Frenchness. Ultimately, this contradiction

gives rise to objective valuation in which the object of enjoyment confronts the subject with its newfound value resulting in a sense of dependency, which in turn leads to unhappiness. It would seem that distantiation from everything external to the subject is the solution.

Yet as previously mentioned happiness requires absorption into something other than the self, which explains the gregarious susceptibilities of individuals, their wish to associate with groups or doctrines from which they can derive a temporary and imaginary sense of personal worth and potency. As already seen Proust is wary of any sense of identity based on superiority or exclusion. Therefore the recourse to aesthetics as a harmless form of identification remains the only viable alternative. Art allows for “the absolute surrender of the Ego to his momentary feelings . . .” (Simmel 73). However, as Simmel shows, a naïve attitude is crucial to the absolute submission of the inner self to fleeing impressions and sensations because it does not participate in the normal cultural scheme of valuation. Indeed, the specificity of the innocent individual is that “his cultural needs can be satisfied by the simplest materials offered by nature. . . .” Consequently, “his practical consciousness is completely subjective, he is inspired exclusively by the agitations and satisfaction of his own subjective condition and his interest in objects is limited to being the cause of these effects” (Simmel 72). By escaping the cultural mediation of the group, the naïve does not generate effects of envy as he is not participating in the struggle for what is valuable to most. Therefore, Proust tactically resorts to a naïve narrator – a characteristic the novel’s apprenticeship dimension gradually reveals as Marcel confronts life’s problems. By his own admission, at the beginning of the cycle, in his childhood and his adolescence, “je croyais exactement ce qu’on me disait . . .” (*RTP4 : TR* 353). This naïveté plays a crucial role at several levels of the text. Primarily, it allows for the fascination a noble name or an imagined *Francité* exert on Marcel, as to him “les moindres attributs des êtres semblent faire

partie indivisible de leur personnalité.” Furthermore, it is the precondition of his journey of apprenticeship since “l’adolescence est le seul temps où l’on ait appris quelque chose.” Yet this “âge ridicule” is “nullement ingrat, très fécond” precisely because “[p]lus tard on voit les choses d’une façon plus pratique, en pleine conformité avec le reste de la société” (*RTP2 : JF 90*). Its main advantage consists in a non-conformism which brings joy from unexpected, yet readily available sources rather than from what is valuable for the majority. Incomprehension protects the object of contemplation from any sort of mediation, since there are no rules according to which it can be reduced. It makes for both a free subject and a free object. Indeed, the narrator recollects how often “tout d’un coup un toit, un reflet de soleil sur une pierre, l’odeur d’un chemin me faisaient arrêter par un plaisir particulier qu’ils me donnaient . . .” (*RTP1 : CS 176*). Exempt from any humiliation in relation to such insignificant objects, as no judgement of value can be uttered in reference to them, he experiences a free pleasure that is not only unique but also highly personal. It is characterized by an absence of both effort and guilt. Marcel manifests here a naïveté central to his artistic pursuits and which, as this essay will subsequently address, will decisively impact the type of art he will profess.

The narrator’s innocence is akin to Simmel’s conceptualization of indifference – “a rejection of positive value; the *possibility* of interest remaining inactive but is always present in the background” (Simmel 63). By unwittingly ignoring accepted cultural distinctions, it avoids not only the mediation of the group, but also “la passion mimétique de la rareté” which leads to violent competition for possessing that which is termed valuable (Serres 272). The narrator’s naïveté is at the core of the pleasure he is able to take in readily available objects avoiding the violence resulting from conflicting desires. The naïve thus constitutes both a diversion from and a response to *la Belle Epoque*’s obsession with the insidious struggle between fellow men

threatening to rent the fabric of society. *La recherche* has a multifold approach to dissipate social conflict. On the one hand there is Marcel's naïveté, unable to distinguish between relevant elements reflecting social differences. On the other, there is the harmlessness of most characters of which the narrator's lack of willpower and purpose are but a manifestation. In final analysis, indifference to subjective elements of dependence equally characteristic to naïveté and to freedom achieve a similar result with pervasive individual innocuousness – a relaxation of interpersonal rapports equivalent with a social distantiating.

The position of the narrator in the Proustian novel is pertinent to this subject. On the one hand, he heeds conventional rules of storytelling stating that, as the observer through whom the audience is exposed to the universe of the novel, “[i]l faut qu’il soit le dernier sur la chaîne des observables. S’il est supplanté, il devient observé” (Serres 425). Indeed, Marcel remains inconspicuous to the other characters ensuring that “l’observateur toujours fait moins de bruit que l’observé” (Serres 426). In the social game, he endeavors to conform to the rules of the successive groups he visits, persistently avoiding center stage. Yet his position consistently remains asymmetrical to the members of the clans he frequents, in that he never fully belongs – an exteriority already mentioned with respect to the Guermantes, holding equally true for the Verdurin salon, as Marcel confesses “[j]e n’étais pas du petit clan” (*RTP3* : *SG* 340). He briefly cultivates each coterie, enough to expose its internal mechanism and muse on the unhappiness he derived from frequenting it. On the other hand, as a proper character in the novel, the audience continuously scrutinizes the narrator and might unwittingly be impressed by him. To counter such risk, Marcel is by no means the omniscient narrator from the classical novel. The author makes sure that the reader sees further and understands sooner all that Marcel misses, making his audience aware it is always a step ahead of the narrator. Proust's is an art that does not humiliate

anyone, his readers least of all. Consequently, Marcel cuts a narcissistic, yet unassuming figure delighting in his limits and finding joy in what is available to all. His inability to understand what is going on, his lack of social importance, and the failure to finish, or for that fact start his book, protect him from the envy of other characters, and from any authority in front of the audience. Lack of effort, indifference, and even social failure make him a pre-humiliated figure. Yet in conjunctions with his naiveté, his narcissism constitutes a lack of external dependency allowing him the distance required to unwittingly escape from socio-cultural determinations.

Marcel's self-avowed shortcomings directly impact his long-planned oeuvre, yet by leading him to the same aesthetical values as those promoted by *La recherche* they prove to be surprisingly beneficial at several levels. Primarily, though his desire to become a writer stems from social aspirations, as "je commençais à écrire pour . . . voir indirectement [les Guermantes], pour qu'ils eussent une meilleure idée de moi, pour me préparer une meilleure situation dans le monde", it results in a remote joyfulness characteristic to artistic endeavors, given that eventually "mon plaisir ne serait plus dans le monde mais dans la littérature" (*RTP4 : AD 152*). Marcel reaches aesthetics through snobbishness, but in the process he removes himself from the realm of sociability. Furthermore, his illness, "comme un rude directeur de conscience", increases his isolation, "en [le] faisant mourir au monde" (*RTP4 : TR 621*). In this context, the Proustian idea that solitude is the prerequisite of being an artist is relevant: "que l'artiste vit seul, que la valeur absolue des choses qu'il voit n'importe pas pour lui, que l'échelle des valeurs ne peut être trouvée qu'en lui-même" (*Contre Sainte-Beuve 62*). Thus, the narrator eventually understands that, rather than an impediment, illness is a boost to his artistic aspirations: "la maladie . . . m'avait rendu service . . ." (*RTP4 : TR 621*). On the one hand, for his life experience to become a material for his art, rather than useful it must be perceived as wasted – its aesthetic dimension

emerges as its usefulness disappears. On the other, leading a social life, in the realm of objective culture governed by comparisons, is not propitious to writerly endeavors. Both his innocence and enforced isolation insulate the narrator from cultural schemes of valuation. By his own admission, he is “l’être humain qui . . . vi[t] les volets clos, ne sai[t] rien du monde, reste immobile comme un hibou et, comme celui-ci, ne voit un peu clair que dans les ténèbres” (*RTP3* : *SG* 371). Thus, he is able to think for himself only in solitude, as only then “nous nous remettons face à face avec nous-mêmes, nous tâchons d’entendre, et de rendre, le son vrai de notre cœur, et non la conversation” (Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* 161). In this sense, this seclusion goes beyond what the artist is said to require in order to practice his art. Rather, it is akin to what Blanchot describes as “a solitude that is not essentially solitude but rather self-communion” (“The essential solitude” 97).

This conjunction between naïveté and distanciation points to a particular type of art. At its core is a subjectivity that lacks any interest in the object it contemplates, and is consequently able to provide joy both to the creator and beholder of works of art. Yet this attitude is always under the threat of a process of valuation in which the artwork escapes the subject and confronts him with a certain degree of independence (Simmel 80). From it ensues the destructive dynamics of self-doubt, followed by resentments towards that which escapes the individual. Are valuable to us those objects that resist our attempt to possess them, thus threatening our self-esteem through the superiority of their elusiveness: while we depend on them through our desire, they are independent of us through their indifference. Consequently, the dialectics of “the desiring, consuming, valuing subject and the valued object” (Simmel 68) result in unhappiness. This is why in *La recherche* “il n’y a pas de choses plus ou moins précieuses” (*RTP2* : *CG* 714) – an axiom denying the very possibility of valuation, to further insure the remote contemplation

favorable to individual happiness and thus to social peace. The narrator's recourse to literature is the homeopathic remedy he proposes to dangerous mechanisms of appraisal at play everywhere in social life, as writing "consists . . . in withdrawing speech from world currency" (Blanchot, "The essential solitude" 102), which in turn dispossesses it of its capacity to create mass effects.

Distantiation plays a pivotal role. The secluded Marcel, joyfully engrossed in "le dialogue intérieur des souvenirs" (*RTP3* : *SG* 371) is a trademark image of the novel. Indeed, the narrator reliving his own life from the safe distance of memories is the very premise of *La recherche*. Yet the implications of such detachment for Proustian aesthetics go further. It is a tactic attempting to protect the reader himself from the pain too close a contact with even imaginary subjects can cause. Hence, the insistence of the narrator become writer that, whereas many of his readers wrongly assumed he contemplated the world through a microscope, when he wrote his oeuvre "je m'étais . . . servi d'un télescope pour apercevoir des choses, très petites, en effet, . . . parce qu'elles étaient situées à une grande distance" (*RTP4* : *TR* 618). This approach that shies away from the immediate proximity of its matter reflects modern art's more general tendency towards aloofness:

On the whole, the aesthetic interest of recent times has tended towards an increase in the distance produced by transposing objects into art. . . . Many lively, stimulating notions are aroused by what is far away and this satisfies our many-sided need for stimulation, although, because of the absence of relationship to our most personal and direct interests, all these strange and distant notions have a faint ring about them. . . . (Simmel 514)

Pertinently to the Proustian cycle, such an aestheticism cannot subjugate the beholder, protected as he is by a spatial and temporal remove from objects he experiences only indirectly.

Therefore, the audience should remain partly indifferent to an artistic subject to which it has no

direct relationship. Modern aesthetics are the result of “the fear of coming into too close a contact with objects, a consequence of hyperesthesia, for which every direct and energetic disturbance causes pain” (Simmel 515). On the one hand, this is correlated to a wariness of personal attachments, unavoidably bringing about the unhappiness Marcel recurrently feels upon getting close to Gilberte, Mme de Guermantes, and Albertine. On the other, such a distantiating with its attending hyperesthesia is consequent upon Marcel’s illness, emphasizing how Proustian art benefits from the narrator’s failings. Furthermore, this stance “place[s] us at a distance from the substance of things; they speak to us ‘as from afar’; reality is touched not with direct confidence but with fingertips that are immediately withdrawn” (Simmel 515), in a mindset relevant to Proust’s position in French society. As an excluded Jewish gay man, he has recourse to a particular aesthetics in response to nationalism. When confronted by the overpowering rhetoric of the latter, he responds with a self-conscious restraint which is always reticent towards uttering the ultimate.

In this regard, Proust’s modesty and his distaste for public visibility remain significant in their double movement of distrusts towards any form of centrality and awareness of potential mass effects. It should come as no surprise the same restraint characterizes the aesthetics he favors. It is primarily expressed as an opposition to the crushing masterpiece, as Elstir – the painter Marcel so much admires – affirms “il n’y a pas de chef-d’œuvre. . . .” He rejects the Gothic style precisely because of the overwhelming effect it has on the beholder. He asserts that “l’hôpital sans style vaut le glorieux portail . . .” (*RTP2* : *CG* 714), echoing the grandmother’s preference for the modest church of Saint-Hilaire (*RTP1* : *CS* 61-63), discussed in detail in the second chapter. Consequently, the narrator identifies with the unpretentious craft of artisans like Françoise, averring that “épinglant de-ci de-là un feuillet supplémentaire, je bâtirais mon livre, je

n’ose pas dire ambitieusement comme une cathédrale, mais tout simplement comme une robe” (*RTP4 : TR 610*). Pertinently, the passage explicitly opposes the conceptualization of *La recherche* as a cathedral (Kristeva, *Proust : Questions d’identité 25*). Indeed, Marcel’s aspiration is to construct “mon livre de la façon que Françoise faisait ce bœuf mode, apprécié par M. de Norpois, et dont tant de morceaux de viande ajoutés et choisis enrichissaient la gelée” (*RTP4 : TR 612*).

It should be no wonder then that for the longest time the narrator is unable to start his oeuvre, as what hinders him most is deciding upon the topic and meaning of his book. Early on he felt that “il était temps de savoir ce que je comptais écrire”, but “dès que je me le demandais, tâchant de trouver un sujet où je pusse faire tenir une signification philosophique infinie, mon esprit s’arrêtait de fonctionner . . .” (*RTP1 : CS 170*). Despite the dejection he thus experiences, such inadequacies protect him from the nationalistic requirement to “traiter de sujets non frivoles ni sentimentaux, à peindre de grands mouvements ouvriers, et à défaut de foules, à tout le moins non plus d’insignifiants oisifs” (*RTP4 : TR 460*). Yet the aforementioned nationalistic requirements reveal the process at play since the 1850s though which, according to Blanchot, literature started to be devalued. Literature comes to be questioned as valid activity because of “the relationships between general action – grounded in society – and action that is determined by the work” (*The Book to Come 231*). It is this limited action of the work that is so vehemently condemned in the nationalistic appraisal of art for art’s sake (*RTP : SG 346*) to which it opposes the engaged art with a social message to which the narrator previously alludes. Pertinently, in response to such critiques, these *insignifiants oisifs* are main characters in the text the audience is in the process of reading while finding out about Marcel’s trials, underlying the importance Proustian aesthetics accords to trifling subjects. The narrator’s “sentiment intime, immédiat, . . .

du néant de [s]a pensée” (*RTP1 : CS 171*), which confronts him for as long as he tries to conform to grand models of literary achievement, further corroborates this view. In this, he seems to submit to the aforementioned crisis and critique of literature which constantly reminds him of “the uncertainty of his condition in the powerful civilization in which he plays so small a role” (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 197). The outsider position of the sick and unsuccessful Marcel, which mirrors that of Proust in relation to Barrès and the latter’s condemnation of an unpatriotic and frivolous art, forces both the narrator and the real author to confront the failure of modern literature itself: “criticism seem[s] to come from the world, from political and social reality, and seem[s] to submit literature to a judgement that humiliates it in the name of history” (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 197). Yet miraculously the answer lies in the crisis itself. While at this stage of the plot Marcel concludes that a lack of genius places him amongst “ceux qui n’ont pas de dispositions pour écrire” (*RTP1 : CS 171*), he unwittingly emphasizes the miraculous protection his failings offer him in the form of a modest, inward bound artistic stance, which in turn allows him to respond the summons of the nation with a frivolous, yet exemplary, withdrawal. Thus, it is precisely the contestation of his abilities and artistic work that sanction the modern aesthetic, which, to paraphrase Blanchot, no longer makes its audience dream of the artist as an individual more important or more visible than others (*The Book to Come* 196).

Indeed, the narrator’s failings maintain the modesty of the dilettante at the core of his aesthetical endeavor: “j’entreprenais mon ouvrage à la veille de mourir, sans rien savoir de mon métier” (*RTP4 : TR 618*). However, the paradoxical benefits personal imperfections and naïvetés provide the narrator do not stop here. Having complained about his inability to start his oeuvre, as “au lieu de travailler, j’avais vécu dans la paresse, dans la dissipation des plaisirs, dans la maladie, les soins, les manies” (*RTP4 : TR 618*), it dawns on Marcel that “la paresse m’avait

protégé contre la facilité” (*RTP4 : TR 621*). The art towards which he aspires is that of an artisan painstakingly refining each of his phrases as Bergotte realized only too late he should have done in his writings (*RTP3 : LP 692*). This indicates the importance of a deliberate art of the detail, whereas his literary aptitudes left unchecked would have led to the superficiality of speedy work. Furthermore, while a frivolity akin to Charlus’s long prevents him from dedication to his work, it also protects him from external influences: “ma frivolité, dès que je n’étais pas seul, me faisait désirer de plaire, plus désireux d’amuser en bavardant que de m’instruire en écoutant . . .” (*RTP4 : TR 297*). This point is crucial, as in a letter to Daniel Halévy, written on May 10 1880, Proust decries the risks of assimilating the ideas of others, which he deems worse than an imitation which could remain superficial. He who falls prey to the former irredeemably becomes “une machine d’assimilation”: “Au fond, je crois que c’est pire parce que les choses reçues brutes, non assimilées, ne séjournent pas longtemps chez quelqu’un. Tandis que si on assimile on fabrique sa personnalité avec celle des autres” (*Correspondance avec Daniel Halévy 65*).

Marcel’s shortcomings protect him from effects of mediation, while his failing health does benefit his art in the end. In the last part of the cycle, become increasingly aware his days are numbered and his forces in decline, the narrator is keen to proceed with his work. Thus, the same illness having withered his strength and for so long prevented him from writing “allait peut-être [l]e garder contre la paresse” (*RTP4 : TR 621*), as his apprenticeship journey is finally over.

This begs the question as to what are the features of the narrator’s aesthetic. As an art based on distantiation from its subject, it is an art of the detail: “[o]ut of this process [of distantiation] there springs the present vividly felt charm of the fragment, the mere allusion, . . . the undeveloped artistic style” (Simmel 515). The narrator confirms this is so, as upon expounding on the modesty of his literary enterprise, he insists his oeuvre will be built through

an accumulation of details, “épinglant de-ci de-là un feuillet supplémentaire” (*RTP4 : TR 610*), akin to Françoise’s technique for preparing her *bœuf mode* (*RTP4 : TR 612*). This is in turn mirrored by *La recherche*’s plot structure, which achieves “the ultimate degree of fragmentation that narration can sustain” (Gans 40). Fundamentally, this fragmentation neutralizes the sequence of the narrative, blurring its beginning, middle and end, and thus avoids the drama of a necessary closure. The prototype of such aesthetic of the detail is Ver Meer’s *Vue de Delft* painting. While its relevance dawns too late on Bergotte to use in his own oeuvre, it is not lost on Marcel. Its trademark is the “petit pan de mur jaune . . . si bien peint, qu’il était, si on le regardait seul, comme une précieuse œuvre d’art chinoise, d’une beauté qui se suffirait à elle-même” (*RTP3 : LP 692*). Its insignificant perfection brings to mind “ces sculptures gothiques . . . dissimulées au revers d’une balustrade à quatre-vingts pieds de hauteur, aussi parfaites que les bas-reliefs du grand porche, mais que personne n’avait jamais vues” (*RTP1 : JF 627*) which so fascinate the narrator. Yet during this same time period Rodin expressly criticizes the “profusion de petits ornements — inutiles, est-on tenté de dire” (Rodin 148) brought over to French cathedrals by an early Renaissance influence. The divergence of these contemporaneous points of view is instrumental in emphasizing the role aesthetics plays in the Proustian oeuvre and the relevance it gives to details.

As already mentioned, traditional approaches to medieval art during *la Belle Epoque* claimed that “[l]’esprit français est dans toute sa force avec l’art gothique. Il s’appauvrira . . . avec la Renaissance italienne” (Rodin 144). This is because in Gothic art “[l]’architecture est faite de l’obéissance des détails” (Rodin 145), while their free proliferation, so admired by Proust, determines its decline and subsequent disappearance. Rodin is unambiguous on this subject: “On dirait, plus justement que Renaissance : Déclinaison” (Rodin 7). At the root of this

statement lies an appreciation of the traditional mentality which supposedly actuated medieval artisans in their artistic endeavors:

l'homme obéissant ne se risque pas à chercher du nouveau, mais poursuit le mouvement séculaire : tout coule d'un siècle à l'autre comme un fleuve de beauté, sans remous, sans cascades, sans violences, *sans désorganisation* ; le mot « originalité » n'a pas encore été trouvé, l'idée même que traduit ce mot n'existe dans aucun esprit ; l'artiste suit le développement logique du beau et ne sort pas du rang inutilement. . . . (Rodin 148-149)

From this perspective, the same culprit is to be blamed for both the decline of what was considered the pinnacle of Frenchness – Gothic art – and for the decadent state of French society during *la Belle Epoque*, namely “l'esprit individualiste de la Renaissance.” The criticism addressed to late medieval artists that “[l]eur cœur et leur esprit étaient également fermés à la volonté collective” (Morice VIII) is also levelled by Barrès at his contemporaries. Modern art is afflicted by similar shortcomings as society at large.

It is in this context that the significance of “la petite figure inoffensive et monstrueuse” admirably mentioned by Proust in his preface to *La bible d'Amiens* can be properly emphasized. Measuring less than 10 centimeters in height, and hidden in a wealth of larger figures, it is carved with just as much love as imposing statues of saints and kings. This monstrous little shape with no purpose in the general plan of the cathedral is the symptomatic sign of “la revendication des droits de l'individu contre l'autorité de la collectivité” (Morice LXIX). Consequently, such detailed little sculptures are a mark of foreignness rather than Frenchness:

dans ces délicats travaux, ils [les sculpteurs] semblent s'inspirer des miniaturistes et des ivoiriers bien plus que des grands tailleurs de pierre de l'époque héroïque . . . où ne

palpite plus l'âme collective d'une race. . . . Cette dégénérescence n'est pas française :

« Tous les caractères de l'architecture flamboyante sont d'origine britannique ». (Morice

LXXII)

By appreciating the profusion of details disparaged by jingoistic perspectives, Proust surreptitiously upholds individual heterogeneity over homogeneous collectivity. Indeed, an art of the detail is marked by the work's tendency towards fragmentation, which in turn is pertinently described by Blanchot as "an exploration performed with relentless thoroughness but under the new assumption that what such a space will yield may not necessarily conform to notions of unity, totality or continuity" ("Ars Nova" 188). Thus, while "la petite figure inoffensive et monstrueuse" embodies "la disparition au sein de l'infini du nombre et sous le nivellement des ressemblances" preordained to us all, from which the genius of the artisan can still pull it out (Ruskin, *La bible d'Amiens* 72-73). The purpose of art is to emphasize the import of individuals, so often disregarded by many of Proust's contemporaries. It is in response to their attitude that the narrator remarks how "[l]es niais s'imaginent que les grosses dimensions des phénomènes sociaux sont une excellente occasion de pénétrer plus avant dans l'âme humaine ; ils devraient au contraire comprendre que c'est en descendant en profondeur dans une individualité qu'ils auraient la chance de comprendre ces phénomènes" (*RTP2 : CG* 626). It foreshadows a subject this essay will subsequently address, namely the weight individual heterogeneity has in Proustian aesthetics, and its mission to protect it. This undertaking is rendered easier in a detail-oriented art, as in it the distinctions between the basic and the accidental tend to disappear. What is being emphasized instead is a perpetual variation. This approach is at variance with nationalistic art, animated by an organicism interested only in mass phenomena, to which Barrès attests: "D'un point de vue très élevé, le plus haut penseur, et qui prend vraiment connaissance des conditions

psychologiques de la société où il vit, c'est celui qui sent comme des réalités les caractères propres de son pays, les obstacles opposés à sa race, l'honneur de sa patrie" (*Scènes et doctrines* 327). It is from the same collective perspective that nationalistic aestheticism celebrates French Gothic art for its "grandes œuvres collectives", while also blaming the individualistic spirit of the Renaissance for its disappearance:

La cause de ce malheur [la disparition de l'art Gothique] est dans cet individualisme forcené qui dispersa les éléments du monde moderne et que nous avons vu poindre avec la Renaissance. Les artistes . . . se sentent diminués jusque dans leur vie intérieure par cet émiettement des pensées et des forces, qui réduit chacun à ses propres ressources. D'où ce désir, plus ou moins raisonné, mais universel, de réunion, d'unité, que nous notions plus haut ; . . . c'est à l'avenir de la société, dans toutes les voies de son activité, qu'elle importe : mais en art, surtout, il faudrait fermer les yeux aux clartés de l'évidence pour ne pas voir le bénéfice immense de la réunion. (Morice LXXXVIII)

The fragmentation of a detail-oriented art "enables us to 'perceive' almost at first hand the difference between artistic and cultural demands. It jeopardizes the notion of 'a work', whereas culture requires finished works that can be seen as complete and can be admired in static permanence in those store houses of culture that are our museums . . . and libraries" ("Ars Nova" 188-189). Hence the attention *La recherche* gives to details, which is intimately linked to its move away from grand artistic subjects and their potential to create mass effects. In this context, the preponderance Proustian style accords to metonymy over any other figure of speech (Genette 41) becomes relevant. By definition metonymy consists in "a substitution of contiguities", where contiguity itself is defined "in terms of a causal, a local, or a temporal relationship" (Nate). From the perspective of a logical relation, it favors vicinity over similarity, which in turn alters the text

in a significant way given that “l’analogie n’apparai[t] plus alors que comme une sorte d’effet second, et peut-être illusoire, de la *concomittance*” (Genette 50). Proust expounds on the intimate link between metonymy and artistic style in a letter addressed in 1904 to Anna de Noailles, as he describes the latter as “une espèce de fondu, d’unité transparente, où toutes les choses, perdant leur aspect premier de choses, sont venues se ranger les unes à côté des autres dans une espèce d’ordre, pénétrées de la même lumière, vues les unes dans les autres, sans un seul mot qui reste en dehors, qui soit resté réfractaire à cette assimilation” (*Lettres à la comtesse de Noailles* 87). Thus he explicitly predicates assimilation on contiguity, as unity derives from partaking of the same light premised on vicinity. In social terms, it translates in a *vivre ensemble* grounded not on similarity or shared roots but on participation in a shared culture.

Starting from the idea that aesthetic contemplation is possible “without doing violence or denying reality” (Simmel 355), Proust resorts to art as a means to dissipate social conflict, in an attempt to reconcile and pacify a divided nation. As his correspondence substantiates, Proust consciously chose to voice his opinion in literature rather than politics in a move signifying a refusal of social violence. Thus, he writes in 1905 to his friend Antoine Bibesco, an acknowledged playwright at the time, to urge he consecrate himself to dramaturgy instead of politics: “Au lieu de t’occuper de faire modifier la carte de l’Europe au profit de ton pays [la Roumanie], tu ferais beaucoup mieux d’écrire des pièces. L’Empire anglais et les frontières de la Norvège ont moins de signification que les pièces d’Ibsen et de Shakespeare” (*Lettres à Bibesco* 114). The passage expressly compares artistic with nationalistic endeavors, contrasting the peacefulness of the former with the bellicosity of the latter, emphasizing its obsessive protection and expansion of borders. It implies art builds bridges rather than frontiers. Barrès on the other hand resorts to prose for the glorification of the motherland, in a diatribe paralleling literature

with politics: “en interprétant les aventures de l’*Energie nationale* dans ces dernières années, j’ai mieux servi l’esprit français que par les trois cents réunions où j’ai dénoncé les parlementaires” (*Scènes et doctrines* 6).

Contrary to the nationalistic strategy, at the heart of Proustian art there lies a self-sufficient joyfulness able to keep both the artist and his audience away from dangerous pursuits and mass effects. It does so by allowing for an aesthetic contemplation from which feelings of personal inadequacies are absent. In other words, “the two aspects of the process of differentiation which splits the immediate unity of the process of enjoyment” are missing from it (Simmel 62). Such an arduous task can most easily be accomplished if its pleasure emanates from the inner-self of the beholder, eliminating any reliance on the outside. Indeed, Marcel has already delighted in “[des] réminiscences comme celle de l’inégalité des deux marches ou le goût de la madeleine” (*RTP4 : TR 457*), mirroring the modern belief that “the highest values are embedded in everyday existence and in each of its moments, but not in a heroic attitude or in catastrophes or outstanding deeds and experiences, which always have something arbitrary and superficial about them” (Simmel 299). Consequently, Proust tactically conceived his narrator not only as a regular Frenchman, but as an antihero or a man without qualities who, at the end of his journey of apprenticeship, understands that the small pleasures derived from reminiscing are the only form of liberty to which he can reasonably aspire. The unexpected joy they provide is what makes him special or, indeed, unique. Thus, there is no artistic aspiration at the core of the scrutiny Marcel gives to such moments of delights or the contemplation of their source. Rather, he concentrates his attention on them in order to further enjoy them seeing that “[l]a seule manière de les goûter davantage c’était de tâcher de les connaître plus complètement là où elles se trouvaient, c’est-à-dire en moi-même, de les rendre claires jusque dans leurs profondeurs”

(*RTP4 : TR 456*). Eventually however, his desire to “voir clair le plus vite possible dans la nature des plaisirs identiques que je venais, par trois fois en quelques minutes, de ressentir” restores his “foi dans les lettres” (*RTP4 : TR 447*). It thus dawns on him that “faire sortir de la pénombre ce que j’avais senti, de le convertir en un équivalent spirituel . . . , qu’était-ce autre chose que faire une œuvre d’art ?” (*RTP4 : TR 457*). Marcel comprehends that his tribulations have been of an aesthetical nature all along. Yet the road to this realization has been driven by the pursuit of individual happiness rather than a dedication to art or to other lofty ideals, as corroborated by Adorno’s comment that “Proust’s subjectivism looks to art for the . . . salvation of the living” (“Valéry Proust Museum” 183).

Consequently, the subject of the work of art is insignificant in itself, a fact on which the narrator himself insists:

[L]a réalité à exprimer résidait, je le comprenais maintenant, non dans l’apparence du sujet, mais à une profondeur où cette apparence importait peu, comme le symbolisaient ce bruit de cuiller sur une assiette, cette raideur empesée de la serviette, qui m’avaient été plus précieux pour mon renouvellement spirituel que tant de conversations humanitaires, patriotiques, internationalistes et métaphysiques. (*RTP4 : TR 461*)

The reference to doctrines engendering mass effects of confrontation is not fortuitous. Whereas Proustian aesthetics is atomistic, in that it aims to reach and bring joy to the individual beholder, nationalistic art matters as “l’appui magnifique qu’il a donné aux formes successives de l’idéal français” (Barrès, *Les deracinés* 464). As such, the goal of the latter is to celebrate and strengthen the national community. The critique Schmitt levels at the conjunction between liberalism and atomistic aestheticism, “[t]hat art is a daughter of freedom, that aesthetic value judgement is absolutely autonomous, that artistic genius is sovereign – all this is axiomatic of

liberalism” (Schmitt 72), also expresses Barrès’s opposition to any literary style akin to that of *La recherche*. In this context, the consideration Proust accords to culture reflects his opposition to organicism, as the philosophy of culture he develops in his novel is a trademark of liberalism.

Returning to the subject of Proustian art, any topic eliciting joy in the beholder is worth pursuing, no matter how banal. The narrator has figured out that to the artist “la matière” is “indifférente en soi, mais nécessaire” for his craft (*RTP2 : JF 207*). Indeed, Marcel is fascinated by the visual appeal of the interest-bearing certificates his father proudly shows Mr. de Norpois:

Leur vue me charma ; ils étaient enjolivés de flèches de cathédrales et de figures allégoriques comme certaines vieilles publications romantiques que j’avais feuilletées autrefois. . . . Et rien ne fait mieux penser à certaines livraisons de *Notre-Dame de Paris* et d’œuvres de Gérard de Nerval, telles qu’elles étaient accrochées à la devanture de l’épicerie de Combray, que, dans son encadrement rectangulaire et fleuri que supportaient des divinités fluviales, une action nominative de la Compagnie des Eaux. (*RTP1 : JF 446*)

In the process, the costly bond is removed from any schemes of valuation, pointing to the acultural aspect of aesthetic contemplation. The latter is possible with regard to any object (Simmel 355), and thus “il n’y a pas de choses plus ou moins précieuses” (*RTP2 : CG 714*). It should come as no surprise then that Elstir “avait trouvé le motif de deux tableaux qui se valent, dans un bâtiment scolaire sans caractère et dans une cathédrale qui est, par elle-même, un chef-d’œuvre” (*RTP2 : CG 351*). Under the influence of the painter, the narrator confesses that “j’essayais de trouver la beauté là où je ne m’étais jamais figuré qu’elle fût, dans les choses les plus usuelles, dans la vie profonde des « natures mortes »” (*RTP2 : JF 223*). As “seule la

perception grossière et erronée place tout dans l'objet, quand tout est dans l'esprit" (*RTP4 : TR* 491), the banal object is just as full of potential as the valuable one, but less dangerous.

Consequently, "tout est fécond . . . , et on peut faire d'aussi précieuses découvertes que dans les *Pensées* de Pascal dans une réclame pour un savon" (*RTP4 : AD* 124). In this context, the connection between the nobility's affinities for non-representational art, discussed at the end of the third chapter, and Elstir's art which Marcel so appreciates becomes relevant. The latter's paintings shy away from objective representation as they do not expose "les choses telles qu'il savait qu'elles étaient, mais selon ces illusions optiques dont notre vision première est faite . . ." (*RTP2 : JF* 194). Furthermore, both Elstir and the avant-garde art promoted by noble salons engender the same individual contemplation. Indeed, the painter's work "nous fait rentrer en nous-même en nous rappelant une impression" (*RTP2 : JF* 194), while the artistic reunions in the Guermantes salon foster an individual aesthetic experience in the privacy of its guests' minds without ever sharing impressions, though they are enjoying the same works of art. Marcel himself hints at the importance of an aestheticism that not only avoids mass effect, but also compensates from the failure of sociability, as "[l]a musique . . . m'aidait à descendre en moi-même, à y découvrir du nouveau" (*RTP3 : LP* 665). In this, not only is art more beneficial than "la société d'Albertine" (*RTP3 : LP* 665), to which it is directly compared, but also than interpersonal communication in general.

In this context, the particular advantage offered by the insignificant object is to allow those artistically inclined to happily live in their private universe, or in Simmel's terminology "to build a world that may be acquired without conflict and mutual repression, to possess values whose acquisition and enjoyment by one person does not exclude that of another" (Simmel 314). In his recourse to aesthetic contemplation to balance out dangerous group pursuits, Proust uses

what Jean Baudrillard dubs “les passions implosives contre les passions explosives” (*L’autre par lui-même* 80) in a tactical shift from subject to object. Indeed, while the subject has destructive passions, the object has the passion of indifference. The absorption the insignificant object can afford its beholder allows for the miracle of *La recherche*, in which “l’Objet est devenu mode de disparition du sujet” (Baudrillard, *L’autre par lui-même* 83). Its precondition remains an aesthetical relation to the object, as only in it “we forget ourselves, but at the same time we no longer experience the work of art as something with which we are confronted, because our mind is completely submerged in it, has absorbed it by surrendering to it” (Simmel 68). Consequently, “there develops a value the enjoyment of which is not bought by any deprivation on the opposite part” (Simmel 312) and which does not involve any struggle against fellow men. It speaks to the centrality the aesthetical stance occupies in the Proustian cycle: the recourse to it does not offer an answer on how to escape the social and cultural system, but rather how to escape within the system itself. As such it keeps the system intact, but protects it against its own failures, meaning against itself. The narrator expresses thus the miracle of intense aesthetic contemplation: “cette découverte que l’art pouvait nous faire faire n’était-elle pas, au fond, . . . notre vraie vie, . . . que nous sommes emplis d’un tel bonheur quand le hasard nous en apporte le souvenir véritable” (*RTP4 : TR* 459). That art is life itself points to the importance Proust accords to his literary project. In a letter addressed to Jacques Rivière on February 7 1914, he confesses that “si je n’avais pas de croyances intellectuelles . . . , je ne prendrais pas, malade comme je suis, la peine d’écrire” (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière : Correspondance* 2-3). His artistic endeavor has never been a form of dilettantism or an escape from reality, but rather has always had a larger purpose. In his own words, it follows that

[s]i on en déduisait que ma pensée est un scepticisme désenchanté, ce serait absolument comme si un spectateur ayant vu, à la fin du 1er acte de Parsifal, ce personnage ne rien comprendre à la cérémonie et être chassé par Gurnemantz, supposait que Wagner a voulu dire que la simplicité de cœur ne conduit à rien. (*Marcel Proust Et Jacques Rivière : Correspondance 2-3*)

In a parallel between Parsifal's journey of apprenticeship and that of the narrator, Proust points to the relevance of Marcel's naiveté which goes beyond the novel's disillusionment plot structure. The centrality of his innocence allows for the conversion of dangerous formalisms, such as the Frenchness and foreignness discussed in the second chapter, into innocuous aesthetic categories. When approached from an aesthetic stance, life miraculously becomes literature through the distantiation of a second take: "la vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent vécue, c'est la littérature" (*RTP4 : TR 474*). Thus, the novel has two patterns. On the one hand, a horizontal or narrative one, in which the narrator is trying to live, and a vertical or metaphorical one through which he arrives at a broader understanding of his own life. Yet the unifying concept of aesthetics govern these two patterns, keeping them constantly intertwined. The sense of the novel expands through the growing significance of art and of the narrator's artistic attitude.

In this regard, the role chance, in conjunction with art, plays in bringing joy to the beholder becomes relevant. The madeleine incident at the heart of the Proustian oeuvre is entirely fortuitous in nature: "un jour d'hiver, comme je rentrais à la maison, ma mère, voyant que j'avais froid, me proposa de me faire prendre, contre mon habitude, un peu de thé. Je refusai d'abord et, je ne sais pourquoi, je me ravisai" (*RTP1 : CS 44*). Furthermore, the maturation of Marcel's literary project is brought about by the episode of his inadvertent tripping on some

uneven steps. Less momentous instances bringing him the same type of joy are equally accidental: “bien en dehors de toutes ces préoccupations littéraires et ne s’y rattachant en rien, tout d’un coup un toit, un reflet de soleil sur une pierre, l’odeur d’un chemin me faisaient arrêter par un plaisir particulier qu’ils me donnaient . . .” (*RTP1 : CS 176*).

All these experiences “étaient toujours liées à un objet particulier dépourvu de valeur intellectuelle et ne se rapportant à aucune vérité abstraite” (*RTP1 : CS 176*). Trivial and fortuitous, they nonetheless give the narrator the “plaisir irraisonné” (*RTP1 : CS 176*) he strives to analyze and make into his art from the seclusion of his illness. Thus removed from the collective realm and innocently engrossed in “le dialogue intérieur des souvenirs” (*RTP3 : SG 371*), the narrator’s enterprise is significant precisely through its insignificance. The strength of an oeuvre in the form of an interior monologue lies in the intimate weakness of this form of speech, the more surreptitious as it is not destined to any other than the person hearing it or reading about it. Not only is the endeavor open to all, but it also provides the remedy for social confrontation: chance and an aesthetic frame of mind equally distract Marcel “de l’ennui”, and “du sentiment de [s]on impuissance” (*RTP1 : CS 177*) so detrimental to social dynamics through its drive towards charismatic identifications. Yet Marcel remains deficient even in this, as he complains how “la maladie avait usé . . . les forces de ma mémoire. Or la recreation par la mémoire d’impressions qu’il fallait ensuite approfondir, éclairer, transformer en équivalents d’intelligence, n’était-elle pas une des conditions, presque l’essence même de l’œuvre d’art telle que je l’avais conçue tout à l’heure dans la bibliothèque ?” (*RTP4 : TR 621*). On the one hand, the narrator’s memory loss protects from humiliation any reader ill-equipped for aesthetical pursuits. On the other, Marcel’s forgetfulness increases the role chance plays in his projected book, as “par un certain vide dans la tête, et par un oubli de toutes choses que je ne retrouvais

plus que par hasard, comme quand, en rangeant des affaires, on en trouve une qu'on avait oubliée, qu'on n'avait même pas pensé à chercher, faisaient de moi un thésauriseur dont le coffre-fort crevé eût laissé fuir au fur et à mesure ses richesses" (*RTP4 : TR 614*). Thus, the oeuvre he struggles to write will not result from a predefined design, but will rather be driven by the play of free associations. Chance and memory loss herald an oeuvre which no longer depends on the initiative of a privileged individual, thus converging with the theme of modesty.

Ubiquitous Heterogeneity

In the Proustian universe, the role of the artist comes into full relief in the context of the failure of sociation. Indeed, no form of socialization can overcome the inter-individual barrier, not even "les joies artistiques" who remain of a purely personal nature. Sharing them is impossible, "la racine personnelle de notre propre impression étant supprimée" in conversation (*RTP4 : TR 470*). In *La recherche* there is no basis for a genuine coming together at any social level, in essence equivalent with a downgrade of socialization. As an actual community cannot exist in the absence of interpersonal subjectivity, Henry dubs this state of affairs "la destruction de la communauté" (*La tentation de Marcel Proust 101*). This constitutes a radical response to the primacy nationalism gives to a cohesive people. The miracle of art is that it is the only human activity able to overcome the interpersonal barrier. It does so not by bringing people together around a common ideal as Barrès would have hoped, but by allowing for a glimpse into the inner universe of another: "l'harmonie d'un Wagner, la couleur d'un Elstir nous permettent de connaître cette essence qualitative des sensations d'un autre où l'amour pour un autre être ne nous fait pas pénétrer" (*RTP3 : LP 665*). Such encounter is predicated on the artist's ability to reveal his individuality through his artwork. Consequently, he plays a critical role in the Proustian project, as "[c]haque grand artiste semble, en effet, si différent des autres, et nous

donne tant cette sensation de l'individualité que nous cherchons en vain dans l'existence quotidienne" (*RTP3 : LP 664*). De Tarde's statement that "[l]e poète, le philosophe essentiellement . . . : voilà en somme les fleurs terminales d'un arbre national quelconque" (*Monadologie 36*) parallels this view. Uniquely able to convert imitation into originality, the artist's song of the soul is the apotheosis of the universe (Millet 230-373). Heterogeneity made manifest, the artist's "objective spiritual unity . . . rewards the person by becoming that person's purest reflection and expression" (Simmel 493). Many of Proust's contemporaries exalted the extraordinary nature of the artist, that they viewed so unlike that of mere mortals. Proust himself, in an article published in *Le Figaro* on June 15 1907 agrees that the epitome of the poet is represented in one of Gustave Moreau's paintings, as he stands apart from "la foule agenouillée où l'on reconnaît les diverses castes de l'Orient, tandis que lui n'appartient à aucune" (*Lettres à la comtesse de Noailles 227*). In his inner difference made manifest, the artist is the ultimate foreigner. The narrator corroborates this view: "Chaque artiste semble ainsi comme le citoyen d'une patrie inconnue, oubliée de lui-même, différente de celle d'où viendra, appareillant pour la terre, un autre grand artiste" (*RTP3 : LP 761*).

Whereas Barrèsian nationalism insists on roots and cultural patrimony, thus relying heavily on objective culture, Marcel asserts that "chaque artiste recommençant pour son compte un effort individuel ne peut y être aidé ni entravé par les efforts de tout autre" (*RTP2 : JF 194*). Thus, the original artist lacks both a technical, as well as a spiritual heritage. As previously discussed, *La recherche* does not downplay the importance of objective culture. Every individual is born in a culture, and is thus early on exposed to its ideas and convictions. Though steeped in culture, the Proustian cycle remains wary of it not only because of the inevitably alienating effect objective culture exerts on the individual, but also since, as Henry suggests, in the eyes of its

author there is no such thing as cultural enrichment (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 169). As a writer, Proust is anxious to follow his own path, breaking away from that of the collectivity (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 12-13), and in this sense the legacy of his own culture remains foreign to him. At play here is the basic difference between culture and art, which according to Blanchot consists in the fact that art does not tend towards some former natural harmony on the quest of which nationalism is bound, but rather is always in advance of acquired forms of culture (“Ars Nova” 188). The narrator is fully aware of this when he remarks that

[I]es gens de goût nous disent aujourd’hui que Renoir est un grand peintre du xviii^e siècle. Mais en disant cela ils oublient le Temps et qu’il en a fallu beaucoup, même en plein XIX^e, pour que Renoir fût salué grand artiste. . . . Le traitement par leur peinture, par leur prose, n’est pas toujours agréable. . . . Tel est l’univers nouveau et périssable qui vient d’être créé. Il durera jusqu’à la prochaine catastrophe géologique que déchaîneront un nouveau peintre ou un nouvel écrivain originaux. (*RTP2 : CG* 623)

Yet the foreignness of the artist has further relevance for *La recherche*. Described as “le citoyen d’une patrie inconnue, oubliée de lui-même”, he bears obvious similarities with the errant Jew, the central figure of modern anti-Semitism aimed at rootless individuals seemingly coming from nowhere. Without ties to the soil, having forgotten the land from which they came, both the Jew and the artist epitomize the universal foreigner. As such, both embody the indeterminate that opposes any determined type (Taguieff 341). In this context, the explicit parallel the text establishes between Bergotte and Schlemihl becomes pertinent. Nissim Bernard, Bloch’s innocuous uncle, personally knows the writer and describes him thus: “Il est gauche, c’est une espèce de Schlemihl” (*RTP2 : JF* 132). In Yiddish, the term Schlemihl came to designate a clumsy and unlucky individual (Parmentier 174). Yet immediately the narrator places

the comparison to Schlemihl in its proper context, by dubbing it “[c]ette allusion au conte de Chamisso” (*RTP2 : JF* 132). Indeed, Peter Schlemihl is the main character of Adelbert von Chamisso’s *Peter Schlemihl und seine wundersame Geshichte*³⁹, written in 1813 and published in 1814 in Nuremberg (Weinrich 409). The work was extremely popular in Germany, while its first French edition appeared in 1821 (Parmentier 175). As Chamisso suggests that the purpose of this story is to amuse children (Block 93), it is possible that Proust heard it as a child from his mother who was fluent in German and familiar with German culture. The tale relates the story of Peter Schlemihl, an obscure and impoverished youngster arriving in Germany by sea from an unknown place to gain financial and social advancement. As he unwittingly sells his shadow to the devil, believing it lacks any social importance, he becomes an outcast who eventually willingly decides to shun human company, as he endlessly wanders the globe thanks to the seven-mile boots on his feet. Critics agree that Schlemihl’s lack of a shadow, conceived as a deficiency impossible to overcome, makes him the epitome of the outsider (Block 97; Flores 570; Butler 9; Ruge 357; Weinrich 409). According to Richard Block, the fact that Schlemihl is Jewish is evident from his name originating from Jewish folklore (Block 94), which would make the tale a rendering of the wandering Jew legend. Yet any suggestion as to Peter’s Jewishness appears only late in the text, and is exclusively based on a change in his appearance. Having grown a long beard during his extended illness, Peter himself explains how “from my long beard, [I] was supposed to be a Jew” (*The Marvellous History of the Shadowless Man* 89), opening the question of what is the actual meaning of Jewishness in the tale.

³⁹ *Peter Schlemihl’s Miraculous Story* would be its precise translation, though English translations of the book bear the title *The Marvellous History of the Shadowless Man*.

Given this, many critics agree that the whole meaning of the text cannot be evinced without reference to the figure of its author (Ruge 359; André 74-76; Parmentier 169; Weinrich 409). Such an enterprise is justified by the fact that, as Sabine Parmentier explains, it is in the tradition of German Romanticism, which is autobiographical in its essence, for the life of an author and his work to be closely imbricated. Such is the case of Chamisso and his autobiographical tale (Parmentier 167). And the destiny of Adelbert von Chamisso (1781-1838), born Louis-Charles Adélaïde de Chamisso de Boncourt, is indeed singular. Born in Champagne to French noblemen, he grows up on the ancestral estate until the age of eleven, when the Revolution forces his family on the road of exile to Prussia. They settle themselves in Berlin in 1796 (André 73). There he changes his name to Adelbert von Chamisso and becomes one of the most famous German writers of his time, writing almost exclusively in German (Pille 215). Thus, at the time of Napoleon's invasion of the Holy Roman Empire and its subsequent destruction, a new characteristic – nationality and national feeling – came to be the new watchword, while everybody lacking it was declared an outcast (Ruge 359). The story is the result of the birth of nationalism in Germany, just as *La recherche* is a response to its rise in France. And as Proust does not directly take on the nationalism of his time in his oeuvre, so Chamisso could not address it either: “Chamisso could not tell the meaning of his lost shadow in plain words. . . . He lived among enraged Nationalists He was not only an exile of the France of Robespierre and Napoleon, he was likewise an exile of Teutonic Germany So he felt obliged to tell the truth in a mysterious tale” (Ruge 358). Furthermore, Schlemihl's Jewish identity constitutes a reaction to German nationalism: “Chamisso was a French refugee in Germany. The oldest refugees are the Jews: Schlemihl is a Jew. Chamisso recognized his

prototype in his hero, when he undertook to represent the fate of a refugee in a *fairy-tale*” (Ruge 357).

In fact, in the preface to the third edition Chamisso explicitly wonders if Peter Schlemihl truly resembles him on every point (André 75). Chamisso is familiar with the exile fate of the Jewish people, as in his youth he frequented Berlin’s Jewish literary salons while his lifelong best friend, Julius Eduard Hitzig, is of Jewish descent. Thus, Parmentier concludes that the issue of emancipation concerned Chamisso for reasons other than the Jewish question per se (Parmentier 169). He sees Jewishness as the epitome of foreignness, a destiny he himself experiences. Indeed, in a letter to Mme de Staël, Chamisso confesses that “[j]e suis français en Allemagne et allemand en France Je ne suis nulle part de mise, je suis partout étranger” (Parmentier 170). Indeed, these words bring to mind Charlus’s similar position in *La recherche*, equally doomed to be French in Germany and German in France (*RTP4 : TR* 354). Chamisso felt most at home in the cosmopolitan environment of Mme de Staël at the Chaumont castle in France, where a society of French noblemen, Scandinavian artists, Italian painters, and men of letters from all over Europe regularly assembled (Parmentier 170).

Therefore I propose that the relevance of the reference to Chamisso for the Proustian cycle lies in the foreignness of the artist. The French writer Bergotte is “une sorte de Schlemihl” not because he is Jewish – the text makes no explicit mention of any foreign ancestry –, but because as an artist he lacks a shadow. Being without a shadow symbolizes having no homeland (Block 98). Indeed, as Valérie André suggests, Chamisso’s oeuvre – that of a French immigrant to Prussia who writes exclusively in the German language – supports the view that an artist constructs his own spiritual motherland instead of inheriting it from his predecessors (André 79). It anticipates Proust’s aforementioned belief that “chaque artiste recommençant pour son compte

un effort individuel ne peut y être aidé ni entravé par les efforts de tout autre . . .” (*RTP2 : JF* 194). In this sense, it is significant that at the end of their lives both Chamisso and Schlemihl achieve serenity thanks to their dedication to literature and botany (André 76) – two solitary endeavors. Furthermore, the end of the story epitomizes social distancing, seeing that Schlemihl is most alive precisely when he is dead to the human world as he lives apart from all other humans (Flores 583). Yet it is precisely this isolation which allows him to become a scientist and an artist. Having at last accepted his alien nature he can fully express it in his work. Pertinently, this same isolation is the precondition of the Proustian artistic enterprise.

From the image of the artist as the errant Jew, intentionally threatening in nationalistic rhetoric and popular tradition, Proust tactically discards all menacing connotations, just as Chamisso did for Schlemihl. Rather, both the artist’s and the foreigner’s innocuousness lies in their ipseity, equated with a loneliness rendering impossible any effects of mass formation. Interestingly, Barrès picks up on the intrinsic link between the artist and the foreigner, though he does it in the person of Proust and in less than glowing terms, stating the author of *La recherche* “was a Persian poet in a porter’s lodge” (May 2). This formulation implicitly ties his Jewish origins with the superficiality of an aesthetic unconcerned with the lofty and praiseworthy endeavors of patriotic art. There is a strikingly similar description in the Proustian novel, concerning Marcel’s invalid aunt whose main amusement consists in contemplating Combray’s daily routine: “son lit longeait la fenêtre, elle avait la rue sous les yeux et y lisait du matin au soir, pour se désennuyer, à la façon des princes persans, la chronique quotidienne mais immémoriale de Combray, qu’elle commentait ensuite avec Françoise” (*RTP1 : CS* 51). The scene anticipates the narrator’s owl like isolation in the latter part of the novel, who can discern what is going on around him only from the protection of obscurity. By then, illness has confined

him to a sanatorium. Yet rather than observing the daily bustle of a small town for amusement, Marcel's favorite pastime is to relive his life from the temporal remove of memories. Circumscribed to the plentiful local, Persian poet and Persian princes⁴⁰, narrator and aunt, all delight in the banal details of everyday life and personal impressions which are seemingly unremarkable and boring to all others. The particularity of their point of view endows them with an artistic prowess equivalent to foreignness. Indeed, "le peintre original, l'artiste original procèdent à la façon des oculistes", and when they invite us to behold their creation "voici que le monde . . . nous apparaît entièrement différent de l'ancien, mais parfaitement clair" (*RTP2 : CG* 623). The miracle they perform is to amaze us with nothing at all, as it is the world around us, accessible to everybody, which we now see in a different light. They provide us with a socially safe excitement. As such, the narrator asserts art offers "la variété que j'avais en vain cherchée dans la vie" (*RTP3 : LP* 665).

From this follows the pivotal role the concept of artistic style plays in *La recherche*, which goes beyond a simple aesthetical category, as "le style, pour l'écrivain aussi bien que pour le peintre, est une question non de technique, mais de vision" (*RTP4 : TR* 474). It is the precondition allowing the artist to manifest his heterogeneity, given that "la parole humaine est en rapport avec l'âme, mais sans l'exprimer comme fait le style . . ." (*RTP1 : JF* 540). Only art can express the specificity of the individual. In this regard, aesthetic style "est la révélation, qui serait impossible par des moyens directs et conscients, de la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde, différence qui, s'il n'y avait pas l'art, resterait le secret éternel de chacun" (*RTP4 : TR* 474). Indeed, each individual has his own particular vision of the

⁴⁰ Pertinently, Paul Desjardins describes the adolescent Proust he had known as "ce jeune prince persan aux grands yeux de gazelles, aux paupières alanguies . . ." (134).

world, or what the narrator terms “cet ineffable qui différencie qualitativement ce que chacun a senti et qu’il est obligé de laisser au seuil des phrases où il ne peut communiquer avec autrui qu’en se limitant à des points extérieurs communs à tous et sans intérêt . . .” (*RTP3 : LP 762*). While the aforementioned interpersonal barrier prevents people from sharing it with any other, once this vision is transubstantiated into style, “l’art . . . le fait apparaître, extériorisant dans les couleurs du spectre la composition intime de ces mondes que nous appelons les individus, et que sans l’art nous ne connaîtrions jamais” (*RTP3 : LP 762*). In this sense, the individual vision of the world manifested in the artist’s style represents “la fixité des éléments composants de son âme” (*RTP3 : LP 762*). This is why Marcel confesses that “j’ai toujours regretté . . . que M. de Charlus n’ait jamais rien écrit [S]’il eût fait des livres on aurait eu sa valeur spirituelle isolée, décantée du mal, rien n’eût gêné l’admiration et bien des traits eussent fait éclore l’amitié” (*RTP3 : LP 713-714*), as he well appreciates both his genuine kindness and his artistic sensibility unknown to most around him.

Yet converting this personal vision – “[le] livre intérieur de signes inconnus” (*RTP4 : TR 458*) – into art requires a painstaking effort. It consists in “chercher à apercevoir . . . sous de l’expérience . . . quelque chose de différent” because “l’amour-propre, la passion, l’intelligence et l’habitude . . . amassent au-dessus de nos impressions vraies, pour nous les cacher maintenant, les nomenclatures, les buts pratiques que nous appelons faussement la vie” (*RTP4 : TR 474*). The unadulterated impression of a past moment is the only sign “que nous ait dicté la réalité, le seul dont « l’impression » ait été faite en nous par la réalité même”, and as such escapes objective culture. Artistic style has the difficult mission of uncovering that which “notre esprit d’imitation” (*RTP4 : TR 474*) constantly hides. The narrator stresses that “[s]eule l’impression, si chétive qu’en semble la matière, si insaisissable la trace, est un critérium de vérité et à cause de cela

mérite seule d'être appréhendée par l'esprit . . ." (*RTP4 : TR 458*). Consequently "elle est seule capable de . . . donner [à l'artiste] une pure joie" (*RTP4 : TR 458*). The passage insists on the contrast between objective and subjective culture, in an effort to escape the former through the recourse to the latter, as "[c]e que nous n'avons pas eu à déchiffrer, à éclaircir par notre effort personnel, ce qui était clair avant nous, n'est pas à nous. Ne vient de nous-même que ce que nous tirons de l'obscurité qui est en nous et que ne connaissent pas les autres" (*RTP4 : TR 459*).

Joy can come only from the inner self, and the narrator reiterates that he is himself the matter of his book in an enterprise of introspection: "tous ces matériaux de l'oeuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passé . . ." (*RTP4 : TR 478*). As such, "l'art est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier" (*RTP4 : TR 458*). Yet this effort does not benefit only its author, but helps others to actually overcome the fundamental loneliness of the human condition, as "[p]ar l'art seulement, nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n'est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu'il peut y avoir dans la lune" (*RTP4 : TR 474*). By distracting the beholder, it allows him to forget individual failures and diverts him from more dangerous pursuits meant to overcome them. It consequently brings joy to all involved. In this, "Proust holds onto culture for the sake of objective happiness" (Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum" 183). Thus, the artist makes the transition from dilettante aesthetic contemplation providing for individual happiness, prerequisite of social pacification, to the actual transmutation of objective into subjective culture through artistic style. It is this process that ultimately evades effects of mass formation. However to create the kind of art described here, "un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire" (*RTP4 : TR 469*).

This takes us back to the crucial idea that artistic style “est comme la couleur chez les peintres, une qualité de vision, une révélation de l’univers particulier que chacun de nous voit et que ne voit pas les autres” (*Lettres à Bibesco* 177). As such, through his art the artist makes people aware of the gap inherent in individual perception revealing the inner heterogeneity of men. The narrator reminds us that “ce n’est pas un univers, c’est des millions, presque autant qu’il existe de prunelles et d’intelligences humaines, qui s’éveillent tous les matins” (*RTP3 : LP* 696), yet without aesthetics we have no proof of that. Only artists allow us “de voir l’univers avec les yeux d’un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d’eux voit, que chacun d’eux est . . .” (*RTP3 : LP* 762). Their work exposes their inner difference and with them “nous volons vraiment d’étoiles en étoiles” (*RTP3 : LP* 762). As such they stand apart from those around them more than foreigners do. They are veritable aliens amongst humans. Yet at the same time they resemble everyone else, as “[l]a grandeur de l’art véritable . . . c’était de retrouver . . . notre vie, la vraie vie, . . . cette vie qui . . . habite à chaque instant chez tous les hommes aussi bien que chez l’artiste” (*RTP4 : TR* 474). The matter of art is life as lived by every person, as apprehended through individual and unadulterated impressions forming their particular vision of the universe, actual proof of individual heterogeneity. As Henry suggests, Proustian style emanates from the artist’s subjective body (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 208). In final analysis, the artist is special only inasmuch as he is able to translate his subjectivity into perceptible form. He thus detoxifies difference by exposing its universality. By manifesting his “patrie intérieure” (*RTP3 : LP* 761), synonymous to individual essence, in the subjectivity of his work, the artist mirrors the condition of the foreigner who cannot help but display his cultural difference. Yet as each person has his own inner motherland, unwittingly we are all foreigners to each other, which means the artist is like everyone else.

Tardian sociology conceptualizes in a similar manner the pervasiveness of individual difference. While it celebrates the originality proper to each person, it also emphasizes that only the artistic endeavor can capture the personal and fleeting experience of being. It is thus able to reveal the universal human heterogeneity that otherwise would have remained concealed. This is why the artist is the witness of the World (Millet 73-74). Proust concurs in a letter addressed to Louis de Robert in April 1911, stating that “la littérature est la dernière expression de la vie” (*Choix de Lettres* 175). As all its magic lies in the individual, paradoxically art is the latter’s sublimation (Millet 373). Yet this sublimation is possible because “[l]e devoir et la tâche d’un écrivain sont ceux d’un traducteur”, as he converts personal impressions into artistic style (*RTP4 : TR* 469). There is however a crucial difference between the Proustian and the Tardian approach to aesthetics. For the latter, aesthetical life will flourish once humanity has achieved harmony, conceived as unity in diversity. Only then will everyone participate in it to reveal the fleeting and profound singularity of each person’s way of being and thinking, that exist only once, and just for an instant (Millet 369-373). Proust reverses the sequence. The universalization of the aesthetical experience encourages a move away from social violence towards innocent personal pursuits, allowing an atomized society to reach a peaceful equilibrium. At its core lies the idea that any experience of the world is at the same time an experience of oneself (Lévinas, *Difficile liberté* 22), lived fully only through art.

Nonetheless, even this path is not without its pitfalls. Swann is the first to point to them when he qualifies music a vulgar “entremetteuse”. At the same time he acknowledges “la sévérité contre les arts, de Platon, de Bossuet, et de la vieille éducation française” (*RTPI : CS* 283) – an explicit indictment of aesthetics in its totality. The narrator echoes this view when he unwittingly comments on the actual importance of the “clocher de Saint-Hilaire”’s verticality, as

it “dominait tout, sommant les maisons d’un pinacle inattendu, levé devant moi comme le doigt de Dieu dont le corps eût été caché dans la foule des humains sans que je le confondisse pour cela avec elle” (*RTP1* : CS 66). Pertinently, Proust as an admirer of religious art in its purely aesthetical dimension (Ruskin, *La bible d’Amiens* 85) would likely disagree. Yet throughout the novel there are moments of awareness towards the effective role perpendicular social and cultural structures play in preventing mass effects. In relation to this, the centrality of the old nobility derives partly from its topmost position in the social hierarchy: “l’aristocratie princière . . . ne peut chercher à s’élever puisque, au-dessus d’elle, à son point de vue spécial, il n’y a rien” (*RTP2* : CG 671).

This failure of aesthetics is consequent on the fact that art represents the fading out of existence of its own subject. Thus, churches become objects of contemplation only when they are ghosts of theology and the *faubourg* can be reminisced upon only when its prestige and impenetrability are long gone. Yet in final analysis Proust remains allergic to his own insight, approaching this aforementioned perpendicularity from a different angle. Hence he strives to warn his audience off the potential charismatic effects of aesthetics: “c’est un effet de l’amour que les poètes éveillent en nous de nous faire attacher une importance littéraire à des choses qui ne sont pour eux que significatives d’émotions personnelles” (Ruskin, *Sésame et lys* 33). Such effects of mediation, leading to feelings of admiration and inadequacy are not what Proustian aesthetics are about. To counter them, its author reminds us the perceived greatness of art is illusory. The artist should not be envied for his craft, which lies simply in the translation in aesthetical form of his personal impressions, without any significance for the audience. Art is effective only inasmuch as the beholder transforms the objective artifacts into his own subjectivity through the individuation of its perception. Indeed, “dans chaque tableau qu’ils nous

montrent, ils [les artistes] ne semblent nous donner qu'un léger aperçu d'un site merveilleux, différent du reste du monde, et au cœur duquel nous voudrions qu'ils nous fissent pénétrer" (Ruskin, *Sésame et lys* 33), yet it remains the task of the individual viewer to delve into it to fully enjoy it. Consequently, in a move that puts the onus on the reader while reminding him of the modest and personal endeavor of the artist, the narrator reminds us that "chaque lecteur est, quand il lit, le propre lecteur de soi-même. L'ouvrage de l'écrivain n'est qu'une espèce d'instrument optique qu'il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n'eût peut-être pas vu en soi-même" (*RTP4 : TR* 489).

Thus, not only is the Proustian artist the matter of his own art, but so is the reader in the ultimate enterprise of introspection which takes them both away from mass efforts of the group. Proust's recourse to literature derives from his double awareness to the fact that "[t]he work of art is solitary" and that "he who reads it participate in the work's claim to solitude" (Blanchot, "The essential solitude" 98). In an aesthetics emphasizing the reader's involvement, the artist has no choice but to "laisser la plus grande liberté au lecteur" (*RTP4 : TR* 490). Simmel speaks best of this perspective on the artist as an oculist whose work is simply another lens he offers his audience: "All art changes the field of vision in which we originally and naturally place ourselves in relation to reality" (Simmel 513). As such, it functions both as a distantiating from and a check on individual beliefs about the world surrounding us – a shield from preconceived ideas and doctrinal influences.

The first chapter of this essay proposed Proust's retreat into the literary field was motivated both by distrust in politics typical of *la Belle Epoque*'s radicalism and distaste for public visibility. Yet many critics would assign it to a pessimistic view of the world, as does Pericles Lewis. He suggests that the Proustian outlook "is a rather tragic form of liberalism"

lacking belief in social justice (Lewis 128). Indeed, inasmuch as *La recherche* views the nation as society with culture as its motor, its attitude is fundamentally liberal, anticipating Schmitt's belief that the final self-awareness of liberalism is the philosophy of culture. Proust's political romanticism is the doctrine of the autonomous, isolated, and solitary individual, whose stance creates a world in which nothing is connecting to anything else, characteristic of the conjunction of liberalism and democracy. Yet political romanticism is not necessarily tragic, as it comes in different flavors during *la Belle Epoque*. In gauging the kind exhibited by *La recherche*, we should be mindful that modern American optimism is not the appropriate standard against which to measure the French popular outlook of *la Belle Epoque*. The backward looking immobilism of Barrèsian nationalism, exemplified by the belief that "il faut qu'elle [la France] demeure la même dans son essence" (*Scènes et doctrines* 124), is. At its core is the idea that French national character can be protected if and only if the living conditions of Frenchmen remain identical to those that have formed their ancestors (*Scènes et doctrines* 61). Contrastively, Proust's attitude, akin to what Taguieff terms a "disenchanted romanticism" (Taguieff 189), is founded on the primacy of the present – a belief rooted in the conviction that going back is always already impossible. It thus advocates a reconciliation with current conditions, as questionable as they might be. Compared with the retrograde Barrèsian *passéisme* which attempts to reestablish an idealized past or the conservative romanticism of radical and moderate republicans attempting to maintain the current socio-political status-quo, Proust's outlook is the most optimistic.

Furthermore, applying the perverse, futile, and jeopardy theses⁴¹ to the Proustian cycle further reveals the positive aspect of its stance. It most approaches the perversity thesis

⁴¹ These theses conceptualize the three arguments consistently used against social change and reform over the last two centuries (Hirschmann 89-90).

emphasizing the unintended consequences of human actions. While the ‘perverse’ attribute is the result of reactionary modern pessimism, the theory takes into account the possibility that individual acts, even when motivated by negative passions, can have a positive social outcome (Hirschmann 47). The Proustian opus insists on the volatile nature of French society, with individual actions resulting in numerous and unpredictable counteractions. In this respect, the narrator’s delight at the turning of the social kaleidoscope is relevant. Each new configuration forces him to reevaluate his view of French society (*RTP1 : JF 507*). While his first reaction is confusion and impatience, he soon relishes contemplating the design he has uncovered, as he finds change bracing because it renders life more interesting. Unexpected change in the world around him brings a self-renewal akin to Hirschmann’s “self-subversion”, as each new stage contradicts the general assumptions Marcel has made so far. As such, the narrator cuts the fascinating naïve figure of a Sisyphus forcing the rock to tumble down himself, so he can subsequently carry it up again (Hirschmann 89-90). Contrastively, the nationalistic outlook emphasizes the jeopardy thesis which claims that every new reform endangers existing traditions and ways of life, and as such is a regression rather than an accomplishment, while simultaneously manifesting aspects of the futility theory in its organicist beliefs. According to it, the social world is remarkably stable, as it is structured by laws that human action is unable to modify (Hirschmann 49). Proustian optimism stems from belief in human agency, despite its randomness, as individuals can, and often do, alter the course of events.

Not surprisingly, then, the subject of *La recherche* is the endeavor to write a book. On the one hand, this is relevant in response to the prevalent nationalism of *la Belle Epoque*. As Nora shows, French identity has always been “a relationship of lineage and identification, . . . in which one finds fused together . . . the epic poem, prose, and notions of nationhood and national

destiny” (“Memoirs of Men of State” 412). This makes explicit not only the link between France and its culture, but also that between Frenchness and literature, of which Proust was aware. It emphasizes the importance he accorded to his project in relation to the nation, as well as to the fact that his recourse to prose rather than politics still has a deep concern with issues regarding national identity at a critical juncture in French history. Contrary to the militant view of nationalist art, the miracle of literature consists precisely in “breaking off the relationship which enables ‘me’ to address ‘you’, which endows me with speech in the understanding that such speech is enriched by you because it summons you, is a summoning that starts in me and ends in you. Writing is the dissolving of such a link” (Blanchot, “The essential solitude” 102).

Furthermore, the audience does not know if the narrator’s book ever gets written, as there is no indication that the Proustian cycle represents that novel. As such, there is an additional level of indirection in it, given that readers cannot determine if they are exposed to the experiences and conclusions of a regular Frenchman in the person of the narrator, or to those of its actual author. It thus facilitates Proust’s task of writing a French novel which inconspicuously inserts at the basis of French identity the perspective of a gay Jewish writer.

On the other hand, at the core of the writerly endeavor *La recherche* recounts lies an aesthetic enterprise. At least in part this is because, as de Certeau suggests, “[c]eux qui écrivent sont les auteurs. Tout le « reste » est silencieusement réprimé par ce cercle du « même »” (*La culture au pluriel* 135). Escape from homogeneity functions at two levels. Primarily, writing allows Marcel to express his own point of view. But in the process he is also able to reveal how behind the apparent circle of sameness of a silent majority lies hidden a wealth of heterogeneities. This aesthetic enterprise constitutes a unique aspect of the Proustian cycle, allowing its escape from the pattern of most French novels. Though political war as cultural war

is a new *fin de siècle* invention (Benda 149), culture wars have for long been the main subject of French literature, a point illustrated by the example of two famous novels. Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) reenacts the conflict between passion and reason, the two cultural trends of the moment. In accordance to the 17th century rising tendency, reason wins and the princess dies of grief. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) demonstrates, through Emma's tragic fate, the harmful effects novels have on the women reading them – a recurrent theme in French literature reflecting the continuous clash between tradition and modernity. Not surprisingly, both novels end in death as a culture war is still a war of sorts, and there cannot be one without casualties. That is not to say *La recherche* is blind to culture wars, as it affords a lot of attention to that between the left and the right during and after the Dreyfus affair. Yet the text remains at one remove from violence. The controversial events they engender do not directly impact the narrator. Instead, they shape his apprenticeship journey. As a result, the novel does not end with a victim, but with the promise of a new beginning – the actual writing of a book.

The Proustian cycle reverses the usual French approach to prose: instead of being the reenactment of a culture war, it illustrates how a culture war can be the genesis of a book. Consequently, *La recherche* does not offer a sense of closure to its audience. Rather, the whole cycle is wary of it. According to Henry, the Proustian attitude prefigures the surrealism's distrust of the completed work of art, closed onto itself, going as far as to suggest the author has intentionally left his text unfinished (*La tentation de Marcel Proust* 171-211). In this respect, Marcel's confession that “je découvrais cette action destructrice du Temps au moment même où je voulais entreprendre de rendre claires, d'intellectualiser dans une œuvre d'art, des réalités extra-temporelles” (*RTP4 : TR* 508) is not fortuitous. Closure is overrated and absolute, whereas openness to unexpected possibilities characterizes the incessant adaptation of survivors to

unforeseen change. And both his ethnic origins and sexual orientation make Proust such a survivor in the France of *la Belle Epoque*. In this, as in its refusal of the closure of nationalism and its mass effects, the author of *La recherche* heeds Hirschmann's advice to "be deaf, like Ulysses, to the seductive chant of the unique paradigm" (Hirschmann 116). Demise is always already embedded in all things and beings. Men, doctrines, works of art, cultures, and even nations, are all doomed to eventually disappear. Time is their one common denominator. Only the agency and temporality of their end differs. Consequently, the individual and the group are put on a more equal footing as there is no temporal basis for the implicit subordination of the former to the latter. Rather than the primacy of place on which nationalistic immobilism is founded, in the last pages of *La recherche* the narrator insists how in his own oeuvre "les vérités . . . qui se rapportent au Temps, au Temps dans lequel baignent et s'altèrent les hommes, les sociétés, les nations, tiendraient une place importante" (*RTP4 : TR* 510). The novel is but a reiteration of this power of time over place, provided to the narrator and reader alike by Marcel's contemplation of his own life's memories.

Conclusion

Today Proust's novel enjoys a near unparalleled renown. Branded "Europe's last great writer" (Bowie xvii), the equal of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dante (Tadié, *Introduction générale* XI), its author has become "the principal literary icon of the twentieth century" (Gans 37). It should then come as no surprise that his celebration is at its peak in France where he is dubbed "the giant of French literature, which he has somehow subsumed" (Compagnon 212). Yet it took him four decades to reach this supremacy. In the early 1920s, Proust's notoriety was limited to a small circle of dilettantes. Between 1919 and 1940, his readership was still limited judging by the number of *Du côté de chez Swann* copies sold – only 87,000, considerably less than some of Céline's or Gide's works during roughly that same time period (Compagnon 216). Given this, it is legitimate to question what prompted such a change in the oeuvre's popularity and on what grounds does Proust occupy the foremost place in French literature today.

According to Antoine Compagnon, Proust benefited from a postwar rehabilitation, at least partly due to his portrayal of Combray as a town from *la France profonde* (214). This implies that the tactic alluded to in the first chapter of this dissertation – making the narrator's heritage purely French and starting the whole cycle in a provincial French village – actually succeeded in attracting the wide readership the author desired. Indeed, Compagnon admits that during the Third Republic Proust remained a marginal writer on account of his Jewishness and homosexuality (214) – facts largely forgotten by the 1940s and successfully covered by the aforementioned tactic that brings Frenchness to the forefront. Yet it also means that the counter-narrative undermining claims of purity and homogeneity, at play throughout the text, remains largely ignored. Ostensibly, a wider readership was attracted by the narrator's "roots in the soil

of the Beauce”, the descriptions of Françoise as the “personification of the French soul”, and “his affection for churches and the liturgy” (Compagnon 225). It suggests that the description of a Barrèsian Frenchness, present in the aristocracy as well as in the simple people, still worked its magic almost half a century after its heyday.

However, the text’s alertness to linguistic and physical atavisms cannot go unnoticed. Interpreted as the mark the *Belle Époque*’s obsession with heredity and race made on the text and “about which Proust tells us more than any treatise” (Compagnon 245), this is the basis on which *La recherche* becomes an unparalleled “lieu de mémoire” documenting the social history of that time period. Yet in considering it in this particular light runs the risk of ignoring not only the aesthetic dimension of Frenchness subverting its ideological efficacy, while also emphasizing the generational and civilizational changes which prioritize this particular reading of the text. Kritzman’s definition of a realm of memory underlines its capacity of metamorphosis through new associations and symbolic representations: “In becoming a synonym for national identity, a ‘realm of memory’ enables successive generations to mediate their cultural myths by inculcating them with their desires” (Kritzman XII). Consequently, there are “disjunctions between the original meaning attached to memory sites and the heuristic processes currently used to describe them” (Kritzman XII-XIII). Such disconnections are particularly visible in modern appropriations of the Proustian project.

Pertinently, in France Proust’s dramatic rise in popularity happened during the 1960s, long after the end of the Great War. By that time, the society his oeuvre describes is gone and partly forgotten. He only came to be considered the greatest French writer during the Fifth Republic. The year 1965 marks “his apotheosis for the general public” (Compagnon 219-232), as well as the start of crucial cultural changes throughout the country which largely replaced the

outdated values of the Third Republic with more progressive ones in turn allowing for a different readership interpretation of *La recherche*. Treating the novel as a realm of memory today leaves it wide open to various re-appropriations and interpretations, particularly when we evaluate the gap, or lack thereof, between the fin-de-siècle and the present in terms of tolerance and inclusiveness as reflected in contemporary French political rhetoric. For instance, Nicolas Sarkozy's discourse at the *Ecole polytechnique* on December 17 2008 would particularly validate such claims, seeing that the president of the Republic himself exalts creolization as the new value of the Fifth Republic in the 21st century: "l'objectif, c'est relever le défi du métissage. . . . Ce n'est pas un choix, c'est *une obligation*" ("Sarkozy : 'relever le défi'", *Figaro*). Thus, it is not surprising that in 2006, even before becoming the nation's president, Sarkozy prognosticates that the expression "français de souche" is on its way out of the national consciousness as full equality between all Frenchmen is about to be achieved: "Cette France [qu'il faut construire] est un pays réconcilié. . . . C'est une France où l'expression 'Français de souche' a disparu" (Sarkozy 280).

Yet it is precisely through such claims that Sarkozy unwittingly demonstrates that Frenchness, in the guise of "Français de souche", remains a perennial French category and cannot be relegated to the realm of memory. The specific term of "Français de souche" is ostensibly a synonym for autochthone, but is currently used to refer to those Frenchmen devoid of any traceable foreign heritage, in contrast with those descending from immigrants or having only recently acquired the French citizenship. At its core remains the well-known implication that some people are less French than others, a claim that is strikingly similar to the Barrèsian rhetoric of the *Belle Epoque*. It is pertinent that such accusations have been leveled at two former French presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande of late. Indeed, the polemic

engendered by Hollande's use of the term points to its importance. On February 23 2015 during his discourse at the *Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France*, the president used the term “français de souche, comme on dit” when referring to the youngsters responsible for the desecration of the Jewish cemetery of Sarre-Union (“‘Français de souche’ : polémique”, *Le Monde*). His implication was that such anti-Semitic acts are not necessarily committed by French Muslims, but that xenophobia and racism affect Frenchmen for a variety of reasons – beliefs in racial purity being one of them. Yet his use of the term, considered a trademark of the *Front National* and the extreme right, raised a storm of controversies despite the fact that Hollande underscored the next day his position, namely that he used this expression precisely to distance himself from racism and anti-Semitism, or any other form of discrimination (“‘Français de souche’ : polémique”, *Le Monde*).

Nonetheless, the historian Nicolas Lebourg underscores the popularity of the term: “De facto, tout le monde utilise cette expression” because “les thématiques identitaires sont désormais au centre du débat politique” (A. Duval). Indeed, in his discourse on November 25 2015 at Schiltigheim Sarkozy in the same breath states that “il n’y a plus d’identité française dans une société devenue multiculturelle” and that “[l]a crise des réfugiés déstabilisera l’Europe . . .” (“Discours de Nicolas Sarkozy à Schiltigheim”, *Les Républicains*). The larger implications of the latter claim parallel Barrèsian fears regarding the inability of the *Belle Époque* France to successfully absorb its immigration:

La France débilitee n'a plus l'énergie de faire de la matiere française avec les éléments étrangers. . . . C'est pourtant une condition nécessaire à la vie de ce pays à toutes les époques la France fut une route, un chemin pour le Nord émigrant vers le Sud; elle

ramassait ces étrangers pour s'en fortifier. Aujourd'hui, ces vagabonds nous transforment à leur ressemblance ! (Barrès, *Les déracinés* 321)

Yet the previous declarations of Sarkozy are not out of character, given that on September 19 2017 in Franconville he has categorically affirmed that “[d]ès que vous devenez français, vos ancêtres sont gaulois” and from that moment “on parle comme un Français, on vit comme un Français” (“Dès que l'on devient français”, *Le Figaro*). Furthermore, under his presidency between 2007 to 2010, there existed a controversial *ministère de l'Immigration, de l'Intégration, de l'Identité nationale et du Développement solidaire*, criticized for the association of the terms “national identity” and “immigration”. Thus, enquiring into its origins, Jérôme Valluy emphasizes “les amalgames opposant l'immigration à l'identité nationale et . . . l'institutionnalisation du racisme et de la xénophobie” (Valluy 5). But it is the rapid banalization of the new institution that raises a flag, indicative of a long standing acceptance of its tasks, as Valluy insists on the fact that “cette création ministérielle . . . est issue d'une tendance séculaire de la vie politique et de la culture politique européenne, et d'une accentuation de certains de ses traits au tournant des XXe et XXIe siècles, notamment l'inclination au racisme, à la xénophobie et au nationalisme” (Valluy 6). Indeed, Mélodie Beaujeu intimates that “[a]u moment même où s'amorce le débat sur la reconnaissance de la place qu'occupent les immigrés dans la société française, l'idée selon laquelle ces derniers représenteraient un danger potentiel pour la nation française est institutionnalisée par des dispositifs sophistiqués et toujours plus nombreux” (Beaujeu 30).

This attitude echoes Barrès who, more than a century ago, wanted to “réclamer des lois plus sévères sur la naturalisation” necessary for “notre sécurité collective” (*Scènes et doctrines* 91). It justifies the idea that the new ministry is “la cristallisation institutionnelle d'une culture

politique façonnée par des décennies de xénophobie élitaires, notamment technocratique, mais aussi politicienne voire intellectuelle, qui construit comme une évidence le caractère problématique de la présence étrangère” (Valluy 7). Again, this is not without precedent, as during *la Belle Epoque* xenophobia was largely shared by most political parties and most politicians, regardless of their affiliation, a situation that parallels the current “xénophobie de gouvernement ayant une histoire, des caractéristiques et des formes d'expression spécifiques et qui est distincte de la xénophobie contestataire d'extrême droite” (Valluy 8). This statist xenophobia, doubled by a popular chauvinism, is strikingly similar to the phenomenon to which I propose *La recherche* responds:

Le message que ces politiques [gouvernementales] diffusent à grande audience suffit, sans expressions racistes, à désigner l'étranger comme un problème, un risque ou une menace et ils le font avec probablement plus d'efficacité que des groupuscules d'extrême droite longtemps demeurés marginaux avant de prospérer électoralement sur le chemin idéologique tracé par les politiques publiques. Une fois ces partis nationalistes et xénophobes implantés et banalisés dans la vie politique, le système politique dans son ensemble se recompose autour de leur présence, accentuant encore le phénomène de xénophobie gouvernante qui a créé les conditions idéologiques de leurs succès initial et entretient durablement leur croissance électorale : le phénomène devient cumulatif.

(Valluy 9)

In such a climate, it is no wonder that an article published on August 24 2016 by *Le Figaro* insists on “la situation de guerre intérieure, qui peut dégénérer en guerre civile” due to a possible confrontation between “l'ultra droite et le monde musulman”, compounded by “[l]es préoccupations existentielles des Français oubliés” (Riofoul). This sounds eerily similar to the

early Third Republic warnings about “la patrie en danger” – a divided country on the brink of civil war – to which Proust, along most French intellectuals, responded.

Nowadays, *La recherche* has become “the quintessential *lieu de mémoire* of French literature” (Compagnon 214), allowing for the recollection of the past and the celebration of its emblematic continuity with the present. Yet inasmuch as it belongs to the realm of memory, it has been cut off from the present. Indeed, as Pierre Nora explains, “[a] ‘mémoire’ establishes an entirely different relationship with the past by producing a definitive separation and at the same time firmly reappropriating it. But it is a reappropriation of an order other than that of something living. It is of symbolic and historical order” (“Introduction” XI). As the changes brought over by the passage of time have made its original significance obsolete, it has been reinterpreted in terms of contemporary exigencies in order to support relevant modern-day traditions. Thus at the heart of this transition lies precisely an oblivion of how much the past resembles the present. It entails forgetting the historical context in which the novel was written, as well as the actual subject position of its author. These are all facts to which Proust was so attentive when he stated that “il ne peut y avoir d’interprétation des chefs-d’œuvre du passé que si on les considère du point de vue de celui qui les écrivait” (*Contre Sainte-Beuve* 266). Yet the writer was equally aware that “la loi cruelle de l’art est que les êtres meurent . . . pour que pousse l’herbe . . . drue des œuvres fécondes, sur laquelle les générations viendront faire gaiement, sans souci de ceux qui dorment en dessous, leur « déjeuner sur l’herbe »” (*RTP4 : TR* 615). The author of a novel at the heart of which lies the interplay between remembrance and forgetfulness well knew that “[t]oute œuvre échappe à son créateur pour être réinterprétée par l’humanité” (Henry, *La tentation de Marcel Proust* 169). It is precisely remembrance – the key concept on which this dissertation is predicated – that enables us to see how the oeuvre of a marginalized gay Jewish

writer re-enters the main stream of French literature: “[q]uand l’exclu a produit, la clôture à l’abri de laquelle dorment, repus, les parasites, s’ouvre, lance des pseudopodes pour inclure cette œuvre, où elle trouve un sang nouveau qui la fait se perpétuer” (Serres 305). Indeed, as early as 1927 Albert Thibaudet attributes Proust’s success to his Frenchness:

Une partie de la faveur qui [I]’entoura s’explique peut-être, dans l’inconscient du public, . . . , par une ardeur à se serrer vers ce qu’il y a de plus pur . . . dans la tradition et dans le trésor français. . . . N’y a-t-il pas, dans la littérature de chaque peuple, un coin réservé, étroitement national, où il est presque impossible à l’étranger de pénétrer ? Comment se constituent et se défendent, dans la tradition littéraire et critique, ces jardins secrets ? . . . [I]l semble bien que Proust devrai figurer dans des jardins fort peu cosmopolites. (Thibaudet, 121)

Nonetheless, only a few pages later, the same Thibaudet explains what he terms a mobile style to Proust’s Jewish ancestry. And the importance attached to *La recherche* in French literature will become more prominent with every passing year.

Howe it is not the text itself that has evolved, seeing that Maurice Blanchot reminds us how writing consists in “dispossessing [speech] of the power to achieve clarity through labor, action and time” (“The essential solitude” 102), but only the meanings that are ascribed to it. Are dubbed *lieux de mémoire* those “symbolic sites that form French social and cultural identities” (Kritzman XIII). As such, they are the basis on which French identity is constructed, and *La recherche* can now be counted amongst them. Theretofore the closure of national identity has taken over the entire text of an oeuvre the main endeavor of which is precisely to undermine the

very concept of Frenchness. Ironically, national identity is still defined nowadays in strikingly similar terms to those of *la Belle Epoque*.

If the Proustian opus is perceived today as “a compendium of all French literature” (Compagnon 215), this has a lot to do with the particular position of its author. In what amounts to putting “culture on stage”, the narrator makes numerous intertextual references to various works of the past in a text that consequently appears to be the “repository of French culture” (Compagnon 236-237). Yet it is precisely the performative dimension of this dramatization of culture that points to it being a tactical demonstration of the author’s Frenchness as competence in front of readers that considered themselves to be more French than him. Furthermore, in spite of the end result that makes the novel appear “to have swallowed the whole of France’s cultural memory” (Compagnon 236), *La recherche* makes a fundamental distinction between subjective and objective culture, favoring the former’s participative aspect over the latter’s normative dimension in order to restate national identity on a cultural basis.

Did Proust build his work like an architect would a cathedral, conceiving it in monumental terms from the start (Compagnon 214)? Or is his oeuvre a more modest enterprise, pinned together like a dress (*RTP4 : TR* 610) and akin to Françoise’s *bœuf à la mode* (*RTP4 : TR* 612)? Is it a “total, self-contained book” (Compagnon 238), or was it intentionally left unfinished (Henry, *La tentation de Marcel Proust* 171)? Regardless of the answer to any of those questions, what Proust has built remains a virtual protective construction the roof of which consists in “the concluding promise of the protagonist’s salvation through art” (Gans 39). Caught between the wars issued from particularisms and the violence of those who want to reduce them in a nation, Proust searched for an apolitical and peaceful resolution. He finally found it in aesthetic contemplation. Thus, the narrator’s salvation stands for the deliverance of an entire society – the

ideal pacification of the French nation through art. Indeed, *La recherche* suggests that it is not by further engaging with the collective that a response to its problems can be found. Rather the solution lies at the heart of the individual able to move away from the group through innocent, if egoist pursuits. But this mass dispersion can happen on condition everyone is willing to do the same. Then and only then would the problem of the nation fade away, to never return nor ever require another sacrifice for its redemption.

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