Chapter One: Introduction

PART 1: DIFFRACTION OF LIGHT RAYS

L'Objet d'Histoire, objet mnésique, contient un amalgame de faits établis scientifiquement et de rumeurs fascinantes et non fondées. Ces attentes entre le vrai et le faux vont provoquer une mise en veille de la rationalité, voire une fascination trouble sur le réel qui tend à se dérober.

—Robert Liris[1]

We don't see as much of the world as we think we see . . . . We focus our attention on a few things that we want to see and the result of that is that we have to filter out things that we don't care about. And we sometimes also filter out things that we might care about. This is known as inattentional blindness.

—Daniel Simons[2]

A few words before I start. Actually, I have already started. You can see that by the various little citations preceding the beginning of my text. Although I will explain the whole method in due course, from chapter to chapter, if you need to be prepared to follow the argument, already the main themes should be evident. Things in this world and in the world of experience that Alfred Dreyfus, his wife, other members of his family, and his closest friends and associates underwent were not always as they seemed—or as they seem to us when we try

1 Robert Liris, "La Tour foudroyée: Image factuelle ou Object d'Histoire" *Mentalities/Mentalités* 25:1–2 (2011), "The historical object, the mnemonic object, consists of an amalgam of scientifically established facts and fascinating and unfounded rumors. The tensions between the true and the false set off a wake-up call from rationality, and that in itself stirs up a troubling fascination inside reality which then tends to scurry away in darkness."

2 Cited in an interview between Alok Juha and Daniel Simons, "Gorillas in our midst—but they're easily missed: A famous study has forced us to question how our brains see the world around us," published on the Perspectives page of *The New Zealand Herald* (4 August 2010), based on *The Invisible Gorilla and Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us* by Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris (New York: Crown Publishing Group/Random House, 1998).

to read the documents of the period.

There are many reasons for these discrepancies, which this book will address often indirectly rather than directly because I don't see how they can be addressed effectively in any other way. Part of the reason is that everyone in Western and Central Europe in the final years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth was undergoing an epistemological change in the way they could feel, see, think about, imagine, and write about themselves and the world they lived in. Some of the changes were relatively minor and due to technological transformations—from telegraphy to railroads and steamboats, photography and urban architecture; some were more profound, more deeply embedded in the very affective and cognitive mechanisms of perception and articulation—from aesthetics to physics and psychology. Some were even more hidden in the shadows of history and the blinding brightness of new social relationships, changes a long time brewing and beginning to emerge to consciousness in a series of traumatic shocks in political events, wars, and personal crises.

The Dreyfus Affair was one of those occurrences that seem suddenly to bring to light what had been unnoticed and that called for ways of seeing, speaking, writing, and acting that would have been unthinkable and unimaginable before.

Things before Words

> *Utilize as best you can the transformations of the universe into a local section; use the process by which time is canned and called a newspaper. The world has become uglier since it began to look into a mirror every day; so let us settle for the mirror and do without an inspection of the original. It is uplifting to lose one's faith in a reality which looks the way it is described in a newspaper. He who sleeps away half a day has won half a life.*
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> —Karl Kraus[3]

3 Karl Kraus, "In Praise of a Topsy-Turvy Life-Style" in *In These Great Times: A Karl Kraus Reader*, ed. Harry Zohn, trans. Joseph Fabry, Max Knighty, Karl F. Ross, and Harry Zohn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984 [1976]), 37.

This section contains a rough summary of received opinions. After I set forth this narrative of events, I will put the words and the beliefs through a prism to see what patterns of light and darkness the rays break up into. Now we see through a glass or mirror only in enigmatic reasons and concepts; then we shall start to see more clearly the various midrashic faces or facets of the man, the milieu and the mentality.

The Dreyfus Affair, one of the shaping events of the modern age, occurred over a twelve-year period, from 1894 to 1906. This event began in France twenty years before the outbreak of World War I, but came to involve the rest of Europe and North America, with repercussions as far away as Australia and New Zealand. The affair that bears his name concerned a young artillery officer in the French Army named Alfred Dreyfus.

He was in his early thirties, comfortably married with two children, and at the beginning of a brilliant military career. Everything fell apart one morning, however, when Dreyfus was summoned to his office in the Intelligence Department and accused of offering to sell military secrets to the German embassy in Paris. With virtually no proof at all—and what little evidence was at first adduced and then used covertly at his court-martial a few months later proved to be either irrelevant, ambiguous, or forged—Dreyfus was found guilty of treason, stripped of his rank as a captain, and sent to perpetual incarceration in solitary confinement on Devil's Island, a former leper colony and an unpopulated outcrop of rock near the French colony of Cayenne or French Guiana on the northeastern coast of South America.

The morning he was arrested, it was as though he had been lifted up out of his normal life and suddenly found himself in a five-year-long nightmare, an absurd and grotesque dream—or a mad and fantastic silent film, of the type which was just beginning to be made at exactly the same time by men like Georges Méliès. In other words, a theatre of grotesque illusions, a horror movie, a nightmare.

But this event was no simple *phantasmagoria*. It was all very real, all too real. Alfred Dreyfus had been set up, framed, and scapegoated because he was a Jew. Although he was a dashing young officer who rode his horse every morning before going to the office at military headquarters, although he was a comfortably middle-class husband married to a rich and educated wife, although he seemed to be a normal Frenchman of the late nineteenth century, to the anti-Semites in France he was an

ugly stage Jew with a hooked nose and disgusting habits, and he was caricatured almost daily in the press and on posters as a dangerous non-Aryan monster[4] who could never fit in and who threatened Christian France. He was hated by screaming mobs in the streets, who called out, "Down with the traitor! Death to Dreyfus! Death to the Jews!"[5]

At first, only his wife, immediate family, and a few close friends believed that there had been a miscarriage of justice, a mistake, an error in the procedures of the court-martial. Most people in France, including most French Jews, simply accepted the verdict of the military tribunal. But Edouard Drumont and the anti-Semitic press and a political opposition made up of an unholy alliance of Boulangists or disgruntled monarchists, angry Jesuits and fearful Catholic priests, and all sorts of jingoistic patriots began to whip up strong feelings both in the streets and in the chambers of the French parliament.

From 1894 through 1897, not many people inside or outside the Jewish community of France seemed to care—except Alfred's wife, Lucie, and older brother, Mathieu Dreyfus, and their extended families, along with just one or two other allies. Again, as is now widely known, this early inner circle of Dreyfusards pledged their time, their fortunes, and their lives to the cause of proving Alfred Dreyfus innocent and bringing him back from Devil's Island for a revision of the verdict against him. Most of the Jewish community in France, it seems, did not believe, or did not want to believe, that he was innocent, because to do so would question their loyalty to the French Republic. Many feared, as too often happens even today, that taking a public stand would draw too much attention to themselves as Jews. A few probably also considered themselves more French than Jewish or not even really Jewish at all, and to protect their own status and to prove in public their separation from the organized synagogues and rabbinical institutions, they even spoke out as anti-Dreyfusards. Some of them perhaps honestly believed that whether he was innocent or not, the best course for France was to accept the verdict of the military courts

4 Although this Germanic terminology was not used often in France, the label Semite was applied regularly to Jews, and the Semite is always implicitly contrasted to the Aryan or whatever is currently fashionable for the nationalist racial ideal. Gobineau was not cited often in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

5 Romain Rolland: "Just look at your old Dreyfus affair. You shouted loud enough: 'Death! Blood! Slaughter!' . . . Oh! you Gascons! Spittle and ink! But how many drops of blood?'" (*Jean Christophe*, vol. III, 228).

and to respect the opinions of the men in government.

Yet gradually, through the second half of the 1890s, the truth began to emerge—that there was a strong possibility that Dreyfus had been framed by a small clique of envious officers, that the real spy and traitor was a rather unsavoury character of Hungarian descent named Charles Marie Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy, that the officers in the French high command were lying and forging documents to protect one another, and that this corruption went right up into the offices of cabinet ministers and even, it seemed, to the president of the republic. So by 1898, a great wave of reaction had began to form, calling for, on the one hand, a revision of Dreyfus's verdict from the court-martial and, on the other, for a radical change in government and a separation of church and state in France.

Despite the emergence of a new class or category of people, the intellectuals, who spoke out for Dreyfus and signed their names to petitions,[6] the military, the government, and the clergy tried to bluff it out, using all the means at their disposal—not only newspapers and books but new media as well, such as motion pictures, illustrated postcards, wax museums, vaudeville shows, and street parades. Matters reached a head, however, when the most popular and important novelist of the day, Emile Zola, published a scathing attack on the whole of the establishment. In a full-page open letter in the press, Zola's *J'Accuse* (*I Accuse*) forced the issue into the public arena. In the following days, weeks, and months, a new kind of group came into being—the intellectuals. Students and professors, doctors and lawyers, and writers and artists signed petitions almost every day in the newspapers, calling for a revision of the original verdict.

But while there were also mobs screaming in the streets for the death of the traitor Dreyfus, the Jew, and all the Jews, there also seemed to be professional men and women, cultural leaders, and university-trained people, also intellectuals, arguing that the honour of the army must precede that of an individual, that the ideals of France were worth more

6 Romain Rolland: "There were famous men among them men who had been wrenched away from their stylistic labors and plunged into public meetings by the Dreyfus affair . . . . There was now a mob of writing men all engrossed in politics, and claiming to control the affairs of the State. On the slightest excuse they would form societies, issue manifestoes, save the Capitol. After the intellectuals of the advance guard came the intellectuals of the rear: they were very much of a muchness. Each of the two parties regarded the other as intellectual and themselves as intelligent" (*Jean Christophe*, vol. III, 179).

than simple justice, and that if Dreyfus were found innocent, then the whole of the military leadership and most of the government would have to resign—something untenable.

Several other related trials took place in the 1890s, all part of the Dreyfus Affair—that of Emil Zola, the novelist who had spoken out so bravely; of Colonel Georges Picquart, the military officer whose investigations had confirmed Dreyfus's innocence; and of the infamous Esterhazy, the real culprit, all against the Dreyfusards—until a second court-martial for Dreyfus took place. Each trial resulted in victory not for the Dreyfusards but for the anti-Dreyfusards. Even Colonel Henry's suicide[7] raised more sympathy for the case against Dreyfus, rather than undercutting it.

In 1898, in the provincial city of Rennes, for a second time, to the dismay of the intellectuals and of liberal, progressive men and women around the world, Alfred Dreyfus was found guilty again—but this time, adding insult to injury, with what was called extenuating circumstances. Picquart was found guilty in his trial, and Esterhazy was declared innocent in his. As for Alfred, twice condemned by military tribunals, even after the civilian court of appeals had found the evidence insufficient to accept the original verdict and thus set the stage for the second Rennes trial, the offer of a pardon was too good to be turned down on principle: his family and friends were convinced that his health and sanity could not be risked again. How could they allow him to be sent back to Devil's Island for another day, let alone another five or ten years? Thankfully, there was by then a new, more liberal government in Paris embarrassed by the whole affair, and so a few days later, Dreyfus was indeed pardoned. Yet the struggle for his exoneration carried on for several more years until 1906, and eventually he was brought back into the army, promoted, and given the *Legion d'honneur*. Yet none of those responsible for the crimes of perjury, deception, and worse were

7 A documentary film by Jean Cherasse made in 1975, *Dreyfus: L'Intolerable vérité* (rereleased in 2006 for the centenary of Alfred Dreyfus's rehabilitation on DVD by Janus Diffusion and available at http://www.horsfilm.com), alludes to questions raised about the veracity of this culprit's death as self-inflicted, not least because the colonel's corpse was never subjected to a postmortem examination. Like the accidental death of Emile Zola by asphyxiation due to a malfunctioning gas heater in his home or the failure of police to apprehend the would-be assassin of Dreyfus's lawyer during the Rennes trial, this is one of the still-unsolved mysteries associated with the affair. (On the theory that Zola was murdered by an anti-Dreyfusard workman, see Frederick Brown, *Zola: A Life* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996]).

brought to account, except for a few who committed suicide.

In hindsight, we can see that justice was not done, peace was not restored, and the truth was not fully known or given its proper due. The great paradox of the affair, then and now, is that while Dreyfus and the Dreyfusards wrestled with the monsters in their nightmare as though the enigma of his persecution still lay in an unresolved distortion of justice—the judicial error and the mystery of why the powers-that-be still suspected him of treason—the anti-Dreyfusards and the old Dreyfusards who grew weary of his whining and moaning did know the truth: it was because Alfred belonged to the Jews—that unassimilable, annoying, untrustworthy other.

The Narrative of the Case

> *This is not a book. A book, even a bad book, is a serious affair. A phrase that might be excellent in the fourth chapter would be all wrong in the second, and it's not everybody who knows the trick.*
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> —Paul Gauguin[8]

One definition of a myth is "what everyone says." The ancient Greeks and Romans did not use this term because what we see as *mythos* in the sense of lies or false stories or fantastic explanations for things they could not otherwise understand, they called histories, in other words what everybody says and consequently believes. They are not books or formal, rational arguments, *logoi*. The argument I am making here is only a *book* in a superficial sense: it is a way of playing with the words of the narrative everyone says they know and believe. I am not trying to say it is false, but that this so-called history of Alfred Dreyfus and the affair that bears his name is not "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Much if not most of what is found in history books is true today. However, not all the truth appears in them, and there are some untruths mixed up in the official narrative. Most of all, what is left out in Dreyfus's history is Alfred Dreyfus himself, the man, as well as

8 Paul Gauguin, *The Intimate Journals* (London, Boston, Sydney, and Henley: KPI/Pacific Basin Books, 1985 [1983]; orig. trans. 1923; orig. French 1903), 1. Then a few pages later, he adds, "Besides, even if he has no serious readers, the author of a book must be serious" (4).

his wife Lucie, and how they formed a new milieu in writing for themselves, and how this milieu, as we shall see, is a midrashic one. To begin with, as I have already begun to do, my words and processes will seem to come less out of Jewish techniques of reading and more out of the shifts in optics and aesthetics occurring in the nineteenth century. The other thing left out is more than just that Dreyfus was a *Jew*, but that he was *Jewish*. Though he thought of himself as an assimilated Frenchman and tried to dismiss the anti-Semites howling out on the streets as irrelevant fools, he thought and felt like a Jew, guided more and more by his wife Lucie in her letters. Whatever he may have believed about himself, the Jew-haters saw him as Jewish and thus absolutely unassimilable. They read the clues in his actions and words, and so we have to take their interpretations seriously because their bigotry and ignorance was in response to qualities in his personality, his milieu, and his mentality, which was different, alien, special. Drumont and his colleagues were wrong about Dreyfus being a spy, part of a conspiracy by the enemies of France, and a figure of evil, but they were right about him being Jewish. In due course, my book will address the questions about what it meant to be Jewish in France at the end of the nineteenth century and what traditional resources of rabbinical knowledge and analysis Alfred could have drawn on, even if he did not know he was doing so.

As I said above, one of the shaping events of the modern age occurred over a twelve-year period, from 1894 to 1906. To know what a "shaping event" is, we need to pass the received opinions (which the midrashic rabbis called *pshat*) through a number of epistemological and aesthetic filters, that is, to diffract the light rays—to break them up through a moral filter, so as to reveal what has not been noticed before, or what could not even be seen because of the shadows out there in archival reality and inside the mind of the participants in these events. This momentous set of events did indeed begin in France twenty years before the outbreak of World War I, and come to involve the rest of Europe and North America, and even Australia and New Zealand. The life of a promising young artillery officer and family man began to fall apart upon the accusation that he had offered to sell military secrets to the German embassy in Paris. As everyone now knows or thinks they know, despite the extraordinarily weak and falsified case against him, Dreyfus was found guilty of treason and punished: stripped of his rank as a captain and sent to perpetual incarceration in solitary confinement on Devil's Island. His

arrest seemed to remove Dreyfus from his normal life and into a world of insanity, reminiscent of the worlds men like Georges Méliès were just beginning to create in cinema with the new instruments in the world's techological toolbox. Dreyfus did not know about these technological advances in optics, but he sensed in his deepest soul that something had changed and that he could no longer trust his own perceptions or his mind to make sense of what he was experiencing.

But although Dreyfus himself later used the word *phantasmagoria* to describe the experience, it did not fit that definition in truth. It is clear that he was set up, framed, and scapegoated because, despite his profession, despite his behavior, and despite his lack of religious conviction, to France's anti-Semites he remained a Jew, wearing an ugly mask with the features anti-Semites throughout recent history have given to members of his class.

The absurdity of all this resonates close to home now for us. In late October 2011, another Jew, also a Frenchman, a soldier, and an innocent young man, was released from five years of imprisonment, five years of torture and solitary confinement, five years kept out of the sunshine, with no contact with the outside world. When he was released, he looked emaciated, weak, confused, hardly able to stand erect, fumbling in his speech. In many ways this young Israeli, Gilad Shalit, is like Alfred Dreyfus. There are, of course, many important differences, but a central similarity is the fact that Gilad, like Alfred, was transported from normal life to a nightmare existence. The differences mainly serve to remind us about what was unique in Dreyfus's case—that the young Israeli was not left alone by his nation and that his plight did not split the intellectuals from the ordinary citizens of France. The modern instance also alerts us to the fact that for a Jew, while certain specific circumstances shift and reconfigure themselves through the books of history, there is also something unique in the experience of hatred in the world, as though that world of prejudice and cruelty could at least temporarily override rationality and justice.

How so?

Because the military tribunal, made up of respected French military officers, produced a unanimous verdict, it was at first difficult to persuade any members of society at all that it had been in error. As Eli Wiesel, one of the leading moralists and witnesses to the Holocaust in our times, points out often, anti-Semitism is a form of moral, that is,

pyschological, contagion that goes from cell to cell, person to person, and nation to nation, and no cynical or hard-headed economic or materialistic explanations can explain what it is or why it happens.

In 1898, when the second court martial was at last held, Alfred Dreyfus was shockingly found guilty again, with "extenuating circumstances." The main extenuating circumstance, as his supporters could clearly see, was that Dreyfus was innocent. It was a joke, a shock, an abuse of logic, a perversion of justice.

These flagrant distortions of the truth could not be accepted, and yet they were and by many, for they were believed to belong to a higher truth, that of reasons of state, the honour of the Army, the glory of France, and the integrity of the Church, The culture shock, the abuse of reason, flabberghasts us only in retrospect, although many Dreyfusards, like Emile Gallé the *art nouveau* glass-maker, believed the world was coming to an end.

Words before Things

> *Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning*.
>
> —Franz Kafka, *The Trial*[9]

Hundreds, if not thousands, of books concerning the Dreyfus Affair already exist—many of them quite thorough and up-to-date. Such books deal with history, sociology, law, politics, aesthetics, and morality. In what is an example of a collective scale of "inattentional blindness,"[10] these academic historians, their publishers, editors, reviewers, and general readers tend not to see what is most significant about the affair. This would include not only what the mobs in the streets of the big cities and towns of France during the late 1890s considered central, and the popular anti-Semitic press screamed day after day in their headlines and editorials—the fact that Dreyfus was a Jew and the treason he was as-

9 Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, definitive edition, with an epilogue by Max Brod, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950); *Der Prozess* (Berlin: Verlag die Schmiede, 1925), 7.

10 This is a term coined by Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris in the late 1990s after a series of experiments in which a gorilla passed unseen through a room of students concentrating on tasks that they thought was the point of the experiment; to be discussed later in this book.

sumed to have committed was part of an age-old rabbinical conspiracy, and also that Alfred Dreyfus and his family, as well as the family of his wife, Lucie, were wrenched out of their normal lives and forced by circumstances to reinvent themselves. This process that was only partly typical of how other educated, middle-class, assimilated Jewish families in Western Europe had to conduct themselves in public and at home—and in their own most private, intimate moments. Exactly what was the normal life of Captain and Madame Dreyfus before his arrest? How Jewish were they? How aware and concerned were they about the matters Alfred chose to write about in his prison notebooks of 1898, such as contemporary psychology, aesthetic theory, historiography, imperial and colonial developments, and political economy, for instance? Have they and we missed the gorilla standing in the middle of the scene?

The Dreyfus Affair as a political phenomenon, to be sure, grew out of attitudes and opinions that were already in the process of changing by the final decade of the nineteenth century—and these attitudes and opinions had been part of people's minds and were ordinary everyday ways of seeing the world[11] and were reflected as well in the more refined perceptions and feelings of the arts, the sciences, and the philosophies of the period. The affair also did concern the issues that the Dreyfusards believed were under threat—liberty, equality, and fraternity, along with justice and secularism and scientific reason. On the other hand, did it not also deal with the issues the anti-Dreyfusards believed in—the traditional values of rural France, the dignity of the army as the backbone of the nation, the spiritual power of the Catholic Church and its institutions, the threats made by modernity, not least the industrial revolution, the transformation of the economy from agriculture to urban productivity, and the breakdown of the family and the community? It would be egregious to dismiss all the opponents of Dreyfus as ignorant, fanatical lunatics, just as it would be to idealize the Dreyfusards all as sincere, intellectual, and tolerant citizens. There were fools and cynics on both sides.

One phrase in the lectures of Jakob Burckhardt clears the air by blow-

11 Here is what John Rewald says in an analogous situation: "Thus the new phase in the history of art inaugurated by the impressionist exhibition of 1874 was not a sudden outbreak of iconoclastic tendencies; it was the culmination of a slow and consistent evolution" ("Introduction," *The History of Impressionism*, 4th rev. ed. [New York: The Museum of Modern Art/Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1980 (1973), orig. 1946], 8).

ing away the smoke and the mists of illusion that fill the places where the Dreyfus Affair is still discussed. The nineteenth-century Swiss historian says, almost in passing, that after 1870, the French, even France itself, became afraid of its own shadow.[12] The shadow represents the illusions and impressions that hovered over the realities of life itself so that this is a way of saying that France became fearful of itself. The nature of the fear was the terror of modernity, and behind it still further is the anxiety of the *fin de siècle*. Was the image of Alfred Dreyfus the scapegoat for the shadow of France? Was the Dreyfus Affair a phantasmagoria displayed when the magic lantern of his story—his arrest, his condemnation, his exile, his long years on Devil's Island, his return for a revision of his trial, and the defeats again and again of his fight for honour—was projected on those smoky clouds in the darkness of the 1890s? Can we say that the whole experience of his ordeal was not so much a tragedy by Racine or Corneille or even his beloved Shakespeare, nor even a philosophical novel or allegorical tale of rationality and justice versus obscurantism and demagoguery, but more like the bizarre and grotesque films of Georges Méliès, a pioneering French cinematographer who portrayed fantastic journeys to the moon, visions of men whose heads explode, and choreographed pictures of dancing musical notes played by half-clad young women? These shadowy mechanized pictures are always in motion, shadows scattering and colliding into one another like atoms, creating the impression of a reality undermined by its power of fantasy.

This book will try to engage with many of these changes in the social and intellectual milieu in the processes of transformation of those mentalities that constitute the national consciousness and its imagination, as they push and pull, influence, and reshape each other. This book demonstrates that *midrash* is at once an analytical tool we can use to discuss the Dreyfus Affair and the people involved in it, as well as an epistemological stratagem used by Jews, consciously or not, to survive in a non-Jewish and often anti-Jewish world. It will consequently also be a book about the isolated life imposed on Dreyfus by the military and prison authorities or rather projected on to him by all of French society, while he bravely tried to maintain his inner dignity and sanity, and how, through his love for his wife, Lucie, and her active efforts on his behalf,

12 Burkhardt, Jacob, *Force and Freedom: Reflections on History*, ed. James Hastings Nichols (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964 [Pantheon Books, 1943]).

he generated a whole new moral dimension of reality for the both of them.[13] Their mutual efforts form part of the midrashic transformation of their milieu, through acts of *tikkun ha'olam* and *tikkun ha'nefesh*, the repair or correction of the world and of their souls.

Man: *L'Humanité*

> *By extension, the term "children" can designate something born of the mind, like opinions (GP, I:7, p. 32). The "children" who will bear the brunt of God's wrath are now identified with a facet of Jacob's personality. Jacob's thought processes and intellectual maturity will be frustrated to some extent by the natural progression of history as represented by the four kingdoms.*
>
> —James Arthur Diamond[14]

Although this book is neither a history nor a biography, it is about Alfred Dreyfus the man[15]—the military officer, the husband, the father, the son, the man of his time, and the Jew—and so it is an anthropology in the old sense of a study of man as a moral being, a *mensch*. Instead of bearing the sexist burden of terms like *macho* and *patriarchal*, this sense of *mankind* stands proudly in the domain of humanity and humanism. The analysis here follows the kind shown by Diamond in his analysis of the interpretative techniques and strategies used by Maimonides in his monumental *Guide of the Perplexed*. These methods of analysis and midrashing are also central to my own way of understanding the Dreyfus Affair and the way in which I read the statements and actions that constitute it. For instance, right here, I am modelling my argument on

13 Unlike the Proust family, in which Jeanne née Weil seems not to have practiced the Judaism of her family and ensured that her sons, Marcel and Robert, were brought up with knowledge of Catholicism, the families of Alfred and particularly Lucie were still observant, at least to the point of being married by a rabbi, celebrating the main Jewish holidays of the year, and teaching their children the basic forms of worship. Cf. Evelyne Bloch-Dono, *Madame Proust* (Paris: Grasset, 2004), 15.

14 James Arthur Diamond, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutic of Concealment: Deciphering Scripture and Midrash in* The Guide of the Perplexed (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 128. In Diamond's statement, *GP* stands for *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

15 A year before this book appeared, some booksellers were already advertising it online, and I found one of them had included it in their "masculine" titles, which I came to discover meant it had something to do with gay men's lifestyles.

what the Rambam (that is, Maimonides) does with the figure of the *sulam* (ladder) and *semel* (statue), both spelled the same in Hebrew as *SML*.

> This type of wordplay seems to be best suited for plumbing the depths of cryptic visual objects that are encoded with secrets or matters pertaining to *ma'asseh ber'eshit* [the narrative of the creation recounted in the opening chapters of Genesis] and *merkavah* [the elaborate apocalyptic image of the chariot of God described in Ezekiel].[16]

In fact, in order to plumb the depths of the Dreyfus Affair, it becomes necessary to treat words and phrases, as well as imagery and rhetorical tropes, in ways quite dissimilar to those usually used by social scientists and deconstructionists. Gradually, through our midrashic reading of the relevant documents, it will be possible to see how Alfred Dreyfus worked within the paradigm of *melitza*, rabbinical rhetoric and poetics, what José Faur calls "horizontal dialectics."[17]

So, in one sense, I will be using a lot of old words, or familiar words in their older senses. However, I will be going out of my way to avoid contemporary usages, jargons, and neologisms because their inaccuracy is part of what I see as a disastrous loss of historical sensibility and knowledge, a shameful lack of sensitivity in thinking and feeling, and a terrible loss of great areas of what used to be common human experiences, the very places in the life of the man—and of the mankind, humanity, *humanité*—Dreyfus cared about and suffered for. For instance, when he writes about morals, he means not simply sexual habits and attitudes, but instead, as it used to mean, a concept that includes psychology, public ethics, and private self-control and integrity. Morals are thus closely related to the anthropology first mentioned, part of the experience of and the value in *humanité*. It is these now virtually unfamiliar and disparaged concepts from which arises another old word, *honour*, with the dignity, integrity, sense of loyalty, duty, and pride that it embodies.

I also try to avoid the incomplete passive structures of sentences. This way of forming syntax removes active, responsible human agents from the world and replaces them with allegorical personifications of abstract

16 Diamond, *Maimionides and the Hermeneutics of Concealment*, 87.
17 Faur, *The Horizontal Society*, section IV, introductory remarks.

and linguistic constructs. Thus, instead of arguments and struggles between individuals and groups representing living interests, even when much of what is at stake is unconscious or poorly misunderstood, the universe is conceived by this postmodernist discourse as merely paradigm shifting and "societal" powers wrestling with one another in an endless and quite meaningless tussle. Again, the consequence of such malformations creates something beyond the awkwardness, weakness, or infelicity of style that would occur if it were merely an occasional lapse; as a persistent and pervasive feature of the current scholarly language, it marks out huge areas of what Alfred Dreyfus saw to be *l'inanité, la déraison humaine, cette légende imbécile, une pretendue bonne foi . . .*[18]

Milieu: The Ambient World

> *On n'a peut-être pas assez remarqué que, bien avant 1914 et alors qu'elle n'avait aucun sens de la gravité de l'heure, la société française ne connaissait plus l'ironie.*
>
> —Julien Benda[19]

The study will have at its centre less the *Affair Dreyfus* than *l'homme Dreyfus*, the man Alfred Dreyfus—one who is not only elusive but also often effectively absent from many accounts, which at best take him as a symbol or a cipher, whereas he was instead a person of flesh and blood, a man of intellect and emotions, a son, a father, a brother, and a husband, and he was a part of a family, a community, a nation: a secular Jew and a patriotic Frenchman, a soldier, an engineer, an intellectual, and a man of his period. Indeed, Dreyfus was very much a man with a history and a place.

Ironic? The newspapers, even those somewhat inclined at first to hesitate at proclaiming his guilt, called him "the zinc man" in the press, and even after he returned home from Devil's Island for the revision of his trial, alluding to what they thought was his lack of feeling, his fail-

18 These phrases are taken almost at random from the pages of Dreyfus's *carnets* of 1899–1907, volumes which are to be discussed at greater length further into this book.

19 Julien Benda, *Belphegor: Essai sur l'esthétique de la présente société française*, 2eme éd. (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, 1924), 130–131. "Perhaps it hadn't been noticed enough but well before 1914 and because it had no sense at all of the seriousness of the times, French society no longer recognized irony."

ure to display the passions of a true-born Frenchman, they blamed him for not breaking through the icy hatred of his accusers and judges. For those who didn't know him, Dreyfus was aloof, taciturn, and stiff in a military way. But even for those in his family and the allies who began to study his case, Dreyfus was not a warm, emotionally expressive man. He was a friend to few, and yet, as we will come to see him, extrapolating from his own writings during his imprisonment back to the more carefree days of his early marriage, a man with wide tastes in books and art.

During the affair and especially afterwards, to be sure, Alfred Dreyfus changed—how could he not? His circle of acquaintances grew, his view of the world matured, and his inner world went through a transformation. But these changes were not known to most people outside his family, even as it expanded to include those who had rallied to his cause and those whose children married his own. What he exposed to the outside world was unspeakable: for amongst these Dreyfusards were many former supporters who, following his acceptance of the pardon, could see no reason to remain loyal to a man who seemed to betray *their* cause. Their goals were ideological and political in ways that did not fit with a military man, a believer in moral values, and a Jew. These socialists, anarchists, and progressives saw in Dreyfus's personal campaign for total rehabilitation something better kept private because otherwise it would just prove annoying, if not downright dangerous to their new cause in government.

Though often categorized as a loner, a solitary, unsocial being, Dreyfus was very much a social being—son, brother, husband, father—and his solitary self was a protective screen, while his unsociableness was an illusion, a mask of a person isolated within himself almost to the point of autism which he was forced to wear by circumstances, by the pressure of the press, and by the trick of the anti-Semites. Like the man in Méliès's film whose head grows larger and larger until it at last explodes, Dreyfus's autistic image is an illusion, and he was seen, because he was expected to be seen, wearing this and related masks.

While he balked at accepting the pardon offered in 1899 following the second condemnation at Rennes, he did in the end accept it, to the chagrin of those supporters who wanted him to remain the victim and the martyr, to wear the mask of the drama they wished to keep producing to their own political ends, while he took the role offered on the understanding that, no matter how it was hidden from the spectators,

he would keep up the fight for his dignity and his good name.

These changing masks and the changeable qualities they projected and hid together constitute his milieu or the matrix in which he lived—and may be termed, in the sense in which Dreyfus came to use the term in regard to his life, *artistic*. To outsiders, Dreyfus, the zinc marionette, whether they actually knew him in person or not, was a symbol and a cipher, and it is important to analyse those roles carefully. The symbol was a sign of issues in politics and philosophy that were swirling around society in the long aftermath of the disastrous Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the lead-up to the Great War of 1914–1918, *la der des der.*[20] The was being a less clear and more dreamlike indicator of the anxieties and other stresses that haunted the *fin du siècle*, that first period between wars, what Léon Daudet called *l'entre-deux-guerres*.[21] This was not a one-man show at all, although sometimes it seemed like a no-man show—the affair without Dreyfus—but a complex interactive performance wherein multiple mentalities, with their fluid imaginations and shifting, dynamic ideologies played off against one another.

Mentalités

> *The Dreyfus Affair left him [Daniel Halévy] very much changed, subject to spells of amnesia and melancholia.*
>
> —Mina Curtiss[22]

But this book is perhaps more interested in two other things, although it does not leave aside completely the question of milieu. Like Daniel Halévy, many, if not most, Frenchmen and women were morally ill, mentally disturbed by the affair, although as we have said—and will explain in due course—they projected their disease onto one man on a faraway Devil's Island. One of the matters we push to the fore of the milieu is the mentality, or rather mentalities, which made the Dreyfus Af-

20 The War to End All Wars, *la dernière des dernières*; cf. Robert Liris, *L'Ordinaire de Vichy. 1940–1942* (Bellerive sur Allier: Privately Published, 2010), 67.

21 Léon Daudet, *L'entre-deux-guerres: souvenirs* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1915). This confused and degenerated generation between 1870 and 1914 is not to be confused with the interwar period from 1919 to 1939.

22 Daniel Halévy, *My Friend Degas*, trans. and ed. Mina Curtiss (Middletown, CT: Wesley University Press, 1964) n. 7, 33; original edition of Halévy's memoir entitled *Degas parle* (Paris: La Palestine, 1960).

fair possible. The affair was more than an isolated instance of a "judicial error" or a localized grievance lodged by his family and friends. It was something that gave historical shape and substance to an era—the people, the events, and the ideas current during a given period of historical and existential time—and was an organizing concept in an ideology, sometimes virtually a vivid narrative in the sense of a myth, and thus a suite of intertwining affective and cognitive tensions that wound over more than a dozen years from 1894 to 1906, playing itself out through that kind of intelligence we have called elsewhere mentalities. In other words, they may be envisioned as subatomic particles constituted of energy, mass, and antimatter described metaphorically as the spoken and the unspeakable, the seen and the unseeable, the conceivable and the inconceivable, the imagined and the unimaginable, and the experienced and the unconscious.

The expression "intelligence" is to be taken in a dynamic sense, as it was used by one of Dreyfus's favourite authors, Hippolyte Taine. In *On Intelligence*, Taine defines the seen, the conceivable and the imagined as "a true hallucination"; in other words, what the mind comes to know it has to reconstruct from the confused sensations of experience and the stock of memory sensations it brings up at such a point of sensory arousal. Yet this mental image or hallucination is unseeable, inconceivable and unimaginable outside the mind—as are the more fantastic hallucinations created by the mind, unless somehow they are confirmed by other persons and tested against external objects and forces. Unlike Plato, who would consequently banish poets from his ideal City because they compounded the hallucinatory effect of unreliable imitations of vague impressions of ideas, or Kant, who could find no reliable means of confirming the unreliability of sensory experience, Taine offers an Enlightenment solution, at least a practical working proposition through scientific and rational training of the mind. Dreyfus, who had had unquestioned faith in the methods of science and technology, comes to doubt the reality of what is happening to him, and seeks, partly through acts of the imagination, partly through love-driven dialectical conversations with his wife Lucie, and partly through an intellectual ordering of his mind, including, as we shall show in a further study, the reiteration of variations on particular doodles or row on row of drawings that are related but never the same, to maintain his sanity, his emotions, and his sense of faith in Truth and Justice. Intelligence combines for Dreyfus, as

it does for Taine, both poetry and science, creative thought and rational proofs.

Thus, it is not so much the world of feelings and ideas (a *world picture* or *Weltanchauung*) as it is the realm where feelings and ideas come in and out of existence and awareness. This is the mentality in which the affair can only be spoken about, thought about, and imagined precisely in relation to textual gaps and silences, historical surrogates, and mistakes, in philosophical fringes and thus heard, read, and perceived between the lines, as well as in denials and misunderstandings. But how does one write about such things?

Midrash

> *I staggered through a world whose signs remained as inscrutable to me as Etruscan script. Unlike the tourist, for whom such things may be a piquant form of alienation, I was dependent on this world full of riddles.*
>
> —Jean Améry [23]

> *From Dreyfus's point of view the world had turned upside down, and it proved too much for him to endure. He went temporarily mad, screaming his innocence and banging his head against the walls of his cell until it was bloody.*
>
> —Michael Kurland[24]

What does it mean to be in a wonderland of riddles and nightmares, where nothing seems to make sense at all and where interpretations are violent and bloody? Is this *midrash* or *mishmash* or *mishigas*?[25] Here

23 Jean Amery, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980; 1977), 47.

24 Michael Kurland, "An Account of the Ordeal of Alfred Dreyfus," *Knol* (13 September 2008), 10 online at http://knol.google.com/k/michael-kurland/dreyfu[alfred/1m3ftpwcv6va/3.

25 In contemporary usage, *midrash* has almost come to replace *aggadah* as the term for a rabbinical story or riddle or poem that helps to explicate a sacred passage, indicate how a law may be applied, or demonstrate the process of analysis needed to engage with a revealed message. It is also usual to define *aggadah* in relation to *halachah*, the legal explication or application itself, in the sense that whatever is not *halachah* is *aggadah* and vice versa. This kind of ambiguous and relatively open-ended definition, however, does not help us move to the term *midrash* outside the strict historical boundaries of rabbinical discourse nor promote understanding of the term *midrashing*,

where the sense is deeply implicated in specific historical examples of rabbinical exegeses, I am concerned mostly with how the term *midrash* developed. Scholars have noted evidence of the *midrash* being understood as both the thing produced and the techniques of analysis, interpretation, and application found already in Hebrew scriptures, as well as in legal and homiletic books outside the strictly authorized documents of the Oral Torah. Hence, it can be extrapolated without too much effort to be a verb—*to midrash*, *to be midrashed*, that is—a process of acting in the world both psychologically and politically.

Though related to the classical Greek and Roman and Christian legal discourses of allegory, parable, metaphor, metonymy, and so forth—the figures of thought and speech that constitute the colours of rhetoric—the *midrash* is more dynamic, fluid, witty, ingenious, and radical. Alphabetic letters (their shapes, their sizes, and their actual placements on the page), lexical units or words (sounded, seen, and organized in relation to one another), syntax and grammar (logically, historically, and wittily conceived), and allusiveness (near and far-fetched, adjusted and re-created) are in a *midrash* fissured, scattered, reassembled, but also turned upside down, inside out, and backwards, so that the meaning is as much a hallucination as the reality is a counterhallucination.

The *midrash*, turned from noun (a historical and specifically rabbinical mode of exegesis or discourse, a genre) to a verb (a transformation of the world and of the self's place in it), in regard to the Dreyfus Affair and to Alfred Dreyfus the man or the mensch, is a way of using a very

a verb to indicate how the mentality of rabbinical exegesis in this poetic, speculative, and creative sense can be seen in social and individual actions. Another drawback in the use of the aggadah-halachah pairing can be shown to be historical and culture-specific. As David Shasha puts it, introducing Leon Wieseltier's review of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's now completed translation into modern Hebrew of the Talmud, "There is no evidence in the Ashkenazi tradition between Halakha and Aggada because both of them serve to express the Divine truth in a literal way." He then adds, by way of contrast—and he is again exaggerating for the sake of a polemical argument, or at least one hopes he is—"In the Maimonidean tradition—rejected by the Ashkenazim—Halakha is binding after the ruling of the Sage or rabbinical court while Aggada is a more open-ended creative process." From my perspective, this kind of mutually exclusive thinking may perhaps be temporarily true in regard to certain hard-line conservative elements in the Orthodox branch of Ashkenazi Judaism but does not square with the more inclusive and longer historical perspective. Even Shasha himself also often complains that contemporary Sephardim, especially the subcategory of Arabic-speaking Syrian Jews to which he belongs, have allowed themselves to give away their own ancient traditions centered on Maimonides and other wise men. David Shasha, "SHU Classic Article Revisited: Leon Wieseltier on the Steinsaltz Talmud" (1989) available through davidsha@googlegroups.com (11 November 2010). A *mishmash* is a mixed-up thing, a *balagan*, as they say in Hebrew, and a *mishigas* is a crazy thing.

Jewish word for a very Jewish experience and a common type of modern Jew, and because of that, this book takes very seriously the role that anti-Semitism played in causing, giving shape and substance to, and providing the continuing influence for the affair, for *midrash* is not only a historical phenomenon, an ancient rabbinical artefact, a way of interpreting scripture and shaping the law; it may be the term we have come to use for an insidious, counterintuitive, uncreating way of imagining Jews living in and experiencing the non-Jewish or anti-Jewish world of the late nineteenth century in France and elsewhere in Europe.

Since so much scholarship on the Dreyfus Affair tends to denominate the *Jewish background*, placing it in the margins of history and conceptual thought, treating it as a nasty and annoying background noise to the reality of the events and the personages that constitute the events and ideas they want to deal with,[26] this book will have to dwell on the anti-Semitism.[27] We have to ask more than *who* were its proponents or *why* they believed that Jews had invaded France and were ruining its traditional values and institutions, but also *how* these false perceptions were generated and maintained for generation after generation, and *what* were the epistemological and aesthetic consequences of these distortions. Such recurrent anti-Jewish prejudices can be used to explain partly why justice was traduced in the affair, in trial after trial, for there were many; why documents were forged; why witnesses perjured themselves; why otherwise normal and orderly people rioted in the streets; and why old friends and relations—artists and intellectuals both—split apart over the affair, but they won't explain why these distorted and insane ideas took hold and seemed convincing and rational.

How were the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards convinced by the same apparent evidence either to act or not to act—almost everyone had a point of view, but not everyone wrote letters to the paper, signed petitions, joined a league, contributed money, or marched in the boulevards—and how did they attempt to persuade others that Jews were or were not an alien presence to be removed by all necessary means from the heart of the nation? Indeed, what was the heart and what was the nation? And did all that hullabaloo mean that the two sides in the great

26 How much of this "wanting" can be measured will be discussed later in this book, where we deal with the limitations of the current critical imagination.

27 Including a cloying and equally distorting philo-Judaism to be found in many booklets, pamphlets, and letters of the period.

conflict between the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards divided along a pattern of Jews and their allies on one side against Judeophobes and their ignorant dupes on the other, good guys against bad guys, and progressive intellectuals against reactionary fools? This book looks at a much more dynamic and unstable field of activity wherein the people and the issues become more complicated and confused. Part of my argument will be, as another of Dreyfus's favourite authors, Gabriel Tarde, put it, that each party imitated the other so that their intelligences and mentalities were entangled by an interpsychic experience. This book will therefore also attempt to show that the best way to understand this kind of complexity is that of the *midrash*.

Midrash, as we shall show at greater length later in the course of this book, developed in the period when the books of scripture were being redacted and rewritten for inclusion in the formally collected national archives or library, the *morasha*. The ancient collections of oral traditions, written documents, and commentaries were put together in the sense of proclaiming them as sources of the law, historical justifications and authorizations of the applied interpretations of such law, and ancillary discussions and exemplifications of these practical readings.

In a sense, then, the very constitutive attribution of national status and legal acceptance by the representatives of the community made the formulation of scripture a political event: the formation of nationality at the moment of the giving and the reception of the law at Sinai and its acclamation by the people assembled, and then later, with the destruction of the temple and the permission to set up a constitutional assembly, as it were, with the eventual formulation of a *nation in exile*. This conceptual development precedes the institutionalization of a canon in the years following the destruction of the Jewish political state, the loss of the temple in Jerusalem as a site of cultic practice, and the pillaging and burning of the *morasha* itself as a depository and clearinghouse of authoritatively copied documents. *Midrash*, as the process of formulation, constitutes these very stages in production: (a) transcription and collection of traditional oral and written materials of national-historical importance regarding the functioning of the kingdom and the temple, including supplemental traditions needed to understand, interpret, and formulate additional texts; (b) direction for constant redaction, annotation, and correction or adjustment of texts put together to ensure coherence, consistency, and correctness of texts presented for discussion

and debate by various scholarly, judicial, political, and spiritual groups; (c) the recording of such dialogues and debates, decisions made, and questions left unanswered.[28]

In another sense, the *midrash* represents the collections of rabbinical texts produced and promulgated subsequent to the loss of the political-juridical state, the priestly temple, and the national archives. The midrashic process is therefore separated from the dynamic production of primary documents, now assumed to be in another category of authority, as a canon takes shape, a process that comes to its conclusion when the Masoretic schools establish the final forms of the Tanakh. Further enhancements, internal questionings, and discussions of meaning and application constitute a body of work deemed in a state of orality—that is, open to continuous development. In particular, amongst all these rabbinical writings, *midrash* is identified with only one generic type. It is partly designated by what it is not: *midrash* per se is not Mishnah, Gemarah, Talmud, and so forth, even though in these kinds of debates, poetic enhancements, or philosophical speculations, midrashic exercises may be found. The word *midrash* designates both particular procedures of exegetical discussion and narrative or lyrical development and the corpus of such works produced under rabbinical authority and practice.

In this book, as in others I have written,[29] *midrash* is used in the sense of a process of thought, of imagination, and of action in the real world. In other words, (a) it is a way of thinking about religious and secular texts; social, political, and psychological ideas; scientific or art-conceptual problems; and other intellectual matters; (b) a creative mode of revisioning the world of existential experience and speculative evaluation of nature and history; and (c) a set of practical and ironic strategies for acting as an individual or group in a society or civilization that is no longer aware of or in agreement with Jewish legal or moral values, historical traditions, and social relationships.

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28 One might add that on the one hand, the law is, in José Faur's term, "the hyperspace where God's revelation unfolds" and Heinrich Heine's *aperçu* that the Torah is the "portable homeland of the Jews." Putting these together, we can see how Alfred Dreyfus in the thousands of pages of letters, journal entries, and workbook folios created a unique Promised Land of Truth and Justice for himself and Lucie over the long years of the affair from 1894 to 1906.

29 See the bibliography at the end for a list of relevant titles.

PART 2: THE DREYFUS TEXTS

> *For him [Paul Bourget] . . . the Will is . . . a state of final consciousness which results from the co-ordination, more or less complex, of a group of conscious, subconscious or unconscious states, which in combination translate themselves by an action or an inhibition; a state of consciousness which causes nothing; which establishes a situation, but does not constitute it.*
>
> —Anatole France[30]

> *Le rôle du commentaire n'est pas d'expliciter un texte, mais de le construire. Le rapport du commentaire avec le texte n'est alors évidemment pas celui d'une déduction.*
>
> —Marc-Alain Ouaknin[31]

Alfred Dreyfus has left us three categories of document for analysis: letters, journals, and workbooks. Lucie Dreyfus has also left us many letters, some of which were not edited and published until very recently, and some of them form themselves into suites of what can be called a virtual journal; her writings also require careful analysis. Above all, the relationship between these various letters, journals, workbooks, and other writings has to be seen in itself as a mode of composition, one not always intended or recognized by the writer and his or her immediate audience.

While many of the thousands of books written about the affair barely touch on the man at the centre of the controversy, the best way to get in touch with who he was and what he became during the long ordeal he underwent lies in a close reading of the documents produced during his imprisonment and, to a lesser extent, in the years following. Alfred Dreyfus was not a man of letters and certainly not a literary figure, whether as a writer of essays or fiction or as a critic and commentator; by profession he was a captain of artillery. Yet as the written evidence

30 Anatole France, "Science and Morals" (an essay on Paul Bourget's *La disciple), Of Life and Letters*, third series, trans. Bernard Miall (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1924), 72.

31 "The role of the commentary is not to explain a text but to construct it. The relationship of the commentary with a text, then, is evidently not that of a deduction." Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Lire aux éclats: éloge de la caresse*, 3eme ed. (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1992), x.

discloses—sometimes quite surprisingly, given all that has been said about him for more than a hundred years—he was well-read; studied literary, historical, and moral (in the older sense that combines our modern notion of private ethical concerns and psychology) books; and had quite definite opinions about these texts. He often expressed the view, too, that art and history were primary sources of knowledge and moral guidance, at the same time as he valued science, technology, and mathematics.

There is a further surprise in what he read and how he responded to the authors he studied, and that is that although he does not seem to be interested in the novels, poets, dramatists, and essayists of the *fin de siècle*, he was aware of up-to-date critical and psychological issues and arguments. His knowledge of the fine arts—painting, sculpture, music, dance, and so on—seems virtually nonexistent, and yet he declares himself a lover of aesthetics and the artistic temperament. Even more than that, considering how in this book we stress the centrality of Judaism and anti-Semitism in the events and the conceptualization of the affair, he virtually never speaks of himself as a Jew, directly or indirectly, and seems not to recognize that the charges against him and the opposition to his figurative role in the Europe-wide debates stemmed from the rise in anti-Semitism as a pseudoscience, a political ideology, and social exclusionary principle, and yet examining the various documents he wrote and occasionally edited—except, of course, those he removed from the public record and thus kept from publication—through a midrashic lens, we can discern patterns of thought, points of historical convergence and allusive lines of "magnetic" influence that do indeed mark him out as a Jew and establish his role in what was still mythically conceivable: the affair as an all-Jewish phenomenon. More scientifically, the explanatory figure has to do with light rays passing through prismatic lenses, each ray being diffracted through the other and thus exposing the constituent bands of light, not only those usually visible as in Newton's model of colours, but the normally unseen range, from the ultraviolet and infrared at each end of the prism to the energetic powers of x-rays, the discovery of which fascinated Dreyfus.

First of all, he wrote a large number of letters to family and friends, the bulk of which is correspondence to his wife, Lucie, from the time of his arrest in 1894 right through until his release on a pardon in 1898. Those from Lucie have only recently been edited and made public in an

accessible form. Thus, we have to see the epistolary exchange as precisely that, a process of double creation and mutual support through love and loyalty. Yet, without detracting from their intrinsic value as domestic, intimate, highly personal expressions of feeling between a wife and her husband, the letters, set against any number of more "normal" affectionate relationships in historical or fictional circumstances, take on a very distinct characteristic. In part, they have to be registered and filtered through the critical gaze of historical research, following the various editorial schemes through which they have been collected, selected, and annotated as suites of communication.

Thus, to begin with, these letters should be read in two forms: one, in their original form, with all their rough edges and incompleteness, as they have more recently been published; or two, in the context of various selected editions, with and without the comments of Dreyfus himself or different external hands, some of them participants in the affair, and some more modern editors. However, whether read as an epistolary sequence along a trajectory of narrative development, albeit with many gaps and repetitions occasioned by frustration and the desire to rearticulate key words and concepts by either or both of the writers, or as a series of discrete, separate, and occasional moments of experience, the letters cannot be fully appreciated outside of a larger context, a consideration, that is, of how they swerve away from traditional love letters, prison writings, and diaries or journals of despair and/or defiance.

From almost the very first letters sent before Alfred was shipped to Devil's Island, the letters of the man and his wife have a different tone, content, and function than what would have been expected from them—or anyone under similar conditions. As we shall see later in this book, these conditions include an awareness of constant surveillance and censorship, a need for each of the pair to withhold vital aspects of their own situation and understanding—or lack of understanding—of what was going on. There is a felt need to assume, presume, or intuit circumstances and attitudes in the other's situation so as to shape the words of one's own epistle and thus to affirm, confirm and induce necessary responses, and then, not least or last, to attain to a sensitivity perhaps as unconscious/conscious of deeper Jewish values, aspirations, and traditional modes of entering into *zman cherusenu*, the time of our remembrance. This last matter of time and memory will be shown to be analogous to aesthetic and psychological strategies undertaken by Mar-

cel Proust in his *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Even more, the reading of the letters between Alfred and Lucie has to be undertaken within a frame of reference that understands the epistles as only part of their textual relationship. In a general sort of way, scholars have been aware of this, in the sense that they know that Alfred did more than write letters to Lucie: he kept a journal of his acts, thoughts, and feelings while he was separated from his wife and as he prepared to rehabilitate his name and the honour of his family after his return to France and the disaster of the second court-martial in Rennes, and Alfred also undertook some of the editorial work of preparing those letters and journals for publication—that is, he helped to select letters, write explanatory and polemical introductions, and provide annotations. Only recently have historians and editors sought to see that the *cahiers* (workbooks) and *carnets* (journals) do more than amplify or supplement the letters. These notebooks and workbooks contain in themselves a variety of forms of expression, some of them verbal texts, some nonverbal mathematical equations and chemical formulae, and some of them drawings of a number of kinds from geometrical shapes, to iterative doodles and playful design-making.

The second category of documentation may be found in the journals (*carnets*) kept by Dreyfus during and after his imprisonment on Devil's Island. These also have been edited and annotated by the author himself, members of his family, and later scholarly commentators. Most of this material has either disappeared altogether, is hinted at in reports made by various prison and government officials charged with monitoring Dreyfus's activities while in exile,[32] or is contained in fragments and as trial sketches in the *cahiers*, in the same way as there may be found a few sentences or outlines of letters to be written to Lucie, other family members, or political officials in Paris.

The third kind of evidence is found in the extant *cahiers* or workbooks brought back from his years in exile in the French penal colony in Cayenne, South America. Most were either lost or destroyed by Dreyfus himself and have only recently been made available in a selected, part-

32 Faur: "Jews were the first (and only) people going into *Galut* ('Exile') that introduced a new doctrine in international law and diplomacy: a nation is not extinguished by the fiat of sword and banishment. A vanquished nation, ejected from its territory could preserve its political identity as long as it administers its internal affairs according to its *own legal and political institutions*" (*The Horizontal Society*, Section II, 21).

facsimile and part-transcribed format. These fifteen surviving manuscript texts are the most interesting now because they are the last to be made public in an accessible form. Unfortunately, the latest editors, while transcribing the verbal texts and numerical exercises, do not reproduce all the pages filled with Dreyfus's doodles—either in the opening section devoted to photo-reproduction of the original documents or the transcribed and printed version of the workbooks. The editors do indicate where the drawings are placed in relation to the essays and mathematical ciphers, and so we can imagine to a greater degree than ever the total impression the books have as physical objects and artefacts of Dreyfus's last two years on Devil's Island.

Allowing for these gaps in our knowledge, it is now possible to attempt a new reading of the whole body of evidence in its various forms and to show it to be, not so much a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a collective and synthetic work of art, even if it's more like a *satura* or confused hodgepodge than an aesthetically conceived or logically organized whole, as what Dreyfus hints at and once actually designates *une fantasmagorie*, a phantasmagoria. It can also be approached as a kind of social dance of reason, a *mazurka* of mentalities.

Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation

> *En effet dans les premières Tables il est dit:* Zakhor ét yom hachabbat; *dans les Secondes,* Zakhor *est remplacé par* Chamor *"garde" au lieu de "souviens-toi!"*
>
> —Marc-Alain Ouaknin[33]

While the early historians of religion in the nineteenth century were busy discovering that Hebrews had once been like their surrounding neighbours in regard to archaic rituals of bloody sacrifice, temple prostitution, and other forms of ceremonial violence, they tended to do so, if they were Christians, out of a duty to exalt the religion of Jesus and depict the early Church as justly leaving the Jews either behind in the cellars of history, or in the shadows of modernity, where they could only

33 "In effect, in the first Tables [of the Law] it is said *Zakhor ét yom hachabbat* [Remember the Day of the Sabbath]; in the second, *Zakhor* is replaced by *Chamor* 'guard' in place of 'thou shalt remember!'": Ouaknin, *Lire aux éclats*, 100.

survive by becoming less and less Jewish in their minds, hearts, and souls. And if they were Jews, as indeed many were when the century came to a close, they sought to prove that Judaism had now cleansed itself of all such ancient detritus and could stand tall as a purified, moral system, ready to support the modern world and share in its progress.

Yet at the same time, outside of the arena of these new anthropological and sociological arguments, in the real world of modern life, Jews in the Western nations, such as France, Germany, and even Italy were doing what their ancestors had always done: engaging with the ideas and the institutions of the peoples they lived amongst in such a way as to keep developing their Jewish beliefs and practices and carefully accepting and modifying "the knowledge of the nations"—and nowhere more clearly than amongst those assimilated and more or less occulted or veiled Jews whose achievements in the arts, literature, theatre, and music, as well as in the sciences and technologies of psychology, architecture, medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, and mechanics, enhanced the entire spectrum of twentieth-century culture and society. This means that the studies of Israel Bédarride, Franz Cumont, Theodor Reinach, Marie Joseph Lagrange, Ernest Renan, and a host of others could at best be seen as opening the eyes of modern men and women—ordinary middle-class educated folk, as well as those with more literary or aesthetic sensibilities—to the way in which there was a continuum of relations and developments from the archaic Semitic civilizations of the Near and Middle East through the great prophetic and mystical reforms in proximity of time and space to the classical cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, the constant refinements and variations in late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance and into the Enlightenment and the Romantic periods.

Simultaneously, however, and usually completely outside the scholarly intentions or conception of the writers themselves, these same tomes by Jewish and non-Jewish authors provided grist for the mill of the new forms of anti-Semitism, which seized open the paradigms of evolution and the struggle for existence to build up myths of exclusive and progressive nationalism, racial classifications of humanity, and notions of moral degeneration, the dangers of biological impurities in language and ideas, and the pernicious operation of unseen organisms and organizations.

The dialectical tensions between these two ways of seeing the his-

tory of Judaism form, to a large degree, the matrix in which the Dreyfus Affair came into being and then played itself out. Nevertheless, insofar as a Jewish perspective may be found through which to view the major players, events, and ideas of this set of phenomena—this kaleidoscope of ideas, this phantasmagoria of illusions, and this swirling mazurka of social relationships—we have to explain what a *midrash* is and how it functions. And to do that, it is needful to set out a scheme of Jewish cultural development somewhat different from the Christian patterns of spiritual triumphalism or condescending tolerance normally applied.[34]

Judaism was constituted out of archaic rituals and ancient beliefs by refocusing all its efforts on the law and its interpretation, which meant on the study and analysis of texts. While the word became central to the exercise and practice of the new constitution for the nation of Israel, the primary text, received in the revelation of Sinai by Moses our teacher and handed on to the elders, sages, and rabbis of the great tradition, was not to be taken as a fixed, immutable thing, an idol, for not only were there two *luchot ha-brit*, two tables of the law, but two versions of the tables, one inscribed by the hand of God and then broken by Moses in his righteous indignation against the idolatrous worship of the golden calf and one written as he took dictation from the voice of God. The fragments and the dust of the broken tables were collected and stored in the moveable Ark of the Covenant and then in the Holy of Holies of the two temples in Jerusalem.

Simultaneous with the donation of the stone tablets on which the primary words of Torah were written, there was another ongoing oral revelation of the Torah, that which continues in all discussions, debates, and public readings of the law. Combining the written Torah with the oral Torah creates the Talmud, and there were two versions developed, one for the land of Israel called *Yerushalmi*, the Talmud of Jerusalem, and one for the Diaspora or Exile, called *Bavli*, the Talmud of Babylonia. All of these texts form into a multilayered, intertextual machine for thinking—a complex lens to see through, a mechanism for generating ideas and mental images, and a continuously flowing river of interpretation through conversation, debate, and questioning.

34 Faur: "In my view, given that we are all endowed with the image of God within, it would be sacrilegious to presume that anyone has the right to impose his sense of sacrality on anyone else. God alone, who sees into the hearts of men, can know who is righteous (see 1Sam 16:7, cf. MT *Teshuba* 3:2)," *The Horizontal Society*, Section II, 25.

Several important clues as to how texts are created, transmitted, discussed, and reproduced in Jewish tradition need to be teased out from this overly condensed scheme. Texts are, to begin with, actual physical objects, generated in specific historical times and places, and then, though they are reproduced, the secondary—*mishnaic*, *deuteronomic*[35]—objects do not totally replace the originals, for the originals, even if broken, annihilated, or hidden, remain intact in memory, a memory that includes the original time and place but includes them in such a way that they continue to draw into themselves, through reading and interpretation, those who hear, see, and understand these texts, meaning that the original time-place textuality is always expanding from its moment and space of creation. By continuous doubling, something quite distinct from the platonic horror of mimetic diminution occurs, for whereas Socrates, through his textualizing student Plato, fears that writing as an art(ifice) fixes the original dynamic idea of reality into a flat, virtually dead copy, withdrawn from its original social signification, destroying the mind's ability to encompass and transcend the mere moment of transcription, the rabbis and their predecessors experience and envision textualization as a creative and consequently divine action, with those primary energies and meanings flowing outwards and expanding to embrace ever more time and space, the moments and places embodied, and the individuals who participate in the explosive act.

Reading, study, argument, and application therefore form an ongoing dialectical process, moving forward towards as yet unachieved instants in history and backwards to the first and continuing explosion of creative energies. Variations and variations within variations spill forth, generating ever-renewing and transforming contexts for all that had preceded them, so that there can be no fixed eternal interpretation—that would be idolatrous and soul destroying. It is not, however, that every meaning is equivalent to all others, but that even small or erroneous interpretations are part of a cumulative, self-correcting whole, determined not by a secret and single truth hidden in the mystery of

35 Each term contains a sense of repetition, doubleness, duplication, reiteration, supplementariness, complementariness, and implemental repetition. Like the term *twin* in English, which can mean at once to have two versions of the same person or thing or one person or thing divided into two or a situation where the object or being is more than the sum of its part, that is, a wholly new kind of phenomenon distinct from whatever it was that doubled itself or split into two units, so too the learning that is *mishna-ed* is made into *shnay*, two, and the law (*nomos*) repeated by *deuteromonizing*, repeated and learned and readjusted to changed circumstances.

the created beginning but freely expanded and guided by its dynamism and dialectical connections to the existing traditions of logic, loyalty, and love.

A Mutual Admiration Society[36]

> *Every two or three weeks the jailer had brought me a letter from some of my family. It was previously submitted to the Commission and most roughly handled, as was too evident by the number of ERASURES in the blackest ink which appeared throughout. One day, however, instead of merely striking out a few passages, they drew the black line over the entire letter, with the exception of the words, "My DEAREST SILVIO," at the beginning, and the parting salutation at the close, "ALL UNITE IN KINDEST LOVE TO YOU."*
>
> —Silvio Pellico[37]

What Lucie and Alfred write to each other over the nearly five years of the captain's imprisonment and while he resided in at least three separate jails is, from a cold, almost cynical perspective, not much; their letters are repetitive, full of clichés, and superficial. However, what they say is not of great importance; there are elsewhere in the nineteenth century and earlier great and passionate love letters, soul-searching epistles from men in prison or exile, and well-crafted expressions of all kinds. What is significant in the letters lies in a number of factors emerging into focus only after repeated readings and intense scrutiny. One of these factors is how gradually and almost unconsciously each of the correspondents picks up clues from the other and repeats or anticipates the other's words, phrases and sentiments, reinforcing their mutual commitment to the main themes that underlie their relationship. A second factor is how, again gradually and without deliberate planning, they each come to realize the conditions under which the epistolary exchange has to be carried out—the censorious interference by various

36 The title of a 1956 song made by popular by Teresa Brewer, with words and music by Matt Dubey and Harold Karr.

37 Silvio Pellico, *My Ten Years' Imprisonment* (1833), trans. Thomas Roscoe (London: Cassell & Co., 1886) Chapter XXXII, 40. This was a book that the guards on Devil's Island were afraid Dreyfus would read.

prison and governmental officials; the delays in passing letters on so that there are gaps, clusters, and out-of-sequence arrivals; and the different degrees of epistemological repression and confusion between husband and wife, the one trying to hide the specifics of his discomfort and despair, the other forced to avoid revealing information forbidden by order of the men in charge of passing on the letters, since that would end the permission to write altogether and perhaps cause greater punishments, and also attempting to conceal as much as possible her own private anxieties and anguish.

One result of these factors is that time is annihilated since there is no real narrative of change or development to be recounted, other than expressions of pain caused by the seemingly hopeless and endless ordeal or remarks on how their two children, Pierre and Jeanne, are growing up, reacting to their own changed and confusing conditions. Similarly, though in a somewhat different sense of literalness and existential understanding, space is conflated and transformed for the pair of separated spouses. They each confess to feeling what the other does and consequently offer to inhabit a new imaginary realm of experience created by the words they exchange in letters, with these written words being transformed into sounds of imagined speech, and these imaginary conversations being contextualized by more tactile fantasies of being together again in a mixture of memories and anticipated restoration of normality, the words on the pages, the handwriting of the other seen and felt—until the censors realize this and try to stop the process of transformation by having the actual letters recopied before passing them on—and then in dreams of embraces and unification of their persons.

It is possible to see some of these transformations if we compare the words inscribed by one and then the other writer to a fictional conversation between two lovers in Ludovic Halévy's short romantic novel *L'Abbé Constantine*, published more than a decade before Lucie and Alfred began writing to one another.[38] In this fictional account set in 1881, a young Canadian woman, Mrs. Susie Scott, comes to France with her sister, Miss Bettina Percival, both having inherited an enormous amount of wealth from their father. At first, when they arrive in Paris, the older married sister and her younger single sister quickly

38 Ludovic Halévy, *The Abbé Constantin* (English translation 1882), no translator given.

become the talk and the toast of the town, thanks to their good looks, exotic oddity as free and vivacious American women, and the lure of their great fortunes. The younger sister, especially, attracts suitors of all sorts, mostly men with titles but little money, seeking to gain both a trophy wife and her untold millions of francs. But when the sisters decide to move to the country and buy up a series of farms, houses, and tenants once constituting a whole aristocratic estate, they also meet the old parish curate and his godson, Jean Reynaud, a young artillery officer of relatively humble origin.

Both sisters, seeking to ingratiate themselves with the *abbé*, show themselves to be generous, genial, and eager to fit into the community. The young *Canadienne*, Bettina, finds herself emotionally drawn to the handsome officer, finding him a welcome relief from the pretentious, snobbish, and gold-digging dandies of Paris and the various princes and lords who tried to win her hand and purse. In the climactic scene before the romantic ending to the novel, the lovers find themselves in an awkward, untoward impasse: the rich young woman fears that the man she loves will be too embarrassed to risk marrying her because it would humiliate him to be thought an adventurer just after her money, and she is also sure that he would be unwilling to enter the world of high society, in which he would have to play roles totally unsuited to his character. Jean, on his part, wishing to remain loyal to his military career, is afraid that the woman he loves would not want or should not live the life of an army wife, having to exist not only on his modest income but in a relatively unstable way, travelling from one posting to another, often to isolated and insalubrious parts of France or elsewhere in the world. While each is sure of his or her own love for the other, they cannot be sure of the other's commitment—nor whether it would be fair to force the other to give up their friends, ambitions, and cultural pleasures.

Only with the aid of the *curé* is the moral impasse broken. By the parish priest's gentle prodding, each one confesses to loving the other, and then, remarkably, gives the reasons for not wishing to harm the other's way of life. It is in this conversation, hardly realistic in its tones or execution, that the young woman states her willingness to enter into the humble conditions of an artillery officer's wife, her desire to support him in all his endeavours, and lack of any regrets for the gay lights of Paris and the artificialities of the high life. As she feels there can be an accommodation as well to her personal fortune insofar as she and he

can live comfortably enough, perform together acts of Christian charity, and bring up any children without the snobbish artificialities they both dislike, a marriage is quickly agreed to and then occurs.

What is striking is how closely the words, phrases, and postures of these fictional lovers in Halevy's novel are echoed in the letters written by Lucie and Alfred Dreyfus. This remarkable similarity highlights the very different contexts and functions of the words themselves. For instance, the following lines from the novel describing Jean Reynaud's feelings before going away on military manoeuvres foreshadow words Dreyfus and his wife used:

> Jean is no longer tranquil; Jean is no longer happy. He sees approach with impatience, and at the same time with terror, the moment of his departure. With impatience—for he suffers an absolute martyrdom, he longs to escape from it; with terror—for to pass twenty days without seeing her, without speaking to her, without her in a word—what will become of him? Her! It is Bettina: he adores her![39]

Even more surprising are the words spoken by Bettina during the scene in which the priest guides the lovers towards an understanding and commitment to one another.

> "Jean, I know what you are, I know to what I should bind myself in marrying you, and I should be for you not only the loving and tender woman, but the courageous and constant wife. I know your entire life; your godfather [the Abbé Constantin] has related it to me. I know why you became a soldier; I know what duties, what sacrifices, the future may demand from you. Jean, do not suppose that I shall turn you from any of these sacrifices. If I could be disappointed with you for anything, it would be, perhaps, for this thought—oh, you must have had it—! That I should wish you free, and quite my own, that I should ask you to abandon your career. Never! Never!

39 Halévy, *The Abbé Constantin*, Ch. VIII, "Another Martyr to Millions," 59.

Understand well, I shall never ask such a thing of you."[40]

A short while after, Bettina makes another statement, one resonant with echoes from the book of Ruth, where the young Moabite new widow, returning with her mother-in-law, declares her commitment to be from then on a good and faithful Jewish daughter-in-law,[41] thus providing an indication of the allusive power inherent in Lucie Dreyfus's oath of loyalty to her husband:

> "When I can follow you, I will follow you; wherever you are will I be [and do] my duty, wherever you are will be my happiness. And if the day comes when you cannot take me, the day when you just go alone, well! Jean, on that day, I promise you to be brave, and not take your courage from you."[42]

It is uncanny how prescient these speeches are, although Halévy could have no inkling of what would happen to Alfred Dreyfus and his wife, nor what kind of letters they would write. The prescience extends to the language of military loyalty as a code for marital love and duty, as well as to the general pattern of development of the events Alfred and Lucie would be tested through.

Refuge in the *Cauchemar*

> *Alfred Dreyfus was very affected by the affair but he avoided showing his feelings. He was criticized for his attitude but it was a pure product of his generation. He was secular, rationalist and when he became the victim of injustice he thought that the truth would impose itself naturally.*
>
> —Pascal Ory[43]

40 Halévy, *The Abbé Constantin,* Ch. IX, "The Reward of Tender Courage," 83.

41 Ruth becomes the ancestor of King David and thus of the messianic line in ancient Israel. Her conversion has no other ritual than her promise to Naomi.

42 Halévy, *The Abbé Constantin,* Ch. IX, "The Reward of Tender Courage," 83.

43 Pascal Ory, in an interview with Shiri Sitbon, "Historian: 'French Jewry was Falsely Accused of Abandoning Dreyfus," online at http://ej[ress.org/printversion.aspx?idd=10064 (updated 4 August 2006) (read 19 May 2009).

One of the most frustrating aspects of reading Alfred Dreyfus's journals and *carnets* is the lengths to which he seems to go to avoid having to recognize that when all other hostilities against him are taken into consideration, the commonest feature—and the common denominator between his manifest enemies and many of his non-Jewish supporters—is anti-Semitism. Whether it is in his allowing to pass by without any notice the comment by Georges Clemenceau that Dreyfus is—like all other Semites, of which he is so typical—a bothersome annoyance, or his own annoyance at a police officer who comes to warn him of a suspected plot by a band of rabid Jew-haters to kidnap him on the street and probably spirit him away to be murdered, it is only by going to the modern footnotes appended to the edition of his *carnets* that we discover who these dangerous criminals are, as Dreyfus merely calls them nationalists.

Whereas in the letters to Lucie, as we have seen, the constant threat of censorship and thus the need to maintain a vigilance against any hint at their Jewishness[44] may justify the absence of any but the most subtle and covert hints of their religion and culture, the journals and the *carnets* emerge from a different set of circumstances altogether, and the strong sense of denial has to be found elsewhere than in what Pascal Ory calls "a pure product of his generation." Even in the prison notebooks, to be examined later in this book, the reasons for a similar silence and invisibility in regard to Dreyfus's religious heritage and spiritual or ethical concerns cannot be brushed aside as a consequence of his and his age's "secularism" or his own philosophical positivism, scientific rationalism, and indifference to Judaism. Without midrashing the texts we have, any interpretations would seem forced and against the grain.

Fourteen Prison *Cahiers*

> *Mirabeau always carried around within him the pains of his past; he had the glory but never the esteem and confidence [that should have gone with it] However, in the midst of all the disorder [of the late eighteenth century], Mirabeau*

44 It was not that everyone did not know that Lucie and Alfred were Jews, but that both of them attempted, as much as possible, to keep from calling attention to that fact, as any reference to holidays, customs, ritual objects, or Hebrew or Yiddish words would have been leaped on as evidence of a secret code and a plot for escape.

> *worked hard and educated himself; the three years that he spent in the dungeon of Vincennes were fertile years of study and meditation. It was at Vincennes that he wrote the famous Letters to Sophie, a kind of journal of his heart and intelligence, with a profundity, penetration and marvellous passion. When the Revolution began, Mirabeau was ready; his previous studies would serve [him in good stead], but it was not only as a great orator that this was revealed; it was as a statesman, endowed with a rare gift, as much for great things as for great words.*
>
> —Alfred Dreyfus, *Cahier* 14, Folio 4

In the last of the fourteen extant notebooks written while he was on Devil's Island, which is dated from 11 to 29 April, 1899, shortly before he finally returned to France to have his long-awaited second court-martial in Rennes, Dreyfus writes one of his many little essays on the leaders of the French Revolution, drawing from his favourite historians, such as Michelet and Thiers. In this brief meditation on Gabriel de Mirabeau (1749–1791), Dreyfus spends a full paragraph discussing his transformation into a great revolutionary orator, giving credit for this rise in character and rhetorical skills to the three years he spent in prison in the town of Vincennes, a period which he spent in intense study and meditation. Although Dreyfus does not detail what books and authors the Comte de Mirabeau focused on during those three years, what is implied mostly is that, like this famous historical figure who recreated himself as a revolutionary hero through his own efforts, Dreyfus was preparing for his own future by an analogous regimen of reading and meditation.

When we read this fourteenth *cahier* and the thirteen that precede it, we become aware of Dreyfus's rather complex regimen of self-education, as well as a sustained exercise in maintaining his sanity and emotional stability. He imagines himself to be not only in a kind of intellectual conversation with himself, on the one hand, but in a conversation with all the writers and books he was commenting on his notebooks on the other. His intellectual conversation with himself was in preparation for that hoped-for eventual return to France and normality, at which time he would have to speak and write on behalf of the principles for which he was being unjustly punished, although at this point he was not aware

of the deep impact his case was making on the educated classes in the metropolis. The conversation with the other writers, as we shall make more clear as we proceed in our discussion, not only kept him in touch with and more worthy of being so involved with thinkers who provided the matrix of French civilization, but also allowed him to engage in a form of secularised adaptation of rabbinical discourse. This second aspect of his notebooks—with their puzzling mixture of brief commentaries, complex mathematical and scientific annotations and exercises, and strangely mesmerizing and ever-varying proliferation of drawings—is what we are calling by the neologism of *midrashing*—that is, turning the Talmudic Hebrew word *midrash* into a verb, to *midrash*.

Before the notebooks from the final year of his imprisonment on Devil's Island became available, it was thought that Dreyfus was a man of rather narrow learning, his mind formed by the military school he attended to make him an officer in the engineering corps. Scholars have presumed, because of his taciturn behaviour in court at his two trials, that he was not a cultured man able to express—or perhaps even to have—very deep thoughts or to engage with the wide range of ideas in literature, philosophy, and the arts flourishing at the end of the nineteenth century. But these *cahiers* from the years 1898 and 1899 put paid to such notions, as they reveal a Dreyfus far more sensitive, critical, and learned that previously envisaged.

In these surviving notebooks—those from the previous three or four years of his imprisonment were destroyed by Dreyfus himself—we see discussions of not only a very long list of Latin and Greek authors from the classical period and a range of French poets, dramatists, essayists, and novelists from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, but also representative thinkers from elsewhere in Europe, references to painters, musicians and sculptors, and, of course, historians, political theorists, and psychologists. I say "of course" because this latter list underlies the ideas and opinions expressed in Dreyfus's subsequent journals, which were composed as part of the campaign to clear his name after the pardon granted at Rennes and, though these individuals are not mentioned by name, they are clearly alluded to, indirectly and directly.[45]

Although Dreyfus was a well-educated man with wide interests, there

45 See Appendix A for an index of names and authors written about or mentioned in the *cahiers*.

were limits to these interests and to his own scholarly skills. The prison workbooks, as we have noted several times, were prepared under trying circumstances and serve several functions other than those of intellectual note-taking or literary and philosophical musing on ideas important to their author. In my attempt to translate what the fifteen remaining notebooks contain, it quickly became clear that Dreyfus would lose track of his train of argument, repeat himself, seem to stutter, and return at long intervals to the same book, author, or idea to try to correct his understanding. In other words, just as it would be wrong to measure the value of these jottings in terms of any subsequent career in scholarship or creative literature—there is no such career in Dreyfus's life aside from his polemical and apologetic letters and journals meant to further his cause after the pardon and in a generally *ad hoc* manner—it would also be wrong to dismiss them as of merely passing interest and as a witness to his suffering in the tropical hell of Devil's Island. These books are of the essence in coming to an understanding of the man.

These *cahiers* seem at first glance to contain a miscellaneous series of reading notes and short commentaries on the various books he has been perusing while confined to his cell and with no one to converse with. However, as we shall see, we have to do more than enumerate, classify, and evaluate these authors and the ideas they generate in Dreyfus's mind as evidenced by his explicit comments. Putting aside short, incomplete fragments of trial letters to his wife, Lucie, and outlines of appeals to the commandant of the prison he is incarcerated in or to ministers back in Paris, for the most part Dreyfus writes about ideas, history, and scientific or aesthetic principles. Yet from time to time something else emerges which is of far greater significance for our understanding of the man and his place in the affair.

Occasionally, when he criticises one of the authors, he reveals an attitude quite distinct from that usually attributed to him, such as in his suggestion that the artistic personality and the work of art should be more than just factored into the history of eras and nations but taken as central matters. It also happens that he starts to discuss one particular author or book and then seems to slide inadvertently to another, and thus establishes new ideas, new contexts, and new perspectives, perspectives that moreover spring from memories of childhood, deeply personal tastes in the arts, and unexpected attitudes towards people, places, and historical events.

In his recently-published *Prison Notebooks* for 1898, Alfred Dreyfus obsessively writes his response to Ernst Renan's comment that in the future, literary history will effectively replace direct reading of great works of literature. Dreyfus finds himself forced to disagree with the renowned historian and critic, stating that direct reading—that is, direct contact and engagement with the masterworks of world literature—offers a profound access to the themes and experiences of human genius. Several important ideas emerge as we see Dreyfus, in his fifth year of imprisonment, exile, humiliation, and torture grappling with this seemingly abstract and purely intellectual problem. First, in coming back again and again, never really getting beyond the few points noted here, Dreyfus indicates how significant the idea is for him, representing not so much a problem in literary history or critical theory as a point around which his own shocking confrontation with history keeps running against a major impasse. Second, in finding himself forced to disagree with one of the truly pivotal figures of critical thinking in nineteenth-century France, Dreyfus indicates, probably without being fully aware of the implications of the blockage, that conventional middle-class thinking, as taught in schools and institutionalized elsewhere in the national consciousness, does not answer to his own transformed circumstances and thus serves as a sign, at least by hindsight to readers like ourselves, that there has been an existential shift in the paradigms of knowledge and imagination. Third, insofar as Dreyfus, normally a man of science and technology, a military practitioner in engineering and mathematics, now reads and rereads literature, literary history, philosophy, and the philosophy of history, he attempts to put himself on the side of creative, speculative, and aesthetic thinking.

Above all, what he comes back to again and again, in many forms, are the key themes of justice and truth, in Hebrew *Daat v'Emet*. Rather than appealing to the fundamental principles of the French Revolution and the republic (i.e., *Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité*), Alfred Dreyfus returns to these two key words, concepts, and values.[46] From time to time, he does speak of liberty, believes in the equality of peoples, and seeks to promote the notions of mutuality, charity, and tolerance. However, his

46 At this point, in a personal communication, Norbert Col wrote: "Most challenging this. Maurras would have agreed. His late disciple, Pierre Boutang, has a few fascinating remarks about this side in Maurras, and precisely related them to the Hebrew *seddaqah*," that is, to acts of charity and loving-kindness.

whole value system, insofar as we can piece it together from his writings, does not lean towards modern liberal principles as they have come to be understood in terms of socialism and anarchism, the conceptually leftist movements in his own time, which for the most part backed up his or rather his family and friends' efforts to have him released from imprisonment, his verdict revised and reversed, and his status in the army and his honour in the public eye restored.

On the one hand, perhaps most ironically, his own moral ideals were more akin to those of the intellectual anti-Dreyfusards, the traditionalists who believed in the importance of the state, the church, and the army, and who also favoured rule by intellectual and moral elites but not, of course, those who were bigoted, superstitious, and irrational. On the other hand, most surprisingly, his strong conviction in the power and rightness of justice and truth place him within the conceptual world of rabbinical or Talmudic Judaism, surprisingly because this source of values is the one he seems most determined not to speak about explicitly. In Judaism, these two great principles of the law are called *Daat* and *Emet*, and they resonate through liturgy, legal discussions and mystical speculations. In my close readings of the Dreyfus letters and *cahiers*, I hope to show that they are deeply and implicitly embedded in those documents as well.

Equations, Formulae, and Kabbalastic Signs

> *Il y aurait une très curieuse étude à faire sur le fantastique, sur l'*irréel *que dégage ce prodigieux ensemble de lignes, de formes et de couleurs, si magnifiquement réel, si mathématiquement coordonnés. Le fantastique n'est qu'une question de géométrie; voila ce qu'il faudrait prouver et ce que l'Exposition démontre.*
>
> —Octave Mirbeau[47]

Although Octave Mirbeau—novelist, art critic, and Dreyfusard[48]—was

47 "There is a very interesting study to be done on the fantastic, on the unreal which may be drawn out of the prodigious assembly of lines, forms and colors, utterly magnificent and mathematically coordinated. The fantastic is only a question of geometry; and there it is, that which ought to be proved, and that which the Exposition demonstrates." Octave Mirbeau, 372.

48 According to Norbert Col (in personal communications during December 2010), in France,

writing about the Universal Exhibition of 1889, which he saw very much as a "tumult of joy" or what we have called elsewhere generically a "Festival of Laughter," he can also be describing—and his modern editors see him very much as an accurate prophet of what is coming in the next few decades—the phantasmagoria of Alfred Dreyfus's prison notebooks. These fourteen *cahiers*, with their mixture—including pages of alternating sequences and overlapping presentations—of numerical equations and formulae, kabbalistic or arabesque doodles, and brief essays and commentaries on literature, historiography, philosophy, aesthetics, and science, are a new form of *fantasia*, a coordination of mathematics, technology, art, and morality. But although Mirbeau mockingly assesses the role of the exposition, with its wonders of modern technology and architecture, such as the Eiffel Tower and its surging crowds of drinking, eating, laughing, and babbling people, he takes no account of the real transformations occurring in the imagination and the subversive role played in such changes by the gradual leaking into the current of French history of Jewish ideas, attitudes, aspirations, anxieties, and ways of perceiving and evaluating reality.

Along with many of his compatriots on either side of the divide that yawns open so conspicuously during the Dreyfus Affair, Mirbeau is an anti-Semite. Not that he is a raging fanatic like Drumont, Maurras, or the crowds out on the streets in a riot of mockery and hatred, but he, like Degas and other intellectuals—even amongst those who temporarily and for politically strategic reasons joined the Dreyfusard cause—finds the Jews an annoying people. In fact, after Dreyfus's return to France, the second trial at Rennes, and the granting of a pardon, when his firm supporter Georges Clemenceau was approached to continue to help the captain gain full rehabilitation of his name, rank, and salary, he dismissed this annoying Jew, sick and tired of his whining and complaints.

Jews? An Annoying People!

Nouveau refus. Lebon m'explique, en termes plus embarrassés, qu'il lit toute la correspondance de D., mais qu'il n'est pas

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arguments still rage about whether or not Mirbeau was really an anti-Semite throughout his career or only in his early years, and whether or not the author came into his own during the time of the affair or not. Pierre Michel and Samuel Lair, young specialists, are now disputing these matters. I will leave the issue to resolve itself for a few years before venturing to give my opinion.

> *le seul à lire, qu'elle est soumise au ministère de la Guerre dont il se défi, où l'on bavarde, qu'elle est lue ensuite par le personnel pénitentiaire de la Guyane, dont il se défie encore plus, que, par conséquent, ma lettre risquerait d'être connue, et que, cela pourrait être pour moi,* Sémite, une cause d'ennuis.
>
> —Alfred Dreyfus[49]

This is one of the very few instances when Alfred Dreyfus or anyone calling him- or herself a supporter mentions the fact that the captain was a Jew and that much of the opposition, if not the vast majority of opposition, derived from anti-Semitic hatred. Here, capturing in the rhythms of his own syntax the pattern of deceit and duplicity ranged against him, Dreyfus writes how he was treated in André Lebon's ministerial office in 1899, soon after his pardon, when he had gathered enough strength of mind and will to begin the campaign for a more complete vindication of his innocence. Dreyfus wants to have all his letters, books, and papers from Devil's Island returned to him. "Another refusal," he starts off. "Lebon explained to me in embarrassing terms that he had read all of D.'s correspondence, and that he was not the only one to read it, that it was sent to the Minister of War who rubbished it, since it was blithering nonsense, and that it was also read by the officials of the Guiana Penal Colony who also rejected it, and consequently my letter risked being known and that would be, for me, a Semite, an annoying thing."

It is important here to watch the way Lebon dismisses Dreyfus's appeal to have his documents returned to him. Although many of the letters had already been published as part of the build-up to his second trial in Rennes and in order to garner support from a wider public based on his personal sufferings on Devil's Island for five years, as far as the government was concerned—from the Ministry in Paris to the colonial officials in Guiana—it was all blather and nonsense, *bavarde*. Then, continuing the condescending tone and the condescension due to a mere Jew, Lebon warns Dreyfus to watch out because all his efforts will just be *ennuis*, vexatious, bothersome, annoying to him and to the government, to the army, to France—to real and true Frenchmen.

49 Alfred Dreyfus, *Carnets (1899–1907*), ed. Philippe Oriol (Paris: Calmann-Lévy. 1998), 56.

When the aged Senator Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, a convinced Dreyfusard, appealed to Lebon, he replied "that he would not be cast in the role of a jailer, which disgusts him," and yet, since "if you who are not a Semite" (*vous qui n'etes pas sémite*), insist, then he will pass the request on, but . . . and he goes on speaking of how tedious, annoying and vexatious the whole affair is.[50] In his report on what transpired in this encounter with the minister, the ancient and respected politician goes on citing this conversation with the Minister of Colonies:

> *"Je l'ai dû: ah! Mon métier me dégoût!" Puis, pour soulager sa conscience, il me dit qu'il ne croît pas à l'innocence de D. Qu'il a lu toutes ses letters et qu'elles ne l'ont pas ému, que c'est toujours la même chose, et dans les mêmes termes! "Et que voulez-vous donc que cela soit?"*[51]

> "I was forced to do that: ah! My profession disgusts me!" Then, to assuage his conscience, he told me that he did not believe in D's innocence. That he had read all his letters and that he was not moved by them, that it was always the same thing and in the same terms! "And what do you want me to do about that?"

Nothing about Dreyfus rouses Lebon's sympathies, and look what an annoying situation he has been put in by this troublemaker of a Yid. Reading the letters between Lucie and Alfred, which we will analyze at length to show how truly moving they are and how important they are for understanding the character of the man wrongly accused of treason, the mean-spirited little *apparatchik* cannot see anything in them but boring repetitions of puerile complaints. However, in correspondence with Joseph Reinach, Scheurer-Kestner shows a different way a non-Jew could respond to the same evidence. When the aged senator was told about the long period Dreyfus was kept in irons, he exclaimed, "*C'est hideux! Je suis étonné . . .*"[52] That was the way a mensch should react to the torture inflicted upon a loyal French officer. That was the way an en-

50 Dreyfus, *Carnets*, 57.
51 Dreyfus, *Carnets*, 58.
52 "That's hideous! I am astonished . . ." Dreyfus, *Carnets*, 305, n. 122.

lightened Frenchman of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century responded to the Dreyfus case. But what about those others, like Lebon?

Jews are, if you go by the comments of the government and judicial officials Dreyfus appealed to after his pardon, often explicitly called an annoying people. How so? The Semite asks too many questions. He doesn't accept words on the mere authority of the speaker but wants reasons. He is never satisfied. He should go home, be quiet, stay with his wife and children, and be satisfied with what he has. But this Semite and his brother keep badgering us. The Jew is therefore a troublemaker. He demands truth and justice. He is not like us; he is not part of the team which pulls together to protect the institution and each of us. Semites, the people in power complain, do not take words at face value. Words escape them in the sense that common associations, tonalities, and historical resonance are different to different kinds of people. It is not the words themselves but the social dynamic, the historical matrix, and the epistemological technologies that shape the flow of communication, the impasses, and the static that replaces understanding. The Dreyfus Affair occurred along the long and jagged fault line between these different modalities of thought, feeling, and experience.

Which Words Escape Them?

> *The reason why we need to remember the Dreyfus Affair now is that we failed to remember it the first time. We, the citizens of the world, did not pay attention to what was happening to the Jews in Nazi Germany because we were convinced that nothing so atrocious could really happen in the modern world. Our faith in the press and our ability to communicate almost instantaneously across vast distances led us to imagine that no large-scale injustice could go undetected for so long.*
>
> —Sioucho[53]

For Jews, assimilated and practicing their ancestral customs, words are phenomena quite different from what they are for their Christian com-

53 Sioucho, "'I'm not a Man: I'm a Cause'—The Story of Alfred Dreyfus in *J'Accuse*" (1 July 2001) *Epinions.com* (18 November 2010).

patriots in France and the rest of Western Europe. For the Jew, words are objects in which meanings are stored, but the meanings are active processes, particles of energy emanating from revealed truth and yet now confused by diverse interests and emotional states of being. The words are processes of meaning-creation, which have historical trajectories as well as unclear and confused explosions of irrational fear and desire, cries of pain and anxiety, soothing noises, and temporizing arguments. Words therefore cannot be totally detached from the occasions in which they are used or from the people and the institutions that use or abuse them; they are fragments of rhetorical discourse and shards of explanations that have shattered in the course of time. More urgently, words are sounds and appearances, open to etymological connotations and semantic slides and able to be fractured and reassembled by paronomasia and letter manipulation and other witty, ironic, and cynical inversions and reconfigurations.

Truth: *Emet*

> *The notion that the goal of Talmud is truth is un-Talmudic in spirit. It promises a finality, a definitiveness, a certainty, that the Talmud mocks on every page . . . . The objective of Talmud is not truth but thought.*
>
> —Leon Wieseltier

Like a refrain, in his appeals for a revision of the second court-martial at Rennes and those of his supporters for the first revision of the original military tribunal, the two words that appear throughout are *truth* and *justice*. But what does a Jew mean by the truth? In one sense, the truth is what is real and verifiable, what is not a lie or a distortion of what really happened. In another sense, it is what is in accord with the principles of the law and the patterns of history, putting aside as accidents and contingencies that which belongs only to the moment. Yet it is neither an absolute idea upon which all else is measured as real or valid nor an unreal manifestation of wish projected by the rich and powerful into the matrix of changeable, unsteady, and immeasurable events and experiences. Truth is certainly an ideal of just and compassionate probability in a world in which human reason cannot reach perfection.

Truth by itself, however, is not a statement or a fact settled once and

for all or available *ab initio* and eternally revealed to those who know where and how to look for it. Rather, and this is the essence of a traditional Jewish approach, it is something dynamic and always renewing itself. For this reason, as Leon Wieseltier points out, the Talmud does not teach the truth but how to think, and, through thinking, to create the truth appropriate for this time and this place, which is not the same as for all times and all places. Yet that does not make a Jewish version of *emet* something relative or arbitrary—there are rules of logic, processes of argumentation, and a rhetoric of discourse with which to wrestle with the angel.

Even further, as will be opened up gradually like the facets of a precious stone, emitting its flashes of light in all directions, rabbinical *melitza*, or horizontal dialectics is, in Faur's words,

> a humanistic eloquence which springs from the Hebrew doctrine that every human being is created in God's image . . . . The essential *meliṣa* is a dialectic in which neither side must necessarily be wrong; or conversely that both sides may be indeed uttering "the words of the Living God.[54]

Justice: *Daat*

What does the Jew mean by *justice*?[55] He or she says it is an ideal of the law and of law but then doesn't treat it as an absolute abstraction, a general idea, a distant goal of perfection, but as an eternal idea to be realized in practice without being perfect for all times and places but for specific occasions and persons. In one construction of the term, justice is what is right and fair, what is commensurate and balances out differ-

54 Faur. *The Horizontal Society*, Section IV, Introductory Remarks.

55 If we were to ask, on the other hand, what was the official line on "justice" during most of the affair, we could do worse than turn to one of Anatole France's so-called profitable tales, that of "Crainquebille," wherein a magistrate explains his meaning of the word: "Justice is the sanction of established injustice. Was justice ever seen to oppose conquerors and usurpers? When an unlawful power arises, justice has only to recognize it and it becomes lawful. Form is everything" (in *Crainquebille Putois, Riquet and other Profitable Tales*, trans. Winifred Stephens [London: John Lane/The Bodley head, 1916, 1905], 29). A few lines later, the parody of the Dreyfus Affair is even more pungent: "Such would have doubtless been the words of President Bourriche, for he has a judicial mind and he knows what a magistrate owes to society. With order and regularity, he defends social principles. Justice is social. Only wrong-headed persons would make justice out to be human and reasonable" (30).

ent desires and objections, what is measured, and so what can be made most fitting to maintain peace and harmony between individuals and groups. In another construction, justice is what is lawful when the law confronts complicated and confused circumstances, different versions of reality, and thus adjusts itself for the moment to what is most beneficial for all in their various conditions. Still more, *justice* is the term used for decisions reached thoughtfully, deliberately, after dispassionate consideration, when most irrelevant interests have been put aside, but when the consequences of the decision are also thought through so as to avoid undue pain or suffering to parties not directly involved and without leading to even more disturbing disruptions to the good running of families and communities. Thus, although it would be cynical to define justice as merely the application of the wishes of the most powerful over those who have less influence or wealth, it also cannot be tipped totally on the side of mercy or compassion, although the judgement should avoid undue harshness and not over-reward persons or groups who are merely technically in the right.

Thus, both the concepts and processes of *emet* and *daat* are at once the matrix in which thought operates, the process of rational argumentation and analysis, and the rhetorical construct or figure of thought in which the interpretation and the application are for the time being realized. In brief, like the Talmud in its widest acceptance as Torah—from a specific word or passage in a text to an argument rehearsed in a witty and mutually respectful manner regarding the performance of wise and saintly deeds—it is a lens through which to see, a kaleidoscope to keep adjusting to the swirls of history and social revolution, and a moral mazurka, a dance of reason. Or to cite Franz Liszt in his remarks on Friedrich Chopin, following George Sand,[56] again one of those citations we

56 Taken from George Sand's *Lucrezia Floriani*. According to James Huneker's *Chopin: The Man and his Music*, Mr. A. B. Walkley, the English dramatic critic, after declaring that he would rather have lived during the Balzac epoch in Paris, continues in this entertaining vein:

> And then one might have had a chance of seeing George Sand in the thick of her amours. For my part I would certainly rather have met her than Pontius Pilate . . . . But, to my mind, the most fascinating chapter in this part of her history is the Chopin chapter, covering the next decade, or, roughly speaking, the 'forties'. She has revealed something of this time—naturally from her own point of view—in "Lucrezia Floriana" (1847). For it is, of course, one of the most notorious characteristics of George Sand that she invariably turned her loves into "copy." The mixture of passion and printer's

make only to keep adjusting the lens and focusing in a different way on the subject of our choice:

> His [Chopin's, but here read the Jew's] imagination [in the sense of a creative, midrashic process of thought] so filled with exquisite beauty [i.e., the beauty of the Law, in all its rational splendor and mystical power], seemed as it were holding a monologue [make that now a dialogue or a conversation or even an argument] with God himself; and when upon the radiant prism, in the contemplation of which he forgot everything else [instead of this mystical loss of self and rationality, read here: in which the Jews remember deeply, creatively and wittily], the phantasmagoria of the world [the great contraption that spews forth the claptrap of anti-Semitism and foolish ideas] cast even its disturbing shadow he [like Alfred Dreyfus confronted with the machinations of arrogance and racial hatred] was deeply pained, as if in the midst of a classical concert a shrieking old woman, in shrill and broken tones, should blend her vulgar musical motive with the divine thoughts of the great masters.[57]

Peace: *Shalom, Tikkun*

These concepts, as we have been showing, come close to, sometimes overlaps with, but are never exactly the same as, their Christian or secular, enlightened brethren. *Peace*, familiar in the greeting, and *farewell* (*shalom aleichem*), "Peace be unto you!" does not mean primarily a state

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ink in this lady's composition is surely one of the most curious blends ever offered to the palate of the epicure.

57 Liszt, *The Life of Chopin*, 208–209. The original French is somewhat different and therefore deserves its own midrashic interpretation: "*Il semblait noyer son imagination si exquise et, si belle dans un monologue avec Dieu même, et si parfois, sur le prisme radiaux où il s'oubliait, quelque incident faisait passer la petite lanterne magique du monde, il sentait un affreux malaise, comme si, au milieu d'un concert sublime, une vielle criarde venait mêler ses sons aigus et un motif musical vulgaire aux pensées divines des grands maîtres*" (chapter VII). It is not just the substitution of a magic lantern for the phantasmagoria, but the sublime rather than the classical concert the old woman interrupts with her shrieking. Broadhouse's translation draws out the implications of the figurative language we have interpreted in a new context and given a new Jewish accentuation.

of nonviolence and harmony with others, including states as well as individuals, but a harmonious, just, and equitable relationship, free of threats and constraints, drawing on the same root *sh-l-m* שלם that applies to paying a bill or a fair wage—to balance out a situation of temporary inequality, disequilibrium, or debt.

The opposite of war is justice, and justice is achieved when order is restored. This restoration, repair, and correction of an incongruity is called *tikkun*, deriving from the kabbalistic myth of the contraction of *time* and *space* (*tsimtsum*), the breaking of primary vessels of creative force, and their scattering like sparks; *tikkun* which consists of gathering up the hidden sparks, putting them back into an orderly flow of creativity, and reconciling the seemingly hostile and violent relationship between the infinite and the finite, brings about the conditions of *shalom*.

PART 3: THE MYTH OF THE UNTHINKABLE AND THE IMPOSSIBLE

> *They are the quintessence of what I detest most, people like her and her father. They are the incarnation of the modern world, in which there is nothing more despicable than these cosmopolitan adventurers, who play the grand seigneur with the millions filibustered in some stroke or other on the Bourse.*
>
> —Paul Bourget, *Cosmopolis*[58]

What happened to Alfred Dreyfus from the moment he was told of his arrest was impossible to believe, something unthinkable, and, as we can see in his reactions over the first few days when he raged in his cell,

58 Paul Bourget, *Cosmopolis* (1892), no trans. (Doylestown, PA: Wildside Press, 2010), 24. The speaker here is the Marquis Claude-François de Montfanon, a notorious aristocratic bigot, and he is speaking of Baron Justus Hafner and his daughter, "a young girl of almost sublime beauty . . . Her profile, of an Oriental purity . . . so much on the order of the Jewish type that it left scarcely a doubt as to the Hebrew origin of the creature . . ." (20–21). As Norbert Col remarked on reading this book in manuscript, Bourget, like others, from Walter Scott in *Ivanhoe*—but even before him in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* with Shylock's daughter Jessica—temper their presentation of grotesque Jewish men with a titillating fascination for young Jewish girls. By the way, Col also points out that although he was an anti-Dreyfusard, Bourget was not a rabid bigot but came down on the side of the army because he could not believe French officers would deliberately lie or manipulate evidence. Unlike others, he did not equate Dreyfus's Jewishness with prima facie evidence of his treason. This matter is further discussed in relation to the essay on Bourget in the *cahiers*.

threw himself against the walls, and cried out in inarticulate despair, it was unspeakable. Such traumatic occasions are thankfully rare in life, even more so when they occur to a group of people, a whole community, or a nation. Gradually, as the news of what happened to Captain Dreyfus spread from his family through the Jewish community to the whole of France and then the rest of Europe and other parts of the so-called modern world, the trauma became general. It was moreover an increasing, cumulative trauma, only beginning with the shock of the arrest of a quiet, middle-class, assimilated Jew in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century and became more unbearable and unbelievable at each new turning point: his condemnation at the first court-martial, his degradation in public, his exile to Devil's Island, his solitary confinement and shackling to a bed, and his second condemnation at Rennes—and these are only the most salient events.

What began as a personal or family tragedy, seemingly based on a judicial error, soon re-formed into a national and international scandal as more and more evidence began to emerge of a conspiracy amongst Dreyfus's fellow officers and some members of the government until it reached into the highest echelons of the army and the leading members of the National Assembly and strained the loyalty and faith of the whole population in the ideals of the republic, in the integrity of the state, the church, and, yes, of the truth.

What does it feel like when the impossible happens, when the unspeakable has to be spoken, when the unimaginable is put into pictures, and when the inconceivable fits into the normative paradigms of thought and of rationality itself? Some of us have had such experiences, perhaps even more than once in our lives. Take the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rapid collapse of the Soviet Empire. I was teaching on an exchange agreement at the University of Ottawa at the time. There was to be a conference of various leaders from the countries of the Warsaw Pact in a building around the corner from the university, so I made sure to take a detour to pass by, coming and going, each day. I could not keep my eyes off the flags, all of them with the old hammer and sickle emblem either cut away or sewn over. It was unbelievable. My whole life, I had grown up on the paradigm of the Cold War, and whether one felt sympathy or not for the ideals of Communism, no one of my generation or that of my parents could have escaped the power of the conflict and the influence of the Iron Curtain that cut across Europe and the world.

I would come into the classroom trembling at what was happening a few hundred metres away, as the Warsaw Pact states disentangled themselves from the Soviet bloc and prepared to reenter history and European life. But the students, mostly young, middle-class Canadian kids from Ontario and Quebec—the University of Ottawa was a bilingual institution and still had structural memories of its recent transformation from a Catholic to a provincial college—seemed quite uninterested. These comfortable, smug young people, for all their supposed intelligence and imagination, could not see the big deal. They sniggered at my remarks about how these were days that were transforming the world, how we viewed history, what politics and economics could mean from now on, and where the truth of the past nearly ninety years would be found. It was therefore impossible for me to explain to them how deeply the ideas of the division between East and West had gone into every part of my consciousness and even, I am sure, unconsciousness; and how, although people had speculated on the eventual demise of what Ronald Reagan termed "the Evil Empire" and had spoken about possible scenarios over the next hundred years, basically most of the men and women I knew could not really believe that such an eventuality would happen in our lifetimes, if ever.

Or take another example, what happened on 11 September 2001. This was far more traumatic than the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the accidental death of Princess Di, events to which others have compared it, in the sense that for many people such dates are marked by everyone comparing where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news. The so-called 9/11 phenomenon digs deeper into the consciousness and the unconsciousness because it transformed—as some news broadcasters were able to say within hours of the terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington DC, and a lonely field in Pennsylvania—the way many of us think and feel about reality. If it didn't transform the thoughts and emotional reality of our lives, because those changes occur over a longer period of time, it was the moment that exposed the processes of change and made it impossible to use the previous discourses of rationality in history, politics, or aesthetics. I say this even though with each passing year—and I merely have to point to young students in my classes since then to demonstrate this—the trauma has been papered over by those who wish to deny that anything really world-changing happened, or who cannot live with the trauma

and have already repressed it so deeply that they are angry and offended if you merely suggest it to them.

In a sense, what the several terrorist attacks revealed on that memorable day was what one could have—perhaps should have—made articulate a few months earlier in the ironically entitled 2001 "Anti-Racism" UN Conference held in Durban, South Africa. This festival of racial hatred, and especially vicious slandering of Israel and the United States by a wide range of nongovernmental organizations and national representatives to the United Nations, manifested the same declaration of war against what is known as the Judeo-Christian value system of the Western World, was a celebration of superstition, demagoguery, and envy—and led directly to the hijacked airliners that flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and might have targeted the White House itself. It revealed the new distortion of all the language of human rights, democracy, and racial harmony that was responsible for the subsequent terrorist attacks in London, Madrid, Bali, and Mumbai. The bizarre alliance of Islamacist fanaticism, Marxist ideology separated from its old class analysis of dialectical materialism, anti-globalism, and other politically correct ideologies, all wrapped up in a Palestinian scarf, makes a nonsense of the traditional language and activities of liberalism in the West. It is now impossible to talk sensibly using any of the words and concepts that used to be filled with and resonate morality and responsibility.

I learned of the 9/11 attacks in the middle of the night, since I live in New Zealand, and realized that my wife was somewhere in the air en route to New York City, and so I had first to overcome a personal panic. I spent most of the night using the telephone and internet trying to locate members of my family and transmit messages from persons who, though near each other geographically, were cut off from news about each other's whereabouts and conditions. By the next morning, when I had to go to the university to teach, I was exhausted but somehow buoyed up by the adrenalin of panic.

There were two reactions that met me when I drove in that next morning. On the one hand, there was the deaf silence of most of my colleagues and students, who neither knew nor cared what had happened, and who treated the event when they bothered to find out about it—most never read newspapers, listened to the news on radio or television, or used the internet as a source of current events—as unimportant. Not one ventured to ask how my family in New York City was, where my wife

was, or what I was feeling at the moment, although I was clearly shaken and upset. On the other hand, the politically aware minority, to a man, all expressed anti-American sentiments, smiled, and congratulated one another on the fact that "the big bully got a bloody nose" and "now they know how it feels." No sympathy for three thousand murder victims. No understanding of how deeply the event had shaken Americans' long-lasting confidence in the safety of their nation from foreign attack or invasion—that not since the war of 1812 had the Continental United States been hit by such an attack. Not even a recognition that that confidence has been built up since the late 1980s, with the sense that the Cold War was over and the world was safe from any major conflicts again.

But more than these political or military actions that shattered the myth of Fortress America, there was the other, deeper trauma of a total destabilization of our concept of reality. This might be a variation on Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" or some notion of "the end of history." It was a trauma that meant that the Enlightenment was over and that the whole history of rationality, science, and secularism was teetering of collapse.

I do not mean to say, however, that the shocks experienced at the Fall of the Soviet Union or the terrorist attacks of 9/11 could be considered the most shattering experiences of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and thus equivalent to that most enormous of all traumas, the Holocaust or Shoah. No more could, at least for a Jew, the episodes surrounding the Dreyfus Affair and then soon after the Mendel Beylis case in Czarist Russia be so considered. For many, to be sure, the outbreak of World War I was in itself the opening up of a deep abyss between the relative security and comfort of the nineteenth century and the seemingly endless violence of the twentieth. What we are talking about here are moments in existential history when individuals and groups of smaller or larger size pass through a liminal event that at once seems to bring to an end not so much the institutions and paradigms of one form of noetic universe or *Weltanschauung* as the realization that those organized and collective paradigms of knowledge can no longer be trusted; in fact, at such a moment, the vast inner dimensions of what had hitherto been unquestioned, usually unexpressed dimensions of truth and reality come to the surface and reveal themselves to be inconsistent, incoherent, and riddled with contradictions.

At the same time, as this experience of shock and disappointment be-

gins to play itself across the consciousness of a community, a nation, or even a whole civilization, there is another realization crystallizing into awareness and seeking to take charge of how knowledge is generated, taught, preserved, and transformed into art and philosophy—the realization that already for a long time, perhaps even a generation or more, other paradigms have been created, new ways of seeing and feeling have been articulated, in both popular and elite cultures, and seemingly radical and rash modes of social relationship have started to stabilize themselves into patterns of normality and hence of acceptability. Yet since generations overlap, as Proust shows throughout *À la recherche du temps perdu*, individual and collective memories crisscross over each other, different memories inform various individuals and groups in asymmetrical ways, and denial and misprision often dominate over acceptance and clarity of perception.

For the narrator, Marcel, in Proust's *A la recherche de temps perdu*, the moments of realization burst forth unexpectedly and change the way in which he sees others, himself, and the world in which he lives, so that he can feel himself alive in many times and places at once, sometimes riding in a horse and carriage, sometimes driving in an automobile, encountering an aeroplane for the first time, walking through Paris during an aerial bombardment, sending messages with a servant, using a telegraph, writing a note for the pneumatic post, or using the telephone. Not that the accumulation of technological advances by itself can account for the transformation in the imagination and rationality of an age, but that such inventions are markers of more dynamic shifts occurring in the minds, the memories, the milieu, and the mentalities of the society.

Scattering Sparks of Memory

> *The artist expresses specifically what all our dreams tend to express in more fragmentary form, through symbolism rather than words. This symbolism is both highly personal and, at a deeper level, universal . . . This unconscious realm is the meeting place of aesthetics and psychological or biological inquiry, and symbolism is its means of delineation*.
>
> —Milton L. Miller[59]

59 Milton L. Miller, *Nostalgia: A Psychoanalytic Study of Marcel Proust* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin

It is clear, of course, that Dreyfus was no artist and his tendencies were always towards the more scientific, positivistic philosophies of the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, when the prisoner on Devil's Island comments on the authors he approves of, he does so with provisos, objections, and modifications, most of them expressing a recognition of the importance of the aesthetic perspective and the artist's role in society and history. Moreover, as should become more and more evident in this book, when we examine the full range of his thoughts in his various letters, notebooks, and journals, Dreyfus does not fully adhere to his own stated principles. This is not only because he knows that whatever he writes, even in personal, intimate letters to his wife, there is a manifest censorship by prison and other officials going on, making any allusion to radical ideas—and this could be as much a statement of antigovernment opinions as a hint at Jewish adherence to the Law of Moses as a guide to moral and ethical views, let alone to suspect anarchist tendencies in the aesthetic manifestos of the period—dangerous, at least in the sense of interfering with his search for a revision of his case in the military courts and in the parliamentary process but also because he is himself fearful of letting uncontrolled and uncontrollable thoughts and feelings emerge, and thus sliding into the despair and madness his situation could all too easily create.

Whereas Proust seems to have found both consolation and transformative power in his literary art, thus avoiding the threats of physical and psychological annihilation he so dreaded, Dreyfus struggled to make rational sense of what had happened to him and to maintain a sanity that would protect his wife and children along with his own honour. He knew that any concession to the savage rage and melancholia deep within himself—in what Jewish mystical tradition would call the *sitra achra*, the demonic other side—could be taken as a mark of guilt and stigmatize his family and himself with all the calumnies published in the anti-Semitic press.

Although I will consequently seem to wind the life experiences of Marcel Proust around those of Alfred Dreyfus, along with their families and circle of friends and acquaintances, it is not my intention to suggest that these men and their accomplishments are to be considered inter-

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and Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1956), 258.

changeable—or that in any way they had more than the most tangential relationship with one another. At best, Proust was aware of Dreyfus's plight, sympathized with the cause of his revision, and helped collect signatures on a petition for the revision of the first court-martial's decision. Rather, I want to show—and in a very special way, the way of *midrash* which will be explained over the whole course of this book, occasionally in a theoretical discussion but more usually through application and demonstration—that both Proust's literary achievement and Dreyfus's ordeal are part of the way in which the impossible came to be possible. Once we know through our own experiences that the impossible can happen—because it has happened again and again, as suggested in my thumbnail sketches of how I came to understand the traumatic and shocking nature of liminal events, such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall or the breaking out of the War on Terror in the place where the Cold War had been—then we can try to unpack the levels of textuality and follow the threads of memory in the *midrash* of Alfred Dreyfus's life and the specific ordeal of his case.

An Age of Boredom and Anxiety

> *These two peoples, always in presence of each other, and living within the same walls, still had almost nothing in common . . . . They were two peoples that did not even understand each other, not having—so to speak—common ideas. . . . They reproached each other with injustice: each was just according to his own principles, and unjust according to the principles and beliefs of the other . . . . And yet there was something which formed a tie between these two peoples.*
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> —Fustel de Coulanges[60]

Many writers say or at least imply that the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first thirteen years of the new century were marked by a great boredom and melancholy amongst the bourgeoisie, with the so-called Gay Nineties or Age of Salons and Banquets a misreading of the

60 Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (1864), trans. Willard Small (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956; orig. trans. 1873), 296–297.

period. It would seem by such an assertion that, out of nowhere, at least in France, the Dreyfus Affair appeared, and suddenly in 1894 one people became divided, the Dreyfusards versus the anti-Dreyfusards. And then just as suddenly in 1906 all went silent again, the lights dimmed, and France drifted along as if in a dream until the Great War shattered everything once and for all. But this is, of course, a specious assertion. Even if we discount the suddenness of the affair or the shattering quality it had on French society, the fin de siècle was not all a *Belle Epoque*, a time when Paris, France, Europe, or the world deluded itself into thinking these were the best of times, that all was well, and that as many new inventions and discoveries as one could ever think of had been invented and discovered. Such a statement or vision or wish is untenable.

Any authors who speak like that seem to treat the society of the late nineteenth century as one in which life was staid, repressed, and smug, something like the Vienna of Stefan Zweig's lengthy autobiographical essay. However, judging by the innovations in the arts and sciences, the advances in technology and popular entertainment, and the radical twists and turns in literature, this was anything but a prim Victorian period. The question nevertheless remains: why in the midst of so much change and confusion, innovation, and struggle to assert traditional or mythical values and institutions, did so many people feel themselves to be men and women without qualities, individuals lost in the power of crowds and mobs, adults trapped in the memories of an abused childhood?

Stefan Zweig wrote a thesis entitled "Die Philosophie des Hippolyte Taine," pointing out in this way the direction in which we need to track down some of the paths through which mentalities travelled in the lives and events we are talking about in this book. Although thinkers like Hippolyte Taine and Ernest Renan have faded from the centres of attention of those who write about the Dreyfus Affair, they form part of the constellation of writers who created the matrix of ideas in which the mentalities and the imaginations that made the clash of personalities, institutions, and paradigms possible, and whose explosion and disintegration are the playing field where the affair was fought out. It is in the work of the forgotten writers, and often in the neglected books and essays of the authors we still care about, that the games and battles were contested—not in the works that are important to us, who come after the paradigms have shifted.

The Phantasmagoria

Le premier devoir de l'homme sincère est de ne pas influer sur ses propres opinions, de laisser la réalité se refléter en lui comme en la chambre noire de photographe, et d'assister en spectateur aux batailles intérieures que se livrent les idées au fond de sa conscience.

—Ernest Renan[61]

Lorsque seul, dans le silence, demi-couche dans un fauteuil, je me laisse aller à la rêverie, et que, par l'effacement des sensations ordinaires, la fantasmagorie interne devient intense, si le sommeil approche, mes images précises finissent par provoquer des hallucinations véritables.

—Hippolyte Taine[62]

During the months that followed our interviews and in which the book took shape, not only did I live completely involved in Proust, thanks to the voice I had been listening to, but I also saw and heard him in a way that at times was almost hallucinatory. Not once did I doubt that this was the real Proust.

—Georges Belmont[63]

61 Ernest Renan, "Examen de conscience philosophique" (September 1888) in *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse,* ed. Laudice Retat (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1973), 283. "The first duty of an honest man is not to be influenced by his own opinions, but to let reality be reflected in him as in a photographer's darkroom, and to observe passively and objectively the interior battles of ideas rising from the bottom of his consciousness" (my translation).

62 Hippolyte Taine, *De l'Intelligence*, volume 2 (Paris: Hachette, 1870); facsimile édition Lexington, KY: Biblibazaar, 2010), 35. "Alone and in silence, half-asleep in an easy chair, I let myself float into reverie and when, by the fading away of all normal sensations, the internal phantasmagoria becomes intense, if sleep approaches, my precise images end up by provoking veritable hallucinations" (my translation).

63 Georges Belmont, "Introduction" to Céleste Albaret, *Monsieur Proust*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, NY: New York Review Books, 2003), xvi-xvii. Belmont recorded the interview with Alberet, who had been Proust's servant and confidant for seventeen years. She had an uncanny memory for details and tones of voice in the conversations she had with the great writer. Although she lacked a formal education, Albaret was extremely intelligent and intuitive and she could hold her own in discussions of Proust's book with the author and his artistic friends. Belmont's comment sets the stage for a double way of reading the character and the writings of Alfred Dreyfus undertaken in this book: first, close attention to specific details, an attempt to grasp the nuances of his style and tone, and a contextualizing of his emotional and intellectual documents within the creative and scientific writers of his time, and second, a midrashic enhancement of the text by various rabbinical techniques of exegesis explained over the course of this book.

There are two broad and distinct ways to look at truth, reality, memory, and history. In one, it is possible to imagine our minds as photographic lenses through which the facts of the outside world pass with minimal distortions and then register objectively on the screen or chemical plate of our minds as memory—things that can be recalled and discussed as accurate and truthful records of the past, our own and those of people; ideas; and institutions outside of us. The other way, more creative, poetic, and subjective, is to recognize that our experience of the world is always in flux, subject to transformations, distorted by conscious and unconscious pressures, our own and those of society around us, already limited and censored by language, culture, and political ideologies (including religion and aesthetic theories)—and to take this second vision as not always having a negative effect that at best leads to scepticism and at worst to cynicism and hedonistic behaviour, but also sometimes leads to something positive, that allows for artistic re-creation, scientific innovation, philosophical refinement, and other innovative and critical acts and dreams.[64]

The assumption usually is that even in dreamlike states, whether in hypnotic trances or private reverie, such as Taine imagines for himself, the images created are hallucinatory distortions of reality, anything, that is, but accurate and detailed depictions of reality so that while speculative interpretations of the natural world and human history are based on such false memories, they have at best a heuristic or aesthetic value and at worst a dangerous, insane influence on our lives. However, certainly by the 1890s, following the radical shifts in perception brought about by the impressionist painters and initiated by the advanced psychologism of Tarde, Bergson, and Freud, it was possible to conceive of an approach to memory, history, and poetry that avoided the incongruities and mutual exclusiveness of these two earlier perspectives, either truth or distortion, reality or madness, objectivity or interference.

Even Marcel Proust, who in *A la recherche du temps perdu* seems to dismiss the new cinematography as another form of photography, was

64 This is not the kind of argument that can be refuted as Dr. Johnson thought he did with Bishop Berkley by kicking a stone to prove that the outside world did exist; this kind of practical cynicism appears in ancient satires too where, for instance, Plato's thesis of the ideal of love is undercut by a husband and wife team of *kyniks* writhing in ecstasy on the floor in front of his students. Logic needs to be met by logic, as facts by facts.

merely a passive recorder of facts and so a distorter of the dynamic fluidity of lived experience, and yet this rejection of the technology of motion pictures misses the points where cinema can enhance, advance, and interpret finely the insights of his own concepts of time, reality, memory, and art. Proust took a negative stand against photography, which he identified with a positivist realism; he saw photographs as banal and bourgeois. But Méliès the magician promoted a more dynamic, playful sense with his moving pictures. They are illusions to be sure, but they take artificial reproduction of reality to a higher, more artistic reality. Two things happened when Daguerre found a way to fix fleeting images on metal plates to make what we call photographs. First, artists and philosophers realized that the pictures produced were different from artistic paintings or drawings, insofar as they could not reproduce nuances of colour or texture and did not distinguish between the significant and the insignificant elements in an image or the reality it supposedly reproduced, and yet they revealed details and aspects of the scene or object that had not been noticed before. Therefore, second, the camera could be more than just an aid to the artist in recalling persons, places or things for him or her to later reproduce as an aesthetic object: it could itself be a way of manipulating the memory of the reality experienced, revealing what had not been noticed, exploring the subtleties and interstices between shadows and light or colours—indeed, the shadows were themselves aspects of light and colour. For all his opposition, Proust actually worked in a cinematic way in both his narrative structures and in his exploration of the nuances of character and social reactions. Dreyfus was fascinated by the technology of photography and also of x-rays, and saw in the optical mechanics of transferring fleeting and seemingly confusing light and shades to fixed pictures a way of coming to terms with the phantasmagoria of his plight and the enigma of his arrest and guilty verdict.

Despite these theoretical speculations and the advances in everything from cosmology and psychiatric medicine to quantum physics and hypnotic techniques,[65] today most historians still approach the Dreyfus Affair through a lens of mid-nineteenth-century positivism,

65 This was precisely the period when spectacular advances were published in Einstein's essays on relativity, and related topics or Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud were making their advances in two kinds of depth psychology.

taking the words, images, and events of the period as transparent, accurate, and true, and the result is that like those thinkers who were against Dreyfus and who we now know were deluded, hysterical, and delirious, they are still mistaking the ideological misperceptions of the popular press as reality.[66]

What I have found through a close reading of the recently published notebooks that Dreyfus kept during the years he was imprisoned on Devil's Island is that he was himself wrestling with the received ideas—because for all his faith in the republican values of reason, justice, and freedom, his existential reality could not sustain the consequences of that faith. He was reading a wide range of books, commenting on them critically, and posing new questions. To be sure, this initial reading of his notebooks cannot mark Dreyfus as a major innovative thinker of the period; he was, it seems, uninterested in many of those we today see as the avant-garde painters, musicians, novelists, and philosophers of the late nineteenth century, and he often expressed distaste for the aesthetic theories or political ideologies he was aware of. Nevertheless, he did not accept what he was reading—he made objections, he provided additional details to create new contexts, and he suggested other ideas and processes to apply. In a certain way, he played out the roles of the underground man, the man without qualities, the Kafkaesque victim of bureaucracy gone mad, the *artist manqué* . . .

Meditated on more soberly, however, Dreyfus was none of these—neither autistic nor artistic—and yet, as we shall argue throughout this book, he found himself both cast out of normality and cast into the role of anti-hero in a national theatre of the absurd, an externalized phantasmagorie.[67]

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66 Which is not to call these historians of the last twenty-five years anti-Semitic or belonging to the various political ideologies that in the later phases of the affair, after supporting Dreyfus for their own strategic purposes, turned against him, but to say that the inability or refusal to interpret documents and actions in a more dynamic way, recognizing all the techniques in psychoanalysis or in Leo Strauss's modes of deciphering messages written during persecution, yields variants on the old canards about Dreyfus's character being dull and conventional or about the tediousness of his letters to Lucie. Worse are those who still write hundreds and thousands of pages about the juridical procedures and the political implications of the struggle for Alfred Dreyfus's rehabilitation and lament the "fact" that there is little or nothing to say about his personality.

67 Romain Rolland speaking of Russian revolutionaries but giving a sense of the matrix in which the affair was fought out in France: "It is not treachery so much as versatility, and it is thoroughly disinterested. There are so many men of action to whom action is a theater into which they bring their talents as comedians, quite honestly prepared at any moment to change their part!" (*Jean Christophe*, vol. III, 181).

My Book Is a *Midrash*

> Midrash*, as "witty" poetry, possesses malleability not available with doctrinaire teachings in the realm of Jewish law (*halakhah*). For this reason it is a suitable candidate for the kind of liberal and ambiguous usage Maimonides employs in the labyrinthine undertaking that constitutes the* Guide of the Perplexed.
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> —James Arthur Diamond[68]

The way in which I *midrash* this study of Dreyfus is in truth four different ways, some overlapping, some alternating, some conflated, and some hinted at. While it is evident from previous discussions of what a traditional Jewish *midrash* was and how it works as a generic, epistemological tool, my own performance in this book about Alfred Dreyfus and the Dreyfus Affair is more restricted and is also modified to meet with the particular circumstances prevalent at the historical period of the captain's and the French nation's ordeal, as well as with the nature of the crises through which we went in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a hundred years later.

These midrashing techniques will be applied to the following kinds of texts: (a) books, letters, journals, memoirs, and essays by Alfred Dreyfus, other members of his family, and close associates or participants in the affair; (b) documents referred to, hinted at, or implicit in the writings of Alfred Dreyfus and Marcel Proust and other authors and artists who took aspects of the affair as major or minor subjects of their work; (c) historians, reporters, and analysts of the affair, especially those within the first ten to twenty years of its occurring—that is, from about 1894 to 1924; and (d) books, articles, essays, and other works by and about the anti-Semitists involved in or inspired by the affair.

First, the texts of written documents and the articulated memories of events are described in and of themselves. The exercise involves a series of close, etymological and cultural studies of the words, references, allusions, and echoes in the texts written by Dreyfus and his supporters. Words and phrases have to be seen not only in the specific contexts

68 Diamond, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics of Concealment*, 3.

of their normal usage by these writers and their contemporaries, but also in wider and deeper contexts, so that implications and significance can be ascertained. They also have to be measured in their literal and figurative senses, perceived in patterns—what words they are normally associated with, and what words they stand related to as antonyms and variants in regard to tone, nuance, and hint. Thus, what may seem like casual, passing, or insignificant words and phrases can be charged with an electrical or magnetic energy that reconfigures the texts we are studying and hence the dramatization, memorial quality, and probative value of the man, the milieu, and the mentality of Alfred Dreyfus.

Next the study approaches the relationship of text to countertext (where there are two or more competing versions of the same supposed reality or subjective experiences), text to antitext (where the validation of one text does more than undermine the truth content in full or in part of its competitors but designates a different sort of reality that excludes the reality of the others by sheer rhetorical force, political censorship, or some deeper epistemological technique), or text and nontext (where the power of one textual experience invalidates, undermines, and consumes to the point of obliterating the memory, traces, and conceptual space of the others). Juxtapositions of these kinds of textual networks are made using the range of documents and authors mentioned by and commented upon by Dreyfus and his supporters. At first sight, many of these juxtapositions seem outrageous and far-fetched, but as we explore their analogies, often by intricate and witty discussions, aspects of the meanings not fully appreciated or even missed out upon completely should begin to surface and register in light of the larger picture emerging in this book. It is in this way that this book forces the reader to examine from new angles, new filters, and new measuring devices the matrix of the man and the affair.

Third, rather than setting two or more texts next to one another in order to see what is precipitated, crystallized, or destroyed by the epistemological phenomenon, we attempt a series of new contextualizations of passages and events from the books and authors mentioned by Dreyfus and his supporters. Much like the juxtapositions, the relocation brings new angles of appreciation and unexpected perspectives into focus, even creating paradigms of connectivity, analogy, and contrast that illuminate the pictures and arguments in the text. Normal, commonsense, and traditional readings, analyses, and interpretations

are thus challenged by the new angles of vision, the new connectivities established, and the annihilation of previously assumed relationships and historical signs.

Most radical and shocking of all will be the fourth midrashic mode, which is a series of rhetorical conversations that undermine the apparent conventional integrity of the texts, especially the discourses of scholarship—history, psychology, and philosophy—in order to develop new perspectives. These dialogues may at times seem irrelevant, trivial, or transgressive. Although they are indeed made_up, they provide a number of tools to shatter entrenched truisms and unquestioned assumptions about Dreyfus and the affair. Their value is therefore less in their literal development inside this book than in their probing, discombobulating, and destabilizing faculties. They invite the historian and literary critic to participate in the formation of a more powerful conversation about the topics at the heart of this book.

A further word is also needed on what we mean by hints, oblique allusions, echoes, and similar techniques of *inadequation*. Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus, for instance, knew that when they wrote to each other, whatever they put into words in their letters would be subject to censorship, but they only learned through harsh experience what the consequences of mistakes, casual or unconscious, would be, and hence needed to work out—without direct communication and certainly without having previously agreed upon codes, signals, and experience—various ways of reassuring one another, of their complete love, loyalty, and trust in one another. While their correspondence was not perfect and was often fraught with frustrations, in the long run, over the five years in which they sent epistles to one another, they reproduced, totally without forethought or formal recognition, methods of writing that were firmly rooted in Jewish experience, particularly amongst those men and women caught up in contraptions such as the Inquisition. It is unlikely that either would have read books, such as Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, in which much of this tradition was discussed and analysed, although Maimonides too composed his book using these techniques to exemplify exactly what this mode of hiding knowledge and teaching students would entail.

My argument, tentative as it must perforce be, is that Marcel Proust became aware of this way of writing through his family background—the conversations he had and overheard with his mother, his grandfa-

ther, and their Jewish friends—and the books he read as he moved from preparatory short stories towards his major novel; and if Proust could absorb and modulate these techniques in the same period as the Dreyfus Affair was unfolding, so too could the Dreyfuses have become aware of them, albeit through less systematic means—partly from Lucie's parents and relatives, who were more attached to Jewish traditions than her husband's family and friends, and partly from hints he had picked up but not needed to think about before the shock of his arrest and the nightmare of his imprisonment.

This knowledge and skill in Dreyfus cannot be traced to specific moments or texts in his experience, however, and we are left with only two modes of proof: one is in the fact of what he did write in concord with Lucie—in other words, the proof is in the pudding; and the other is in the similarities between what this couple did in their letters and what the husband wrote alone in his notebooks, workbooks, and journals, and what Maimonides recommended and hundreds of Marrano, Crypto-Jewish, and Sephardic individuals and families did over the course of more than four hundred years when they had to keep their true identities a secret from church spies, inquisitorial officials, and suspicious relatives, friends, and neighbours. That these techniques were more or less suspected, if not always exposed and confirmed, can be seen in the responses of non-Jewish commentators, not least of whom were the prison guards and administrators who observed Dreyfus in captivity, searched his writings for criminal ideas, and reported regularly to their political masters in Paris.

I thus justify my own way of writing this book on the grounds that it is only by such imitation that the reader can properly grasp the phenomena we are studying and, even more, that it is only through this shattering of literary and scholarly conventions that the truth of Dreyfus's experience and the meaning of the affair can be understood, and thus, justice in a Jewish sense served.

In each of these four midrashings, but especially the second and third modalities, I will put into play the words, images, themes, and conceptions of anti-Semitism. Although usually dismissed as delusionary ravings or deliberate distortions of historical reality, such discourses and imaginations nevertheless are valuable both as markers of the hateful currents of the times, at times only partly audible or visible to the main players in the Dreyfus Affair, and as tracings of variant ways of thinking

and feelings, as well as of seeing and articulating the existential truths of private and collective experiences—fears, anxieties, hopes, aspirations, desires, and so on. We show in this book that not all opponents of Dreyfus were raving maniacs or fanatics; many were intellectuals, and indeed some were themselves Jewish, or at least claimed Jewish relatives in their close family histories, formed part of the educated, professional elite, and were sometimes recognized leaders in the arts, sciences, and political movements of their time, and in most other ways of speaking, writing, and picturing the world were quite sane, perceptive, and sensitive. The manifestation of Judeophobia—something that also could be measured at various degrees of intensity at various stages of their lives or in different social or political venues—does, therefore, form part of the complex existential reality of the period.