

Jews in an Illusion of Paradise

Jews in an Illusion of Paradise:

*Dust and Ashes Volume Two—
Falling out of Place
and into History*

By

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Der Atlas ist das Libretto f.d. Commedia dell'Arte.

The Atlas is the Libretto for the Commedia dell'Arte.
—Aby Warburg

The entire world is like a spinning *dreidel*.
—Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav



Figure 1: The Musée Grévin in Paris opened by Arthur Meyer represents the alluring prospect of a paradise (PaRDeS) but hides within itself a hell of misunderstanding and intolerance (ShEOL).

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PREFACE

In the first volume of *Dust and Ashes*, subtitled “Comedians and Catastrophes,” I dealt with some major themes and images pertinent to the study of how a small group of Jewish intellectuals and artists from the mid-nineteenth through to the early twentieth centuries bamboozled themselves, in various ways, into believing they were safely ensconced in a secular and tolerant world, if not always accepting of them as creative individuals or their work as conforming to current tastes and practices, in which anti-Semitism was not a major danger or obstruction. The basic model for this discussion in the first part of the book was the ancient Talmudic legend of the Four Sages who visited Paradise, or rather who entered a PaRDeS of exegetical wonders through diverse means of *midrash*, the result being that one of them died upon arrival and another went mad, and then the third returned a heretic who separated himself from Jews and Judaism, and the last who came back convinced he must take a conservative and unimaginative role in his religious community.

As this paradigm of the Four Sages was expounded, many brief or longer episodes and proof texts from the lives of the Jewish intellectuals and artists were introduced to exemplify, challenge and recreate those categories of thought. The proof-texts required modification because often enough the individuals themselves were not brought up in Jewish belief or practice, rejected their ancestral faith in full or in part at some stage of their lives, or assumed that these religious matters did not apply because they were assimilated fully into European society and culture. When they passed away, they were not always aware of the limitations to their acceptance, nor did they have doubts about the security of their reputations. In hindsight, we can see that they variously died in shock at what the world had become, went into a form of madness rather than processing the new insights, tried to separate themselves even further from their own identities by a bundle of intellectual tricks, or believed that they could dig their heels in and be Jews no matter what the world thought of them.

The second volume, the subtitle of which is “Falling out of Place and into History,” may seem to shift to focus on to the lives, careers and achievements of a dozen or so Jewish artists and intellectuals and away from abstract themes; but not fully so, because the parsing, analysis and interpretation of various pertinent texts follows a complex and overlapping pattern of

analogies in figures of speech and thought, casual conversations, and accidental events. These objects of rabbinical-like midrashic and psychohistorical scrutiny include inadvertently recorded remarks, personal diaries more or less meant for private consumption, more public journals attempting to construct acceptable images of self, supposedly objective newspaper reports, biographies, and autobiographies. The figures discovered include mirrors and lenses, jokes and persistent or annoying memories. These almost *sub rosa* details are the kinds of marginal or trivial events in people's lives; more than just Freud's malaprops, bloopers and mistakes in movement and gesture somewhat similar to the points of entry used by rabbinical exegetes, such as repeated words, inconsistent spellings, oddities in personal handwriting or manuscript transmission, puns, echoes and obscure or unknown etymologies. To grasp these bizarre and elusive details as meaningful, the book creates new contexts in popular fiction, public theatrics, newspaper obituaries and a host of other sources not usually considered pertinent to the study of art, culture and ideas in regard to high culture and fine arts.

For the most part, the main characters in this book did not realize that before they could attain the positions they sought to achieve, they first had to be accepted as Jews, paradoxical as that may seem. This means that our approach cannot be to take them or their achievements at face value, as though they were writers, artists or performers and then perhaps, only incidentally, Jews. Without always knowing why, they were different from their peers, friends, and colleagues, those women and men who formed their social and professional environments. They received and chose their influences differently, too, out of unusual contexts; and they passed on to their immediate progeny a heritage that was different from the one their contemporaries experienced. These differences, and the tensions they caused in the ambient reality in which such characters worked, were the main themes in the first volume of this book.

The task here, in the second part, is to harness the insights that come from looking at those themes and tensions in the special spaces that distance in time and place opens up. We need to sharpen the focus so as to examine more clearly what for these artists and thinkers was only vague, marginal or invisible. Hindsight proves to be a lens that has to be carefully adjusted to meet each circumstance. Trivial details, once dredged up from not necessarily reliable sources—the kind of gossip and innuendo that most historians and critics dismiss if there is no documentary corroborating evidence—needed to be kneaded into shape, formed into pretzel-like patterns, and the dynamic and ephemeral patterns juxtaposed, interlaced, back-looped to form new points of contact, little spots of pain,

pressure points, areas of high sensitivity from which radiate the energy of possible connections. That is not always an easy matter, and there is no guarantee of success. Yet negative conclusions can be new portals to journeys of discovery.

We begin, typically, not through the study of a central figure in this book, but with an encounter of a different kind, with a notorious anti-Semite. We set text against counter-text: not immediately in anything but an arbitrary juxtaposition, two unfriendly oxen fixed to the same plough. They do more than pull in different directions, no matter how much the yoke or the farming tool keeps them going in the same way; since the alternative should be considered as a text next to a non-text, the one's energies seeking to negate the efforts of the other, and thus stymieing the whole process. If they are not two alternative versions of the same narrative or argument, they are each likely to become meaningless; for they cannot co-exist other than in a rhetorical illusion. If one version of the text is true, the other cannot be, and vice versa. If they were not yoked together by history—that is, both Catulle Mendès and Léon Daudet lived at the same time—then coexistence would be impossible. The Jewish narrative is one of successful participation in French culture. The anti-Semitic argument is that Jewish success comes at the expense of Christian morals, culture and ideals.

In this argument that culminated in his collaboration with the Nazis during the Occupation, Léon Daudet followed the insights he drew from Eduard Drumont's *France Juive*, that immensely popular two-volume encyclopedia of Jew-hating clichés. Helping in the preparation of this screed helped establish Daudet's conscious grounds for evaluating the cultural life of his nation upon the "alternative fact" that Jews had already invaded French culture and insinuated themselves unfairly and irresponsibly into it at all levels of its development; so disproportionately, moreover, that "*ils en était les maîtres réel*" (they are its real masters).¹

It does not matter that what Drumont or Daudet or any other ignorant Jew-hater said was balderdash or a ludicrous distortion of contextless lies and slanders. What matters is that this nonsense was what ordinary people—and not only them—at the time accepted as unquestioned facts that created the constant barrier against the assimilation of Jews into society. However, the anti-Semitic barrier was not just a fence or protective wall against truth; it was a lens through which they perceived reality and their place in the world. More than that, too, it was a gigantic

¹ Léon Daudet, *L'Entre-Deux-Guerres: Souvenirs des Milieu Littéraires, Politiques, Artistiques et Médiaux de 1880 à 1905* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1915), p. 43.

optical machine (something like a kaleidoscope) for producing variations in thought and feeling, as well as in shaping tastes and testing opinions—especially strong and deceptive in France.

Thanks to Napoleon I's decrees, Jewish emancipation had been granted in the last years of the eighteenth century at a fundamental price: only individual Jews were to be accepted into the French polity and recognized as citizens, but not the Jews as a nation.² Israel as such could no longer continue to be an autonomous community within the state, and yet that is what the anti-Semites believed they were seeing—not individual Jews living and working more or less as everyone else does in France, but one massed alien being threatening the existence of the French state and culture. Even in the early twenty-first century the legal system in France

² Yet this is precisely what constitutes Jewish identity: they are *b'ne* or *am yisrael* (the children or people of Israel). There is no word for *religion* in biblical Hebrew, the closest being *avodah*, service or work in a temple or at a shrine. Jews, Hebrews or Israelites, are adherents to the Law, their covenant with God and their national constitution, both in the Land of Israel and throughout the Diaspora where they identified themselves as a holy nation in Exile. Other identifications based on faith, belief, or even practice, derive from Christian paradigms, and any attempt to force them into such non-Jewish categories is an act of anti-Semitism. See Evelyn Gordon, "Denying Jews the Right to define Judaism is anti-Semitism," *Commentary*, last modified 13 May, 2015, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/201505/13/denying-jews-the-right-to-define-judaism-is-anti-semitism>.

The historical compromise offered to them by Napoleon after the French Revolution was accepted in the hope, on all sides, that Israelites would adjust themselves to the new conditions and thereby be absorbed into France as full citizens. At best, there was sometimes a tenuous tolerance, but in times of crisis the Jews were reviled and sacrificed to *la gloire*; for example, during the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906) and under German Occupation (1941-1944).

This footnote, like many others I create, makes statements that help bind together the diverse threads of this book. It seems to relegate insights and suggestions to a minor position at the bottom of the page and compress them into small print, but this very forced obscurity (in the physical and metaphorical sense) should make readers aware of something suspicious, some flaw in the text that draws attention to itself, as midrashic rabbis would pounce on a peculiar spelling, an iteration that breaks the syntax, or some other small detail that indicated that everything was not as it seemed to be in the main argument or narrative.

Thus the dialogue between the various strands of my argument back and forth between the main body and the annotated remarks, mirrors a kind of reading not only typical of rabbinical discourses, but reproducing the fate of these figures who thought they were entering the paradise of celebrity and remembrance but actually passed through the shadowy valley of misunderstanding into oblivion; in other words, who thought they were writing about their successes but nevertheless called attention to their failures.

cannot deal with a renewed spate of anti-Jewish acts of terrorism, because French law may not recognize the Jew as a separate category of citizen. Confronted with the irrationality of anti-Semitism, whether in the 1890s or the 2010s, the legal system is stymied: it is blind to its own deficiencies. French citizens who happen to be Jews become vulnerable because they cannot seek redress for crimes committed against them as Jews, whereas their vociferous and violent enemies, behaving outside that law, can claim their own rights as a refugee nation—a religious nation—of true believers with their own separate laws, customs, beliefs and rights.

This Catch-22 situation, not always evident in the stark terms it has assumed recently in France (and elsewhere in Europe), was there in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that is why, someone like Catulle Mendès could not struggle through life and eventually succeed in reaching a position of fame, fortune and artistic influence along with his French friends and colleagues, and moreover why his reputation and even appearance in histories of the culture of the period fades away more rapidly than those of others. Catulle Mendès, Arthur Meyer, André Suarès, Marcel Schwob, Sarah Bernhardt, Aby Warburg, Gertrude Stein, Bernard Berenson and all the rest, thanks to their enormous talents, could momentarily rise to the top in their careers and enjoy the pleasures and other rewards of that success, but they also were to one degree or another aware of being different, of living in, citing Léon Daudet again as an articulate yet not a rabid anti-Semite, a nightmare (*cauchemare*).³

Always the pariah, sometimes the parvenu, and at times surrounded by swarms of piranhas, “*cette agglomération Hébreux des deux sexes*” (this mob of Jews of both sexes), Daudet goes on, makes its presence known, “*en sueur ou en chaleur, une odeur âcre et spécialement fétide*” (in sweat or in heat, by a bitter and particularly fetid odour). What we have to search for, in order to *midrash* these opinions and anecdotes (fictional as well as historical),⁴ is some way to put together the patterns of detail, fill out the fragmented and incomplete picture, and generate the appropriate context that will reveal the special qualities of life—inner and outer—that the would-be assimilated Jews had to contend with. Take, for instance, the

³ Daudet, *L'Entre-Deux-Guerres*, p. 49.

⁴ The personal anecdote or historical instance, like the proverb and the fable, is a brief narrative involving a small number of characters (real or false, human or animal, and occasionally inanimate objects), with a small number of actions (sometimes only one), and a few chosen words, likely to resonate with truisms, clichés and memorable catch-phrases. If there is no explicit “moral” or statement of meaning, there are implications of significance, such as winks, digs in the rib, rolling of the eyes... and y’know what I mean.

following little scenario imagined by Léon Daudet at his vivid best in conjuring up anti-Semitic characters, their actions and voices. The famous French opera composer Jules-Émile-Frédéric Massenet (1842-1912) meets with the foreigner, Seligmann Heller (1831-1890), whose father was a teacher of Talmud and the author of *Ahasuerus* (a libretto based on *The Wandering Jew*) and *Hebrew Melodies*. Daudet says he once observed how the dignified Frenchman was embarrassed by the pushy, inelegant old Jew:

Viens donc, M. Massenet va jouer quelque chose.

“Rutulu, rutututla,” minaudait l’auteur de Manon devant une vieille juive croulante et émerveillée. Puis, bondissant au piano, il commençait a plaquer quelques accords, se prenait la tête, déclarait qu’il souffrait d’une migraine subite, se faisait supplier, se rasseyait et finissait par exécuter une polka de 1830, en criant aux jeunes filles: “Dansez, mais dansez donc!” Au poussah Seligmann, en le salissant aux aisselles: “Tanzen, balliren, valsiren.” Car “monsieur Massenet” ne manquait pas d’une certaine ironie. Quand je lui glissais dans l’oreille: “Quel milieu fête!” il me répondait, en mâchonnant comme un lapin: “C’est la société moderne, mon cher ami: c’est un gouffre, un gouffre, un gouffre!”⁵

Come, then. Monsieur Massenet is going to play something.

“Rutulu, rutututala,” simpered the author of *Manon* in front of a dodderly and befuddled old Jewish woman. Then bounding to the piano, he began to pound out some chords, then taking himself by the head and declaring he had a sudden headache, implored [their indulgence], and cut [his performance] and finished by playing a polka from 1830, and he shouted to the girls: “Dance, so dance already!” To the paunchy old Seligmann, seizing him by the armpits: “*Tanzen, ballieren, valsiren*” [Dance, twirl, waltz]. For “this Monsieur Massenet” did not lack a sense of irony. When I whispered into his ear: “What a stench around here!” he answered mumbling his teeth like a rabbit: “It’s modern society, my dear friend: it’s a whirlpool, a whirlpool, a whirlpool!”

A mad swirl of chaotic activity, a stinking maelstrom of incoherence, a deep pit of ugly smells and tastes, and yet beauty through the making of art can transform the hideous into the desirable. Says Mendès:

Mais qui donc assumerait la tâche d’écrire des contes de fées s’il n’avait le droit de transformer, au cours de ses récits les plus hideuses personnes en jeunes dames éclatantes de beauté et de parure?

⁵ Daudet, *L’Entre-Deux-Guerres*, pp. 50-51.

But who then will assume the task of writing fairy tales, if he didn't have the right to transform, in the course of these stories, the most hideous persons into young ladies of striking beauty and adornment?⁶

⁶ Catulle Mendès, *Contes de Rouet* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Deux Mondes, 1885), pp. 211-212.

CHAPTER SIX

ABRAHAM CATULLE MENDÈS

Death at the End of the Line

Without introspection, Man cannot realize the violence he was subjected to as a child. Therefore, he cannot establish the links of cause and effect between his past and what he lives through every day. So, he tries to believe he is the victim of a dramatic present whose precarious balance he must constantly manage.¹

The life of Catulle Mendès is more than the career of a Jewish artist whose personality expressed itself more or less fully in his intellectual gifts and aesthetic talents, and in the impressions recorded in the journals, memoirs

¹ Sylvie Vermeulen, "Terrorism and Mutilation, World in the Grip of Terror," *Research Insight*, <http://www.regardconscient.net/earchives/0201eterromut.html>. This statement, when applied to the seduction, capture and torture of Ilan Halimi in Paris described at the outset of Volume One, seems to sum up the basics of psychohistory: that childhood trauma shapes and forms the unconscious structures of subsequent personality in the adult which is then articulated, again as much unconsciously as consciously, by subsequent pains, humiliations, frustrations, anxieties and fears. Vermeulen does not allow for the complexities of what Freud called dream-work—condensation, displacement, substitution, and various punning, riddling and other distortion in words, images and actions—and takes the world too seriously, that is, as though it were all as it seems to be to an objective external observer: powerfully tragic, profoundly pathetic and indelibly determined.

The assumption here also is that the mind is very much an individual phenomenon rather than the dynamic space in which groups—from the very small mother-infant relationship through the domestic circle of care-givers, siblings and helpers out to more political, professional, religious and cultural entities function—whereas what the incident shows is that the plot against the victim involved many people, their prior beliefs and their assumptions about how the whole of France, as well as the small Jewish community, would respond.

There are immediate circumstances, personal grudges, anxieties, fears and desires, but there is also a matrix, a shared ideology and a social network of ways in which specific actions and words rise to attention, achieve focus and are recollected from hour to hour so as to make sense to everyone involved; even if the sense is muddled and contradictory.

and other writings of his friends and colleagues. Such tangible materials—texts, images and even vague reminiscences—lie open before us as a public archive. What we are after, however, is neither history, sociology, philosophy, religious studies nor anything other than those insights which only a *midrash* could reveal. This chapter, like the nine others in my book, is more a poetic meditation than an act of scientific discourse, perhaps even a special kind of Jewish joke. How special remains to be seen, although already hinted at many times.

Catulle Mendès and the other persons who appear here are not found to be transparent to their words and actions, just as they are not reflected accurately in their novels, paintings, compositions or described dramatic performances—at least, not simply so. None of them were, or imagined themselves to be, “normal” persons subject to the ebb and flow of history, even if they thought of themselves as special because of their talents and insights, their hard work and their good luck. Moreover, when they tried to set themselves apart from everyone else, they were not always fully aware why.

Jewish Boy Baptized

*Mais après les apothéoses de l’opium, les puérilités fantasmagories du hachich et les excitations ou la langueur délicieuses de la morphine leurs nerfs, leurs sens tout leur être—comme une corde, trop tendue, rompt et choit—défaill plus irrémédiablement en une désolation plus profond; et s’ils vivent encore—on nomme cela vivre!—c’est qu’ils n’osent pas mourir.*²

But after the apotheoses [or “highs”] of opium, the puerilities of hashish and the delicious exaltations or lows of morphine, their nerves, their senses, their whole being—like a string stretched too tight, that snaps and falls—into a swoon more irremediable than the most profound despair; and yet they live—they call this living!—because they dare not die.

Adrien Bertrand, shortly before the start of the twentieth century, recounted in a brief critical biography of Abraham Catulle Mendès,³ in a casual and

² Catulle Mendès, *Méphistophéla* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1903), p. 253. In this *fin de siècle* novel of same-sex female passion and despair, to be discussed later, Mendès describes the nightmarish vision of an orgiastic excess by the title character as she tries to lose herself after realizing the emptiness of her loveless life.

³ You would think that neither Mendès himself nor any of his friends knew of or used his first name because it would have called attention to his Jewishness, but his anti-Semitic enemies did, as well as the ambiguous philo-Semites like Léon Bloy who, in 1864, wrote about “M. Abraham Catulle.” Cited in Eric Vauth, “Catulle

offhand way, almost a kind of passing joke, how two and a half year old Catulle was baptized while on holiday with his rich French parents in Bologna, Italy visiting with the Rothschilds to celebrate Passover:

*Il sortit de chez eux avant ses parents, avec sa bonne. Un moine mendiant qui l'avait souvent rencontré dans le quartier s'approcha de lui... Mendès le voit encore, avec son froc et son tronc à cliquette qui représentait la Vierge d'un côté, le Diable de l'autre, et vous offrant l'une ou l'autre face—selon qu'on lui avait fait la charité ou non—*⁴

He ran out of the house before his parents with his nursemaid. A mendicant monk who had often met him in the neighborhood approached him... Mendès saw him again, with his cloak and his poor-box and rattle which depicted the Virgin on one side, the Devil on the other, and showing you one or the other face, depending on whether you gave charity or not ...

In fact the monk grabbed hold of the boy roughly and baptized him in a nearby fountain, thus making him, legally, into a neophyte, a converted Christian. Yet in his thesis, Bertrand does not identify young blond-haired⁵ Catulle as a Jewish boy,⁶ although he does indicate that his mother was a

Mendès, nouvelliste cruel de la Décadence,” *Annales de Filologia Française* 14 (2005-2006), p. 237.

⁴ Adrien Bertrand, *Catulle Mendès* (Paris: Bibliothèque internationale d'édition E. Sansot & C^{ie}, 1898).

⁵ Alain Rusenholz, “Les sectateurs de l'idéal, ou les contemporains fin de siècle!” *Le Paris d'Alain Rusenholz*, last modified November 2012, <http://www.alain-rustenholz.net/2012/11/les-sectateurs-de-lideal-ou-les.html>.

⁶ Stoddard Dewey, the American turn-of-the-century journalist we introduced earlier in this book as making one of the fullest descriptions of Mendès' career, pulls no punches in his *Boston Evening Transcript* essay of 12 November, 1902 (parts of which were trucked out for *The New York Times* report of his death in the tunnel accident on 9 February, 1909): “Catulle Mendès comes of a line of Jewish bankers established in the South of France” (in other words, amidst the Sephardic tradition) and then adds several tantalizing details such as the following: “There was a strain of literature in the family, and his grandfather cultivated French versification for his pleasure until the Revolution of 1848 put an end to his business and his life,” something that happened when Catulle was six years old, and may have led to the decision made by his parents to take the boy to Germany and Italy to complete his primary education.

Whether Catulle acquired more than two foreign languages and a taste for music that included Wagner, Dewey does not say, just as he does not report any specific formal or informal training in Jewish religious practices, though some other sources (as given in the body of this book) seem to hint at this. The American journalist also leaves out what we take as the crucial episode of the forced conversion in Italy. Dewey merely says that, “At twelve the family returned to

Catholic, only implicitly describing the father Tibulle Mendès⁷ and his unnamed grandfather as Jews. They were, in fact, Sephardim, whose Latin names suggest their typical openness to classical and Mediterranean cultures. Born into a wealthy family of Portuguese-Jewish⁸ bankers, the Mendès parents were acquainted with other wealthy Jewish clans, and their friendship with the Rothschild family and their holidays together in Italy, further tell us what the author of this laudatory pamphlet does not,

France and settled down in a château of Toulouse, leading the great life of that provincial city.” Again the local Jewish community, with its synagogue and other rabbinical institutions is not mentioned: “Catulle was not sent to college, but he was under a tutor who was a Latinist after the old fashion, and steeped the growing mind in literature.”

More than that classical bent to his formation, “His mother was a noted beauty and her box in the theatre, when she sat with her blond-haired son beside her, became known to all Toulouse.” Catulle was handsome and precocious, as is evident in this rapid-fire series of statements with very little connecting links or explanatory contextualizing, “When the boy was fourteen years old [*The New York Times* version says twelve years of age] he gave to the local Variétés a vaudeville entitled the ‘Bailiff’s Garters’ and it was played several times.”

Building on this success, the next year, at fifteen, Catulle “started a theatrical paper, and the following year his indulgent father allowed him to go up to try his fortune in Paris.” Dewey carries on with the introduction of the brilliant young teenager to the rising generation of young writers and their older supporters. The reporter sees so much, but not enough, and therefore understands so little.

⁷ Of him, Vance Thomson says he was “a speculative Israelite not without guile” and Tibulle Mendès passed on to his son Catulle sufficient entrepreneurial skills to keep funding magazines, journals and newspapers “not one of which has survived.” See: Vance Thomson, *French Portraits: Being Appreciations of the Writers of Young France* (Boston: Richard G. Badger & Co., 1900), p. 80. This is a case discussed earlier in the first volume of *Jews in an Illusion of Paradise: Dust and Ashes*.

⁸ Again, while virtually no mention is ever made by his critics—positive or negative—of his Portuguese connections through his father’s family, and modern historians barely consider the passing reference when establishing his origins, as we shall see later, the Portuguese community in France was sufficiently moved at Mendès’ funeral to take a prominent role in the cortège. In other words, much about the man and his Jewishness has been distorted, trivialized or wiped away in the history of his life and influence.

These aspects of his personality and character remain, however, part of the ghosts, revenants and dreamy phantoms that surround his biography, just as he stands out amongst the Decadents, Symbolists, and other poetic movements of his time by his own sense of the “psychopathologique.” See Éric Vauthier, “Catulle Mendès, nouvelliste cruel de la Décadence,” *Annales de Filologia Francesa* 14 (2005-2006), p. 244. On his interest in the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and other psychologists at the end of the nineteenth century, see also p. 246.

that these assimilated French Jews, often with a Christian wife and mother,⁹ still belonged to the Jewish community.

This episode in Catulle Mendès' childhood is not that of the self-denying Jew. This is to use Janet Malcolm's expression in regard to such unexpected moments of confession in Alice B. Toklas's later life: the first, when she met Doda Conrad by chance, and, not knowing who he was, began to speak to him and then invited him to her apartment in Paris; this seemingly casual and insignificant meeting with a stranger led her to say things about her own Polish-Jewishness¹⁰—and by implication that of her life-long companion Gertrude Stein¹¹—something she either never mentioned or denied or contradicted throughout her writings.

We immediately became friends, and she took me into her confidence as if Alice B. Toklas had discovered in me someone with whom she could speak as an equal, which it appeared she had been unable to do for a long time. She told me about her trip to Poland, when she was a child, to visit her paternal grandfather. This grandfather was the rabbi of Ostrow, a small city near Kalisz, the cradle of the Tykociner, who were my ancestors. The rabbi's son had emigrated to San Francisco in the middle of the last century, where he had married a small Spanish Jewess, a great beauty.

⁹ The opposite situation is less common. It does appear nevertheless in Marcel Proust's background, where his Jewish mother and grandmother provided a halachic-legal identity to him as a Jew, while his father, the famous Dr Proust, makes him born a French citizen and a Christian, who was duly baptized in a church and educated to be familiar with ecclesiastical holidays. Those children of mixed parents where the mother is not Jewish do not inherit their Hebrew identity, even if the father provides a stimulating Jewish education. The child grows up, however, with a more or less double heritage, in conflict, barely noticed, sometimes denied, but still there, at least in those instances we are examining.

¹⁰ John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company/An Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1959), p. 103. Alice's upbringing seems even more erratic and dysfunctional than that of Gertrude Stein. She was also far more calculating and manipulative than she led others to believe. "While Alice B. Toklas regarded herself as a personality who is acted upon rather than as one who acts she was never the clinging, dependent character that legend had made of her. Intellectually acute, full of acerbities and strong opinions, she chose her role with Gertrude Stein and, for nearly forty years, played it with utter success" (Brinnin, *The Third Rose*, p. 109).

¹¹ Gertrude's parents, "Daniel and Amelia Keyser Stein, [were] both of German-Jewish extraction" (Brinnin, *The Third Rose*, p. 4). After a brief stay in Europe with their five children, the Steins returned to America and settled in California, "Daniel sometimes attended synagogue services, and both the boys and girls for a time went regularly to Sabbath school" (Brinnin, *The Third Rose*, p. 18).

Alice described the elegance of the excursions the rabbi organized for her when she was a child.¹²

The second moment when a veil seems to fall from the Jewish character of Alice B. Toklas occurred still later in 1957, while interviewed by Janet Flanner, after she had become a Catholic. She reacted strongly to the suggestion that this conversion was a long time coming, the resistance deriving from an attachment to her upbringing in a Jewish household. According to Flanner,

she went so far as to characterize the conversion not as a repudiation of Judaism but as a return to the Church. She told the writer, Janet Flanner, in all seriousness, that she had been baptized in childhood when a Catholic friend of her parents sprinkled her with holy water.¹³

This has the ring in it of the young Mendès's forcible baptism on the street by the mendicant friar, and even of other figures, but also reminds us of a memory of Sigmund Freud, who was taken into church by his nursemaid and made to listen to, and perhaps participate in, the Catholic mass.

But Toklas's story lacks the tonality of a truth suddenly expressed after years of repression; it reverberates like a lie, a regular feature of Toklas's way of speaking with people. If at first she seemed to take Conrad into her confidence to say what she would never confess to her friends and associates, let alone write in a book, it may be a trick, a ruse she played to please herself at the expense of an unknown Jewish stranger, albeit one who is the brother of a figure she knows from the stage; in the second instance, however, she makes up a narrative of wish-fulfilment, another deception to entrap the supposed naïveté of a busybody who intrudes precisely into an area which Alice and Gertrude had studiously suppressed in their lives. Janet Malcolm cites a series of contradictory documents—memoirs, interviews, and newspaper reports—that show the two old lesbians teasing and parrying their interlocutors, coming to the conclusion that, as with post-modernist ideology, “The instability of human knowledge is one of our few certainties. Almost everything we know we know incompletely at best.” Yet all these stories prove is that it takes a lot of effort and interpretive skill to dig out the truth: a truth not out there,” but *in medias res*, “in the midst of life.”

¹² Doda Conrad cited by Janet Malcolm, “Strangers in Paradise: How Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas got to Heaven,” *New Yorker*, last modified 13 November, 2006, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/13/strangers-in-paradise>.

¹³ Janet Flanner cited by Malcolm, “Strangers in Paradise.”

STOP: Bitterness and Regret

It is notorious that converted Jews are apt to turn bitterly and ragingly anti-Semitic, and by “converted” I refer this time not to religion alone but to standards of living, feeling, and thinking.¹⁴

At this point it is necessary to stop for a moment to reflect on the self-conscious regrets and doubts that come upon the convert to Christianity whose Jewishness was thought to be put aside and left behind, at best a childhood memory occasionally to be regarded through the lens of nostalgia, and at worst a bothersome stain on one’s character, a reminder of past sins; but such reflections on the wisdom of a strategic decision or an expediency, rather than a matter of faith or aesthetic sensibilities, cannot be made objectively and in a neutral space where they concern only the mind and heart of the historical Iberian “New Christian” or neophyte.¹⁵ The crisis of conscience and consciousness in the late 1930s and early 1940s was of a very different order, an “existential” threat to all Jews—a category conceived in the mad pseudo-biological ideology of the National Socialists beyond notions of faith, aesthetics or mere convenience—including someone like Bernard Berenson, who, in the above quotation, is

¹⁴ 12 December, 1941, Bernard Berenson, *Rumour and Reflection* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 48. Throughout this journal of the war years, and various other notebooks and diaries he kept, Berenson was forced from time to time, when confronted with refugees, rumours of denunciations by erstwhile friends and colleagues, and the personal witness to the effects of marauding Fascist bands and German troops in his neighbourhood near Florence to think about his own status as a Jew in ways he not had to do in his earlier life.

His reflections, though often contradictory, stand out for their articulate sensitivity and disarming honesty, in a way never indulged in by other persons examined in this book, Sarah Bernhardt, Catulle Mendès, André Suarès, Arthur Meyer, et al., or at least not in their published writings.

¹⁵ It is necessary to clarify terms once historically specific to the Iberian crisis at the end of the fifteenth century of mass conversions, expulsions and massacres, and the immediate aftermath. The consequences haunted all concerned: the original converts and their children and grandchildren; subsequent generations born into the role of New Christian and accepting or rejecting the conditions of such a religious-political status; the rabbinical authorities asked to adjudicate in questions of inheritance, marriage and doctrinal interpretations for persons who either refused to return to Judaism when it was possible; those who left the Jewish settlements in North Africa and South-Eastern Europe to try to re-absorb into Catholic Spain, bringing opprobrium down on the heads of their families and colleagues; and the various jurisdictions of power and belief in Iberia when confronted by a huge proportion of men and women whose faith could not be counted on, whether in holy orders, aristocratic brotherhoods, or town councils.

struck to the quick by the reality of his own vulnerability, by the fact that should the Germans dominate Europe more fully, he and people like himself, are on the list of those doomed to extermination. In response (and here it is to a visit by a Viennese physician which opens his eyes to what is going on), whatever regret or bitterness he may feel, whatever rage swelling up inside him against the injustice and ugliness of it all, he is stuck. Therefore it is no time for abstract musings. In addition, as I mentioned about the value of anti-Semites as sources of information: these bigots, even of the relatively mild (or “soft”) order, are able to say things other more neutral or politically-correct sources are too afraid or discriminating to say, and in which they reveal aspects that the subjects of their discourse often do not know about themselves.

Vance Thomson remarks that Catulle Mendès “had long, golden hair and a long beard, like a young rabbi.”¹⁶ In addition, “he had little Hebraic gestures,”¹⁷ and he had a defect “which may be racial.” At more length: “He has no faith in himself. His talent is not self-centred; it does not revolve on its own pivot. He is never triumphantly himself.”¹⁸ Thus, for Thomson, looking at the man in 1900, nine years before his mysterious death, Mendès’ life is “very tragic; it is the eternal tragedy of the talent that would be genius.”¹⁹ Although the youthful Catulle was often seen and praised for his angelic appearance, handsome beyond what a man should be, it was precisely this beauty that made him suspicious: because when onlookers were apprised of his Jewish identity, they were frightened by what lurked hidden by his golden curls and cherubic face. Léon Daudet juxtaposes the image of the more mature and highly successful Mendès with a young man he interviews for a job with his newspaper, a Jew named Lajeunesse (ironically meaning “the Youth,” like a handsome young Greek *ephebe*):

*Mendès se chargea de recruter des éphèbes, comme il disait. Justement un petit juif, parfaitement hideux et sordide, nommé ou surnommé Lajeunesse, venait de publier un recueil de balbutiements bords de bave, qui auraient voulu être acerbes et injurieuse. Il passait dans le jet de l’actualité, comme un Caliban du ghetto. On l’embaucha.*²⁰

¹⁶ Thomson, *French Portraits*, p. 75. But compare this to “that blond, pathetic head of Christ” (p. 76). Also see what Joanna Richardson reports in her biography, *Colette* (New York: Laurel, 1983), “He looked at the same time, it is said, like a lymphatic Christ and like a turbot,” p. 12.

¹⁷ Thomson, *French Portraits*, p. 76.

¹⁸ Thomson, *French Portraits*, p. 83.

¹⁹ Thomson, *French Portraits*, p. 84.

²⁰ Daudet, *L’Entre-Deux-Guerres*, p. 139.

Mendès was charged with recruiting *ephebes*, as he said. A perfectly hideous and sordid little Jew, named or nick-named Lajeunesse, had just published a collection of babblings covered in slobber which he wished to be taken as sharp-witted and hurtful. He stepped into the limelight, like a Caliban fresh from the ghetto. He was hired.

On the other hand, albeit through the eyes of those who came to distrust Catulle or worse, the entire entourage of wild young men surrounding the poet was peculiar and Catulle himself as their leader a foolish show-off, an *alazon*. For his future father-in-law, Théophile Gautier, it was enough that the young man was a Jew to hold him in disregard, and though, surprisingly like Heinrich Heine, he was an Israelite who had talent as well as money, it was not enough to make him acceptable as a husband for Gautier's daughter.²¹

Though these two Jews—we have back-looped to the scene in which Daudet and Mendès are together interviewing a candidate for a position—may look very different on the outside, one old and the other young, one distinguished and handsome in his middle age and the other ugly, unctuous and pretentious, to Daudet they are two sides of the same coin: an “*Oriental transplanté dans la blague de Paris*,” a “*personage des Mille et une Nuits*” (an Oriental transplanted into the joke that is Paris straight from the Thousand and One Nights).²² For what else are Jews, no matter how assimilated they may seem, such as the various businessmen, artists, writers and musicians Daudet associates with in his career, but creatures from the ghetto, “*comme échantillon de purriture, comme spécimen de la dégradation humaine*” (like a model of corruption, like a specimen of human degradation)?²³ This is not the Judeophobia of religious theology nor the pseudo-scientific racism of the late nineteenth century, but a visceral hatred and disgust: the life-long reactions of those who, like piranhas, smell blood and swarm in a frenzy of feeding. You cannot debate with them, you cannot marshal evidence to the contrary, and

²¹ Maurice de Waleffe, *Quand Paris était un Paradis, mémoires 1900-1939* (Paris: Denoël, 1947), pp. 41-45. Without connecting the dots, as it were, not too many pages later, de Waleffe discusses how the orthodox Jewish communities distrust and even ostracize Jews who marry out of their faith, and then blames them for their own fate by trying to remain independent and exclusive: “*C’est ainsi qu’on appelle sur sa tête les pogroms et less massacres. Aucun peuple ne peut habiter éternellement chez les autres en refusant de se mêler à eux. La solution de la question juive sera dans les mariages mixtes*” (It is in this way that they call down on their own heads pogroms and massacres. No people can live forever among others refusing to blend in with them. The solution to the Jewish Question will be found in mixed marriages), de Waleffe, *Quand Paris était un Paradis*, p. 60.

²² Daudet, *L’Entre-Deux-Guerres*, p. 153.

²³ Daudet, *L’Entre-Deux-Guerres*, p. 171.

you cannot even hide from them by conversion or imitation of “normal” society; they will always smell out²⁴ the essential Jew and seek to eradicate this infestation of disease-bearing vermin.²⁵

The Italian Mendicant and the Boy with Two Souls

*Toutefois, le professeur anglais, plus hardi ou moins consciencieux eu le Docteur Vincenod, n'avait pas craint, lui, de révéler au jeune homme la monstruosité mentale qui devait être le clef de ce mystère. Il lui avait dit: —Vous avez deux âmes.*²⁶

However, the English Professor, either more hardy or less conscientious than Dr Vincenod had been, showed no fear in revealing to the young man the mental monstrosity which would become the key to this mystery. He said to him: “You have two souls.”

Thus the story of the Italian mendicant who frightens passers-by in the street with his clackers and holy pictures underplays the nastiness of the Church and the ambiguity of Catulle Mendès’ place in a world still implicitly Christian and wary of intruders, especially those who do not look different enough to contemplate from afar. The poet did not know how unacceptable he appeared to others nor what tell-tale gestures, attitudes and imaginings he projected into a society increasingly anti-Semitic. Though in this anecdote young Catulle is an innocent, the scenario is a set-up, as the monk had already noticed the child in the quarter and was waiting for an opportunity to pounce. Bertrand leaves the event incomplete. He does not tell the reader how the father and mother or someone else managed to get out in time to prevent a more serious outcome.

²⁴ Daudet puts it into a parody of a Yiddish-German accent to rub the joke in: “*Je reconnais à la lorgnette les habitués de Territet-Montreux, de Vevey et de Clarens, les boucs, les dromadaires, les puants kamerates des salons Dreyfus, Lazard, Meyer, Seligmann, etc., chacun ayant amené son Berlinois, son Francfortois, son Francforto-Viennois, son Berlin-Triestois, son Boche à nom de ville boche*” (I recognize with their lorgnettes the denizens of Territet-Montreux, Vevey and Clarens, the goateed-goats the hump-backed dromedaries, all the stinking Kamaraden of the Dreyfus Affair, Lazard, Seligmann salons, each one carrying on him an accent from Berlin, Frankfurt, Frankfurt-Vienna, Berlin-Trieste, and each named after his Boschy hometown), *L'Entre-Deux-Guerres*, p. 311.

²⁵ Daudet, *L'Entre-Deux-Guerres*, p. 245.

²⁶ Jean Richepin, “L’âme double,” taken by S. Pestel from the Electronic Collection of the Bibliothèque de Liseux, last modified 15 May, 1997, www.bmlisieux.com/literature/richepin/amedoubl.htm.

Stop: When is a Joke not a Joke?

All the public bought the newspapers for so avidly [did they desire] to follow the progress of Cornelius Herz. That agile adventurer, it need hardly be said, had not waited to feel the heavy hand of the police on his shoulder... he decided to become an invalid. From that time the whole thing became a farce. Doctors were called in consultation and gravely issued bulletin; the diplomatic authorities began to take an interest, distinguished visitors left their cards, and the gallery read all the reports in the newspaper like instalments of a serial. Cornelius Herz became the public joke.²⁷

This kind of incident was anything but a joke and there were major scandals in the mid-nineteenth century when bigoted, unscrupulous clerics forcibly immersed Jewish children in the baptismal font, then kidnapped them on the grounds that they were now Christians and could not under canon law be permitted to stay with their parents. They were placed in monastic houses to be brought up as Catholics and many were so brain-washed they refused to return to their original homes, and instead became anti-Semites themselves. The most infamous case was that of young Edgardo Mortara in June 1858. A six-year-old boy seized from his father's arms by two officers of the Inquisition, the Holy Office claimed that Edgardo had been secretly baptized by a household servant who feared that when the boy was ill he would have gone to hell without this impromptu sacrament. By papal law no matter how criminal may have been the servant girl's act, the waters of the sacrament were efficacious and the boy was therefore Catholic. The pope responsible was Pius IX (reigned 1846-1878) who subsequently brought the child up himself in the Vatican and

²⁷ Jules Bertaut, *Paris 1870-1935*, trans. R. Millar, ed. John Bell (London: D. Appleton Century, 1935), p. 122. Cornelius Herz "was born in Besançon in 1845. His parents being Bohemian Jews" (pp. 117-118). "Cornelius Herz was not a figure of romance and inspired neither confidence nor sympathy at first glance; he was perfectly aware of this. 'Everything is ranged against me,' he said once, 'even my own arrogance'" (p. 117).

Bertaut continues: "But his coldness and dullness disappeared when he talked. His black eyes radiated hypnotic influence," and like Svengali, "he had the supreme gift of suggestion, and he could make others believe what he wished" (p. 117). The details of his life and personality are couched in increasingly anti-Semitic terms. "What was his race and his native language?" Bertaut rhetorically asks: "He spoke a jargon in which French, English, German, and Italian were oddly jumbled up, but in which English came finally to predominate" (p. 117).

Herz was involved in the Panama Canal Scandal, just behind the Baron de Reinach, whose sense of guilt and public humiliation led him to commit suicide (pp. 118-119). The farce turns into a tragedy.

fought off all legal attempts by the parents to redeem him, though many heads of state and diplomats pleaded with the pontiff to release the child.²⁸

Bertrand's thesis hardly mentions anything about Mendès' Jewish background or about the implications of his Jewishness for his career as a poet, essayist, dramatist and intellectual. Thus when he suddenly tells this anecdote of the forced conversion—and faux baptism—it must be seen to represent something else in the character of the writer of whose life story he is telling.²⁹ There must be something that the biographer cannot put into discourse, either because he has no conceptual language to deal with such matters or because, in the context of the new racial anti-Semitism that is rising rapidly in France and the rest of Europe, he feels he must suppress. The story of the mendicant monk on the streets of Bologna ready to pounce on vulnerable little Jewish children represents an example of old fashioned religious bigotry within the Church. For us, however, in the developing argument of this book, the seemingly fantastic episode—did it really happen or was it a dream?—stands as a warning at the very beginning of his life, at least implicitly, of the dangers that surrounded Catulle Mendès when he ventured into what he assumed would be the tolerant, liberal circle of French intellectuals he hoped to be a part, if not a leader, of.

How to Read his Fantastic Tales and Life?

*Cette dimension "fumiste" de l'œuvre de Mendès est sans doute l'une des plus méconnues. Elle domine une grande part d'un des derniers recueils de l'écrivain.*³⁰

²⁸ For background information on the kidnapping see David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Vintage, 1998). This is the same Pope who re-instituted the Roman ghetto in 1850 and during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 called the Jews of Rome dogs, stating that "there were too many of them at present in Rome and we hear them howling in the streets and they are disturbing us in all places." See: Kenneth Stowe, *Popes, Church, and Jews in the Middle Ages: Confrontation and Response* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 57.

²⁹ On the other hand James Gibbon Huneker, writing a review of the opera *La Reine Fiamette*, for the *New York Times* (25 January, 1919), shows no hesitation in the describing the librettist, at least in his youth when he was one of the most promising of Parnassian group, in this way: "This brilliant young poet of Jewish origin and nicknamed because of his personal beauty 'the Portuguese Christ' as Daudet (David) was known as the 'Christ of the Midi'." Here we have Mendès identified as Jewish, Portuguese and—remarkably and ambiguously, if not ironically—as a "beautiful" image of Christ!

³⁰ Vauthier, "Catulle Mendès, nouvelliste cruel," p. 246.

This dimension of “mystification” in Mendès’ work is without a doubt one of the most misunderstood. It dominates a great part of the writer’s last collections.

But if one earlier biographer gets himself caught up in a knot of contradictions and incomplete thoughts about Catulle Mendès’ background, thirty years later a young graduate student has no hesitations about inscribing what surely were the usual caricatures, slanders and misunderstandings of the writer’s Jewishness. John Jex Martin submitted his Master of Arts dissertation at Loyola University of Chicago, a Catholic institution, in 1940, and his racial and religious libels went unquestioned.³¹ For instance, despite his family’s efforts to educate young Abraham, as he was still called at home, in a thoroughly French manner—and in the German and Italian mode as well, since the family moved when Mendès was seven to Germany and then to Italy, only returning to Toulouse when he was twelve years old—Martin describes both the father and son as displaying “the usual talents of [their] race”³² and their “racial inheritance.”³³ On the positive side, these characteristics are a devotion to education and a loyalty to religious heritage; on the negative, Martin says:

His surprising vitality, his barbaric tastes, his sentimentality, his exoticism, his adaptability to established forms, were all Jewish traits which he shared with his contemporaries, Porto-Riche and Halévy.³⁴

Translated, these terms describe Jews as nervous and unstable, “oriental” and bizarre, overly emotional, lacking in classical self-control, constantly imitating those around them; a kind of chameleon or “Zelig.”³⁵ This, too,

³¹ John Jex Martin, *Catulle Mendès, a Critical Study*, Master’s Thesis (Chicago, IL: Loyola University of Chicago, 1940).

³² Martin, *Catulle Mendès*, p. 3.

³³ Martin, *Catulle Mendès*, p. 11.

³⁴ Martin, *Catulle Mendès*, pp. 11-13.

³⁵ Zelig is the Woody Allen character who appears inconspicuously in every major event of his life time recorded on film. He is at once an inconspicuous nobody (*nebesh*) who pops up in the crowd along with historical leaders, and at the same time the grinning little outsider (*shlemiel*) whose presence disturbs the solemnity or seriousness of the occasion. By being where he is unwanted and doesn’t fit it in, he recalls that Jews and Judaism are more than incidental to history and couture.

This is what I discuss elsewhere as the phenomenon of *Incidentalism*, the attempt by professional historians to airbrush Jews out of the picture and trivialize their participation in culture as “merely incidental” to their character and achievement. It also occurs when someone keeps giving lists of artists, writers, scientists, philosophers or other important members of some movement, organization or school of thought, among which Jewish names represent an

was commonplace among snobbish British anti-Semites in the late nineteenth century, such as George du Maurier, grandfather of the more famous novelist Daphne du Maurier, who dismissively characterizes his figure of Svengali as “an Oriental Israelite Hebrew Jew.”³⁶

inordinate percentage of the total, but makes no comment regarding what these persons have in common as distinct from the rest of the list.

Joël Goffin, in his discussion of Georges Rodenbach’s novel *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892), mentions Catulle Mendès, Sarah Bernhardt, Marcel Schwob and many other poets, performers and artists again and again, as part of the founders and constitutive members of the Symbolist movement, but does not mention that they are Jews. See self-published text *Le secret de Bruges-la-Morte* (2011), <http://bruges-la-morte.net/le-secret-de-bruges-la-morte/>. Goffin does say Mendès was a Freemason and the first disciple of occultist Eliphas Levi, but says nothing of his Jewish background. Goffin also expounds on the nature of secret organizations such as “L’Arche d’Alliance” and other secret, pseudo-Jewish clubs, yet not why these enthusiasts were fascinated by “Old Testament” names, themes, images and ideas. That young Jews trying to assimilate into modern French society, something often alien and sometimes hostile to them, might feel comfortable using these archaic words and concepts does not come up for discussion.

It is mentioned that during the years immediately after the loss of Alsace-Lorraine there was a surge of nostalgia and patriotism to find ways of reconstituting France as “*une terre sacrée*” (a holy land) based on ultra-Catholic nationalism without noting the surge of Jewish immigration from those two lost provinces, the idealization of those areas as a sacred homeland for Jewish culture, and thus a rise in the number of books written about the “older generation” of traditional Jews who were forced to flee from Prussian oppression. This double rootlessness (or deracination) of the French Jews from their own and from French society could be compensated for in a fashionable magic, mysticism and symbolic dream-world at least in literature; and again all the more amenable to young French Jews precisely because “everybody was doing it” from the 1870s through the *fin de siècle*.

And yet, to point to the fly in the ointment, these games of unreason and Catholic mysticism, did also stir up anti-Semitism and a feeling of resentment at the presence of so many Jews among them. It was therefore dangerous and occasionally disastrous for Mendès, Schwob and the others to dabble in these forbidden topics insofar as these pseudo-ideas of alchemy, astrology and the whole panoply of unconscious archetypes, Theosophical syntheses, and revivals of archaic blood-cults lead directly towards National Socialism and the Holocaust.

³⁶ George du Maurier, *Trilby: A Novel* (New York: International Book and Publishing Co., 1899), p. 368. After his death, further details of Svengali’s life are revealed, such as that he had a wife and two children; details which, however, the genteel English characters as well as the narrator find rather comical in their mourning and concern over his fortune.

Yet in a slight tilt towards humanity, du Maurier brings in the other elusive East European person known as Gecko, who had been Svengali’s submissive factotum, to say that “Svengali was the greatest artist I ever met! Svengali was a demon, a