# Introduction: Charting a Noisy Silence

It is well documented that in times of crisis, the French have made use of Jews to think through change and upheaval. The French Revolution was one such moment. We know that during that time, as well as the Napoleonic period, there was disproportionate discussion of Jews, as they were used to explore and enunciate new concepts such as citizenship and nationhood.[1] A similar process occurred a century later, with the Dreyfus Affair. Yet little or nothing has been written about the intervening period, and especially the early years of the nineteenth century. Did people simply stop using Jews, once they had been emancipated, as one way to decipher their world? Was this truly the "tranquil century" of French Jewry, as one historian has put it?[2] My exploration of this question begins with the premiere in 1823 of a short comic play entitled *Le Juif, comédie anecdotique*.[3]

*Le Juif* is set a decade before the French Revolution. The Jew of the title, known as Samuel, is the character around whom the action turns, and the night he spends in an inn, together with his fellow travellers, forms the setting for the play. The play opens as all of the characters arrive at the inn on the road to Orléans, where they are obliged to take refuge following an accident involving the coach in which they were travelling.

[1] See, in particular, Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715–1815* (Berkeley, 2003).

[2] This was the title given by Jean-Jacques Becker to his chapter on the nineteenth century, in Jean-Jacques Becker and Annette Wieviorka, ed., *Les Juifs de France, De la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris, 1998).

[3] Auguste Rousseau, Marc-Antoine-Madeleine Désaugiers, and Jean-Baptiste Mesnard, "Le Juif: Comédie anecdotique en deux actes, mêlée de vaudevilles," in *Fin du répertoire du théâtre français* (Paris, 1824).

Samuel stands out almost immediately from the other characters through their reactions to him. They distrust him: he is secretive. His foreignness is announced by his pidgin French and his awkward Germanic accent. (Another character notes that he speaks a "French-German gibberish.")[4] No physical description is given of him, but his appearance inspires disgust in the other characters, and they react to him with caution and suspicion. He appears greedy and scheming: when thieves descend on the inn and rob the passengers, the travellers' worst suspicions appear to be confirmed. Samuel alerts the thieves to a sum of money being carried by a fellow traveller, a young, naïve girl named Lucette, and he negotiates a portion of this money for himself. But by the end of the play, Samuel has become a hero. His secrecy, it would seem, was none other than prudence, and his treachery quick thinking. In directing the robbers to Lucette's money, he safeguarded his own sum, much greater, which he reveals himself to have been carrying for none other than Lucette, an embroiderer whose father is away fighting in the American War of Independence. Indeed, Samuel is in fact the Paris banker who, on behalf of her distant father, anonymously sent Lucette the sum she herself was carrying. And Samuel's sphere of influence is shown to reach far and wide, for not only does he magically produce a fortune, intact, for Lucette and her fiancé Charles, but he also, by dint of one letter, has Charles released from his military obligations. Thus, while Samuel is initially painted negatively, by the end of the play, his actions show him to be quite a different character altogether. Samuel turns out to be loyal and trustworthy, he shows an astounding lack of greed and disinterested fondness for Lucette; he uses the expectations of him as a Jew (he in fact calls himself "un pauvre chuif [juif] allemand"[5]) to do good to a non-Jew.

The playwrights were clearly making use of Samuel to manipulate their audience. (That the prolific and celebrated playwright and songwriter Marc-Antoine Désaugiers was counted among the authors would very probably have ensured the play's success.) They were drawing on concepts that would, at the least, have been meaningful to their audience, using a stereotype that, if not instantly recognizable, was reinforced by the

[4] Ibid., 166. Samuel's words are transcribed thus: "Vous pien heureuse" ; "Vous li être pas plessée?" Ibid., 77. "Che me être trompé" Ibid., 79.
[5] "A poor German Jew." Ibid., 204.

reactions of other members of the cast. But were the authors seeking to make some commentary on the pitfalls of stereotyping, or were they merely finding a new use for the common practice of making the selfish and speculating character a Jew?[6] Either way, *Le Juif* provides a fascinating insight into the codes and images understood by the theatre-going public of Restoration France to mean Jew, and there is no overcoming their ambiguity. For, although many of Samuel's acts turn out to have been calculated to have a positive outcome, his character is not neatly resolved. We are not told what happens to the thousand francs of Lucette's money that Samuel bargained from the thieves. Nor is it explained what power he has that makes him able to convince Charles's commanding officer to write the letter that frees him. Why did the authors choose to leave these ends untied? Was it so as to avoid an overly neat ending? Or did these issues simply not figure high on the list of questions central to the plot? Either way, the effect of these outstanding matters is to leave the audience (or the reader) with a feeling of ambivalence and complexity surrounding the character of this Jew, and from here it is not a difficult step to find that, as it is being subverted, the stereotype is also being reinforced. The audience could easily have chosen to understand from this play that behind every powerful banker, however good his character might appear, lurked the foreign and secretive Jew. Moreover, as a tool for the manipulation of the audience, Samuel has clearly exhausted his usefulness by the end of the play. As they climb back into the coach to resume their journey, the characters sing a song entitled "Vite en route" ("Quick let's go"). Each character sings a verse about his ideal place. Lucette's fiancé Charles sings of a utopia where all men would live together as brothers.[7] In contrast, Samuel, his French encumbered by his accent and the many grammatical errors he makes, sings pure nonsense:

> If I knew a country
> Where the windows are rounded
> The arms and hands the same shape
> The faces enormous
> The calves conforming

[6] Luce Klein, *Portrait de la juive dans la littérature française* (Paris, 1970), 110.

[7] Charles: If I knew a country/ Where all the inhabitants, united/ Artisans, bourgeois and military/ Without opposing parties/ Lived as brothers/ Ah! How I would go/ And how I would say/ Quick let's go. Rousseau, 264.

Ah! How I would go
And how I would say
Quick, let's go
Gentlemen, let it be said in confidence
The father to whom I owe my presence on this Earth
Floats at the moment
Between fear and hope, from one to the other
Ah! Prove to him, as he suspects
Whatever the row, whatever the debate
That Wednesday for my religion
Is not the Sabbath day.[8]

In the final image we are given of him, then, he reverts to the stereotype, becoming once again a figure for ridicule. Is it possible that stereotypical Jewish Samuels were so deeply entrenched in early-nineteenth-century French society that playwrights could call on such figures readily in order to subvert them?

The historiography suggests the opposite. The narrative follows a well-established path that states, overwhelmingly, that in terms of the persistence of stereotypical notions of Jews, there is little of significance to tell during this period, as though figures such as Alphonse Toussenel, for whom the Jews were the hated kings of the era, were aberrations in an otherwise "tranquil" nineteenth century.[9] Historians of French Jewry have traditionally tended to focus on prominent events where anti-Jewish

[8] This is written in French as: Si che gonnaissais un pays/ où les fenêtres soient arrondis/ Les bras, les mains de mêmes formes/ Les faces énormes/ Les mollets conformes/ Ah! gomme j'irais/ et gomme che dirais: Vite en route. Messieurs, soit dit en confidence, Le père à qui che dois le chour/ Entre la crainte et l'espérance/ Flotte en ce moment tour à tour/ Ah! proufez-lui, comme il suspecte/ Quelque orache, quelque débat/ Que le mercredi pour ma secte/ N'être pas le chour du sabbat. Ibid., 265–6.

[9] On tranquillity in particular, see Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 3, *From Voltaire to Wagner*, trans. Miriam Kochan (London, 1975), 364. François Delpech, "De 1815 à 1894," in Bernard Blumenkranz, ed., *Histoire des juifs en France*, 305–46 (Toulouse, 1972); Jean-Jacques Becker and Annette Wieviorka, ed., *Les Juifs de France, De la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris, 1998), 42, 46. For this approach in more general terms, see Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1980); and idem, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770–1870* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); Pierre Birnbaum, *Jewish Destinies; Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France* (New York, 2000); Michel Winock, "Emancipation et exclusion: La France et la question juive," *Histoire. Spécial: l'antisémitisme*, October 2002, 46; Ilana Zinguer and Sam Bloom, ed., *L'Antisémitisme Éclairé: Inclusion and Exclusion: Perspectives on Jews from the Enlightenment to the Dreyfus Affair* (Leiden, 2003).

sentiment has been illustrated most spectacularly, such as Napoleon's Infamous Decree of 1808, and the Dreyfus Affair.[10] The first half of the nineteenth century – particularly the period of the Restoration, from 1815 to 1830 – contains no such dramatic event and as such has received little attention. With some exceptions, historians from all disciplines have followed this lead.[11] In histories of religion, for example, the place of Jews in nineteenth-century France, if treated at all, is seen as having nothing to contribute to the principal narrative. Jews tend to be placed alongside Protestants under a separate heading that deals with their level of assimilation, or government rulings that concerned them.[12] Thus, the ways Jews have lived out modernity in France, their interactions with French non-Jews, and how the latter saw the former, have also, for the most part, been told as a series of separate stories. In this way, the history of France is kept separate from that of the Jews in France, and both, in turn, are distinct from the discipline that encompasses the history of antisemitism. Where this latter is concerned, the story of antisemitism in nineteenth-century France has, at best, been told uprooted from its context, or treated as a peripheral part of either histories of French Jewry or of France.[13] Overall, the history of nineteenth-century France is simply not told as a story where some French citizens took account of their Jewish fellow citizens.[14]

[10] See, for example, Patrick Girard, *Les Juifs de France de 1789 à 1860: de l'émancipation à l'égalité* (Paris, 1976); Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Du Juif à l'israélite: histoire d'une mutation (1770–1870)* (Paris, 1989); François Delpech, "De 1815 à 1894"; or more recently Jean-Jacques Becker and Annette Wieviorka, ed., *Les Juifs de France, De la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris, 1998).

[11] Some historians of Jews in France, such as Jay Berkovitz, Michael Graetz, and Paula Hyman, have incorporated incidences of Jewish–non-Jewish interactions where these feature in their histories of Jews in France. See Jay Berkovitz, *The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Detroit, 1989); Michael Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France: From the French Revolution to the Alliance israélite universelle*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Stanford, 1996); Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley, 1998); and idem, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace: Acculturation and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1991).

[12] See, for example, Adrien Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France*, vol. 1: *From the Revolution to the Third Republic*, trans. John Dingle (New York, 1961); and Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine* (Toulouse, 1985).

[13] See, for example, as well as Léon Poliakov, Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction.*

[14] See, for example, H. A. C. Collingham, *The July Monarchy: A Political History of France 1830–1848* (London, 1988); André Jardin and André-Jean Tudesq, *Restoration and Reaction, 1815–1848,* trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge, 1983); Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815–1830* (Berkeley, 2000);

David Nirenberg has argued that since the Holocaust, the idea that Jewish history is written by Jews, for Jews, to be ignored by others, has become "untenable."[15] But it would seem that, where early-nineteenth-century France is concerned, perhaps because the historiography has not been driven by a sense of urgency, Jewish history has remained marginal.

This process of teasing out the story into separate strands has not allowed us to understand it fully. The way a majority culture makes sense of the minorities in its midst is the story of the majority, and thus the history of French attitudes towards French Jews must be considered as French history. People in early-nineteenth-century France did construct the Jew as a way to think through the vertiginous changes taking place around them. And if we examine how such people used Jews to make sense of their world, we are offered a window on their vision of their world: in this case, competing ideas of what France could and should be. For as *Le Juif* suggests, the French continued to think with the Jew right throughout the quiet nineteenth century. My intention, here, is to bring this thinking to light. I take up where the narrative generally stops, with the aftermath of the Napoleonic regime. I focus specifically on the period that has been the most easily dismissed: the Restoration and July Monarchy, encompassing the years 1815–48. I explore how the idea of the Jew in the nineteenth century allows us to reflect on core questions of French history during this period.

Nonetheless, while I take issue with the direction the historiography has tended to take, I must acknowledge the scholarship on which I have drawn. And indeed, the historians whose work I discuss here do have a point: relative to other moments in their history in France, this was indeed a tranquil time for the Jews of France; a golden age. In 1818, one of the last remaining pieces of state-sanctioned discrimination, in the form of Napoleon's Infamous Decree, expired. Jews could now enjoy

Bernard Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830–1914; The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley, 1976); Pamela Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France, 1814–1871* (London, 1995); idem, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (New York, 1991); Roger Price, *A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France* (London, 1987); William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France; the Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980); and André-Jean Tudesq, *Les Grands notables en France (1840–1849). Etude historique d'une psychologie sociale* (Paris, 1964).

[15] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1996), 3.

rights and opportunities that had never before been presented to them. They were citizens of a state that afforded them complete protection, and in such an atmosphere, occasional acts of violence – verbal or physical – could be viewed much as they have been depicted: random and idiosyncratic. Perhaps in this sense, there simply is no story. Perhaps the historiography is a reflection of the reality of life for the lucky Jews of early-nineteenth-century France: if stories of Jews and Protestants are reserved for confessional histories and treated on the same terms, could this simply be a reflection of the state's treatment of these two confessions? Nonetheless, acts against Jews – be they random or not – cannot be left to fall through the cracks of historical analysis. So in what sense can they be understood? Can we see a play such as *Le Juif* as antisemitism, sufficient to complicate, or even negate, the story of tranquility?

This question begs another: what should qualify as antisemitism? Much of the scholarship on antisemitism has focused on achieving a definition of this hatred, and perhaps also with it some understanding. The size of the body of work on the subject is a reflection of the sense of urgency that comes across at times in this writing. Could one "live after Auschwitz"?[16] This was the agonized question that Theodor Adorno posed in the immediate postwar period, in his intimate psychoanalysis of the antisemite. In fact, works on antisemitism range from close, careful dissection of the hatred to broad surveys of antisemitic figures and moments through history.[17]

But is the term antisemitism the most appropriate for this context? I do not believe so. Quite apart from the risk of anachronism that the use of this term presents, it also invites us to deny the complexity – and ambiguity – in much of the stereotyping that dates from this period. To simply lay out the sentiment and its adherents is to present a story that, in Nirenberg's words, "resists interpretation."[18] There are works contained within these pages that, strictly speaking, cannot be labeled as antisemitic, because their authors did not necessarily write hatefully or see the Jews as

[16] Theodor Adorno, *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Stanford, 2003).

[17] For examples of the former, see ibid.; idem *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1969); and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris, 1954). For the latter, see, for example, Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, or Robert Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York, 1991).

[18] Nirenberg, 68.

evil. In their eyes, the presence of Jews in modern society was a problem that could, under certain circumstances, be solved. Although their consideration of this question may appear to be negative and condescending from the vantage point of our sensibilities, they did not write in a spirit of hatred. The title character of *Le Juif* is, in turn, repugnant, powerful, and ridiculous, but there is a fundamental ambiguity surrounding him, as – particularly from our distance – the authors' intentions in his regard are unclear. So how should Samuel be understood? I would like to suggest that we can view him in terms of what Zygmunt Bauman has called ambivalence. That is, that non-Jews find that the Jews in their midst, or for that matter Judaism, cannot be described or comprehended according to what Bauman calls their "orderly world," and thus the Jew comes to signify what challenges this order.[19] This could be taken a step further: if Jews can be understood as challenging the system, they also serve to explain it. In early-nineteenth-century France, this means that as French men and women deliberated on and debated the meanings of citizenship and nation in their new world, the Jew, who so often constituted the site of anti-citizenship, or anti-nationhood, helped the French to make sense of this new world. In this book, I approach discourses of alterity as being composed in this spirit of ambivalence. In this usage, the term does not denote ambivalence as it is commonly understood; rather, it indicates a sort of discomfort (which can at times be expressed in the most hateful of terms) at the prospect of the Jew who, in so many ways, challenges and defies categorization and who, because of this, takes on a much greater significance. How did the defiant messiness of the Jew help to explain an apparently streamlined ideological system, be it Christianity, Enlightenment thought, or indeed, the post-Revolutionary world?[20]

[19] Zygmunt Bauman, "Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern," in Brian Cheyette and Laura Marcus, ed., *Modernity, Culture, and 'the Jew'* (Stanford, 1998), 144. Bauman argues for the use of the term "allosemitism" to replace the binary pair of anti- and philo-semitism. Kenneth Stow argues that there is a fundamental ambivalence – in the sense closer to the true definition of the term – towards Judaism at the very root of Christianity, stemming from Paul's notion that the Jews should at once be "pushed away," yet also "brought close and loved." Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and its Interpreters. Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Stanford, 2006), 34.

[20] Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (New York, 2003), 9. A similar approach has been taken to a much earlier period by David Nirenberg in his *Communities of Violence*, in which he argues that atrocities committed against Jews in fourteenth-century France are best understood in the context of social conflict and competing discourses around notions such as "kingship, bodies, Jews, and the nature of evil in a Christian society" (Nirenberg, 68).

How was the Jew used to explain its failure, or indeed, at times, its success?

Refusing a framework of analysis that separates antisemitism, not only from its context, but also from its supposed opposite, also allows for greater contextualisation of the story. We can understand expressions of ambivalence towards Jews as attempts to deny or define that which threatens to break through the borders of a tidy world. In turn, the way in which this alterity is defined, offers insights into what was to constitute inclusion and what was seen to pose the greatest threat to this system. Thus, if rather than separating a figure's ambivalence towards Jews from their belief system and the ideas of the time that influenced their thinking, we focus precisely on that link, we can examine the ways in which such writers sought to negotiate their own identity in the changing world of early-nineteenth-century France, and what this then suggests to us about this period. For, in the context of nineteenth-century France, when we take works that explore the idea of the Jew as problematising the idea of the nation, and using the Jew to think this through, then it becomes clear that they constitute a vital aspect of the construction of the many different worlds that made up this place and time. Thus, I would like to shift the focus away from questions of the precise nature of antisemitism, or of how intense hatred must be before it qualifies as antisemitism. Rather, I would like to shine a light on those who chose to use Judaism to define alterity and examine their words in the context of their world. How did this latter influence the choices they made? How did they make sense of it? In other words, I examine how the Jew was constructed, as Sartre put it, to explain experience.[21]

The question to consider here, then, is not one of relative intensity. Rather, the issue is *in what terms* alterity was framed, and what this, in turn, reveals about the experience of French men and women in nineteenth-century France. This is a fertile period for research, for in fact it was anything but quiet. In 1815, the assembled powers of Europe, wishing perhaps that France might leave them in peace, restored a member of the Bourbon Monarchy to the throne. King Louis XVIII, a younger brother of the beheaded Louis XVI, saw in the period of fifteen years that was known as the Restoration. Recent scholarship has challenged the prevailing notion that the Restoration was a period of stability. Rather,

[21] Sartre, 18.

this scholarship suggests that between 1815 and 1830, negotiations over what the past represented and what the present and future of France should be were intense and ongoing.[22] The Catholic hierarchy sought to persuade the population that the previous twenty-five years of ferment had been nothing more than a parenthesis, which could now be closed, and that French society had been "restored" to the unquestioned hierarchy in which the Church took its rightful place at the top. But however much conservative Catholics may have longed for a return to the world of ancien régime society, too much had occurred during the interregnum for all of French society to simply take up where it had left off before 1789. The Revolution had shown that the three pillars of ancien régime society that were Church, monarchy, and nobility could no longer lay claim to unchallenged legitimacy. The reign of the conservative, devoutly Catholic, and royalist Charles X brought this tension to its climax and resulted in what were to be known as "three glorious days" in July 1830. This, the 1830 Revolution, brought the restorative experiment to an end and put in its place an era of pragmatism. At its head was the so-called bourgeois king Louis-Philippe. Louis-Philippe was of the house of Orléans, a cousin of the Bourbons, and seen by conservative Catholics as the regicide king, whose father Philippe-Egalité had voted for the beheading of his relative Louis XVI. Men such as Charles X, called Ultras, were now to become Legitimists, planning and longing for the return of a legitimate, Bourbon king. But those who maintained their close identification with Catholicism were not the only ones alienated by the new regime. Indeed, if during the Restoration Catholics and Republicans had competed, during the July Monarchy, they were in agreement over their disgust with the succession of pragmatic and materialist governments that now held power.

In nineteenth-century France, therefore, successive regimes faced nothing less than the imposing task of negotiating the meaning and significance of the Revolution in the context of their own times and beliefs. And different groups for whom the Revolution had been a reference point variously for wonder or disaster were forced to do the same. Republicans, for whom citizenship was a privilege and Jews its

[22] See, for example, Kroen, *Politics and Theater*, and Bettina Frederking, "'Il ne faut pas être le roi de deux peuples': Strategies of National Reconciliation in Restoration France," *French History* 22, no. 4 (2008): 446–68.