

# Portraits

Highlighting the exceptional contribution  
of European Jewish Women

## Jeanne Proust

Mother of Marcel Proust

(1849-1905)

Born Jeanne Weil. Wife of Adrien Proust. Mother of Marcel and Robert.

To the question "What would be your greatest misfortune?" Marcel Proust is said to have replied: "Being separated from my mother."

Educated, she belongs to the enlightened Alsatian Jewish bourgeoisie and receives a very full education for a girl of her time. She studied Latin, spoke English and German. An accomplished pianist, eager reader, she knows the classics by heart. At the age of 21, her father introduced her to Adrien Proust, a serious and reassuring Catholic doctor, guaranteeing her place in society. He's 15 years older than Jeanne. She likes him. Her eldest son, Marcel, soon replaces him in her affections.

She worried about Marcel even before he was born. In July 1871, starved by the siege of the Prussians, he nearly died at birth. At the age of 10, he had his first asthma attack in the woods of Boulogne. A fragile, difficult, emotional child, Jeanne watches over him, demands to know everything about his lifestyle. She translates Ruskin so that he can rework his text, even though he does not speak English. She watches over his savings, his friends, his outings, his working hours.



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/64/PortraitJeanneProust1880.jpg>

Marcel Proust writes of his mother: "The truth is that as soon as I am well, the life that makes me well infuriates you, so you demolish everything until I feel bad again." ... "It's sad that you can never have both affection and health." Exasperated, he cannot live far from her. There will be 159 letters exchanged between Marcel and his mother. « ... When, like the two of us, we are connected by a wireless telegraph, to make us more or less close or more or less far away, it is always sharing a close communion and staying side by side.. (Letter CXXIX)

When she dies, he begins his "In search of lost time". And as Michel Schneider writes in his admirable book entitled "Maman", Proust writes in order to bring her back to life, abolish separation, bring back the evening kiss.

Jeanne inspired Proust's character as Ms. Santeuil and the narrator's mother