

## Marcel Schwob and Léon Daudet: Exploring Jewish Jokes and Murder in Tibet

Norman Simms

*The following essay was deleted from my Jews in an Illusion of Paradise, a study of Jewish Intellectuals who misread their place in the gentile society they think they have assimilated into. Its immediate context is a scene in which the short-story-writer, journalist and Symbolist critic, Marcel Schwob (1867-1905) goes on holiday to the Channel Islands (where Victor Hugo had spent his long exile) with his friend Léon Daudet (1867-1942), the son of Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897), author of Lettres de mon moulin . The scene is presented in the memoirs of the younger Daudet, an anti-Semite (like his father) who later became a collaborationist under the Nazi Occupation of France a generation later. Léon is unaware that his friend has just been diagnosed with a mysterious disease that slowly killed him over the next ten years. In the course of their visit to Guernsey, they with another visitor to the island, the elderly Jew, Salomon Ignace (1828-1898). Ignace is a retired civil servant. Joining in to the conversation the two young men are having, he makes reference to the famous French explorer, Dutreuil de Rhins. But the old Jew, with his Yiddish accent, mistakes the expedition into Africa for a later fatal trip into Central Asia. The befuddled words of this old man and the reaction of the two intellectual friends can be seen as evidence of the unstated cultural tension between Maurice and Léon, an assimilated Jew and a future Nazi sympathizer. . To Daudet, the error made by the elderly bourgeois is a sign of stupidity in a Jew racially unable to understand French culture, while to Schwob the mistakes made by this Jewish gentleman are embarrassing to his own sense of belonging to and participating in that same Christian civilization.<sup>1</sup>*



Jules Dutreuil de Rhins, 1846-1894

---

<sup>1</sup> Specific textual references are to be found in this two-volume study. A further essay on Marcel Schwob's literary and social sensibilities has also appeared and underlies the current argument; see Norman Simms, “[Marcel Schwob and the Subconscious World Below the Surface of the Sea](#)” *New English Review* (October 2018). Because of mechanical difficulties, many of the notes cannot be given here or located to their correct places in the body of the text.

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

## Murder in Tibet

In 1891, Jules Dutreuil de Rhins, following his explorations in French Indochina in 1881 and in West Africa along with Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza in 1883, returned to service in the Ministry of the Marine. There, working on maps and plans, he met Léon Daudet, who was there in his capacity as a journalist, and was inquiring about details of the next official trip to Tibet.<sup>2</sup> The two young Frenchmen met informally then in an exclusive club for officials of the Ministry and both shared a sense of comfortable colonial and racial superiority. What subsequently happened on that expedition into Central Asia at first seems unrelated to the scene when Marcel Schwob went on holiday in Guernsey to meet Victor Hugo's family along with his friend Léon Daudet. But if we follow the account of the adventure into the strange land of Tibet, we discover how to map the contours of these two young men's friendship, especially the hidden terrain of tensions between a Jew who believes himself both secular and assimilated into French society and a nationalistic and racist Frenchman who will eventually become a Nazi collaborator half a century later.

We learn that Dutreuil de Rhins had

*...décidé d'organiser une mission d'exploration en Haute-Asie. Commence en 1891, elle est principalement centrée sur le Turkestan oriental (Xinjiang) et le Tibet. Il n'aura cependant pas la possibilité de la mener à bien en totalité, puisqu'il est tué lors d'un accrochage avec des Goloks près de la localité de Tom-Boumdo, dans ce qui est aujourd'hui la province du Qinghai, le 5 juin 1894.*

...decided to mount an expedition in the Central Asia. Begun in 1891, it was principally centred on eastern Turkestan (today Xinjiang) and Tibet. There was no way it could have been completed as he was killed during a misunderstanding with the Goloks [Gologs] near the region of Tom-Boumdo in what is today the province of Qinghai on 5 June 1894.<sup>3</sup>

When we look at the conversation between Schwob and Daudet on Guernsey, intrusion of the old Jew, Salomon Ignace who did not know the full story of Dutreuil's death and who mistook the explorer's expedition into Central Asia for earlier trips into West Africa, embarrasses the Marcel and makes Léon snigger.<sup>4</sup> The old Jew makes comments about primitive tribes, cannibalism and other clichéd derogatory comments about natives. This kind of racial prejudice was standard for the period and could have been picked up in any newspaper or magazine relating exotic adventures into Africa. The old Jew has no conception of how such bigoted remarks could be turned against himself. The two young men know

<sup>2</sup> For a brief biography, go to Serre, « La mission de Dutreuil de Rhins en haute Asie » 1257-1258. After secondary school in the Loire, he entered the Naval College but turned towards the merchant navy after graduation. The earliest shipboard assignments proved rather disastrous for him, and, with the knowledge he had picked up in Southeast Asia, he turned his mind towards exploration, first in Indochina and later in Africa, especially his work with the Brazza expedition. This often involved liaison work with the government in Paris. He also became well-known for his cartographic and anthropological publications. By the late 1880s he was also becoming a scientific journalist which is how he may have come in contact with Maurice Schwob.

<sup>3</sup> “Golog (ethnie)” in *Wikipedia* online at [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golog\\_%28ethnie%29](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golog_%28ethnie%29). The Goloks or Golok were a people, with a reputation for ferocity, exiled from various regions Tibet and eventually settled around Tom-Bourndo where the Dutreuil de Rhins expedition encountered them. In recent years their numbers have been greatly reduced.

<sup>4</sup> Anon, « Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins » *Wikipedia* online at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jules-L%C3%A3on\\_Dutreuil-de-Rhins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jules-L%C3%A3on_Dutreuil-de-Rhins). See the French *Wikipedia* entry for “Congo français” online at [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congo\\_fran%C3%A7ais](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congo_fran%C3%A7ais). Svetlana Goršenina. « Les Voyageurs francophones en Asie Centrale de 1860 à 1932 » *Cahiers du Monde Russe, Russie, Empire russe, Union Soviétique, Etats Indépendants* 39 : 3 (1998) 361.

that the explorations in Turkestan and Tibet were of a different order altogether. They think of themselves as too learned and sophisticated to make such a blunder or to express their prejudices so openly.<sup>5</sup> As Svetlana Goršena puts it:

*Les relations entre l'Asie et l'Europe n'ont jamais répondu au schéma univoque "professeur-elevé," calqué sur un système comprenant des centres de progrès et des zones de diffusion. Elles suivent plutôt le principe du dialogue réciproque, dont l'orientation, d'une époque à l'autre, varie en faveur tantôt de l'Europe, tantôt de l'Asie...<sup>6</sup>*

The relations between Asia and Europe never corresponded to a univocal scheme “teacher-pupil”, matched on a system comprising centres of progress and zones of diffusion. Rather they followed the principle of a reciprocal dialogue, whose orientation, from one epoch to another, varied sometimes in favour of Europe, sometimes of Asia.

Unlike the politically correct—and therefore usually wrong or at least incorrectly applied—argument of Edward Said's *Orientalism*,<sup>7</sup> the encounter between East and West did not take shape around racialist, colonialist or politically expansionist intrusions. Explorers from France, Britain, Russia and other European nations did not march aggressively in with a sense of manifest superiority.

*Les ruines dont les voyageurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle en Asie reconnaissent déjà la majesté évidente offrent une pâle reflet de cette civilisation. Nulle part, dans les déserts, les steppes or les massifs montagneux, ces voyageurs ne semblent s'être sentis comme des maîtres ou représentants d'une culture supérieure, comme cela avait souvent été le cas avec les peuples de l'Afrique ou de l'Amérique, dont l'héritage culturel est paru au premier contact comme primitif et dépourvu de racines profondes.*

The majestic ruins which the nineteenth-century travellers saw in Asia were recognized as a pale reflection of this civilization. Nowhere in the deserts, steppes or huge mountain ranges did these travellers feel themselves to be

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Serre, « La mission de Dutreil de Rhins en Haute-Asie (1891-1894) *Comtes Rendus de l'Academie des Inscriptions* 152 :3 (2008) 1217-1281.

<sup>6</sup> Svetlana Goršenina. « Les Voyageurs francophones en Asie Centrale de 1860 à 1932 » *Cahiers du Monde Russe, Russie, Empire russe, Union Soviétique, Etats Indépendants* 39 : 3 (1998) 361.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said's pernicious books and their spawn of Orientalist writings have taken on an increasingly anti-Western and anti-Semitic burden in the years since his death. As Julie Kalman writes, such polemical discourses masquerading as objective post-modern scholarship “does not allow space for marginal voices, for protagonists’ self-doubts, or for intimacy and entanglement between describer and the described”; in regard to Jews, who were part of the landscape being described, they have been more than marginalized, they have been erased from the scenery, just as, for the most part, Jews as travellers and readers of travel books have been excluded, when not denigrated in the polemic against anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-Zionism. See Julie Kalman, “The Jew in the Scenery: Historicising Nineteenth-Century Travel Literature” *French History* 27:4 (2013) 517, As much as possible, I have eschewed such faulty ahistorical concepts, tried to censor out of my own writing the neologisms, jargon and fatuous locutions that make up such ideological arguments. In the instance discussed in the body of this chapter, I have attempted to see the anti-Semitic context in which Marcel Schwob’s conversation with the elderly Alsatian Jewish advocate is reported by his friend Daudet. In other contexts throughout *Jews in the Illusion of Paradise*, I discuss the state of Schwob’s health and his increasing interest in morbid and depth psychology. Much more is implied rather than made explicit. That is my way of responding to the charge made by Kalman: “Rather than consider the ways Jews played central roles in stories of imperialism and colonialism, it would appear that it has been seen as preferable not to allow space for them” (517), my silence having a different tone and function in returning Jews to their proper place; they return like Aby Warburg’s revenants and *Nachleben* images through the smoke and ashes of history.

the masters or the representatives of a superior culture as often tended to be the case with the peoples of Africa or America, whose cultural heritage seemed at first contact to be primitive and deprived of deep roots.

Whatever the ordinary citizens in the metropolitan centres back in Europe may have felt about the great world being opened up to their own explorers, with whatever misunderstandings and misconceptions carried over from encounters with more primitive and backwards tribes, this was certainly not the case with the explorers themselves—nor with the governments they represented nor with the educated elites who served as journalists and commentators.

*Parvenu au centre du continent asiatique, l'Européen rencontrait une civilisation fondamentalement différente, qui lui était mystérieuse et incompréhensible, mais il savait qu'elle avait été remarquable dans le passé, en y ressentant alternativement surprise, accablement ou ravissement. Sous les guenilles poussiéreuses de vieillard—image de l'Asie récente—tout regard curieux pouvait saisir l'éclat des vêtement impériaux de l'autre Asie, celle de la splendeur de l'époque médiévale. Une parcelle de mémoire complaisante et d'imagination vive suffisait alors pour en sortir l'image du néant, malgré la rareté des témoignages des voyageurs revenus de ces contrées.*

Once arrived at the centre of the Asian continent, the European encountered a civilization fundamentally different, which was mysterious and incomprehensible, but he knew that in its past it had been remarkable, and sensing in himself alternatively surprise, awe and ravishment. Under the dusty rags of an old man—the image of the recent Asia—his full attention could grasp the brilliant imperial vestments of the other Asia, the splendour of its medieval epoch. A small degree of generous memory and imagination were sufficient to draw the image out of nothingness, despite the rarity of witnesses returned from these countries.

As well-argued as this position seems to be, it leaves dangling at least two factors that are essential not only for understanding what happened to Maurice Schwob's friend Dutreuil de Rhins, the man whom he knew from visits as a journalist to the Explorers Club in Paris, but also for the misconceptions that underlie the confrontation between the young writer and Salomon Ignace, the elderly Jew he met on his visit to Guernsey with Daudet. The first factor is that the newly opened “Mysterious Orient” was more than an illuminating and enlightening experience for Western explorers to wonder at; it was also a series of sometimes romantic adventures, frightening encounters with the wild and untamed peoples beyond civilized norms, and manifestations of those inner demons—dreams and hallucinations—such as poetic symbolism, occult spiritualism and scientific psychoanalysis—that were opening up to cosmopolitan eyes at the close of the nineteenth century. In other words, the more strange, wonderful and puzzling the other civilization was, the more it made the explorers and intellectuals back home wonder about their own place in world history, if not raising two ancillary questions: first, did European culture actually represent a the pinnacle of human evolution—or did the decadence of the East reveal that something more spiritually advanced once existed? and second, did all the strange, barbaric, even savage customs discovered mirror the real experience of Europe’s unconscious mind, as evidenced as well in infantile and hence pre-verbal feelings and behaviour, in mad and hysterical patients locked away in asylums, and superstitious, folkloric and otherwise inexplicable truisms and assumptions made by educated and bourgeois people in their private and intimate lives? Thus, as we shall show, the two scenes are complicated versions of comparable cross-cultural encounters based on the tensions evident in the period before the First World War.

A modern account of the “Les voyages de Dutrueil de Rhins et Grenard” given by the French poet Jean Dif and based on Fernand Grenard’s *Mission scientifique dans la Haute-Asie 1890-*

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

18958 speaks of the natives in the region entered by the two French explorers in less than flattering or respectful terms:<sup>9</sup>

*Le Tibétain, rude comme la nature, malpropre et déguille, au moral faible, nonchalant comme dans tous les fables, défiant et peu sincère, qui plait cependant par sa gaieté, possède un caractère médiocrement équipé pour faire face aux défis de la vie et triompher des confrontations avec ses voisins, le musulman grave et conquérant, le chinois industrieux et imbu de sa supériorité, l'Hindou souple et actif.*

The Tibetan, uncouth as nature, dirty and in rags and tatters, with a feeble morality, listless as in the fables, defiant and insincere, yet who pleases with his gaiety and possesses a character moderately equipped to confront the challenges to his life and to triumph in confrontations with his neighbours, the grave and conquering Moslem, the industrious Chinese imbued with his own superiority, the sly and agile Hindu

In other words, though somewhat hinted at in Goršena's essay, there were also a kind of middle people in the high mountains and deep valleys who lived apart from the surrounding civilizations and whose precarious life was marked by a ruthlessness and duplicity that threatened the European travellers. These folk were neither the noble savages of Enlightenment myth nor the idealized and overly refined Orientals of sophisticated longings.

Thus the second modification to the paradigm set out by Svetlana Goršena must be seen as the distrust and hostility of the indigenous people whom the explorers encountered in these strange and long-isolated regions (re-idealized in James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* as "Shangri-la"). These Tibetans were ever-suspicious of outsiders, especially those whose appearance, habits and attitudes struck them as threatening, and in what the anonymous writer on Grenard's published account of the expedition calls a text full of prejudices and amusing tales at the expense of the native tribes, shows as actions (such as catching, cooking and eating wild hare) or attempts to parley with them, presuming on the naïve good will of the locals, while the beasts of burden carrying the explorers' supplies grazed on the sparse grasses and in other ways disturbed the tranquillity of the settlements they infringed upon. The two Frenchmen arrived late, tired, many of their supplies depleted, and in no mood for compromises.

According to a brief synopsis of the expedition into Upper Asia by Fernand Grenard,<sup>10</sup> who returned and edited a three-volume account of this trip, the fatal episode occurred in this way:

In 1893, Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard, left Xinjiang in order to cross Tibet and reach Xining... In December, they reached , the men and animals exhausted and their supplies run out after a journey that had taken them three months longer than anticipated. The authorities refused them permission to enter Lhasa and ordered them to turn back, in spite of the bitter cold and lack of supplies.

<sup>8</sup> Anon, « Fernand Grenard » Wikipedia online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernand\\_Grenard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernand_Grenard)

Dif, "Les voyages de Dutreuil de Rhins et Grenard". From studies that have taken into account the reports of the Swedish explorer Sven Hadens on the events that followed, it is important to note how the situation should have been better appreciated before they became impossible to control: "there were unmistakable signs of hostility on the part of the authorities.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Dif, "Les voyages de Detruiot de Rhins et Grenard" Online at Tibet/ Chrono/Grenard. Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins, *Mission scientifique dans la haute Asie 1890-1893*, 3 tomes (Paris : E. Lerroux, 1897). The first volume is entitled « Récit du Voyage (18 février 1891-22 février 1895» and does not have the name of Fernand Grenard on the cover, although he prepared the books on behalf of the deceased M. Durteuil de Rhins. An English version, extracting relevant chapters, is found online and does identify the author as F[ernand] Grenard, *Tibet: The Country and Its Inhabitants*, trans. A Teixra de Mattos. (London: Hutchinson, 1904).

<sup>10</sup> Anon, « Fernand Grenard » Wikipedia online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernand\\_Grenard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernand_Grenard)

The following summer, Dutreuil de Rhins was wounded in a skirmish with a group of Golok bandits in lawless country near Tom-Boumdo (province of Qinghai). Grenard tried to save him but in the end was forced to leave him to his death. All the expedition's papers were stolen but eventually Grenard persuaded the Chinese authorities to take action against the criminals and the papers were recovered.

In Grenard's original text, it is possible to see him as more self-serving than Jean Dif shows. The failure of the expedition and the death of Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins are blamed on the victim more than on the situation or Grenard himself.

Jean Dif's version supplies a few further details, such as how Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard sought to trade for more camels because many had been lost on the arduous journey to Naktchou. The reported narrative also indicates that under the surface of the meeting between two peoples there are questions of epistemological advantage and crisis, points at which assumptions and presumed prior knowledge of the other cannot be sustained by the facts and where the ability to use cunning and logic are tested: who best understands what is happening and what is at stake? Who is able to establish strategic grounds for the encounter? The two explorers gradually approached a place of unknown dangers, first entering the area populated by adherents of

*Bōn, ancienne religion du Tibet, est toujours pratiqué ; ils sont bien accueillis par les bonpos charmés de voir parmi eux ces Européens qui le Dalai lama déteste ; tout ce qui déplaît au pontife tibétain les réjouit ! Plus tard, on approche du territoire où les farouches Goloks font régner la terreur en enlevant les animaux, les femmes et les enfants, au cours de sanglantes razzas.<sup>11</sup>*

Bōn, the ancient religion of Tibet, still being practiced ; they were welcomed by the Bonpo people who were charmed to see among them those Europeans whom the Dalai Lama detested ; everything which displeased the Tibetan pontiff made them rejoice ! Still later, they approached the territory where the ferocious Goloks maintained a reign of terror by stealing animals, women and children, during bloody raids.

It was there amongst the notorious blood-thirsty Goloks that Dutreuil met his end. Going in the direction of Xining, Detrueil de Rhins ran into great resistance from the locals and merchants at a fair when he attempted to gain much-needed supplies. Did he understand what he was getting into and how he ought to approach the situation? Can he be held morally responsible for what happened to his party and to himself?

*...il arrive au pied d'un monastère auprès duquel se déroule un important marché décrit de manière pittoresque et réalisée par Grenard; malgré la présence de nombreux marchands, l'expédition ne peut rien se procurer; le lama de monastère a défend à ses ouailles de fréquenter les étrangers et de leur rendre le moindre service: les Chinois eux-mêmes, qui professent un profond mépris pour les Tibétains, se refusent à vendre quoi que ce soit aux explorateurs, de crainte de se mettre à dos le puissant abbé et de compromettre leur fructueux commerce.*

...he came to the foot of a monastery where an important market was taking place described as picturesque and illustrated by Grenard. Despite the presence of many merchants, the expedition was unable to procure anything. The lama of the monastery forbade his congregants from mingling with the strangers and rendering them the least services. The Chinese themselves, who professed a profound dislike of the Tibetans, refused to sell what they had to the explorers out of fear of placing them at odds with the powerful abbey and compromising their fruitful commerce.

Though we have to recall that the text is not only filtered through a minor person on the expedition, Grenard, but also through the modern synopsis made by Jean Dif,<sup>12</sup> it seems that

<sup>11</sup> Dif, "Les voyages de Dutreuil de Rhins et Grenard".

<sup>12</sup> Dif, "Les voyages de Dutreuil de Rhins et Grenard". From studies that have taken into account the reports of the Swedish explorer Sven Hadens on the events that followed, it is important to note how the situation should

the version Grenard tells is mostly in accord with other documents, such as they are, and more importantly presents us with the story as most Frenchmen would have come to know it—and would have been able to understand because it met with their prior expectations of how such encounters ran their course. In other words, both sides in this encounter have so-called “agency,” and regard one another with a set of assumptions and a mode of epistemology that is not quite sufficient to understand the event in full.

Our own particular perspective, while certainly not sheltered in a region of objectivity, comes by way of the other encounter we are dealing with, namely, the conversation between Marcel Schwob, Léon Daudet, and Salomon Ignace: the assimilated Jew who believes himself the cultural equal friend of the anti-Semitic Frenchman, that son a famous author whose name bespeaks his right to all the privileges of his cultural heritage but whose inner insecurities lead towards his eventual betrayal of the nation, and the old Jewish civil servant whose long service to France allows him to be considered French but whose status is that of the outsider by virtue of his religious and ethnic heritage makes him seem a grotesque to the two young friends, and is especially embarrassing to Schwob, or so it seems to Daudet.

Now back to Tibet. The two European explorers meet with a resistance that could only have inflamed their desperate attempt to restock their supply of food, material and animals. They may have begun with high ideals and may have originally appreciated the special nature of the ancient Asian cultures they would encounter, but the lack of respect or courtesy shown them probably came as a big surprise.

The circumstances which led to the attack through a misreading of the intentions of the Gologs was one thing, but also there is a consideration of the moral state of the French explorers and why they became vulnerable at this point and so were unable to assess the threats or prepare a proper defence. Holdich, who at first follows Hedin’s account and who seems more sensitive to the problems to be faced—writes:

Possibly the effects of hard work and exposure in a frame already much enfeebled by pain and sickness had told upon him and dimmed his perceptions of the urgent necessity for that “equal mind” which Horace tells us we should be specially mindful to preserve in face of adversity; for we read previously, that at Jyekundo he had threatened to pull the ears of the chief official in the town if his wishes and demands were not complied with. Anyhow, the end soon came.

Then the perspective shifts to that of Grenard and reverts to a self-justifying rationalization of what happened after Dutreuil de Rhins was wounded:

The caravan was attacked, and De Rhins was mortally wounded by a Tibetan bullet before they had proceeded far from the village. There can be little doubt, from M. Grenard’s account, that the attack was organized by the village authorities, and countenanced by the officials at Jyekundo. After De Ehirva fell, the party was broken up and scattered, and it appears that De Rhins, alive or dead, was thrown into a small affluent of the IHohu river. M. Grenard escaped with difficulty into Chinese territory. This happened in June, 1894, and the news reached Sven Hedin the following January. On arrival at Sining, Sven Hedin was shown, amongst other

have been better appreciated before they became impossible to control: “there were unmistakable signs of hostility on the part of the authorities.

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

curiosities, the skull of De Rhins' murderer, but it must be extremely doubtful if the individual who fired the fatal shot was ever identified.

In other words, turning back to the primary documents, we find that in the face of such a negative welcome at the Tibetan monastery, Dutreuil de Rhins inopportunely—and certainly unwisely from Grenard's perspective—decided to change his plans and go to Guiergoundo where he hoped to have better luck.

*[L]a tâche n'est pas facile car son guide connaît mal le pays; ce jeune homme, un moine mendiant affame, ne suit le caravan que pour nourrir des entrailles de moutons rejetées par les musulmans de l'escorte comme une viande impure ; les nomades rencontre se montre de plus en plus soupçonneux les moines leur enseignent que les Européens sont des démons, experts en sortilèges, dont il convient de se méfier ; en maintenant à l'écart du monde ces simples gens qui les engrassen, les religieuse espèrent maintenir sur eux leur emprise.*

The task was not easy because their guide did not know the country well. He was a hungry mendicant monk who only joined the caravan in order to nourish himself on the discarded sheep entrails the Moslems who served as escorts rejected as impure meat. The nomads they met showed themselves increasingly suspicious, the monks having taught them that Europeans were demons and experts in magic, who it was proper to hate. And now away from the outside world, the religious hoped to control these simple people to do their bidding.

Then comes the first attack against the group of explorers who were finding themselves increasingly considered to be inhuman monsters and wicked magicians. What in the earlier versions we cited seemed some vague misunderstanding, here becomes much clearer: a challenge to the religious integrity of the locals. Albeit committed without malicious intent by the Europeans, the locals did not know this, and were already suspicious from past experiences reported to them, and from fears that the Europeans were in league with other outsiders, including the Chinese and Russians. The violent act seems to confirm the hostile intent of these strangers, that is, they were all that the Buddhist monks claimed they were.

*Un jour, les membres de l'expédition, sont assaillis à coups de pierre par des forcenés au moment où ils entrent dans un tente; ils se dégagent en tirant en l'air une balle à blanc; dans la tente repose un malade, accompagne d'agneau charge d'éloigner les mauvais, ce qui en fait un lie tabou pour les Tibétains.*

One day, the members of the expedition were attacked with stones by a group of madmen at the moment when they entered a tent; they were able to get out by firing a blank shot into the air. In the tent a sick person was resting, accompanied by a lamb meant to keep away evil spirits, which made them place taboo for the Tibetans.

This violation of sacred space proves to be fatal for the success of the French expedition. But it does not happen all at once. Several intervening adventures occur before the end comes to the main character. Moreover, designating the attackers as “madmen” sets up an opposition between sane (normal, logical, rational, understandable) people and those who are insane (abnormal, outsiders, foreigners, those who cannot understand the situation and who behave illogically and irrationally).

Again we owe it to Grenard for the pacing of the text, whether this may have required doctoring with the truth cannot be fully ascertained because he is the main source—and sometimes the only—of our information on the expedition. Each step along the way towards the climax takes the explorers and the readers closer into a world where the easy (familiar) generalizations of their contemporary and our own expectations are not fully met, so that the violent conclusion comes as something of a shock to all concerned. Our European epistemology does not function well at all: we cannot piece together the facts or know the difference between appearance and reality. Everything seems to be seen through a glass darkly.

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

---

## Part Two

### **Caught in the Illusions of the Looking Glass**

There is an analogy between the misunderstandings of the French explorers and the Buddhist monks and the local villagers and the story that Léon Daudet tells about his friend Marcel Schwob and the retired financial agent Salomon Ignace, two Jews—of different generations and degrees of assimilation into French society, Schwob almost completely absorbed into the surrounding culture, Ignace still looking and sounding like the Yiddish-speaking Alsatian Jew he was throughout his life. When the older man hears the report on Dutruil de Rhin's death at the hands of the Tibetans, he assumes that these monks and villagers were savages, and thereby takes the tale to be another example of wild men and cannibals, such as he has read about in popular travel-books about Africa and other exotic lands. Marcel Schwob is embarrassed and shocked and embarrassed by the old Jew's ignorance, both of world geography and recent history; and well might he be, since the future Nazi-collaborationist Daudet sniggers into his notebook at the ludicrous argument between two Jews—in the eyes of an anti-Semite, all Jews are the same, any differences being merely superficial, and moreover he implies these Semites are virtually as savage as the Tibetan heathens and the African cannibals. However, Ignace, who leaves no record of his own, and from the account given, seems oblivious of the blunder he has made, while Schwob hopes that his gentile friend can see the difference between one kind of a Jew and another; but Daudet takes the whole confrontation as a nasty little humiliating joke played by the Jews on themselves.

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.



alamy stock photo

CW8FWY  
[www.alamy.com](http://www.alamy.com)

@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

## Léon Daudet

We shall see, too, when not only reading closely, but contextualizing the description of the occasion, that the structure of Daudet's memoires, flawed as they are with his own inaccuracies of detail and his misunderstandings of Jewish characters, their sensibilities and their wit, are foreshadowed in the structures of a joke, the *Witz* that Freud sees in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* as an alternative royal road to the unconscious: the need for at least two intense interlocutors who exchange words, and a third party who hears but does not necessarily comprehend the issues involved, and then the external and more objective (or at least disinterested) audience (ourselves) who listen and observe and thus enjoy the embarrassments, a sudden and painful release of repressed anxieties and urges, and finally in retrospect the reconfiguration of knowledge and power that results, however temporarily it may be. It may not be clear, however, who has the epistemological advantage in this cosy bourgeois conversation, with none of the three men quite aware of what the other is thinking and also not sure of how they actually do appear to one another; but the epistemological crisis is close at hand, insofar as the assumptions they each have about the world, each other, and specifically the place of Jews in French civilization does not give them a feeling of real security. Ignace is too superficial to realize what is going on. Schwob thinks he can depend finally on his own achievements and loyalties, but is also deeply worried about his own mortality, given the sickness that is eating away at his body and soul for an extended period of time. Daudet seems most comfortable and secure in his identity as a Frenchman, a writer, and the son of a famous author, but his own propensity towards fearing the invasion of clever and canny Jews makes his own position less solid than he likes.

And so, to return to the story of Tibetan exploration, the caravan with Grenard and Dutreuil de Rhins travels further into the territory of the wild tribes known as Goloks.<sup>13</sup>

*A Tom-Boumodu, où on finit par arriver, sous une pluie battante, après de longs et épuisants détours, toutes les portes se ferment. Les explorateurs campent la quelque jours, dans un enclos qu'il fallut faire ouvrir avec beaucoup d'insistance. Deux chevaux disparaissent et les traces montrent qu'ils ont été volés par un Tibétain. Pour obliger les habitants du village à les rendre, et pour éviter aussi d'autres larcins, Dutreuil de Rhins en saisit lui aussi deux, comme gage, aux autochtones. Sans s'en douter, il vient de signer son arrêt de mort.*<sup>14</sup>

At Tom-Bomudu where they finally arrived under a beating rain after long and exhausting detours, all the gates were shut. The explorers camped several days in an enclosure which they were forced to open with much insistence. Two horses disappeared and the tracks showed they were stolen by a Tibetan. In order to compel the inhabitants of the village to return them and also to avoid any further larceny, Dutreuil de Rhins himself seized two of theirs as a forfeit. Without a doubt, he had just signed his death warrant.

Grenard's original narrative text given in a 1903 translation provides both more details and a hint at the tone in the French, and especially the sense of relief felt by the explorers when they begin their departure from the scene of their humiliation. In Chapter IV the text reads as follows:

<sup>13</sup> T. H. Holdich, "Sven Hedin and Dutreuil de Rhins in Central Asia" *Geographical Journal* 13 (1899) 103.

<sup>14</sup> Holdich, « Sven Herdin and Dutreuil de Rhins » 104.

On the 1st of June 1894, we set out at the first gleam of dawn, happy to leave this inhospitable place, to know that the caravan which we were now leading would be our last and to feel the object so long dreamt-of and longed-for almost within reach of our hands. Pu Lao Yeh went with us for a very short way and took leave of us with his excuses at not being able to go further, as he was detained by a very urgent piece of business. None Fe and the little monk who had come with us as far as Jyerkundohad deserted at the sight of the reception which his great brother had given us. We were therefore without a guide, a matter which gave Dutreuil de Rhins hardly any concern. This time he was wrong. The tracks of the road were lost in grassy bogs and he missed his way and went up a valley instead of crossing it. Being thus obliged to make a considerable circuit, he was unable to camp that same of his servants were met. The tracks of the road were lost in grassy bogs and he missed his way and went up a valley instead of crossing it. Being thus obliged to make a considerable circuit, he was unable to camp ...and had to halt half-way. One of the ancients might have believed that a hostile god was contriving everything to lead him to the spot and time at which his evil destiny awaited him.

It seems that their dreams of discovery have now to be abandoned, but at least that the nightmare that has descended on them when they reached the village of Tom-Bumoudou is almost over. The duplicity of the little monk, now called Pu Lao Yeh, and the other two guides, is seen for what it is; yet this does not upset Dutreuil de Rhin, and a sense of exasperation emerges in what Grenard writes—that it was “a matter of little concern.” The writer presents himself as a more cautious traveller, and takes into the present moment of the fatal event about to explode around them a wisdom that could only come through hindsight. “This time he was wrong.” The place where they set up camp was ill-considered. Grenard then fantasizes a cosmic force luring the expedition into an ambush, leaving them alone and vulnerable.

The little descriptive details of the event revealed in the original text add to its supposed reality and yet also add to the mystery, the sense of impending doom that Grenard attempts to build around what happens after his leader, Dutreuil de Rhin makes a tragic error of judgment:

Several of our yaks fell by the road. After seven hours' march, we were approaching Tumbumdo when rain began to fall, lightly at first and then extremely heavily. Our clothes were soon soaked through and Dutreuil de Rhins, who complained of acute pains in the shoulders, hurried on to find shelter in the village. On our arrival, we found all the doors closed and no one outside. In answer to our summons, two men appeared and told us that there was no room in the houses. the valley was very narrow and the few places where the incline was not too steep seemed to be covered with crops, we asked them to show us a place where we could pitch our tent. They answered with careless insolence: "Go down the valley; you'll find a place there."

Not only is the scenery filled out with vivid descriptions, but the state of Dutreuil de Rhins' mental state is given: he is in physical pain and searches desperately for a place of shelter. People suddenly appear and give advice, issue commands, create a sense of dreamlike unreality in the midst of the unfamiliar environment.

The narrative continues to build up both the sense of vulnerability and the hints of supernatural control from beyond the Frenchmen's perceptions, what in exasperation Dutreuil de Rhins cries out to be “nonsense.”

We saw a walled enclosure surrounding a rather large space of empty ground with an unoccupied shed. It was a cattle-enclosure which was not being used at the time, as the herds had been sent to the pastures for the summer. “Let us camp in that yard which you are not using,” said Dutreuil de Rhins. “We will pay you.”

“The owner is away, replied the owner himself, “and has taken the key with him.”

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

"Nonsense!" retorted Dutreuil de Rhins, bluntly, losing patience. "I can't remain in the rain like this."

What might have been accepted as a natural and common sense reality around them—the poor weather, the empty sheepfold, the gruff responses by the natives—has already taken on some qualities of exotic and Gothic horror. So that the more, in Grenard's account, the French explorers attempt to make sense of what is going on around them, rejecting the lack of cooperativeness by the Tibetan villagers, the more there is a sense of something untoward, ominous and uncanny in the events that are transpiring.

The rain stopped and a few people came to see us. Dutreuil de Rhins produced the Tibetan letter which Pu Lao Yeh had given him and asked if anyone knew how to read. The young scullion offered his services and read the document to those standing around. It was a summarised translation of our Chinese passport, with a special and urgent recommendation, in the name of His Excellency the Imperial Legate, that they should not steal our horses, nor our yaks, nor anything that was ours. "*Di tebo re* (Very good, excellent as the thumb compared with the fingers)," said the Tibetans, raising their thumbs in the air to mark the liveliness of the approval.

All this smacked a little of hypocrisy and it would have been prudent not to linger. That same day, a dorgha came from Jyerkundo on behalf of Pu Lao Yeh. .

Official letters are read, documents ordered, texts are translated, so that there is a new sense of a civilized authority in which this strange little village is located, not completely cut off from the literate government that exists—even as the looming presence of monasteries, with the lamas and monks within, which also exudes a culture that defies the comprehension or even the imagination of the Western travellers.

The judgment of the Frenchmen that what they see and hear—for they themselves cannot read the Chinese documents—is "hypocrisy" rings hollow as a piece of arrogant western cultural prejudice. But because they cannot understand what is happening to them, they feel an increasing need to get away from the place where they seem stuck. This is more than embarrassment at being out-manoeuvred by supposed inferior races, especially in front of the non-French members of the expedition. But afterwards, it necessitates putting on the best face for French scientists and other educated European readers.

What happens next is that Grenard tries to provide a rational explanation after the fact, to translate foreign terms and describe ordinary bureaucratic activities:

A *dorgha* is the name in Tibet, as in Turkestan and Mongolia, of a man who combines the duties of a policeman and a courier and who, in a general way, is the errand-porter and factotum of an official of any kind. This one, who was called Tiso, wore his hair shaved, for he was a Golok by birth. This ex-brigand and son of a brigand had settled down, had married a Taorongpa wife and, changing his trade with his country, had become a policeman in the Chinese service; but he wore a hurried and excited air, spoke quickly, fluently and noisily, was fond of giving advice when he was not asked for it and boasted readily. He told us that he had been charged by Pu Lao Yeh to assist us in making our purchases at Labug Gompa ; that he had much influence in the country; that he was a particular friend of the chief lama's; that he felt a great sympathy for us; that he would serve us zealously and hoped that we should reward him with our customary generosity; that, if we started on the next day, he would

have the pleasure of going with us; that for the moment he was very busy and begged for permission to leave us until the morrow.

And he went off.

The names of people and places, the technical terms translated and explicated, and the connections between distant authorities and local officials seems to normalize the situation; at the same time, however, when the Frenchman are informed that the agents are unable to help them and that the situation is not really under control, the former sense of unease builds up again. They realize they are being fobbed off, and can get no real support, even if they were to provide the bribes requested. The situation is impossible to handle, and again they feel that they have to leave as quickly as possible. This sense of desperation does not really enter into Dif's synopsis and paraphrase. Nor does the impatience Grenard feels with Dutreuil de Rhins. This human drama, played out partly in the present tense of the narrative and partly in the reflective considerations of the edited, published text meant for a scientific readership and an ordinary French audience, gives us some grasp of the tensions that could be played on by a casual reader, such as Maître Ignace and his young interlocutors, Marcel Schwob and Leon Daudet. These tensions are those obtaining between generations, to be sure, their attitudes towards the colonial adventure, and also between Jews and non-Jews.

Back in the narrative, the surviving French writer reports the supposedly ordinary events of the day that follows, and yet the tensions between the men, especially between the two leaders of the expedition comes through, as they feel themselves trapped by circumstances:

On the following day, having risen before daybreak, I was giving instructions to prepare for our departure, when Dutreuil de Rhins came out and, seeing the sky covered with black and lowering clouds, gave the order to remain. He told Razoumoff to occupy his day in making the men practise their shooting, which had been neglected during the journey. I myself made an excursion up the torrent on whose right bank Tum Bumdo stands. This is the Deng Chu, a little affluent of the big river, the DoChu, a glimpse of whose valley was seen from our encampment. I passed a village whose inhabitants kept fiercely aloof. The few people whom I was able to accost answered my questions in a curt, dry and evasive manner. When I returned, I had a vague and confused feeling that things might go badly. Just then, I saw Razoumofi, knowing that Dutreuil de Rhins could not see him, indulge in one of his ordinary eccentricities.

Grenard's description of the mountain torrent nearby takes on greater significance when we realize later that this is where the corpse of Dutreuil de Rhins will be dumped, a place which we will be able to recognize as one which the writer is familiar with, something that makes his failure to try to retrieve the body all the more shocking. He, however, presents himself as more aware than the other of the dangers surrounding them: the natives who keep themselves "fiercely aloof" and whose comments are "curt, dry and evasive." Hence he returns to the encampment "vague and confused" and, even more ominously, wary of the Russian companion whose actions and words Grenard is wary of, while Dutreuil does not suspect anything untoward.

He was showing off before some Tibetans, ostentatiously directing our men's drill movements. I put an end to this scene, which had the two-fold drawback of making the Tibetans think that perhaps our men did not

know how to handle their intentions...[that they] were not strictly peaceful and of [a need to prepare our] weapons.<sup>15</sup>

It is not the leader, but his subordinate Grenard suspects that Razamouff's actions will provoke the natives into an attack. His boastful showing off alerts the villagers to be on guard and to prepare to act before the Europeans do.

However, as the day's weather seems to clear, Dutreuil de Rhins becomes more optimistic, to the dismay of Grenard. The leader makes statements that frighten the other by its casual disregard for everything ominous around them, even the weather. It does seem, by the written account, that Dutreuil de Rhins is sleepwalking his way towards his destiny.

The sky seemed to brighten a little and Dutreuil de Rhins spoke of breaking up camp in the afternoon.

But he changed his mind : " Bah! " he said. "Why risk wetting everything and spoiling everything for the sake of going three or four miles ." It's not worth while." For that matter, the rain soon began to come down and flooded us in our tent. However, Dutreuil de Rhins fixed the start for three o'clock on the next morning, whatever the weather might be.<sup>16</sup>

In a fuller account of the events than given by Dif, with their details implying much more than the modern historian seems to be aware of, Grenard's narrative continues:

We had just fallen asleep, when they came to tell us that two horses had disappeared. Shortly after nightfall, a heavy shower had driven our sentry to take shelter for a few minutes in the shed and, when he came out to go his rounds, the two animals were missing. I was able by the light of a lantern to follow tracks of horse-shoes, accompanied by the tracks of Tibetan boots, until where they were lost in the stones on the ground. The first tracks were those of our horses, for the Tibetan horses are never shod; and the others were certainly those of a native, for none of our men wore those boots. Besides, the tracks were all equally fresh and, as those of the Tibetans were always evenly beside those of our beasts, it was evident that the latter had been led away by the former. The theft was therefore duly established and there was no doubt but that it had been committed by a man acquainted with our habits who had taken his measures in consequence, possibly by the over-zealous scullion.<sup>17</sup>

In this version of the events, Grenard shows himself far more discerning of what is happening; he understands how to follow the horse tracks, like a good detective, and carefully distinguished between the footprints his own men would leave compared with those of the natives. He more than Dutreuil de Rhins suspect that the theft is an inside job, and also that the implications are far more ominous than merely petty pilfering. Again, it would seem, his intention to lay the death of the leader and the failure of the expedition elsewhere than his own shoulders. He also seeks to present himself as heroic in salvaging what he can after the attack.

Not that he blackens completely Dutreuil de Rhins's reputation, for he must show him to be a tragic figure who has made an incautious set of decisions and thus failed to see what was far more plain to himself, Grenard. The villains, after all, are the wily natives, and they have the numbers and the local knowledge to out-manoeuvre the Europeans who, at worst, might be

<sup>15</sup> Grenard, *Tibet*, p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> Grenard, *Tibet*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>17</sup> Grenard, *Tibet*, p. 150

accused of naiveté. The two explorers have not fully appreciated how different these villagers behave:

The natives, meanwhile, instead of coming to our camp as on the previous day, kept aloof and sneaked off with cunning speed so soon as they saw us go towards them. Those who allowed themselves to be taken by surprise were indifferent to the glamour of rupees and to soft words alike and, in a tone that seemed to reproach us with their theft, declared that they had no chief or that they did not know his house. This display of ill-will and insincerity confirmed Dutreuil de Rhins in his conviction that the villagers were the culprits and in his determination not to yield. He had good reasons for this. When he left Jyerkundo, he had no more horses than were absolutely indispensable and he had no money left with which to buy others. On the other hand, he feared that, if he did not insist upon obtaining justice, he would encourage the Tibetans to commit fresh thefts and would run the risk of losing all his animals. He consulted me and consulted Mohammed Isa, the interpreter, and we were all of the same opinion. An expedient must be found which would induce the population to emerge from their silence and the invisible authorities to show themselves and interfere. Dutreuil de Rhins thought that the best thing would be to seize two horses belonging to the Tibetans, not, as Mohammed Isa suggested, by way of restitution, but as a pledge, while declaring that we would restore them so soon as we should have come to an understanding with the authorities, whether these undertook to hunt for and recover our animals or took measures to prevent any similar act in the future.<sup>18</sup>

On the surface, the narrative seems to be guided by common sense, and the Europeans are shown to be attempting to deal fairly with the natives, as well as to be concerned with finding “an expedient” to get them out of the mess they have fallen into. Yet they also rely, perhaps too heavily, upon the advice of their interpreter, Mohammed Isa, or perhaps too much: for it is Dutreuil de Rhin’s idea “to seize two horses belonging to the Tibetans,” a plan that, as it turns out, is completely wrong-headed. Grenard separates himself from its formulation.

I repeat that I am belabouring this point because it is important for figuring out what cultural misunderstandings occurred between the various parties at the Lockroy’s estate on Gurnsey, particularly when, as we shall see, Marcel Schwob draws a false analogy between one set of tribes, the Goloks in Tibet, and another, the Jews in his own experience and his vague awareness of ancient history. In a sense, the person who writes the account, after the other is dead and no longer in control of the narrative text, creates the grounds upon which judgment can be made. Yet early news reports of what happened during the ambush suggest that there was a school of thought that differed with Grenard’s version, that Dutreuil de Rhins had not brought the whole tragedy down on his own head, that circumstances spun out of control beyond the knowledge and capacity of the European explorers to take adequate precautions or to effect a proper exit before firing began, and that Grenard had failed to rescue his leader before he died, retrieve his body, and ensure the integrity of the papers left behind for more than a month. *The San Francisco Call* for 16 June 1895 put together earlier accounts in French newspapers to let its readers know of the famous explorer in Tibet.

*M. Grenard, the French traveller, has sent to the Turkestan Gazette a graphic account of his disastrous experiences in Thibet. He decries the assertion of Swedish traveller . M. Sven Hedin that he deserted his companion Dutreuil de Rhins, at the moment of danger and left him wounded in the hands of the Thibetans. He says that the trouble with arose through Dutreuil de Rhins seizing of their horses in response to the theft of two of their own.*<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Grenard, *Tibet*, p. 154.

<sup>19</sup>T. H. Holdich, "Sven Hedin and Dutreuil de Rhins in Central Asia" *Geographical Journal* 13 (1899) 103.

The description of the ambush is given with greater details than elsewhere, many of them missing from the formal published account of the expedition, and designed here by Grenard both to answer to the slanderous accusation by the Swedish witness that he was derelict in his duties and to present the alternative in which he was a victim—and a hero in the occasion.<sup>20</sup>

The fighting began in a village, from the houses and windows of which the Thibetans kept up a well-sustained line the French caravan, which was on a narrow road hemmed in by a stream. First a horse was killed, and then M. Dutreuil de Rhins was wounded in the abdomen and vomiting blood. M. Grenard declares that he went at once to his help, and endeavoured to stanch the wound, at the same time giving his men orders to let the two confiscated horses go at once. He hoped thus to appease the enraged Thibetans, but they soon resumed their attack, and when the French fire slackened for want of cartridges, they rushed upon the caravan and put the porters and others to flight, and carried off M. Grenard, forcing him on with blows from the butt-ends of their pikes. After women and children threw stones at him, M. Grenard was taken to the Thibetan frontier and there released.<sup>21</sup>

While these additional details are claimed to be drawn from his memory of the experience in which he fought valiantly against superior numbers, the fate of Dutreuil de Rhins he knows only from hearsay:

He heard afterward that his unhappy companion had been carried wounded as he was to the river and thrown into the water, the Thibetans [*sic*] hurling heavy stones at him until his body disappeared.<sup>22</sup>

If we compare this journalistic text, many months following the incident itself and drawn from previous newspaper reports in which Grenard has begun to shape the version he wants to undercut the narratives already beginning to circulate against his good name, to what he has printed in the *Mission scientifique*, then it is hard to grant him full veracity, “graphic” though his words are.

The more Ferdinand Grenard’s official narrative comes closer to the climactic attack in which Dureuil de Rhins is fatally wounded, the more he seems caught in the confusion of the moment and the ambiguity of his attempt to write out his memories of the occasion:

On the whole, however irritated he might be, his intentions were exceedingly moderate and he was so far from expecting a serious fight that he did not even order the few rounds of ammunition to be taken from the chests containing them.<sup>23</sup>

The initial reaction of Dutreuil de Rhins is “moderate” and he does not realize the extent of the dangers around and already within the camp. As a leader, he certainly is deficient, from the facts provided by Grenard, if facts they are:

The orders given in consequence were executed at daybreak the next morning, while we were preparing to start. Did the Tibetans grasp the meaning of our declaration? I cannot say; but the promptness with which they seized upon this opportunity to attack us seemed to me to show that they were waiting for it and that they had only been looking for a pretext, good and soon filled the whole village. A formidable cry of “*Ki ho*” or bad. A clamour arose, grew ever louder...[until] “*Ki ho !*” rang through the valley and we saw a few men run in the direction of

<sup>20</sup> San Francisco Call 75:16 (16 June 1895) available online from the California Digital Newspaper Calendar at <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-nin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC18950616.2.214>

<sup>21</sup> Holdich, « Sven Herdin and Dutreuil de Rhins » 104.

<sup>22</sup> Grenard, *Tibet*, pp. 154-155. The English text is somewhat mangled at this point.

<sup>23</sup> Holdich, « Sven Herdin and Dutreuil de Rhins » 104.

the monastery, which was hidden from us by a projecting portion of the mountain. The *shadso*, that is to say the lama charged with the temporal administration of the convent, is at the same time, as I learnt later, the chief of the whole canton of Tumbumdo, which numbers seven villages. Hardly had these men returned, when, as we were beginning to leave the enclosure, I heard a musket-shot and the sharp whizz of a bullet. It was a quarter-past four in the morning. Meanwhile, we formed our march according to our usual order : Dutreuil de Rhins in front, armed with his Winchester rifle; I bringing up the rear, armed only with my compass.<sup>24</sup>

Here Dutreuil de Rhins, after initial hesitations and confusions, seems to take charge, and Winchester rifle in his arms, bravely leads his men out of their enclosure, while Grenard, takes up the rear position, almost comically possessed only with his compass rather than a weapon. Yet all around them, still not fully realized by anyone until much later when it is too late, the natives have them in their sights.

At this point Grenard gives the geography of the village and thus the strategic advantage the local tribesmen have over the Europeans:

The village is situated on an eminence in the angle formed by the confluence of the Deng Chu with the torrent which we had come down on our way from Jyerkundo. The road retreats a little, describing a small curve in order to cross this torrent and to pass along the side of the mountain on the right Dg Chu. The houses are similar to all those in Tibet, with thick walls, narrow embrasures and bank on their flat roofs with parapets.<sup>25</sup>

These topographical features should have been noted before and taken into account, if not by the leader of the expedition then at least by his second in command, his compass indicating the role he played on the trip as recorder of events, map-maker and illustrator of interesting sights.

### Part Three

---

<sup>24</sup> Grenard, *Tibet*, p. 155.

<sup>25</sup> Grenard, *Tibet*, p. 159



Trekking through Tibet

This brings us to a point where we must cite Dif's synopsis of the attack in which Dutreuil was shot and wounded.<sup>26</sup> To all intents and purposes, the members of the expedition were trapped and there was little they could do to save themselves despite Dutreuil's supposed bravado at the head of line seeking to leave the enclosure. In the moment, none of the actors on the expedition side were fully cognizant of how extreme their position was. By behaving as though he had some control over the situation and therefore in some sort of strategic advantage at least for the moment, rather than trying to effect an escape when it was still perhaps possible, according to Dif, Dutreuil de Rhins provoked the final showdown. From our perspective as disinterested spectators, and with the advantage of hindsight, both the mistakes the leader of the expedition supposedly made come into question, meaning that the writer of the primary text had ulterior motives in putting blame on Dutreuil de Rhins; and the local people, the villagers and the monks in the monastery, were not necessarily as devious, wily and preternaturally motivated as the writer of the account seems to imply, this being another ploy to rationalize the fact that European were out-manoeuvred in this situation. On the one hand, the French leaders assume they are superior to the natives and yet put off their guard in circumstances where they do not have full information as to the plans and weapons available to the others, as well as not being

---

<sup>26</sup> Dif, "Les voyages de Dutreuil de Rhins et Grenard".

familiar with the layout of the region. On the other, the locals also do not know the true intentions of the European party and what plans they have, nor how much the expedition had learned about the villagers and the monks in the context of Tibetan geopolitics. In other words, both groups are at a disadvantage strategically and epistemologically: they are caught but they do not know how impossible it is for them to act.

*Au moment où l'expédition quitte le village, le 5 juin 1894, on commence à lui tirer dessus depuis les maisons. Comme la caravane chemine sur une corniche exposée, Dutreuil de Rhins est blessé au ventre, alors qu'il vient de s'arrêter pour riposter aux assaillants, leur offrant ainsi une cible facile. Grenard, sous une grêle de balles le met à l'abri derrière un muret. On essaya en vain de parlementer et d'envoyer chercher des secours. Bientôt, la situation devient intenable ; Grenard est contraint d'abandonner Dutreuil de Rhins ; ce dernier a perdu connaissance et est probablement intransportable.*

At the moment when the expedition left the village on 5 June 1894 shooting began from above the houses. As the caravan travelled along road on an exposed angle, Detrueil de Rhins was wounded in the stomach, just as he stopped to fire back at his assailants, offering them an easy target. Grenard, under a hail of bullets, pulls him to the shelter behind a low wall. They tried in vain to negotiate and to send for help. Soon the situation became untenable. Grenard was forced to abandon Dutreuil de Rhins who had lost consciousness and was probably immobilized.

This is a difficult situation, and a morally ambiguous, if not compromising one, to be in; but also for Grenard to write about. The real knot he has to untie to save his own face and to satisfy the suspicions of his European readership in a period of colonial expansion is how to explain away the loss of Detrueil de Rhins, meaning both the leader's life and the corpse of a respected comrade. Grenard was not trained as a soldier or a diplomat and the rules of combat cannot have applied when he felt compelled to leave his fellow explorer behind to save his own neck and that of the other members of the team to the mercy of the Goloks. While he could not suppress or change all the facts of the case in his text—there are still many witnesses—he could disguise some of them by playing down some and manipulating others: he was, in brief, probably putting the best light on his own actions here, without casting himself unrealistically as a romantic hero. He muddled through the events of the day without displaying any great valour, and he presents himself in the text as though he were caught in a nightmare, and nightmares—in fantasy fiction, as well as in sensationalized accounts of explorers encountering exotic peoples for the first time were popular fare in the fin-de-siècle:

It will therefore pay to examine the final sentences in this passage closely, first as rendered by Dif and then as Grenard himself recounts the episode. The more Grenard can blacken the character of the Tibetan enemy and the hopelessness of his own situation, the better it will be for his reputation.

*Grenard, un moment à la merci de ses ennemis, leur échappe par miracle ; il est dépouillé de tout objet de valeur, puis chassé à coups de pierres par des garnements. Il est recueilli par un fonctionnaire chinois et reste près d'un mois à proximité de Tom-Boumdu, dans l'espoir de se faire restituer les papiers tombés aux mains des assaillants. Quant au corps de Dutreuil de Rhins, il ne faut pas songer à le récupérer : il été précipité dans une rivière, au fond d'un ravin, sur l'ordre du lama du monastère voisin.*

Grenard, that moment at the mercy of his enemies, escaped by miracle. He was stripped of any concern for valour or glory, then chased away by rogues throwing rocks. He was rescued by a Chinese functionary and rested for a month near Tom-Boumdu, in the hope to retrieve papers fallen into the hands of his assailants. As for the body of Dutreuil de Rhins, he could not dream of getting it back It had been thrown into a river at the bottom of a ravine by order of the lama of the neighbouring monastery.

If Grenard's survival is due to a miracle, then he may be excused for leaving his companion behind and not making any effort to retrieve the body thrown into a mountain torrent; yet he does wait a month to try to get his notes on the expedition back. It was a few months later, thanks to the intervention the Chinese authorities in Xining, who in turn applied for the aid of the government in Peking (Beijing today) that his precious papers (*les précieux papiers*) were returned and four of the men who attacked the caravan were caught and punished.

*At this point in the original text of Jews in an Illusion of Paradise I dealt with two other seemingly tangential themes, which can only be given here in a brief synopsis before offering a single example to help explain the questions surrounding the fate of Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard's moral and ethical dilemma of reporting on what occurred and why. In so doing, as I suggested at the start of this three-part essay, the reader should begin to guess at the analogy between the strange adventures in Tibet—including deception, self-deception, murder and colonial racism—and the anecdote recounted by Léon Daudet about his friend Maurice Schwob and the passing encounter with Salomon Ignace can illuminate the way the two misunderstood the occasion, each other, and the situation in France which would come to fruition a generation later under Nazi occupation.*



Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

Marcel Schwob (1867-1905)

One theme has to do with a series of novels and stories that appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that dealt with doppelgangers, split personalities, mystical survivals of archaic and mythic creatures or personalities into the modern age; with the presence of these uncanny and disturbing beings and inner demons seeming to shatter preconceived notions of the natural, the normal and the rational. The other has to do with journeys beyond the boundaries of the familiar, the explicable and the conceivable, where the European traveller, missionary, explorer, scientist or adventurer loses himself and his humanity on the other side, in the heart of darkness, a place of ghosts, demons and zombies.

For instance, in Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1904-1907), we find a pertinent statement, if not relevant or accurate in terms of the Czech writer's attempt to manipulate a medieval Jewish legend of the Prague ghetto, then full of insight as to the psychology being discovered and discussed in the *fin-de-siècle*: "And when I review in my mind all the strange people who live in them, like phantoms, like people not born if woman who, in all their being and doing, seem to have been put together haphazardly, out of odds and end, then I am more than ever inclined to believe that such dreams carry within them dark truths which, when I am awake, glimmer faintly in the depths of my soul like the after-images of nightly coloured fairy-tales" (p. 42). In a sense, that we hint at in our midrashic readings of the jokes told by Leon Daudet about the Jews he met in Guernsey and, within that another hidden text of discovery, of the killing of Dutreuil de Rhin as recounted by Grenard and the occasion for old man Ignace's witticism in poor taste, there are aspects of both the joke and the adventures in Central Asia which are more dreamlike than recollections of past historical events, the joke being for Freud, as we have said, another royal road to the unconsciousness along with dreams, and the tale of mysterious encounters in far-away exotic places as much a fantasy—individual and collective—as any other discourse subject to what psychohistorians call fantasy analysis.<sup>27</sup>

There is also a distant but significant analogy between what Hanneh Arendt sees as the cause of the Holocaust and its consequences in the post-World War Two years and the events leading up to the murder of Dutreuil de Rhins in Tibet in 1894. There is sufficient likeness in the two cases—albeit comparing the small with the great—to use the late nineteenth-century case as a pivot on which to rotate various ideas about the relationships between Jews and Jews, as well

---

<sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious: Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten* (1905; not yet translated into English until 1960). Though he does not say so explicitly, almost all the examples in the book are Jewish jokes; and so while not a universal theory of wit and humour, a good gauge of what makes Jews laugh about themselves, their fears of anti-Semitic ridicule, and the defensive strategies they put-together to anticipate and preclude humiliations and social shaming. His raises the immediate question here of how much Schwob and Ignace are colluding at the expense of Daudet. The other question of not whether there is a Jewish *Witzenschaft* (The Wit of Jokes, from *Wissenschaft*: Science) involved in the encounters and their written recollections, but how much posturing and showing off of a different kind there may be between the French explorers and the Tibetans is part of their strategies to intimidate the other and ward off unwanted attacks can be seen in this account after the fact and needed to remove blame for the sake of personal honour, diplomatic justification, and excusing various blunders by both leaders and loose-cannons among the secondary players.

as Jews and non-Jews; their will then be implications of another way to look at the problem of what Arendt calls the conscious pariah status of the Jew, the person who both steps outside of the traditional rabbinical culture and community and tries to live in the post-Enlightenment world as a critic both of that intolerant and hypocritical culture of modernity and accepting the opprobrium of both as the price for independence of thought and the parvenu type who deludes himself into believing that paradise has been (re)gained and that is mortified (or murdered) when the trick is exposed through his own inadvertence or the connivance of others. Unlike the schlemiel type of Jew who blunders into situations beyond his control and has only a kind of wry sense of humour and a bit of native wit to try to grapple with the humiliating, painful and dangerous situations, so that by good luck, some divine interference or a benevolent narrator, the worst consequences can be avoided; the parvenu is too clever by half to understand the mistakes he is making and his attempts to bluff out the unpleasantness and life-threatening ambush he discovers too late, there is really no way out, except totally humiliating obsequiousness, debilitating bribery, suicide or a feeble resignation to the inevitable.

## Back to the Mountains of Central Asia

*Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins, géographe précis et de talent, explorateur du Tibet, est mort comme le dit Edouard Blanc en “martyr de la géographie.” Il représente assez bien l’homme de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle : chercheur en bibliothèque, explorateur du terrain, dispose à endurer de grandes épreuves et peu soucieux de sa vie pourvu que cela soit utile au progrès de la science et de la connaissance des terres inconnues.*<sup>28</sup>

Jules-Leon Dutreuil de Rhins, a talented and exacting geographer, explorer of Tibet, died, in the words of Edouard Blanc, « a martyr to geography. » He well represents the man of the late nineteenth century: library researcher, explorer in the field, ready to endure great ordeals and unconcerned about his comfort provided it can be useful to the progress of science and knowledge of unknown lands.

In this modern remembrance there is given the very opposite of what the anti-Semites would characterize as the typical Jew, a person of uncontrolled and wild thoughts, someone whose unfocused attention skitters through the real and material world around him, a non-Aryan who is weak, soft, always whining and complaining, only concerned about money and the influence it can purchase. Yet we placed Dutreuil de Rhins in a positive light when we discussed how was the centre of a discussion between Marcel Schwob and Leon Daudet. Should we look at him again, this time with this question in mind? Is he—like the mysterious Tibet around which “le grand jeu” the Great Powers gambled in the late nineteenth century—a pivotal point around which the ambiguously Jewish mentality of Schwob turns?<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Dif, “Les voyages de Dutreuil de Rhins et Grenard”.

<sup>29</sup> Like Tibet, where Dutreuil de Rhins is killed, his body lost, and his would-be rescuer afraid to act, the anti-Semitism of the *fin de siècle* was fascinated by the cleverness of the Jews (Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein), repelled by the image of what unchecked modernity does to the certainties of mind, family and society (see Christopher Hitchins, “The 2,000-Year-Old Panic” a review of Gregor von Rezzori, *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, in *The Atlantic* (1 March 2008) online at For those French intellectuals who could not make the trip



Lockroy Manor Museum, Guernsey

He seemed to come on to the stage of our discussions of modern Jewish intellectuals—poets, composers, actors, critics, art historians, and journalists—during a lengthy digression on the propriety of a categorization of modern traditional *schlemiels* or self-deluded *parvenus*, as Hannah Arendt would set the paradigm;<sup>30</sup> and the discussion was sparked when the old Jew made a bad joke about the murder of the Tibetan explorer Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins (whom the old Jew in his caftan calls *anthrophages* or cannibals) in 1894, that is, the *piranhas* who swarm out of the flow of history to devour their helpless victim. Though that digression seemed to go on much too long and its relevance was barely evident and perhaps appeared to many readers as forced, it kept on demanding attention because I wanted to find out what prompted Salomon Ignace to turn the killing into a joke when meeting with the two young friends Marcel Schwob and Leon Daudet on the Isle of Gurnsey, how these journalists reacted to the inappropriate witticism of the older man, and why Daudet dwelt so long on the encounter in his rather anti-Semitic book of memoirs. There seemed to be no end of misunderstandings and further attempts to score points with other jokes prompted by the original occasion and subsequent encounters between the two writers. Just at a crucial point, when the tracing back of the lines of confusion to the murder in Tibet and the problems associated with how the killing

---

themselves, there was the Société de Géographie de Paris as a place explorers, travel-writers, novelists and journalists could meet (Désiré-Marchand, « Cartographe et Exploration » 41).

<sup>30</sup> Feldman, Introduction to *The Jewish Writing of Hannah Arendt*, citing her *Origins of Totalitarianism*: “”The result was that the political history of the Jewish people became even more dependent upon unforeseen, accidental factors than the history of other nations, so that the Jews stumbled from one role to the other and accepted responsibility for none” (pp. xlvi-xlvii).

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

took place and what were the responsibilities of other Europeans for the failure to rescue Dutreuil de Rhins, retrieve his body, and eventually give an accurate account of what had happened, I felt I could not go on and dropped the issue. Too much else had to be said, especially about André Suarès about whom the whole chapter was nominally about. Like Marcel Schwob, Suarès was a Jewish author whose memory had been eclipsed by time, circumstances and prejudice, and the concern of the chapter sought to discuss how far anti-Semitism and self-loathing had to do with their slippage out of most literary histories of France. In other words, words that suggest answers in Hannah Arendt's pairing as complementary rather than contrasting terms, on the one side, the *pariah*, and on the other, the *parvenu*. The *pariah* runs the gamut from the rabbinical *tam* or intellectual fool through the nineteenth-century Yiddish literary and stage type of the *schlemiel* or unconscious fall-guy and foil to the *nebeshor shmegeggie* or man without qualities and without the will to stand up for himself. As for the *parvenu*, the assimilationist, whether he goes so far as to separate himself so far from the Jewish community and heritage he was born to and fools himself into thinking he is safely ensconced in the gentile world as an independent, autonomous individual or to create or discover even greater distance between himself and the gentile society wherein he is at best accepted as a token Jew, a court jester, or an informant—well, he is deluded, sometimes right to the end without ever realizing how much of a nothing he really is, or sometimes to a moment when catastrophe strikes and he sees himself for what he is, and when it is too late to save himself; he cannot rectify his position among the *goyim*, as Marcel Proust's Charles Swann realizes thanks to ostracism that pushes him away during the Dreyfus Affair, or return to the Jewish community, however much he longs nostalgically for the scenes and tastes of his youth, as happened with Bernard Berenson in his last years, beginning with the long months of hiding from the Fascists and continuing into his nineties, with decrepitude and failing memory assailing him.

We earlier pointed out the double contrasts between the older generation of Yiddish-speaking Jews personified in this passage of Léon Daudet's memoirs by Salomon Ignace and the upstarts like Marcel Schwob who felt uneasy in the presence of this man an embarrassed by his crude humour and the tensions between Schwob and his friend Leon Daudet who took delight in watching Marcel squirm and the older man become befuddled by the lack of respect he was shown. Much of that analysis was based on what was implied rather than what was actually put into words in Daudet's memoirs, and all along we had to be alert to the limitations of reading too much into the text since there is no other version of the encounter on Isle of Guernsey at Lord Lockroy's house. That was what drove us further and further into a discussion of the way we had to approach an understanding of the killing of Dutreuil de Rhins. Yet other than the statement that Marcel Schwob was a friend of the murdered man, there seems nothing at first blush to associate him with the Jewish jokes within Jewish jokes within Jewish jokes, and certainly nothing to connect the explorer with the Jews. But is the analogy drawn merely on the basis of how the interpretation of rewritten, edited and translated texts work?<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Joëlle Désire-Marchand, "Cartographe et Exploration : Le cas d'Alexandra David-Neel en Asie" *CFC* 153 (septembre 1997) 39. This "great play" for control over the « roof of the world » was all the more intriguing because Tibet was so remote and unknown, one of the last remaining blank spots on the map. It may have also

---

been one of the very few places in the world where any adventurer expected to find a Jew—even if he or she were one. Yet here in the episode we are giving background to there are an assimilated Jew, an old traditional Jew, and anti-Semite, and an explorer who somehow brings them together textually.

**Mentalities/Mentalités Volume 33, Number 1, 2019**

**ISSN- 0111-8854**

**@2019 Mentalities/Mentalités**

All material in the Journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission.

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.