

The Fictitious World Traveller: *The Swede on Timor* and the Noble Savage Imagery

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Abstract

Travel writing soared in the Western world in the early-modern era with the widening geographical knowledge. This was accompanied by a genre of travel fiction. The present study analyses a short Swedish novella from 1815, *Swensken på Timor* (The Swede on Timor), “translated” by Christina Cronhjelm from a purported English account. It is a romantic tale of a Swedish sailor who is shipwrecked and is adopted by an indigenous group on the Southeast Asian island Timor, marrying a local woman and converting to Islam. The novella is remarkable for the positive portrayal of indigenous society and to some extent Islam. The article discusses the literary tropes influencing the account, and the partly accurate ethnographic and historical details.

Keywords: Travel fiction, Timor, noble savage, Islam, Christina Cronhjelm

Travel between Truth and Fiction

Travel writings experienced a great upsurge in early-modern Europe, for obvious reasons. With the maritime expansion to the Americas, Africa and Asia, and the rapid dissemination of printing technique, an increasing supply of travel accounts found its way to an increasingly literate public. If you survived your tenure as sailor, soldier or scribe at a colonial outpost and made it back to Europe, a well-told account of your adventures could earn you fame and money. A look at the multi-volume work of Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe* (1965-93) gives an idea about the rich and varied outpour in the centuries after 1500. Sea captains, Jesuit priests, employees of trading companies, soldiers of fortune – all had their story to tell of distant, exotic places which they had often just barely left alive.

On the following pages I will scrutinize the alleged life-story of a castaway Swedish sailor in Asia, published in 1815. The example is interesting since Sweden was not known as a travelling nation, and it therefore becomes essential to investigate how it relates to the European discourse of the tropical or Asian Other in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The complexity of the text in terms of metaphors and balance between authenticity and fiction will be highlighted.

In this context one should note the problems of using travel writings as testimonies of foreign cultures. In recent decades this has been increasingly pointed out by historians and literary scholars: the European traveller (and, for that matter, any traveller) tends to reproduce ideas of cultural otherness of the places that he or she visits. Usually unable to fully grasp the local culture, the external observer will construct an image of the Other that becomes an implicit mirror of the culture of the metropolitan homeland. This, of course, can be done in positive as well as negative ways although the latter have tended to dominate through five centuries of European travel writing. In the postcolonial tradition of Said et al. this refers to a discourse where Western representatives strive to master and in effect dominate non-Western areas (Said 1978; Nyman 2013). But it can also be seen as a ubiquitous human impulse to relate impressions of foreign milieus to one's own place in this world.

To the problem of bias must be added general issues of reliability. Wherever we can compare the travel accounts with external data (local chronicles, archival data, concurring travel reports, etc.) they display an enormous range of truthfulness and care. And it is not certain that the more modern accounts are the more reliable. The enormously popular work *Revolt in paradise* by Muriel Pearson alias K'tut Tantri (1960) depicts the American author's life in colonial and revolutionary Indonesia in the 1930s and 1940s in terms that are largely gainsaid by other information (Lindsey 1997). Some older works such as Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação* (1614), which describes the vicissitudes of a Portuguese adventurer in maritime Asia, defy any distinction between fact and fiction (Catz 1989). The

temptation to add hearsay accounts and mere invention to a putative autobiographic travel story can presumably be strong when the details cannot be controlled by the audience.

But there is also a genre of travel fiction, that can be either realistic (*Robinson Crusoe*) or fantastic (*Gulliver's travels*). This genre was popular in West Europe from the early seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, frequently depicting adventurous journeys to real but little-known lands at the edges of geographical knowledge. The heyday of travel fiction coincided with the rapid expansion of European knowledge of foreign continents in the second half of the eighteenth century (Arthur 2011: xx). This might have bearing on the example that will be studied in the present essay.

The Swede on Timor

Swedish expansion in the early-modern period was seldom directed to other continents, in spite of short-lived enterprises in Delaware and West Africa. Consequently, Swedish travel accounts of non-Western areas are rare up to the eighteenth century. With the activities of the Swedish East India Company (1731-1813) and the peregrinations of the disciples of Linnaeus (1707-1778) a spate of published travel accounts surfaced, notably Carl Thunberg's account of his visit to Japan (1775-1776).¹ At least some of these writings display a positive curiosity about the lands and peoples they visited. It should be recalled that this was at the height of the Enlightenment, with universalistic ideas about the fate of mankind and sentimental interest for the noble savage (often, though less correctly, associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings).

In 1815, two years after the dissolving of the East India Company and a year after Norway's forced union with Sweden, a short text of 15 pages appeared at Marquardska Tryckeriet, a well-known publishing house in Stockholm. The title was laconic but suggestive: *Swensken på Timor* (The Swede on Timor).² Timor was known to the avid reader of travel literature at the time as the destination of Captain William Bligh after his remarkable sea travel in 1789, following the much-publicized mutiny of the *Bounty* (Bligh 1969). Otherwise, apart from passages in a few published travelogues, the sizeable island was something of a *terra incognita*. Although the Portuguese and Dutch were positioned there since the seventeenth century, Timor was an inaccessible and supposedly primitive place that lay at the margins of the European spheres of interest.³

No author is given on the title page, which only states that the story is an "account [translated] from English". From other sources, however, we do know the name of the person who committed the tropical adventures of the Swede to paper. Her name was Christina Cronhjelm (1784-1852), the daughter of an officer and soon to become the wife of Major Johan Gustav Berger. The short story under scrutiny lies at the very beginning of a long writing career. She wrote a series of

short romantic novels, translated literary texts from French and English, and contributed to various journals and newspapers. Her literary exploits were not praised by posterity, which found her style stymied by romanticist overtones and conventions. Nevertheless, some of her work enjoyed much popularity and she wrote lyrics to which her husband composed music (Ekelund 1886: 65-71).

The preface of *The Swede on Timor* adds to the expectations of an exotic adventure. Cronhjelm relates that she made the acquaintance of an English sea captain in Gothenburg whose father, a Captain Richardson, bequeathed a diary relating a sea travel to the Indian Ocean in 1783. The diary was remarkable for one particular incident which caught the interest of Cronhjelm, who gained permission to borrow the manuscript and copy excerpts from it. "Certainly", she writes, "it is sometimes somewhat similar to romance. However, one may not assume that a man who has neither written to win honours or money, but only annotated what he has heard since it has interested him, has wished to deceive. If one gains the endorsement of the reader, then one is rewarded for the small effort that has been spent" (Cronhjelm 1815b: 2).

From Norrland to the East Indies

The short text is framed by the passage to the East Indies by Captain Richardson with the ship *Triton* in 1783. Visiting Timor for trade, the sea captain is amazed by encountering a European who speaks good English and provides substantial assistance to the Britons through his knowledge of the local language and customs. He stays with his "Malay" wife and four handsome children in a house situated a mile from the coast which is surrounded by pretty gardens and built according to mathematical principles. Being no common beachcomber, he evokes the curiosity of the crew. After the conclusion of the more important commitments, the stranger invites the Britons to his home for a meal and there relates the story of his life.

As it turns out his name is Carl Enander, a vicar's son from the vicinity of Gävle in northern Sweden (Norrland).⁴ When he grows up he is captivated by the exotic travel accounts found in his parental home. When 14 years of age he is sent to Gävle for education, but the pedantic style of tuition does not appeal to Enander who dreams of a life at sea. In spite of the refusal of his father to allow this, he takes hire on a Danish ship bound for Dublin at the age of 15. As the ship lifts anchor and departs, Enander is overcome by regret and vainly asks the captain to put him ashore again. He nevertheless has to endure a troubled sea trip to Ireland where the captain dismisses him. The young Swede has a rudimentary knowledge of English and takes up work at a factory for iron manufacture. He is doing well and might have settled down on Ireland for good if not for an incident that changes his plans at the age of 19. A love affair with the daughter of a rich tenant farmer ends abruptly when her furious father surprises them with threatening ges-

tures. Enander hastily abandons work and sweetheart and goes to Dublin where he is hired by a ship leaving for Java – from the internal chronology of the story this would have been about 1770 (Cronhjelm 1815b: 3-6).

Carl Enander's passage to Asian waters marks a change of the narrative to that of wild adventure. The merchantman makes it to Batavia, the hub of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) where the unspecified cargo is sold. Instead the captain purchases merchandise which can be sold to the inhabitants east of Java. The general idea is to return to Java after two months and then bring a suitable cargo back to Europe. However, the ship does not make it that far; due to a violent gale the crew loses control over the ship which is driven against the Island of Banka by the winds.

Our old captain regarded our salvation as impossible and admonished us to meet death with constancy. I asked him not to abandon all hope – I believed I could save him if the ship would be calamitously destroyed. I asked him to put the most necessary objects in the bladder of an ox: some money, a chart, a compass and some gunpowder; and to largely undress since it was not cold. However, we were sometimes rocked towards the abyss, sometimes lifted towards the sky. We tried to cast anchor a few hundred fathoms from shore, but the anchor ropes were torn apart by the raging storm. A moment later the ship collided with a rock. Water poured in from all sides, the ship creaked horribly. I ran to the captain. He stood in just his shirt with the required objects in hand. I had a cutlass and a pistol bound at my hip. I bound the ox bladder around my neck. Crying 'God be with us' I threw myself into the sea. The captain followed me. He could swim but his powers were soon exhausted. He was about to sink. I asked him to grab my long hair. I used all my powers, which were not small, to reach the shore. I finally reached it but was so exhausted that I fell down unconscious (Cronhjelm 1815b: 7-8).⁵

Enander, the captain and four others survive the shipwreck. Having doubts about the inhabitants of the island the Britons steal a canoe and resolve to reach Batavia. However, the winds inevitably push them in south-easterly direction, and they then decide to search for the Dutch colony on Timor instead. On their way the six vagrants land at a minor island where they rob a local family of some Indian cotton cloths and jars, admittedly after handing them 4 guineas. After three weeks of sailing and rowing they eventually reach Timor. It turns out that the Dutch stay at another section of the coast, but the inhabitants turn out to be good-hearted and helpful. "They were Malays⁶ who had occupied the coasts of this island and pushed the old natives to the interior... The religion of these Malays is the Mohammedan one, but it is mostly limited to the simple teachings of natural religions. They live in prosperity, partly as a consequence of the splendid land, and partly due to the trade that they carry on with Asians as well as Europeans. They also have European weapons such as shotguns and cutlasses, but they handle the first-mentioned rather ineptly; and they have no sense of fighting in order, without which wild courage cannot commit anything" (Cronhjelm 1815b: 9).

A Castaway on the Islands

The captain dies a couple of days after reaching Timor. The others, being housed in the household of an amicable and well-regarded man, are soon invited to participate in a war against the tribes of the interior which have raided their Malay neighbours. Much is expected from their European fighting tactics. The five Europeans gladly accept to fight under the banner of the Prophet and depart along with the able-bodied levies. On the fourth day they make contact with the enemy which roam around the hills and plains in scattered detachments, and a memorable encounter ensues:

This tribe had a muscular constitution, brown of colour, being completely naked apart from a piece of cloth around the waist. They had long spears, bows and arrows and a kind of small, round shield. As soon as they detected us they split up in four orderly troops in order to attack in that peculiar manner; but we formed a large square and calmly awaited their attack. They stopped at 30 paces distance in order to shot their arrows, but we anticipated them and triggered a general well-aimed salvo that killed several. Their commander, distinguished by a high feather headdress, rushed against the side where I stood. I let him come at 10 paces distance to be the more confident. Then I triggered my pistol. He fell and a terrible slaughter ensued around his corpse which his men wanted to defend. From this moment the victory was not in doubt since all sense of order was gone among the enemy. Escape and defeat was now general. Many prisoners fell in our hands; they were humanly treated although they became slaves. Three of our Englishmen were so badly injured that they died before we came home (Cronhjelm 1815b: 9-10).

Carl Enander is likewise wounded by a spear but is nursed to life by the 16 years old daughter of his Malay host, Alzima. Her beauty is comparable with the prettiest girls of Dublin, and her tenderness does not fail to make an impression on the Swede, who is now the only survivor left from the shipwreck together with an old sailor. After the victory celebrations he stays with his host and cultivates his fertile land, meanwhile making gardens and flower plantations after the European manner. A hot romance develops between Enander and Alzima:

[W]hen I had picked some fresh flowers and put them in the billowing bosom of the enchanting girl, and she rewarded me with a grateful smile, then I would have forsaken a throne. My masculine power had disappeared entirely; I was as weak as a woman. My happiness increased daily, especially when I had acquired proficiency in the language, and she could show me her bright intellect and splendid heart, which had not been formed by moral teachings but by the influence of a beneficial nature (Cronhjelm 1815b: 11).

His host is a venerable old man who likes to tell of warlike exploits against the natives whose islands his tribesmen have assaulted. After some time his powers abate and it is obvious that his end is near. On his death-bed he speaks to Enander and Alzima: during a long life he has experienced happiness as well as calamities, but declares to be content to pass away to unite with his late wife. He has no worries for his daughter since the Swede will be her friend and protector. "You have the same worship of God; yes, we all have. Do we not all believe in a being who rewards the virtuous, punishes the scoundrel, and links our destiny in such way

that we must finally admit that all that has happened to us in this world has been for our best, and that we will understand the reason for everything when we unite with our friends in blissful Paradise?" (Cronhjelm 1815b: 12-3).

After the death of the father, trouble ensues. A young man of fierce character, Elifu, has long desired Alzima but been repeatedly turned away by her father. With the old man gone he decides to act. When Carl Enander goes to the forest one morning, Elifu and his accomplices enter their home and capture Alzima. She is brought to a boat waiting on the shore and taken in the direction of a nearby island. When Enander comes back he is informed by an old man what has passed. A gale is raging and it is impossible to follow the captors, but the Swede can discern a boat far away that capsizes in the waves. He fears that Alzima might be on board. His neighbours offer assistance, and when the gale has passed they set out for the nearby island. There they find Alzima bound and guarded by two men. Enander rushes forward and cuts one dead while the other begs for his life and tells that Elifu has returned to the larger island to deal terminally with the Swede. It is now clear that it was Elifu who was drowned when the boat capsized. United again once and for all, Enander and Alzima marry after the Swede has been formally converted to Islam:

Before that I had to undergo a ceremony that the law of Muhammad has prescribed for every Muslim, and I then became the happiest of husbands and have been a happy father for ten years. Meanwhile several Dutchmen have visited me. I have not found them worthy of my confidence, but I have told you noble Britons everything that has happened to me. This story may be useful for your young fellow countrymen. It should teach them not to follow the darting passion but rather the voice of cool reason. Many people thoughtlessly abandon their homeland to make a quick fortune in foreign land, but mostly find nothing more than poverty and misery. For a seaman to succeed he should be taught such matters that belong to his profession, and not throw himself out on the tempestuous world ocean, where his lot is mostly to see his expectations crushed and find death, missed by nobody, cursed by the parents since he has spent his powers, which could have tended them in their darker days, in hazardous adventures.

Richardson and his men heard this account with astonishment. He offered the narrator to bring him and his family back to Europe. However, Carl, whose youthful impetuosity had now cooled down, did not wish to abandon a beloved tranquillity and engage in new dangers. 'I hope that my father, before his demise, has forgiven me my thoughtlessness; here in the bosom of nature and friendship, I wish to abide the moment when our shadows shall meet on an unknown shore' (Cronhjelm 1815b: 14-5).

Historical and Ethnographic Considerations

If genuine, this short account would be of considerable value. Timor and the adjacent islands (Rote, Savu, the Solor and Alor Islands) were roughly divided in a Dutch and a Portuguese sphere of interest in the period when Carl Enander supposedly flourished. We have tens of thousands of archival folio pages dealing with the Timor area in the early-modern period, but it is usually written from a

strictly official point of view. As I have shown elsewhere the Dutch archival material from Timor is detailed enough to enable us to pinpoint social structures and European-indigenous hybridity in the seventeenth century and onwards (Hägerdal 2012). However, reflective “inside stories” of cultural encounters are not to be expected in this period. The closest we come is probably Ernst Christoph Barchewitz’s lengthy account of his stay on Leti, an island off Timor, in the early eighteenth century (Barchewitz 1730).

The strongly romantic overtones of the account may cast some suspicion. It should be recalled that this is the age of romanticism with an avid literary interest in the distant and exotic (Schwab 1984). However, it may be worth the effort to check the story of Carl Enander against other available sources. A number of difficulties immediately surface. The name of the father of the narrator is given as Gabriel Enander; however, the Swedish church records do not disclose a person with that name, either close to Gävle or elsewhere.⁷ Even more curiously, the British merchantman where Enander serves makes a stopover in Batavia and then heads in the direction towards Timor. Richardson’s vessel *Triton* is said to have visited Timor peacefully in 1783, at a time when the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was still raging. Even in peacetime a British vessel would likely not have been allowed to pass Batavia for trade with the VOC-affiliated islands, though it could have visited the Portuguese harbours (Batugade, Dili).⁸ It is known, on the other side that British merchantmen turned up in increasing numbers on the islands to the east of Java in the 1760s and later, in obvious defiance of the monopolistic ambitions of the declining VOC (Bijvanck 1894: 153-5).⁹ There are also inconsistencies in the story. Banka is an island outside Sumatra which seems illogical if Enander’s ship went towards eastern Indonesia. Admittedly it could allude to Banggai outside Sulawesi; that would fit with the south-eastern course taken by the survivors of the shipwreck.

Let us now turn to Timor itself. The VOC records from Kupang, the Dutch port in the area, provide us with events and ship movements year after year. Unfortunately the material becomes less detailed towards the late eighteenth century. Even so we should expect the presence of shipwrecked Britons to have been anxiously observed by the servants of the monopolistic Company – for example, there is a long report about Captain Bligh’s arrival to Kupang in June 1789 after his remarkable sea trip following the *Bounty* mutiny.¹⁰ A search in the records of the 1760s, 1770s and 1780s yields elusive results at best. In 1769 a report came to the ears of the Dutch that an English ship had arrived to Sikka on Flores, north-west of Timor, and that the crew began to construct a stronghold there. Flores was more or less outside the control of the VOC at that time but had certain products of economic interest, in particular cinnamon (Schooneveld-Oosterling 2007: 307-12). Sikka was nominally a principality under Portugal; part of the population was Catholic in name but a section of the north coast was (at least by the first half of the nineteenth century) dominated by Muslims from Sulawesi.¹¹ An officially

sanctioned British foray might have been hard to stop since the Kupang post had nothing to say in Sikka, but would have been utterly unlikely given the still peaceful relations between Great Britain, Portugal and the Netherlands. Could these people have been the survivors of the shipwreck? A following VOC report from the same year opined that the rumour about the Englishmen after all seemed unfounded.¹² With a no-smoke-without-fire logic we may acknowledge the possibility that a few British castaways had actually surfaced on the islands, giving rise to the rumour. At any rate it remains to be confirmed.

The ethnographic details are intriguing. The Timor Islands (Timor-eilanden) consist of the mainland (often called Groot-Timor, Grand Timor, in the documents) and a number of adjacent islands.¹³ As well known the name merely means “the East” (Malay, *timur*). The Timorese mainland was not characterized by a Muslim coastal population; actually the Timorese feared the sea and were no sailors. However, the situation was different on the islands to the north of Timor: the Alor and Solor Islands, and some sections of Flores. Some of the populations were oriented towards the sea and were nominally Muslim since about the sixteenth century. Nevertheless their religion was heavily blended with beliefs in spirits (*nitu*).¹⁴ Among the means of livelihood among the coastal groups were whaling, fishing and trade while agriculture played a subordinated role. In particular the Solorese and Endenese (on Flores) were known as good sailors. The population had contacts with a number of external groups such as the Makassarese and Butonese from Sulawesi, the sea migrants known as Bajaus, Ternateans from the Moluccas, and last not least the Europeans (Barnes 1987). The Dutch were stationed in Kupang while Portuguese (or mestizo) settlements were found in Dili, Batugade, Oecussi, and Larantuka on Flores (Hägerdal 2012). By the eighteenth century the contacts had led to a dissemination of firearms on Timor and adjacent islands, at least among the coastal communities. Even before that a number of American-derived crops such as maize changed the economic preconditions and allowed for denser populations.

A leading theme in the Solor and Alor Islands, and on part of Flores, was the troubled relationship between the coastal dwellers, who were often Muslim or Catholic, and the tribes of the mountainous interior who mostly held on to their ancestral beliefs. Such ethno-religious highland-lowland dichotomies are known from many places in Indonesia and could be economically complementary, but on the islands north of Timor they were frequently hostile.¹⁵ Raids were followed by counter-raids and the adversaries would sometimes call in assistance from external powers. The lack of executive power on the part of the Dutch and Portuguese colonizers meant that the local polities were free to act on their own accord as long as they did not counter the interests of the European power to whom they were nominally affiliated. Some groups did not have the least political contact with Europeans. The taking of slaves was an inevitable part of this. Captured highlanders were frequently sold off as slaves to Europeans or to other Indonesian

groups.¹⁶ As can be seen from this, there are some elements in *The Swede on Timor* which indeed fit well with what is known of the islands to the north of the Timorese mainland. The hip-cloths, the high feather adornments of the principal warriors, and the small round shields are found at various places in the region, while long lances, bows and arrows were used by the highlanders in places like Solor and Alor.¹⁷ Of the two indigenous personal names given in the story, Elifu could represent the Solorese name Liwu while the vaguely Arab-sounding Alzima is less conclusive.

A Literary Perspective

All this has to be juxtaposed with the background of the so-called translator of the text, Christina Cronhjelm, and the literary tropes of exoticism common in a second-rank European nation in the wake of the Napoleonic era. Does *The Swede on Timor* stand alone in the literary output of the time, or are there similar published stories? And what other kinds of literary works emanated from Cronhjelm's pen?

The trope of a morally upright castaway surviving in an exotic milieu is clearly reminiscent of Daniel Defoe's immensely successful *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). The book gave rise to a genre of novels with castaway themes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Swede on Timor* conveys a rather optimistic view of human capabilities to make the best out of a foreign environment. To this is added the romanticist impulse that surfaced towards the late eighteenth century and held sway until at least the mid nineteenth. Being a reaction against rationalism and old societal hierarchy, romanticist writers frequently emphasized the benefits of closeness to nature. One may compare the novel *Panjumouf* (1817) by the well-known Swedish writer Carl Jonas Love Almquist which contains similar element as *The Swede on Timor* – a journey to New Holland (Australia) where the protagonists meet a local girl of extraordinary beauty belonging to an unknown tribe.

The positive image of the native population in *The Swede on Timor* is apparent. In spite of scenes of blood and gore, the coastal dwellers among whom Carl Enander settles repeatedly convey philosophical wisdoms through their words and customs. The old Muslim man expresses inclusive interdenominational ideas on his death bed; in general Islam is portrayed in neutral or even positive terms, as Carl Enander has no qualms of embracing the creed and to undergo circumcision prior to his marriage. This is combined with the image of the locals as children of nature, not restricted and stymied by the regulations of the Western world. The concept of the noble savage was current in European intellectual culture since the days of John Dryden (1672). Although Jean-Jacques Rousseau did not use the concept, he put forward similar ideas: "Nothing is milder than him [man] in his primitive state, placed by nature between the stupidity of the brutes and the deceitful enlightenment of civil man" (Rousseau 1835: 354). Meanwhile the "discover-

ies” of James Cook and other explorers in the Pacific region opened up a public interest for indigenous peoples living in an unspoilt state, far from social rigidity and hypocrisy. The gaps of concrete knowledge of these “new” areas made them tempting for travel fiction or semi-fiction: “The antipodes offered one of the last places on earth where one could dream of a different, better world that has not yet been entirely ruled out as a possibility” (Arthur 2011: xx). As pointed out by Frederick Quinn, the Western image of Islam in the early-modern period was complex and not always negative. Travellers to Islamic countries could even be complimentary towards the lands they visited. A much-read historian such as Edward Gibbon (1737-94) stated Islam to be compatible with reason to an extent, while purportedly Turkish and Persian milieus were used by a philosopher such as Montesquieu and a composer such as Mozart. As more detailed information of the Muslim world reached the Western audience, sympathetic and curious attitudes flourished alongside negative stereotypes (Quinn 2008: 59-60, 71-2, 91-2).¹⁸ However, the production of romantic Orientalist writings mainly belongs to a period subsequent to Cronhjelm’s story (Said 1978; Schwab 1984).

Christina Cronhjelm, later Christina Berger, is not a well-known name in the annals of Swedish literature. Moreover her early works were published anonymously, not uncommonly at the time. *The Swede on Timor* was among her first publications, but during a long life she authored numerous novels and poems which were highly appreciated by her contemporaries but have never been reprinted and are entirely forgotten today. The novels tended towards the fantastic (J.G.C. 1858-59: 1-2). For example, *Trollgrottan i San Miniato dal* (The magic cave in the valley of San Miniato, 1816) was a colourful adventure in a diffuse Italian medieval or Renaissance milieu where mystery, love, warlike exploits, and strong emotions played a role. Another novella, *De franska krigsfångarna i Sverige* (The French prisoners of war in Sweden, 1815) was supposedly based on a true story and told of an old French father who, braving any dangers and obstacles, found his son who was a prisoner of war in a Swedish town. It was an idyllic interpretation of history that also included lively but not always accurate images of the French nature and society.¹⁹ Here, Cronhielm does not disclose any intimate knowledge of the ethnography or geography of foreign lands.

Truth or Fiction – or Both?

As our investigation has shown, the many obvious anachronisms in the story make it impossible to accept it at face value. The castaway trope emanating from Defoe, travel accounts from the South Sea by James Cook and William Bligh, appreciation of nature and primitive cultures by Enlightenment authors, and the discourses of romanticism of the time, did not fail to reach the cultural circles in Sweden, a land without a pronounced tradition of overseas travel. The travels of the disciples of Linnaeus and the activities of the East India Company could have

further spiced a public interest in Asian lands. Much of the content of *The Swede on Timor* could therefore be the product of Cronhjelm's lively imagination.²⁰ Captain Richardson's diary is quite possibly a literary device to enable a story related in first person singular, Robinson Crusoe-style. Seen in that way the travelogue of Carl Enander has a metaphoric side to it; it is a tale of abandonment of the near and dear in a futile quest for adventure and fortune, and in the end the recovery of familial happiness through the twists of fate. This is paired with a display of exoticism for a Swedish audience that had seldom seen a non-European, let alone travelled to foreign continents. The non-white protagonists are not merely exotic objects though, but on the contrary stand out as subjects whose words and attitudes convey (European Enlightenment-type) ideas of natural life and love.

But the matter is not that simple. There was very little published literature about Timor at the time, and Cronhjelm could not have drawn the local setting merely from the short notes in William Bligh's published account, which are only concerned with the Dutch hub in Kupang.²¹ A number of ethnographic features in the story fit very well with what we know about parts of the Timor Islands from archival data and studies which were only published long after Cronhjelm's novella. It is therefore not improbable that she had seen an unpublished account containing data about local society, and used it as basis for an otherwise fictitious short story. The nature of such an account, and whether it actually mentioned a ship-wrecked Swede, cannot be known unless some letter or other private document surfaces. What is important is that a confluence of several literary and cultural tropes about the Other produced a vision of a society at the margins of Asia which did not conform to the discourse of race and evolution that was taking shape in the West around this time. Conversion to Islam formed a *rite de passage* which sealed the Swedish world traveller's inclusion in a state of natural way of living. Closeness to nature and adherence to a foreign creed were seen as commendable and capable of absorbing an open-minded Westerner.

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Notes

- ¹ A list of Swedish travel literature before 1800 is found in Hedenquist & Stenbacka 2000: 75-6, 82-3, 90-2, 95, 98, 101-3, 105, 109, 112-4, 116.
- ² The modern spelling would be *Svensken på Timor*, there being no difference in pronunciation between the letters v and w.

- 3 General surveys of the colonial history of Timor before 1800 may be found in Matos 1974; Hägerdal 2012.
- 4 Though strictly speaking being situated in central Sweden, Gävle is traditionally counted to Norrland (“Land/region of the North”).
- 5 All translations from the Swedish text are by the present author.
- 6 The ethnic denomination Malay at this time did not just allude to Malay speakers, but denoted all kinds of Austronesian peoples on the islands.
- 7 This conclusion is based on a study of the various *herdaminnen* (registers of clerics in various Swedish provinces) which have been published.
- 8 European power on the Timor Islands was vaguely defined at this time. It rested on a few coastal strongholds and alliances with various local “kingdoms“. See for all this Hägerdal 2012; Matos 1974.
- 9 The British had a trading post at Bencoolen on Sumatra’s west coast, and British ships anchored at Lombok which was not under VOC suzerainty. The Dutch had no means of stopping British ships from visiting the islands east of Java during the Anglo-Dutch War (Cool 1896: 235).
- 10 VOC 3859 (1789), f. 4-5.
- 11 It is known, for example, that a certain Makassarese Muslim seafarer called Daeng Muna forcibly established a position on the north coast in 1847 (Kartodirdjo 1973: 424). An Islamic coastal area called Geliting existed in the Sikka area in the nineteenth century (Steenbrink 2013: 105). For Sikka in general, see Lewis 2010.
- 12 VOC 3277 (1769), f. 190. There was a strain of Anglophobia in the VOC possessions in the second half of the eighteenth century which may easily have led to inflated rumours.
- 13 VOC 3810 (1788), f. 50.
- 14 Cf. the account of Jean-Baptiste Pelon from 1778: “The islanders who inhabit the shores are almost all Mohammedans, although they are not very knowledgeable about that religion. Those who live in the mountains do not have any [world religion]. It is the same on the neighbouring islands” (Pelon 2002: 64).
- 15 Steenbrink 2013: 104-5. On the complementary relations between coastal (*hilir*) and highland (*hulu*) groups on Sumatra, see Andaya 1992: 13-20.
- 16 Van Lijnden 1851; Hägerdal 2010: 240.
- 17 For an early picture of Solorese people in waist-cloth, and a depiction of the elaborate head adornment of a Solorese warrior, see De Roever 2002. 88-9. Bound-up hair with feather adornments can be seen on early nineteenth-century depictions of Alorese people; see Hägerdal 2010: 219,241. Small round shields from eighteenth-century Timor are seen in Sá 1949, appendix; and from Solor in the sixteenth century in Subrahmanyam 2009: 41. On the Solor and Alor Islands the shields were otherwise often rectangular or oblong (see image from 1818 in Hägerdal 2010: 219).
- 18 A rare case of upper-class conversion, which might have been known to Cronhjelm, was that of the French General Jacques-François Menou, who commanded the French forces in Egypt in 1800-1801. He married an Egyptian woman and converted to Islam under the name Ali Abdallah Menou; see Soboul 1989: 734-5.
- 19 Reviewed in *Allmänna journalen*, 4 October 1816: 1-2.
- 20 Cf. Teodor Ekelund’s characterization: “This learned woman was by nature endowed with a lively opinion and an always playful imagination“ (Ekelund 1886: 65).
- 21 The cartography and published travel accounts about the Timor area have been discussed and quoted in some detail by Frédéric Durand 2006 (for the European accounts prior to 1815, see pp. 43-196).

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