

The Transformation of a Swedish Traveller – the Naples syndrome?

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Introduction

Examples of the importance of French language in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are not lacking, and Sweden was by no means an exception to this.¹ On the contrary, Sweden was a country that was very exposed to French during these centuries. According to Nordfelt,² it is approximately after 1630 that an important French influence is clearly manifest in Sweden. A very important reason for this was the peace treaty of Bärwalde in 1631 between France and Sweden,³ which had as a consequence an opening towards Europe. Another reason were the Frenchmen immigrating to Sweden who were members of the armed forces, artists and French protestants, or huguenots,⁴ as they were labelled in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Later on during this century, the francization of Swedish noblemen became more important: the leading persons who had visited France played a major part in the modernization of the country, where France was the model.

In addition, the conquests of King Gustavus Adolphus, and his daughter Christina's cultural efforts, played a mayor role in this,⁵ so it should come as no surprise that one can still find letters and diaries written in French from this period in Swedish libraries.

Recently discovered, the diary written by the Swede Eric von Roland is a literary example from this period. During his research on documents written in Latin in Uppsala, Hans Aili, Professor of Latin, found this diary by coincidence. Eric von Roland had published a doctoral thesis on China in 1697, *De magno Sinarum imperio*, which will be published in the future by Aili, as it is an interesting document from this period, although in Latin. Thus, when Aili was working on this text, he discovered the manuscript X370 held at Uppsala University Library.

1. See Rjéoutski *et al.*, 2014.

2. Nordfelt 1934, 127.

3. Nordfelt 1934, 127.

4. Nordfelt 1934, 129.

5. Hammar 1980, 3.

The career of Eric von Roland, son of a burgher in Stockholm called Roland Eliasson,⁶ is indeed a very interesting part of Swedish history, but it is not known to many. Born in 1675, Eric defended his dissertation on China in 1697, after which he accompanied the two scientists Johan Bilberg and Anders Spole to northern Sweden in order to conduct astronomical calculations, which he describes in his diary. He then did his *Grand Tour* of the major cities of Europe. Among the cities that he visited were Amsterdam, Berlin, Bologne, Florence, Hamburg, London, Lyons, Naples, Paris, Prague, Rome, Stralsund, Vienna and Venice. In comparison with the twenty largest cities of Europe around 1700,⁷ he visits more than half of them. Cities that he does not visit are Lisbon (the fifth largest city), Madrid (sixth), Moscow (ninth), Palermo (twelfth), Marseille (fourteenth), Sevilla (seventeenth) and Granada (eighteenth), hence cities in the outskirts of Europe. These kinds of travels were by no means unusual among noblemen,⁸ but one must bear in mind that Eric was not a nobleman. It seems that it was less usual amongst the merchant classes to travel like this, but his father was a rich burgher. This phenomenon was in fact quite new at that time, since the journeys made by Richard Lassels, for instance, had been posthumously published in 1670:⁹ the term of Grand Tour was used for the first time in his *Voyage or a Compleat Journey Through Italy*. The subtitle in the Lawson manuscript gives the modern reader an idea of what to see and do during such a journey: *With The Characters of the People, and The Description of the cheif Townes, Churches, Monasteryes, Libraryes, Pallaces, Gardens, Tombes, Villas, Antiquities, Pictures, Statues: as also Of the Interest, government, Riches, Strength &c of the Princes*.¹⁰ When we consider Eric von Roland, he might have had a Swedish predecessor. There are indeed other examples of Swedes travelling abroad, such as Johan Otter, son of a merchant, who converted to catholicism and, according to Östman,¹¹ even became Professor of Arabic in 1728 in Paris. Nevertheless, Eric von Roland's career is surprising. It is quite interesting to see that this kind of journey, with so many cities, is similar to the journey previously made by another Swede, Bengt Oxenstierna (1591–1643). He was facetiously called “Travelling Bengt” (*Resare-Bengt* in Swedish).¹² According to his biographer,¹³ Bengt Oxenstierna mentions the cities and their sights, but almost nothing else, so the string holding these cities together is lacking. It is possible that Eric was inspired by this journey,

6. He was a vendor of spices (“*kryddkrämare*” in Swedish), but that also meant a vendor of provisions in general.

7. Bairoch, Batou and Chèvre 1988, 278.

8. Cf. de Seta 2005, 205, Nordfelt 1934, 131 and Östman 2014, 281.

9. de Seta, 2005, 205.

10. Chaney 1985, 121.

11. Östman 2014, 294.

12. It is possible that he was aggrieved by this comment as Hedin suggests (1921, 477); in fact, his diary was never published. What remains are some letters in Swedish (Hedin 1921, 45–61).

13. Hedin 1921, 82.

since the structure of his text is quite similar in fact. However, he never mentions in his diary if he had studied printed *itineraria* as young noblemen usually did.¹⁴ Maybe both diaries belong to the genre *ars apodemica*, the theory and method of travelling.¹⁵ Among other things, this kind of travel was a preparation for a career as a civil servant as Winberg remarks.¹⁶ In fact, at the end of the year 1700, Eric returned to Sweden in order to begin such a career, a position he held until the death of King Charles XII in 1718. This feature is striking since his predecessor Bengt Oxenstierna also served a Swedish king, namely Gustavus Adolphus, as Privy Councillor and Governor-General of the two Baltic provinces, Ingria and Livonia.

We do not know much about the history of this diary, but writing in French seemed to be quite natural for Eric. What we do know is that he begins his report in 1691 by describing his journey to the northern part of Sweden. In 1697, his Grand Tour, which will last for three years, begins. According to the diary, we know the cost of this journey as he provides this useful information in the latter part of the diary when he thanks his father for paying for his *Grand Tour*:

All the costs of this journey amount to four thousand six hundred seventy Dutch guilders.¹⁷

Regarding its contents, the description of Italy occupies a significant part: he describes Venice in approximately 10 pages, Rome in 33, and Naples in 15. Eventually, he describes Florence and Bologna in a couple of pages.

After the tour, Eric served in the Swedish army as a secretary in Livonia, Courland, Lithuania, Poland and Prussia until 1707. Later on, in 1710, he becomes engaged to Anna Maria Grevesmühl, which he does not neglect to tell us in his diary. Born in 1687, she was the daughter of the German merchant Engelbrecht Grevesmühl and Ingrid Hansdotter Törne. Hence, as the diary does not stop until 1715, we have a text that covers approximately 25 years. However, I have to stress that I do not know if Eric von Roland was writing a continuous diary every day or if he only wrote in it after gathering events, choosing the most important of these from his travels. It could also be that he composed his diary after his career as a civil servant. In fact, since the writing is less neat, i.e. graphically, at the end of the diary, one must ask if this is a sign of fatigue.

It should be mentioned that this diary is to be found in a cover, which contains music notes¹⁸ dating from the Middle Ages. It was perhaps during the Reformation that the manuscript was

14. Bortolozzi 2015, 33.

15. Winberg 2000, 111.

16. Winberg 2000, 112.

17. "Toutes les depenses de ce voyage se montent à quatre mille six cens soixante et dix florins d'Hollande" (fol. 153). The examples are from the manuscript. A critical edition of the von Roland's travel diary is forthcoming.

18. Being an antiphon in Latin: *Lucia virgo quid a me petis quod ipsa poteris prestare continuo matri tue* (Virgin Lucy, why do you ask of me what you yourself may immediately bestow on your Mother).

slaughtered of its content. We do not know when someone chose to put the diary in this cover, but it contains approximately 220 pages. This text has never been edited, which is surprising, since it is an excellent witness from the period when French played a major part in Sweden, but the fact that the diary has been concealed behind this cover in Uppsala University Library could explain why no one has mentioned it previously.¹⁹ Besides, it seems that travel diaries of this kind were often judged with some disdain, since they were perceived to be of practically no literary value.²⁰

Unlike other documents written by von Roland, for instance the ones that are kept at the Municipal Library of Linköping, it is hardly a draft, since the self-corrections are quite numerous. If he had gathered the draft in order to make a fair copy of it, one would obviously find more self-corrections. One should also notice that corrections are more frequent in other texts, like the ones written in Spanish, also kept in Linköping, and hence, he seems to master French better than Spanish. Since this library keeps a catalogue of all the books that Eric von Roland had in his library, we know that he was very interested in languages, for instance. Some of the commentaries are of special interest for my research on his French. He makes particular reference to the famous *Dictionnaire universel* by Antoine de Furetière (1690); one must mention this metalinguistic commentary, showing that he had a certain conscience in linguistic matters:

This dictionary is of an illimitable price and usefulness. It is a work above all praise. It is different from The French Academy's dictionary, since we learn the power of old and new terms and the sentences used in every art and every matter instead of The French Academy's, which is only devoted to polishing up the language.²¹

When reading his diary – which is in fact a travel diary since he travelled to many European countries during his *Grand Tour* and during the office as a field secretary – one discovers a person that seems to relate to nearly everything, sometimes adding personal commentaries. (One should add that he narrates almost everything, since he does not describe the persons that he meets, which may well be something he took from his predecessor Bengt Oxenstierna or a feature belonging to the *ars apodemica*.) However, in the latter part of the diary, he describes the persons that he meets as a field secretary, for instance Charles XII and the Queen Mother Hedvig Eleonora. But a very striking feature in his diary is the fact that he only mentions Queen Christina twice in the diary. First, when visiting Palazzo Farnese in Rome (fol. 97), where she lived for four years, and then,

19. Genealogies and biographies are to be found under the reference X, where one also finds travels made by Swedes abroad.

20. Winberg 2000, 100.

21. "Ce dictionnaire est d'un prix et d'une utilité infinie. C'est un ouvrage audessus tous louanges. Il differe de celui de l'Academie françoise, en cela qu'il nous apprend la force des termes vieux et nouveaux, et les phrases consacrées à chaque art et à chaque matiere au lieu que celui de l'Academie françoise [qui] n'est destiné que pour polir la langue."

when describing Saint Peter's Basilica, where her tomb is (fol. 102v). He does not mention the reasons why she left Sweden.

A transformation or a status quo ?

For a traveller from the protestant part of Europe, anti-catholicism was a common point of view. As Black claims,²² anti-catholicism was the prime ideological stance in eighteenth-century Britain. We have reason to believe that it was so for Scandinavians as well, but it seems that the British travellers showed strong and contradictory feelings about Italy.²³ They enjoyed a cosmopolitan reputation, yet despised Italian catholicism, which they considered as superstitious. When Eric von Roland began his journey, it was 65 years after the tragic death of King Gustavus Adolphus, which some Swedes could remember indirectly, if not directly, via their parents and grandparents. Furthermore, one must not forget that his daughter, Queen Christina, eventually converted to catholicism and abdicated. As a consequence of this, Swedes who were going abroad were "vaccinated" against catholicism in Uppsala: in the statutes of Uppsala University of 1655 there was a paragraph, which forced every student to take a theology examination before going abroad to avoid any devilish temptations.²⁴ In fact, he mentions an exam in theology (fol. 16v), and it is clear that this is the case with Eric when reading the description of St Peter's Basilica in Rome, especially if one looks at the final phrase:

One sees on top, opposite these stairs, the sanctuary, where it is said that Saint Peter's and Saint Paul's heads are, along with the table where Jesus Christ ate the Easter lamb with his apostles, the staff of Moses, Aaron's rod and finally the Ark of the Covenant without mentioning an endless amount of other relics. Since it is not allowed to enter this sanctuary, I can not say anything about these alleged holy relics, but I believe that they are all fake.²⁵

It is also in his story about Italy that he describes the inhabitants' morals, i.e. low morals. Thus, we are obviously dealing with a person who represents Sweden abroad.

However, it is not just Italian morals that are criticised by Eric, but also those of other places that he visits, like Hamburg, where he arrives at the beginning of his journey. First, he describes this city in a very positive way (fol. 22), but does not neglect to say that it is the centre of officers

22. Black 2003, 166.

23. West 2004, 38.

24. Battail *et al.*, 1992, 181.

25. "On voit en haut à la face de cette Scala le sanctuaire, où l'on dit que se trouvent les testes de saint Pierre et saint Paul, la table à laquelle Jesus Christ mangea l'agneau pascal avec ses Apostres, la verge de Moïse, le Pastorale d'Aron et enfin l'Arche de l'Alliance sans nommer une infinité d'autres reliques. Comme il n'est pas permis d'entrer dans ce sanctuaire, je ne sçauois rien dire touchant ces pretendues saintes choses, mais je les crois toutes fausses" (fol. 106–106v).

and young noblemen from Germany, Holstein and Denmark, who come to this city to winter there after the finishing campaigns in Flanders and Brabant to spend all their time on every manner of hedonism. This leads to killings or duels or tragic events almost every day, as Eric remarks. Later on, he describes Vienna in almost the same way. Here, he tells us that different people live in this city, such as Savoyards, Neapolitans, Spaniards and Germans, which causes great disorder regarding mores and ways of living (fol. 49v).

Regarding their mores and ways of living, they could hardly be more depraved. [...] When they make these journeys (viz. Pilgrimages), they gather pell-mell men, women, boys and girls. They walk together, they eat, drink and even sleep together, if they want so. What nice manners and holy means to fulfill their devotions!²⁶

He adds that the adults and the rogues are never punished and that especially the women break the sixth commandment. As he says, sin is not punished, but on the contrary is so fashionable that the more galants a lady has, the more she is esteemed. A princess had even told Eric that sin is transformed into virtue (fol. 51). Thus, this big city is so full of depravity that God will one day revenge it. He also describes the city of Breslau (Wrocław) in such terms (fol. 162): one leads life here in a very immoral way, adding that catholicism and protestantism dominate here. It is a striking feature that every time that he mentions low morals, he blames religion. In that way, the exam in theology that he underwent in Uppsala served its purpose well.

Perhaps Eric von Roland is quite unusual in describing the mores and ordinary people as he does. In fact, ordinary people are not often described in these reports.²⁷ This feature became frequent much later, after Sterne's travels,²⁸ when travellers begin to censor mores in depraved societies. Having read some travel diaries from this period, I have tried in vain to find something similar, but I have not found elsewhere the sort of descriptions that one finds in Eric von Roland's diary. In fact, it seems that his journey is like a transformation, but in a negative way. As we have seen, he clearly did not like the manners in Hamburg, Vienna or Wrocław, but Italy will be an ordeal as we are about to see in the following passage when he comes to the beautiful city of Naples, one of the largest in Europe at that time.

After arriving in Naples, Eric describes a city full of murders and debauchery, since women show their breasts and their legs quite undisguised, even prostituting their own daughters. As Eric remarks at the end of this excerpt, infamous things and scandalous disorders happen even in the monasteries:

26. "Touchant leurs mœurs et leur maniere de vivre, ils ne peuvent gueres être plûs corrompûs qu'ils sont. [...] Quand ils font ces voyages, ils s'attruppent autant qu'ils veulent pelle melle homme (*sic*), femme (*sic*), garçons et filles. Ils marchent ensemble, ils mangent, boivent et couchent meme, s'ils veulent, ensemble. Belles manieres et saints moiens de s'acquiter de ses devotions!" (fol. 50–50v)

27. Bertrand 2008, 112.

28. Roddier 1964, 451.

Having seen all these beautiful antiquities, with many others which I do not mention, we returned to Naples, where we came from. Before leaving this city, I was curious to walk in almost every neighbourhood and on every street to see a little what was happening there. And I found out that there are bad things happening there and that it is a city full of depravation, for, not to mention the murders and assassinations which happen every day, almost all the other sins are practiced without punishment. Especially that of debauchery is so fashionable that it is not seen as a sin or a vicious thing there, because the lecherous women prostitute themselves publicly and with an incredible audacity. One finds them partly sitting at their entrances to their homes, partly at their windows, with bare breasts and the skirts above the knees, calling loudly to the bypassers and even forcing them, if they can, to enter their houses. And what is more, I saw that the mothers lead themselves their daughters to be objects of the most infamous love of depraved men. I will not talk about the infamous things or the scandalous disorders which happen in the monasteries. Shortly, everything is extremely depraved and impious in this city, which can be attributed to their religion and which fits well to the people's spirit. For the rest, this city is very rich and powerful and the one with the most inhabitants in Italy.²⁹

A careful reader may have already noticed that Eric discovers this depraved life after having seen all the beautiful antiquities and art objects in the city, adding that he wanted to walk on his own in the streets to see for himself what was happening there. As Sweet remarks,³⁰ although the association of Naples with sexuality was longstanding, the element of sexual impropriety and licentiousness was not so explicitly articulated: overt sexuality was not one of the principal dangers associated with the city during the eighteenth century. So, in this respect, the description made by the Swede Eric von Roland seems quite unusual. Naples was often the end or the turning point for Grand Tour travellers like the famous James Boswell, who made his journey 60 years later. At that time, Naples was in fact the third largest city in Europe with 300 000 inhabitants.³¹ There were also 10 000 prostitutes, a phenomenon that Eric indeed mentions in his diary as we just saw,

29. "Après que nous eûmes vû toutes ces belles antiquités avec plusieurs d'autres que je passe sous silence, nous nous retournames à Naples d'où nous étions venûs. Avant que de quitter cette ville, j'eu la curiosité d'aller presque dans tous ses quartiers et par toutes les rues pour un peu voir ce qui s'y passe. Et je trouvois qu'il s'y passe beaucoup de mal et que c'est une ville pleine d'iniquités, car pour ne point parler des meutes et de assassinats qui s'y commettent journellement presque tous les autres genres des pechés y sont exercés impunement. Surtout celui de la paillardise est tellement à la mode qu'elle n'y est plus regardée comme un péché ni comme une chose vicieuse. Car les femmes debauchées s'y prostituent publiquement et cela avec une effronterie incroyable. On les trouve en partie assises dans les portes de leurs logis, en partie aux fenestres, le sein tout decouvert et leurs jupes retroussées audessus des genoux, appeler les passans tout hautement et meme les forçer, s'elles le peuvent, d'entrer chez elles. Et ce qui est bien plus, j'ai vû que les meres ont menés elles mesmes leurs filles pour etre les objects des plus infames amours des hommes corrompus. Je ne veux point parler des infamies ni de desordres scandaleux qui se passent tant dans les couvents des religieux que dans ceux des religieuses. Court, tout est extremement corrompu et impie en cette ville, ce qu'on peut attribuer à leur religion meme qui est en tout accommodé au genie du peuple. Du reste, cette ville est fort riche et puissante et la mieux peuplée de toutes celles d'Italie." (fol. 130v–131)

30. Sweet 2012, 193.

31. Cederberg 2015, 36.

but he could obviously not mention the *lazzaroni*, the unemployed men who were strolling along the streets searching for a job in the eighteenth century. During Boswell's time, there were about 40 000 *lazzaroni* in Naples. Before that, there were without doubt other persons in this city who were unemployed. As de Seta remarks,³² Italy was on the one hand adored, but on the other strongly criticised: there were bandits and villains, as well as paganism, immorality and perversion. Travellers like Swinburne, Lessing, Montesquieu, Sharp and even the Marquis de Sade judged Italy harshly. It could well be that Eric had heard of the splendour of this great city, but was very disappointed when he saw the immorality there. In fact, one could say that Naples may have opened Roland's eyes. The allure "*Vedi Napoli e poi muori*" was perhaps a cliché at the time when he visited Naples. As mentioned above, Naples was often the turning point for travellers, who returned back to Rome and so forth. That is the reason for introducing the notion of the Naples syndrome in the case of Eric von Roland: one could define it as the disappointment of having discovered immorality and debauchery in this city. This syndrome reminds of the more known Paris syndrome: the disappointment after having visited what is considered as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The *topos* of immorality is thus a striking feature in Eric von Roland's diary.

In fact, it seems that Eric describes the other cities in a different way, even more negatively, after this. Returning to Rome and Florence, he discovers that the Florentines are also extremely depraved, not to mention that he notices that sodomy is very common in this city. He also adds that the husbands put chastity belts on their women, which is, according to Eric, a scandalous and ridiculous invention:

Here, we went to see the duke's palace, which is more large than magnificent. And the garden has nothing extraordinary either. Regarding the inhabitants of this city, I can say without doing them wrong, that they are extremely depraved. They are accused as having more sodomites and being more depraved than any other people in Italy, of which only God is the witness. But it is certain that they are extremely leed and jealous. And this jealousy goes so far that they put locks on the private parts of their women so that these cannot commit that sort of debauchery when they want it, indeed a scandalous and proposterous invention, but not very comfortable for the ladies.³³

Thus, one could say that there was indeed a transformation in Eric's case after the trip to Naples. In fact, when he visited Bologna, that is before Naples and Florence, he just makes a single

32. de Seta 2015, 210.

33. "Ici nous fûmes encor voir le palais du duc qui est plus grand que magnifique. Et le jardin n'a rien d'extraordinaire non plus. Pour ce qui concerne les habitans memes de cette ville, je puis dire sans leur faire tort qu'ils sont extremement corrompûs. On les accuse aussi d'être plus sodomites et plus paillards qu'aucun autre peuple d'Italie, ce dont Dieu est seul le juge. Mais cela est certain que qu'ils sont extremement lacives et jaloux. Et cette jalousie va meme jusques là qu'ils mettent des serrures aux endroits honteux de leurs femmes affin qu'ils n'ayent pas moiens de commettre ces sortes de dabauches toutes les fois qu'elles le voudroient bien, invention egalement scandaleuse et ridicule, mais tres incommode aux dames." (fol. 139v–140)

comment about the murders committed in this city, adding that the malefactors could seek asylum in the churches (fol. 70v), but does not make any other comments on the morals of this city. This seems to permit us to identify the *topos* of immorality as a major one in Eric von Roland's travel diary.

An interesting fact is that Eric seems to have been prepared for other things in Italy, for instance when leaving Rome on the 29th of December 1699, he says that he was accompanied by ten other travellers from different countries and that they were on horses and well armed (fol. 111v). Perhaps he was not prepared for the low sexual morals in Italy. When he underwent the exam of theology in Uppsala, and it clearly seems that he did, he was only warned against the risks of other religions and not other people's (low) morals. In the same way as Stern,³⁴ he becomes "a sadder and wiser man" after having seen the world and all its ordeals.

When he eventually returns to Stockholm, Eric tells us in his diary that, first of all, he must thank God for protecting him from all sorts of dangers during the travel and then his father for giving him the opportunity to make this journey. But above all, he says that the most important thing for him was the fact that God protected him from falling into the hands of the unfaithful (fol. 153), which could be a proof of the exam of theology that he underwent in Uppsala. Thus, it seems that this so called vaccination was very efficient and served its purpose well.

Conclusion

The journey made by the Swede Eric von Roland in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century was indeed a special one. The *Grand Tour* was as such invented quite late, in 1670, by Lassels, but it was almost always made by a nobleman. In Sweden, this way of travelling was probably less common and quite unusual among merchants. Nevertheless, it is not certain that Eric von Roland was aware of the Briton Lassels and, instead, he could well have been inspired by his Swedish predecessor Bengt Oxenstierna, who made this kind of journey in the beginning of the same century. In that respect, the notion of *ars apodemica* is probably very important in these two cases.

As a traveller in Europe, Eric von Roland seems to discover things that he was not prepared for when he underwent the exam of theology against the risks of catholicism in Uppsala – and we have reasons to believe that he did undergo this exam – in order to preserve his protestant faith, which could well be the case. The journey was made only 65 years after the death of King Gustavus Adolphus, the standard-bearer of the Protestant faith, fighting against the Catholics, and only 43 years after his daughter, Christina, stunned Europe by abdicating. In this way, Eric von Roland was not transformed: we find almost the same kind of commentary throughout his diary about Protestants, Catholics and Jews, but his comments on the low morals of the citizens in the

34. Cf. Roddier 1964, 451.

European cities, in particular the sexual morals in Italy, seem to show that he was transformed after the visit to Naples in a negative way, that is, full of disappointment. Hence, one could identify the *topos* of immorality as a major one in the case of Eric von Roland and also introduce the Naples syndrome, quite similar to the Paris syndrome: the disappointment after having visited one of the most beautiful cities in the world at that time. Perhaps he discovered a new world in Italy, in particular in the big and beautiful city of Naples, something he was surely not prepared for in Uppsala.

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