

TRAVEL WRITING

A few years later it so happened that a schoolmate of mine and a good neighbour, discovered at their family countryplace a dwelling-site from the stoneage, about 4000 years old. I became very curious and got permission to attend the excavations which the Royal Academy then had decided to carry out. I now learned a great deal about the mysterious past and from now on I became seriously concerned about devoting at least some of my time to the exploration of the infinite and intricate inner space of the human mind, as revealed by old potsherds and many other curious items, brought to light after thousands and thousands of years of oblivion.⁶³

If uncle Otto was his very first archaeological inspiration, it was his friendship with the Nerman brothers that introduced Olle to the world of words and writing. Their father Janne Nerman had a bookshop and their mother Ida was, just like Hilma Janse, a former shop assistant who had married her employer. Janne and Ida Nerman lived with their three sons in an apartment in the same building as the Janse family on Repslagaregatan 31, and the two families spent much time together. The two youngest sons, Birger (1888–1971) and Einar (1888–1983), were non-identical twins and four years older than Olle. Their older brother Ture (1886–1969)

63. Olov Janse's handwritten notes for a lecture at the American Association in Saigon, Vietnam, on 14 January 1959. ATA: Enskilda arkiv 59. Olov Janse. Arbetspapper vol. 2 [the notes are incorrectly dated 1958].

became something of an idol and inspiration for Olle.⁶⁴ In his memoirs *Allt var ungt*, Ture Nerman describes his early friendship with Olle Janse:

[Olle] played theatre with us, sometimes at his place downstairs, and at Torsskär where we were neighbours for a couple of summers. We read poetry together, and perhaps my endeavours inspired Olle to write some pieces [...]⁶⁵

Ture Nerman was one, if not the most, important source of inspiration for Olle Janse's early writing. He was a man of words, radical and creative. He even introduced his own reformed spelling system, in which the words were spelled as they sound, often with a more frequent use of the letters *å*, *ä*, and *ö*. Some of Janse's early writing and letters, in particular his correspondence with the Nerman brothers, are written in this reformed spelling.

Ture Nerman later pursued a successful career as a radical political journalist, editor, poet, and author, and ended his professional life as a Member of Parliament for the Social Democratic Party (1946–1953). He is now most widely known in Sweden for his fierce critique of Nazism and what he saw as a submissive Swedish politics during the Second World War. For that he famously served a three-month prison sentence for breaking with official neutrality, by publishing critical texts in his own journal *Trots Allt!*.

But before his journalistic career took off, back in the summer of 1905 when the thirteen-year-old Olle Janse enjoyed a safe and prosperous life next to the candy factory in Norrköping, Ture Nerman was a frustrated twenty-year-old student in Uppsala. He had taken a course in archaeology (Swe: *fornkunskap*) for his BA degree, and during the summer break he found and began to excavate a Stone Age site on a hillside at Säter near Norrköping. The excavations soon caught the interest of his professor Oscar Almgren who took part in the excavations the following year, and

64. He remained friends for life with Ture and Birger (who became professor of archaeology and ended his career as director of the Swedish History Museum (1938–1954)). He did not, however, have as close a relationship with Einar Nerman, who became a famous artist and graphic designer, widely known in Sweden for his classic matchbox design *Solstickan*.

65. "Han [Olle] och vi spelade teater ihop, ibland hos honom i våningen under vår, också på Torsskär där vi ett par somrar var grannar. Vi läste vers ihop, kanske inspirerade mina försök Olle till några dikter [...]" (Nerman 1948:93).

obtained funding from *Vitterhetsakademien*, The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, to further the investigations.⁶⁶ Ture, however, soon lost interest in archaeology and concentrated on his career as a political journalist. But the excavations at Säter had a lasting impact on his younger brother Birger and his friend Olle, who both decided to study archaeology under Oscar Almgren in Uppsala. Birger left Norrköping for Uppsala in 1907, and only a couple of years later he reopened his brother's investigation at Säter and excavated there in the summers of 1913 and 1914.⁶⁷ Olle, who had just begun his studies in Uppsala, joined the excavation team and reported on the results in the local newspaper.⁶⁸ Hence it seems to have been a double influence from his uncle Otto and his friends Ture and Birger Nerman that sparked and stimulated Olov Janse's childhood interest in archaeology.

His relationship with the intellectual and creative Nerman brothers laid yet another important brick in the foundation of his archaeological career. Their early theatre and poetry sessions were followed by adolescent efforts in journalistic and academic writing. While Olle was still in school in Norrköping, the six years older Ture found a political passion that he expressed with poetic precision, and he travelled across Europe, the United States, and Russia, on funding that he acquired from writing travel reports for Swedish newspapers. Birger developed academic ambitions as an archaeologist in Uppsala, and Einar enjoyed his life as an art student in belle-époque Paris. Influenced by all three Nerman brothers, Olov Janse found his very own intellectual identity, in the fertile space where archaeology meets travel writing.

After he had left Norrköping to study in Uppsala, Ture Nerman became editor of the Social Democratic newspaper *Nya Samhället* in Sundsvall.⁶⁹ Inspired by his friend, Olle Janse wrote poems and short reviews for his local newspaper in Norrköping. In January 1911 he published his very first text – a romantic poem under the pseudonym *Fremissin*:

66. Nerman 1948:291–292; Olov Janse's handwritten notes for a lecture at the American Association in Saigon, Vietnam, on 14 January 1959. ATA: Enskilda arkiv 59. Olov Janse.

67. Nerman 1927.

68. Janse 1913a; 1959:14.

69. Letter from O. Janse to T. Nerman. 19 September 1912. Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek. Ture Nerman. 3.1.7.

Den tredje passageraren

(Fritt efter Heine)

—
En natt på tu man hand vi sutto
i deligensens mörksta vrå.
Vi flörtade försvarligt
och hade roligt båda två.

Men tänk, när morgon åter grydde
hon bar, som jag, förundrans air,
ty mellan oss satt amor
en liten osedd resenär.⁷⁰

In her seminal work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary-Louise Pratt analyses the phenomenon of travel writing in the light of European imperialism, from the eighteenth century until today. Pratt sees travel writing as a crucial component of colonial culture, spell-binding the audiences at home to a certain view of the imperial projects. Travel books, says Pratt,

[...] gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized.⁷¹

This genre of political prose, often presented in the form of adventure tales, was widespread and very popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It created “a sense of curiosity, excitement, adventure, and even moral fervor about European expansionism”.⁷² For a young bourgeois boy in Norrköping around the turn of the century, adventure tales were an exciting and inspirational source of information about far-away lands. They presented children like Olov Janse with an imperial order of the world, and offered them a dominant position in it. In this sense, ac-

70. Östergötlands Dagblad, 17 January 1911: “Den tredje passageraren.” Our translation: “**The third passenger** / (free after Heine) // One night the two of us sat/in the darkest corner of the coach./We were flirting a little/both having a good time//But imagine, when the morning broke/she carried, like me, an air of surprise/because between us sat Amor/a small unseen traveller. //Fremissin.”

71. Pratt 2008:3.

72. Pratt 2008:3.

ording to Pratt, travel writing is a way to dominate the world by writing and reading about it.

The poem *Den tredje passageraren*, which was the very first piece that Janse published, reveals a romantic sentiment attached to travelling. The sense of romance and thrill connected with travelling is characteristic of Janse's earliest writings. His early correspondence with Ture Nerman shows that dreams about a better world and erotic yearning for unattainable young women were common points of reference in their friendship. Alone in Norrköping, longing for more excitement, he writes in a letter to Birger Nerman who had left home to study in Uppsala:

Norrköping is immensely boring. The only thing interrupting the monotony is an old mutt standing outside barking itself hoarse. He has been here about a month ranting and howling again and again and again and again, so now that has also become monotonous.⁷³

The sense of longing (away from Norrköping, or for a romantic meeting) implies a distance, which Janse would later carry with him to his more mature travel writing. A deeper understanding of the figure of distance that is inherent in the fusion of travel writing and archaeology, which would become an important part of Olov Janse's professional profile, is offered by a critical view on the narrative format Mary-Louise Pratt calls "the monarch-of-all-I-survey genre".⁷⁴ Peaking in Victorian England with the writings of British explorers searching for the source of the Nile, this is a common style for travel writing to this day. Travel writing in this genre is centred on discoveries (for example of the source of the Nile), and the appropriation of the discovered object by the successful explorer and his patria (in this case Britain). The more complex circumstances of native presence are always left out of such writing. Discoveries and appropriations like these are of great importance in archaeological travel writing. A famous example is Henri Mouhot's "discovery" (and the subsequent French appropriation) of Angkor Wat, where the actual native

73. Letter from O. Janse to B. Nerman, n.d., (around 1908–1910). Riksarkivet. Kartong 9. Korrespondens Brev Osorterade. In Swedish: "Norrköping är ofantligt trist. Det enda som avbryter enformigheten är en gammal hundracka som står här utanför på gatan och skäller sig hes. Han har stått här ungefär en månad och skällt och tjuter ideligen ideligen så nu börjar det också bli enformigt."

74. Pratt 2008:197.

presence, knowledge and use of the ruins has simply been ignored or twisted to induce images of primitive ignorance.⁷⁵

In her analysis of the discovery rhetoric in the monarch-of-all-I-survey genre, Pratt identifies three narrative strategies: (i) an *aestheticization* of the landscape, (ii) a search for *density of meaning* in the passage, and (iii) a prediction of *mastery* in the relation between seer and the seen. These strategies contribute to a certain *rhetoric of presence* in the monarch-of-all-I-survey genre.⁷⁶

Olov Janse's first report from a journey abroad, was in the form of a series of newspaper articles with the title *Iceland: Impressions from a journey*.⁷⁷ He was twenty years old and had just left Norrköping to study in Uppsala. He travelled to Bergen in Norway by train, and from Bergen to Iceland by steamship via the Faroe Islands, along with his travel companion Birger Nerman (referred to as Dr N). The young student Olov Janse was not the Victorian scientist exploring colonial territories who was the original model for Pratt's monarch-of-all-I-survey. Nor had Sweden any colonial ambitions for Iceland (or Norway, which he passed on the way). But if we view his travel report in terms of Pratt's three rhetorical strategies, we find the first (an *aestheticization* of the landscape) reflected already in the first two paragraphs of the first article:

The first rays of the morning sun find their ways through the misty wagon windows. Awake but still sleepy the passengers get up, one after the other. They wipe the condensation off the windows and look out in awe. [...] Just after Kongsvinger, the typical Norwegian landscape begins to reveal itself. Nature has here created a coherent chain of the most delightful sceneries. [...] The high forest-covered mountains rising towards the sky, on both sides of the sea, make a magnificent frame to the beautiful painting.⁷⁸

75. E.g. Cooper 2001:17.

76. Pratt 2008:200–201.

77. Swe: "Island – intryck från en resa" (Janse 1913b–f).

78. Janse 1913b. In the Swedish original: "Morgonsolen kastar sina första strålar genom de dimmiga kupéfönstren. Nyvakna och sömniga börja passagerarna att resa på sig, den ena efter den andra. Man torkar bort imman och kastar en spörjande blick genom fönstret [...] Redan när man passerat Kongsvinger börjar det för Norge så typiska landskapet att visa sig. Här har naturen bildat en sammanhängande kedja av de mest

And a little later, we find the second strategy (a search for *density of meaning* in the passage):

Bergenbanan is probably one of the most outstanding and awe-inspiring railways on earth, having been built high up in the mountains. It is a masterpiece of engineering. A journey on this railway is a memory for life.⁷⁹

In order to fully understand Bergen and its inhabitants, you need to imagine the town without the grand railway, which has taken us there. The only major connection with the outer world before the construction of the railway, that is 1907, was the sea. With its history of isolation behind the mountains, the town has taken on an old-fashioned character.⁸⁰

When I see the massive cascading waves wrestling the boat, I come to think of past times, when the Norsemen thousands of years ago steered their open longships over the sea, not knowing if they would find land, or if the sea stretched all the way to the ultimate cold and darkness of Niflheim.⁸¹

The account of Janse's passage by train through Norway and by boat via the Faroe Islands creates a sense of meaning and purpose by repeating a figure of tension between the eternal landscapes and primitive cultures that he sees around him, and the modern train and steamship vehicles moving through that landscape towards his final destination. Once dis-

förtjusande naturscenerier. [...] De skogklädda höga bärjen [sic], som resa sig mot skyn, på båda sidor om havet, bilda en präktig ram till den vackra tavlan."

79. Janse 1913b. In the Swedish original: "Bergenbanan är förmodligen en av de egen-domligaste och mest storslagna järnvägar på jorden, byggd som den är högt uppe på fjällen. Den är en ingenjörskonstens mästerverk. En resa med denna bana blir ett minne för livet."

80. Janse 1913b. In Swedish: "För att rätt förstå Bergen och bergenborna måste man tänka sig staden utan den grandiosa järnväg, som fört oss dit. Dess enda större förbindelse med yttervärlden var före banans tillkomst, d v s 1907, havet. Isolerat som det varit genom de höga fjällen, har staden fått en gammaldags prägel."

81. Janse 1913b. In the Swedish original: "Då jag ser de väldiga störtsjöarna, som båten brottas med, kommer jag att tänka på gångna tider, då nordborna för tusen år sedan på sina öppna drakar styrde ut över havet utan att veta om de skulle finna land, eller om havet sträckte sig ut i köldens och mörkrets Niflheim."

embarked in Iceland, Janse put Pratt's third rhetorical strategy (a prediction of *mastery* in the relation between the seer and the seen) into play:

After almost six days on the sea, we had finally reached "Ultissima Thule", and my long-nurtured dream was about to come true: to see this enchanted land of songs and sagas with my very own eyes.⁸²

As we all know, Reykjavik is the largest town in Iceland, with approximately 15,000 inhabitants. [...] The streets were full of life and the many foreigners gave the town a rather continental character. German tourists were strolling, dressed à la mode, searching with obvious interest the shop windows for suitable souvenirs. [...] Everywhere one could hear the sound of small ponies' hooves hitting the paving stones. And as I was walking along I heard – mirabile dictu – the sound of an approaching automobile, and I could certainly smell it as well. I turned around and saw to my surprise a modern "stink-panter" – Iceland's only automobile and the pride and joy of Reykjavik.⁸³

In Janse's travel report, the Icelandic houses have a "boring" appearance and the Reykjavik cathedral looks "in our sense" more like a half derelict country church. The people are slow, stupid and parsimonious. And they are ugly too; the women's faces remind him of raw potato.⁸⁴

On our way back [we] saw a peculiar cottage. On the exterior it was built entirely of peat. The chimneys were two herring barrels with knocked-out bottoms. To me, the cottage seemed more like a

82. Janse 1913d. In the Swedish original: "Efter nära sex dagars sjöresa hade vi äntligen kommit hit upp till 'Ultissima Tule', och nu skulle en länge närd önskan gå i uppfyllelse, att med egna ögon få se detta sagans och sångens förlovade land."

83. Janse 1913e. In the Swedish original: "Reykjavik är som bekant Islands största stad med cirka 15 000 invånare. [...] På gatorna var det nu liv och rörelse och de många utlänningarna satte en viss kontinental prägel på staden. Överallt spatserade de tyska turisterna alamodiskt klädda och betraktade med synbart intresse butiksfönstren för att se, om de kunde finna några lämpliga souvenirer. [...] Överallt hördes ljudet av de små ponnyernas hovar då de slogo mot gatstenarna. Bäst som jag gick och spatserade hörde jag – mirabile dictu – ljudet av att en automobil var i annalkande, också tydligt kändes ju lukten. Jag vände mig om och såg till min överraskning en modärn [sic] stinkstänka – Islands enda automobil och Reykjaviks stolthet."

84. Janse 1913d, 1913e.

museum object than a place to live. Inside it was smoky and dark. An old lady, who looked as if she had witnessed the saga times, was frying meat on a couple of rocks. On the floor, which was of raw clay, sheep, cats, and rats walked unabashedly. We tried to contact the old lady, but it was not possible, because “she knew no language” as she put it herself.⁸⁵

It is clear that Janse, twenty years old at the time, had a talent for writing travel tales. His descriptions are at once witty and condescending, true to the ideal of his time. The rhetoric is clear and sharp, fitting with great precision the strategies in Pratt’s monarch-of-all-I-see genre of travel writing. He had no direct colonial ambitions, but mimicking its rhetorical turns allowed him, the twenty-year-old Uppsala student, to pose as a monarch-of-all-he-saw. It offered him a sense of control over the landscape he travelled through, and a secure lofty position in relation to the travelees,⁸⁶ the people he met and wrote about. Communicating his experiences to the readers of *Östergötlands Dagblad*, he allowed them to share his sense of control and lofty position vis-à-vis the Icelandic people. This, in turn, gave the travel writer power and position in his home community. Having returned from Iceland, Janse wrote later the same year a review of Albert Engström’s book *Åt Häcklefjäll*, itself a travel description from Iceland, in which he used his own travel experiences.⁸⁷ Since Engström was one of Sweden’s most famous artists and writers at the time, the review strengthened Janse’s position as a travel writer.

Already here, as a young student, we see how Janse makes canny use of metaphors of time and distance that are common in ethnographic and archaeological travel writing. By physical and metaphorical movement, the travel writer takes control over distance. The archaeological (and ethnographic, by metaphorical association) travel writer moves through

85. Janse 1913b. In the Swedish original: “På återvägen fick Gräslund och jag syn på en egendomlig stuga. Den var utvändigt helt och hållet byggd av torv. Skorstenarna bestodo av två silltunnor, vars bottnar voro utslagna. Mig syntes stugan lämpligare som museiföremål än som boningshus. Invändigt var det rökigt och mörkt. En gumma, som såg ut som om hon varit med under sagoåldern, höll på att steka kött på ett par stenar. På golvet, som var av tilltrampad lera, promenerade ogenerat får, kattor och råttor. Vi försökte komma i kontakt med gumman med det gick inte alls, ty hon ‘kunde inget språk’, som hon själv sade.”

86. Pratt 2008:225.

87. *Socialdemokraten*, 25 November 1913, “Litteratur”.

time *and* space and can thus claim a double control over distance. Mobility is therefore key to the archaeological travel writer, as is translation. By moving between distant units (in time and/or space), and translating between them, the archaeological travel writer gains prestige and position.

Looking back at his archaeological career in Saigon in 1959, Olov Janse said that the Säter excavations had inspired him to devote his life to “the exploration of the infinite and intricate inner space of the human mind, as revealed by old potsherds and many other curious items, brought to light after thousands and thousands of years of oblivion”.⁸⁸ He recycles here a package of metaphors that arranges signs of time and distance, the human body and mind, of culture and development in a particular order, which is common to much archaeological writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But with a sharp emphasis on *distance*, Olov Janse found a distinct identity that allowed him to stand out from most of his fellow Swedish archaeologists. He found a rhetoric and a tone, already in his first texts, that he would retain for the rest of his career. Distance remained a privileged sign in all of his work, and by travelling and translating between units he built a successful career on the capacity to bridge and master it.⁸⁹

88. ATA: Enskilda arkiv 59. Olov Janse. Arbetspapper vol. 2.

89. On the importance of distance, see Stewart 1993. In the Conclusion we take a more detailed look at Stewart and the importance of distance in antiquarian and collecting enterprises.