



Window to a world beyond: Göran Schildt's journey to Bulgaria and Romania in 1963 and some multilingual and multicultural strategies

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Abstract

International traveller and acclaimed Swedish-language author Göran Schildt sailed in the Black Sea in the summer of 1963. He was a well-read scholar with a deep interest in the Antiquity and a seasoned traveller with a vast experience of multilingual and multicultural situations. This was the first and last visit of his yacht Daphne to the Black Sea and the Eastern Bloc. Through the eyes of this keen observer, a small aperture can be detected among the bricks in the walls dividing Europe.

A window had been opened by world politicians in the Iron Curtain at the end of the 1950s. Although there were periods of high global tension, new possibilities for travel and tourism were created in some Eastern Bloc countries, among them Bulgaria and Romania. Visits by dozens of journalists, writers and artists and thousands of charter tourists from the Western Bloc over the next few decades opened up new windows to the world beyond the Iron Curtain. Göran Schildt stands out among the Nordic cultural visitors to Bulgaria and Romania in the post-war period. His desire to get acquainted with everyday life and ordinary people, capability to see behind facades and analysing experiences could be defined as journalistic, but his travel writing went deeper. In comparison with some other writers from Finland, who visited Bulgaria or Romania during the Cold War, such as the poet Lassi Nummi or comic fiction writer Arto Paasilinna, and the Bulgarian author Yordan Radichkov who visited

Rezumat

Călătorul internațional și apreciatul autor de limba suedeză Göran Schildt a navigat către Marea Neagră în vara anului 1963. Era un savant cu lecturi bogate, cu un interes profund pentru Antichitate și un călător experimentat, cu o vastă experiență a situațiilor multilingve și multiculturale. Aceasta a fost prima și ultima vizită a iahtului său „Daphne” la Marea Neagră și în Blocul Răsăritean. Prin ochii acestui observator pasionat poate fi detectată o mică deschidere printre cărămizile din zidurile care despărțeau Europa.

O fereastră fusese deschisă de politicienii lumii în Cortina de Fier la sfârșitul anilor 1950. Deși au existat perioade de mare tensiune globală, s-au creat noi posibilități pentru călătorie și turism în unele țări din Blocul Răsăritean, printre care Bulgaria și România. Vizitele a zeci de jurnaliști, scriitori și artiști și a mii de turiști care călătoreau cu curse charter din Blocul de Vest în următoarele câteva decenii au deschis noi ferestre către lumea de dincolo de Cortina de Fier.

Göran Schildt se remarcă printre vizitatorii culturali nordici din Bulgaria și România în perioada postbelică. Dorința lui de a se familiariza cu viața de zi cu zi și cu oamenii obișnuiți, capacitatea de a vedea în spatele fațadelor și de a analiza experiențele ar putea fi definite ca fiind jurnalistice, dar scrisul său de călătorie a fost mult mai profund. În comparație cu alți scriitori din Finlanda, care au vizitat Bulgaria sau România în timpul Războiului Rece, cum ar fi poetul Lassi Nummi sau scriitorul de benzi desenate Arto Paasilinna, și cu autorul bulgar Yordan Radichkov care a vizitat Suedia, mediul de forare, interesele,

Sweden, Schildt's background, interests and multilingual and multicultural strategies supported the discovery and collection of extensive information and the processing of it into a multidimensional travel book. This article discusses the journey and travel narrative of Göran Schildt from the perspective of multilingual and multicultural strategies for encountering other languages, societies and cultures, and the processing of experiences as recorded in his diary and his popular travel narrative.

și strategiile multilingvistice și multiculturale ale lui Schildt au susținut descoperirea și colectarea de informații extinse și prelucrarea acestora într-o carte de călătorie multidimensională. Acest articol abordează călătoria și narațiunea de călătorie a lui Göran Schildt din perspectiva strategiilor multilingve și multiculturale de întâlnire cu alte limbi, societăți și culturi, precum și procesarea experiențelor, așa cum au fost consemnate în jurnalul său și în consemnările sale populare de călătorie.

Keywords: Black Sea, Bulgaria, citizen diplomacy, Cold War, intercultural encounters, Iron Curtain, multicultural strategies, multilingualism, Nordic writers, post-war period, Romania, travel narratives, tourism

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Introduction

High tension and political crises – Cold War in full force, Berlin Wall and Cuba: the Iron Curtain fell between East and West Europe and the world stood at the brink of a nuclear war. At the beginning of the 1960s, the global situation certainly did not look cheerful, but although many doors were closed, some windows were opened. In the Soviet Union, the Stalinist period had ended and a thaw in the ice appeared. Not much, but just about enough to reduce the high tension in the Eastern Bloc. Many communist regimes, who came to power at the end of the 1940s, perceived that they had finally gained control over society, and they could start relaxing their grip at least a little.

One of the windows opening at the beginning of the 1960s was mass tourism. Countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain developed tourist resorts and services. Among the Eastern Bloc countries opening up to charter travel were also Bulgaria and Romania. The European economy after World War II was recovering and even ordinary people could now afford a holiday abroad. Flights brought them to destinations they had never heard about before, but which soon would become hugely popular. Many of these destinations are still frequented by thousands of charter tourists each year.

For the Eastern Bloc states, Western visitors meant hard currency, a highly coveted foreign “product” among many others. Eastern Bloc tourists brought some income, too, but they often spent their holidays on the beaches as part of an exchange agreement, and thus did not contribute much to the local economy.

In the summer of 1963, the first charter flights from Finland arrived at the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. In a newly built exclusive summer resort, Sunny Beach near Burgas, Finnish tourists could enjoy sea and sunshine together with tourists from the other Nordic countries, West and East Germany and the United Kingdom. The Black Sea resorts in Bulgaria and Romania are still major European tourist destinations, but before the 1960s they were largely unknown in the North. In addition to journalists and TV teams reporting on the new beach destinations,¹ also one private traveller, Göran Schildt, visited the area with his yacht, and wrote a travel narrative about his Black Sea journey.

Göran Schildt and the Black Sea

The Swedish-language travel and history writer, art historian, journalist, essayist and novelist from Finland, Göran Schildt (1917–2009), sailed with his yacht *Daphne* in the Black Sea during three weeks in August 1963.² After World War II, Schildt had been exploring extensively the rivers and seas in Europe. He especially focused on the Mediterranean region and wrote hugely popular articles and books about his experiences, which were distributed widely also outside the Nordic countries. Göran Schildt is today

¹ See for example a Finnish-language TV report with two famous moderators, produced by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE in 1963: “Bulgarian aurinkorannikolle” [To the Bulgarian sunny coast]: <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50197468> and related article “Bulgarian aurinkorannalla 1963” [On the Bulgarian sunny beach 1963]: <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2007/03/12/bulgarian-aurinkorannalla-1963>

² The journey has been discussed in detail by Sabira Ståhlberg, *Resan till Kolkis – Matka Kolkhiiseen – Journey to Colchis. Göran och Christine Schildts färd på Svarta havet – Göran ja Christine Schildtin Mustanmeren matka – Göran and Christine Schildt's travels in the Black Sea 1963* (Ekenäs: Villa Schildt, 2014).

considered one of the most important European travel writers of the post-war period.

During the Black Sea journey, Schildt and his crew visited Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. He also made an excursion by plane to Odessa in the Soviet Union (now in Ukraine). After the journey Göran Schildt wrote a travel narrative, *Det gyllene skinnet* 'The Golden Fleece', which appeared in 1964.³ The book tells an engaging story with dramatic moments, humorous observations, interesting encounters and discussions with local people, political comments and an abundance of background information about the countries and towns he visited, including culture, history, economy, society and other aspects. The legendary adventures and locations visited by Jason and the Argonauts is the *leitmotif*, but the main part of the book does not deal with the Black Sea. Instead, it tells about travels in the Mediterranean Sea: Italy and Sicily, Greece, Malta and North Africa. Out of 235 pages only around 75 are about the Black Sea journey, and dozens of these pages are dedicated to Istanbul and the Turkish Black Sea coast. This book did not become a bestseller and in contrast to several other books by Schildt, which were translated into many languages and had several print runs, it was soon forgotten.⁴

At the time of the journey, Göran Schildt lived in Sweden and was making his living mainly as a travel writer. He had already sailed down the rivers in Western Europe and the Nile, explored the Mediterranean coasts and gained international acclaim for his writings. This was his first and only visit with the yacht *Daphne* behind the Iron Curtain and to the unknown and little documented Black Sea. The *Daphne* was probably the first private vessel after World War II to visit Bulgaria and Romania, a supposition which Schildt also liked to point out in his travel narrative. The Golden Fleece he searched for was not golden, he noted, but it contained the cold glimmer of

³ Göran Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand / Helsingfors: Söderström & Co., 1964).

⁴ The book was translated into German, *Das goldene Vlies* (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1965); and *Das goldene Vlies. Auf den Spuren der Argonauten* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Nr. 1022, 1969). In Swedish it was republished as an e-book only in 2014, when Villa Schildt in Ekenäs/Tammisaari in Finland hosted an exhibition prepared by Sabira Ståhlberg about Göran Schildt's Black Sea journey.

the Iron Curtain. His goal was to force this barrier and be the first to bring a private Western yacht to the other side.⁵

The Black Sea was far more unknown to post-war sailors than the Mediterranean: only a handful of foreign yachts had been there before, and they mainly kept to the Turkish coast. Nobody could tell Schildt what to expect. The Bulgarian, Romanian and Soviet coasts were uncharted territory and scantily covered by maps. Other sailors warned him about the capricious Black Sea, its sudden storms and strange currents. He was not surprised, because he had read the classics: ancient mariners found this sea inhospitable (ἄξενος, aksenos). The name of the sea called Pontos was changed into hospitable (Εὐξείνιος Πόντος, Efxinos Pontos) only when Greeks colonised its coasts more than 2,600 years ago. Despite the fact that officers and soldiers from Finland had visited Romania and Bulgaria as part of the Russian army during the Russian-Ottoman wars 1828–1829 and 1877–1878, historical knowledge about the Black Sea coast appears to have been almost non-existent in Finland and Sweden at the time of Göran Schildt's journey. In 1829, some officers from Finland, among them Gustaf Ramsay and Otto von Essen (1805–1860), had travelled in the same regions as Schildt did in 1963.⁶

Windows to a world beyond

At the beginning of the 1960s, Schildt discovered a crack in the Iron Curtain and decided to take this unique opportunity to visit the Black Sea. The budding Bulgarian and Romanian tourist industries attracted (and probably organised tours for) both journalists and others, who could be expected to write positive reviews about the beaches and the hotels. There were also advertisements for charter trips, tempting tourists to try out the new destinations. Schildt could not have missed them when reading newspapers. He had visited Istanbul on an earlier occasion, but never sailed

⁵ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnnet*, 90.

⁶ Gustaf Ramsay's letters were found in the National Archive, Finland, and published by Sabira Ståhlberg only in 2017, but Otto von Essen's diary was published some twenty years before Schildt's journey. It seems, however, that Schildt had not read it, as there is no mention anywhere about von Essen. See Sabira Ståhlberg, *Färden till Bulgarien. Svenska och finländska resenärer från medeltiden till våra dagar* (Varna: Lecti Book Studio, 2017), 30–45.

further than the Bosphorus. This was the point between the known and unknown worlds: both the *Daphne* and Jason's mythical *Argo* reached here the point of something "threatening and untested". The Symplegades, or clashing rocks, were the legendary ancient gates to the Black Sea. For Schildt they became symbols of the Cold War fluctuations in tensions between the East and West.⁷

Göran Schildt was a curious and interested person, well prepared for the journey and experienced in dealing with all kinds of situations. His standard of morals and ethics can probably be found in the Antiquity more than in the contemporary world, but he was far from living in a dream of the past, which also his actions and observations during the Black Sea trip reveal. Still, the voyage proved to be a challenging adventure, which he did not repeat; the *Daphne* remained afterwards firmly in the Mediterranean. The Soviet Union refused to accept any private vessel in its ports, so Schildt had to give up his dream destination Colchis, then in the Soviet republic of Georgia. A further complication was the crew. Schildt was a hospitable man, who invited in addition to his fiancée Christine (a few years later his wife) also an Italian friend and artist, Roberto Sambonet. Roberto in turn invited his new girlfriend Annuska, whose presence caused much tension among the crew. During the trip Schildt also invited guests for shorter distances, including two young Bulgarian students and a Romanian guide.

In spite of several setbacks, Göran Schildt caught a favourable wind and managed to sail through the Iron Curtain. At the Black Sea coast there was a freedom Schildt had not expected, and especially Bulgaria turned his expectations upside down. The situation in Romania answered more to Schildt's preconceived ideas about the Eastern Bloc, but also here a thaw in the ice was palpable. Only during his visit to Odessa did Göran Schildt find the poverty, misery and bleakness of communism he had expected. This specific temporal and spatial crack in the Iron Curtain, a small aperture among the bricks in the walls dividing Europe into East and West, was closed again, when politics turned from wine to vinegar and clouds gathered over the sunny beaches.

⁷ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnnet*, 76–77.

Other windows opened, however, and some remained open. Mass tourism continued throughout the Cold War on the Black Sea coast, but private visitors or vessels were not greeted with smiles until a few decades ago when the communist regimes had been removed. The fact that Göran Schildt could break through the walls and anchor at the harbours in Bulgaria and Romania reflects the relaxed local political situation in the summer of 1963 and the existence of small pockets of freedom in the Eastern Bloc, where people from both sides of the Iron Curtain could meet. The cracks were a prerequisite for successful encounters; another condition enabling a direct dialogue was the personality and multilingual and multicultural strategies of the traveller.

Argonautic quest

Göran Schildt's aim, according to his own words, was to follow in the wake of the most famous Black Sea sailor in history: Jason. A legendary and literary figure, possibly with some real models, the earliest dating back to the Bronze Age, Jason and his Argonauts sailed to find the Golden Fleece in Colchis at the eastern end of the Black Sea. Few other ancient figures have managed to keep the attention and ignited the imagination of the European public to such a high degree as Jason. The topic of his quest has inspired literature for centuries and more recently also films and travellers; after Schildt, several other sailors have tried to trace the supposed route of the *Argo*. The character of Jason, who appears in several versions in ancient Greek mythology and drama, is an audacious but simultaneously hesitant adventurer. He sails into a strange sea without knowing where he will end up and if he will come out alive. Probably Jason's association with the princess of Colchis and cruel sorceress Medea contributes to the dramatic appeal of these legends.

Göran Schildt's chief interest was the Antiquity and he had already travelled in the wake of Odysseus in the Mediterranean. Schildt found, however, that he felt increasingly like Jason. The journeys were initiations and the Black Sea visit was one of his "argonautic" sailing trips. The journeys with the *Daphne*, he wrote in his travel book, broadened his knowledge of and initiated him into many essential issues, "such as how days become

night and nights become day”, physical phenomena like winds, clouds and sea water, but also into human relations, history, local life and traditions: “[...] but what I first and foremost have searched and found is a form of rapture, a belief in life as a great adventure”. For the overall “argonautic purpose” he felt compelled when travelling to ignore or refuse many encountered aspects and problems of lesser significance: “Let others in their journeys look for the material their lives are built of: I have my Golden Fleece, which I have found and bring home.”⁸

What exactly the Golden Fleece means here he did not clarify; several interpretations are possible, but the adventures, knowledge and experiences gathered during the journeys is a probable explanation. A few years after the Black Sea journey, he and his wife Christine bought a house on the Greek island of Leros and called it Villa Colchis, in line with his self-identification with Jason. Whether Schildt received the idea about Jason from books or newspaper articles he had read, or came up with the idea only after the Black Sea journey while processing his impressions into the travel book we cannot verify, but he most certainly was acquainted with the mythology concerning Jason from his Antiquity readings. In the book he says that the idea of sailing to the Black Sea appeared while he was planning the following journey. Not he chose this adventure, but the adventure chose him. In the ship’s diary from the journey the name Jason is not mentioned even once.⁹

Purposes

This article has a few purposes and parallel discussions about the journey of Göran Schildt to the Black Sea. Through the eyes of this well-informed and clear-sighted traveller we can observe how ordinary people experienced and tried to deal with the divisions of Europe.

Another topic is the multilingual and multicultural experiences and encounters of Göran Schildt with local inhabitants and tourists. A short comparison with two writers from Finland, who visited Bulgaria or

⁸ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 71.

⁹ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 11–12; Göran Schildt. Unpublished diary. The Christine and Göran Schildt Foundation / Svenska Litteratursällskapet (SLS, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland), SLSA 1150: Göran Schildt’s archive.

Romania, and a Bulgarian writer who spent time in Sweden, can support the clarification of the multilingual and multicultural strategies of Schildt. The comparisons also highlight the differences between a multilingual and multicultural writer such as Schildt and those who are basically monolingual and deeply anchored in a single culture.

The topic of how multilingual and multicultural persons speak, act and behave in different situations, and especially how they write travel narratives or process their multilingual and multicultural experiences into literature or art is hardly researched at all. Most of the research on travel books and multilingual and multicultural literature is limited to literary studies on published texts, which have been processed and rendered into partly fictional forms of literature. An important aim here is therefore to contribute to a cross-disciplinary discussion of how multicultural encounters reflect the attitudes, cultural and linguistic outlook, previous experiences and world views of a multilingual and multicultural author.

Another goal is to observe how the original impressions are transformed when being prepared for publication. This article is based on my previous research about Göran Schildt and his journey to the Black Sea, historical travel narratives about Bulgaria and Romania, and discussions over several years with persons who were young in the East or the West during the 1960s. For this article both the published work of Göran Schildt, *The Golden Fleece*, and his unpublished travel diary have been used.¹⁰ The diary was written when the events were fresh in his mind, while the book appeared a year later after he had reflected, read up on the region and processed his experiences into a format he could present before readers. There are several discrepancies between the two works and they will be discussed further on.

¹⁰ Göran Schildt. Unpublished diary. See also Sabira Ståhlberg, *Resan till Colchis* 2014; *Finländska fotspår i Bulgarien och Rumänien* (Varna: Lecti Book Studio, 2016), 257–266; and *Färden till Bulgarien*, 192–199.

The Black Sea journey

On 4 August 1963 the *Daphne* arrived at the Bulgarian port of Burgas.¹¹ The authorities had at first little idea of what to do with her and the crew, but soon solved the question. Tourists from the West were packed like sardines alongside East European tourists in the nearby resort Sunny Beach, and here was apparently a new form of tourist. Göran Schildt found the Bulgarians “charmingly careless”. He and his friends talked and joked with the port officials, and the crew enjoyed great freedom while sightseeing and getting to know local people. Keeping an eye on the foreigners was probably one of the goals for setting a guard before the yacht, but the guard also kept a curious crowd at bay. The only person, who had the right to approach the foreigners was an archaeologist who spoke good English, and then appeared the vice-president of the International Seamen’s Club, who spoke Italian.

In the archaeological museum in Burgas, the Greek and Roman heritage of Bulgaria caught the attention of Schildt, but the museum contained also a history about the “Marxist revolution since all the Turkish wars”. He noted especially that there was no propaganda with “horror illustrations”, only groups of “grim mountain warriors”. The shops were almost empty and before any food store there were enormous queues; hardly any cars were to be seen in the streets. Still, Schildt found that the Bulgarians looked free and confident in comparison with the inhabitants of Istanbul, who did not live in a communist country.

¹¹ The journey is described here according to Schildt’s notes in the unpublished ship diary. The arrival in Burgas is described dramatically in Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnnet*, 91.



Figure 1. Customs office, Burgas, Bulgaria. The text on the rocket being launched by the Western capitalist says "war" (война, война). Photo: Göran Schildt, 1963. SLS.

On 6 August, friendly officials in the Port of Burgas called the next town, Sozopol, located south of Burgas. When the *Daphne* came to anchor in Sozopol, nobody appeared to check on the yacht and the crew simply walked into town. The next day the crew took on board two Bulgarian students, Anton and Violeta, who sailed with the *Daphne* to Nesebar. The newly built tourist resort Sunny Beach, north of Burgas, provided some unexpected insights into the East-West division of Europe and the efforts of people from both sides to connect despite political difficulties.

A Swedish-Western German couple told Göran Schildt that most hotel guests were West and East Germans from separated families. They

could meet only in Bulgaria, where both travelled freely. Observing the *Daphne*, the husband asked many questions and started making plans for bringing his wife's East German family to Bulgaria and then by a Swedish yacht to the West. New acquaintances on the beach were also a few young lifeguards, with whom the Daphnenauts (crew) visited the town. Nesebar, since 1983 a UNESCO World Heritage site, captivated the visitors especially through this personal contact. The Greek-speaking mother of one of the lifeguards invited them home.¹² In the evening the young men in turn joined in a fish dinner on the *Daphne*.

On 8 August, the *Daphne* continued north to Varna. In the port, the crew met a friendly policeman who spoke French, and Schildt encountered a group of important American visitors. One of the Americans had read his books and enthusiastically wanted to present him to the other visitors. Schildt and his crew were invited to a film festival in the Golden Sands resort just north of Varna, where they watched films about the Archaeological and Marine Museums and how churches were being restored. Very pleasant, Schildt noted in his diary, but "hardly realistic" in the communist system. The system indeed showed its teeth the next morning: it took almost half a day to clear the yacht for departure.

After leaving Varna, the *Daphne* passed the small town of Balchik and observed the Romanian Queen Maria's white villa at the waterfront; today the villa is one of the most popular destinations for Romanian tourists to Bulgaria. At Cape Kaliakra the coastal guard signalled with flags, but the crew did not understand the messages. Then the guard started firing rockets, but the *Daphne* simply continued towards Romania without stopping.

Table 1

Göran Schildt's journey on the Black Sea, August 1963

4 Bosporus; Burgas (Bulgaria)

6 Sozopol, Nesebar (Bulgaria)

8 Varna (Bulgaria)

¹² In the book, some events noted in the diary are not mentioned, as they were too private, while others are exaggerated, such as the number of guests for the fish dinner. Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnnet*, 97–98.

- 10 Balchik, Kaliakra, Shabla (Bulgaria), Mangalia (Romania)
- 11 Constanța (Romania)
- 14 Sulina (Romania)
- 15 Danube Delta (Romania)
- 20 Constanța (Romania)
- 23 Odessa by plane (Soviet Union)
- 24 Constanța (Romania)
- 26 Istanbul (Turkey)

The weather and attitudes changed in Romanian waters. A thunderstorm and a Romanian patrol boat forced the *Daphne* to continue north from Mangalia to Constanța. The port formalities required a lot of paperwork, haggling and shouting. The yacht was the first private vessel since the war, according to the officials, and they were deeply suspicious. To Schildt they appeared afraid to break any rule and even unwritten regulations. Every time the crew left the yacht, they had to show their passports to the policeman on guard. A Finnish ship was also in harbour, but the Daphnenauts were at first not permitted to visit it. "At the end he [the chief of police] was softened by our description of the Finnish food we had not enjoyed for two months", Schildt mused in his diary. He also visited a cultural evening organised by the Americans he had met earlier in Varna.

The next day the Daphnenauts visited the town and the tourist resort of Mamaia. Schildt tried to arrange a visit to the Danube Delta through the local tourist agency Carpati. He was finally successful, after being interrogated several times, but the German-speaking guide Nina Constantina had to travel overland to the Delta. She was not allowed into the open sea onboard the yacht, probably because the authorities feared that she could be spirited away. Nina had read some of Schildt's books and admired *Valse triste* by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957). On 14 August the *Daphne* set out for the Danube.¹³

¹³ The tribulations with Carpati and Romanian officials are engagingly told in Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 104–105. In the diary there are only short notes. During the journey Schildt and the crew got to know Nina better and he noted in the book

The Danube Delta became for Schildt the highlight of the journey. After the “Nordic cold” and rain on the way to Constanța, the air in the river landscape was “wonderfully mild, just like at home in the North”. The lightweight yacht could enter also into the smaller channels, and the Daphnenauts spent several days exploring. “A feeling of the Amazonas, but not unkind to humans”, Schildt commented in his diary. In the encounters with local people there was little official control, yet in the towns and larger villages people were afraid to talk openly with the foreigners. They still spoke in secret, wanting to tell about their lives and situations to the visitors. An elderly gentleman in Sulina told Schildt in French that he was a fisherman, and he chatted happily with the crew on the beach. In the published book Schildt noted: “There are lots of surprising things in the Eastern countries.”¹⁴

In the Danube Delta Schildt noticed more details of the landscape and people than anywhere else during the journey. He saw fishing villages and Lipovan houses with reed roofs and fences, and talked with river skippers and local villagers. Fishermen asked for help and their boats were towed by the *Daphne*, sometimes for several hours. In the delta reigned a calm and silence, which gave Schildt time to think and enjoy. A passing Soviet ship playing music, but without even one human being in sight, left a strong impression on the Daphnenauts.

that it was refreshing to talk with a person who had so very different views and experiences of life (p. 110).

¹⁴ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnmet*, 107.



Figure 2. House with reed fence, Danube Delta, Romania. Photo: Göran Schildt 1963. SLS.

The *Daphne* approached also the Soviet side of the river, but without visiting villages. Nobody disturbed the return journey to the sea; only the mosquitoes were plentiful and aggressive. Only at the last stop officials entered the yacht and turned everything inside out. A group of grim Romanian officers and soldiers stayed on board until the yacht had left the delta, but then said a cordial goodbye to the crew. Back in Constanța, the *Daphne* remained in harbour, while Schildt and his friend Roberto took a one-day tourist trip to Odessa. Schildt was also interviewed for a Romanian newspaper. On 26 August the *Daphne* was back in Istanbul. The Italian friends Roberto and Annuska left the yacht, while Schildt and his fiancée

Christine sailed for the Turkish Black Sea coast before returning to Greece and the Mediterranean.

Other and othering

Travelling seems easy when everything goes smoothly. During the trip, the travellers can immerse themselves in the new world around them – if they wish. After their return the process of explaining about observations, events and emotions to others, who do not share the same experiences, is a more complex process. Encounters, impressions and situations must be analysed, recreated and structured into a story, so that people who did not participate in the voyage can understand. Or, if they do not understand, they should at least be able to catch a glimpse of the different environment and the feelings the traveller-storyteller experienced at a given moment.

What happens when travellers encounter a different world, languages and cultures they do not understand? One of the first human reactions is to discover what is different. This highlights also the question “who am I?” and which characteristics make up one’s self. The *Other* is a philosophical concept originating in phenomenology, meaning someone who is not like the “Self”; someone different, who possesses distinct traits which are not “mine” or “ours”, and dissimilar to the self-image. The concept is nowadays used widely in philosophy, psychology, ethics, human geography and many other scientific fields, in a great variety of contexts, and it is also used to highlight racial, cultural and other differences.¹⁵ In this article the concept is used in its broadest sense to signify all and everything different from what is perceived to be or belong to “us”, including people, languages, cultures, economic and political systems, societies etc.

Othering is a term which means making someone the Other. When othering occurs, differences are emphasised, without the balancing effect of allowing for any similarities or even sameness. Othering is often condescending, the othering part seeing the Other as less valuable and important. In travel narratives the question is how the author perceives the

¹⁵ Aarhus University, for instance, has a Centre for Studies in Otherness and a journal, where a multitude of aspects of Otherness are discussed, showing that the concept has an extremely broad definition and usage. See <https://otherness.dk>

Other, and how far the Other or aspects of the Other through the creative process becomes part of the Self. Do writers pick up for instance linguistic or cultural patterns from their journeys, or add something from the culture they meet into their lives and writings?

If writers took up something from beyond the Iron Curtain during the Cold War, it often happened despite the attitudes of their contemporaries. Sympathies directed to the Other – those on the other side of the Iron Curtain – were not much accepted by general audiences anywhere, who were being fed with daily propaganda against the Enemy. Writers were not expected to really understand the Other in a period when national and political identities were usually limited to one per person. Which factors influenced the freedom of writers and what did freedom actually mean to them? Göran Schildt for instance was so famous, multicultural in his thinking and experienced both with East and West, that he could ignore much of the political propaganda. His personal experiences also helped him make holes in the political mythology, and let his readers see through these apertures.

Many people in this world accept the Other and othering as normal, and never gain much insight into other cultures or societies. Some even refuse to acknowledge or respect dissimilar people, even when they meet them. Yet when travellers set out on a journey, they take up the challenge of engaging with other people and environments. The engagement occurs to different degrees, depending on the way of travel, personal attitudes such as curiousness, previous knowledge and experiences of the travellers. The travellers explain after the voyage about their experiences to family and friends, and maybe also to the general public; telling a good story gives additional value to the trip, and for example also to the landscape and the food tasted during the journey.¹⁶ By default the travellers also explain about

¹⁶ Hanne Pico Larsen shows the added value of stories and storytelling after an experience in an interesting article about Nordic food. Hanne Pico Larsen, "På jakt efter sniglar och berättelser: vildplockat som motiv och praktik i det nya nordiska köket" [Chasing snails and stories: food from the wild as motif and practice in the new Nordic cuisine], in *Etnologiska reflektioner över ny nordisk mat* [Ethnological reflections about new Nordic food] (Y. Lindqvist & S. Österlund-Pötzsch, eds. SLS: Helsingfors, 2018), 113–129.

themselves and their self-image in contrast to the Other: their stories reflect their backgrounds, views and attitudes, and their capacity of observation and analysis.

Linguistic and cultural competence

Writers and artists are often presumed to move through life with their eyes and ears wide open and to be inspired by everything they see, sense and experience. This is partly true: their brains are trained in observation and gathering impulses, asking questions, communicating with the surroundings and processing experiences and information into something more than just some entertaining stories told around the dinner table. When travelling, writers and artists gather knowledge, observations, reactions, insights and emotions just like everybody else. In contrast to ordinary travellers, however, they more often transform their impressions into texts, paintings, music, films or other artistic formats. A legitimate question is therefore: do writers and artists possess or gain more linguistic and cultural competence, only because they are supposed to be creative, that is they produce something new out of their experiences? If yes, how? What strategies do they use? What is the impact of their work on their audiences, and maybe even on the cultural sphere and the societies they are active in?

As public figures, writers, and to some extent artists, have more influence than ordinary tourists on other people's attitudes. Before the twentieth century many authors did mostly armchair travel, however, writing about areas they had no idea about in real life. Their sources were travel descriptions by people who actually had visited the locations, or writings by other authors. Among such internationally acclaimed writers, who never visited the places they wrote about, are for example William Shakespeare, Jules Verne, Karl May, Franz Kafka and Italo Calvino.

In the nineteenth century, European scholars and writers were increasingly travelling around the world, but they carried with them a baggage of various attitudes and strategies about encountering the Other, and therefore also came up with widely dissimilar results. Some adapted and learned languages and cultures, for instance the Orientalist Georg August Wallin (1811–1852) from Finland, who travelled in the Levant in the disguise

of a Central Asian medical doctor.¹⁷ Many others, who visited the Mediterranean or Balkan regions around the same time as Wallin, did what foreign visitors would be expected to do: they kept to their hotels and to fellow travellers from their home country or international travellers from Europe or North America. They followed the guidebooks and paid to be transported and taken care of by local people, who spoke the tourists' languages at least tolerably. Several writers were fascinated by what they saw in the "Orient", such as the French poet Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), who toured in 1842, or Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), who travelled in 1832–1833. They observed the regions they visited through the prism of romanticism and often also esotericism.¹⁸ Others encountered local conditions literally with their gloves on, like the Danish author H. C. Andersen, who wrote a glorious travel account about his journey to the Ottoman Empire around the same time as Nerval. This fabled author did his best to avoid too close or engaging relations with local people.¹⁹

Much of early travel literature is in fact an effort to tame the Unknown, the strange, the Other in the sense of different cultures and languages, and to "domesticate" everything that is perceived as "foreign". One of the methods is to explain the cultural differences in a way, which makes them "comprehensible" for the audience at home. Naturally this means making compromises, distorting facts, adding adventures or mythology, and dealing out judgement on the "natives" and their lack of (Western European) "civilisation". Many writers turned into authorities on other cultures without knowing a word of the local languages or understanding more than superficially the social, economic or political

¹⁷ Svenska Litteratursällskapet (SLS, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland) has published several works by and about G. A. Wallin. For a full list, see <https://www.sls.fi/sv/utgivning/person/georg-august-wallin> (in Swedish)

¹⁸ See for instance Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* [Journey in the Orient] (Paris: Charpentier, 1851); and Alphonse de Lamartine, *Impressions, souvenirs, pensées et paysages pendant un voyage en Orient, 1832–1833, ou Notes d'un voyageur* [Impressions, memories, thoughts and landscapes during a journey in the Orient 1832–1833, or Notes by a traveller] (Bruxelles: Louis Hamuman et Co., 1835).

¹⁹ See H. C. Andersen, *En digters bazar* (Kjøbenhavn: C.U. Reizel, 1842; English *A poet's bazaar*, transl. Charles Beckwith. London: Richard Bentley, 1846).

situations. Reflecting the contemporary attitudes of superior civilisation, these writers could become highly influential in their home countries and even internationally. They produced a lot of misunderstandings, myths and stereotypes which unfortunately are still in circulation today, although the Internet, increasing individual travel and mass media could correct them very easily. Armchair travel has changed now into real travel. But has it really? Do modern writers understand more than their predecessors?

Linguistic and cultural competences are now considered important, but just fifty or sixty years ago during the Cold War they were not much appreciated. In some countries, especially in the Eastern Bloc, multilingual and multicultural skills could even be dangerous for an individual. Also in the West, knowledge of Eastern Bloc languages or frequent travels behind the Iron Curtain could bring a person into the interest sphere of those concerned with state security. A writer had to conform to at least some of the national stereotypes as well, in order to be taken seriously and not to be labelled as a friend of the Enemy beyond the Iron Curtain. For several visitors between the Nordic countries and the Balkans this epithet had no significance, because they were socialists, communists or had in general more leftist sympathies, and they were not seldom proud of their political “understanding”.

This deeper vision into life east of the Iron Curtain was an illusion, however, because their political convictions caused them to be short-sighted. They othered the Eastern Bloc just the same and filtered out everything, which did not fit into their ideology. For the others, non-leftists such as Göran Schildt, there were conflicts between their own view and the audiences’ attitudes of the Other. They had to compromise between their own observations (maybe positive; not all behind the Iron Curtain were agents or enemies) and the political and public attitudes (mostly negative).

Multilingual and multicultural strategies

Without training or experience, visitors abroad may find it difficult to function outside their personal comfort zone. In Europe, the travellers without linguistic and cultural preparation make up the majority since the 1960s. Mass tourism is the expression of a desire to travel without needing

to encounter many cultural challenges. A charter tourist often chooses a ready-made trip because there is no need to learn another language or culture, or to meet more exotic people than guides or restaurant and hotel staff, who are trained in understanding even the strangest of languages.

Scientific and other specialised education, such as military or journalistic, can help an interested visitor to see behind the facade and surface of a society, political system or landscape. A person who is multilingual and multicultural, or who has received training in working with different realities, can usually adapt more quickly to a new situation and analyse the local situation more efficiently. These prepared and informed visitors quickly adopt and create new behavioural models for themselves and find different ways to observe and interact with the local people and systems.²⁰

There is a broad range of strategies and instruments, which can be learned for multilingual and multicultural situations and to increase the linguistic and cultural competences. Some strategies found in the travel narratives of Göran Schildt are below discussed in comparison with the works of Lassi Nummi, Arto Paasilinna and Yordan Radichkov. These three authors have been chosen chiefly because of the time and destinations of their journeys. Their works represent different literary genres; none of them wrote a travel narrative directly comparable with Schildt's, but the different genres can shed light on the possibilities and choices an author can pick up when processing impressions from a journey.

All authors mentioned in this article wrote about their travels in some form, but none of them except Schildt wrote a travel book. He could have chosen to write poetry like Nummi, a comic novel like Paasilinna or about an imagined reality like Radichkov, but he selected to write a travel narrative with history and legends. All these authors had a certain influence on the attitudes of the audiences in their home countries, but none reached the international readership and impact that Schildt did. At least a few of these

²⁰ For strategies and a discussion of multiculturalism and communication, see for instance Alexander Thomas, Eva-Ulrike Kinast; Sylvia Schroll-Machl (eds). *Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation. Volume 1: Basics and Areas of Application* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

writers could if not change, then at least modify public opinion about the unknown and foreign regions they travelled in. To understand why they wrote as they did it is important to look into their strategies for gaining and processing insights.

Each traveller creates their own strategies to deal with the Other, but Göran Schildt stands out among these writers mainly due to his broad palette of strategies. His background, attitudes, experience, multilingual and multicultural outlook and competences differed clearly from the other authors. Schildt preferred a non-standard way of encountering the unknown and the Other. His home was always with him – the yacht *Daphne* – in opposition to most other tourists or travellers, but he also emphasised that an open mind was important: “To be open to everything, and foremost to the unexpected, is usually praised as the virtue of the true traveller, the condition that he can learn something, broaden his domains, be renewed”, wrote Schildt in his travel narrative. However, he had “the feeling that we reacted only on the surface [...] instead of going deeper [...] – this is a thorn I have often felt during my life full of journeys, the suspicion that I have just passed by, where a more attentive traveller could have picked up gold nuggets I have unconsciously tread on.” He was aware that theory and practice do not always go together: “The person who opens his full sensitivity, his complete attention in every encounter, risks never to get out of them [...]. It is impossible to really penetrate to the bottom with even one of our present moments.”

Instead, Schildt suggested another kind of openness, one which has a direction and “only accepts that which can be used constructively for certain goals”. He played with the idea of creating a fauna of travellers, depending on their nutrition and environment, including the Business Traveller, classical Discoverer, International Sportsman, ship Captain, and the strangest of all, the Tourist, “who only wants to see, to be an invisible witness”, and who goes back to the Romantic Traveller of the nineteenth century. The modern Charter Tourist, however, was a close relative of the locust: the mass invasion of sun-thirsty tourists was as destructive as a natural disaster. The condescending Socially Aware Tourist, usually a journalist, received even less sympathy from Schildt. Although he himself

was a kind of journalist, reporting for newspapers on his journeys, he found ordinary journalists too limited.²¹ Newspaper reports are important for the understanding of the period and there are several articles and reports from the Black Sea coast in Nordic media, which started appearing around the same time as Schildt journeyed in the region, but a discussion about them are outside the scope of this article.

Describing the Other (and the journey): source criticism

The one-day trip with a combined Danish, Swedish and English tourist group to Odessa merits special mentioning, because Göran Schildt's description of it diverges drastically in the diary and the published book. The ship diary tells that the city of Odessa made a mixed impression on Schildt. Communist propaganda was visible everywhere, from the loudspeakers to signs and writings on walls. Queues, bad food and beggars were irritating elements. There were also many reminders of the heroic Great Patriotic War, which Schildt had experienced personally from the other side, and which he had been wounded. The only positive elements in Odessa were the architecture and the personal encounters.

Schildt and Roberto talked with a teacher from Leningrad, who spoke French. She openly criticised the government's empty promises during the past forty years about attractive holiday trips for everybody. A group of students speaking Italian wanted to practise with the foreigners, but an hour later at an appointed time and place nobody turned up; probably they had lost courage or had been warned not to fraternise with foreigners.

The shops had little to sell and Schildt only bought a souvenir. "The final impression was deplorable", he commented in the diary. The mixture of communist monuments and baroque buildings, rotten grapes in the shops for which people were queuing, the still visible Stalinist heritage and the eternal checks at the airport contributed to the negative feelings. Returning to Romania in the evening was "like coming home": there was less control and the shops were filled with goods. Schildt wrote in his diary: "Romania

²¹ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinn*, p. 69–70.

is for us totally Western. [...] We are happy that the Odessa episode is behind us and we do not need to sail there.”

The diary, written in the evenings immediately after the events, clearly explains that the two men flew to the Soviet Union with an international tourist group and returned on the same day. Yet in his book Schildt embroidered a tall and dramatic tale: how the yacht reached Odessa and the crew spent a few days there.²² Then they wanted to continue to the Crimea, but were forced back into the open sea by an aggressive Soviet patrol boat during a thunderstorm. The crew prayed to be saved, and the captain himself promised the *Daphne* that this would be her last visit behind the Iron Curtain. The story is practically the same as the experience outside Mangalia, but transported from Romania to the Soviet shores.

Schildt mentioned in the published book that he had earlier visited the “western provinces” of the Soviet Union, and he recognised the atmosphere and the “Soviet” environment also in Odessa. In the book he freely discussed the communist system. He wondered at the “Russian” focus on the revolution: “It is sympathetic that they strive for social justice and raising the living standards for the people.” All this was also the goal in the West, Schildt noted, but the difference was observable in the fact that in the West people were free to do it, while the communist countries were tied to an old anti-capitalist system based on “opposition to the negative aspects of capitalism, which already have been overcome”. The people in the East paid for this error “through the lack of even the simplest goods and services”. He saw clearly that the rulers had to remind the people constantly about the old injustices, otherwise the people would not accept the “craziness” of the system. Schildt finally asked how long this could go on, because “eternally strangling private initiatives is hardly possible”. Already when talking about the Golden Sands tourist resort near Varna, a “Riviera-like” international environment, he wrote in the published book: “One wonders [...] how long the wall between the two systems will stand against the pressure of the enormous economic differences.”²³

²² This fabricated visit to the Soviet Union is told in Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnnet*, 130–136.

²³ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnnet*, 100.

Schildt did not discuss, among others, the aspect of fear in the communist countries; instead, he talked at length in the book about the Russian "inclination" for patricide and of not forgetting, and the incapacity of moving on from the past. His feelings ran strongly on the side of the West with anti-Russian and anti-communist attitudes. There were some apparent reasons for awakening such sentiments during the Black Sea trip, in addition to Schildt's own history of fighting against the Soviet Union in World War II. At the last stop in the Danube Delta before leaving for the Black Sea, a soldier fired bullets over the heads of the crew on the *Daphne* to make her stop. "Today at least tyranny is efficient", Schildt noted ironically after two hours of waiting for a confirmation that the crew were "legitimate travellers". Finally Schildt and the crew could go into the village, but the officials were not happy about it. Earlier in Tulcea, when Schildt wanted to fill up the tank of the yacht with fuel, "one had the feeling that things were conflicting and squeaking even up to the ministries". Fortunately the other boat owners were friendly and helpful, which softened the stressful encounters with the officials.²⁴

There are some other discrepancies in the book and the diary, too, but they are minor compared to this completely rewritten story about the visit to the Soviet Union, which stands out in its degree of intensity also in comparison with Romania or Bulgaria.²⁵ Göran Schildt's vivid and dramatic description of the efforts to reach the northern Black Sea shore sounds very real in the book, and without the diary it would be easy to believe the *Daphne* really was chased away from the waters around the Crimea.

Why did Schildt create this imaginative story? To make the book more interesting to readers, or because he wanted to give readers a political message? The book is full of adventurous scenes and encounters also without it. How trustworthy is the rest of the story he told in the book, if this

²⁴ The story about the shooting is dramatically told in Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 115, than in the diary. The quotation about bureaucracy in Tulcea is on p. 111.

²⁵ Another event is also related to the Soviet Union: the *Daphne* and how it journeyed close to the Soviet border in the Danube Delta is more dramatic in the book than in the diary. Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 112–113.

episode is not real? There was no political reason, except maybe his aversion to the Soviet Union, to create a story with a totalitarian villain.

Writers describing another society or culture are often accused of being interested only in high culture and official politics. Many visitors on either side of the Iron Curtain belong to this category, taking up a position for or against the political system. According to his own words, Schildt was mainly interested in ordinary people and how they lived, but he tried to push holes in the dividing walls in his writings, often managing to make the bricks crumble. He also had a political bias and a strong interest in politics, despite efforts to appear objective. Possibly the self-proclaimed neutrality was a way to protect himself from accusations that he belonged to the political right or left, or it was an intended or unintended result of his main focus on history and especially Antiquity.

A comparison between the diary and the book, and readings into earlier works by Göran Schildt show that he was not shy of improving a story if it could become more appealing to the reader. The diary functions as a corrective, as it was written during the journey, before the processing of impressions and decisions for improvement had begun. Certainly Schildt processed his experiences also during the journey, but the notes are fresher in the diary. The book, on the other hand, is the product of several months of work on different materials, his own and other authors', and it can give some clues to how the writer's mind worked. The question if we can believe in Schildt's writings should be answered with in principle yes, but source criticism should be applied throughout.

Collecting knowledge and impressions

How does a creative person process impressions about the Other and from a foreign environment? Several skills are needed for processing: a good memory and the capability to observe not only with the eyes, but with all the senses.

A usual strategy to gain insight into another culture is to gather information before, during and after the voyage, and to use previous knowledge to understand and analyse the new situation and environment. Göran Schildt gathered information about the Black Sea from classical and

modern books, maps and guidebooks both before and after the trip. He was deeply interested and well-read in mythology and Mediterranean history. His travel narrative in the published book tells, together with his own adventures in the Black Sea, also the story of Jason and the Argonauts, borrowed from the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes (third century bce).²⁶ At the end of the book there is a literature list showing that Schildt had studied also other writers from Antiquity, Herodotus, Arrian, Pindar, Xenophon, Ovid and others, and also modern writers' works. He also commented on several of the books throughout the book.



Figure 3. Byzantine church in Nesebar, Bulgaria. Photo: Göran Schildt 1963. SLS.

²⁶ Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*. Several translations exist of this work; Schildt used the ones by R. C. Seaton (London: Loeb, 1912) and E. V. Rieu (London: Penguin, 1959).

During the trip Schildt used the strategy of asking questions and talking with people as a daily strategy, and he also tried to find all kinds of complementary information on location. Combining the information he acquired through talking and the rare written accounts available on Bulgaria and Romania with his previous knowledge, he could assess the situation fairly accurately on several points and less exactly for others, although he was an outsider who did not know the local languages and who spent just a few weeks in the region. A contributing factor to the capacity to gather much information in a short time was probably that Göran Schildt had more experience as a traveller than most of his contemporaries; few people in the post-war period had spent as much time visiting and exploring abroad as he had.

In totalitarian regimes, gathering information could become a challenge, and some knowledge was given to the foreigners only in fragments or in a roundabout way, when nobody else was looking or listening. The case of the roasted duck reflects this, and the habit of the interested traveller not to give up easily. It also shows that the curious traveller is capable of entering into the world of the person he speaks with, even if only for some moments.

In the Danube Delta, Romania, the Daphnenauts went ashore in a village. They found some women who were carrying water, and chatted and joked with them. The women understood quite a lot of Italian and Roberto asked if they would sell a roasted duck to the foreigners. Two passing ladies interpreted the business deal. One lady was “very aristocratic” and spoke French and English. She told the foreigners about her life, while they walked in the main street. Her husband had previously owned a factory, but now he was a simple worker in an office, and the family lived in a little room in their previous house. The couple could not change jobs or house without permission and lived under constant surveillance.

Schildt was not so much astonished about the conditions told to him, but the fact that the lady did not complain about the situation was strange. He felt sympathy for her and wrote in detail in his diary what she had told them. The lady explained that fear made people disciplined. The feeling of

fear was confirmed in the evening, when the Daphnenauts received their roasted duck as promised from a peasant woman, but only under cover of darkness.²⁷

Linguistic and communicative competences open up a wealth of possibilities for a curious traveller, but also the person himself and his background are important for receiving or giving information and the degree of openness. Göran Schildt belonged to the Swedish minority in Finland and his minority identity influenced his relations with other minorities. An elderly man in Sozopol, Bulgaria, told Schildt that the inhabitants actually were Greeks and talked in Greek at home. "Yet to the outside world we are Bulgarians", the man explained. Schildt was not surprised; many minorities were in the same situation. Also other local inhabitants both in Sozopol and a few days later in Nesebar north of Burgas talked with the crew in Greek, when they discovered that Schildt spoke their language.²⁸ In Sozopol the crew visited a food bar, where they could go into the kitchen, thanks to a "nice Greek who served wine and beer". In Nesebar Schildt even noted Greek signs in shop windows. The Greek-speaking inhabitants told him that their children went to a monolingual Bulgarian school and many young people had already changed their language to Bulgarian. At the beginning of the 1960s, the Communist Party crusade for creating a consolidated Bulgarian nation was only starting and smaller minorities such as the Greek were targeted. The crusade culminated two decades later and reached also international media during the campaign for the change of the Turkish and Arabic names of the Turks in 1984–1985. Although Schildt does not directly comment on the minority situation in Bulgaria, the way he noted the negative facts indicates that he mentally compared them with the situation in Finland.

Being a foreigner among other foreigners can be an advantage for communication, too. At Sunny Beach near Burgas, all kinds of tourists would

²⁷ The story is told in a slightly different way in Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 116–119.

²⁸ See Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 93. In the diary there are more notes about the minority situation; in the book it appears they were not considered that important.

swim out to the *Daphne* to talk with the crew. In the tourist resorts Schildt and his crew met other foreigners every day. They were all just tourists, not visitors from the East or West. In Sozopol he noted many “kind tourists”, who chatted happily with the Daphnenaunts. Among them especially a Hungarian artist couple made an impression; the wife had recently managed to get permission to visit Italy on a group tour, but the husband had to remain in Budapest. Common memories of Italy animated the discussion.

Relying chiefly on literature and talks with local people contain some risks, however. In his book, Schildt mentioned for instance that the Ottoman period (1396–1878) had cut short the history of Bulgaria.²⁹ This opinion was during the communist period commonly used for propaganda purposes (Turkey belonged to the West). It is still shared by many Bulgarians, who have been educated in the nationalist mythology of the country’s history. History does not stop because the regime changes, a fact which also modern Bulgarian historians acknowledge. Schildt probably read or heard this opinion, and had no possibility to check or did not think of doing a fact check.

Communication

One of the most important factors contributing to the capability of gaining deeper insights into another culture and the world of the Other is the traveller’s language skills. None of the travellers from the Nordic countries to Bulgaria and Romania discussed here spoke or read any local languages. Göran Schildt had probably the broadest language skills: he had studied among others the classical languages (Latin, Greek) and spoke at least Italian, modern Greek, English, French and German. Arriving in Bulgaria, he found out quickly that he could talk with the Greek fishermen living along the Black Sea coast. All these languages are mentioned in the diary and the book, and they helped him communicate with local inhabitants, officials and administrators, and also with beach tourists from different countries.

²⁹ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnmet*, 100.

When language fails because neither part speaks the language of the other, communication skills are needed. Schildt had gained a lot of experience in breaking the ice and talking without a common language elsewhere: his travels along the rivers in Europe, the Nile and throughout the Mediterranean had given him enough triggers to develop different strategies and tools for communication with people who spoke nothing else than their local language or dialect, or languages he did not know. Schildt's communicative competence is illustrated by the first meeting with the young Bulgarian students Anton and Violeta and their friends at a bar in Sozopol.

The whole student group from the Bulgarian capital Sofia was "young, clean, nice", but they spoke just a few words of French, Schildt wrote in his diary. At first they were shy, but Schildt invited them to drink wine with the foreigners. The artist Roberto quickly drew portraits of the students and donated the pictures to them. The foreigners also said the magical word "capitalist" several times, pointing at themselves. This broke the ice and the students started to laugh and ask questions. They wanted to know about almost everything. "A humorous and pleasant mixed discussion ensued", Schildt noted. The students wanted to know for instance how many languages the foreigners spoke. They were then invited to visit the *Daphne*: "Everything interested them hugely, they wanted to taste all drinks on board and see every detail, deeply impressed that anything like this vessel existed." Only at midnight the students returned to their tents.

Schildt and his crew managed also the next day, when only Anton and Violeta appeared, to communicate over the language barriers. Neither spoke any language the crew understood. The foreigners used what they thought was internationally recognisable words and showed what they meant through face expressions, movements and gestures. Schildt's ear was quick to detect new words, which he imitated and tested in the communication without feeling self-conscious, a typical strategy of a multilingual. He also pointed at objects and asked for the word, and he made

the other party laugh, which caused them to relax and try similar techniques as he used to communicate.³⁰

Throughout the journey, Schildt gathered linguistic information from every encounter and used it in the next encounter. He also played with language, transforming for instance the names of lighthouses with saints' names in Bulgarian into Swedish forms. Sveti Ivan (Saint Ivan) became "Svettiga Ivan" (sweaty Ivan). Both strategies are common among multilingual persons: they quickly pick up not only words and expressions, but also mimic facial expressions, gestures and tones, and test them with interlocutors in other situations; and they play with language. This makes them appear to "communicate without a language", although they use different language resources and skills to communicate. These phenomena and especially the playfulness of multilingual persons should be researched to a fuller extent, not only in the case of Schildt, but also for other authors.

In the Danube Delta in Romania, Schildt and his crew successfully used their knowledge of Latin, French and Italian in contact with the local inhabitants. Romanian is close enough to these languages to make simple interaction possible, but for more complicated issues Schildt needed the guide Nina, or had to rely on the language skills of his interlocutors, who often could speak French. Code-switching, the multilingual strategy of using words from several languages in one sentence, are not found among the other travellers discussed in this article. The other authors from Finland and Bulgaria were basically monolingual, although they had studied other languages, too. They had apparently not encountered many situations where they had to communicate without a language, or they felt no need to develop more flexible ways of communication with the Other.

Reference points

Using historical references in travel literature is a fashion since at least a few centuries. Most intellectuals in Europe had previously a classical education (and some still do), which opened up the world for them. At the

³⁰ See Schildt, *Det gyllene skinn*, 94. For multilingual strategies and a comprehensive discussion of multilingualism, see Sabira Ståhlberg, *Multicoloured language* (Helsingfors: Bokpil, 2020).

same time this education limited their views, as the focus tended to shift to classical sources instead of the present time. A common strategy for “taming” an Other, strange geography is to use toponyms from Antiquity, as if they make it easier to create a relation to the surroundings; probably they do for some people. Although connecting the ancient Haemus with the Balkan Mountains might be thrilling, both the mountain chain and its inhabitants have changed in the past few thousand years. There are no Thracians anymore in the Balkan Mountains, only traces of them found by archaeologists. A few thousand years is a short period in the age of mountains, but weather, waterways, plants and forests have changed their outlook.

The same is true for the Black Sea and the Danube: Jason and the Argonauts would probably not recognise the shores if they had travelled with Schildt, three thousand years after the first tales of the ancient adventurer were in circulation in the Mediterranean world. Schildt was always looking for Antiquity, however, and noted in his diary a little disappointedly about Sozopol in Bulgaria: “The cape [of the town] looked like a perfect acropolis in an antique town, but we found no antique fragments, only modern.” He commented on historical changes in the published book with reference to H. C. Andersen and the Danish author’s complaints about a multicultural and dilapidated town in the 1840s: Andersen should be sent to Mamaia by bus and also see the modern and expansive city of Constanța.³¹

Modern reference points for Schildt were found in specific experiences, for instance a Yugoslavian circus visiting Burgas in Bulgaria. Schildt wrote in his diary:

The guest performers from Yugoslavia were brilliant with their songs and dancers. [...] It was like a Western dream for the sluggish Bulgarian audience. [...] Apparently the whole of the Western world, with its glamorous New York, Rome and Paris, found a roundabout way and a gate opening to the audience beyond the dull communist

³¹ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinn*, 102–103.

border. Vitality and freedom opened up thanks to the unrestrained and Europeanized Yugoslavian cheekiness. [...] ³²

Afterwards the Daphnenauts were invited to the International Seamen's Club in Burgas. It was clean and well-organised with a bar, ping-pong and billiard tables, magazines and comfortable chairs. East German beer was served. "Instead of drinking in town and making contact with the local people, or even spying on our conditions, it is better to gather the foreign sailors in this comfortable environment", the vice-president explained to Schildt. The Yugoslavian circus with its "Western" influences and the international setting were something Schildt and his friends could relate to, recognise and understand. Their distance to the "sluggish" Bulgarian audience was much bigger.

Home versus exotic

Another common strategy for travellers to feel safe and "at home" in Other surroundings is to recognise something reminding of home. In unfamiliar environments, human beings tend to look for reference points, elements or things they recognise. It can be anything that helps the brain to connect and start sorting out the billions of impressions it receives: a tree, a car brand, a person who looks like someone at home, or any other element. A person who has training in observation can perceive more than a person who has not trained or is abroad for the first time. Yet practice or multicultural experience are not enough: to be able to observe we also need curiosity, interest in the place and people, and a desire to know more about the Other.

Schildt noted in his book that the thunderstorm and the cold night spent at sea after leaving Bulgaria were the first Nordic weather the Daphne had experienced since 1948. He wrote in his diary from the Danube Delta: "Note: I found a real Finnish smoke sauna, with the bench, stones on the stove and heating from outside with reed." He thought the village was Russian, and observed several such "saunas" on the way. Other things also

³² See Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 92. The diary entry is quite detailed, and also the book scene is told with much local colour.

reminded of the North in the Danube Delta: "Good speed, a pleasure to sail, almost like in a Nordic archipelago", Schildt noted. Seeing a specific small hut, he thought it "could have stood anywhere in the Finnish archipelago". In the travel book he wrote that the Danube Delta had become one of his three sailing paradises, together with the Nordic archipelago and the Aegean Sea.³³



Figure 4. Göran Schildt and his fiancée Christine in the sailing paradise of the Danube Delta, Romania, exploring with the small boat. Photo: Göran Schildt, 1963. SLS.

³³ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnmet*, 102, 108.

These comments reflect some aspects of the framework, which Schildt employed when observing a foreign culture or landscape: Finland and the Nordic countries were at least some of the personal reference points he used for defining or describing an Other landscape. The fact that he used the descriptions in his diary shows that they were active in his mind, and not merely instruments he employed for making the Danube Delta more comprehensible for Nordic readers. Other identifiable frameworks, against which Schildt analysed his impressions, are his interest in Antiquity and Mediterranean history, architecture, art and also the sea and the international sailor community, who offered a well-known setting like home for Schildt.

In the diary, Schildt kept exoticism to a minimum, but in the published book the environment comes alive. Making a setting more colourful and exotic than it is in reality is a common trick used by writers. The Finnish comic novelist and leftist journalist Arto Paasilinna (1942–2018) found a monastery in the Rhodope Mountains in Bulgaria worth using as the background in his 1989 novel, *Auta armias* 'Heaven help us'.³⁴ Paasilinna wrote entertaining novels mostly from one perspective: the prototype of a male from the North, who is not only a social but also an economic and political loser. In this book about how God goes on a holiday, the forests and landscapes in the Rhodope Mountains in southern Bulgaria provide the background. A Finnish man is brought to rule the world while God is resting. Forest was something Paasilinna could relate to: Finland is a country of forests and lakes, and the stereotypical Finnish man is a creature of the forest.

An important question here should be: how far is the author and his fictional characters capable of functioning outside their own world? Are they at all interested or curious about other natural settings, cultures and people than those they can recognise, relate and speak to? Paasilinna's Rhodope Mountains are just a backdrop to an entertaining story, where a Finnish man and his well-known (in Finland) habits, way of thinking and attitudes play the main role. In Arto Paasilinna's case one could argue that using the forest as a reference point for a Finnish audience is normal; the literature in Finland is full of references to nature, and especially forests are very much present in

³⁴ Arto Paasilinna, *Auta armias* [Heaven help us] (Helsinki: WSOY, 1989).

nature, books and films. Why then put the divine headquarters by a lake far away in Bulgaria?

Using exotic settings and adding a personal touch to them is common especially in fictional works, and this is probably also one reason why Paasilinna chose Bulgaria. Through the choice of a background, the writer can transmit certain messages to the readers. The writer knows and often shares public stereotypes, generalisations and common notions, and expects the readers to react in a specific way. In contrast to Göran Schildt's travel narratives, which are mainly based on reality and try to educate the reader about history, culture, politics and society, Arto Paasilinna's books are full of surprises and contrasts, but they all follow the same line. The north is the best place to be, and every place else is simply exotic and therefore absurd, including Bulgaria.

Göran Schildt's and Arto Paasilinna's landscapes diverge also in another aspect: Schildt's landscapes are full of life, people and movement, while Paasilinna's landscape does not change. Personal preferences and genre differences seem to play a more important role than time and political situation: Paasilinna's novel was written when the political changes starting in the mid-1980s were already in progress, ultimately ending in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. He could have, if he wanted to, observed much more than Schildt had the opportunity to do in 1963. Paasilinna apparently had no use or interest for that kind of information.

Processing reality

The Finnish poet, novelist and translator Lassi Nummi (1928–2012) visited the Danube Delta in Romania in the 1960s. Training and processing capacity are crucial for the outcome of a literary work after a journey. Nummi published a poetry collection, *Keskipäivä, delta* 'Midday, delta' in 1967.³⁵ For many years he was a literature activist working for and representing the Union of Finnish Writers and the Finnish PEN. Similarly to Göran Schildt, Nummi used Greek mythology and history to try to understand the environment he was exploring, although there are few

³⁵ Lassi Nummi, *Keskipäivä, delta* [Midday, delta] (Helsinki: Otava, 1967).

references in Greek sources to this region. Nummi's poetry book is floating through the impressions of this visit to the Danube Delta. The poems are full of nature, sounds, smells and feelings, in addition to the extra layer of Mediterranean history transported to the Black Sea. The surface reason was poetical, but Nummi tried to grasp the experiences and explain them through these added references.

Lassi Nummi wrote in another genre than Schildt, but when Schildt wrote about the Danube Delta, also he became almost lyrical: "Imagine the sky over this landscape, full with strange birds [...], imagine the water under this landscape, full of fish, crabs, frogs, imagine a wonderful summer and a mild but steady breeze, which willingly fills the sails and lets the yacht silently glide in the meandering fairways."³⁶ The poetical choice of impressive surroundings and especially birds to transmit specific meanings is not new in literature. Both Schildt and Nummi tried to recreate their experience of an untouched and free nature, but Nummi contrasted it with the towns, tourists and fishermen, who in his view were intruders in the paradise-like, quiet and slow-moving river world. The environment was for him not only the background, but it interacted with humans in the poems and provided more depth to Nummi's musings about symbolic meanings in ancient Greek mythology and history. Göran Schildt used the classical sources in another way. He was looking for landmarks and signs in the real world. Using the *Argonautica* as the chief inspiration for his own quest, he tried to identify the world of Jason, although being fully aware that it was impossible.

Lassi Nummi apparently collected both consciously and subconsciously many kinds of impressions from the Danube Delta. In the next phase of processing these impressions, he reflected on pelicans, happiness, himself and others, life and death, art and music – mostly topics which had no connection at all with the surroundings, but awoke in the encounter with the foreign environment and also during the work for the book. He mentioned in the book that he thought even during the trip itself about what he would remember in the future about it. Göran Schildt did this more extensively by keeping a ship diary. Like Schildt, Lassi Nummi was a

³⁶ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnet*, 108.

seasoned traveller, but in poetry images, symbols and references to literature and art are in general more important than in travel narratives. Nummi's poetry book reflects how his brain seemingly jumped back and forth between already existing information and fresh ideas.

Every creative process is unique, and the resulting literary product is different for every individual, genre and situation. In this case the creative process brought Nummi to paint a world upon the real world he saw, an abstract world full of elements which did not exist in the Danube Delta; they appeared in his own head during and after the journey. Not being able to understand the strange environment, Nummi preferred to fill it with things he knew and had thought about, and which probably also at least some Finnish readers would understand.

Göran Schildt had a much larger audience in the Nordic countries and throughout Western Europe, and he was less confined to one single reader community. His travel book is also full of elements he knew, but they require much more insight into European history and literature. His goal was also to write about the present situation; this required that he anchored the text more firmly in reality. Schildt also processed the unknown aspects of the Other in a different way, through reading, analysis and discussions about them with his friends during the journey, and later in writing with himself, when he was preparing the book.

Imagination

Processing reality into acceptable literature for readers and regimes could be a challenge for writers from the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War period. A window to the North was provided to the Bulgarian audiences by the writer and journalist Yordan Radichkov (1929–2004), who journeyed several times to Sweden for writer meetings and remained for a longer period in the north of the country. Radichkov was active in several state structures and the Union of Bulgarian Writers. After 1989 he joined the Socialist Party (earlier Communist Party). In his book *Malka severna saga* 'A

small northern saga' from 1980 he told about his adventures (or lack of them) in the far north of Europe.³⁷

Yordan Radichkov was deeply fascinated by Sweden, but although he visited the country several times, he could – or would – not capture and tell about his encounters in a way which reflected his real experiences. Already on page one of his travel book he wrote that his many different impressions of Sweden did not fit into any ordinary text form. Instead he opted to tell about his own life, views and events which happened to him both in Bulgaria and Sweden. His own life, imagination and memories were superimposed over his experiences in the foreign country.

Imagination is a strategy authors often use, when they for some reason do not wish or cannot express facts. Either Radichkov had problems understanding the other reality, due to the short time or other limitations, or he wanted to, or had to keep his impressions from Sweden within certain limits acceptable for the regime in Bulgaria. Radichkov already had developed a preference for magic reality and Bulgarian traditions, folklore and history. He also picked up some Swedish traditions and mythology from books and talking to people. He abundantly used all elements in his book, blurring some and making others bigger than they are in reality.

Göran Schildt used imagination too, but for another purpose: adding drama to the adventures, such as how *Daphne* almost reached the Crimea. The description is dramatic: there is a thunderstorm and the Soviet patrol boats force the little, helpless yacht into the open, terrifying sea.

Comparing traditions and folklore can be a useful strategy for writers, who prefer not to dive too deeply into another culture or language. This is very common in nineteenth-century travel narratives, but Radichkov used in addition his own memories, ethnographic information and superstitions, turning them into a dreamlike reality, and thus did not need to touch upon difficult topics. Göran Schildt did not use this kind of strategy, but by adding excerpts from the *Argonautica*, he created another layer of mythology to his personal experiences.

³⁷ Jordan Raditjkov, *Träskorna. En liten nordisk saga* [The wooden clogs. A small Nordic saga] (Stockholm: Raben & Sjögren, 1981; original *Malka severna saga* [A small northern saga], Sofia 1980).

Comparison

A comparison between the real situations in the West and East was not a productive strategy during the Cold War, especially if an author wanted to continue living in the Eastern Bloc. Yordan Radichkov showed not Sweden in his book, but a romantic picture of a country where snow is falling all the time. Actually he confirmed and recreated the Bulgarian stereotypes of the northern Other, mainly climate and life in a harsh environment. These stereotypes are still prevalent with the addition of Santa Claus, who was introduced in the 1990s. Christmas was forbidden during the communist period.

Also in the use of stereotypes Göran Schildt and Yordan Radichkov differ. Schildt introduced some stereotypes in his book, which were not present in his diary, especially when illustrating his views on the Soviet Union. Radichkov made free use of any stereotypes he could find and added some of his own, apparently without much thought about the effects on the readers. A crucial factor influencing this difference was certainly the authors' background, situation and self-image: Göran Schildt saw himself as a free spirit, unrestrained by political convictions or systems, and heeding only to his own internal ideas and thought processes. He looked outward, to the world, and his world was large. Yordan Radichkov was limited by an oppressive system and a party, whose ideology he supported and which had contributed to form his inward-looking world view.

Radichkov's distance from reality was not unique. On the sunny beaches of Bulgaria and Romania, politics seemed far away in August 1963, despite the fact that only a year earlier the world had been threatened by a nuclear war. Tourists were officially encouraged to come to the beach resorts and spend as much (Western) money as possible. These peaceful holiday resorts were far removed from reality, which also Schildt understood was an exceptional situation. He observed and discussed in his book about the "international" beaches where Westerners could get anything for a cheap price in hard currency. The local workers had their own holiday "stations", but the ordinary people received nothing at all of this.³⁸ Meetings between

³⁸ Schildt, *Det gyllene skinnmet*, 96.

people from both sides of the visible and invisible political walls between East and West were watched by agents, sipping drinks in sunglasses and bathing suits. They did not interfere, just observed, and probably had the bright idea to combine holiday with work.



Figure 5. Mamaia beach, Romania. Photo: Göran Schildt, 1963. SLS.

Criticism against this dream world was not lacking inside Bulgaria, however. In 1968, a Bulgarian film showed how the tourist resorts had become an empty facade. Thousands of hard currency Western tourists visited the beaches every year. Bulgarians also had the possibility to stay at the resort by then. In the popular film *Shvedskite krale*, 'The Swedish kings',³⁹

³⁹ *The Swedish Kings* (Шведските крале, *Shvedskite krale*), directed by Lyudmil Kirkov, 1968.

one of the main characters in the film goes to a beach resort for a holiday. He has saved money for this trip and tells everybody he will live “like the Swedish king” in luxury. Then he discovers that the beach world is a gilded surface with a hollow content. This could be interpreted as a criticism against the capitalist way of life, represented by the luxury in the resorts, or a critical view toward the system, which spoke about equality but supported the creation of different classes. In 1968 it was already possible to say that there was a discrimination between Western and Bulgarian tourists, and that the tourist resorts were actually not as wonderful as the state propaganda stated. The politics and the borders of what was considered acceptable – freedom if one prefers – had shifted only within five years.

Conclusions

Göran Schildt had visited the Soviet Union earlier and he was openly suspicious of communist regimes, which is reflected in his travel book and less in his ship diary. When the *Daphne* arrived in Bulgaria, Schildt expected to confront strict officials and have the yacht searched. Instead the port officials just stamped the documents and chatted with the crew. In contrast to many other writers, who chose sides and contributed to ignite and support the ideological battle between East and West, he had a clear vision of the limitations of the communist system and also of the illusions and propaganda in the West, but he also had little positive to say about the Soviet Union. The situation in Bulgaria should not have surprised such a keen observer as Schildt. His descriptions of the major beach resorts and the towns along the Black Sea coast in Bulgaria and Romania show that at the beginning of the 1960s there were small pockets of freedom in the Eastern Bloc and especially in holiday resorts. Here people from both sides of the Iron Curtain could meet and socialise.

The question if the *Daphne* had a fairly free passage in Bulgaria and Romania because Schildt was a famous travel writer is certainly justified. Probably it contributed to the attitudes of at least some officials he met. Those in charge would think that a friendly encounter would instigate him to write nicely about their country. Only the Soviet Union refused to permit the yacht to visit its ports. The Iron Curtain with its dichotomies of

friend/enemy, East/West etc. has been removed and today an increasing number of people and also authors express multiple identities openly. Also previously there were not only one Self and one Other, but lots of selves and others; the main difference is now the permission and possibilities to express them. Yet the challenge remains the same: how do we encounter and write about each other?

Göran Schildt's multilingual and multicultural strategies in meeting the Other in comparison with some other writers from this period show that his curiousness, attitudes, experiences, skills and lifestyle of travelling had created a person who was capable of not only gathering information, but also to put down reference points, recognise similarities in the Other and adapt to changing conditions. In his travel narrative there is less othering and distance to the Other than in the writings of Lassi Nummi, Arto Paasilinna and Yordan Radichkov. This can be attributed to his multilingual and multicultural strategies: he could not have written either his diary or his book in another way, or treat the people he met differently; his multilingualism and multiculturalism were present in everything he thought or did and permeated also his thinking, processing of information and writing. But also the genre defined the form and contents, and influenced the final result: Nummi wrote poetry, Paasilinna fiction and Radichkov a travel narrative, which was more fiction than reality, while Schildt wrote a travel book with mythological overtones.

This article is a tentative case study about observations, processing of impressions and information, and publishing books about the Other gathered during journeys in Bulgaria and Romania in the Cold War period. Differences between Göran Schildt's ship diary, written during the journey, and the published book have been highlighted and discussed, and also his work has been compared with a few other writers' literary expressions. This study opens up for more research and new aspects both for literary studies and brain research, especially in the aspects of how creative persons like writers encounter the Other and what aspects influence them, and what kind of strategies they use and develop.

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Photographs

Original photographs by Göran Schildt, 1963. Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland (SLS, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland). Göran Schildt's archive, SLISA 1150.

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