

## Olof Högberg's Analogy for the Colonisation of the North of Sweden

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I first met Bjarne Thorup Thomsen at the conference *Centring on the Peripheries* held at the University of Edinburgh in 2002. The theme of the conference was important to me. It tried to acknowledge the significance of literatures from parts of Northern Europe that had been marginalised as coming from peripheries. The conference showed that there could be surprising literary alliances and historical parallels between literatures from the northern parts of Scandinavia, Scotland, and Greenland. The different papers presented at the conference showed that the participants had similar experiences concerning the relation between periphery and the national centres in their countries.

It was Bjarne who understood these similarities between the northern regions and invited researchers and authors to share their experiences with each other and discuss the problems and the opportunities of belonging to a periphery. A few years later, Bjarne edited a volume, published by the Norvik Press, which contained several of the papers, including mine, delivered at the conference. This was an important step in my research of the novels from the northern part of Sweden, Norrland, which tried to talk back to the national centre of Sweden. Therefore, I

am still much obliged to Bjarne for inviting me to Edinburgh and for making me see the similarities between the history of northern Sweden and other parts of Northern Europe.

In this article, I want to discuss a novel by Olof Högberg, one of the first writers who reacted against what he saw as the exploitation of Norrland by companies and authorities from the south of Sweden. Olof Högberg, who, together with his contemporary colleague Pelle Molin, is regarded as one of the first writers coming from and writing about Norrland. I argue that, in this rather unknown novel from the early twentieth century, Högberg found a way to discuss the consequences of colonisation. He did this, as I will try to show, by writing a chronicle of the colonisation of a fictive land in South America. The consequences consist of the creation of social, religious, and ethnic hierarchies, the subordination of indigenous people, and, not least, the exploitation of nature. These were issues concerning the relation between the south of Sweden and Norrland, which he had previously treated in novels, lectures, and articles.

Olof Högberg was born in the parish of Högsjö, located between the cities of Härnösand and Sundsvall, in 1855 and died in his home of Njurunda outside Sundsvall in 1932. Around 1900, he worked as a journalist at the newspaper *Sundsvalls-Posten* but left shortly before he made his debut as a writer with the novel *Den stora vreden* ('*The Great Wrath*'), which is the first great epic of Norrland. Chapters from the novel was rewarded with the journal *Idun's* novel prize in 1905, and the complete edition of more than 1,200 pages was published in 1906.

Högberg has an aura of eccentricity surrounding him. He studied at Uppsala University for a long time without completing his exam, but that does not mean he was an idle student. He took an active part in different radical associations at the university devoted to discussions of problems of contemporary

society, not least the question of the exploitation of land and forests in Norrland.

His childhood in the surroundings of Sundsvall and Härnösand meant that he grew up in what was considered the very centre of the violent industrialisation of the northern parts of Sweden. At close range he could watch how several forest industries threatened to decompose and ruin his childhood tracts. In his suite of novels *Från Norrlands sista halvsekel* ('From Norrland's Last Half Century'), published between 1910 and 1912, he gives a graphic picture of the rapid transformation of nature which followed in the steps of the forest industry:

*Här omkring sträckte sig nu det ändlösa skogsriket, där marker såldes, köptes och kalhöggs, skogsdomäner och millionförmögenheter skapades, millioner timmer flottades och millionbolag bildades. [...]. Alla foro fram som utbölingar från rus och i rus, utan hejd, utan vett, utan återhåll, utan tanke på en morgondag.*

Around here the endless forests laid, where land was sold, bought, and clear-cut, forest domains and fortunes of millions were made, timber in millions were log-driven and million-companies were formed [...]. Everyone ravished like outcasts from drunkenness and in drunkenness, with no stopping, no sense, no restraint, without any thought of tomorrow.<sup>1</sup>

Högberg saw through the contemporary rhetoric about Norrland as a land of the future. The promise of the future was associated with the exploitation of the natural resources in the north. There wasn't any reflection about what we today would call a sustainable development; it was more like devastation. At

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1. Högberg, 1912: 89 (author's translation).

least, it seemed like that for Högberg. In a lecture script from the 1890s, he described the inhabitants of the north as unaware of the real worth of the natural resources, and thereby letting other people take care of them. These people didn't have any feeling for their real worth and meaning.

In another lecture script from around the turn of the century 1900, Högberg writes in the mode of satire about the colonial dimension in the south of Sweden's relation towards Norrland:

*Vi ha gubevars många gånger hört omtalas att Norrland blifvit upptäckt på det ena eller andra viset. På 1850-talet upptäcktes det af skogspatroner. [...] På sista tiden har landet upptäckts af geologer, kartografer, konstnärer, turister, vattenfalls- och grufspekulanter, mormonprofeter och alla möjliga sorters värfvare. [...] I alla tider har Norrland på olika vis varit upptäckt. Och så pass djupt och mångtydigt är detta land att detta eviga upptäckande skall fortgå i evärdliga tider.*

We have, goodness me, many times heard that Norrland has been discovered in one way or the other. In the 1850s it was discovered by forest bosses. [...]. Lately the country has been discovered by geologists, cartographers, artists, tourists, waterfall- and mine-speculators, Mormon prophets, and all sorts of recruiters. [...]. At all times, Norrland has in different ways been discovered. And so deep and versatile is this land that these constant discoveries will go on forever.<sup>2</sup>

Högberg seems to be saying that Norrland is not a virgin wasteland you can treat in any way you like. This is probably the reason why it is so crucial to Högberg that the people

2. Högberg, Olof Högbergs arkiv, vol 9, Landsarkivet i Härnösand, 'Kung Sverres genomtåg till Norges eröfring', MS (author's translation).

living in Norrland become aware that they have a history, a culture, and a nature which surrounds them with importance and meaning. And it is the role of the intellectuals to create such an awareness and cultural identity. As Högberg wrote in the journal *Idun* as a comment on what his motives were for writing *Den stora vreden*: ‘*Om detta land icke har en historia, en saga, så måste landet få en sådan!*’ (‘If this land does not have a history, a story, then the land must get one!’)<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, it was the ambition to give Norrland a history, a cultural identity, which made it take so long to write *Den stora vreden* (*The Great Wrath*).

Ingeborg Nordin-Hennel, who wrote the first study of Högberg’s novel, claims that he was working on the novel at least since the end of the 1870s.<sup>4</sup> Mainly this had to do with the problem of finding a suitable form to contain all the stories and tales that Högberg had gathered and wanted to incorporate in his novel. In the end, it was the genre of the adventure novel, combined with that of the chronicle, which became the form that could solve his problems of composition. The adventure concatenated the different stories with each other and brought the plot forward in the long novel.

The novel, with the mythic Gråe Jägarn (‘The Grey Hunter’) and his godson Svarte-Mickel (‘Black-Michael’) as two of the main heroes, was mainly about how Norrland for a short period of time in the beginning of the eighteenth century was liberated from the oppression which had been the cause of its sufferings. For a while there is a kind of utopian equality in the north, but after a couple of years, the Swedish crown regains its power and the rebel leader and his wife, Mäster-Sara (‘Master-Sara’), take their refuge in subterranean caves in the mountains.

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3. Högberg: 1906 (author’s translation).

4. Nordin-Hennel: 1976.

I have previously also mentioned the role of the chronicle in Högberg's novel in an article in the scholarly journal *Samlaren*, where I focused on the importance of the adventure plot to construct a Norrlandic cultural identity.<sup>5</sup> The chronicle functioned above all to contribute with descriptions and legends about events and relations in the past in the novel.

It is remarkable that Högberg's choice of the chronicle as a form originated from his interest in the colonisation of South America and the different chronicles which dealt with this. During his time as a student in Uppsala, he learned both Portuguese and Spanish to be able to read the old writings. One of the main influences for *Den stora vreden* probably was the Spanish writer Antonio de Solís y Rivadeneira's chronicle on the conquest of Mexico from 1691, *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*.

Thus, it seems that the chronicles on the different colonial powers' conquest of the continent of South America had a strong attraction for Olof Högberg. It seems not too far-fetched to imagine that he, in the Spanish nation's relation to the colonised parts of South America, could recognise a parallel to the colonisation of his own Norrland. Although Ingeborg Nordin-Hennel brings up the chronicle on the conquest of Mexico as an important influence for Högberg's *Den stora vreden*, she does not mention the novel that came out in 1915 and which I take as Högberg's attempt at writing a novel completely in the genre of the chronicle. That novel is *Under Jesu bröders' spira* ('*Under the sceptre of "The brothers of Christ"*').

The chronicle as a genre consists of, as its name indicates, chronological accounts for historical events. The perspective of the genre is mainly to report on conditions of a society and the changes of these. Therefore, it is not principally depicting how different characters are psychologically developed and changed

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5. Öhman: 2015.

or how a hero acts as in the plot of an adventure novel; rather it is occupied with the description of events.

For this reason, Högberg's novel is also interesting from an ecocritical perspective. Many scholars with an ecocritical point of view have discussed other descriptive genres, like for example the pastoral, as distinctive for an early awareness of man's relation to nature. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, argue that it is nature's impact on man which is usually the focus of these descriptive genres: 'The emphasis of pastoral or romantic elegy has generally been on the impact of the environment on the human rather than the other way round.'<sup>6</sup>

However, in Högberg's *Under Jesu bröders' spira* it is also described how the human affects nature. Högberg shows how certain men with their lust for power colonise other people and their land. In the process, this also upset the order of nature, even if the consequence regarding nature is only suggested in the text. It is interesting how the colonisation and its consequences are depicted in the novel about a fictitious nation in South America, and how this also has bearing on what you can call the Norrlandic question.

The novel begins with a foreword written by the narrator, the fictive last 'archduke of Mitácan, the last name vassal on the Andean wall, Fernán Diégo de Huèlvas'.<sup>7</sup> The chronicle about the history of Mitácan is directed his excellency General Don Carlos de Sucra of Orinóco, to whom Fernán Diégo escaped when Mitácan had gone under due to the rebellion of the indigenous people.

The perspective of the narrator Fernán Diégo is the view of the conqueror. He is the descendent in the third generation of

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6. Huggan and Tiffin 2010: 16.

7. Högberg 1915: 3. [The novel has not been translated to English and all quotations are translated by this author.]

the knights that by coincidence happened to arrive at the realm that became Mitácan. He writes that in front of his paternal grandfather, who founded Mitácan as a fiefdom, '*låg som oftast El dorado, bakom dem alla rivna broar, se där en enkel geografi!*' ('mostly there lay El dorado, behind them all the demolished bridges, look, what a simple geography!').<sup>8</sup> That is, it is by coincidence that these Spanish knights arrive at Mitácan in the new world and occupy a land which they consider to become a vassal state to the Spanish crown. However, Castile and later Spain do not know of its existence, initially because they don't know how to get into contact with Spain, and later because the Jesuit priests make sure that no news between the old and the new world is transmitted.

By the way, this is an analogy to one of Högberg's arguments in *Den stora vreden*, regarding the unawareness of the royal power in Sweden of how its power was exercised in a harmful way in Norrland by both the clergy and the king's trustees.

Fernán Diégo describes Mitácan in the beginning as a paradise which made it seem like an El Dorado to the conquerors. There was the mighty mountain Atamináco, which irrigated the plateaus and made the land a fertile paradise. But he also contemptuously calls the inhabitants that populated the land to which the Spaniards arrived 'redskins', 'barbarians', and 'savages'. Also, he is ambivalent towards the role of the Jesuit priests in the making of Mitácan. They and their high-handedness, intolerance, and viciousness are the reason that Mitácan finally perishes, but, on the other hand, it is their structural engineering and craftsmanship that made Mitácan one of the richest cities in the new world.

The leader of the rebellious indigenous people against the Jesuits and the other people of Mitácan was, according to the

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8. Ibid.: 5.



chronicler, a ‘*rasförgäten vit ledarhand*’ (‘race-oblivious white leaderhand’), that is, a white man for whom the colour of the skin or ethnicity didn’t matter:

*Personen røjde nog för våra ögon tycke av en castilian, men icke så den främmande tonen i hans castilianska, om även denna flöt ledigt från hans mun. Staben utgjordes till största delen av nordiskt blonda män. De talade ett strävt men ej missljudande språk, där ett ofta återkommande ord var fan eller möjligen vad holländaren skriver som van.*

That person seemed to our eyes to have the resemblance of a Castilian, but not so the foreign tone of his language, even if this flowed freely from his mouth. His staff consisted mainly of Nordic blonde men. They talked a rough but not dissonant language, where a frequent word was fan or perhaps what the Dutch people writes as van.<sup>9</sup>

It is this leader of, supposedly Swedish, men that Mauritz Edström in an essay declares to be none other than the hero from *Den stora vreden*, Svarte-Mickel (‘Black-Michael’), the godson of Gråe Jägarn (‘The Grey Hunter’) and the liberator of Norrland.<sup>10</sup> And of course, it will be he who comes to liberate Mitácan from its colonial masters, whether these represent the secular or the spiritual powers.

However, the story of Mitácan does not begin with Fernán Diégo’s paternal grandfather, the Jesuit priests, or the other Castilians. Those who, apart from the Iquitos, constituted the inhabitants of Mitácan from the beginning in the sixteenth century were refugees from the oppressive tyranny of the

9. Ibid.: 6–7. (*Fan* is a Swedish swear word for the devil.)

10. Edström 1981.

old world. They came to the continent of South America in the hope of creating a new home for themselves. Until the Castilian knights arrived, this was a home depicted as a new kind of Eden. The unique aspect of these refugees was that they represented all three great religions in their time. They were Jews, Christians, and Muslims that had been forced together on the ships to protect their lives and escape from oppression.

Because they were people in exile, they didn't have any claims on the unknown territory to which they arrived. From the start, the native Iquitos were suspicious and sought to question the newly arrived about what they were looking for in their land. Those answered that they only wanted nourishment for themselves and their families. It was an answer that satisfied the Iquitos who therefore chose to '*bevilja främlingen från havet en broderlig landrätt jämsides med sig själva i detta paradisiska land*' ('grant the strangers from the sea a brotherly right of land alongside themselves in this paradisiac land').<sup>11</sup>

The chronicler reflects on the nature which surrounds the first refugees and declares that it constitutes an eternal background to the development of Mitácan from its greatness to its downfall:

*Och bland dessa högslätter, som aldrig skulle svika första stundens löften om ett paradis, hamnade omsider fäderna i sitt eget valda klimat å södra basen till Nevádan de Atamináco. Allt framgent skulle detta urverk skifta deras dagars stunder med teckenspråk i rosenrött och guld, violett och liljeskärt [...]. Och sedan, utan att behöva vite mäns beundrande aktgivelse, skulle Nevádan vidare, lika oförtruten som förr i världens tider, avdela året, skifta timmar, flöda och välsigna landet, pålitlig, god och härlig endast genom fri betingelse i sitt eget väsen.*

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11. Ibid.: 17.

And among these plateaus, who never would betray its first promise of a paradise, the fathers ended at length in their own chosen climate at the south base to the Neváda de Atamináco. Henceforth, their clockwork would divide the moments of their days with a sign language in rose and gold, violet and pink [...]. And then, without the need for the admiring attention of white men, the Neváda would, just as tireless as before in the times of the world, divide the year, change the hours, flow, and bless the land, reliable, good, and lovely only through free conditions in its own being.<sup>12</sup>

There are similarities with the views of nature which Huggan and Tiffin say characterise the pastoral. Nature affects man through its cyclical movement, but it stays eternal and unaffected by her.<sup>13</sup> It is a view of nature that Timothy Morton in his *Ecology without Nature* calls a traditional ecological view where man is placed besides the so called 'nature'.<sup>14</sup>

This is also, interestingly, a view of nature that the first refugees in their daily practice does not include. They live in and with nature. They do not use it as scenery, or a pastoral background, which becomes clear when the first knights of Castile arrive and threaten the Edenic condition. As the knights disappointedly observe when they first enter the city: '*Den stora slätten tedde sig för sviket spanande ögon som ett huvudsakligt åkerbruks- och betesland.*' ('The great plain looked, to disappointedly searching eyes, as mainly a pasture and agricultural land'.)<sup>15</sup> That is, just like Norrland, it was not an exotic virgin land but settled, cultivated, and inhabited.

In the society which the first refugees created, and in which Josua Cazár became the natural leader, the hierarchies of the old

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12. Ibid.: 22.

13. Huggan and Tiffin 2010.

14. Morton 2007.

15. Högberg 1915: 36.

world vanished. Cazár understood how to '*rikta krafterna på den omgivande rika naturens många möjligheter, hålla trogen fred och vänskap med iquiterna och angelägnare än allt tygla kolonisternas inbördes trosbat*' ('turn their energies to the surrounding fertile nature's many possibilities, to maintain a loyal peace and friendship with the Iquitos and, more important than anything else, curb the settler's mutual hatred of belief').<sup>16</sup> Their relation to the Iquitos is also, I think, an analogy to how Högberg imagined the northerners' relationship with the Sami people should look like.

It is nearly a utopian society that is established in the new continent, though it is a society that does not bear the stamp of exotism or idealisation. It is a concrete and pragmatic society, something of the kind Högberg thought about the society of Norrland. Cazár and the chief of the Iquitos became close friends, and their unison lasted for three generations. And, as the chronicler observes, quarrels between different religious beliefs were forbidden:

*Den ständigt värnade friden medförde, att kärleken allt som oftast slog enande bryggor mellan oliktroende och utjämnade skiljaktligheten till en viss fördragsamhet. [...] Man började småningom tycka, att både Kristus, Moses och Muhámmed kunde vara bra på olika vis [...]. Ja, märkligt nog icke heller hedningen befanns så dum i alla delar, när man väl och vackert kom på vänlig fot med honom. Religionerna försmälte, raserna likaså till en ny folkstam.*

The constant protected peace entailed that love most often resulted in unifying bridges between different believers and flattened out disputes to a certain tolerance. [...] One began to think that both Christ, Moses, and Muhammed could be

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16. Ibid.: 23.

alright in different ways [...]. And yes, strangely enough, not even the heathen was seen as all that foolish, when one became friends with him. The religions fused, and so did the races into a new racial group.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the original Mitácan was a kind of Eden because its foundation was built on unanimity and the mixing of racial group, religion, and nature, and the fact that it did not contain any hierarchies. But it was also a society that lived and functioned in a continuous pragmatic and concrete exchange between nature and culture. Nature was work and nourishment, not a projection surface for exotic and pastoral ideas or exploitation for the sake of profit.

This certainly will change when the first knights of Castile arrive. It is significant that the refugees do not have a particular name for the city where they have lived in peace for some generations. They just call it the Castle and are genuinely surprised when they hear that it is called Ciudad Mitácan by the knights. The leader of the refugees, Cazár, wants to know why the knights think that Ciudad Mitácan is so famous. The answer from one of the knights points to the difference between the two groups of colonisers. His answer is that it *'helt naturligt är, att man föga vet om en stad, som ännu ingen sett'* ('is quite natural that one know so little about a city no one yet have seen'), and continues by saying that, in the same way people were searching for the holy grail, lately they have been looking for *'El Dorado eller Ciudad Mitácan i alla riktningar av Nya världen'* ('El Dorado or Ciudad Mitácan in all directions of the new world').<sup>18</sup>

In the eyes of the knight, the castle is something that, by virtue of being unknown, may function as a projection surface

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17. Ibid.: 24.

18. Ibid.: 32.

and a momentum for ambition and conquest. The knight also does not care about the people who already live in the city – for him it is an unseen city. It is a view that is exoticising and which transforms the world of the refugees into an empty virgin place to colonise, almost like a blank paper to write upon.

In the discussion with Cazár, the knight finally asks if they are allowed to call the place Ciudad Mitácan. In view of the future, a name is needed, he says, and continues: *'Ett stort och lysande namn, som framtiden helt säkert skall rättfärdiga! För övrigt, här kunde både geografer och kronister komma på besök; sådana måste ju hava namngivna städer för sina kartor och böcker.'*<sup>19</sup> (‘A great and brilliant name which the future surely will justify! Moreover, both geographers and chroniclers could come visiting. Those must have named cities for their maps and books.’)<sup>19</sup>

The talks between Cazár and the knights arriving ends in the knights' primary business, which is that Mitácan in the future will be the property of the crown of Castile. Admittedly, the refugees are granted tax exemption and freedom of religion for a period of one hundred years, but after that they must obey the king. The chronicler and narrator comments that the refugees were happy being discovered and gave their approval to everything the knights suggested.

This is one of the places where one can perceive the author Olof Högberg's argument through the discourse of the chronicler: *'Ingen mindes längre de gömda fädernas vedermödor under hans katolska majestät av Castilien, ty ett folk utan liv i sin egen historia vandrar fram genom tiderna med sina dyrbaraste skatter i bottenlarvig säck å ryggen.'* (‘No one no longer remembered the hardship of the hidden fathers under the reign of the Catholic majesty of Castile, because a people without spirit in their own history wanders through time with their most precious treasures in a sloppy

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19. Ibid.: 32.

bag on their back.’)<sup>20</sup> This is a clear reference to what, according to Högberg, has happened to Norrland. As he wrote in the journal *Idun*: ‘*Om detta land icke har en historia, en saga, så måste landet få en sådan!*’ (‘If this land does not have a history, a story, then it must obtain one!’).<sup>21</sup> It is a reference to the way Norrland had become a projection surface for all kinds of exoticism, but also a criticism towards the northerners themselves for not having cherished the memory of their history. Thereby, they had been exposed to the colonisers’ exploitation of their land and their culture.

The arrival of the knights is also the beginning of the end of Mitácan, even if the continuation of their story is what Högberg’s novel mainly consists of. The important thing for my discussion, however, takes place in the first forty pages. The rest of the chronicle consists of a slowly increasing perversion of power and an early vision of what Timothy Morton would call a dark ecology, i.e., everything and everyone is interconnected as if in a loop.<sup>22</sup>

First, it affects the relations between the people of Mitácan and the Iquitos, and then the freedom of religion. The Jesuit priests, who arrive in Mitácan shortly after the knights, are skilled craftsmen and builders, but they also strive towards both spiritual and secular dominance. They execute the leaders of the Iquitos because they do not accept God as their Lord and as heathens insists on worshipping nature and especially the mountain Atamináco.

Gradually it becomes clear to the chronicler Fernán Diégo that the Jesuit priests have constructed a veritable factory in the underworld of the city of Mitácan to, in an industrial way, take care of the inhabitants’ bodies after they died. However, to increase the production rate, they also accelerate death through an ingenious irrigation system which, in an orbit of birth and

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20. Ibid.: 36.

21. Högberg 1906.

22. Morton 2016.

death, produces both manure and plague of the dead so that they infect the living, besides manufacturing other products from their bodies. It is a depiction of hell that prefigures testimonies from the concentration camps of the Second World War. During the siege of Mitácan, Fernán Diégo and his closest men discover the death factories of the Jesuit priests underneath the city. The chronicler and the others open a door and enters a room that

[...] tycktes innesluta något slags fabrik. [...] Vad kunde detta vara? På en hylla i grannskapet anträffades fosfor i massor. Åh, man gjorde fosfor av våra dödas ben, när de äntligen avskalats i pesthärden. [...] I nästa avdelning funno vi ett garveri med fina, vita människohudar å stängerna. I ett hörn tillverkades i massa våra överdådiga 'handskar av Sverige!' Sista avdelningen visade oss en kokare förblekning av de dödas hår, som hängde fullt på stänger i skrumpnade skalper [...] Alltså, vad allting var det nu, som 'Herrens bröder' tillverkade av oss? Peruker, handskar, såpa, tvål, lim, fosfor, gödsel och pest!

[...] seemed to contain some kind of factory. [...] What could this be? On a shelf nearby a lot of phosphorus was to be found. Ah, they made phosphorus of the bones of our dead when they had been peeled off in the plague. [...] In the next section we came upon a tannery with fine, white human hide on bars. In one corner a large amount of our luxurious 'gloves of Sweden' were manufactured! In the last section a boiler showed us the bleaching of the hair of the dead, hanging from the bars in withered scalps [...]. Thus, what was all this that 'the brethren of the Lord' made from us? Wigs, gloves, soap, glue, phosphorus, manure, and plague!<sup>23</sup>

23. Högberg 1915: 186–187.



It seems that Högberg, through the chronicler/narrator, wants to show the consequences when power becomes abstract with no connection with concrete nature and the people who organically work with it.

From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, the original Eden in Högberg's novel is a place where things *are* and are *made*. This is the reason that it makes no sense to create a distance between men themselves or between men, animals, or nature. There exists no awareness of the fall, no projections or wishful thinking, only active work. Unfortunately, it also makes the refugees vulnerable because they lack awareness of their own history. This was the same as in the case with the culture and nature of Norrland that Olof Högberg was an early and eager spokesman of, and which the fictitious colony of Mitácan in many ways reflect.

The story of the conquest of the fictive South American city of Mitácan is, in the genre of the chronicle, an allegory of the history of Norrland. From the beginning, Norrland was an egalitarian and near utopian part of the country, where there was no aristocracy or priesthood and where the inhabitants lived in unison with each other and with the indigenous Sami people. At least, that was what Högberg imagined and wanted to highlight with his writing. To this aim he especially, so it seems, added an aversion towards the clergy.

According to Högberg, after this Edenic condition in the history of Norrland, the explorers and the exploiters arrived and broke the egalitarian relations and ravished nature for the greedy sake of profit. It was with a depiction like this that Högberg wanted Norrland to write back to the authorities in the south of Sweden.

There were several reasons for his choice to disguise his critique of colonisation. He had already written two novels that took place in Norrland, but none of them seemed to create any

reaction against what he saw as the exploitation of Norrland. I think that his reading of the chronicle of the conquest of Mexico gave him the idea that he could make his critique more profound by writing a chronicle. He clearly saw the analogies between the conquest of South America and Norrland – why shouldn't other people see it? Also, in *Den stora vreden* ('*The Great Wrath*') he had partly used the form of the chronicle to retell stories and legends that he had heard, and I believe it suited his way of writing. He was more inclined towards storytelling than in creating dialogue and dramatic conflicts between his characters.

You can certainly say that Högberg failed with his novel's ambition. I have not found a single review of the novel, only an article that says he is going to publish the novel, and I presume that only a few people might have read the novel since it was published. Despite this, it is an interesting book, not least in the way it foreshadows an ecological consciousness and relates this to a postcolonial problematic. Also, it shows how an intellectual and a writer in Norrland in the early twentieth century reacted against what he considered to be a colonisation and exploitation of the nature and culture of the north of Sweden. Even if the novel itself was not a success, Olof Högberg's writing in general had a great impact on successive Norrland writers – he was an inspiration to authors such as Albert Viksten, Kerstin Ekman, and Sara Lidman in their writing about the nature and culture of Norrland and its complex colonial relation with the south of Sweden.

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