



Stefan Jonsson

The first man

On the North, literature and colonialism

While the Nordic countries cannot compare with France, the Netherlands, or Great Britain when it comes to classical colonialism, this is no reason not to discuss their colonial past. An understanding of northern colonialism must start with Nordic culture's view of nature and the myth of the "first man", writes Stefan Jonsson.

There is one text in which Nordic culture appears to begin and end. What is it about? Let us examine the first paragraph of this creation story, the *Genesis* of the Nordic text:

The long, long road over the moors and up into the forest — who trod it into being first of all? Man, a human being, the first that came here. There was no path before he came. Afterwards, some beast or other, following the faint tracks over marsh and moorland, wearing them deeper; after these again some Lapp gained scent of the path, and took that way from fjeld to fjeld, looking to his reindeer. Thus was made the road through the great Almenning — the common tracts without an owner; no-man's-land.

The man comes, walking toward the north. He bears a sack, the first sack, carrying food and some few implements. A strong, coarse fellow, with a red iron beard, and little scars on face and hands; sites of old wounds — were they gained in toil or fight? Maybe the man has been in prison, and is looking for a place to hide; or a philosopher, maybe, in search of peace. This or that, he comes; the figure of a man in this great solitude. He trudges on; bird and beast are silent all about him; now and again he utters a word or two, speaking to himself. "Eyah — well, well..." — so he speaks to himself.

In this passage from a novel, we meet the first man as he makes his way up the first path, bearing on his shoulders the first sack. He will eventually set up the first farmstead, the first home, which will grow into the first society. And the first words he utters? "Eyah — well, well." They are scarcely words in the conventional sense, more an inarticulate cry, a human cry — perhaps a Nordic cry — let out by an organism to express both joy and labour, both exertion and relaxation, a human cry emanating as much from the body as from the spirit and showing how both of them together, at this early stage, form a single entity, with contraction and resting of muscles on the one hand, and concentration and distraction of thoughts on the other, making a single, organically working unit that tames the wilds, breaks new ground and builds a

home, a glade of humanity amidst the natural world, a colony in the valley between the mountains.

The first society is called Sellenrå and the first human being is named Isak. The creation story I have just quoted is the opening of Knut Hamsun's epic novel of the North, *Growth of the Soil*. Hamsun's narrator leaves us in no doubt that Isak is the ideal human being and Sellenrå the ideal society. On the final page, he returns to the subject: "A tiller of the ground, body and soul; a worker on the land without respite. A ghost risen out of the past to point the future, a man from the earliest days of cultivation, a settler in the wilds, nine hundred years old, and, withal, a man of the day."

"Eyah — well, well," one is tempted to exclaim. We have weaned ourselves off the sort of idealised images of the North that Hamsun introduced in his novel, and have become used to treating them with distrust. For Germany's National Socialists, but not only for them, *Growth of the Soil* seemed emblematic of all things Nordic. For them, the North was one point of the compass in a mental geography that located Germany at the centre of the world, or at least in Mitteleuropa, poised in a state of equilibrium between the Latin sensuality of the South, most beautifully expressed in Goethe's cult of Italy, the Anglo-Saxon rationalism of the West, most forcefully expressed in Spengler's Faustian worship of the machine, and the Asiatic despotism of the East, which gave rise to that era's fear of the yellow hordes.

In this geography, the North was accorded a special place. But it was not only the Nazis of Germany who believed in this model. That same imaginative horizon still colours the image of the North that we encounter in the world about us. When the residents of the Nordic region see how they appear in the world's image of the North, it is not unusual for them to adopt it as their self-image. It is an image of the North as a region of people who, with the mentality of a people who have worked the soil for nine centuries, carry on building their ideal communities and defending them against the degeneracy and extremes both of hyper-modernity and archaic barbarism. We know how laborious that is. We also know we can rely on our own strength. Eyah — well, well, as we say here in our colony, the North.

The veracity of this image of the North is sometimes the subject of debate within the Nordic region. The debate is fruitless. The question is unanswerable. Or to be more accurate, it can be answered both in the affirmative and in the negative, depending on the degree of generalisation, or to put it bluntly, of superficiality, one is prepared to accept in one's description of cultural processes.

But rather than answering the question, we can stand back and try to see it as foreign to us. What do we see then? The narrative of the North as depicted by Hamsun and idealised in Nordic and European history seems to be the narrative of some kind of settler colonialism.

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When we speak of the Nordic countries and Nordic culture, we are not speaking of some constant substance. We are not even speaking of an experience, but of an identity. Like all identities, the Nordic one consists of identification processes. Identity arises in people who are under the influence of symbols and discourses that affect how they divide up their world, so that some parts are alien, others their own. The result of these processes is a

self-image, a personal or collective identity. The historian Hayden White speaks of "ostentative self-definition by negation" and is convinced that this is the most common way of establishing cultural identities. We find out who we are, not by really finding out who we are but by pointing out who we are not.

It is the rule today to see collective identity as a construction, created within the framework of what Edward Said calls an "imaginary geography", in which all those involved belong to what Benedict Anderson terms an "imagined community". The object of much of today's humanities research and cultural criticism is to demonstrate how an imaginary geography or an imagined community develops permanence and boundaries and ultimately replaces reality itself, and how this happens through identification processes in which some elements are discarded in order for that community's identity to come into being, be it Swedish, Nordic, European or global.

But this list itself highlights something interesting. In the critical analysis of the emergence of such identities, the Nordic one has got off relatively lightly. There are many identities being built up or restored today. Take for example the Swedish, Danish and European identities, or take the great dream of the common culture of the Baltic region. Here we find identities that are being subjected to dynamic projects of construction and reconstruction. Not so the Nordic identity, which by contrast is considered uninteresting, tedious and not in the least binding. One does not criticise one's identity, one does not turn it inside out or tear it to shreds, unless there is a pressing reason to do so. And that pressing need only makes itself felt when a person perceives his or her identity as suffocating and false, confining or over-exclusive, dishonest or oppressive. The fact that we do not perceive Nordic identity in this way — that we more easily tolerate our Nordic identity and that our Nordic identity troubles us less than our national, ethnic or European identity — naturally does not mean that we cannot attack the construction of Nordic culture with the same critical disposition as we attack other cultural identities, but it does explain why there has yet to be any critical analysis.

Not that I am claiming Nordic identity is all innocence. One has only to look to the 1930s or read the Swedish Democratic Party's political programme to realise how easily it can be abused. But as long as we keep all talk of a blonde Teutonic race and of northern virtues at arm's length, Nordic identity appears relatively permeable and permissive. It is not an imposition from any particular direction. Nordic affiliation does not make any claims on us, does not demand that we set aside our universality as human beings to establish our particularity as residents of the North. Unlike other collective identities, the Nordic one is neither confined nor exclusive.

For what appears to distinguish Nordic identity from other collective identities is that it is not constructed relative to an invented enemy. Europe has needed the Orient, the Turks, Islam or America to make it pull together. The Denmark of today needs Muslims and threatening Swedes in order to find its soul. Swedes, for their part, can only be Swedish by driving immigrants out of the equation. And as we all know, there would be no Baltic cooperation without the Russian menace.

The Nordic area, on the other hand, has no need to look at itself in the mirror provided by some cultural enemy. But how, then, does the Nordic area determine itself if it has nothing to negate, nothing to determine against? For it surely cannot be that Hayden White's definition of the basic mechanism of cultural identity applies to all collective identities but the Nordic?

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When foreign critics write about what makes a person "Nordic", they are fond of using the natural world as their point of reference. We Nordics have long since tired of the clichés. The grip of the cold, the vast tracts of forest, the fells and the cries of the diver over dark waters in the white summer night. When anyone claims that Nordic art and literature reflect an experience of life on the borders of the natural world, we are quick to deny it.

But imagine if this exoticism actually concealed a nucleus of truth that could be brought out and scrutinised? What if one could even investigate the extent to which the counter-image, in contrast to which Nordic identity assumes its contours and its significance, is in fact, and always has been, that very natural world? This is certainly one of the questions one asks oneself after reading Kerstin Ekman's extended examination of her own and her fellow Nordics' ambivalent attitude to the trees, forests, animals and wilds. If that is case, Nordic identity needs no cultural enemy figure to enable it to maintain itself, because nature *per se* has always stood out as the object in relation to which the inhabitants of the Nordic region construct their subjectivity, as Isak Sellén builds his colony in the mountain valley.

Pursuing that line of thought, one soon realises there are two ways of studying Nordic culture's relationship to colonialism. One approach is self-evident. It focuses on the position of the Nordic states in the capitalist and imperialist world system that emerges around the year 1500 and is fully developed by the start of the twentieth century. It examines the colonial empires of the Nordic states, which in practice means limiting itself to Swedish and Danish colonial domination, for the simple reason that Norway and Finland were under Danish or Swedish sovereignty for a large part of this period. It compares the colonial policies and trading patterns of the Nordic states with the colonial empires of the rest of Europe, seeks similarities and differences and thus contributes to an understanding of how Nordic culture and social life is marked by its participation in the imperial world system. Colonialism did undoubtedly lay the foundations of racism and discrimination in the Nordic states. But the Nordic states' position on the periphery of the imperial West has also meant that the colonial legacy has had some different implications and consequences in the Nordic region than it has, for example, in Germany, France and Britain. This has in turn meant that Nordic authors, artists, intellectuals and scholars have long considered colonialism as a system, as well as the reality of colonised peoples, with different eyes from, say, a typical British imperialist. Exactly what their Nordic eyes have seen remains to be investigated. We have only recently begun to take an interest in the issue.

Having started to take an interest in it, we should perhaps consider whether there might also be a completely different way of approaching the question of Nordic culture and colonialism. Might it not be worth pausing a moment before incorporating the North into the basic paradigm of postcolonialism? Naturally we should consider the extent to which Nordic politicians, merchants, generals, researchers and authors had a hand in the carving up of Africa, Asia and America, in the slave trade, sugar revenues and all the other civilising contributions white men have made to faraway countries. But before we study these connections and slot the North into the world culture of Western imperialism, might it not be worth penetrating a little more deeply into the original story of Nordic culture? To what extent does this story in itself reveal a colonial mentality?

Let us shift perspective. Let us assume that colonialism has a place in the Nordic heart and that this original colonial experience in its turn colours Nordic participation in the great game on the oceans of the world. (Saree Makdisi takes a similar approach when he examines how English Romantic poets' infatuation for the Lake District was an idyllic expression of a primal state from which one can map the British Empire's most grandiose claims to domination.) For what is the implication of a Nordic identity created in relation to birches, bogs, mountains, lilacs, wolves, fields of corn, red cottages in forest glades and painstakingly built stone walls? The implication is that Nordic identity arises out of the conquest of nature. That is why Hamsun's *Isak in Growth of the Soil* can so readily be seen as the archetype of the Nordic human being.

In order to understand relations between the North and colonialism, we must therefore start back at home, in Nordic culture's view of nature, famed in myth and legend. This view of nature in itself conceals a colonial heart. Hamsun again:

Man, a human being, the first that came here. There was no path before he came. Afterward, some beast or other, following the faint tracks over marsh and moorland, wearing them deeper; after these again some Lapp gained scent of the path, and took that way from fjeld to fjeld, looking to his reindeer. Thus was made the road through the great Almenning — the common tracts without an owner; no-man's-land.

The man we see is master of the land. He is said to be the first human being on the path. An animal or two has trodden the path before him, to be sure, and even "some Lapp". For *Isak* to be acknowledged as the first, the master taking possession of the land, the Lapp can hardly count as a human being. In Hamsun, the world is split into two halves: culture and nature, community and wilderness. "Human being" and "Lapp" end up on different sides of the boundary.

"Civilisation creates itself by offering resistance to savagery; without the savage element, the civilised person would not know she was civilised," writes Patricia Lorenzoni in her major study of the way western scholarship has fabricated "the savage" on the pre-modern periphery of the world. This is the colonial essence of the Nordic story, too: internal colonisation that erases certain people from history. "The Lapp" is part of the wilds. He is a representative of a primitive people. He is a savage. That is the way it has to be for the Nordic narrative to commence and the Nordic narrative to take shape, and shape its people, whose combined forces will tame the wilds, break the ground and build a home, a human glade under the protection of the natural world.

In countless Nordic texts and pictures we encounter this primal cell: the image of an agrarian, human community, in dialectical metabolism with nature, establishing society and culture complete with all its drawing of boundary lines between self and other, cultivated and wild, domesticated and foreign, blond and dark. As soon as one postulates that this scene is colonial — that it is built on conquest, occupation, settlement, mapping, classification, demarcation and cultural transformation — the way is clear for a new reading of Nordic art, literature and history of ideas.

Nordic history of ideas then appears as a series of mutations of the primal colonial cell or as a series of different lines of development radiating from that single point. From Hamsun onwards, the Nordic narrative emerges against a background of fields and forests. There are glimpses of a distant past, a rural settlement in which the narrator places the symbolic beginning of everything. The narrative then swiftly abandons its wild origins and finds its way along the various paths of modernity out into the world and towards our own age. But even when the narratives of the North are played out in settings that are contemporary and urban, as is the rule nowadays, they often derive their metaphors, symbols and imagery from the primal cell.

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One of my tasks during a year's stay in the USA was to teach the twentieth-century cultural history of the Nordic region. Instead of supplying facts, I decided to try to convey an experience, as expressed in Nordic art, film and literature. Is there such a thing as a Nordic experience? If so, is there a Nordic identity? Through which narratives and experiences has it been formed? When I was obliged to consider these questions with a group of twenty-year-olds, talented students but lacking any knowledge of the Nordic countries, I felt I caught a glimpse of the primal cell of Nordic culture. From it, a Nordic line and a Nordic text could be derived.

In preparing my course, I discovered that the amount of Nordic literature translated to English is extremely limited. What the publishers had to offer only amounted in practice to twenty or so disparate titles. Our reading therefore comprised: Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*, followed by Kjartan Fløgstad's *Dollar Road*, Moa Martinson's *Women and Apple Trees*, Karin Boye's *Kallockain*, Harry Martinson's *Aniara*, Jan Myrdal's *Confessions of a Disloyal European*, P. O. Enquist's *The March of the Musicians* and Monika Fagerholm's *Wonderful Women by the Sea*. To these were added a handful of films, short stories and poems, and some background reading on history, social studies and politics. From this motley collection I was to uncover a Nordic text and a Nordic identity that my twenty-year-old students could grasp. All the greater my astonishment, then, when the various texts merged virtually unaided into a larger narrative, an imaginary Northland that made me realise how unique the Nordic twentieth century is.

So we began with Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* and Fløgstad's first novel, which in Norwegian and Swedish is called *Dalen Portland*. It was easy to see how the two books place themselves on two different sides of a historical epoch. Hamsun stands at the beginning of the great rationalisation. Fløgstad shows it coming to an end. Hamsun's Isak is presented as the first human being, but also as the last, as the eternal human, in fact. Hamsun's community is also the first community, a colonial ur-cell, which the author wishes to perpetuate at any price. Isak builds his farmstead, breaks his ground, establishes a world of rural harmony. Then all the forces of modernity break into this world — the telegraph, the mining prospectors, the crime, commerce and money — which in the real Norway ushered in urban industrial capitalism and obliterated Isak's organically-rooted world.

All those who have read Hamsun's novel know that it does actually succeed in fending off the modernisation process without losing credibility. The utopia of Sellenrå persists, miraculously enough, as a feasible way of life amidst, or in spite of, the cities and factories of technological civilisation. That, of course, was why the Nazis and conservatives loved *Growth of the Soil*. Hamsun does

away with modernity and diverts its driving forces onto an alternative course that returns humanity to harmony with the universe.

Moving on to Fløgstad's *Dollar Road*, we immediately realise this novel was written as a conscious counterpoint to *Growth of the Soil*. Here, too, we encounter someone making their way up the valley, but not to break new soil. A youth dashes breathlessly from farm to farm, calling the men down to the steelworks in the town, which is hiring new labour. The modernisation process Hamsun managed to fend off breaks through with full force in Fløgstad. As the boy runs up through the valley, the narrator observes that the fields will soon be overgrown. All the names that Isak and his kind gave to their farmsteads, infields, streams, mountains and forests will soon be forgotten. Peasant society is replaced by industrial society, the growth of the soil by bauxite. The route to modern society seems staked out, and Isak's colonial primal cell — the farmer breaking his ground and driving off the savages with his cudgel — is replaced by the imperialism of multinational metal conglomerates.

But not even Fløgstad is prepared to take that route. His novel, too, proposes an alternative path to the future. In Fløgstad's case, the alternative does not involve making agrarian society permanent; instead, his protagonist reaches back to another colonial archetype: he becomes a seafarer, a hero and, in the course of time, a belated discoverer of America. In short, the hero of the novel sails away on an odyssey so programmatically fantastic that it can only be explained by Fløgstad's will to maximise the contrast between, on the one hand, the social state of Norway, the lifeless result of modernisation, and on the other, the scope for adventure people had to sacrifice for the sake of material advancement. Fløgstad brings out all the unrealised opportunities slumbering in the text of modern history.

The other books, too, fitted without difficulty into the wider Nordic story of the quest for alternative paths through the modern project, from Karin Boye's picture of the totalitarian empires of the future and Harry Martinson's colonisation of outer space to Jan Myrdal's critique of the imperial *realpolitik* of the western world. Throughout this vast text, colonial conquest is recurrently seen as one among a number of conceivable modernisation schemes. But the Nordic text also uses a recurrent series of symbols to embody the return of what has been repressed. All the wild and natural things wiped out by progress come back to modern society in the form of monsters and omens. It starts when Isak's Inger drowns her firstborn in the beck outside Sellenrå because the child is hair-lipped and therefore, as she sees it, doomed to ill fortune. It runs all the way through to Monika Fagerholm's *Wonderful Women by the Sea*, when one of the young misfits meets death by drowning. In the Nordic text there is a subtext linking both the utopias and the victims of modernity to a sphere close to women and dark waters. We encounter it in Moa Martinson's famous descriptive scene "Mother takes a bath", the first part of *Women and Apple Trees*, in which the women who gather by themselves in the bathhouse are seen as a threat to the order of the resident male farmers. We find the same sphere in Jan Myrdal, where the entire conflict is crystallised in the suicide of the girlfriend; in P. O. Enquist, where the traitor of the labour movement drowns himself in a hole in the ice; in Harry Martinson, where female figures such as Isagel and the supercomputer Mima itself are the only ones who know how to steer modern civilisation on the right course; in Fløgstad, where the protagonist's brother drowns in the harbour; and of course also in Boye's *Kallocain*. As part of the course we also watched Ingmar Bergman's "Persona" and that, too, is about a pair of women by the water, grappling with the trauma of modern civilisation.

Who can say why this subtext of dark waters, female figures, suicide, child murder and death by drowning flows beneath the pictures of society portrayed in the Nordic text? One fact seems clear. In the Nordic countries, the narrative text has provided the modern project with a capacity for self-reflection throughout the twentieth century. Modernity has been reproduced in the subjunctive: it could also take this form; it could be done better; it could be done worse; it could be done differently. Seen thus, the twentieth-century Nordic text has functioned as the conscience and corrective of the Nordic model. In some instances, it has literally intervened in history and altered the direction of the welfare project; Ivar Lo-Johansson in Sweden is one example.

It may be that the Nordic text has clung so closely to the historic process because it has been sustained, to a greater degree than other countries' texts, by writers experiencing modernisation from within. It has been documented by writers, from Knut Hamsun to Monika Fagerholm, who came, broadly speaking, from the same class as those driving forward the Nordic model. The result, seen from an international perspective, is a unique literature that has illuminated modernity from above and below, from the wrong side and the right side, giving the ordinary people's hard confrontation with modernity a voice and an embodiment. This, too, is a track that could be explained by post-colonial theory formulation. One of its principles, in fact the very hub of criticism of Western colonial modernisation, is that there are various routes through the modern era, alternative modernities. The further out on the periphery we find ourselves, the more those alternative routes can be presumed to deviate from the norm and the closer they bring us to the colonial scene that constitutes the beginning of modernity.

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Stories create a sense of community in their readers and listeners. The further removed the subjects of the stories are from the world that is the community's own, the better their ability to bring the audience face to face with what is unfamiliar, to the point where they mediate close contact with *The Others*. In stories from faraway regions, we therefore seldom come across people like us, though the probability of doing so ought to be the same there as here. Those we encounter in that distant place are all monsters, strangers and foes, with a single common denominator: they are the negation of our own way of life.

But that is not all. The further from home our stories take us, the further out into the system their plots go running off, the closer we get to the colonial primal cell: the battle with the wild, the expulsion of the stranger, the division of the world into the blonde and the dark. Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* is set at the extreme edge of the world. After Isak's successful colonisation, the barren wastes have been transformed into the cosy centre of Nordic culture.

It should therefore come as no surprise that the colonial origins of Nordic identity are to be seen most clearly at Scoresbysund in East Greenland. Ittoqqoorttoormiit, as the place is called in the local language, is so distantly located on the periphery of the world system that the history of the place is synonymous with the history of its colonial conquest. Scoresbysund is a crystal: frozen colonial power. On the barren point at Scoresbyfjord, Danish colonists erected a small cluster of houses in 1924. The following year, the Danish authorities arranged for a score of Greenlandic hunting families to move in. Life would be better for them there, the Danes promised. But Denmark's real motives were more cynical. To strengthen the claims of the Danish crown to sovereignty over East Greenland — the territory was

classified as no man's land at the time — Denmark was obliged to demonstrate that people wanted to use the wilderness. The place had to be occupied. But how? No Danes wanted to move there. So Denmark relocated some seventy Greenlanders there, holding out the prospect of better conditions in the new colony. Did it turn out that way? The settlement has never been self-sufficient, remaining dependent on the annual delivery of basic necessities from Copenhagen and West Greenland.

In the visual art of Pia Arke, this periphery becomes the *Urszene* of Nordic experience. She was born there. In her case, telling her story means telling Scoresbysund's story, and telling Scoresbysund's story means telling the story of colonialism. Pia Arke returns in the footsteps of Hamsun's Isak, tearing down what he built, as if she were dreaming of undoing, or at least redoing, what he did. She dismantles the monolith of Nordic colonial history by exposing the motives and passions of the Danish colonists who wanted to be East Greenland's masters and benefactors. They fostered all the colonial tools of the West to create a whaling and fishing community that would be unsullied by the West. They wanted to give the savages their place in the natural world by creating a reserve where they were expected to carry on living like savages. They sought to reclaim the primitive with the instruments of modernity.

Once Pia Arke has dismantled all that history, one can see all the lesser histories that were forced out by it. In her work, you sense a Nordic (hi)story that has long remained untold, because the people it most intimately concerned have not been allowed or able to tell it. It is a Nordic story of force, violence, power struggle, fair promises and cultural conflicts. This, too, is a story that goes back to the primal cell: the settlement of the land and the division of those who live there into whites and savages. What remains as a subtext in Hamsun and several of the other writers I have discussed, becomes the main text in Pia Arke's work. "I make colonial history part of my history the only way I know, by taking it personally," writes Arke in *Scoresbysundhistorier* (Scoresbysund stories).

If we follow the Nordic narrative backwards and inwards, as I have already mentioned, we discover that it often begins with a colonial *Urszene*: the first human being labours to clear a space in the wilds and establishes a community. It is the story of Isak Sellenrå. It is the story of Scoresbysund.

It is also the story of Erik the Red, who in the eleventh century founded the first — the first? — colony on Greenland. Some time in the fifteenth century, contact ceased between the Christian colony and the European mainland. There has been speculation ever since about what happened to that northerly contingent. Did they die out? Of sickness? Of starvation? Of cold? Did they abandon their distinctiveness and assimilate into the Greenlandic population? Did they move to some solitary fjord valley nobody knows about?

Explorers from Europe in the nineteenth century cherished a dream of finding the descendants of Erik the Red. Various research teams were sent out to locate them. The dream was most powerful of all for Adolf Fredrik Nordenskiöld, the famous polar explorer. In 1883 — in a period when both imperialism and Nordic nature romanticism were at their height — Nordenskiöld explores the east coast of Greenland. He is searching for the settlers' eastern base, Österbygd. He drops anchor off the coast and travels by sledge into the interior. He claims that the inland ice is only an outer barrier. Behind it, green forests lie concealed.

Yes, that is what Nordenskiöld believes, and he puts forward circumstantial evidence to support his theory. If his theory is correct, then presumably it would not be impossible, but conceivable, perhaps even likely, that those old Northlanders will be found in those green groves, Nordenskiöld speculates as his sledge carries him over the inland ice. Nordenskiöld journeys across the vast expanses of snow, nearer and nearer to the origins of the North. And those origins are all about the colonisation of nature.

Like Hamsun, Nordenskiöld saw the Nordic settler as the first man: "A tiller of the ground, body and soul; a worker on the land without respite. A ghost risen out of the past to point the future, a man from the earliest days of cultivation, a settler in the wilds, nine hundred years old, and, withal, a man of the day."

Any attempt to define the relationship between the North and colonialism can take this myth of the first man as its starting point. To the extent that we can speak of Nordic culture's modern project, it has a great deal to do with returning to that *Urszene*. Why go back there? Either from a wish to carry on working side by side with Isak and Erik the Red as they break new ground. Or to tell the stories of those who were already there, but were then driven away and forgotten, when the first man came striding over the lordless land with his axe.

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