

The Nightmare Island: Representations of St. Barthélemy in Swedish Novels¹

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Swedish colonialism is a nightmare, in which the colony confuses and mocks its witnesses. The Caribbean island colony of St. Barthélemy, transferred from France to Sweden in 1784 and returned in 1878, re-appeared in the late twentieth century into Swedish historical consciousness, largely due to a re-emerging interest in post-colonial theory and colonial history (Fur 2013). In its most basic social form—transatlantic expansion and slavery—St. Barthélemy contradicts the notion that Swedish history stands outside of global European colonial exploitation. However, because this notion of innocence is so central to modern Swedish identity, the introduction of Atlantic colonialism into Swedish political history challenges perceived aspects of Sweden's relation to the rest of the world. This challenge does more than expand the perimeters of Swedish history: through a domino effect of moral implications, it breaks down the basis of what it means to be a Swede. When I say that “Swedish colonialism is a nightmare,” I mean this in the sense that it is the opposite, the antithesis, of the Swedish dream of collective innocence. So when authors and readers return to this depiction of Swedish colonialism, they not only confront past crimes, but enter a world of horror, where the notion of self is assaulted by the ground they step on.

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After the Second World War and the rise of social democracy, as European nations began to reflect on the horrors of Nazi Germany, and the Cold War began to ramp up a perpetual sense of aggression, suspicion, and doom between the United States, the Soviet Union, and China, Sweden created a self-image as a third alternative between capitalism and communism. Dag Hammarskjöld's position as Secretary-General of the UN and increased focus on foreign aid showed how Sweden wished to present itself as a European ally to the colonized world, in large part due to its lack of colonial heritage. It was also reflected in an increase in foreign aid, in which Swedish participation in international solidarity efforts was not just idealized, but expected (Engh 2009).² Swedish Prime minister Olof Palme was highly vocal in his anti-colonial views, in particular, regarding South Africa and the Vietnam War (Vivekanandan 2016, 15–116). It can certainly be discussed to which degree this participation was reflective of a genuine moral view of the world, or rather, a *realpolitik* approach to achieve diplomatic balance between the Eastern and Western blocs (see Makko 2017; 2012).

Regardless of its authenticity, there was a popular view of Sweden and Scandinavia as a whole favoring international cooperation above domination and exploitation. As Sweden's foreign minister Pierre Schori stated in a debate regarding foreign aid in 1997: "Sverige har en lång demokratisk tradition. Vår historia som ett alliansfritt land utan kolonialt förflutet gör oss till en trovärdig, respekterad och eftertraktad samarbetspartner för många länder i förändring" (Swedish parliament 1997) [Sweden has a long democratic tradition. Our history as an alliance-free country without a colonial past makes us a trustworthy, respected and sought-after partner for many countries in the process of change]. This sentiment was reflected by Social Democratic member of parliament Olle Thorell as late as 2016: "Vi har också en lång tradition av bistånd och utvecklingssamarbete med många länder i världen. Där har vi visat en genuin vilja till gemensam utveckling och solidaritet. Vi har inte, som många västländer, ett kolonialt förflutet, och under kalla kriget stod vi inte på någon av supermakternas sida, vilket gav oss en självständig röst" (Swedish parliament 2016) [We also have a long tradition of foreign aid and development with many countries around the world, where we have shown a genuine willingness to

2. For very ambitious and recent research on Swedish foreign aid, see Berg, Lundberg, and Tydén (2021).

common development and solidarity. We do not have, as many Western countries, a colonial past, and during the Cold War we did not side with either of the superpowers, which gave us an independent voice]. It should be noted that this reflection is not a conservative distancing from responsibility in the Third World, but a social democratic assertion of the past that enables Sweden to be a leading moral voice and facilitator of global justice.

In *After Empire*, Paul Gilroy discusses the concept of “postcolonial melancholia,” modeled on Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich’s view of Germany’s inability to process Hitlerism in the aftermath of World War II. As Gilroy views it, the trauma from the loss of empire causes Great Britain to redirect its frustration, often toward those representing the lost empire, that is, migrants and people of color. Racial conflicts are thus sparked from an inability to productively mourn and reconceptualize imperial history (Gilroy 2004; Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1975). From a Swedish perspective, however, the trauma is not loss of the empire, but the discovery of it. Within contemporary history, Sweden is considered primarily as an indirect actor in the colonial ventures of the major imperial powers, a dynamic that Aryo Makko has called “imperialism in the backwater” (Makko 2014, 508, 512).³ What is lost recently is not a glorious empire, but instead a continual history of neutrality. Just as British colonial history has been internalized as an essential aspect of British identity, Swedish non-participation in colonialism and imperial politics is not viewed as a particular era of post-World War II history, but as an essential part of Swedish identity.

Within this framework of Sweden as untainted by colonial guilt, the fact of Swedish colonialism is a nightmare. More than the nightmare of being hunted and killed, it is the nightmare of finding yourself to be the hunter and the killer. It is the nightmare in which what is familiar becomes twisted into unrecognition. The nightmare of walking in what you know to be your house, but with a different shape, different furniture, and saying hello to a complete stranger who is also your mother.

To give the growth of this nightmare a shape, I have examined five historical novels set in the Swedish colony of St. Barthélemy during the early 1800s, the time of the colony’s financial boom. Swedish neutrality created ample opportunity for French, British, Dutch, and American merchants and mariners to swear loyalty to the Swedish crown and

3. For an example of this dynamic, see also Nilsson (2013).

avoid the draconian contraband laws of the Napoleonic Wars. From Sweden's acquisition of the colony in 1785 to 1800, the island population rose from 700 to 6,000, of which approximately half were enslaved, a quarter were free people of color, and another quarter were whites. Many legal and administrative aspects of the island were directly copied from neighboring colonies, including the *Code Noir*, a French Caribbean legal framework of the rights, crimes, and punishments of the enslaved and free people of color (Thomasson 2015). As the years after 1815 ended direct conflict between major imperial powers until 1914, with the exception of the Crimean War, there was no utility in Swedish neutrality. The economy of St. Barthélemy suffered financially until it was returned to France in 1878. Swedish slavery was abolished in 1847, in which roughly 600 slaves were bought by the state and freed.⁴

All of the examined novels take place before 1847 and depict St. Barthélemy as a slave society. The novels are written from 1945 to 2019 and are all published by major Swedish outlets. *Ur havets skum* (From the Foam of the Sea) by Elisabet Falkenberg was published in 1945; *Den gudomliga ön* (The Divine Island) by Evert Lundström, in 1982; *Månbröderna* (The Moon Brothers) by Tomas Blom in 1991; *De ofria* (The Unfree) by Janne Lundström in 2016; and *1794* by Niklas Natt och Dag in 2019. There are additional novels written that could have been discussed, but these are either written in the nineteenth century, while St. Barthélemy was still a Swedish colony (*Skattgräfvaren* by Sigfrid Nyberg, published in 1866), or are published by smaller publishers (*Äventyret på Gustavsvärn* by K. O. Zamore, published in 1950 by Harriers Bokförlag; *Dagboken* by Laura Trenter and Katrin Jakobsen, published in 2005 by Tiden; *Slavflickan på St Barthélemy* by Lars Lager, self-published in 2015). In order to ensure that the reflections and perspectives displayed in these novels reflect a larger public consciousness, I have decided to focus on the five novels mentioned initially.

By examining the historical novels and their changing perspectives on Swedish colonialism, we can follow how Sweden has attempted to grapple with the harsh reality of its colonial history from the end of World War II to today. It is crucial to recognize that the significance of historical novels as objects of analysis does not lay in any increased

4. For further information on St. Barthélemy's Swedish history, see Pålsson (2016); Wilson (2016).

understanding of historical events. Rather, it is the relation between the reader and their sense of historical meaning that is re-negotiated by historical fiction. The author, together with a profit-seeking editorial team, creates necessary changes in the themes, language, and narrative of historical events and environments in order to inscribe a sense of narrative meaning for the reader. Thus, a sense of historical authenticity, meant to create the suspension of disbelief necessary for the reader to imagine themselves within a historical setting, is combined with the analogies and anachronisms necessary for this historical setting to carry a sense of meaning and narrative (de Groot 2016).

There have been some examinations of Swedish colonial heritage as represented in literature, such as Susan Brantly's discussion of Ola Larsmo's *Maroonberget* and Afro-Swedish identity, as well as Theresé Svensson's examination of whiteness in Dan Andersson's *Chi-mo-ka-ma*, and Dan Landmark's thesis on orientalism in late nineteenth-century Swedish literature (Brantly 2017; Svensson 2017; Landmark 2003). However, the literature examined in these studies is never directly about Swedish colonialism, but rather tangentially related aspects, such as Swedes in a colonial environment or encountering colonial subjects of a different imperial power. For example, *Chi-mo-ka-ma* (discussed in Svensson 2017) relates the story of Swedish immigrants in Minnesota relating to the Native American population. While questions of whiteness certainly arise, the central relation between the Swedes and Native Americans are only indirectly those of colonizers and colonized. Similarly, *Maroonberget* (discussed in Brantly 2017) portrays the story of Gustav Badin, an Afro-Swedish member of the court of Gustav III and draws a parallel to contemporary Afro-Swedes attempting to find a new identity in Sweden. While Badin was originally enslaved, the novel does not depict Swedish colonial slavery.

Furthermore, the project ScanGuilt⁵ at the University of Oslo, led by Elisabeth Oxfeldt, has examined Scandinavian narratives on happiness and guilt, in which the Scandinavian welfare states are put in contrast with the changes of globalization. Here, Lill-Ann Körber has examined how Danish tourism literature addresses and reconciles the colonial guilt associated with slavery in the Danish Virgin Islands and Ghana, in large part through a combination of exotic imagery

5. ScanGuilt can be accessed at <https://www.hf.uio.no/english/research/projects/theme/scandinavian-narratives-of-guilt-and-privilege/>.

and acknowledgment of past events (Körber 2017; see also Körber 2019).

Körber has also contributed with an analysis of the Danish film *Gold Coast* about Danish colonialism in 1830, which carries many similar themes to the novels discussed in this article. The film carries the same narrative setup of a Scandinavian naïve of the horrors of colonialism traveling to the colony of their nation and being truly upset about the actions carried out. Attempts at redemption are fraught with difficulty and result in physical and mental breakdown of the main character, leading to their death. Additionally, in order to display the shock experienced by the main character, the landscape becomes nightmare-like and highly eroticized. Körber notes that this film was not well-received, but is unsure of how an ethical representation of past colonialism should be made (Körber 2018).

Julianne Q. M. Yang examines depictions of colonial guilt in Roy Andersson's film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, which she claims leads to no resolution, as these depictions take place within an allegorical nightmare in which several Black slaves are led into a giant brass organ by British colonial officers and tortured to death, which in turn produces music. As she concludes:

An issue worth discussing further is whether *Pigeon*, despite touching on important issues, may also be criticized for evoking the question of guilt about the past while simultaneously leaving that very question unresolved, if not problematically diffuse.

On the other hand, by bringing up guilt about the past but refusing to provide any solution or closure, *Pigeon* could also be said to make an important ethical, and political, point—namely, that any search for happiness is likely to be disrupted, time and time again, unless we actively consider how the past is connected to the present. (Yang 2017, 593)

My analysis will not answer the questions asked by Yang and Körber, but I hope it will add another layer of analysis and ask different questions regarding the ethical choices of depicting Scandinavian colonialism. One of the ways to do this is to employ a different theoretical approach. While much research in the ScanGuilt project primarily deals with the notion of feeling, inspired heavily by Sara Ahmed's discussions on the "Politics of Bad Feeling," I am, in my analysis, not directly concerned with colonial guilt as a feeling, meaning the emotional relation by an individual or collective toward a conceived crime (Ahmed 2005; Oxfeldt 2016).

Rather, I am concerned with two aspects, the one preceding and the one succeeding guilt: First, the cognitive rupture between the past cultural markings of neutrality and solidarity and the recognition of contradictory evidence in the form of colonialism. This is what I call the nightmare. The temporal growth of this cognitive rupture from 1945 to 2019 adds a historical dimension to the question of colonial guilt, which is often discussed as a timeless concept emerging from a random discovery of colonial history.

Second, the double bind presented by the protagonists, stand-ins for the reader, between placing one's subjectivity within a colonial framework or outside of it. This latter approach is heavily inspired by Gayatri Spivak's discussions of the double bind (Spivak 2012), and frames the nightmare as a prerequisite for an ethical choice. The double bind is the experience of being faced with two contradictory choices, in which a subject is faced with having to take an ethical stand. This is not a clear choice between a correct and an incorrect option, however, or even a problem to be solved, but often a choice between two options that are both correct and incorrect. Thus, this choice will never lead to a satisfying outcome, but remains an ethical duty. This concept lies close to the experience of postcolonial relations, where the contradictory choices between modernity and tradition, objectivity and subjectivity, and collectiveness and individualism rarely have satisfactory outcomes, but often lead to further anxiety before and after the choice is made. As Gabriel Huddleston has noted as well, it is important to remain in this double bind, experience it and grapple with it, rather than rush into one decision in order to escape awkwardness and anxiety (Huddleston 2015). This communicates well with Yang's previous analysis of Roy Andersson's imagery, as these dreams linger in awkward positions and do not offer easy escapes or narratives about what is the "right" choice.

I propose that the question of colonial guilt, as experienced by the protagonists of the novels (and through extension, the contemporary audiences of the novels), is not a question of confronting one's colonial acts, since they rarely actually commit any of these acts and often try to resist them. One could, of course, argue that they consider their identity as Swedes to be a guilty crime in and of itself, but we should twist the question to view it from a different angle. Rather, the crisis experienced by the protagonists is whether or not they actually belong within the colonial territory. Thus, keep Spivak's double bind in mind

when considering the choices the protagonists of the novels consider and commit to.

UR HAVETS SKUM

Although Elisabet Falkenberg's novel *Ur havets skum* was written in 1945, it best represents the pre-World War II attitude toward colonialism. The main character, Wilhelmina Netherwood, called Nelly, travels to St. Barthélemy together with her brother, who is set to work as a colonial official. There, she meets Gottlieb von Platen, a military officer. The two fall in love, but without each other's knowledge. As they spend time together on the island, depicting the colonial setting to the reader, they eventually confess their love to each other and become engaged. However, Gottlieb is murdered before they can marry, and Nelly is at risk of being raped by the villainous American trader Joseph Hart, but instead dies of disease and ascends to heaven.

The most striking aspect of *Ur havets skum* is how it completely embraces slavery, as Nelly soon discovers that "åtminstone under svensk regim var det inte så farligt. Negrerna tycktes trivas utmärkt" and "föreföllo rakt inte förtryckta, utan togo sig tvärtom allehanda friheter gentemot sitt husbondsfolk, som de oftast voro tillgivna på ett sätt som sökte sitt motstycke i Europa" (Falkenberg 1945, 32) [at least under Swedish rule, it was not so bad. The Negroes seemed to be quite comfortable and they certainly did not seem oppressed, but took freedoms toward their masters, whom they were affectionate toward in ways unparalleled in Europe]. She is initially uncomfortable toward slavery, but her problems are not the inhuman treatment of enslaved people, but rather seeing white children reared by Black women, or the teasing of her house slave Chrissy. Thus, the racial hierarchy is always central. Nelly simply has to let go of seeing slaves as foreign and frightening objects and accept them as integral property of the colony. Gottlieb is attracted to Nelly partly because her hair reminds him of his childhood crush back in Sweden: "Han brukade dra henne i flätorna. Hennes hår hade haft samma färg som fröken Netherwoods. Han undrade om det också skulle kännas likadant att röra vid. Han kunde inte med negerhår. Negrernas lukt kväljde honom" (Falkenberg 1945, 43) [He used to pull her braids. Her hair had the same color as Miss Netherwood's. He wondered if it would feel similar to touch. He couldn't with Negro hair. The smell of Negroes nauseated him].

This apparent disgust toward Black bodies is not just a sign of Gottlieb's and Nelly's personalities, but speaks to the larger danger of colonialism, meaning the corrupting influences of miscegenation. The other colonizers are tainted by Black blood, and Nelly quickly learns to "se skillnad på lockar och lockar. . . . Det röjde genast närvaron av några droppar negerblod i vederbörandes ådror, även när anletsdragen försäkrade motsatsen" (Falkenberg 1945, 32) [see the difference between locks and locks. . . . It immediately revealed the presence of a few drops of Negro blood in their veins, even when their facial features assured the opposite]. Exorbitant orgies between white British and French colonizers and free mixed-race women are depicted as not just amusing, but also disturbing events:

Unga Dinzey, som var nybliven äkta man, sades ha råkat i klorna på Gustavias mest beryktade kokott, oaktat hon nästan var gammal nog att vara hans mor, och till hennes förnöjelse rullade nu den intet ont anande lilla fruns hemgift all världens väg. Det var underliga saker som timade och allt fördes ipp på den onaturliga hettans konto. En överretad fysik krävde nya, rafflande sensationer för att kunna erfara någon njutning—vanvettig lyx, svinlande hasardspel, orgier av sprit och vållust. Sådana raptus av onormal livshunger brukade emellanåt skaka samhällets grundvalar, och ofta hade de något att göra med atmosfärska abnormaliteter. (Falkenberg 1945, 134)

(Young Dinzey, who was a newly wed man, was said to have ended up in the claws of Gustavia's most infamous coquette, despite the fact that she was old enough to be his mother, and to her great amusement the wife's dowry was fading away. Strange things were happening and it was all due to the unnatural heat. An overstimulated physique required new, exciting sensations to derive any pleasure, insane luxury, raffling gambling, orgies of booze and lust. Such rapture of unnatural life hunger would at times shake the foundations of society and was often connected to atmospheric abnormalities.)

This sexual chaos is a constant danger of the colony, as mixed-race women tempt the white men into unnatural unions. As Mimi Sheller notes, there has been fear of tropicalization of the colonizer, which "can also be thought of as a moral danger inherent in the climate itself, and in the proximity of 'different' bodies. . . . This degeneracy was, in a way, a kind of disorientation, a loss of moral bearings, purpose and direction" (Sheller 2003, 118–9). The theme of endangered sense of morality will be consistent in all of the analyzed novels, although the

tenets of morality will shift. We can also note that double binds will often be influenced by the theme of tropicalization.

The strength of Gottlieb's and Nelly's love lies in their ability to withstand the tropicalization of the Caribbean milieu and retain their sexual honor. When Nelly is almost overtaken by her lust for Gottlieb while they are preparing for their wedding, he exclaims that as much as he feels the same for her, he wants her on their wedding night as a "*virgo intacta*." The American, Joseph Hart, on the other hand, throws exorbitant parties where the champagne flows. His desire for Nelly is that of the New World corrupting the Old World, and her virgin death is the last defense against sexual pollution, preserving the humble and proper Swedish woman. Although the danger of Caribbean sexuality is frequently revisited, *Ur havets skum* is quite self-assured in Sweden's place in the Caribbean. They are the last vestige of whiteness, order, and civilization, and despite attempts to corrupt them, the stalwart Swedish officer and the virtuous Swedish woman resist temptation and keep the race pure.

More than the depictions of people of color as comical children and of whiteness as beautiful, the racial hierarchy of the novel relies on Swedish colonialism as a benevolent and necessary force to create order in a chaotic Caribbean. This is most clearly seen in the postscript, where Governor Ulrich of 1878 reflects on the colony after it is returned to France:

Men ändå—aldrig skulle han glömma sin förväntansfulla iver, när utkiken varskott att S:t Barthélemy siktades, den sällsamma förnimmelse av äganderätt och hemkänsla, som strömmade över honom, när han fick sätta foten på dess mark. Detta lilla stycke Sverige ute i världshavet, var det inte trots allt en fosterländsk tillgång, vars värde inte kunde räknas i pengar? Svensk rättsordning och svenska hedersbegrepp, i viss mån också svenskt språk och svenska sedvänjor, hade nu i snart ett århundrade fått vittna i världen om vår nationella egenart, ett vittnesmål som vi inte behövt blygas för. Men nu skulle det bringas till tystnad, och därmed var väl också drömmen om ett svenskt kolonialvälde för alltid skrinlagd. (Falkenberg 1945, 342–3)

(But still—he would never forget his excitement, as the scouts told that St. Barthélemy was sighted, the rare sense of ownership and feeling of home rushing over him as he stepped foot on its land. This small strip of Sweden on the World Seas, was it not an asset to the fatherland, whose value cannot be counted in money? Swedish legal order and

a Swedish sense of honor, to a certain degree Swedish language and Swedish traditions, have now for almost a century paid witness to this part of the world our national uniqueness, a testimony we should not be shy of. But now it would be silenced forever, and thus the dream of a Swedish colonial reign was forever closed.)

Worth noticing is that already upon first landing on the island, Swedish ownership is clear, not just legally but within the physicality of the ground. Sweden has a given place within the Caribbean, not just as an example to Afro-Caribbeans, but to the rest of the European colonizers.

By 1945, this novel was quite out of date, with reviewers complaining about stilted dialogue and a boring love story. Most likely, readers would not have minded a little bit more tropical corruption in their colonial romance novel. But there was no real objection to its racial politics and the environment “vimlar av godmodiga svartingar med pittoreska namn,” according to one reviewer (Tykesson 1945, 617–8) [was swarming with good-natured Blacks with picturesque names].

Much more could be said about *Ur havets skum*, but the critical aspect from the perspective of this study is that there is never any crisis of identity or morality. While the novel was more conservative than the others, within the historical conceptualization of 1945, there was no moral ambiguity about the benevolence of slavery, the Caribbean’s threat to white sexual purity, or the righteousness of Swedish colonialism.

DEN GUDOMLIGA ÖN

Evert Lundström had, previous to 1982, written several historical adventure novels, often set in Gothenburg or in global environments, such as the Russian revolution or on an East Indian trade ship. As he turned to St. Barthélemy, it was as part of a continuity of depicting the Swede in foreign lands. In *Den gudomliga ön*, the Swedish soldier Niclas Junggren leaves for the colony to take part in the initial Swedish colonization. However, he becomes incapacitated by a falling log and spends the rest of his life on the island as a crippled accountant. He befriends the Swedish doctor Fahlberg and proceeds to tell the story of his great work on the island.

Niclas does not have much of a character progression in this novel and serves mostly to give his impressions of the colony. As we will see in all subsequent novels, the protagonists are typically passive witnesses to the events of the island rather than active participants in them. All

protagonists are Swedes traveling from mainland Sweden to the colony, and their discoveries and observations serve as stand-ins for our own discoveries and observations as readers. Here, the nightmare begins.

In *Den gudomliga ön*, this growing tension is most present within the nationality of physical matter. Already in the introduction, the question of whether or not tropical ground can truly be Swedish sets the tone:

Solen går upp och havet blöder. Ingen stund av dagen älskar jag som denna. Solen stiger lingonröd ur havet och dränker mig med ljus. Lingonröd! Lustigt, det är femtio år sedan jag såg ett lingonbär, och ändå minns jag dess klarröd färg så väl att jag nu ser solen som ett väldigt lingon, vilket en gud sakta baxar upp ur havets djup.

Jo, så är det. Jag har inte kunnat undgå att märka, hur mina tankar på senare tid allt oftare sökt sig till mitt hemland, mitt fosterland. Jag bor inom Svea Rikes gränser, och ändå inte. Varje dag trampar jag svensk mark, och ändå inte. Är inte själva havet, på vars soldränkta yta jag just nu sitter, svenskt? (Lundström 1982, 7)

(The sun rises and the sea bleeds. I love no time in the day like this. The sun rises lingonberry red from the sea and drowns me in light. Lingonberry red! Funny, it is 50 years since I saw a lingonberry, and yet I remember its clear red color so well that I now see the sun as a giant lingonberry, which a god slowly pushes out the depth of the sea.

That's right. I have not been able to avoid noticing, how my thoughts lately turn to my homeland, my native land. I live within the realm of Sweden, yet not. Every day I step on Swedish ground, yet not. Isn't the sea, on whose sun-drenched surface I now sit, Swedish?)

As a colonizer, Niclas constantly battles with the metaphor of nationality, conquering the Caribbean ground itself with symbols of Swedishness. As they replace the rotting French flagpole on the island with a new pole of “real Swedish fir,” the “Swedification” of the island is not subtext, but text: “Flaggan gick i topp på sin nya helsvenska stång. *Fort Gustaf III*. Vi hade börjat försvenska Saint Barthélemy. På ön fanns nu en fästning, som hette Fort Gustaf III” (Lundström 1982, 56) [The flag rose on our new wholly Swedish flag pole. *Fort Gustaf III*. We had started to Swedify Saint Barthélemy. On the island there was now a fortress, called Fort Gustaf III]. When slaves show up to build houses, Niclas is too ashamed to look them in the eyes, yet as the house is finished, he remarks: “Det första *svenska* huset på vår ö! Vi kände oss alla stolta över vårt första hus” (Lundström 1982, 58) [The first *Swedish* house on our island! We were all proud of our first house].

The ambiguity between the shame of Swedish slavery and the pride of Swedish colonialism begins to show. When his British abolitionist friends tell him that new slaves are to be shipped to the island on Swedish ships, he struggles to accept it:

Men det var som om jag ändå inte ville tro vad jag hört. ‘Vi i Sverige är ju emot slavhandeln! . . . Det har varit diskussioner länge—redan långt innan vi for hit! . . . Och inte bara i Sverige, jag har hört av Fahlberg att det är samma sak runt om i världen, i hela Europa finns det massor av människor som . . . Ja, som sätter sej emot det!’ (Lundström 1982, III)

(It was as if I could not believe what I was hearing. ‘But in Sweden we are against the slave trade! . . . There have been plenty of discussions—already before we went here! . . . And not just in Sweden, I have heard from Fahlberg that it’s the same all over the world, in all of Europe there are plenty of people who are . . . Are against it!’)

Soon afterward, they beat up a Swedish bourgeois, foppish slave trader after a Black enslaved woman is publicly humiliated, which creates a difference between the working-class Swedes and Brits who retain their moral high ground. However, the harassed woman is given no lines or any other identity and is in no way saved from slavery. As noted by Susan Brantly, Evert Lundström tends to re-create homosocial adventures in which women are treated as little more than background material (Brantly 2017, 78). For example, the mother of Niclas’s future bride Mary, whose father and brothers are the aforementioned friends, is described simply as being small and round like a pool ball and smelling of onions. She is never given a name. The friendship with Mary’s male family members is also given much more time than his marriage, and male friendship is generally depicted as a stronger bond.

With just a degree of separation from slavery, Niclas can settle into a more comfortable moral position: “Jag skeppade socker och en f.d. Kompanichef, inte slavar. Jag var tacksam över det” (Lundström 1982, 160) [I was shipping sugar and an ex-Company official, not slaves. I was thankful for this]. Yet, as the Swedish Company office was bought by American traders, he notes that “golvet på kontoret [hade] varit en bit av Sverige. Efter ägarskiftet blev golvet amerikanskt” (Lundström 1982, 255) [the floor of the office had been a part of Sweden. With the new owners, the floor became American].

Just as in *Ur havets skum*, there is a sense of pride in the order and responsibility of the Swedish colonizers. Straight street lines, vaccination, strong Swedish wood, and enlightenment modernity allows

Sweden to shine a light in the Caribbean, but where Falkenberg puts disciplined and responsible slavery among the Swedish characteristics, Lundström instead believes anti-slavery to be a sign of Swedish order. With this shift, the undeniable Swedish-Caribbean slave society thus starts to unsettle the vision of a just Swedish colony. Questions of responsibility, shame, and power difference not only shake the moral foundations of the island, but also the physical foundation. After the decolonization of large parts of the Caribbean in the 1960s and 1970s, the question had to be addressed: Was this Swedish land? Were these Swedish trees? Was this Swedish water? The reviews of the novel regard it as somewhat stale and ask for more excitement. Björn Holm in *Expressen* comments that had it not been for the Swedish history, there would have been nothing interesting about “den lilla flugskiten på kartan” (Holm 1982) [this little fly turd on the map]. Göran Schildt in *Svenska Dagbladet* writes that the reason this story has seldom been told “är kanske att ‘kolonialism’ överhuvudtaget är någonting man skäms över, vartill kommer att dessa besittningar var ytterst anspråkslösa samt förknippade med föga gloriösa historiska omständigheter” (Schildt 1982) [is perhaps because ‘colonialism’ generally is considered shameful, as well as that these possessions were very modest and associated with not especially glorious historical circumstances].

What we can see from these reviews is that there is still an ambition for historical novels to portray exotic escapism, and the lack of excitement within this narrative disappoints the reader. There is, however, an increasing acknowledgment of the problematic aspects of the colony, although both the writer and the readers do not know how to approach them. A feeling of unreality emerges on the island. The protagonist has to second-guess his own motivations and his place within the Caribbean, leaving little time for pirate adventures. As the protagonist is a stand-in for the reader, it means that the Swedish reader has to face the questions of the Swedish colonial past, and the confusions and doubts of the protagonist reflect our own doubts. This is the beginning of the end of the Swedish dream.

MÅNBRÖDERNA

While the least commercially successful novel of the five, Tomas Blom’s *Månbröderna* from 1991 is a good indicator of several themes that now start to emerge. The story starts in Stockholm, where twin brothers Karl and Johan Cederhielm are rivals. Karl assaults his brother, assumes

his name, and flees to St. Barthélemy together with loan shark and pimp Fischerström. Upon arrival, he meets a free Black woman, Sarah Duck, who seduces him by pretending to be his slave. The three of them seek a hidden treasure, which drives Fischerström and Sarah mad with greed, as they strand Karl on the island. When Johan arrives to rescue his brother, Karl has gone insane. An explosion renders the two brothers burnt and indistinguishable from one another, with one blind and one deaf, causing them to become a two-headed monster:

Här stod nu två livs levande karlar med alldeles svartnade och vanställda drag, skinnet spänt över ansiktsbenen, nästan inga läppar kvar och näsorna som rovfågelsnäbbar. Den ene dessutom blind, efter vad det syntes. I alla fall bar han en bindel över ögonen. Men de var ändå människor och ingen kunde neka dem deras beskärda del av den barmhärtighet och omsorg som en kristligt sinnad bör skänka sin nästa. Det var bara det att de log så jävligt! Sneda, envetna leenden, som tycktes sitta som klistrade i deras vederstyggliga ansikten. Det var som om leendena ville säga att de var förmer än andra, att de lidit och utstått så mycket att de nu var bortom mänskliga mått och stod över denna världen. Eller om det var så att de blivit så i branden, eller vad det nu var de fått sina märken av. (Blom 1991, 613)

(Here stood two living men, with blackened and mutilated features, their skin tight over their skull bones, almost no lips left and their noses like raptor beaks. One of them blind as well, or at least with a blindfold. But they were people after all, and no one could deny their part of grace and care a good Christian would give to their neighbor. But those damned smiles! Twisted, persistent smiles, which seemed glued to their hideous faces. It was as if they wanted to say that they were better than the others, that they had suffered so much that they were beyond human measurement and stood above this world. Or their faces had become so from the fire, or wherever they got their marks.)

The markedly darker tone of this passage is indicative of the shifts toward a nightmare setting within the subsequent novels. Karl's exile on the island is a movement from the realistic depiction of Stockholm as a city of political conflict, class difference, prostitution, and misery toward a magical and highly sexual Caribbean, in which morality is no longer relevant. Upon first seeing an enslaved woman, Karl is aroused, but conflicted in his disgust with slavery and the desire to own her:

Slav? Att äga en människa som slav, att förfoga helt och hållet över en sådan magnifik kropp, vore det verkligen möjligt? Karl hade aldrig på allvar tänkt sig in i vad det kunde betyda att vara slavägare. Alla

hans innersta instinkter, och allt förnuft tillika, uppreste sig mot detta vidriga, ogudliga utnyttjande av medmänniskor—åtminstone hade han trott att det var på det viset han betraktade frågan. Ända tills nu. Han ville äga den här kvinnan, eller någon som han, ville besitta henna, ha henne natt och dag, få sitt lystmäte av hennes kropp när och hur han ville. Det var som en djup och lerig grop öppnade sig inuti honom, i hans själ och sinne. Insikten om att här, på denna förbannade ö, gick det an att kasta sig rätt ner i dyngan och vältra sig utan att en jävel lade sig i, drabbade honom med sådan kraft att han började kallsvetas. (Blom 1991, 371–2)

(Slave? To own a human as a slave, to completely control such a magnificent body, was it really possible? Karl had never seriously considered what it would mean to be a slave owner. All his inner instincts, and all his sense as well, revolted against this vile, ungodly abuse of fellow humans—at least he thought that was his viewpoint. Until now. He wanted to own that woman, or someone like her, possess her, have her day and night, get his fill of her body when and how he wished. It was as if a deep and muddy pit opened up inside him, in his soul and mind. The revelation that here, on this damned island, he could throw himself right into the dirt and languish without some bastard interfering, struck him with such force that he broke out in a cold sweat.)

Morals have no place here. Even after Karl wishes to do the right thing and sell weapons to Haitian rebels, they decide to kill him. But the governor's men, who had used Karl as a pawn to draw the rebels out, save him. After this, he withdraws to spend his days having sex with Sarah Duck. By this point, Duck has poisoned the Dickson twin sisters, who both flirted with Karl, and one of them had sex with him outside of a ball, riding him to the rhythm of the music.

Tropicalization thus is present here as well, as the music, parties, and sexual mania, together with the absence of a moral center, push Karl further into nihilism. When Sarah Duck is revealed to be a voodoo priestess, holding a ceremony in the nude in a nearby cave, the fear and sexual desire become even more clearly intertwined, as he is discovered and threatened by the other enslaved people:

Karl fick inte fram ett vettigt ord till förklaring, så lamslagen var han av att ha mött denna nya och skrämmande sida av sin älskarinna. Hon stod framför honom, naken och ståtlig, men hennes kropps hållning, blicken i hennes ögon, ja själva hennes nakenhet var annorlunda, främmande och plötsligt var det svårt för Karl att föreställa sig att han någonsin famnat och lägrat denna vilda kvinna. (Blom 1991, 431)

(Karl could not come up with an explanation, so terrified was he to see this new and frightening side of his mistress. She stood before him, naked and proud, but her body's posture, her gaze, even her nudity was different, strange, and suddenly it was hard for Karl to even imagine he had grasped and taken this wild woman.)

However, as his twin brother's shadow is visible in the moonlight, he is spared, as the enslaved fear magic. While this magic aspect of the brothers was hinted at in the introduction, it is not until the plot moves into the Caribbean that magic becomes a real concept of consideration in the novel. In this way, St. Barthélemy cannot be described as anything but an erotic nightmare landscape. Here, Karl's guilt of assaulting his brother is reflected in his anxiety and guilt over slavery, but his helplessness over not stopping it, but also giving in to its sexual temptation, creates the nightmarish aspects of the colony. His sexual escapades are not seen as exciting or even desirable, but as uncontrollable urges that further drive him from his humanity.

Upon discovering the treasure, his mind is filled with images of centuries of colonial slaughter in the Caribbean, and envisions the Caribbean people dying for the gold lust of the colonizers. Even here, the betrayal is sexualized, as he wakes up to see Sarah Duck giving Fischerström a blowjob. He loses his mind, and eventually becomes a monster together with his brother. The nightmare has claimed him, and he has lost his humanity, both physically and morally.

Mänbröderna was never a particularly popular book, partially due to its unnecessarily explicit sexual elements, and partially due to its generally poor quality. Despite disavowing slavery, it had no issue falling back on racist depictions of voodoo queens and oversexualized parties, to name some but not all aspects. Still, we can now see a new template for St. Barthélemy novels, as the pride of colonialism has faded and the nagging guilt of Swedish slavery starts to set in. Reaching 2017 and 2019, we see how the nightmare fully blossoms.

DE OFRIA

Published in 2017, Janne Lundström's young adult novel more closely reflects our current-day relation to colonial history. The protagonist is fifteen-year-old Matilda, whose mother dies, and she has to travel to her father in St. Barthélemy. There, she is confronted by slavery and has to deal with her father being a slave owner. She later discovers that two

of the slaves, twins Pieter and Willem, also called Zwarte and Witte, are her half-brothers, as her father is now keeping his slave Beatrijs as a mistress. Pieter is depicted as rebellious and angry, while Willem is obedient and complacent.

Matilda's confusion toward slave society, as she witnesses slave auctions, punishment, and cruelty, is also reflected in her place as an outsider. As she first arrives, the language is mostly a mixture of Dutch and Swedish. While initially trying to heed her father's justifications for slavery, she eventually rebels. As Willem is granted a letter of freedom, Matilda steals it and gives it to Pieter, granting him the opportunity to escape under Willem's name.

Here, the narration shifts from Matilda's first-person diary entries to third-person, as Matilda chronicles the journey of Pieter. More than simply a narrative trick, it reflects a shift, in which Matilda no longer wishes to be the protagonist of her own narrative:

När jag skriver dessa rader, skakar mina händer så våldsamt att jag stundom måste lägga ifrån mig pennan.

Jag, jag, jag.

Så jag hatar det ordet. Jag önskar att jag kunde utelämna det, att alla dessa jag kunde ersättas med tomrum. Men så i fall skulle min berättelse falla isär.

Jag är tvungen att skriva om min far och Witte och Zwarte och Beatrijs och om hur Vår Herre eller revolutionärernas Högsta Väsen eller Djävulen själv eller en kedja av obarmhärtiga tillfälligheter formade deras liv och levnadsöden.

Jag skriver för att bli fri.

Nej, jag skriver för att förstå. Och för att, om det är möjligt, försona mig med mig själv. Fri från min skuld blir jag väl aldrig. (Lundström 2017, 122)

(As I write these lines, my hands shake so violently that I at times must put away my pen.

I, I, I.

How I hate that word. I wish I could remove it, that all these I's would be replaced by blank spaces. But then my story would collapse.

I am forced to write about my father and Witte and Zwarte and Beatrijs and how Our Lord or the highest being of the revolutionaries or the Devil himself or a series of unforgiving coincidences formed their lives and fortunes.

I write to be free. No, I write to understand. And to, if possible, forgive myself. I suppose I will never be free of my guilt.)

Crucial to this aspect is that the guilt felt by Matilda is not based on any action taken by her, but by her association to her father, which, of course, is a reflection of colonial guilt. Being only fifteen, she is in no way able to meaningfully participate in slave society, neither by supporting it nor by resisting it. Yet there is an unavoidable gap of experience between her and the enslaved, which she cannot escape or ignore, as shown when she visits a friend's plantation as an adult and sees the enslaved people there:

Vilka är de? Var är de födda? Vilka fador genomled de på slavskuppen?
Hur hamnade de på Bartolomejan? Benämner onkel dem med namn,
som de inte vill kännas vid?

Längtar de hem till Afrika? Längtar de efter friheten? Brinner van-
makten i deras bröst?

Och slavarna betraktar mig i smyg.

Deras ansikten är slutna. Outgrundliga. Som huggna i svart granit.

Känner de samma hat, som Pieter kände? (Lundström 2017, 469)

(Who are they? Where are they born? What horrors did they suffer
on the slave ships? How did they end up in St. Barthélemy? Does he
call them by names they do not want?

Do they long for Africa? Do they long for freedom? Is hopelessness
burning in their chests?

And the slaves watch me in secret. Their faces are closed. Unknow-
able. As if carved from black granite.

Do they feel the same hate that Pieter felt?)

Slavery and Swedish colonialism are thus portrayed as unanswerable but inescapable questions. Matilda chronicles Pieter's travels to St. Eustatius and later to Martinique, in an attempt not just to find him, but to find the narrative and meaning of his escape. Similarly, she is heartbroken not just for the pain of the slaves, but for her own inability to know their pain. In her review of the book, Ida Therén of *Svenska Dagbladet* clearly associates this historic injustice and inequality with present day inequality:

Rollen som slav och ägare finns kvar, som ett vidrigt minne, en vägg
mellan människorna. Det blir ett straff även för de vita, privilegierade:
kontakten som alla människor söker med andra människor, med
världen, går inte att infria så länge det finns ett element av ägande,
av ofrånkomlig makt, som ligger mellan och skaver. (Therén 2017)

(The role of slave and owner still exists, as a disgusting memory, a
wall between people. This becomes a punishment for the white and

privileged as well: the contact which all humans want with other humans, with the world, cannot be achieved as long as there is an element of ownership, of inescapable power, which creates tension between them.)

This is the nightmare. Rather than elicit a sense of national pride, the colony now only brings forth a vision of nameless guilt, which we relive through the main characters' travel to the island. As they witness the colony and feel shame, so should we read the book and feel shame, not through our actions, but through our associations. The pride of global solidarity gives way to a sense of guilt and shame.

As in Yang's analysis of the film *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, the feeling of guilt is vaguely linked to a broader global inequality, but the protagonist's relation to this inequality is never clearly located or defined. At both times, this sense of shame is not associated with actions personally taken, but unjust, unavoidable historical events and the melancholia of having one's identity associated with these types of events. Matilda is not ashamed of being cruel to Pieter and Willem, but of being the daughter of a man who was. This is a position she cannot escape. She cannot stop being her father's daughter, just as she cannot move away from her position within the racial hierarchy. She is thus faced with a double bind of how to relate to this position, to embrace it or deny it. Ultimately, she attempts to be a better version of her father, a kinder slave owner and merchant. Thus, her social position is fixed, just as with all other colonial subjects. In the final epilogue, she has a dream that she is dying, and Pieter comes in to lick her wounds clean. "Du är som en lejoninna, viskar jag. En lejoninna som slicker lejonungens sår att det kan läka" (Lundström 2017, 477) [You are like a lioness, I whisper. A lioness who licks the lion cub's wounds clean so it can heal]. Just as Nelly in *Ur havets skum* ascended to heaven a *virgo intacta*, Matilda dies blessed with the forgiveness of Pieter. They can both die pure.

1794

In 2017, Niklas Natt och Dag had a hit with his debut novel *1793*, translated to English under the title *The Wolf and the Watchman*. Set during 1793, the novel recounts a gritty crime story, with the author calling the tone "Bellman Noir" after the Swedish composer Carl Michael Bellman. The discovery of a disfigured corpse leads two detectives to unveil a secret society of sexual deviancy among Stockholm's

aristocracy. *Natt och Dag* depicts early modern Sweden as a callous, brutal and nihilist place. It would therefore make sense for the sequel to be set in St. Barthélemy.

The sequel, *1794*, was published in 2019. The first part of the novel depicts Erik Tre Rosor, a young nobleman living on an estate, who falls in love with the daughter of the estate's caretaker, Linnea Colling. His father does not approve and sends him off to do business in St. Barthélemy, together with his friend Johan Axel. Upon arrival in the colony, his immediate impression is chaos and confusion:

De män vi tilltalade för att fråga om vägen till guvernörens hus visade sig alla vara fransmän, och även om vi både förkovrat oss i språket var deras uttal ofta främmande och beredde oss svårighet. Vi gjorde oss en lov bland husen, som blev allt mer ödmjuka ju längre bort från Carenagen—så kallade man hamnen—vi kom. Snart var där bara hyddor med jordgolv, sammanfogade av brädlappar, vilket ingalunda hindrade deras invånare från att bedriva allsköns kommers. Vad som skulle gälla för gator förlorade här varje tillstymmelse till system, och vi befann oss istället i en labyrint renons på ledtrådar. Inne i gytret föreföll också stämningen vara en annan, mättad av den sorts illvilja jag anat redan vid kajen. Berusade män vacklade framåt på platta fötter och tvingade oss att väja medan de besvor oss på franska eller engelska. Bedagade kvinnor under palmbladstak ylade ut den taxa för vilken deras tjänster kunde säkras, och när vi vände dem ryggen satte de vår manlighet ifråga. Männen var inte stort bättre: med oförskämd uppsyn erbjöds vi rom, och deras avfärdande kommentarer sved i våra ögon när vi skyndade vidare. Nakna barn med mörkt skinn följde oss på avstånd och gjorde stora ögon åt våra knäbyxor, sidenstrumpor och pråliga jackor. (*Natt och Dag* 2019, 25–6)

(The men who we asked for the way to the governor's house were all Frenchmen, and even though we had both partaken in the language, their dialect was often strange and difficult to understand. We walked around the houses, which became more and more humble the farther we got from the Carenage—which the harbor was called. Soon there were only huts with earth floors, created from odd boards, which did not stop its inhabitants from running various kinds of commerce. What were called streets lost any resemblance of a system, and we soon found ourselves in a labyrinth without clues. Here in the throng, the mood was different, satiated with a kind of ill will I had suspected already in the docks. Drunk men staggered on flat feet and forced us to swerve as they cursed at us in French or English. Aged women under palm leaf roofs hollered out the price for which their services could be secured

and when we turned our backs, they questioned our manliness. The men were not much better: we were rudely offered rum, and their dismissing comments burned our ears as we hurried along. Naked children with dark skin followed at a distance and made wide eyes at our breeches, silk socks and garish jackets.)

The licentious nature of St. Barthélemy is visible here again, as the tropical chaos simultaneously threatens and seduces with its vices. We see here how the confusion is built into the very infrastructure of the city, as houses give way to huts and streets, becoming a labyrinth. Language fails, and the young boys find themselves in a dangerous world. They soon fall ill, and when Erik wakes up, he is shown a Swedish slave ship:

De låg i sitt eget träck, i avföring och blodiga spyor och floder av piss som vispades av och an med vågorna. Bland dem låg några döda, vända på mage med ansiktena nedåt i sörjan. Surret av flugor var så högt att deras jämrande röster knappt gick att urskilja, men rasslet av de länkar som fjättrade var och en av dem till sina grannar förnam jag tydligt. Och deras blickar ska jag aldrig glömma, dels de som var fulla av ett mordiskt raseri och som vittnade om varje slag och varje förnedring för vilken de utsatts, dels och långt värre de som var lika tomma och uttryckslösa som boskaps, döda inombords redan. (Natt och Dag 2019, 32–3)

(They lay in their own filth, in feces and bloody vomit and rivers of piss that washed to and fro with the waves. Among them lay some dead, turned on their stomach with their faces down in the sewage. The buzz of flies was so loud that their agonizing voices could hardly be discerned, but the rattle of the chains that bounded everyone to their neighbors I remember clearly. And their gazes I will never forget, partly those filled with a murderous rage, witnessing every beating and humiliation they had taken, partly, and far worse, those who were as empty and expressionless as cattle, dead inside already.)

Natt och Dag makes an explicit reference to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the following chapter starts with the line: "Sådan var min första inblick i Barthélemys [*sic*] mörka hjärta" (Natt och Dag 2019, 34) [This was my first view of the dark heart of Barthélemy]. Erik later receives the job to count the lashes of a pregnant woman getting whipped, which he is unable to do as he faints. Graphic descriptions of the woman urinating from the pain add to the body horror of the place, similarly to what was seen on the deck of the slave ship. Another

view of a slave wearing a headcollar, which fixed his jaw and made him unable to speak, depicts St. Barthélemy as a place of cruelty:

Jag har vant mig vid att slavarnas hud kan skifta i olika nyanser, men jag har aldrig sett någon som denne. Lika naken som den dag han föddes visade han en kropp fläckig som av någon sjukdom, skiftande från mörkaste svart till ljusare partiet. Hår hade han inget kvar och skalpen bar ännu blesyrer efter den egg som skurit. Ansiktet så mörkt att bara ögonens vitor syntes, och illa mörbultat var det till köpet. Han grät, ylade åt mig och sträckte sig så långt halsjärnets kätting tillät, och jag hann tänka att han säkert var en av dem som trånsjukan drabbat hårdast innan en grovlemd engelsman klev mellan oss och gav slaven ett väl inövat rapp rakt över blygden med sin spatserkäpp. Ynglingen föll som en fura med hela sina fläckiga kropp lindad om det onda. Engelsmannen snäste åt mig: "Den här rivs och slåss om han får chansen. Fast han var nästintill gratis anser jag mig lurad. Håll dig borta." Ur slaven kom bara hulkande grät, och jag hörde honom länge medan jag fortsatte på min väg. (Natt och Dag 2019, 48)

(I had gotten used to the shifting skin tones of the slaves, but I had never seen any like this. As naked as the day he was born, he showed a body patched by some disease, shifting from darkest black to lighter parts. He had no hair left and his scalp still had marks from the cutting edge. His face was so dark that only the whites of his eyes showed, and badly beaten as well. He cried, howled toward me and stretched as far as the chain of his neck collar allowed, and I barely had the time to reflect that he was probably one which the languish sickness had gotten to most severely, before a thick-limbed Englishman stepped between us and gave the slave a well-practiced swipe right across his groin with his walking cane. The youngling fell like a tree with his patched body curled around the pain. The Englishman snarled at me: 'This one scratches and fights if he gets the chance. Even though he was practically free, I was robbed. Stay back.' From the slave came only sobbing tears, and I heard him for a long time as I kept walking.)

What is of significance here is not just the inhumane treatment of the slave by the slave owners, but the description of his body as diseased and foreign, almost as a mixture of machine and man, with no ability to speak. However, the silencing of slaves is also reflected in the fact that no enslaved people have any lines in the novel. They are observed, discussed, tortured, bought, sold, and empathized with by the Swedes on the island. Just as in many similar novels, they are still depicted as foreign and strange, and it is unclear if they are even able to communicate at all. The enslaved man was desperately trying to

reach out to Erik, only to be silenced and punished for his attempts at communication. In a sense, this also reflects the act of the writer, who uses their bodies as a canvas to paint a portrait of historic nihilism, but without these bodies communicating their own place in this milieu.

Erik later befriends Ceton, a slave owner who tricks him into thinking he actually freed all his slaves, which is why none of them could be found on the property. The truth is that they were all killed. Ceton, who had to leave Sweden, later returns as the caretaker of the Tre Rosor estate, as Erik's father is now sick and weak. Ceton helps to arrange Erik's marriage to Matilda, but his friends paralyze Erik with a drug and later that evening dismember and disfigure Matilda, implicating Erik as committing the crime while insane. Erik is committed to an insane asylum, where he is drugged and slowly loses his mind, until he is finally lobotomized. This is a choice he himself accepts gladly, as a final way to escape his own perceived guilt of murdering Matilda, intersticed with colonial imagery. "Bilder och tankar bläddrade förbi inom mig. Där fanns kannibalerna på Barthélemy. Mina konversationer med Fahlberg. Min bröllopsnatt. Slavarnas däck och kättingar. Frangripani med uppräckta rötter" (Natt och Dag 2019, 65) [Images and thoughts scanned by me. There were the cannibals of Barthélemy. My conversations with Fahlberg. My wedding night. The deck and chains of the slaves. Unrooted frangripani].

Like a vampire being invited into a house, Ceton brings with him the horror of the colony to Erik's home. The brutality of the slave trade and sugar fields is paralleled with the acts of cannibalism of the Arawaks and the viciousness of the Age of Revolution. When asked what is wrong with him, as he confessed to the act, Ceton responds: "Vad jag försöker säga är att det inte är mig det är fel på. Jag är blott morgondagens man kommen i förtid" (Natt och Dag 2019, 133) [What I'm trying to say is that there is nothing wrong with me. I am simply the man of tomorrow come early]. As the novel moved into its second half, all references to St. Barthélemy disappear. If in *Mänbröderna*, the colony serves as the end point of a decline into madness and dehumanization, in *1794*, it serves to establish a world without morality and afterward recedes into the periphery.

THE NIGHTMARE AND THE DOUBLE BIND

In his article "Nej, Sverige är inte en moralisk supermakt" (No, Sweden Is Not a Moral Superpower) in *Svenska Dagbladet*, author

and historian Carl-Michael Edenborg recounts a number of aspects in which Sweden is in fact less progressive than it claims to be. In part, he mentions the Swedish colony, “skildrad i Niklas Natt och Dags utmärkta roman ‘1794.’” This colony and Swedish slavery, he claims, “förblir en stinkande varböld i vår historia” (Edenborg 2020) [depicted in Niklas Natt och Dag’s excellent novel ‘1794’ . . . will remain a stinking cyst on our history]. Here, we can see the two critical aspects of the claims of this article: First of all, historical novels remain a strong influence on our perception of history and, by extension, national identity. Second, the history of slavery undermines national narratives of solidarity, replacing them with un-erasable guilt, from which there is no escape and thus no ability to regain an identity as a moral nation. What remains is a sense of guilt rooted in being. This is particularly illuminating, because Natt och Dag’s novel does not actually argue for the importance of guilt. Like in *Mänbröderna*, the main character is tricked when attempting to combat slavery, leading to their further demise. Attempts at reconciliation are seen as naïve responses to the breakdown of meaning, pushing them further along the path of mental and physical destruction, yet the takeaway from readers and reviewers is still that of guilt and shame.

What can really be said about the nightmare? It is not a fixed position, but moves and takes different shapes itself throughout the different readings of Sweden’s colonial history. As can be seen in the contrasting descriptions of *1794* and *De ofria*, the nightmare is not simply a matter of being for or against slavery, or even about how accurately slavery is portrayed. If we dive deeper and look at the two authors’ views on morality and the possibility for the enslaved to be represented, we can see more clearly how the nightmare presents us with different forms of colonial anxiety. Janne Lundström entertains the possibility of agency, resistance, and communication between owners and slaves, although much of this involves depictions of failure and tragedy. There is also an overwhelming sense of guilt and responsibility of the witnesses to slavery, but it never becomes clear what one “ought” to do, or if it is rather a matter of what one “ought” to be.

Niklas Natt och Dag instead shows a carnival of torture, where humans are contorted into inhuman shapes, for almost no reason but the delight of their owners. Erik’s disgust about this becomes his downfall, as he falls for Ceton’s descriptions of himself as a humanitarian, although he is the most brutal sadist of them all. Erik commits the cardinal sin of a person living in a nihilist universe: he is naïve, and for

this, he is punished by losing his mind. Although this bleak depiction of the world is centered around St. Barthélemy, it only becomes the starting point of a larger notion of human brutality throughout history and civilization. Slavery, cannibalism, the guillotine, monarchy, and sadomasochism are all different but equivalent aspects of historical brutality.

The nightmare breaks down the symbols of humanity, honor, and decency. It tears into a depiction of a Swedish past of justice, equality, and solidarity, leaving only strands that highlight the destruction of its banners. It shows monsters behind every door and obstacles to all paths. A person cannot exist in this nightmare without losing themselves, just as the reader loses their own sense of meaning. The presence of slavery prevents any sort of approach toward solidarity between white and Black people, as all moves toward the slave's freedom must fail.

Yet this is not a failure of the narrative, but an essential part of its structure. To show a common sense of purpose would break our immersion as readers, whereas sinking deeper into the hopelessness of the nightmare only further asserts our impression of historical realism, critical to the act of being a witness. How could it have been otherwise? To show anything but the utmost senseless brutality, to hold back the descriptions of torture for the sake of torture, would be to say that "it was not that bad after all." In this way, the nightmare is fueled not by a sense of sadism toward the enslaved, but by a sense of compassion. And as our compassion for the victims of slavery becomes deeper, the nightmare grows even darker.

Here, we, through the protagonists, are faced with a double bind, between, on one hand, accepting the Swedish/white/colonizer subject as a component of the colony, embracing it as their/our home and territory, and on the other hand, denying oneself any connection to the colony/colonialism, considering oneself an alien element within it, and dissociating or escaping from its society. In a sense, the nightmare, the shattering of Nordic innocence, leads to the confrontation with this double bind.

The clearest reference point to this double bind outside of these novels (and arguably *Gold Coast* as analyzed by Körber) is Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Set in post-emancipation Jamaica, it is an alternate version of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in which the main impediment to Jane's and Edward Rochester's love is Antoinette (Bertha Antoinetta), Edward's insane wife from the West Indies who lives in the attic. As discussed, tropicalization leading to insanity was

a recurring theme in fiction regarding Creoles, with some indication that Antoinette's being mixed-race would also affect her sanity.

Wide Sargasso Sea tells the story of Antoinette, growing up as a white daughter of a slaveholding family, forever resented by the previously enslaved. She is engaged to Mr. Mason, who openly distrusts the Caribbean. Antoinette tries to show him the wonders of the colony and spends much time with her childhood nurse Christophine. Yet she is never treated well by Mr. Mason, who wants her to go back to England. Neither is she accepted by the servants in Dominica.

It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. (Rhys 2011, 76-7)

When she tries to combine the two worlds, by giving Mr. Mason an obeah love potion, the potion instead acts as a poison. Here, Antoinette is faced with a double bind. Either she acknowledges herself as a hated part of the Caribbean and remains there, or she cuts all ties and returns to a loveless marriage in England. Either way, she becomes the "white cockroach" or the "white nigger." Neither placement of her subjectivity can be considered neatly right or wrong, and neither choice will ease the pain it causes.

The circumstances of this double bind are different for Karl, Matilda, Niclas, and Erik, as they do not have to face the prejudice of tropicalization from Europeans, but rather, the denial of their own participation and the attempt to return to a state of innocence. Regardless, they are faced with the same choice of whether to place their subjectivity within or outside the colony. Unable to manage, Karl and Erik commit the same action as Antoinette: they leave the colony and place their subjectivity in Europe. However, through one way or another, their disconnection from the colony results in their insanity. Karl returns to a primordial state and loses all connection to the outside world on the deserted island, only to return to Sweden disfigured. Erik, on the other hand, escapes back to Sweden, only to have the guilt remain and the brutality of the colony inflicted on his wife. He then further escapes into nothingness through a lobotomy.

Matilda and Niclas however remain in the colony and embrace themselves as constituent parts of it. For Niclas the choice is simple, since Evert Lundström cuts the Gordian knot with a heroic action of a bunch of ordinary working men beating up a prissy upper-class slaver,

then removes all people of color from the narrative. At the time the novel was written, 1982, the nightmare had not grown strong enough to resist such dismissals. This is also why Nelly never faces this double bind, because in 1945, the nightmare had not yet begun to form. For Matilda, however, her placement of her subjectivity within the colony is never without shame and doubt, and, as mentioned, is never forgiven until her death. “In the aporia or the double bind, to decide is the burden of responsibility. The typecase of the ethical sentiment is regret, not self-congratulation” (Spivak 2012, 104–5).

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