Fig. 22.1: Selma Lagerlöf painted in her home in Falun by Carl Larsson in 1908. Bonniers Porträttsamling, Stockholm.

Jenny Bergenmar

Chapter 22

The Fatherland and the Holy Land:

Selma Lagerlöf's *Jerusalem*

Selma Lagerlöf's novel *Jerusalem* (1901–1902) was one of her most successful ones, and it is reflecting the national project circa 1900. However, she also wrote other, lesser known short prose texts about Jerusalem. These texts introduce Jerusalem to a Swedish public, and in them Jerusalem also serves as an exotic place that can be juxtaposed with a Swedish national identity; thus promoting a notion of Swedishness. The Jerusalem constructed in these texts also functions as a code to Christian cultures. The main questions posed in this chapter concern how the Jerusalem code plays out in these texts, more precisely how the concept of the “Holy Land” can be interpreted in them. Moreover, the question of how religious faith plays into the national discourse is explored.

At the peak of the Swedish migration to the West (North America), Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940) wrote a novel about migration in the opposite direction, to the East (Fig. 22.1).¹ In her novel *Jerusalem* (1901–1902), a group of farmers from the region of Dalarna is motivated not by the economic reasons common to migrants to the West, but by another shared reason: the longing for freedom, in this case religious freedom, more precisely, a longing for the heavenly Jerusalem. *Jerusalem* was written in two volumes. The first, *In Dalarna* (1901), narrates the religious revival of a group of villagers in Dalarna and the conflicts arising from it; ending with their departure to Jerusalem. The second, *In the Holy Land* (1902) describes the lives and the subsequent return to Sweden of the main characters, Ingmar and Gertrud, and others from Dalarna in the American Colony in Jerusalem.

Lagerlöf's novel is known to have relied on factual sources. The migration of about 40 people, including children, from the village of Nås in Dalarna to Jerusalem in 1896 was reported in newspapers. This probably did not arouse much interest, since reports

¹ The portrait of Lagerlöf by Carl Larsson (1908) has linen tapestries in the background with motifs and a quote from Lagerlöf's novel *Jerusalem*: “Jerusalem – with streets of gold where holy men and women wandered in long white robes” [“Jerusalem – med gator av guld där de heliga vandrade i vida vita kläder”]. The tapestries were designed by Anna Wettergren, woven by The Society for Swedish Handicraft, and commissioned by 347 women of the society Nya Idun [New Idun]. The tapestries are now preserved at Dalarnas museum. The information regarding the tapestries in Larsson's portrait of Lagerlöf (Fig. 22.1) was kindly furnished by Ms Monica Hilding and Ms Anna-Karin Jobs Arnberg.

of groups migrating to America were common at this time, but Lagerlöf credited a short newspaper article for drawing her attention to this migration to the East.² The group from Nås went to Jerusalem to join the American Colony, a commune of nonconformist evangelical Protestants founded by Anna Spafford (Mrs. Gordon in the novel) and her husband, Horatio, in the 1880s.³ The American Colony was premillennialist, that is, they believed that Jesus would physically return to earth.⁴ The contact between the families from Dalarna and the colony was mediated by Olof Larsson (Hellgum in the novel); a sea captain and revivalist preacher who had met Anna Spafford in Chicago in 1895.⁵ In the novel, he is portrayed as a charismatic character who separates his followers from those in the village who choose not to join him.

The novel is a study in contrasts: the familiar landscape of Dalarna against the foreign Jerusalem; the traditional, inherited faith against the new revival; the down-to-earth and thoughtful mindset of the village leader, Ingmar Ingmarsson, against the emotionally high-strung exaltation of the revivalists (including Gertrud, the principal female protagonist). Erland Lagerroth summarized the novel's central theme as "revolutionary sectarianism versus traditional peasant heritage."⁶ As Vivi Edström shows, the original edition of the second part of *Jerusalem* differs considerably from Lagerlöf's 1909 revision. Edström finds the original more consistent with the first part of the novel. The 1909 version harmonizes the conflict between the emigrants and the village, and it portrays life in Jerusalem as more hopeful and, in the end, more like that of the old village. The original 1902 version does not resolve the ideological conflicts between the villagers and the emigrants, and it paints a darker picture of Jerusalem and the possibility of finding God there.⁷ Edström connects this to the national emotions around 1900, also expressed in Verner von Heidenstam's *Karolinerna* [*The Charles Men*].⁸ In

² Selma Lagerlöf, "Hur jag fann ett romanämne," *Svenska Jerusalemföreningens tidskrift* 35 (1936): 126.

³ Milette Shamir, "'Our Jerusalem,' Americans in the Holy Land and Protestant Narratives of National Entitlement," *American Quarterly* 55 (2003): 29–30.

⁴ Shamir, "'Our Jerusalem,' Americans in the Holy Land and Protestant Narratives of National Entitlement," 30.

⁵ Sigvard Lindqvist, *Kring Selma Lagerlöfs Jerusalem. Några anteckningar* (Falun: Dalarnas Museum, 1990), 24.

⁶ Erland Lagerroth, *Selma Lagerlöfs Jerusalem. Revolutionär Sekterism Mot Fäderneärvd Bondeordning* (Lund: Gleerup, 1966), 79.

⁷ Vivi Edström, "'Gud styr.' Motivförskjutningen i Jerusalem," in *Lagerlöfstudier 1958*, eds. Nils Afzelius and Ulla-Britta Lagerroth (Malmö: Selma Lagerlöf-sällskapet, 1958), 185. Landmark argues that while the original edition emphasizes religious and existential aspects, the revised 1909 edition foregrounds social and political issues. Dan Landmark, "Vi, civilisationens ljusbärare" – *orientalistiska mönster i det sena 1800-talets svenska litteratur och kultur*, Örebro studies 23 (Örebro: Universitetsbiblioteket, 2003), 146.

⁸ *Karolinerna* was the original title. Verner von Heidenstam, *Karolinerna. Berättelser*, 2 vols. (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1897–1898), 117.

that novel, as in Lagerlöf's, love of the nation is narrated as an intense longing for home experienced by Swedes in foreign lands (in both cases, West Asia).⁹

To prepare for writing her novel, Lagerlöf travelled to Jerusalem with fellow-novelist Sophie Elkan; her intimate friend and travelling companion. They plotted a route to Jerusalem via Egypt, and returned through Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey (1899–1900) (Fig. 22.2).¹⁰ In addition to their novels, Lagerlöf's *Jerusalem* and Elkan's novel *Drömmen om Österlandet* [*The Dream of the Orient*], the journey also prompted short stories and travel writing. Helena Bodin has argued that Elkan's texts derived from this journey promoted internationalism and questioned the idea of Swedishness, while Lagerlöf's stories were more patriotic and propagandistic.¹¹ Not surprisingly, Lagerlöf's texts from her eastward travels brim with European *fin de siècle* ideas about the Orient. As Ulf Olsson has remarked, while the conflict in *Jerusalem I* is between tradition and renewal, in *Jerusalem II* it is between the colonists and the Others; mainly non-Christians.¹² Lagerlöf's incentive for writing about the Orient and Jerusalem was, concrete, to an extent, stemming from the 1897 newspaper article and her travel with Sophie Elkan to Jerusalem. However, in her own, fictionalized story about the origin of *Jerusalem*, Lagerlöf points to the interests she shared with her fellow author Heidenstam: they both wanted to write a national epic.¹³ In the newspaper notice describing the migration of the farmers from Dalarna to Palestine, Lagerlöf found her subject. She thus frames *Jerusalem* as both a national and heroic story: for the sake of their faith, the farmers “abandoned Sweden to seek the poor and desolate Holy Land.”¹⁴

The main questions posed in this chapter concern how the Jerusalem code plays out in Lagerlöf's texts; more precisely how the concept of “the Holy Land” can be interpreted in the novel *Jerusalem* and how this relates to Swedish literature as a

9 Edström, “‘Gud styr.’ Motivförskjutningen i Jerusalem,” 186. See also Landmark, “*Vi, civilisationens ljusbärare*,” 143.

10 Lena Carlsson, *Frihetslif! Selma Lagerlöf och Sophie Elkan. ‘Två ensamma fruntimmer’ på resa med kamera* (Karlstad: Votum förlag, 2017), 49. On the postcard (Fig. 22.2) Lagerlöf has written the following (in Swedish, my translation): “Dear Mother, Yesterday we actually did arrive safe and sound in Jerusalem and I am very happy to be at the final destination of our journey. The place is more worthy and more interesting than I imagined, very beautiful, very ancient but no more so than an Italian city. I have spent the whole day in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and seen thousands of Russian pilgrims. I have seen all the holy places, tombs, Golgatha etc. Tomorrow we will go to Jericho. Jerusalem is worth all the troubles it takes to get here. Tonight, Sophie and I will visit the American Colony.”

11 Helena Bodin, “Sophie Elkan's Ambiguous Dream of the Orient: On Cultural Identity and the National Literary Canon,” in *Rethinking National Literatures and the Literary Canon in Scandinavia*, eds., Ann-Sophie Lönngren, Heidi Grönstrand, Dag Heede and Anne Heith (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 88–9.

12 Ulf Olsson, *Invändningar. Kritiska artiklar* (Stockholm – Stehag: Symposion, 2007), 107.

13 Lagerlöf, “Hur jag fann ett romanämne,” 125.

14 Lagerlöf, “Hur jag fann ett romanämne,” 1267. My translation. In the original: “övergivit Sverige och uppsökt det fattiga och ödsliga heliga landet.”

Fig. 22.2: Postcard from Jerusalem sent by Selma Lagerlöf to her mother on March 4, 1900. Courtesy of Lena Carlsson and Anneli Oxenstierna. Photo: Anneli Oxenstierna.

national project circa 1900. Moreover, how does the question of religious faith play into this national discourse? As these questions indicate, I focus in this chapter on the novel *Jerusalem* in its original edition, but I also consider some of Lagerlöf's other literary texts with motifs from the journey to Jerusalem, in order to investigate the position the narrator assumes in relation to the foreign places and people that are being portrayed. Her texts introduce Jerusalem to the Swedish public, and Jerusalem serves, in her texts, as an exotic place that can be juxtaposed with a Swedish national identity; thus promoting a notion of Swedishness. More importantly, Jerusalem also functions as a code to Christian cultures.

There was already a long tradition of European novels and travel writing about the Orient to which Lagerlöf added her contributions. Fredrika Bremer's *Lifvet i Gamla Verlden* [*Travels in the Holy Land*]¹⁵ provided the impressions and experiences of another female traveller and novelist, and for several other artists of the Modern Breakthrough (c.1860–1920) the Orient was in fashion: Henrik Ibsen let Peer Gynt

¹⁵ Fredrika Bremer, *Lifvet i gamla världen. Dagboks-anteckningar under resor i Söder- och Österland* I–III (Stockholm and Uppsala: Adolf Bonnier, 1860–1862), 118. It was published in English as Fredrika Bremer, *Travels in the Holy Land* I–II, trans. Mary Howitt (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), 119.

travel to North Africa; August Strindberg named one of his plays *Till Damaskus* [*To Damaskus*] (1898); Verner von Heidenstam portrayed the Orient in his novels *Endymion* (1889) and *Hans Alienus* (1892), and other texts; and Knut Hamsun published his impressions of eastern travels in *I Æventyrland* [*In Wonderland*] (1903) and *Under Halvmaanen* [*Under the Crescent Moon*] (1905).¹⁶ The conditions for travel had improved. Thomas Cook and other travel agencies had detailed Egyptian itineraries, and after the railway was built from Jaffa to Jerusalem, a tour through the Holy Land was added.¹⁷ It became easier for women to travel; even without male company, as proven by Lagerlöf and Elkan. The second volume of *Jerusalem* sometimes assumes the character of tourist guide, eagerly documenting the different historical and religious monuments. The contexts of travel, migration, and aesthetic fascination for the Oriental, in contrast to the Western and national, frame this reading of Lagerlöf's *Jerusalem*.

Jerusalem as Hope and Threat

In the first part of *Jerusalem*, Lagerlöf presents the reader with three symbolic representations of Jerusalem. In the opening chapter, "At the Schoolmaster's," Gertrud, the schoolmaster's young daughter, is busy building a model of the village from stones and small pieces of glass. While she elaborately replicates the landscape, the church, the schoolhouse, and all the other important buildings of the village, her father and the village vicar are engaged in a debate. The schoolmaster is concerned that the old vicar will be abandoned if any travelling revivalist preachers reach the village. He wants to build a chapel where people could be addressed about faith in a simpler way than the elderly vicar is capable of. The vicar defends the old faith and traditions and warns that a new chapel and simpler speech will drive people from the church. When leaving, feeling defeated and obsolete, the vicar asks Gertrud what she is doing. She tells the vicar that she built the whole village and then destroyed it to build Jerusalem, since she had read in school about its beauty. The vicar takes this as a predication that the new faith will destroy the village. In narratological terms this can be viewed as a prolepsis, an episode anticipating what is about to happen.¹⁸ By presenting Jerusalem

¹⁶ Elisabeth Oxfeldt has investigated this "Nordic orientalism" more thoroughly in Elisabeth Oxfeldt, *Nordic Orientalism: Paris and the Cosmopolitan Imagination 1800–1900* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2005), 111. In it, she discusses among other texts Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and Hamsun's *I Æventyrland*. For an in-depth investigation of orientalism in late nineteenth-century Swedish literature, including *Jerusalem*, see Landmark, "Vi, civilisationens ljusbärare."

¹⁷ Lindqvist, *Kring Selma Lagerlöfs Jerusalem*, 19.

¹⁸ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 40.

Fig. 22.3: *Dalmålning [Dalarna Painting]* by Snarf Anders Andersson. Inscribed “*Christus Gråter öfver staden Jerusalem 1819 A. A. S [Christ Crying over the City of Jerusalem 1819].*” Nordiska museet, Stockholm. Photo: Sören Hallgren. Even though the painting in Lagerlöf’s novel is fictive, paintings by local artists abounded in Dalarna.

as a threat to the village, the episode is also part of the construction of opposites in the novel: the old faith rooted in the village and its inherited traditions versus the revivalism connected to Jerusalem and the disruption of the old society.

The second symbolic representation of Jerusalem is more visual and functions as an ekphrasis. It is a painting, described in the chapter “The letter from Hellgum” (Fig. 22.3). When the preacher Hellgum arrives in the village he attracts many followers, but when he later has to leave for America, a good deal of the villagers turn their backs on the revivalists and they lose their purpose. Hellgum had promised

them that the “new Jerusalem would descend from the sky,” but this cannot be since the villagers in general continue their normal, but – in the eyes of Hellgum’s followers – worldly and sinful life.¹⁹ It is at this point the letter of Hellgum, urging his followers to come to Jerusalem, arrives. When reading the letter, the revivalists are gathered in the old Ingmarsson farm. On the wall, there is a painting of Jerusalem with the inscription “This is God’s Holy City, Jerusalem.”²⁰ The description of it is lengthy and detailed. The painting is said to have been made by an old, local artist, who has made Jerusalem look like a city in Dalarna. There are the traditional, small, red cabins, and buildings that remind the viewer of Kristine church in Falun; and the landscape is green and full of trees and creeks. The people are dressed in clothes from the previous century.²¹ The Holy City is thus transposed to a specific time and place: Dalarna in the eighteenth century.

The description of the painting is followed thereafter by a quotation of a passage from the Book of Revelation, in which the heavenly Jerusalem is detailed. Thus, a third image of Jerusalem is presented directly after the one firmly rooted in time, space, and tradition: Jerusalem as the city with gates of gold, and walls of clear glass, adorned with precious stones.²² Two images of Jerusalem are juxtaposed: one as home in a literal sense, connected to inherited traditions and familiar customs, the other as eternal and unfathomably rich, but unfamiliar. In his letter, Hellgum conflates the city of Jerusalem with the heavenly Jerusalem; reporting the colonists’ image of Jerusalem as a glorious city, shining on its white mountain²³ where the very stones speak of their Saviour.²⁴ The juxtaposition of the Jerusalem of the painting, and that of the Bible entails a conflict between the home and the departing from it, between the real earthly home, and a transcendental heavenly home.

To address this conflict, Lagerlöf composes the letter as a dialogue between Hellgum and his followers. In this way she allows for the villagers’ possible arguments against joining the Colony to be met by arguments for joining. The letter poses the question: do they love their fields and farms more than they love Christ? One by one, the gathered followers of Hellgum hear the calling of God. The exception is Eva Gunnarsdotter, one of the most devoted members of the congregation. When she realises that the others will go without her if she is not called, she laments the costly price of the desire to reach the heavenly Jerusalem: wives and children, mothers and fathers,

¹⁹ Quotations from *Jerusalem*, vols. 1–2, and from the short stories commented in the next section, are my translations. In the original: “det nya Jerusalem skulle nederkomma ur himmelens sky.” Selma Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1901), 221.

²⁰ In original: “Detta är Guds heliga stad, Jerusalem”. Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 223.

²¹ Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 122–3.

²² Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 224. See also the vision of the New Jerusalem in Rev 21:18–19.

²³ Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 228.

²⁴ Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 230.

and their good homes will be left behind. These negative consequences of the desire to go to Jerusalem are elaborated upon in the second half of *Jerusalem I*. They are, for example, crucial to the chapter “The Auction,” which will be discussed in the next section. In this chapter the painting of Jerusalem appears again. When the Ingmarsson family farm is emptied, there is nothing left in the house except the painting of Jerusalem on the wall.

The conflict between the representatives of the old and the new, the inherited faith and the new interpretation is also played out by placing important characters on each side of the dichotomy. Young Ingmar, who is opposed to the migration, is contrasted with his fiancée, the schoolmaster’s daughter Gertrud, who decides to heed Hellgum’s call to join the congregation in Jerusalem. With her skill in employing free indirect speech, Lagerlöf allows the reader to understand the motives and predicaments of individuals on both sides of the conflict. She also complicates a simple connection between the Ingmarsson family and the old faith, rooted in the native home, by making young Ingmar’s sister Karin one of the most devout followers of Hellgum and the Ingmarsson family farm the centre for the revivalists. It is clear that there is a gender aspect to this, albeit not explicitly expressed: the village is a patriarchal community, while the Colony offers a community led by a woman, where men and women live as equals.²⁵ Although the narrator presents the conflict in a multifocal and balanced manner, certain elements in the narration indicate that the new kind of Christianity represented by Hellgum is not sound. The sectarians’ ideas about a life of unity and brotherhood, inspired by the apostles, lead them to reject old customs, break with their families, and sell their farms and belongings.

A Tourist’s Gaze

While Lagerlöf was fascinated by the emigration of the Nås farmers and admired their bravery to follow their faith, both the description of the brutal separation of families and the farmers’ misfortunes in Jerusalem suggest that she was as equally occupied with the pernicious consequences of the emigration. To contextualize the image of Jerusalem in her novel, I will in this section examine representations of Jerusalem in her other texts. In a short 1908 biographical text Lagerlöf relates an episode from her travel to Jerusalem in 1900. One night at the Grand Hotel she is summoned to the reception hall to meet a guest considered unfit to be shown into

²⁵ Lisbeth Stenberg reads the colony as “a radically different alternative” for the women, and argues that *Jerusalem* both can be interpreted as a nationalist, homogenizing idyll and a feminist utopia. Lisbeth Stenberg, “Nationen som hem. Idyll, utopi och reella kontradiktioner i Selma Lagerlöfs Jerusalem,” *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap* 24 (1995): 66–7.

her room or the salon. He is described as “an awfully ugly old negro, a man whose enormous lips, long monkey arms, swollen muscles, heavy body, and thick bark-like skin gives the impression of belonging to that race of people existing before the Flood.”²⁶ In this passage, the meeting with the Orient is mediated through a colonial European gaze and language, constructing whiteness as normative. The old man, a fortune teller brought to tell Lagerlöf's future, is deprived of humanity; he is monkey-like, his fingernail is “like a claw,” and he is described as coarse and primitive.²⁷ Here Lagerlöf clearly participates in the “orientalizing” of the Orient, establishing the positional superiority of the western narrator while drawing on familiar stereotypes of eastern backwardness.²⁸ Her description also employs a racial caricature to underline the foreign and exotic. However, as is often the case in her writing, Lagerlöf turns the differences in culture, origin, race, and position into a discussion of similarities. In the story, the narrator cannot think of anything to ask the fortune teller. “Isn't there an insurmountable gap between an Arabic fortune teller and a Western traveller?” she asks herself.²⁹ This gap is challenged, however, by how Lagerlöf relates the fortune teller's prophecy of her future to that made at the time of her birth by her aunt in Värmland. Both predicted that she would write books and be successful. Although she imagines her aunt's voice in her mind, cautioning her that Arabs want to flatter and will say what they need to get paid, Lagerlöf's narrator concludes that the two prophecies have the same meaning. However different the Muslim fortune teller and the aunt in Värmland might be, they both see what is true.

This story is characteristic of Lagerlöf's ambiguous representations of Jerusalem, oscillating between underlining differences; not least in her descriptions of characters and physical environments, and the idea that people can reach each other beyond cultural and religious differences. The image of the repugnant fortune teller is recycled from her previous story, “En sägen från Jerusalem [A Story from Jerusalem]” (1902), that describes the removal of a fortune teller from the Al-Aqsa Mosque before a visit from a “powerful monarch from the West.”³⁰ The characterization is strikingly similar: an “incredibly ugly old negro” with enormous lips, low forehead, and a nose like a snout. Considering this physiognomy, and the dirty white shawl he is clothed in, the

²⁶ “Det är en gammal neger av en fruktansvärt ful typ, en man, som med sina ofantliga läppar, sina långa aparmar, sina utsvällda muskler, sin tunga kropp och sin grova, barklika hud gör intryck av att ha tillhört den människoras, som fanns till före syndafloden.” Selma Lagerlöf, “Två spådomar (1908),” in *Troll och människor I* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1915), 229.

²⁷ Lagerlöf, “Två spådomar,” 232.

²⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 5–9.

²⁹ “Ligger det inte ett oöverstigligt svalg mellan en arabisk spåman och en västerländsk resande?” Lagerlöf, “Två spådomar,” 230.

³⁰ Possibly this refers to Kaiser Wilhelm who visited Jerusalem in 1898. Selma Lagerlöf, “En sägen från Jerusalem (1902),” in *En saga om en saga och andra sagor* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1908), 185.

narrator states that “there is no wonder he was forbidden to show himself in the mosque when the celebrated guest was there.”³¹

In these stories, the physiognomy of the foreigner (black, Arab, and Muslim) is not fit to be seen and is clearly de-humanized. Expelled from the mosque during the monarch’s tour, the fortune teller, Mesullam, is later visited by a guide and a European guest, implied to be the Monarch himself, who is not repelled by his appearance. Lagerlöf writes that the European “watched him with the same pleasure as a child watches a wild animal in a menagerie,” continuing the de-humanization of a non-white Muslim man.³² Although the story is partly narrated from the perspective of Mesullam, the fortune teller remains inferior to the visitor who has come to ask for an interpretation of his dreams and visions. The visions seem, to some extent, to bridge the differences between Christians and Muslims, but in the actual physical meeting between the European and the Oriental, a clear hierarchy is established and reinforced through de-humanizing rhetorical strategies.

As Sara Ahmed writes, the alien is a source of fascination and desire, but also a representation of the danger of the unknown.³³ The fortune teller has this double function in both stories, and he would have been an easily recognizable figure to many contemporary European tourists in Jerusalem. In other stories, and in the second part of *Jerusalem*, Lagerlöf turns her touristic gaze towards the city itself, with its long history, many legends, and important sights. As with her image of the fortune teller in the short story, Lagerlöf’s representation of Jerusalem in the novel is divided between fascination and danger. The same ambivalence characterises her other stories about the city. “En julnatt i Betlehem [A Christmas Eve in Bethlehem]” (1908) describes Jerusalem as the site of a violent clash amongst different nationalities, ethnicities, and religions.³⁴ Through the eyes of a young French consul, the reader is brought through Jerusalem to the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem while the dragoman points out all the sights. The question the story poses is: how can there ever be peace in a church divided between the followers of different faiths, all claiming their right to possess a bit of this holy place? The conflict in the church escalates almost to violence, but a sudden strong wind blows out all the candles except one; all fighting then ceases in a communal experience of the presence of God. This revelation also answers the consul’s question about why so many people leave their homes to live in Jerusalem. The story ends with the consul’s resignation and entrance to one of the cloisters of Palestine.

31 “så kan man inte förundra sig över att han blev förbjuden att visa sig i moskén, så länge den firade gästen befann sig där.” Lagerlöf, “En sägen från Jerusalem,” 186.

32 “såg på honom med samma nöje som ett barn, då det betraktar ett vilt djur i ett menageri.” Lagerlöf, “En sägen från Jerusalem,” 190.

33 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters. Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

34 Selma Lagerlöf, “En julnatt i Betlehem (1908),” in *Från skilda tider 1. Efterlämnade skrifter* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1943), 106.

This story in many ways resembles the narrative about the Holy Land in *Jerusalem*. One of its main questions is what motivates people to leave their homes in Sweden to live in a foreign and very different country. In the novel *Jerusalem*, as in “A Christmas Eve in Bethlehem,” the answer is to be close to God and to experience the presence of God, or, as in Gertrud’s case, in a more literal sense to be present at Jesus’s return. However, the immigrations of different nationalities, ethnicities, and religions causes conflict and misery. In “A Christmas Eve in Bethlehem” a Western, secular, modern man sees both sides of Jerusalem: holiness and unity versus worldly conflict. Lagerroth points out that in the first part of the novel, Jerusalem is imagined as the only worthy place for the followers of Hellgum’s faith, while in the second part of the novel, it is presented as the place most in need of his and Mrs Gordon’s belief in unity.³⁵

The Inherited Land and the Holy Land

As many scholars have remarked, the Swedish region of Dalarna was not an ideologically neutral place around the turn of the century. The rural landscape and the peasant farmers of Dalarna had a symbolic meaning in the construction of Swedishness around 1900.³⁶ The preface to the novel adds to this nationally encoded discourse. It is set before the actual events of the novel. A young farmer is ploughing his field. “The earth, as it was turned by the plough, lay black, and shone with moisture and fatness, and the man at the plough was happy in the thought of soon being able to sow his rye.”³⁷ The farmer is Ingmar, the youngest in a line of men in the Ingmarsson family, whom had traditionally served as the village’s patriarchs. The farmer Ingmar is also the father of the Ingmar who is the novel’s protagonist. In the preface, Ingmar the older is pondering a moral predicament and in his mind’s eye he sees his father and all his forefathers sitting in the large room of the Ingmarsson farm. In an internal dialogue he speaks to his father and decides to break with the collective opinion of the village and to “walk in the ways of God.” In making his decision, the farmer Ingmar the reader encounters in the preface eventually becomes “Great Ingmar” and can finally fulfil his role in the village.

The preface establishes a strong connection between the farmer and his soil, a rootedness in a specific landscape, and a faith inseparable from old traditions and customs. Interjected in this moral soliloquy are observations about the plough, the horses, the soil, and the beauty of the landscape and the village. Great Ingmar

³⁵ Lagerroth, *Selma Lagerlöfs Jerusalem*, 194.

³⁶ Jeff Werner and Thomas Björk, *Blond and Blue-Eyed. Whiteness, Swedishness, and Visual Culture* (Göteborg: Göteborgs konstmuseums skriftserie, 2014), 106–7.

³⁷ “Jorden, som vändes upp af plogen, låg svartbrun och sken af fukt och fetma, och han, som plöjde, gick och gladde sig åt att snart få så råg där.” Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 3.

gains his manhood by inwardly returning to a long line of patriarchs, while carrying on their tradition of hard manual labour. While a return to the roots, both in a literal and metaphorical sense, is what helps Great Ingmar “walk the ways of God,” the departure for Jerusalem is narrated as a brutal uprooting of families and homes, not least in the episode where an auction is arranged to sell the Ingmarsson family farm and all its belongings. In a deeper sense, this event signifies that “the identity of the family is for sale,” as Anna Bohlin has argued.³⁸ Ingmar (the younger), who is deprived of his rightful legacy, winces with every blow of the auctioneer’s club. Another sign of the wrongness cruelty of Hellgum’s followers’ true faith is the plight of the old people who spent their lives living on the farm and working for the Ingmarsson family, who now fear being separated from their home and forced to become beggars. They all sit beside young Ingmar in quiet demonstration.

The departure of the families to Jerusalem is narrated as a tragedy, with heart-breaking separations and an elegiac portrait of the province they are leaving. One of the migrants meets his brother who blames him for selling the family farm, which was not really his, but was inherited and meant to be passed down to coming generations.³⁹ The children try to run away because they miss their home. The organic connection between the people and their homeland is expressed not only in their grief in separating from their homes and families, but also in what they will no longer share with the other villagers: the beautiful view over the mighty river, the sunlight on the trees in the valley, and the view over the blue mountains.⁴⁰ The separation is thus not only about relations and belongings, but also about an uprooting from ones’ natural environment.

While the first part of *Jerusalem* begins with a loving portrait of the village as Great Ingmar ploughs the field, the second part opens with a panoramic view of Jerusalem, so hot and dry that the flowers wither, the wells dry up, and the sand is too hot to step on. The hot dry climate creates one of the novel’s most important elements of difference and alienation for the farmers. While the village in Dalarna is characterized by the great river and the fertile soil, the Swedish colonists suffer from the lack of fresh water and fields to farm. Gunhild, one of the Swedish colonists, dies from dehydration and sunstroke. When young Ingmar visits the colony, he wonders how the farmers from Dalarna can stand not to do their usual work in the forest or the fields. The Holy Land seems cursed, taking the lives of one after the other of the followers of Hellgum, and depriving the still living of the blessings of the good work described in the preface.

³⁸ Anna Bohlin, “Mårbacka: Ladders, Cow-Houses, and Other Spiritual Matters,” in *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf. Performance, Intermediality, and European Transmissions*, eds., Helena Forsås-Scott, Lisbeth Stenberg and Bjarne Thorup Thomsen (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014), 68.

³⁹ Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 308.

⁴⁰ Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 306.

Gertrud's longing for the heavenly Jerusalem and her conviction that they have come to Jerusalem to witness the return of Jesus on earth is intensified after her friend Gunhild's death. But her daily walks to the Mount of Olives and her waiting for Jesus's return is in vain, and by the others in the Colony her walks and her waiting are perceived as a sign of beginning insanity. Already in the fourth chapter of the 1902 edition (the opening chapter of the 1909 revision), it is suggested that the followers of Hellgum will not find the Jerusalem of their faith. In this chapter, one of the Swedish migrants, Birger, catches a fever upon arriving in Palestine. When he realizes he is about to die, his last wish is to see "Jerusalem's palaces and its streets of gold, where the holy walk side by side, dressed in white, with palms in their hands."⁴¹ This is, after all, what was promised in the letter from Hellgum previously discussed. But when his friends carry him through Jerusalem on a stretcher to see the sights, all he sees are filthy streets, poor beggars, and dirty dogs. The "true Jerusalem," that is the heavenly Jerusalem, that Birger is looking for is not to be found in the actual geographical place of Jerusalem.

Migrants and Colonizers

In contrast to the comfortable position of the tourist in Lagerlöf's short prose drawing on her Jerusalem travel, the experiences of the farmers in Jerusalem is described as one of confusion, desperation, and loss of identity. The episode about the dying Birger's futile search for the heavenly Jerusalem is one example that has already been mentioned. This episode is also interesting in the way it portrays the people of Jerusalem. They are depicted with the same appalled distance as the fortune teller in the two stories previously discussed: he sees "dark-skinned Bedouins, with rifles on their shoulders and daggers in their girdles," "half-naked water carriers," "the Muhammedan women, looking like ghosts, when they came walking, wrapped in white with black cloth over their faces."⁴² These frightening non-Western, non-Christian others come even closer when some beggars with leprosy approach the stretcher, reaching out their hands with withered fingers to him, their voices like the growling of dogs, their faces destroyed by the disease.⁴³ Lisbeth Stenberg argues that in *Jerusalem*, Lagerlöf makes an effort to not

41 "Jerusalems palats och dess gator af guld, där de heliga vandra i sida, hvita kläder med palmer i händerna." Selma Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1902), 58.

42 "mörkhyade beduiner, som hade bössa på skuldran och dolk i gördeln," "halfnakna vattenbärare," "de muhammedanska fruntimmrena, hvilka sågo ut som spöken, där de kommo gående helt insvepta i hvitt med ett svart tygstycke framför ansiktet." Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet*, 63–4.

43 Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet*, 64–5.

portray people of other origin as different in a negative way.⁴⁴ It may be that she did not consciously portray the different people the colonists meet in Jerusalem as inferior, but the effect of the examples above is that Lagerlöf transgresses the touristic gaze, looking at the foreign with fascination, and instead presents Jerusalem in the eyes of Birger as a feverish nightmare.

This episode is significant on two levels. It challenges the religious undertaking of the emigrants, posing the question of whether the holy place and spiritual life they are looking for is possible in Jerusalem, and it is part of an orientalist discourse, using common stereotypes to establish the superiority of the Swedish emigrants. Even though the Swedes are poor and vulnerable, they are portrayed as culturally and morally superior in their belief in unity when the rest of Jerusalem is characterized by conflict. Chris Bongie made a distinction between an *exoticizing exoticism* and *imperialist exoticism*. The former is connected to the late nineteenth-century critique of modernity, which valued the exotic culture above that of the modern West; the latter attitude viewed the exotic culture as uncivilized and inferior.⁴⁵ European *fin de siècle* literature often used the exotic as a critique of modernity, and the symbolism of the Swedish 1890s can be seen as a part of this tendency. However, it soon developed into a national romanticism expressing an imperial rather than an exoticizing exoticism.

The narrative strategy Lagerlöf employs is clearly visible in the chapter discussed here: the Swedish migrants' clash with the hard realities of Jerusalem makes it possible to represent them as heroic, subjecting themselves to the conflicts and hardships of Jerusalem to live their lives as a good example for others. While the revivalists in the first part of the novel seemed hard and uncompromising in their righteousness, in the context of Jerusalem they seem noble and honourable, albeit vulnerable victims of the cruel Jerusalem. As Lagerroth writes, in the foreign, far-away land they no longer seem like sectarians, but as people from Dalarna: as Swedes.⁴⁶ The chapter "God's Holy City, Jerusalem," Lagerlöf continues the same strategy. Jerusalem is described as the city of lies, slander, and blasphemy, where "the Catholic speaks ill of the Protestant, the Methodist of the Quaker, the Lutheran of the Reformist, the Russian of the Armenian."⁴⁷ This slander also hits the Swedish migrants in the colony. They are despised by the rest of the Christian community, and when these rumours reach Sweden, they contribute to Gunhild's death, which is caused explicitly by sunstroke, but connected metaphorically to the slander.

⁴⁴ Stenberg, "Nationen som hem," 53.

⁴⁵ Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin De Siècle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 17.

⁴⁶ Lagerroth, *Selma Lagerlöfs Jerusalem*, 41.

⁴⁷ "Här är det, som katoliken talar illa om protestanten, metodisten om kväkaren, lutheranen om den reformerte, ryssen om armeniern." Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet*, 71.

This negative narrative of the actual Jerusalem and the sense of loss and purposelessness felt by the Swedes are epitomized in the chapter "In Gehenna". In it, a member of the colony, Halfvor, finds the Swedish cemetery dug up and the dead bodies thrown in a pile of garbage. As he carries the body of his youngest daughter back to the colony, the contrast between life in Dalarna and in Jerusalem becomes clearer: in Dalarna his daughter would have been put to rest under a green tuft of grass, but in Jerusalem the vultures and the wild dogs gather around the half-open caskets. He concludes that they "cannot grow the soil of this country and drink its water," and therefore they cannot survive there.⁴⁸ The experience of finding his daughter's dead body, and carrying it in the burning sun back to the colony is too much for Halfvor, who dies at the gate of the colony. His last wish is to be buried with his daughter under a "green piece of turf," like they would have been at home.⁴⁹ Gehenna in this context may broadly signify Hell, but also acknowledges that the Gehenna valley was used as a refuse heap and a place to dispose of the bodies of executed criminals. The message is clearly that the emigrants left the Garden of Eden for Gehenna, and confused the ideal Kingdom of God with the actual place of Jerusalem.

This is similar to a later incident in which Gertrud confuses a dancing dervish with Jesus. While she had expected Jesus to appear at dawn on the Mount of Olives, surrounded by light, she instead follows a Christ-like figure far into the Muslim quarters in the middle of the night. But instead of preaching, the dervish dances and screams. Here too, Muslims are portrayed as ugly and primitive: their look "horrible," their hair long, their faces like the faces of dead people, their movements wild and uncontrollable with white foam coming out of their mouths.⁵⁰ However, Gertrud's meeting with the dervish is ambiguous. Later she encounters the same man at the Mount of Olives, sitting on the ground, looking down over Jerusalem. Gertrud "did not for a moment forget that he was just a poor dancing dervish," but seeing his face she is nevertheless convinced of his spiritual power and she kisses his hand, just like his followers used to do.⁵¹ Here different religious beliefs are to some extent conflated, just like in the previously discussed tale of the two prophecies.

Although there are some hopeful episodes in which the migrants feel closer to God and to their own purpose, the first part of *Jerusalem II* is above all about the violent clash between the Swedes' imagined Jerusalem and the reality they face: with the chapters "In Gehenna" and "The Well of Paradise" – in which the Swedish part of the colony is almost eradicated by fever – as the culmination of a series of conflicts and

48 "Lika litet som vi kunna odla detta landets jord och dricka dess vatten, lika litet kunna vi fortsätta leva här." Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet*, 138.

49 Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet*, 140.

50 Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet*, 242.

51 "Gertrud glömde ej ett ögonblick, att mannen endast var en stackars dervisch . . ." Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem II. I det heliga landet*, 290.

contradictions. The turning point is the arrival of young Ingmar, who has come to the colony from Dalarna to bring Gertrud home. After bringing Gertrud to her senses by exposing the falsity of her expectation of meeting Christ, he goes on to reform the colony. He stays in Jerusalem, helps the colonists run a mill, encourages the start of a school for Muslim girls, stops the desecration of graves, buys the colony horses for transport and farm labour, and convinces Mrs. Gordon to accept the concept of payment for work. By these means, the colony's ill-fortune reverses and it begins to prosper. The trajectory of the Swedes' experience in Jerusalem goes from identity loss and destitution to development and improvement. To use Edward Said's concept, the "strategic location," *i.e.* the position of the author in her representation of the Orient, includes a portrayal of the farmers as both victims of a primitive culture and devastated landscape and as a part of a Western civilization project.⁵²

Conclusion

In Lagerlöf's *Jerusalem* the Swedish revivalists are portrayed as vulnerable migrants, subject to prejudice, social stigma, and material obstacles. Lagerlöf constantly measures the foreign against the familiar in a series of oppositions; constructing the home in Dalarna as the natural environment of the Swedes, where they are organically rooted in the landscape, the community, and the patriarchal system of values carried forward by the Ingmarsson family. The position of the Swedes as vulnerable migrants is combined with their position of moral and cultural superiority. According to Bjarne Thorup Thomsen, *Jerusalem* is about "the loss of old territory and the attempted acquisition or conquest of new territory."⁵³ With the help of Ingmar, who fulfils his fate to be a village leader, like his father, the Swedes in the American Colony devote themselves to improving and developing the conflicted and uncivilized place that the actual city of Jerusalem proved to be. Using Said's distinction between the Orient as an idea and the Orient as an actual place that has been conquered and colonized, the Jerusalem of the novel can be said to be a product of religious imagination transformed into an actual place; resisting the messianic dream of the migrants, but subject to their projects of improvement.

Although *Jerusalem* is narrated from different viewpoints (the ones who stay in Sweden and the ones who leave; representatives of the old faith and the new), it is clear that the dream of finding Christ in Jerusalem and living by his example in the colony is a product of unrealistic hopes and misguided devotion. Hellgum promised that the American Colony would be "the real, heavenly Jerusalem, which has descended from heaven," but the Jerusalem of the migrants' dreams remained connected

⁵² Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

⁵³ Thorup Thomsen, "Aspects of Topography in Selma Lagerlöf's *Jerusalem*, Vol. 1.," *Scandinavica* 36 (1997): 25.

to their home in Dalarna.⁵⁴ This Jerusalem is represented by the painting in the living room of the Ingmarsson farm, depicting Jerusalem as a homey place in Dalarna with red wooden cabins and green trees.⁵⁵ The painting seems to suggest that for the villagers of Dalarna, the Holy Land cannot be located in a faraway and foreign country; it must be in their own fatherland. The dichotomies between Jerusalem and Dalarna also support this interpretation. While Jerusalem is dry and barren and fraught with conflict and violence, Dalarna is green and fruitful, and it builds on respect for tradition and history. The Holy Land of the novel is clearly connected to the fatherland, or more precisely to the village where the Ingmarsson patriarchs show the people how to walk “the ways of God.” It is only when young Ingmar arrives in Jerusalem, helping the migrants to replicate the values and customs of the village in the colony, that the life of the migrants becomes endurable. In viewing the migration as a national, heroic deed in *Jerusalem*, Lagerlöf makes the virtues of the national stand out against the brutality of the foreign. The heroism lies in the self-sacrifice, bravery, and hard work of the Swedes, who prevail against the hard physical and cultural conditions in Jerusalem.

While an exoticizing exoticism is observable in the parts of *Jerusalem II* that take the reader on a guided tour through the marvels of the city, and in the short stories set in Jerusalem drawn from Lagerlöf's journey to West Asia, an imperialist exoticism is also evident in the strong emphasis on reform and development introduced by young Ingmar's arrival in Jerusalem. Even though the journey serves to develop his character and allow him, like his father, to seek “the ways of God,” it is significant that the novel ends by him bringing Gertrud home, not to marry her, but to save her from life in Jerusalem, which has almost broken her down mentally and physically. In the short stories with motifs of Jerusalem, there is also a combination of touristic fascination and a gaze differentiating the non-white, non-Christian stranger from the white Christian human. Lagerlöf thus shares the “stranger fetishism” of the Oriental other of many of her contemporaries.⁵⁶ The meetings between the fortune teller and the tourist, the monarch and the consul, are those of an identity of civilization and western modernity encountering and labelling the other as underdeveloped, poor, and less than human. In these stories, as well as in *Jerusalem*, Lagerlöf clearly implies that the European subject can learn something from the Oriental other, not least when it comes to faith. Still, it is through the self-development of Western subjects (for example Ingmar or the French consul) that the Orient gains its value. Neither the fortune teller nor the dancing dervish are allowed to be subjects in this national discourse.

⁵⁴ “det rätta, heliga Jerusalem, som är nederkommet af himmelen.” Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 158.

⁵⁵ Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem I. I Dalarna*, 223.

⁵⁶ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 7.