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SHE

EXPLORATIONS INTO A ROMANCE

edited by

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Introduction

In his autobiography *The Days of My Life*, H. Rider Haggard refers to a letter he received from a group of engineers of the Electric–Technical Factory of Messrs. Ganz and Co. in Budapest just after the publication of *She*. The peculiarity of both content and sender of the letter surprised him, yet the comments it contains remain relevant for today’s readers, as they shed light on some essential qualities of the novel. In the series of observations received on the newly published work, Ganz and Co.’s letter provides a very topical image of *She*:

Despite our various tastes, characters and nationalities we have, one and all, taken a most lively interest in your story.

It appears that each of us found in it a something which appealed to his sympathies; to one the ethnographical and topographical descriptions may have given satisfaction; to another the frequently occurring remembrances of athletic sports; in a third, perhaps, sweet memories of bygone classical studies have been awakened.

The last time we dined in company it was decided that we should proffer to you, in humble acknowledgment of our respect and thanks, our united most hearty good wishes for your happiness, contentment and general well-being, with the hope that you may be spared to enrich your fellow-creatures and coming generations with the fair products of your fertile mind.\(^1\)

The group of Budapest employees metaphorically mirrored the wider nineteenth-century reading public and, in a more general perspective, all the readers that have followed them up to today. Also, the letter grasps one of the essential merits of the novel, that of addressing individual interests and inclinations through its wide range of topics. *She* is a rich text, whose themes, concealed under the veil of the adventure plot, have been

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recognized as crucially important. Their complexity epitomized Haggard’s multifaceted personality, as well as his widespread cultural views, spanning from history, politics, sociology, to agriculture, gardening, occultism, classical literature, and mythology. She was written in less than two months, between February and March 1886, and published in volume format in 1887. It came just after two of Haggard’s most important achievements, King Solomon’s Mines (1885) and Allan Quatermain (1887) and since the day of its first publication it has never been out of print. It shared the adventure plot of Haggard’s previous fictional production, as indicated by the novel’s subtitle, A History of Adventure, and reiterated evocative sceneries of distant places and the typicality of romance themes and structures. Despite this, it also contained and was indirectly shaped by the background of the Zulu War and First Boer War, whose historical connotations made it a blend of contemporary impulses and fantastic desires.

The figure of an immortal woman, and of her eternal love for the man she has murdered, had been the main inspiration for Haggard’s novel, and “[a]ll the rest shaped itself round this figure.” Ayesha’s strength lies in a series of oppositions around which Haggard worked masterfully. Her extreme beauty is paired with her resolute, somewhat evil character; her deep knowledge about nature and culture with traits of profound ingenuity; her everlasting feelings with moments of weakness and doubt. ‘She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed’, as the queen is also known, gives terrible punishments to her subjects; at the same

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2 Critics have recently underlined the author’s versatile character, and commented on the impact this had on his fiction. See, among others, Norman Etherington, Rider Haggard (Boston, Twayne, 1984); Lindy Stiebel, Imagining Africa. Landscape in H. Rider Haggard’s Fiction (Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 2001); Gerald Monsman, Rider Haggard on the Imperial Frontier (Greensboro, ELT Press, 2006).

3 H. Rider Haggard, The Days of My Life, cit., p. 190.

Andrew M. Stauffer

The Lost World of Paper: Rider Haggard’s Pulp

Umberto Eco’s *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* tells the story of an amnesiac bookseller who recalls nothing but the printed material he has read, and that comprehensively and accurately. In an attempt to regain his own extra-textual identity, he embarks on a kind of archival immersion at his childhood home, searching through familiar piles of old magazines, books, comics, and ephemera for a key to his lost self. These documentary investigations open out in a number of directions, with particular reference to Italy during the Second World War, as the narrator attempts to evoke the memory of his first, lost love. Entering a bricked-up portion of the old house “full of printed matter” from the 1930s and 40s, he remarks, “I felt like Lord Carnarvon setting foot in Tutankhamen’s tomb after millennia”, and each time he touches upon a particularly evocative document, he reports feeling “a mysterious flame” wash over him. This feeling is soon traced to an “incredibly dumb” comic-book, which is in fact an adaptation of H. Rider Haggard’s *She*, with “Queen Loana” taking the place of Ayesha, “She-who-must-be-obeyed”:

Tim and Spud and two friends, while traveling in Central Africa, stumble upon a mysterious kingdom in which an equally mysterious queen is the guardian of an ultra-mysterious flame that grants long life, immortality even, considering that Loana, still beautiful, has been ruling over her savage tribe for two thousand years […] She wants to marry one of Tim and Spud’s friends, who resembles (two peas in a pod) a prince she loved two thousand years before, whom she had killed and petrified when he refused her charms.

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2 Ibid., p. 252.
Eco does not mention Haggard, leaving that source text encrypted, but his elevation of the title of this “insipid tale” to the title of the novel itself suggests that She bears some vital relationship to Eco’s archival vision\(^3\). Indeed, it appears that, in naming his novel after a descendant of She, Eco recognized in Haggard’s novel an intense concern with archaeological encounters with the material, documentary past as a key to identity\(^4\). In this essay, I would like to draw out this theme by considering the late-Victorian imagination of paper and its relationship to archival imaginary of She: A History of Adventure\(^5\).

At the moment when Haggard began writing his works of fiction, the British paper-making industry had reached a watershed. Since the introduction of the Fourdrinier machine in the early years of the century, technological improvements had fueled a steady and rapid expansion of productivity, allowing for things like cheap periodicals, poster-bill advertisements, and the rise of paperwork of all kinds. By the 1830s, machine-made paper was being used in a wide range of venues, and writers of the Victorian era had seen the streets of London grow increasingly littered with waste paper, the byproduct of this industrial revolution. Yet the really explosive years for paper did not begin until the early years of Haggard’s life. In the 1860s, the repeal of the paper excise and the beginning of the use of wood and other vegetable fibers (such as esparto grass) as serious alternatives to linen rags created a world of new possibilities for the industry, and thus for British culture. As D.C. Coleman writes, “The decades of the 1860s and 1880s are a true dividing line in the history of paper-making [...] it is wood pulp that has made possible the many and diverse guises in which paper appears in modern

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\(^3\) Ibid., p. 251.

\(^4\) Shawn Malley has written evocatively on this theme in She: “‘Time Hath No Power Against Identity’: Historical Continuity and Archaeological Adventure in H. Rider Haggard’s She”, English Literature in Transition 40, 3 (1997), pp. 275-297.

\(^5\) H. Rider Haggard, She: A History of Adventure, Andrew Stauffer (ed.), Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, Broadview Editions, 2006. All subsequent references in the text are to this edition.
Stephen Coan

‘The most extraordinary romance’

H. Rider Haggard and the writing of *She*¹

1. *She – biography of a book.* Snow fell heavily in London during the early hours of 31 March 1917 but by the time Sir Henry Rider Haggard left the Norfolk Hotel in North Kensington the snow had turned to slush and the streets had become rivers. World War I was now in its third year and Haggard, who had recently finished work on the Dominions Royal Commission report, was keeping busy attending meetings of the Empire Settlement Committee, keen to promote the settlement of servicemen in the Dominions at war’s end.

The 60-year-old Haggard lunched that day with Charles Longman, the publisher of *She*, and his wife Harriet, “a rather sad couple now, I fear”², still desolate at the death of their son, Freddie, who had been killed in France in October 1914. In the afternoon Haggard visited the Hildyards, relations of his wife Louie, who had recently moved to a new home in West Kensington. Later, with Cecil Hildyard, he went for a stroll to look at a nearby house where he had once lived. Haggard had not been back to 69 Gunterstone Road for over thirty years.

From the pavement Haggard looked up at the ground-floor room that had once been his study. “In its window stood my desk […] on which I wrote *She* in 6 weeks. That stuccoed, suburban residence was a queer birthplace for Ayesha, the immortal”³.

In the same month 31 years earlier Haggard was nearing the end of *She*. The Haggard family, then consisting of son Jock

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¹ Acknowledgement and thanks are due to Chris Coquet, Alastair Mitchell and Professor Lindy Stiebel for generously providing sight of items germane to the essay subject.


and daughters Angela and Dorothy, all under six, had recently moved to Gunterstone Road after Haggard’s fame following the publication of *King Solomon’s Mines* had seen their previous London residence become too small for entertaining.

The family home was in Ditchingham, Norfolk, which Haggard had acquired via his marriage to Louisa (Louie) Margitson, in 1880. On returning from southern Africa in 1881 Haggard had decided to read for the Bar and the family had relocated to London while letting the Norfolk estate.

The house where *She* was born was “one of a long terrace, its five storeys of grim, grey brick were encrusted with stucco floral reliefs around door, window, and cornices; the room beside the front door became Haggard’s study, his desk […] set in a bay window facing a cliff of similar houses across the street”.

Haggard was in the habit of dating his manuscripts but when writing his autobiography in 1911 a paper clip fastened to the manuscript had obliterated the commencement date of *She* and he could only confirm he had begun writing in February 1886. “At the end, however, is inscribed ‘Finished 18 March 1886’”. Haggard wrote *She* in a little over six weeks: “Moreover, it was never rewritten, and the manuscript carries but few corrections”.

Haggard seems almost at a loss to explain how his 29-year-old self produced *She*:

> The fact is that it was written at white heat, almost without rest, and that is the best way to compose. I remember that when I sat down to my task my ideas as to its development were of the vaguest. The only clear notion that I had in my head was that of an immortal woman inspired by an immortal love. All the rest shaped itself around

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4 Haggard passed his exams and obtained his certificate on 3 October 1884 and was called to the Bar on 26 January 1885.


7 *Idem.*