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Mythical Aspects of *She* in the Context of Nineteenth Century Knowledge Production

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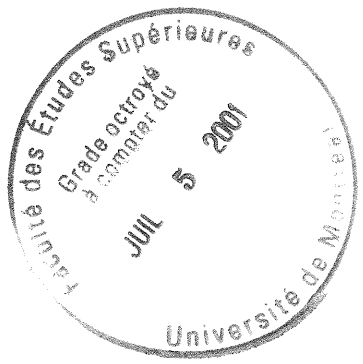

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présenté par :

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Abstract

This study aims to demonstrate that the main character of Henry Rider Haggard's novel, Ayesha, is a personification of the scientific knowledge of the Victorian period. The Victorian period is one of great changes where the certitudes of all kinds were being questioned. The novel *She* is a particularly good illustration of the feeling, widely shared in this period, of being lost in a world increasingly alien and potentially dangerous. Its study is still relevant today since it traces the relationship that Western civilisation has with knowledge since the advent of the industrial revolution.

The first chapter exposes the relationship between Ayesha and scientific knowledge of the period. Nineteenth-century science is very much preoccupied with geology, astronomy, and biology. The discoveries in geology question the biblical story of creation and those of astronomy reduce the importance our planet has in the cosmos. The theory of evolution advanced by Darwin brings humanity down to the level of beasts and makes the idea of a more evolved being credible. Haggard represents the fears generated by these discoveries in a character who is more evolved than we are and who has no religious morality.

The second chapter looks at the mythical aspects of such a character and on the ways to interpret her quest for absolute knowledge and eternal life. The myth of Faustus is very useful to understand the progress from the mystical knowledge of religion to the scientific knowledge of the industrial revolution. Faustus appears during the same period as Protestantism and he also rejects the right of the church to monopolise divine knowledge. His destiny is tragic because he does not have any viable alternative. Ayesha possesses this alternative, she even personifies it, but under its negative aspect and potentially dangerous.

The third chapter is about the social function of such a novel. The fantastic genre is recognised by many as being a good vehicle for what has no place of expression in society. *She* is the reflection of a general unease present in the Victorian society toward a rapid scientific progress that was changing everyday life along with the traditional way to view the world. Haggard did not neglect any device to illustrate the fullness of this unease. His character combines all the elements that could trouble his audience: absolute knowledge that brings power, eternal youth, and the loss of any moral sense.

Résumé

Henry Rider Haggard est né en 1856, peu de temps avant que Darwin ne soit prêt à publier sa théorie de l'évolution. Il a grandi dans un monde en perpétuel changement où les certitudes de toutes sortes étaient remises en question. Son roman «*She*» est une illustration particulièrement juste du sentiment répandu à son époque d'être perdu dans un monde de plus en plus étrange et potentiellement dangereux. «*She*» traite de thèmes d'intérêts majeurs pour le public victorien comme le progrès, la moralité (ou son absence) et même l'eugénisme jusqu'à un certain point. Son étude n'est pas sans objet même aujourd'hui puisqu'elle trace la relation qu'entretient la civilisation occidentale qui est la nôtre avec la connaissance et cela depuis l'avènement de la révolution industrielle.

«*She*» est l'histoire d'une femme ayant déchiffré les secrets de la nature et ayant su s'en servir pour prolonger sa vie au-delà de deux mille ans. Leo Vincey est l'homme qu'elle attend depuis tout ce temps. Il est la réincarnation de celui qu'elle tua dans un excès de jalousie alors qu'il se détournait d'elle en faveur de sa femme, la princesse égyptienne Amenartas. Celle-ci lui échappa et donna naissance à un fils à qui elle confia la lourde tâche de venger son

père ou de transmettre cette tâche à ses descendants. Soixante-six générations plus tard, c'est ainsi que Leo s'embarque pour un voyage qui le conduira dans une région inexplorée d'Afrique à la recherche d'une reine blanche réputée immortelle. Après bien des aventures, ils sont enfin réunis. Par sa beauté surnaturelle et ses pouvoirs immenses, Ayesha, la reine en question, séduit l'homme qui venait se venger. Elle lui offre son savoir absolu et l'immortalité à ses côté. Comme Leo hésite et qu'elle désire le rassurer, Ayesha entre pour la seconde fois dans le pilier de flamme qui la rendit immortelle la première fois. Malheureusement pour elle, au lieu du glorieux triomphe auquel elle s'attendait, son corps commence à s'affaisser et à ratatiner. Elle vieillit sous les yeux de Leo et ses compagnons. Elle semble subir une évolution à l'envers en se transformant rapidement en singe.

L'époque victorienne en est une de grande expansion pour la nation britannique. Comme le roman est situé en Afrique, plusieurs critiques ont étudié «*She*» pour son discours impérial ou d'un point de vue post-colonial. Une autre approche populaire pour ce roman est le féminisme puisque le personnage principal est une femme malgré sa position de pouvoir. Il était très rare à l'époque victorienne de trouver un personnage puissant représenté comme une femme. Ce que je souhaite étudier à travers ce roman est

l'émergence d'une nouvelle façon de concevoir la connaissance, celle qui a le plus façonné notre conception moderne de la connaissance.

La connaissance que Haggard accorde à Ayesha est décrite comme la connaissance scientifique du dix-neuvième siècle: sans moralité ou contrôle intrinsèque. Si Ayesha doit être détruite à la fin du récit, ce n'est pas pour détruire sa connaissance, mais pour l'empêcher de l'utiliser à mauvais escient. Pour les victoriens, le progrès scientifique et technologique prenait une vitesse essoufflante et ne semblait pas avoir de limite dans son impact sur la vie de tous les jours ainsi que sur leur conception du monde et d'eux-mêmes. Comme tout ce qui semble hors de contrôle semble aussi potentiellement dangereux, ils trouvaient l'allure du progrès atterrant et menaçant. Ils craignaient que les scientifiques ne perdent le contrôle sur la science. Ayesha est une représentation parfaite de ce potentiel puisqu'elle a commencé sa vie comme être humain, mais a dépassé le reste de l'humanité dans sa recherche de savoir et d'évolution.

La première partie de mon mémoire traite de cette analogie que je vois entre Ayesha et la science du dix-neuvième siècle. La théorie de l'évolution avancée par Darwin peut être appliquée à l'espèce humaine et rend possible pour des auteurs tel que Haggard

de créer des êtres comme Ayesha qui a évolué au-delà de l'humanité. Je fais un survol du contexte scientifique et anthropologique a partir duquel Haggard a écrit son roman pour mettre en évidence sa compréhension du concept de la race et comment cela définit Ayesha comme n'étant pas humaine. Pour que quiconque puisse même imaginer qu'un être pourrait un jour évoluer au-delà de l'humanité, il était nécessaire que les dogmes religieux traditionnels soient prouvés comme étant faux. Le contexte scientifique, avec la géologie et l'astronomie prouvant que la version biblique de la création était fausse, est responsable du rejet de la religion par beaucoup de gens.

Cela m'amène au second chapitre de mon mémoire où j'étudie la transition d'une conception religieuse de la connaissance à une conception scientifique de cette même connaissance dans la société. La connaissance est un sujet de prédilection pour la mythologie et c'est à travers celle-ci que je compte analyser la transition. Le malaise envers la science vient en partie de l'allure du progrès dans différents domaines, mais cela vient aussi du fait que les gens n'étaient pas familiers avec la façon de traiter et d'intégrer cette nouvelle connaissance. La tradition chrétienne est très claire face à la connaissance; elle est considérée comme mauvaise à posséder pour un être humain, parce qu'elle entraîne tentations et

péchés. La seule façon d'acquérir la vrai connaissance, utile pour l'âme, est à travers une révélation de Dieu (méditation extatique ou prière). Avec l'avènement de la révolution industrielle, une nouvelle façon d'envisager la connaissance est nécessaire puisque la connaissance prend de plus en plus d'importance dans la survie de la nation. Le mythe de Faust est un symptôme pré-industriel de l'inhabilité de la tradition chrétienne à inclure les nouvelles réalités. Ayesha est une disciple de Faust qui a réussit à se libérer complètement des croyances religieuses auxquelles Faust s'accrochait toujours malgré sa rébellion. Elle réussi là où il a échoué en atteignant la jeunesse éternelle, mais elle est néanmoins détruite pour s'être affranchie de la moralité et de ses qualités humaines en même temps que des superstitions.

Les thèmes importants de la troisième partie de mon mémoire sont l'immortalité d'Ayesha et la perte de moralité qui lui semble attachée. Ce sont, en fait, des thèmes importants du genre fantastique. Le terme «fantasy» en anglais, ou le fantastique, ne correspond pas à une œuvre de fiction dans laquelle l'auteur s'imagine toutes sortes de lois de la nature frivoles qui sont acceptées comme naturelles par les personnages. Les personnages de Haggard ne sortent pas du monde que l'on connaît, le nôtre, c'est le surnaturel qui l'envahit d'une façon que même les

personnages rationnels ne peuvent nier. L'argument que j'avance est que le genre, qui vient avec ses conventions et ses thèmes reconnaissables, aide à soutenir la peur de l'inconnu représentée par Ayesha en soutenant l'ambiguïté. L'ambiguïté est créée dans le fantastique en faisant cohabiter dans le même univers deux dimensions, non seulement différentes, mais mutuellement exclusives.

J'ai simplement voulu démontrer à travers le personnage principal du roman de Henry Rider Haggard que des personnages littéraires pouvaient avoir le même impact sur une société séculaire qu'avaient les mythes religieux. Comme Bill Moyers dit à Joseph Campbell: «Les mythes nous content l'histoire de notre quête à travers les âges, quête de la vérité, du sens, de la portée de notre vie. (...) Nous avons tous besoin de donner un sens à notre vie.» (p.5). La littérature a été de tout temps un moyen de prédilection par lequel la société a transmis le sens de sa propre histoire à elle-même.

Je tiens à remercier tout d'abord le professeur Amaryll Chanady pour ses conseils judicieux et pour la confiance qu'elle m'a accordée.

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Introduction

Henry Rider Haggard was born in 1856, not long before Darwin was ready to publish his theory of evolution. He grew up at a time when the world was changing rapidly and certitudes of all kinds were being questioned. His novel *She* is a particularly good illustration of the sense of being lost in a world increasingly alien and potentially dangerous. It is not surprising then that the novel became an immediate success among Haggard's contemporaries. It dealt with major themes of interest to the Victorian public, namely progress, morality (or the lack thereof), and even eugenics to a certain extent. Its study is still relevant today in that it traces Western civilisation's relationship to knowledge with the advent of the industrial revolution, and the economy of knowledge.

The story starts at Cambridge College where we are introduced to the narrator, Ludwig Horace Holly, a very talented scholar, but not a man out of the ordinary. The world he is describing is very much our own, and the adventure begins with a mysterious inheritance that disrupts the normal course of college life. A dying friend visits Holly late in the night to give him custody of his five-year-old son along with a strange iron chest which contains material tracing his lineage back over sixty-six

generations. Twenty years later, upon opening the chest, both Holly and Leo Vincey, the grown pupil, embark on a journey that will lead them to an unexplored area of Africa in search of an immortal white queen. In addition to his lineage, what Leo finds in the chest is the story of his first known ancestors: Amenartas the Egyptian princess, and her husband, the Greek Kallikrates. Leo learns that the immortal queen in question killed Kallikrates two thousand years ago out of jealousy. His wife escaped to deliver the baby she was carrying and to set the task of revenge on her descendants.

To Holly's surprise, they discover abandoned ruins proving the existence of a lost civilisation now inhabited by the Amahagger, an African people of indeterminate origins. The Amahagger people is effectively ruled by a white queen whom they call "She-who-must-be-obeyed," and who is reputed immortal. Ayesha, for that is the white queen's name, cures Leo of a fever and recognises in him his ancestor Kallikrates whom she killed and whom Leo was sent to avenge. Her beauty and power are so overwhelming that she seduces Leo over his dead wife's body (his wife according to Amahagger customs), and offers him absolute knowledge along with immortality. Unfortunately for her, when she enters the flame of eternal life for a second time, wanting to prove to Leo that it is not dangerous, she shrivels up like a monkey and dies.

The Victorian period being one of great expansion for the British nation, and the novel being set in Africa, many critics have studied *She* for its imperial discourse or from a postcolonial point of view. Another popular approach to this novel is feminism because of the gender of the main character and the particular significance this has for her position of power. What I wish to do is to study the emergence of a new conception of knowledge, that of modernity.

The knowledge ascribed to Ayesha is described as the scientific knowledge of the nineteenth century: without intrinsic morality or self-control. If Ayesha needs to be destroyed at the end of the story, it is not to destroy her knowledge, but to prevent her from using it badly. For the Victorians, scientific and technological progress acquired a breathtaking speed and seemingly limitless reaches into everyday life as well as into their conception of the world they lived in, and of themselves. Anything out of control is potentially dangerous. For the Victorians, the pace of progress was overwhelming and threatening, and many felt that it could easily escape the control of the scientists who contributed to it. Ayesha is a perfect illustration of this potential in that she started out as human, but outgrew humanity through her great knowledge of nature's secrets. Another successful story of progress written in the Victorian period is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which the

scientist uses his knowledge while refusing to face the possible consequences of the actual application of this knowledge. The fear is fulfilled in that the creature evolves beyond the creator's intention and understanding. In both stories, the fear that is materialised is that of science applied to the human body.

The first part of my thesis will deal with this analogy I bring up between Ayesha and nineteenth century knowledge production. Darwin's theory of evolution as applied to humanity made it possible for authors such as Henry Rider Haggard to create beings like Ayesha who have evolved beyond humanity. I give an overview of the scientific and anthropological context from which Haggard wrote so as to highlight his understanding of race and how it defines Ayesha as not belonging to our species anymore. For anyone to imagine that a being could one day evolve beyond our species, it was necessary for religious beliefs to be proven wrong. The scientific context, with geology and astronomy proving the Bible's version of creation wrong, was again responsible for the rejection of religious truths by many people.

This brings me to the second chapter of my thesis where I study the transition from a religious conception of knowledge to a scientific one. Knowledge is a subject of predilection for myths. The unease toward science comes in part from the pace of progress in

its different fields, but also from the fact that people were not familiar with the way to treat and integrate this new kind of knowledge. The Christian tradition is very clear about knowledge. It is a bad thing to possess for a human being because it leads to temptation and sin, and the only way to gain true useful knowledge for the soul is through a revelation from God (ecstatic meditation or prayer). With the advent of the industrial revolution, new ways to envisage knowledge were needed since knowledge was becoming such a big part of the nation's survival. The myth of Faust was a pre-industrial symptom of the inability of the Christian tradition to include new realities. Ayesha is a clear follower of Faust, one who has completely freed herself of the religious beliefs that Faust still clings to despite his rebellion. She succeeds where he has failed, in attaining eternal youth, but she is nevertheless destroyed for having cast off morality and humanitarian qualities along with the superstition of religion.

The immortality Ayesha has attained, unlike Faust, and the loss of morality that seems to be attached to the loss of her mortality are the important themes of the third part of my thesis. They are major themes of the fantastic genre. The term fantasy or the fantastic does not refer to a work of fiction in which an author has imagined all sorts of frivolous laws of nature that are taken for

granted by the characters. Haggard's characters do not leave the world as we know it; it is the supernatural that invades it in a way that the rational British characters cannot deny. My argument here is that the genre, with its conventions and recognisable themes, helps sustain the fear of the unknown represented by Ayesha by sustaining the ambiguity.

Ayesha's Significance in the Context of the Nineteenth Century.

It is very important to situate Henry Rider Haggard, as a man and an author, and his novel *She* in the context of Victorian society. I see Ayesha as representing a threat to society, but not just any society at any given time. Haggard was very much a man of his time and to see what social values and institutions Ayesha threatens, we need to understand the values and institutions Haggard and his contemporaries held dear. The Victorian period is often, if not always, associated with the industrial revolution and rapid change, for obvious reasons. There is no denying that the advancement of industry and science played a great role in defining Victorian social values and way of life. What we tend to forget or overlook is that beyond technology were people with knowledge and values. The influence was mutual, moving back and forth in both directions. Eugene Black reminds us that:

> Industrial revolution is produced by a confluence of forces, people, and events. Technological innovation, capital, and entrepreneurship will not produce it for themselves. The industrial revolution is economic, psychological, social and cultural (p.ix).

The Victorians influenced science as much as it influenced them. Scientific advancement was not, and is still not today, a straightforward business. It is not surprising, then, that a character who stands for science, like Ayesha, possesses the secret of earth's life force, thus promising extraordinary potential, but also constitutes a serious threat.

There is one name in particular that we cannot hope to overlook when discussing scientific advancement in the Victorian period and it is that of Charles Darwin. In popular knowledge today, it is generally thought that Darwin revolutionised the scientific world with the publication in 1859 of his hypotheses, for that is all he ever claimed them to be, in *The Origin of Species*. I do not mean to minimise Darwin's contribution to biology: he was the first one to publish a book on biological evolution based upon rigorous scientific observation. What we seem to have forgotten today is that Darwin was not the first one to elaborate the notion of evolutionism. He was just the first one to bring some kind of scientific proof to sustain it, and thus deserved his place in history. Already a few decades before *The Origin of Species*, the study of geology had proven that our planet was very much older than the Bible would have us believe. Likewise, astronomy extended our

knowledge of stellar distances, thus minimising the importance of our planet and its rank in the universe.

The theories in both disciplines were not accepted without opposition, but the people who questioned the conclusions of geology, for example, found it difficult to sustain the old mythological beliefs of the Bible against the hard facts the geologists presented. Writing about his father, Sir Edmund Gosse highlights the moral dilemma for people at the time: "It was this discovery, that there were two theories of physical life, each of which was true, but the truth of each incompatible with the truth of the other, which shook the spirit of my Father with perturbation" (Quoted in Norton, p.1578). Sir Gosse, the father, tried to reconcile his two beliefs by arguing that God created our planet as it is, with its traces of slow development already hidden in its rock. Needless to say, he was not taken very seriously neither by the scientific community of his time, nor by posterity. Nevertheless, his moral dilemma is very characteristic of the Victorian public's response to scientific discoveries.

There is no dilemma for Ayesha; she is already well aware of what the Victorians were just discovering about their world. She tells Holly:

> What are ten or twenty or fifty thousand years in the history of life. Why in ten thousand years scarce will the rain and storms lessen a mountain-top by a span in thickness. In two thousand years these caves have not changed, nothing has changed but the beasts, and man, who is as the beasts. (p. 112-3).

Up to that point, science seemed to challenge old values about the world which forced society to re-examine its religious truths. The questioning Rider Haggard brings up metaphorically in his book *She* goes much deeper into human values than the debate about the earth's age. As if the world we live in was not a big enough preoccupation, *She* questions our very conception of humanity, of ourselves, by referring to us as beasts. That was the issue brought up by the theory of biological evolution and it brings us back to Darwin's predecessors. Jean-Baptist de Monet, Chevalier de Lamarck, was the French scientist who was the first to relate fossils to living organisms. He was the first to elaborate a theory of evolution as early as 1809 and he influenced many English thinkers all through the Victorian period. Lamarck's theory was not based on natural selection but on the inheritance of acquired characteristics. The best known example he gave was that of the giraffes who, he thought, acquired long necks through striving to

reach the leaves on the upper branches of trees and who passed their longer necks down to their offspring through genetic inheritance. He formulated two laws that he "held to govern the ascent of life to higher stages: first, that organs are improved with repeated use and weakened by disuse; second, that such environmentally determined acquisitions or losses of organs 'are preserved by reproduction to the new individuals which arise'" (Britannica, vol.7, p.144).

His influence is clear in such thinkers as Herbert Spencer, who published his ideas on biological evolution before Darwin. Spencer believed in the inheritance of acquired characteristics and he applied it to his social theories. After 1859, he came to accept natural selection as the driving force behind evolution (he even popularised the expression 'survival of the fittest'), but that did not change the way in which he saw evolution at work in society. His theories, and through him Lamarck's theory, were well accepted by his contemporaries, mostly by those of the rising middle class. Applied to society, evolution meant that society as a whole could evolve, be improved, by the individual efforts of its members. The easy acceptance of Spencer's social evolutionism (it was later called social Darwinism) might be explained easily by the increasingly industrial and capitalist context which favoured individualism. The

scope of social acceptance can be measured by the publication of many texts like that of Samuel Smiles: *Self-Help* in 1856. Smiles carries individualism quite far, when he argues that:

> Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates. Whatever is done *for* men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves; and where men are subject to over-guidance and over-government, the inevitable tendency is to render them comparatively helpless (Black, p.366).

This middle-class value of individualism can be traced back even further, to Robert Chambers, as early as the late 1820s and the 1830s. In his *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, published later in 1844, Chambers argues, not that God tried to fool us into heresy by giving the earth an older look than it had, but that evolution was in fact part of the initial divine plan of creation. God created earth and all that lives on it, and then let it run its course according to His planned evolution advancing toward ever higher states of being. Chambers was quickly put aside in favour of Spencer, Wallace, and Darwin, but what remains important is that his theory was motivated politically. Bowler argues that progress was used by Chambers to "throw off the shackles of traditional

authority so that active, middle-class entrepreneurs could push society toward new levels of activity" (p.132). An influential current of thought becomes clear as we analyse this group of important English thinkers: Chambers, who used evolutionism as a political tool to promote what comes down to free trade; Spencer, who did pretty much the same thing toward very similar ends, namely to promote the importance of the individual over society; and Huxley, who, though he had reservations about Darwin's theory of natural selection, nevertheless defended *The Origin of Species* against Bishop Samuel Wilberforce's religious attack before the British Association for the Advancement of Science because it had become evolutionism's figurehead. Bowler explains Huxley's defence of evolutionism as symbolising "science's bid to replace religion as the source of authority in the modern world" (p.137).

Taken on its own, this current of thought, widely shared by the increasingly dominant middle-class, is represented in Haggard's main character Ayesha. Her individualism is pushed to the limits, like everything about her. Through her, Haggard demonstrates how social Darwinism can be used to justify amorality:

> Those who are weak must perish; the earth is to the strong, and the fruits thereof. For every tree that grows a score shall wither, that the strong one may take their share. We run to

> place and power over the dead bodies of those who fail and fall; ay, we win the food we eat from out the mouths of starving babies. It is the scheme of things. Thou sayest, too, that a crime breeds evil, but therein thou dost lack experience; for out of crimes come many good things, and out of good grows much evil. The cruel rage of the tyrant may prove a blessing to thousands who come after him, and the sweetheartedness of a holy man may make a nation slaves. (p.153).

The threat Ayesha represents to Victorian society becomes clearer when we see how she can pervert highly valued notions like individualism. Taken along with other contexts of the time, especially the context of imperialism, this current of thought becomes even more significant. The advocates of imperialism quickly saw the advantage they could gain from a certain form of evolutionism in solving the moral dilemmas raised by the occupation of already populated countries.

Haggard was well aware of the different conceptions of evolution upheld in the anthropological circles of the nineteenth century. It is important to remember that Henry Rider Haggard had an extensive imperial career before he ever was a writer. His father, William Haggard, found him his first position on the African

continent when his neighbour, Sir Henry Bulwer, was appointed Natal's governor in 1874. Acting as a secretary, he proved to be a very skilful collaborator. Later affected to Sir Theophilius Sheptone, who was working in Transvaal, Haggard took part in the mission which, in 1877, would bring the area under British rule. He then worked at Pretoria's high court as a clerk for two years before going back to England to find a wife. His involvement with Africa was not over, since he moved back to Natal where he tried raising ostriches without much success. The Zulu revolts and the Boers' situation convinced Haggard to move back to England, but Africa remained very present in his writing.

His colonial experience, though mostly gained in Zulu land, was not restricted to Africa. In 1905, the Colonial Office, knowing him for a distinguished economist, sent him to inspect the industrial and agricultural colonies established in the United States by the Salvation Army. Moreover, on an order from the Royal Dominions Commission, he visited, from 1912 to 1914, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada to produce a report concerning colonial commerce (Lacassin, p.ix). Of course that occurred after the publication of *She* in 1887 and I will not dwell any longer on those travels, but it tells us how deeply involved Haggard was in his country's imperial endeavour.

The imperial aspect I want to raise is not irrelevant to the debate on evolutionism, quite the contrary. Anthropology and ethnology were the two main disciplines dealing with the knowledge gathered about the dark-skinned non-European peoples. Anyone wanting to justify or denounce the colonisation of populated areas of the world turned to these two fields of study for arguments. James Hunt founded the Anthropological Society of London in the 1860s and from then on, there was much debate and downright antagonism between his group and that of the Ethnological Society, notably about Darwinism. Hunt's society gave prominence to physical anthropologists who, for the most part, believed in the polygenic origins of humanity, while the Ethnological Society supported evolutionism and a monogenic origin of humanity. On the surface, the theory promoting polygenic origins for humanity seems the most obvious choice as a foundation for an imperial domination ideology. After all, "Those who saw the Anglo-Saxon nations as having a unique mission to dominate the world (...) they preferred to see each race as having its own origin, its own pattern of development, and its own destiny" (Bowler, p.144). If one accepts that the dark-skinned non-European has a different origin, then one accepts that they are not of our species despite the resemblance and thus it is morally right to colonise them. Even

more so if we do not give their society the status of civilisation. Many imperialists did use those polygenic arguments to justify their activity, but that does not mean that the monogenic theory could not be used to do exactly the same.

Forgetting for a moment the theory of evolution, which was too recent to have pushed Christian beliefs aside completely, let us examine the monogenic view of humanity that represented the traditional view upheld by the Bible. God created Adam and Eve, and from them descended the whole of the human species. If one believed this religious version of the origin of humanity, then one believed that all races of humans came from the same genetic material, that the appearance of man on earth was fairly recent, and that there was nothing in common between humans and animals. In order to explain the existence of the "savage" races of humans that the Europeans met when they started exploring far-away lands, thinkers introduced the concept of degeneration which, "conceived in physical and cultural terms, provided an alternative explanation for the manifest human diversity that increasingly forced itself on anthropological observers in this period" (Stocking, 1987, p.44).

Degeneration is to be understood in Lamarckian terms as a general disuse. James C. Prichard was the leading authority on the

subject and he claimed that the physical and social environment could modify the physical appearance of a man, and that this change was inscribed into the genetic material and thus hereditary. To illustrate his meaning, Prichard used the Irish example:

> ...exposed for two centuries to hunger and ignorance, the 'two great brutalizers of the human race,' the descendants of the Irish expelled from Armagh were remarkable for their 'projecting mouths,' and their 'advancing cheekbones and depressed noses' were evidence of their 'barbarism' (Stocking, 1987, p.63).

He clearly equated the Irish with the black Africans, and went on to claim that if these peoples could be exposed to a different environment, the physical defects would disappear within a few generations.

This biblical version of the monogenic origin of man was rather positive and excused the savageness of the African nations by blaming it on something out of their control (environment). It was at its strongest before geology and Darwinism interfered with the Christian dogmas, almost invalidating them. Nonetheless, monogenic thought remained, although it differed slightly from that upheld by Prichard. The theory of the evolution of humankind from apes was not in contradiction with a monogenic view of man's

origin. What evolutionism contradicted was the creation of man through the word of God. It was considered possible that humans came from the same species of apes, but that some groups of men were more advanced on the evolution scale than others. The "apelike quality" of African physiognomy was explained by the Victorian anthropologist's assumption that the African peoples had not evolved as fast as the European peoples and were indeed closer to apes than to white humans. For all practical purposes, both instances of the monogenic theory have the same results: the Europeans felt justified in taking over the land from those less-than-human peoples. Colonisation could then be seen as an act of kindness on the part of the Europeans who were saving the Africans from barbarism and bringing them the comfort of true religion and civilisation.

The polemic surrounding evolution is particularly relevant to a study of Henry Rider Haggard's book. Haggard characterises his main character Ayesha by her longevity, her beauty, her knowledge, and her extraordinary powers. He defines the main character of his book as the next possible step in human evolution by extrapolating from the scientific discoveries of his time. Ayesha being so much above the Victorians in knowledge and power, coupled with her strong individualism, makes her a threat to that society. Knowledge

is what helped Ayesha evolve, not a change in her environment, and it is this knowledge that represents a threat to the Victorian society. The society of nineteenth-century England was the first one to value knowledge so highly. People's way of life was changed through the application of technical knowledge in the work place and in everyday life. The very conception people had of themselves was transformed through knowledge of astronomy, geology, and, of course, biology. Such enormous transformations were bound to bring many fears along with them and several writers, Haggard among them, treated those fears in a variety of ways in their literature. Haggard personified in Ayesha the potential threat the ideals and values of scientific advancement posed. Ayesha is a blend of all that is wrong with Victorian values: scientific knowledge put to very selfish uses, unprecedented longevity wasted away for personal vengeance, and individual power devoted to subjugate a whole people (and not just any people, but the British people who worship all those values). Haggard imagined this personification with a very attractive presentation to illustrate another danger of industrialism, namely its attractive powers upon the human psyche. All the values mentioned hold a highly positive potential for the welfare of humanity, but Haggard is afraid that the power it

affords will tempt the scientists and leaders toward self-rewarding amoral ends.

A closer look at the novel allows us to see how Haggard articulates his particular views on evolution and industrialism. Ayesha does not appear in person before the middle of the novel. Haggard creates a dramatic effect by withholding her appearance while he illustrates the present (his present) state of the species by contrasting the three British characters with the Amahagger, or the People of the Rocks, that is, She's people. Of course, the Amahaggers are not of Ayesha's blood and for the first hundred pages the British readership of the nineteenth century are conforted in their conviction of being the highest race on the evolutionary scale.

That is why it is important not to overlook the description and evaluation of this strange African people, in which Haggard develops his own conception of our species' origin and evolution. On the very second day after their arrival in Africa, the English characters give us their appraisal of their Arabic crew. Job the servant is afraid of theft: "I don't like the looks (...) of these black gentry; they have such a wonderful thievish way about them" (p. 35). He does not suspect them of contemplating thievery because they are poor or because the English expose too much wealth, but

because of their 'looks.' It is also interesting to notice that for Job, there is no difference between North or South African, Arabs or Zulus. All the people he meets in Africa are 'blacks,' and it does not matter if their skin colour is barely brown and if their culture has produced cities like Istanbul: an African is a "black" which makes him inferior and possibly criminal. This opinion is widespread among the popular masses of England who have no first-hand knowledge of Africa. Job's masters, Holly and Leo, are more indulgent in their judgement, but no less prejudiced: Holly calls the Amahaggers 'evil looking.'

To find out where Haggard stands concerning the genetic relationship between races, it is necessary to look at a longer description of the Amahagger people:

> They were of a magnificent build, few of them being under six feet in height, and yellowish in colour. Generally their appearance had a good deal in common with that of the East African Somali, only their hair was not frizzed up, but hung in thick black locks upon their shoulders. Their features were aquiline, and in many cases exceedingly handsome, the teeth being especially regular and beautiful (p.56).

Two pages later he describes the women of the tribe in even more flattering terms mentioning that their hair, though curly, was 'not

crisped like a negro's' and that some of them had hair of a 'chestnut' colour. He uses comparisons to draw a picture of the savages for us, and he uses Arabs, Somalis, and even Chinese to do so: all of whom are non-Europeans.

Does that mean that he believes in the polygenist view of humanity's origin? We have to look further into the genealogy of the Amahagger to answer. Holly is also curious about the 'origin and constitution of this extraordinary race,' but he finds it difficult to get an answer on the subject from the Amahaggers themselves. Leo's indigenous "wife" tells them about an ancient city in ruins called Kôr and she guesses that her people are descended from the builders of this city. It is interesting to mention here that her people live in the great catacombs, or tombs, which the builders of the ruins had built for themselves, and they use vases and cloth that have been found in those catacombs. The vases introduce a new problematic in that they have drawings on them of white men hunting a bull-elephant with spears. Holly learns that the race of builders was actually white: "White was she, too, and her hair was yellow and lay down her almost to the feet. There are many such still in the tombs at the place where She is,..." (p. 81). This is Billali, a wise man of the tribe, talking about a mummy he had found in the tombs. On his way to She's lodgings, Holly discovers

wonders of technology that the ancients have used to dig very straight channels. Furthermore, Billali explains to Holly that inside the volcano where She lives was once a lake:

> But those who were before us, by wonderful arts of which I know nothing, hewed a path for the water through the solid rock of the mountain, piercing even to the bed of the lake. But first they cut the channel that thou seest across the plain. Then, when at last the water burst out, it rushed down the channel that had been made to receive it, and crossed this plain till it made the swamp through which we have come. Then when the lake was drained dry, the people whereof I speak built a mighty city on its bed, whereof naught but ruins and the name of Kôr yet remaineth, and from age to age hewed the caves and passages that thou wilt see (p.93).

Visiting the ruins, Holly notices some drawings on the walls, a fact which explains to him some customs of the Amahagger and again he wonders if they are the descendants of the ancient 'white' race.

This clearly introduces the idea of degeneration. Are the Amahagger the degenerate descendants of the people of Kôr? If so, how did the degeneracy come about? The fact that Prichard, the authority on degeneracy, emphasised the importance of the environment and its degenerative effect on humans points to this

explanation. If the ruins had shown signs of a great cataclysm, that would mean a change of environment for Kôr's people and the possibility of physical and intellectual degeneration through the ages until Holly found them. The problem with this theory is that Holly describes the ruins as amazingly well preserved: "near to the entrance of the cave both pictures and writings were worn away, but farther on in many cases they were absolutely fresh and perfect as the day on which the sculptor had ceased work upon them" (p.98). Ayesha gives us part of an answer when she tells Holly how the ancients died, when their population was decimated by pestilence (she also adds that this society was much older than that of the Egyptians). She is later more explicit, although what she gives us are speculations, since Kôr had already fallen before Ayesha came to live there, even if that was two thousand years ago:

> Yet were not these people utterly destroyed, as I think. Some few remained in the other cities, for their cities were many. But the barbarians from the south, or perchance my people, the Arabs, came down upon them, and took their women to wife, and the race of the Amahagger that is now is a bastard brood of the mighty sons of Kôr, and behold it dwelleth in the tombs with its fathers' bones (p.136).

If we are to believe Ayesha, that means that the white race of Kôr intermingled with the black race of the south. This new evidence points to a particular type of degradation: by miscegenation.

Other evidence points in the same direction. It is a known fact that Henry Rider Haggard visited the ruins at Great Zimbabwe three years after their discovery by a German geologist, Karl Mauch. Many books have been written about Great Zimbabwe, most of which claim that the ruins were not built by the Africans, but by an ancient colonising race. Many anthropologists thought them to be the location of King Solomon's mines (Haggard published a novel called just like that) which would make the ruins the ancient biblical city of Ophir. Among those who sustained that idea was Karl Mauch, who published his impression of the ruins, saying that he thought them "to be that of the Israelites of king Solomon's time, reminiscent of Solomon's Temple and the palace visited by the Queen of Sheba" (Kuklick, p.139). Theodore Bent published a report about the ruins in which he also rejects the possibility of the Shonas, the African tribe living nearby, having built the ruins. Unable to speculate in more detail about the architects, Bent often refers to them as the "ancients", in the same way in which Haggard has the Amahagger do in his book:

> "To be sure, their peaceful and industrious character was superior to that of other Africans, and their appearance suggested that their ancestors included non-Africans (...) And it was 'a well accepted fact that the negroid brain could never be capable of taking the initiative in work of such intricate nature'" (p.140).

This is quite close to the argument Haggard seems to make in *She*. What is at stake here is the justification of colonisation. If these ruins really were the work of a colonising race, this would mean that:

> "Africans had no clear title to the land either by virtue of long occupation or capacity to use natural resources productively. Wave upon wave of migrants had descended not only upon Zimbabwe, but had coursed throughout Africa, making population displacement a routine feature of the continent's history" (p.146).

A. Wilmot also wrote about Great Zimbabwe, and here the connection with Haggard's novel is striking, since it focuses on the danger of miscegenation. According to him, the ancient colonising race was never driven out and did not die out either: it mixed with the local Africans through marriage and thus lowered "the quality of the kingdom's ruling stock" (p.141). Haggard's connection to this

way of explaining what has been called 'the Great Zimbabwe mystery' is self-evident when we see that he wrote an introduction to Wilmot's book.

Thus, I believe that Haggard has used the mystery of the Great Zimbabwe ruins and the speculation about them to elaborate a complex African setting for his white queen. Miscegenation, instead of degeneration due to climate, explains the origins of Ayesha's people, the Amahagger. This clearly shows that Haggard espoused Darwin's theory of evolution for humanity. Haggard sees the races of humans, as evolved from the apes, as classified on a vertical scale where the white Europeans are on the top, as far from the apes as humanity has come so far. As for the other races, the darker their skin, the lower their place on the scale, and the closer to our common ancestor they are. Ayesha, however, was born in Africa of an African people, two thousand years ago, and has remained unchanged since then. How can such an antique being be our superior? How can she be more advanced on the evolution scale, more than the post-industrial Victorian white man represented by Haggard and his contemporaries? Before trying to answer those great questions, let us examine Ayesha's first apparition to Holly. Not until page 106 does he actually look at her, and she is still wearing a veil. He describes the moment as follows:

> ...I felt more frightened than ever at this ghost-like apparition, and my hair began to rise upon my head as the feeling crept over me that I was in the presence of something that was not canny. I could clearly distinguish, however, that the swathed mummy-like form before me was that of a tall and lovely woman, instinct with beauty in every part, and also with a certain snake-like grace which I had never seen anything to equal before. When she moved a hand or foot her entire frame seemed to undulate, and the neck did not bend, it curved (p. 106).

What Holly is telling us is that she is simply not human anymore, though she might have started out as one and still retained the form. Her essence is now beyond humanity.

The moment of her fall is the moment when Holly and Leo have visible proof of her having evolved beyond humanity. It also gives them proof that Darwin's theory of evolution is right, at least in part. In his critical introduction to Haggard's book, Normand Etherington writes that: "The idea that not all evolution is progressive runs like a thread of arsenic through Haggard's tale, spreading gradually through the fabric until all unravels at the moment of Ayesha's sudden backward evolution from goddess to monkey" (p. xxvii). Since Ayesha is so old and since she is still the

only representative of her new advanced "species," the evolution cannot have been uniform.

Bowler reminds us that, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, a less well-known "equivalent non-Darwinian model of evolution gained considerable strength within biology" (p.140). He elaborates a little on this theory "in which progress was confined to occasional episodes during which life advanced suddenly on to an entirely new plane" (p.140). I believe that this was the prospect that daunted Haggard, a modified Darwinism in which "progress would occur in cycles, each one beginning with the injection of something new into the world, and then continuing along its own inexorable path until replaced by the next upward step" (Bowler, p.140).

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that one of the most important characteristics of the Victorian period was rapid change. Would it not be logical that the Victorians, after learning that their species was not created thus, but had evolved from the apes after a series of changes in the environment, would be wary of too many and too rapid changes? Ayesha, a simple woman at the core, has nothing simple about her after having already been through all the changes affecting the Victorians. Knowledge has brought her a seemingly limitless life span, science has enabled her

to genetically engineer her servants (as we do our cattle), and, even though a woman, she has attained self-empowerment and self-sufficiency. The result is pictured negatively by Haggard despite the attractive exterior. This negative perception of scientific achievements is not unheard of for the time, where:

> although most perceptive Victorians did share a sense of satisfaction in the industrial and political preeminence of England during the period, they also suffered from an anxious sense of something lost, a sense too of being displaced persons in a world made alien by technological changes that had been exploited too quickly for the adaptive powers of the human psyche (Abrams, p.892).

This is what Haggard tried to express through Ayesha, a sense of the strangeness of a world where some human beings are completely different from most. This alien quality or potential he ascribes to future humans could not be expressed through the conventional realism of the nineteenth century novel. Fantasy and myth are the forms Haggard used to convey his meaning without being didactic and boring.

The Mythical Aspects of *She*: The Victorian Need for New Myths.

Chapter two brings us back to the title of this thesis and, more specifically, to the term "mythical." My argument is that Haggard's character has a mythical status. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines myth as:

> a kind of story or rudimentary narrative sequence, normally traditional and anonymous, through which a given culture ratifies its social customs or accounts for the origins of human and natural phenomena, usually in supernatural or boldly imaginative terms (p.143).

Critics differ widely in their assessment of myth, but some elements are mentioned more often than others. Wallace W. Douglas gives us a good overview of all that is implied by the term in his article "The Meaning of 'Myth' in Modern Criticism" and explains that "it can be expected to have almost as many meanings as critics who use it; as it turns out, the meanings are almost as many as the uses" (p.68).

Nevertheless, most critics agree that the traditional view of myth links it with ritual and the sacred. Some challenge this view and argue that a myth can be secular, but most recognise that it has usually been viewed as sacred. Douglas more specifically mentions three critics whom he sees as following the Cambridge

Hellenists: S. E. Hyman, Northrop Frye, and Francis Fergusson. All three critics tend to treat literature "as a repository of truth, of racial memories, or of unconsciously held values" (p.70). What it implies is that myth is considered as a revelation (from above?) of a higher truth. It comes as no surprise then that most classical examples of myth, as Frye points out in his article "The Archetypes of Literature," involve characters that are above the human condition: gods and goddesses, semi-divine heroes, or heroes who are granted a divine status through their deeds, their beauty, or their usefulness to the gods.

Henry Rider Haggard's novel does not readily fit this traditional view of myth since there is no god or goddess involved. Ayesha does come close though with her apparent immortality, her superhuman beauty, and her awesome powers. Does the lack of a divine sanction rob her of any mythical claim? Many critics would not think so. That is not to say that the main protagonist of a myth could be an ordinary person. That would bring it too close to a folktale. But, short of being divine, the character can be "merely" extraordinary in one sense or another. As Douglas argues, the characters and actions we find in myths "have qualities that make them representative of types or classes or ideas" (p.68). This is one mythical aspect that can be ascribed to Ayesha. As I have stated in

chapter one, she stands for an unnatural new stage of evolution in humanity and threatens the old human model.

The core of my claim for Ayesha's mythical dimension rests mainly on two authors: Joseph Campbell, well-known in comparative mythology, and the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung. In the interview he did with Bill Moyers and that was later published under the title *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell discusses myth in relation to modern, twentieth-century society. Nevertheless, the arguments he raises for the need of a new mythology also apply to the British society of the Victorian period since it was the first to experience industrialisation and its attendant moral dilemmas.

Campbell sees myths as models we should follow through life; models to help us cross the major thresholds such as adulthood, marriage, and death. Although the themes related to these thresholds are universal, the shape they come in is not. Campbell adds:

> But the models have to be appropriate to the time in which you are living, and our time has changed so fast that what was proper fifty years ago is not proper today. (...) The moral order has to catch up with the moral necessities of actual life in time, here and now. And that is what we are not doing. The

> old-time religion belongs to another age, another people, another set of human values, another universe (p.13).

That was especially true of the Victorian period. As I tried to demonstrate in chapter one, the entire universe was changing for the British society of the time because of major discoveries in astronomy, geology, and biology. When the world changes, the myths need to change because if they do not, they simply lose their meaning and become empty shells.

Though Carl Gustav Jung worked exclusively in the field of psychology, his research has brought him to conclusions similar to those of Campbell about mythology. The vocabulary is different: whereas Campbell talks of models, Jung discusses symbols. Despite this difference in terminology, and it is not the only one, Jung and Campbell stress the impoverishment of certain forms and their loss of meaning. Of course, Jung's assessment of the phenomenon is quite different, since he believed that the symbols never had any meaning to begin with. The loss of meaning is in fact our realisation of the initial lack of meaning as he explains in the following passage:

> It almost seems as if these images had just lived, and as if their living existence had simply been accepted without question and without reflection, much as everyone decorates

> Christmas trees or hides Easter eggs without ever knowing what these customs mean. The fact is that archetypal images are so packed with meaning in themselves that people never think of asking what they really do mean. That the gods die from time to time is due to man's sudden discovery that they do not mean anything, that they are made by human hands, useless idols of wood and stone. (1968, p.13).

He does not exclude Christianity from this discovery. Many symbols of Christianity crumbled during the nineteenth century: the biblical story of creation, the fall from Eden, the Christ our saviour, and so on. The realisation that those symbols were just that, symbols, projections, archetypal images as Jung stamps them, enabled the intellectuals of the period to recuperate them and cast a more modern light on them.

That is not only what Haggard does with Ayesha, it is also what he has Ayesha do for herself and Holly. She has understood that the religious symbols are just that, symbols that humans create to explain things that lack an explanation. She says of religion that: "It is terror for the end, and but a subtler form of selfishness – this it is that breeds religions" (p.145). She does not believe in any religion herself and she regrets the fact that human

beings feel the need to worship the symbols created by other human beings to justify their existence:

> Ah! If man would but see that hope is from within and not from without – that he himself must work out his own salvation! He is there, and within him is the breath of life and a knowledge of good and evil as good and evil is to him. Thereon let him build and stand erect, and not cast himself before the image of some unknown God, modelled like his poor self, but with a larger brain to think the evil thing, and a longer arm to do it. (p.145).

Of course, since Ayesha represents the potential danger scientific knowledge can bring to humanity, her alternative is not one the Victorians were ready to accept. Social Darwinism is what she proposes to replace religious thought, and the Victorian reader would have looked in vain for a moral basis in Ayesha's philosophy. For her, morality was a very relative thing that should be left to each individual's conscience. Through her, though, Haggard tries to replace the crumbling symbols of Christianity with something more in line with the theory of evolution. Etherington argues that "It is not Christianity but a hash of Eastern mysticism that Haggard offers most earnestly as a way of escape from a godless universe ruled by chance and change" (1991, p.xxix). What he is referring to

is Ayesha's explanation about Death being just a simple Change, and her conviction that all living beings come back to life over and over again. Her view is supported in the novel by the reappearance of Kallikrates two thousand years after she killed him.

Nevertheless, in her nakedness encircled by a serpent belt, Ayesha has much in common with the Christian Eve as temptress. Jung himself designated Ayesha as a good example of a modern archetypal image. For him, she represented Haggard's anima, or soul. Jung defines the anima as "a natural archetype that satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the unconscious of the primitive mind" (1968, p.27). It does not stand for the whole soul, since being feminine she represents the "not-I, not masculine." Since the anima lies deep within the unconscious, a man wanting to get in touch with his anima would have to go beyond his socially constructed morality, which is why she is mostly portrayed as an attractive but dangerous being. The anima is that part of the soul that wants to feel wholly alive, that accepts the bad sides of life on equal terms with the good sides, and again this explains her dark reputation. Jung does not develop his thought on Ayesha as Haggard's anima in detail, but one of his followers, Cornelia Brunner, did so in a book called *Anima as Fate.*

Brunner adheres completely to Jung's idea that Ayesha is in fact Haggard's anima. I ascribe a much broader meaning to this female character, but some of the observations of the psychoanalyst I found very interesting. The first one is the physical description Brunner gives of Ayesha. The same description, or a very similar one, could be applied to the science of Haggard's time. She calls Ayesha glorious when looked in the face, but even the magnificent smile cannot hide the shadows, the downsides of experience and grief. Brunner goes on to mention that Ayesha has an alchemical laboratory and places herself beyond good and evil. Here again, this remark sustains my claim that Ayesha represents science: scientists have always put science and knowledge beyond good and evil, it is the use we put it to that determines the moral value; in itself, science has no moral value, or so its dogma of empirical "fact" would have us believe. However, Brunner prefers to see her as representing the past:

> As the personification of the unconscious, she reaches far down into collective layers. Very much embodying these early layers, she appears in men's dreams as a medieval feudal lady, as a witch, or as a priestess, like Ayesha who represents an ancient goddess. She is yesterday's truth which has been repudiated by our one-sided consciousness (p.70).

Before trying to refute this statement, I will take a closer look at the collective layers she mentions. She is referring to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious.

Freud is the one who first elaborated the concept of the unconscious of the human psyche. His theories are much studied in many different academic circles and I do not want to enter into a discussion of the unconscious as he saw it. Suffice it to say that for him, the unconscious was mainly of a personal nature even though it was present in all individuals. Jung, a student of Freud, did not reject his mentor's concept, but thought that there was more to it than Freud had seen. He thought that there was a deeper layer sustaining the personal unconscious, one that was not acquired through personal experience and repression. In fact, it was not acquired at all:

> This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term "collective" because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals (1968, p.3-4).

Brunner's postulate about Ayesha stands only as long as you accept Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. It is her basic premise on which all of her arguments stand.

G. S. Kirk gives us a good summary of the application of this concept to literature: "...all human beings possess similar inborn tendencies to form certain general symbols, and that these symbols manifest themselves through the unconscious mind in myths, dreams, delusions and folklore" (p. 275). The evidence advanced by Jung to support his theory is the recurrence of the symbols all over the world, in very different societies. Unfortunately for him and his followers, as Kirk points out, "no convincing statistical evidence has ever been presented or even attempted" (p.275). Furthermore, proving that those symbols are recurrent would not necessarily prove that there is a collective unconscious. The similarity of the symbols could also be explained through the similarity of the human experience in all individuals. Yet Kirk does not disavow Jung entirely, and I agree with him on the following argument: "Yet the mind has a physiological basis, and there may be no obvious reason why modes of thinking should not be inherited just as modes of behaving (...) such as those that cause fish to force their way up long and dangerous rivers to spawn" (p.277). The phenomenon that has been proved in the discipline of comparative

mythology is the recurrence of certain motifs (separation of earth and sky, spiritual quest) with enough cultural variations to fit the above-mentioned hypothesis. Kirk does not reject Jung's idea of basic mythical symbols, but calls for a remodelling of its premises.

Despite those reservations about Jung's theory, I cannot simply overlook his explanations about archetypes and archetypal images. Though I disagree with Brunner about equating Ayesha with ancient truths, some other comparisons she makes I find very useful. She brings up the archetype of the wise old man with the character Noot, the hermit and philosopher who discovered the fire of life and who transmitted his knowledge to Ayesha. She traces this archetype to Eve: "He showed her the path to life's secret but he also warned her, just as God warned Eve in paradise about the fruits of knowledge" (Brunner, p.95). Another reference comes to mind here: Faust and Mephistopheles. Further reading in literature and mythology will yield more examples such as Pandora and Prometheus. Ayesha's relationship to Pandora or Prometheus is more problematic. She can be equated with Pandora for being the first representative, not only of her sex, but of her species since she has outgrown humanity. Pandora is described as a tool used by the gods to punish humanity. Ayesha is nobody's tool, but she does represent a threat that could potentially destroy humanity. What

she has in common with Prometheus is the act of stealing the fire of life. Here again the implication between the two characters is quite different: Prometheus steals fire from the gods to give it to humanity whereas Ayesha hides the existence of the fire to keep it to herself. Prometheus is punished for his kindness to humanity and Ayesha is destroyed by her greed. The archetypal image of a beneficial fire and its relation with a mythical figure is nonetheless quite strong.

Trying to give literary criticism a scientific basis and credibility, Northrop Frye attempted to salvage the concept of the archetype without the use of psychoanalysis. He explains his view of archetypes in this way:

> ... every poet has his private mythology, his own spectroscopic band or peculiar formation of symbols, of much of which he is quite unconscious. (...) But when so many poets use so many of the same images, surely there are much bigger critical problems involved than biographical ones (Archetypes, p.98-99).

The archetype of a powerful immortal female figure can be found in almost all world mythologies. The positive or negative connotation attached to these figures depends on the culture and values of the society that imagined it. I could go as far back as Sumerian

mythology with its goddess Inanna, sometimes called Ishtar, who killed her lover to gain back her immortality after being killed by her sister, the queen of hell. But Inanna being a goddess, the symbolism in her myth is quite different from that of Ayesha. Inanna is the goddess of war, but she is also a principle of fecundity, love, and prosperity. As such, her disappearance brings disastrous consequences for humanity, and the descent to hell of Dumuzi, her lover, is a sacrifice for the good of the world. Ayesha is not a goddess and she kills her lover out of jealousy. Her retirement from the world is portrayed as beneficial for the rest of humanity and she is the one who has to be kept away from the world.

In order to find truly useful archetypes in myth to help us study Haggard's book, we have to look into his immediate religious and literary background. What are the mythical elements in *She* that carry significance and where can we find those elements in religion and literature? Do they carry the same meaning? The most obvious element of myth is Ayesha's longevity and the way she dramatically lost it. Knowledge is the means by which this is made possible. Knowledge has often been seen negatively in British culture. The same is true of all Christian cultures and we can find proof of that in one of the most important Christian myths, one that I have already mentioned: the forbidden tree of knowledge in

the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were not created as suffering mortals; mortality and hardship was God's punishment for their disobedience. Therefore, in the Christian tradition, knowledge is seen as a tool used by the devil to lead humanity into sin, into disobedience of God's law.

Other myths illustrating the moral danger attached to knowledge exist, but none are more basic or well-known than the fall of humanity. During the Medieval period, also called the Dark Ages, the Christians in Europe were not encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. It was the clergy's role to study the Holy Book and guide their "flock" according to its teaching. With the appearance of Protestantism, this element of Christianity was rejected in favour of a more individual relationship with God on the part of the believer.

In Haggard's time, those Christian values were shaken to the core with the advent of science and the theory of evolution. Without going back to the discussion of chapter one, we have to remember that the Victorians were the first to grapple with the idea that a human being is an animal. If humanity was not created by God in his image, than humanity did not "fall" from an original blissful state through the acquirement of knowledge. This realisation was made at just about the time when the great economic potential

discovered in technical knowledge and its application caused the Victorians to reassess the values attached to knowledge. Many Christian values and myths were questioned, but the transition was not easy for everyone. Haggard grew up with those Christian beliefs and thought of them as true throughout his childhood along with everyone else in England.

The fact that many stopped believing in the Bible's myth of creation did not mean that they stopped believing in God. The advent of Protestantism had also brought to light the preoccupation about the value of knowledge and obedience to God. This preoccupation was elaborately dramatised in the Elizabethan period by Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*.

Marlowe did not create the Faustian figure, which took on mythical proportions from the start. *The Norton Anthology* gives his immediate source to be "a German narrative called in its English translation, *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*" (vol.1, p.768). George Thinès' analysis of the Faustian myth is based on what he calls the *Faustbuch* of 1587. In his book *Le mythe de Faust et la dialectique du temps*, Thinès tells us more about this *Faustbuch* written by an anonymous German author. What he analyses in his book is the significance of the

myth of Faustus and this also applies to Marlowe's version. The *Faustbuch* was written anonymously, but was clearly inspired by the inquisition and had edifying purposes in mind. The intention was obviously to set up a negative example in order to illustrate to good Christians the danger of absolute knowledge and of the pride that often comes with it.

The parallel I intend to make between Faustus and Ayesha becomes clear here. The German *Faustus* was not very successful in fulfilling its goal of edification because the heroic nature of the character takes precedence over the moral goal of the author. Haggard, on the other hand, makes sure to thrust the importance of Ayesha's demise on us, for the survival of England and its institutions. Thinès highlights two central ideas in *Faustus*: the negation of time (or its completion, the French word he uses is "finitude") coupled with that of the conquest of knowledge as power.

What brings both characters together in their significance is their pride and ambiguous relationship to knowledge as power. Their pride is their tragic flaw, their downfall, and their knowledge is the object of their pride. What is at stake in both myths is the very concept of knowledge and its source. In Christian culture, absolute knowledge can be gained only through the study of the scriptures, meditation, and an ecstatic revelation from God. God is

absolute truth which can be revealed through prayers. Faustus, the earliest myth of the two, challenges this notion about knowledge. He demands that his knowledge be proved true by God, and he conjures up a demon to obtain what he believes he needs.

Dr. Faustus was written much earlier than *She*, at a time when science as a modern concept of knowledge did not exist, and when Protestantism was still quite new. Nevertheless, "...l'exigence de démonstration qui le caractérise (...) substitue à la connaissance spirituelle acquise dans l'apparition extatique, le simulacre d'une connaissance positive. La science divine du mystique est remplacée par la science de fait du conjurateur..." (Thinès, p. 140). It is only a pretence of knowledge because he still trusts a mythic figure to bring him proof in exchange for his eternal soul. According to Thinès, the solution for Faustus would have been to become a real physicist, and demonstrate in a scientific way that the only heaven was that of the astronomers. That would have liberated him from theology along with astrology. It is not surprising that he failed to do so since sixteenth-century science was not ready for this concept (p. 215). Thinès' theory is that all civilisations call for a Faustian myth, or one of its kind, in times of consolidation of a culture, and its relationship to truth. In *Faustus*' time, the new element that changed the existing culture was Protestantism, which

did not question the existence of God, but which questioned the right of the Catholic Church to hold on to absolute truth for itself.

In Haggard's time, evolutionism and geology are good examples, perhaps the most important ones, of the new elements of culture that challenged the old truths about God, the world, and humanity itself. New myths illustrating the search or formulation of new truths were needed, and Ayesha is not the only one we can find in Victorian literature. Haggard uses the figure of a knowledgeable and powerful female to illustrate the potential of scientific advancement. Of course, she represents the negative potential that needs to be avoided, or brought under the control of morality. Other authors of the period reflected on the subject of science and came to similar conclusions. I am thinking here mainly of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* which is one of the best examples of a particular fear of the Victorian period: the fear that by making the human being its object of study, science might detach humanity from its privileged position of observer.

In opposition to *She*, *Frankenstein*'s mythic qualities have been widely recognised by posterity. It is mostly so because the creature constructed by Victor Frankenstein is not so specifically tied to the context of nineteenth-century England. This can also be explained by the fact that *Frankenstein* illustrates a very specific

danger in a very specific discipline within science, whereas *She* illustrates a vague sense of uneasiness in society toward science in general. The fantasies and science-fictions of today are still very much preoccupied with human creatures elaborated in a science laboratory. Of course, the scientists of today will not need to plunder a graveyard for biological material: they will use aborted embryos or tissue samples from an unknowing patient. A sample is enough when working on the genetic level itself where it is possible to grow skin or organs artificially from DNA. Recently, scientists have been able to create the first living clone of a sheep, which brings out the Frankenstein threat: the possibility to create human clones for amoral purposes, namely for their body parts in order to furnish their "original" with viable and riskless transplants.

There is also the possibility of creating a genetically engineered human being who, like Ayesha, would threaten to displace the traditionally conceived (thus imperfect) human as the "fittest" humanoid. To turn back to the nineteenth-century context, the important figure of Shelley's book was Victor Frankenstein, the creator and not the creature. Popular culture has put the emphasis on the spectacular, namely the creature, and Hollywood has even given it its creator's name, but Mary Shelley never even named it. Victor Frankenstein has much in common with Ayesha: they both

looked for, and found the secret of life with very different consequences. Monette Vaquin wrote a book on *Frankenstein* called *Frankenstein ou les délires de la raison* in which she tries to go beyond the metaphor of the monstrous life-giving act:

> Le savoir ne comportait rien de répréhensible à ses yeux.
>
> Mais elle avait débusqué la passion; l'obsession de maîtrise derrière l'alibi du savoir. Elle avait perçu le désir de puissance dans l'exercice de l'intelligence, dans la corruption de son usage. (p.157).

According to Vaquin, then, Mary Shelley did not fear scientific knowledge for itself, but she knew that it could be used by unscrupulous people for unscrupulous ends. Vaquin is a psychoanalyst who studies artificial reproduction techniques and she specifically points out, in Victor Frankenstein, that behind the scientific objectivity, we tend to forget the mechanical and reifying dimension of theoretical systematisation. To Vaquin, that is what Frankenstein's creature represents: an artificial human being made object.

The parallel I am trying to draw between the danger of unchecked scientific progress and Ayesha is similar. As a psychoanalyst, Vaquin points out that "L'accélération des possibilités techniques donnait aux découvertes l'aspect d'une

irruption de fantasme dans la réalité" (p. 192). These fantasies were taken up by authors and presented as such. In the case of Mary Shelley, the fantasy enacted is that of eliminating the debt of life owed to our parents. Henry Rider Haggard turned to the fear of genetic science whose original function was to be a tool in understanding the evolution of our species, but it was feared as a possible source of unwanted mutations. The fear is of industrialising the human body along with the national economy.

That is exactly what Ayesha does with her servants. She does not say how she bred them, genetically or through the standard procedures of selective mating we ourselves use for animals, but she uses them as we use the species we consider inferior:

> They are mutes, thou knowest, deaf are they and dumb, and therefore the safest of servants, save to those who can read their faces and their signs. I bred them so - it has taken many centuries and much trouble; but at last I have triumphed. Once I succeeded before, but the race was too ugly, so I let it die away; but now, as thou seest, they are otherwise. Once, too, I reared a race of giants, but after a while Nature would no more of it, and it withered. (Haggard, p.115).

What she is discussing so casually and with so much pride is eugenics, or a certain form of it. Instead of recreating an improved human being like she herself has become, Ayesha prefers to create a race of servants to wait on her. The theme of eugenics raises more questions than Ayesha provides answers for since she drops the subject after the few lines I have quoted above. One question is how does she breed her servants? She only mentions girls and there is no hint anywhere in the novel of male counterparts for the servant girls. Eugenics is the science that seeks to improve "the human race by a careful selection of parents in order to develop healthier and more intelligent children" (Gage Dictionary, p. 406). Except that she does not improve the race, but subjugate it to her needs. With the little information she gives the reader, one would feel justified to think that she created her race of servants out of thin air. Ayesha, though she has discovered many of nature's secrets, keeps those secrets to herself.

In sum, Ayesha is a representative of the new ways of seeing knowledge in the nineteenth century, scientifically instead of mystically. Since knowledge now has a positive connotation in society and a positive economic impact on the nation, its progress seems limitless. That is precisely where the danger lies. In its wider understanding of nature's secrets, science may create beings who,

like Ayesha, go beyond the rest of humanity, and become a danger to it. She has rejected before everyone else the search for knowledge through meditation and prayer, and has studied the secrets of nature scientifically, looking to prove what she thought was true. For example, she tells Holly about death: "Dost thou still believe that all things die, even as those very Jews believed? I tell thee that nothing dies. There is no such thing as Death, though there be a thing called Change" (p.111). Ayesha believes in reincarnation and with the arrival of Leo, she now has proof of it since she was careful enough, two thousand years ago, to preserve her lover Kallikrates' corpse. Now that she has found him again, she can prove to him that what she says is true:

> ...for her explanations were beyond the grasp of our finite minds, and when they were stripped from the mists of vague esoteric philosophy, and brought into conflict with the cold and horrifying fact, did not do much to break its force. For there, stretched upon the stone bier before us, robed in white, and perfectly preserved was what appeared to be the body of Leo Vincey. (p.179).

Ayesha proves to them, at the same time, that she really has mastered one of the world's greatest mysteries, the secret of eternal life (or very prolonged life at least). It brings us back to a theme

highly favoured by Victorian writers and by the Victorian public in general: morality. What Haggard next emphasises, after the proof of her immortality, is the loss of morality brought on by extreme longevity. After having seen so many generations die and knowing that whole civilisations had disappeared during her long wait, how could Ayesha be expected to value a single human life? I will discuss this in more detail in my next chapter.

She in the Context of the Fantasy Genre.

Outside of the scientific field, which took up much of the educated public's attention, the subject that most occupied the thinkers and writers of the Victorian period was morality. Most historians agree on this point, as Dorothy Marshall writes in *Industrial England 1776-1851*:

> England had been presented with a new pattern of family life in which morning and evening prayers and regular church or chapel attendance on Sunday were *de rigueur*. Swearing and cursing were no longer fashionable. Dress became more restrained and modest. Dancing and the theatre were looked on askance by many, who took literally the notice 'to the Pit.' Family life was expected to be happy, with husbands faithful, wives dutiful and children obedient. (p.121).

Family life was at the core of Victorian values and one activity that was done in family was reading. The Victorian middle class expected to be edified and inspired into greater moral truths by its favourite authors. Many authors were quite happy to comply and many didactic essays were written in which the morality of this or that idea was debated. For example, one of the great themes of discussion for the Victorian essayists was that of women and their

relationship to education and politics. Could women retain their moral purity if they were allowed an active position outside the home? The novelists did not escape this tendency.

On the other side of the coin are authors such as Dickens who, instead of upholding morality in a positive example, preferred to denounce the amorality of certain people under the respectable guise of business. Dickens went further than simply denouncing the amoral individuals; he graphically represented the inhumanity of the industrial economy. Dickens used the conventions of realism to portray the injustice caused by capitalism as a social philosophy. He drew this picture and placed it under society's nose to force it into a reflection about the social costs of a nation built on technological advancement.

What Haggard expresses in *She* is a potential danger to the British society, nothing as concrete as Dickens' social costs. It is a general unease at the pace of change, and of scientific and technological advancement; a pace that made it difficult to follow or, even worse, to predict where it would lead. The literary realism of the nineteenth century was not fit to express something as formless in appearance as this unease which was nevertheless shared by much of Haggard's audience. The only literary form that

could allow him to formulate his idea on the subject was that of the fantastic.

Anyone wanting to discuss this genre needs to start with Tzvetan Todorov, if only to disprove his classification or understanding of the fantastic. Todorov defines the fantastic as follows:

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination — and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality — but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (p. 25).

Still according to him, the fantastic requires an ultimate resolution. If what seems supernatural at first glance is given a logical explanation at the end, then the text is in fact uncanny and not fantastic. If the supernatural is finally accepted as the only possible explanation, impossible though it may seem, then the story enters the marvellous. If we adhere to this definition, *She* would be of the

fantastic genre only as long as Holly doubts Ayesha's affirmation about her age.

The first two chapters of the novel are dedicated to the description of college life in Cambridge as Holly and his pupil Leo lived it for twenty years. It is the world we know as Todorov described it. The event that brings hesitation into the lives of the characters is the opening of the chest left to Leo by his father. In it, Leo's first known ancestor tells the story of her life. The antiquity of the sherd on which the story is engraved is already an element of surprise and wonder, just as the story of how it was kept in the Vincey family for so many centuries. The ancestor recounts a meeting with a magician queen who stood in the flames of the "Pillar of Life," and came forth undying. That is the supernatural element that Holly cannot accept as true. The opinion Holly has of this story is without ambiguity: "As for myself I said nothing: my first idea being that my poor friend, being demented, had composed the whole thing, though it scarcely seemed likely that such a story could have been invented by anybody. It was too original"(p. 20). If we follow Todorov, the story so far is uncanny because it belongs to the realm of the imagination.

After examining the sherd more closely, Holly comes to the conclusion that it is authentic, but that does not give more credit to the story it tells:

> The entries absolutely prove it, and therefore, however improbable it may seem, it must be accepted. But there I stop. That your remote ancestress, the Egyptian princess, or some scribe under her direction, wrote that which we see on the sherd I have no doubt, nor have I the slightest doubt but that her sufferings and the loss of her husband had turned her head, and that she was not right in her mind when she did write it. (p. 32).

Nevertheless, not wanting to let his pupil embark alone on such an adventure, Holly decides to be a part of the expedition. His conviction that the story was an invention is challenged very quickly upon their arrival in Africa. Their first discovery is the head of the Ethiopian that seem to be carved in a cliff, just like the manuscript said was there. Then, they encounter what seems to be an ancient port where big vessels once moored, and they later reach something that they first took for a river, but which turned out to be a canal dug out by man.

The evidence piles up until the culminating point when Holly actually meets the undying white queen of the Amahagger. Even as

he faces Ayesha, Holly doubts her longevity and is horrified to hear her talk of her stoning by the Jews of Jerusalem before their Messiah was born:

> Pardon me, O Queen,' I said, 'but I am bewildered. Nigh upon two thousand years have rolled across the earth since the Jewish Messiah hung upon His cross at Golgotha. How then canst thou have taught thy philosophy to the Jews before He was? Thou art a woman, and no spirit. How can a woman live two thousand years?

Ayesha demonstrates some of her power for him. This is where the novel becomes truly fantastic according to Todorov's definition, because Holly cannot decide for one explanation over another. It is not before he sees the queen kill with a look that Holly comes to accept the truth about her: "Ayesha said nothing, she made no sound, she only drew herself up, stretched out her arm, and, her tall veiled frame quivering like an aspen leaf, appeared to look fixedly at her victim" (p. 171). From this moment, there is no doubt in Holly's mind, and Todorov would classify it under marvellous.

Many critics have contested Todorov on more than one aspect of his definition. Amaryll Chanady introduces a good argument against Todorov's theoretical approach of the fantastic. She writes that: "...Todorov calls it a genre, and at the same time destroys the

concept of genre by situating the fantastic between the uncanny and the marvellous, that is, on the borderline of two literary modes..." (p.1). Rosemary Jackson favours an analytical approach to the function of the fantastic, but she also refers to it as a mode. Though I disagree with the evanescent quality Todorov ascribes to the fantastic, I prefer to talk of it as a genre as he does. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines genre as "the French term for a type, species, or class of composition. A literary genre is a recognizable and established category of written work employing such common conventions as will prevent readers or audience from mistaking it for another kind" (p.90). The fantastic fits this definition much better than it does the definition of mode, which is " an unspecific critical term usually designating a broad but identifiable kind of literary method, mood, or manner that is not tied exclusively to a particular form of genre" (p.140).

Whether genre or mode, all the authors I have mentioned so far on the subject agree that the fantastic story takes place in the world as we know it. A fantasy world with natural laws different from the ones we know, is to be classified in the marvellous. That much is clear and as for the evanescence of the genre, I believe Todorov to be wrong. In the marvellous, the supernatural is accepted as normal, as residing inside the natural laws of the

world. When the supernatural is finally accepted after much doubt as something extraordinary but proved, we are still in the fantastic mode since it is still of our world we are speaking.

Haggard's book is a very good example of the fantastic genre. The world that is described is one that the Victorian audience would have accepted as the one they lived in, but at the same time, Amenartas' manuscript, and the actual meeting of Ayesha later on, introduces an incredible element. A woman who is two thousand years old does not fit into our conventional view of the world; she represents an absolute impossibility. Yet, Holly and Leo meet her and are eventually convinced of her reality. This is where Todorov would say that *She* enters the marvellous and is no longer fantastic. I tend to favour Chanady's version in which she distinguishes two criteria: bidimensionality and antinomy. Bidimensionality refers to "two distinct levels of reality" that are represented in *She* by Ayesha herself on the one hand, with her "supernatural" powers and her extreme longevity, and by the rest of the world on the other hand, described in terms of conventional logic. The antinomy is "the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text" (p.12). It is the fact that the two realities are observed at the same time and thus remain inexplicable because mutually exclusive. Haggard did try to give a natural explanation

for Ayesha's supernatural qualities, but the planet's life force as a pillar of fire is unknown to science and thus outside our reality.

In her book *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Christine Brooke-Rose confirms this view of the fantastic which accepts Todorov's theory, but with further elaboration. She emphasises ambiguity as the core element of the fantastic and explains her use of the term as follows: "The complexity and subtlety of the pure fantastic lies in its absolute ambiguity, so that instead of one diffuse *fabula* we have two clear, simple, but mutually exclusive fabulas, ..." (p.229). By fabula, she means the "term used in Russian Formalism for the 'raw material' of story events as opposed to the finished arrangement of the plot (or sjuzet)" (Baldick, p.80). Her definition is not evanescent like that of Todorov, since the ambiguity brought about by the two fabulas remains even after the supernatural has been accepted as an explanation; one could even argue that the ambiguity has been heightened by this acceptance. As the mention of Russian Formalism implies, we have been dealing exclusively with the structure and devices that make up the fantastic as a genre. *She* is a perfect example of the fantastic as Todorov saw it up until the point where Holly is convinced of Ayesha's age. It remains fantastic until the end if we add Chanady's and Brooke-Rose's enlarging contributions to the definition, because the two realities

coexist until the end when Ayesha is destroyed. I will now look beyond definition and structure and turn my attention to the social function of the fantastic genre and one of its examples, *She.*

I have already written that what Haggard tried to express through his novel could only be said through fantasy. Jackson writes, in her book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, that "The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (p.4). The uneasiness about the potential dangers of scientific advancement fits this 'absence' she mentions. Some fears and desires were expressed openly by authors such as Dickens, but the kind of threat posed by evolved beings like Ayesha, or constructed ones like Frankenstein, were generally absent outside the fantastic.

Charles Elkins furnishes a more serviceable definition of the fantastic's social function in his article "An Approach to the Social Functions of Science Fiction and Fantasy." He writes that fantasy

> has traditionally dealt with the incongruities of social order as such. It has provided the symbolic forms by which its creators and audiences have been able to gratify their desires in 'proper' symbolic actions, which are either impossible to realize in the 'real' world or which those in power have prohibited as overt acts (...) The writers' terms for structuring

> this conflict may either reinforce, question, or reject the principles upon which their audience's existence depends. (p.24).

This definition confirms Jackson's view of fantasy's social function except that she distinguishes two ways in which it operates: the *telling of* the desire (acting it out by proxy through the 'act' of reading), and the *expelling of* the desire (to purge it out of the system when it threatens cultural order). The desires that need to be acted or purged out in this way are, according to Freud, necessarily repressed for human beings to be able to live in society. The social order that is being reinforced, questioned, or rejected is the structure of social relationships among individuals of the same society.

The British society of the Victorian period was based, among other things, on the growing industry and on the scientific knowledge behind it. This scientific knowledge brought, along with technological advancement, revelations about humanity that society as a whole was not ready to accept. The scientific truth, which increasingly became the only one accepted by scientists, challenged the old religious certainties and the sources of damnation were then to be found in the self. As we have seen in chapter two, the new myths representing our relationship to

knowledge did not emerge in their present form without going through a period of rejection of the old myths (illustrated in the Faustian character) and a period of adjustment.

Gothic literature preceded the Victorian fantasies and Jackson writes of its evolution that

> Their introduction of supernatural agents – ghosts, magic, animation – to aid human affairs by restoring justice and moral order, reveals a longing for an idealised social order to replace the one which was in the process of being destroyed by emergent capitalism (p.97).

What these supernatural agents also reveal in Gothic literature is a longing for interventions from above to restore the moral order that is wished for. With respect to *Frankenstein*, Jackson stresses "the establishment of a tradition of disenchanted, secular fantasies," which she sees as inhabiting a gap "between knowledge (as scientific investigation and rational inquiry) and gnosis (a knowledge of ultimate truths, a kind of spiritual wisdom)" (p.101). With Ayesha, the transformation is complete. She is the supernatural agent of the novel, but she does not come from outside our world, and the justice and moral order she wants to "restore" is far from ideal. She is disenchanted and secular in that the order she plans to bring to England is far from the idealised

pre-industrial social order. On the contrary, she has brought knowledge and gnosis together with a catastrophic result for the moral sensibility of the Victorians.

Upon her first meeting with the British Holly, Ayesha boasts of having done just that:

> ...I, who am all-powerful, I, whose loveliness is more than the loveliness of that Grecian Helen, of whom they used to sing, and whose wisdom is wider, ay, far more wide and deep than the wisdom of Solomon the Wise, -I, who know the secrets of the earth and its riches, and can turn all things to my uses, -I, who have even for a while overcome Change, that ye call Death (Haggard, p.112).

At least it seems like boasting until she asks him to look at the water contained in a font-like vessel, and Holly sees the boat he and his companions came with and he sees themselves on it. By giving him proof of at least some degree of supernatural power, she introduces doubt into his mind where before there was only incredulity.

Ayesha clearly distances herself from any divine connection by declaring that "There is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as knowledge of the secrets of Nature" (p.113). She comes back to this idea more than once to make her visitors

understand that she is very much of this world and has nothing to do with either the divine or anything supernaturally evil. This motif, of magic being like any other craft, and of knowledge of nature being the only way to gain it, could not have been included in any pre-industrial literary text because of religious prejudices which ascribed magic to evil-doers. C.N. Manlove mentions this motif as very important in the fantasies of Tolkien and Ursula LeGuin, both writing from an industrial society. He sees it as tied to a motif of circularity and balance which can be found in most fantasy literature from the nineteenth century onward. The balance he distinguishes in Tolkien and LeGuin is that of nature itself, and the balance between good and evil. At the beginning of the story, the balance is disrupted by the appearance of the supernatural agent. What the protagonists need to do is to restore the balance, thus the circularity motif. Very often, the way to restore the balance is to get rid of the supernatural. In *She*, the balance is that of the British society, and Ayesha threatens it by her very existence. Nevertheless, the threat she poses does not need to be destroyed until she is reunited with her Greek lover Kallikrates, and ready to leave her retreat to conquer England.

Accordingly, Ayesha represents the disruptive supernatural agent that threatens to create an imbalance in British society, and

the source of her supernatural quality is her longevity. In Carl B. Yoke and Donald M. Hassler's *Death and the Serpent: Immortality in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, which is dedicated to the study of this theme (death's death and immortality), Hassler comments in his introduction that "Mortal humanity become immortal would, first of all and most fundamentally, not be the species we know" (p.3). This is exactly the point about Ayesha I tried to make in my first chapter. Immortality is a theme frequently used in fantasy literature, and Hassler points out that "the image of the serpent swallowing its own tail as a symbol for the endless end of mortality, or the death of death itself by its own absorption into itself, is perhaps ageless" (p.3). It comes as no surprise then to find that Ayesha is wearing a "double-headed snake of solid gold" (Haggard, p.116). about her waist to fasten her kirtle. It is a symbol of her immortality as well as an identification with Eve and the tree of knowledge.

For his part, Yoke reintroduces the theme of morality, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and wonders: "Will the immortal's endless experience and infinite knowledge lead to jadedness and then to his loss of morality?" (p.14). He does not attempt to answer this question though he quotes Jung on the topic of humans being isolated in the cosmos because they are no

longer directly involved in nature. Industrialisation has introduced too many tools and machines through which we cultivate our land, and already we do not feel connected to our food. Yoke further asks about immortals: "Will they degenerate into unfeeling, uncaring, and completely self-consumed pleasure-seekers?" (p.15). That is exactly what Ayesha is becoming after being reunited with her lover, and that is also why she plans to disrupt England's balance.

Ayesha has come to lay more and more importance upon her will and desires through time, but after two thousand years, Ayesha's self-importance has taken equivalent proportions. When Holly begs her to spare the lives of the Amahaggers who tried to kill him and his companions (or at least spare them torture), Ayesha compares her will to the heavens in its unavoidability:

> Those who live long, my Holly, have no passions, save where they have interests. Though I may seem to slay in wrath, or because my mood is crossed, it is not so. Thou hast seen how in the heavens the little clouds blow this way and that without a cause, yet behind them is the great wind sweeping on its path whither it listeth. So is it with me, O Holly. My moods and changes are the little clouds, and fitfully these seem to turn; but behind them the great wind of my purpose blows ever. (Haggard, p.132-133).

Her self-importance, her pride, makes her speak of her will as others speak of the will of God; after all, God works in mysterious ways too.

In her article "Is There Life After Immortality?," Merrit Abrash notices that in eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature, immortality is treated as a curse in most fantasies. This curse is portrayed as the loss of humanity (morality along with it) and of their place in society. Like Ayesha, the immortals of nineteenth-century tales live in secluded areas in extreme solitude. The Victorian prejudices against Africans explain why Haggard describes Ayesha as living in extreme solitude even as she rules over the Amahagger. What she lacks is not company, but civilised and educated company. The solitude of immortal characters is partly due to the pain of losing the people they love one after another, and knowing that everyone they come to care for will also die before them. They can also be drawn to solitude by other people's attitude toward them. As Samuel H. Vashbinder writes in "Deathless Humans in Horror Fiction":

> They become amoral and unsympathetic to those humans with whom they must interact. They nearly always lose typical human sympathies in matters of ordinary intercourse,

particularly in the areas of love, marriage, friendship, and the treatment of their enemies. (p.71).

This generalisation is very true of Ayesha. At the very moment when she became immortal, stepping out of the pillar of fire with new glory, she truly lost her lover: "Then I stretched out mine arms to thee, Kallikrates, and bade thee take thine immortal bride, and behold, as I spoke, blinded by my beauty, thou didst turn from me, and throw thine arms about the neck of Amenartas" (Haggard, p.212). It is also accurate to say that the way she treats her enemies makes her an object of dread among the mortal humans, thus separating her from the rest of humanity. When Ustane, who is Leo's wife according to Amahagger customs, dares to stand between Ayesha and her desires, the white queen simply destroys her:

> Even as she did so Ustane put her hands to her head, uttered one piercing scream, turned round twice, and then fell backwards with a thud – prone upon the floor. Both Leo and myself rushed to her – she was stone dead – blasted into death by some mysterious electric agency or overwhelming will-force whereof the dread *She* had command. (p.171).

It is increasingly clear why Ayesha's desire to live in her lover's country (England) is disruptive of the British social balance.

In order to restore the balance, she must be kept away not only from England, but from the whole of the civilised world. With the kind of powers she has at her command and with her enormous self-importance, Ayesha would not rest until no one remains above her in station or power. Even if England were to be the last country on earth where she would set foot, it would not be very long once she sets out before she would sit on Victoria's throne.

Henry Rider Haggard did not neglect any element that could add to the overall feeling of uneasiness conveyed by his novel. The theme of immortality implies more than the loss of morality, especially when, like Ayesha, this immortality is lived in eternal youth. Patricia Meyer Spacks has studied the implication, not of eternal youth, but of youth as it is experienced by people who no longer have it, in her book *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination.* The link with Haggard's novel *She* is not obvious, but it is a very interesting one to make. Spacks writes mostly about the didactic works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and she notices in them that they reveal a lot about the adults' ambiguous attitude toward youth:

> ...didactic works reveal adults' fear of their children (...), but they offer as convincing testimony of grown-ups' unquestioning sense of authority and superiority. Such

> contradictions suggest not only the malleability of texts but the difficulty virtually all adults, in all periods, experience about maintaining a firm, clear, single attitude toward the young, those protean creatures who defy classification and judgement, who in their perplexing combination of resemblance and opposition to their elders inevitably fuel fantasy. (p. 119).

Adolescence is conceived by adults as years of intense feelings and passions. One way in which Haggard sets his character up as dangerous is by portraying her as a teenager, with the reputed passions and impetuosity of a teenage girl (or very young woman), who would have infinite powers at her command. He gives us a very good example of this adolescent passionate nature in chapter fourteen. Holly cannot sleep and he follows Ayesha down to a cave where she keeps the body of her dead lover. He describes her as follows: " The beauty was still there, indeed, but the agony, the blind passion, and the awful vindictiveness displayed upon those quivering features, and in the tortured look of the upturned eyes, were such as surpass my powers of description" (p. 122). He goes on to describe the passionate curses that Ayesha, after two thousand years of waiting, still lavishes on her rival's name.

In the Victorian period, as much as in our time, it was felt that teenagers should be kept in line: "The proliferation of admonitory works for and about the young itself suggests adult uneasiness about youthful impulse" (Spacks, p.291). The same word again: uneasiness. Why would adults feel so uneasy about their own children? Because a child growing up is a constant reminder to his/her parents of their mortality. Most adults look back fondly on their adolescent years when all was potential and everything seem possible. To the older generations, it must seem like the "young people have all the fun, and, far worse, they outlive us" (p.191).

This uneasiness grows quite unbearable if we confront them with a youth that is in fact much, much older than they are, but who found a way to retain the formidable strength of youth coupled with the privilege of the old: the experience of whole generations. After all, the one great justice on this issue is that, eventually, we know that all children will grow up, and then grow old like their parents and their grand-parents before them, only to be replaced in their turn by their own children. Ayesha has put herself outside of humanity's ultimate justice and so is not even expected to submit to the laws mortals have made for themselves.

What is more, Ayesha is a female adolescent, and that fact makes her eternal youth and her powers even worse. Women had no space in the Victorian period to express their desires, and so Ayesha breaks a formidable taboo by her self-assertion. Women, especially young ones, were not allowed to do anything for themselves. They were considered minors all of their lives, first under the guardianship of their father, or eldest brother if the father was dead, and later under the tutelage of their husband. The "Woman Question" was very much discussed in the nineteenth century and many writers defended women's right to self-determination. Nevertheless, queen Victoria herself supported women's subordination as God's will, and she was not the only one.

Sarah Stickney Ellis wrote to defend what she thought was the female role in British society, which she saw as the protection of morality. Spacks also points out this particularity of the British middle-class that forced women into the role of "guardians of goodness and allowing men free range in the marketplace" (p.215). A sound morality was the duty of the women so that the men did not have to bother with it in their commercial dealings:

> Paradoxically, the very fact that girls are early trained to compliant social behavior may heighten uneasiness. If young women do what they have been educated to do, allowing the

> world to see their training rather than their natures, those natures remain hidden, objects of speculation. Because hidden, perhaps dangerous. (p.128).

Of course, this speculation was done only when the writers did not believe that it was a woman's nature to be obedient and submissive.

In the quote above, one can notice the use of the word uneasiness again. I do not believe that Haggard intended to make a statement about the emergence of the Victorian "new woman." On the contrary, I believe that he used the strong uneasiness already present on the issue, along with the uneasiness occasioned by youth extended to eternity, to give more weight to the threat he portrayed for British society. Despite the fact that she is more advanced on the evolution scale, Ayesha acts in such a way as to confirm a Victorian man in his perception of women. The evolution is pictured as a simple biological fact that does not influence the psychology of the character. She is "A person with the experience of two thousand years at her back, with the command of such tremendous powers, and the knowledge of a mystery that could hold off death" (p.119). Nevertheless, what she wants from her first civilised visitor in two thousand years is to be complimented on her beauty: "There, sit so, and tell me, for in truth now I desire praises

– tell me, am I not beautiful?" (p.143). Bringing him to his knees through an almost sexual exhibition, she justifies herself by referring to female nature: "I have not seen a man kneel before me for so many days, and believe me, to a woman's heart the sight is sweet, ay, wisdom and length of days take not from that dear pleasure which is our sex's only right" (p.143).

It is quite disturbing to find such a frivolous nature in a being of so much power. That is the danger inherent in knowledge: it brings power that some people might not be fit to wield. Ayesha is an extreme example of what old-fashioned Victorians saw as typical of young women, namely their inconsistency, lack of judgement, and overwhelming passions. Ayesha gives us some hope for her redemption when she swears to be a good submissive wife for Leo: "I swear, even in this first most holy hour of completed Womanhood, that I will abandon Evil and cherish Good. I swear that I will be ever guided by thy voice in the straightest path of duty" (p.214). It is quite a strange utterance coming from one who believed herself wiser than Solomon the Wise, and who did not see it as a crime to "put away that which stands between us and our ends" (p. 153). For Ayesha, the survival of the fittest/strongest applies to the dealings of individuals within a species. This mood of submission does not last very long, though, and she is back to her

good old self on the very next page: "As a God shalt thou be, holding good and evil in the hollow of thy hand, and I, even I, I humble myself before thee. Such is the power of Love, and such is the bridal gift I give unto thee, Kallikrates, my Lord and Lord of All" (p.215). I say back to her usual self because, if she is ready to obey her husband, she wants this husband to be above everybody else with her coming second.

Haggard cannot let Ayesha survive to find a mate of her species; the danger would be too great for England. As I have stated elsewhere, she represents the danger of too much knowledge fallen in the wrong hands. The social function of fantasy being to give a space to express what is impossible to express realistically, the myth of the eternal white queen gives shape to society's fear of unchecked scientific "progress" (as in positive or negative movement forward) applied to the human body. It is also a warning about the glorification of knowledge that was taking place in replacement of religion. Knowledge as science comes naked, without the dress that morality had put on religion. Morality not being an integral part of scientific knowledge, one can decide to ignore it when using the power afforded by knowledge. Holly summarises the danger Ayesha represents for humanity:

> But her talk gave me a fresh thrill of fear, for what may not be possible to a being who, unconstrained by human law, is also absolutely unshackled by a moral sense of right and wrong (p.153). (She would also) have revolutionised society, and even perchance have changed the destiny of Mankind (p.223).

Although she is pictured as Other, as a stranger living far away, from Egypt, Ayesha originated in the Victorian culture itself; she is the desire and search for infinite knowledge that the society of the time was experiencing. As Jackson wrote about the fantasy genre: "...it is precisely this subversion of unities of 'self' which constitutes the most radical transgressive function of the fantastic" (p. 83). Ayesha stands for society's desire for knowledge (which had a space to be expressed) at the same time as she illustrates the dangers it can bring to this same society (which was overlooked by most scientists).

Conclusion

I tried to demonstrate through Henry Rider Haggard's main character in *She*, that literary characters can have the same impact on society that religious myths used to have. As Bill Moyers said to Joseph Campbell: "Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our story" (p. 5). And literature has always been the means of predilection by which society conveys the meaning of its own story to itself.

I do not presume Haggard had any conscious intention of putting all the meaning I ascribe to Ayesha in his text. That is why a study of his society, of the historical context out of which he was writing was needed. I firmly believe that we are all products of our education and social conditioning, and since we mostly take it for granted, it permeates all of our cultural production whether we intend it to, or not. That is why I have put so much emphasis on archetypes and the unconscious process by which they come into being in my second chapter. I want to mention here that though I argued against his "collective unconscious" the way he defined it, I still agree with much of what Jung has said about archetypes as it applies to literature. He wrote that: "The Archetype is essentially an

unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (1968, p.5). *Frankenstein*'s creature and Ayesha have the same role in Victorian culture; the role of expressing what is unsaid and thus feared in this society about science.

I tried to situate Ayesha in relation to other literary characters that have taken on mythical proportions. Among them, Faust is the most important one because it marks a break in the traditional conception of knowledge. He is not successful in his quest for absolute knowledge; he rejects meditation as the only possible way to arrive at truth, but he fails to find an alternative. Ayesha is successful in her quest, but Haggard and other writers of the Victorian period question whether society is ready for this knowledge, and its application. Haggard's answer is that society needs to find a moral approach to the power afforded by knowledge; otherwise, we face self-destruction. Mary Shelley arrives at a similar conclusion with *Frankenstein.* After his success, Victor Frankenstein's only alternative is to destroy his creation or let it destroy him. The consequences of knowledge's application is illustrated on a personal basis by Shelley, but the implication for society is the same as in Haggard: the lack of a morality that would

be closely tied to the application of scientific knowledge is the major flaw that will bring disaster to humanity as we know it. Of course, today we prefer to talk about ethics instead of morality.

Even though *She* is mostly relevant to the society of the Victorian period, I believe that a character like Ayesha still needs to be studied today. She is a mythical figure who has helped to teach Western societies how to deal with the knowledge that we were not a favoured species among the others. Today, religion has continued the retreat from our everyday lives, and we have replaced it with ethics. We are still threatened by what Ayesha represents about amoral scientists using their near infinite knowledge to fulfil amoral personal goals. Maybe this is even more the case today than in Haggard's time, but he and his contemporaries were the first ones to grapple with this idea.

Henry Rider Haggard's novel was very much of its time, not only in its use of the evolution theory, or in its illustration of society's evolving relationship to knowledge, but also in many other aspects. Feminism is one strong aspect of the novel, and many critics have studied it, but I believe there is still much that could be analysed in the novel. Normand Etherington, for example, notices that many of Haggard's female characters epitomise beauty, but have an enormous flaw: their brains. He points out that: "In every

case there is the suggestion that the association of physical loveliness and intellect is unnatural in women" (1984, p. 79). It is true that if we take Ayesha as a good example of Haggard's female character, she is not the typical Victorian female. Haggard describes her as self-assertive and intelligent, and this is her flaw in the author's view. Haggard is not a feminist and his intelligent female characters are constructed as evil in nature. What Etherington overlooks, as most other critics do, is Ayesha's childishness. This is one of many interesting avenues that could be studied with interesting results in a future paper. Henry Rider Haggard still has much to contribute to our understanding of the Victorian society, and how it shaped the knowledge economy we know today.

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