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**The White Man's Gaze: Orientalism and Imperialism in
H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1887)**

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the requirements for Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation.

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Dedication

First and foremost, all praise and gratitude are due to Allah, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful.

To my beloved family, the greatest gift Allah has granted me: to my dear father and mother, whose love, sacrifices, and endless prayers have been my strongest support; to my brother Alaa, whose presence always brings strengths and comfort; to my grandmother, whose heartfelt duas have perpetually shielded and guided me; to my favourite cousin Nardjes, for always supporting me; and to every member of my family, who through even the simplest prayers, have contributed to this accomplishment; I dedicate this work with all love and respect.

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Abstract

This study delves into the imperial imagination of late Victorian England as illustrated in H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1887). The dissertation examines how the novel reflects and reinforces Orientalism and imperial discourse through the novel's representation of Africa as an exotic landscape and its main character, Ayesha, who symbolizes both intrigue and danger. The study addresses essential concepts, including the white man's gaze, otherness, gender, and power, while also emphasizing Victorian concerns regarding empire, race, and sexuality. Chapter one presents a contextual overview of Orientalism and imperialism during the nineteenth century, drawing on Edward Said's theoretical framework and related critical approaches as well as adventure fiction and the role of women. Chapter two offers a close textual and literary analysis of *She*, discussing how Ayesha is both celebrated and confined, and how Africa is characterized as mysterious, threatening, and inferior to the West. Through findings grounded in postcolonial and feminist critique, this research work reveals how Haggard's novel upholds imperial ideologies and Orientalist stereotypes, while reflecting the wider cultural anxieties of the Victorian age.

Key words: Orientalism, Imperialism, the White Man's Gaze, Otherness, Adventure Fiction, Race and Empire.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

The nineteenth century was an age marked by unprecedented expansion, industrial advancement, and the consolidation of imperial power. Literature, serving as both a cultural and ideological product, became deeply intertwined with these historical transformations. Adventure fiction, in particular, thrived during the Victorian era, mirroring the Western fascination with distant lands while concurrently reproducing colonial ideologies. Within this context, the discourse of Orientalism emerged as one of the central frameworks through which the West constructed its perception of the East and Africa, shaping images of otherness that intertwined fascination, fear, and domination.

The critical turning point in the study of this discourse was Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1987), a foundational text that revealed how the Orient had historically been portrayed through stereotypes and misconceptions that justified Western superiority. Orientalism is not only an academic field but also a style of thought and a system of power, one that frames the Orient as irrational, exotic, and inferior. Such representations deeply influenced Victorian literature, particularly the adventure novels that enthralled audiences by framing imperial expansion as both thrilling and natural.

Africa, in this literary imagination, was often depicted as a dark and savage continent, a place where European protagonists could demonstrate their heroism and authority. These depictions relied on tropes of mystery, barbarism, and exoticism, often intertwined with gendered imagery that feminized the Orient and cast women as both enticing and perilous. As a result, the colonial encounter was narrated not only as a geographical conquest but also as a symbolic domination over racial and gendered Others.

She: A History of Adventure (1887) by the British novelist Henry Rider Haggard, stands as one of the most influential works of the late nineteenth century. The novel recounts the journey of English travelers into the heart of Africa, where they encounter the powerful white queen Ayesha. Its publication left a significant impact on Victorian popular fiction, making it one of the defining adventure novels of the century.

The present dissertation aims to examine Orientalism, imperialism, and the dynamics of the white man's gaze within Haggard's *She*. It seeks to uncover how the

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novel mirrors and perpetuates recurring stereotypes concerning Africa and its inhabitants, how it portrays Ayesha as a feminized Orient, and how the narrative positions European protagonists as central interpreters and wielders of authority. The study raises the following questions:

- How does *She* reproduce Orientalist and imperialist stereotypes about Africa and its inhabitants?
- In what ways does Ayesha's character represent the feminized Orient, and how does her depiction mirror Victorian anxieties regarding race and gender?
- How does the white man's gaze influence the narrative and reinforce power dynamics within the text?

Relying on an analytical approach, this dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter provides the theoretical background, introducing Orientalism as a concept, tracing its evolution, and examining the common depictions and stereotypes of the Orient, with attention to Africa, the white man's gaze, and the role of women in adventure fiction. The second chapter is analytical, offering a close reading of *She* in light of Orientalist tropes, imperial discourse, and the white man's gaze. It investigates the novel's plot, characters, and symbolic structures in order to reveal how Haggard's narrative both reflects and complicates the ideological frameworks of his time.

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1.1. Introduction

The Orient, including Africa and the Middle East, encompasses a variety of cultures, traditions, and civilizations, and has been frequently observed, recorded, and reinterpreted through a predominantly Western perspective. This perspective, what may be called ‘the white man’s gaze’, was influenced not only by a quest for knowledge but also by an ideological framework rooted in domination, expansion, and a belief in the superiority of European culture.

Such ideological constructs found a particularly effective vehicle in adventure fiction, a genre that thrived during the height of British imperial expansion. These narratives transformed remote regions into dramatic stages for exploration and conquest, focusing on white male protagonists whose journeys reflected the ambitions of empire.

Accordingly, this chapter will first delve into the theoretical underpinnings of Orientalism and its literary manifestations, with particular attention to depictions and stereotypes of the Orient and Africa, as well as the concept of the ‘white man’s gaze’. It will then shift to Adventure fiction and how it naturalizes imperial power and authority. Finally, it will address the position and portrayal of women in these narratives, uncovering how gender and empire converge in the ideological frameworks of colonial and imperial literature.

1.2. Orientalism in Literature

Since antiquity, the Orient has fascinated Western travelers, authors, and academics who ventured into unfamiliar territories in pursuit of exploration, conquest, or enlightenment. Over the centuries, the narratives arising from these encounters contributed to the formation of an ‘Orient’ that existed as much in the Western imagination as in geographical reality, a space that was exoticized, mystified, and

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ultimately subordinated. This image served as an ideological tool to justify colonial domination and the subjugation of Eastern peoples and cultures.

1.2.1 Definition

In cultural and literary criticism, Orientalism is the discourse of the West that represents Orientals (the 'Orient') as essentially 'Other', that is to say, often irrational, sensational, exotic, and backward, as opposed to the rational, progressive, moral West. Edward Said gave a new life and meaning to it in *Orientalism* (1978), his influential exploration of the non-neutral and non-autonomous nature of orientalist knowledge.

Said describes Orientalism as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (Said 1). It is not only an image of the East, but also a way of thinking and an epistemological topic that enables the West to speak on behalf of the Orient and represent it with none of its own input. In this way, the Orient becomes an object, a product, made and molded, and defined by the Western gaze.

This definition of Orientalism draws on Michel Foucault’s theory of power as discourse; Orientalist discourse “creates the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (Said 3), namely the recognition that knowledge is not produced in a vacuum but is tied to the operations of power. For Said, “...knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (Said 36). This reveals how colonial regimes constructed the East as an object of study to justify and sustain domination. Orientalism, as a system of knowledge production, did not merely describe but actively produced the Orient as subordinate, exotic, and governable, a discursive strategy that naturalized imperial control.

The claim that “knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge” reflects Foucault’s axiom that power and knowledge are constituents of Orientalism; colonial administrators and scholars generated ethnographic, linguistic, and political knowledge not for enlightenment but for efficient subjugation. Thus, Orientalist knowledge, far from being objective, functioned as an instrument of hegemony,

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perpetuating a cycle where epistemic violence enabled material exploitation, suggesting that Orientalism is not merely about knowing the Orient but about possessing and controlling it. This reflects on the broader goal of colonial discourse, which frames non-Western societies as subjects to be ruled, studied, and disciplined.

Furthermore, according to Professor Diana Lary, as cited by Zhihan Gao, Orientalism operates as a ‘racial construct’ that primarily targets the Near East, particularly the modern-day Middle East, while also extending to the Far East and other non-Western regions. Its impact lies not only in the cultural devaluation and the projection of a Western-imposed image onto Eastern civilizations, but also in the distortion produced by unequal power relations between the West and the Orient within scholarship (38).

Although originally defined as a scholarly and artistic engagement with the East, Orientalism did not remain fixed. Over time, the concept evolved beyond its descriptive meaning to embody power relations, imperial ideology, and cultural domination. Examining this evolution reveals how Orientalism shifted from academic study to a critique of Western hegemony.

1.2.2. Evolution of the Concept

After WWII and decolonization, *Orientalism* came to mean “not only the work of the orientalist, and a character, style or quality associated with the Eastern nations, but also a corporate institution, designed for dealing with the Orient, a partial view of Islam, an instrument of Western imperialism, a style of thought... and even an ideology, justifying and accounting for the subjugation of blacks, Palestinian Arabs, women and many other supposedly deprived groups and peoples” (Macfie 4).

Orientalism thus becomes “an integrated discourse, an accepted grid for filtering the Orient into the Western consciousness, and an ‘integral part of European material civilisation and culture’, an instrument... of British, French and later American imperialism.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Orientalism* was generally understood, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* records, to describe the work of orientalists, scholars specializing in the languages and literatures of regions such as Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Arabia, later extending to India, China, Japan, and much of Asia.

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Within the arts, the term was also used to signify a style or quality associated with Eastern nations, as Macfie explains. (1)

In its earlier sense, the meaning of the term *Orientalism* remained fairly stable until after the Second World War. However, with the rise of decolonisation, its connotations shifted drastically. No longer confined to describing the work of scholars or the cultural styles associated with the East, *Orientalism* began to denote broader structures of power: a corporate institution for managing the Orient, a selective representation of Islam, and ultimately a tool of Western imperialism. Orientalism thus becomes an integrated discourse, an accepted grid for filtering the Orient into the Western consciousness, and an integral part of European material civilisation and culture, an instrument of British, French, and later American imperialism. It became understood as a way of thinking rooted in distinctions between East and West, and even as an ideology justifying the subjugation of colonised peoples, women, and marginalized groups. According to Macfie, this transformation made the term one of the most contested in modern scholarship. The shift was enabled by wider political changes, since movements like the Young Turk Revolution (1908), the Egyptian national movement (1919), and later waves of decolonisation, including India's independence in 1947 and Algeria's uprising in 1952, created the conditions for challenging not just European political domination but also its intellectual authority (Macfie 2).

Furthermore, as Gao explains, the shifting balance of power in the early modern period played a decisive role in shaping European perceptions of the Middle East. The rise of the gunpowder empires, the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals, equipped with advanced weaponry, consolidated Muslim power and posed a threat to Europe. At the same time, the commercial revolution, fueled by the influx of goods from the New World and Europe's growing dominance of global trade, relegated the Middle East to the periphery of a newly emerging Eurocentric world order. The Protestant Reformation further contributed to these shifts, as confessional conflicts within Europe prompted Protestant powers such as Britain to form alliances beyond the continent, notably with the Ottoman Empire, against Catholic rivals. Gao asserts that these transformations not only altered the geopolitical landscape but also deeply influenced the way Europeans studied and wrote about the Middle East (51).

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Thus, Orientalism is not merely a field of study but a mode of representation that has been instrumental in reinforcing colonial hierarchies and Western hegemony, particularly through cultural production such as novels, travel writing, and art.

1.3. The Orient: Depictions and Stereotypes

In Literature, Orientalism functions through symbolic oppositions: East/West, irrational/rational, feminine/masculine, mystical/real. These oppositions have a tendency to be found in imperial adventure novels, where exotic settings and people are employed to emphasize the moral superiority and excellence of the Western protagonist. This is particularly evident in H. Rider Haggard's *She*, where the Oriental setting 'Africa' and people are marked by mysticism, sensuality, and otherness, all of which are typical of Orientalist stereotypes.

1.3.1 Otherness

Otherness is the conceptual basis of Orientalist discourse. The binary of the Self (Westerner) and the Other (Oriental) explains how the West constructs the East region to be subordinate relative to their constructed frameworks. Edward Said argues in *Orientalism* (1978) that the Orient was never understood on its own terms but rather framed as part of a representation system meant to serve the cultural and imperial identity of the West. 'The Orient', as Said writes, "was almost a European invention... and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 1). This projection capsulizes the fundamental logic of Orientalism; the East becomes a blank slate upon which the aspirations, fears, and contradictions of the West are superimposed.

This 'Other', defined as inferior, irrational, static, in contrast to the progressive, rational, dynamic West, differs markedly. This duality comes from the portrayal of Eastern societies as timeless, unsophisticated, and hence, appropriate for exploitation, subjugation, and transformation. The 'Other' helps the West stabilize its sense of identity by providing a troubling but essential figure needed to justify Western supremacy.

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Homi K. Bhabha builds on these ideas by looking at how colonial discourse reinforces stereotypes that fix and repeat the image of the Other. Stereotyping is a colonialist gaze affecting a cycle of 'as other' where sameness construing difference is repeated, weaponized representation. So, as Bhabha seems to articulate, "the stereotype", "representation" becomes "the self-conscious performance of mastery" (Bhabha 66). As such, a stereotype does a far greater job than a mere pattern. In this case, it draws one with undeniable ease only to compel, manage, and dominate.

Orientalism operates by constituting the Orient as the West's racial, sexual, and cultural Other, an object to be studied, dominated, and ultimately contained. The purpose of literary Orientalism is to contain the so-called Other. It makes sure to capture and control the Other not by free expression but by fixing meaning through narrative form and cultural symbols.

1.3.2 Exoticism and Mystery

Exoticism in Orientalist texts is a potent method of both aesthetic and ideological distancing. By depicting the Orient as mysterious, sensual, and timeless, Western texts characterize it as not only different but also in the realm of fantasy; a place for projecting European desires and anxieties. In this configuration, exoticism converts actual cultures into spectacles; it flattens complex societies into symbolic landscapes to be enjoyed or feared by the Western gaze.

Edward Said underscores the allure of this literary Orientalism as he remarks, "The Orient...had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences." (Said 1) This underscores that the Orient in contemporary Western texts is not so much a geographical or cultural reality, but at best an object constructed to incite curiosity and intrigue. The exotic is itself an object of control; by creating spectacle out of the unknown, the West diminishes its possible menace.

As a feature of the exotic and mystery approaches, the portrayal of Eastern characters and landscapes as unknowable or mystical delegates them outside rational

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understanding. Seen through the lens of Victorian adventure fiction, this performative aspect of the exotic further entrenches the West's claims of epistemic and civilizational superiority.

In furthering this critique, Graham Huggan identifies the way exoticism operates through the appropriation and commodification of difference through appreciation, stating:

Exoticism... [is] a particular mode of aesthetic perception - one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery. The exotic production of otherness is dialectical and contingent; at various times and in different places, it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of rapprochement and reconciliation (Huggan 13).

Huggan's insight is important in that exoticism is not merely about wonder or fascination. Rather, it is a regulatory aesthetic that allows the West to manage the foreignness of the Other.

In conclusion, exoticism and mystery are not benign literary tropes. Rather, they are ideological mechanisms that allow colonial narratives to transform cultural difference into an object of desire and domination, thereby reinforcing the predominance and hegemony of the Western gaze.

1.3.3 Representation of Africa

Western approaches to Africa, in both scholarship and cultural discourse, have been influenced by colonial conditions of epistemic domination and ideological misrepresentation. Africa was not studied as a continent with historical, intellectual, and cultural particularities, but rather, it was represented through colonial and Eurocentric discourses. Those discourses effectively turned Africa into nearly a symbolic Other, a

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place where European superiority could be made manifest and a backdrop for the projection of European values and identity.

The representation of Africa within orientalist discourse is shaped by a fundamental condition that Edward Said describes as 'exteriority'. Said contends:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact (Said 20-21).

The significance of this statement lies in understanding how Africa, along with the broader colonized world, has been depicted not through its own narrative but through a Western perspective characterized by authority and detachment. The Western scholar does not perceive Africa as a living, self-defining entity but approaches it as an object to be interpreted, spoken for, and defined from an external standpoint.

This perspective finds further support in V.Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa*, where he argues that Africa has been constituted as an object of external knowledge. Rather than take the position of understanding Africa on Africa's terms, Western discourses, across fields of anthropology to literature, tended towards producing Africa as an Other that they believed was legible and governable. Indeed, he writes that "A prevailing ethnocentrism and a lack of sincere curiosity produced a totally absurd framework, in which African cultures and peoples constituted merely an inversion of European traditions and human types." (Mudimbe 131).

His words express the ultimate dynamic of this conception, namely, that Africa was marginalized not merely physically or in image, but ontologically eliminated, producing a foreign mirror image of all things European, valid only in that it could define what European is not. Africa thus becomes a conceptual foil, rather than a subject of inquiry.

Africa is portrayed as ahistorical and mythical, whether as a space of darkness and savagery or as a lost paradise awaiting discovery. These tropes are based on what

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Mudimbe calls the “colonial library,” a collection of Western texts that, through repetition and institutional power, became authoritative sources about Africa. This represents a systemic erasure or distortion of African realities, serving thus not only to colonize space but also to colonize knowledge.

Likewise, the critique of Africa’s literary representation is articulated in Chinua Achebe’s influential essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*”. In it, Achebe asserts that “Africa is... a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity” (Achebe 790). This statement encapsulates the violent abstraction at the heart of much Western literature about Africa: the continent is not depicted as a space inhabited by real, thinking, feeling human beings, but rather as a symbolic terrain upon which Western moral, psychological, and philosophical dramas are played out.

Achebe argues that African characters are routinely stripped of subjectivity and reduced to background elements, figures of savagery, chaos, and darkness whose primary function is to illuminate the moral growth or crisis of European protagonists. This narrative structure does not simply marginalize Africans; it denies their humanity altogether by refusing them agency, voice, and interiority. The African "Other" is thus not a character in the story but a mechanism through which the Western self is defined and tested. Moreover, Achebe’s critique extends beyond individual works to target a broader tradition of literary ethnocentrism, in which Africa is imagined not as a diverse and dynamic region but as an empty, ahistorical void, a place to be known only through the eyes and values of Europe.

The feminisation of Africa is a theme that also appears in colonial discourse. As Anne McClintock explains in *Imperial Leather*, Africa was feminised and rendered agentless as a site of Western male delusion, conquest and regression (23), whereby Africa was framed as a passive, seductive terrain, giving rise to colonialism and imperialism, whose primary purpose was to be penetrated, mapped and changed by the West. Thus, Orientalism is not merely about misrepresentation; it is a mode of power that privileges the West’s cultural supremacy while reducing the East to a passive, mysterious entity in need of exploration, domination, and control.

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These critiques show how Africa was discursively constructed through a nexus of racial, sexual, and cultural hierarchies. The body of representation was not benign, for it served tangible ideological ends: to legitimate imperial expansion, establish European identity, and regulate what knowledge about Africa could be regarded as legitimate.

1.3.4 The White Man's Gaze

The "White Man's Gaze" is a conceptual framework that elucidates how Eurocentric power dynamics have historically dominated the production, circulation, and consumption of knowledge about non-Western people and cultures. Emerging from postcolonial and critical race theories, this term is representative of a hegemonic way of seeing whereby whiteness is positioned as the universal subject, and racialised others are portrayed as objects to be watched, categorised, disciplined, and exoticised. The gaze is not neutral or innocent; it is structured by power, used to position and contain the Other within ideological boundaries built from imperial and colonial projects.

For Said, Western representations of the East are rarely grounded in genuine engagement or inquiry. Instead, they are filtered through a matrix of control and desire. He writes:

The Orient is watched, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the *Description de l'Egypte* called "bizarre jouissance." The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness. (Said 103)

In the abovementioned passage, Said asserts that the Orient is positioned as a passive object under perpetual Western gaze, framed as exotic to provoke fascination and erotic pleasure.

In his seminal work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon examines how the external white gaze is internalized by colonized individuals, leading to fractured identities, and dissects the psychic devastation wrought by this racialized gaze. His assertion, "I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others

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have of me but of my own appearance” (Fanon 116), captures the paradox of internalized oppression and the psychological violence of the gaze; the colonized people begin to perceive themselves through the distorted lens of the colonizer, judging their own skin, features and culture as aberrant, resulting in self-alienation and own erasure. Thus, the white gaze becomes both external control and internalized oppression.

Western women at times participated in the Western colonial gaze, with writings that dwell voyeuristic ally on oriental clothes, postures, and gestures, exoticizing the female ‘other’. If male narrators were intrigued by the harem as the scene of lesbian sexuality, female travelers, who had more access to female spaces, undermined and re-oriented the pornographic imagination of the harem. Interestingly, the detailed description of Turkish female bodies in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, particularly those drawn from her visit to the hammam (baths), points to a subliminal erotic fascination with the female ‘other’, a fascination that masquerades, at times, as a male gaze.

The dynamics of the white man's gaze, with its capacity to objectify, categorize, and exert dominance, did not remain limited to theoretical discussions or colonial experiences; rather, it became deeply rooted in cultural and literary production. This gaze was narratively performed in the adventure fiction genre, which not only reflected but also reinforced imperial ideologies. By situating the white male subject as the heroic explorer and positioning colonized peoples and landscapes as objects of spectacle, adventure fiction both dramatized and disseminated the very structures of vision and domination examined in the previous section.

1.4. Adventure Fiction

Adventure fiction, recognized as one of the most prominent literary genres of the late nineteenth century, was not merely a form of innocent entertainment but rather a cultural artifact intricately linked to the imperial agenda. The narratives generally depict white male explorers undertaking dangerous journeys into 'unknown' lands, frequently reinforcing the ideological tenets of empire.

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1.4.1. Functions and Motifs

Adventure fiction emerged as a dominant literary genre in the 19th century, concurring with the apex of European imperial expansion. Characterized by explorations of distant lands, encounters with 'primitive', 'savage' peoples, and glorification of Western masculine heroism, these narratives served as both popular entertainment and ideological functions and motifs.

The rise of the British Empire created fertile ground for adventure fiction to burgeon. As Europe expanded its reach into Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, adventure tales proffered Western readers accounts of exploration and conquest. These narratives frequently depicted non-European lands as exotic, dangerous, and morally ambiguous, waiting for the civilizing presence of the Western hero.

This genre, indeed, cannot be extricated from the ideological frameworks of Orientalism and imperialism that were foundational to British cultural production in the nineteenth century. In *Rule of Darkness*, Brantlinger explains that the adventure tales were not solely for entertainment; they were ideological vehicles that mythologized empire and colonial expansion. He states:

The adventure tales that formed the light reading of Englishmen for two hundred years and more after *Robinson Crusoe* were, in fact, the energizing myth of English imperialism. They were, collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night; and, in the form of its dreams, they charged England's will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule (Brantlinger 11).

This demonstrates how this genre constructed a national narrative of expansionism and imperialism, portraying colonial conquest as a heroic, moral, and civilizing duty. In fact, these narratives hearten English audiences and assert their superiority and the righteousness of the empire. The metaphor of the nation 'dreaming' its empire illustrates the subtle yet widespread way in which imperial values permeated the collective consciousness, transforming political domination into a normalized, even unconscious, cultural necessity.

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This literary genre frequently framed colonial expansion as a noble, moral, and civilizing mission, recasting conquest as an act of goodwill rather than aggression. The structural logic inherent in these texts typically favored the viewpoint of the white, male adventurer, portrayed as the embodiment of order, rationality, and moral superiority, while depicting colonized individuals and territories as exotic, perilous, or in need of reform.

Echoing this perspective, Brantlinger adds that “...the ‘benighted’ regions of the world, occupied by mere natives, offer brilliantly charismatic realms of adventure for white heroes, usually free from the complexities of relations with white women” (Brantlinger 11), demonstrating orientalist and racialized framework of adventure genre; colonized lands and peoples were perceived as mysterious, exotic spaces awaiting white male exploration. These regions were often portrayed as feminine, passive, and seductive to justify masculine hegemony both sexually and territorially.

Adventure fiction heavily relied on Orientalist themes, depicting colonized regions as both alluring and perilous, in need of discovery and control, while also influencing gender roles in ways that reinforced patriarchal and imperial dominance. Women in these narratives were often absent, silenced, or rendered symbolic, serving either as temptations to be resisted or hurdles to be overcome. Their representations were thus embedded in the same power structures that governed the portrayal of colonized lands.

1.4.2 Women in Adventure Fiction

The roles of women within these narratives were severely restricted: they were often absent, confined to domestic roles, or exoticised into symbols that enhanced the protagonist’s masculinity and the justification of his imperial mission. As noted by Anne McClintock, such fiction “reproduced the imperial world as a gendered space” (22), where both territory and women were framed as objects of desire and conquest. Thus, the literary feminisation of landscapes reflects the narrative treatment of actual female characters in adventure fiction; both are portrayed as mysterious, enticing, and ultimately subject to male control. In Rider Haggard’s *She*, for instance, the African

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interior is infused with a sensual yet menacing allure, with its 'secrets' framed as the ultimate reward for the hero's perseverance and bravery.

In the context of late nineteenth-century adventure fiction, the illustration of foreign landscapes is inextricably linked to the gender politics of imperialism, with uncharted territories envisioned through the discourse of sexual conquest. David Bunn explores how colonial romance consistently associates the image of women with the depiction of African landscapes, resulting in what he terms an “obsessively reiterated metonymic connection between the female body and the African landscape” (1). He also writes, “Exploration – be it imaginative or actual – is depicted as an exclusively masculine act, a moment of penetration into a suggestively feminised locale” (Bunn 8). This gendered mapping not only sexualises geography but also legitimises imperial conquest by framing the act of exploration as a natural extension of male desire and authority. Bunn reveals how visual and cartographic motifs, including maps shaped like female forms or landmarks named after women's anatomy, reinforce a metaphor of sexual domination (10), ensuring that control over the land is narratively aligned with control over women. In this manner, imperial fiction inscribes male power into the very structure of the narrative landscape, transforming colonial expansion into an eroticized act of possession.

Anne McClintock further elaborates on the intersection of gender and empire in her influential work, *Imperial Leather*. She contends that imperial conquest was both a territorial and a gendered act. This dual structure meant that the control of land and the subjugation of women were mutually reinforcing aspects of the colonial project. As she explains, the “vision of a world knowledge dominated by Europe was animated not only by an imperial geography of power but also by a gendered erotics of knowledge” (McClintock 23). By comparing colonial domination with the regulation of female bodies, McClintock illustrates how imperial ideology feminised colonised spaces and peoples to justify control and subjugation.

Furthermore, McClintock highlights the intrinsic link between gender, sexuality, and the imperial endeavour. She describes how women served as “the boundary markers of imperialism, the ambiguous mediators of what appeared to be—at least superficially—the predominantly male agon of empire” (24). This relationship is

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strikingly evident within the literary genre of imperial adventure fiction: female figures frequently act not as autonomous agents, but as symbolic barriers between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the civilised and the 'savage'. McClintock further notes that the characterisation of unknown territories as feminine represents "a strategy of violent containment" (24), wherein the imperial imagination transforms geographic exploration into a gendered ritual. She describes this as "a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse, as male intruders ward off fear of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy" (McClintock 24). In adventure fiction, this dual mapping of land and the female body converges, portraying both as domains to be penetrated, mastered, and contained. In this manner, women in adventure fiction evolve into not just characters within a narrative but also symbols of the imperial landscape: conquered, feminised, and disciplined under the scrutiny of the white male gaze.

Further considerations involve the fact that the adventure fiction produced during the imperial period was not merely gender-biased in its characterisation but also structurally designed to privilege male experience as the central narrative focus. Rebecca Stott expands upon Lawrence Millman's assertion that colonial adventure fiction frequently manifests as what he terms the 'male novel': "that which is authored by men, intended for men or boys, and centred on the pursuits of men" (Millman 12). Stott employs this conceptual framework to argue that the imperialist narrative within adventure fiction is inherently male-centric, reflecting the fantasies, fears, and anxieties of its male authors and readership. Within this framework, women are not seen as equal adventurers but rather as disruptive figures whose presence is regarded with scepticism, as they may undermine the masculine connections that propel the narrative. This "androcentric mystique of exploration" favours male camaraderie and depicts exploration as a homosocial domain, while concurrently featuring overtly sexualised images of women that waver between desire and apprehension (Stott 70).

This characterisation of the imperialist adventure novel as fundamentally male-centric discourse invites a critical reassessment of the role of gender within the ideological framework of colonial literature. The consistent depiction of women as either absent, ornamental, or obstructive is not simply an incidental aspect of plot construction; it represents a calculated narrative approach that upholds the dominance

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of male authority in both fictional and imperial contexts. By aligning territorial conquest with the exclusion or containment of women, these works perpetuate a symbolic hierarchy in which the feminine is relegated to the periphery of action and meaning.

Women in adventure fiction occupy a complex and often paradoxical role within imperial narratives. While their representation is frequently filtered through the lens of the male adventurer and framed within patriarchal and colonial frameworks, these figures can also serve as focal points of ideological tension. On one side, they are utilized as emblems of the domestic sphere, the exotic, or the perilous 'other,' thereby reinforcing both gendered hierarchies and imperial dominance. Conversely, certain portrayals, whether deliberately or inadvertently, undermine these frameworks by endowing female characters with agency, intellect, or moral authority that challenges the masculinist rationale of conquest. A critical examination of these representations reveals the intricate intersection of gender and empire, generating narratives that are as much about the regulation of women as they are about the governance of colonial territories.

1.5. Conclusion

Chapter One had delineated the theoretical framework that this dissertation employs to analyze H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure*. It has situated the study within the context of Orientalism in literature, beginning with key definitions of the concept and tracing its development from a descriptive label for scholarship on the East to a potent ideological tool that supported imperial domination.

The chapter then examined the construction of the Orient through various depictions and stereotypes, emphasizing the processes of othering, the allure of exoticism and mystery, and the enduring Western gaze on Africa. These components, often expressed through racial hierarchies and cultural distortions, illustrate how the colonial Western imagination frames portrayed the non-European world as both threatening and fascinating. In this framework, the concept of the 'white male's gaze' emerged as a central tool of narrative control, positioning European characters and readers as agents of power while relegating colonized peoples and spaces to objects of representation.

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Finally, the chapter explored adventure fiction as a genre, highlighting its central functions and recurring themes, such as exploration, danger, and conquest, while paying special attention to the place of women within these narratives. Women in adventure fiction often embody both desire and danger, mirroring broader concerns regarding gender, race, and imperial authority.

With this theoretical and literary foundation established, the analysis will shift to a close reading of *She*, examining how Haggard's narrative both reflects and reinforces, while at times challenging, the orientalist and imperialist discourses discussed herein.

Chapter Two: Orientalism, Imperialism, and the White Man's Gaze in *She*

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2.1. Introduction

This chapter builds on the theoretical foundation established in Chapter One by employing the concepts of Orientalism, imperial discourse, and the white man's gaze to conduct a close reading of *She* to demonstrate how the novel encodes cultural anxieties related to race, gender, and empire through its depictions of Africa, its portrayal of Ayesha, and its reliance on tropes of exoticism and otherness. By scrutinizing these aspects, the chapter traces how Haggard's narrative both reinforces and destabilizes imperialist ideology, offering an Oriental space where desire, fear, and domination intersect.

In order to pursue this analysis, the chapter opens with a comprehensive overview of the novel, summarizing the plot and introducing the characters whose interactions drive the narrative. It then delves into how Orientalist themes and imperial discourse shape the text, especially through the portrayal of Africa as the exotic and savage other and the titular character Ayesha, who serves as a feminized representation of the Orient. Special attention is given to the influence of the white man's gaze, which shapes the reader's perspective and situates authority within the European male characters.

2.2. *She: A History of Adventure*

H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure*, published in 1887, stands as one of the most renowned and contentious novels of the late Victorian period. It belongs to the genre of imperial romance and adventure fiction, and the novel swiftly became a cultural phenomenon, influencing British popular imagination regarding Africa and the Orient. It remains central in discussions of race, gender, and empire in Victorian literature, not only due to its thrilling narrative but also because of the anxieties it encodes about female authority, racial hierarchies, and colonial expansion.

The significance of *She* within the literary canon is attributed to its ability to merge aspects of classical quest narratives with imperial ideologies that mirror Britain's self-image as a civilizing power. At the heart of the narrative is Ayesha, "she-who-must-be-obeyed", whose beauty, immortality, and power both intrigue and intimidate the white

male character. She epitomizes the quintessential 'other': alluring, exotic, perilous. The novel can thus be interpreted as a fantasy that reflects Victorian anxieties and fears of female agency, the breakdown of the patriarchal order, and the threats posed by colonial lands and peoples to imperial powers.

2.2.1. The Plot

The narrative begins in England, where Horace Holly, a scholar from Cambridge, assumes the role of guardian to Leo Vincey, the heir of an ancient lineage that can be traced back to the Egyptian priest Kallikrates. On the occasion of Leo's twenty-fifth birthday, the two individuals unveil a box bequeathed by Leo's deceased father, Vincey, which holds a potsherd inscribed with an enigmatic message: a summons to embark on a journey to Africa, locate the queen who once took Kallikrates' life, and reinstate the family lineage. This revelation propels them into an expedition into the heart of Africa, accompanied by their servant Job and a guide.

Their expedition is fraught with the anticipated perils typical of imperial adventure tales: shipwrecks, perilous terrains, swamps, wild beasts, and hostile tribes. Eventually, the travellers are captured by the Amahagger, a so-called 'savage' tribe that resides in caves and engages in brutal rituals, embodying the Victorian perception of Africa as a realm of barbarism and primitivism. However, the true aim of their quest becomes apparent when they are presented to 'She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed', the enigmatic queen Ayesha.

Ayesha is 'unveiled' as an immortal being, having existed for over two millennia in the decaying city of Kôr, awaiting the return of her lost love Kallikrates, whom she had slain in a moment of jealousy. To her astonishment, Leo is the exact reincarnation of Kallikrates, and she immediately claims him as her destined lover. In the narrative climax, the group descends into the feared 'Place of Fire', a cave where Ayesha urges Leo to walk through the 'Pillar of Fire', the source of eternal life. When he hesitates, she enters the flames herself to demonstrate their safety. Instead, she undergoes a horrifying regression, shrinking into a monstrous, ape-like figure before dying. Overcome by the horror of Ayesha's dreadful end, the servant Job collapses in terror and dies.

Like all quest heroes, the men who survived ascend from the depths, deeply affected by their ordeal. They make their way back to England, carrying with them the recollection of Ayesha's allure alongside the awareness of her demise. The story concludes in an ambiguous manner, lingering on the potential for Ayesha's resurgence, while simultaneously reinforcing Victorian fears regarding unrestrained female authority and the threats posed by the colonial Other.

2.2.2 The Characters

The major characters in *She: A History of Adventure* are not just figures in an adventure romance; rather, they are constructed archetypes through which Haggard delves into Victorian concerns regarding race, gender, and power dynamics.

Each character represents a unique ideological role: the intellectual defender of empire, the passive object of desire, the faithful servant, the sacrificial native, and, at the heart of it all, the immortal queen whose beauty and authority threaten to undermine the patriarchal and colonial order. Scrutinizing these characters is vital for grasping how the novel encodes imperial discourse and how the narrative is influenced by the 'white male gaze.'

Ludwig Horace Holly, the narrator, is a Cambridge scholar. He serves as the narrator of the story by giving his first-hand account of the expedition. Through his own unflinching self-description, he acknowledges being "short, thick-set, and deep-chested almost to deformity, with long sinewy arms, heavy features...branded by Nature with the stamp of abnormal ugliness" (Haggard 7). This deformity isolates him socially despite his "iron and abnormal strength and considerable intellectual powers" (7). As a representation of Victorian rationality, he is both a protagonist and a round, dynamic character. His rational and intellectual narrative voice aligns with the authoritative stance of Victorian science, yet it is consistently tinged with ambivalence. Holly fluctuates between feelings of wonder and fear when faced with Ayesha, highlighting the contradictions inherent in the imperial gaze: desiring the Other while simultaneously seeking to contain her. His progression from a skeptical scholar to a tormented witness signifies his development as a dynamic character, one who undergoes psychological change under the weight of colonial encounter. From a narratological perspective, Holly

also functions as the focalizer, shaping the reader's entire understanding of Africa, Ayesha, and the concept of the Other.

Alongside Holly, is his ward Leo Vincey, "the handsomest young fellow" (2), nicknamed "the Greek god" (2), and he is the youthful heir of a venerable lineage. Although nominally, Leo is the heroic protagonist, he occupies a more symbolic position within the narrative and is a flat character, serving more as an object of desire than an active agent. His passivity in the love triangle involving Ayesha and Ustane subverts patriarchal expectations, thereby unsettling Victorian ideals of male authority. Nevertheless, his whiteness, beauty, and lineage affirm his status as the rightful heir to imperial order, marking him as a symbolic character who represents continuity rather than change. The only instance of transformation and change, the whitening of his hair, serves more as a visual metaphor for trauma than as evidence of inner development, further emphasizing his flatness.

As a titular character, Ayesha, "the mighty Queen of a savage people" (9), a "Beautiful white woman... who is reported to have power over all things living and dead" (24) or "She-who-must-be-obeyed," (67) is the antagonist of the narrative, a round and dynamic character, depicted with psychological intricacy, narrative power, and eventual downfall. Her otherworldly beauty, immortality, and political power make her both fascinating and terrifying. From a feminist lens, she represents Victorian anxieties regarding female emancipation and agency, while from an orientalist perspective, she epitomizes the exotic and perilous Other. Her characterization thus stages the ultimate Victorian fantasy: the silencing of the powerful woman who transgresses patriarchal and imperial boundaries.

Beyond the central figures, the narrative also presents Job, the faithful middle-aged servant. He is a minor, flat, and static character, consistently portrayed as loyal, devoutly Christian, and deeply suspicious of foreign cultures. His xenophobia toward the Amahagger mirrors the rhetoric of late Victorian society, positioning him as a representative figure of imperial fiction. He describes the Africans with degrading generalizations, calling them "black gentary" who have "such a wonderful thievish way about them" (Haggard 44), or "blackmoors and their filthy, thieving ways" are "only fit for muck...and smell bad enough already" (45). Narratively, Job is a foil to Holly and

Leo; his unwavering traditionalism contrasts with their more complex struggles. His death at the plot's climax symbolizes the vulnerability of ordinary Englishness in the face of the Other.

In contrast to the all-powerful native queen Ayesha, Ustane embodies the voiceless native woman. Her assertion of her claim to Leo, through Amahagger tradition, temporarily challenges European male supremacy, as she exercises sexual agency within her cultural context. However, her demise at Ayesha's hands highlights the expendability of native women in the colonial imagination. Ustane's erasure from the narrative reinforces the dominance of the white female Other 'Ayesha' and underscores how native women are doubly marginalized, both as women and as colonized subjects.

The narrative carefully underscores the disparity between the European characters and the native figures, a contrast that not only shapes the plot but also reveals the imperialist discourse of the novel. Holly, Leo, and Job are depicted not merely as distinct individuals but as representations of historical continuity, rationality, and moral order, set against Ayesha, Ustane, and the Amahagger, who are relegated to the sphere of cultural otherness. Holly's academic perspective, accentuated by his role as the narrator, transforms the journey into a credible historical account, while Leo's ancestral connection to Kallikrates places him within a classical framework that imbues his presence in Africa with a sense of fate rather than mere coincidence. Job, despite being a servant, serves as the ethical guide of the group, reinforcing the English identity that characterizes their collective persona. In contrast, the Amahagger, portrayed through images of savagery and primitiveness, remain silent actors in a narrative they are unable to comprehend, while Ustane's momentary claim of tribal rights over Leo disintegrates under Ayesha's authority, underscoring the disposability of native figures. Even Ayesha, whose influence eclipses both the Europeans and the natives, is constructed as an exception who will ultimately undergo her fatal downfall. This stark division between Europeans as agents of history and natives as background reinforces the colonial gaze of the novel, where adventure is legitimized only when mediated and narrated by the white protagonists.

2.3. Orientalist Tropes and Imperial Discourse in the Narrative

The narrative framework of *She* is deeply embedded in the conventions of nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse, where imperial imagination and cultural representation converge. Haggard does not simply narrate an adventure into an unknown land, but rather frames Africa and its natives through tropes that both mystify and subordinate the 'Other'. The narrative naturalizes imperial ideology through the protagonists' authority as explorers, through their translations and interpretations of ancient relics, and through their descriptions of foreign landscapes and peoples. The white male's gaze functions as an Orientalist lens that both reveals and distorts. In this sense, *She* can be read not only as a work of adventure fiction but also as a cultural product that reinforces and circulates the imperial worldview of its time.

By titling the novel *A History of Adventure*, Haggard claims authority and truthfulness. The word 'History' evokes the authority of fact, record, and chronology. The text presents itself as a documentary narrative; thus, blurring the boundary between fiction and ethnography, between novel and archive, lending the story a sense of credibility.

From its opening lines, *She* reveals an obsession with history by framing the narrative through a carefully constructed editorial voice. As Murphy mentions, the editor asserts that the work is not a romance but rather a "history", delivered with the weight of truth and authenticity, aligning history with masculinity, believability and consequentiality. This allowed Victorian audiences to engage with stories of the Orient as both entertainment and knowledge (Murphy 752). As Gulbar and Gubar further observe, "Informational footnotes to Holly's narrative, illustrative diagrams, sample quotations, and realistically representative typographies create an illusion of historicity so intricate that the reader is quickly entangled in the web of alternative history that is *Her* story" (10).

Haggard lends the text the appearance of scholarly authority. This "illusion of historicity" not only legitimizes the narrative but also entangles readers in what seems to be an authentic historical record rather than a romance. When the editor claims: "In giving to the world the record of what looked at as an adventure only, is I suppose one

of the most wonderful and mysterious experiences ever undergone by mortal men” (Haggard 1), the focus on remarkable and enigmatic “experiences” foreshadows the exoticization of Africa as a realm of wonders and oddities, a territory awaiting interpretation by the European perspective. The narrator further asserts: “I am not the narrator but merely the editor of this extraordinary history...” (1), reinforcing this framework of authority. By identifying himself as “editor,” he takes on the role of a rational intermediary who filters and legitimizes the narrative for the English audience, establishing the manuscript’s provenance and emphasizing authenticity and credibility. This act of mediation perpetuates a familiar imperialist motif: reality must be reframed and sanitized through European authority before it can be deemed credible.

Consequently, the narrative structure itself embodies the imperial gaze. As Stott notes in addition, this narrative structure conveys underlying sexual anxieties. Its layered narration, beginning with the editor, passing through Holy, and then tracking back to generations of Leo’s ancestors, mirrors the tension surrounding Ayesha (Stott 72).

The genealogical narrative of the Vinceys is firmly situated within an Orientalist context. Vincey asserts to Holly that:

one day it will be proved to you beyond a doubt, that my sixty-fifth or sixty-sixth lineal ancestor was an Egyptian priest of Isis though he was himself of Grecian extraction, and was called Kallikrates.... in or about the year 339 before Christ... (Haggard 9).

This merges history, myth, and imperial fantasy in one continuum where a sacred Oriental and his illicit union with a “princess of Royal Blood” (9) becomes the source of a Victorian family line, thereby appropriating the cultural significance of the ‘Orient’ while asserting that its true heirs are European, reinforcing racial and cultural supremacy under the guise of genealogy. Furthermore, Kallikrates was “...murdered by the mighty Queen of a savage people, a white woman of peculiar loveliness.” (9) This description foreshadows Ayesha as a white queen, in contrast to the ‘savage people’ she governs, affirming that authority and beauty in Africa can only be embodied in whiteness. This nomination reduces the African population to a faceless backdrop, useful only as a marker of primitiveness against which the queen’s superiority is measured. This rhetoric mirrors Victorian imperial discourse: the colonized are

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deprived of their agency, whereas the white figure is envisioned as the natural ruler. The genealogy thus encodes the logic of empire, presenting the European presence in Africa not as an intrusion but as a rightful dominion.

In Chapter Two, “Years Roll By”, Haggard weaves imperial ideology into the foundations of the story before the ‘adventure’ in Africa even begins. Holly, as the narrator, embodies the Victorian imperial subject: rational, responsible, and entrusted with knowledge. His inheritance of guardianship over Leo is framed not only as a personal duty but as destiny. The will instructs Leo’s education in “Greek, the higher Mathematics, and Arabic,” (16) foregrounding the imperial agenda as mastery of the classics to reinforce continuity with European civilization, and mastery of Oriental languages to prepare for the control of the ‘Other’. Education is rendered an imperial tool. Arabic is not taught for cultural appreciation but as an instrument to penetrate, decode, and dominate the Orient. This reflects Edward Said’s observation that Orientalist knowledge is never neutral but embedded in structures of power.

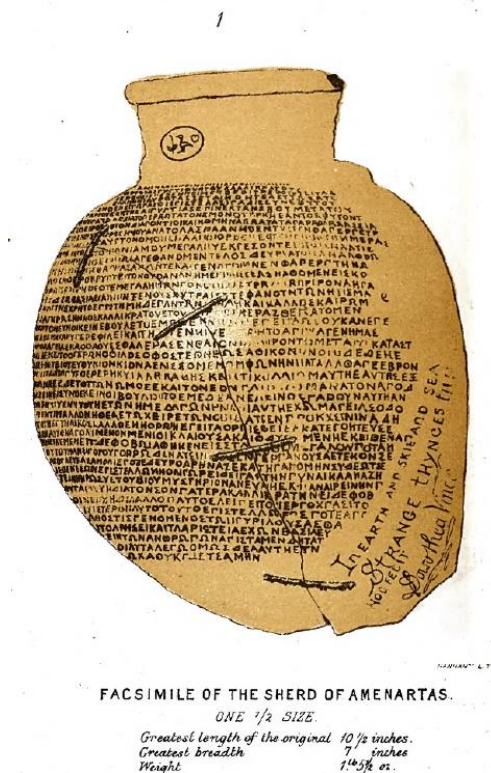


Figure 1: The Sherd of Amenartas (Haggard 26)

The “Sherd of Amenartas” (35), introduced in Chapter Three functions as a crucial narrative device that bridges myth, archeology, and imperial authority. At a surface level, it is presented as a discovered family relic, a fragment of ancient pottery inscribed with Greek and later supplemented with additional notes and translations “of the Uncial Greek Writing on the Potsherd... another ancient roll... translation ... into black-letter Latin... Edmundus de Prato... pupil of Grocyn, the first scholar who taught Greek in England.” (35) This genealogy of translation, from ancient Greek to medieval Latin to modern English, mirrors the layered process through which Western knowledge claims to access and possess the Orient. The artifact becomes more than a mere object of antiquity but it symbolizes the imperial desire to recover, decode, and ultimately control the mysteries of ancient civilizations.

In an Orientalist fashion, Haggard situates his tale within a genealogy of scholarship, where the sherd is not simply an archaeological curiosity but a discursive tool that legitimises imperial exploration, and ‘evidence’ to justify Leo and Holly’s quest to Africa.

Another main Orientalist trope present in the narrative is the veiled and unveiled Eastern woman, notably in the scene of Ayesha’s ante-room in Chapter Seventeen, “The Balance Turns”. Holly records:

So draw the curtain, and sit here by my side, and we will eat fruit, and talk of pleasant things. See, I will again unveil to thee...And without more ado she stood up and shook the white wrappings from her, and came forth shining and splendid like some glittering snake when she has cast her slough. (Haggard 167)

The act of unveiling here is not merely physical but symbolic. Within Orientalist discourse, the East is imagined as a land of hidden truths, veiled mysteries, and forbidden desires and fantasies waiting for Western rationality to uncover. Yet, in this moment, it is the English adventurer Holly who is overwhelmed and devoid of rational control. He admits,

I could bear it no longer. I am but a man, and she was more than a woman. Heaven knows what she was—I do not! But then and there I fell upon my knees before her, and told her...that I worshipped her as never woman was worshipped... (Haggard 169)

The irony is central to imperial narrative: although the novel claims to depict English masculine authority penetrating the African interior, it is the white male figure who becomes disarmed, enthralled, and subjugated by Ayesha's body. Holly's description of himself as a man undone by forces beyond comprehension aligns with the trope of the mystical Orient that exceeds Western logic.

The concluding return to England further emphasizes the imperial perspective. Holly recounts their return not merely as an act of survival, but as the culmination of a civilizational quest:

Our journey home was a successful one, and we arrived at the quay in Southampton precisely two years after we embarked on our wild and seemingly absurd adventure, and I now compose these final words with Leo hovering over my shoulder in my former room at college. (Haggard 277)

This conclusion serves to restore European order following the tumult of Africa. The protagonists endure to tell their tale, transforming their dangers into imperial wisdom, a narrative "for the outside world." (277) The 'college room' evolves into a site of authority where the African experience is translated into written form, ensuring that the savage and Other Orient remains confined within European narrative frameworks.

The Orientalist discourse present in *She* cannot be comprehensively analyzed without taking into account the manner in which Africa is portrayed within the narrative. The imperial narrative relies not solely on European dominance but also on the persistent representation of the African landscape as a space of mystery, savagery, and danger, reflecting the Western conception of the exotic Other. It is therefore crucial to transition from broad Orientalist themes to a detailed investigation of how Africa and the natives are represented as the exotic and savage Other that both endangers and entices white explorers.

2.4. Africa as the Exotic and Savage Other

The portrayal of Africa in the text corresponds with Orientalist narratives by depicting the continent as a space of excess and spectacle. The assertion that Holly will narrate "...a real African adventure, of a nature so much more marvellous than the one which you describe, that to tell the truth I am almost ashamed to submit it to you lest you should disbelieve my tale" (Haggard 3) positions Africa as a domain that transcends rational understanding, described as "marvellous" and "unbelievable." These characterizations resonate with Edward Said's exposure of the conceptualization of the Orient as a geography of fantasy and irrationality. In Haggard's narrative, Africa is not depicted as a concrete place but rather as a stage for European self-exploration, thereby reinforcing the imperialist hierarchy between the center and the periphery.

The ruins of "the Caves of Kôr" enhance this depiction. Presented before the actual journey begins, the ruins contextualize Africa as a cemetery of civilizations, a territory characterized by temporal disjunction. Africa is portrayed both as the site of ancient glories and present degeneracy, awaiting rediscovery and reinterpretation through Western knowledge. This narrative justifies British exploration and dominance by framing Africa within a framework of loss and decline, recoverable only through imperial authority.

The protagonists' journey formally begins when they leave behind the safety and the intellectual stability of England to embark on their perilous quest into the African interior. This transition from the "quiet college rooms" (42) of the familiar world of Cambridge to the untamed wilderness of Africa symbolizes more than a physical voyage; it inaugurates a narrative structured by imperial exploration and the confrontation with the 'unknown'. African nature is figured as a monstrous adversary. The sea is personified as a "shriek of terror" (45), "gleaming teeth of hell" (47), and "avenging ghosts" (48), collapsing the boundary between natural disaster and mythic terror. The imagery of breakers "smiting and gnashing together like the gleaming teeth of hell" (Haggard 48) amplifies Africa's association with chaos, violence, and savagery. Yet, paradoxically, this chaos is aestheticized into beauty: the dawn looks like "angels... scattering light with both their hands" (50), the moonlit ocean is described

“like some troubled woman’s breast”, (49) and the moon “went slowly down in chastened loveliness... like some sweet bride into her chamber...” (49). This feminization of the landscape ties directly to Orientalist discourse: Africa is both seductive and deadly, a space feminized to be mastered, penetrated, and ultimately subdued by European adventurers.

Furthermore, Leo, Holly, and Job meet the Amahagger depicted as ambiguous native people: “exceedingly handsome”, tall, “magnificent in build” (68), yet terrifying in their cruelty and silence. Holly admits that he “had never seen a more evil-looking set of faces,” attributing to them “an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty... uncanny in its intensity” (Haggard 69). This duality, fascination with their physical beauty, and horror at their perceived moral darkness, encapsulate the construction of Africa as the exotic and savage Other.

The customs of the Amāhagger further deepen this exoticization. Ustane’s embrace of Leo shocks the English narrator, who gasps, expecting violence, only to find that it is a cultural form of marriage. Holly comments, “It is very curious to observe how the customs of mankind on this matter vary in different countries, making morality an affair of latitude” (Haggard 73). This remark reflects Victorian ethnographic curiosity while reinforcing cultural superiority: African sexuality is constructed as primitive and instinctive, in contrast to European notions of morality and propriety. By framing their practices as both fascinating and deviant, the narrative reproduces the colonial binary of civilization versus savagery, with Africa imagined as a site of strange, transgressive customs. Furthermore, Stott notes that the women are the ‘female aggressors’; when one native woman’s advances toward Job are rejected, she incites tribal violence against the white men, nearly costing them their lives. This reversal of traditional gender roles anticipates the dominant sexuality later embodied by Ayesha (Stott 70).

Another recurrent trope is Africa being a silent, primitive backdrop against which the drama of Western men and the Oriental queen unfolds. Holly describes her mute followers:

In a few minutes, following the lamps of the mutes, which, held out from the body as a bearer holds water in a vessel, had the appearance of floating down the darkness by themselves, we came to a stair which led us to She's ante-room. (Haggard 167).

This imagery of faceless, voiceless Africans reinforces the idea of a mysterious otherness. The same discourse is repeated when Ayesha enforces her power over Ustane. She protests to stay with Leo: "It is surely the right of a wife to be near her husband when he dieth. Nay, I will not go, my lord the Baboon" (Haggard 174). Yet Ayesha silences her with a single word, "Go!", forcing Ustane to creep away "on her hands and knees" (128). Here, Africa is subjected and humiliated: Ustane embodies the savage, animal-like native woman who dares to resist but is immediately crushed by the Oriental despot.

Africa and the natives, for all savagery, are not the only source of fascination and fear. Ayesha represents the seductive and all-powerful force of Africa, fusing racial, sexual, and imperial anxieties into one figure. She serves as both a reflection of the exotic landscape and a subversive force that challenges patriarchal and imperial order. To move from the broad portrayal of Africa to the representation of Ayesha is to engage with the novel's most intricate representation of the feminized Orient, a figure whose allure, power, and eventual demise expose the profound contradictions of imperial desire and fear.

2.5. Ayesha and the Feminized Orient

Even before her direct introduction, Ayesha is foreshadowed in mystical and exaggerated terms that frame her as both enchanting and menacing: "...that woman on whom, clothed in the majesty of her almost endless years, the shadow of Eternity itself lay like the dark wing of Night..." (Haggard 5). This initial depiction cloaks her in mystery and femininity, invoking the archetype of the Oriental femme fatale who embodies both fascination and peril. She is linked to the eternal and the unfathomable, defying the rational constructs of Victorian England while simultaneously captivating the male gaze. The narrator's later remark: "...what am I to say further?... As regards She herself I have nothing to add" (4) emphasizes the paradox of Orientalist portrayal.

While asserting a lack of capacity to explain her fully, the narrative still elevates Ayesha as an object of obsession and allure. This conscious choice to leave her undefined functions as a method of containment: she remains inscrutable yet can only be interpreted through the mediation of the white male gaze.

Ayesha's characterization is carefully staged as an extended process of anticipation, secrecy, and awe. When Ayesha is finally revealed in Chapter 11 "She", the narrative lingers on the moment of unveiling, dramatizing her entrances as an erotic and theatrical performance. The suspense culminates in the long-awaited moment of her unveiling. The narrator describes with mounting expectation:

At length the curtain began to move. Who could be behind it?—some naked savage queen, a languishing Oriental beauty, or a nineteenth-century young lady, drinking afternoon tea? I had not the slightest idea, and should not have been astonished at seeing any of the three. I was getting beyond astonishment...there appeared a most beautiful white hand (white as snow), and with long tapering fingers, ending in the pinkest nails...I heard a voice, I think the softest and yet most silvery voice I ever heard. It reminded me of the murmur of a brook (Haggard 127).

This description fuses three archetypal images of the Eastern woman: the "savage queen" as a figure of barbaric authority, the "languishing Oriental beauty" as an eroticized trope of passive femininity, and finally the "nineteenth-century young lady" as a projection of Victorian familiarity. That the narrator considers all three as plausible possibilities underlines the extent to which Ayesha embodies a palimpsest of Western fantasies projected onto the Orient. The dramatic unveiling of Ayesha thus marks the climax of the protagonists' journey into the unknown and simultaneously reveals the ideological framework of the novel.



Figure 2: Ayesha Uveils (Haggard 138)

This scene of Ayesha's unveiling is one of the clearest demonstrations of the white male's gaze in *She* (see fig. 2). Holly frames the moment with projections of his own cultural expectations and prejudices. This catalogue of possibilities is not about Ayesha at all, but about Holly's, and by extension Victorian England's, preconceived images of women. Before she is even seen, Ayesha is trapped within the projections of the male

imperial imagination, reduced to a set of visual archetypes that reveal more about the observer than the observed. Metaphorically, the unveiling reinforces the colonial process itself. Just as the white explorer unveils the “mysteries” of Africa, so too does Holly unveil Ayesha, claiming access to a knowledge that is framed as secret and forbidden

In the ‘Pillar of Life’, Ayesha confesses her past crime, exemplifying her position as the feminized Orient, both captivating and menacing, representing the fantasy of absolute female power yet bound within a male-centered narrative. When she recounts her betrayal of Kallikrates and Amenartas, she frames it in passionate, almost operatic tones:

Then did I stretch out mine arms to thee, Kallikrates, and bid thee take thine immortal bride, and behold, as I spoke, thou, blinded by my beauty, didst turn from me, and throw thine arms about the neck of Amenartas. And then a great fury filled me, and made me mad, and I seized the javelin that thou didst bear, and stabbed thee, so that there, at my very feet, in the place of Life, thou didst groan and go down into death. (Haggard 246).

This moment crystallizes the trope of the dangerous Oriental temptress; her beauty is “blinding”, her jealousy uncontrollable, and her passion is deadly. The African setting amplifies this: the ‘place of fire’ becomes the locus of death, symbolizing how her desire contaminates rather than preserves. However, the narrative simultaneously attempts to contain her. In a scene heavy with symbolic submission, Ayesha kneels before Leo:

Behold! in token of submission do I bow me to my lord! Behold! in token of my wifely love do I kiss my lord. Behold! and she laid her hand upon his heart... I swear: I swear, even in this first most holy hour of completed Womanhood, that I will abandon Evil and cherish Good. (Haggard 248)

The shift from sovereign immortal queen to kneeling slave reflects the colonial desire to subjugate the Orient. Her vows symbolically transfer her immense power into the

possession of the white male protagonist. The Orient, in the form of Ayesha, offers not only herself but the world's resources and mysteries to the European male subject.

Chapter "What We Saw", as Stott notes, encapsulates "the sexual voyeurism of the climax" (83) when Ayesha deliberately unveils herself enthralling the male gaze as Holly describes, "she stood there before us as Eve might have stood before Adam, clad in nothing but her abundant locks... and no words of mine can tell how sweet she looked—and yet how divine" (254). But then comes her catastrophic undoing: she was shriveling up;

...smaller and smaller she grew; her skin changed colour, and in place of the perfect whiteness of its lustre it turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment... Smaller she grew, and smaller yet, till she was no larger than a monkey. (Haggard 256)

Her degeneration reverses the fantasy; the 'divine' Oriental woman collapses into monstrous abjection. Crucially, her body is racialized in its decay, showing how the narrative ties the collapse of beauty with associations of racial otherness and animality. As Reid notes that she is a "post-Darwinian figure of atavistic reversion," and Holly interprets her death as a providential deliverance for humankind (Reid 26). The narrative reduces her from a goddess-like immortal into a degraded, bestial being. Ayesha's fiery death at the novel's conclusion can be interpreted as male retribution against a woman who is both intellectually powerful and physically alluring.

Ayesha's death can be read as a carefully staged punishment. Her demise appears to be a natural accident, but in deeper significance, it reveals itself as a narrative strategy designed to neutralize her transgressive power. Ayesha embodies anxieties that disrupt Victorian gender norms; she is immortal, intellectually superior, sexually assertive, and politically dominant. These attributes place her outside the acceptable boundaries of femininity and threaten the male protagonists as well as the patriarchal order they represent. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, Ayesha's punishment represents "the final judgment upon her pride and ambition" (21). She is undone not by an external foe but by her own desire to re-enter the flame that granted her immortality, a narrative that frames her as guilty of hubris, punished for overstepping the limits assigned to her gender.

As Libbey notes, the male protagonists are given “opportunities to exercise their heroism and power by transferring the object of their control from ‘savage’ natives to ‘savage’ women” (4). Ayesha embodies this displacement: her ferocity and sexual allure create a sense of sublime terror that frames her both as a threat to masculine order and as a symbolic stand-in for Africa itself. By ultimately disarming and destroying her, the narrative allows the men to reaffirm their masculine authority and sustain their imperial masculinity.

By silencing Ayesha at the height of her power, the novel alleviates its anxieties by eliminating the danger she poses to patriarchal and imperial structures. Yet, her lingering presence underscores the fragility of those very structures, exposing how the text's reliance on Orientalist and imperialist discourse is bound up with its attempt to contain female agency.

2.6 Conclusion

The narrative of *She* reveals how Orientalist tropes, the constructions of Africa and its native people as the savage Other, and the feminization and objectification of Ayesha, are not merely narrative techniques but interconnected mechanisms that influence the ideological foundation of the novel. The novel presents itself as an adventure into the unknown, yet beneath this guise of exploration lies a reproduction of Victorian anxieties about race, gender, and empire. Africa is cast as a space of mystery, primitiveness, and danger, while its inhabitants are reduced to stereotypes that justify the intrusion of the European protagonists.

Central to this is the white man's gaze, which frames and disciplines the narrative from beginning to end. It is through the eyes of Holly and his companions that the reader encounters Africa and Ayesha, and it is their vision that translates the unknown into familiar categories of savagery, exoticism, and dangerous beauty. This gaze transforms the Other into spectacle, turning African landscapes, bodies, and even Ayesha into objects of desire and domination. By placing the reader within this perspective, the novel naturalizes imperial power and legitimizes its authority.

General Conclusion

This research was written with the aim of analyzing the Orientalist, imperialist, and gendered aspects of *She: A History of Adventure* (1887), authored by the British writer H. Rider Haggard. The novel's depiction of Africa and its people is influenced by Orientalist discourse and the imperial imagination of the nineteenth century. Orientalism, as demonstrated throughout this work, represents the constructed image of the Other in the Western mind, whether based on fragments of reality or pure fantasy. Specifically, the Western view of Africa was formed as a land of mystery and savagery, serving as a source of fascination.

The first chapter of this dissertation focused on Orientalism as a theoretical framework, outlining its definitions, historical development, and representations in literature. Drawing on Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), the chapter showed how Orientalist discourse functioned as both a system of knowledge and a tool of power, producing stereotypical images of the East and Africa as inferior, exotic, and threatening. It also considered how adventure fiction as a literary genre significantly contributed to the propagation of these images, while the 'white man's gaze' shaped the narrative perspective and reinforced European dominance.

The second chapter delved into a literary analysis of *She*, focusing on the plot, main characters, and ideological tropes embedded in the narrative. By situating its characters and events within these frameworks, the novel engages in the ideological work of empire, legitimizing conquest while masking its anxieties through fantasy. The supposed 'history of adventure' is thus less about quest and discovery and more about projecting Victorian fears and aspirations onto Africa and the Orient. The journey undertaken by Holly, Leo, and their companions symbolizes the larger imperial endeavor: a pursuit not solely for knowledge and riches but for the reaffirmation of white, masculine authority in response to perceived threats to its stability. The analysis further revealed that Africa is consistently portrayed as the 'exotic and savage other,' a dark and mysterious setting against which the European protagonists affirm their authority. Ayesha, the central female figure, embodies the feminized Orient: she is constructed as powerful, seductive, and dangerous, yet ultimately contained and destroyed within the narrative. Her portrayal reflects Victorian anxieties about race,

gender, and sexuality, while also reinforcing stereotypes that align the non-European woman with both fascination and fear. The presence of the white man's gaze was also evident, as the narrative is filtered through Holly and his associates, ensuring that European male figures exclusively hold the power of interpretation and judgment.

Through this exploration, the present research contributes to the broader field of postcolonial and Orientalist literary studies by re-evaluating a canonical adventure novel that has long been appreciated for its imaginative scope. It demonstrates how Haggard's *She* serves as both entertaining adventure and cultural text deeply embedded in the imperial and patriarchal structures of its time. The study thus enriches the critical understanding of how Victorian literature not only mirrored but also perpetuated colonial hierarchies, racial prejudices, and gender biases. In doing so, it reveals the novel's lasting relevance as a representation of the intersection between literature and imperial ideology.

Nevertheless, while this work has sought to offer a comprehensive critical reading of *She*, it remains limited in scope to textual and contextual analysis. It does not extend to the study of Haggard's wider oeuvre or to a comparative examination with other contemporary adventure novels, which might provide a broader understanding of the persistence of Orientalist and imperial tropes in late Victorian fiction. Additionally, future research could explore the reception and reinterpretations of *She* in modern literature, cinema, and popular culture to trace the continued evolution of the colonial gaze and its modern manifestations.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that *She* is a quintessential example of Orientalist adventure fiction. It constructs Africa and its inhabitants through racial and cultural stereotypes, feminizes the Orient through the figure of Ayesha, and positions the European travelers as the rightful subjects of power and knowledge. The novel reflects not only the imperial ideologies of its time but also the cultural anxieties of Victorian Britain, where fantasies of conquest and fear of decline coexisted. Consequently, Haggard's *She* can be read as both a thrilling adventure story and a cultural artifact that exposed the deep entanglement of literature, Orientalism, and empire.

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The Summary

This dissertation explores H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1887) through the framework of Orientalism, imperialism, and the white man's gaze. It underscores how the narrative portrays Africa and its female titular character, Ayesha, as both fascinating and dangerous within the imperial perspective. Through a detailed analysis, it illustrates how Orientalist narratives reduce Africa to an exotic, mysterious space, reinforcing Western supremacy. The work also examines the role of the white man's gaze, which ultimately contains and erases Ayesha's authority, reflecting broader colonial anxieties. Ultimately, the dissertation reveals how imperial ideology, gendered representations, and racial hierarchies converge to shape the narrative and its portrayal of the Other.

Résumé:

Cette dissertation examine *She: A History of Adventure* (1887) de H. Rider Haggard à travers le prisme de l'orientalisme et de l'impérialisme. Elle met en évidence la manière dont le roman construit l'Afrique et sa figure féminine, Ayesha, comme à la fois séduisante et menaçante dans l'imaginaire impérial. L'analyse montre comment le discours orientaliste réduit l'Afrique à un espace exotique et mystérieux tout en renforçant la domination occidentale. Le travail étudie également le rôle du regard masculin, qui finit par contenir et effacer l'autorité d'Ayesha, reflétant ainsi des angoisses coloniales. La dissertation révèle comment l'idéologie impériale, les représentations genrées et les hiérarchies raciales convergent pour façonner le récit et sa représentation de l'Autre.

ملخص :

تبحث هذه الأطروحة في رواية رايدر هاغارد هي: تاريخ مغامرة (1887) من خلال عدسة الاستشراق، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على تقاطعات العرق والجنس والسلطة. وتبرز كيف يصور النص إفريقيا وشخصيتها عائشة باعتبارها في آن واحد جذابة ومهددة في الخيال الأوروبي. ومن خلال التحليل، تُظهر الدراسة كيف يقلص الخطاب الاستشراقي إفريقيا إلى فضاء غامض وغريب يعزز في الوقت نفسه الهيمنة الغربية. كما يتناول العمل دور النظرة الذكورية التي تُخضع في النهاية سلطة عائشة وتمحوها، مما يعكس مخاوف استعمارية أوسع. تكشف المذكرة في الأخير كيف تتقاطع الإيديولوجيا الإمبريالية والتمثيلات بين الجنسين والتسلسلات الهرمية العرقية لتشكيل السرد وصورته عن الآخر.