



Rider Haggard
King Solomon's Mines

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HENRY RIDER HAGGARD was born in Norfolk in 1856, the son of a barrister and country gentleman. His father considered him unsuited to a proper education, and as a result the young Haggard failed at his Foreign Office exams. His parents found him an unpaid post on the staff of Sir Henry Bulwer, who had just been appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, and Haggard went to work in South Africa, where he spent several years during the time of Britain's disastrous wars with the Zulus, and the First Boer War. Haggard turned these experiences to good account on returning to England, when, after an unsuccessful start as a lawyer, he began writing, and he achieved a great popular and critical triumph with his adventure story *King Solomon's Mines* in 1885. Other remarkable tales soon followed, such as *She* (1886) and *Allan Quatermain* (1887), and Rider Haggard became one of England's most popular novelists for the next forty years.

A distinguished public servant as well as a writer, Rider Haggard had an extensive knowledge of agriculture and of imperial affairs, and sat on a number of Royal Commissions, for which he was made a Knight Bachelor in 1912 and a Knight Commander of the British Empire in 1919. He died in 1925.

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H. RIDER HAGGARD

King Solomon's Mines



Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

ROGER LUCKHURST

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INTRODUCTION

HENRY RIDER HAGGARD was an imbecile. This was the firm view of his father, a Norfolk squire and farmer, who called his son 'a dun-derhead', too stupid for an expensive education and fit only to be a greengrocer.¹ The eighth of ten children, and born in 1856, Rider alone of the boys was not sent to public school and university. Instead, he spent his time dreaming through classes with an undistinguished priest at Garsington and took a few terms at Ipswich Grammar School. At 17 he failed his army entrance exams, whilst two of his brothers went on to have notable army careers. He crammed for diplomatic exams in the early 1870s in London, but was doomed by distractions, spending much of his time amongst Spiritualist and occult society circles. Two other brothers, meanwhile, became notable colonial administrators.

In despair, his parents arranged for Rider to be attached as an unpaid secretary to their Norfolk neighbour, Sir Henry Bulwer, who was appointed in 1875 to the role of Lieutenant-Governor of the colony of Natal, the troubled British territory in southern Africa, an underdeveloped sibling to the wealthy and powerful Cape Colony. In the Victorian period white settler colonies were often deemed the ideal place to dump excess populations, none more useless than unwanted younger sons about to reach their majority with absolutely no prospects.

Natal transformed Haggard's life. He arrived at a critical period in South African history. His willingness to embrace frontier life, to mix with all manner and races of men, led to him working closely with leading architects of British imperial policy in southern Africa. Haggard was in Pretoria, the capital of the Dutch Boer Transvaal colony, in 1877, with the small group of Englishmen who read out the proclamation that the bankrupt state had been annexed as a territory of the British Empire. Haggard ran the Union Jack up the flagpole on Queen Victoria's birthday in May 1877. He was then appointed Master and Registrar of the Transvaal Court at 21 years old. He travelled through the wild edges of the empire with a judge

¹ H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life* (Longmans, 1926), 5.

and native servants for two years, administering justice as the geopolitics of empire shifted around him. He avoided being murdered by Ndebele warriors angered at land-grabs, grew to hate the obstinate Dutch Boer settlers, who bridled at any sign of British control, and lost white friends and black servants to skirmishes on the edges of empire as treaties and concessions were made with African chieftains. Haggard began to write up some of these adventures for London magazines, such as his role in the journey to visit the Basuto chieftain Secocoeni, deep in the African interior, hundreds of miles beyond any white control.² Some intemperate comments on the Boers in an essay on the Transvaal for *Macmillan's Magazine* caused diplomatic problems. In the fateful year of 1879, when the British army went to war with the Zulu nation, Haggard resigned his government posts and attempted to set up a farm.

Failure began to haunt him again: he brought his young wife back from England to a farm that they quickly had to abandon as the area descended into war in 1880. The British annexation of the Transvaal was overturned at a battle within a stone's throw of his front door; the territory returned to the British-hating Boers. Haggard came back to England to study instead for a law degree: he did so with little enthusiasm, idling through his hours in the Temple. He published, at his own expense, a book on Zululand in 1882 which was largely ignored. He also paid for his first novel, *Dawn*, to be published. It was a laborious, three-volume failure, and his army brother, Andrew, who also had ambitions to be a writer, criticized its weaknesses at great length. He got better reviews for *The Witch's Head*, particularly for its vivid African sequences, but his publisher had limited the run to only 500 copies. Rider Haggard looked set to be an also-ran in the book world as well.

King Solomon's Mines, the legend goes, was the result of a wager made with his brother John on a train to London. Could Rider write a romance in the style of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883)? 'Well, I'd like to see you write anything as good—bet you a bob you can't.'³ Stevenson's book was revolutionary in terms of its style and as a revival of the romance form, a book that

² See 'A Visit to Chief Secocoeni', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 141 (Sept. 1877), 302–18.

³ For the family account of the origin of the book, see Lilius Rider Haggard, *The Cloak That I Left: A Biography of Henry Rider Haggard*, K. B. E. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), 121–3.

was written episodically and off-the-cuff to entertain his children. Most importantly, *Treasure Island* was radical in its financial model: it was a short, one-volume book for direct sale at a cheap price to the mass public. Most Victorian fiction had been consumed in loans of three stolid volumes from circulating libraries like Mudie's and W. H. Smith's, which completely dominated the market. Within ten years, this new publishing model of the one-volume mass edition had virtually killed off the three-volume novel. *Treasure Island* sold in the tens of thousands: it helped give birth to a new market, which required the coinage of newfangled terms like 'best-seller'. Haggard's brothers must have welcomed the long odds of their useless sibling repeating this success. Yet some six weeks later, in April 1885, Rider had the manuscript of *King Solomon's Mines* completed.

Haggard's novel was published in the autumn of 1885 with a major advertising campaign. He had hit upon a winning formula. Haggard relocated Stevenson's treasure hunt to the exotic terrain of a frontier then being opened by European adventurers, who were propelled by the prospect of legendary treasure somewhere in the unknown African interior. He used all of his youthful experience beyond the edge of empire to bring this bizarre and savage territory home to English readers, inventing a seemingly very plausible world of the Kukuana people. The narrator of the story, the plain-speaking frontiersman Allan Quatermain, offered simply told, unpretentious thrills at a fast pace. With Quatermain's comrades, the warrior-gentleman Sir Henry Curtis and the dandyish naval officer Captain Good, Haggard created a trio of unpretentious heroes engaged in remarkable acts of derring-do, their actions framed by a simple moral code of manly virtue. Yet *King Solomon's Mines* also thrummed with a heightened weirdness too, the allure of lost races and uncanny survivals, strange superstitions and unnerving witchery. The book drips with fantasies of violent release, sexual possibility, and untold wealth, the delirious phantasmagoria of savage Africa that at times reads like the transcript of a fever dream. It was an instant commercial success, selling over 30,000 copies in its first twelve months.

Within a couple of years Haggard had published five further romances, all on the same model: short, breathless, brutal adventures set in Africa, produced at white heat in an artless style with virtually no editorial revisions (Haggard rarely revised any of his manuscripts, arguing that editorial work stifled their primal energies). These books

included *She* (1886), if anything a greater success than his first breakthrough. Some readers were amazed, the public thrilled. Andrew Lang, the influential literary critic who had got *King Solomon's Mines* into print, wrote to his friend: 'The more impossible it is, the better you do it, till it seems like a story from the literature of another planet.'⁴ *She's* heady exoticism, hints of an immortal desire, and tinges of supernaturalism were vital to its success. Haggard also wrote a sequel to *King Solomon's Mines* called *Allan Quatermain* (1887). It was the first of a further seventeen romances to feature this hero.

These novels elevated Haggard to a writer of international importance. Copies of his books were pirated and imitated around the world. With little struggle, it seemed, he had become a wealthy gentleman of letters, able to produce about two of these romances every year for decades on end. He was a member of the Savile Club, a confidant of that other colonial oddity Rudyard Kipling, a respected private collector of ancient Egyptian artefacts, a political commentator on matters to do with farming and empire, and was soon called on for government committee work. He became a friend and advisor to the political titans of British imperial policy.

Yet Haggard was also viciously attacked by the literati from the very beginning, since his work embodied the changes wrought by the new mass market on journals and book publishing. He was abused for a prose full of terrible schoolboy errors, sensational plotting that mixed up realism and romance, and his presentation of extreme violence in a jarring jocular tone, which seemed to be a symptom of the new cruelty and cynicism of mass culture. The *Church Quarterly Review* declared that Haggard was the leading offender in 'the culture of the horrible', and the august *Fortnightly Review* accused the books of wallowing in 'the human abattoir', the romances interesting only as a measure of the 'deplorable' taste of the masses for cheap 'intoxication', like the swill sold in gin-houses to hopeless alcoholics.⁵ 'I am afraid that neither time nor tide', sighed Augustus Moore, 'will ever make Mr. Haggard any better than a writer of penny dreadfuls.' The success of his book showed only that the reading

⁴ Lang, cited in Morton Cohen, *Rider Haggard: His Life and Works* (Hutchinson, 1960), 181.

⁵ See the anonymous review 'The Culture of the Horrible: Mr. Haggard's Stories', *Church Quarterly Review*, 25 (Oct. 1887–Jan. 1888), 389–411 and [William Watson], 'The Fall of Fiction', *Fortnightly Review*, 44 (July–Dec. 1888), 324–36.

public 'must be very ignorant and wholly devoid of judgment of any kind'.⁶ This was popular fiction for those George Gissing once called the 'quarter-educated'.

There were also persistent accusations of plagiarism, played out in articles and letters pages of the press, and these deeply offended Haggard's sense of gentlemanly honour. It didn't help that in 1887 Haggard wrote a short essay denouncing the state of the novel in America, France, and England as 'worthless'. The healthy vitality of the romance contrasted with the 'carnal and filthy' kinds of realist and naturalist books then being written. 'About their work is an atmosphere like that of the boudoir of a luxurious woman, faint and delicate', he complained, naming naughty Émile Zola, but perhaps also thinking of Henry James and the school of the 'analytic' novel. James published *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and declared the novel the highest aesthetic form in his essay 'The Art of the Novel' (1884), prompting vigorous debate. 'Why do *men* hardly ever read a novel?' Haggard asked pointedly in response.⁷ He soon realized that this essay had ensured his permanent eclipse from serious literature, later calling it an act of madness. He never wrote literary criticism again, and even considered abandoning his writing career altogether. Farming, though, was in decline and his legal and business acumen was not up to the demands of a successful career. He travelled instead, to Egypt, Iceland, and Mexico, each time imbibing the local atmosphere and producing preternaturally successful books based on it.

Haggard was plunged further into despair when, in 1891, he received news in Mexico that his only son, Jock, had died. His failure to produce an heir to carry on the family line continued to haunt Haggard, leaving him with a markedly melancholic sensibility, a feeling of living out the end days as the last scion of a vanishing country squirearchy.

He spent the rest of his career mechanically writing romances, delivering reports on the parlous decline of farming in rural England, and travelling the world for his work on the dominions of the British Empire. He was knighted for this work, and not his literature, in 1912. He helped found the Anti-Bolshevik League after

⁶ Augustus Moore, 'Rider Haggard and "The New School of Romance"', *Time* (May 1887), 523-4.

⁷ Haggard, 'About Fiction', *Contemporary Review* (Feb. 1877), 172-80, at 172, 176, 177.

the Russian Revolution, and wrote with great anxiety about the prospect of a Socialist government in England. He lived long enough to see a majority Labour government in 1924, and as a Tory Imperialist was utterly appalled. He died in May 1925. His global fame as a romancer did not comfort him in his last years. He replied to a letter from an enthusiastic reader in 1922: 'I know well enough that I am looked down upon as a literary amateur, born of a combination of country squire and public servant, and, to some extent, this is true. I have never set out to write modern novels.'⁸

Literary history has largely agreed with this assessment, and also judged Haggard something of an imbecile. *King Solomon's Mines* and its successors are popular imperial fictions, the very opposite of the kind of Modernism that was being born at the same time in the late Victorian era. Literary critics have preferred liberal Bloomsbury or revolutionary Paris over colonial Africa, and novelistic experiment over the retrenchments of romance. Haggard's work has been routinely dismissed as 'juvenile' by literary scholars, any pleasure derived from it being only regressive, both politically and aesthetically. If reading Haggard has any use, it is only as giving an insight into the conservative imperial mindset, a world-picture that we post-colonials have triumphantly overthrown.

Yet even so subversive a Modern as Sigmund Freud found that the very architecture of his mental life was built from elements of his compulsive reading of Haggard. Freud recorded in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that his attempt to force a copy of *She* on a patient who had already read it prompted the sharp query: 'Have you nothing of your own?' 'No,' Freud responded gloomily, 'my own immortal works have yet to be written.'⁹ It produced a dream that was acted out in the landscapes of Haggard's romances, as if his unconscious was foundationally shaped by Haggard's fiction. Indeed, Freud envisaged his vast tome on dreams as a Haggardian quest narrative, a perilous journey across an unknown territory.

Carl Jung, Freud's rival psychological theorist, also frequently pointed to Haggard as a route into what he called the 'collective unconscious', that primal strata of mind built of symbols, legends,

⁸ Haggard, *Private Diary*, vol. 19 (1922), p. 121: Haggard Papers, Norfolk Record Office.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Penguin Freud Library, vol. 4 (Penguin, 1980), 587.

and romances imprinted on the 'race memory'. 'The so-called "psychological novel" is by no means as rewarding for the psychologist as the literary-minded suppose . . . In general, it is the non-psychological novel that offers the richest opportunities for psychological education.' Naming the romance form used by Haggard, Jung argued that 'such a tale is constructed against a background of unspoken psychological assumptions, and the more the author is unconscious of them, the more this background reveals itself in unalloyed purity'.¹⁰

The Christian writer and romancer C. S. Lewis came to the same conclusion: 'What keeps us reading in spite of all the defects is of course the story itself, the myth. Haggard is the text-book case of the mythopoeic gift pure and simple.'¹¹ Haggard's fiction coincided with the emergence of psychodynamic theories of mind. Like his contemporaries Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and Arthur Conan Doyle, Haggard wrote at speed as if to disconnect his conscious filters and allow the subliminal or unconscious mind to speak unedited. This stratum—a strange and wholly new conception of mind—was often figured as childish and elemental, the survival of an earlier evolutionary stage, savage and primitive. It was felt to have immense, primordial power.

One of Freud's central ideas was that the dynamic of the mind was marked by psychical conflicts, the struggle of Eros and Thanatos, life and death. Rather than dismissing Haggard's romances as simplistic, they can be seen as complex and riven products of the depths of the mind of the sort his contemporaries in psychology were beginning to trace in all kinds of cultural expression. Indeed, Haggard's books are among the best routes into the ambivalent mindset of Britain at the height of empire in the late Victorian and Edwardian age. His fiction is supremely confident, yet utterly anxious. It regards itself as liberal and enlightened, yet is bathed in blood. It forges a heroic masculinity, yet systematically undercuts it. It aspires to timeless myth, yet is also inescapably historical. The best way to explore the conflicts that drive *King Solomon's Mines* is to begin with its genre and form.

¹⁰ Carl Jung, 'Psychology and Literature', in *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, *Collected Works*, vol. 15, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 88.

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, 'The Mythopoeic Gift of Rider Haggard', in *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. L. Walmsley (HarperCollins, 2000), 560. Compare Jung's comments on Haggard's mythopoeic power in 'Psychology and Literature', *Collected Works*, vol. 15 (Routledge, 1971), 84–107.

Blurred Lines: Reality and Fantasy

What exactly are we reading, as Allan Quatermain picks up his pen? The homely, idiomatic voice of a rough frontiersman, suspicious of literary pretensions, was familiar from Victorian travel narratives. Whilst there were strategic European footholds all along the coast of Africa, the interior was still unknown except to intrepid adventurers, culture heroes like Mungo Park or David Livingstone who died there, or like Richard Burton and Henry Stanley who triumphantly returned and wrote up their exploits 'in darkest Africa'. One of the models for Quatermain was the professional big-game hunter, colonial agent, and soldier Frederick Courteney Selous (1851–1917), who published *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* in 1881. The journey into the interior in *King Solomon's Mines*, beyond the sketchy frontiers of white settlement, follows the path of Selous's account of hunting in Manicaland and Bechuanaland rather closely. Sensitive critics disliked Haggard's descriptions of hunting and slaughter, the loving detail of weapons used and animals bagged, but this was common in the genre. James Sutherland began his account, *The Adventures of an Elephant Hunter*, with the proud boast: 'I have shot 447 bull elephants (I do not count females) thereby creating a world record.' Hunting was, Sutherland proclaimed, 'a life of wild, exhilarating excitement, of sunlight and air, vast spaces and solitude, of all the things which seem to me so far removed from the restricting influences of complex civilisation'.¹² This is what Quatermain and his friends most desire. The sequel, *Allan Quatermain*, begins with a diatribe against civilized restraint: 'The thirst for the wilderness was on me; I could tolerate England no more; I would go and die as I had lived, among the wild game and the savages.'¹³

King Solomon's Mines also echoes the genre of amateur ethnography, a narrative record of exotic cultures written for the scientific instruction of the colonial metropole. The emerging discipline of anthropology relied heavily on reports from missionaries, colonial functionaries, hunters, and settlers in the field, and this was first formalized in 1874 in the guidebook *Notes and Queries on Anthropology, for the Use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilised Lands*. The

¹² James Sutherland, *The Adventures of an Elephant Hunter* (Macmillan, 1912), p. x.

¹³ Haggard, *Allan Quatermain* (Hodder, 1919), 12.

guide offered a systematic way of organizing intelligence-gathering, 'to promote accurate anthropological observation on the part of travellers'.¹⁴ Haggard had the model of Sir Theophilus Shepstone to learn from, the hunter and colonial administrator of Native Affairs, who was fluent in local languages and steeped in detailed knowledge of the customs and cultures of southern Africa, and who used this immersion to exert influence and control on Zululand. Another Englishman, John Dunn, was fully integrated into the royal circle of the Zulu king, adopting local language and customs. Dunn ended up with forty-eight native wives and over a hundred children, before he used the intelligence he gathered at the court to ensure British victory over the Zulus.

Haggard had read Edward Tylor, then the only university appointment in anthropology, whose book *Primitive Culture* appeared in 1871. Tylor understood racial difference in evolutionary terms, translating the distribution of races in geographical space into biological time, ranging races along a single axis, from the simple to the complex, the earliest to the latest, the most savage to the most civilized. This privileged northern European races of course, yet Tylor also considered it the job of anthropology to warn that none of the stages of human development were lost, that even the most civilized cultures were shot through with primitive 'survivals'. Haggard's literary ally, Andrew Lang, was also a noted amateur anthropologist, who often argued that there were strengths in savage vitality that could counter civilized decadence and decline, and he championed the virtues of Haggard's primitive writings in just these terms. 'Not for nothing did Nature leave us all savages under our white skins,' Lang said; 'she has wrought thus that we might have many delights.'¹⁵

During his time in southern Africa, Haggard was assiduous in recording native legends and stories as he travelled, later telling and retelling the history of the Zulus in over ten books. He lived and travelled amongst the Zulus, even acquiring a Zulu name, Lundanda u'dand Okalweni, which meant literally 'the tall one who walks on the mountain tops', but which Haggard also translated (in terms with which his father might have agreed) as 'the man with his head

¹⁴ *Notes and Queries* (Stanford, 1874), p. iv.

¹⁵ Andrew Lang, 'Realism and Romance', *Contemporary Review*, 42 (November 1887), 689.

in the clouds'.¹⁶ The narrative of *King Solomon's Mines* echoes the dynastic struggles of both the Zulus on the edges of white settlement in Transvaal and Natal, and also the much-feared Ndebele further north of the Zambesi River. Haggard's imagination was fired by the ruthless warriors who forged these militarized native powers in rivers of blood: Shaka, the founder of the Zulu nation, who murdered a million to do so; Lobengula, the still-living chief of Matabeleland, whose word had ensured the death of some of Haggard's closest friends and servants.

There is thus a certain patina of ethnographic authority overlaying Quatermain's most casual observations of local customs, beliefs, and language—particularly compelling to the thousands who turned these weird and exotic pages back in England who knew little of the realities of frontier life. In the 1870s and 1880s southern Africa was a patchwork of different territories, tribes, and ethnicities—Griqualand, Swaziland, Manicaland—and the trick of *King Solomon's Mines* was to blur the precise moment when the real shifted into the fantastical: the fictitious Kukuanaland. Haggard's first romance established a topographical pattern where the known world runs out and the adventurers cross a symbolic threshold into an unknown interior that is nevertheless conveyed in the same rough-and-ready anthropological style.

What was real and what was marvellous was sometimes difficult to determine. The title 'King Solomon's Mines' referred to the legendary city of Ophir, named in the Bible as a place of fabulous wealth, from which the Queen of Sheba brought a vast tribute of gold to Solomon in Jerusalem. Explorers had long suspected that Ophir lay in the inaccessible interior of Africa, the gold mined there carried along fragile supply-lines to Arab traders on the East African coast and thence by boat to the civilizations of the Mediterranean. In the sixteenth century Portuguese ships in search of new gold had landed on the east coast of Africa, their crews venturing hundreds of miles inland to a territory then called Monomotapa. Reports from pioneers, which included a Jesuit priest called Gonsalvo Silveira, reported sites of ancient gold-workings, now seemingly abandoned and left to rack and ruin for centuries. The Portuguese were still an imperial power on the east coast of Africa in Haggard's time, but the

¹⁶ See Haggard, 'A Journey through Zululand', *Windsor Magazine*, 45 (Dec. 1916), 85–90.

hopes of riches from the interior had never been realized. Quatermain and his friends follow the map and trail of a Portuguese Renaissance explorer called Silvestre, echoing this history. It is *Treasure Island* all over again, but rooted deep in the history and mythology of the European quest for gold.

The story of the gold-mines had come alive again, because in 1871 the German explorer Carl Mauch had visited an impressive series of architectural ruins known as Great Zimbabwe, a complex of massive stone structures surrounded by much evidence of ancient gold-mining. This, he declared, was the site of the biblical Ophir: King Solomon's Mines had finally been found. The number of substantial ruins and abandoned workings in this region prompted Hugh Walmsley's speculative novel *The Ruined Cities of Zulu Land* (1869), sometimes brandished as one of Haggard's unacknowledged sources for his own romance. The spectacular ruins at Great Zimbabwe were evidence of a sophisticated culture, but evolutionary anthropology made the idea that these structures could be native to savage Africa simply unthinkable. The Bantu tribes living in the area, one archaeologist confidently asserted in 1909, had no ability to build such edifices. 'There has been no evolution of the Bantu people within historic times, that is since 900 A. D. The Bantu are not a progressive people.' Civilized invaders must have been responsible, because 'no Kafir chief . . . could have called his people to work such mines on the rock on this vast area. Kafir chiefs cannot create "culture."' ¹⁷ Many, Rider Haggard included, argued that these remains were the abandoned traces of another settler race, probably the Phoenicians. 'Real' biblical history was in the process of being confirmed by European explorers and archaeologists in the heart of Africa, just as it was in Egypt and Palestine.

The promise of African riches had ceased to be a pure fantasy of Europe's Renaissance empires when a large diamond was discovered in the Orange River near Kimberley in 1867. Other finds of large diamonds in 1869 prompted a rush of prospectors, and began a struggle over ownership of this contested, liminal territory. Kimberley diamonds would make the fortune of Cecil Rhodes, a ruthless prospector

¹⁷ R. N. Hall, *Pre-Historic Rhodesia: An Examination of the Historical, Ethnological and Archaeological Evidences as to the Origin and Age of the Rock Mines and Stone Buildings* (Fisher Unwin, 1909), 13 and 79.

who rapidly rose to wield immense political and economic power in the region by consolidating mining concessions, and whose ambition would lead to the eventual confederation of South Africa and the founding of Zambesia—renamed Rhodesia after him—further north. For Rhodes, the ruins of Great Zimbabwe were a kind of legitimation of imperial expansion: it had happened before that a superior northern race had been in the region; now it was happening again.

Rhodes sponsored many archaeological excavations at the site, and in his preface to the report on one of these Haggard wrote that the findings proved that an invading northern race must have built the structures. The Phoenicians were ‘the English of the ancient world’, travellers and imperialists, Haggard argued, and when they arrived so far inland it was ‘necessary that these adventurers, sojourning in the midst of barbarous tribes, should build themselves fortresses for their own protection’. Haggard ended his preface with the peroration: ‘It is legitimate to hope . . . that in centuries to come a town will once more nestle beneath these grey and ancient ruins, trading in gold as did that of the Phoenicians, but peopled by men of the Anglo-Saxon race.’¹⁸ Needless to say, this history was a complete fantasy—the ruins are Basuto in origin, native to the region. Yet this belief that Great Zimbabwe was the site of King Solomon’s Mines held a certain truth-value in the politics of South Africa until professional archaeologists began to debunk it early in the twentieth century. Some in the white minority that ruled Southern Rhodesia until 1980, however, continued to assert that Great Zimbabwe could not be a native structure.

The Romance: Origins and Revival

If *King Solomon’s Mines* had a foothold in these realities, it was also clear of course that it was composed in the form of a literary romance. One response to industrial modernity and rapid social change in Victorian Britain was a strong cultural investment in narratives of the deep past, evident in the Gothic revival in architecture or the medievalism espoused by the Pre-Raphaelites, John Ruskin, and the Arts

¹⁸ Haggard, ‘Preface’ to A. Wilmot, *Monomotapa (Rhodesia): Its Monuments, and its History from the Ancient Times to the Present Century* (Fisher Unwin, 1896), pp. xiv, xviii, and xxiv.

and Crafts movement. Literary culture was saturated in Arthurian legends (retold by Lord Tennyson) or Icelandic sagas (retold by William Morris). Whilst the modern novel tried to configure meaningful plots from contemporary social conflict, the older romance form was storytelling that felt embedded in centuries of tradition, with roots stretching into the very origins of nation and race. The quest romance, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, told of departure into the unknown, trial by physical endurance, mental agonies, moral temptations, sacrificial violence, supernatural revelation, barely possible survival and return, a hero of chivalric honour born from these sublime tribulations. The trio of white heroes in *King Solomon's Mines*, Quatermain, Curtis, and Good, have these functions distributed between them, but follow the same archetypal route. Haggard was steeped in ancient and classical legends, and some of the elemental strength of the story of *King Solomon's Mines* comes from this sense that the narrative is a retelling embedded in stories millennia old.

Haggard's romances are so codified that they appeal to schools of criticism that look for the foundational character types and narrative steps that underpin myths, legends, and folk-tales, and which filter into literature through the highly conventionalized typologies of the romance. For Carl Jung, myth and romance are constructed from archetypes, condensations into symbols, recurrent plots, and motifs that repeat the 'biological, prehistoric, and unconscious development of the mind in archaic man' and that 'function, when the occasion arises, in more or less the same way in all of us'.¹⁹ This sense of archaic underpinning and compulsive repetition explains why Jung recommended reading Haggard's romances, since they seemed to channel this primal structure of story. Archetypal literary criticism, as pursued by Northrop Frye and others, places the romance at the core of literature's psychological purpose: the quest of individuation.

In a different way, the structural analysis of narrative and character 'functions' in folk-tales, as developed by Vladimir Propp, also finds rich resources in Haggard. Propp's study, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1929), claimed to be able to reduce hundreds of Russian tales down to a small set of basic narrative functions and seven key character types: a *hero* is prompted by a *dispatcher* into a quest, aided

¹⁹ Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (Aldus, 1979), 75.

by a *donor*, accompanied by a *helper* or two, the quest-object usually being a *princess*, but the path blocked by the *villain* and the *false hero*. ‘Functions of characters’, Propp argued, ‘serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.’²⁰ Propp’s approach has since been extended to analyse medieval romance quest narratives, from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to the Arthurian legends collected in Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*. It is very easy to play the structuralist with Haggard too, tracking these abstract morphologies in his fiction. *King Solomon’s Mines* has been examined as a romance with twelve basic narrative steps, whose recurring plot functions can be shown to underpin the entire late Victorian genre of imperial adventures.²¹ This approach reinforces the sense that Haggard is dealing with foundational things: it is primitive, of course, because it operates with the very building-blocks of narrative and character function.

But the Victorian scholars who were the contemporaries of Haggard, like Andrew Lang and the Oxford don Max Müller, used rather different frameworks to understand the ancient origins of myth and romance. They were not interested in identifying abstract narrative patterns for their own sake. They used philology and comparative anthropology to investigate the origin and transmission of legends, myths, folk-tales, and romances, and came to regard them as inseparable from the story of the roots of the northern race itself. These tales spoke from the very kernel of racial memory and being, rooted even deeper in the convolutions of the brain than the chivalric stories of King Arthur and his circle of knights. As Sir Henry Curtis swings his axe in battle, he is continually compared to an ancient Dane or Viking warrior. This was an echo of Haggard’s own belief that his family was descended from the noble warrior Danes, the Ogards. In *King Solomon’s Mines* the journey into the African interior is also a regressive psychological journey, moving forward in space but continually back in time, back down the evolutionary scale, stripping away the fripperies of modern civilization to reach the kernel of

²⁰ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. L. Scott (University of Texas Press, 2003), 21.

²¹ Richard Patteson, ‘*King Solomon’s Mines*: Imperialism and Narrative Structure’, *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 8: 2 (1978), 112–22.

racial truth beneath. Haggard was hardly alone in borrowing this narrative underpinning for modern fiction, but his work became the centre of controversy about the revival of the romance in the rapidly changing literary scene of the 1880s.

As Haggard and Lang framed it in their essays following the press attacks on *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*, the older romance simply trumped the upstart novel through its cultural richness and longevity. The Realist novel had been temporarily privileged in the culture of the time, but was becoming affected, decadent, and distasteful. The novel had risen through the nineteenth century, but was now entering its decline and fall. Against this civilized over-refinement, the romance reconnected with uncorrupted primitive energies.

The contrast was also explicitly gendered. Realism was feminine, even effeminate. Lang complained of 'an almost unholy knowledge of women' in recent novels, which 'makes one feel uncomfortable in the reading, makes one feel intrusive and unmanly'.²² Romance was a man's world, the only active roles were for the hero and his male helpers, his band of white brothers and black servants. The intent in reviving the genre as fears of decadence and degeneration swirled in late Victorian culture was the ambition to *re-masculinize* its readership, just as the new journal, the *Boy's Own Paper*, stuffed with healthy Christian virtues and manly imperial adventures, intended to do when it started publication in 1879.

This gendering is explicit from the dedication of *King Solomon's Mines*, 'to all the big and little boys who read it', and in Quatermain's early reassurance that few petticoats will disturb the forward thrust of this stirring story. The journey is driven by Curtis seeking his brother, to resolve a brotherly dispute, but the heroes sidestep this plot in order to intervene to right a wrong done to the patrilineal descent of kingship amongst the Kukuanas. The manuscript is written by Quatermain for his son, to secure their bond in the absence of a now dead wife and mother. Lang and Haggard soon formed a brotherhood and wrote in the Homeric mode together. Haggard sealed this friendship (as he did with several close male friends) with pharaonic rings that he had brought back from his travels in Egypt. The ring was the emblem of an eternal bond, a fraternal closed circle. This is a rigorously male world in which heterosexual desire is allowed but

²² Lang, 'Realism and Romance', 688.

best contained, otherwise it becomes fraught with danger, particularly if it dares to cut across racial boundaries.

As many studies have pointed out, the gendered imagination of Haggard's thinking about the form of romance saturates the very landscape of *King Solomon's Mines*. The men set out to penetrate a virgin territory, brushing passed the nipples of the mountains called Sheba's Breasts, then plunging down the road into the mines, a dark and labyrinthine interior, a nightmare place policed by an old crone, where the realization of desire comes laced with the terror of engulfment and death. Turn Silvestre's map upside-down and it is clearly a crude sexual cartoon of a female body. Anne McClintock has rather brilliantly called this phantasmatic part of the Victorian globe the 'pornotropics', where feminized African nature is dominated and subdued by the violent entry of Western men who legitimate their rapine acts with presumptions about the 'immorality' of leaving natural resources to be left to waste unless put to use by invaders.²³ Weren't the diamonds in the biblical story meant as the Queen of Sheba's deferential tribute to Solomon, the king from the north? We don't need Freud to remind us that jewels often symbolize the female sex.

This narrative of masculine triumph is not so straightforward, of course, attended as it is by cross-currents of anxiety. There may be no petticoats, but native women pervert the natural course of things with unnatural or supernatural powers (Gagool) or with simple sexual allure (Foulata). This is before Haggard started to evoke the annihilating queens that embody the ambivalence of Eternal Feminine, figures that arrive in *She* and the following romances. *King Solomon's Mines* consistently asks the question, 'What is a gentleman?' as if Quatermain has lost confidence in the answer. There is a safety in the homosocial bond of the adventurers, but this teeters close to the homosexual, particularly in the fetishization of muscular warrior bodies, those carapaces of invincible masculinity forged in violent conflict. Between Captain Good's dandyism in dress and weakness for the ladies of whatever hue and Curtis's regression to Viking warrior, drenched in battlefield blood, Quatermain's role is meant to re-balance the softened, decadent masculinity of civilization

²³ See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (Routledge, 1995). For other feminist readings of the landscape of the novel, see also Rebecca Stott, 'The Dark Continent: Africa as Female Body in Haggard's Adventure Fiction', *Feminist Review*, 32 (1989), 69–89.

with a counterweight of savage strength. The scene in which Curtis is compared to their black servant Umbopa—‘They make a fine pair, don’t they?’—reads like an immensely camp moment now, but was delivered entirely straight. The fusion of the two men would create the imagined ideal: the ‘barbarian gentleman’.²⁴

A disorder in the paternal function, a perversion of rightful inheritance from fathers to sons, is a common plot in Gothic romances, from the very first ‘Gothic Story’ (as it was subtitled), Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). In *Otranto*, the hauntings and supernatural disturbances signal a usurping of the rightful male line. *King Solomon’s Mines* also adopts elements of the Gothic romance. It overloads the plot with relationships gone awry between men, but its central concern is the decision of our white heroes to commit to the battle to re-establish the rightful king of Kukuluanaland, a fantasy of a fraternal bond across the races that also legitimates violent intervention in native matters. In this sense, early readers of the romance would also have read it within the framework of the late Victorian Gothic revival, typified by the crisis of masculinity and its savage horrors in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which appeared in January 1886. The memorable depiction of Gagool beetles into the closing sections of the novel like one of Shakespeare’s ‘weird sisters’ in *Macbeth*, ramping up the shiver of the uncanny. The phantasmagoria of the scenes inside the mine complex echo the horrors in the maze-like passageways and dungeons of Ann Radcliffe’s mouldering castles and monasteries from the first Gothic romances of the 1790s. Here, the topography of subterranean labyrinths again provides a physical terrain that offers concrete metaphors for the strange subliminal world of the mind being proposed by the new psychology.

Empire: Conquest and Consequence

Thinking about the romance form of *King Solomon’s Mines* always seems to pull us back to the mythical, the archetypal, and the

²⁴ See Merrick Burrow, ‘The Imperial Souvenir: Things and Masculinities in H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and *Allan Quatermain*’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18: 1 (2013), 72–92. For a different reading of this fusion, see Bradley Deane, ‘Imperial Barbarians: Primitive Masculinity in Lost World Fiction’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), 205–25.

psychological. Yet it is crucial to understand *King Solomon's Mines* as a contemporary book, a product of the urgent historical situation of British imperial policy in southern Africa in the 1880s. It may be quest romance, but part of its hybrid form is that it also shares the Victorian novel's ambition to speak to its time, even—perhaps especially—in the fantasy resolutions it offers.

Haggard's arrival in Natal as a young colonial coincided with a significant shift in British attitudes to the empire. From 1870 to 1900 a new 'forward' policy moved to annex thirty-nine new territories or nearly 5 million square miles, bringing a further 88 million subjects under the rule of the queen and newly titled empress, Victoria. The reasons for this shift were complex and multiple: an economic reaction to domestic recession; a land-grab for raw materials, supply lines, and protected markets; a hardening of the ideological notion of 'Greater Britain' that regarded expansion as intrinsic to the Anglo-Saxon race, bolstered by pseudo-scientific conceptions of race hierarchy; a pragmatic strategic need to take territory to block the ambitions of Britain's European rivals. The 1880s saw the ignoble spectacle of the 'Scramble for Africa', as a continent previously largely ignored by Europe was carved up between rival European powers. At the Berlin Conference in 1884, competing governments agreed on the 'Principle of Effective Occupation', protocols that legalized (in European law) the process for claiming African territory. It was a licence for every adventurer to light out for unknown territory to claim it for God and Country. The Berlin Conference included the formation of the Congo Free State as a gigantic buffer zone in central Africa, a territory that was gifted to King Leopold II of Belgium as his private property, to exploit as his agents in the Congo Society saw fit. It would result in the imposition of a system that led to the brutalization and murder of millions.

Rider Haggard was a direct agent in this vast geopolitical shift, playing his part in the patchwork of struggles in southern Africa as the British attempted to expand and confederate their colonies. The rival Dutch Boers and powerful native populations resisted this expansion. Haggard played a part in the annexation of Transvaal, taken over from the Boers in 1877, which resulted in war with the Zulus in 1879 and the First Boer War in 1880. Confederation ambitions of the British inevitably led to the major conflagration of the Second Boer War in 1899, with the loss of nearly a hundred thousand

lives. The Union of South Africa was eventually declared as part of the British Empire in 1910, but this took decades of violent conflict, barely legal land-grabs, underhand tactics, and military occupation. At times the British government in London hardly had control over local actions, always reacting belatedly to the dubious schemes of the private entrepreneurs of empire, like Cecil Rhodes, whose devious plots were rarely legal and never ethical.

Those who read Haggard's imperial romances as simplistic forms of propaganda, cynically aimed at indoctrinating boys, big and little, into the glories of empire, fail to read the moral ambivalence that saturates *King Solomon's Mines*. It is, of course, a wish-fulfilment fantasy: our heroes get their treasure, wealth beyond imagining, and a proper restoration of masculine order. But this part of the story is sidelined for the majority of the book by the destiny of Kukuanialand. When Curtis, Good, and Quatermain leave the domain, having restored proper rule, they swear the king, their friend, to uphold just law fused with gentlemanly British values, but also determine to leave this honourable native race alone, to ensure that no other white man will follow in their tracks and bring the catastrophe of Western civilization across the mountains. White civilization heralds death, the romance seems to imply: perhaps it can and should be held at bay.

This is another order of wish-fulfilment, a complex retrospective one, for Haggard, writing in 1885, is clearly trying to imagine a different fate for the Zulus, something other than the complete destruction of their social order at the hands of the British in 1879. Haggard called the Zulus 'the finest savage race in the world', and was clearly enthralled by their culture and history. His obsessive need to retell their past reads like the retroactive attempt to master a deeply traumatic event.

During Haggard's time in Natal and the Transvaal, the local British administration plotted to expand north, and therefore needed to deal with the threat of a Zulu society organized with rigorous military discipline and able to raise a fearless army at short notice. Rumours of invasion and fantasies of annihilation by Zulu forces frequently swept the white settler colonies. To legitimize a military incursion into Zulu territory, a series of impossible demands were issued to the Zulu chief Cetshwayo. He ignored them, for to obey them would have destroyed the basis of his kingship.

A British force moved across the river and into Zululand in January 1879, a large army commanded by Lord Chelmsford. What happened then entered into the annals of imperial legend. A poorly chosen camp at Isandhlwana was overrun by a well-organized surprise Zulu attack. British redcoats fell to Zulu bullets (white traders had been selling guns to the Zulus for years), but were also mercilessly stabbed and disembowelled by the short assegai stabbing-spears used by Zulu warriors overrunning the British positions. The British bodies were left on open ground (years afterwards visitors, including Haggard, could literally pick through the bones on the battlefield).

The following day the Zulus attacked a rearguard British camp at Rorke's Drift. The defence of this camp by a handful of British soldiers snatched a heroic story from the jaws of humiliating defeat: eleven Victoria Crosses (Britain's highest military honour) were showered on these soldiers for their bravery under relentless attack. Nevertheless, the humiliating defeat of a modern army by what was perceived to be a bunch of savages made punishment and annihilation of the latter inevitable. In July 1879 a much larger British army, at a cost of several million pounds, steamed through Zululand to Cetshwayo's royal kraal at Ulundi. In a few brutal minutes British machine-guns slaughtered thousands of Zulu warriors armed only with assegai spears. Those who survived were chased down by the cavalry and either shot or lanced to death. Ulundi was then looted and razed to the ground. Cetshwayo survived the battle, but was hunted down, imprisoned, and initially sent into exile. The Zulus were given puppet overlords, but were essentially left to collapse into internal conflict and immiseration. Not long after the war, amidst unruly chaos, the British tried to restore Cetshwayo as king, having utterly destroyed his authority.

Haggard's *Kukuanaland* is an act of compensation for this grim history, an alternative world that lives in the hope that the 'noble savage' can be left unsullied by the fatality of white civilization, yet knows already that the deathly sword of history has fallen on the Zulus. Haggard defended the colonial wars in South Africa as grimly necessary passages to progress, yet sentimentalized what was lost. He later defended the further war against the Ndebele and the ousting of the feared and hated chief Lobengula in 1893. Yet he recognized, at least, what the consequences of these acts were, writing in 1908:

'One day, there is little doubt, must come a dreadful struggle between white and black which will deluge South Africa with blood.'²⁵

The critic Paul Gilroy has written about a particular cultural pathology in contemporary Britain that he calls 'post-imperial melancholia', 'the morbid core of England and Englishness in remorseless decline, the same strain that feeds interminable and increasingly desperate speculations about the content and character of the shrinking culture that makes England distinctive'.²⁶ Haggard's romances demonstrate that this melancholia does not simply come 'after' empire, but is already coiled within fictions we might at first mistake as stridently pro-imperialist. This is the great paradox of romances written in the pomp of the British Empire, its most forceful years of forward march. The value of *King Solomon's Mines* is not as an imbecilic reflection of imperial ideology, but lies in its recognition of the complex ambivalences that drive this ideology forward.

²⁵ Haggard, 'The Zulus: The Finest Savage Race in the World', *Pall Mall Magazine*, 41 (1908), 764–70.

²⁶ Paul Gilroy, *Joined Up Politics and Post-Colonial Melancholia* (ICA, 1999), 16. These ideas are fleshed out in his book *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (Routledge, 2004).