The Gendering of History in *She*

PATRICIA MURPHY

H. Rider Haggard's 1887 *She* is not merely an intriguing exemplar of the male quest romances that mirrored and furthered imperialist initiatives; as critics have persuasively asserted, *She* is also a thinly disguised allegorical admonition to recognize and dispel the threat that the New Woman posed to late-Victorian society. The novel's thematic valences reflect a unique cultural moment: the Woman Question that had vexed the nineteenth century intensified during the *fin de siècle* with the appearance of the societal and literary figure of the New Woman who foregrounded the clash of perspectives on separate spheres, degeneracy, immorality, and women's rights. To Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, "the all-knowing, all-powerful" She "was in certain ways an entirely New Woman."¹ To Nina Auerbach, *She* conveys anxieties about "national and domestic reality," including "the learned and crusading 'new woman.'"² To Ann L. Ardis, the novel "anticipates all the questions to be asked of the New Woman."³ Although agreeing with the tenor of these readings, I depart from them in contending that part of the ideological force unleashed in *She* derives from a complex subtext that reflects the Victorian valorization of history. Integral to the novel's condemnation of the New Woman is a gendered opposition defined by historical acuity or apathy. An attentiveness to history is firmly gendered masculine and unequivocally validated over a corresponding lack of historical sensibility, evidenced in the character of She, through this subtle binarism pervading the text.

*She*'s frantic attempt to privilege male historicity over female ahistoricity represents the most insistent example of a labyrinthine series of binaries that further the novel's ideological work in condemning the New Woman. Linking these binaries are the temporal underpinnings they share, for the linear time of history associated with the masculine civilizing mission is valorized over the nonlinear time conventionally associated

---

¹ Patricia Murphy is an assistant professor at Missouri Southern State College. This essay is part of a larger project on Victorian conceptions of time.
with female subjectivity through procreativity, natural rhythms, and infinitude. This essentialist distinction, demarcated in Julia Kristeva's important essay on "Women's Time," reflects the Victorian mindset in a century marked by an overwhelming interest in time. Whether explicitly or indirectly, discourses on time played a significant role in the construction of gender positions in late-century novels responding to the New Woman. The best-selling She manipulates such discourses to reassert rigid gender roles, distancing the New Woman avatar from linear time through her affiliations with paganism, myth, nature, gothic immortality, and devolution, as well as ahistoricity. Through persistent attempts to delineate strict gender positions by temporal maneuvering, the novel reveals unsettling slippages between them but ultimately strives to contain the New Woman threat by annihilating the unruly She at closure.

She's disdain for empowered women conforms to Haggard's misogynous master narrative in his fin de siècle oeuvre. For example, in the 1885 King Solomon's Mines, the hideous Gagool, a “frightful vulture-headed old creature,” wields her power to control the English adventurers' access to the legendary rich mines. The 1887 Allan Quatermain more explicitly assaults the New Woman figure in sharply contrasting female subject positions—idealized submission versus untoward strength—through the depiction of two sister queens. The White Queen resembles “an angel out of heaven” who exhibits “the nature of loving woman” and frequently addresses her husband as lord, whereas the Lady of the Night plots (twice) to murder her sister and unleashes a devastating civil war, even leading the battle charge. Not unexpectedly, the “good” version of womanhood ultimately prevails. In the 1889 Cleopatra, the title character is a transgressive New Woman figure who takes on quasi-divine status in designating herself as “Isis come to earth.” Satanic resonances position Isis as a false god who, much like the New Woman, has exceeded her rightful role, evidenced by periodic switches between meek female and diabolic presence. In the 1898 Elissa; or the Doom of Zimbabwe—an almost unknown Haggard text—the main character is a priestess of the “she-devil” Baaltis and is tainted as a sorceress as much for her sex as her heathenism. Requiring no “witcheries . . . beyond those lips and form and eyes,” Elissa leads the God-fearing male protagonist to “the unpardonable sin of his apostasy” that is expiated through her death. In the 1904 Ayesha: The Return of “She,” a repetition of She with a significant difference, the New Woman is not only disempowered but converted to Victorian ideology, ultimately embracing the proper domestic role in preference to her status as the potent priestess of Isis.

In She, as in his other fin de siècle novels, Haggard draws upon the traditional male anxieties that critics have noted over enigmatic woman-
hood and female essence to bolster the condemnation of the New Woman. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, remark that She represents “primordial female otherness” as “an ontological Old Woman” who “brings to the surface everyman’s worry about all women.”9 In a related vein, Rebecca Stott categorizes She as a *femme fatale*, an exemplar of mysterious womanhood.10 Anne McClintock broadens the point in remarking upon “Haggard’s well-nigh pathological anxiety about female generative authority.”11 Even Sigmund Freud, as several critics have mentioned, saw She as the “eternal feminine.”12 She builds upon the ongoing fears about the “Old Woman” in its portrayal of the New Woman to supplement the sinister, chaotic, and disruptive qualities this puissant female was deemed to bring to late-Victorian culture. The New Woman thus is not only a historically specific menace to male authority and power, but she compounds that threat by displaying the unnerving traits associated with womanhood across the ages.

My project in this essay is to focus on the demonization and marginalization of the New Woman achieved through the main temporal binarism operating in *She*, the privileging of masculinized historicity over feminized ahistoricity. *She* mirrors and contributes to the widespread Victorian reverence for history that arose, in large part, from the incessant changes wrought by scientific, technological, and philosophical developments during the century.13 To impose at least the illusion of control over the continuous fluctuations in their lives, Victorians turned to the solace of history, viewing it as a kind of secularized religion that could confer a sense of order upon a seemingly chaotic universe.14 In its unidirectional movement through time, history replicated the framework of Christian temporality, itself grounded on a conception of linear progression in contrast to the theory of cyclical repetition that had characterized ancient pagan faiths. Building upon the Crucifixion as a seminal and unrepeatable event, Christian time presupposed an irreversible and purposeful movement toward a distinct conclusion, the Last Judgment.15 In effect, Victorians could transpose the teleological element inherent in Christian time onto history to achieve a similar sense of purpose. Instead of being powerless victims of incessant flux, individuals thus could become an integral part of a meaningful historical continuum.

Inextricably bound with this teleological component of history was the idea of progress and the supposition that civilization as a whole was proceeding to a more idyllic state. Thomas Babington Macaulay’s mid-century encomiums to such advancement bolstered the common belief that “[t]he history of England is emphatically the history of progress.”16 Even Darwinism contributed to a progressionist faith, since the disconcerting
mechanism of natural selection could be interpreted as one that would further a movement toward perfection, according to the conclusion of the 1859 *On the Origin of Species*. As Peter J. Bowler characterizes the effect, the teleological element of human history was updated rather than discarded, as evolutionary discourses were shaped by Darwin and his disciples to coincide with the dominant progressionist philosophy.17

Though dissenting voices questioned the appraisal of progress—and history—as indubitably positive, the optimistic view nevertheless continued to hold sway as the decades passed. In *She*, history similarly is figured as a remarkably beneficial force that provides an element of solidity and viability for Victorian culture; virtually absent from the novel are the outcries of disagreement that surfaced in the culture at large. The New Woman, however, contested historical values in critiquing the guiding societal tenets that shaped the past and in seeking to undermine their hold over the future. In *She*, the threat to cultural stability embodied in the New Woman emerges through the text’s obsessive portrayal of She as severed from history, in striking contrast to the historical groundings of the male protagonists whom she confronts. My interest is in identifying key passages in the novel that foreground the gendering of history and underscore the distancing of the New Woman figure from historical momentum and influence.

Those crucial novelistic moments are contextualized within a quest romance that traces the fortunes of two Englishmen who leave the comforting environs of Cambridge to search for Ayesha, the title character, in response to an ancient plea for vengeance. After perusing a hoary sherd and accompanying documents that urge subsequent generations to continue the familial pursuit of She, the young Leo Vincey and his adoptive father, L. Horace Holly, launch their search for the female monarch of the central African kingdom of Kôr. Successfully traversing a perilous feminized landscape—“a Freudianly female *paysage moralisé,*” as Gilbert and Gubar describe the marshy terrain—the Englishmen eventually meet the ruthless and enigmatic She-who-must-be-obeyed, who wields her power over the matriarchal Amahagger tribe.18 A seeming immortal who has existed for centuries, Ayesha resides in a sepulchral volcanic chamber where she has preserved the remains of her ancient lover Kallikrates, a somatic double of Leo himself. Convinced that Leo is a reincarnated Kallikrates, Ayesha urges the English adventurer to accompany her to the pillar of flame that would allow Leo to attain the virtual immortality that she had achieved centuries earlier by immersion in its fire. As a horrified Leo and Holly look on, however, Ayesha enters the pillar and is transformed into a hideous form before ultimately perishing. In the novel’s final scenes, the English-
men complete their two-year adventure by returning to Cambridge, yet
the text intimates that She will be reborn and the quest resumed.

Attesting to a preoccupation with the past, the novel begins to con-
struct its historical binarism in the initial paragraph. In an introdunotory state-
ment tracing the genesis of the manuscript he has been asked to publish,
the "editor" opens the novel with a remark laced with telling clues to She's
determined efforts to align history with masculinity, believability, and con-
sequentiality: "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, I feel it incumbent on me to
explain what my exact connection with it is. And so I may as well say at
once that I am not the narrator but only the editor of this extraordinary
history, and then go on to tell how it found its way into my hands."19

Though the use of a frame narrative to establish a story's authenticity
is not an anomalous approach, She's version is remarkable for its extreme
concern with credibility. Of special interest in the quoted passage are the
multiple signifiers of authenticity and authority that position the forthcom-
ing account as an "extraordinary history" rather than simply a specious yarn.
As a "record" of events "give[n] to the world," the manuscript carries the
self-conferred status of a historical document, presumably entitling it to
be included among the reams of British archives. The narrator's explana-
tion of the manuscript's origins establishes a provenance that can attest to
the document's authenticity and the veracity of the story to unfold. Included
in the passage are repeated reminders of the editor's attentiveness to de-
tail, as if such precision is itself evidence of the reliability of the history he
will present. As one with a responsibility "incumbent" upon him, the edi-
tor is compelled to explain his "exact connection" with the manuscript,
clarify "at once" that he is merely its editor rather than narrator, and, having
established these points and his own credibility, proceed to an accounting
of the manuscript's appearance in his hands. The opening passage of the
novel serves, then, as both a prehistory and a classificatory gesture. It po-
sitions a narrative that could be considered "an adventure only" as a true
report analogous to other factual records that would be evoked in the mind
of the implied reader: a male consumer of the quest romance, as critics
have noted, immersed in a culture marked by an acute historical conscious-
ness and search for origins.

The tale's status as history is not merely signaled but accentuated when
the narrative focus shifts to the letter that accompanies the manuscript sent
by its pseudonymous author, Holly. Repeatedly invoking the word "his-
tory" to describe his narrative, Holly both emphasizes the truthfulness of
this "real African adventure" and elevates it to the status of a document, as
did its editor (p. 3). Holly, however, enhances the manuscript's significance by claiming that it properly belongs in the public sphere rather than in the private, where he would have preferred that it remain unknown until his death. Indeed, Holly remarks, “it has become a question whether we are justified in withholding [the manuscript] from the world” (p. 4). The manuscript undergoes a subtle but decisive change in import through this statement, for its publication is no longer a matter of preference but of duty. Refusal to share it becomes tantamount to denying the world a vital chapter of its history.

As in the editor's opening remarks, Holly's letter stresses the manuscript's accuracy and consequence, particularly in the missive's concluding paragraphs: “And now what am I to say further? I really do not know beyond once more repeating that everything is described in the accompanying manuscript exactly as it happened... [Y]ou will, we believe, have the credit of presenting to the world the most wonderful history, as distinguished from romance, that its records can show. Read the manuscript (which I have copied out fairly for your benefit)... Believe me” (p. 4). The reiterations of authenticity have become compulsive in this passage. There is, for example, nothing “to say further” because the sole point to be conveyed is the document's truthfulness; Holly's “history” is again firmly distinguished from “romance” through “its records”; and the edict to “believe me” is the parting phrase. A less overt indication of credibility emerges in the penultimate sentence, with Holly's remark that he has “copied out [the manuscript] fairly,” suggesting with his adverb a literal meaning of exact transcription as well as conjuring the image of a medieval scribe meticulously replicating the annals of history for future generations.

The final evidentiary claim of historicity presented in the frame narrative comes with the editor's return to his introductory remarks. Again, the editor focuses on the believability of the account, but he seemingly elevates the document to a biblical standard of truth in advising the proper readerly perspective. In his autobiography, Haggard views the Bible as a historical account to be accepted literally, implicitly arguing against allegorical interpretation since the events chronicled “took place substantially as they are recorded.”20 Similarly, the editor advises that Holly's narrative be read as history rather than as allegory: “At first I was inclined to believe that this history of a woman on whom, clothed in the majesty of her almost endless years, the shadow of Eternity itself lay like the dark wing of Night, was some gigantic allegory of which I could not catch the meaning. Then I thought that it might be a bold attempt to portray the possible results of practical immortality... But as I went on I abandoned that idea also. To me the story seems to bear the stamp of truth upon its face” (p. 5).
The "stamp of truth" that characterizes She's story will not become evident until a quarter of the novel has been narrated, however, since the early portion is more concerned with recording male rather than female history. Appropriately, then, the novel truly commences after the frame narrative with Leo Vincey's twenty-fifth birthday, the "date this strange . . . history really begins" (p. 22). In marking a coming of age, the birthday represents Leo's symbolic entrance into the patriarchal order and thus provides a logical narrative origin because of the gender valence of history as the record of men's actions through time. Leo's suitability as a participant in that structure emerges through his extensive patrilineal heritage, detailed by his dying father as he arranges for Holly to become the young Leo's surrogate father. Leo's assumption of the Vincey legacy two decades later represents yet another link in an ancestral chain traced through male descendants, with only an occasional reference to a wife. In the catalogue of forebears, Leo's father tracks across some sixty-five generations to Kallikrates, a priest of the Egyptian goddess Isis. The paternal figures seem to generate and preserve the line virtually unaided; women are mentioned only in fleeting allusions to Leo's unnamed mother and Kallikrates' wife, Amenartas. Yet even those maternal roles are minimized. Amenartas serves as a vehicle for "bearing a child" to safety (p. 11), a phrase that signals her primary function as a maternal receptacle, while Leo's mother has apparently died in childbirth, leaving Vincey to arrange for his son's upbringing without female interference. The male attentiveness to the linear time of history imparted in Vincey's detailed recapitulation of ancestry is conveyed in more immediate terms as well: the ailing Vincey punctuates his request that Holly adopt Leo with the repeated phrase, "I have no time" (p. 12).

To reinforce the masculine affiliations of history in Vincey's genealogical monologue, the novel relegates the task of recuperating the past exclusively to male interpreters. In descriptions that repeatedly call attention to the unidirectional movement of history and its shaping through the actions of men, the significance of Leo's heritage is gleaned from layers of ancient texts secreted in a silver "casket," a noun choice that connotes death to serve as yet another reminder of linear time. Further suggesting the masculine tenor of history are Vincey's connections to linear time that undergird it. He informs Holly of his imminent death "in a few hours," with "the journey done, the little game played out" (p. 14); he "put[s] a period" to his sufferings through suicide (p. 27); and he speaks to his son "from the unutterable silence of the grave" (p. 27).

Transmitting the Word of the Father through a letter accompanying the array of documents, Vincey ensures that influence over the family history is paternally determined through his appropriation of the word of the
original mother. The legend inscribed on an ancient potsherd by Amenartas, seeking vengeance upon Ayesha for slaying Kallikrates, is translated by Vincey; his words therefore direct the interpretation and shade the nuances of her text, one that presumably has been firmly in male control since it was passed to him by his own father. Texts, and the family history they delineate, thus are effectively male-authored. Vincey can influence both the reading of the past and the direction of the future course of that history by instructing the next generation "through this link of pen and paper" (p. 27).

These texts—Vincey's letter and the potsherd it "rewrites"—are but two of the documents found in the opening chapters that bestow a gender designation on history and establish the written word as a male province. Accompanying the textual package Leo inherits are the official male-inscribed documents that properly consign it to him: a Dickensian letter penned by his father's lawyers, a doctor's certificate attesting to Vincey's death, and a duly executed will whose "utter unintelligibility" guarantees its legality (p. 18). The effect of these documents, like Holly's earlier request to the editor urging publication of his manuscript, is to move private life into the public sphere so that male personal experience becomes the basis of historical record.

This supposition is borne out by the many documents contained within the casket, which translate the sherd into several languages and record Vincey responses spanning centuries to the call for vengeance against She. Representing each major period in Western culture, as critics have remarked, these texts blend personal and public history, for Vincey males take part in major events of each era through the family's residence in ancient Egypt, migration to early Rome, a journey with Charlemagne, and service in the Crusades. The private literally melds with the public in these entries, since several of the signatories are names Holly recognizes from "history and other records" (p. 37). Written in a host of classical learned languages—uncial and cursive Greek, medieval black-letter Latin, and Old English, all graphically reproduced in the pages of She itself—the Vincey history is exclusionary not only because it is limited to the actions of its prominent men, but also because the languages that preserve it would be accessible only to an educated man. As a result, Vincey history belongs solely to its male descendants, who alone would have the education and expertise to inscribe and translate family records over the centuries. Indeed, even Holly—a surrogate Vincey, as Leo's adoptive father—holds such credentials. A Cambridge fellow immersed in a community of male scholars in this notable seat of Western learning, Holly is uniquely poised to analyze the historical record Vincey bequeaths to his son.
The inference to be drawn, of course, is that all links to Western culture are traced through the male, reminding us of Hélène Cixous’s claim that “[h]istory has never produced or recorded anything else [than phallocentrism].”23 Even the scarab that accompanies the casket of documents suggests the masculine cast of history with its symbol of Ra, the sun god, and the repetition of this homonym for “son” in the scarab’s translation identifying its owner as “the Royal Son of Ra or the Sun” (p. 26). A woman’s tangential participation in that history puts her in a double bind, as Amenartas’s fate reveals, for she functions as either a vessel whose words are expropriated and reinterpreted or as a potentially disruptive source of inaccuracy. As Vincey asserts in his letter, Amenartas’s story represents “the greatest mystery in the world” or “an idle fable, originating in the first place in a woman’s disordered brain” (p. 29).

The fascination with history and historiography that marks the novel’s early chapters seems even more pronounced when measured against authorial preparations and cultural responses. The Greek translation of the sherd was penned by Haggard’s former master, whom he identifies in his autobiography as “one of the best Greek scholars of the day”24; the black-letter Latin and Old English transcriptions were produced by “a very great authority on monkish Latin and mediaeval English”; and an “elaborate sherd” copied from “a genuine antique” by Haggard and his sister-in-law to accompany the six-shilling Longmans version of the novel was so effectively reproduced, Haggard boasts, that “a great expert” could remark only that “it might possibly have been forged.”25

Several parodic treatments of She foreground the novel’s excessive interest in historiographic and scholarly paraphernalia. In the 1887 He, for example, Haggard’s friend, Andrew Lang, includes mock footnotes that identify absurd historical, textual, etymological, and orthographic references. The editor, for instance, glosses the comment that “no woman can curse worth a daric” with the presumption that the choice of the word “daric” means a certain ancestor who “lived under the Persian Empire. There or thereabouts.”26 With comparable aplomb, the editor responds to the publisher’s skepticism that a pharaoh’s daughter settled in Ireland with the claim that “it is in all the Irish histories,” instructing him to “[s]ee Lady Wilde’s Ancient Legends of Ireland, if you don’t believe me.”27 Advising the reader to refer to “The Mark of Cain [Arrowsmith],” which he recommends as “an excellent shillingsworth,” the unabashedly commercial editor causes the publisher to complain, “Is this not ‘log rolling’?”28 Replying to the publisher’s query about the accuracy of “walri” as a plural form, the editor grumbles that he “can’t find walrus in the Latin dictionary nor anything else beginning with W somehow, but it seems all right.”29 Asked if the
story is referring to “the quivering footsteps” of the “Dawn” rather than the “don,” the editor querulously counters that “[e]very Oxford man knows what I mean.”

Throughout the parody, the editor and publisher acridly but hilariously debate whether the text’s elaborate descriptions and references are overwrought. In one heated exchange, for instance, the publisher questions whether a lengthy discussion of hieroglyphics is not “a little dull,” since “[t]he public don’t care about dead languages.” Despite the editor’s claim that the “[s]tory can’t possibly get on without” these additions, since “[y]ou must have something of this sort in a romance,” the publisher interjects such admonitions as, “Don’t keep hammer hammering [sic] away at Greek! This is a boy’s book, not a holiday task, this is!”

The parody similarly targets the self-conscious scholarship of *She* with an outlandish reproduction of an ancient sherd rendered in typographical gibberish, the discussion of which rapidly disintegrates into a pun on pi, a term designating a jumble of printing types, and the Leo character’s claim that “pie or no pie, I love it like a pie, and I’ve broken the crust.” Such a frivolous tone can be attributed, in part, to the parody’s transposition of gender designations in its conversion of Leo and Holly into Leonora and Polly; thus, it is the notion of female scholarship that becomes a primary object of ridicule.

*She*’s historical trappings offered an especially easy target for *Punch*, as seen in several short parodies. One version, by “Walker Weird” (5 December 1889), features “Unredd,” a writer, and “Spoypaperos,” a sketcher, as its main characters who find an odd scroll filled with a hodgepodge of languages, including a fragment “that might be antediluvian Irish.” Even a voice speaks in hieroglyphics, which Unredd deciphers as “You be blewed?”—a correct assumption, since the utterer “gravely inclined its head.” An earlier *Punch* effort (26 February 1887) made much of Vincey’s narrative of ancestry, which the parody describes as “a long incoherent story” told by an inebriated “Winkle,” who is either the “sixty-sixth or six hundred and sixty-sixth” descendant. His tale originates with “Killikrankie,” identified as a “[c]hap at Isis—hic!—priest, you know,” who apparently “quarrel[ed] with a lady of theatrical tastes.” Among his descendants is one who traveled with “Champagne,” which perhaps inspired another descendant to “ma[k]e a fortune in beer,” a product that Winkle apparently has enjoyed greatly. The textual version of Winkle’s story, written on a “pot of pomatum,” or pomade, is dismissed as merely “the same incoherent story that poor Winkle had tried to tell me with his head resting in the coal-scuttle.” In *Punch*, then, as in *He*, the mere fact that *She*’s historiography is so excessively satirized points to the novel’s frantic interest in the workings, implications, and consciousness of history.
Returning to *She* brings us from the absurdity of the parodies to the solemnity that Haggard accorded to history, especially in contrast to the bizarre She. Unlike the overdetermined connection between masculinity and historicity in the opening chapter, She is remarkable for her dearth of historical consciousness. As a self-described “very woman” (p. 199)—merely “an intensified woman,” according to the *Saturday Review*—She is emblematic of all women in her presumed obliviousness to and distance from historical matters. As her interrogation of Holly intimates, She may be superficially interested in the progression of Western civilization but is unaware of its signal events. Instead, Ayesha has been insulated in a static world, where the passage from the classical societies of Egypt and Greece to the dawn of Christianity is unknown:

“[A]nd there is yet an Egypt? And what Pharaoh sits upon the throne? . . . [I]s there still a Greece? . . . The Hebrews, are they yet at Jerusalem? And does the Temple that the wise king built stand, and if so, what God do they worship therein? Is their Messiah come, of whom they preached so much and prophesied so loudly, and doth He rule the earth? . . . Ah, thou canst speak the Latin tongue, too! . . . It hath a strange ring in my ears after all these days, and it seems to me that thy accent does not fall as the Romans put it . . . Knowest thou Greek also?”

“Yes, oh Queen, and something of Hebrew, but not to speak them well. They are all dead languages now.”

(PP. 146–8)

Posing her queries in an archaic phraseology whose form is as revealing of ahistoricity as its content, Ayesha aligns herself with the remote past through her facility with the tongues that Holly, as an emblem of modernity, designates as “dead languages now.” Despite an acquaintance with such ancient languages, Holly nevertheless evidences a telling distinction from the more fluent She in not “speak[ing] them well” and in betraying the semantic alterations occurring through the centuries that confer upon his replies an “accent [that] does not fall as the Romans put it.” As the linguistic distinction between the two speakers reveals, only Holly is identified with the diachronic movement of history.

Parodic interest in this passage from *She*, specifically in Lang’s *He*, suggests that the distinction drawn between historicity and ahistoricity represented a cultural touchstone. In Lang’s version, the disembodied voice of “He-who-was-mummied”—another amusing gender switch that illustrates a carnivalesque world in which women are the explorers and men the ex-
explored—asks such comical questions as, “Who sitteth on the throne of Hokey, Pokey, Winky Wum, the Monarch of the Anthropophagi?” These questions, which reveal that He “had been for a considerable time out of the range of the daily papers,” baffle his servant, “Pellmelli,” and can be answered only by Polly. The reference to the “daily papers,” although merely a humorous aside, nevertheless associates an attentiveness to history with modernity, a significant connection in the Victorian mind. The distinction between historical acuity and inattention, evidenced in the passages from *She* and Lang’s parody, mirrors a culturally formed binarism through which historicity signifies a civilized superiority opposed to a primitive inferiority. Ignorance of history serves as a kind of *prima facie* evidence that one also denies history and instead seeks to return to the notion of cyclical temporality that had been discredited by nineteenth-century theorists. Refusal to accept oneself as a historical entity, as Mircea Eliade argues in a valuable treatise on the topic, perpetuates the illusion that one exists in an eternal present; acceptance of oneself as a historical individual represents the marker of “modern man,” one “who consciously and voluntarily creates history.”

The gender overtones that *She* brings to this binarism emerge in a telling passage:

> How was it possible that I, a rational man, not unacquainted with the leading scientific facts of our history, and hitherto an absolute and utter disbeliever in all the hocus-pocus that in Europe goes by the name of the supernatural, could believe that I had within the last few minutes been engaged in conversation with a woman two thousand and odd years old? . . . It must be a hoax, and yet, if it were a hoax, what was I to make of it? What, too, was to be said . . . of the woman’s extraordinary acquaintance with the remote past, and her ignorance, or apparent ignorance, of any subsequent history? What, too, of her wonderful and awful loveliness? This, at any rate, was a patent fact, and beyond the experience of the world.

(p. 158)

In the opening sentence, masculinity is linked to reason, history, and knowledge in a tight metonymic chain as Holly attempts to apply logical tools to derive a plausible explanation for “hocus-pocus,” a particularly loaded noun in this context. In addition to its denotations of trickery and magical incantation, the term carries a connotative hint of Otherness, since in Europe the concept would be labeled by the less judgmental word “supernatural.” Situating Holly as the subject (“I, a rational man”) skeptically
pondering an indecipherable object ("a woman two thousand and odd years old") elevates him above an Other allied with phantasm ("hocus-pocus"), incognizance ("ignorance" of "any subsequent history"), and exoticism ("wonderful and awful loveliness"). As a trafficker in "patent fact," Holly foregrounds, through his self-addressed queries, She's resistance to classification—the Victorian scientific technique that could illuminate her "extraordinary acquaintance" with an occlusive "remote past" by precisely locating her within a historical continuum.

Also consigning She to a devalued eternal present is her contradictory "awful loveliness." The phrase yokes the wondrous yet disturbing implications of her immunity from the somatic markers of time, distinguishing her from the male protagonists who bear such traces throughout the text. Elsewhere depicted and indicted as an unchanging essence who manifests, for example, a "beauty [that] endures even as I endure," Ayesha belies the supposition that "woman's loveliness . . . passes like a flower" (p. 154). In contrast, Leo experiences temporal alterations, since “[t]he child grew into the boy, and the boy into the young man, as one by one the remorseless years flew by” (p. 20); his father's countenance, once "a beautiful face," displays the ravages of time, since "disease had wrecked it” (p. 14); and Holly's appearance, though only slightly transformed during a quarter-century, nevertheless reflects "some modification” (p. 8). Ayesha's unmarked body thus serves as damning evidence as much as enviable immutability, for it exposes her distance from the changes determining the course of history.

Moreover, the ahistoric Ayesha is condemned through her affiliation with "degenerate" non-European cultures. In identifying her Arabian background, She connects Ayesha to the racial Other constructed through the Victorian conception of Orientalism. Edward Said has pointed to Orientalism's binary underpinnings with its presumption of Western superiority fortified by the specular image of Eastern inferiority, which created a widely accepted matrix for interpreting and homogenizing cultural differences. Defining Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction" that assumed an unbridgeable chasm between East and West, Said credits it with creating "one of [the] deepest and most recurring images of the Other"—a perspective that is especially evident in She. Most pertinent to my discussion, however, is the Victorian assumption of Oriental immutability. Theorized by Said as an isolated psychic and physical terrain, the Orient represented a "static system of 'synchronic essentialism'" that stood in marked contrast to the putatively progressive movement of British life. In She, the Oriental separation from history is transposed onto ancient Kôr's unchangeability across
centuries; She's first glimpse of it two thousand years earlier, for example, revealed it "even as it is now" (p. 179).

Additionally informing She's distance from history is the careful distinction Orientalists drew between contemporary and classic non-European civilizations, appraising the former as an inferior manifestation of the latter. As mapped onto She, the dichotomy emerges through the substantive difference in the relationships that Ayesha and Leo hold to ancient cultures. Ayesha is allied with the vitiated and isolated descendants of once-noble Arabic societies through her rule over the Amahagger, whose barbarism is evidenced behaviorally in their primitive practices and linguistically through Ayesha's claim that they have "debased and defiled" the "purity" of the ancient language once her "own dear tongue"; in fact, Ayesha is compelled to converse "in what is to me another tongue" (p. 146).

Leo, however, is doubly linked with advanced civilizations that initiated Western history as the descendant of Kallikrates, an Egyptian priest of Greek extraction living in the time of the pharaohs—an authorial choice of ethnicity that builds upon the Victorian veneration of classicism. As monarch of Kôr, which chronologically and developmentally predated the civilization of Leo's Egyptian forefather, Ayesha represents a culture that not only has deteriorated into ruins but lacks any pretensions to pedigree, since its Amahagger descendants are "a bastard brood of the mighty sons of Kôr" (p. 181). If, as Darwinian social theorists postulated, civilizations progressed along an evolutionary continuum, then the Amahagger apparently followed a separate and doomed path from the Egyptian cousins who shared their Kôr ancestors, thus boasting only a tenuous connection with Kallikrates' valorized culture. Ayesha's association with the Amahagger further separates this representation of woman from the shaping of Western history—indeed, the Amahagger lack even a sense of their origins (p. 89)—and relegates her to the margins of that process.

Ayesha is further divided from history through her status as the "essence of Paganism," in Murray's Magazine's phrase, which positions her in condemnatory contrast to the British explorers as Christian faithful. Ayesha is set in opposition to the linear time that undergirds Christianity, like history, with each heathen tenet she imparts, each sacrilegious action she performs, and each proof of virtual immortality she conveys. As a heathen, Ayesha shares the ancient pagans' presumed lack of historical consciousness through their discredited belief that events recur in a cyclical pattern. Conversely, frequent allusions to religious dogma and pertinent biblical quotations associate Leo and Holly with a Victorian version of the true faith, as does their connection with the linear time underlying Christian teleology that Holly specifically notes: "[T]he mind wearies easily when
it strives to grapple with the Infinite, and to trace the footsteps of the Almighty as he strides from sphere to sphere, or deduce His purpose from His works ... Here the lot of man born of the flesh is but to endure midst toil and tribulation ... and when the tragedy is played out, and his hour comes to perish, to pass humbly whither he knows not" (pp. 117-8). Signifiers of linearity punctuate the passage to differentiate human mortality from divine infinitude. The human “tragedy” that “is played out” invokes the customary dramatic form in which sequential emplotment expires in a definitive conclusion. Humanity is “born of the flesh,” a noun selection that stresses the finite limits on somatic endurance. The reference to the “hour” in which one “comes to perish” not only directs attention to a discrete unit of linear time but hints of a progressive movement toward death and willing participation in, rather than defiant resistance to, the divine plan.

As a virtually immortal being, however, Ayesha inhabits the cosmic time of the Christian divinity. Like Him, she can “see without eyes and hear without ears” (p. 84). Yet the differences between them, as persistent allusions underscore, establish a Manichaean relationship that positions She as a female Lucifer figure marked by unconscionable hubris; even Job, the Englishmen’s ignorant servant, perceives Ayesha’s resemblance to the “old gentleman” (p. 245), a euphemism for Satan.45 Like Lucifer, the bearer of light, She emits “a supernatural radiance” that distinguishes her from any “merely mortal woman” (p. 158). Her “almost angelic rapture” is superficial, however, since it can rapidly dissolve into “the very reverse of angelic” (p. 201). With her resemblance to a serpent—indeed, at one point she “half hissed, throwing back her head like a snake about to strike” (p. 156)—Ayesha is exposed as a deviant divinity in this late-century metaphor for the New Woman.46

Such examples are indicative of the abundant references that construct She as a female antichrist, primarily through religious inversions. Like William Morris’s late-century “Hill of Venus” in The Earthly Paradise and Algernon Charles Swinburne’s “Anactoria,” for example, She adopts the medieval literary practice of twisting religious references into blasphemous revisions, using the trope to diabolize obstreperous women. Female potency, such inversions imply in She, reverses the natural order that rightly relegates women to a posture of submission. As a practitioner of “unholy rites” (p. 164), She appropriates and profanes Christian liturgy, most revealingly in her adaptation of the baptismal ceremony. Although mimetic of an ecclesiastic chamber, the curtained alcove in which She has placed her version of a baptismal font is tainted by a stereotypical Oriental sensuality, as Holly’s description reveals: “I entered, shuddering. This woman was very
terrible. Within the curtains was a recess, about twelve feet by ten, and in
the recess was a couch and a table whereon stood fruit and sparkling wa-
ter. By it, at its end, was a vessel like a font cut in carved stone, also full of
pure water. The place was softly lit with lamps . . . and the air and curtains
were laden with a subtle perfume. Perfume too seemed to emanate from
the glorious hair and white-clinging vestments of She herself" (pp. 145–6).

Suggestive of a presumed Eastern decadence, the setting resembles a
seraglio with its concealing curtains, inviting couch, luxurious fruit, and
provocative scent. Numerical descriptions contribute to the blasphemous
picture, since the alcove’s measurements coincide with Christian markers
of perfection (twelve, indicative of the dimensions of heaven) and obedi-
ence (ten, the number of the Commandments). Sacerdotally but sacrile-
giously garbed in erotic “white-clinging vestments,” She assumes the role
of the priest for which she is trebly unsuited as a pagan, a woman, and a
sensualist. The hieratic function alone condemns her, since it evokes the
Roman Catholicism that was marginalized in nineteenth-century Britain.
Ayesha sullies the baptismal apparatus not only in placing its simulacrum
in such an impure chamber but in employing it to gain untoward knowl-
dge, raising disturbing visions upon the “font-like” vessel’s watery sur-
face (p. 146). In effect, She appropriates both the Law and the Word of the
Father in her assumption of omnipotence.

Not only does Ayesha’s perverse divinity distance her from the linear
time of history, but so do her multiple identifications with mythic figures.
All of the mythic characters whom She resembles—Eve, Circe, Aphrodite,
Venus, and Galatea—were infamous for their deleterious influence upon
men and bring a gender valence to the fin de siècle theories of myth that
they invoke, carrying significant implications for She’s relationship to his-
tory. Those theories, offered in multiple permutations, presumed that
mythic figures were emblematic of enduring human traits.47 John Ruskin,
for example, advised that “the right reading of myths” is predicated on the
recognition that “all true vision” presupposes “constant laws common to
all human nature” and identified “things which are for all ages true.”48 Walter
Pater, summarizing the “three successive phases” of mythic development,
noted that ancient figures “are realised as abstract symbols, because in-
tensely characteristic examples, of moral or spiritual conditions.”49 John
Addington Symonds similarly cautioned that “[t]he truth to be looked for
in myths is psychological, not historical.”50 She builds upon such discourses
in specifically attributing mythic immutability and inherent unreliability
to Woman, situating the sex in an eternal present.

The characterization of Ayesha weaves these discursive threads even
more tightly by suggesting that the New Woman is merely another mani-
festation of all women, whose dangerous effects upon men replicate those of her mythic counterparts. One is reminded of Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s feminist reading of myth, in which she identifies myth as a frequently “hostile” response to the historical underpinnings of gender roles. Displacing mythic qualities upon women confers “universal, humanistic, natural, or even archetypal status” that divorces them from history. Like the mythic narratives DuPlessis describes, She participates in “the solidification, consolidation, and affirmation of a hegemony” in which patriarchal figures ultimately prevail.51

Spanning the centuries—both figuratively as a perpetual object of Vincey narratives and literally as a somatic anomaly—She has a dual claim to mythic immortality. Through her defiance of death, She enacts a monstrous transgression of temporal boundaries, mirroring the New Woman’s refusal to remain within her sex’s sphere. She imports gothic tropes to convey the horrific implications of that uncontainability, structurally evidencing many of the trappings that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies as intrinsic to the genre: tales embedded in tales, sinister landscapes, a feudal structure, and dreams, for example.52 Unlike the usual approach of other novels that employ gothic elements, however, She internalizes the conventions within the corpse-like Ayesha herself, as Holly’s first glimpse of her reveals:

[T]he curtain was drawn, and a tall figure stood before us. I say a figure, for not only the body, but also the face was wrapped up in soft white, gauzy material in such a way as at first sight to remind me most forcibly of a corpse in its grave-clothes... I felt more frightened than ever at this ghost-like apparition, and my hair began to rise upon my head as the feeling crept over me that I was in the presence of something that was not canny. I could, however, clearly distinguish that the swathed mummy-like form before me was that of a tall and lovely woman, instinct with beauty in every part, and also with a certain snake-like grace.

(p. 142)

Implied in the passage are several other elements that Sedgwick designates as typically gothic—live burial, doubleness, the unutterable, and a blurring of inside/outside boundaries—which are joined explicitly to She to portray her as a virtual embodiment of the gothic.53 She’s immortality, the most significant and disturbing of her qualities, is the nexus of these characteristics and the locus of her power. The notions of doubleness and illegible boundaries occupy a temporal dimension in She under which all
of the novel's other gothic tropes are subsumed. The sense of duality applies to She's deviation from the forward movement of linear time through discrete units and the resultant elision of temporal demarcations. Such disorder creates a suffocating and disorienting effect through the bewildering layers of centuries incorporated within She and consequently stymies efforts to affix her within a temporal span. Through this confusion, Ayesha resembles the transgressive gothic character who undermines the distinctions between the rational and the irrational, the apparent and the actual, the self and the Other. Ayesha becomes a kind of "gothic sublime"—an oddly pleasurable source of fear who not only embodies centuries-old qualms about enigmatic woman, but also heightens the effect by linking them to the specific threat of female empowerment in the late nineteenth century. In so doing, She suggests that its gothic female endangers not only the male protagonists she encounters, but the fate of Western civilization as well. If, as Rosemary Jackson comments, early gothic novels displayed "a longing for an idealised social order," then She demonstrates the perils to that order posed by the New Woman.54

She not only points to Ayesha's antithetical relationship with linear time but also casts her as the devolutionary figure critics have identified, one who seemingly reverses and subverts temporal movement. Clearly, the novel argues, woman's Darwinian reversion is a threat to the progress brought by the masculine projects of history. In Ayesha's regressive episode, the pillar of flame transforms her from a vibrant woman to a hideous simian form: "'Look!—look!—look! she's shrivelling up! she's turning into a monkey!'... smaller and smaller she grew... Smaller she grew, and smaller yet, till she was no larger than a baboon. Now the skin was puckered into a million wrinkles, and on the shapeless face was the stamp of unutterable age... [N]obody ever saw anything like the frightful age that was graven on that fearful countenance, no bigger now than that of a two-months' child, though the skull remained the same size, or nearly so" (pp. 293–4). The scene has drawn much critical commentary for its devolutionary implications. Stott, for example, argues that She's demise reproduces the Victorian theory of recapitulation, which held that an organism reenacted the development of its species but passed beyond the final stage of lower specimens.55 Gilbert and Gubar consider She's death as both a devolution and a reassertion of patriarchal law through "unholy intercourse with the phallic 'pillar of Life.'"56 I suggest that the scene not only reverses linear time in these ways, but also creates a temporal disorientation through its curious conjunction of opposites that mirror the New Woman's disruption of an orderly world. Ayesha became "smaller and smaller" but also paradoxically "grew," a point apparently so disconcerting that it is made twice within this
brief passage. By simultaneously incorporating age and youth, She initiates a vertiginous blending of times: despite the wrinkles indicative of “frightful age,” her face shrinks to the size of “a two-months’ child,” yet the skull “remained the same size” as an adult’s. Elaborating on She’s horrific transformation, “too hideous for words,” Holly alludes to its temporal upheaval in sputtering, “And yet, think of this—at that very moment I thought of it—it was the same woman!” (p. 294).

She’s devolution further responds to and builds upon prevalent evolutionary and anthropological discourses of the late Victorian period that theorized the development of earlier matriarchal and patriarchal societies. These theorists bolstered a concept of human history in which matriarchal cultures represented a primitive social form that, through evolution, advanced to a valorized patriarchal structure.57 In She, Ayesha’s reign over the Amahagger is a signifier of cultural decline, since a matriarchy represents a step backward in time. Indeed, the brutal, ritualistic, and cannibalistic practices of the Amahagger identify them as a primitive strain in the human developmental process. By reducing matriarchal society to the kind of “Prehistory” that Luce Irigaray identifies as “a partial, reductive, and fruitless conception of History,” She gives credence to the idea that “patriarchy is . . . the only History possible”58—a notion underscored by the repeated attempts to align the Englishmen with history in She’s opening chapters. As a New Woman exemplar, Ayesha represents not an evolutionary progression, but a return to chaotic primitivism.

Further condemning Ayesha is her discomfiting link to nature, frequently designated as feminine in literary texts. Margaret Homans’s appraisal of Wordsworthian influence is especially germane in this context, since she identifies “feminization of nature [as] the most obvious example of sexual polarization in the literary tradition.”59 Ayesha reveals an ominous bond with and manipulation of nature, designating herself as one “who know[s] the secrets of the earth and its riches, and can turn all things to my uses” (p. 150). Of particular significance is the idea that nature, as Cixous has argued in her Derridean rupture of sex-based binarisms, is specifically opposed to history in a gender economy. The nature/history dichotomy mirrors the “dualist and hierarchical” divisions of gender that Cixous similarly locates in other pairings, since this opposition juxtaposes “immobility/inertia to the march of progress, terrain trod by the masculine footstep.”60 Nature, then, provides an ideal foil for the historically attuned explorers in She, building upon the gendered distinction that the text has elsewhere drawn between historicity and ahistoricity.

Nature is consigned to a negative register not only through Ayesha’s unsettling manipulations of it, but also through the clarifying perspective
between natural and divine law that Haggard presents in his autobiography: "[T]he laws of Nature differ from the laws of God as these are revealed to us (and we must follow the higher Light)—a fact from which I am sometimes tempted to argue that Nature, 'red in tooth and claw,' is not begotten of God alone. Surely the powers called Satan and Death have had a hand in its makings." Not only does nature take on satanic overtones in She as Ayesha wields its forces, but it also works against late-century theories of nature as changeable and vibrant. When ideologically useful, She suspends its Darwinian allegiances and resurrects the Hegelian conception of nature prevalent earlier in the century to further the novelistic indictment of the New Woman. In his theorization of history, G. W. F. Hegel opposed the endless reproduction of nature to the nonrepetitive quality of history, citing the latter for its novelty. Applied to She, the Hegelian binary reinforces the novel's validation of linear time, since the shiftings of history suggest a purposeful dialectic contributing to human advancement in contrast to nature's unproductive reiterations of a stagnant past.

As we have seen, She diligently strives to differentiate the sexes through multiple techniques that place Ayesha in temporal opposition to her male visitors. Despite the text's feverish efforts to marshal temporal discourses in support of distinct gender roles, however, the border between masculine and feminine cannot be indelibly marked or practicably policed in She. As emblematized by She, the female evinces a disquieting tendency to exceed the boundaries set to contain her and compromise the unfortunate males she encounters. In problematizing the demarcation of masculinity and femininity, She therefore is the quintessential New Woman.

The vexed delineation of gender boundaries is suggested in one crucial scene where Leo encounters his doppelganger, Kallikrates, both overtly through Leo's feminization and covertly through his inability to distinguish between self and Other:

"[H]ave no fear, Kallikrates, when thou—living, and but lately born—shalt look upon thine own departed self, who breathed and died so long ago . . ."

"...[T]he sight was an uncanny one... For there, stretched upon the stone bier before us, robed in white and perfectly preserved, was what appeared to be the body of Leo Vincey. I stared from Leo, standing there alive, to Leo lying there dead, and could see no difference; except, perhaps, that the body on the bier looked older. Feature for feature they were the same, even down to the crop of little golden curls, which was Leo's most uncommon beauty . . . I can only sum up the closeness of the resemblance by
saying that I never saw twins so exactly similar as that dead and living pair.

I turned to see what effect was produced upon Leo by this sight of his dead self and found it to be one of partial stupefaction. He stood for two or three minutes staring and said nothing, and when at last he spoke it was only to ejaculate—

"Cover it up and take me away."

"Nay, wait, Kallikrates," said Ayesha . . .

. . . "Do thou, oh Holly, open the garment on the breast of the dead Kallikrates, for perchance my lord may fear to touch himself."

(pp. 23–8)

Temporal confusion results from the difficulty in distinguishing between life and death, since the boundary between a deceased Leo represented by the ancient Kallikrates and a living Leo figured as contemporary Englishman periodically collapses and reappears. In severing the Englishmen’s temporal moorings, the text calls into question their complacent perceptions of themselves as unified subjects and thus problematizes the whole notion of identity and the gender assumptions from which it proceeds. The inseparability of the female component from male subjectivity is made manifest in the feminization of Leo/Kallikrates, for example; Leo is distinguished by his “little golden curls,” his “most uncommon beauty”—traditionally considered a feminine attribute. Leo is additionally feminized through the identical garb of Ayesha and Kallikrates, whose white robes present them as pagan priestly figures but also resemble flowing Victorian gowns.

The interchangeability of Leo and Kallikrates suggests the very impossibility of defining oneself as an autonomous subject with a discrete and impervious identity. Particularly illustrative of the unstable border between self and Other is Leo’s verbal reaction to the sight of his deceased double, urging She to “[c]over it up and take me away.” The statement is fraught with ambiguity through the unstable signifier, “me.” The remark can be read either as Leo’s wish to be removed from Kallikrates’ presence or as a desire for his dead self to be covered and taken away. The difficulty in differentiating between selves is likewise complicated when She implores Leo to observe “thine own departed self,” addresses him as Kallikrates, and comments on his “fear to touch himself.”

Such a confusion of self and Other, wrought by the analogous uncertainty between present and past, problematizes the gender binarism that also comes under assault in other ways. The Englishmen increasingly participate in She’s ritualistic culture; Holly’s simian appearance resembles
the devolutionary figure whom She finally becomes; Holly’s “distaste for the prolongation of [his] mortal span” (p. 297) is overcome by a desire to share She’s immortality; and the line between fantasy and reality becomes less and less distinct as quotidian events mimic the incomprehensibility and timelessness of dream states.

In response to She’s effects, the novel attempts to expel this transgressive figure and reinforce the gender divisions she has disturbed. Through her death, She is forced to submit to and be conquered by linear time and, inferentially, the men who determine its course through their control over human history. Though temporarily a disruptive presence, She is ultimately contained and her threat dispelled—an apposite end for the New Woman, as the text implies simply through this form of closure. In effect, then, She’s resolution elides the troubling questions the text has raised about the viability and stability of gender roles. In annihilating She and returning the travelers to the security of Cambridge, the novel concludes with the restoration of order. Even the hint that She will reappear, conveyed by Holly’s prescient supposition that “the end of this history... is not reached yet” (p. 316), serves not so much as a warning as a prediction that She as New Woman will again be brought under control and the presumed natural separation between the sexes reinscribed.

That prediction is indeed borne out in the 1904 Ayesha: The Return of “She.” To a certain extent, Ayesha replicates the thematic and structural maneuvers of She: a pronounced interest in history, launched by a frame narrative that compulsively positions Holly’s story as a historical account; the demonization of She as a disturbing divinity; and her trademark corpse-like appearance. In her latter incarnation, however, She progresses from the demon of the temple to the angel in the house. The potent She of the 1887 version becomes, in Ayesha, a chastened and submissive handmaiden. She’s metamorphosis from castrating virago to upholder of feminine virtues is “the most... thrilling of her many changes,” which will usher in a newfound passivity, delicacy, and superficiality. In repudiating masculine ambitions and accepting her “natural” role, Ayesha’s conversion suggests the desired and destined fate for the New Woman: “Ayesha grew human; I could... hear her breath come in soft, sweet sobs, while o’er her upturned face and in her alluring eyes there spread itself that look which is born of love alone. Radiant and more radiant did she seem to grow, sweeter and more sweet, no longer... the Valkyrie of the battleplain, but only the loveliest and most happy bride that ever gladdened a husband’s eyes. She spoke, and it was of little things, for thus she proclaimed the conquest of herself” (p. 179).

If we consider Ayesha as a “conclusion” rather than a “sequel” to She,
as Haggard did, the solution to the New Woman problem becomes two-fold: the goal is not simply to conquer her but to enlighten her. As She demonstrates, the New Woman must first be disempowered to neutralize her threat to society. Once patriarchal authority has been restored, she can be convinced of the error of her ways and recognize that the route to happiness rests not in being a “Valkyrie of the battleplain” but a comely bride. Only by internalizing and validating Victorian ideology can the New Woman truly be tamed, Ayesha suggests, and the gender binarism buttressing the doctrine of separate spheres reinforced. The New Woman cannot merely be defeated, then, but she must display, through a new interest in “little things,” that she has conquered herself.

NOTES

I wish to thank Dal Liddle and Heidi Johnson for their many valuable suggestions in reading earlier drafts of this essay.


8 Haggard, Elissa; or the Doom of Zimbabwe (New York: Longmans, Green, 1900), pp. 44, 111, 193.

9 Gilbert and Gubar, p. 7.


13 See Buckley and Gilmour for discussions of Victorian perceptions of history, as well as Hans Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), and Raymond Chapman, The Sense of the Past in Victorian Literature (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

15 For background information on the nature of Christian time, see Francis C. Haber, The Age of the World: Moses to Darwin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1959); Aspects of Time, ed. C. A. Patrides (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1976); and Hans Meyerhoff, The Philosophy of History in Our Time (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1959).


17 See Bowler, p. 135.

18 Gilbert and Gubar, p. 13. Other critics have also remarked on this connection. Stott argues, for example, that She is “a journey inside a female body” (p. 95), while David Bunn sees “the landscape becoming increasingly feminized and eroticized” (“Embodying Africa: Woman and Romance in Colonial Fiction,” EJA 15, 1 [May 1988]: 1–28, 19). Elaine Showalter offers an interesting variation on this interpretation, asserting that the Englishmen enter Kōr “as if it were a masculine body, through rear cave entrances into the ‘bowels of a great mountain’” (Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the “Fin de Siècle” [New York: Viking, 1990], p. 86).

19 Haggard, She (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), p. 1. All references are to this edition and are indicated parenthetically in the text.


21 Barri J. Gold offers an intriguing interpretation of this patriarchal lineage in “Embracing the Corpse: Discursive Recycling in H. Rider Haggard’s She,” ELT 38, 3 (1995): 305–27. In describing the “patriarchal parthenogenesis” of the frame narrative, an “insistent and repetitive removal of mother figures” that provides “a narrative of fathers giving birth to sons,” and the “emphasis on patrilineal” Vincey family, Gold argues that “traces of female progenitors…inseverable surface. In spite of their marginalization, the exceptional presence of these women always threatens the closure of the male genealogy” (pp. 306–8). In Rider Haggard (Boston: Twayne, 1984), Norman Etherington makes the useful observation that “[t]he only member of the family ignored in Haggard’s fiction is mother” (p. 89).

22 See, for example, discussions by Laura Chrisman (“The Imperial Unconscious? Representations of Imperial Discourse,” CritQ 32, 3 [Autumn 1990]: 38–58, 45), as well as Gilbert and Gubar. The latter critics additionally address She’s “alternative history,” along with the text’s “illusion of historicity” (p. 10) and the “self-reflexive historicity with which Haggard presents his tale” (p. 11). Critics have also pointed to the scholarly paraphernalia that Haggard employs to emphasize authenticity. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, comment on the novel’s “parodic scholarship” (p. 11). My specific interest is the gendered polarization of history and ahistoricity.


24 Haggard, Days, 1:251.

25 Haggard, Days, 1:252, 248. In The Annotated She (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), Etherington notes that Haggard rewrote descriptions of the potsherd to correspond to the fake one and revised a reference to one of the translations from “a little free but quite accurate” to “accurate and elegant” to reflect the assistance he gained from Andrew Lang in compiling the translation (p. 214).
27 Lang, p. 16.
28 Lang, p. 12.
29 Lang, pp. 42–3.
30 Lang, p. 32.
31 Lang, p. 15.
32 Ibid.
33 Lang, p. 34.
34 Lang, p. 20.
36 “Hee! Hee!” Punch (26 February 1887), pp. 100–1, 100.
37 “She,” The Saturday Review (8 January 1887), p. 44.
38 Lang, p. 63.
39 Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 86, 141. An article by Evelyn J. Hinz (“Rider Haggard’s She: An Archetypal ‘History of Adventure,’” SNNTS 4, 3 [Fall 1972]: 416–31) offers an interesting application of Eliade’s theories to She. Hinz’s reading, however, does not deal with gender. Instead, Hinz argues that the novel offers an “archetypal premise—that history repeats itself” and implies that “progress is decline, that ‘history’ is the fall” (p. 417). The voyage to She’s home thus represents a “basic mythological movement—the return to the beginning” (p. 420). Although I certainly agree that She is distinguishing between linear and cyclical notions of history, I argue that linear history is judged superior to a cyclical model.
40 Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 2, 1. Other critics have likewise found Orientalism useful in their analyses of She.
41 Said, p. 240.
42 Haggard was fascinated by Egypt and its classic civilization, claiming in The Days of My Life an understanding of Egyptians “from Menes down to the Ptolemaic period” (1:255). Feeling “at home” with “the old Egyptians” (1:255), Haggard considered Egypt his “greatest recreation to study” (2:158). He also wrote a series of articles on his visits to the country.
43 In drawing a similar distinction between the Amahagger and Egyptians, Chrisman makes the important point that an equation of the two would “preclude any exploration of what it is that should make imperial discourse so bivalent in its desires and fears about racial otherness” (p. 44). Orientalism, Chrisman notes, is “a divided and flexible construct” in the text, “not a monolith of otherness” (pp. 45, 46).
45 Two editions of She in particular provide helpful biblical references: Etherington’s The Annotated She and the Oxford World’s Classics 1991 version.
46 In his discussion of literary and pictorial representations, Bram Dijkstra observes that serpentine images were commonly used to depict women in the late century (Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986], p. 305), building on the familiar Lamia myth. To fin de siècle males, Lamia was “perfectly representative of the New Woman who, in their eyes, was seeking to arrogate to herself male privileges, refused the duties of motherhood, and was intent upon destroying the heavenly harmony of feminine subordination in the family” (p. 309).
47 See James Kissane’s article, “Victorian Mythology” (VS 6, 1 [September 1962]: 5–28), for a fascinating discussion of Victorian mythology. Noting an eclectic mix of mythological theories in the period, Kissane credits George Grote’s 1846 History of Greece with perhaps being the strongest influence on perception of myth, quoting Grote’s re-
mark that it is "a special product of the imagination and feelings, radically distinct both from history and philosophy" (p. 8). Also see Kissane for insights into the views of John Ruskin and Walter Pater cited below.

50 Qtd. in Kissane, p. 14.
53 See Sedgwick's first chapter, "The Structure of Gothic Conventions," pp. 9–36, for a discussion of these elements.
55 Stott, p. 115.
56 Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 21, 19.
62 See Eliade, p. 90.