



# Examining the Redefinition of Masculinity in New Imperial Discourse: H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*

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Nina Vasic

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One of the initial perplexing questions and themes explored in H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* is posed by the novel's main character Allen Quatermain when he asks, "what is a gentleman?" (Haggard 43). Quatermain's inquiry invites an exploration into redefining the term "gentleman" within the English mainstream consciousness towards the end of the 19th Century. However, what is more significant about his question, is the social and political time in which it was posed, which in 1885, the time the book was published, the British Empire was immersed in an "ideological fog" (Deane 8); while the details of the Bolyn Act were being mapped out to solidify European control over Africa, the abolitionist movement to end slavery was prevailing, and the aftermath of the Imperial Crisis lead to questioning the capability of the imperial army and manhood in general in England. It is precisely this last point about questioning manliness that Quatermain was addressing at the height of New Age Imperialism, and which in turn, is significant in initiating the imperial quest in the novel with the central paradox of the "crisis of masculinity" (Deane 6).

Due to the fact that Imperial Discourse towards the end of the nineteenth century saw its main struggle within the lack of an able military to uphold the empire, Haggard places the paradox of lost masculinity at the centre of his novel so that he is able to more appropriately redefine that masculinity. Ideologically speaking, Haggard's attempt to redefine masculinity in the social psyche of his time had real political and historical effects. Novels and stories, after all, are the fabric of culture – fabric that both shapes and is shaped by culture. It is no surprise that what we know as archetypical masculinity today was in part shaped by Haggard and the like in 19th Century England's Imperial Crisis.

Haggard achieves his redefinition of masculinity by empowering our Englishmen heroes, and consequently the story's protagonists, through: rewriting narratives of racial and generational gaps between the savage warriors, and the white Englishmen, thus allowing for the repressed white self to emerge; creating a space of automatic male dominance often without the class hierarchies found in white English society; placing greater value on savage traits in order to ideologically align the savage warrior to the white man; and using archetypical savage-warrior hybrids.

The first, and quite probably the most critical step, is to decrease the racial barrier which otherwise does not allow the savage to be a "model of new imperial masculinity" (Deane 3) nor the white man to freely identify with this newly established manly ideal. This Haggard achieves in an ideological and literary sense by describing the skin of Umbopa as "very light-coloured for a Zulu" (68), and "scarcely more than dark" (70) which lessens the physical and racial difference as well as brings him closer, in a Mid-Victorian evolutionary sense, with the lighter skinned people of England. Furthermore, the Kukuana soldiers are, in a similar way, described as "copper-coloured... [their] bod[ies]... in the attitude of a Grecian statue of a spear thrower" (Haggard 110), and their "chant" compared to that of "the old Greek" (Haggard 190). These references to Greek antiquity

and more specifically to Greek statues, which often depicted idealized bodies of Gods and warriors, can translate into the idealization of the Kukuana warriors and their relation in genealogy to past great Empires and Western civilizations which, again, defies racial boundaries. This initial alignment between the savage Kukuana people and the white men is what lead to their "joint ingenuity" (Haggard 163) in preparing for the Battle against Twala and also to their ability to fight "shoulder to shoulder in that great battle" (235). In both ways, the collaboration of dark and white demonstrated Haggard's removal of the racial wall of separation in order to wed the new imperial definition of masculinity with the savage warrior.

The next cross-identity barrier that lost world fiction breaks is what Deane saw as the "religious differences" (8) between the savage and the British, which expected certain behaviours from the civilized man's moral, Christian, and "gentleman" background. By placing greater value on the physical stature of men over their Christian morality (Deane 8), the valuable characteristics of masculinity shifted, allowing the white man to forgo his civilized past and the ability to transform into a savage (Brentlinger 162). For instance, during their journey, the trio was forced to "eat raw meat," a deed that Quatermain concludes was brought on by "hunger [which] made this proposition less distasteful than it would otherwise have been" (105). However, the "distastefulness" of the raw meat is less due to its actual flavor then to the repulsive act of eating raw meat itself because it is not seen as "civilized". In other words, the restraints on behavior that civilized society puts on men are "made...less" in Africa allowing the men the ability to become more like the savage and "do as the Kukuana's do" (Haggard 118). Similarly, Christian beliefs and practices are almost entirely written out of the text through the character of Quatermain who believes he is not "a first-rate praying man" (Haggard 86) and also through the trio's inclination to "than[k] [the] stars" (95) over any God or monolithic Christian divinity. Finally,

the lost world is constructed in a way that strictly reinforces masculine ideals by providing the trio who penetrate it an unquestioned and endless automatic dominance, a dominance that in England might be questioned or subordinate due to one's place on the scale of social hierarchy that dominated Victorian English social life (Brentlinger 153). In Africa, a white man's "utterances [are] met with a respect which has never been accorded to them before" (Haggard 174) shows the white man's ability to be a "real man" in this space, whereas in another he may be a subordinate citizen. To sum up, the new imperial man must be neither too religious nor too "fanciful" in new colonial settings but rather be open to adapting to the customs of the savage in certain ways and dropping civilized behaviour in others while the lost world itself provides the optimal space for the development of male power to occur and solidify itself.

Similarly, the generational barrier between the times of great empires and great men is broken in order to facilitate the alignment between the heroic trio and the great warriors and explorers of the old world (Deane 2). It was already an esteemed quality, in late nineteenth century England, due to Darwin's evolutionary theory, that the Englishman should be "establishing himself like his ancestors" (Kidd 35), mostly in order to aspire to the greatness of past Empires. The most notable example of this is when the trio discovers the three thousand year old, frozen body of the ancient explorer José de Silvestra, the only other man to ever make it across the mountains and into the mines and the felicitator of the trio's exploration. Silvestra is read as a person of legend and his superior masculine traits are outlined in his manly "aquiline features, grizzled hair... [and] long black moustache" (Haggard 102). Furthermore, not only does the discovery of the Dom's physical body serve as imagery for the flattening of time, but so too does Quatermain taking and later using the same cleft bone (Haggard 102) that Silvestra used to draw the map to the mountains. The alignment of Quatermain to the Dom solidifies his

status as being part of a genealogical line of explorers and manly men, a narrative to which he is naturally written into. Furthermore, the trio's decision to leave behind the deceased Ventvögel with the "proud white man" (Haggard 101, 103) provides an imaginary erasing of time and racial disparities between generations of explorers. Ultimately, this leveling out of historic time writes the "grand narratives of progress" in a way so as to highlight a seemingly universal and "timeless model of imperial character" (Deane 3) through emphasizing all of the men as paradigms of masculinity and exploration through their genealogical connectedness.

Furthermore, the remnants of the great Old World are tied to the Kukuana's and the character of Sir Henry Curtis to reveal a theme in the lost world genre that outlines the "greatness of lost cultures," and the impotence of time (Deane 11). Thus, the sequestered region beyond Sheeba's breaths is viewed as a "paradise," with an "extraordinary" and "gigantic" (Haggard 108) nature and a "luminous beauty" (107), just like the empires that came to define it. In fact, the trio therefore does not at all find it odd that they should encounter "a sort of Roman road" or the "art... of Egyptian handiwork" (108) in the "heart of darkness" only because this piece of land is defined by great ancient Empires. Similarly, Henry's manliness is demonstrated through his connection to the "ancient Dane" that he so remarkably resembles (Haggard 127) and furthermore by his shouting which sounds just "like his Bersekir forefathers" (183). Thus, the setting, the character Sir Henry, along with, as previously outlined, the Kukuana warriors, are shown to have close ties with the antique which not only transcends the barriers of space and time but are used as the "image of the grandeur and transience of forgotten empires" (Deane 11) to which all men should aspire.

So it is that, once all the barriers of identity are eradicated, the novel begins to "dramatized encounters with such manly races" (Deane 9) and emphasizes the barbaric

and ancient qualities of men (Deane 2), the same primitive traits that Darwin saw as "serviceable" and useful (33), and which came to define the new imperial masculinity as having a savage instinct, military discipline and great physical stature. In fact, the conditioning of military men started in England, as Hyam points out, post-imperial crisis, with the reformation of the school system to include "games" to promote male-to-male relationships, physical fitness and competitiveness (Hyam 73). In the novel, the Kukuana's valued "running [which] was an exercise much practiced" (Haggard 119) to build stamina while the trio "hunt" as a game right before their "real" (Haggard 79) journey begins in order to hone their skills of sharp shooting, relentless killing and silently approaching the pray – which later prove to be practical and applicable skills in the battle scene. Moreover, the trio's stamina is without a doubt tested when they become "utterly worn out in body and mind" (Haggard 91), in order to prove their remarkable strength and endurance, which is what Darwin suggested leads to the "success of the English colonists" (Darwin 34), but also their power to commit their mind, body and soul to one collective goal. Likewise, the setting provides the optimum space for the men to portray and use their strength and endurance through snowy mountains to hot desert, the extremes meant to emulate the need to be "trained for the rivalry of life in the strenuous conflict with nature" (Kidd 38). Therefore, after the imperial crisis, England started to redefine masculinity in order to empower men to fulfill their role as colonizers, Haggard adds the additional role of admiring the primitive man's stamina, perfection of skill and having a collective goal to fulfill, what Kipling called, "The White Man's Burden."

Furthermore, the imperial recruitment campaign at work in this text is further depicted by the need to reform the masculine to possess an instinctive desire to kill, just like the savage. For this, Haggard employs a reoccurring image of blood in a way that glorifies and justifies savage ways, like the water that turned to the same "temperature as

a man's blood" (90) that the trio, just like the raw meat, drinks out of necessity or the illusion of the "flying rays of light" that "stained the snow red... with a diadem of glory" (99). In other words, the imagery of drinking blood water and the admiration that blood stained land depicts, glorifies and emulates the savage customs of cannibalism and the relentless killing in order to attain land, power and control. The savage's blood-thirsty instinct to kill is in a similar way used to demonstrate the ideal militaristic state of mind that men should uphold while in battle while, the imperial hero, Quatermain, proves that any man is capable of possessing this instinct. This is evident when he undergoes the transformation from a "modest" (Haggard 48), "cautious" (59), and "timid" (41) man, indeed a man of "peace, and a bit of a coward" (138) to having a "blood-thirsty finish to [his] appearance" (167), and to feeling his "bosom burn with martial ardour... [his] blood... beating through [his] veins, and... [finally] a savage desire to kill" (182). The suggestion that not only can the modest, every day Englishman possess these savage traits, but that they overcome him, make his blood boil and possess him in a way that is dark and uncanny because it has hitherto been repressed. Indeed, through these glorified images of blood Haggard is trying to show that the "instincts these wild-bred men possess" is not only "wonderful" (Haggard 93) but something that should be imitated and admired.

The male physical body came to be similarly redefined in order to fit this new need for stamina, endurance and military capability, which is best shown through Sir Henry Curtis and his superior masculine body which ultimately makes him the hero of the text. This archetypal romance adventure hero's stature and strength are aligned both to the ancient warriors and the Kukuana's, none of which "[is] under six feet in height" (Haggard 119). Similarly, Sir Henry's manliness is exposed through him being "one of the biggest-chested men... [with] a big yellow beard,... a low, deep voice,... magnificent physique... [and] enormous strength" (Haggard 46, 167, 225) and one who the ancient "magic coats"

fit "like a glove" (140). Thus, height, facial hair, physical strength and a broad chest is what makes men ideally masculine, while Quatermain, for example, struggles with inadequate "grizzled scrub...an inch long" (127). Sir Henry's heroic status further emphasizes Haggard's vision of the ideal new imperial man through the clear hybridity of Sir Henry's war uniform – the chain armor of the Old World, the axe and feathers of the Kukuana's along with the English rifle (167) – Haggard "maintains a sharp division between savage and civilized" (Brentlinger 161) because the savage within the white man is valuable insofar as his military skills, after which point the savage is reinserted in his proper place on the racial hierarchy allowing the white man to remain inevitably superior.

Above all, the trait that is most valuable to the new imperial man and one that the savage Kukuana's display again and again, is that of duty and honour in death for one's King. At the heart of battle, although the noble savage Infadoos' military strategy creates a death sentence for his men, they are upheld in highest esteem because they show the truth of their bravery by "never hesitat[ing]" and showing no fear (Haggard 175) regardless of their doomed fate. Hence, honour, courage and bravery at the hands of duty makes it less horrific (Haggard 175) and what is more, is that Haggard is clearly using imperial propaganda within his text to promote the "duty" and "honour" in dying for one's country. This concept, however, was not unique to Haggard but rather, was becoming very common in the new imperial era; Kipling for example calls on England to "[s]end forth the best ye breed" (line 2, 326) and the imperial man to "check the show of pride" (11-2, 326). Similarly, the Kukuana army utilizes "every able-bodied man [as] a soldier... the whole force of the nation is available for the wars" (Haggard 124) which means they not only send their best men, but every able man to fight. Moreover, King Leopold II encouraged his men's loyalty by referring to how they "gallantly sacrificed their lives in the performance of their duty" (Leopold II 106) with a "strong sense of the career of honour"



(107). However, the greater duty yet, may be the duty to bring light to the darkness of savage customs by introducing trade, commerce and industry, which Kidd claims is more powerful than the sword (Kidd 39) and which Sir Henry fulfills when the battle against Twala is won. Nevertheless, all these men, including Haggard, used stimulating diction and images to glorify militarism as manly and one's rightful path. Haggard still puts it best, that in time of battle his heroes fought for "dear life, and dearer honour" (Haggard 189), which from an ideological standpoint, ultimately makes the honour to fight "dearer" and more important than an individual's life, promoting a man's ultimate sacrifice to empire for "honour".

Haggard employs a number of military propaganda tactics, including the destruction of racial, religious and genealogical borders, and admirable savage warriors that are mimicked by the white men, throughout his exploration of a new male identity within the context of a post-imperial crisis British Empire. The need to redefine masculinity was utterly essential at this point in time when the British Empire saw that the military was an essential component of empire building, but also that this was what they lacked. Indeed, the definition of primitive masculinity is summed up by what Deane saw as Quatermain's critical point of view; "He who kills not when his blood is hot is a woman, and no man... [t]he people who kill not are slaves" (13). Overall, lost world fiction promoted ideologies and narratives of empire and gender, which define social and military life not just then, but the world as we know it today.

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