

## Haggard's Art and Craft of Fiction

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Although Haggard amused the Victorian, Edwardian and Georgian readers by his thrilling and adventurous novels and romances dealing with foreign lands, he was deficient in the art of plot-construction. His contemporary novels of ordinary life and his romance suffer alike from loose and diffuse plots, which have not casual connections. Haggard was a fascinating story teller, who mostly relied on the technique of first person narration. The thrilling adventures in foreign lands. The anecdotes and the psychic and mystic aura of ancient religions and cultures are interspersed in the narration given in the first person by an adventure. Haggard liked to disguise his personality under his favourite narrator, Allan Quatermain.

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**By his own confession he is a man of gun, not the pen, and he finds difficulty in giving his tale. The sophistication and polish he feels it demands. In this context, the readers are fully prepared to overlook and amount of stylistic coarseness, a degree of bluntness in the manner of telling the story.**<sup>1</sup>

By 1887 when Allan Quatermain appeared, The character of this hunting hero had become a favourite with Haggard, who used him not only for story telling in the first person in most of his romances, but also for ventilating his views on British imperialism and the character of English men vis-a-vis the Zulus and other primitive tribes. For example, Allan Quatermain extols the Zulu girl Mameena in 'child of storm' 1913 and emphatically asserts that she was different from all other women he had come across Quatermain adds:

**This beautiful girl with 'The five 14 her hear', This woman who was different from all other woman I had ever known, seemed to have twisted her slender fingers into my heart strings and to be drawing in towards her.'**<sup>2</sup>

Let us now examine the salient features of characterization in Haggard's novels and romances. Haggard lavishes more care on his hero than on his subordinates, be he a Quatermain or his extended substitute. The real made protagonist is very often a narrator, who is more developed than his youthful companion. Some companions of the hero are, however forcefully drawn. They are valiant and dutiful native servants of the hero, for example:

**Umslopogaas, with his great and deadly axe, is himself an heroic figure and his body rests, after the last and finest of all his figures, at the top of the great staircase of the city of Milosis. The Hottentots is different, combining loyalty into death with more comic qualities with a certain degree of knavery and pronounced liking for the bottles. He is a grotesque and attractive rascal.'**<sup>3</sup>

Rider Haggard was more successful in the characterization of women. There is an infinite variety of women in his novels and romances. Broadly speaking, Rider's heroines may be classified under three heads: (1) the romantic heroines discernible in novels and romances. (2) The shadowy or secondary heroines, who emerge successful at the close of the book and the hero reconciles him with the type as a last report. (3) The third type of heroine is the super-natural or the super human woman.

The first type of romantic heroine is generally found in the novels of ordinary life, which we have examined in chapter-III. They are often talented and beautiful maidens, who come to tragic and because of their greedy and mischievous or political minded guardians, who stubbornly marry them to wealthy, undesirable and villainous suitors. These romantic heroines are overtaken by chance or fate and eventually meet sudden or violent death.

The second type of heroine remains undeveloped and moves in the shadows of the tale' in the early chapters. She comes before us towards the end of the book, when the hero has

lost the heroine he loves, and he is prepared to reconcile himself with this type, the second best.

In the romance of Haggard we come across the third type of heroine, who is a superhuman woman with eternal life, heavenly beauty and psychic or mystic wisdom. for instance, she-who-must-be-obeyed in the 'Ayesha' in "Ayesha : The Return of she" and "Wisdom's daughter" come in this category.

The techniques of the novels of ordinary life like those of "Jess", "Joan Haste" etc. has already been discussed in chapter III. Although Haggard was a romancer with abundant creative imagination, he gives ample evidence of realism in his novels of ordinary life. Being deeply interested in agriculture and in preventing serial exodus and being skilled in law, rider was not an empty dreamer. He vacillated between the world of affairs and the world of creative literature they never fully accepted merely. The world of romance neither was he quite comfortable in the world of realism. That is why he intersperses some mystic or psychic elements in the realistic novels of ordinary life.

He is deficient in human. Being a failure in his love-affair and possessed of a reflective and sad temperament he failed miserably as a humorist even in his realistic novels.

As regards the techniques of his romances, several critics have praised their fascinating and thrilling stories and episodes, but almost all of them complain of their loose and prolix structure and crude and involved style. Haggard is, no doubt, a skilled master in conjuring up the appropriate atmosphere of foreign lands, but in regards of his yarns, he is monotonous and tiring. Haggard did a great service in reflecting. The zulu atmosphere beautifully and sympathetically in his romance.

Rider believes like Sir Walter Scott in ancient and medieval romance and the world of chivalry, but he differs from scott in not choosing England or any period of English History for projecting his romantic imagination. Rider has been successful in giving a new colour to us otherwise old and conventional work of medieval romance. Scott projected the present into the past, but Rider amalgamates. The past cultures with the quest of Englishmen

of his age. Thus Rider 'Victorianizes' his romances. A detailed picture is given below.

**In the geographical sense the world that Haggard creates is new, but it is actually the old, conventional world of the medieval romance adapted to modern tastes and contemporary attitudes. The knight in his romances is at the centre not in shining armor but in a flannel suit from New Band Street, carrying not a spear and shield but a Winchester rifle.**<sup>4</sup>

In the end let us examine the charges against the style of his romances. Although some other critics have also pointed out defects in Haggard's literary style. Norton Cohen is very devastating when he examines its critique. It is true, that Haggard's style suffers from cumbersome sentence structure, which are unnecessarily involved. He is prolix and too often he uses personification. After the perusal of "she" Andrew Lang was of opinion that the romance suffered from hasty execution the added.

**I'd like to see it polished up a bit and made more worthy of the imagination in it.**<sup>5</sup>

Despite, The demerits of literary style, Haggard's romance are forcefully vivid. the reader feels the 'wildly impossible' seeming 'possible'. This is due to the fact. Haggard lived in the world he created. The romancer according to Rider should share the impulses and emotions of the hero or heroine that the creates. He adds:.

**He (The Romance Writer) must share every hope and care of those whom he begets-the rich, low voice of Ayesha must thrill his nerves; he must discern her unearthly 'beauty' and look into the mingled grandeurs of her blasted soul."**<sup>6</sup>

Whatever might be said against Rider's style, the truth remains that he was a successful novelist and romancer. He cannot be dismissed simply as an escapist writing fantasies. Beresford aptly remarks in this connection:

**.....he was a successful novelist whose work stands out from his contemporary's not just as good escapist literature mere romantic fantasy but as serious exercise into man's nature and the evolution of the universe.**<sup>7</sup>

To sum up, rider has enchanted the Victorians Edwardian and Georgian readers for many year,

the witch Gagool screaming as the rock-door closed and crushed her, Eric Brighteyes fighting his doomed battle, the death of the tyrant chaka, Umslopogaas holding the queen's stairway in Milosis, these pictures in his romances remain indelible from the surface of memory even today. Henry Miller is undoubtedly right when he remarked.

### References

1. Morton Cohen, Op. Cit., p. 115.
2. Sir Henry Rider Haggard, Child of storm, 1952, P.72.
3. The London Mercury, P.77.
4. Morton Cohen, pp.219-20.
5. 1 bid.p.181.
6. Lilies Rider Haggard, p.208.
7. Peter Beresford Ellis, p.11.
8. Henry Miller (Vide the cover note of the World's Desire.)

**Rider Haggard is one of those imaginative writers who undoubtedly feed from many streams..... Perhaps only when our scientific explorers and investigators stumble upon the truths recalled through imagination will be recognize the true stature of such a writer.**