

Tolkien's further indebtedness to Haggard

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Tom Shippey's guest Editorial in *Mallorn* 45 calls for more investigation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors who influenced Tolkien. My entry on this topic for Routledge's *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment* documents Tolkien's acknowledgement of Sir Henry Rider Haggard's *She* as an influence and Tolkien's appreciation for the Viking romance *Eric Brighteyes*, and records parallels in Tolkien's fantasy with elements from five additional Haggard stories, namely *King Solomon's Mines*, *Ayesha: The Return of She*, *Heu-Heu or The Monster*, *The Treasure of the Lake* and the short tale 'Long Odds.' I've found evidence in at least two further books for Haggard's influence on Tolkien's fiction. Any particular example could be coincidental, but enough parallels exist between Haggard's romances and Tolkien's fantasy that many readers will be ready to affirm that reference to 'major influence' is justified.

The climax of Haggard's 1892 historical adventure *Montezuma's Daughter* contains a surprise for admirers of *The Lord of the Rings* — a scene in which protagonist and enemy come together at last at the edge of a volcano, and the tale's cunning and evil antagonist struggles with an invisible attacker before falling into the crater. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum overtakes Frodo at the Cracks of Doom and tackles the invisible hobbit, desperate to take the Ring of Power from him, and clutches the Ring for one appalling moment before he falls into the flames. But two generations earlier, as Haggard's villain de Garcia is about to fight a final duel with the hero, Wingfield, the former loses his reason:

He seemed to perceive me no more, [Wingfield writes,] but nevertheless he fought, and desperately, thrusting at the empty air. It was terrible to see him thus doing battle with his invisible foes, and to hear his screams and curses, as inch by inch they drove him back to the edge of the crater. Here he stood a while, like one who makes a last stand against overpowering strength, thrusting and striking furiously. Twice he nearly fell, as though beneath a mortal wound, but recovering himself, fought on with Nothingness. Then, with a sharp cry, suddenly he threw his arms wide, as a man does who is pierced to the heart; his sword dropped from his hand, and he fell backwards into the pit.

I turned away my eyes, for I wished to see no more; but often I have wondered Who or What it was that dealt de Garcia his death wound.

Wingfield suspects that a Higher Power reserved this fate for de Garcia, whereas readers of *The Lord of the Rings* will recall remarks by Gandalf and Frodo about Gollum having some fateful part to play before all is done.

The great event in the War of the Ring that occurs before

the hour at Mount Doom is the siege of Minas Tirith. The defenders retreat towards the Citadel. Fires "rage unchecked in the first circle of the City" (*The Lord of the Rings* p. 806; Houghton Mifflin single-volume paperback, 2001). Sauron's forces attack the gate with the colossal battering ram, Grond. Chapter 34 of *Montezuma's Daughter*, 'The Siege of the City of Pines,' describes how Wingfield and a desperate remnant of Aztecs are besieged by the Spaniards. They bar themselves inside the city and prepare a 'great trench' and barricades that will retard the advance of the Spanish soldiers when they have breached the city walls. The Aztecs and Wingfield make their final defence at the high *teocalli* or temple. Two great moments in Haggard's novel — the large-scale siege; the harrowing fight of individuals at the volcano — are paralleled by the two great moments in Tolkien's account of the War of the Ring.

Montezuma's Daughter may have influenced Tolkien's writing of *The Hobbit* as well. Early in the story (Ch. 12), Wingfield leaps from a ship in order to get away from de Garcia and his cronies. He avoids drowning and drifts ashore by inserting himself in a floating barrel half-filled with discarded rotten meal cakes. The episode naturally reminds us of how Bilbo engineered his own and the dwarves' escape from the woodland Elves by means of empty provision barrels that are floated on the river. This was one of the *Hobbit* episodes that Tolkien painted. One of the other paintings is the memorable picture of the dragon Smaug wrapped around the stolen Dwarf treasures, with the Arkenstone glittering in the darkness. *Montezuma's Daughter* contains a chapter titled 'The Burying of Montezuma's Treasure.' Wingfield and his Aztec friends resolve to hide precious gems, and a gleaming 'golden head of Montezuma' with emerald eyes, in a secret chamber before this wealth can be found and carried off by the conquistadores. At one point, a traitor is executed and, when his body is flung on the heap, his arms seem to encircle two jars of valuables. If Tolkien read this book, his depiction of Smaug, the hoard and the Arkenstone, could be indebted to Haggard.

Another New World adventure by Haggard, *Heart of the World* (1895), may have influenced critical elements of Tolkien's plotting of the story of *The Lord of the Rings*. Let's pause to recollect that the evidence of his comments and manuscripts is that Tolkien did not set out to write the 'new Hobbit' story with a plot outline at hand or even a strong desire to write another hobbit adventure. His publisher did not want to follow *The Hobbit* with some version of the Silmarillion materials; Unwin wanted a sequel. I would argue that this situation put Tolkien under pressure that was bound to nudge him towards the conscious or, more likely, unconscious use of elements of adventure fiction that he liked.

Readers of Christopher Tolkien's presentation of his father's

drafts (in *The History of Middle-earth*) have marked what a protracted effort was necessary before Tolkien resolved who ‘Trotter’ was. For a long time, this mysterious stranger, encountered by Frodo and his companions at Bree, was a hobbit who wore wooden shoes. Tolkien tried stubbornly to make this conception work, but could not remain content with it. It took him more than a year (summer 1938 to autumn 1939) to arrive at the conception, instead, of Strider. Christina Scull’s essay ‘What Did He Know and When Did He Know It? Planning, Inspiration, and *The Lord of the Rings*’ traces the phases of Tolkien’s struggle (in *The Lord of the Rings, 1954–2004: Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder* pp. 101–112 (especially 105–107), eds Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, Marquette University Press, 2006).

The Strider-Aragorn plot is truly fundamental to the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* as we have it. Who would have guessed, reading *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954–55 when the book was first published, that this plot was not a part of the story from the time Tolkien began to write? The weather-beaten Ranger is actually Aragorn, the heir of the sword that was broken and the hidden true king of the now-declining realm of Gondor; he is the king whose triumph gives the third volume, *The Return of the King*, its title. Having at some time read Rider Haggard’s *Heart of the World* may have helped Tolkien to drop the wooden-shoed Trotter and develop this much more promising cluster of ideas.

Heart of the World supposes that thousands of years ago, according to legend, the white hero Quetzal, who bore on his brow a carved emerald, brought civilization to the Indians of Mexico and Guatemala. Then he sailed away, having promised to return, but leaving the green stone behind. After his departure, civil war broke out and the stone was divided. One half eventually came, centuries later, to the last Aztec emperor, Guatemoc, and then was passed on through the generations until it came to Guatemoc’s descendant, Ignatio, the narrator of Haggard’s novel, when his father was near death (Ch. 1, Ch. 4).

Ignatio, a Roman Catholic, learned that he is the rightful ruler of the Indians, and that, as bearer of the talisman, he will be recognized as such by a secret brotherhood and may command much treasure. It is believed that “when the two halves of this stone come together, the men of white blood will be driven from Central America and an Indian emperor shall rule.” However, his attempt to raise a rebellion against the land’s modern rulers come to nothing because of betrayal. Ignatio lost the treasure and “became a wanderer” for many years, despised for his apparent poverty and because of his race (Ch. 1). Yet it remains Ignatio’s dream to see the two halves of the Heart-gem reunited and to bring about the rise of an “Indian empire — Christian, regenerated, and stretching from sea to sea” (Ch. 4). (Ignatio does not envisage Quetzal’s return.)

Ignatio learns that the capital of the ancient pagan empire still exists on an island in the interior (Ch. 4). It turns out that

this city, called ‘Heart of the World’, is ruled by chiefs, the chief in Ignatio’s time being an old man, the pagan high priest Zibilbay; when Zibilbay set out on a quest, in his absence his nephew Tikal was in charge. (There is, then, a multiple stewardship theme here: the great Quetzal has gone away, to return someday when a white man shall appear; for centuries the city has been ruled by chiefs who are descendants of the last Aztec king, Guatemoc — or by their stewards, such as Zibilbay, or even by a steward’s steward, such as Tikal.) Zibilbay had heard a voice in a dream that told him to “wander forth from the country of the Heart [to] find that which was lost” (Ch. 11). Zibilbay bears the other half of Ignatio’s stone.

Eventually, Ignatio and his friend, the white miner James Strickland, join Zibilbay and his daughter Maya and journey to the ancient city. It is built of “snow-white stone, whereon the light gleamed and flashed” (Ch. 14). However, only “a few — a very few — children” may be seen (Ch. 15). The once mighty population has “dwindled to a few thousands”; they are “perishing as, in a season of drought, flowers perish for lack of rain, bringing forth no seed” (Ch. 11). The city is falling into dilapidation, with tree roots pushing aside the centuries-old masonry. When Ignatio and the others arrive there, they find that Tikal has usurped the throne. Eventually, however, Maya and Strickland marry and she bears a son. (In writing the novel, Haggard may have intended to bring forward Strickland as Quetzal returned, but he didn’t follow through with this plot element.)

Tolkien’s Aragorn, of course, passed many years in which his rightful kingship was unknown and he was the wanderer, Strider. Before he is revealed to Boromir as Isildur’s heir at Rivendell, Aragorn takes time to advise Bilbo about the importance of a green stone, an emerald, upon the brow of Eärendil, and he himself bears a green stone, presumably the same one, as king (*LOTR* 227, 231, 960). However, the broken object associated with Aragorn is not a stone but the sword Narsil. The broken sword is essential to the verse that a voice cries in the quest-inciting dreams of Faramir and Boromir, who are not stewards like Zibilbay, but are sons of a steward (*LOTR* 239–240).

Aragorn is heir to the throne of Gondor at the white city of Minas Tirith, whose steward, Denethor, is unwilling to give place to the rightful ruler. The ancient capital has become a forlorn place, “falling year by year into decay”. Only half of the men who “could have dwelt at ease there” remain (*LOTR* 736). Beregon tells Pippin that “there were always too few children in this city; but now there are [nearly] none” (*LOTR* 747). Although Gondor, unlike the city called Heart of the World, does not suffer from drought and the resulting death of flowers, the White Tree of Minas Tirith is dead (*LOTR* 736). As king, Aragorn plants a new seed, and his marriage to Arwen promises the birth of children. These deeds are signs of the coming renewal of Minas Tirith and Gondor.

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great city, indeed of a great realm, which perished beneath the Great Wave at the end of the Second Age because of the sacrilege of its impious king in defying the Ban of the Valar, as Tolkien tells in the *Akallabêth*. At the end of *Heart of the World*, the city is overwhelmed by a great flood, set in motion by its vengeful, despairing queen, the impious Maya (she acted thus because Tikal murdered her infant son) (Ch. 25). In both books, the watery destruction of a beautiful island city is the doom following upon a horrendous, even sacrilegious, act. I don't ignore Tolkien's references, in his letters, to his dream, recurrent since childhood, of the Great Wave, nor do I contend that this dream had its origin in a youthful reading of *Heart of the World*; but one might conjecture that the drowning of the city in the Haggard book would be especially likely to impress someone already dreaming of a catastrophic wave. Perhaps Haggard's book — as well as Plato's Atlantis myth — contributed the detail of the drowned city, to fill out and help to provide a literary use for the 'Great Wave.'

Incidentally, before the main story with Zibilbay, Maya, and the lost city is well under way, Ignatio and Strickland have an adventure that might have contributed its own element to Tolkien's Bree episode. Fearing for their lives, Ignatio and Strickland, uneasy guests of the ill-reputed Don Pedro, hide behind a false panel shown them by a servant girl at the hacienda. Sure enough, at night six men enter the room where Ignatio and Strickland are presumed to be sleeping, and murderously slash at the bedclothes with swords and knives (Ch. 9). Readers of *The Lord of the Rings* might wonder if this sequence contributed to the incident of the Black Riders attacking the beds where they think the hobbits are resting. One wonders: supposing that the Ringwraith ambush here owes something to the Haggard episode, does that help to explain why the Ringwraiths are still, at this point in Tolkien's writing, less appallingly horrifying than they later become? Does their country-inn cutthroat behaviour reflect a bit too plainly the derivation of the incident from Haggard's tale? The Black Riders have already appeared before the hobbits reach Bree, but maybe Tolkien would have developed their dreadfulness sooner, as he toiled at the book, if not for the 'convenience' of using them as assassins in a 'revision' of the Haggard scene. At any rate one must acknowledge that the Riders at Bree "are not the menace they later become", as Tom Shippey notes in *The Road to Middle-earth*.

"The invention of languages [was] the foundation" for his serious literary fantasy, Tolkien wrote in 1955. 'The 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse' (*Letters* 219). In this oft-quoted passage, Tolkien implied that he was *not* like many an author who has orally told or written stories ever since childhood. His imagination did not teem with characters and incidents. He did not, one surmises, carry a notebook in which to jot down the ideas that were always presenting themselves as germs of possible stories.

If, then, Tolkien often drew, probably without realizing it, on Haggard for plot materials, may we venture to say more than that he did so because both authors wrote adventure stories? I believe that we can. Haggard would appeal to Tolkien

not only as an adventure-romance writer, but because of the importance, in some of his fiction, of love and suffering, subjects that mattered greatly to the professor.

For example, in Haggard's medieval adventure story *Red Eve* (1911), we have a love story complicated by the haughtiness and hostility of a father who opposes his daughter's desire to marry the hero, as well as by war, arduous journeys, treachery and the supernatural. There are feats of skill with weapons, the fellowship of comrades-in-arms, disguises, separation of the lovers, and narrow escapes before, at last, the lovers are united. The author of the Beren and Lúthien, and Aragorn and Arwen stories would be likely, I suppose, to find that *Red Eve* engaged his interest. As regards suffering, *Red Eve* and *Montezuma's Daughter* brood upon matters such as lack of sleep, water or food; repeated disappointment; grief at parting from the beloved; injury and sheer physical weariness, and so on. Suffering is basic to what the hero experiences in some of Haggard's tales. That the same is true of much of Tolkien's fantasy throughout the half-century of its creation probably does not require demonstration here — but be it noted that the treatment of the heroes' sufferings is one of the things that set Tolkienian fantasy apart from most modern fantastic fiction. What importance does *suffering* have in the plots of William Morris, Lord Dunsany, E. R. Eddison, and other modern fantasists before Tolkien? For that matter, where is the realistic depiction of weariness, hardship and suffering in Malory and the Icelandic sagas? When we think of these narratives, do we remember their protagonists as being men who suffered much? Hugh, the hero of *Red Eve*, says in the last chapter, "I wonder has ever man borne a heavier burden for all this weary while?" Frodo might have said something like that — but the typical hero of modern adventure fiction or fantasy would not say it. Such expressions do not diminish the heroism of Haggard's and Tolkien's heroes.

I'm not suggesting that Haggard's plots provided Tolkien with a template for his own, but it seems as though Tolkien's invention of plots (as well as his deployment of many descriptive and narrative details) probably was enabled to a significant degree by his absorption of work by the earlier writer. It's a commonplace of Tolkien criticism to allude to bits from Haggard's *She* as influencing Tolkien and to suppose that Gagool (in *King Solomon's Mines*) had something to do with Gollum. Such passing comments are inadequate as acknowledgement of the probable importance of Haggard for Tolkien. M

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