

SHE: A History of Adventure

H. Rider Haggard

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She, subtitled A History of Adventure, is a novel by Henry Rider Haggard, first serialized in The Graphic magazine from October 1886 to January 1887. She is one of the classics of imaginative literature, and with over 83 million copies sold in 44 different languages, one of the best-selling books of all time. Extraordinarily popular upon its release, She has never been out of print. According to the literary historian Andrew M. Stauffer, "She has always been Rider Haggard's most popular and influential novel, challenged only by King Solomon's Mines in this regard". The story is a first-person narrative that follows the journey of Horace Holly and his ward Leo Vincey to a lost kingdom in the African interior. There, they encounter a primitive race of natives and a mysterious white queen, Ayesha, who reigns as the all-powerful "She", or "She-who-must-be-obeyed". In this work, Rider Haggard developed the conventions of the Lost World subgenre, which many later authors emulated. She is placed firmly in the imperialist literature of nineteenth-century England, and inspired by Rider Haggard's experiences of South Africa and British colonialism. The story expresses numerous racial and evolutionary conceptions of the late-Victorians, especially notions of degeneration and racial decline prominent during the fin de siècle. In the figure of She, the novel notably explored themes of female authority and feminine behaviour. It has received praise and criticism alike for its gendered representation of womanhood.

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