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Department of Language and Culture

## **These Monstrous, Decadent New Women**

Exploring the Death of Dangerous Femininities in the Fin de Siècle

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## Abstract

Engagement with the Gothic often brings readers into the realms of the unknown and that which is difficult to represent. In this thesis, I intend to convey to you the fin de siècle's fascination with representing powerful women as monstrous, something that was analogous with the representations of the New Woman. Whilst there has been much research and discussions around the subject of gender in late Victorian Gothic literature, not much has been said for the reasoning behind the killing of *powerful* women in such literature. The body of this work will thus engage with various of the dominant themes present in the literature of the late nineteenth century, including the changing faces of feminism, themes of decadence and abjection, the Gothic uncanny and exoticism.

In this thesis, I will outline the systems that denounced such powerful women as H. Rider Haggard's Ayesha in *She*, and Arthur Machen's Helen Vaughan in *The Great God Pan*, as evil and brought them to their deaths. By exploring these unstable gender representations on an individual and collective level, we will be able to draw connections between such fears of woman represented in Gothic literature with the very real fears of invasion, and by extension, identity crisis that the turn of the century heralded in Britain.



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# 1 Introduction

This thesis will be an enlightening project in the realms of the Gothic and the feminine, in a profound look into the fin de siècle's rise of the New Woman and their depiction in the fiction of the time in Great Britain. The primary texts we will engage with in this thesis are H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894). The thesis will therefore open up a space for dialogue within the ongoing discussions revolving around gender studies, particularly surrounding the feminine in literature.

The decade leading into the turn of the century proved to be one of challenges and many of these challenges were reflected in the texts of that time. Aligning my reading with the Gothic genre, I will use this thesis to explore the perceptions of the Victorian feminine through a definition of the Gothic defined by Fred Botting as "a writing of excess" (1) with a focus on "morality and monstrosity" (14), which led the genre to be one that strayed far enough from realism to offer an escapist route but retained enough realism to still be used a social commentary. As such, the Gothic as a space to visit the taboo and transgression thus offers the grounds for authors to engage with challenging issues surrounding the anxieties of the time, such issues of historicity, sexuality, and gender.

Conversations surrounding gender representations of the late nineteenth century have frequently called upon the social anxieties and nightmares that were mirrored in the fiction of the time, notably in the Gothic, exploring "deep-seated fears (especially masculine ones)" (Stansell 470) but in literary studies, there is not so much mention of the signification of the killing of women, particularly *powerful* women in the texts of this time. I intend therefore to address the liminal space within the Gothic which engages with the feminine, especially since not much has been said for the killing of female characters in late Victorian literature. This way, we can explore how dismissing female promiscuity and sexual expression as evil and transgressive thus legitimises the need for the male protagonists' endeavour to eliminate the women. But even more so, how fear of female transgression relates to a social anxiety that marks a nation's fears of invasion and corruption. This is where I will draw my ideas from fields as far as orientalism and degeneration to explore these *novel* fears of the time.

As new views of the feminine and gender emerged, new ideas also arose in retaliation to the threats that presented themselves to contemporary society of the time. The rise of the

New Woman, with its promises of empowerment and autonomy only threatened the self-established values of Victorian Britain. Whilst this gave birth to novel ideas regarding what defines a woman and the reassertion of feminine perspectives in history and literature, resulting in a particularly new brand of the Gothic fiction even, the female Gothic (Wallace 1), it also led to problematic relations between the prominent novelists of the time and the reception of their works. It is for this reason that I have chosen to look at two male authors writing two novels with female-oriented themes within their works, as opposed to looking solely at the works of such authors as Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters, whose works reflected the Gothic and the feminine from a lived experience. By positioning the works of Haggard and Machen together, I propose looking at the mobility of Gothic terms and themes that can be attached to such radical conversations as the changing faces of feminism, as far back as the nineteenth century, allowing us to draw connections with the contemporary Britain. Using Machen and Haggard, I hope to convey how through their revolutionary writing, they still managed to portray the very issues and anxieties plaguing British society in the fin de siècle, managing to help further define what we consider the feminine but also widening the gap between the two spheres. Rather than placing the woman's sphere as separate from the men's and therefore a safe space for female expression, the woman's sphere was "far from being a self-contained realm" and was thus prone to male influence, "everywhere invaded by patriarchal values and attitudes" (Stansell 479). New ways of viewing the feminine thus perverted the views of women and the spaces they inhabited, creating the New Woman into cursed women presiding over primitive, *unheimlich* realms, thus creating a monstrous feminine.

## 1.1 History

The Gothic has always been the realm of the unexplainable and the difficult to represent. This place which engages with the taboo is critical ground for viewing such themes that disturb the mundane. Within the nineteenth century, these would have been ideas revolving around the birth and rise of the New Woman. This new perception of femininity and womanhood proved itself to be a difficult one to represent, as seen within the novels of H. Rider Haggard and Arthur Machen.

The works of Haggard looked towards foreign and exotic lands and their exploration of foreign, exotic others paralleled the romantic quest narratives that followed in the traditions



of the adventure novels present in a great part of nineteenth century fiction. Through its *protagonists*, *She* takes the reader to virgin territory to satisfy the Victorian obsession with nationalism and colonialism, in a way that as Ardel Haefele-Thomas states, is “inevitably marketed to young boys as a way of selling patriotism and the greatness of the British Empire” (76). The empire as a state symbol is evident in the juxtaposition of Britain and Africa in the novel, whereby Ayesha’s position is an exotic other threatens the stability of what the antagonists, Holly and Leo assume are stable. Ayesha in the novel becomes a multifaceted symbol representative of the contemporary. On the surface, she “embodies Victorian anxieties about female power and sex” (Stephens 372). However, deeper within, identified as both a monarch and beyond that, revered as a deity by her people, she has ultimate power and influence, and this is something unimaginable to the men in the novel.

Historically, as Aarti D. Stephens goes on to demonstrate (372), *She* draws connections from the popular fictional trope of the time, the adventure narratives, and Haggard uses his own experiences as assistant lieutenant to the British Colony of Natal in his depiction of Africa in the novel, and his characterisation of the populace of the continent whom Holly and Leo encounter during their travels. There is also a clear similarity between this and Haggard’s other works, including the popular *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), in the depiction of the adventure, explorer type gouging their way through the virgin, dark continent and encountering the natives.

In addition to the exposition of Africa as a primitive place of savagery, there is an interesting juxtaposition done here by Haggard in positioning Britain and Africa as two contrasting entities, both governed by queens but in differing ways. Through Ayesha, this contrast is made clear, as in contrast to the “staid Queen Victoria, Ayesha is depicted as a monstrous threat, whose seductive but emasculating powers are presented as simultaneously attractive and destructive, dramatizing conflicting Victorian ideas about imperial expansion and sexuality” (Stephens 372). Here, Haggard positions women as dangerous, particularly the exotic, primitive woman and this creates a dangerous femininity, whereby “the landscape of Africa itself is repeatedly described in preternatural terms that personify contemporary attitudes about gender roles, power, and sexuality” (372), therefore opening up the novel to be read further as a commentary on the New Woman and Britain’s fear of invasion in all its forms. This will be a central point of view that will be further explored within the thesis as we move on to deconstruct and analyse the role of the monstrous and male-perceived depictions of women in the novel. What is clear though, is that *She* is a novel that is very much

analogous with the conditions of the time and as such, it is rife with elements that with further exploration will guide our analysis of the very Gothic anxieties of Victorian Britain pertaining to gender.

On the other side of this we have the work of Machen, *The Great God Pan*, an influential text that continues to influence writers of the Gothic and the horror, with Gabriel Lovatt claiming that the novel, “remains one of the most influential works of horror ever written, cited by seminal artists who work in the genre—from H.P. Lovecraft to Guillermo del Toro—as a prominent influence for its psychological and aesthetic complexity” (19). The novel is indeed filled with psychological and aesthetic complexity, themes often presented within Gothic texts. These themes add to the stylistic attributes of the novel and play a great role in the commentary that can be made of Machen’s novel.

Lovatt goes on to say of the stylistic legacy of *TGGP* that, “Machen uses horror to explore the symbiosis between physical sensation and interior perception against the backdrop of an increasingly unrepresentable modern world” (21). Lovatt’s view is one that is crucial especially in the fact that the external-internal dichotomy he recognises within Machen’s works shows an “increasingly unrepresentable world”. In light of our reading then, this proposes that such things as separate spheres and the rise of the New Woman were so influential in the destabilisation of the hegemony as Machen’s stories “portray the destabilization of the most established elements of society” (Lovatt 32).

Furthering all this, we will be exploring many of the previously stated terms, which here I will proceed to introduce in the following sections. The structure of these thematic introductions will also feed into the structure of the thesis, as they all work together in forming my argument. Each particular section, such as abjection, the New Woman and all other voices present here in this introduction will be further developed within the thesis as they are used to further analyse the novels of Haggard and Machen.

In this thesis, I will be engaging further with the historicity of these novels in relation to my argument by using various theories from several critical voices. Much of the works used here revolve around the theme of femininity and as such, I have categorized the main chapters of my thesis with one particular theoretical stance. The overarching theme will be that of the genre, as such, I will include different ideas on the Gothic throughout to help with defining the genre and situating my thesis within it.

We will begin thus by looking firstly at the New Woman, the powerful figure that I argue Ayesha and Helen represent, the concept that is synonymous with many of the leading thoughts of the nineteenth century, leading into the twentieth century. Here, the exploration of the New Woman introduces the gist of my argument – the symbol of nonconformity that threatened an entire society.

## 1.2 The New Woman

The rise of the New Woman followed a rise in what can be termed the Victorian identity crisis. As Victorian society progressed, so did societal norms and expectations. The typical spheres pertaining to the masculine and the feminine, became even more defined and as such the seemingly impermeable barrier between the two gendered spheres became even more fluid allowing for transgressive allowing for intersectional relations to occur, giving rise to decadent behaviours and the New Woman.

Machen and Haggard present the readers with a view of the feminine within the nineteenth century that is quite revolutionary and situates the texts well within the range of contemporary discussions. Whilst they attempt to situate the feminine within a new sphere of its own, one that mirrors “that part of society Victorians deemed to be properly within women's control” (Stansell 467), and thus pioneer a certain view of the New Woman, the novels’ eventual demise of the female characters illustrates the flaws with this, particularly considering that the texts were written by male authors. How can we, as contemporary readers, interact with Ayesha and Helen Vaughan so as to understand their plights as women trying to carve for themselves their own identity yet the male voices of their texts still manage to suppress them and eventually obliterates their voices completely?

For instance, it is interesting to look at the way that the authors’ present the texts – they become male-narrated accounts of events that happened, and this in itself is problematic for the female is relegated to being voiced through the male characters. The novels therefore represent the very real fears that spread throughout Britain during the nineteenth century as the country itself carved a new identity for itself under the rule of queen Victoria. As the century heralded scientific advancement, medical advancement and social progression, there were still dark spots whereby such advancements faced certain limitations. This post-

enlightenment society was therefore still primitive, and the dominance of patriarchal empirical ideologies would suggest just that.

As such, this thesis' work with dominant ideas of the time yet perhaps not so spoken of ideas such as abjection, decadence, degeneration will help us better determine the rise and fall, if there was a fall or a rise indeed of the New Woman. Our chosen texts will help us do this as we view and challenge the critical ideas coming from the works of Max Nordau, J.J. Bachofen and Julia Kristeva amongst many others, to better understand why death becomes the ultimate weapon for such authors of Gothic fantasy in retaliation to the strong feminine powers rising within the texts. And by extension, what were those threats that threatened the very essence of Britain's identity and way of life.

In aid of the main argument of the thesis, various other themes will follow through, including views on consent, degeneration and decadence. This is all important in looking at this since as posited, the New Woman is symbolic of the various anxieties facing Britain's identity in the late nineteenth century, questioning the nation's position as a stronghold of Empire and as a pioneer in progress, scientifically, politically and socially. To contextualise the fear of the New Woman, we will dive into Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject as the overarching theory into the monstrous New Woman.

### **1.3 The Abject**

Much has been said of the abject, a term attributed mostly to Kristeva, whose works in *The Power of Horror* will form the basis of the background of this thesis. We will focus intently on Kristeva's abject, and as such, all subsequent theories and ideas used in this thesis, from the monstrous to the abhuman will all stem from this for Kristeva's work represents the main themes of my argument, that the abject not only reflects perceptions of the individual but also the collective society. To use her own words to introduce this, "[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Here, I will focus on a few snippets from the opening of Kristeva's work, which will be explored in depth in the following chapters. Whilst Kristeva's work on abjection exemplifies and looks into many things including identity formation and language, it is particularly her focus on the formation of identity and meaning that will influence our work. This will open

up our conversation into how Leo and Holly perceive themselves and Ayesha as well as how Helen is viewed.

Julia Kristeva's work on the abject, though emerging much later than our novels, shares some pivotal ideas that were central to the development of much of Victorian literary works. Taking us through perceptions of the person, Kristeva permeates the boundaries between self and other in ways that bring us to understand the individual's view of the outside.

Through Kristeva then, we can begin to see how abjection aids in the formation of the self but also, inevitably of the other. As she goes on to say, "[t]here is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (5). The interconnection between all these is also evocative of how all the different terms I will introduce here are all connected in our reading of women in the fin de siècle.

Within the first chapter of the thesis then, we will go into greater detail of this as we consider the selves of Ayesha and Helen, and focus on the monstrous appearance of Helen and more so over the idea of the corpse, a term attached to Ayesha in Haggard's novel to explain her physicality. Our introduction point to this idea of the corpse as abject will thus come Kristeva's claim that the corpse is most forcefully "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (4). These inform our creation of our selves and our society as well, as we consider the functions that society has, particularly a patriarchal society in accepting individuals.

This is also where our engagement with J.J. Bachofen will begin, as we look into how this move from woman as individual is reflected largely unto a societal and cultural stage. In his works, Bachofen recognizes a similarity between matriarchal and patriarchal society, an observation that is most important in our reading of *She*, particularly as we come to explore Ayesha's home of Kôr and her reign over it. This will be interesting as we contrast this similarity with the novel's *protagonist's* view of Great Britain, a country which at that point was also under the rule of a queen, queen Victoria. It is interesting to note the contrast between Ayesha's Kôr and Great Britain, in the way that even though they are both under the rule of queens, Great Britain lacks the strong matriarchal strengths that Kôr has. The

difference here is that one still bears strong patriarchal societal connections while the other has a more matriarchal structure. This shows further how unstable this Victorian society was, with its inability to fully define itself resulting in contrasting modes of representation and aestheticism.

## 1.4 Decadence

It is hard to conceive of the nineteenth century without thinking of decadence, one of the dominant movements of the time, one that is very much aligned to our discussion in this thesis. With the terms origins stemming from ‘decay’, it is no surprise that criticism of the term, particularly when assigned to literature has been quite problematic, including such harsh criticism of the term as one of failure and a celebration of these failures (Thornton 188). In addition to this, decadent literature attempts to portray an escape from the real, as R.K.R. Thornton states it,

Decadent literature is a literature of failure: of a failure to provide a literary synthesis for the disintegration of life; of an expression of that disintegration and failure in elegant cadences; of a fleeing into an artificial world or an ideal world to escape from the consciousness and consequences of that disintegration; of a somewhat indulgent melancholy at the contemplation of that failure; and of a wistfully gay self-mockery at the beauty and vanity of the attempt to escape that failure. (Thornton 188)

This itself is not a false criticism, as it is true that celebration of the decadent is undoubtedly a celebration of that which plagues society – the lack of morality and norms. But this is also the beauty of decadence, especially in relation to our texts. Decadence allows us to put into perspective the changes of the nineteenth century beyond its apparent escapism that R.K.R. Thornton posits.

With our female characters, decadence becomes a way of appropriating a term most often thought of in relation to men, including Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and giving it new footing in relation to the New Woman. This is especially important when we will come to consider Helen Vaughan, who is perhaps the most decadent of the two women we will look at. Helen’s appropriation of decadence is morally degenerate, in the view of the men in the novel, but it is also liberating. In viewing this, freedom, Christine Ferguson claims that, “Instead of forming opposite poles of the late Victorian cultural scene, science and

decadence represent different incarnations of a desire for freedom from usefulness” (471) and this is evident with Helen, whereby her birth from pseudoscientific experimentation and the constraints attached to her as a woman leads to her decadent behaviour. As Ferguson goes on to suggest, [t]he price of wholeness, decadence suggests, is disintegration...The survivors at the end of the decadent text are typically moderates who, like Ovid Vere, lack the desire to push the limits of experience to their extreme or to obsessively assert individuality. (477). As we will go on to explore, this is an important function as the survivors of our texts, the male *protagonists* face the need to reassert themselves once they have faced these decadent figures. And this is what leads us then to view the abject, decadent individual as degenerate, both physically and mentally.

## **1.5 Degeneration and Atavism, the parents of the Abhuman**

Following from the abject and decadence then, degeneration becomes one of the ways in which the woman is rendered monstrous. During the nineteenth century, with the fascination with the human race and its evolution, degeneration arose as one of the ways of thinking about this, as a means of explaining differences and similarities between people, internally and externally. There are various works on degeneration to be found, yet we will align our view of degeneration with two particular schools of thought – degeneration as a consequence and symptom of abjection and degeneration as an atavistic trope.

With degeneration then, the individual descends further into the monstrous, particularly in the Gothic, with the imagery used to characterise the individuals. Particularly with Helen Vaughan, we will use this to look into how the elusive character is assigned degenerate qualities that render her evil. Using Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso’s works as a possible adaptation of Darwin’s, we can use this to form the basis from how the outside influences the inside and vice versa. Nordau and Lombroso’s works regarding degeneration and atavism generated great interest in the realms of the scientific and social studies, stemming from the same traditions of the nineteenth century of Social Degeneration, influencing the sciences well into ethnic studies and eugenics. As we progress through our analysis of Machen and Haggard, such topics will be pivotal as there are clear connections between atavism and degeneration and the Gothic used by our authors, all conjuring up such views of the hereditary, the physiological and psychological as all influencing one another.

One of the ways we will address degeneration and atavism in relation to our novels will be in line with the abhuman, also linking it back to our position of the abject and the corpse, but here we will read the abhuman in relation to Kelly Hurley who writes of the Gothic and the fin de siècle, stating in her introduction to “The Abhuman” that the “*Fin de siècle Gothic* offers the spectacle of a body metamorphic and undifferentiated; in place of the possibility of human transcendence, the prospect of an existence circumscribed within the realities of gross corporeality; in place of a unitary and securely bounded human subjectivity, one that is both fragmented and permeable” (3), setting up the claims that we will go on to deconstruct in relation to Ayesha and Helen, the views of the human body that unites yet separates individuals. This leads us inevitably to the works of Nordau and Lombroso as we go on to see how this is transposed onto two powerful women – how their physicality is linked to their psychology and furthers adds to their monstrosity that eventually leads to their demise.

## 1.6 Orientalism

In addition to the decadence and degenerate, there is also a clear correlation between the decadent woman and the exotic woman. Whilst Helen Vaughan fits the mold of the decadent woman perfectly, Ayesha inhabits an altogether different version of this, and it is that of the exotic. The exoticism of Ayesha functions upon two levels. Firstly, it interacts closely with the abject monster we have been looking at by exploring the interplay between that which we love yet fear at the same time. It expresses the attempts at flirting with the unknown due to fascination yet feeling forcibly revolted by it due to difference. On the second level then, this itself relates further to our perception of nineteenth century Britain. The view of Britain as the central focus of the globe and the colonies and other lands as existing on the periphery, allowing them to be catalogued with mystery and exotic traits.

This brings us to consider for a moment Edward Said’s view on Orientalism, an area of study that resonates with how our novels depict not only Ayesha or Helen but the geographies represented in the novel. Through Said’s works, we get the implication that there exists a West and an East, a symbolic representation of the world that separates the world. In his description of the Orient as opposed to the West, Said posits that “as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabular that have given it reality and present in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (Said 5). This is also the case with our texts. This



is perhaps most obvious in *She*, in which Haggard presents a view of the world as representing on the one side Britain, the centre of progress and modernity and on the other side, Africa, the collection of all things other. The dualistic and antagonistic relation between these two poles is strikingly represented within the texts.

*She* gives us this as Ayesha becomes the representation of the other, as the exotic queen of another land but even more so, she plays on the other hand with this idea as she becomes an image of the West having invaded the *Orient* or, that place at the periphery of the Empire. This is done on the one hand through her physical description, and on the other hand the amount of agency she is given in the novel.

And this is perhaps one of the most problematic issues with how Ayesha is portrayed. Should *She* be read as a commentary on how the West views other locales, then Ayesha as the white queen of an African tribe is quite difficult to come to terms with. The reason for this is that in this same light, Ayesha represents the coloniser again, “I learnt also that the people there speak a dialect of Arabic, and are ruled over by a *beautiful white woman* who is seldom seen by them, but who is reported to have power over all things living and dead” (Haggard 28). Her white ancestry buys her the position as colonizer and this is made worse when one considers how she appropriates her position as both queen and god to her people, ruling them with fear.

Through this then, Haggard is able to draw upon the Victorian views of the world, particularly in terms of the empire and its dominions, in the way that “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said 3). In this way, the general view of the West managed to self-identify and maintain this identity by putting the Orient and Occident next to each other as two different poles, each carrying specific ideologies and attributes which are reflected in our chosen fiction in the lexicon used to identify these different geographic locales, as we will go on to explore in the following chapters.

It is also through orientalism that we get our views on exoticism, as it charts others and attaches exotic attributes to them that places them as other. As Said says of the Orient, “the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either” (Said 4), it implies that this position of being *there* needs to be explored in order to understand why these two differing poles were created in the first place, and this is

what we will do with our texts to understand Ayesha and Helen. It is through these basic components of Said's that we can gain some understanding of what is being done to Haggard's Ayesha and Machen's Helen, particularly, Ayesha, as we go through the story. As I posit that Ayesha and Helen represent threats to the self and the identity of a nation, Orientalism can help us to understand how this is done, particularly in *She*, with Ayesha.

## 1.7 The Monstrous

Another one of the terms that will be explored in this thesis is the monstrous, yet another Gothic theme that is prevalent in our texts. The use of the monster as a trope is one that conveys a lot of the other themes we will explore, as the monster too, becomes a multifaceted symbol of multiple anxieties. The monstrous will be the basis for our view of women as we move from viewing the abject individual as monstrous. Our reading of the abject will inevitably lead us into reading Ayesha and Helen as monstrous, as these are terms used to define the women and to vilify them.

The monstrous follows on from the abject as it too implies an inside-outside dichotomy between the I, the self and that which is other. The one that sees the other as monstrous is always separating themselves from the monstrous, guarding the self from the monstrous in order to keep the other out. The monstrous is present in nearly all works of Gothic fiction of the nineteenth century, as evident in such texts as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, but our reading of the monstrous will lead us closer towards the real than many other texts have perhaps done.

With the monstrous, we will go into the complexities of defining those we fear as monstrous as a means of self-preservation which is reflected here beyond the individual into the collective. What I intend to convey here is that by seeing Ayesha and Helen as monstrous, as the male *protagonists* of our novels do, they are pushing the qualities they fear into those women away from them. The monster as mirror will therefore be our entry into this as we follow the steps that make these women monstrous, through abjection and degeneration primarily. However, it is important to look at the distinction that Jarlath Killeen notes in his works in *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories*, where he says of a re-defined Gothic:

It is important to recognise that Gothic is not synonymous with horror, and although the Gothic novel appropriates the imagology of horror which monsters others in proto-Gothic literature, it does so in a surprising way which actually articulates a much more amenable toleration for that reviled Other and a genuine desire for reconciliation with that Other. (49)

Killeen paints a picture of the monster here as not only being a creature of fear, that in contrast to what I claim of our female characters, a reflection of the societal anxieties out of fear, the monstrous other is also an object of fascination and demands understanding. This will be important to our reading as well as we look into the attraction that our characters have, which as we will go on to explore is characteristic of their abject qualities – the constant interplay between that which attracts yet at the same time repulses. A desire for the change, a love for the New Woman yet a revulsion for all that they represent to the stability of the normal.

In using all these different ideas and voices then, we can go on to explore Ayesha and Helen, and as Lovatt concludes in his exploration of *Machen*,

The subjects of “The Great God Pan” and “The Inmost Light” find themselves in a mutable world where the terms that define the individual mind and body, as well as the larger community body, are undergoing radical changes that will continue through to the twentieth century. (Lovatt 33)

This delineates the correlation between history and the present, indeed when we consider the ways that we view femininity, by even more so in conjunction with how a society defines its individuals. How, therefore, the death of Ayesha and Helen becomes a way of expressing the fears of the Victorian populace and attempting to suppress them.

The main structure of the thesis will be in three chapters comprising of close reading and analysis of the novels in relation to the different themes mentioned. The first chapter will be dedicated to an analysis of what formulates the New Woman as abject by taking a closer look at Kristeva’s abject. This exploration will posit that abjection is the first process in vilifying the women and becomes the basis for turning them monstrous. This chapter will give a deeper understanding of how abjection works in the novels and will therefore pave the way for the following chapters’ engagement with the other dominant themes.

As we move into chapter two, we will engage more with this notion as we view how the abject woman is seen as monstrous. Here, we will look intently at decadence, which will move us from a view of the women as individual and take us onto a more societal and cultural view of this, exposing the very real Victorian anxieties further. Using Bachofen's works in *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, we will take it further into showing how Victorian society came from a foundation of patriarchy, and using Bachofen's works, we can consider how in our novels, there is the proposition of matriarchy – which is then turned dystopian. Alongside this, in this chapter I will go on to posit how such influential works as Charles Darwin's and Cesario Lombroso can be used to understand the use of atavism and degeneration are used to create the monstrous beyond mere representations of terror or horror.

In the final section of the thesis, I will posit finally how all these elements add to the deaths of the women. Focusing on the scenes surrounding their deaths, this chapter will thus include further upon degeneration. The dominant voices here to guide this will be that of Hurley, as we look into the abhuman and the demise of Ayesha and Helen. In this chapter, the themes of decadence and degeneration will come together to play an even greater role as we consider the agency that Ayesha and Helen have in their respective stories and even more so, their perception of their demise as the novels go into great lengths at commenting on their deaths, especially from the point of view of the *protagonists*. As such, we will consider as we move towards concluding, how much agency and what issues of consent the women have in their stories and what this represents in relation to their deaths. We will from there be able to take this from the fictional to understand the very real implications that such deaths can mean for the woman when read as symbolic and symptomatic of the society that engendered them.

Altogether, the thesis will tie in all these dominant themes of the time in exploring the sobering reality of powerful women in the nineteenth century. In doing so, we can draw conclusions from this and the conclusion I mostly wish to draw here at this point, is that the threat that powerful forms of femininity pose is fearsome. The instability and chaos that such characters as Ayesha and Helen represent to hegemonic representations of society cannot be allowed to spread – Ayesha cannot be allowed to invade Britain and Helen cannot go around living a hedonistic lifestyle. Therefore, how do we move past the killing of them and how do we engage with the knowledge that we cannot simply reject the other, be it transgressive women or revolutionary conceptions of society.

## 2 Chapter

### Introducing the Abject New Woman

In their differing forms, Machen and Haggard both engage with complex representations of the feminine that border on the problematic due to their use of the *monstrous* New Woman, in their development of their female *antagonists*. As this thesis progresses, we will explore the use of the monstrous in line with discourses of abjection, degeneration and finally decadence, three discourses that coloured much of the late nineteenth-century Gothic fiction. Our first foray into this thus begins with our introduction to the women of our texts, namely Ayesha and Helen Vaughan. In this first chapter, I hope to open up the thesis to the various derogatory methods that have been attached to these female characters by the authors of the novels, focalising through the male narrators in order to turn the female characters monstrous and therefore, facilitate their demise.

Shrouded in mystery, in each novel, the chapters leading up to the eventual discovery of the women place them in a state of otherness. Much of this stems from the narrative styles of the stories as we find the male protagonists recounting the stories of those women, deemed monstrous, through a lens of abjection to begin with as a first line of separation. Here, we will use Kristeva's works on abjection to open up the conversation and to form the framework of this first chapter surrounding the abjection of the feminine. As Kristeva explores in her introduction:

The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-ject, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. (Kristeva 1)

When meaning becomes impossible to ascertain, then the reaction to it is that of abjection, horror or revulsion. What becomes interesting and apparent here, is the interplay between Kristeva's abject in relation to Jacques Lacan's concept of "l'objet petit a". Whilst Lacan's perpetually drags the subject towards that which incites desire and thus would appear positive, Kristeva's abject draws attention towards that liminal space between said desire and

the aversion to it. It continually "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). This is where the constant drawing up of boundaries and borders arises. The subject is therefore constantly separating that which is self from that which is other by considering what attracts them yet also repulses them.

Thus, the abject explores an interplay between the outside and the inside and invokes the need to produce boundaries to keep otherness out and this is where Ayesha and Helen Vaughan come to play. Symbolically, the women become representations of abjections, subjects of fascination yet also of repulsion. Let us look at Haggard's Ayesha first and explore how she becomes of this.

## 2.1 The Veiled Lady, Ayesha

Haggard's text despite predating Kristeva's work, engages with the abject in the ways that the oeuvre plays around with the changing gender dynamics of the time. Here, the abject goes beyond merely engaging with simple boundaries and borders and instead posits a greater understanding of how women, in particular, viewed in the fiction of the nineteenth century, were seen as *others* on a quest for gaining their own identity. Particularly through the rise of the New Woman, they became forces to be reckoned with and as such, they had to be dealt with as threats to all that stands for masculinity.

To present this, I propose a look at one of the first physical mentions of Ayesha in *She*, when Holly gets admitted to her sacred boudoir for the first time: "At length the curtain began to stir. Who could be behind it? – some naked savage queen, a languishing Oriental beauty, or a nineteenth-century young lady, drinking afternoon tea?" (139).

Holly regresses here to such limited thinking as he, himself an othered character due to his appearance, which would seemingly situate him in that liminal space, he still gives into the fallacy that causes him to view Ayesha in limited and degenerate terms as "naked savage queen" (139), placing her within the adventure novels of the time that viewed people of the Dark Continent as savages, but more importantly, he then goes on to presuppose that she could be an "[o]riental beauty" (139). Culminating with bringing her closer to home, or rather, closer to what he can comprehend, she then assumes the image of "nineteenth-century young lady, drinking afternoon tea" (139). In one short line, Holly manages to take the reader across three Eurocentric, geographic perceptions of womanhood across the continents –

beginning firstly with that most feared, the savage and finally reassuming the comfort of the known or expected.

The mimetic need to define one's self or others in accordance with another is precisely what leads to engagement with the abject as it forces the need to reassert one's boundaries. It follows in that in order to see the self and be able to maintain this self, one has to be aware of others that either help to assert the individuality of the self or further distance the self from these others. As Kristeva goes on to say:

That order, that glance, that voice, that gesture, which enact the law for my frightened body, constitute and bring about an effect and not yet a sign. I speak to it in vain in order to exclude it from what will no longer be, for myself, a world that can be assimilated. Obviously, I am only like someone else: mimetic logic of the advent of the ego, objects, and signs. But when I seek (myself), lose (myself), or experience jouissance—then "I" is heterogeneous. Discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt against, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise. (Kristeva 10)

By engaging with all his perceptions of woman and finally returning to that which he finds most comforting, Holly manages to keep his boundaries intact and as such he preserves on the first level, his own self. At this point, it has to be noted that all that he has heard about Ayesha is of her greatness and beauty and even those are not enough to comfort his sense of imagination.

The binaries are further reinstated here as Holly views himself as man against the image of woman in all its forms. And as this first introduction to Ayesha progresses, Holly's perception of Ayesha changes into more of that comfort as she protrudes a hand from behind the veils:

Presently the hanging agitated itself, then from between its fold there appeared a most beautiful white hand, white as snow, and with long tapering fingers, ending in the pinkest nails. This hand grasped the curtains drawing it aside, and a voice spoke, I think the softest and yet most silvery voice that I ever heard. It reminded me of the murmur of a brook. (139)

The hand that is presented to Holly is one that even in its paleness erases all his previous assumptions of her as either savage or oriental, cementing her already in the comfort of the known that he knows better. Further from this, even her vocal attributes lull him into this comfort, that voice being silvery and here it “reminded” him of something familiar, and this mimetic value is also validated by Kristeva who asserts what she terms the “mimetic identification (transference and countertransference)” (30), which plays a great role in how the self identifies itself. By associating Ayesha with what is known to him, Holly manages to preserve himself from the potential of her being worse than he has expected.

But here, before venturing further into Holly’s reaction to Ayesha’s unveiling, I would rather focus a little more on this idea of mimesis and identification as we deconstruct further how this moves us beyond Holly’s personal insecurities and encourages us to read the novel as a dialogue involving the collective, cultural and social discussions of the time.

Perhaps adhering to the romance genre, which the novel engages with, Holly’s desire and attraction to the feminine is what causes him to switch instantaneously from thinking of her as savage and placing her instead within the limits of beauty which he is most familiar with. In this respect then, before he manages to engage with her and see her for who she is, as a potential threat to all that he holds sacred – masculinity, patriarchy, his monarchy which he attributes his patriotism to and beyond that, knowledge, he finds it easier to fall into what is known and his own preference to attributes of feminine beauty. Holly is in fact very lucky, for even though he is not the protagonist nor the love interest in the novel, he is the first to see Ayesha and it is through him that we are first presented to her physical appearance. It is important that we get this perspective from one who is not particularly handsome, as Holly is described so as to give an unbiased description of her beauty and to truly show how great it is. And her being beautiful would also make it difficult for her to be killed off or silenced in the novel. Her beauty, however, does not undermine her actual power though. Far from it, it works as a camouflage of sorts, that allows her heinous acts and characteristics to be excused, for she is after all, but a beautiful, *exotic* woman.

And this will become important to the narrative, as whenever Ayesha moves beyond those attributes of beauty and femininity and shows her most powerful, *monstrous* self, then the male characters quickly try to find attributes that they can give her that remind them of women, as though to preserve that same boundary again and to lessen the impact of her as a threat.



## 2.2 Exoticising Ayesha

In turning Ayesha into the abject object or subject, Holly accentuates all the fears that go beyond him as an individual and becomes a shared collective fear, one that Kristeva points at as being that of the “generative power” (77) of the woman, but this itself goes beyond the woman’s reproductive qualities. This becomes “symptomatic of an ongoing challenge to the monolithic ideological certainties of mid-Victorian Britain” (Ledger22), with the rise of the New Woman. What I would like to articulate here is that this fear is transposed onto a certain fear of the woman being able to create, rule and express much of the same qualities attached to the masculine. By extension, as seen through Ayesha, the ruler of a society that differs much from Holly’s *patriarchal* one, Ayesha’s one is a matrilineal society that presents a different hierarchical structure and this in itself is a difference that is enough to push Ayesha into the realm of the abject. In being so, Ayesha becomes the “femme fatale” (Rodgers 36) and as such she is “a magnetic figure of male longing, but also fear, who threatens the integrity of empire, manliness and brotherhood” (Rodgers 36). Within the New Woman then resides all the attributes of the abject – the intense longing but also of fear. Ayesha is well aware of the effect she has on those who encounter her. She uses this to her advantage, using it to seduce Leo and at the same time, entrance Holly into falling in love with her.

To code a subject as "abject", “points to the considerable importance some societies attribute to women (matrilineal or related filiation, endogamy, decisive role of procreation for the survival of the social group, etc.)” (Kristeva 64). Therefore, pushing Ayesha into the realm of the abject, such as describing her as corpse-like, renders her abject and monstrous. This becomes especially problematic since this is done by the male characters through efforts that make it easier to reduce her to the margins. Furthermore, as Kristeva goes on to explore, the “symbolic "exclusory prohibition" that, as a matter of fact, constitutes collective existence does not seem to have, in such cases, sufficient strength to dam up the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine” (64). However, rather than subjecting herself into the margins and accepting this, Ayesha assumes a certain agency that may well be attributed to such qualities we attach to depictions of the New Woman – the autonomous acceptance and deviation of and from one’s assumed position. In this respect, the woman “precisely on account of its power, does not succeed in differentiating itself as other but threatens one's own and clean self, which is the underpinning of any organization constituted by exclusions and hierarchies” (65). Whilst here Kristeva is alluding mostly to the abject in relation to filth and defilement, it befits our characters well as, for instance, Ayesha herself is associated with filth, as we

mentioned before, her corpse-like attributes but even more so in Haggard's seemingly othering of the Ammahagger culture as something that is inferior to the civilised West.

Kôr, Ayesha's home becomes a cesspool of defilement where the norms of the civilised West are subverted and where man seems to have regressed to a more primitive state, or rather, the commentary would be that these people have not evolved beyond their savage state and this society reflects this. Yet, at various times, Holly manages to see beyond this and remarks on the Ammahaggers' culture as having once been from a great society, but he sees this as something that has fallen to ruins and Ayesha becomes the figure behind this ruin. In being the abject monster, her ways have forced her people into becoming the "degenerate descendants of a civilized Arabic race which once inhabited the now ruined 'City of imperial Kôr'" (Reid 369), regressing into the primitive men that they are when Holly and his companions venture to Kôr. Ayesha's perversion of sacred patriarchal power thus defiles the very nature of human beings and keeps her people from developing beyond what they are. She becomes the ultimate threat to the symbolic order here and this is what is expected of Kristeva's abject, something and in this case, someone, that disrupts the symbolic quite violently.

### **2.3 Born of Evil, Helen Vaughan**

Beyond Haggard's representation, Machen's text engages with abjection through its use of horror and terror. He adopts the growing influence of the time; scientific writing and interests in the paranormal, all culminating into pseudoscience. In the space that Machen engages with, the text is rife with themes of abjection of Machen's *protagonist*, or antagonist, Helen Vaughan as she takes on the monstrous. What separates Machen's Helen from Haggard's Ayesha, however, is the level of agency given to these women. Whilst Ayesha is given the space and agency to tell her own story, Helen is deprived of this. Instead, she is forced to regress into the shadows and having her story told solely by male agents. The only agency afforded to her turns out to be her demise. The subject of agency will be explored further on in the thesis but at this point, applying abjection to Helen's level of agency is even more pivotal as she is rendered less than human, monstrous in her own story, of which she is not even afforded the chance to speak.

The interest with Helen lies first and mostly in who, or rather, what she is. This itself is shrouded in a veil of mystery, as Helen is rumoured to be a child born of an experiment. This experiment brought on to help man see “The Great God Pan”, in essence, is an experiment to help man see the paranormal world but this itself is flawed. Not only is it a defilement of science and all that is sacred, it draws the individuals involved into a liminal space where none but the monstrous and the abject exist.

What I hope to attach to abjection in relation to Helen Vaughan, however, is the view of decadence, such a movement enmeshed with ideals of the late nineteenth century that it is in an intricate battle with such ideas as the New Woman. Before we get into the details of this, we should take a look at our introduction to Helen Vaughan, this to help us understand how she compares with Ayesha and to deduce who she really is within the story that is hers but told by others. Firstly, speaking of the New Woman, Sally Ledger comments on portrayals of New Women which can be linked to how Helen is portrayed by saying that, “[w]hilst medico-scientific discourse, for example, concentrated on the threat she apparently posed to women's role as mothers, anti-feminist fictional discourse frequently constructed her as a sexual decadent.” (Ledger 23).

Perhaps managing to capture the true essence of what these texts seem to engage with, at least to an audience looking back at a time beyond them, Natasha Rebry in situating Machen's work notes aptly that:

Through its portrayal of neurological theories and experimental practices, *The Great God Pan* calls into question the biological reductionism and materialism of late Victorian mental science, illustrating the threat to self-governance and the potential erosion of social stability occasioned by a lack of will or spiritual force guiding human thought or action. (Rebry 11)

Rebry could not be more right as both our primary texts share the same anxieties of the self vis-à-vis society. The uncertainty that such women as Ayesha and Helen pose to the stability of the then contemporary society is much too threatening and since the status quo must be maintained, such threats must be dealt with. In some ways, the novels attempt to express ways of dealing with these threats, albeit negative.

Yet, Helen does not enter her text as physically monstrous or abject as Ayesha would seem to Holly in her first appearance. The reader gets to grow alongside Helen as her story is

narrated, from the moment her mother is experimented upon to her being born and being sent into the care of a family. What marks the story as quaint, though, is the existence of gaps and spaces where Helen seems to be able to fleet between recognition so easily and beyond, so as to adapt a sense of agency that the men of the time cannot comprehend. It is this that we will look at in relation to decadence.

It is rather interesting how to those men, such an act which can be seen to be akin to lobotomy, performed on Helen's mother was a heinous act which might explain the daughter's eventual trail of activities. The experiment that they performed was the first monstrous act within Helen's story and it stripped Helen's mother of anything human:

They shone with an awful light, looking far away, and a great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch what was invisible; but in an instant the wonder faded, and gave place to the most awful terror. The muscles of her face were hideously convulsed, she shook from head to foot; the soul seemed struggling and shuddering within the house of flesh. It was a horrible sight, and Clarke rushed forward, as she fell shrieking to the floor. (Machen 19)

In this visual representation of the effects upon Mary's face, beginning with her eyes show the negative effects of the experiment carried out on her. What the doctor had done to her changed her, it also highlights the development of scientific studies and what lengths they would go through to achieve results. After this unfortunate accident, however, Mary is left "rolling her head from side to side, and grinning vacantly" (Machen 19) and that is all we get of the woman who is later revealed to have been Helen's mother. And from there Helen's story begins.

Our introduction to Helen then follows, as she is described to be "Helen V." (Machen 22) and that if she were alive at the time of recounting her story, she would be a woman of twenty-three years of age. She is said to be an orphan, sent to "a village on the borders of Wales" (Machen 22) to be raised by a distant relative, in a place that is reputed for its history dating from the Roman occupation of great swathes of Britain. It is in this setting that Helen's rather wild story is to begin. Helen is described as free-spirited individual at that point, who enjoyed venturing out into the forests. Mr. R, the man under whose care Helen was released, was "given to understand that the girl be allowed to find her own occupations and to spend

her time almost as she liked” (Macher ch.2) and there Helen is described for the first time, physically. Mr. R’s first impression of her is that he:

[s]eems to have remarked nothing extraordinary about the child except that she was reticent as to her former life and her adopted father. She was, however, of a very different type from the inhabitants of the village; her skin was a pale, clear olive, and her features were strongly marked, and of a somewhat foreign character. (Machen 23)

She is described here, quite like Ayesha, in some ways, in that she is seen as a ‘normal’ young girl, just like any other girl, yet, at the same time she is instantly othered, with what seems to be like the act of abjection we attached to Ayesha. The constant interplay between being alluring yet also repulsive becomes prevalent in defining her, even at an early stage in the narrative. Here, Helen is marked with the same, a “somewhat foreign character” (Machen 23) that mirrors acts of exoticising, albeit not at the same level as the exoticisation of Ayesha.

What follows this is the peculiar description of Helen’s movements in Wales, coming from testimonies of the locals, particularly of a Joseph W., who first describes his encounter with Helen in the forest upon hearing his son screaming upon finding Helen in the middle of the woods playing with a “” strange naked man”” (Machen 25). This event is a profound one as it suddenly lunges the reader into the realms of the impossible, which such a ‘scientific’ text would seem to be against. By extension, this particular scene draws Helen already as existing within spaces of the imaginary, and the naked man, though could be seen as a normal thing is described as “strange”, adding a level of mystery to it that would continue to haunt Helen and make it easier to paint her as monstrous. This encounter would shake the boy and infuse him with a certain trauma. The reader thus becomes complicit in this attempt to piece this mystery of who Helen is and all these affectations of horror and terror are thus means to be felt by the reader as well.

The next to follow this then, to further incriminate Helen into this is a girl, Rachel, whom Helen befriends, and they end up spending quite a lot of time together. Yet, something similar to what happened to Trevor would happen to Rachel as well. At this point, the narrative would come to a certain realisation as to Helen’s being, inscribing her once more in the realms of the unknown as Clarke and Phillip, would go on to say:

It is too incredible, too monstrous; such things can never be in this quiet world, where men and women live and die, and struggle, and conquer, or maybe fail, and fall down under sorrow, and grieve and suffer strange fortunes for many a year; but not this, Phillips, not such things as this. There must be some explanation, some way out of the terror. Why, man, if such a case were possible, our earth would be a nightmare.

But Phillips had told his story to the end, concluding: "Her flight remains a mystery to this day; she vanished in broad sunlight; they saw her walking in a meadow, and a few moments later she was not there" (Machen 29).

At this point then, the narrative posits a story of Helen that is left to be wondered at. She, like Ayesha, is first exposed as *normal* yet at the same time she is also othered. As we carry on then, we will look at how this exposition of the characters, first as normal but then hinting at a possible monster within them. In Ayesha, this takes the form of Holly's initial perception of her, as both graceful, beautiful, but also fearful whilst with Helen, she is painted as a beautiful, country young woman with a penchant for the otherworldly. In both cases though, this initiates the process of abjection which Kristeva writes of – this inherent fascination yet also repulsion for them that persists throughout the narratives.

To look at this then, we must look then at the moment that these women are turned monstrous, physically. Ayesha's monstrosity comes purely from her status as a powerful woman but beyond this, she is physically othered, presented as a corpse-like figure that is both alluring but also horrific. To use an example from Kristeva's work that is also relevant in our primary texts, let us look at the corpse as something that creates abject reaction. "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (Kristeva 4). This state of being which exists between life and death, the corporeal and noncorporeal is a good example as both our authors play with this idea of Ayesha and Helen Vaughan as being corpse-like, particularly Ayesha. Living deep within tombs and forever clad in funereal garbs, she represents the corpse. The fact that this state of being is beyond life yet still manages to infect life, as Kristeva put it, it escapes our understanding of life and this inability to produce or embody complete meaning causes us to erect boundaries against this. Holly does so in *She*, as he continually negotiates what it is about Ayesha that attracts him, her womanly qualities, her physique and allure yet at the same time, he keeps reminding himself of how alike a corpse she is, erecting boundaries that would therefore create revulsion in him and as such fight of the desires within him.

Upon meeting Ayesha and finally seeing her unveiled, Holly remarks on how despite being a beautiful woman, the spaces that she inhabits and her attire, even, reminds him quite violently of a corpse, “I say a figure, for not only the body, but also the face, was wrapped with a soft white and gauzy material in such a way as at first sight to remind me most forcibly of a corpse in its grave-clothes” (Haggard 140). This allows us to commune once more with Kristeva, as she states the corpse as one of the primary examples of what signifies or invokes the abject – “[t]he corpse (or cadaver: cadere, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance” (Kristeva 3). The forceful remind of that which is beyond us, of what lies between the boundaries of life and death therefore brings up the abject. The corpse as a symbol manages to bring up the boundaries. This reminder then of a state which we attempt to deny, one that in essence threatens the “I” is an important signification of what Holly, and Leo and Job, by extension fear.

In addition to this, the abject causes us to consider these borders that we erect, making us consider, as with Orientalism, what we use to define ourselves in relation to the outside, as Kristeva speaks of filth, “[i]f dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without border?” (Kristeva 3). We are ultimately forced to make the borders real, objectifying them and this is done in *She* not only by the death of Ayesha but even more so by the constant questioning done by Holly and Leo in reflection.

The subject then loses agency in the presence of the corpse, it is another reminder of one’s mortality and fragility and this in itself is frightening. Ayesha, therefore, as a corpse-like figure, is already exposed as one who has defied death and this only makes the realisation even scarier for her companions in the text. This primary allocation of her as monstrous due to the clear *abjectification* of the corpse then allows for Helen to also enter her story. Whilst Ayesha is depicted as physically monstrous as a corpse, from the beginning of her narrative, Helen only assumes physical monstrosity at the ultimate ending of her narrative. Before then, the Helen Vaughan present, who is barely ever seen but is encountered through testimonies, is nothing monstrous but a formidable woman. It is rather her actions that are depicted as monstrous and command abjection. Her string of liaisons in the novel, resulting in the death, or rather, suicide of her partners is what incites the horror of abjection. Helen as an example

of the New Woman then would seem to hint at all that is feared from the rise of the New Woman.

Before she assumes the monstrous physically, the only mention of physical monstrosity or curiosity would come from depictions of her early years, allegations of the naked companion she played with in the forest or even satyr-like decorations upon architecture,

[T]he men had found a curious head, evidently of the Roman period, which had been placed in the manner described. The head is pronounced by the most experienced archaeologists of the district to be that of a faun or satyr.[\*]

[\* Dr. Phillips tells me that he has seen the head in question, and assures me that he has never received such a vivid presentment of intense evil.] (Machen 27)

It is perhaps noteworthy how this particular depiction of something monstrous results in a presentiment of “intense horror” within Dr. Phillips. Even though this description does not pertain to Helen, physically, the possibility of her communing with something beyond comprehension is enough to invoke a similar sentiment of abjection within the people who have encountered Helen or heard about her. At the same time, the uncertainty of Helen’s origins, propelled by different accounts of her and her elusive nature gives us a hint that links Helen to Ayesha. Both are others, existing within that space which is like but also not like. Helen, for instance, is described as beautiful but even this beauty encourages fascination and feelings of repulsion. Just like Ayesha, she is endowed with a strange beauty - ““most wonderful and most strange beauty’ (Machen 32). She becomes the object in that she exudes a fascination that draws people to her, allowing her story to live on, and at the same time, her beauty is that which is different, that which makes her beauty “strange”.

Further commenting on Helen’s physical attributes and what renders her monstrous and horrific, the character of Austin remarks that, “she was at once the most beautiful woman and the most repulsive they had ever set eyes on. I have spoken to a man who saw her, and [...] he positively shuddered as he tried to describe the woman, but he couldn’t tell why” (Machen 40). Note here how the same dichotomy we encountered with Ayesha is played off. She is “the most beautiful” yet at the same time, “the most repulsive” that they had ever seen, and this causes a strange sensation within the characters, who cannot explain how they feel in her presence. This beauty is so haunting that those who come in contact with these women are



ensnared and are seen as victims (Machen 64), playing on the fascination and repulsion that the abject signifies.

Both Ayesha and Helen therefore operate within the Gothic trope of the uncanny, especially Helen, even more so due to her elusiveness. The repulsion people feel in her presence can be extrapolated to being more than just her physical appearance but also due to the fact that her manner of her deviant behaviour and clear way of evading it paints her as something to be feared. In a similar manner, Ayesha explains to Holly, man fears most what man does not understand. Centuries of claiming to understand women and then realising the complexities that lay in front of them generated fears for those women, particularly the New Woman. To contrast the figure of the New Woman and align it with the monstrous, Sarah Gilbert's outtake on Haggard's work regarding the New Woman is of interest:

The figure of the New Woman, with its evocation of such unruly females...vividly suggested an ultimate triumph of otherness...But even without overt articulations of the links between feminism and other antipatriarchal movements, the very idea of the New Woman was so threatening that her aspirations tended to evoke all the other subversive aspirations that were suddenly, or so it seemed, being voiced throughout the Empire, with some even being conveyed from the invisible world of the dead. (Gilbert 450).

Here, Gilbert hints at the very nature of what made the New Woman fearful – the unruliness, particularly noted in Helen Vaughan's promiscuous nature and even more so through Ayesha, the ruler herself. Whilst Gilbert aligns this with a historical view of the Empire and its interaction with foreign others. This is most visible in Haggard's work and less so with Machen's since, as Haggard takes the reader away from Britain and explores the curious interactions between the western individual and the other. However, as Gilbert also explores, voicing the New Woman's "subversive" aspirations would fit in quite strongly with Machen's work, particular in Helen's behaviour. Therefore, when the negative connotations of the New Woman are that of fear and repulsion for subversive behaviour, then the rightful discourse, particularly with such Gothic texts would be that of the uncanny and its relation to the abject.

This brings us to our next thoughts on the presence of the abject within the Gothic fiction and it is one of language. The abject as a state or a sentiment is one that evades

language or linguistic interpretation. This can also be linked to the uncanny, which as we will explore here, goes beyond Sigmund Freud's depiction of the uncanny. The Gothic uncanny has much in common with the abject as both represent this *unheimlich* sensation that urges the subject to erect barriers between themselves and that which they cannot explain. Nevertheless, the abject still manages to get the subject to seemingly purify themselves by keeping without such things that threaten their self.

Holly, in particular appears to be most susceptible to Ayesha's powers. He aligns the fear and reverence he has for the woman with what we can term as uncanny, "[a]nyhow, I felt more frightened than ever at this ghost-like apparition, and the hair began to rise upon my head as a certainty crept over me that I was in the presence of something that was not canny." (Haggard 140). He views her thus again as the abject corpse-like creature through her "ghost-like" appearance which renders her more so into an "apparition" (Haggard 140) and he then relegates her to something that is "not canny", our first direct reference to the uncanny in both our texts. This is filled with the terror, horror and fascination that the Gothic bears and which also demarks both the uncanny and the abject. The level to which Ayesha is fearful beyond her actions but into her physicality itself is interesting. Helen, on the other hand, due to her elusive nature is easier to become the monster. Most accounts of her whereabouts and actions come from testimonials and these accounts all paint her as the same *femme fatale* as Ayesha.

To use Freud's uncanny then, there is a point at which our novels present anxieties beyond the realm of the real and rather into the imaginary. The very imaginary fear of Ayesha as an uncanny, abject being then is relevant since it translates to a very real fear of the other, a fear of being consumed by the other and above all, a fear of the New Woman disrupting the long-established ideals of a patriarchal society.

It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread. Yet we may expect that it implies some intrinsic quality which justifies the use of a special name. One is curious to know what this peculiar quality is which allows us to distinguish as "uncanny" certain things within the boundaries of what is "fearful." (Freud 1)

The uncanny then when linked to the abject shares a great connection for both work on the mental, or as Freud would have it, the psychological faculties of a person and the effect of this

is reflected deeply in the imaginary. The uncanny whilst being fearsome then also bears the mark as Freud would have it of some regression to something long repressed.

In our texts, for instance, experiencing uncanny sensations from Ayesha and Helen or even labelling them as abject comes thus from this return, ““this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed”” (Freud 13). Contrary to assumptions then, the uncanny is not merely fear of the unknown for somewhere in there is a familiarity. It is perhaps this familiarity that such characters as Holly retain as they use a system of identifying and mimicry to understand Ayesha – comparing her first to “savages queen” and even more so in the more horrific elements of the uncanny as he identifies her ‘corpse’ appearance and “snake-like” attributes. It is these fragments of known things that inform his fear of Ayesha and this is made worse by her actions which are in Holly’s view, malignant and even unnatural.

To place Ayesha and Helen into the category of abject and also the uncanny both through their physical representation as well as the actions that they commit then makes it harder to view their ultimate demise as a bad thing. The abject figure with malevolent or malignant intentions as is implied of Ayesha’s desire to defy nature and be immortal, to conquer Britain and rule the country and Helen’s promiscuous nature thus justifies their demise. In the eyes of Holly and his companions as well as the male narrators of Helen’s story, in stopping Ayesha and Helen, they are ridding the world of an evil that goes beyond its immediate effect on the individual but rather on the collective. To protect themselves and world from these terrible women, they must therefore be destroyed.

Reid goes on to view how this is reminiscent of a fear of the other, for instance. Just as many have read Haggard’s *She* as a commentary on the other and racial tensions aligned with British imperialism and its dangers, Reid suggests that “[t]he narrative of *She* appears alternately attracted and repelled by the vision of female rule embodied in the figure of the white African queen, Ayesha, ‘She-who-must-be-obeyed’ (51). Reid’s reading itself of this links to the same dichotomous relations between attraction and repulsion that we have linked to the abject. This shows how discourses utilising the abject can be linked to much greater discourses and in similar fashion, it relates well to Machen’s work with its interesting view of the gender tensions of the late nineteenth century emergence of the New Woman.

### 3 Chapter

#### Moral and Social Decay

Following the abjection of the women as we have explored in the previous chapter, the movement towards monstrosity renders them further into the realms of what will lead to their demise. Whilst abjection played closely with the inside-outside dichotomy, it also ensured that they became monsters – vilifying the efforts of the New Woman and rendering their actions amoral and symptomatic of an ongoing social decay. It is this focus on morality that draws us first into the discourse of decadence.

Decadence has its roots in the flamboyant nature of nineteenth century high society. Above all, it is a term best attributed to male society, the likes of which is reflected in Oscar Wilde's *Dorian*. Although it is most often associated with men, the term though not called decadence as such when it comes to the feminine also bears relation to women. In this chapter, we will move on to chart the term when it is attached to the being that has been deemed abject and turned monstrous and see how this ties in so well with the pillars of decadence. Here, decadence will be the assigned mostly to Helen Vaughan from *TGGP*, as she, more than Ayesha, embodies the aesthetic term.

Writing of *TGGP* as a central work of fiction of the nineteenth century, Gabriel Lovatt claims that there is much in common with decadence, as a movement with many of the greater discourses of the nineteenth century as we will attempt to look at in this chapter. In Lovatt's view, Machen "explored how immersion in a chaotic modern landscape yielded equally tumultuous internal experiences" through his use of "horror to explore the symbiosis between physical sensation and interior perception against the backdrop of an increasingly unrepresentable modern world. In this respect, "The Great God Pan" and "The Inmost Light" fit into the larger ambitions of Decadence, in which expressions of the modern world can only be represented as excess, abnormality, and discontinuity" (Lovatt 21). By "The Inmost Light", Lovatt is referring to Machen's other novella, published alongside *TGGP* in the first publications of it. Here, Lovatt not only identifies principal properties of the Gothic as a genre and Machen's writing in general, but he also manages to link this to our discourse of the abject.

Using Lovatt's ideas then, excess, abnormality, and discontinuity will be three of the tenets that this chapter will focus on. Firstly, with excess, we have already attributed decadence as a central idea of the chapter, followed onto by abnormality, through which we will explore the discourses, scientific, and pseudoscientific of the time, followed finally by discontinuity, the eventual demise of Ayesha and Helen as we will go on to explore in this chapter and the following one. All three form the focus of what will lead on to our argument of killing off that which threatens to invade for fear of change and all three "provides a progressive narrative of decomposition" (Mighall 197) of moral and society.

### 3.1 Experimentation

Such movements of the nineteenth century as decadence or the New Woman can be said to be reactions to and against the normative. The actions of Ayesha and Helen therefore represent a "regulatory function – conjuring deviance in order to contrast or defend an explicit or implicit (bourgeois) norm" (Mighall 169). The same can be said of decadence, which found itself being a movement that turned away from the morally normative. Whilst we will posit decadence as the term most attributed to *TGGP*, we will further explore the oriental exoticism of Ayesha as doing the same thing as decadence but from a different view.

Applying the term decadent to the New Woman, however, is a difficult one since these two movements had their differences, particularly in that the New Woman's expression was not seen as decadent. Instead, decadence became the Wildean fantasy, representing "self-indulgence" and freedom from "social and moral accountability" (Ferguson 471) for the young man. However, I propose to attach the term decadent with Ayesha and Helen, in favour for the *decaying* aspect of the term decadence. As we have seen with abjection, these two women represent a certain decay that is rife within themselves as individuals but even more so, the texts are rife with a social decay, with Helen and Ayesha becoming the personification of this. It is this decay that leads further into the states of degeneration and monstrosity that comes to define these characters and cements an understanding of what troubled Victorian society in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, Ayesha represents the decay that could fall unto British society should a woman go on to impose her matriarchal rule upon it, whilst Helen represents the other side of this, the decay that could fall upon male, patriarchal society should she be allowed to carry on with her deviant ways.

The constant interplay between the inside and the outside as we have explored previously already situates the work within the complex issues of the outside invading the inside that we have touched upon. The decay of the inside projected outwards thus becomes an important device that drives the plot forward but it also promotes further ideologies of the invasion. As Holly would remark on Ayesha's monstrosity and actions, he fears that her own moral decay would decay his bellowed Britain (Haggard 248), should she set foot on British shores. There was a tendency then, with the Gothic of the nineteenth century to use horror and terror to express this. From abjection to atavistic horror, we face the very real fears that the horror is trying to convey by exploring the taboo.

In some ways, all of these ideologies become experimentations into new forms and new explorations, something reflected in the narratives of our texts. These experimentations on the individual are then extrapolated onto society in such ways that, "the mind-body split still had purchase in the philosophical tradition, the scientific community had begun to identify and map the connections between the body, perception, and cognition" (Lovatt 22). In "The Great God Pan" and "The Inmost Light," this intense desire for knowledge about the relationship between body and mind drives scientists to perform unregulated experiments on human patients. (Lovatt 22) Lovatt reads rightly into the experimentation that led to the conception of Helen. It was a pursuit of knowledge and progress that led to her *creation*.

Let us take this further by looking at this idea of experimentation as Lovatt has posited as part of the decadent and as one of the foundations of what leads to Ayesha and Helen's demise. As such, we will look once more at Ayesha and Helen and associate the term decadence with them in order to better chart the move from monstrous to degenerate and eventually, what causes this to condemn them to a death most unnatural. As we move through this chapter, we will analyse Ayesha and Helen further now that they have become objects, not so much subjects, of abjection and take a look at the ongoing biological and psychological discourse of atavism and evolution that was perpetuated throughout the nineteenth century. All these come to represent ongoing social anxieties that threatened the foundation of the Victorian age.

One of the ways we can view this is by looking at another form of discourse that was going on in the nineteenth century, especially in scientific circles, which was also linked to the decadent movement, often as regarded as a possible explanation for it. With Charles Darwin's works on evolution in the nineteenth century also came his works on atavism, which influenced the way people viewed biology, psychology and even infiltrated the Gothic fiction

of the time. It is this particular branch of his work that I intend to address here in this chapter as we look into the progression from abjection that Ayesha and Helen have experienced to becoming monstrous by firstly attributing atavism to them.

### **3.2 Perversion of Progressive Patriarchy**

Having touched upon this before, let us elaborate a bit more on the wider scale of what was happening as we deconstruct the social implications of the abject subject. Here, I intend to do so by looking at atavism as a symptom of the ongoing decay that decadence and the emergence of the New Woman proposed to the wider society. Our point of entry will therefore refer once more to J. J. Bachofen's works in *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*. In this collection of Bachofen's works, we get a clearer picture of the social structure that matriarchy proposes, as Bachofen charts the historical implication of a matriarchal society and culture from antiquity to times contemporaneous with his writing. The study here is rather pivotal, particularly since as we are looking at two particular examples of societies – with the duality between Holly's Britain and Ayesha's Kôr, and the rather urban exploration of Helen Vaughan's story.

As we have seen, dualism and dichotomous relations are rife in the Gothic and our novels and Machen uses this to good effect again in his juxtaposition of the urban and the rural in his writing, one that reflects a tendency of looking at the urban as a result of progress in all its forms whilst tying the rural with myth and legends and a primitive nature, alluding once more to the atavistic nature of man. Helen is represented as a child of Pan, a being tied to the rural traditions of many lands, but she grows up within an urban setting, her life mapping the city of London. It is no shock or doubt that the culture represented here in Machen's Britain reflects the very real patriarchal stratification of the nation at the time. The world that Helen inhabits, although she moves through it freely, is one that is founded on patriarchal principles and foundations. The many voices that claim her stories is evidence of this, so is the implication that her demise at the hands of the men is reflective of this.

To put this into perspective, we have to also consider, on the other hand, Haggard's world, one that is also dualistic as he envisions the progressive state of the British society of the Victorian age against the far recesses of the Empire, *Africa*, particularly Ayesha's home of Kôr, an amalgamation of many other cultures from the middle east to the deep recesses of the

African continent. In descriptions of Kôr, Haggard brings together all that forms Africa, from the outcrop that forms “[t]he head of the Ethiopian” (Haggard 57) to the “bastard Arabic” (Haggard 44) spoken and even the mention of “Zanzibar mat” (Haggard 131) and “Zulu people” (Haggard 2). This creates a curious collection of all types across the continent in aid of his creation of something other, something that the average British reader would latch on to as exotic in a way that echoes with Edward Said’s words in culture identification, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said 3).

### **3.3 The Noble Savage Queen**

Through Ayesha, for instance, we are presented with the notion of the noble savage. Here, the noble savage is a queen who rules over her people with her own idea of how society should be and this itself is as we have mentioned, in relation to Bachofen’s works, a certain view of matriarchy. The position of women in Kôr, and their treatment is one that undermines much of what is known or expected of matriarchal societies, and this is used to represent how Western ideologies fail to match ideologies that are not from the West. Reflecting on the society and position of women and men in Kôr, Holly goes on to give us our first reflection of what matriarchy means in this narrative -

It then appeared that, in direct opposition to the habits of almost every other savage race in the world, women among the Amahagger are not only upon terms of perfect equality with the men, but are not held to them by any binding ties. Descent is traced only through the line of the mother, and while individuals are as proud of a long and superior female ancestry as we are of our families in Europe, they never pay attention to, or even acknowledge, any man as their father, even when their male parentage is perfectly well known. (Haggard 81)

Holly remarks on one fact that is perhaps of grave importance here, and that is of the lack of homogeneity between peoples in the world but then he goes on to remark on the equality between men and women in this savage society he is observing.

This is shocking to him, considering that men and women do not share equal status in Britain, unlike the Amahagger “as I think I have said elsewhere, among the Amahagger the weaker sex has established its rights” (Haggard 89). This first instance of comparison would



seem very positive, giving the Amahagger women a great chance of agency and choice, one that women from Britain were still bargaining for. Yet, as we move to consider Kôr further, in particular the relationship between the women of Kôr and their great queen, we come to see how this is a rather problematic observation.

Ayesha as a monarch is by no means perfect, nor does her vision of matriarchy reflect a perfect one. Whilst we have commented on the new faces of feminism as something cohesive, something that brings women together in solidarity for their own betterment, there is something lacking in Ayesha's matriarchal rule. To put it simply, Ayesha's dominion over her people is rather tyrannical and whilst she proposes the advancement of her people, and alludes to the position of women in Kôr as better than in Britain, this is not simply the case. Every instance of Ayesha speaking of her people includes her distancing herself from them, "It is but a rude life that thou must live here, for these people are savages, and know not the ways of cultivated man..." (Haggard 151). She already sees herself apart from them – "These people! Speak not to me of my people...these slaves are no people of mine, they are but dogs to do my bidding till the day of my deliverance comes" (Haggard 150), noting her noble white, cultivated ancestry as opposed to their savage lineage. This act of disunity is further emphasised in the way that she chooses to rule her people, through terror and fear. And this says something of her, considering how she speaks of having *made* these people.

Interestingly as well, it is said in *She* that the people of Kôr have their own customs and Ayesha her own. One of the customs that she has which explains her status is that of managing the breeding of the people that serve her. She is attended by a group of mute girls and she claims responsibility for their *creation*,

I have bidden my girls to wait upon thee. They are mutes, thou knowest, deaf are they and dumb, and therefore the safest of servants, save to those who can read their faces and their signs. I bred them so- it hath taken many centuries and much trouble; but at last I have triumphed. Once I succeeded before, but the race was too ugly, so I let it die away; but now, as thou seest, they are otherwise. Once, too, I reared a race of giants, but after a while Nature would no more of it, and it died away. Hast thou aught to ask of me? (Haggard 151 )

Ayesha assumes the role of creator there, claiming mother right, as Bachofen would have it, assuming the maternal as overseer or creator of the servants that attend to her, or even of the

giants she reared, she becomes the mother. And perhaps those are the only children she can have, whether she had them biologically or through orchestration or experimentation. Yet, with the giants, for instance, this too is seen to be wrong as nature takes them from her. It would seem that even the force of nature works to prevent her from continuing her matriarchal lineage, or rather, takes from her the ability to create her own children, further exemplifying the need to *discontinue* her perversion.

As mentioned before, she sees herself as a goddess, a creator of her own race of people's but even this has its limits. She is unable to procreate naturally, and even the creatures she creates are far from perfect, she creates abject monsters, from the race of giants she attempted to create to the mute and deaf girls that serve her (Haggard 151). Those servants themselves are purposefully made deaf and mute by Ayesha as she wants complete passivity from them. In that sense, Ayesha is no better than any misogynistic individual who would deem her monstrous. She earns the monstrous attribute here as she proceeds to unleash monstrosity upon the world and by her disregard of others beneath her.

Furthermore, it is interesting how she refuses to align herself with the people she rules, to them, they are nothing but beasts, "'Baboon,' he says," and she laughed; "but that is the fashion of these savages who lack imagination, and fly to the beasts they resemble for a name..." (Haggard 143). Instead, she chooses to associate herself with the Western principles of Holly and Leo, even if she finds qualms with those as well. However, she chooses to see herself as the white coloniser of sorts and her actions reflect this entirely. Nowhere else does she embody all the ideals of monstrosity, abjection and degeneration than here. This immortal woman is monstrous in her actions and her inability to correct her wrongs mark her even more monstrous as she is unable to progress to a state beyond the degenerate leader she is, and the way she chooses to rule over Kôr and her penchant for striking those who defy her dead relegate her back to the atavistic subject who still clings onto a primitive act of murder without remorse.

What is evident here, just as in *TGGP*, is the similar exposition of the progressive and modern versus the primitive and archaic. However, we can take this further and see it as ironic since although Machen's protagonists reflect on the fact that Kôr is itself progressive in its own ways and that its unique differences, resting upon a matriarchal backdrop. Furthermore, the society that Ayesha presides upon is regarded as a matriarchal one, but only to a certain level. Ayesha's Kôr is only so much as a matriarchal society in that it is ruled by a

matriarch, Ayesha. Even still, this is seen as dated and Holly remarks that it is this kind of society that has denied Kôr progress in the same way as the West has, perhaps due to patriarchal attributes. Ayesha and her mentality, and immortality, become a hindrance to progress, and it is for this reason that life in Kôr remains in a stagnant, primitive nature.

It is a discontinuity that needs to come from this then in order to ensure progress. Ayesha and Helen are villainous women, they are living lives of excess. These are lives that should not be attributed to the women of the age and by extension, they pertain certain deformities, both physical (Ayesha as the corpse and Helen tainted by evil) and psychological (Ayesha's desire to impose her matriarchal culture onto Great Britain and Helen's rampant deviant behaviour). These are all threatening qualities that cannot be allowed to continue as it becomes threatening to the normative. Ayesha chooses to rule for eons with fear, creates her own breed of slaves and defies nature in doing so. Helen wreaks havoc wherever she goes, terrifying the men she encounters but not only do her actions cause harm to men but also to the women she encounters, such as her encounter with Rachel, "her mother heard a noise which sounded like suppressed weeping in the girl's room, and on going in found her lying, half undressed, upon the bed, evidently in the greatest distress. As soon as she saw her mother, she exclaimed, "Ah, mother, mother, why did you let me go to the forest with Helen?" (Machen 28).

One of the ways that our novels explore the discontinuity and ensure it, is through the implication that with the deaths of Ayesha and Helen, there can be no other, no progeny. Ayesha and Helen are both implied to be childless, at least naturally. This is interesting even more so when considering Helen's implied sexual exploits throughout the novel. As the fire consumes Ayesha and as Helen reverts to a primitive form of being, there is the confirmation that there can be nothing left of them. This ensures that since there is no child from them, the atavistic and decadent natures of the women cannot be continued and thus the threat is averted.

In this way, discontinuing Ayesha's lineage, albeit not being an actual lineage due to her immortality, ensures the end of a possible atavistic cycle. Even as she comments on the fact that nature would not allow her to have her race of giants it is implied that she cannot be allowed to continue. Furthermore, as Bachofen would have it, this is a greater injustice on the feminine as "[i]n a word, maternal conceptions cede to the requirements of patriarchal theory" (Bachofen 74). The greater powers of patriarchy would take over, just as the name of the

father, as Bachofen elaborates here takes over that of the mother. Reflecting on the past traditions of matriarchal lineages, as the feminine is replaced by the masculine, Bachofen highlights how no matter what progression a society seems to take, the patriarchal manages to be the dominant.

Even from its conception, matriarchy was ensured not to carry on. “Matriarchy is followed by patriarchy and preceded by unregulated heterism” (Bachofen 93). There is above all, a great upheaval in the social structure, heralded here by our female characters who have strong, deviant natures which manages to unpivot the normative social beliefs of the society from where they come. Matriarchy as we can attribute here to Ayesha’s society represents just that as her society differs greatly from Holly’s Great Britain. It is the threat of matriarchy here that drives Holly to further view Ayesha as monstrous and worthy of death. Ayesha has thus far represented all that Holly knew could threaten what he knows as normal.

What is prevalent in the texts is the idea that altercations or moments whereby the two genders collide often result in violence, “[e]very change in the relation between the sexes is attended by bloody events; peaceful and gradual change is far less frequent than violent upheaval.” (Bachofen 93). This violence is thus a haunting reminder of an atavistic past. By extension, the commentary in both *She* and *TGGP* imply that violence here is associated with women. Ayesha and Helen’s actions are viewed as more violent – Ayesha’s as barbaric and Helen’s as purely atavistic. Having posited Helen’s actions as atavistic then, let us first come to terms with atavism as Helen’s monstrosity and reason for being killed.

### **3.4 Atavism and the Monstrous**

Atavism as a nineteenth century theme engages often with ideas of regression, both biological and psychological. As we move into looking at the decay represented by decadence through atavism, we encounter another of the tenets of the Gothic that Lovatt mentions, and it is that of abnormality. What ties it closely with the Gothic is its inclusion of body monstrosity, and by extension degeneration of individuals that here relates to the abject again as it shows how internal decay, that which is symptomatic of one’s ancestry, manifests itself outwardly, showing the physical body itself as monstrous. This becomes important in viewing the decadent subject since “[a] central tenet of Aestheticism and Decadence was the rejection of Cartesian dualism in order to investigate embodied” (Lovatt 20).

The Gothic uncanny often evokes notions of the abnormal through atavism and here, we will attempt to look into what atavistic traits are present in the novels, especially since those traits contribute to the abjection and turning monstrous of our characters. Atavism found its way to literature and the Gothic through its Darwinian origins as well as in criminology through the works of Cesare Lombroso.

I will open this up by a look at the character of Holly first, whose descriptions explore the dialogue of the abject and degenerate, since he too is a similar product of abjection, abhorred, a fact that is repeated throughout the novel.

Like Cain, I was branded- branded by Nature with the stamp of abnormal ugliness, as I was gifted by Nature with iron and abnormal strength and considerable intellectual powers. So ugly was I that the spruce young men of my college, though they were proud enough of my feats of endurance and physical prowess, did not even care to be seen walking with me... Women hated the sight of me. Only a week before I had heard one call me a "monster" when she thought I was out of hearing, and say that I had converted her to the monkey theory.(Haggard 8)

The extent to which Holly acknowledges himself as ugly is remarkable and seems to also inform his prejudices towards gender constructs and his opinion of women. The description of Holly presented here gives a glimpse into how physicality, as Lombroso goes on to work with, appears to depict a person's character, but it also becomes a marker of one's past and future.

Although he is depicted as physically monstrous, Holly protrudes this same judgment onto Ayesha instead, growing to see her as monstrous. Atavism thus follows the course of revisiting biological inheritances that haunt a lineage and merges within morality, biology and psychology. By extension, the Gothic takes this a step further by adding the supernatural or preternatural to this. As we continue, we will come to better understand the correlation between all these forces that form the nineteenth century Gothic and it will help us see what frames the death of Ayesha and Helen Vaughan as ultimately, atavism brings us deeper into the realms of the abject and monstrous to give us the degenerate figure that such decadent women were painted with.

In writing his works, Lombroso refers to physiognomy as he would go on to write of his conception of his ideas of it in his first chapter on "The Born Criminal":

This was not merely an idea, but a revelation. At the sight of that skull, I seemed to see all of a sudden, lighted up as a vast plain under a flaming sky, the problem of the nature of the criminal—an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals. Thus were explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheek-bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped or sessile ears found in criminals, savages, and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh, and drink its blood. (Lombroso xv)

The terms Lombroso attributes to the physiognomy of criminals here echo with the abject and the monstrous. It is no shock that they are important elements in the Gothic when trying to represent such taboo subjects. All this is seen in our novels, especially in *She*, for instance, with the comparison of man to beast, “In two thousand years these caves have not changed, nothing has changed, but the beasts and man, who is as the beasts” (Haggard 148), which in Holly’s view marks the people’s proclivity for bestial actions. Talking of her own people in Kôr, Ayesha highlights something that resonates with the works on atavism, the likening of people to beasts. But she too is described as animal-like in the book, but here it is with a different effect. Ayesha is mentioned to be bird-like, ““Surely thou art not afraid,” called this strange creature in a lull of the gale, from where she stood, poised like a bird on the highest point of the rocking stone” (Haggard 274), rendering her beastly and inhuman physically and in her mannerism. She does this to show how primitive the people she rules are, distancing herself from them whilst still being seen as something elegant and regal in contrast to them. Lombroso labours unto the bestial in his description of the criminal as he views them as embodying “lunatic” behaviours that are very like “wild beasts” and savage beasts” (84).

How can we relegate this to Ayesha and Helen then, two characters whose actions have deemed them abject through deviance? The deviance of Ayesha and Helen manifests itself outwardly. As Lombroso would posit, an atavistic nature would relegate to one’s primitive past that has lingered down one’s lineage. Relating this to Ayesha first then, it is clear that this has strong emphasis. Not only is Ayesha’s lineage quite *short* from her primal past but she also wears this proudly. Her nostalgic musings of her past and the lingering *primitive* states that form the culture and society of Kôr refer once more to traits of atavism

and perhaps this is a stronger one than the atavistic traits that we can attribute to Helen Vaughan.

Whilst Lombroso is looking at criminals in his work, what his work proves is a correlation between one's physiognomy and one's actions. As we explored in the previous chapter, Ayesha as a corpse-figure is reminiscent of this. Lombroso's focus on the physical attributes of one's facial and cranial features reminds us of our preoccupation with judging individuals based on what they look like. The best way to approach this then is to look at the eventual description of Ayesha and Helen at the moments of their deaths, as it is then that they assume their 'true' forms. Ayesha, for example, at once beautiful and ethereal in her beauty still bears attributes that can be likened to Lombroso's view of the criminal.

True enough- I faint even as I write it in the living presence of that terrible recollection she was shrivelling up; the golden snake that had encircled her gracious form slipped over her hips and to the ground; smaller and smaller she grew; her skin changed colour, and in place of the perfect whiteness of its lustre it turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment. (Haggard 286)

In this first instance, we get a clear description of her body deteriorating, decaying even. Her body begin to shrivel up as the true nature of her age catches up to her. She takes on the Darwinian evolutionary reversal whereby she changes and becomes older, smaller and her skin even changes tom the likes of parchment, taking from her anything even human. This we get into even more as the description of her change continues:

She felt at her head: the delicate hand was nothing but a claw now, a human talon like that of a badly preserved Egyptian mummy, and then she seemed to realize what kind of change was passing over her, and she shrieked- ah, she shrieked!- she rolled upon the floor and shrieked! Smaller she grew, and smaller yet, till she was no larger than a monkey. (Haggard 286)

Once more, we are greeted with Ayesha as a corpse-like figure, she becomes a mummified being and even more so, she keeps losing more human aspects, like Helen who de-evolves into nothing, taking on animalistic ones as the hand becomes nothing but a claw and the eventual description of her is that of a baboon in sieze once she has been stripped of her human attributes. Not to end there, Holly goes on to describe the next changes within her,

Now the skin was puckered into a million wrinkles, and on the shapeless face was the stamp of unutterable age. I never saw anything like it; nobody ever saw anything like the frightful age that was graven on that fearful countenance, no bigger now than that of a two-month-old child, though the skull remained the same size, or nearly so; and let all men pray to God they never may, if they wish to keep their reason.

Holly now mingles the abject with the atavistic traits as he views her as devoid of shape and this is a frightful sight, especially considering how enthralled he had been by her when he first met her. Now, he cannot help but comment on her changing size, diminishing, decaying and her skull, the locus of Lombroso's study on atavism and criminology becomes one of the features that remains engraved in his mind.

At last she lay still, or only feebly moving. She, who but two minutes before had gazed upon us the loveliest, noblest, most splendid woman the world has ever seen, she lay still before us, near the masses of her own dark hair, no larger than a big monkey, and hideous- ah, too hideous for words. And yet, think of this- at that very moment I thought of it- it was the same woman!

In her death, Ayesha moves from being physically attractive to becoming the grotesque corpse that she has embodied throughout the novel. The fire that consumes her takes away her youth, consuming her beauty and rendering her down to her skeleton and here, as though relegating to the primitive that Lombroso speaks of, Holly, spectating the event, focuses on the size of her skull, commenting on its size and he eventually compares the size of her remains to that of "no larger than a big monkey" and above it, he comments on how "hideous" she looked in death, emphasising the hideousness by repeating it twice. By seeing her as animalistic thus allows Holly to attach her behaviour to an atavistic nature, further cementing her within his civilised versus uncivilised dichotomy that permeates his perception of the people of Kôr. As such, the atavistic being is even more so detestable due to their position as a threat to society and all that is normative, just as we saw with the abject individual.

### **3.5 Haunted by the Father, Daughter of Pan**

Helen, on the other hand also embodies views of atavism, albeit in a different thought. Contrary to Ayesha, firsthand experience of Helen's physical attributes is quite lacking. On



the other hand, witnesses speak of her highly, complimenting her “exotic” yet mystifying beauty which is similar to descriptions we get of Ayesha upon first encounter. With Clarke’s encounter with a sketch of Helen, we get our first good description of her facial features and the sort of presentment it harbours,

Clarke looked again at the sketch; it was not Mary after all. There certainly was Mary’s face, but there was something else, something he had not seen on Mary’s features when the white-clad girl entered the laboratory with the doctor, nor at her terrible awakening, nor when she lay grinning on the bed. Whatever it was, the glance that came from those eyes, the smile on the full lips, or the expression of the whole face, Clarke shuddered before it at his inmost soul, and thought, unconsciously, of Dr. Phillip’s words, “the most vivid presentment of evil I have ever seen.” He turned the paper over mechanically in his hand and glanced at the back. (Machen 48)

It is interesting here how her facial expression itself is enough to cause a “vivid presentment of evil” and beyond that, the most vivid presentment. Whilst we have looked at this presentment in relation to the figure of Pan and the shock aspect of the abject, here we can look at it at the atavistic shock that the atavistic individual bears, the individual being Helen.

This engages well with Lombroso’s work as Clarke remarks of Helen’s facial features in the sketch, particularly her lips which is one of the features that Lombroso labours on exploring, writing of the differences between criminal versus non-criminals by saying “[t]he lips of violators of women and murderers are fleshy, swollen and protruding, as in negroes. Swindlers have thin, straight lips. Hare-lip is more common in criminals than in normal persons” (Lombroso 16). Note how Lombroso remarks on the “violators of women” and this instance of sexual deviance is also linked to Helen, as she herself is seen as a violator of men as she has sexual intercourse with them before managing to convince them to commit suicide. This remark could also be attributed to Helen’s own mother, Helen, as the text abounds with evidence that she suffered some form of violation before her death at the hands of Doctor Phillips who took advantage of her trust and submitted her to his experimentations. The level of which we can attribute Helen’s lips as marking her as an criminal can be problematic since all evidence up to this point of her appearance comes from second hand accounts. Moreover, Lombroso’s research itself does not constitute an exact science when it comes to atavism.

However, this changes at the climax of the novel when we finally encounter Helen in person and are told of her demise. Here, Machen seems to play with atavism and degeneration in a way very reminiscent of Lombroso's work. Towards the end of the novel, as Helen reaches her demise, Machen gives us a graphic account of her physical appearance as she perishes, just as we received with Ayesha's demise.

The blackened face, the hideous form upon the bed, changing and melting before your eyes from woman to man, from man to beast, and from beast to worse than beast, all the strange horror that you witness, surprises me but little. What you say the doctor whom you sent for saw and shuddered at I noticed long ago; I knew what I had done the moment the child was born, and when it was scarcely five years old I surprised it, not once or twice but several times with a playmate, you may guess of what kind.  
(Machen 87)

Now, as we see here, Helen embodies the monstrous perfectly in her final demise but also symbolises the atavistic being, as she is shown to revert from man to beast, expressing Lombroso's view of the criminally inclined as bestial and primitive and in the end, she is changes from beast to "worse than beast" and this itself it indescribable, much like sensations of encountering the abject.

At this point, Helen Vaughan is no longer anything human and this is what is remarked upon at the end of the novel,

I knew what I had done the moment the child was born, and when it was scarcely five years old I surprised it, not once or twice but several times with a playmate, you may guess of what kind. It was for me a constant, an incarnate horror, and after a few years I felt I could bear it no more, and I sent Helen Vaughan away. You know now what frightened the boy in the wood. The rest of the strange story, and all else that you tell me, as discovered by your friend, I have contrived to learn from time to time, almost to the last chapter. And now Helen is with her companions...

No longer is she human and thus she is no longer called upon as "she" or "her", instead, she is talked upon as "it" as in "I surprised it", even in recollections of her after her death, she is no longer human enough, she has now embodied the monstrous completely. This is of course seen from the perspective of a man, giving the reader a *civilised* account of what he witnessed.

Not only is she abject at this point, becoming that which fascinates but also repulses but she also comes to embody degeneration completely. As she assumes monstrous forms, Helen degenerates from man to beast into nothingness in a manner that reverses Darwin's view of evolution.

From the experiment on Mary, Helen's mother, we are introduced to this idea that something otherworldly is taking place, albeit in the name of science, and this is where the uncanny comes to play again. As it is implied that Mary is impregnated by some otherworldly being, in the form of the god Pan of old paganism. As such, as Helen's father, Pan as a the devious being had certain evil qualities that presented within his offspring.

Whilst this too is a little step away from the origins of atavism which sees that such traits come further back in one's lineage and often skips generations, it is rather fitting here as we are engaging with themes that are beyond the natural world. Helen's evil traits come thus from her father and are most reminiscent in her physical appearance, particularly in the face as her face contains mere traces of something odd beyond its beauty and these are enough to evoke presentiments of horror in the people she encounters. And it is these same traits that turn her monstrous and since they manifest in amoral and criminal behaviour, i.e. the death of people around her, it is enough to vilify her and sign her demise.

Karschay gives a good basis for the use of the terms atavism and degeneration in the Gothic and they both reflect well with ideas of the monstrous Gothi. As Karschay explores, there is a dualistic relationship between the two terms and this is both one of similitude but also of opposition and difference. Furthermore, Karschay goes further into the actual background of the terms coming from the original Darwinian concepts of evolution and this itself adds basis to Lombroso's works with atavism.

As Karschay says, "[i]n theoretical terms, atavism and degeneration can be understood as inverse processes, which share the same developmental endpoint: both phenomena can be conceptualised as abnormal or pathological deviations from a given norm" (39). It is this that we have chosen to focus on here, as we explored the move from the norm through decadence and other forms. Even more so, [w]hile degeneration signals a devolutionary development from a higher evolutionary standard, atavism signifies an individual's incapacity to reach a given level of evolutionary perfection. In other words, degeneration proper suggests *an actual*

*regression from* a norm, whereas atavism implies a *failed progression to* such a normative condition” (Karschay 39).

Yet, even if we attribute Helen with an atavistic nature, it is hard to diagnose her as entirely so since she is only represented as such through witness accounts. To complicate this, not only is she devoid of a voice but even at times when others attempt to come to terms with Helen’s activities there is an air of silence or even mystery that suddenly shrouds the narrative so that, “Whenever Machen’s novel comes close to representing Helen Vaughan’s mysteries, the text silences itself by invariably robbing its characters of speech” (Karschay 110). Moving from abjection then, atavism makes it easier to view these women as monstrous and since their behaviour is seen as monstrous, this goes hand in hand with atavism.

However, what is clear for our reading of the two novels is the concept that, “[t]he first generation of New Woman of the Victorian age seem by and large to have accepted these medico-scientific parameters of the field discourse surrounding female sexuality, inasmuch as that they rarely, in the discursive realm at least, constructed themselves as sexual subjects” (Ledger 30) and that is perhaps what makes it easier to term our powerful, female characters as decadent. And this itself is something that was perpetuated in the fiction of the time, just as “whilst the mainstream women’s movement of the *fin de siècle* was busy distancing itself from the sexual excesses associated with Wildean decadence and concentrating instead on civic and constitutional rights for women, the popular fictional press often insisted on represented the New Woman as a sexual decadent” (Ledger 30). It is this view of the women as decadent and sexually driven that we have adopted here in this chapter, particularly with our view of Helen Vaughan as we assume her use of a male-inclined decadent movement is enough to render her monstrous. Sally Ledger goes on to view the fiction of the time, particularly the vampire fiction in discovering how it is a certain *awakening* that these women experience and which turns them into the decadent, sexual deviants that they are represented as in the fiction of the time but it is not entirely this view that I will attempt to use in my reading of Helen, for she, unlike the likes of Lucy Westenra of *Dracula*, whom Ledger uses as a prime example, is monstrously and deviant-inclined from the inception of the novella.

Conversely, writing of the New Woman during the nineteenth century, poet Charles Harper posited some critical and problematic observations of the New Woman. These views, though negative and discouraging for the efforts of the New Woman visit the familiar territories of the abject. Here, Harper paints the New Woman as a monstrous creature.

[N]ature, which never contemplated the production of a learned or a muscular woman, will be revenged upon her offspring, and the New Woman, if a mother at all, will be the mother of a New Man, as different indeed, from the present race as possible, but how different, the clamorous females of today cannot expect... [There is] the prospect of peopling the world with stunted and hydrocephalic children ... and ultimate extinction of the race. (Charles Harper)

Harper takes on the counter view here that also resonates with atavistic ideas – the conception of offspring that will bear upon them the failures of their parents and this he attributes to the concept of the New Woman. But this is not allowed to carry on in our novels. There is an assurance with the demise of Ayesha and Helen that their evil ways will not continue.

Britain was thus facing turmoil, all these rising movements and ideas contrasted with the established norms and this, for a nation building its identity based on its imperial prowess was too threatening. In line with Harper's words and notions of atavism, "the New Woman was also frequently presented as a danger to the continuance of the 'race', in the guise of a potential mother of physically weak and mentally feeble children" (31), something which Britain did not need. "The crisis in gender definitions was accompanied by - and inextricably linked with - a crisis within the politics of empire. It was, as I've mentioned earlier, the threat to women's reproductive function - the threat to their role as mothers of the 'race' — which was used as ammunition against the New Woman in medico-scientific discourse. (Ledger 31).

The argument here follows such criticism of the New Woman as that of Harper, as well as many others during the nineteenth century who feared the rise of the New Woman due to the threat that the New Woman posed to society in general. The view that the New Woman would give rise to a lesser race is quite interesting, particularly when we consider again Ayesha's view of herself as mother to her deaf and mute servants as well as the race of giants that she once created.

In essence, the argument that the New Woman was an altogether different breed of woman that risked creating a deformed race of children resonates once more not only with eugenics but even so with Darwinian evolutionary theories and theories of atavism that we have looked at. It shows further how a progression towards better scientific understanding still presented dated modes of thinking.

As many continued to vilify the New Woman, some voices arose to try and find a middle ground for the New Woman as well as to better enlighten the people during a time when the conflicting ideas of what made the New Woman prevailed in making it more difficult.

As women stood up to advocate for the New woman, the general view changed a little. The change would be in that the New Woman would not be seen simply as a “morally superior being who was a 'little above' men” but rather “that men should emulate the moral superiority of women, rather than that the New Woman should have the moral freedoms allowed to men” (Ledger 32). This in itself carries with it the weight of much of the contemporary’s concerns with gender politics and the continuing dialogue of feminism and it shows how that discourse was an old one, and that even then, the definitions of feminism or of the New Woman was fluctuating greatly.

By extension, it also shows how the moral decay that such women seemed to possess was even more evident in the people commenting on the dangers of the New Woman, they seemed to possess more decay of the mind in their views of femininity and the New Woman. Altogether, all these movements put together formed the backbone of the threat to British society. The decadent New Woman was morally corrupt, and they obviously pertained some primitive and atavistic traits that could result in deformed progeny. Above all, this was threatening to all that was British. Using such ideology not only made it more difficult for people to accept the New Woman but also made the social anxieties greater.

## 4 Chapter

**Your life is mine to use as I please.**

Having breached the death of Ayesha and Helen, let us take into account now how all these terms work together. We shall finally look at this idea that beyond reflecting anxieties of the end of the century, these two Gothics texts utilised abjection, atavism, monstrosity and degeneration to express the decay of the Victorian society and a fear that this would carry on in the new century. Above it, it represented a distrust of the New Woman and social upheaval that such an idea carried. These ideas reinforced the futility of dualistic thinking as they highlighted the binaries that still coloured the century even towards its end – man – woman, white – other, self – other, inside – outside.

In this final chapter, I propose to look at the ideas of agency and voices, something we have touched upon in the previous sections of this thesis but here, this agency will look further into the voices afforded to Ayesha and Helen and the level of agency they have in their own demise, if there is any at all. We shall thus play devil's advocate in identifying what and or who led to the deaths of Ayesha and Helen, and why. This will help us paint a bigger picture of why decadence is vilified, particularly when attached to the feminine and to the New Woman. This legacy that carries on to this day is thus important to look into.

We will do this by focusing closely at the ruination of them, as mentioned before through atavism, monstrosity and degeneration, by using part of Kelly Hurley's ideas of the *abhuman*, whereby Hurley delves into the ways that the Gothic fiction of the fin de siècle proposed a ruination of the human subject through abhumanism. This will allow us to look once more at the final ruination of Ayesha and Helen in their respective narratives. Firstly though, I will address the moments of their death to illustrate the importance of this.

### 4.1 The Moment They Perish

As we have attributed abjection, the monstrous and degeneration to the manner of death that both Ayesha and Helen go through, we can look further into their moments of death, particularly here as we begin with Helen's, the one which is most detailed. The description of Helen's death is lengthy and gruesome, and it mixes elements of the Gothic

with the scientific in a discomfoting way. I thought it important to include the passages describing her death as only through there do we get the reiteration of the dialogue of the monstrous and grotesque that we have been using throughout this thesis.

Before the first instances of her death, it is revealed and implied that she accepted to take her life by the cord that was offered her rather than having the police intervene. And witnessing this death was pivotal Villiers and Clarke remain present throughout the entire moment of her death. No last words are afforded her and even in this moment we do not get any understanding of Helen's true character. This makes it even more difficult to humanise Helen, or to empathise with her and as they describe her death as she shifts through states during her death.

Though horror and revolting nausea rose up within me, and an odour of corruption choked my breath, I remained firm. I was then privileged or accursed, I dare not say which, to see that which was on the bed, lying there black like ink, transformed before my eyes. The skin, and the flesh, and the muscles, and the bones, and the firm structure of the human body that I had thought to be unchangeable, and permanent as adamant, began to melt and dissolve. (Machen 80)

Once more, the entirety of the process is relegated to the discourse of the sciences as a means to understand the difficult to understand process that the men are witnessing. The language becomes scientific and almost clinical as they recount the separation of the body "into its elements" but to make it even more confusing, Helen's death sees her moving from sex to sex, diving from man to beast and all this reflects the language of evolution that had been used previously. Here, she regresses through grotesque and monstrous means to a form that is beyond understanding and beyond the human.

I know that the body may be separated into its elements by external agencies, but I should have refused to believe what I saw. For here there was some internal force, of which I knew nothing, that caused dissolution and change.

Here too was all the work by which man had been made repeated before my eyes. I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. The



principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed. (Machen 80)

Why, though, is Helen afforded such a terrible form of death? And why is it important that she takes her own life? This explanation if not given in the novel itself but several conclusions can be drawn from it.

Firstly, Helen taking her own life is one that is important, simply that no one must be the one to take her life. The choice that her mother was not given is thus afforded to her even though that is a rather disturbing choice. Therefore, to absolve the men of what happens to her and to stabilize things again, she must be the one to do this.

Secondly, Helen's manner of death has to be so in that it confronts the very dialogue that the men of the novel are accustomed to, they know of evolution, the talk of the time, but to see the reverse of this only makes it more credible. Furthermore, so far, evidence of Helen had only been from witnesses, but they had to be there to witness her death in all its entirety for only then could they have complete evidence of this. Another reason for this is a macabre fascination that forces them to watch her writhe to her death and this is also problematic for it revisits the same conversation of who is the villain there.

And lastly, as I choose to express here, is that Helen's death is a symbolic one. As she represents the threat to society that we have explored, it is important that her death is witnessed by the symbols of patriarchy, men and it is important that her death is shown as so gruesome and that she is rendered to nothingness for only then is the threat neutralized completely. This is further emphasized by the fact that the events surrounding Helen's life will be included in Clarke's book, "*Memoirs to Prove the Existence of the Devil*" (Machen 21) which would therefore provide all the evidence of this neutralized threat. The men having heard of the rise of this decadent New Woman and of her horrendous acts that threatened their society and culture had to be the ones to coerce her into taking her own life and had to be the ones to witness this act.

But we cannot only look at Helen's death as justifying her actions, for us to better understand her we must consider her as a character more carefully, especially considering the fact that she has been denied a voice throughout the narrative and has been given only one choice in her life, and that is the one to end her life. As my aim is to denounce claims of Helen as being a completely villainous character, I choose to address her actions and

investigate what fuels her actions, and this I will link to her past including her mother. In doing so, we will be able to use this to comment on the larger scale of things and allow Helen's story to better reflect my idea of her as a symbol of decadence that was to herald change.

Ferguson begins her reading of Helen Vaughan by reading her as one whose actions are driven by a desire to accumulate wealth and stature, but she states that Helen's "seductions deviate substantially from those of the typical fictional adventuress, seemingly having neither money (although she accumulates wealth in the process) nor social status as explicit goal" (Ferguson 475), which is a pivotal difference between Helen and most fictional femmes fatales, and between herself and Ayesha as well. Ayesha, unlike Helen, is a queen and has both status and wealth, both of which work mostly in her homeland, which Holly considers unequal in his consideration of what it would be like should Ayesha invade Great Britain.

However, even if Helen desires wealth or status, as her transgressions imply as she moves around the city *collecting* people, money and names, "the thought that Mrs. Herbert was Mrs. Beaumont came into my mind" (Machen 73), it is not merely a desire for these that fuel her actions. On the one hand, as Ferguson goes on to rightly argue,

[t]hese objects are coveted because they confer stability on the individual—wealth assures food and shelter, status offers access to beneficial social contacts. However, Vaughan seeks the antithesis of stability. She aims to induce the same type of ontological collapse that accompanied her birth in all those who look on her. (Ferguson 475)

This ontological collapse would therefore be the true reason behind her dealings in the novel and would justify them to a certain extent. She is still plagued by the mysteries of her conception and the fate of her mother, and as Ferguson says, she wishes to "induce" unto the people she encounters. I choose not to use the term victims for them, even here as I comment on their fates at the hands of Helen as I argue that Helen is no predatory monster and as such, not entirely the antagonist of the novel.

She is an agent of change if anything else, she as the decadent New Woman forces men to face atrocities that they have done to woman kind and in doing so, it is of their own accord that they commit suicide. Helen becomes the Gothic monster in that she is not merely

other and villainous, instead, she becomes the mirror that is raised to society, here raised to a patriarchal society to reflect the truth of the wrongs that they have been doing – she reflects the meaninglessness of accumulating money just for the sake of it, the meaninglessness of seeking the company of prostitutes and above all, she reflects the true horrors that these men and many others have come to do to women, including her own mother in their pursuits. It is eventually those reflections that bring the men to near madness and drives them to commit suicide.

Ayesha knows that Leo and Holly oppose her ideas and her rule, but she accepts this and during their time in Kôr, she attempts to show them her way of life. She does not do what the colonists would have done, merely imposing their ideologies on others, she instead shows them the reality of her life and what life for them could be like were they to consider or attempt it. She knows, however, that her dominion is one that is unheard of to Leo and Holly, as she finds it strange that the people of England revere their queen, ““But here is a strange thing,” said Ayesha, in astonishment; “a queen whom her people love! Surely the world must have changed since I dwelt in Kôr” (Haggard 248). To Ayesha, a queen should rule with fear for it is then that her people will obey, and she demands full obedience. This, to Holly and Leo is, of course, absurd since Britain had gone through its period of being ruled by fear of many kinds and to them, having moved away from this is an act of progress and going back to it only makes Ayesha into the primitive, monster that her rule of fear and macabre way of life carries.

## **4.2 In Command of My Own Death**

In dying, Helen is given one form of agency that was not afforded to her mother or herself. Washing their hands of her death, the gentlemen give her an ultimatum, neither of which are rewarding. She can either relinquish her evil ways and turn herself in to the police – which would likely result in investigation and eventually her death, or she can take her own life. The fact that they give her this choice, both of which includes death is both an act of kindness, or so they believe and a villainous act, on par with the villainy that they have attributed to Helen. The decision to have her take her own life brings forth a moral and ethics discussion by Austin and Villiers, who come to consider the implications of causing Helen to kill herself –

“You would not do it,” he murmured at last. “You would not have blood on your hands. My God!” he exclaimed, with sudden vehemence, “you cannot mean this, Villiers, that you will make yourself a hangman?”

“No. I shall offer a choice, and leave Helen Vaughan alone with this cord in a locked room for fifteen minutes. If when we go in it is not done, I shall call the nearest policeman. That is all.” (Machen 78)

Not wanting to be implicated in her death, the men agree to give her the choice to take her own life with the cord, but this does not justify the action. The fact that they have taken it upon themselves to take matters into their own hands makes it even worse. In the first place, the ideal course of action would have been to alert the police of Helen’s acts and whereabouts, no matter how fantastical their evidence of it all was.

There is thus a clear connection between that which we call abject, or abhuman when rendered monstrous as from this point on, they become worthy of death. Calling this the “ruination of the human subject” (3), Kelly Hurley terms this the abhuman subject.

In other words, I am positing the fin de siècle Gothic as a highly innovative genre which is at the same time deeply imbricated within its cultural moment. Jacques Derrida argues that there can be no such thing as absolute discursive originality in any case; even the most inventive of discourses borrows its “concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined” (“Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” p. 285). Understandings of human identity underwent a radical transfiguration at the fin de siècle as new modes of imaging and narrativizing the (ab)human subject became available. Those scientific disciplines like sexology, which sought to fix the meanings of human identity, were capable of fracturing it beyond recognition; the “heritage” they made available for discourses like the Gothic was sometimes “more or less coherent,” sometimes more or less in ruins. (Hurley 9).

Taking us back to Mary, Helen’s mother, we get evidence of what makes Helen the way she is, Helen’s “genealogy is striking enough: she is the product of experimental neurology and of certain obscure primitive forces, as these are brought to play across the body of a seventeen-year-old virgin named Mary” (Hurley 12). The female body here becomes a blank canvas to be experimented upon and this depends almost entirely on passivity. It is

Mary's compliance that allows such horrors to occur and here, she is given agency into allowing this to happen. In the conversation that occurs between Raymond and Clarke we get a glimpse into their moral perception of their actions:

“But you remember what you wrote to me? I thought it would be requisite that she—”

He whispered the rest into the doctor's ear.

“Not at all, not at all. That is nonsense. I assure you. Indeed, it is better as it is; I am quite certain of that.”

“Consider the matter well, Raymond. It's a great responsibility. Something might go wrong; you would be a miserable man for the rest of your days.” (Machen 13)

However, even this is contested here in the voice of doctor Raymond who intervenes to say of Mary that “[h]er life is mine, to use as I see fit” (Machen 14). Even Clarke, who breaches this topic of Mary's involvement in the experiment is problematic. Clarke's qualm here is not exactly with Mary's life *per se* but rather as he mentions, Raymond's life and reputation, noting that should things go wrong, he would be “a miserable man” for the rest of his days. In this moment here, Mary is not even seen as a potential victim of something that could go wrong, she is seen rather as something that stands in the way of progress – the experiment conducted on her could advance understanding of life and should she perish in the process, then that is of no great loss. The triviality of her life makes it so that he, as the person who *saved* her from other fates becomes the proprietor of her life and as such, the experiment he conducts on her is justified only in that it becomes an equilibrium, in other words, she owes him her life for having saved her.

“No, I think not, even if the worst happened. As you know, I rescued Mary from the gutter, and from almost certain starvation, when she was a child; I think her life is mine, to use as I see fit. Come, it's getting late; we had better go in.” (Machen 14)

Both men manage to disregard both morality and ethics here in favour for the progress of the sciences. This becomes the triggering sense of terror that this novel carries, the mere fact that this idea of consent is played upon.

Even though Raymond and Clarke have this conversation over the morality of the experiment, it is one that is not carried in depth. Raymond shows no remorse in what he does

even as he recounts it, it is only towards the end of the novel that he presents a rather real, remorseful consideration for what he has done to Mary as he writes, “It was an ill work I did that night when you were present; I broke open the door of the house of life, without knowing or caring what might pass forth or enter in” (Machen 86), where he accepts that his oeuvre was an ill one. He goes on to refer back to the conversation he shared with Clarke at the beginning, “I recollect your telling me at the time, sharply enough, and rightly too, in one sense, that I had ruined the reason of a human being by a foolish experiment, based on an absurd theory. You did well to blame me, but my theory was not all absurdity” (Machen 86).

What this shows, however, even in his moment of accepting that he did a wrong, is a foolish attempt at justifying his actions in the name of science and progress, focusing on his theory firstly as absurd and foolish but then going to accept that it was not. It is rather sad that he still gives little thought to what he did to Mary, recognising first what he did as wrong but then he simply relegates her to the discourse of science, “I had ruined the reason of a human being”. Even if this still gives way to him considering Mary’s humanity, not naming her only reinforces the fact that he saw her merely as a test subject, or in this case, an object.

Consent then becomes the reliant term in the continuation of the novel, and it becomes the drive for Helen’s actions and ultimately it becomes a tool that ensures her death. It is therefore implied that Helen’s movements throughout the novel, and the trail of death that follows her is a reaction to what happened to her mother. There is no evidence of her physically killing the men she encounters in the novel, but it is implied that she manages to convince them or edge them into committing suicide after their encounter with her. In addition to this, it is after every encounter with her that we can find another connection as to why this is reiterative of what happened to her mother. For instance, it is shown in the death of Lord Argentine, for instance, whose death is directly implied to be suicide, “there can be no doubt that his lordship committed suicide, though no motive can be assigned for the act” (Machen 58), yet Helen is not linked to his death at that point. The men who die from encountering Helen are considered ‘victims’, “Another gentleman has fallen a victim to the terrible epidemic of suicide” (Machen 64), a term that was not even attributed to Mary, even though what was done to her was enough to term her a victim.

Moreover, Helen’s power over the men is akin to that of an incubus, likening her even more to the preternatural stories of her origins, with the implication that she has sexual intercourse with them before they go in a state of madness that drives them to their deaths.

This is reminiscent of her own mother who underwent the same state of madness after the experiment that was conducted on her, albeit her death not being that of suicide. The mystery of the effect of this caused by Helen is interesting in that the men describe it as her taking over their entire being, “the woman, he had avowed, had corrupted him body and soul” (Machen 35), and this is seen as a corruption, alluding once again to the decay that the decadent Helen carries with her.

As expressed there, Helen is not the weak child of her mother and does not have the same frailty of mind that her mother seemingly had. Helen is able to move throughout London unnoticed, assuming identities and managing her life better than anyone would have expected. She becomes the perfect definition of the New Woman, appropriating attributes of the dandy as well, as she moves across London living a decadent lifestyle. And this becomes her undoing.

Furthering this thought of agency then, we get a different story whereby the only agency afforded her is in choosing between two terrible fates. In doing this, the perpetrators of Helen’s death absolve themselves entirely of involvement in her demise. This is even more complex when one considers the fact that her death leaves nothing behind. Helen’s death wipes away all traces of who she was and all that remains behind of her is witness accounts and the written accounts of her life. The act of this is paramount as Helen as the decadent figure of a new femininity suffers at the hands of men, men who come to represent the patriarchal symbolic which commands her death but plays no involvement in it. Only by eradicating her completely is the normal restored.

In playing with these conceptions of consent then we get another clear view of the anxieties of the late Victorian society, this fear of invasion that consent connotes. Mary’s body is invaded upon conception of false consent (Morse 489) and this itself reflects a fear of invasion that Victorian society carried. The degeneration of a great nation, the rampant spread of criminality and above all, the dangers that the New Woman posed to British progression into the new century thus represented all this.

### **4.3 The Fire That Was Mine**

As we have seen with Helen, the lack of a voice also signifies a lack of agency. This is also the case with Ayesha, to some extent. On the one hand, Ayesha is shown to be quite

vocal, whilst on the other hand, Helen is completely devoid of any instances of a voice in her narrative. Yet, even if we consider Ayesha's narrative to include her voice, we must address the fact that it is in fact Holly's voice we are hearing there, as the novel is an account of the events he witnessed, so instances of Ayesha's speech are merely Holly relegating what he has heard.

How then, can we assume that the Ayesha we get through Holly's vocalization is authentically Ayesha? The same could be said of the accounts of Helen's life. Scarcely do we get an account of both women from the lips of a woman. Helen's story is recounted solely by the men of the novel, whilst Ayesha's story is also the same, albeit some fragments gained from the likes of Ustane, the Amahagger who falls in love with Leo but dies at the hands of Ayesha. In general, though, we are only painted a picture of both Ayesha and Helen through the eyes of the male *protagonists* of the novels and these men represent the dwindling foundations of patriarchy. Their job in these narratives is to police and document instances of insurgence and societal upheaval. Holly and Leo take it upon themselves to explore this matriarchal culture in Africa that could potentially usurp their own culture and similarly, Clarke, Austin and the plethora of men in *TGGP* take it upon themselves to narrate and document the story of Helen Vaughan, assuming control of the fate of Ayesha and Helen.

For Ayesha, at least, who gets to speak a little in the narrative, there is another form of agency afforded to her, comparable to Helen's choice of death. The pillar of fire in *She*, Ayesha's fire, becomes a metaphor for strength and agency is an interesting device in *She*. It is to her fire that Ayesha owes her strength and longevity, and the fire here plays an important role to the feminine. Here, it becomes the core of her being. Ayesha has to bathe routinely into this fire in order to ensure her longevity. Though she has stolen this fire from a man previously (add citation from text), she has kept the secret of this fire to herself, and despite being seen as a monster, she winds up wanting to share the secret to her immortality with Holly and Leo. It is a connection of love and kinship that makes her want to do so. However, even this is taken from her as ultimately, the fire would eventually strip her of what she once had, her youth, beauty and immortality. Even this symbol afforded to her is taken from her and this is almost symbolic of the appropriation of other's strengths in order to weaken them.

Ayesha's death as she bathes in the fire for the final time is a horrific one and it is a moment that forces Leo and Holly to contemplate what they knew of her. Recounting the



death of Ayesha, Holly and Leo recount the trivialities they attributed to Ayesha, even in death.

The heap beneath the white garment we did not uncover. We had no wish to look upon that terrible sight again. But we went to the pile of rippling hair that had fallen from her in the agony of that hideous change which was worse than a thousand natural deaths, and each of us drew from it a shining lock, and these locks we still have, the sole memento that is left to us of Ayesha as we knew her in the fulness of her grace and glory. Leo pressed the perfumed hair to his lips. (Haggard 291)

Here, they speak of how she was, commenting once more on her beauty as the factor that drew them towards her. Even in this moment, Holly and Leo contemplate her beauty, thought hideous in the fire, they still remember her grace and glory. It is a memento of her that they decide to keep, even though all that was essentially Ayesha is now gone, they choose to have a keepsake of her. This also further emphasizes the terror that Ayesha played upon them, as the sensation she now leaves them with is profound. In the footnotes here, Holly comments on this by alluding to how it is shallow that they looked upon her and revered her for her beauty and that in death, what remained of her was nothing of that beauty. Leo is the one to show the most emotion for the loss of Ayesha here,

“She called to me not to forget her,” he said hoarsely; “and swore that we should meet again. By Heaven! I never will forget her. Here I swear that if we live to get out of this, I will not for all my days have anything to say to another living woman, and that wherever I go I will wait for her as faithfully as she waited for me.”

To which Holly remarks as well,

“Yes,” I thought to myself, “if she comes back as beautiful as we knew her. But supposing she came back *like that!*”<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] What a terrifying reflection it is, by the way, that nearly all our deep love for women who are not our kindred depends—at any rate, in the first instance—upon their personal appearance. If we lost them, and found them again dreadful to look on, though otherwise they were the very same, should we still love them? —L. H. H. (Haggard 291)

The reaction to Ayesha's death alludes once more to the reaction one faces with the abject and monstrous, the interchangeable fascination and horror. But even in the death of these women lies a message of positivity for the feminine as a whole. Recounting Ayesha's death, we get this sense of something that is not quite finite.

She was dying: we saw it, and thanked God—for while she lived she could feel, and what must she have felt? She raised herself upon her bony hands, and blindly gazed around her, swaying her head slowly from side to side as a tortoise does. She could not see, for her whitish eyes were covered with a horny film. Oh, the horrible pathos of the sight! But she could still speak.

“Kallikrates,” she said in husky, trembling notes. “Forget me not, Kallikrates. Have pity on my shame; I shall come again, and shall once more be beautiful, I swear it—it is true! *Oh—h—h—*” and she fell upon her face, and was still. (Haggard 287)

Ayesha vows that she will return, and this has a profound effect on Leo who had even come to despise her by the end of the novel. He goes on to cherish that last memento of her, the lock of hair that manages to remain of her and claims that he will never forget her (Haggard 287). This itself is a wonderful sentiment as it once again regresses us into the realms of the abject for even if Leo had grown to dislike and abhor Ayesha, in her death he still manages to find an attraction to her, dragging him back into the same cycle of the abject – the fluctuation between attraction to disgust and here, once again into attraction. After this symbolic death, the monstrous queen is no more, this becomes a symbolic eradication of the threat that could have befallen Britain and this death restores a symbolic order, or at least it is hoped that it would.

Just as with Helen, it is the complete destruction of all that these women represent that is important. It is the lack of anything left of them that allows us to draw connections to the possibility of this. Disregarding the fact that locks of Ayesha's hair remain, we can connect the two women in that they are completely gone without much of a corpse. Since they both stood as symbols of the decadent New Woman, their death restores things to a certain extent. Without a trace of them, these ideologies thus die with them. The decay that they represented in society, at least for Helen, and the threat that Ayesha posed to the stability of Victorian British society can thus be averted. What is left of her is thus a reminder and sensation that one has encountered the abject and the novel attempts to make light of this by positing that

this encounter with the abject allows Holly and Leo to revert to the *norm*, that they still manage to re-erect the barriers that were eroding in the presence of Ayesha.

Within the world of the novel, there is therefore an implication that Ayesha's death could symbolize a complete restructuring of life for the people of Kôr. No longer are they under the rule of one woman and thus perhaps patriarchy can begin to flourish. However, whilst Holly is rather certain that Ayesha's demise assumes the complete end of her and that things can now change for the better, it is Billali's belief that She will return,

He believed indeed that we thought that she was dead, but his explanation was that It had suited her to disappear for a while. Once, he said, in his father's time, she had done so for twelve years, and there was a tradition in the country that many centuries back no one had seen her for a whole generation, when she suddenly reappeared, and destroyed a woman who had assumed the position of Queen. (Haggard 304)

And even in this recollection, there is a sense that Kôr's matriarchal dominion is not over, since as Billali tells Holly, women have risen before to rule Kôr in Ayesha's absence. This shows that even without them tyranny of Ayesha's rule, women still have a strong presence and influence on the politics of Kôr.

Billali's reaction is also one of fear. As Julia Reid mentions, there is a stronger sense of fear in the idea of the feminine power in that they herald "social and cultural change" (Reid 363). This change can be seen evidently in the fear of Ayesha and the fear that people have for Helen. Attributing such tendencies as decadence or dangerous femininity to these women only reinforces this as they become forces to be reckoned with and this threatens the patriarchal foundations of a society. Only by killing them can the transgressions they represent be averted.

Stopping it here and calling the deaths a justification for a wrong does not complete my work, though. Nor does it suggest that a great change has occurred in society. As I progress forward with the conclusive parts of my thesis, I intend to address the consequences of these deaths on a wider, social stage, on that continues to this day in how we view women and feminism in general.

Even though the idea of the New Woman died with Helen and Ayesha in these novels and in the early twentieth century in the real world, they are not really dead. Much like

Ayesha speaks, she will return and yes, the New Woman continues to return even if there are also constant attempts to stifle the New Woman.

## 5 Conclusion

Visions of powerful, dangerous femininities continue to perplex and scare us and there is no getting past this. Through the abject, the monstrous and the degenerate abhuman, we face reflections of ourselves that generate anxieties due to the instabilities these reflections focus on. As explored in this thesis, the death of the decadent New Woman as seen in the fiction of the late nineteenth century Britain was a way of eroding ideologies that were giving rise to new forms of feminism in an attempt to ruin the idea of the New Woman and prevent the foundation of radical feminist ideas. In doing so, the Gothic texts of the nineteenth century managed to silence such ideas of femininity while managing to promote and strengthen the foundations of a patriarchal Britain founded.

The discursive spaces of the nineteenth century were thus contested spaces, as we have seen in this thesis, a space that allowed women in but also excluded them when desired. The radical movements of the time, social, scientific, political all played a great role in this. Even the spaces that sought to include women managed to exclude them and contributed to their deaths. The separate spheres of the nineteenth century were continuously fluctuating as women attempted to take control of their own sphere.

Ayesha and Helen as representatives of this evoke these ideas but it is their deaths that is most striking. We are of course used to reading of death in Gothic texts, as the Gothic plays heavily within that liminal space we attempt to avoid, that of life and death but the death of women who do not fit the normative is always worth exploring. The effect brought on from these novels is a clear rejection, even if not entirely on the authors' parts, but a clear rejection of the normative and the monolithic. Ayesha and Helen promise a world of change, a world of the celebration of differences, albeit their actions in trying to represent this novel world being regressive. As Reid comments on *She*, “[t]he irony is that while the adventurers expect – and the genre seems to promise – that they will discover a rejuvenating primitive masculinity, they encounter instead a potent vision of ancient female rule” (Reid 365). The constant quest for what they expect to be the norm forcefully reminds them that this is not the case.

It is through visiting all these dominant themes of the time that we get a better understanding of what was being done. Through the fiction of the time, Haggard and Machen have been able to represent in varying ways how the annihilation of threats to the individual

self or the collective nation requires a process that begins with abjection. This first stage of pitting the self against the other thus allows one to paint the other as different and from there we get the monstrous. As this process endures, the monster then takes on all the negative connotations that would engender fear and repulsion – the monster becomes degenerate, full of repressed atavistic traits that threaten a return and thus the monster takes the form of that which is worth eradicating.

As we move forward then, it is clear that the movement from adoration to abhorration signifies a move towards new perceptions of femininity that focuses on the dangerous aspects of these women, creating a dangerous feminine. This notion of the dangerous feminine is one that followed in all discussions of femininity, even more so in discussions of feminism. In our texts, we have seen this dangerous femininity expressed through the very real fears of the protagonists, who placed emphasis on the darkness within Ayesha and Helen and made those the basis for their undoing.

What this proposes is that removing Ayesha and Helen from the moorings of the typical Gothic narratives can allow us to review the position of women within the nineteenth century and form comparisons with our changing views of the feminine in the contemporary. Radical changes would go on to occur that would make:

[t]he complex dialogue between feminist politics, socialist politics and the politics of empire which was so strongly manifested in the *fin-de-siècle* is ongoing at the close of the twentieth century. What emerges from an analysis of these issues in the 1880s and 1890s is that the New Woman and her advocates were, although a transgressive sociocultural force, in many respects complicit with residual elements of the dominant Victorian ideologies concerning gender roles, sexuality, 'race', empire and social class. Although the New Women and the decadents were forced to occupy the same discursive space in the cultural politics of the 1890s, they inhabited it in radically different ways, with little consensus in the realm of sexual politics emerging between them. (Ledger 41)

Through the lens of the Gothic then, fictional worlds can be opened to represent much of society's anxieties. This thesis' emphasis on the gender representations as evocative of an era's fears and anxieties only reinforces this. Even the efforts of such writers as we have explored can be seen as a pragmatic move towards a change. The uncertainties of what the

end of an era would bring are thus reflected here, through the Empire's fear of its position within the world and a nation's anxieties of its own identity which is no longer as impermeable as once thought.

This thesis itself is by no means a finite work. It is instead a chance at opening a new space within discussions of the Gothic and gender to look within the depictions of death in the fictional world of the Gothic. Moving from here then, this allows for us to form correlations between the many texts that spanned the birth of the Gothic to the contemporary. In this way, the plights of these ladies of the Gothic such as Lucy, Carmilla, Ayesha and Helen do not die with them.

It also drags us into revisiting our perceptions of the Empire and present-day Britain in particular new ways. By having posited these ideas, we see how a reserve colonialism has taken place within the texts following then, as Britain fortified itself against those threats that came from the outside but even more so, from those that came from the inside. In this regard, it forces us to reconsider what indeed was and is this identity that Britain forged for itself and is so afraid of losing.

With this then, other books can be read in line with this idea of the death of the feminine, but rather than reading them simply as figurative, it can be read as symbolic and thus show a progression in the trends that have contributed to feminist discussions throughout the years. At the time of the novels' publication, such ideas may have seemed unfathomable and too progressive, these ideas are at the core of discussions in the contemporary, both within academia and outside it.

As we move past the woman as abject, degenerate and monstrous then, we can think of other ways of interacting with the feminine that does not involve death. How we did this comes down to our observations. As we saw, the woman is not merely a space for degenerate expression, even when they are viewed as decadent. On the other hand, the feminine is becomes a site for movement forward. Instead of vilifying such women as Ayesha and Helen and painting them monstrous then, let us instead celebrate what they have to say. Ayesha is more than the lady in the house standing in front of the hearth, and Helen is not the passive Victorian wife. Instead, they choose to appropriate what they have been denied.

What these women represent then, aside from being perversions of the gender narratives, as Harper would have it, reflects the nation and the Empire as a whole. For a

nation that had built itself up as a model of power and strength is aware of changes that threatens this self-identity. Going back to Reid, “Ayesha’s plan to overthrow Queen Victoria and, with Leo, ‘assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth’ plays on fin de siècle fears of reverse colonization but also, more interestingly, sets up parallels between Ayesha and Queen Victoria as fellow imperialists (p. 256). (Reid 367). Britain was the one to impose colonialism and conquer, in its self-identity, it was not meant to be conquered.

As in Ayesha’s view of how the world should be ruled, it is implicit in its progression that patriarchy is the dominant form there, the “triumphant patriarchy” but on the other hand, “*She* imagines a matriarchal past that is poised to return to confound modernity” (Reid 365). This too reiterates the very nature of the themes we visited in this thesis, a return is something both desired but also something feared. Just as with atavistic trains coming back to haunt the present, the haunting nature of what these women represent is bound to return and as Reid has stated, “confound modernity”. Ayesha may perhaps not return as a physical reincarnation of her previous self, but she vows to return beautiful, and the beauty we read here is one of novelty for the feminine, that new perceptions of the feminine will not be merely that of fear and revulsion but one of awe and acceptance, perhaps.

This is the same with Helen, her story and legacy lives on beyond her death. She still manages to haunt in such a way that her story will continue to be told by those who have experienced it and even those who have not.

As expressed in each chapter, in order to justify the killing the powerful but dangerous new woman, there is a progressive process that takes place, separating these women from the normative in turning them abject. The Victorian tradition of cataloguing and exoticising that which we do not understand has thus turned into something completely other. There is a newfound fear of that which we do not understand. As the empire grew progressively bigger and attempted to assert its dominance, such new forms as the New Woman right upon British grounds threatened this dominion.

Thus, following my argument here, the monster cannot become monstrous unless first subjected to being seen as abject. But even this is flawed as the abject subject, as we have explored, is a multifaceted subject. Ayesha as abject is not the same as Helen as abject. We get the vision of a tyrant through Ayesha, who is despised due to her maniacal rule and



immortality, all of which could be quite damaging should it leave the sheltered plains and ancient caves of Kôr and reach the civilised world. What Ayesha has however, which also separates her from Helen, is the fact that even in death she is mourned, as we explored in the third chapter. In death, Ayesha is finally mourned as Holly and Leo remark once more on the beautiful Ayesha they had known (Haggard 291). Ayesha, unlike Helen, leaves a lock of hair behind which also ensures her immortalisation in memoriam. With the threat averted, the monster *slain*, they can look upon her again as beautiful and see her as human again. There is therefore, with Ayesha, an element of return from the abject monster. With the monster dead then, this signifies a reconfirmation of one's barriers, of one's self as impenetrable. What remains of Ayesha then is a confirmation of her demise but is also symbolic of her domestication, relegating her memory to the mundane.

On the other hand, the demise of Helen is perhaps more poignant due to the fact that she leaves nothing behind to be mourned. Helen's story is a tragic one, albeit her actions. Whilst Ayesha had the courtesy of being mourned, Helen is only remembered as terrible in writing and from witness accounts. As a threat, she is annihilated. No tear is shed for her and this is due to the fact that Helen posed too much of a threat. Through Ayesha, for instance, we have explored how the woman as monstrous is abhorred and threatening to patriarchal ideologies attached to a nation's sense of identity. However, whilst Ayesha could be averted, living on the peripheries of the Empire, Helen is at the core of it and her position as a threat from within exceeds Ayesha's. The fluctuating reception of these women then expose the very uncertainties that followed in such a time. Reading Haggard alongside Machen thus opens doorways into how the men perceived such poignant issues at the time.

Furthermore, Ayesha's death, or even Helen's, represents the undying nature of the feminine. The New Woman, or at least visions of a femininity that is beyond the passive subject did not die with the end of the Victorian era. On the other hand, it flourished. The new century that followed carried with it new movements that have led to the current state of feminism. The New Woman did not die with the end of the nineteenth century, instead they rose, fell and were reincarnated. And this here is the power that the Gothic nature of these texts offer, they allow for the reincarnation of new forms beyond a singular, homogenous representation.

Let us therefore keep the discussion going. We are yet to settle gender politics within the real, and since the novel offers us a way to visit such complex issues and reflect upon

them, it is important that we keep looking into those texts that attempt to represent the anxieties we face. Instead of raising these boundaries that fear of the other or the abject generate within us, let us instead face what the abject and the monstrous force us to consider. Only then are we able to move past resolutions of eradicating that which we fear and only then do we come to terms with why we keep erecting barriers to protect our identities, whether it be individual, personal identities or social, collective identities.

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