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"On Heroes and Antiheroes: Visions of Resistance and Victorian Ethos Revisited"

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Abstract: The aim of this project is to analyze the antagonist of H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure*, Ayesha, and the main character in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four*, Sherlock Holmes, to characterize them as anti-heroes, by conflating them with the features of the Byronic hero archetype and with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, examining if a relation can be established between these three figures. To that purpose, the work's first section outlines the figure of the hero and its conceptualization in Victorian England through the prism of Thomas Carlyle's seminal text, *On Heroes*. The influence of this work transformed the dichotomy protagonist-antagonist into the clash between the socially minded Carlylean hero and the individualistic Byronic hero/villain; a situation that changed drastically with Decadentism and its admiration for the more nuanced figures of the anti-hero and the *Übermensch,* both studied in the subsequent sections of the work.

Keywords: Carlyle, Nietzsche, hero archetype, übermensch, Sherlock Holmes, Decadentism.

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On Heroes and Antiheroes: Visions of Resistance and Victorian Ethos Revisited

0. Introduction

The literary tradition present in the discourse of history intends to portrait the human condition as the gravitational center in the development of the world. That tradition involves certain inscrutable aspects which preoccupies the human conscience due to its unresolvable nature. In that quest for knowledge, humankind encounters a question of an unfathomable character: the divine intervention in the meaning of life. Said intervention brings along with it a mythological component that humankind has contrived in order to find a plausible

explanation to their doubts. Subsequently, that explanation also brings along a direct intermediary between the divine intervention and humankind: the hero.

Whereas in the Victorian ethos, the mythological element remains on the background, there is still a godly foundation regarding the hero and his role as the voice of a superior entity. Although there is not a direct necessity to explain those questions, the hero rises as the visionary whose duty is to establish the safe limits within which a community and its ethical framework may feel safe from a transgressive force that could endanger its commodified state. Nevertheless, this expounds another problem regarding the will of the human being as an individual entity, in which the human will seeks a way to disassociate from that framework, enabling the individual to unleash his/her true nature as a multifaceted being. This liberation is exhibited as a literary dualism in which hero and villain will confront each other as a means to preserve the imposed order, which during the Victorian era were represented by the Carlylean and Byronic hero archetypes respectively. However, this dualism will suffer several ethical alterations due to the change in the British mentality that resulted from the period of sociocultural decay experienced by Victorian society at the end of the century. This provoked the progressive shift from the Carlylean archetype to the Byronic, which found its counterparts in the more modern archetype of hero, the anti-hero, as well as in Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, both of them starting to consolidate their importance in the literature and culture of the closing century.

The aim of this project is to define the antihero and demonstrate the influence of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* ("Overman") on this figure. In order to do so, this work begins by establishing the figure of the hero in the Victorian ethos and his role as a preserver of the moral rules of the community through the study of Carlyle's *On Heroes*, as well as identifying the opposing forces this archetype must restrict to accomplish his duty in the Victorian framework. Then, in the second section, the archetype of the hero will be analyzed in different key historical periods in order to trace the origins and examine the core features of the first prototypes of antiheroes; this includes the revisit of previous periods in history and the corresponding idiosyncrasies regarding the treatment of the hero and his role in society. Finally, in the third section, said evidences will be supported with excerpts of H. Rider Haggard's *She* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four*, connecting the characters of Ayesha and Sherlock Holmes to the *Übermensch*, examining whether there is a relation between this and the figure of the antihero or not.

1. The hero

By definition, the hero is supposed to encompass a series of traits which confer him his status as a figure of power who serves as a role model for society.[1] Due to the nature of his existence inside a community, the reader is expected to sympathize with this character. By this means, a bond between the hero and the reader is created with the purpose of, aside from entertainment, acting as an exemplar of virtue. This educational purpose, however, is not a fortuitous inherent characteristic of the hero, but rather an ideological manoeuvre

[1] Throughout the present work the figure of the hero will be predominantly considered and addressed as male. This design is intentional and attempts to reflect Carlyle's patriarchal stance in *On Heroes*, in which the great figures of history and the different archetypes of heroes are exclusively men.

executed in order to delimit the sociopolitical framework of a given community. In this section, the figure of the hero will be approached by analyzing the ethos of nineteenth century British society.

In the early Victorian period, Britain was in all its splendour. It became a global economic power thanks to the First Industrial Revolution, enhancing the economic system of the country. This caused, among other things, an acceleration in the consumption of literature since books started to be considered as an affordable object. The idea of reaching a wide range of people through the publication of novels and short stories in newspapers soon brought along with it the possibility of using them as ethical tools. This function was embodied by the figure of the main character, who was purposely intended to be –and, for the benefit of the correct ethos, must be– conceived as a hero by their readers. Given the circumstances, the hero's role had to ensure the prevalence of England's success and teach the right moral values to keep the country's status safe. Thus, by endowing this figure with such power and purpose a new social contract is formed and, therefore, English society would have to follow a new moral code.

Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes*, illustrates the many personalities through which this archetype of hero has been presented in history: as a divinity, as a prophet, as a poet, as a priest and as a Man of Letters (Carlyle 3). The archetype proposed by Carlyle is also known as "Carlylean hero", a term coined by Eduardo Valls ("Dueños" 110). Whereas the "Carlylean hero" is not described as a superior entity –from a theological point of view–, his predecessor, the mythological hero *is* conceived as a person of superhuman qualities and semi-divine origin, which is widely exploited in several mythologies. By this means, his origins serve as a direct and intentional relation to the divine, which makes the hero share certain characteristics with God. Whilst not identifying the hero as a godly figure, Carlyle synthetises these characteristics in a more ethical and practical approach:

> And look what perennial fibre of truth was in that. To us also, through every star, through every blade of grass, is not a God made visible, if we will open our minds and eyes? We do not worship in that way now: but is it not reckoned still a merit, proof of what we call a "poetic nature," that we recognize how every object has a divine beauty in it; how every object still verily is "a window through which we may look into Infinitude itself"? He that can discern the loveliness of things, we call him Poet! (12)

In order for the hero to be what Carlyle refers to as "Poet", the "Carlylean hero" shall and must perceive that divine presence in nature, which requires an exhaustive process of observation that would allow him to get closer to God's revelation in His creation. Additionally, said process would consequently display the only valid truth created by God. Given the fact that Carlyle also alleges that a great man is always sincere since such is his first condition (107), this establishes a direct relation between the hero's duty of being sincere and his nearness to God. Valls emphasizes that the result of the hero's qualities comes from his union with the "divine substance", as said union enables him to detect the signs which are conveyed by the divine truth ("Dueños" 96). Ultimately, that divine substance confers a positive aesthetic value on the "Carlylean hero", since the beauty in

God's creation comes from His own beauty; therefore, the "Carlylean hero" is a combination of divinity, truth and beauty.

As the hero acts as God's Emissary, he has his own duties which requires him to be brave. Carlyle claims that "the first duty for a man is still that of subduing *Fear*" because "the completeness of his victory over Fear will determine how much of a man he is." (30) If the hero, who serves as a role model, is brave, then those following him will be brave as the hero's main duty is to carry the light to society. This is the point in which the social contract begins. Along history, as Carlyle points out in the types of heroes he proposes, there has been a pattern in the construction of the archetype of the hero. Although Carlyle suggests focusing in the most modern – the Man of Letters, they all have one thing in common: their prevalence. This is what he remarks:

> Thought does not die, but only is changed. The first man that began to think in this Planet of ours, he was the beginner of all. And then the second man, and the third man; —nay, every true Thinker to this hour is a kind of Odin, teaches men *his* way of thought, spreads a shadow of his own likeness over sections of the History of the World. (Carlyle 32)

By this means, Carlyle establishes a relationship between the sociopolitical evolution of humanity and the evolution of the archetypes of heroes. Thomas Carlyle proposes the creation of a primal message, the first thought and beginner of the cult of gods and heroes, which has been mutating and reinventing itself according to the different idiosyncrasies of each civilization and moments in history until becoming the main reference and guiding light of society in every culture. Valls notes that the hero is the fixed and immutable point which justifies the universe ("Dueños" 102); thus, at the same time, the hero represents the only fixed point in the flow of history, as stated by Eric Bentley (67). Said fixed point reflects the real heroic sense which must be perpetuated in the future, as history itself progressively reveals its heroic nature (Valls "Dueños" 102).

This does not only explain the functioning of a whole social system, but also sets up the hierarchy of every society, in which the people who are capable of thinking and acting as the archetypical hero of that period will occupy the higher positions, assuming the role of leaders and expecting people to do as they command. Carlyle names this "Hero-worship" (1), and assures that it guarantees the correct evolution of history, since people would always admire the hero and aspire to be like him, which at the same time would allow humanity to get closer to God. Additionally, the hero must ensure the unification of the community for the purpose of achieving the common good and eliminate any trace of individuality, as self-interest would break this social contract.

Nevertheless, Carlyle also warns us of the dangers of this system of "Hero-worship" and associates a society's periods of decadence to the moments in which said community fails at worshipping the hero by simply idolizing any figure (*Eidolon*) that is just a symbol of God, empty of any meaning (103). Thus, while the hero is the subject, a symbol is just an object that cannot serve as a model for individuals. Carlyle summarizes history in these two decisive events which are constantly alternating depending on the society and the cultural

context of each time, in which the hero is an inflective point and his worship might result in either success or disgrace, as he reflects the ambitions and mentality of the people.

Then, considering the situation of England during the early Victorian era, it is safe to assume that the country is in the historical moment in which people are, theoretically, worshipping the hero and not the symbol. Being in a glorious period soon had an impact on literature, which started to depict the archetype of hero that the English society was supposed to follow: the "Carlylean hero". In this way, the vast majority of novels carried the message of a hero whose duty, as Valls denotes, was to preserve the order by being close to God – this means, to avoid any type of sinning, be sincere, truthful, brave and to act as a leader inside and outside the story, thus becoming the leader of the society ("Dueños" 102-103). Furthermore, in order to reinforce that message and show the superiority and rewards of representing this archetype, the main antagonist was portrayed as the opposite of what society should admire and the moral values that under no circumstances could be followed.

This dualism in literature is not, however, an entirely new device proposed in the early Victorian period, but a reconsideration of the artistic conception of the presence of the different representations of aestheticism exhibited in Greek mythology: Apollo and Dionysus. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche further elaborates on this dualism, claiming that they appear as artistic forces which break forth out of nature itself, "without the mediation of the human artist" (Nietzsche "Birth" 28). Apollo presents himself as a world of dream images, whose perfection has no connection with an individual's high level of intellect or artistic education, while Dionysus himself represents the intoxicating reality, which once again does not respect the individual, but even seeks to abolish the individual and to redeem him through a mystical feeling of collective unity (Nietzsche "Birth" 14). This dichotomy between the "Carlylean hero", who incarnates the Apollonian values, and his antagonist, who embodies the Dionysian nature, originates a literary tradition in Victorian literature which would revolve around this collision of opposed forces. By this means, literature establishes itself as the guiding light which points at the right direction the British ethos must follow. In the next section, this heroic dynamic will be further analyzed.

As a conclusion, the "Carlylean hero" is found to be a figure that had power and control over society not only as the archetype of a great man, but also as a literary resource which revolutionised the composition of novels. Hence, the "Carlylean hero" can be defined not only as a regular pattern, but also as a tool to change the dynamics of history through different fields. Following this approach, a parallelism between reality and fiction is seen through the novel, as the plot itself functions as a representation of the history of humanity observed from different points of view and in a wide variety of situations and problems which are the mere reflection of what is happening right in that moment in the world. Simultaneously, the novel becomes a point of reference for people and establishes the behavior of the archetype as the main model. This is accomplished through the Apollonian delimitation of the Victorian ethos, fully embodied by the "Carlylean hero". This creates a closed circle which, depending on the type of hero, determines the final development of humanity; in the Victorian period, this development was determined by the worship of the hero, in which he becomes a subject rather than a mere symbol, thus facilitating the comprehension of the divine substance to those who follow him. Throughout the early

Victorian period, it is the "Man of Letters" type of hero (Carlyle 3) the one in charge of reconducting humanity: a poet who manages to put humankind in contact with nature and, therefore, reality, as well as teaching people the truth –or rather his own– through his works.

2. The anti-hero

As stated in the previous section, the Carlylean type of hero changed the dynamics of the literature of the early Victorian period. He embodied what was considered the proper behavior of the nineteenth century gentleman, whose actions must always be directed to the communal good. However, a new artistic movement known as Decadentism appeared during the late Victorian period and greatly influenced the Fin-de-siècle literature. This involved another major change in said dynamics by questioning the previous values proposed by the Carlylean archetype, focusing on individualism rather than collectiveness. This different prototype of hero is, therefore, invoked as a response to the social structures built during the first half of the century, making the hero adopt a rebellious position towards the established laws and conventions. Consequently, and due to the nature of his creation, this hero will be addressed as *antihero*. Nevertheless, this archetype is not an innovation, as will be shown in the work's subsequent section. It must be kept in mind that the role of the main character has always been subject to change, according to the idiosyncrasies of its historical and sociopolitical backgrounds, underlining the versatility of the figure. If Carlyle's definition, already exposed in the previous chapter, is taken into account, a hero is the subject that civilization must worship to ensure its unity and success. Under this premise, it is safe to assume that throughout history both cases of "Hero-worship" –subject and object– have been alternating and, therefore, have influenced directly the construction of the hero; thence, in Carlylean terms, an antihero will be intimately related to the object-worship type of history period.

In this section, the antihero's origins will be traced through the first examples of this kind of hero. Then, the text will analyze the periods of time in which the ideological frameworks are more susceptible to an individualist point of view to establish an evolution. To conclude, the information about the evolution of the archetype of the antihero will be adapted into the Victorian framework, comparing it to the "Carlylean hero", thus defining the Victorian antihero.

The first examples of this prototype can be find in ancient mythologies, such as the Greek or the Nordic. Considering its own nature, a myth serves as a traditional story displayed to illustrate the early history of a given civilization, as well as explaining natural or social phenomena through characters of divine or semi-divine origin. These stories are often, if not always, fictitious and have transcend their mythological origin thanks to their incorporation into classical Greek literature, in works, for instance, such as the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* by Homer. According to Gregory Nagy, "heroes were humans, male or female, of the remote past, endowed with superhuman abilities and descended from the immortal gods themselves," ("Introduction" 15) but they are not exempt from dying. In fact, death is the human condition which defines heroic itself (Nagy "Introduction" 16).

The massive popularization of these Greek heroes provoked a social phenomenon named "hero cult", as Nagy states, since the own figure of the Greek hero began to become ingrained in ancient Greek culture ("Cult" 26). However, under Carlyle's perspective this figure would have been a mere object of worship, an *Eidolon*, and due to the nature of Greek mythology these characters often embodied some human qualities such as individualism, despair and violence. Furthermore, these heroes sometimes clashed with the gods, as in the case of Heracles and Hera, which contradicts Carlyle's analysis of the archetype of modern hero.

This new type of hero-worshipping, now referred to as hero cult, helped to set the basis of a society which, instead of excluding the individual self, included it as part of their culture in an attempt to imitate the heroes of their beliefs – or more accurately, the icon that represented them. Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* establishes a direct relation between this cult and the role of individuals inside a community; in other words, through cults, rites and mythology the individual secured his/her identity within and in relation to the community itself (Campbell 222). Given the fact that, as previously defined, mythology serves as an explanation to a natural or social phenomenon, it is safe to assume that every vicissitude presented in Greek ancient mythology is a mere reflection of the human condition and its multidimensional nature; hence heroes also represented these humane traits. Campbell traces this representation to the human subconscious, in psychoanalytical terms, reinforcing the notion that both heroes and myths serve as a vector which carries the symbols present in the human spirit (38).

In this way, Greek mythology will serve as a starting point for further philosophical trends, as well as strongly influencing certain periods of time. In fact, despite taking a secondary place during the Middle Ages, Greek mythology became the gravitational center of the Renaissance period, which aimed at recovering some of the values of the classical world, considered the cradle of Western civilization. These philosophical and cultural trends soon had an impact on the artistic field, which followed the Greek canon and, therefore, placed the individual as the main subject of study. Consequently, in the literature of the Renaissance the desire for analyzing in depth the human being, as the humanist philosophy demanded, also brought along with it an increasing sense of individualism. The human being was conceived as an independent entity from society, flawed and displaying a deep psychology.

Moving on from there, that admiration for the multidimensional character of the individual originated another kind of prototype which will become the foundation of the modern antihero: the tragic hero. As its own name implies, he is the main character of a tragedy, a rather popular genre promoted by the Greek civilization. According to Aristotle, in his work *Poetics*, the tragic hero must be "a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty (…) he must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous." (45)

Said hero is often doomed and cannot escape his destiny and experiences a process of catharsis through the witnessing of a tragic situation. The genre's own nature implies an emotional development of the character, who unsuccessfully tries to change his fate and sees himself forced to face moral dilemmas. One of the most representative figures of this kind of hero is Hamlet, the main character of the Shakespeare's homonymous drama.

Campbell asserts that the realization of the inevitable guilt of life may so sicken the heart that, like Hamlet, one may refuse to go on with it, choosing death as the ultimate liberation of the soul (221).

Following this line, not only did Shakespeare advocate for human individuality and the impossibility –and subsequent acceptance– of changing its fate; he also introduced a disruptive –and rather transgressive– element in his works regarding this individualism. *Othello* displays a visceral nature in the construction of the plot, considering that the homonymous protagonist commits a crime of passion by killing Desdemona. This treatment of passion is fully exhibited in the character of Iago:

> Virtue! a fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are gardens (…) the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions: But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take this, that you call love, to be a sect or scion. (I, iii, ll. 677-691)

In the previous section, the dynamics of the Carlylean hero and his antagonist were represented as the aesthetic dualism existing between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Iago reveals part of that Dionysian force by addressing the control of passion through the use of human reason. According to Valls, reason is submitted to will and not the other way around, which allows Iago to strengthen his vital virtues. ("Formación" 17) By this means, Iago does not reject that Dionysian force, but embraces it and projects it towards a personal use to magnify his will.

Moreover, there were other works during this period that helped to consolidate this archetype of hero. For instance, Machiavelli's consequentialist philosophy,[2] presented in *The Prince*, also contributed to further establish the psychology of the Renaissance hero. Hugh Grady makes a relation between Shakespeare's and Machiavelli's conceptions of the Self:

> In Machiavellian dynamics, there's a being–for–others, an outward appearance, which is theatrical, manipulated by the subject in order to manipulate others; and there is an inner self, occluded, but reducible to the desire for power and/or pleasure which generates the outer appearance. (121)

Not only Grady reaffirms the unpredictable nature of the Self, but also confers it an epicurean character, enjoying the pleasures of the body. Moreover, Grady also includes, through Montaigne's philosophy, the ethical rationality of the character, allowing him to achieve a harmony between his/her inner and outer world. By this means, the nature of the Self extends to a more multidimensional facet, as it embodies the experience, thoughts, and perception of the reality (Grady 121). In addition, Ida B. Howard exemplifies the nature of

[2] As exposed in Chapter XVIII: "And it must be understood that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which are considered good in men, being often obliged, in order to maintain the state, to act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion." (Machiavelli 70-71)

the Byronic hero in the Renaissance period as a character of unquestionable leadership who, nevertheless, disdains camaraderie and discourages familiarity (184). Once again, this reasserts the individualistic character of the hero, as those characteristics may display the Byronic hero's apprehension of commonality.

Subsequently, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a new artistic movement arose as a response to the values and ideas the Enlightenment had imposed, as well as to the direct consequences of them, the supremacy of science over nature resulted from the scientific advances and the Industrial Revolution. This artistic movement, known as Romanticism, was marked by a more rebellious attitude towards the previous period. This collision called the new way of thinking into question, criticizing the rural depopulation and advocating for the harmony between humanity and nature. In the midst of this fight between reason and feelings, a new archetype of hero, which will serve as the direct predecessor of the modern antihero, was created: the Byronic hero.

As his own name indicates, this type of hero arose from Byron's works and embodied the mindset of the movement. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Manfred*, or his own reconceptualization of *Don Juan* are accurate examples of this archetype. Howard establishes a series of similarities between the Byronic hero and his predecessors: melancholy, solitariness, nobility, and determination (173). The outcome of said characteristics is the denial of a collectiveness which would oppress every individual who is part of a community. Magnus and Higgins associate that sense of community –influenced by the presence of the extreme rationality of the previous period– to the loss of the Dionysian perception of reality, in an attempt to correct the flaws in human nature (23). Therefore, the Byronic hero embraces a rebellion towards the models of cohabitation the Enlightenment era proposed. Since the movement admired the state of nature, the Byronic hero brings along that desire of being independent from civilization with him.

This behavior is especially lethal in the beginning of the Victorian period. Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* will have an effect on the construction of modern society. In the chapter named "The Social Compact", Rousseau set the basis of said contract in order to establish the proper society:

> Let us take it that men have reached the point at which the obstacles to their survival in the state of nature overpower each individual's resources for maintaining himself in that state. So this primitive condition can't go on; the human race will perish unless it changes its manner of existence. (6)

By this means, Rousseau justifies the existence of the social contract as the only solution to the extinction of humanity, thus rejecting the state of nature. However, said society needs a leader:

> The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master unless he transforms •strength into •right, and •obedience into •duty. Hence 'the right of the strongest'—a phrase that one might think is meant ironically, but is actually laid down as a basic true. (Rosseau 3)

Right and duty, as it has been previously stated, are qualities of the Carlylean hero, which intimately connects the social contract, the modern model of society, to the archetype of hero who must ensure the continuity of it. Then, it is not wonder why these two archetypes, the Carlylean and Byronic hero, live in a constant conflict through literature, especially during the Victorian era. As a matter of fact, the Byronic hero becomes a Byronic villain against whom the Carlylean hero must fight in order to preserve the right order (Valls "Dueños" 123). From a sociopolitical point of view, this fight symbolizes the power of the social contract over the longing for a state of nature, in which every individual would be free. That is why the Byronic hero is a threat to an imperialist country like the England of the nineteenth century.

Beyond that, the Byronic hero brings along a transgressive nature that would destroy Western civilization, or, at least, destroy the concept thereof. As Eduardo Valls asserts, the literary discourse of the nineteenth century averted that transgressive force by sublimating it until this force could be placed into the ethical and ideological framework (Valls "Dueños" 72-73). In this way, the Byronic hero –now Byronic villain– retains his original traits, but remains as the subject of the Victorian ethical judgment (Valls "Dueños" 123).

As a conclusion, the construction of the archetype of antihero evolves from the individualist and humanist condition of the Renaissance, to employ these two characteristics in the rebellion towards the modern society during Romanticism, acquiring a transgressive nature in the nineteenth century. Consequently, a progression within the evolution of the antihero can be observed, originated in its tragic existence as a mortal entity whose fate cannot be changed and the acceptance thereof, its individualism and the consequent process of abstraction regarding his nature. That individualism brings along the rejection of the Apollonian limits set by the community, which impels him to explore his Dionysian nature as a multidimensional being and act according to his own set of beliefs. Howard claims that this rejection towards communality does not imply an inherent criminal behavior within the Byronic hero, but a rather humanistic one (298), thus assuring his amoral character. With the publication of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche will propose the concept of *Übermensch* ("overman"), a person who is capable of inducing his or her own system of moral values by using his or her will to power, a figure that could be seen as the culmination of the Byronic hero: an individual being powerful enough to transcend beyond good and evil and, who, as Valls states, embraces the philosophy of the eternal recurrence regarding time and death as part of life itself. ("Dueños" 178) Ultimately, the overman becomes the worst enemy of the Victorian society since its own nature does not accept the social contract, but also becomes the hero for those individuals who seek the achievement of the ultimate self-realization and, thus, to become an overman.

3. Ayesha and Sherlock Holmes: the consolidation of the Antihero

In the previous sections, the outlined heroic figures from nineteenth century literature –the Carlylean and Byronic hero– have been defined according to the social context. Both types of heroes are found in a social spectrum in which the perception of the exemplary character moves from one end to another depending on the historical context. After having pointed out

the constant change of said hero throughout history in the second section, it is safe to state that during the Victorian period, the archetype was submitted to the same continuous process of adaptation as his analogues in past periods of time. Curiously, during this period, the prototype varies from the Carlylean hero –early and middle Victorian period– to the Byronic hero –late Victorian period. Moreover, the rising influence of the Decadentism helped to consolidate this new Byronic set of morals. This change in the dynamics of society brought along with it the popularization of nihilism, as well as the proposal of a new concept in the evolution of the human being: the *Übermensch*, a term coined by Friedrich Nietzsche, which appeared in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, published in 1891.

The aim of this section is to find a direct relation between the concept of the *Übermensch* –or overman– and the characters of Ayesha, from H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), and of Sherlock Holmes, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In order to do so, some excerpts of *She* and *The Sign of the Four* will be provided to explore if there is a relation between this and the figure of the antihero. These two novels were written in the late Victorian period. However, they present unique traits regarding the treatment of the hero despite being set in and written around the same period of time.

First of all, as previously stated in the first section, the depiction of the Carlylean hero was intimately related to the current circumstances of England at that time and thus inseparable to its imperialistic politics and system. In Haggard's novel, the two main characters, Horace Holly and Leo Vincey, embark on a journey to Africa in order to find the land of Leo's ancestors, as requested by his father in his last will. Under this premise it is safe to claim that one of the main themes is the glorification of British imperialism that is further supported by Holly's statements concerning Ayesha and the culture of the African tribe that worships her:

> I halted, and felt scared. Indeed, my knees began to give way of their own mere motion; but reflection came to my aid. I was an Englishman, and why, I asked myself, should I creep into the presence of some savage woman as though I were a monkey in fact as well as in name? I would not and could not do it, that is, unless I was absolutely sure that my life or comfort depended upon it. If once I began to creep upon my knees I should always have to do so, and it would be a patent acknowledgment of inferiority. So, fortified by an insular prejudice against kowtowing, which has, like most of our so-called prejudices, a good deal of common sense to recommend it, I marched in boldly after Billali. (Haggard 130)

Here, Holly is seen in a position of disagreement about the display of veneration towards Ayesha. There are a couple of sentences which also have a strong connotation about his perspective on that act; first, he remarks he "is an Englishman" and wonders why he should "creep into the presence of some savage woman". He does not only reassure his identity as an English citizen, but also states the primitive character of She in comparison with him. By this means, he establishes a hierarchy of power based on his mere point of view, influenced by England's imperialistic ethos and politics. Furthermore, Holly describes

the scene as a "patent acknowledgement of inferiority", counteracting this by putting himself above Ayesha just on the basis that she lives in a continent colonized by England.

This helps to understand the sort of character Holly is: a man who carries the colonizing spirit of England in an attempt to make himself remember that, in any case, he must be the invasive entity and not the other way round, even when he finds himself in another country which already has a well-built sociopolitical system. Moreover, he somehow tries, if not to impose, at least to persuade Ayesha by explaining his beliefs: "I had recovered myself a little by now, and, feeling bitterly ashamed of the weakness into which I had been betrayed, I did my best to expound to her the doctrines of Christianity." (Haggard 174) Holly, as a man who must embody the ideology of his country, finds himself in a constant trial for supremacy and with the duty of conquering the transgressive force, Ayesha, thus becoming the Carlylean hero of the novel.

After having asserted this, it must be taken into account that said transgressive force which Holly faces is no other than a figure which embodies the exact opposite values of the Carlylean hero. Therefore, Queen Ayesha's role, as portrayed in the previous section, is the Byronic hero. Nevertheless, the denomination of hero brings along with it both thematic and moral problems. Holly, aside from being one of the main characters and the hero of the novel, is also the narrator, who imposes his perspective over the reader. In the eyes of Holly, Ayesha is not a heroine, but someone pretty close to be an enemy of the state. In fact, at some point in the novel Holly fears for their lives as Ayesha freely expresses her desire to reign in England:

> "(…) For thou shalt rule this England-"
> "But we have a queen already," broke in Leo hastily.
> "It is naught, it is naught," said Ayesha; "she can be overthrown." At this we both broke out into an exclamation of dismay, and explained that we should as soon think of overthrowing ourselves. (Haggard 225)

Later, after Holly and Leo reject that idea by warning her about the consequences of the Law, Ayesha makes another statement:

> "The law," she laughed with scorn, "the law! Canst thou not understand, O Holly, that I am above the law, and so shall my Kallikrates be also? All human law will be to us as the north wind to a mountain. Does the wind bend the mountain, or the mountain the wind?" (Haggard 225)

A force willing to alter in such a drastic manner the social order of a country, thus destroying the social contract, as well as inducing his/her own moral code, becomes a transgressive character who may be the end of the idea of Western civilization and the natural enemy of the Carlylean hero as a result. In the previous section, it has been claimed that, according to Valls, the literary discourse of the nineteenth century averted that transgressive force by sublimating it until this force could be placed into the ethical and ideological framework ("Dueños" 72-73). Consequently, this clash sets out, as Valls states, a

really productive dialectic between these two kinds of heroes, around which the commodified texts of the Victorian period revolve ("Dueños" 122-123). Thus, the Byronic heroine —the Queen Ayesha— becomes the Byronic villain.

However, despite the fact Ayesha is, to a certain extent, overtaken by Holly by the end of the novel, as he and Leo eventually remain safe and go back home without major issues, she is actually more powerful than them. The reason Ayesha loses that battle of dialectics is because she inadvertently chooses it so by accidentally turning herself into an ape, but she was in every moment in control over herself. In addition, her condition as a *femme fatale* supposes the control over the male gender. According to Valls, Holly's duty as a Carlylean hero was to destroy the faux Byronic idol but failed at the attempt, introducing into de Victorian framework the Dionysian conception of life due to the lack of dialectic closure ("Dueños" 199). All these circumstances may be in Ayesha's favour almost to the point of making her become a deuteragonist rather than an antagonist.

This treatment of the Byronic villain becomes more attractive especially in comparison with novels published further in the period. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, a severe change in the dynamics of the construction of the characters is seen. In *She*, despite offering a new vision about the villain and the failure of the Carlylean hero, Ayesha is still conceived as the antagonist of the novel. In the Sherlock Holmes canon, one of the main characters —Holmes himself— *is* the Byronic hero.

Considering that the Sherlock Holmes' novels reflect the Decadent thinking of the period, it is not surprising to see the evolution from the Carlylean hero to the Byronic hero once more in history. However, the figure of Holmes also brings up several moral issues concerning the use of drugs or the work of the forces of the state, among them, the police. For instance, in *The Sign of the Four*, Watson asks Holmes about his preferences for that day:

> "Which is it to-day?" I asked,—"morphine or cocaine?"
> He raised his eyes languidly from the old blackletter volume which he had opened.
> "It is cocaine," he said,—"a seven-per-cent solution. Would you care to try it?" (Conan Doyle "Study" 109)

And the same topic is brought back again at the end of the novel:

> "The division seems rather unfair," I remarked. "You have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit, pray what remains for you?"
> "For me," said Sherlock Holmes, "there still remains the cocaine-bottle." And he stretched his long white hand up for it. (Conan Doyle "Study" 204)

Holmes' addiction to cocaine sets two problems about himself: first, the moral responsibility over drugs, risking himself to lose control over his body and give it to an object; second, the satisfaction of the pleasures of the body (Valls "Consulting"). This last one is especially harmful to the Victorian system, as it is highly based on a social contract, a principle of collectiveness. By taking drugs to please himself, Holmes is merely contributing

to individuality, thus becoming a nonproductive member of the system. This is the opposite of what a Carlylean hero would do (Valls "Consulting").

Furthermore, Holmes' vision about his work as a detective is also based on satisfying himself. When asked by Watson about his professional inquiry, Holmes replies:

> None. Hence the cocaine. I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-colored houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth. (Conan Doyle "Study" 115)

Holmes is always trying to escape from the *ennui* (Conan Doyle "Adventures" 48), as he does not conceive life without any type of stimulus (Valls "Consulting"). This negation of existence per se, trying to dwell into its meaning with the use of drugs is pretty similar to what Queen Ayesha did by entering into the Pilar of Fire in *She*. These two characters share a common ground in the perception of reality and that is the existence of oneself as an individualistic being rather than constituting part of a community, which creates some sort of curiosity towards the Dionysian aspects of life. These characters also reject the limits established by the English ideological framework, which drives them to induce his own set of morals to comprehend life. This process firstly experiences a nihilistic perception of reality, which Nietzsche describes in his book *The Will to Power*:

> Radical nihilism is the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes; plus the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be "divine" or morality incarnate. This realization is a consequence of the cultivation of "truthfulness" —thus itself a consequence of the faith in morality. ("Will" 9)

This is an intermediate step, which is necessary to become what Nietzsche calls "the *Übermensch*", a human being capable of creating new values after experimenting the nihilistic process of deconstructing reality. According to Robert Solomon, a good definition of this archetype would be:

> The *Übermensch* is whatever we want, in the most profound way, to be. The will to power is nothing if not Nietzsche's one attempt at an all-embracing if not ultimately convincing psychological hypothesis. How do we explain masochism, self-destructive behavior, righteous self-denial, the urge to martyrdom, wanton cruelty. The "desire for pleasure" fails on all of these counts. The desire for power gives us a much better understanding. (186)

Valls gathers together all those aspects about the non-pleasant side of reality and the inevitable attraction towards some of the most violent characteristic of the human being, defining the *Übermensch* as the owner of time, accepting death as the ultimate part of life, and the horror, accepting the pain and fear inherent in life including, obviously, death ("Dueños" 177-178). Inevitably, Nietzsche's overman owns a transgressive nature for a system of values based on laws and contracts that limits reality, the same nature that characterises Ayesha and Sherlock Holmes and their actions. As previously claimed, both characters could be addressed as the Byronic prototype of hero. Then, if we understand that these two characters are, on the one hand, representatives of the Byronic hero and, on the other hand, of the Nietzschean overman on the basis of this transgressive nature, it might be reasonable to argue that the Byronic hero could be an approximation to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, as it seeks for its liberation from the socio-political framework.

Ultimately, and taking into account what has been defined in the previous section, the antihero is born from the necessity to break with the current prototype of exemplary character, the Carlylean hero. However, despite the fact that, as its own name indicates, the antihero should embody atypical characteristics regarding the hero's conventions, it somehow shares a common goal with the Carlylean hero, in spite of not following a certain– and more morally accurate– methodology at the time of achieving said goal. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, he does help the police solve crimes and mysteries, keeping himself inside the system in his own way. In Ayesha's case is more complicated, as she is depicted as a villain, which of course is a consequence of the Carlylean hero's control of the narrative voice, as Holly is the story's narrator.

To conclude, it is not that clear whether the antihero could be described as a proper *Übermensch*, as this concept could only function properly in a utopic situation of nihilism and fiction, especially in the case of these Victorian adventure novels, does not offer the optimal conditions to ensure the certainty of a strong connection between these two figures. Nevertheless, they do move in the margin between both realities, thus being influenced by the overman perspective.

4. Conclusion

The archetype of the hero manifests itself as a representation of the human condition throughout history, comprehending its desires, inquisitiveness and anxiety towards the inevitable. While it is true that, as Carlyle expresses, the hero remains as an immutable entity in the discourse of history, its nature as a subject –and, in some periods, object–of worship implies a certain degree of adaptation. As it has been previously contrasted, the archetype of the hero presents a wide variation in his personality, as well as the externalisation of his values. Whereas the hero serves as an ethical tool to properly determine the limits of society in the Victorian framework, he might as well collapse due to the exhausting suppression of his Dionysian nature.

It has been already asserted that the heroic tradition portraits this human dualism through a prolific literary tradition, especially during the Victorian period. However, as the fin-de-siècle approached, this tradition sustained a change in the dynamics of the British narrative. The main characters, considered previously Carlylean heroes begin to experiment

a process of self-liberation as a consequence of the alteration of the Victorian ethos during Decadentism. The Dionysian forces present in the human condition emerge through heroes who share certain resemblance with his Romantic analogues, Byronic heroes, thus adopting a more individualistic personality, which from a Carlylean perspective infringes upon the established order proposed by the community. Nevertheless, despite this exaltation of the Dionysian dimension, these heroes somehow manage to remain inside the system, as it has been proven in the case of Sherlock Holmes. Besides, their roles as main characters lead them, to a certain extent, to perform heroic actions. Given the fact that both types of heroes define each other by opposition, it is safe to claim this new archetype is referred to as antihero: a character who, despite not complying with the features present in the prototypical heroes, is still able to achieve a heroic deed. Ultimately, however, this character's motivations must not be mistaken with a morally good attitude. This hero's nature shifts towards self-realization, based on the full compliance with his will's requests. Although –as it has been explained in the previous chapter– the *Übermensch* is a utopian state of being, due to the commodified character of literature, the archetype of the antihero displays an attitude which positions itself near the margins of the *overman*'s conception of life. By this means, the antihero takes shape into an independent being which claims itself as a superior not because of a presupposed divine origin, but due to his ability to transcend beyond morals and his comprehension and embracement of his Dionysian nature.

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