

Colonial pedigree: Class, masculinity, and history in the early Rhodesian novel

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Among the literary landmarks held by the British Library is an exceedingly rare copy of what has been called “the first story of ‘ordinary life’ in Rhodesia” (Snyman 1952: 39). A cheap novella of some sixty pages, *Bulawayo Jack; or, Life Among the Matabele Kopjés* was published in 1898 by Cardiff’s *Western Mail*, probably after concluding a weekly serialization. Its British-born author, Richard Nicklin Hall (1853–1914), had trained as a solicitor before moving in 1897 to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where he worked in a variety of administrative capacities, organizing the Rhodesia section of the Greater Britain Exhibition of 1899 and editing the *Matabele Times* and *Rhodesia Journal*. In 1900, Hall collaborated with William Neal of the Ancient Ruins Company, essentially a treasure-hunting enterprise, in an excavation of the historic site of Great Zimbabwe. His resulting monograph, *The Ancient Ruins of Rhodesia* (1902; co-authored with W.G. Neal), caught the attention of Cecil Rhodes, who appointed him curator of Great Zimbabwe between 1902 and 1904, and was followed by two further archaeological studies, *Great Zimbabwe* (1905) and *Pre-Historic Rhodesia* (1909).

Surprisingly, given his prominence as an archaeologist and colonial ideologue, Hall’s authorship of one of the earliest Rhodesian novels has never been examined. Despite its unremarkable appearance and negligible aesthetic qualities, *Bulawayo Jack* is a significant literary document. Most immediately, it attests to the existence of a market in Britain for tales of Rhodesian frontier life, the readiness of a cadre of writers to meet that demand, and the arrival of a new literary genre: the Rhodesian settler novel (see Chennells 1982). *Bulawayo Jack* displays many of the features of this genre in embryo. A mix of tourist guide and commercial prospectus, it wastes no time on descriptions of the colony’s indigenous inhabitants and existing social structures but instead presents Rhodesia as a *tabula rasa* of unrealized potential. Eschewing the supernatural and Gothic themes of H. Rider Haggard’s pre-Rhodesian

romances, Hall models his tale on the vernacular character studies of Rudyard Kipling, particularly *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888). Above all, *Bulawayo Jack* exemplifies the peculiar reconfiguration of class and masculinity which characterized literary and media discourse on Britain's latest colonial acquisition.

From Cambridge to Bulawayo

The plot of *Bulawayo Jack* is easily summarized. A white settler named James Fletcher has engaged as a transport rider and "squatter farmer" in "the new colony of Rhodesia" (Hall 1898a: 7, 30), the sprawling territories north of the Limpopo River which fell under the jurisdiction of Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company (BSAC). Despite having distinguished himself at the Siege of Bulawayo during the Second Anglo-Ndebele War of 1896–97, he chooses to live in mysterious seclusion on the high veldt. One day, after a police sergeant recognizes "Bulawayo Jack" from a magazine photograph, Fletcher is visited by Philip Devant, brother of his erstwhile fiancée in Britain. The truth is revealed: Fletcher, in fact a Cambridge gentleman named Ivor James, has nobly taken the blame for a cheque forged by Devant, who now wishes to make amends. Both men return to Bulawayo, where James is reconciled with his sweetheart, and all three decide to make a fresh start in Rhodesia.

Questions of social class figure prominently in *Bulawayo Jack*, as they do in Hall's two previous novels, *Owen Tregelles—Bank Clerk* (1896) and *Gilbert Vance—Curate* (1897).¹ Thus we learn that the "stalwart young officer" who identifies Fletcher/James, is "himself the son of a member of Parliament, representing a county division in the West of England (for in the B.S.A. Co.'s Police public schoolmen and graduates, and those of good British parentage are plentiful)" (Hall 1898a: 18). While Rhodesia may well have boasted more than its fair share of aristocratic younger sons—evidence, perhaps, of imperialism's special appeal to the upper classes (see Porter 2004)—the notion that its policemen and farmers were predominantly drawn from the social elite is

¹ "The noble-minded Cambridge-educated Vince feels his calling to the priesthood confirmed while meditating in Peel Castle [Isle of Man]" (Belchem 2001: 330n).

fanciful in the extreme. At the same time, Britain's landed classes were experiencing a very real decline in their economic and political fortunes, a decline which lent force to the growing chorus of warnings about social "degeneration" and to Social Darwinist calls to preserve the racial-national stock, what Hall calls "good British parentage".

What this means is that the class fantasy offered by *Bulawayo Jack*, which would become a staple of Rhodesian veldt melodramas by writers such as Gertrude Page and Cynthia Stockley as well as a central motif in the colony's earliest representation in cinema (Donovan 2009), presents a mirror-image of the promise implied by the BSAC's promotional literature and countless magazine articles, namely that emigration to Rhodesia offered unique opportunities for *upward* social mobility. As such, Hall makes a complicated appeal to his lower-middle-class intended audience. In relating how Fletcher/James rises from tenant farmer to gentleman only to return voluntarily to his humbler adopted station, *Bulawayo Jack* invites these readers to imagine Rhodesian settler identity not as a class position but as a vocation. On this view, gentility denotes a state of mind, an ethical perspective, and a heroic capacity for self-sacrifice. No longer merely inherited privilege, it has become a token of character.

Gender plays a central role in this ideological adjustment. In the public culture of late-Victorian Britain, particularly its advertisements and periodical press, class was being increasingly redefined in terms of taste and, less explicitly, purchasing power. By contrast, in a young colony such as Rhodesia, which was characterized by the virtual absence of all but the most essential commodities, the attributes of class identity were instead projected onto those of gender (see Burke 1996: 63–90). The result was a kind of neo-chivalric settler code in which personal qualities, including, not least, bodily attributes such as endurance, physical courage, and capacity to execute manual tasks, came to serve as indicators of a new mode of social. Thus it is that Fletcher/James reveals his true—that is, Rhodesian—self in the white heat of battle even as he acquires yet another cognomen, "Bulawayo Jack", whose latter term, not coincidentally, is synonymous with the common man.

By emphasizing that its protagonist's heroic masculinity involves not only martial prowess but an aptitude for work, *Bulawayo Jack* registers the latest phase of a long historical process by which the word "gentleman" was redefined in terms of manners and cultural attitudes

rather than simple distance from manual or even salaried work.² Qualities such as moral superiority are notoriously hard to represent, however, and Hall resorts to a visual shorthand of physique, attire, and demeanour—what in the lexicon of Pierre Bourdieu might be called the *habitus* of the new Rhodesian settler class—in order to confirm the special status of Fletcher/James: “He looked every inch the gentleman he was: energetic, stalwart, bronzed, one of the very pick of Anglo-Saxon manhood” (Hall 1898a: 7). In so doing, Hall paradoxically invokes the physical marker of sunburn that, like his crumpled blue shirt, would have identified Fletcher/James, were he in Britain, as a working man:

Standing on the summit of the “look-out,” one could see him clad in the usual free style of a gentleman settler, blue unstarched linen shirt, front unbuttoned and opened wide, showing his sunburnt and brawny chest, sleeves rolled up over the elbows, a Jameson hat, with the broad brim looped up on the left side, white corduroy riding breeches, brown laced leggings and boots, and a belt on which were suspended revolver, knife, pouch and leathern tobacco bag; such was the dress of the Rhodesian Colonists. (Hall, 8)

The indispensable element of Fletcher/James’s “dress” is, of course, his hat. During the nineteenth century, as Felix Driver has noted of David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley, the headgear of African explorers and pioneers was “cultural currency to be exploited for all sorts of purposes” (Driver 1996: 234). “For the future legend, have a distinctive cap designed, à la Stanley,” noted Theodore Hertzl in his plans for a Jewish pioneer corps (cited in Gelber and Liska 2007: 89), and when designing the iconic uniform for Boy Scouts, Robert Baden-Powell drew on the hat worn by Frederick Russell Burnham during his service as a BSAC scout in the 1890s. The variety of slouch hat here sported by Fletcher/James had been a symbol of the Rhodesian settler ever since the dramatic invasion of Mashonaland by the BSAC’s Pioneer Column in 1890 (see fig. 1). Its name derived from Leander Starr

² Thus the patrician Mrs Swancourt in Thomas Hardy’s *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873): “‘My dear, you mustn’t say “gentlemen” nowadays We have handed over “gentlemen” to the lower middle class, where the word is still to be heard at tradesmen’s balls and provincial tea-parties, I believe’” (Hardy 2005: 142).

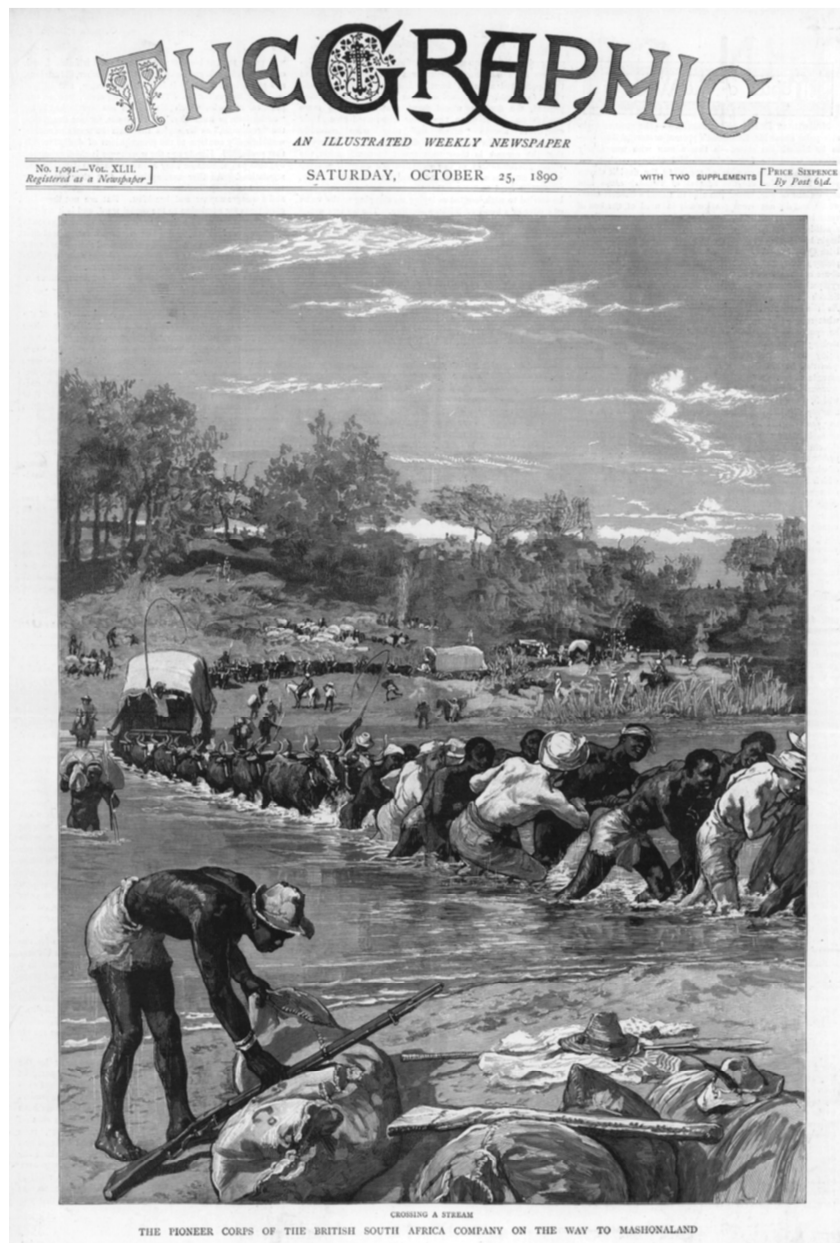


Figure 1. "The Pioneer Corps of the British South Africa Company on the Way to Mashonaland," *Daily Graphic*, 25 October 1890, 457.

Jameson, second Administrator of Mashonaland and leader of the abortive raid on the Transvaal that indirectly triggered the Ndebele insurrection of 1896. Like the visiting police officer, Fletcher/James is thus in uniform, indeed, literally so, since slouch hats were standard issue in the Bulawayo Field Force of which he is a veteran.

Self-fashioning in the “free style of a gentleman settler” also embodies what Hall evidently saw as a deeper process at work within the colony. The utopian ending, in which Cambridge gentlemen throw in their lot with penniless adventurers, is a restatement of the novella’s premise that Rhodesia is the crucible of a new social order. Just as what appears to be a description of one man turns out to be a description of a class of men (“the Rhodesian Colonists”), so, too, is the Fletcher/James character sketch really an account of his unnamed compatriots. Metonymic rather than exceptional, his bravery and selflessness serve to confirm the essential gentility (in its newly abstracted sense) of all Rhodesian militiamen. Hall underscores this point when he portrays Fletcher/James reminiscing easily in the uncensored idiom of his old comrades-in-arms:

Modestly he covered any narration of his own share in the best remembered exploits by retailing Davie Cameron’s laager jokes, especially how Sandy Butters lost the horses from the fort at Matabele Wilson’s, how he would from Scriptural texts find Divine authority for “potting” niggers, how the Dutch patrol one night fired 500 rounds from a Maxim gun at a supposed besieging impi, which on the morrow proved to be two wandering donkeys, neither injured, of Ted Slater’s descriptions of hanging rebel spies on the trees outside the town by the brickfields; and how the Jewish tradesmen with their bundles of valuables scooted with Shylockian expressions of despair into Laager whenever the alarm of the approach of the enemy was given. (Hall 1898a: 19–20)

In this brave new world of yeomen-squires, colonial identity takes on a strictly relational character, defined largely in opposition to those others—Africans, Dutchmen, Jews—who lie beyond the barricade of imagined ethnic community.

A race of Titans

In 1898, Rhodesia was still spectacularly a colony in the making. Its population of barely ten thousand settlers was dispersed across a territory of 175,000 square miles, its official name was barely three years old, and

its African population outnumbered whites by almost thirty to one. The sheer rapidity of the BSAC-led occupation, the ruthless efficiency of its suppression of African resistance, and, above all, the novelty of its being governed by a private chartered company all served to associate Rhodesia with modernity in the eyes of contemporary observers. In the writings of John Buchan, indeed, the colony would become synonymous with advanced technology, inventive military strategy, and administrative innovation (see Donovan 2013). When interviewing Cecil Rhodes in Bulawayo for the *Western Mail* in April 1898, Hall similarly played up the magnate's global media presence, his grand dream of a transcontinental telegraph, the irresistible appeal of "philanthropy plus 5 per cent," and "the favourable impression of Rhodesia now gaining ground at home" (Hall 1898b). As the BSAC's brochure *Rhodesia 1889–1899* trilled, Rhodesia was synonymous with the future:

For anyone visiting Bulawayo for the first time, it is hard to realise that a town of such size, with massive stone and brick buildings in every street, Churches, Hospitals, Stock Exchanges, Government Offices, Banks, Clubs and Hotels, equal to any in South Africa—the whole town brilliantly illuminated by electric light, has sprung into being within the last five years. (cited in Wisnicki 2007)

For all this, the dead hand of the past lay heavily on Rhodesia. While settler culture was predictably quick to mythologize fetishized incidents from the colony's founding, particularly the loss of a military detachment known as the Shangani Patrol during the First Anglo-Matabele War of 1893–94 and the Siege of Bulawayo during the Second Anglo-Ndebele War of 1896–97, the pre-colonial era also posed pressing and, at least initially, more intractable challenges to colonial ideology. This tension is reflected in *Bulawayo Jack*, whose underlying theme of psychological and ethical rapprochement with the past finds expression in the converging narrative arcs of its two protagonists, both of whom are implicitly held up as types of the sturdy new settler class. On the one hand, Fletcher/James's desire to conceal not only his dishonour in Britain but also his unsought media celebrity in Rhodesia echoes a wider colonial anxiety about social provenance. On the other, Devant's atonement for his crime is rather obviously compromised by the fact that emigrating to Rhodesia—in effect, becoming another anonymous "Bulawayo Jack"—will put him beyond the reach of the law. For each

man, then, Rhodesia promises suppression of the past as well as its transcendence.

As a writer, Hall, too, lived under the burden of the past. Haggard's evocations of pre-colonial Rhodesia in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887) had created a vogue for African romances which doubtless played a role in Hall's choice of geographical setting for *Bulawayo Jack*. Yet the two men's treatment of social class could hardly have been less alike. Haggard's deep sympathy with Zulu warrior society went hand-in-hand with a strongly nostalgic view of Britain's feudal past and what Anthony Chennells has described as "an anxiety that commercialism might have compromised the idealism of empire" (Chennells 2007: 77). For the white adventurers of *King Solomon's Mines*, the unnamed lands "to the north of the Transvaal" (Haggard 1907: 20) are the object of a secular pilgrimage, a moral and physical testing-ground, and a space in which classes and races can temporarily mingle. Yet Haggard's treasure-seekers must return (albeit vastly enriched) to their respective social spheres in Britain after having installed Ignosi, their erstwhile servant, as anointed chief of "Kukuanaland". What would become Rhodesia is emphatically not a future home for Sir Henry Curtis or Captain Good, nor even for Haggard's grizzled hunter-pro prospector Allan Quatermain.

By contrast, Hall envisages the uncharted territories of Rhodesia as a dynamic social project. Thus we learn of Fletcher/James: "He came not to South Africa as others came in a reckless race for wealth, for at home he possessed better means than he might secure in the Colony, but if only he could stifle recollection he would make money" (Hall 1898a: 24). Hall is clearly drawing here on a familiar motif of empire as the white man's burden, its purpose, in Kipling phrase, "To seek another's profit, / And work another's gain." Even so, the need to "stifle recollection" is suggestively ambiguous in this context. Concealing his putative guilt requires Fletcher/James to deny (or at least maintain a strict silence about) his social origins, but modern readers nonetheless cannot fail to notice how Hall takes for granted that Rhodesia is the best place to do both. Fletcher/James, it will be recalled, has managed to preserve complete anonymity until Devant arrives from Britain. Interestingly, the *New York Times*'s assertion that Hall had attended a minor public school called "Kinver College in Staffordshire" (29 November 1914, 14)—he had, in fact, attended a grammar school in Kinver, a far less prestigious

free school—raises the possibility that the author, too, may have embellished his personal history upon arrival in Rhodesia.

Rhodesia has, then, provided Fletcher/James with a new identity. Fittingly, given the intense media attention directed towards the colony during its first decade, he owes this new identity as “Bulawayo Jack” to *Black & White*, a popular illustrated periodical published, not locally, but in London. News from Rhodesia was a regular feature in this magazine of current affairs, which devoted numerous articles and cover illustrations to military campaigns and public events such as the magnificent obsequies for Cecil Rhodes (fig. 2). In this light, the invention of Fletcher/James as “Bulawayo Jack” can be seen to instantiate the “Rhodesian Colonist” discursively created by the media in Britain, much the same way as the war-stories circulating among Fletcher/James and his comrades echo the stirring reportage with which British periodicals had diverted their own audiences during the recent wars in Rhodesia. The fact that the BSAC Police officer recognizes him “by your likeness given in ‘Black and White’” (Hall 1898a: 16) is also significant in this regard. In addition to foregrounding the detail and verisimilitude of half-tone magazine illustrations, whose engravers often worked from photographs, it alerts us to the way that contemporary readers treated them as documentary glimpses of Rhodesia. Such blurring of the line between fiction and current history is further compounded in *Bulawayo Jack* by the cameo appearance of Cecil Rhodes, subsequently a cliché of Rhodesian novels such as F. Reginald Statham’s *Mr Magnus* (1896).

Crucially, Hall’s novel includes five photographic illustrations: a cover image of a lion cub; a full-length portrait of two Ndebele men (“Cococo and Jim”); another lion cub (“Miss Gwanda”); a landscape view of a deserted village (“Native Kraal”); and a picture of a white man standing beside a tree (“At the Foot of a Giant Euphorbia”). The ideological function of these photographs is easily recognized in the demeaning names bestowed upon the Ndebele men, the ironic award of the title “Miss Gwanda” (Gwanda being a town in Matabeleland) to an animal, the evocation of the landscape as empty of inhabitants, and the posing of the white man alongside what is effectively a botanical trophy. Yet these paratexts also serve less visible and arguably more important ends. In the first instance, they graphically connect this obscure work of

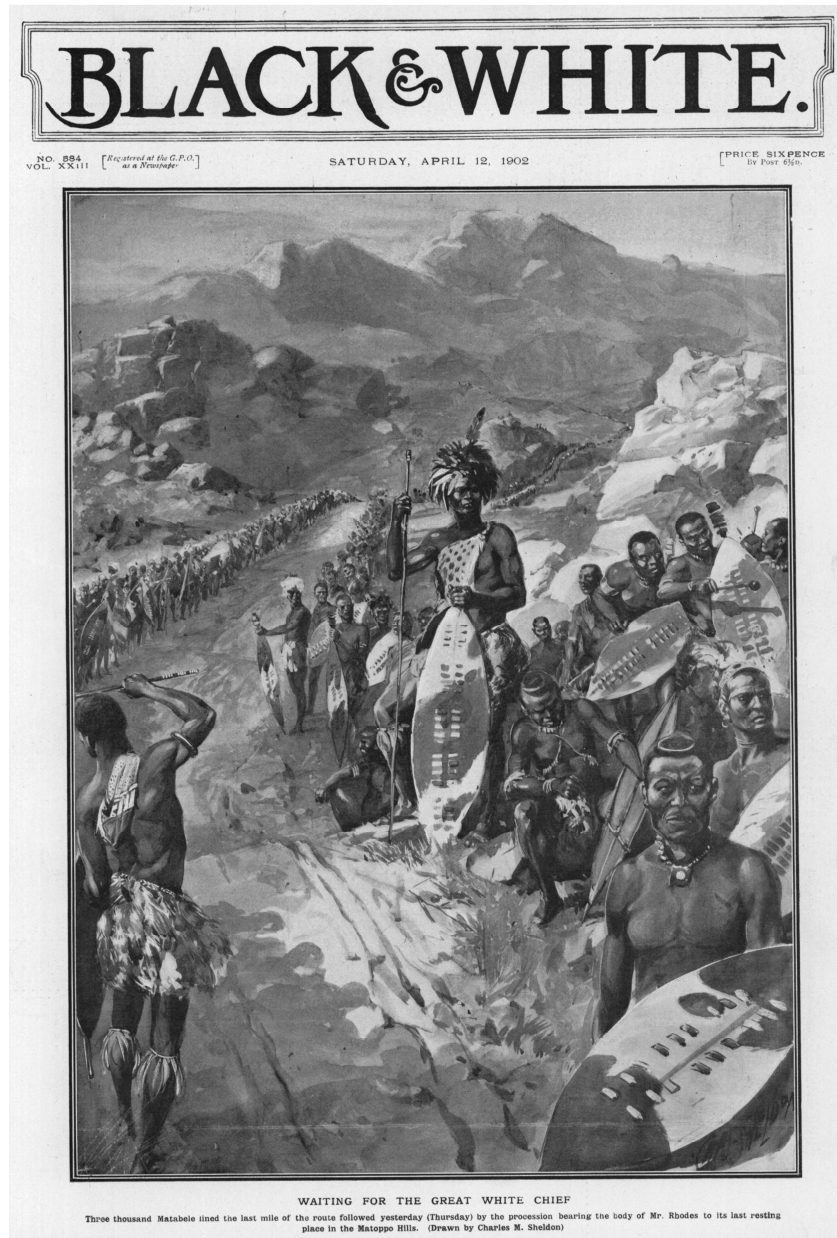
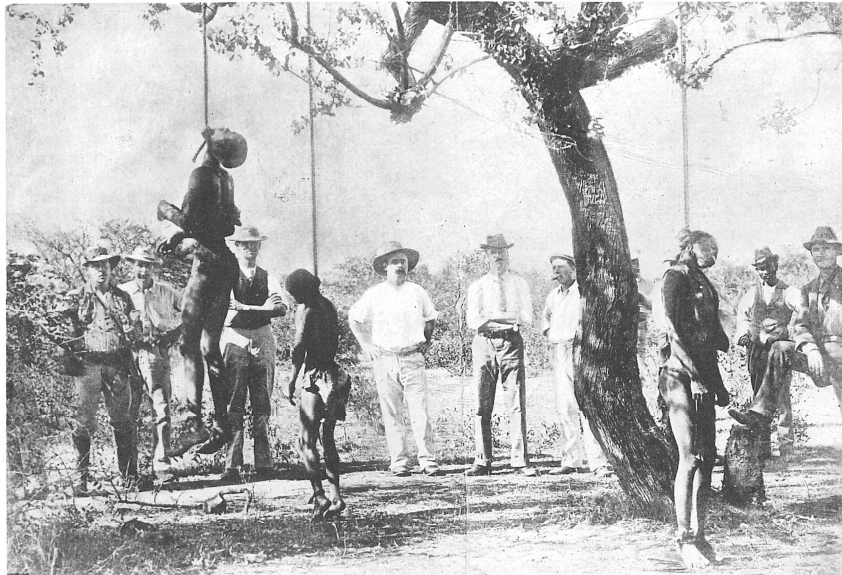


Figure 2. Charles Sheldon, "Waiting for the Great White Chief," *Black & White*, 12 April 1902, cover.

fiction to a burgeoning discourse on Rhodesia in contemporary British culture. Indeed, since the captions bear no relation to Hall's narrative beyond also having as their subject the people and landscape of Rhodesia, these photographs can only be understood as a deliberate allusion to this larger array of periodical and other texts relating to the new colony. They establish, too, a metonymic connection between the colony and the author; these are personal souvenirs, clearly taken by an amateur, rather than journalism or official propaganda. *Bulawayo Jack* may be a sentimental romance but the photographs signal that its author, unlike Haggard's numberless imitators, has seen Rhodesia for himself and is thus an authority of sorts. The anomalous final photograph goes even further by offering the unnamed white man not merely as an image of the author but as a kind of visual proxy for Fletcher/James, in the process all but collapsing the distinction between the real Rhodesia and that of the novel.

The photographs also have a deeper significance by virtue of the fact that *Bulawayo Jack* was published the year after photographs of Rhodesia in a novella had provoked an international scandal. In 1897, Olive Schreiner delivered an impassioned attack on the greed and brutality of the BSAC in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, an allegorical fable about a meeting on the veldt between a common soldier and Jesus Christ. Schreiner prefaced her indictment of the Company's crimes with a shocking frontispiece titled "From a photograph taken in Matabeleland" (fig. 3), which, despite being removed from subsequent editions, has become an iconic image of colonial brutality. The photograph, which depicts three Ndebele prisoners executed at Bulawayo's "Hanging Tree" during the reprisals that followed the relief of Bulawayo in May 1896, is also described by a character in the novella: "I saw a photograph of the niggers hanging, and our fellows standing round smoking" (Schreiner 1897: 50–1; see also Walters and Fogg 2007). A public relations setback for the BSAC, Schreiner's frontispiece offers a cogent explanation for the inclusion of photographs that have no direct relevance for Hall's tale of "ordinary" life in Rhodesia. With their sentimental and normalizing presentation of the colony as a domesticated space, the photographs constitute an intervention in a struggle over (literally) the image of Rhodesia. They are, in effect, the visual counterpart of Catherine Radziwiłł's bizarre novella *The Resurrection of*



From a photograph taken in Matabeleland.

Figure 3. Olive Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland: A Tale* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1897), frontispiece. Image courtesy of Ashleigh Harris.

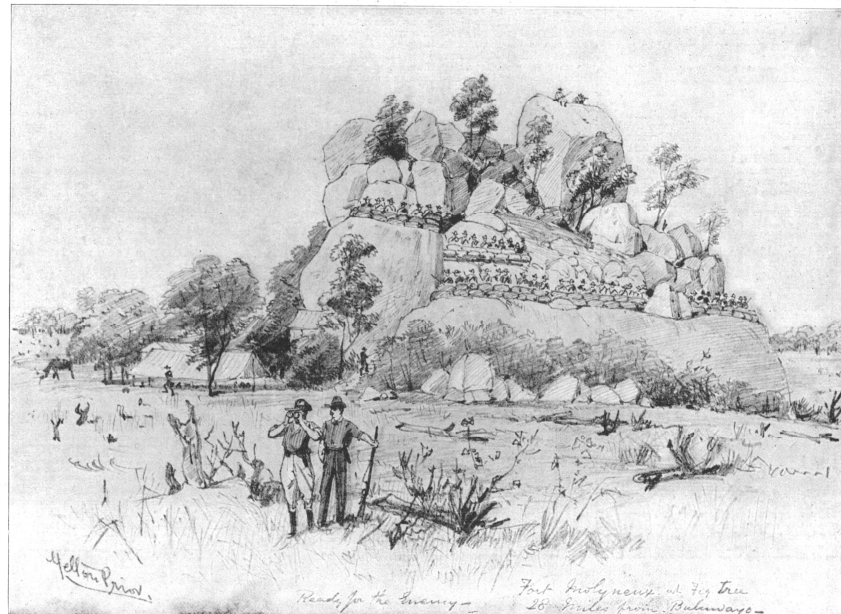
Peter (1900), which would offer a riposte to Schreiner by having Jesus Christ return to make an impassioned defence of the BSAC. Indeed, the proposition that Hall intended the photographs as a direct challenge to the frontispiece of *Trooper Peter Halket*, a novel which, like *Bulawayo Jack*, places special emphasis on the class identity of its eponymous hero, is seemingly confirmed by Fletcher/James's reference to "Ted Slater's descriptions of hanging rebel spies on the trees outside the town" (Hall 1898a: 20).

All of these factors—the transcendence of history, literary romance, the popular image of Rhodesia—are curiously fused in a climactic scene in which Hall relates how Fletcher/James and Devant make their way back to Bulawayo:

As they drove through the Mangwe Pass in the Matoppos, the scenery was perfectly grand and marvellous. It was full moonlight, and the white clear light enabled Philip Devant to see distinctly for a considerable distance the hills, which are generally supposed to be the scene of Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. The heights were most romantic. Great, huge boulders of hundreds of tons weight were so poised

in the air that it seemed but a push were required to send them toppling into the deep ravines below. Their shapes and contours were so fantastic—in many instances outlining the forms of elephants and lions *rampant et couchant*, and gigantic human faces—that one at first was compelled to the conclusion that they must have been shaped centuries back by some Titan race. (Hall 1898a: 44–5)

Hall's description, while accurate enough, has as its object a landscape with which many British readers were already persuaded that they were familiar, thanks in part to the extensive coverage of Rhodesia in illustrated magazines of the mid-1890s (see fig. 4).³ As such, it offers an example of the enduring semiotic power of the Matopos Hills, whose



READY FOR THE ENEMY: FORT MOLYNEUX, AT FIG-TREE, TWENTY-EIGHT MILES FROM BULUWAYO.

Figure 4. Melton Prior, "Ready for the Enemy: Fort Molyneux, at Fig-Tree, Twenty-Eight Miles from Buluwayo," *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1896, 681.

³ Twenty years later, a reviewer for the *Kinematograph Weekly* (London) could declare confidently of a film shot entirely in South Africa: "Much of *The Rose of Rhodesia*'s grand scenery (crag, precipices and waterfalls) is of a kind which could only be taken in Rhodesia" (6 November 1919, 115).

multiple significations for Africans as well as white settlers have been eloquently documented by Terence Ranger in *Voices From the Rocks* (1999).

But what are we to make of Hall's whimsical suggestion that the Matopos had been built by Titans? Like his awkward locutions—"grand and marvellous," "full moonlight," "Great, huge"—it appears at first glance to be a self-conscious attempt at "literary" style. Hall's interpretation of the rock formations as heraldic figures and faces likewise seems merely a banality of the anthropomorphizing and orientalizing colonial gaze. And yet the notion that Rhodesia in the distant past had been the playground of a now-vanished race of godlike beings had a more immediate connotation than classical myth or even Haggardesque romances such as George Cossins's *Isban-Israel* (1896), the story of an ancient Jewish tribe in Matabeleland. Coming as it does in a scene in which two white settlers draw a line beneath their own personal histories so as to take possession of "vacant" lands of which they are the undisputed owners, this passage from *Bulawayo Jack* relies upon the implicit assumption that lasting changes can only be made to the African landscape by non-African agents, effectively reframing the question of historical origins as one of racial pedigree. Four years later, its author assumed responsibility for the most politically charged archaeological site in Africa.

The land of romance

Located in Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province, Great Zimbabwe is a deserted settlement of 1,800 acres whose three walled enclosures are comprised of dwelling houses, cattle pens, ramparts, and monumental stone edifices, among them a massive conical tower. The complex, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has yielded numerous historical artefacts, including eight soapstone carvings of a bird whose emblem now adorns the national flag of Zimbabwe. Carbon-dating and other metrics have confirmed that construction work in stone began in the eleventh century and that the site was abandoned some time before the early fifteenth. In Anthony Chennells's words: "The old city was not an outpost of some ancient and exotic empire but an African city, built by the Shona, who are still the dominant people of the southern Zambebian plateau, and depended on African economic networks,

African politics, and African religion for its existence and status” (Chennells 2007: 1–2).

By the time Hall took up his post—whose responsibilities were in fact custodial, not archaeological—Great Zimbabwe had been forcefully appropriated by colonialist historiography. In 1871, Karl Mauch, a German explorer, identified the ruins as the Queen of Sheba’s palace, and his risible claim that the site was the gold-rich Ophir described in the Bible was cynically repeated by Rhodes’s associates when wooing financiers and settlers in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Shortly after, Mauch’s views were roundly dismissed by James Theodore Bent, an antiquarian sponsored by the BSAC, who instead declared that the site was a military installation built by Phoenicians or Arabs to protect gold mines.⁴ The evidence produced by his excavation of the site, as he emphasized in the preface to the third edition of his *Ruined Cities of Mashonaland* (1892), “quite excludes the possibility of any negroid race having had more to do with their construction than as the slaves of a race of higher cultivation; for it is a well-accepted fact that the negroid brain never could be capable of taking the initiative in work of such intricate nature” (Bent 1902: xiv). A similar line was taken by John Willoughby, formerly a leading conspirator in the Jameson Raid, in his *Narrative of Further Excavations at Zimbaye* (1893), and by Alexander Wilmot, a researcher engaged by the BSAC to scour European archives in support of Bent’s thesis, who speculated in his *Monomatapa (Rhodesia)* (1896) that the abandoned site told a cautionary tale of imperial decline hastened by interbreeding. Hall’s own contributions, which included the most comprehensive description of the site hitherto, cleaved faithfully to the historical narrative established by these precursors.

The controversy over the origins of Great Zimbabwe has already been examined in some detail by historians and anthropologists, who have usefully highlighted the ethnocentric prejudices exhibited by its

⁴ Thus an early history of Rhodesia: “Here, then, we have a people well skilled in constructive art, deeply religious, and of probably a quiet and inoffensive description, having wandered on to the plains of Rhodesia to dwell among the fierce tribes that evidently overran the country then as later, to search for the precious metals that they knew to lie beneath the ground. . . . It has long been thought that India represented the ancient Ophir, but it seems as though in the light of recent discoveries it must give place to Rhodesia” (Hensman 1900: 9, 11).

participants (e.g. Kuklick 1991; Derricourt 2011: 21–37). In Hall’s case, however, the ideological stakes seem to have owed as much to the representation of pre-colonial Rhodesia in imaginative literature as to the more obvious political agenda of the BSAC at the turn of the century. His reference in *Bulawayo Jack* to the Matopos as being “generally supposed to be the scene of Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*” is illustrative of his broader approach to Rhodesian history—as a *literary* subject. “Mr. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* are known to ‘walk’ the country,” he remarks elliptically in *The Ancient Ruins of Rhodesia*, an archaeological monograph which opens, somewhat unusually, by describing its topic as “the Land of Romance” (Hall and Neal 1902: 5, 1). And he repeated these sentiments in *Great Zimbabwe*: “In the passages on the hill one might almost expect on such a night to come face to face with Rider Haggard’s She at any corner, or to see her draped form issuing from one of the numerous caves which still pierce the cliffs”; “Romance rivalling that of Rider Haggard at his best pervades the massive walls of this ancient ascent as it insinuates its upward way along the precipitous side of Zimbabwe Hill” (Hall 1905: 19, 294).

Nor was Hall alone in conflating fiction and history. Having imagined a lost race in *King Solomon’s Mines*, Haggard himself did not hesitate to lend his considerable authority in support of Wilmot’s claims that Great Zimbabwe was Phoenician in origin (see Kuklick 1991: 142–3). In a Post Scriptum to the 1905 edition of *King Solomon’s Mines*, he announced: “Imagination has been verified by fact; the King Solomon’s Mines I dreamed of have been discovered, and are putting out their gold once more, and, according to the latest reports, their diamonds also; the Kukuanas or, rather, the Matabele, have been tamed by the white man’s bullets” (Haggard 1907: 8). He also echoed Wilmot’s assertion that “there is no greater analogy than that between the Empire of Britain and that of Phoenicia” (Wilmot 1896: 118) by declaring the Phoenicians to be “the English of the ancient world” (Wilmot 1896: xvii). Thanks to the “bold enterprise of the British South Africa Company” (Wilmot 1896: xxiii), Haggard added, Great Zimbabwe might soon be “peopled by men of the Anglo-Saxon race” (Wilmot 1896: xxiv)—a vision which he subsequently fleshed out in his romances *Elissa* (1900) and *Benita* (1906), both of which are set in or near the historic site. Indeed, Haggard seems to have been unable to think about African history without having

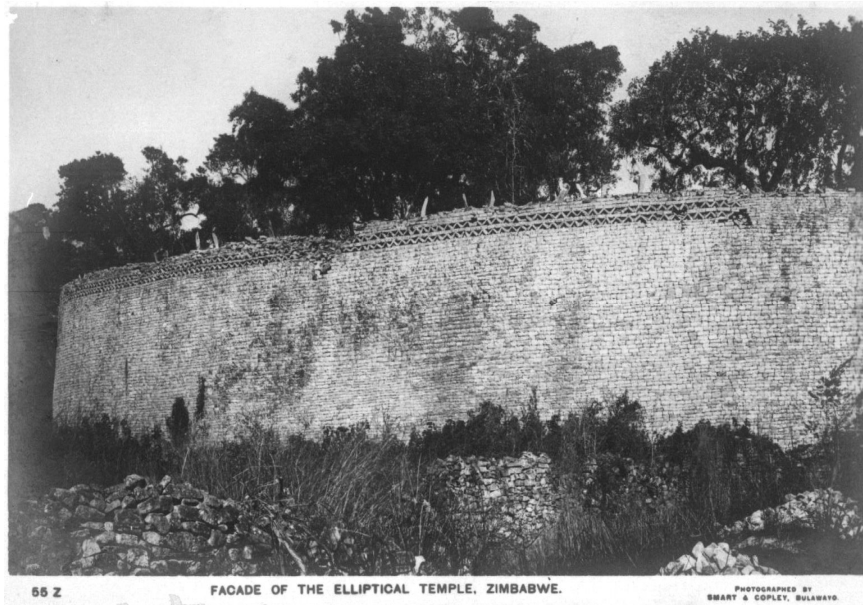


Figure 5. Postcard of Great Zimbabwe. Bulawayo, e.1900s.

recourse to the extravagant tropes that characterize his own fiction. After entering the so-called “Elliptical Temple” (see fig. 5) during a visit to Great Zimbabwe in April 1914, he noted in his diary: “Well can I imagine the priests of some dark and bloody ritual creeping down its gloomy depths, thrusting or bearing between them the human being destined to the sacrifice” (Haggard 2001: 158).

The *mise-en-abyme* created by this self-reinforcing inductive logic is highlighted by Haggard’s account of a day spent exploring the ruins with Hall, whom the BSAC had reinstated after lobbying by white settlers.⁵ Although professional archaeologists were increasingly in agreement with David Randall-MacIver’s conclusion in *Medieval Rhodesia* (1906) that Great Zimbabwe was “unquestionably African in every detail”

⁵ Scrambling behind the unexpectedly agile curator, Haggard recalled: “Halfway up this impossible place [Hall] turned to beckon to us hesitating weaklings who crawled behind and instantly there flashed into my mind the picture of old Gagool in *K[ing] S[olomon’s] Mines*. . . . The resemblance was so ridiculously accurate that I burst out laughing and nearly came to grief” (Haggard 2001: 161).

(Randall-MacIver 1906: 85), Haggard remained unconvinced: “How any antiquarian can have suggested that all these buildings were erected by African natives in the Middle Ages passes my comprehension. Surely he must have but a slight acquaintance with kaffir races” (Haggard 2001: 158). Despite being in agreement on the age of Great Zimbabwe and despite Hall’s enthusiasm for Haggard’s writings—Haggard noted with surprise that the curator had dubbed a nearby chain of ancient forts “Allan Quatermain’s Road” (Haggard 2001: 157)—a curious misunderstanding arose between the two men. As Haggard recorded in his diary:

Mr. Hall seemed a little aggrieved with me because I, he said, was responsible for various false ideas about Zimbabwe. He said that once he made a practice of sitting on the top of the great cone, reading my stories, noting their every *word*. I tried to explain to him the differences between romance and the history of fact. . . . [W]ith the exception of *Elissa*, which he has not read, I never wrote of Zimbabwe, but rather of a land where the ruins were built by the fairies of imagination.

(Haggard 2001: 159)

Charges of plagiarism earlier in his career had made Haggard wary of acknowledging sources for his fiction—here, Hugh Mulleneux Walmsley’s *The Ruined Cities of Zululand* (1869) (Etherington 1977). He may also have been embarrassed by the extraordinary image of Hall trying to derive archaeological details from a popular novel while seated atop Great Zimbabwe’s iconic tower. And yet his strictures to the curator on “the differences between romance and the history of fact” are deeply disingenuous insofar as they seek to conceal the extent to which literary romance had enabled the bogus “history of fact” to which both men so readily subscribed.⁶

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions about *Bulawayo Jack*. For all its obscurity, the novella offers a useful insight into the peculiar pressures of class and gender in early Rhodesia. Fletcher/James’s determination to protect his sweetheart’s good name

⁶ Hall’s *Great Zimbabwe*, notes Martin Hall, “made heavy use of the power of the romance genre, employing its devices in conjuring up Bent’s pagan rituals and phallic worship” (Hall 1996: 109); and Haggard’s writings were included by Hall and Neal among the “opinions . . . which must be weighed by archaeologists in dealing with the question of the original builders of the ruins” (Hall and Neal 1902, xi-xii). See Hall 1995.

even at the cost of his own is an extravagant instance of the fetishizing of white women, and specifically their virtue, in early settler society (McCulloch 2000). As might be expected, this neo-chivalric honour code was to receive less rosy treatment at the hands of female Rhodesian novelists such as Gertrude Page and Cynthia Stockley, whose “advanced” social themes include domestic violence, marital infidelity, and mental illness (see Donovan 2009). The absence of women in *Bulawayo Jack* seems to be merely a convention of the romance genre—the imperial frontier as a space of masculine derring-do and homosocial friendship—yet the necessity of importing a female love interest in order to resolve its plot was both topical and utopian. On arriving in Rhodesia in 1897, Hall had joined a settler population that was overwhelmingly male, thanks to the deterrent conditions of frontier life, the upheavals of two wars, and a ban on BSAC employees marrying which had been imposed the previous year after white women were killed by Ndebele insurgents. Indeed, it was not until the following March that the *Illustrated London News* could report that the Rhodesia was once again welcoming female emigrants. Five years later, men still outnumbered women by almost four to one (McCulloch 2000: 88), and as late as 1913 women could be described as being “as scarce as roses in December” outside of urban settlements (Page 1913: 147).

That Rhodesia’s most prominent archaeologist should have authored a tale in which a white settler assumes his rightful identity by coming to terms with the past offers, in turn, a fascinating corollary to Rhodesia’s own fraught relationship with its precolonial past. Indeed, Fletcher/James’s journey of redemption presents an allegory of the larger travails of the fledging colony, each bound on a quest for self-realization predicated on a perspective more akin to the notion of pedigree than historical truth. Just as the archaeological “evidence” presented by Hall and other BSAC apologists asserted a political and ethical continuity between the empires of antiquity and the present, so, too, does *Bulawayo Jack* imagine Rhodesia as a mythic site not of class displacement but of an ongoing reconstruction of class itself. In their blurring of history and fiction, both fantasies served an immediate political need. Imperial antecedents confer a useful aura of legitimacy and inevitability, not to say romance, on the sordid business of subjugating, expropriating, and taxing a colony’s indigenous inhabitants, and while the international archaeological community may have reviled Hall as bungler who

inadvertently destroyed the very site he was excavating, Hall remained, as Henrika Kuklick notes, a “local hero” among Rhodesians for unwaveringly advocating the “ancient-exotic theory of Great Zimbabwe’s origins” (Kuklick 1991: 150). At the same time, such fantasies clearly made a powerful imaginative appeal to British readers as well as to those men (and women) on the ground, as indicated by the presence of Mary Thurcytel’s “The White Dove of Khami: A Tale of Monomatapa,” a lurid Haggardesque feuilleton set in Great Zimbabwe which was serialized alongside prosaic advertisements for mining equipment and stock prices in the *Bulawayo Chronicle* in 1901.

Ultimately, then, *Bulawayo Jack* illustrates the special place of imaginative literature in the self-image of early Rhodesia. It would be easy to say that Hall’s historical delusions, which were based on his reading and, not least, writing of fiction, stemmed from a deliberate attempt to deform precolonial history in the interests of the BSAC’s racial and political goals. Certainly, there can be no doubt about Hall’s commitment to the BSAC’s agenda; one of the two other surviving copies of *Bulawayo Jack* contains an autograph inscription to Dr (Johannes) Hans Sauer, member of first Mashonaland Legislative Council, participant in the Jameson Raid, and personal friend of Rhodes, whom he even accompanied at the famous *indaba* in the Matopos in 1896.⁷ And yet the evidence of this now forgotten novel is that Hall came to Rhodesia with these romantic and repellent notions already pre-established. Less conscious propaganda, they stand as an instance of colonial ideology wedded to a peculiarly literary variety of bad faith.

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⁷ Held by Boston College. See http://openlibrary.org/books/OL16584391M/Bulawayo_Jack.

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