Damning the Colossus: Schreiner's Compromised Critique in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*

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In June 2020, the Governors of Oriel College, Oxford University, voted to remove the statue of its once illustrious alumnus, Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902), from the college premises in an attempt to disengage from his controversial legacy of imperialism and racism that has been under sustained attack in Britain and other parts of the Commonwealth over the past few years.(Coughlan)[1] However according to another BBC report that came two days later, despite the majority of the members of the Commission set up to study this demand agreeing to remove the statue, the college decided not to do so, citing 'costs and complex planning process,'[2] thereby reinforcing Britain's ambivalent relationship with its empire builders. The Oxford and Colonialism website hosted by the University explains the persistent ambiguity in the British ruling class's relationship with its colonial past: "Rhodes is also depicted on a plaque on Oriel's property … , citing his 'great services to his country.' Prime Minister Johnson … argued that judging Rhodes by current moral standards is illegitimate and anachronistic. The implication of this defence is that even though we may now come to a different view, Rhodes's conduct was admired,… by his contemporaries who also supported his imperialist ideas.[3]

The hegemonic control that Cecil Rhodes had exerted over the political, social and economic structures of the British Empire in Africa as well as the metropole at the end of the nineteenth century can be gauged from the fact that apart from being an advisor and financier to the British government and the monarch, he was the Prime Minister of Cape Colony from 1890-1896. In an exercise in unrestrained megalomania, Rhodes successfully imprinted an African country with his name. Countries now known as Zimbabwe and Zambia continued to be identified as Rhodesia well after Rhodes's death. Rhodes also used his fabled riches to establish the Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa and instituted the sought-after Rhodes Scholarships at Oxford University to educate the future empire builders. The current controversy and Rhodes' history makes it pertinent to re-examine a contemporaneous text that was overtly critical of his policies in Africa and the manner in which he was lionised by the ruling class in Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century.

South African writer Olive Schreiner's novella, which is often categorised as a political allegory and which the contemporary critics dismissed as anti-Rhodes propaganda or a moral tract, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, published in 1897, is a little known but powerful work that has provoked contention while simultaneously inspiring insightful and perceptive critiques in recent years. South African History Online (SAHO) reinforces this perception as it describes Olive Schreiner as

> "a writer and feminist and one of the first campaigners for women's rights. She was also a pacifist. She did not agree with British imperialism in South Africa or with the South African (Anglo-Boer) War 1899-1902 that was fought to achieve it. She opposed racism in whatever form, whether against Boers or Black people."

The same site continues:

> She later wrote a number of political works - for example *Trooper PeterHalkett of Mashonaland* (1897) which attacked British imperialism and racism in South Africa and championed the causes of the Boers and Black people. She was particularly critical of Cecil John Rhodes and his policies when he was the prime minister of the Cape (1890-1896). When the South African (Anglo-Boer) War broke out in 1899, the English burned her house and her manuscripts and sent her to a concentration camp for several years because of her public support of the Afrikaner cause. (https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/olive-schreiner).

Novelist and critic, Stephen Gray belabors the point when he states that Schreiner "meant the book as a moral challenge to the English world."[4] The statement is borne out by Schreiner's decision to jolt the British reading public out of its self-righteous zeal to 'civilize the savages' by printing a frontispiece showing the hanging of three African men with some white men watching the scene with no discernible sense of horror or shame. Similarly, according to Gerald Monsman, "the fiction of Olive Schreiner … suggests that conquest all too easily becomes synonymous with the worst features of imperial decadence. Moreover, there is a parallel between imperialism or colonialism and sexual exploitation or conquest."[5] This becomes evident in the protagonist's's justification of his rape of the young African woman and his treatment of the two African women he had forced to cohabit with him because "a black woman wasn't white" (16).

The recent interpretations of this text are evidently attempting to reclaim Schreiner as an anti-imperialist writer. ~~Yet, this text, in spite of~~ Schreiner was famous as a radical nineteenth century political thinker. But in this text, her focus on the immorality of the Rhodesian version of imperialism[6] embodied by the Chartered Company which practiced its viciously exploitative form of racism and political skullduggery in southern Africa, highlights her tacit acceptance of other versions of imperialism. It is this selective and somewhat

ambiguous anti-imperial stand – which challenges the available critical assessments of this work – that is examined in this paper.

Born in Cape Colony in 1855, Olive Schreiner left for England and published her best-known work *Story of an African Farm* there in 1883. It was a commercial and critical success, and along with *Women and Labour* (1911), cemented Schreiner's credentials as a feminist writer. In 1889, she returned to South Africa and was deeply involved in the colony's politics along with some other members of her family. Her brother William Cronwright later became a prime minister of Cape Colony, while Theo, another brother, was a senator in the Parliament of Cape Colony. Schreiner soon earned a reputation as a political thinker for her opposition to imperialism, colonialism and racism in South Africa.[7] *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) attacks Cecil Rhodes' colonial policies in South Africa while acquiescing to the right of Britain to rule over the colonies. Schreiner dedicates this book to "Great Good Man, Sir George Grey," whom she lauds as "Once Governor of the Cape Colony, who, during his rule in South Africa, bound to himself the Dutchmen, Englishmen, and Africans he governed, by an incorruptible justice and a broad humanity; and *who is remembered among us today as representing the noblest attributes of an Imperial Rule* (emphasis added)." This sets Sir George and Rhodes at the opposite poles of the imperial axis. This adulatory dedication seems to be devoid of any criticism of British imperialism and makes Schreiner's stance on imperialism deserving of a closer reading.

The two-part novella ostensibly describes the military adventures of Peter Halket, a young trooper in the British army, who is separated from the other men in his unit during one of their marches. Sitting alone in the darkness of the African veldt gives Peter an opportunity to ponder over what he hopes to gain out of his service in the imperialist cause. As he reflects on his humble beginnings as a village boy in England with a mother who is a washer woman and father who had been a labourer, he dreams of earning enough wealth in South Africa to provide a luxurious, upper class life for himself and his mother upon his return; dreaming of luxuries such as a grand house, servants and attendants to care for his needs, and flourishing business interests that would allow him to float a company in the style of other well-known imperialists like Cecil Rhodes and Barney Barnato. As he sits in front of a fire, Peter is accosted by a Stranger with Christ-like overtones, who makes him question the exploitation and violence against Africans that would allow the trooper's dreams to become a reality. It is through the conversation between Peter and the Stranger that the readers learn of the English soldiers' and Peter's sexual exploitation of African women, which allows Schreiner to represent the cost of conquest visited on the bodies of women. The Stranger, a representation of Christ and Peter's somnolent conscience, outlines in stark terms the moral compromises inherent in the imperialist

endeavour to continue the supposedly divine mission to civilise the savages.

The second part of the novella describes Peter reuniting with his band of fellow troopers and his apparently irrational behaviour in trying to save an African runaway captured by the regiment. When the Captain hangs the African with the aim of forcing Peter to execute him in the morning, Peter takes advantage of the cover of darkness to cut the captive African loose to let him escape and then shoots himself. Peter's body is discovered by his fellow soldiers in the morning. Clearly, upon realization of the barbarity of the imperial enterprise – in much the same way that Kurtz realizes the "horror" of the Belgian conquest of the Congo in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – Peter cannot live with himself and having attempted to atone for his previous excesses by rescuing the African, he chooses to die. This makes Schreiner's response to imperialism more ambiguous. While Schreiner's position with regard to the Rhodesian brand of imperialism is voiced overtly, her stinging criticism, focused exclusively on Rhodes' depredations, hints at her acceptance of the other versions of imperial ideologies and discourses. This ambivalent stance toward imperialism casts a doubt on the validity of her engagement with this ideology.

Over the past four decades, Schreiner's novella has elicited a variety of critical responses. Patrick Brantlinger, for instance, calls it "Schreiner's fictional diatribe against Rhodes."[8] Despite these assertions supporting Schreiner's stand against the self-professed messiah of British imperialism, it is surprising to note an absence of discussion about Schreiner's position on imperialism per se.[9] After years of marginalization as a propagandist tract of little literary merit in comparison to Schreiner's other works, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* has gained renown in recent years as a document with historical and political value, not only because it is, as Laura Chrisman insists, "an appeal to the English people and government, in the hope of mobilizing support against Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company. Ultimately, (Schreiner) hoped to help remove the Company's Royal Charter, through publicizing the atrocities perpetrated in the conquest of Mashonaland and Matabeleland;"[10] but also because it can be seen, in Deirdre David's words, as a harbinger of "new imperialism (that) distanced itself from the rampant capitalism brought to lucrative perfection by its most notorious exponent Cecil Rhodes at the end of the Victorian period."[11]

The novella is hard to pin down when it comes to genre, not only because of Schreiner's experimental style but also because the intention behind writing it, oft stated by the writer, complicates the issue. A spirited debate about the genre to which this slim book belongs has raged ever since it was written: some perceive it as an allegory of Schreiner's views on British rule in South Africa, while for

others, like the anonymous first reader commissioned to read this book by the publishers, it is a political tract which makes no attempt to disguise its message. Laura Chrisman, however, concedes that "Those few critics who acknowledge *Peter Halket's* existence tend mostly to dismiss it as a crude propaganda exercise." She includes an impressive array of critics, including the first two reviewers of the book who considered this work to be "halfway between a tract and a novel" along with Nadine Gordimer, in this list. Similarly, for the second reviewer, the only redeeming feature of the text was the "actual description of the suffering of the 'niggers [sic].'"[12] This book had been written with a specific intention by Schreiner, which was to highlight the iniquities of Rhodes' business and political designs to the world at large, as professed in her letters. She uses the device of the vision to fictionalise her concerns and cast them in an ethical and moral framework that was the dominant narrative about the imperial project, as she had been a victim of institutional violence for voicing these concerns.

Schreiner's deep engagement with the subject and her desire to influence public opinion against Rhodes' Company justify the oft-quoted accusations of *Peter Halket* being a propagandist text, although for many contemporary readers, Schreiner's efforts at getting the charter of Rhodes' company cancelled by the British parliament were deemed inappropriate as they went beyond the sanctioned intention of a fictional work. Consequently, *Peter Halke*t has mostly been read as a flimsy "allegorical novella" and as liberal propaganda. According to Liz Stanley, it "came out of [Schreiner's] wider political activities and as well as her experimental approach to writing and to ideas about genre;" and that *Peter Halket* was written "not as a literary exercise but as the only kind of protest she could make that might have an effect on these matters of land, profit, guns, lives."[13] This point of view is reinforced when we read in one of Schreiner's letters to the publishers, "I have a story, somewhat of the nature of an allegory, dealing with Rhodes and the problems in Rhodesia, more especially with the treatment of the natives" (September 1896). Allegory by itself is a literary trope often resorted to by people, especially women, when dealing with political and social oppression under conditions when it is not possible to challenge the oppressor head-on. Schreiner, a South African woman deeply invested in the land and with close family affiliation there, would have found it impossible to launch a direct attack while Rhodes was the all-powerful arbiter of the country's fate.

Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* presents a feminist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist perspective on the British rule in South Africa. Schreiner's censure is flimsily disguised by the hackneyed device of a vision of the Christ-like Stranger appearing before Peter, because it was written at a time when the British government was known to be complicit in Rhodes's expansionist plans that benefited him as well as the British ruling class. The notorious

Jameson Raid of December 1895 led by Sir Leander Starr Jameson, a trusted confidante of Rhodes, is an example of ambitious plans to control the Transvaal region, where some of Rhodes' most important diamond mines were located, with the tacit consent of Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain.[14] Nor is Schreiner circumspect in her attacks on this version of imperialism, unlike the contemporary male writers like Rider Haggard, and Rudyard Kipling, both of whom admiringly immortalized Rhodes in fact and fiction. In comparison with Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, which is perceived as a "legitimation" of the British imperial policies, Schreiner's work appears to be critique of the Rhodesian version of imperialism.[15]

It was indubitably a courageous act to write about the deeds of powerful figures like Rhodes who had numerous admirers in South Africa, Britain and all over the British Empire. Schreiner knew very well the dangers of opposing entrenched interests, as shown by the death of Peter Halket in the eponymous text and the reality of her book's rejection, after initial excitement, in and by the literary world.

The Personal and the Authorial

In a letter to her brother Will Schreiner, 29th June 1898, Schreiner wrote: "In spite of its immense circulation, I do not believe [*Peter Halket*] has saved the life of one nigger [sic], it has not had the slightest effect in forcing on the parliamentary examination into the affairs in Rhodesia and it has cost me everything."[16] The racist language here is quite typical of Schreiner's views of indigenous South Africans, much like her fictional character, Peter. *Peter Halket* was obviously a work in which Schreiner had invested emotionally, morally, and intellectually. In a letter written in April 1897, Schreiner wrote, "we fight Rhodes because he means so much of oppression, injustice, and moral degradation in South Africa"[17] and her political and moral inclinations get full play in this novella. Schreiner openly accuses Rhodes of profiteering and political adventurism and the troops of his Chartered Company of waging a genocidal war against the indigenous Matabele and Mashonas communities. It comes as no surprise that the original publishers of the book considered it to be libellous, and despite being reprinted and translated into other European languages immediately after publication, it got relegated to the category of Schreiner's minor works and almost disappeared from public memory. Schreiner's own response to this studied neglect of this book veered between pessimism about the futility and irrelevance of her work as her letter indicates, or great pride which made her want an epitaph that said, "She wrote Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland."

On the surface, *Peter Halket* is a work through which Schreiner, practicing her agency as a colonial subject, attempts to inform the metropole of significant facts about South Africa. Furthermore, as a *female* colonial, she fulfils her socially approved traditional

responsibility as the keeper of communal morality. It is likely that Schreiner subscribed to this belief herself because in this text, the protagonist, Peter's belatedly awakened vestigial conscience is ascribed to his mother's teachings, whom he compares to Christ (88). One finds that although Schreiner graphically describes the unthinking barbarity and inhumanity of white races in South Africa, her obvious focus is the monopolistic colonialism practiced by its political administrators.

Schreiner refers to instances of racial, gender, sexual, and economic exploitation at that time through Peter Halket, a newcomer to South Africa, who is initially blinded by the tales of the fabulous fortunes produced out of gold dust, but because of his youth, upbringing and his recent arrival in the country, is still in possession of a conscience that is not completely dead. Peter says at one point, "All men made money when they came to South Africa, - Barney Barnato, Rhodes – they all made money out of the country, eight million, twelve million, twenty-six million, forty million; why shouldn't he!" (28). At different points in the text, Halket insouciantly recounts the cruelty practiced by the Company and its employees to make these millions. For instance, the readers are casually told that "a month before the Chartered Company's forces had destroyed a native settlement" (15), and Peter thinks of the times, "when he had sat around the camp fire with his comrades, talking of the niggers [sic] they had shot or the kraals they had destroyed" and "heard the loud cry of the native women and children as they turned the maxims on to the kraal" (20). Throughout the book, there are vivid descriptions of the senseless brutality with which the indigenous groups, especially the women, are treated by the whites, who, in this case, were mostly troopers of the Company. Yet in Schreiner's text, this savagery against Africans serves primarily as an example of Rhodes' Chartered Company's exploitative policies and its corrosive effect on the human spirit and not as a practice that was common throughout South Africa. This is revealed in Peter's plans for the future: "When he had served his time as volunteer he would have a large piece of land given him, and the Mashonas and Matabeles would have all their land taken away from them in time, and the Chartered Company would pass a law that they had to work for the white men; and he, Peter Halket, would make them work for him. He would make money" (16). In planning to continue this cycle of exploitation, Peter reveals that he is a successor to men like Rhodes.

At another point in the narrative, Schreiner underlines the bigotry and hypocrisy of the company through Peter, who blindly spouts the theories propagated to suit the Company's policies. For instance, Peter explains to the Christ-like Stranger:

> A rebel is a man who fights against his king and his country. These bloody niggers [sic] here are rebels

> because they are fighting against us. They don't want the Chartered Company to have them.... "If these men," said the stranger, "would rather be free, *or be under the British Government* (emphasis added), than under the Chartered Company, why, when they resist the Chartered Company, are they more rebels than the Armenians when they resist the Turk? Is the Chartered Company God, that every knee should bow before it, and before it every head be bent? Would you, the white men of England, submit to its rule for one day? (42-43)

As this dialogue indicates, Schreiner seems to consider the Armenian as well as the African rebellion for liberty perfectly laudable insofar as it concerns independence from the Turks or the Chartered Company, but she fails to consider the moral validity of a rebellion against the British rule. This exchange seems to hint that it is natural for subject races to want freedom from the Turks or institutions like the Chartered Company and posits simplistically that the Africans prefer colonisation by the British crown. Yet this selective anti-imperialism is undercut by the ugly colonial reality that is narrated in graphic terms in the novella. The text then goes on to express outrage at the British maltreatment of the indigenous communities as well as the Boers, who had been victims of Rhodes' avarice recently, which contradicts its support of the British rule.[18]

In another episode, one finds a similar obeisance at the altar of British imperialism, ironically enough in a situation that is a testimony to Schreiner's feminism and anti-racism. Peter mentions the two African women whom he had forcibly taken away from their families. He is not shy of describing how he exploited them sexually and profited from their agricultural and housekeeping skills which allowed him to sell produce to his fellow soldiers. Further, he proudly recounts that the older woman had "learnt the lingo" and started dressing in a shawl and skirt. With self-conscious rectitude at having thus civilised these savages, he boasts that he had "treated those women really well. I'd never given either of them one touch all the time I had them. I was the talk of all the fellows round, the way I treated them." He is outraged at the ingratitude of the women as, "I hadn't been gone six hours when those two women skooted! … They didn't touch another thing: they left the shawls and dresses I gave them kicking about the huts, and went off naked with only their blankets and the ammunition on their heads" (28-29). Given Peter's imperviousness to the fact that imperialism by definition cannot be positive, even in its British avatar, there is no self-reflexivity in him about the tactics of colonial mimicry adopted by these captive women. The supposed conversion of these women to the superior graces of British civilization and their prompt

rejection of this followed by reversion to their original state mockingly echo the blind belief of the British liberal fringe in the civilizing power of Western customs, including clothing, to expose the hollowness of such beliefs.

Imperialism as Moral Imperative

Seemingly unaware of the dichotomy of exploitation and moral imperatives when appealing to her readers, who were, as the narrator informs us, British citizens, Schreiner seems to imply that the policies of conquest and rule favoured by the English were more humane and liberal and therefore, acceptable. Schreiner does not seem to dispute the divine right of the British to wield the sword that is used to conquer other lands. What she is objecting to here is the supposed abuse of the imperial mission and its civilizing influence by politicians and businessmen like Rhodes for their own selfish ends.

The Christ figure in the text asks, "Peter Simon Halket, [to] take a message to England"… Go to that great people and cry aloud to it: 'Where is the sword was given into your hand, that with you might enforce justice and deal out mercy? How came you to give it up into the hands of men whose search is gold, whose thirst is wealth, to whom men's souls and bodies are counters in a game?'"(155-156). At this juncture in the novella, the Christ-figure addresses a litany of complaints to British institutions expected to safeguard the supposed purity of the imperial mission and save it from the depredations of men of Rhodes' ilk. For instance, the Queen, whose grand title 'Empress of India' and her grant of Privy Councillorship to Rhodes were indicative of royal collusion in the imperial mission, seemed to neglect her duty toward her non-white subjects. Schreiner accuses the Queen of political and moral quiescence, "Great Prince's Daughter, take heed! You put your sword into the hands of recreant knights." (77) The question here is not why African lands were conquered and appropriated with the help of the sword, but that they shouldn't have been placed in unworthy hands. Similarly, the writer castigates the indifference of the intellectuals towards this issue, but not their reasons for rationalizing the imperial discourse:

> To whom has England given her power? How do the men wield it who have filched it from her? Say not, what have we to do with folk across the waters…? Where the brain of a nation has no time to go, there should its hands never be sent to labour: where the power of a people goes, there must its intellect and knowledge go, to guide it. …You have no right to sit at ease knowing nothing of the working of the powers you have armed and sent to work on men afar. (77 - 78)

In urging intellectuals to exert moral authority over capitalistic monopolies exercising unbridled power in colonies like South Africa, Schreiner seems to be asking for a more rational system of governance in the colonies on the assumption of the rightness and moral validity of England's rule over South Africa. These lines accuse Rhodes and his cohort of stealing political and economic power and exercising it with impunity while criticising the collusion of the British elite, especially the intellectuals, who have 'armed and sent [them] to work on men afar' but do not 'guide' and oversee the exercise of these powers over the subject races.

Schreiner seems to be exhorting the metropole to take responsibility for its conquests. What she is asking of the metropole in *Peter Halket* is not the elimination of militaristic control but its greater involvement and responsibility towards the colonies and subject races. As the British imperial discourse propagated itself in moral terms with lavish use of mottoes like 'the white man's burden' and its goal of civilising the savages, these aims also pandered to the national pride. The popular Victorian cliché that the sun never set in the British Empire expressed the complicity of all sections of Victorian society in the imperial project. Peter mentions the dukes and lords who were a part of Rhodes' Company and provided his ventures a veneer of respectability, while politicians like Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary of the British government, conspired with Rhodes to abet his plans. But by doing so, Schreiner implies, the British political establishment failed to fulfil its responsibility towards the subject races. Through this account, Schreiner hopes to create an 'ethical' and 'honourable' model of imperialism for those sections of society who have usually been at the fringes of social power structures, as they are likely to be less morally corrupt. The author, therefore, demands a more active engagement of the British working class in matters of the empire by asking them to empathize with subject societies, as they too are victims of capitalism. Castigating its habit of unthinkingly echoing the dominant discourse, she reminds the British working class: "Have you not some times said… 'It matters not who holds out our sword, marauder or speculator, so he calls it ours, we must cloak up the evil it has done!' Think you, no other curses rise to heaven but yours? Where is your sword? Into whose hand has it fallen? Take it quickly and cleanse it" (76)! In this implied solidarity between the two groups, we see a complete elision of race as a factor in inequality, a fact that seems to be in keeping with Schreiner's use of racially derogatory epithets for Africans.

Similarly, reminding the British women of their moral centrality in Victorian society, Schreiner repeats, "For the womanhood of a dominant people has not accomplished all its labour when it has borne its children and fed them at its breast: there cries to it also from overseas and across continents the *voice of the child-peoples* (emphasis

added) -'Mother-heart, stand for us!" (78) By calling subject races 'child-peoples', Schreiner reinforces the discourse that routinely infantilized the other races, thereby justifying the imperialist policies that denied them the right and ability to govern themselves. Once again, there is an attempt to link gendered subjugation and benevolence without adequate consideration of racial power differentials; as in the call to the British working classes, her call to British women establishes a false equivalency not borne out by historical realities.

Schreiner's maternalistic imperialism is in support of the paternalist version embodied by the "Great Good Man, Sir George Grey," to whom this book is dedicated Schreiner nostalgically admires the humanity of the former governor, especially in contrast to the self-aggrandising exploits of Rhodes. The implication of her address to women seems to be that the future of British rule in South Africa lies in the nurturing guidance of the "womanhood of a dominant people," because the dominant manhood of the country has been tainted by self-interest.

As if highlighting the decay of the moral fibre of Englishmen, Peter seems to ignore this message of ethical and responsible imperial rule and admiringly discusses Rhodes' unconstitutional attempts to pass punitive laws against Africans: "But the other English men wouldn't let him pass it. But here he can do what he likes. That's the reason some fellows don't want him to be sent away. They say, "If we let the British government here, they'll be giving the niggers [sic] land to live on: and *let them have vote, and get civilized and educated* and all that sort of thing: but Cecil Rhodes, he'll keep their nose to the grindstone. *I prefer land to niggers* [sic], he says (82)!" This ironically naïve and staunchly racist criticism of England's so-called civilizing mission carefully juxtaposes and reinforces the corruption and barbarity of Rhodesian brand of colonialism with the idealised vision perpetuated by the political liberals who later became the most vocal opponents of British imperial policies. Schreiner's political idealism inspires her to look up to this class to provide the missing humane element in the current policies of imperialism, though the paternalism explicitly articulated in this statement is not challenged. The fact that these sentiments are so much at odds with Rhodes' destructive and self-serving capitalism gives them a validity of their own, which Schreiner seems to accept without any question. The implication is that just because this version of imperialism is more benevolent, it is to be preferred over the Rhodesian, somewhat like Charlie Marlowe's valorisation of the British version of colonialism over the Belgian in *Heart of Darkness*.

Even the Rhodesian style of imperial robbery is criticised primarily for its rapacity and genocidal misdeeds. Schreiner had initially been an admirer of Rhodes' mercenary and political genius. It

is only after his underhand deals benefiting his business interests at the expense of other colonials and the British ruling class were made public, that the author became trenchantly critical of his policies. What she disapproves of is the self-serving nature of Rhodes' career as a politician and businessman, as articulated in the two allegorical comparisons in the text, where Rhodes is first compared to a light that "men set … on high within a lighthouse, that it might yield light to all souls at sea; that afar off they might see its steady light and find harbour, and escape the rocks" (84-5). However, instead of guiding others to the right path, this lighthouse, she explains, led the others to their economic, political, and moral demise, while it flourished at their expense. The second comparison is that of Rhodes to "a streamlet… [which] burst forth from beneath the snow on a mountain's crown…. It ran on pure and blue and clear as the sky above it, and the banks of snow made its cradle" (85-8). But it became a poisonous swamp after losing its direction and destroyed the marine life that it should have nurtured. In both these analogies, Rhodes' original mission is presented in idealised terms with no condemnation, and his early business and political successes are lauded as pioneering efforts. What are condemned are his monopolistic business practices that are exploitative and destructive of the rights of the Africans, Boers, and other British colonials.

Schreiner's acerbic criticism of Rhodes' business and political activities in this text is based in her fears about their perniciousness. She in fact, leaves the colonial subjects out of the ambit of this discussion as she feels that they are either blinded by petty matters and self-interest to be able to see Rhodes for what he really is or are too craven to oppose him. '"This *isn't* (emphasis added) a country where a man can say what he thinks." The Englishman rested his elbows on the ground. 'And the Union Jack is supposed to be flying over us.' 'Yes, with a black bar across it for the Company,' laughed the Colonial'" (118). The black bar marring the Union Jack is the rapaciousness of colonial plunderers such as Rhodes and his ilk and their denial of freedom of expression to all, white and black.

At another point in the text, Rhodes is presented as a vulture eagerly waiting for two white beasts, representing the two classes of white colonials, the Boers and Englishmen, to kill each other, so that he can feast on their carcasses. It suggests that the burden of opposing the all-pervasive power of Rhodes seems to lie with two men, both closely affiliated to the metropole: Peter, the recent immigrant, and the Englishman, who disapproves of the punishment being meted out to Peter by the captain for helping the wounded Mashona. The colonial troops on the other hand, are too accustomed to, and scared of, the brutality of this system to protest against it.

Death and Imperialism

The tendency to collate Schreiner's anti-Rhodesian stand with anti-imperialism that is also exhibited on the SAHO website that has been cited above is further emphasized in the way critics project Peter's death. On the one hand, Peter's death has been seen as undermining and rejecting "the comforting Christian mythology that one final deathbed act of redemption can expiate the past" Stanley, 197). On the other, it has been read as an example of the white man's burden, an Englishman's willingness to sacrifice his life to fulfil his moral responsibility toward the subject races. Peter's sacrifice is futile; as it doesn't stop the evils of imperialism though Peter somewhat redeems himself by saving at least one life after having taken many earlier. But in the chilling words of the colonial to the Englishman "What's one nigger [sic] more or less? He'll get shot some other way, or die of hunger, if we don't do it" (116). In its Christian allegorical structure, specific attention to the sexual exploitation of African women, address to readers, specious calls for solidarity across classes, and patina of religiosity existing with racist tropes and ideologies, the novel forces a reconsideration of Schreiner's *oeuvre*. Well over a century after the work first appeared, readers can read it as an important but ideologically compromised text that has acquired renewed relevance because of its long overdue assessment of Rhodes's infamous imperial legacy. Whether as a victory of the pernicious brand of control or a moral imperative, the underlying message about reinforcing British imperialism is evident even in a work which is supposedly critical of it.

Notes

1. Sean Coughlan, "The governors of the Oxford University College voted on Wednesday to remove the statue of the colonialist. Campaigners have called for the statue to be taken down - saying it was a symbol of imperialism and racism." 18th June 2020. BBC. Last accessed on 5 July 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/education-53082545.

2. Michael Race, "Cecil Rhodes Statue will not be Removed from Oxford College. 20 May 2021. Last accessed on 5 July 2023 https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-57175057

3. Race, https://oxfordandcolonialism.web.ox.ac.uk/article/falling-statues-and-morality-cecil-rhodes-cant-be-rescued-history

4. Stephen Gray, "Schreiner's Trooper at the Hanging Tree." *English in Africa*. Sept 1975, vol. 2 (Oct. 1975), 22 -37

5. Gerald Monsman, “Olive Schreiner: Literature and the Politics of Power.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, WINTER 1988, Vol. 30, No. 4 (WINTER 1988), 584

6. Imperialism, Said explained in *Culture and Imperialism*, “means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; colonialism...is the implanting of settlements on distant territory,” 9. He adds further, “imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you don’t possess,” 7.

7. See note on Olive Schreiner, *Undine* (Reade and Co. Classics, 2020)

8.Patrick Brantlinger, “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent.”*Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1985, Vol. 12, No. 1, "Race," Writing, and Difference (Autumn, 1985), 170

9. Paul Walters and Jeremy Fogg, “Olive Schreiner in Rhodesia: An Episode in a Biography.” *English in Africa*, Oct, 2007, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Oct., 2007), 95

10. Laura Chrisman, *Rereading the Imperial Romance: British Imperialism and South African Resistance in Haggard Schreiner and Plaatje*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, 124

11 Deirdre David, *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire and Victorian Writing*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995. 184

12. Chrisman, 130

13. Liz Stanley (2000) Encountering the Imperial and Colonial Past through Olive Schreiner's Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland[1], Women's Writing, 7:2, 197-219, DOI: 10.1080/09699080000200103

14 See John Marlowe, *Cecil Rhodes: The Anatomy of the Empire* (New York: Lipscombe and Mason, 1972)

15 Chrisman, *Rereading the Imperial Romance: British Imperialism and South African Resistance in Haggard, Schreniner and Plaatje*. Oxord: Clarendon Press, 2000. 121

16 Quoted by Laura E. Franey, Victorian Travel Writing and Imperial Violence: British Writing in Africa 1855-1902. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 86

17. https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?view=collections&colid=51&letterid=9

18. Schreiner discusses the disastrous Jameson Raid at length, 114-140