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SPACES OF DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE: *KING SOLOMON'S MINES* (1885), *ULA MASONDO* (1927) AND LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES OF SOUTH AFRICA

Dominic Davies

Abstract

This article is concerned with the geography of Johannesburg at the turn of the twentieth century as produced by William Plomer's novella, *Ula Masondo* (1927), one of the earliest literary explorations of that city. This text operates in reaction to, and as a subversion of, the generic conventions of the imperial romance; a genre which is embodied by the novel that is generally perceived by critics to have established the prototype for that genre: Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines (*1885). The imperial romance depicted the South African landscape as both empty and thus easily penetrable for the imperialist, and as embedded with mineral wealth available and accessible for profitable resource extraction. The romance was involved in the production of an idealised geography of South Africa for the metropolitan imagination, writing the presence of emerging urban spaces such as Johannesburg out of its cartographic representations. By inverting a number of the key genre-defining tropes, Plomer's *Ula Masondo* (1927) shifts the focus of this body of colonial literature from the empty *space* of the South African veld to the infrastructural *place* of the Transvaal's mining-centre turned industrialised city: Johannesburg. This spatial re-configuration of the South African landscape, from rural idyll to bustling urban environment, enables certain polemic and anti-imperial qualities of Plomer's novella to come to the fore, conceptualising Johannesburg's cityscape as a site of racial and economic contestation. *Ula Masondo* formally deconstructs the confident, linear narratives of the romance, a shift in narrative style and construction that exposes the socio-ideological borders of the romance and maps the new geographical and political terrain of the emerging urban environment.

Keywords: imperial romance, colonial literature, industrialisation, production of space, literary geographies, South Africa, Johannesburg, resistance

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Industrialisation, Urbanisation, Segregation

> Industrial revolution is one thing when it is the natural movement of internal forces, making along the lines of the self-interests of a nation and proceeding *pari passu* with advancing popular self-government; another thing when it is imposed by foreign conquerors looking primarily to present gains for themselves, and neglectful of the deeper interests of the people of the country.[1]

Thus wrote British economist and anti-imperialist J.A Hobson in 1902, midway through the fifty-year period that saw a complete transformation in the socioeconomic organisation of South Africa. The industrial revolution, sparked by the discoveries of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867 and of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, occurred at a furious pace, tearing apart 'the fabric of African life' so that where, prior to 1870, 'the majority of Africans in southern Africa lived in independent chiefdoms', by the 1920s South Africa was home to huge urban centres with large black populations.[2] Shula Marks' and Richard Rathbone's comprehensive account of the period demonstrates that this half-century was dominated by 'the imperatives of mining capital', imperatives that drove this swift industrialisation and subsequent urbanisation.[3] With its creation and utilisation 'of the colonised peoples primarily as an urban

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working class' and 'the bewildering array of discriminatory laws and practices' introduced 'to keep workers cheap and pliable', South Africa's mineral and industrial revolution was unique.[4] It has been argued by many that these specific historical conditions laid the foundations for the phenomenon that would overshadow South Africa for much of the remainder of the twentieth century: apartheid.[5] Johannesburg, a city born of the settlements that had arisen around the gold mines of the Witwatersrand, lies at the heart of these historical processes. The historical sedimentations of its physical and infrastructural arrangements, and the traces still present in its contemporary spatial organisations and discriminations, tell the story of 'the rise, fall and reconstruction of the segregated city.'[6] Literary representations of South African geographies have been both complicit with, and resistant to, the production of this deeply racialised and segregated space.

With the intensification of British imperial interest in Southern Africa in the 1880s, mapping the region's geographies became a central pre-occupation of one literary genre in particular: the imperial romance. Its ideological agendas are written into the contours of the narrative, and the industrialising landscapes are most conspicuous in their absence. William Plomer's novella, *Ula Masondo*, not only lays the thematic and formal groundwork for a radical turn to the production and representation of the emerging cityscapes, but does so in a dialogic move that explicitly engages and illuminates the implicit politics of the romance genre.[7] In order to grasp the impact of Plomer's literary geography and its wider sociopolitical implications, it is therefore necessary to first outline the romance's cartographic project and map its own ideological perimeters.

Mapping the Imperial Romance: *King Solomon's Mines*

The broad plot motions of Rider Haggard's imperial romance, *King Solomon's Mines* (a novel that, as Laura Chrisman argues, 'established the prototype' for this extraordinarily popular genre) are encapsulated by the map that introduces the quest, within the first few pages of the text, on which his characters will embark.[8] This map has received much critical attention, predominantly for its 'explicitly sexualized' representation of the South African landscape.[9] But for the purposes of this article, I want to re-interpret this revealing and, despite its apparent simplicity, deeply layered document. When set within its historical context, it becomes possible to see the map as part of a broader discursive project to render the South African landscape geopolitically knowable and controllable for British imperialists and capitalists alike. The map enacts this very process for Haggard's own narrative, as the novel's plot is inscribed within its contours. Presented to the reader before the end of chapter two, this document establishes the landscape that the novel will represent. By invoking this 'skeletal landscape' the framework is set to keep the novel 'on track', a literary infrastructure upon which the narrative detail can then build.[10]

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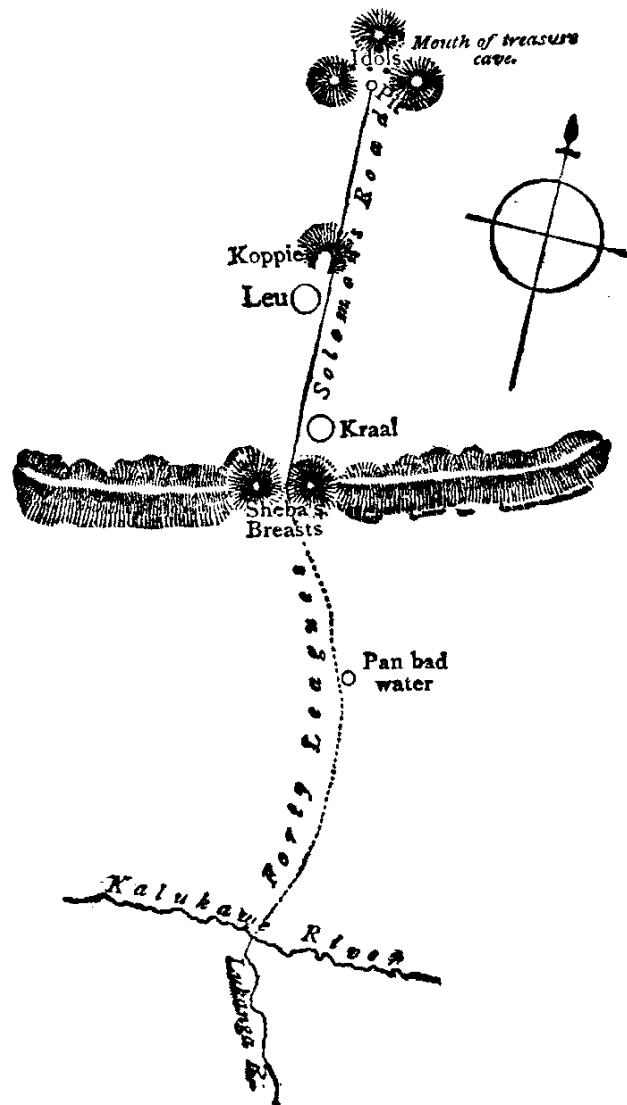
Haggard (2008), p.21.

The map represents the route that Haggard's protagonists will take, including the mine, or 'treasure cave', in which their adventure will culminate. As Robert Tally explains, just as the 'plot' of a narrative 'is also a plan, which is to say, a map', this map is simultaneously the plot, 'understood as establishing a setting, setting a course.'[11] Quartermain, Haggard's fictional narrator, prefaces his narrative with the assurance that the best plan would be to tell the story in a plain, straightforward manner, and leave [other] matters to be dealt with subsequently in whatever way may ultimately appear to be desirable.[12]

The 'plan' is indeed, 'straightforward'; straight and forward along the line so clearly demarcated on the map. Quartermain's reference to the subsequent dealings of other matters, such as contrasts between 'Zulu and Kukuana dialects' and the 'magnificent system of military organisation in force in that country', alludes to the potential of his own text to become a map upon which future discursive representations of the South African landscape may draw. The text predicts its own entry into the creation of 'a field of textual genres' that creates 'ways of seeing' the colonised world.[13] However, this acknowledgement of the limitations of the narrative also reveal its 'mapping project' to be 'incomplete, provisional, and tentative', despite the confidence professed by its linearity, or as Quartermain describes it, his 'blunt way of writing.'[14]

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It is not a historical coincidence that the line that runs through the centre of Haggard's map—'Solomon's Road'—is a physical infrastructure embedded within the landscape, leading directly to a mine loaded with diamonds and gold. After its appearance on the map, Solomon's 'great white road' recurs with systematic regularity throughout the text as Haggard's protagonists' progress along it.[15] It re-orients the material and economic focus of the imperialist quest by providing the invading characters with a linear direction that moves towards their ultimate goal. As Paul Carter describes it, the 'straight line' presupposes the possession of a 'goal', a goal that always enables Haggard's imperialists to locate or re-locate themselves in relation to the 'somewhere'—in this case, Solomon's mine—at which they are bound to 'arrive'.[16] Although the mythological road has not actually been built by British imperialists, the very colour of the road—'white'—and the fact that it is eventually attributed to an ancient white civilisation, alludes to the contemporaneous expansion of imperial infrastructure whilst, as Norman Etherington notes, discounting 'African ability'.[17] In 1881, Haggard's final year in South Africa, the formation of a host of joint-stock companies saw the era of independent diggers come to an end. As Martin Meredith documents, the 'rush to invest in joint-stock companies was as hectic as the original diamond rush of the 1870s.'[18] By 1885, the year of the publication of *King Solomon's Mines*, the first railways were extending some 1000 kilometres inland from the Cape colony to reach Kimberley, opening up the South African interior for the first time and operating as the 'vehicle for imperial expansionism.'[19]

These new infrastructures, combined with the reinvigorated interest in the extraction of diamonds from the Kimberley mines, permeate Haggard's text as it simultaneously attempts to produce a romanticised geography of the South African landscape that is devoid of the historical realities of industrialisation and subsequent urbanisation. His questing trio are, after all, 'independent' diggers, detached, if not symbolically then actually, from any over-arching organisation, be it governmental or corporate. As Chrisman has argued, through these plot sequences, Haggard's text attempts to write 'the activity of trade', its 'association with urbanism' and 'profiteering', and its implications of 'industrial and financial capitalism' out of its production of South African space.[20] But the thematic infrastructural vein that runs through the literary landscape of *King Solomon's Mines,* when set within its historical context, alludes to the infiltration of colonial and mining capitalism into South Africa. This line becomes, then, an ideological border upon which the project of geographical romanticisation hinges, gesturing towards what Fredric Jameson would call the 'political unconscious' of the text.[21] Contemporaneous maps demonstrate that infrastructural lines—and railways in particular—were central to the configuration of South African space and the culture of profitable resource extraction that *King Solomon's Mines* both drew on and perpetuated. These lines of transport and communication run between the colonial ports and the mining centres of Kimberley and the Witwatersrand, through what is depicted as an otherwise empty landscape. Haggard's romance writes these industrialising centres out of its textual production of South African space, attempting to retain and produce a romanticised geographical imagination of the landscape that would serve as a redemptive rural space for the industrialised metropole. However, the historical realities of infrastructural expansion are in fact refracted, albeit mythologically, into the novel's underlying cartographic project and embedded within the narrative's political unconscious.

The 'white ribbon of Solomon's great road', like the novel's plot, finds its 'terminus' in a chapter entitled 'The Place of Death'; death being the ultimate and final culmination of the narrative's progression, the 'goal' to which, from the introduction of the map at its very start, it has not only been ceaselessly moving towards, but defined in relation to.[22] The mine to which the road leads is repeatedly compared to those found in Kimberley: 'the formation is the same',[23] observes Quartermain, as he superimposes his prior experience as a trader on the

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'Diamond Fields' in Kimberley onto 'Solomon's Diamond Mine'.[24] However, it is not only 'diamonds' that, at least initially, Solomon's mines yield:

> On the opposite side of the chamber were about a score of wooden boxes, something like Martini-Henry ammunition boxes, only rather larger, and painted red. [...] Pushing my hand through the hole in the lid I drew it out full, not of diamonds, but of gold pieces.[25]

Whereas Chrisman understands Haggard's depiction of gold as 'the common denominator of antiquity and the present day', the novel's reference to this valuable mineral cannot be historically detached from the emerging gold discoveries on the Witwatersrand.[26] Whether or not Haggard was aware of the ongoing discoveries that had begun to produce 'speculation about the likelihood that even richer gold deposits would be found'—though it is likely given the extensive coverage of early discoveries through the 1870s by the colonial press and bluebooks—his text played a central role in giving that 'speculation' a popular status after the formal discoveries that would take place in 1886, just a year after the novel's publication.[27] This is evidenced by the prolific publication history with at least one—in some cases more— re-publications appearing almost every year between 1885 and 1926. Furthermore, it is alluded to on a textual level by the amendments Haggard made to the Revised New Illustrated Edition that was first published in 1905. Whereas in the 1885 edition Quartermain only stuffs his pockets with diamonds and gold, in the 1905 edition he also picks up Foulata's empty basket and fills that as well, tracing the increased ambition for, and actual extraction of, the material wealth embedded within the South African landscape.[28]

   Embedded within this archetypal imperial romance, then, is a trace of the mineral that transformed the geography of South Africa in such explosive and violent ways. The significance of the gold buried in King Solomon's mine, when extracted from the bare geology of the text and situated in a richer historical topography, comes to the fore. It is, after all, this gold that becomes the economic foundation for twentieth-century South Africa's most spatially constrictive and politically contested urban space: Johannesburg.

Johannesburg: City of Exploitation, Segregation and Resistance
Contemporary Johannesburg is, undoubtedly, still a city of spatial segregation, at the very least on an infrastructural level. It is cut through with borders marked by walls, barbed wire, spike-topped fences, and toll-booth style entrances and exits. The complex imperial and segregationist history is written—quite literally inscribed—into the city of Johannesburg. Jan Smuts Avenue leads off Empire Road onto Queen Elizabeth Drive, just across from Nelson Mandela Bridge. The result is a spatial record of the region's history, as names intersect with one another, their temporal sequence obscured by this urban palimpsest. In this way, Johannesburg itself brings a 'historical dimension to contemporary "urban problems"': embedded within the city are, as Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe argue, 'the dialectics between dispossession, exploitation, and struggle so characteristic of South African history,' all closely tied 'to the race, labor, and capital triptych.'[29] Literary interrogations of, and resistance to, different aspects of these historical processes emerge throughout the twentieth century. They shift from critiques of the exploitation of black labour in the gold mines of Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* (1946, suggestively described by the African Writers Series as 'The First Modern Novel of Black South Africa'), through interrogations of the corrupting power of the metropolis such as Alan Paton's Cry, *The Beloved Country* (1948), and into the proliferation of contemporary urban literary explorations such as the work of Zakes Mda or Phaswane Mpe.[30] But it was in 1927 that William Plomer published his novella, *Ula Masondo*, laying the foundations and 'literary infrastructures', to use Nuttall's term, for the

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literary production of Johannesburg's urban space.[31] Though this article aims to emphasise the dialogic interaction of *Ula Masondo* with the earlier imperial romance, it is also crucial to understand the extent to which Plomer's short work also looks forward, initiating not only representations of segregation but also a resistance to it, in both content and form.

In 1911, William Plomer's father, Charles, moved to Johannesburg to work in the central pass office at the Department of Native Affairs. Charles's job was, as the head of a complex system of clerks, interpreters, and police, to administer increasingly restrictive policies to black Africans working in the gold mines.[32] This early experience of Johannesburg made an impression on William Plomer, who was enrolled at the nearby St John's College in 1912. In his autobiography, Plomer was later to recall the unique physicality of the surrounding cityscape that had, only twenty-five years after the first settlements on the Rand, been 'conjured out of the waving grass by greed for gold.'[33] His awareness of the socioeconomic predicaments that the mining industry had induced, and of which his father was a part, developed from an early age. He saw that black Africans came to the Witwatersrand mines because 'they had to earn money to pay their taxes and could not earn it at home', an 'economic pressure, or exploitation' that Plomer, looking back on his youth, considered could most accurately 'be called "colonialism".'[34] It was between 1911 and 1914 that he gained the experience that would provide the material for *Ula Masondo*, published in 1927 by Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. Plomer was aware that 'the unskilled black migrants of many tribes came as strangers, uneducated and bewildered, to the white man's new, urban, industrial world', and of the complex 'pass system' that would regulate their presence in the urban centre. This system, he observed, 'came to be regarded as a kind of slavery and much hated by the Africans.'[35] This became the foundation of the retrospective anti-colonialism that came to characterise Plomer's outlook and that, it must be acknowledged, he worked out and articulated from a position of both economic privilege and whiteness: these discursively hierarchical locations surface more prominently, and problematically, in other sections of his oeuvre. Though a more in-depth discussion of Plomer's broader writings are beyond the scope of this article, it should be noted that his anti-colonialism was by no means consistent across his literary productions of South African space. Indeed, *Ula Masondo* is unusual within Plomer's body of work because of the very fact that, unlike much of the rest of his literary output, it takes the urban space of Johannesburg as its primary geographical setting.

Plomer's biographical experience of the mining city was tumultuous. In May 1913, just two years after his arrival in Johannesburg, a miners' strike began that sought further political recognition for the trade unions that had recently been formed in the gold mines. The strike quickly became violent and the city was full of 'angry miners, who overwhelmed the police force, so that for a time anarchy ruled'.[36] The uprising was quickly suppressed by imperial troops who used 'cavalry charges and machine-gun attacks' to control the striking miners in scenes that resembled 'open war' rather than 'industrial conflict'.[37] At this peculiar historical intersection, the military force that underpinned British imperial expansion confronted new forms of resistance made possible by the urban environment. Though the violence was quickly suppressed and many strikers were killed, in December 1913 workers in the nearby coal mines went on strike, and they were quickly followed by the railway workers in January 1914. As Peter Alexander describes, the 'country seemed on the verge of revolution', and this persuaded Plomer's parents to leave South Africa for Great Britain for five years, taking their son with them.[38]

When Plomer returned to Johannesburg in 1919, these episodes of urban resistance were still widespread, intensified by the economic depression that was affecting South Africa after the First World War. The general strike of 1922, however, was led by white miners who sought to retain their privileged position in the work force through the re-entrenchment of the colour bar.[39] The result was a piece of legislation (the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923) that

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was important in the consolidation of the policies of segregation that would dominate not only Johannesburg, but the whole of South Africa, laying the legal, administrative, and spatial foundations for apartheid in 1948.[40] This instituted a regulatory system that enabled white municipalities to restrict and control the boundaries of the now 'burgeoning African settlements', establish new 'locations' for Africans on the edge of white residential areas, and 'define the categories of Africans who were permitted to live in urban areas'.[41] Through these mechanisms, the legislation ensured that only Africans who 'served white needs' were permitted access to the city.[42] As Africans continued to resist and contest these restrictive policies through union organisations and strikes, the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 increased the intensity of the pass system and made it legally impossible for Africans to be considered as employees, thereby 'excluding them from all rights of labour representation, mediation and organisation.'[43] These were accompanied by a string of further acts in the years immediately prior to the publication of Plomer's novella until finally, in 1927, the Native Administration Act was passed, 'giving the Department of Native Affairs control over all matters pertaining to Africans', forcing Africans into reserves whilst retaining them as a labour supply for the mining districts of the cities.[44]

Ideologies of racial segregation and white control were thus imposed through the construction of boundary lines and borders that had conceptually permeated the imperial romance narrative and that find infrastructural echoes in the cityscape of contemporary Johannesburg. The urban environment, which brought whites and blacks—as well as the huge Indian and Chinese indentured labour populations—into close daily contact with one another, demanded these new levels of spatial regulation in order to sustain the racial discourses that had functioned as a legitimisation of imperialism and that had been solidified in the romance's ideological project. Though in the 1910s and 1920s these regulations were cemented in legislative policies of segregation and Johannesburg's urban planning, Plomer's fictional representation of the topographical in *Ula Masondo* demonstrates ways in which these boundaries were transgressed and resisted from the outset, despite the restrictions placed on organised resistance in 1924. Johannesburg can and must be understood through the geography that Plomer's *Ula Masondo* produces, as an intensely political space that is in a constant process of contestation and renewal.

Re-Writing the Imperial Romance: *Ula Masondo*
Ula Masondo appeared as one of the longer narratives in Plomer's first collection of stories, confidently entitled I Speak of Africa. As Stephen Gray notes, this 'bold claim' implies both 'an outright declaration of content (Africa) and of intention (plain talk, straight from the shoulder).'[45] Unlike many authors of imperial romances, including Rider Haggard, Plomer wrote the stories of which this collection is comprised not after a period of spatio-temporal distance from the geographical area of South Africa, but rather from within the immediacy of the 'contact zone'.[46] By writing from within this space of contestation and social upheaval, the perspective, or to use Mary Louise Pratt's terminology, 'the center of gravity' of Plomer's narrative shifts to include both colonising and colonised subjectivities. According to Pratt's theoretical paradigm, Plomer constructed a 'contact language' in which the relations between white and black are not configured in terms of 'separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction,' and 'interlocking understandings and practices,' despite the 'radically asymmetrical relations of power' that defined them.[47] Rather than writing the infrastructural lines that had held the ideological, racial, and geographical borders of the romance narratives together as contained and secure, Plomer instead explores their permeability, their susceptibility to appropriation, and their lack of totality.

It is in this way that *Ula Masondo* can be configured as a rewriting of the imperial romance; explicitly inverting and subverting several of the genre's thematic concerns.

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Plomer's narrative is still framed within the subjectivity of a 'white storekeeper' whose ambition is to open up trade with a rural native population, setting up 'a second Harrods here in Lembuland.'[48] Lembuland, also the setting of Plomer's first novel, *Turbott Wolfe*, published two years earlier in 1925, is a railway journey of about 'two days and two nights' north of Johannesburg, placing it in a geographical location towards the African interior that had been the site of Haggard's own idealised landscape.[49] In doing so, Plomer de-mythologises the romance's geography, introducing the socioeconomic realities of colonial capitalism into King Solomon's realm.[50] Furthermore, after the first few paragraphs have introduced this white, profit-orientated perspective, the one-dimensional narrative breaks down and its progression falters. A novella of just some thirty pages, *Ula Masondo* is nevertheless fragmented into nineteen short chapters, or sections, each of which exhibit sharp perspectival and geographical shifts, formally deconstructing the linear movement mapped out by the imperial romance narratives of Rider Haggard. At the beginning of section two, the narrative shifts from the perspective of the white trader to a black African, the titular *Ula Masondo*. Section three shifts yet again to the perspective of Ula's father and section four, just one page later, throws the reader straight into a 'crowded' train as Ula makes his way from the rural northern territory down to the mining centre of Johannesburg.[51]

Plomer's decision 'to break the linear narrative into fragments' results in the creation of a 'simultaneity or spatiality', as the narrative engages in a new form of literary 'mapping' that produces a different, more complex, South African geography.[52] However, *Ula Masondo* exhibits enough of the thematic traits of the imperial romance to recall the genre, despite its distinct re-writing of them. By explicitly defining the object against which it writes in this way, Plomer's narrative operates within a system only to subvert it, working—to use James C. Scott's terminology as outlined in his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*—to bring the imperial romance's 'hidden transcript' into the 'public discourse'.[53] By self-consciously drawing attention to the 'discrepancies' between its own narrative and the conventions of the romance genre, *Ula Masondo* exposes and interrogates that genre's ideological underpinnings.

The novella narrates a journey into a bewildering and dangerous landscape that nevertheless promises wealth to its travelling protagonist, Ula. The short story contains detailed descriptions of the environment into which it moves, presenting them as new and alien to an implied reader through Ula's perspective: 'the air was full of foreign newness.'[54] Ula becomes part of a small group that are unified in the face of the difficulties that they face ('financial adversity kept them together'), before himself becoming trapped in a 'cave' when there is a rock-fall in the mine that yields the gold—the mineral that, as with Haggard's imperialists, though for different economic reasons, has been the ultimate object of his journey.[55] After escaping the 'entombing rock' of the mine, Ula realises his fortune and returns to his homeland wealthier than he left it, laden with symbols of his newfound materialism.[56]

The similarities with imperial romances such as Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* are striking. The key inversions of these features not only operate subversively as a process of re-writing—though this they undertake with great effect—they also throw the boundaries of the 'political unconscious' of imperial romance narratives into relief.[57] These thematic inversions reveal the extent to which the romance, as Jameson explains in his discussion of literary texts more generally, 'maps the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and marks the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go'.[58] This spatial configuration of the romance's ideological borders is most poignantly embodied in the physical space of the represented landscapes, though the interplay of other factors across these geographies is also crucial. The adventuring protagonist is not a white imperialist but a black African who, rather than travelling from the south to the north, instead moves in the opposite direction, down from

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the rural north to the industrialising south. This landscape, or what is in fact a cityscape, is not rendered as empty or penetrated only by one or two infrastructural lines. 'The thin brown grass of the veld' gives way to 'the great Reef Road' that runs 'parallel' to the train taking Ula closer to the heart of Johannesburg.[59] This road is bustling with 'an incessant traffic of cars, bicycles and pedestrians' and the cityscape becomes increasingly saturated with 'streets', 'shacks of corrugated iron', 'trams, buildings, shops.'[60] It is a landscape not of redemptive, romanticised space, where, as Bill Schwarz has comprehensively demonstrated, the 'prescriptive ideal of the figure of the white man' is at its most 'absolute'.[61] Instead, it is littered with barracks, compounds and mines, and instils in Ula a taste for the materialism of the metropole: 'the wearing of clothes', 'methylated spirit at the price of French brandy', and 'cigarettes'.[62]

As a labourer in the gold mines, Ula becomes trapped after a 'fall of rock' blocks his exit: the 'entombing rock' is not a mythologised King Solomon's mine set in the rural districts of the African interior, but is instead the economic heart of South Africa's newly industrialised urban centre. Whilst trapped in the mine, Ula does not envision an empty landscape giving itself up to imperial penetration, but 'valleys' that are 'threaded with the smoke of occasional trains, with telegraph wires', with 'the houses of men of property', and 'humming motor-cars, shining and powerful'; a landscape of industrial capitalism.[63] Even Ula's newfound material wealth parodies the financial wealth that the romance's imperialists are able to extract, embodied in 'a suitcase of plum-coloured cardboard embossed to look like leather, which he carried in a hand resplendent with cheap rings', swinging 'ear-rings', and 'streamers of pink wool' that he wears on his wrists.[64] In a final, explicit rejection of an idealised rural geography, and in a parodic enactment of the romance's racism, on his return from the city Ula pretends not to recognise his mother, dismissing her as a 'bloody heathen'—in reaction to which, she commits suicide.[65] In the closing frame narrative, which returns to the perspective of the white trader in conversation with his wife, the transformed black man is illuminatingly and (at the level of over-arching narratorial voice) satirically discussed:

> 'By jove, there's an example for you, of a boy going away all right, and coming back with all this Christian dandy business that I can't stand at any price. Give me the raw nigger any day, is what I have always maintained.'
>   'Oh, go on, Fred, you're the one that's always talking about increasing their wants, and getting the trade built up for little Freddy—'
>   'Yes, that's all very well, but if that Ula Masondo ever comes here again, won't I give him a piece of my mind!'[66]

In this closing interchange, the ideological tension generated between the infiltration of an economically driven imperialism and the creation of a black urban proletariat that engages with the consumer society imposed upon it is brought to the fore. The romanticisation of the rural landscape and the image of the 'noble savage'—a trope that, as Chrisman argues, was commonly used in imperial romance narratives to 'articulate and then resolve anxieties' created by black resistance to white rule—cannot be reconciled with the simultaneous incorporation of both the geographical space and its indigenous peoples into the industrialised world of global capitalism; a process that has nevertheless been necessary to render its mineral wealth accessible.[67] Even as Fred's wife begins to point out this tension, gesturing towards the economic function of the colonies as a new market for capitalist production, she is cut short by her husband, reducing this crucial point to what Pierre Machery would call a 'silence' or 'absence', a faltering that marks an ideological limit or border.[68] Nevertheless, the argument is still there, 'in the very letter of the text', the white trader making it even more conspicuous by his explosive interruption.[69]

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Plomer's text reveals, on this syntactical level, the deeper borders of the romance's ideological terrain by moving beyond them, rotating the colonial gaze full-circle, back upon itself, to map its limits. The imperial romance attempted to construct, to turn back to Jameson's terminology, 'imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions' by producing a South African space conspicuously evacuated of both industrialising cityscapes and black subjectivities.[70] In his re-writing of the imperial romance Plomer targets those tensions, located in the genre's ideological, formal, and cartographic borderlands, to produce a South African geography that is dominated not only by vast infrastructural webs and emerging urban environments, but by the various forms of resistance that these spatial configurations and their segregationist underpinnings both provoked and enabled.

'Revolutionary Trajectories': Writing Urban Space

Michael Wade, in his 'preliminary investigation' into the relationship between 'the historical processes of industrialisation and urbanisation in South Africa' and 'their literary inscriptions', identifies the railway as one of the most potent and 'multivalent symbols' in the articulation of these concerns.[71] Wade argues that whilst configured as 'the symbol of penetration', the railway's power is in fact 'necessarily dualistic'.[72] The train 'brings together' only to 'set apart': it becomes a 'mediating environment' that both 'symbolically and actually brings white and black groups together', whilst maintaining the parameters of separatism that defined these industrialised environments.[73] For *Ula Masondo* and the other black migrants that accompany him on his journey from the rural province of Lembuland to Johannesburg, the train 'window' around which the passengers crowd reveals to them 'the bitter citadels of unreasoning industry', leaving among Ula and his 'compatriots in the train' the 'silence of apprehension.'[74] However, by the end of the narrative, after Ula's inauguration into the metropolis and engagement with global capitalism, the carriage is no longer a location of uneasy revelation. Instead, as 'the rushing train' returns Ula to Lembuland in the story's penultimate section, the infrastructural line is not the 'white' road of King Solomon, but is described, significantly, as 'black'.[75] Ula is comfortable in the crowded station amongst the 'many moving forms of noisy and emerging humanity', and his refusal to recognise his mother reinforces the shift in his social and spatial affiliations from a tribal to an urban socioeconomic organisation.[76]

This confident appropriation of 'the representative symbol of the industrial-political power of the South African state' occurs after Ula's experience of its urban cityscape.[77] Immediately after his arrival in Johannesburg, Ula is at first restricted to the regulatory structures, both spatial and temporal, that are in place: 'he suffered and never forgot the routine of work and rest at the Simeon and Steck Amalgamated', and moves past only 'the engine-house on his way to the compound.'[78] However, as Sean Moroney documents, these compound systems that sought to regulate black labour permitted 'the discretionary issue of "special passes" by compound managers to workers, allowing workers to move about the Witwatersrand, particularly on weekends.'[79] Indeed, as Ula soon discovers, on 'Sunday afternoons life improved.'[80] In these small temporal segments of freedom, Ula begins to drink, gamble, and befriend a small group of other black workers. After the group's gambling habits land them 'several pounds in debt', they begin to devise ways of increasing their acquisition of material wealth:

> Stefan suggested that they should join his friends, who knew a good way of making money, their custom being to station themselves on a lonely road behind the kopjes near the Simeon and Steck, and to lie in wait for cyclists and pedestrians, on whom they would rush out with a volley of sticks and stones.

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> After the assault there was robbery, and after the robbery there was flight. The scene of these operations had lately been changed, so there was little danger of arrest.[81]

Peter Richardson and Jean Jacques Van-Helten have drawn attention to the 'progressive growth of urban crime' as 'evidence of African resistance to the control imposed by the mining industry'.[82] Ula, Stefan, and their friends locate themselves in a geographical space that is within the infrastructural web of the urban landscape, yet simultaneously beyond its regulatory apparatuses: both police and compound managers, though nearby, are evaded. They situate themselves in what David Harvey, in a discussion of Henri Lefebvre, calls 'liminal social spaces', where '"something different" is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories.'[83] It becomes 'the custom' of Ula's gang 'to meet in a thicket of [...] bushes on an unfrequented part of the kopje near the mine', where they are, significantly, 'unseen by the rest of the world', despite being located deep within the networks of global capital.[84] The "something different" they enact begins to arise, as Harvey would argue, not necessarily as part 'of a conscious plan, but more simply out of what people do, feel, sense, and come to articulate as they seek meaning in their daily lives.'[85] Plomer's story narrates this process as Ula and his fellow workers, ground down by their heavy labour, seek hedonistic indulgence to make their life bearable, and in turn resort to crime in order to fund this lifestyle. The infrastructures that dominate the cityscape and the white population situated within its bordered areas of spatial segregation are transfigured, by Plomer's text, to become both the targets of this crime and the source of wealth that improves Ula's material condition. The urban environment enables a form of resistance that was unrealisable in the rural geographies of the romance. As one member of Ula's gang comments, 'There is no money in Lembuland [...] All the white people there are policemen or missionaries. How can you get money in such a place?'[86]

The revolutionary trajectory to which the gang's spontaneous actions give rise becomes increasingly coordinated as they plan to steal from their 'masters', seeking increased financial reward for their tactics of resistance in the process.[87] Their plan is sophisticated, with each individual playing a different, pre-designated role in the robbery, and is premised on the gang's ability to cross over the boundary wall surrounding their white master's home, as well as penetrating the building's entrances and exits. Ula is able, quite easily, to 'peep' over the wall, and does so 'just in time to see Emma leaping out of the back door with a jingle of jewellery' in an act that empowers her—a black African woman—to remove these embodiments of material wealth from the home of a white man.[88] With this distraction in place, Stefan is able to 'dart' into the house, and after stealing the 'box' in which the money is kept, 'hurdles' over the wall.[89] This transgression of physical boundary lines—infrastructures of segregation inserted to maintain both racial and class divisions—results in a successful act of resistance that is itself enabled by the geography and spatial planning of the urban environment. As Michel de Certeau argues, 'stories about places' expose the 'relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order.'[90] In this narrative moment, Plomer presents the literal deconstruction of that order, as its physical demarcations are 'punched and torn open' by the 'spatial practices' of Ula and his gang.[91] Their ability to 'insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order', and depart from it unscathed exposes the rigidly segregated cityscape for what it really is: 'a sieve-order.'[92]

Decoding Domination, Initiating Resistance
This urban environment, created by the industrialisation of the mining industry that had drawn Africans in as a labour force, becomes the location of a disruptive, if not revolutionary, black proletariat that threatens the environment's stability. This transformation results in the

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functioning of the city, to return to Harvey, 'as an important site of political action and revolt', with the 'physical and social re-engineering and territorial organisation' that has been central to the industrialising process becoming 'a weapon in political struggles.'[93] Stephen Gray has argued that, during this period, Plomer was engaged in a project of 'demystifying and de-exoticizing what before him had been the vast romantic emptiness of the non-Eurocentric world.' Fundamental to this process was the representation of urban environments that, as sites of socio-political contestation, were repeatedly written out of the South African geographies produced by the imperial romance. Plomer's *Ula Masondo*, to draw once more on Scott's terminology, produces a 'public declaration' of these 'hidden transcripts' by re-orientating its perspective and producing a hitherto unmapped area of South African space.[94] The effect of Plomer's literary intervention is to expose the limits of the romance's spatial productions, revealing both the socio-ideological and geographical borders of the genre's cartographic project. In responding to the imperial context in this way, *Ula Masondo* is able to look forward to the conceptualisation of Johannesburg not only as a city of segregation and domination, but as an arena of narrative possibility that initiates resistance to, and transgression of, the spatial structures of segregation that still dominate Johannesburg to this day.

Notes

[1] J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1988), p.292.

[2] See Sheridan Johns, 'Volume 1: Protest and Hope, 1882-1934' in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, eds. Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter (California: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), p.4, and Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone eds., *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-1930* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1982), p.1, p.272.

[3] Marks and Rathbone, p.12.

[4] Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Ltd., Second Edition, 2011), pp.8, 14-15. See also Marc Ferro, *Colonization: A Global History* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.144-5, and Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone eds, *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-1930,* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1982), p.12.

[5] Marks and Rathbone, p.12.

[6] Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe eds., *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p.10.

[7] See M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1994), p.295. In this section of his essay, 'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin explains the way in which any 'literary-verbal performance' inserts itself into an historically defined socio-ideological consciousness, orienting 'itself amidst heteroglossia' by choosing one 'language' of many 'languages'. In this way Plomer's text is dialogic: it is in dialogue with both the romance's earlier depictions of the landscape and the subsequent literary representations of South Africa's urban space.

[8] Laura Chrisman, 'The Imperial Romance', in David Attwell and Derek Attridge eds., *The Cambridge History of South African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.226. See also, for example, Norman A. Etherington, 'Rider Haggard, Imperialism, and the Layered Personality', *Victorian Studies*, 22: 1 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 71-87 (74), ('King Solomon's Mines [is] the first and still more widely read of the romances'); Wendy R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire: A Critical Study of British Imperial Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.4; Gerald Monsman, *H. Rider Haggard on the Imperial Frontier: The Political and Literary Contexts of His African Romances* (Greensboro: University of North Carolina, ELT Press, 2006), pp.1-4. For the map see H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.21. It is worth noting that Haggard left South Africa on 1st September 1881, never to return after just a few years in the colony, though he continued to consider himself an authority on sociopolitical affairs there. It is perhaps this combination of firsthand experience and spatiotemporal distance that enabled him to produce the romanticised vision of the South African landscape that *King Solomon's Mines* depicts.

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[9] See, for example, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.1-4.

[10] See Mike Chang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.43-4. See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998).

[11] Robert T. Tally Jr., *The New Critical Idiom: Spatiality* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.49.

[12] Haggard, pp.7-8.

[13] See Haggard, p.7, and Chang, p.57.

[14] Tally, p.53, Haggard, p.8.

[15] Haggard, p.47.

[16] Paul Carter, *Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2002), p.39.

[17] Haggard, pp.47, 161. See also Etherington, 75.

[18] Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold and War: The Making of South Africa* (London: Pocket Books, 2008), p.107.

[19] Ieuan Ll. Griffiths, *The African Inheritance* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.35.

[20] Laura Chrisman, *Rereading the Imperial Romance: British Imperialism and South African Resistance in Haggard, Schreiner, and Plaatje* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p.49.

[21] See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious, Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002), especially p.32.

[22] Haggard, p.158.

[23] Haggard, see p.156, and p.160.

[24] Haggard, p.11, and p.160.

[25] Haggard, pp.171-2.

[26] Chrisman, p.37.

[27] Meredith, p.207.

[28] Haggard, p.181, and p.212.

[29] Nuttall and Mbembe eds.,p.11.

[30] See, for example, Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001), and Zakes Mda, *Black Diamond* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2011).

[31] See Sarah Nuttall, 'Literary City', in Nuttall and Mbembe eds., pp.195-218.

[32] Peter F. Alexander, *William Plomer: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.16.

[33] William Plomer, *The Autobiography of William Plomer* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1975), p.94.

[34] Plomer, Autobiography, p.94.

[35] Plomer, Autobiography, pp.95-6.

[36] Alexander, p.20.

[37] Alexander, p.20.

[38] Alexander, p.20.

[39] See Karis and Carter eds., p.146.

[40] Karis and Carter eds., p.146. See also Clark and Worger, p.21.

[41] Karis and Carter, p.146.

[42] Meredith, p.523.

[43] Clark and Worger, p.22.

[44] Clark and Worger,, p.23.

[45] Stephen Gray, 'William Plomer's Stories: The South African Origins of New Literature Modes', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 21:53 (January 1986), pp. 53-61 (53).

[46] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p.8.

[47] Pratt, p.8.

[48] William Plomer, Selected Stories, ed. by Stephen Gray (Johannesburg: AfricaSouth Paperbacks, 1984), pp.51-2.

[49] Plomer, Selected Stories, pp.51-2.

[50] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.55.

[51] Plomer, Selected Stories, pp.52-5.

[52] Tally, p.36.

[53] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p.5.

[54] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.56.

[55] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.64.

[56] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.70.

[57] Jameson, The Political Unconscious, p.32.

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[58] Jameson, p.32.
[59] Plomer, Selected Stories, pp.55-6.
[60] Plomer, Selected Stories, pp.55-6.
[61] Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire, Volume 1: The White Man's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.118.
[62] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.57, 60, 62.
[63] Plomer, Selected Stories, pp.75-6.
[64] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.78, 80.
[65] Plomer, Selected Stories, pp.80-1.
[66] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.81.
[67] Attwell and Attridge eds., p.237.
[68] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production,* trans. by Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1986), p.79.
[69] Macherey, p.151.
[70] Jameson, The Political Unconscious, p.64.
[71] Michael Wade, 'Trains as Tropes: The Role of the Railway in some South African Literary Texts', in Elleke Boehmer, Laura Chrisman and Kenneth Parker eds., *Altered State? Writing and South Africa* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1994), p.76.
[72] Boehmer et al. eds., p.78.
[73] Boehmer et al. eds., pp.78-84.
[74] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.55.
[75] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.80.
[76] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.80.
[77] Boehmer et al. eds., p.90.
[78] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.56.
[79] Sean Moroney, 'Mine Married Quarters: The Differential Stabilisation of the Witwatersrand Workforce 1900-1920', in Marks and Rathbone eds., (1982), p.260.
[80] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.57.
[81] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.61.
[82] Peter Richardson and Jean Jacques Van-Helten, 'Labour in the South African Gold Mining Industry, 1886-1914', in Marks and Rathbone eds., p.92.
[83] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), p.xvii.
[84] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.62.
[85] Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p.xvii.
[86] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.68.
[87] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.65.
[88] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.65.
[89] Plomer, Selected Stories, p.66.
[90] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1988), p.107.
[91] de Certeau, p.107.
[92] de Certeau, p.107.
[93] Harvey, Rebel Cities, pp.117-8.
[94] Gray (1986) 60.
[94] Scott (1990), p.5.

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Biography

Dominic Davies is studying for a DPhil at the University of Oxford. He is researching the ways in which literary texts, set in the colonial spaces of South Africa and South Asia respond to, and in turn configure, geopolitical developments in the infrastructural expansion of the British Empire at its height (c.1880-1930).