# Representations of Masculinity in Wilbur Smith's Courtney Saga.

## Contextual Causes and Strategies of Authorial Control

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## Chapter 4: Imperialist adventure. Genealogy and characteristics

### 4.1. Imperialist adventure: an attempted genealogy

> Specific adventure formulas can be categorised in terms of the location and nature of the hero's adventures. This seems to vary considerably from culture to culture, presumably in relation to those activities that different periods and cultures see as embodying a combination of danger, significance and interest. New periods seem to generate new adventure formulas while to some extent still holding on to earlier modes. Adventure situations that seem too distant either in time or in space tend to drop out of the current catalogue of adventure formulas to pass into another area of the culture.[1]

Although adventure stories retain an underlying story-plot or archetype, different adventure sub-genres have emerged depending on the location of the adventure, the period when it is narrated (or when the adventure is supposed to take place) and specific cultural determinants such as the activities different cultures and periods regard as adventurous. New periods generate new adventure patterns, and as Martin Green[2] argues, the beginning of a modern world system in Europe, in which two core countries, England and Holland, wielded power over the rest of Europe increasingly after 1550, and over the rest of the world after 1650, necessitated the emergence of a new type of adventure.

The modern world system was characterised by the abandonment of feudal practices and the creation of politically strong core states, mercantile and industrial capitalism, the re-structuring of society and the emergence of new castes, notably the merchants, and, above all, geographical expansion. In order to subsist financially, the core states needed the profits derived from exploiting the periphery and trading with the arena surrounding the system, which, by the way, suffered enormously from the effects of this systematic and unruly exploitation. As Martin Green puts it,

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[1] John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, 40-41.
[2] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, 8-14.

[U]nconsciously or indifferently the core countries weakened the state machinery
and cultural life they encountered out there, reducing the states to dependencies if
not to colonies.[3]

The new colonial and capitalist state of affairs affected the development of
adventure narratives in England in two different ways. In the first place, the nature of
the hero had to be altered. The hero of pre-capitalist adventure (the knight of the
chivalric romance) had relied on the chivalric code of honour to guide his actions, and
on Fortune and other magical helpers to assist him against fantastical enemies in a
world steeped in the atmosphere of the marvellous. By contrast, the paradigmatic
modern hero is a figure constituted from traits drawn from mercantilism: a rational,
prudent, calculating man defeating the challenges he meets by means of tools and
techniques, drilling and organisation, and clearly moved by economic interests
(interests coated in altruistic and civilising robes).

Secondly, the location of adventure was removed from imaginary landscapes
and translated to the peripheral territories, Britain's most marvellous possessions and
the foundation of the British empire, where the hero used rationalised and
systematised habits of thought to "create order and value out of the wilderness in
which he [found] himself, and to subdue its native inhabitants to his will."[4] These two
complementary additions to adventure are epitomised in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson
Crusoe* (1719), which is considered the founding text of modern adventure. Empire
became Britain's most valuable asset and its maintenance and support, a matter of
necessity. And adventure stories faithfully served this purpose; they were used to
celebrate the opportunities that empire offered to Britain, to the extent that "to
celebrate adventure was to celebrate empire and vice versa."[5] Not all writers could
sincerely adopt a celebratory attitude to empire. In fact, the morally serious were
readier to condemn it, or purposefully to ignore it; they turned away from adventure to
write 'serious' fiction - essays and poems, for example - which implicitly advocated a
quite different career. Celebration of empire, therefore, became the domain of
adventure stories, and the emerging imaginaries of empire, together with new

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[3] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, 9.
[4] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 59.
[5] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, 37.

historical forms of English nationality and masculinity in relation to the colonised Other and other forms of human life, notably women and other colonial forces, sedimented into its structure. Imperialist adventure stories, in the tradition inaugurated by Defoe, emerged for the purpose of preparing the young men of England to "go out to the colonies, to rule, and their families to rejoice in their fates out there."[6]

These imperialist adventure stories up to Conrad, silenced the ills of imperialism: the more sordid aspects of the trading expeditions, the more appalling aspects of the technology that the traders employed, the complete annihilation of native forms of life, the destruction of natural resources, etc. Only jingoistic tones were used for the construction of the imperial subject and the support of the "ideologies in force."[7] Adventure evolved into pro-empire 'propaganda', predetermining the population's outlook and attitude towards empire. As Andrea White puts it:

> [T]he concurrence of adventure novel's great popularity in the nineteenth century with the growth of Britain's empire into an extensive and formidable world power was not an accidental one. Like any other genre, adventure fiction reflected and constructed a social reality. This adventure fiction and much of the travel writing of the time also purported to chronicle the English adventure in the lands beyond Europe then being explored and colonised, but they did so in such a manner that they formed the energising myth of English imperialism. While seeming to inform the stay-at-homes, this writing shaped a particular outlook. In fact, as these discourses engaged in narrating the story of the white man in the tropics, sorting out who those Others were who inhabited the foreign lands, who the tellers and readers of the story were, what their relationships were, what was civilisation and what was savagery, the overall stance was largely interpretative and as such served as the culture's dominant fiction, arguing that the benefits of civilisation justified the white man's - especially the Englishman's - incursions into other lands.[8]

The expansive thrust of the white races, the creation of the new nation states in Europe, and the necessity to promote and propagandise empire help to explain the emergence and development of imperialist adventure in nineteenth-century England. However, and applying Martin Green's metaphor, it takes four fingers to make one fist and other factors of various kinds - social, technological, moral, religious or literary -

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[6] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, 38.

[7] Tzevan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982) 253.

[8] Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 6.

have to be taken into consideration if a full account of the conditionings that propitiated the emergence and evolution of the genre is to be provided here. Empire itself was a key determinant, but other factors conditioned both the appearance and characteristics of imperialist adventure. First of all, following the education reforms of 1870, the creation of free Board Schools led to an increased demand for juvenile and popular literature and a host of writers essayed to quench the thirst of the newly literate juvenile readers. Secondly, technological developments also facilitated, for the first time, the production of cheap books and newspapers. The development of rotary presses and mechanical typesetting devices, the adoption of new bookbinding techniques and cardboard covers, and the introduction of inexpensive pulp paper, made possible the mass production and mass circulation of cheap popular editions of the classics, missionary writing, travel and exploration stories, lives of great men, and accounts of naval and military engagements - suitable tales of adventure and excitement to satisfy the thirst of the new reading public.

Thirdly, and as C.C. Eldridge explains, "the launch of the new style of adventure story was to some extent a deliberate ploy designed to counteract the popularity of the notorious 'penny dreadfuls' (mainly stories of glamorised violence and crime which were thought to undermine society's values)."[9] Concern about the material available to the literate classes was not new to the 1880s. From the late nineteenth century, attempts had been made to direct reading habits. The Sunday school movement, for instance, was accompanied by the establishment of religious publishing societies in an attempt to provide reading material of an improving nature. However, although these readings had a pious nature and a highly moral content, and probably because of this, their appeal was limited. People preferred the 'penny dreadfuls' with their Gothic horror stories and their tales of crime and violence in which authority was often held to ridicule and wrong-doers often escaped punishment. In order to combat the corrupting effects these stories might have upon society, evangelical publishing houses recognised the need to furnish the increasingly literate public with appropriate reading material that was both moral and appealing. Weekly

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[9] C.C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience. From Carlyle to Forster* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1996) 56.

papers such as *Boys' Own Paper* (1879-1967), *Union Jack* (1880-1883), *Chums* (1892-1934), *The Captain* (1899-1924), *The Halfpenny Marvel* (1893-1922), *Pluck* (1894) and *The Boys' Friend* (1895-1927) appeared. In these papers, accounts of adventurous exploits in imperial territories combined a secular morality of an enlightening and conservative kind, with appealing violence and aggression utilised in the service of imperial advance and conquest of far off lands. They also catered to the voracious interest in the world's new frontiers, the distant peoples, places and traditions that increasingly absorbed modern readers. They also made adventure fiction available to readers who could only afford newspapers and journals, rather than those who patronised the more expensive books. The stories contained in these weeklies had an overtly racist, jingoist nature, to the extent that "in many eyes, [the] answer [...] to the penny dreadfuls turned out to be a halfpenny dreadfuller."[10] The success these papers enjoyed encouraged many writers to follow the trend and to write their own fictional accounts of the British imperial exploits. Henty became extremely popular - "an unsuccessful author of twelve adult novels, he found his true métier in writing for boys over 80 adventure stories whose eventual sales may have topped 25,000,000."[11] After Henty, other writers followed: Haggard, Charles Kingsley, Captain Marryat, W.H.G. Kingston, R.M. Ballantyne or Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote not only for boys but for an adult audience who rejoiced in reverting to childhood. Empire alone, therefore, did not account for the emergence of these writers and the content of their novels. It was also a direct consequence of the evangelical publishing endeavours and the success they enjoyed.

The evangelical influence did not stop here for the evangelical mood in England both prepared the reading public for adventure and affected the approach towards the natives that imperialist adventure was to take. Evangelical missionaries championed the abolition of the slavery movement in England. Africa had always been regarded as the 'dark continent', the site of slavery and other kinds of indescribable aberrations, and the British 'goodthinkful', particularly the evangelicals, took upon themselves the stamping out of slavery in Africa and other parts of the

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[10] C.C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, 60.
[11] C.C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, 68.

world and the introduction of Christianity and 'legitimate' commerce in its place, providing both a rationale and an altruistic excuse for empire. As Fowell Buxton declared:

> A nobler achievement now invites us. I believe that Great Britain can, if she will, under the flavour of the Almighty, confer a blessing on the human race. It may be that at her bidding a thousand nations now steeped in wretchedness, in brutal ignorance, in devouring superstition, possessing but the one trade, and that one the foulest evil that ever blighted prosperity, or poisoned domestic peace, shall, under British tuition, emerge from their debasement, enjoy a long line of blessings - education, agriculture, commerce, peace, industry and wealth that springs from it; and far above all, shall willingly receive that religion which, while it confers innumerable temporal blessings, opens the way to an eternal futurity of happiness.[12]

With these objectives in mind, missionaries sailed out to imperial territories where they became heroes, even martyrs. The accounts of their experiences were eagerly awaited and consumed by a reading public whose imagination they appealed to and who, henceforth, looked upon adventure narratives for similar excitement. Unfortunately, the abolitionists' constant portrayal of Africa as a land of superstition and cruelty, of savagery and human sacrifice, put an end to eighteenth-century ideas of the noble savage. The missionaries inadvertently added to the image of darkest Africa by emphasising in their writings and propaganda both the danger of their positions and the evil customs of the degenerate Africans. As a consequence, the representation of Africans in adventure suffered enormously for, influenced by missionaries' accounts, Africans could only be pictured as intrinsically evil and bloodthirsty. Accounts of travellers and explorers' expeditions were also avidly devoured by British readers, who found in them real life adventure tales in which intrepid explorers overcame human and geographical obstacles on triumphant journeys across the dark continent. The same applies to the newspaper's or participants' reports on military campaigns against Abyssinia, Asante, the Zulus, the Boers, the Mahdi or the Ndebele. Again, these stories both generated the interest that made readers turn to adventure for 'a little more of the same stuff' and influenced the treatment that natives were to receive in imperialist adventure.

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[12] qtd. in C.C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, 64-65.

Imperialist adventure writing is also importantly derived from the Romantic tradition, literature and philosophy, which planted the seeds from which this type of adventure would eventually sprout. The general thrust and philosophy of the Romantic movement, therefore, provided imperialist adventure with many of its foundations. From the double impact of Renaissance and Reformation on Romanticism, imperialist adventure appropriated the importance of individualism and private judgement; the exhilarating and intoxicating sense of power that the steady march of progress in terms of trade and technology gave western civilisation; and the belief in improvement here on Earth rather than deferred to the hereafter. The romantic tendency to present a world divided into opposed halves appears in adventure in the narrative tendency to polarise the world into two realms, one innocent and idyllic and the other its opposite, as represented by heroes and villains. Romanticism often found its natural articulation through symbolism and myth, initially in stories of knights and chivalrous deeds before expanding to a broad range of forms containing love and action. Adventure adopts these themes, utilising the quest structure as an excuse for love and action and the performance of courageous deeds.

Romanticism inspired a look backwards to the popular history and cultural inheritance of various countries, as well as forwards towards the potentialities of a brave and courageous race equipped with progress and technology, becoming a force of nationalistic pride. Imperialist adventure sprouted from the same sense of nationalistic pride, featuring young heroes, prime examples of the Anglo-Saxon race, who atavistically revert to the ways and customs of their valiant predecessors, while wielding progress and technology as the shields that assist the advance of civilisation over the globe. The emphasis Romanticism placed on the individual and his capacity to subvert established social or political structures, together with the heroic treatment that outlaws and outcasts received as living embodiments of romantic beliefs, favoured the equal heroic treatment that explorers, frontiersmen and hunters received in imperialist adventure, where they are not regarded as antisocial, but as men of bravery and courage capable of fighting their way forward in the name of a higher good, that of progress and nation.

Another characteristic of Romanticism that imperialist adventure incorporated was a yearning for the primitive and remote for its own sake, seeking the far horizons in a desire for the experience and dominion that motivated such explorers of different periods as Drake or Stanley. In adventure, much of this was translated into a fascination and absorption with wild, primitive, uncivilised life, and the question of how modern European men would react to such conditionings. A parallel factor was that of the noble savage, which appeared in imperialist adventure in various forms from Friday to its modern culmination in the Tarzan phenomenon. Combined with these factors, and as Taves writes, "was a visionary element that allowed imperialists and explorers to see their endeavours as having civilising connotations."[13] Like romantic poets before them, imperialist adventure writers saw themselves as the spokesmen of their civilisation, the visionary bards that predicted the birth of a better future when evil, wretchedness and barbarism would be eliminated from the world and a better society would ensue. The metaphysical leanings of Romanticism could also have influenced the empire adventurer to be intrigued by the primitive religions of the newly colonised areas, which he saw both as a manifestation of the backwardness of the colonised peoples and proof of the undercurrent of spirituality running through the globe.

Finally, imperialist adventure emerged from the combination of human curiosity and an existing literary tradition that catered for the needs of excitement of the readership. From ancient times, the deeds of heroes, gods and demi-gods had always been narrated in the form of adventure. As Taves writes, "adventure is the oldest, most widespread form of story-telling, and a study of this literary form could be carried back to the Middles Ages or to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, even to the beginning of myth-making."[14] From times of old, therefore, the interest generated by adventurous expeditions or deeds has always been satiated by means of adventure stories. The yeasty ferment of excitement generated by contemporary events at a time of European expansion logically "worked in the minds of white readers and writers to produce an enormous mass of adventure tales."[15] The ships setting out from Spain,

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[13] Brian Taves, *The Romance of Adventure*, 59.
[14] Brian Taves, *The Romance of Adventure*, 58.
[15] Martin Green, *Seven Types of Adventure Tale*, 217.

England and Holland, establishing trading posts and factories in Africa and Asia, and landing small armies in Central and South America; covered wagons crossing the North American prairie and the South African veldt; Russian expeditions going east across Siberia and Central Asia; British ships carrying convicts to Australia; the slave trade; missionary and humanitarian endeavours; the exploration of Africa; the little wars of Victoria's reign; all these events piqued the curiosity of British citizens about the world beyond Europe and "created a great deal of interest in the exotic places of the world."[16] The curiosity of the citizens not only had to be satisfied, but humoured and encouraged if the imperial project was to succeed; thus, the emergence of imperialist adventure stories, which were one of the forms in which the imperial project was expressed, fantasised about and propagandised, accentuating the natural curiosity about the world's far horizons in the service of imperialism.

All forms of enthusiastic celebration eventually come to an end; imperialist adventure is, to all appearances, not an exception. In the early twentieth century it was Conrad, not Kipling or Haggard, who was accepted into the English literary tradition. After Forster's *A Passage to India* and Somerset Maugham's stories, those who continued to use the adventure genre in an imperial setting - George Orwell, Joyce Cary, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene - used it sardonically. It became the fashion to mock both the adventurer and the empire. Otherwise, indictment ensued. Imperialism's apparent benevolent paternalism began to be questioned and the truth about the empire's unequal class relations and the economic purpose they served, together with British racial arrogance, became apparent and came to be regarded as gigantic flaws. Contemporary obsession with Political Correctness has also contributed to the repudiation of the racism, jingoism, violence and masculinism contained in imperialist stories, which are constantly assessed in the light of present-day morality. As a consequence, empire and imperialism can only be presented as evil in revisionist rewritings of the imperial project. These rewritings undercut the validity of imperialist beliefs and deliberately question colonial politics and even the desirability of adventure.

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[16] C.C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience*, 55.

However, imperialist adventure is by no means dead. As Eldridge explains, the imperialist adventure story continued to flourish and have an impact outside the confines of those works formally dubbed English literature well after the demise of the British empire and the two world wars. Readers still resort to imperialist adventure as a province of escapism and a source of 'manly' entertainment. Writers did not stop writing adventure. John Buchan continued writing in the imperial tradition and his *Prester John* (1910) contains all the ingredients of a Haggard romance. The genre was also kept alive by A.E.W. Mason, Edgar Wallace, Edgar Rice Burroughs and W.E. Johns. The mid-Victorian classics continued to be read, as did Haggard and Henty. Imperialist juvenile literature stuck to its traditional form well into the 1950's. All Henty's titles were still in print in 1955, and many were later reprinted, though frequently in abridged form. The energising myth of empire remained at the heart of popular culture decades after high culture abandoned them, and still survives in the imperialist works by Wilbur Smith, Stuart Cloete and Patrick O'Brian, which glamorise and popularise the imperial era and its philosophy. With them survive the xenophobia and national and racial superiority that was staple food for thought in imperial times.

Simultaneously, the imperial tradition has lived on on cinema screens. From the 1930s, which witnessed the screening of, among others, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Four Feathers* and *Sanders of the River*, examples of imperialist adventure have been successfully featured in cinemas and on television world-wide. Recent cinematic productions and television serialisations are the films *The Mission, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Mountains of the Moon, Christopher Columbus. The Discovery* or *1492. Conquest of Paradise*; and the television series *Shogun, Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Captain Cook, John Silver's Return to Treasure Island, The Last Place on Earth* or *The Search for the Nile*. Although some of those contain revisionist elements (less optimism, much harsher tone, heroes flawed and less virtuous, greater maturity and absence of the earlier devil-may-care approach), the spirit of imperialist adventure lives in them. They still serve the same purposes that late-Victorian adventure did in the past, disseminating imperialist world-views - so useful to promote the Neo-colonial endeavours of new imperial powers such as the

United States; helping readers to escape from the problems of modern life into safe exotic locales; and providing readers with 'mythical' and comforting versions of an ethical, altruistically-motivated past.

## 4.2. Characteristics of imperialist adventure stories: an outline

The genre of imperialist adventure writing, therefore, is a distinctive entity with its own point of origin and its own development. As a genre it has its own fictional life: with its birth, its joyful adolescence, its introspective maturity, and its decadent old age. Also, as a well-established generic form, it has its will to survive, its anxious attempts at self-regeneration in various media. And, very importantly, it also has its own characteristics, its idiosyncrasies that come up in various and peculiar combinations in the different examples the genre comprises. Being born with the British empire, the historical and socio-political context of the times determined the characteristics that this particular form of adventure takes, providing both the context and the ideological framework that determine the outlook of these narratives, which I proceed to outline.

In the first place, imperialist adventure stories take place in different parts of the British empire,[17] which became both the physical and temporal backdrop against which these stories unfolded, and against which the heroes undertook their quests beset with dangers. But the distant lands were not depicted in a realistic fashion. In these narratives, India, Africa and the East emerge as magical lands filled with wonders: gold, ivory, cinnamon, ginger, exotic beasts, human beings of different cultures. Written in order to show how exciting life in the colonies could be, and how wealthy people might become there, they encouraged settlement in the colonies. By providing this detailed, although far from realistic, description of the marvellous possessions available in the colonies, adventure fired people's imagination and encouraged them to travel and colonise these distant lands. In fact, imperialist adventure promoted emigration by providing pamphlet descriptions of the colonies as

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[17] See Appendix 2 for a very brief summary of the evolution of the British empire.

'new found Edens' and even by depicting emigration as one of the highest national duties: "None takes a higher place in the great national family, none is happier or more beloved than those that to forth from such homes to fulfil new duties."[18] Secondly, adventure tales supported colonialist / imperialist practices and concerns and were used to further justify the existence of the British empire. Consequently, all the ideological standpoints that imperialists used to defend empire, the rationale for empire, can be found in these narratives, which are outlined here.

In the first place, adventure writers developed the idea of racial supremacy based on Darwin's theories. The basic idea they supported was that imperialism was part of the natural struggle for survival: those endowed with superior qualities are destined to rule the others. The 'racially superior' British, therefore, were naturally predetermined to rule and control 'inferior' races which needed the British in order to improve. Empire was also supported on moral grounds in the narratives. Imperialism as undertaken by British colonisers was regarded as a benign force as opposed to other forms of imperialism that were viewed negatively and were thus condemned in adventure. Unlike the British, who were supposed to be motivated by altruistic purposes, the Spaniards and the Portuguese were characterised as being moved by economic ambitions alone, practising indiscriminate and unmotivated cruelty against the Indians, exterminating whole cultures and peoples in order to make room for themselves in the newly occupied territories, and with little intention of benefiting natives by helping them to create freer and more enlightened societies. British imperialism, on the other hand, was executed as the means of liberating peoples from tyrannical rule or bringing them the blessing of a superior way of life. The natives became a cheap labour force that enabled the British to produce new products and sell them dearly, as the production costs were low. But colonisers did not feel guilty of abuse: they thought that work was morally good and that working granted people salvation. Consequently, they thought that natives would benefit immensely from labour under European supervision; work on European lines was the only salvation for people living in idleness. It was useful, therefore, to picture the natives as: degenerate, lazy, indolent, malingerers, layabouts. It was a means of getting rid of the sense of

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[18] Wyss qtd. in Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 74.

guilt that abuse through work could have caused. The effect of colonisers, then, could only be good as they thought that they were saving them from a destiny of damnation as the gates of heaven would remain closed to idlers and good-for-nothings. All in all, empire came to be seen as a benign force of fate. Any extension of British influence would widen the skirts of light, would increase the amount of good in the world. Empire distributed to those in need values which upheld a fair and democratic culture. The British brought good government and peace all over the world; they were the best rulers a colonised people might hope to have; they brought education and improved the conditions of the land; they brought Christianity and, thus, salvation to tribes sunk in barbarism.

Adventure also shared in the support of the idea of empire through economic arguments. The colonised lands provided human and material resources. The lands were also outlets for goods, investment of capital and surplus population. Empire was an enterprise which converted paupers into customers: imperial developments created among the British public an entirely new menu of needs and desires. The middle / working classes developed a taste for tea, sugar, jam, pudding, buns. Whether rural or urban, northern or southern, privileged or poor, the British day became unthinkable without the colonial trimmings of spicy biscuits, sticky sweet pudding, and chocolate cakes. This demand stimulated the quest of new markets and in turn it stimulated the British economy.

Finally, empire was not only essential to boost the economy in England; the fringe benefits that England received from the colonised territories were many. These additional perks England got from the colonies were also introduced in imperialist adventure stories to further stress the *raison d'être* of empire. To start with, exploitation of distant territories encouraged technological development as new devices were needed in order to make the work of colonisers easier. Secondly, exploitation encouraged scientific development and research - the research conducted in the new lands which the British conquered enlarged people's knowledge of the world we inhabit. In the third place, the development of the colonies and territorial expansion were a means of ensuring social stability at home: emigration was

encouraged and the fear of population increase gradually disappeared. Finally, the new territories were essential for reasons of strategy and security, the colonised territories becoming bases, strategic positions or buffer states that enabled the British to control lines of communication and to prevent the other nations striving to become world powers from overshadowing Britain.

Another defining characteristic of imperialist adventure tales is their unrelenting support of the idea of British superiority. British imperialists cherished a heroic image of themselves as conquerors and civilisers. They saw themselves as the best race in the world, a superior race. They based their superiority on industrial and military power and on ideologies of moral, cultural and racial supremacy. And they used imperialistic adventure stories to create images of the British race as superior and fit to colonise other lands and control and rule other peoples. Writers were part of the imperial society and they shared the concerns of the society of the time. Consequently, their work was imbued with, if not animated by, an awareness that a vast proportion of the earth's surface belonged to them.

If the colonial context, an endless defence of empire and imperialist practices, and an overt 'taken-for-grantedness' of British superiority are traits that characterise imperialist adventure tales and give them their particular outlook and ideological slant, they are not, by far, the only idiosyncrasies of this particular form of adventurous romance. Other characteristics can be identified. In the first place, imperialist adventure stories are self-centred and self-absorbed. They are not concerned with native life. The British introduced their language, town planning, upholstery, cuisine, ways of dress, etc. to the lands they colonised. The British unquestioningly believed that their culture was superior to other cultural forms. And the adventure stories taking place in the colonies present and reflect a world in which British rule and ways of life are forced onto the colonised territories. These stories, consequently, offer the spectacle of a society ceaselessly reproducing itself, its own history and ways of doing things, and repeatedly asserting its invincibility. Consequently, imperialist adventure concentrates on the exploits of the white man and the readership perceives the story through the viewpoint of its surrogate, the western

representative of empire who must acclimatise to his surroundings, but never lose his own sense of national identity.

This does not mean that adventure stories do not offer descriptions of the lands being explored, occupied and colonised, together with the ways and customs of 'primitive peoples'. In fact, one of the main motivations of empire and one of the reasons that accounted for the readers' interest in imperialist adventure was the desire to learn about exotic places, to break the ordinary conventions of day-to-day existence and to broaden their horizons. However, the voracious appetite for the foreign and the exotic was often cannibalistic, the emphasis being placed not on understanding foreign territories, but on appropriating and assimilating them. Travelling and the sense of movement in imperialist adventure are often portrayed as a desire to compress the whole planet on which we live and as a triumph of mankind over the environment. Knowledge of the topography of the colonised territories and of the customs of colonised peoples serves imperialism, assisting the lust for possession and power ('the more you know the more you can encompass and dominate' seems to be the maxim that adventurers believed in). Discovery and exploration, therefore, are never separate from possession and domination, an attitude that William Cowper epitomises in his famous line about Robinson Crusoe: "I am monarch of all I survey."[19]

Imperialist adventures also focus on the dangers of cross-cultural contact. Contact between the races, in particular sexual contact, invariably brings trouble. It was believed that contact with dark peoples threatened race purity. So there is always the pervasive idea that standards and certainties could easily warp under the pressure of alien environments and peoples. There was always the doubt that British white men might not be fully in control. The fear of other cultures or of the primitive found its way into the texts cropping up with all manner of images of contamination, infection and bewitchment. Constant anxiety was expressed about the degeneration allegedly caused not only by direct encounters with natives, but by the proximity to the savage passions or simply by the malign influence of the alien environment.

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[19] qtd. in Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 62.

Another outstanding feature of imperialist adventure stories is the youth of their heroes, which served three different purposes. Firstly, it served as a correlate for imperial energies and enterprise: whether sailor, soldier, castaway, cadet or trader, the young male hero was portrayed as a British lad of spirit, full of life and energy, who from a very early age proved his integrity and fearlessness. Secondly, the timeless youth underlined the type of empire the British strove to create: young and stretching over a long period of time maintaining the youthful appearance. Finally, in a world pervaded by Darwinist thinking, the young hero also symbolised the vitality of the new races, poised at the evolutionary cutting edge, the very latest development in human evolution. An emissary of progress, he embodied the best of the west, its life-force and virility, rationality, restraint, technological prowess and moral earnestness.

Imperialist adventure stories masked the reality of the natives. They never described the suffering which invasion supposed since empire for natives meant deprivation and dispossession, destruction of communities and people. The number of natives who died as a result of wars, transportation, labour, disease and starvation are never pictured in the books; if pictured, they are not analysed or given any sort of relevance. When natives appear at all in the tales, they are seldom the protagonists. They are shadowy figures in the background; not often allowed diversity, resistance, language, voice. Furthermore, they are presented as lesser (less human, less civilised, children, headless mass, animal-like, irrational, barbarian, secondary, other) or feminised, vulnerable and penetrable, a body receptive to the male or, if not, requiring subjection.

The essential inferiority of the colonised peoples had been common currency since Elizabethan times (if not before). The Chain of Being (a system that endeavoured to connect the highest forms of life to the lowest) had already established that the white man was a step below the angels, and the black man was below the white man, closer to animals than to the white man. But in the nineteenth century different arguments were activated in order to further support the black man's underdog position. The superiority of the British was matter of fact in different ideological / philosophical trends that enjoyed widespread popularity during the

nineteenth century, and whose influence permeates the pages of the adventure tales produced at the times: evolutionary theory, which established that black people were at a lower stage of development; the founding document of British anthropology, Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), which further supported this evolutionary interpretation (Tylor regarded the so-called primitive cultures as the fossilised survivors of earlier evolutionary stages; in his ascent, western man was believed to have undergone certain metamorphoses, the types of which could still be seen at large in other, less developed societies); and social Darwinism, according to which societies had undergone evolutions, and white society, particularly British society, was at the top of the social evolutionary ladder, whereas black societies were considered to be at a lowest stage of development. These ideological currents were underwritten by the latest British economic, scientific and technical advances, which were supposed to give ample proof of the superior British development, especially in contrast with the colonised people's 'primitive' social structures and culture, and 'savage' and 'degraded' ways and customs.

By highlighting the essential inferiority of the Other, colonisers served two different purposes. They validated the violence of invasion: the struggle for survival dictated that only the strong or those best at imposing their power deserved hegemony. And they supported white supremacy. In the 19th-century view, the European was a leading example of humanity: master of himself, in command of reason as well as of new technologies, the rest of the globe was presumed available for the operation of his intellect and curiosity. The inferiority of the Other highlighted the superiority of the European: his mastery, control, rationality, cultural superiority, energy, technological skill. This inferiority of the natives had to be promoted, otherwise there was no excuse for white colonisers to maintain a hold on the colonised lands and people.

Occupation was not always unproblematic and easy. Sometimes the colonisers were not at home in the lands they occupied. The uncertainty the colonisers felt in these foreign lands, and to conclude with the characteristics of imperialist adventure stories, was translated in different ways in the texts. In the first place, natives are sometimes pictured as mysterious, eerie and uncanny beings. We have to bear in mind

that they fought and opposed resistance to white control and exploitation, and they attacked and killed many colonisers. Also, the white man considered they had primitive ways of acting; they were naked, animal, did not have moral codes. They were sometimes regarded as representing the sexual primitive impulses which civilised men had to hide and control, and, thus, they were seen as representations of passions, the darkest aspects or instincts which white men had to suppress. The strange and unusual customs of colonised peoples were even believed to be dangerous and to inflict harm on the colonisers, punish them for having dared to disturb their peace and ways of life; they even thought that the superstitions and magic of the tribes could have effect and haunt them forever. Finally, the 'untamed' landscape in the distant territories was very different from European mild and 'civilised' landscape, and, consequently, it was often presented as frightening: vast, mysterious, full of hidden dangers, caves, rivers, swamps, deserts, volcanic concavities and labyrinthine passages; teeming with ferocious animals, poisonous waters and disease.

Emphasis is systematically placed on the Otherness, savagery and barbarism of the colonised peoples in imperialist adventure, together with on their strangeness and unfathomable nature. Native culture, or lack of it, is just a matter of casting spells, sacrificing animals, getting drunk and chanting. Blacks are specially negatively viewed. Burdened by the myth of the dark continent, there is little attempt to understand African culture; the continent is portrayed as largely unmapped, the site of slavery and Arab exploitation; it is left in a seemingly timeless state of perpetual underdevelopment. But the primitive customs of other peoples are also brought to attention, highlighting the excesses of such native rituals as India's suttee or the murderous sect of Kali or Thuggee. Among Polynesian tribes, cannibalism, the ultimate sanction of white imperialism, is emphasised. Marryat's cannibals, for instance, are presented as multitudinous, terrifying and nightmarish:

> The savages were all painted, with their war-cloaks and feathers on, and armed with spears and clubs, evidently having come with no peaceable intentions [...]. 'What a fierce cruel set of wretches they appear to be; if they overpower us, they will certainly kill us.[20]

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[20] *Masterman Ready* qtd. in Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 87.

Ballantyne also provides horrific images of pagan and cannibal rites in the Fiji Islands. In *The Coral Island*, he describes a pond full of eels that are fed human babies by the natives. Otherwise, the violence and selfish motivations of native leaders is brought to pre-eminence. They are presented as blood-thirsty, power-hungry khans, or self-serving maharajahs, or religious or political fanatics whose goal is not to promote liberation or the best interests of their people, but personal ambition. They are pictured as predators, indigenous destructive forces, enemies of liberty and justice who willingly cause civil war and give free rein to barbaric instincts by promoting infighting amongst the tribes or the colonial power; who use their leadership among their people to increase personal power or wealth; and who are even more dangerous to their own race than the forces of occupation.

Although imperialist adventure as a whole has been characterised by racism, the virulence of that racism differs from case to case. We can even find positive and admiring descriptions of natives and native culture, which proves that explicit xenophobia is not always the case in imperialist adventure. Heroes are often accompanied by a native of remarkable intelligence and vitality who serves them. Servility does not imply inferiority or self-abasement: devoted servants are presented as honourable and intelligent, and, although they are treated with condescension, they are not dealt with differently from whites in the same position. There are also portrayals of prominent, individualised natives in positive roles, some are even equals or superior to Occidentals. These are often presented as native opponents or are respected as fellow warriors or as comrades. Often, comradeship between natives and whites goes beyond respect and becomes friendship, and the hero and his native companion ally themselves to achieve a common goal. Entire native races may be held in respect in adventure, especially when the white adventurer comes to realise that his native counterpart is hardly a child of nature or an innocent savage, but a product of an ancient and complex civilisation, albeit one with many different values. Sometimes, native societies are presented as utopian, leading a placid life, having a commendable set of values and living a non-competitive existence. Although miscegenation is more than often frowned upon, there are examples of imperialist adventure, frequently films, in which the possibility of racial interaction is contemplated. Colonial

adventurers are portrayed as showing real love for the land and the people and colonial service is viewed as an opportunity to learn from the unfamiliar locale and coming to understand the natives. Examples of interracial marriage are few, however, and when they appear, they are treated symbolically: when 'the twain do meet', it is to become a symbol of social mixture that results in a more egalitarian world. Although all these examples provided appear to refute accusations of racism in adventure, the essential backwardness and inferiority of native culture is seldom questioned. Even when natives are portrayed positively, no real effort is made to reach a better understanding of native ways and customs. As a consequence, natives often play minor roles and are shunted into simple stereotypes. Also, only those natives who are open to European influence or those who are devotedly committed to their masters, even to the point of wanting to die for them, are granted full acceptance by whites. More than often, 'nice' natives are just walking excuses for white interference: they are situated as distressed victims whose plight requires the white hero to come to the rescue.

Imperialism was openly professed only for a short time and then was energetically repudiated in literary and cinematic revisions of the imperial project. However, ideas that emerged and flourished in the nineteenth century ran on, and still run on, underground, even openly, particularly in the imperialist films produced in the first half of the twentieth century, which are still thoroughly enjoyed at present, at least by some. As happened in nineteenth-century narratives, imperialist films take pains to justify empire by brandishing its altruistic motivations. They endorse the colonial system by portraying it as a way of bringing peace and justice to a land where both are endangered; as a way of protecting imperilled natives from domestic or foreign enemies; as a way of holding in check the propensity toward civil conflict in the colony; and as a way of spreading the advantages of a civilisation that will eventually suppress all the ills affecting colonised peoples: disease, torture, slavery, cannibalism or barbaric rituals. Europeans are shown as believing that a beneficent outside regime is preferable to the withdrawal or defeat of the colonial presence and the dire consequences it could portend, whether fierce religious tensions; atrocities against civilians, native and foreign; or a return to a previous barbaric state. All in all, like in imperial narratives of old, in imperialist adventure films 'the white man's

burden' is that of dispelling the clouds of primitivism by virtue of an occupying presence. Adventure, therefore, struggles to justify imperialism as beneficial: the main interest is not in the settlement of the land but in winning over other people and their unfair politics; colonisers do not displace or eliminate the native, they preserve the best of the native's way of life; wild, unsettled outposts are sought not only to serve a nation's policy of expansion, but out of a sincere wish to do some good for the colony itself; and the reasons behind treks and expeditions are scientific and humanitarian, not only a desire for economic reward. Exploration and colonialism are justified in the belief that colonisers spread the benefits of their civilisation to supposedly unenlightened lands.

## Chapter 5: The 'imperialist connection'. Wilbur Smith's perpetuation of masculinism and patriarchy. A literary perspective

### 5.1. Introductory remarks

Imperialist adventure is by no means dead. Its tenets and ideological premises re-emerge and come alive in different narratives of which Wilbur Smith's could be regarded as both example and epitome. Smith's novels under analysis rely on imperialist adventure parameters for their development. Written in contemporary times, when the British empire has long since met its demise, and from the perspective of a British settler / citizen of South Africa, his narratives cannot be read as British imperial propaganda. Yet, Smith's works make use of all the other constitutive elements of imperialist adventure. They take place in the periphery, in the wide 'uncivilised' expanses at the margin of the 'west's' metropolitan centres; they feature powerful heroes moved by enterprise and a sense of adventure who find in the contexts of both the wilderness and armed conflict scope for the development of their personal fortunes and of their virile manly attributes; they present the wilderness and other open expanses as 'matter', open for possession and 'pillage'; they defend a white supremacist approach to the colonised peoples, who are either portrayed as vicious and troublesome presences interfering with the progress of civilisation or self-effacing recipients of the whites' good-will; they celebrate the virtues of the Anglo-Saxon race, particularly the British, who are presented as infinitely better than all the other races in South Africa, not only blacks, but also Boers / Afrikaners who are accused of lacking democratic spirit; they rely on big-game hunting, fortune-making, exploration, weapon and technology manipulation and the defence of justice and other democratic values to provide occasion for adventure.[1]

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[1] Although I make only passing mention to these characteristics, they are further analysed when I focus on Smith's texts in the chapters that follow.

Smith's novels, above all, as examples of imperialist adventure, perpetuate still another of the characteristics essential to the imperialist genre, a characteristic that I have deliberately disregarded in the previous chapter because I develop it in greater detail in this one: its masculinist / patriarchal parameters. Now, masculinism, sexism, misogyny, patriarchy are obviously not unique to imperialist adventure. I have already explained in chapter 3 that adventure, as a genre, is supposed to appeal to a wide male readership / audience for it not only supplies ideal powerful heroes with which male readers / audiences can identify, but it systematically defends a status quo fashioned for and by men. This is true of most types of literary production because masculinism / sexism / patriarchy have traditionally pervaded western thought, and still do; consequently, adventure is only one of the many literary manifestations that these forms of discrimination take. In this chapter, I want to observe these, starting with an outline of the misogynist vein in literature, following with a brief analysis of masculinism and patriarchy in imperialist adventure, and finishing with situating Wilbur Smith as a perpetrator of masculinism through imperialist adventure writing and the function this serves in our contemporary world far-removed in time from the imperial milieu in which the genre developed and reached its peak.

## 5.2. The misogynist vein in literature: genesis, retaliation and endurance

Throughout history, women have always occupied a tangential position in relation to production, culture, and nation. Forced to guard the fireside comforts of the domestic space, their sphere of action was limited to kitchens and beds, seldom invading the external, masculine domain. Essentially masculine, the world 'outside the house' assimilated women only as symbols of passivity and weakness so that men, in contrast, could construct an image of themselves as strong, active, virile and generative; fit and equipped to rule triumphant over women.

Western thought, therefore, is suffused with the polarisation weak-feminine / strong-masculine. Science, for example, was represented as a matter of power (masculine) over nature (feminine, chaotic, disorderly and to be subdued and

controlled).[2] The discourse of nationalism, to mention another example, was, and still is, constructed as a gendered discourse; as Anne McClintock phrases it:

> All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite many nationalists' ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalisation of gender *difference*. No nation in the world gives women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state. Rather than expressing the flowering into time of the organic essence of a timeless people, nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimise people's access to the resources of the nation-state.[3]

Nationalisms invented nations of active men protecting a masculine cultural and economic patrimony; women, on the other hand, were represented as the bearers of the nation, the mothers that gave birth and comforted. But it was men who fertilised, defended or improved the nation. Women were denied any relation to national agency.

So, traditionally, women have been constructed as inferior. Fundamentally 'Other', they were the embodiment of a non-culture; they were everything that men were not: not adventurous, not strong, not intelligent, not powerful. And the list could go on *ad infinitum* by just adding 'not' to every positive qualifying adjective of masculinity. Their only possible 'survival-attitude' was to remain humble, virtuous, sweet, open to penetration, for the delight and pleasure of their potent cultural fathers. Given women's inferiority, the variety of roles they could play in society was rather limited before the feminist movements took root in society in the 1960s.[4] Men occupied the positions of power, their superiority protected not only by law, but also by the Judeo-Christian tradition that established and reinforced man's centrality as a decree from God. In such a society, women were stereotypically presented as paragons of virtue, humble beings subjected to man's will and dictates, and sacrificing their own well-being for the well-being of the nation, family and men, not necessarily in

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[2] Science has also been used to validate man's superiority by providing a rational framework for women's essential inferiority. In 1861, for example, anthropometry and craniometry began with Paul Broca in France. Measuring-tapes were developed to measure skulls and, unsurprisingly, women were discovered to have smaller skulls than men. See: Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys*.

[3] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 353.

[4] Although Mary Wollstonecraft published her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, it was not to make its force be felt in society till the end of the nineteenth century, beginning of the twentieth. Feminism, as such, did not develop till the 1960s.

this order. Otherwise, they were presented as lascivious beings, temptresses who, although desirable, were to be controlled and condemned since they disrupted the orderly masculine world and, thus, the establishment, the family and the nation.

In the structuring of such a society, Julia Kristeva sees the impinging of the myth of Electra,[5] which she interprets for her own purpose of defining women's role in society, and which she thinks can be used to explain the position of women in our basically patriarchal world. In this myth, Electra, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, persuades her brother, Orestes, to avenge her father by killing his murderess, Clytemnestra, and her lover Aegisthus. According to Kristeva, the dead father is converted into a symbolic power standing for the patriarchal order, the masculine Name or Word in Christianity. By killing the father, Orestes, an anti-Oedipus, wrests himself from the family and moves into a new community that is supra-familial and political: the city, whose cult was already becoming an economic and political necessity in Greece, that is, the public space where men exercise their power and superiority. Electra, who as the Sophoclean chorus says, 'Never was a daughter more her father's daughter than Electra', stands for the women in society who defend the patriarchal order with their lives, the virtuous virgins who sacrifice their lives for the welfare of the nation. In turn, Clytemnestra stands for the disruptive women who put their personal satisfaction before the establishment and thus threaten the stability of the community. It is for this reason that she has to be despised and eliminated, not because she has murdered the father, but because, like Gertrude in *Hamlet*, she is a mistress whose sexual drive has to be controlled, epitomising, in this way, the Shakespearean myth of women's frailty. Electra, who stands for virtue and self-sacrifice, together with accommodation within the patriarchal order, and Clytemnestra, who stands for frailty and lust, and thus better eliminated for her potential for disruption, are two frequent feminine stereotypes in literature, reinforcing the Virgin Mary / 'Magdalen-acceptable-only-if-penitent' dichotomy of Catholicism. And these are the two different ways in which men, and sometimes women, have presented women in literature.

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[5] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977).

This tendency to represent women in literature, as well as in other representational arts, in terms of fallen women / angels is recurrent and widespread. The 'good types', for example Elizabeth Lavenza in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Clarissa in Samuel Richardson's novel, are approved of and regarded as ideals of femininity to be cherished and imitated by all sensible women in the world. Fallen women, on the other hand, are systematically condemned, domesticated or exiled from the narratives, like, for example, the women in John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*; Milady in Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*; Alicia Clary in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Eve of the Future Eden*; or Rosanna Spearman, Limping Lucy and Rachel Verinder in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*. Authors have never missed the opportunity to teach a moral lesson: women cannot trespass the boundaries of the domestic space; instead, they are to remain humble, homely, 'wifely', passive, self-sacrificing and accept the patriarchal authority that their husbands or fiancés epitomise. This is the message, for example, that Daphne du Maurier underwrites in *Rebecca*. In this narrative, the disruptive, sexually alive 'villainess' is eliminated; ideal femininity, in turn, is clearly defined (and subscribed to): brains, beauty and breeding come as surplus to requirements with regards to women if they are not accompanied by docility, tenderness or submissiveness:

> I was told I was the luckiest man in the world. She's got the three things that really matter in a wife, everyone said, breeding, brains and beauty. But I never had a moment's happiness with her. She was incapable of love, tenderness or decency. You thought I was mad. Perhaps I was, perhaps I am mad. It wouldn't make for sanity, would it, living with the devil?[6]

Although the tendency to present women in a stereotyped fashion was frequent, it did not remain uncontested. Women writers in particular resisted this stereotyping and populated their works with intelligent and self-assertive women who, although enclosed in the domestic space, and seldom questioning the patriarchal order, managed to achieve their objectives, had a voice of their own and made their influence be felt in the ghetto of conventions where they found themselves contained. Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, is a prominent example.

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[6] Maxim de Winter's indictment of Rebecca in the filmed version: *Rebecca*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, perf. Lawrence Olivier and Joan Fontaine, 1940, videocassette, Braveworld, 1992.

Her world was essentially masculine: a world ruled by men and run for their own advantage. Men occupied the public space and women were enclosed in the domestic space. The two spheres seldom came together, or only came together on special occasions, for tea or for a ball. In such a society, gentlewomen's only possible career was marriage which became a question of survival. Women needed men in possession of good fortunes in order to be well-situated in life and lead a comfortable existence. Furthermore, women were supposed to be passive and submissive and their function was to be decorative in society and comforting at home, an appendage to men. But Elizabeth does not conform to the role society expects from her. She does not want to be considered a stereotype like the ones that teemed in the sentimental novels written at that time. She is a sensible, rational woman with independent character and initiative, as can be appreciated when she refuses Mr Collins' marriage proposal in the following terms:

> I do assure you, Sir, that I have no pretension whatever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable man. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed. I thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.[7]

We live in a postmodern, postcolonial world in which old absolutes have been destroyed and monolithic categories no longer apply. After the horrible experiences of the two World Wars, the systematic undermining and eventual disintegration of the great territorial empires, the death of God, and the institutionalisation of capitalism both as an economic system and as a philosophy, we can no longer pretend that old categories and representations still hold true in our society. Whether feminism is a consequence of or a catalyst for the increasing upstart position of women in twentieth-century society, I cannot tell. But there is no denying that since the emergence and development of the feminist movement in the 60s, women have challenged their role as the humble monitresses of the fireside comforts of the domestic space and have penetrated domains that had traditionally been beyond their reach. Although men outnumber women in the professional sphere, and, on average, earn higher salaries,

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[7] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 148-149.

women have penetrated the public space. Consequently, our 'developed' societies proudly display female lawyers, managers or politicians who are competent professionals without sacrificing their motherly instincts and who, although still intent on finding Mr Right, do not need Mr Right for their subsistence, and are not foolish enough to expect any frog to be transformed into 'Prince Charming' on their first kiss.

In turn, representations of women in literature and culture, have undergone a significant transformation, paralleling the changes taking place in society. These transformations are being introduced by women (not necessarily feminists) and men, and analysed by feminist critics, who delight in comparing them to patriarchally-constructed types and encouraging the undermining of patriarchal absolutes.[8] The efforts by feminist movements have not been ineffectual and we cannot deny that our western society is, nowadays, a better place for women: women enjoy an independence they had not even dreamt of in the past, and occupy all sorts of posts in the public sphere. However, it would be naïve to pretend that a society where wife-battering, sexual harassment, inequality in the professional sphere or prostitution are still frequent, is one in which men and women live on terms of equality. Whether we like it or not, ours is, essentially, still a patriarchal world where women mostly occupy peripheral positions around a male-constructed centre.

At the moment, and in spite of the efforts to represent women in a positive way and the striving of some people to transcend the male / female dichotomy in an attempt to understand humanity, there are still too many examples of patriarchal / masculinist representations in literature and culture that need to be highlighted since they contribute to the confirmation and validation of the male-dominated world in the collective subconscious. In these patriarchal constructs, women are still presented as either *femmes fatales* that disrupt the family and put the masculine world into jeopardy (the film *Fatal Attraction* being an outstanding example), or as homely wives, sisters or mothers, completely dependant on men for their survival, well-being and comfort. And, as I show in the following sections of this chapter, Wilbur Smith's narratives, faithful to the tradition of adventure stories, still rely on a patriarchal outlook of the

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[8] See **Appendix 3** for a brief outline of the different types of feminism that exist.

heroines that populate his novels, and construct them in opposition to almost omnipotent men whose masculinity they highlight.

## 5.3. Imperialist adventure stories: a masculinist world and endorsement of patriarchy

In his introduction to a 1957 reprint of *She*, Stuart Cloete, the South African writer, maintains that "he was brought up on Rider Haggard and G.A.Henty" and that his books "were the literary milk of [his] boyhood from which [he has] never been weaned."[9] But Haggard's, and other imperialist adventure writers', influence was not purely literary. In remembering the impact on him of his early reading, Graham Greene recalls that *King Solomon's Mines* was above all other books at that time:

> This book did not perhaps provide the crisis, but it certainly influenced the future.
> If it had not been for that romantic tale of Allan Quatermain, Sir Henry Curtis,
> Captain Good, and above all, the ancient witch Gagool, would I at nineteen have
> studied the appointment list of the Colonial Office and very nearly picked on the
> Nigerian Navy for a career?[10]

Imperialist adventure stories not only aimed at providing "all the big and little boys"[11] who read them with fantasy worlds into which to retreat. They were more than sheer entertainment; they were vehicles of ideology. In fact, they were overt propaganda of empire. The western cult of adventure was a way the forces of imperialism expressed themselves; the adventure tale was the literary form of the expression of those values, and without them it would not have developed. As MacDonald puts it, "the adventure story incorporates social propaganda [...] the texts of adventure write a programme for imperialism."[12]

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[9] Stuart Cloete qtd. in Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, 60.
[10] Graham Greene qtd. in Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, 60.
[11] H.Rider Haggard, dedication, *King Solomon's Mines* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, Oxford World's Classics, 1989) 1.
[12] Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire. Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994) 210.

The ideological burden in imperialist adventure is well-trodden ground in recent literary criticism, and I have already dealt with it when I have outlined the defining characteristics of imperialist adventure. Consequently, I will only focus on one of the ideological tendencies of imperial narratives, masculinism and patriarchy, which Wilbur Smith maintains in his adventure stories and which gives them their particular masculinist and pro-patriarchal slant. This masculinist, patriarchal ethos is not unique to imperialist adventure, though. As I have shown above, a masculinist, patriarchal (and even misogynist in its implications) undercurrent runs through the fiction produced throughout history. But it is in adventure where this undercurrent becomes particularly obvious. Adventure focuses on the values of manliness, both in isolation and in comradeship to the extent that it has become the liturgy of masculinity. As Martin Green puts it, "Adventure is reading for men, not for readers. Usually adventure lives in the Siberia of literature, unvisited by either traditional scholars or radical feminists - far removed from respectability, though romantically attractive to male literary rebels for that reason."[13] Indeed, adventure is largely a male genre: it focuses on men and their exploits, whether military, revolutionary or political; men are presented as brave and courageous, "glorious creature[s] with a gleaming helm on [their] head[s],"[14] absolutely distinct from the heroes, or rather antiheroes, featured in the 'books of the unbrave', like Stephen Dedalus and Gregorio Samsa. Women are either absent or play small roles within the limitations established by patriarchal superstructures.

This supremacist presentation of men in adventure is not gratuitously undertaken; it is not a mindless perpetuation of a masculinist literary tradition, but linked to the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the capitalist system it served. The Enlightenment promoted the ennoblement of men to the detriment (and consequent enserfment) of women and other forms of humanity. Humanity was, in fact, divided into men and those who were not: women, children, unmanly homosexuals, the sick, the aged, or the infirm. This division favoured the advance of the capitalist system (together with the other economic endeavours it necessitated for its progression, such

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[13] Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 5.
[14] Martin Green, *Seven Types of Adventure Tale*, 182.

as colonialism and the ruthless exploitation of far-off territories), which required a sharp division between work and home, men and women, the productive and the unproductive. In the hermetic tradition, matter was suffused with spirit; capitalism called for a divorce, with men becoming the absolute manipulators of matter (technology, science and progress). Adventure, through its systematic endorsement of the separate spheres and its presentation of heroic masculinity, served the capitalist ethos as faithfully as it served imperialism, promoting men and patriarchy as the foundation over which a capitalist system could be constructed. The same masculinist and patriarchal bias is still embedded in recent adventure fictions, whether narrative or cinematic, produced in the last decades.

Among adventures of all kinds, however, imperialist adventure stories were, and still are, the ones that more eagerly celebrate masculinity, or more particularly what Bristow calls "robust manhood:"[15] the hardy virtues of a masculine race marked by sturdy conscientiousness and undespairing courage, patriotism, public spirit, sagacity and a strong good sense. Imperialist adventure had no room for "simpering, dainty, kid-gloved weaklings" but only for "stalwart, muscular, dauntless young braves, brimful of push and energy, and royally endowed with every attribute that goes to make up a peerless and magnificent manhood - the very pick and choice of the world's glorious ones."[16] Through imperialist adventure boys were taught the *ne plus ultra* of exaggerated manliness. These stories stressed the importance of boys being inured from childhood to trifle risks and slight dangers of every possible description if they were to become true men, able to face the challenges of adult life. As Ballantyne wrote: "The muff of a boy who from natural disposition, or early training, or both, is mild diffident, and gentle [...] (if he is also afraid of rain and dogs and indifferent about swimming) will, when he becomes a man, find himself unable to act in the common emergencies of life; to protect a lady from insolence; to guard his home from robbery; or to save his own child should it chance to fall into the water."[17] Above all, they taught them the necessary qualities to survive in the outposts of the British empire: to be bold, straight-forward, cocky, and ready to play a young man's part, not

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[15] Joseph Bristow, introduction, *The Oxford Book of Adventure Stories*, ed. Joseph Bristow, xiii.
[16] Mark Twain qtd. in Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male*, 162.
[17] Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, 121.

shrinking from shedding blood or wielding arms if necessity arises, eager to fight and to give orders; in short, not to be milksops.

Also, imperialist adventure helped to define adventurous manhood as opposed to women and bourgeois masculinity.[18] Thus, real men are defined as having a touch of the devil in them (they play with fire, gunpowder, cannons), while women are angels; men are brave and courageous and playful (playfulness, of course, does not go very far in real men; it knows its place for seriousness is dominant), women are nervous and hysterical; men conquer and expand territories, women stay at home.

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[18] This ideal of masculinity is condensed in Allan Quatermain and Sir Henry Curtis in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1985) and *Allan Quatermain* (1887). Together, they emerge as "embodiments of manliness." (Wendy R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire. A Critical Study of British Imperial Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 61) Allan Quatermain is "a self-reliant man of many talents. A trader, a hunter of wild animals, a warrior, and, after he finds his fortune in *King Solomon's Mines*, a propertied country gentleman." (Wendy R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire*, 67) He is a man of action, "more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen," (*King Solomon's Mines* 6) who feels ill-at-ease in domestic or civilised spaces and, therefore, exclaims in *Allan Quatermain*: "I have had a long enough spell of civilisation. I'm going back to the veldt" (10) or "I am off to my native wilds." (12) Sir Henry Curtis is afflicted by the same sense of restlessness while in England:

> I'm tired of it too, dead-tired of doing nothing except play the squire in a country that is sick of squires. For a year or more I have been getting as restless as an old elephant who scents danger. I am always dreaming of Kukuanaland and Gagool and King Solomon's Mines. I can assure you I have become the victim of an almost unaccountable craving. I am sick of shooting pheasants and partridges, and want to have a go at some large game again. There, you know the feeling - when one has once tasted brandy and water, milk becomes insipid to the palate. (*Allan Quatermain* 11)

Both heroes are pacifists at heart, but do not hesitate to use violence if necessity arises; they are men who do not recoil from even the most overwhelming obstacles, for, as Henry Curtis asserts:

> [...] there is no journey upon this earth that a man may not make if he sets his heart to it. There is nothing, Umbopa, that he cannot do, there are no mountains he may not climb, there are no deserts he cannot cross; save a mountain and a desert of which you are spared the knowledge, if love leads him and he holds his life in his hand counting it as nothing, ready to keep it or to lose it as Providence may order. (*King Solomon's Mines* 67)

Although both heroes have different physical appearances, they nonetheless conform to ideals of adventurous masculine build-ups. Allan Quatermain is middle-aged, verging on old age: he is 55 in *King Solomon's Mines*, 63 in *Allan Quatermain*. He is a "small, withered, yellow-faced man [...], with thin hands, large brown eyes, a head of grizzled hair cut short and standing up like half-worn scrubbing brush," who, still in old age, retains the qualities that won him the nickname 'Macumazahn': "he who keeps a bright look-out at night, or, in vulgar English, a sharp fellow who is not to be taken in." (*Allan Quatermain* 9). Sir Henry is an example of handsome bulkiness; the epitome of the beautiful and strong Anglo-Saxon race:

> What a splendid man he is! Calm, powerful, clear-cut features, large grey eyes, yellow beard and hair - altogether a magnificent specimen of the higher type of humanity. Nor did his form belie his face. I have never seen wider shoulders or a deeper chest. Indeed, Sir Henry's girth is so great that, though he is six feet two high, he does not strike one as a tall man. (*Allan Quatermain* 9)

All quotations from the novels are taken from the following editions: H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, Oxford World's Classics, 1989) and H. Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain* (London: Penguin Books, Penguin Popular Classics, 1995).

Bourgeois men, on the other hand, are not absolutely despised; after all, they are the breadwinners and provide for the well-being of the family; but they lack a distinct personality, are cowards and blustering bullies. Imperialist adventure not only defined the characteristics of men in general, but the qualities of an Anglo-Saxon race of brave men ready to lead, keep order, maintain discipline, and help run an empire - the qualities that gave British men the authority to take possession of most of the globe. Consequently, figures such as the pioneer and the frontiersman were presented as national icons as well as prototypes of virile men, possessing "few of the emasculated, milk-and-water moralities of the pseudo-philanthropist" but possessing, instead, a very high degree of "the stern, manly qualities that are invaluable to a nation."[19] All in all, the nationalist discourse as it emerged from imperialist adventure stories, as well as from other narratives telling the story of progress of the island race, presented a nation of Great Men:

> The master narrative of Britishness, it is constituted by numerous micro-narratives about the nation's Great Men: the success stories of poets and politicians, administrators and engineers, and, of course, soldiers and sailors. With the occasional, troublesome exception of a Queen Bess, a Florence Nightingale or a Margaret Thatcher, the national epic has been predominantly a man's story, and masculine prowess the dominant expression of national character.[20]

In the imperialist adventure's romantic constructs, the prototypical imperial hero is wedded to duty and the companionship of his fellows, and finds in the colonies the perfect framework within which to test his manhood. Consequently, the colonies, together with the dangers encountered there, reach almost symbolic proportions in imperialist adventure; they allow heroes to undergo true 'rites de passage' from simpering boyhood to courageous manhood. Against a colonial setting, heroes have to face elemental nature, undergo a process of toughening, fight dangerous savages and compete against other men. The ones who manage to emerge victorious from the ordeals encountered there become real men, with manhood becoming the superior term in masculinist value-bearing polarities: they become men and not boys, men and

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[19] Theodore Roosevelt qtd. in John M. Mackenzie, "The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times," *Manliness and Morality. Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 178.

[20] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 13.

not slaves, men and not mice, men and not women. Colonies, furthermore, become a symbol of freedom and virility, offering escape from the stifling cities of the old country and domestic slavery. In those imperialist tales, the accent, indeed, falls on masculinity; a masculinity that life in the colonies boosts up. In the colonies, real men stand out from lesser forms of humanity.

These narratives not only celebrate ideal masculinity. By constructing images of men's natural power, they endorse and contribute to the implementation of the patriarchal order, with patriarchy viewed as a relationship in which men dominate, exploit and oppress women and, thus, promotes unequal relations between the genders. As Hartmann has defined the term, patriarchy is "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women."[21] Although not all men wield the same power over women, and men of low social classes or of colours other than white may occupy subaltern positions below educated white or coloured women, patriarchy has traditionally guaranteed the dominance of men over women within patriarchal constructs. It has also served as a key determinant of how men and women are represented in popular narratives, in which men are presented in power positions while women are relegated to domesticity and endowed with what are regarded as intrinsically feminine characteristics such as passivity, sweetness and submissiveness. Adventure in general, as I have shown in chapter 3 when I explain the role of heroines in adventure, has traditionally endorsed this patriarchal construction of masculinity and femininity, and imperialist adventure is not an exception. Faithful to the patriarchal context of nineteenth-century society, to the true conditions of life in the colonies, and to literary tradition, imperialist adventure subscribes to the idea that considerations of worldly aggrandisement belong to men and does not allow women to occupy power positions within or without family structures. The family, if depicted at all, is pictured as a patriarchal band within which relations are hierarchically organised around a father figure, the Father, who occupies the top position above children and women. Boys are taught to be like the father and

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[21] Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism. Towards a More Progressive Union," *The Second Wave. A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 101.

never dispute his authority; if family disputes arise, they are more often between siblings than generational. While husbands are all that is manly and fiery, wives are 'consolers', 'restrainers', reminders of religion; pale, timid figures and largely a drag on the adventurous project. All in all, imperialist adventure reinforces patriarchal authority and justifies, by implication, the patriarchal state, with the family pictured as a microcosm of the larger community or nation.

As the definition of patriarchy provided above stresses, patriarchy relies on "male dominated kinship systems"[22] for its existence. Men bond with other men in order to promote or maintain their authority in society, their material power and control over women. Adventure stories, therefore, being patriarchal in essence, further sustain patriarchy by promoting solidarity among men and furnishing readers with examples of loyal comradeship between friends or men united together, even men belonging to different social classes, against a common evil. Examples of manly love are abundant in adventure tales (Porthos, Athos and Aramis, Huck and Jim, Kim and the Lama, Holly and Leo), where friendship with other men is regarded as an essential ingredient of manliness. This friendship is not to be regarded with the post-Freudian suspicion of intense emotional friendships between men. In order to understand the concept of manly love in the nineteenth century, we need to ignore twentieth century developments and examine a tradition which stretches back in western civilisation to Ancient Greece and Rome, which Christianity incorporated,[23] and which further developed in the Middle Ages with the appearance of the concept of a chivalric love between knights. Although there are patterns of erotic appreciation between young men, images of manly glamour proliferate and relationships between men are stronger than those with women, the affection men feel for each other is not homoerotic, but homosocial: the outcome of an intense desire for men to stand united against a common evil - the stasis and restraint, 'the reality principle', women and domesticity epitomise. When the fantasies of delight to be among men run the risk of turning

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[22] Eve Kosofsky, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 3.

[23] The words of David upon hearing of the death of Jonathan: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love for me was wonderful, passing the love of women," (2 Samuel ch. I. v.26) are a clear example of manly love as it appeared in Christian philosophy. qtd in Jeffrey Richards, "Passing the Love of Women: Manly Love and Victorian Society," *Manliness and Morality*, ed. J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, 92.

erotic, of the homosocial becoming homoerotic, death ensues. The protagonist of the Australian film *Gallipoli*, for instance, is destined to die, while Dumas' Musketeers do not need to; after all, they have not loved so intensely.

The heightened importance male bonding takes on to the detriment of male-female relationships in adventure, a pattern which is still to be found in most of the examples of adventure produced nowadays, is also a direct consequence of the structuring of society in the nineteenth century, when imperialist adventure stories emerged, developed and proliferated. Victorian England was a male-dominated society. For the upper middle classes life revolved around all-male institutions: the public school, the university, the armed forces, the church, parliament, the club, the City. Women were sidelined and manly love came to be regarded as finer, nobler and more fulfilling. In a society controlled by clergymen, schoolmasters, dons and army officers, masculine bonds were not only an expression of a particular milieu, but a means to preserve the social and cultural conditions of a male-dominated world. The adventure tales written at that time further supported the patriarchal status quo, devaluing and segregating women, and favouring non-sexual friendship between equals, men of similar age, rank, habits and sentiments, attracted by each other's characters.

## 5.4. Wilbur Smith and the imperialist adventure tradition

Wilbur Smith is considered one of the greatest and most popular writers of adventure, his fame and status parallel to that of H.Rider Haggard in the nineteenth century. In his books, 'action follows action, mystery is piled on mystery', violence and sex are included in generous amounts; all in all, enough excitement is generated to take us out of ourselves. We identify with the hero and accompany him in his quest beset with perils, face the same dangers he faces and, finally, rejoice with him when he overcomes hazardous trials and difficulties and accomplishes some important mission. Indeed, Wilbur Smith is a great master of 'entertainmentship'. When we plunge into the world he brings to life in his novels, we cross the bridge that separates

reality from imagination in order to escape the boredom of our ordinary experience. In this materialistic age of realism, Smith's novels come as a relief, since, in the tales he unfolds, we do not have to face reality. His narrative, like the tornado that propelled Dorothy to Oz's fantasy world, brings us to a land where wars are only the arena where larger-than-life heroes are created for posterity; where protagonists, endowed with 'the Midas touch', make fortunes overnight; and where all emotions are lived with an intensity which make our most ardent 'real life' feelings dull by contrast.

Smith's novels under analysis, however, do not take us to 'any' fantasy world. *When the Lion Feeds, The Sound of Thunder, A Sparrow Falls, The Burning Shore, Power of the Sword, Rage, A Time to Die, Golden Fox, Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon* take us to pre-colonial and colonial South Africa (including Afrikaner 'colonial' rule under apartheid) in particular and Africa in general.[24] And to take us to these particular landscapes Smith utilises the imperialist adventure tradition, which sediments in the structure of Smith's narratives as a substratum that determines how Smith constructs his adventures and their ideological slant. As Dawson explains:

> Jameson suggests that any particular adventure story will incorporate within itself aspects of the prior generic tradition, which have become embedded into the structure of the genre. These inherited forms of adventure [...] constitute a range of possibilities that define what 'an adventure narrative' is and the parameters beyond which a story ceases to be an adventure and becomes something else, at any particular historical moment. The sedimented content that defines this inherited tradition can be seen as the record of past connections wit and between specific cultural imaginaries.[25]

As exponents of imperialist adventure, Smith's narratives contain the elements that belong to the imperialist adventure tradition, including its masculinist heroes and its patriarchal parameters.

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[24] *When the Lion Feeds* and *The Sound of Thunder* take place in colonial South Africa in the background of the Zulu and the Boer wars respectively. *A Sparrow Falls* and *The Burning Shore* develop during the first decades of twentieth-century South Africa and Namibia (German West Africa) respectively, tracing the formation of the Union of South Africa. *Power of the Sword* and *Rage* narrate the events that led to the implementation of the apartheid state. *Golden Fox* focuses on the events occurred during the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa. *A Time to Die* moves out of South Africa and develops in post-independence Moçambique and Zimbabwe, mainly to reveal the chaos created by African peoples once white colonial rule has been removed. *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*, the latest instalments of the saga, on the other hand, take place in pre-colonial southern and eastern Africa during the seventeenth century.

[25] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 57.

Smith's super masculinist heroes, whom I refer to as Courtney heroes throughout my dissertation,[26] therefore, are reworks of the imperial heroes that populate the narratives of Haggard, Buchan or Smith's other literary 'predecessors'. Like these narratives, Smith's novels turn around prototypical heroes, fighting fit protagonists engaged in epic struggles; they feature boyish bravery and manly courage; they endorse the centrality of the potent muscled body; they create masculine spaces; they stress ultra-masculine behaviour and mannerisms. In what follows, I want to analyse these and how Smith uses these potent 'imperial' heroes in order to create a paradigm of hegemonic masculinity, figures of desirable virility or ideal selves of the kind that men struggle for but can seldom become. Hegemonic masculinity, Donaldson argues, is "the culturally idealised form of masculine character."[27] Being a 'construct' hegemonic masculinity needs to be 'constructed', and to be hegemonic (meaning triumphant over other forms of masculinity or femininity), it needs to be constructed in opposition to an inferior Other. Wilbur Smith's construction of hegemonic masculinity, therefore, does not only consist of creating a hero endowed with all sort of qualities traditionally regarded as manly, but constructing him in relation to other inferior masculinities and subservient femininities. Taking these aspects into consideration, I also analyse the way Smith presents men and women in order to validate 'male power', and how he presents white men and black men in order to construct 'white male power' in the tradition of imperialist adventure that systematically denigrates white women and black people in order to maximise the might of the white hero. Furthermore, I study how Smith manipulates his narratives to construct patriarchal kinship systems that validate patriarchy at large. Smith, I defend, portrays the perfect patriarchal 'paradise'. In his milieu, men bond with other men, strengthening the tight-knit threads of the patriarchal tapestry populated by virile, courageous, enterprising men that form the infrastructure of the patriarchal socio-

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[26] In **Appendix 4** I outline who the Courtney heroes are and what is the relationship they share as well as the relationships they have with other characters I mention in my dissertation. By Courtney heroes I mean those who are direct descendants of Sean Courtney I, together with his seventeenth-century predecessors. I also include men who do not have the Courtney name but are related to the Courtneys through marriage and who are given heroic status in the narratives: Mark Anders and Blaine Malcomess. In **Appendix 4** I also outline Wilbur Smith's biography; I mention the different works he has written; and I provide a summary of each of the Courtney novels and a list of the main fictional characters in the saga.
[27] Mike Donaldson, "What is Hegemonic Masculinity?" *Theory and Society* 22 (1993): 646-647.

economic framework. By contrast, women are marginalised to the outskirts of society and are portrayed as 'wives', clothed in docility and ready and willing to acquiesce to men's whims and desires. Women who dare to trespass the limits of the ghetto of domestic femininity, on the other hand, are presented as wicked or somehow malfunctioning (mad, diseased, demonic, predators, pervert) and are eliminated from the narrative. Indeed, in Smith's patriarchal ethos, the only place where women have some power and freedom of manoeuvre is within the family, which is presented as the sole repository of love, understanding, compassion, respect and sexuality. In fact, Smith defends domesticity as long as it does not interfere with the adventurous strivings of the hero.

Like other examples of imperialist adventure, therefore, Smith's narratives depict a masculinist world and defend and naturalise sexism, white hegemonic male power and patriarchy, through the figure of the powerful, wild, supremacist, 'imperial' Courtney heroes. By the sheer popularity of these fictions Smith makes this ideology available to a large readership. Smith, Graham Lord explains, "publishes a fat new novel every other year and [...] each sells about three million copies that earn him at least £4 million."[28] If we take into account that Smith's novels have sold millions of copies all over the world, Smith's fiction has a great potential for ideological reinforcement in our contemporary world. Smith claims he is no message writer and that he is simply telling exciting adventure stories against the historical backdrop of colonial and pre-colonial Africa and South Africa. And yet, readers take in more than just Smith's 'exoticana', historical data and generous doses of excitement, to which he furthermore gives an aura of credibility that validates both what he describes and his ideological slant.[29] I believe that - although I do not think the quality of a text should

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[28] Graham Lord, "From Taxman to Millionaire," *The Daily Telegraph* [United Kingdom] 17 Feb. 1996: A4.

[29] In fact, Smith loves to play with verisimilitude and builds his narratives in such a way as to make his readers believe that his stories are based on true fact. This is especially true of the narratives that are not forged on the substructure of actual historical data. For example, Smith claims that the story narrated in *River God*, a saga of invented ancient Egypt pharaohs, is a transcription of ten scrolls written by Taita, an eunuch slave, that Dr. Duraid ibn al Simma, another fictional character, discovered in a tomb on the west bank in the Valley of the Nobles. Dr. ibn al Simma, Smith continues, asked the author to assist in the transcription of the scrolls and narrate the story in a style that would make it more accessible to the modern reader; the outcome of this endeavour is *River God*.

In *The Seventh Scroll*, the second part of *River God*, Smith continues with his game of make-believe. The protagonist of the novel, Nicholas Quenton-Harper, is approached by Royan al Simma, late

be quantified in terms of its ideological content - Smith confirms masculinist / sexist / patriarchal myths and stereotypes, reinforces ideologically constructed world-views, and justifies prejudices in his narratives. I am not saying that the ideology of the novels determines social behaviour, that men, for example, develop a masculinist and white supremacist attitude only from reading his novels. I think that the effect of Smith's novels is to reinforce existing world views within a tradition of popular imperialist adventure writing that predetermines the content of Smith's narrative and serves as an indication for readers as to what to expect when getting hold of any of his narratives. They are not primary sites of ideology, but contribute to their perpetuation; as Roger Bromley puts it in his Marxist analysis of the relation between popular narratives and class domination:

> Popular literature is a local instance of the generalisation / naturalisation of class domination - it has a function in the hegemonic process. It is not a primary site of ideology (cf. the educational system, for example) but it is one of the secondary areas where ideological components are represented, and reinforced, as for the ruling class, the class struggle has to be fought constantly and on as many fronts as possible.[30]

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Dr. al Simma's wife, to help her find the tomb of the great Pharaoh Mamose following the directions in Taita's scrolls. Quenton-Harper is presented as a close-friend of Wilbur Smith who had always wished the story to be true. After reading the last sentence in *River God*, "[s]omewhere in the Abyssinian mountains near the source of the Blue Nile, the mummy of Tenus still lies in the unviolated tomb of Pharaoh Mamose," Quenton-Harper had even called Duraid to ascertain whether the story was real since it conjured up a world of adventure that Quenton-Harper found very appealing. Smith is aware of the fact that Quenton-Harper's enthusiasm and his final acceptance to accompany Royan in her quest, together with Smith's introduction of archaeological data, will not grant the story the status of true fact, since it is an example of popular narrative and he knows that popular fiction reduces "what should [be] an important and serious academic subject to the level of popular entertainment, rather like what Spielberg [has] done to palaeontology with his park full of dinosaurs." (*Scroll* 26) So Smith further supports his claim to the story's truthfulness by introducing an indictment of popular fiction in the terms critics have always used to condemn this type of fiction. He asserts that the author takes too many poetic licences to make the facts as palatable and readable as possible to a wide lay public, but that people with scientific training "[revolt] against such popularisation of something so unique and wonderful." (*Scroll* 26) He proceeds by asserting that in spite of the liberties with facts and characters contained in the story, the essentials are true and that Duraid's half-share of the royalties from *River God* had financed almost a year of research and exploration. Smith acknowledges the 'pastime' nature of the narratives, but makes a conscious effort to make readers accept, or at least entertain the possibility of, the veracity of the story. So, as these examples prove, Smith uses any device available to achieve a state of credibility. As he himself acknowledges: "If the reader does not believe in the characters and identify with them, then the story teller has failed. I use any device that comes to hand to achieve this state of credibility." (Isabel Santaulària, "Lost Among the Stars' Uncoded Messages. In Conversation with Wilbur Smith," *Multi-Cultural Voices*, ed. Brian Worsfold, 117).

[30] Roger Bromley, "Natural Boundaries: the Social Function of Popular Fiction," *The Study of Popular Fiction*, ed. Bob Ashley, 150.

This is why the analysis of Smith's perpetuation of imperialist / masculinist ideas in his fiction is so pertinent; the analysis of Smith's representation of masculinity reveals how the imperialist tradition remains alive and how it serves the function of helping to maintain male power and control within patriarchy.

Literature explicates literature and the explanation of adventure and imperialist adventure provided in chapters 3 and 4 facilitates the understanding of Smith's 'masculinist / patriarchal tapestry'. Yet, the literary tradition Smith belongs to does not help to explicate why Smith recreates the imperial premise in contemporary society. Dawson explains that apart from tradition and past connections, one has to take other aspects into account when analysing adventure. He writes:

> Any adventure text [...] involves an encounter between the historically formed motifs and sedimented structure of the genre and new developments in the cultural imaginaries resonant at the moment of its production.[31]

So in order to fully understand Wilbur Smith's novels and his masculinist (patriarchal, etc.) approach one has to be aware of broader trends (social / historical) 'resonant at the moment of their production'. So the questions I attempt to answer in the parts that follow are not just how Smith follows the imperialist tradition and constructs men, blacks and women accordingly, but basically why Smith writes within this tradition and what broad purposes it serves. In order to explain this, I look at both the broader social context in the 'west' and the particular historical circumstances in South Africa. In the part that follows this one, therefore, I claim his novels are a response to a social climate in western society that - even though it has not yet led to a complete transformation of masculinity / patriarchy and has not eradicated sexism from our society - has at least challenged the power men have in the western world and has influenced a re-formulation of what masculinity is and should be in the future, leading to what I call a 'crisis of masculinity' in the following chapter. From this perspective, Smith's imperialist construction of masculinity emerges as a response to uncongenial social trends; his fantasy landscapes and men as 'respites' for modern men, who can entertain an imagining of power and virility at least in the fantasy world Smith creates.

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[31] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 57.

This broad social climate, I follow, conditions how Smith constructs his white men in contrast with other men and women. In the final part, I take the 'micro-context' of South Africa to reach similar conclusions. I analyse how the apartheid and post-apartheid context exacerbates Smith's necessity to utilise the imperial framework in order to validate white British might. Taking this context into account, I study how it determines not only Smith's representation of white masculinity, but also the perpetuation of colonial stereotypes and imperial racial assumptions in Smith's portrayal of black men.
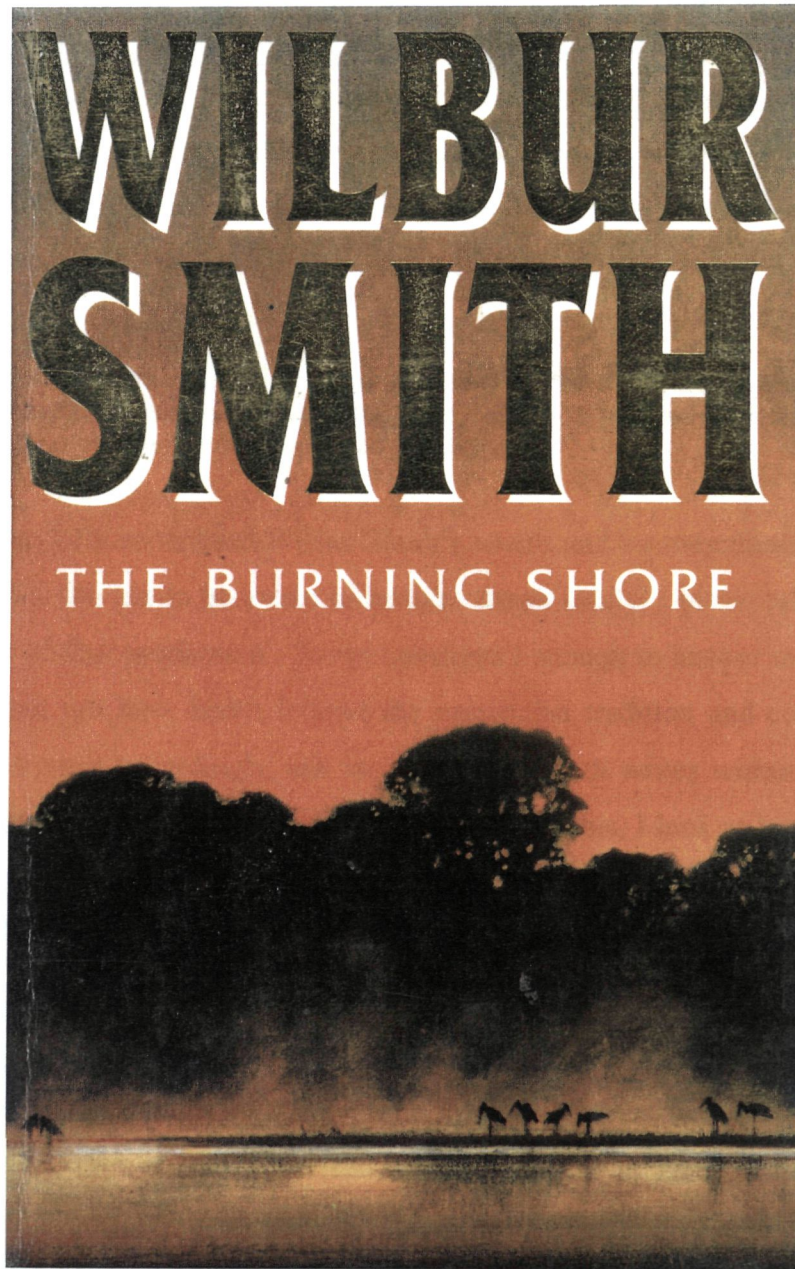
Figure 5. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *The Burning Shore* (London: Mandarin, 1992). Illustration by John Harris.

# Part II

## Masculinity in western society and
## Wilbur Smith's representation of white men

**Chapter 6: Masculinity in crisis. Challenging gender constructs and masculinity. Wilbur Smith's narratives as a response**

**6.1. Gender and male domination as constructs: coercion and resistance**

Masculinity and femininity are not predetermined by sex or sexuality. Symptomatic of this assertion is the fact that certain types of male homosexuals identify with cultural dominant images of misogynous maleness, express a sexual preference for rough and uniformed men, and overstage their masculinity by dressing in an overtly manly way in order to confirm their membership in the privileged male society; or the fact that male transvestites or drag-queens, whatever their sexual preferences, exhibit feminine characteristics and even exaggerate them, overdo their faces, wear hectic colourful dresses that set off their 'feminine' attributes (breasts and bottom), show a preference for wonderful high-heel shoes, and over-elaborate what are regarded as feminine mannerisms and idiosyncrasies; or the fact that there is a tendency among butch-lesbians to favour 'masculine' ways of dressing, short hair, and 'tomboy' behaviour; or even the fact that female yuppies pride themselves on their enterprising spirit, taste for risk and aggressiveness, which are regarded as masculine traits and which place women on an equal footing with men.

What all these examples point to is the fact that gender identity is performative. You are born a sexed being, with specific physical attributes that immediately determine your inclusion in either one or another gender category: male or female. But genes alone do not determine your behaviour. Once inside society, you are expected to rehearse or perform a masculine or feminine role depending on your sex, but which you may decide not to abide by depending on your sexual preferences or your attitude towards life (consider Boy George, for example, who chose to make up his face and dress in a feminine way in order to protest against unequal gender constructions and homophobic tendencies in society, or simply to shock the audiences

by destabilising social and cultural expectations of what is believed to be normative masculinity). Cross-dressing and transvestism, therefore, are particularly revealing for they both demonstrate the performative nature of gendered behaviour. Although different in their implications,[1] both draw attention to the fact of simulation or acting. As Buchbinder puts it, "the signs of gender identity can be entirely self-referential (that is, not referring outside themselves to any actual sexual identity) and hence, in an important way, fictitious."[2] Such an insight questions common assumptions about the naturalness of sexual difference and the fixedness of the male / female gender polarity and, consequently, leads interestingly to the idea that the 'acceptable' heterosexual gendered identities in our patriarchal society are impersonations, learned by all men and women in our culture, but not natural and essential.

This assumption is not without contention, though. The popular belief persists that masculine or feminine behavioural traits are innate (essences) in the individual; that biology determines destiny so women and men are different in every respect: intellectually, emotionally and in terms of their social relationships and careers; and that they are creatures presumed to be ideally biologically equipped for a variety of non-interchangeable sex-linked roles. According to essentialists, therefore, and as Kenneth Clatterbaugh phrases it, "it is natural for men to be the providers and protectors of women; it is natural for men to be politically and socially dominant. Masculine behaviours and attitudes are manifestations of [...] men's natural tendencies as selected through an evolutionary process."[3] Essentialist theorists tend to base their assumptions on supposedly empirical observation. Thus, their research proves, for example, that there are consistent sex differences in aggressiveness, males being more aggressive and, consequently, more dominant and powerful, than females. Evidence substantiates this idea: male children display aggressive tendencies; it is mostly men who have traditionally become soldiers in different wars; wife-battering is a visible

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[1] Men who cross-dress as women allow for their real sex to be glimpsed through the signs, gestures and behaviour intended to convince us of the other gender; male transvestites, on the other hand, do not wish their impersonation to be discovered and may even resort to trans-sexualism to create physically and permanently out of the person of their sex someone of the opposite sex.

[2] David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1994) 52.

[3] Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity. Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society* (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1990) 9.

social phenomenon in contemporary society; aggressiveness has characterised the performance of male politicians such as Sadam Hussein and Ronald Reagan; and history can be read as the story of warfare, massive slaughter and genocide by opposed male factions. However, the acceptability of such a theory of aggression is belied by the following factors. To start with, suggesting that aggression is essentially and fixedly male is undermined by the aggressiveness of, for instance, female politicians such as Margaret Thatcher; or by the existence of husband-battering in society. And secondly, and more importantly, essentialists just state the obvious, without taking into consideration the social, historical and cultural underpinnings that determine the structuring of our society. Saying that males are more aggressive, for instance, can be plausibly explained, as Lynne Segal suggests, "through the cultural influences of men's currently dominant position as a sex, and boys' greater exposure from an early age to physically boisterous and aggressive behaviour."[4] The greater visibility of men's violence in history, on the other hand, can be accounted for by taking into consideration the fact that the writing of history has traditionally been a male activity so that history is just "a chronicle of the decisions of 'great male leaders' [...] the wars they fought, the territories they conquered, the laws they made."[5] The prevalence of essentialism, however, continues unabated in spite of the fact that "the only consistent picture obtained from psychological sex-difference research is one where any sex-differences are small."[6] The belief in an essential generic bedrock that determines masculine as opposed to feminine characteristics, in fact, can be read as an effort to fix difference in an attempt to maintain men's pre-eminence in society based on supposed essential traits that determine this pre-eminence.[7]

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[4] Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 63.

[5] Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 80.

[6] Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 63.

[7] Essentialist theorists, therefore, believe that gendered behaviour is fixed and systematically condemn any attempt to suggest a change in traditional gender constructs. Thus, Michael Levin claims, "Moral prescriptions and social programs cannot be concocted in an empirical vacuum. It is senseless to make the sexes conform to an [...] ideal if they cannot conform to it. What is obviously unattainable cannot be the object of rational human effort." (qtd. in Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity*, 23) Or van den Berghe, for instance, stated, "Neither the National Organisation for Women nor the Equal Rights Amendment will change the biological bedrock of asymmetrical parental investment." See: Pierre van den Berghe, *Human Family Systems. An Evolutionary View* (New York: Elsevier, 1979) 196.

Gender, all in all, is not to be regarded as a unified essential category, unchanging and trans-historical, but as a social construct, resulting from intersecting historical, cultural and social factors at particular moments in a culture's life, and thus it is open to change and variation.[8] Biological differences are the unquestionable starting point for the construction of an edifice of gender differences, but it is not sexual difference alone that determines how we behave. There are codes for each sex, behavioural norms that are mapped on to the sexual body, which determine our performance as 'men' or as 'women', and which are learnt by imitation, interaction with others and peer-group / parental / institutional coercion. In our culture, masculinity and femininity are particularly constructed as a binary and coercive opposition, inscribing into individuals a coherent sexuality mirroring the roles of sanctioned heterosexuality and condemning or considering malfunctioning all males and females who fail to conform to 'acceptable' sexual roles. The roles that males and females are to perform, furthermore, are normative, regularised and homogenised, forcing men and women to conform to standardised gendered behaviour. These normative constructions are disseminated through a network of institutions essential to maintain sexual difference and to erect barriers that fix the boundaries between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' masculinity and femininity, what Foucault calls 'disciplinary systems' (the processes and institutions through which power is replicated and reinforced). Norms and standards of gender roles, therefore, are replicated and enforced through institutions such as schools, medicine, law, prisons, religion, family, sports, jobs, the church, the media and, of course, the representational

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[8] Brittan, for instance, explains that since gender does not exist outside history and culture, this means that masculinity and femininity are continuously subject to a process of reinterpretation. Consequently, versions of masculinity and femininity may vary over a limited time scale. The changes in American men's attitudes to marriage from the fifties to the eighties, for instance, illustrate this point:

> In the 1950s [...] there was a firm expectation [...] that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives. To do anything else was less than grown up and the man who wilfully deviated was judged to be somehow 'less than a man'. This expectation was supported by an enormous weight of expert opinion, moral sentiment and public bias, both within popular culture and the elite centres of academic wisdom. But by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, adult manhood was no longer burdened by the automatic expectation of marriage and bread-winning. The man who postpones marriage even into middle age, who avoids women who are likely to become financial dependants, who is dedicated to his own pleasures, is likely to be found not suspiciously deviant but 'healthy'. And this judgement, like the prior one, is supported by expert opinion and by the moral sentiments and biases of a considerable sector of the American middle class. (Ehrenreich qtd. in Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 1-2)

arts. These institutions emerge as essential "agents of socialisation."[9] They cannot produce mechanical effects in a growing person but they invite individuals "to participate in social practice in given terms."[10] The invitation may be, and often is coercive - accompanied by heavy pressure to accept - forcing men and women to conform to normative 'gender scripts', flattening dissent and ensuring compliance.

In western societies, the prescriptive masculine ideal that has been turned into 'normative parameter' has been fairly consistent since the nineteenth century, when most of the pillars of present-day society were erected - western expansion and colonial thrust, the emergence of middle-class individualism, liberal rationalism and capitalist production systems, the constitution of the separate spheres of the public and the domestic, and the popularisation of the health-club and competitive mentality that characterised public school education in Britain. This ideal or myth (understood not as falsehood, fable or legend but as cultural belief) of masculinity establishes a set of behaviours or attitudes to which all men have to adhere if they are to be socially adjusted, and demands that male individuals conform to pre-determined social notions of what it means to be manly. This stereotype of masculinity that men have to abide by was concisely described in one of the first pro-feminist books, the classic *The Liberated Man* by Warren Farrell,[11] where he lay down the 'ten commandments' of masculinity, which include: not expressing feeling or emotion; not revealing vulnerability; controlling women, being a top breadwinner; assuming no responsibilities for housework, excelling as athletes, scholars or warriors; relying on themselves rather than on others; and displaying characteristics that are supposedly male, such as rowdiness, aggression, restlessness, loud-mouthedness, impulsivity, fearlessness, courage or pluck. The type of masculinity currently regarded as prescriptive does not depart much from Farrell's depiction. Men are still nowadays supposed to be forceful, militaristic, hyper-competitive, risk-taking, adventurous, unemotional; real male-machines as defined by Fasteau (and which correspond to the heroic model of imperialist masculinity conveyed in the boys' books of G.A. Henty or

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[9] Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 23.

[10] R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power. Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) 195.

[11] Warren Farrell, *The Liberated Man* (New York: Bantam, 1975).

Rider Haggard, or even in the Romantic military poems of Tennyson and Robert Bridges):

> The male machine is a special kind of being, different from women, children, and men who don't measure up. He is functional, designed mainly for work. He is programmed to tackle jobs, override obstacles, attack problems, overcome difficulties, and always seize the offensive. [...] He has an armour plating which is virtually impregnable. His circuits are never scrambled or overrun by personal signals. [...] His relationships with other male machines is one of respect but not intimacy. [...] In fact, his internal circuitry is something of a mystery to him and is maintained primarily by humans of the opposite sex.[12]

Within the ideological structure of patriarchal culture, the roles males are expected to play are not only built on these mythical ideals, but also on the premise of the superiority of men (particularly white, straight, moneyed men) over women (and other minority groups such as coloured people and homosexuals), leading to blatant gender inequality. This is not to assume that all white men enjoy the same power in society; that, as Pfeil phrases it, "white straight masculinity comes in only one flavour" or that "all be-penised humans whose skins lack melanin and whose sexual preferences run towards humans with vaginas are thereby 'promised recognition and a secure place in the world', regardless of - for example - their class background, socio-economic status, or ethnic heritage."[13] Yet, and in general, men still enjoy more power than women. As Brittan explains, "Membership of the category 'man' or 'woman' is not simply a convenient way of classifying people - it is rather a major form of inequality. The category 'man' is not neutral - it implies power and domination."[14] Men, still nowadays, control most areas of human experience (culture, politics, economy, production, family, technology), so we can confidently assert that our society is patriarchal, understood as "the domination of society by men and their values;"[15] masculinist (that is, it takes for granted that there is a fundamental difference between men and women and sanctions the dominant role of men in the public and private spheres); and that the primordial discourse that shapes up our understanding of the world is conspicuously phallocentric (it foregrounds "men's

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[12] Mark Feigen Fasteau, *The Male Machine* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974) 1.

[13] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys. Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (London and New York: Verso, 1995) ix.

[14] Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 109.

[15] David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 33.

needs, men's privilege and men's power)."[16] The dominance of men over women has been built on the basis of what Rich calls "compulsive heterosexuality,"[17] Hearn "hierarchic heterosexuality"[18] and Carrigan *et al* "hegemonic masculinity."[19] In our world, that is, biology has been transformed into politics and the state legislates and enforces heterosexuality via familial structurings that translate different sexual organs into a principle of social organisation. These structurings determine that men fulfil the roles of breadwinners while women act as child-bearers and child-carers within the domestic; guarantee women's subordination to men by hindering their access to the public space; and control women and men's desire so that sexuality becomes solely reproductive and non-recreational, and, thus, functional to the maintenance of the marital status quo and patriarchy.

The nuclear family, by law and custom affirming a heterosexual male authority over women and children, is regarded as the institution primarily responsible for the immediate subordination of women, but it is not the only one. Male dominance transcends the familial and is, in fact, lived out and reinforced in multiple and diverse ways within a social system that is organised, in the main, along what Lynne Segal terms "hierarchical gender lines."[20] Thus, and as I have mentioned before, the state, politics, the economy, industry, culture, education, the military, science, technology - in short, all the institutions of authority, control and coercion - are governed and controlled by categories of powerful men that guarantee that men, as a collective, enjoy privileged positions above women. The state, for instance, institutionalises male power by premising welfare, taxation or benefits, upon assumptions of female dependence on men. It is mostly men who are to be found at the top of every state bureaucracy, just as it is overwhelmingly men who are 'captains' of industry. Or, to mention another example, it is mainly men who have access to military technology and weaponry and who become 'professional fighters', sanctioned by law to kill and use violence to protect women and children. On the threshold of the twenty-first

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[16] David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 32.

[17] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5 (1980): 631-700.

[18] Jeff Hearn, *The Gender of Oppression. Men, Masculinity and the Critique of Marxism* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1987).

[19] T. Carrigan, R.W. Connell and J. Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 551-604.

[20] Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 288.

century, we have come to understand sexual difference in terms of a shifting reality - a multiplicity of meanings rather than simple opposition. We have witnessed the emergence of different masculinities and femininities intent on casting off the shackles of gender polarities. Yet, the cultural, social, political domination of men persists. As Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark phrase it, "[T]he suspicion lingers that the more things have changed in outward appearance, the more they have thus far stayed the same in their fundamental political structure, with the game fixed so as always to produce a white heterosexual male winner, who routinely overcomes the other - the Indians, the aliens, the feminine."[21]

Yet, it would be over-pessimistic, not to say naive, to assume that male authority and old stereotypes of masculinity stay unchallenged in our society. In our postmodern, postcolonial, post-apartheid world, this gendered and normative construction of society with its institutionalisation of white heterosexual hegemonic masculinity of 'an imperial kind' is being contested from various factions. Gender roles are performative and enforced by a patriarchal network of institutions and power structures that establish male superiority as a given, but which not everybody finds appropriate or adequate in a progressively changing world. Being a construct, sanctioned and enforced by a patriarchal super-structure, and performative, and thus not fixed or genetically established but fragmented and shifting, masculinity can be deconstructed; conventionalised notions of gender and identity can be destabilised. Foucault, for example, claims that conventional social positions can be challenged by undermining the way modern societies organise and control the knowledge claims of the human sciences. Critics of various tendencies also underline the necessity to deconstruct old stereotypes of masculinity. Bristow, for instance, asserts:

> Hegemonic masculinity of an imperialist kind, has, indeed, been global. In a post-modern epoch, where rewriting can also mean the undoing of dominant narratives (fictional, political, economic), it is certainly a time for different masculinities to emerge - ones which do not demonise women (Haggard), or which make a boy into a man before his time (Henty), or which, finally, substitute one bogus heroism for a higher, metaphysical one (Conrad). Whether new kinds of men can be heroes or not, and whether there are discourses available to enable such men to come into being (whoever they are), is yet unclear. But these men, coming from

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[21] Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, introduction, *Screening the Male. Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 8.

post-colonial and post-modern conditions, could do well to study the imperialist genealogy of hegemonic masculinity before putting it behind them.[22]

Indeed, our epoch calls for a new sort of white masculinity to emerge; old stereotypes no longer satisfy the needs of the majority of the population. The latest social developments challenge traditional conceptions of white masculinity, question white man's ascendancy over women and people from other races, put the patriarchal system into jeopardy and, more importantly, demand a redefinition of what it means to be a 'real man', of real manly values and behaviour, and even of the masculine ideal of physical perfection. These latest developments in society have contributed to dilapidate the concept of male institutionalised, divinely ordained, superiority and genetically determined exceptional intelligence, courage, recklessness and strength, and thus loom large over men, who feel they are being emasculated, what had been regarded as essential masculine characteristics, rejected or, at most, demurred. The traditional conception of masculinity, therefore, is in crisis. Men feel that the old certainties about the male sex role are no longer of much use because they are constantly being rewritten and reinterpreted. To use Brittan's metaphor, men feel that the obstacle race to 'proper' masculinity, which, in the past, was a straight run to the finish, with men straightforwardly negotiating the pitfalls of inappropriate gender identifications and acquiring an unambiguous gender identity, is no longer well-defined and understood. Thus, "[e]verywhere there are casualties, everywhere men are nursing their bruised egos, everywhere the course is littered with the debris of their unresolved sexual conflicts. [...] Now all we can see is the spectacle of countless millions of men experiencing acute gender anxieties. Something has gone badly wrong in the male psyche."[23]

This crisis is not new for masculinity seems always to have existed on the threshold between fixity and annihilation; it seems always to have demanded anxious choices from men, forcing them to act 'like men' for fear of losing their manhood altogether. Masculinity is anxiety-provoking, forcing men to act in a particular way, at a particular time, under specific circumstances, and threatened by both psychological

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[22] Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys*, 166.

[23] Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 27.

and external factors. But in modern times this crisis has reached alarming proportions. Now, to assert that all men are anxious, insecure and in crisis is probably to over-state the case. This would imply that all men believe that their traditional powers and privileges are being appropriated by women and that men-in-general do not know how to behave in a 'manly' fashion anymore. The assumption that masculinity is in a terminal condition is, indeed, simplistic. The truth is that this crisis may be actually affecting only a minority of men (those who have traditionally held the reins of power in western societies, who can be broadly defined as white, heterosexual, middle-class men, and who are the actual target of oppositional groups and anti-masculinist discourses). Yet, the breakdown of 'heterosexuality-as-a-norm' and the decline of men's power and authority in the public sphere has not happened.

Having said that, it cannot be denied that masculinity has become particularly problematic of late. Because of the tremendous structural changes in advanced industrial societies, men are beginning to come to terms with the frightening prospect that masculinity will be shorn of its hierarchical power and that old conceptions of masculinity are no longer suitable in the western world. This situation is perceived as a crisis and is theorised about and discussed in academic journals and books; it is given reality in the media. Furthermore, recent public debates about abortion, gay rights, rape, incest, child-battering, pornography, sexual harassment, and male violence, systematically and openly popularise the idea that there is but one white straight masculinity and it is bad, "shot through with violence, megalomania, instrumental rationality, and the obsessive desire for recognition and definition through conquest."[24] All in all, the idea that old concepts of masculinity are becoming old-fashioned, that men's superiority is no longer pertinent in a changing world, and that a new type of masculinity needs to be fashioned has become part and parcel of present-day discourse. So we can say that there is a crisis of masculinity because this crisis has been constructed as factual in countless television programmes, cinema screens and other mediatic forms such as newspapers, magazines, journals and expert tracts and treatises. So the crisis of masculinity has reached a new visibility and is, therefore, taken for granted and, consequently, accepted by the majority of men in

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[24] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys*, viii.

western society. So men progressively feel that the values that had sustained their conception of masculinity are tumbling to the ground and, with them, their authority and power, their right to control and manipulate. Having said that, we cannot affirm that this crisis is just a case of unfounded paranoia for it has not been built *ad nihilo* on an 'empirical vacuum' so to speak. In fact, old conceptions of masculinity are being assailed by a series of internal (originating in men's psyches) and external (originating in society) factors that I proceed to analyse and which are the ones that can account for the crisis affecting contemporary man.

## 6.2. The crisis of masculinity: 'internal' factors

In the first place, men are becoming increasingly aware of masculinity's burdensome nature. In their circulation and reinforcement through a whole regime of texts, representations and institutions, norms and standards determine social relations, create subject positions and develop competencies and incompetencies within a particular field of practice or knowledge. These rules lay down the current orthodoxy of gender behaviour and determine the areas of experience men are supposed to achieve in if they want to be favoured by other men in the patriarchal stakes. Thus, "men, for instance, [are] conveniently socialised to excel in athletics or manual labour, but not in, say, cooking."[25] Paradoxically, while enhancing the power of men, such gender expectations subjugate them, locking them within a stereotypical gender position which not all men can identify with since it forces them to repress emotions that are not regarded as sufficiently manly, what could be termed their feminine side. In our patriarchal world, men who are not manly enough, who fail to fulfil their gender expectations that is: who do not grin, repress emotions, drive fast, drink, or enjoy a fight, are socially condemned and regarded as cowards, poltroons and sissies. In a nutshell, their sexuality is put into question and they fall victims to the abusive comments reserved for homosexuals, which is tragic, indeed. Homosexuality had

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[25] Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, introduction, *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 6. About this quotation and its reference to men and cooking it is interesting to highlight that, while women (generally) do all the cooking in the world, in western society it is generally accepted that the very best chefs are men.

traditionally been constructed as deviant, immoral, a violation of 'natural' sexual laws. In the 1970s society became more permissive. As a less puritan attitude towards love and sexuality was taking form, the old religious, moral and cultural arguments against homosexuality seemed to be collapsing. But just when the new sexual anarchy of the 70s was beginning to shake the foundations of the patriarchal household, the AIDS pandemic, with its apocalyptic dimension, emerged. AIDS has become part of the collective history and identity of gay men and has directly affected the public perception of homosexuals. The mention of homosexuality immediately conjures up images of gay AIDS victims. Because of the alarming rapidity with which the AIDS 'plague' is spreading, people fear it will wipe out our civilisation. Consequently, homosexuality has become not only morally contemptible, but a potential threat to our civilisation, thus leading to an entrenchment of homophobic feelings among 'virtuous heterosexuals'. The burden of masculinity has, therefore, become unbearably heavy, for any false step may lead to immediate social death. Some men, therefore, feel trapped in constraining gender expectations that they cannot really accommodate. In a society that creates and maintains masculinity by homophobia, men are continuously confronted with the challenge of proving they are not homosexuals by 'posturing' as 'real macho men'. As a result, men always have to behave in a hyper-masculine way, close themselves emotionally to other men or restrict their areas of performance in the public sphere to professions that are regarded as appropriately heterosexual (jobs as artists, actors, nurses, musicians, florists or beauticians, for instance, are 'dangerous' for they are deemed appropriate for homosexual men).

Men are not only expected to repress their 'feminine' side. Our culture constrains them to be the bearers of a gender identity that forces them to compete in a world of power and subordination if they want to benefit from their inherited masculinity. Because of the received notions of masculinity among middle-class professional men, power is attained through efficiency, competition and the pursuit of profit and, consequently, men are forced to excel in their careers if power over the rest is to be obtained and they are not to remain mice among men. Other male expectations are equally anxiety-provoking. Men have traditionally equated virility with sexual prowess and identified impotence with lack of virility. The reality of sexual

intercourse, however, does not always coincide with men's imaginings of multi-orgasmic satisfaction. Sex is often painful and 'phallic failure' (experienced as, for instance, erectile dysfunction or premature ejaculation) frequent. Men cannot always live up to the expectations of orgiastic heights or sexual ecstasy that Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence wrote about, leading to conflict, tension and anxiety. Sex, like life itself, is often anti-climatic; the resolution does not always imply powerful and satisfying closure as befits prevailing definitions of sexual intercourse. So sexual intercourse is experienced by some men as yet another test from which they have to emerge victorious if their virility is to remain intact. Sexual failure, though normal and frequent, is an awesome burden that threatens to destabilise men's self-perception and self-confidence.

If the strain of cut-throat competition in the professional sphere and of adequate sexual performance in the innermost sanctum of the private sphere (the marital or extra-marital bed) were not bad enough, men have to face up to other stereotypes of masculinity that not all men identify with. For some mysterious reason, violent, sportive, gross and 'vulgar' behaviour, together with a fairly large dose of philistinism, have always been regarded as essential traits of manhood, something to be expected and indulgently accepted, but which not all men, particularly men with 'dandy' tendencies and artists with heightened sensitivities, can stomach. The socially acceptable parameters of masculinity, therefore, have met up with the resistance of a legion of male malcontents who display overt hostility to 'the real manly man ethos', who find it oppressive and self-depriving, and who do not hesitate to voice their indictment of traditional constructs of masculinity and gender expectations. Paul Theroux, for example, asserts:

> I have always disliked being a man. The whole idea of manhood in America is pitiful, in my opinion. [...] Even the expression 'Be a man!' strikes me as insulting and abusive. It means: Be stupid, be unfeeling, obedient, soldierly, stop thinking.

And he follows:

> The quest for manliness [is] essentially right wing, puritanical, cowardly, neurotic and fuelled largely by a fear of women. It is also certainly philistine. There is no book-hater like a Little League Coach. But indeed all the creative arts are

obnoxious to the manly idea. [...] For many years I found it impossible to admit to myself that I wanted to be a writer [...] because being a writer was incompatible with being a man."[26]

Michael Leiris also thought that manliness was not natural in him: "It would be almost impossible for me to say at what moments, even when I was very young, I was really *natural*, at what moments I was playing a part."[27] And he expressed his hatred for masculinity in the following terms:

> The hostility I feel towards my own father derives in particular from his inelegant physical aspect, from his cheery vulgarity, and from his total absence of taste in all artistic matters.[28]

Other men have added their voices to this 'chorus of disapproval', so pages of auto-biographical accounts of men's experiences reverberate with the echoes of their discontentment at being men (or being forced to 'act like men'). Angus Suttie, for instance wrote:

> There wasn't an age at which I didn't prefer playing with dolls or dressing up to playing football or playing with toy cars and tractors. Gifts of toy guns were left unused. This was punished by ridicule and being called jessie and sissy. [...] The attempt to mould me to what was expected to be a boy growing to be a man was persistent in school [...], games in particular became something which I dreaded. Football was compulsory and for boys such as me who were not good at it, we were made to feel not only that we were personally worthless but aberrant and morally wanting. [...] Growing up was painful.[29]

And Leonard Woolf, to provide just one more example, wrote about his experience in the manly ethos of public school in the following terms:

> I suspect that the male carapace is usually grown to conceal cowardice. [...] It was the fear of ridicule or disapproval if one revealed one's real thoughts or feelings, and sometimes the fear of revealing one's fears, that forced one to invent that kind of second-hand version of oneself which might provide for one's original self the safety of a permanent alibi [...] it was this vulnerable inhabitant of our bodies over which the irresistible steam-roller of society pounded in whatever private or public school to which our parents happened to have sent us, flattening us all out

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[26] Paul Theroux, *Sunrise with Seamonsters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985) 309-310.

[27] Michael Leiris, *Manhood*, (New York: Grossman, 1963) 149.

[28] Michael Leiris, *Manhood*, 89.

[29] Angus Suttie, "From Latent to Blatant: a Personal Account," *Gay Left* 2 (Spring, 1976): 5.

in the image of manliness or gentlemanliness that our parents, or lords and masters considered appropriate.[30]

## 6.3. The crisis of masculinity: 'external' factors

The traditional conception of masculinity is not only resisted from within the masculine ranks by men who do not support or identify with the values that are supposed to characterise true manhood. Those who entertain a liking for or find themselves comfortable in their 'robes of manliness', or those who enjoy some sort of power within the patriarchal construct, have to face up to an increasingly changing world intent on emasculating men and challenging their ascendancy over other forms of humanity, for the myth of man's superiority on the grounds of their essential leadership attributes or superior strengths is being undermined by the latest trends in society. Probably one of the biggest threats to male domination is currently-fashionable 'peace-keeping' and 'peace-making'. Men have been traditionally expected to excel in the arts of war, and to identify with either knights and warriors of far-off times or with the social castes consecrated to the protection of the nation, the professional soldiers. Violence is supposed to be a truly masculine attribute, as W.P. Day asserts, "violence is, of course, the natural expression of the masculine in its purest form, the application of force to the world to assert its power and identity."[31] Men are also assumed to enjoy a 'good kill'; in *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway, for example, asserted that man "has pleasure in taking to himself use of the Godlike attributes; that of giving [death]."[32] War, in fact, has been experienced as a manifestation of masculine aggression or violence writ large. But in a society that has outlasted the horrors of the two World Wars and the Vietnam conflict, heroic and triumphant visions and masculinist fantasies of war and violence are regarded with mounting suspicion.[33] The Gandhi spirit has indeed triumphed, and images of violence

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[30] qtd. in Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 108-109.

[31] William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985) 80.

[32] Ernest Hemingway qtd. in Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male*, 19.

[33] Ironically, and in spite of the heroic images with which war has been invested in order to boost national consciousness, the reality of war, especially the experiences of the two World Wars and the other conflicts that followed, can be regarded as the originators of the crisis of masculinity assailing modern man. Wars have their heroes. Thousands of men on both of the opposing sides are regarded as exemplifying selfless courage and receive medals and public recognition. Yet, countless men are

provoke nothing but repulsion. Progressively our society is being assailed by waves of pacifism and conscientious objection. Public opinion, influenced by pacifist movements, animal rights activists, or films with subliminal pacifist messages such as *Platoon, Apocalypse Now* or *Born on the 4th of July*, reacts negatively to any extreme outburst of violence. But as pacifism exerts its benign influence over the world, the old militaristic values that had characterised masculinity are being systematically undermined, shaking the foundations of conventional constructs of the masculine, and contributing to the emasculation of modern men, who had found in wars and violent environments the perfect locale where to prove their potency and combatant spirit. Simultaneously, pacifism is posing serious threats to militarist patriarchal constructs; governments that rely on the military to maintain their ascendancy over other countries are being questioned and condemned (the film *J.F.K.*, for instance, is a clear indictment of militarist policies; in this film, Kennedy's assassination is presented as a plot to eradicate the president's pacifist procedures). All in all, pacifism challenges patriarchy and destabilises inherited conceptions of what it means to be a 'real man'.

Another external factor that contributes to the emasculation of modern man is women's higher public profile. Men have not been humanely phased out. They still have more jobs than women and, on average, earn higher salaries. Men do actually hold a lot of positions of power and society is still geared up for men in a lot of ways. Even though we have seen women like Indira Gandhi, Golda Meier or Margaret Thatcher reach the pinnacle of political power, this does not represent a significant undermining of male dominance. But certainly things are changing and the public sphere is no longer a purely masculine domain. In fact, it is no longer easy to imagine that there are many significant activities or areas of life which, by definition, forever exclude women. Men have pretty much set up modern civilisation and technologies but they may not be needed to keep them going in the future. Knowledge-based societies, with their stress on brain not brawn, have made it easier for women to obtain

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slaughtered in their trenches; millions of others are maimed and incapacitated; shell-shock leaves men witless, amnesiac, prone to break down at the least noise or stress. Even the video-game-like wars broadcast on television nowadays (the Gulf War or the conflict in Bosnia, for instance) are inglorious and dehumanising. Chemical warfare, to mention another example, cuts at the very heart of the idea of a chivalrous enemy whom one can see and with whom one can fight. As Brittan puts it with reference to World War I, "if we want to talk about a crisis of masculinity, then we can see the origins of this crisis in the mud of Flanders and the Russian steppes." Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 197.

jobs that men have traditionally despised (such as word-processor consultants or nursery school teachers), and even jobs traditionally held by men; almost equal numbers of women as men are now being recruited into professions like law and medicine and the number of business owned by women has grown rapidly; some women are also moving into positions of power in government and industry; women are outperforming men in the groves of academe where it seems they are achieving better results; and the ideals of equality, democratic values and 'the Politically Correct' have even led to the ultimate invasion of masculine territory, women in combat. Strategically, Lynne Segal explains, "mechanisms for positive discrimination, female quota systems and other means of chipping away at the male face of authority have been studied and [...] implemented."[34] The rise of various women's movements and of different kinds of feminism have resulted in a restructuring of social organisations and in a systematic destabilisation of sexist patriarchal givens. Women have forced men to review their positions willy-nilly. As a consequence, a number of organisations, both governmental and private, have for some time now brought in measures to rectify injustices against women perpetrated on sex alone and to ameliorate women's lot. These have included formal legislation for equal opportunity; the reduction of differentials and occupational segregation between women and men, giving women greater economic parity with men in terms of employment, pay, credit, insurance, pension, fringe benefits and Social Security; the weakening of women's economic dependence on men by the expansion of welfare services; the removal of discriminatory clauses; and official bans on sexist language.

In a society assailed by recession, economic depression and unemployment, and characterised by profound transformations in the nature of work that have led to the elimination of the traditional sources of unskilled male employment, the emergence of professional women and women's penetration of the public sphere have dealt a fatal blow to men's egos. Gainful employment has always been associated with manhood. Work is one of the main anchors of male identity. To be a man implies being a breadwinner. A successful man is measured by his ability to perform in his job. The roots of gender identity, in fact, are inter-fused with expectations of

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[34] Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 99.

achievement so in the scale of our cultural values, a man is more of a man if he has a successful job. But as men's possibilities of finding jobs decline, their status in society is being questioned and they are becoming as abject and powerless as women had been in the past. With women competing with men for gainful employment, men are increasingly faced with declining incomes, work opportunities that are not paying a sufficient family income, and unemployment. Unemployment is particularly harmful for men's self-perception. Having been brought up to see themselves as responsible for the bread and butter of daily existence, men who cannot obtain a job lose their self-respect and become powerless and disjointed. They come to the realisation that they are no longer in a position to demand respect from women. Men are not only suffering much from women's ascendancy outside the domestic. Within the home-boundaries, women challenge the traditional division of labour and are reluctant and unwilling to give up their jobs in order to take care of the family and children. Men are no longer the sole providers at home and, consequently, they have lost the power that women's economic dependency conferred upon them. The intimate power of men over women, therefore, a power which had been historically exercised within the family by the male as breadwinner, property owner, and armed defender of women and children, is being impaired. It has been clear for several decades now, from divorce statistics alone, that the time is out of joint with conventional family life. The only family form that is growing in numbers is one-parent, female-headed households. As ever more married women leave the home to work, men, it seems, feel neglected, their authority challenged by working wives. All in all, women challenge men's superiority in both the public and the domestic. As Buchbinder puts it, "Men [...] find themselves removed from their traditional roles of protectors of humankind, and placed instead in the paradoxical position of reviled antagonists held at bay by a contingent of women who define themselves as men's victims, but who, as victims, seem ironically to have turned feral."[35]

The new visibility of gay men, especially since the advent of HIV/AIDS,[36] has also helped to fragment the notion of masculinity and has destabilised the binary

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[35] David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 16.

[36] HIV/AIDS, though, has also been extremely detrimental for gays. As I will follow to explain, AIDS has popularly been perceived as an exclusively gay ailment and has been constructed by the New Right as

opposition of feminine-women / masculine-men within a coercive heterosexual framework. Gay liberation started in 1969, or so gay historians claim, when gay men in the Stonewell Inn in Greenwich Village, New York, unexpectedly responded with violence to police harassment, which had become routine for twenty years. This demonstration showed that gays were no longer willing to be pushed around and provided the impetus for many homosexuals to come out of the closet. Also, it gave homosexuals a political edge and different gay movements (such as the now disappeared Gay Liberation Front) emerged to examine critically the dynamics by which they had been marginalised and oppressed. Above all, they exposed the absurdity of traditional constructions of masculinity and helped to unveil the role of compulsive heterosexuality in the perpetuation of patriarchal oppression via institutionalised marriage and familial confinement of sexuality and desire. With their open discussions about homosexuality, they demonstrated that it is not abnormal, but a natural capacity in everyone. By doing so, they contested prevailing definitions of gender bonded with heterosexual practices and exposed the fragility of the barriers between 'normal' and 'deviant' by means of which heterosexuality has been policed. They also contributed to create a more permissive social climate and more men, believed to be 'normal' heterosexual machos, have disclosed their homosexuality (Rock Hudson and George Michael, for instance, although forced by circumstances, surprised their fans with the announcement of their homosexuality), undermining, in this way, popular stereotypes of the limp-wisted, lisping and effeminate male homosexual and destabilising the equation made in the dominant model of masculinity between manliness and heterosexuality. The way gay men decide to 'parade' their

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divine retribution, giving them an excuse to consolidate notions of homosexuality as immoral, sinful and pathological. Also, HIV/AIDS has affected male heterosexuals and turned one of the most popular clichés of masculinity on its head. In the 1960s, the hippie movement originated a call for sexual revolution and freedom and opened up a more sexually permissive period. However, and as feminists have noted, sexual freedom was really directed at males. "Women were still expected to be sexually available to men but not necessarily to demonstrate any sexual initiative or desire which might upset the male's ego or his sense of sexual prowess. Nor could a woman require a man to commit himself to a long-term relationship with her, for this would infringe his sexual freedom, contradicting the very ideology of the sexual revolution." (David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 12) This revolution had the effect of reinforcing the idea that men's sex drive is a potent force not to be obstructed and consolidated men's image as later-day Don Juans or Casanovas. The appearance of AIDS/HIV in the early 1980s brought this era, with its ideology of free and easy sex for all to a close, confining sex again to the recesses of family life and undermining men's imagining of themselves as insatiable conquistadors and aggressive sex-machines. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, thus, has contributed to a revision of male sexuality as natural and free from responsibility.

homosexuality, furthermore, challenges the notion of essential masculinity and, as I have mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, reveals the constructedness of gender identity. The adoption of 'effeminate' drag or camp poses, for instance, reveals that men, and not only women, can be gentle, sensitive, sensual and caring, not to say wear perfume, be fashion-conscious or be unashamedly narcissistic. If, on the other hand, they adopt a macho look and behaviour (known as butch-shift), they demonstrate that hyper-masculinity and aggressive maleness is not only the province of the heterosexual. All in all, the critical re-examination of masculinity conducted by homosexuals ('gender fuck' as is known among gays) has contributed to the links between sexuality and gender beginning to fray. 'Real' (heterosexual) men, therefore, have been made aware of the fragility of received notions of masculinity, especially when everywhere around them, men who were regarded as 'macho' rather than 'sissy' come out and proclaim their gayness.

Similarly, black men are also responding to white male authority in our western world. The de-colonisation of African territories has had a parallel development in 'the west', where different black-focused movements (political but also cultural - rap-music and rastafarianism, for instance, have been functional to the awakening of black people's consciousness and have propitiated the development of a positive evaluation of their 'negritude') have systematically worked towards the de-colonisation of the Africans' mind. They have provided a forum for black political activists and social theorists, created groups for the defence of the black community, emphasised the impact of poverty and racism on the lives of black men, and asserted the necessity for black men to develop their manhood if they are to achieve equality with white men. Black men have, therefore, acquired poses and attitudes that threaten the white man's authority, what Richard Majors calls 'cool pose' and defines in the following terms:

> Cool pose, manifested by the expressive life-style is also an aggressive assertion of masculinity. It emphatically says, 'White man, this is my turf. You can't match me here'. Though we may be impotent in the political or corporate world, the black man demonstrates his potency in athletic competition, entertainment and the

pulpit with a verve that borders on the spectacular. [...] Being cool is a unique response to adverse social, political, and economic conditions.[37]

Black men, all in all, reject their subordination by various means. As they challenge the white man's superiority, the pre-eminence of white manhood, once so obvious, looks increasingly frayed and threadbare.

The present organisation of cities and citizenship are damaging the old values of masculinity in another significant way. Men have conventionally been constructed not only as more rational, but also as more adventurous than women. Whereas women have been expected to accommodate within the domestic space, where they can give free vent to their maternal instincts, men regard everything domestic as stifling and annihilating for it neutralises men's supposedly essential characteristics: recklessness, endurance, grossness, courage. Contact with feminine values is regarded as damaging since women stand for entrapment, stasis and 'civilisation', which is in direct opposition to masculinity, which means freedom and motion and adventure. Consequently, men are supposed to do anything - chase white whales, float down the Mississippi on rafts, or even fight windmills - anything to get away from women and what they stand for. It is the adventurer in every man which is the most admired, as John Jawkesworth phrased it in his London periodical *The Adventurer* (1752):

It is the man who provokes danger in its recess, who quits a peaceful retreat, for peril and labour, to drive before a tempest or to watch in a camp [...]. It is the adventurer alone on whom every eye is fixed with admiration, and whose praise is repeated by every voice.[38]

But in our modern civilisation the possibilities for adventure are dwindling. Although there is ample opportunity for adventurous excitement in the liminal areas of social and psychological life (like red-light city districts, hunting woods and battlegrounds, or the years of young manhood before marriage), these forms of intrepid thrill are socially condemned. Cities and citizenship are based on the twin responsibilities of work and family, which have persuaded men to stay with women, obey the law and behave like social animals; and to deny all activities and forms of behaviour hostile to

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[37] Richard Majors, "Cool Pose: The Proud Signature of Black Survival," *Changing Men* 17 (1986): 6.

[38] John Jawkesworth qtd. in Martin Green, preface, *The Adventurous Male*, not paged.

the social contract, such as the ecstasies of eroticism and violence, or gross manners. Nowadays, the moral, the divinely ordained, is the social. Monogamy and mortgage payments have become the equivalent to law-abiding behaviour, and the family has emerged as the principle 'censuring agent', preventing the transgression of the social codes. The social rules supreme and, in its ascendancy, it inhibits impulses that some psychologists regard as essential in men (adventure, violence, etc.). Frederick Godwin, a neuropsychiatrist, for example, identifies violence and hypersexual activity as essentially male and asserts that it is in the areas where the social control that we have imposed on our civilisation is more relaxed, where men can give free vent to their wildest instincts. Drawing a parallelism between primates in the jungle and men living in modern society's new jungles, inner-city areas, he wrote:

> If you look at male monkeys, especially in the wild, roughly half of them survive adulthood. The other half die of violence. That is the natural way of it for males, to knock each other off and, in fact, there are some interesting evolutionary implications of that because the same hyperaggressive monkeys who kill each other are also hypersexual, so they copulate more and therefore they reproduce more to offset the fact that half of them are dying.
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>  Now, one could say that if the loss of social structure in society, and particularly within the high-impact inner-city areas, has removed some of the civilising evolutionary things that we have built up [...] maybe it isn't just a careless use of the word when people call certain areas of certain cities *jungles*, that we may have gone back to what might be more natural, without all of the social controls that we have imposed upon ourselves as a civilisation over thousands of years in our evolution.[39]

With liminal adventurous areas unbound by civilising imperatives and other modes of social control reduced or condemned by right-wing, bourgeois *realpolitik*, men find themselves forced to repress or domesticate their 'basic instincts' for society and family's sake. 'Violence-prone' men are measured against the yardstick of bourgeois values and forced to adopt culture-bound notions of what it means to be a social animal. It is the ultimate male swan song: by becoming more social, they are also more civilised and, thus, more feminine.... and repressed; which, in turn, Freud would probably agree, explains the growing number of 'diabolical men' who cannot bottle up their instincts in our society: the cases of men displaying a symptomatology variously labelled moral idiocy, constitutional ethical aberration, constitutional immorality,

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[39] qtd. in Philomena Mariani, "Law-and-Order Science," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 138.

defective delinquency, psychopathy, sociopathy. They are men who delight in violating social norms; or gentlemen of sober and domestic habits who suddenly erupt into violence or commit a spectacular fraud; or the wayward offspring of genteel citizens who prefer a life of adventure to steady employment. They stand for anarchy against respectable fathers, the work-ethic and self-denial. The characteristics they display are no longer regarded as glamorous; their recklessness, excessive passion, refined talent for deception, licentiousness, extravagance, eccentricity, criminal propensities, impulsivity, childish desire for immediate gratification, or indifference to punishment, have become a threat to the social construct. With the prominence of the 'social man', the old-days adventurer has suffered a fatal blow, for society has domesticated him and has turned men with 'adventurous propensities' into the new figures of horror and contempt, playing the role that King Mob had played in the nineteenth century, and popularised in films such as *Seven*, *Copycat* or *The Silence of the Lambs*, or narratives such as Caleb Carr's *The Alienist* or Philip Kerr's *A Philosophical Investigation*.

Mr Darcy has triumphed over Wickham, Edgar Linton over Heathcliff, Franklin Blake over Godfrey Abblewhite. The social man has become the parameter of bourgeois masculinity, replacing the reckless, courageous, militarist, imperialist individual who, free from the annihilating social and domestic bonds, populated the pages of nineteenth century adventure stories and was regarded as the epitome of true manhood. The New Man is the family man,[40] who Lynne Segal calls *"homo*

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[40] Now, it has to be taken into account that the New Man as the family man, although perceived as common, is by no means a widespread social trend and that notions of masculinity are also destabilised, as I have mentioned before, by the consistent undermining of parental authority within the family. Because of women's higher public profile, they have systematically relinquished domestic chores, which has forced men to take up more responsibilities within the domestic, including child-care. Also, men find it increasingly difficult to rely on the family locus as a site where they can assert their authority as 'fathers'. With women having more opportunities to file for divorce; choose to have a child without any paternal engagement; obtain abortions if they are unwillingly pregnant; or dispense with men altogether for having a child by resorting to modern methods of artificial insemination by donor; men can no longer take their right to confine women within the household for granted. Finally, it would be naive to assume that with more men assuming a more domestic profile at home, the family has become a haven of peace and harmony. The mirage of a healthy, happy, wholesome nuclear family has been subjected to new research and the result of this close examination has revealed that the family does not shine so brightly as one would like to assume. The sheer scale of documentation accumulating about male violence within the domestic - child abuse, incest, wife-battering - does not make for comfortable reading and demonstrates that domestic violence by men is still prevalent, even condoned, in our 'advanced' world.

*sociologicus.*"[41] He is the one who chooses to sit at his own fireside, a baby on his knee and a feeding-bottle in his hand. Fashioned in a 'Kramer-versus-Kramer' style, he is the man who 'mothers' and who has reached a new visibility on cinema and television screens and even in any current *Mothercare* catalogue, where father stands proudly besides mother, with his own baby-sling and baby. The New Man is also the languorous Versace boy. Dressed for success in the new city landscapes of our post-industrial societies, he is certainly more 'civilised' and emotional, but he is also more passive, beautiful, seductive, and, of course, more effeminate, displaying poses, facial expressions and attitudes that had been previously reserved for the iconography of femininity.[42] But this new conception of more 'feminine masculinity', destabilises the traditional notion of what it means to be a man; it forfeits its previous transparency, its taken-for-grantedness, its normalcy, heightening man's fear of emasculation and provoking an anxiety that is often expressed as sexual impotence in literature. As Sandra Gilbert phrases it:

> From Lawrence's paralysed Clifford Chatterley to Hemingway's sadly emasculated Jake Barnes to Eliot's mysteriously sterile Fisher King [...] the gloomily and bruised modernist anti-heroes churned out by the war suffered specifically from sexual wounds, as if, having travelled literally or figuratively through No Man's Land, all have become not just No Men, nobodies, but *not* men, *un*men.[43]

## 6.4. The crisis of masculinity and strategies of resistance

The old, unproblematic, natural, or crisis-free variant of masculinity no longer prevails. Men are assailed by lingering doubts about what it means to be a man, which has led to what Paul Smith calls "male hysteria"[44] or a feeling of being unable to be in control. Symptomatic of this new sense of anxiety, insecurity and vulnerability in the

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[41] Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 4.

[42] In the 1997 Gaudí fashion show that took place in Barcelona in September, fashion designers suggested men can even wear skirts; although the idea has not been adopted, at least not in lands away from Scotland, in the Anglo-Saxon world or in western societies, fashion designers insist and have tried to implement the idea in other fashion shows.

[43] Sandra M. Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," *Signs* 8 (1983): 423.

[44] Paul Smith, "Eastwood Bound," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 77-97.

masculinist ranks is the attempt on men's part to dilute the politics of feminism and other anti-patriarchal movements by activating men's various self-defence mechanisms. To start with, men have endeavoured to create a discourse of man's oppression and self-victimisation channelled through diverse men's movements. Rooted in the politics of women's liberation is the notion of men as upholders and beneficiaries of patriarchy. But men have reversed this traditional conception by adopting the rhetoric of oppression that had always belonged to women. In an attempt to exculpate themselves for their contribution in the construction of our society, men acknowledge "men's roles in reinforcing patriarchy and fucking up the world"[45] and present themselves as "the bearers of a gender identity that deforms and damages them as much as it damages women."[46] Men seek a kind of salvation through the recognition of their powerlessness in a leftist institutional context that they think gives recognition only to those who have a difference (women, blacks, Latinos, gays and lesbians). Characterised by a snivelling self-pity, their discourse of victimisation deals with the hurt of being stereotyped, the lack of support networks for men, unwitting sexism, and, above all, the strain of overresponsibility as a result of the various roles they have been coerced into assuming.

In men's accounts, the burdens they have to bear are heavy indeed, for men are subject to numerous, generally unrecognised, injustices of a legal, social and psychological nature. The legal system, for instance, discriminates against men, particularly in the areas of divorce and child-custody. Many western countries have laws that give men longer sentences for the same crimes as women have committed, grant tax benefits to widows but not to widowers, fail to recognise sexual assault except when it is committed by a man, or extend protective workplace requirements to women but not to men. Also, the media contributes to negative male stereotyping: commercials show mostly mothers as being capable of judging their children's best interests,[47] news programmes focus only on the violence against women and children,

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[45] George Yúdice, "What's a Straight White Man to Do?" *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 268.

[46] Michael Roper and John Tosh, "Introduction. Historians and the Politics of Masculinity," *Manful Assertions. Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 7.

[47] Attempts have been made to change this, though. Progressively, we see more 'domestic men' coping with 'household matters'. However, these New Men in commercials tend to be more concerned with

and talk shows regularly practise male-bashing. Men are also exploited as cogs in the economic machine, forced by generic requirements to provide for their wives, like worker bees, toiling and earning the income that they have to offer to the queen bee. Furthermore, they claim, society tolerates violence against men - so a man's life is less valued than a woman's: in the military, for instance, it is men who are legally required to register for the draft, and men are almost exclusively the cannon fodder in war. Finally, they are trapped in a role that has prevented them from developing their feminine side (warmth, intuition, tenderness, love, emotion). Deprived of their feminine dimension, men are lonely and solitary, incapable of relating to others in an emotionally coherent fashion and, thus, alienated from both other men and women. All in all, they see themselves as victims of a system whose costs are expensive indeed; they translate into shorter lives, a higher suicide rate, alcoholism and drug-addiction, a higher incidence in stress-related and coronary disease, and increasing rates of psychological distress. Ultimately, they explain, it is not all roses being dominant; in fact, masculinity in its traditional form - with its emphasis on men's taking the initiative, being the breadwinners and acting as the pillars of society - is even lethal. The burden of responsibility, all in all, may well have proved too oppressive to masculine subjectivity to be long endured. However, one wonders whether this stress on responsibility as an oppressive element that society foists upon men is not an attempt at flight, not from stereotyped conceptions of the essence of manhood, but from responsibility and domestic bonds altogether, leaving women in an even more unprivileged position, forced to cater for themselves in an impersonal, corporate and bureaucratic society.

Another defence mechanism men have articulated in order to protect their masculinity from emasculating social trends and anti-masculinist backlash is that represented by Robert Bly's Iron John movement[48] (and other related mythopoetic groups) and the Promise Keepers in the United States. These two movements are different in their formulation. The mythopoetic movement, started by Robert Bly's

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'helping' their wives / mothers - cleaning the house, for instance - than really being responsible for child-care alone. Otherwise, these commercials deal with men trying to stay healthy to be able to entertain children or direct their education.

[48] See: Robert Bly, *Iron John. A Book About Men* ( Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element, 1991).

Iron John, has the Jungian theory of unconscious archetypes as its basis, but it readapts it to suit its objectives - David J. Tacey critically calls the movement's formulations "mental junk and psycho-babble."[49] The movement's acolytes believe that our times are characterised by patriarchal disintegration and that external positive forms of masculinity are not to be found for men are turning soft through their contact with the feminine. Yet, they nonetheless affirm there is good news for men since within every male are blueprints, what we can also call 'hard wiring' or masculine archetypes. These are stable entities, a sort of universalist or Platonic core or nuclei, fixed in an eternal dream space that can be accessed by anyone at any time and in any place. So according to these pseudo-Jungian groups,[50] men can recover their former balance by reconnecting with primeval masculine archetypes (conveniently endowed with a mythical aura by being named terms that seem to have come from Propp's account of fairy tales: the Deep Male, the Inner Warrior, the Wild Man, the King, the Trickster, the Lover, the Quester) laying latent inside themselves and, thus, and as Tacey phrases the idea, "re-mythologise [a] new pact with masculinity."[51] This can be achieved by policing the feminine (the anima) both within and outside themselves, bonding with other men and bridging the gap that separates men from their fathers - the absent figure in our industrial societies. The Promise Keepers, on the other hand, have a highly religious point of departure and propagandise a return to Puritanical social structurings with restrictive sexual practices within sanctioned familial organisations, and a re-creation of patriarchal constructs confining women within the domestic. The movement was created by Bill McCartney, a football-coach-at-the-University-of-Colorado-with-a-vision; he envisioned millions of men across the United States crowding into football stadiums and praying together to end society's mess, which he identified with adultery, lack of parental control, sexual permissiveness and women's invasion of the public space. In October 1997, along the Mall in Washington, McCartney's vision became a reality as 700,000 men descended on the capital to

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[49] David J. Tacey, *Remaking Men. Jung, Stirituality and Social Change* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 21.

[50] I say 'pseudo' because Jung never affirmed that archetypes are knowable. He said that the essential nature of the archetype is a metaphysical question. At its core, he argued, it is invisible, empty, and without content. As the archetype enters time and space it acquires content and substance and becomes an archetypal image. All we know are the archetypal images and they are profoundly determined by historical and cultural factors, and by the contingencies of time and space.

[51] David J. Tacey, *Remaking Men*, 2.

make their claims heard. The movement, which started in 1993, has an exclusively male membership of almost three million nowadays. They see themselves as the emotional Masons for the nineties and their main objective is the return of the man to the family unit with zeal and taking both the material and the spiritual lead in the household. Although apparently different ('Iron Johnes' allow men to look hairy, beat their chests and howl like wolves in the wilderness; Promise Keepers, on the other hand, emphasise physical bonding and encourage men to hug each other and weep publicly), both movements are intrinsically right wing, reactionary, conservative and backward looking in their implications. They initiate men into outmoded patriarchal constructs and regressive social and political causes. Together, they provide the emotional and religious foundation for the construction of traditional masculinity and the reaffirmation of patriarchal, male-dominated, social structures.

These two particular instances of masculinist and patriarchal conservatism are not isolated trends but need to be located within a New Right reactionary climate that followed the liberal and permissive 1970s, reached its peak in the 1980s with the governments of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and whose legacy can still be felt in the late 1990s. In our present-day society, the dynamism of innovation, scientific advancement, space exploration, de-colonisation, feminist liberation and other liberal, leftist trends, is still sustained by conservative think-tanks that guarantee the continuous tradition of western culture. The symptoms of these ultra-conservative New Right policies can be felt everywhere. We hear almost daily examples of state monitoring and control in the news: like the law implemented in some states in the United States that establishes that Darwin's evolutionary theory is to be eliminated from the school curriculum as it contradicts the Biblical version of God's single act of creation; or Mr Aznar's attempts to regulate the contents of history books in primary and secondary education in Spain in order to control nationalistic versions of Spanish history; or the passing of new legislation that prevents women from having control over their bodies. All these examples reveal the conservative substratum at the foundation of our supposedly post-fascist state of affairs. This conservatism makes itself be felt, above all, in the family policies the New Right governments support, encourage and propagandise. Feminists regard the

family as a kind of collective bargain among men that legitimates their control over a specific woman's sexuality and children, and as a way to regulate production in such a way as to guarantee women's exclusion from the public spheres and their consequent seclusion within home boundaries. The patriarchal family is a site of oppression and its demise should be greeted with loud 'hosannas'. Instead, it is mourned and New Right governments defend the nuclear family and advertise a return to the 'heterosexual script' in order to protect the moral basis of our society. The old pro-family rhetoric, therefore, is given a new impetus so as to shore up men's power and women's dependence on men.

The New Right policies have also been accompanied by a rearticulation of fantastical idealisations of masculine behaviour as a response to the uncongenial politics developed by gays and women. In a world whose economy seems to become more depressed each day, men stick to old stereotypes of masculinity in order to maintain their power and dominance in society. These hyper-masculine behavioural mannerisms are dramatised in different ways. Some men act out a dream of manhood signified by a huge, muscular body, an impressive sexual scorecard, a powerful car or a high-flying job. Others protect themselves under a crust of tough intellectualism, boast their political apathy, are fiercely critical of all they see as phoney, pretentious or conformist, are honestly self-serving, and reject anything that they could regard as womanly and domestic. Some others practice a brutish, 'working-class' macho behaviour that consists in watching football, drinking beer, dropping pizza on the carpet or treating their wives as rat-bags. And finally some others, create their own exaggerated, artificial, brittle and aggressive version of manhood of a Hemingway-meets-Rambo type, and delight in acting out or fantasising about an action-packed life of boxing, big-game hunting, shooting, drinking, swearing, whoring and other manly pursuits. These ultra-macho lifestyles bespeak insecurity and are to be read as attempts to protect masculine power at a time of disintegration of old, supposedly safe, conceptions of manhood. As Ray Raphael eloquently puts it with reference to cinematic macho ideals:

> Macho, we know now, is just one more indication of insecurity. Many of us really *believed* in John Wayne, but most of us probably suspect Sylvester Stallone is

little more than a joke. We quietly chuckle when we hear that Rocky [...] is scared, in real life, to travel to Western Europe.[52]

These hyper-masculine men are probably wearing false hair on their chest, a kind of furry shield to withstand the attacks of oppositional trends. Yet, they reveal that the ideal of traditional masculinity lives on and that it is far more difficult to dislodge and topple from its high place than oppositional groups might have assumed. The fact remains that masculinity always finds ways of reinventing itself so as to outlive a world obsessed with shifting values and loosening former attitudes of what it means to be a real man.

And finally, men have responded with a defensive backlash against uncongenial social and economic realities. In order to counter-balance the rising ascendancy of women in society, men have rearticulated a virulent misogynist discourse that reached its peak when Lorena Bobbit turned the feminist castrating image into a very real fact. Misogyny has always characterised western society, but women have been endowed with an apocalyptic dimension of late. During the last decades, we have become accustomed to what Susan Sontag terms "Apocalypse From Now On"[53] or what Kate Holden calls "a *fin de siècle* alliance to imminent apocalypse."[54] As the twentieth century draws to its close, fears of the impending end of nature, art, history, civilisation, and, for that matter, life on planet earth, have been voiced in narratives and films (such as for example in the latest catastrophic pyrotechnics manufactured by Hollywood's dream factory, *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*). Stray meteorites heading for trouble are handy, indeed, when it comes to looking for something to blame for civilisation's *finale*. But more 'down-to-earth' people have picked up closer, less astral and more terrestrial scapegoats to account for the western downward path towards destruction. Now, Rita Hayworth singing "Put the Blame on Mame" was not absolutely mistaken for, if not poor Mame in particular, the

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[52] Ray Raphael, *The Men from the Boys. Rites of Passage in Male America* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) 3.

[53] qtd. in Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992) 2.

[54] Kate Holden, "Desirable Transformations: *Fin de Siècle* Fantasies of New Women and the 'Post-Cinematic' Ideal," *Sisterhoods. Across the Literature / Media Divide*, ed. Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 1998) 75.

hyper-active, unbound female sexuality Mame stands for has been identified as one of the main causes of the destruction of our civilisation and the patriarchal *leitmotifs* it relies on: family, religion, women's encapsulation within the domestic and male supremacy. Women's intense penetration of so-far safe masculine arenas such as the armed forces, politics or technology has triggered fears of male emasculation and impermanence that have been translated into a demonisation of women in the representational arts, where they are presented as evil, bitchy and wicked. A film such as *Fatal Attraction* acts as a cautionary tale for contemporary New Women whose sexual and professional expectations and whose freedom to move in the new public space of the city seem to transgress male boundaries and endanger male sanctuaries. Even in narratives in which women are apparently presented as empowered heroines, one can appreciate a reluctance to allow them unbound mobility and an effort to "[inflict, tilt and hedge] popular desires and anxieties towards fundamentally conservative ends."[55] In *Thelma and Louise*, for example, the heroines are allowed to free themselves from suffocating domestic environments and take a walk on the wild-side of life, just to be doomed to inevitable death at the end of the film; a narrative closure that suggests there is no opportunity for women outside patriarchy, which, after all, is not so bad an alternative for there is always a "Harvey Keitel cop who understands and sympathises with our women and tries in vain to pull them back from the abyss into which they will plunge to their deaths."[56] The same efforts to undermine and keep in control women's power can also be felt, for instance, in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, in which the bumped-up, weapon-wielding heroine, Sarah Connor, is ultimately unable to destroy the dreaded T-1000 without the help of another man-machine; or in *The Silence of the Lambs*, in which Clarice Starling has to ally herself with the selfsame predatory masculinity she tries to eliminate, the cannibal killer Hannibal Lecter, if she is to lead the narrative to a satisfactory denouement. What all these examples point at is that hiding underneath the glittering patina of an apparently sanctioned empowered femininity, lies a hysterical male who, afraid to let go of the masculine territories he has so far occupied single-handedly, takes pains to mar the heroine's efforts to combat patriarchal superstructures by means of a series of

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[55] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys*, 54.
[56] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys*, 53.

narrative turns that prevent the heroine from becoming the New Woman envisioned by feminists.

Another self-defence response has been the re-emergence of an overtly racist and xenophobic attitude in society. As Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanic assert, "[r]acist depiction, far from being a social evil, is a social good that enables society to accomplish goals that vary from era to era but always include the subordination or marginalisation of minority men."[57] In our era, as in the past, images and stereotypes of coloured people are not accidental, but functional. And the function the negative representations of coloured men serve nowadays is clearly determined by the fear of overtly sexual coloured masculinities overpowering white men and becoming sexually aggressive towards white women. In our increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse world, white men are surrounded by coloured men who, legend has it, are far more sexually potent than white men (especially blacks and Latinos) and who threaten the balance of social relations. The fear they provoke on the white man's psyche has led to a representation of coloured men, particularly blacks, as either brutish, aggressive and bestial (think of the film *Dangerous Minds*) or as subservient figures who are firm supporters of white patriarchy and who wish to benefit from the 'goodies' of white civilisation, without ever entertaining the possibility of sexual activity with white women (consider the role of Denzel Washington in films such as *The Pelican Brief* or *Philadelphia*).

Homosexuality has not fared better in the representational arts and defensive backlash has allied itself with homophobia in order to protect men from emasculating trends and to defend heterosexuality as the major censuring agent. Homosexuality has been systematically condemned and criminalised in western societies since the nineteenth century. Before that period, homosexuality had been considered immoral, against the will of God or an illness, but in the nineteenth century it became a criminal offence. The state took the lead in deciding what was normal and enacted legislation against anything that disrupted its particular version of the family; homosexuality,

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[57] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanic, "Minority Men, Misery and the Marketplace of Ideas," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 212.

therefore, was criminalised since it was one of the elements that threatened the familial, monogamous morality the state tried to implement. With the advent of gay movements by the late 1960s, things began to change for homosexuals. Through their intervention, homosexuality became a more acceptable identity and laws against its practice were systematically dismantled. However, homophobia has not completely disappeared from our western world. In fact, since the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic it has increased. HIV/AIDS has proved providential for right-wingers who stigmatise gays for being responsible for the spread of the disease and deploy all sorts of scientific and moral discourses about the desirability and normality of heterosexuality. The representational arts are also functional to the articulation of this pro-heterosexual discourse. Although AIDS has been addressed as a medical problem that affects not only the gay community in documentary and educational films and commercials; and although non-incriminatory presentations of AIDS-affected gay men in films such as *Philadelphia* have achieved widespread popularity; the truth remains that homophobia, together with the punitive associations of HIV/AIDS as an act of God and a "Viral Terminator"[58] has conditioned mainstream representation during the last two decades. Thus, Hollywood productions, Maria Lauret explains, propagandise monogamous marriage as the only acceptable relationship, condemn promiscuity and even popularise the idea that love is possible, even better, if there is no actual physical contact between the couple. Thus, Sally in *When Harry Met Sally* has a (feigned) orgasm without Harry's 'intervention'; and the whole plot of the film revolves around the idea that promiscuity is not self-fulfilling and, thus, undesirable; and in *Ghost*, Molly and Sam, like the lovers in *Ladyhawke*, are 'condemned' to continue their relationship without physical contact after Sam's death. Although not explicitly homophobic, these films work towards the legitimisation of the 'heterosexual, monogamous state' in a society where other sexual alternatives may be lethal, indeed. More explicitly homophobic are *Basic Instinct* and the vampire novels by Laurell K. Hamilton. *Basic Instinct* is inspired by Hollywood's homophobia and its willing association of homosexuals with serial murder. As Maria Lauret puts it, "[t]he discursive link, much as film-makers would like to deny it, lies in the HIV virus as

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[58] Maria Lauret, "Hollywood Romance in the Aids Era: *Ghost* and *When Harry Met Sally*," *Fatal Attractions. Rescripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 1998) 32.

'serial killer'."[59] In Hamilton's novels, the same applies. Vampires - constructed around blood, penetrative bi-sexual phallic fangs, elaborate baroque clothes and camp mannerisms, paleness and nocturnal life (characteristics that supposedly apply also to homosexuals) - are also lethal serial killers. In an elaborate ironic twist, Hamilton terms the human activists that populate her world 'HAV', Humans Against Vampires.[60] These examples reveal that we still live in a society geared around homophobia. The representational arts, implicitly or explicitly exacerbate this homophobia by fostering associations between homosexuality, contamination and death and systematically supporting a return to the pleasures of romantic, even platonic, monogamy.

Together with the defensive backlash against women, blacks and homosexuals, probably the most outstanding defence-mechanism activated in the last decades, particularly from the 1980s onwards, has been an attempt to go back to a traditional, essential, instinctive, civilisation-free, unproblematic masculinity in the representational arts, especially in popular culture, in order to provide men with suitably masculine role models and defend patriarchy. Although "[p]opular culture is hardly the only region of cultural practice where masculinities are modelled, re-negotiated or reinforced,"[61] the textual representation of gender behaviour has an extremely important influence on the way that real people behave. Traditionally, the representational arts have worked to prop up a phallocentric bias, constructing an heroic version of masculinity, delimiting the boundaries that define masculine behaviour and reproducing a patriarchal status quo. In a society perceived as destabilised by oppositional trends and with the masculinist discourse consistently undermined by alternative (feminist, gay, anti-racist, Marxist and so on) discourses, the maintenance and even recuperation of an essential and heroic masculinity and the re-affirmation of patriarchy seem to have acquired a new expediency. Thus, the old hunk *du jour* of imperialist adventure stories has been resurrected and disseminated in popular culture through figures such as the Marlboro man, penis-headed Joe Camel,

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[59] Maria Lauret, "Hollywood Romance in the Aids Era: *Ghost* and *When Harry Met Sally*," *Fatal Attractions*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker, 32.

[60] See, for instance: Laurell K. Hamilton, *Guilty Pleasures* (New York: Ace Books, 1993) 89.

[61] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys*, xv.

Indiana Jones and Clint Eastwood. The process from domesticity to a return to real masculinity is probably epitomised in the figure of John Travolta, rescued from the wishy-washy environment of *Grease* and *Look Who's Talking* to star as the violent tough guy of the internationally acclaimed Tarantino's hit, *Pulp Fiction*; or, more recently, to star in *Face/Off* with Nicholas Cage, the favourite *enfant terrible* of present-day cinema. But the epitome of tough masculinity is certainly Rambo, the uppermost example of individualism, liberty, militarism and heroism that has been read as a response to the fragmentation of masculinity prevalent since the 1970s. He functions as a sexist assertion of male dominance. Symptomatic of the 1980s backlash against feminism, Rambo represents the struggle to reassert a traditional image of masculinity and tough authority. As Rutherford explains:

> [This ubiquitous figure] advertises a destructive machismo as the solution to men's problems. He is John Wayne with his gloves off, wildly lashing out at everything that threatens or disappoints him. He confronts a world gone soft, pacified by traitors and cowards, dishonourable feminised men. It is a world that has disrupted his notions of manhood and honour. It threatens his comprehension of who he is. And his attempts to recreate order, and subdue the forces that threaten him, degenerate into a series of violent actions.[62]

Rambo, together with other ultra-masculine and muscular screen-heroes popular in the 1980s and maintained with very few alterations in the 1990s, therefore, are to be regarded as real-macho alternatives to the New Man, a more feminised version of manhood popularised in the media as an attempt to meet the demands of oppositional groups. These are forcing a reformulation of masculinity which, they claim, has to be adapted to our post-feminist state of affairs. Men, especially white men, they assume, have to give up their superior pose and 'tough macho ways', develop their emotional or feminine side and become sensitive to issues such as racism and the environment. As a result of the pressures by oppositional groups, therefore, a move has been made towards Political Correctness in the representation of white men in popular cultural forms; thus, men have been imbued with characteristics that do not offend the heightened sensibilities of oppositional groups or interfere with their political agenda - their struggle to destabilise traditional power structures by

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[62] qtd. in Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies. Genre, Gender and the Action Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 95.

bridging the divide that separates the public from the domestic, the masculine from the feminine, the rational from the emotional, the superior from the subaltern.

This move towards Political Correctness in the representation of men[63] is particularly evident if we examine the array of romantic and family comedies, dramas, and television sit-coms that have been produced in the last decades. Such productions have popularised the image of a new type of hero, the New Age Man or the 'family man' - the old prince charming of fairy tales and sentimental narratives with a few new accessories: a tendency to express sentiments that had traditionally been skin-deep; a predisposition to make life-long commitments with his sentimental partner; a responsible approach to work; devotion to his family; and a flair for resorting to dialogue instead of using unchallenged violent authority to settle disputes. Television and cinema screens are full of examples of this new hero, from sit-coms such as *Family Matters* and *The Cosby Show* to romantic and family movies such as *Moonstruck, Three Men and a Baby, Look Who's Talking, Ghost, Pretty Woman, Sleepless in Seattle, My Best Friend's Wedding* and *The Object of My Affection*. The 'taming of the shrew' has shifted towards the 'taming of the tough guy'; even Arnold Schwarzenegger, one of the epitomes of muscular heroism, has been feminised; his potent body has been recruited to sponsor family and domestic values in films such as *Kindergarten Cop, Junior* and *Jingle All the Way*.

Not even the action genre has remained indifferent. Recent action productions demonstrate how filmmakers have responded to the demands made elsewhere in the culture by women and 'minority groups': Sylvester Stallone, for example, "[flashes] his New Man credentials" in *Tango and Cash*; Stallone even presents himself as a "caring, sharing, sensitive Sly, wearing spectacles, and much more concerned with showing off his Picassos than his pecs."[64] The all-destructive robot Schwarzenegger impersonates in *The Terminator* adapts to withstand the challenges of the nineties'

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[63] Men in the representational arts are assuming a Political Correct profile, emerging as what Buchbinder defines as the SNAG (the Sensitive New Age Guy), who is "supposedly more sensitive to women's needs, both personal and political, more self-aware [...] and more honouring of the earth and of nature than his fellows who pillage their environment for power and profit." See: David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 18-19.

[64] qtd. in Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 85.

society in the film's sequel (*Terminator 2: Judgement Day*), where he learns that "the old ways of violence, rationality, single-mindedness, and goal-orientation [...] were destructive not only for individual men, but for humanity as a whole" and becomes a "more internalised man, who thinks with his heart rather than with his head - or computer chips."[65] Paul Hogan in *Crocodile Dundee* and its sequel, *Crocodile Dundee 2*, is forced to come to terms with the inadequacy of his rough and tough ways in modern, 'civilised' society. And Steven Seagal's character in the film *On Deadly Ground* is presented as a "crack oil fire-fighter and all-terrain fight maven" who is imbued with a "soft spot for the spirit world of indigenous religion and a taste for tough environmental justice."[66] As Andrew Ross asserts, "the 'Political Correctness' monster has broken free from William F. Buckley's genteel lash, and is now lurching its way into the scary psychic domain of ... the Great White Dude." Heroes, he suggests, have "a message as ham-fisted as the kidney [punches] you [can see coming] from the [films'] very first brawl."[67] Such showy and defiant heroes, however, are not to be regarded as more palatable individual examples of masculinity, but as a widespread social and cultural construct endeavoured by patriarchy in order to maintain its dominance. They are the self-same patriarchal, misogynist, homophobic, maverick individuals; born free and with a historical sense of full constitutional entitlement; men who use advanced technology; men whose self-sufficiency positions them beyond race and class; scheduled to speak for the rights and freedoms of the oppressed minorities, or for the necessity to protect the ecosystem from the attacks of petroleum capitalism. They are the latest evolutionary developments of the old tough guy, armed to survive in and maintain a hold on a society obsessed with Political Correctness.

Indeed, the latest developments of society have damaged masculinity as it used to be in the past. But far from leading to its complete deconstruction and to the emergence of a new type of masculinity altogether, men have endeavoured to

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[65] Susan Jeffords, "Can Masculinity Be Terminated?" *Screening the Male*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 253.

[66] Andrew Ross, "The Great White Dude," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 169.

[67] Andrew Ross, "The Great White Dude," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 169.

resuscitate old masculine values and coat them in a nineties gloss in order to be able to survive the *fin de siècle* crisis free from the oppressive yardstick of bourgeois masculinity against which they have been constantly measured. Their quirky desperation to survive bespeaks their fear and their lingering doubts about the role they are to play in a future that does not seem to belong to them anymore. The selfsame survival instinct has led men to furious attempts to go back to an essential, instinctive masculinity and to fight, nullify or vanish from view any potential threat to their manliness in the representational arts, asserting, in this way, their superiority over the Other, whether that be gay men, younger men, women or subordinated ethnic groups. The new, courageous, gross, instinctive man is supposed to become a role-model, part of man's subjective identity. Social and psychic domains are closely woven, how men would like to be has obvious implications for the ways they act in everyday life for, as Dawson asserts, "masculine identities are lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination."[68] By furnishing men with unproblematic versions of the truly masculine man, patriarchy soothes men into tranquillity, nurtures their desire for a natural definition of manhood, gives them a masculine code of ethics to subscribe to, and secures men in power. But, at the same time, this search for a consistent imagining of masculinity gives proof of the chink in the armour of the self-same masculinity, constantly besieged by external and internal forces which men desperately try to overcome, eradicate, contain, suppress, fight. And, thus, the hysteria of modern men, frantically seeking a shield of comfortable masculinity to yield against the forces intent on emasculating or overpowering him.[69]

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[68] Graham Dawson, "The Blonde Bedouin. Lawrence of Arabia, Imperial Adventure and the Imagining of English-British Masculinity," *Manful Assertions*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh, 118.

[69] This hysteria is particularly obvious in films such as *Die Hard*. In this film, John McClane (Bruce Willis) is constructed with nostalgic reference to real one-man-show cowboy heroes, wielding guns to stop criminals and evildoers, always on the side of justice, always winning in the end. The constructedness of this character is obvious in the dialogue between him and the villain, Hans Gruber:

> 'Who are you? Just another American who saw too many movies as a child? Another orphan of a bankrupt culture who thinks he's John Wayne, Rambo and Marshal Dillon?'
> 'I was always kind of partial to Roy Rogers, actually. I really liked those sequinned shirts.'
> 'Do you really think you have a chance against us, Mr Cowboy?'
> 'Yippee-kay-yea, mother-fucker.'

In this character, old gender codes remain firmly in place. And, of course, he wins in the end. However, his sense of lack of control is evident throughout the film: he is estranged from his wife, a high executive in the Nakatomi building where the action of the film takes place; he is perpetually lacerated and entrapped in confining air conducts, lifts or suffocating offices; he has lost contact with the real world and finds himself alone to brave difficulties and oppose his enemies - the feminised executives, his masculinised independent wife and the expert terrorists who control the building. He is a lonely man,

## 6.5. The crisis of masculinity and Wilbur Smith's Courtney saga as a response

Smith's prototypical hero cannot be understood without taking into account the patriarchal / misogynist vein in the western literary tradition, a tradition that reflects and promotes the endemic gender inequality that has so characterised our society;[70] more explicitly, Smith's construction of masculinity cannot be understood outside the tradition of imperialist adventure stories in which Smith's adventurous / masculinist romances are inscribed. But, as I have argued, literary tradition alone is not enough to explain Smith's particular conception of the masculine in his narratives, for the conditionings that determine both the physical and behavioural make-up of his heroes is not solely literary. His creation of an adventurous space in the wilderness of pre-apartheid South-Africa, in the equally wild cityscapes-turned-jungles of apartheid South Africa, and the even wilder expanses of war-torn post-independence African countries definitely calls for the type of hero that populated the pages of nineteenth-

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traversed by doubt, struggling to maintain his manly ethos in a world that seems to have deserted him. He is just another hurt man who, in a quirky desperation to survive, gets hold of traditional masculinist values to maintain his dominance and perpetuate old codes of masculinity.

[70] It cannot be denied that there has been, and is still is, a tendency in the representational arts to present women in a series of roles that, although with some variations, have remained essentially unchanged for ages. There is also a tendency to idealise the patriarchal family, morally controlled and financially supported by men, to confine women in the domestic space, and to condemn women who fail to fulfil the roles expected from them in society. However, as I have explained in chapter 5, section 5.2, these somewhat misogynist propensities have not remained uncontested. Present-day women understand that, in the battle of the sexes, they do not always have to be the losers. Consequently, they reject debasing images of womanhood. Their new self-consciousness about their past subordination and their need to retaliate, has been translated in the representational arts into self-assertive depictions of women and womanhood. Women analyse their own feelings and emotions and focus on concepts and subjects that are women-specific in an attempt to understand and come to terms with womanhood. They also defend autonomy, independence from men, and bonding with other women. They analyse men from a woman's point of view, seeing their faults and their fallibility, and rejecting the idea that all men are potential 'Prince Charmings' and that it takes the right woman to get the prince out of them. They sometimes swap places in the men/predators - women/prey dichotomy, and regard men as objects of desire, good to have sex with but without regarding them as husbands-to-be or providers of comfort and stability, therefore refusing to accommodate within the patterns of domesticity men expect from women. The narratives of, for instance, Terry McMillan, the poetry of SuAndi and films such as *Moonlight and Valentino* and *The First Wives' Club* are examples of this pro-feminist / feminine retaliation.

Saying that the western tradition, therefore, is solely misogynous is just a vague generalisation for women's 'counter-attack has been pervasive and, I should add, effective, operating important transformations in women's self-perception and men's perception of women. Having said this, Smith's narratives belong to a misogynous tradition and cannot really be properly understood outside the misogynist mentality that has so characterised our western construction of reality and its consequent reflection in fiction.

century adventure stories: wild at heart, romantic, brave, white, heterosexual and British, he epitomised masculine values while, at the same time, promoted white supremacy, propagandised empire and encouraged the perpetuation of stern and patriarchal authority over childish, barbarian and uncivilised 'others'. But Smith's conception of masculine heroism stems from the social as well as from the literary, for it is the angst (supposedly) generated by uncongenial social developments in the western world in general, and South Africa in particular, that explicates the stress Smith places on the masculine in his novels.

When Smith started the Courtney saga in 1964 with *When the Lion Feeds* - his first novel and the one that granted him immediate popularity and widespread recognition -, the western world had its eyes firmly placed on the development of the Vietnam War, which, at that time, had been going on for almost five years. The inability of USA troops to bring the conflict to an expedient finale, together with the increasing number of dead USA servicemen and maimed or traumatised soldiers sent back home to heal their physical and psychological wounds, translated into a pervasive climate of disillusionment and defeatism, and into the consequent dismantling of traditional values of militaristic, aggressive, tough masculinity not only in the USA, but in the western world as a whole. This was followed by a wave of pacifism and the development of what Bly terms the 'soft male' in the 1970s and whose characteristics he describes as follows:

> In the seventies I began to see all over the country a phenomenon that we might call the 'soft male'. Sometimes even today when I look out at an audience, perhaps half of the young males are what I'd call soft. They're lovely, valuable people - I like them - they're not interested in harming the earth or starting wars. There's a gentle attitude towards life in their whole being and style of living. [...] But many of those men are not happy. You quickly notice the lack of energy in them. They are life-preserving but not exactly life-giving.[71]

According to Bly, the men who emerged from the seventies (and whose 'offspring' we can see populating modern rural and urban areas, not to say television and cinema screens world-wide), did not particularly help to make our world better, an idea that some men, and women, still uphold nowadays. Richard Nixon, echoing Ernest

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[71] Robert Bly, *Iron John*, 2-3.

Hemingway, for instance, wrote in *Seize the Moment. America's Challenge in a One-Superpower World*: "The world remains a dangerous and unpredictable place."[72] Given this state of conflict and danger in our society, "[a]re the kind-hearted men of *The Doctor* [...], *One Good Cop*, *Regarding Henry*, and *City Slickers* prepared for such a world?"[73] Smith, like Nixon and Bly, certainly does not think so. In fact, he depicts the after-effects of Vietnam and the age of drugs, sex, rock-and-roll and careless lethargy that was Vietnam's immediate aftermath in negative terms in *Golden Fox*. The action of this novel starts in a Rolling Stones' concert in London. Mick Jagger, commanding the situation from the stage, speaks to the audience in a "slurred and incoherent" voice, and reads out "the stumbling tribute [...] to the member of his band [Brian Jones], who only days previously had drowned in a swimming-pool during a wild weekend party." (*Fox* 8) The victim had in fact been almost comatose with drugs when he entered the water. But this death does not produce outrage or sorrow; it is regarded as heroic instead for "this was the age of drugs and sexual excess, of pot and Pill, of freedom and peace and overdosing." (*Fox* 8) The 'repugnant' value system, together with the social decay this 'heroic' death stands for in Smiths' perception, is further emphasised by the description of the concert atmosphere he provides. From the audience rises "the stench of dust and sweat, the sickly odour of cannabis smoke and the heady overpowering musk of young bodies physically aroused." (*Fox* 9) Marianne Faithful, one of the concert's attendants, is described as a remote and ethereal beauty, but her eyes seem "dreamy and sightless as those of a blind woman, and her movements slow and somnolent." (*Fox* 9) The smell of the area is "like that of an animal cage, for some of the audience, both men and women, hemmed in and reluctant to miss a moment of [the concert], [urinate] where they [sit]." (*Fox* 10) The decay the concert epitomises is further emphasised by having a truly masculine hero, Ramon de Santiago y Machado - later on revealed as a communist KGB agent and thus immediately debunked from the heroic pillar from which, at first, he commanded the action - regarding the scene and being "disgusted by the decadence, by the wild abandon and the gross indulgence of it all." (*Fox* 10)

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[72] Richard Nixon, *Seize the Moment: America's Challenge in a One-Superpower World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 273.
[73] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies. Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rudgers University Press, 1994) 180.

Smith, like the narrative voice of Ramon de Santiago y Machado, seems to be appalled by the deterioration of western society; a society which is turning 'soft' as he beholds it; where there is no space for real heroism; where the old concepts of masculinity do not seem to apply anymore; and where all people's priorities, as Stemsland says to White in the film *LA Confidential*, are all screwed up. As the example mentioned above suggests, the whole Courtney saga, therefore, emerged as a foil against the uncongenial social trends that developed in the 1960s, continued to grow and even radicalised in multifarious ways as the social scene began to be taken over by feminist, anti-racist and anti-masculinist groups, and which resulted in western men having to reformulate their behavioural make-up and soften the rough edges of old, macho-style models of masculinity. The Courtney saga, thus, can be read as an attempt to retaliate. In a society assailed by what I have previously defined as a perceived crisis of masculinity and of old imperial values - which are being systematically undermined as decolonisation follows its bloody trail and the postcolonial perspective underlies new models of western man's self-perception - Smith creates a masculine landscape outside the constraints of socio-political superstructures where there is ample space and opportunity for the protagonists to build on the strengths of the archetypal masculinist adventure pattern: killing fields, hunting grounds, natural preserves, emerging cities, the competitive world of business and politics, pre-imperial wild expanses or open seas. And it is against these backgrounds that Smith develops 'essential' manhood: an assumed instinctive essence underlying the veneer of civilisation and the Politically Correct profiles coating present-day western men. Smith taps into this 'essential' masculine vein, brings it to the fore, and imbues it with life through his heroes, who stage masculinity for readers to identify with. His heroes become 'perfect' examples of essential and instinctive manliness to set against the destruction of masculine values, meanings and beliefs in our postmodern world, meeting a (supposedly) widespread desire of men for the reassertion of a heroic masculine identity and value system in times when the oppositional, off-mainstream, socio-political trends in society threaten to make the 'real macho man' at one with the dinosaurs.

Sean Courtney I, Sean Courtney II, Mark Anders, Michael Courtney I, Shasa Courtney, Garrick Courtney II, Blaine Malcomess, and the early Courtneys Hal, Tom and Dorian - the heroes of the narratives under analysis -, therefore, have different identities, but all conform to a single idea of masculinity. They all contribute to a single monolithic image of what it means to be a 'man'. They epitomise the essence of an adventurous ('Politically Incorrect') masculinity, unrestrained by social / domestic pressures and indulging in the wilderness cults traditionally associated with the making of heroic, white male identities (the frontiersman, the cowboy, the explorer, the engineer, the successful entrepreneur, the pioneer, the settler, etc.). Their empowered masculinity, the erectness and hardness of their body, the ubiquity of their 'oversized gun', the careless ordinariness of their clothing, the limited range of their stark facial and bodily gestures, make them the legitimised bearers of masculinity. Their status as heroes, in fact, is not only acquired because of the quests they undertake, the deeds they perform, or the battles they fight, but because they are 'men' acting like 'men' and succeeding because of their capacity to overcome dangers and difficulties by the use of their manly attributes. Being 'men' is in fact their defining characteristic and the narratives are pregnant with references to the heroes' manliness:

'Don't worry about us any more now, maneer. I know how it is with a *man* that is a *man*. When there's work to do everything else comes after.' (*Lion* 461, emphasis added)

He spoke now in a way that he had never spoken before, calmly and with authority. Swiftly he was becoming a full *man*. (*Sparrow* 102, emphasis added)

'Now, that is a real *man*,' she told herself as she watched Sean Courtney step down from the Rolls and come up the front staircase of the château. (*Burning* 164, emphasis added)

'That is a big voice for a small *man*,' he whispered huskily. It never occurred to him that it might be a girl - that arrogant anger could only be *male*. (*Burning* 548, emphasis added)

'Beg your pardon, you can't baby him forever, Missus. [...] He's a *man* now, and a *man's* got to take his own chances.'(*Sword* 55, emphasis added)

'We will make a good kill [...]. It will be a fight for *men* who are truly *men*.' (*Die* 381, emphasis added)

Anderson studied the face of the boy who had swiftly became a *man*. [...] By God, he thought, the pup has become a fighting dog overnight. (*Monsoon* 296-297, emphasis added)

'If you are coming to see with Guy and me, then you have to act like a *man.*'
(*Monsoon* 50, emphasis added)

Smith is doing more than providing us readers with interesting male characters whose adventurous exploits make us hold our breath for a while, make us suspend our disbelief and willingly escape from the boredom and ennui that characterise our mechanised societies. Smith's narratives are a clear endeavour to inscribe masculine sexuality onto an increasingly effeminate, domestic and civilised world in an attempt to exorcise his and modern man's fear of emasculation. His heroes, therefore, transcend individuality, for, all together, they become a single expression of what it means to be a real man: his defining traits and code of behaviour. In Smith's narratives the stress falls on masculinity and, consequently, his heroes have to live up to the challenge. Manly to the core, Smith manipulates his heroes to make them show only their masculine side; everything regarded as feminine in man's constitution is ignored, silenced, repressed. Smith holds the chisel tightly in his hand, carving the marks of true manhood into his male protagonists. And the figures that emerge from his artistic efforts are totems of masculinity, icons the tribe of men look upon for recognition and identity.

However, and before proceeding, it is worth emphasising that Smith's mega-masculine heroes are a response to a perceived crisis of white masculinity and that this crisis is inscribed between the lines of Smith's assertive and, to all appearances, unproblematic depiction of 'true' masculinity - to the extent that, as Giles tells Buffy in an episode of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, "the subtext here is rapidly becoming text."[74] Smith's heroes, especially in the latest instalments of the saga, are not so cocksure as the original Courtneys. Their lacerations multiply, their obsession with durability and the maintenance of patriarchal family arrangements against an uncongenial world is pervasive. The heroes are haunted by a feeling that the time for adventure is coming to an end. Sean II, for instance, meditates on the effect Claudia, his lover, is having on him; he sees that she is domesticating his wild habits and, suddenly, it dawns upon him that he is now deeply enmeshed in an adventurous

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[74] "Ted," *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, second season, writ. David Greenwalt and Joss Whedon, 1998, dir. Bruce Seth Green, perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Nicholas Brendon, Alyson Hannigan, Charisma Carpenter, Bavid Boreanz, Anthony Stewart Head, WB Network, 8 Dec. 1998.

pursuit - the capture of military equipment from guerrilla soldiers in Moçambique - but that "this [is] probably the last time it [will] happen," for he is "over fifty years of age and [...] it [is] time for it to change." (*Die* 384) Centaine, looking at ageing Blaine, her lover, silently muses, "Yesterday we were young and immortal, but today I see at last there is a term to all things." (*Sword* 603) Heroes often find themselves in dire straits, dangerous situations that they only overcome with difficulty, but Smith's latest Courtney heroes seem puzzled about their heroic performance, as if their survival in the world of adventure was a matter of chance rather than of personal effort. Thus, Smith writes about Sean II and his assistants' adventures in Moçambique: "It is against all the odds that they had survived this far." (*Die* 515) The world around Smith's heroes seems to be collapsing and they sometimes feel they do not have the power to control a situation which, like sand in a clenched fist, slips through their hands; Shasa, for instance says, "There are heroes and there are monsters, but most of us are ordinary mortals caught up in events too turbulent for any of us." (*Rage* 627) Smith becomes increasingly aware of the fact that he is just providing fantasies of masculinity that have nothing to do with reality, fantasies so fragile that they are just dreams, figments of his imagination with which he tries to assuage 'real' men into tranquillity; but as 'dreams', they are whimsical 'safety boards', with no real substance underneath them. This explains Smith's heroes continual references to the 'unreality' of it all: a march the heroes undertake is qualified as "dream-like unreality;" (*Die* 120) Sean II, hoping to rescue Job and Claudia from enemy guerrillas, thinks about keeping going blindly through the night, getting ahead of them, shadowing them, and hoping for some fortuitous opportunity to reach and release them, but then comes to his senses and says, "That's dreaming in Technicolor;" (*Die* 197) and Hal, to mention another example, is so tired after a whole day of work that he lapses into comatose exhaustion and all around him acquires a dream-like quality, "meaning and reality [seeming] to recede." (*Birds* 74) Even the increasingly escapist world Smith depicts in the two last instalments of the saga bespeak crisis. In these two novels, *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*, Smith takes the Courtney saga by its tail and flings it back into the past. Unable to maintain the imagining of heroic maleness in a world where Rambo himself has become, at least for the guardians of Political Correctness in our society, an object of derision, a walking joke in his over-excessive

masculinity; unable also to maintain heroic white maleness in a South Africa that has finally been taken over by the black population; Smith recreates a fantastical new (old) masculine space in a world of pirates, open seas, and knighthood in pre-imperial Africa, a world where there are still opportunities for heroic white masculinity of an imperial kind to grow and prosper.

Indeed, the pages of Smith's Courtney saga are populated by true action heroes; but heroes, at least action heroes, are old hat in our western world. A brief recount of titles of action films that have become blockbuster successes speak of nothing but anguish or impermanence. Bruce Willis becomes *The Last Boy Scout* or *The Last Man Standing*; Arnold Schwarzenegger is *The Last Action Hero*. Jean Claude van Damme has *Nowhere to Run*, Antonio Banderas is *Desperado*, Ray Liotta has *No Escape*; Tom Cruise is involved in a *Mission Impossible*. Death and destruction are inscribed in quite a few titles, which although they make reference to the destructive and combatant abilities of the heroes, also bespeak the destructibility of the heroes themselves: *Demolition Man*, *Terminator*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Die Hard*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Death Warrant*. Concern about mortality characterises even the actors who play action heroes on cinema screens. Thus, Chuck Norris once stated:

> There are a dozen death spots, another dozen paralysing death spots, and many, many disabling spots on the body. We human beings are quite fragile, you know.[75]

Gone, indeed, are the Rockys, Rambos and Dirty Harrys. The western world does not apparently hold enough room for these action men to grow and prosper; a situation which Smith acknowledges when he writes: "They don't want heroes anymore;" (*Sword* 616) or "Heroes are out of fashion;" (*Die* 306) or when he has Garrick II dismiss Shasa's choice of words when attacking an enemy from a plane by saying: "Come on, Pater. People only say things like that in World War Two movies," (*Fox* 515) bringing to the fore, in this way, the out-of-placedness of militaristic heroism in modern times; or when Smith has Hal defend selfish self-concern over heroic but

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[75] qtd. in Marshall Julius, *Action! The Action Movie A-Z* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1996) 142.

dangerous involvement when he says to his lads, "Don't try to be heroes. Just stay well out of harm's way." (*Monsoon* 190)

In Antony Thomas' biography of Sir Cecil Rhodes, *Rhodes. The Race for Africa*, he describes the condition of Rhodes' statue in Cape Town's botanical gardens in the following terms:

> The statue of Rhodes in the Cape Town gardens that I remember so vividly from childhood is now discoloured and corroded. Streaks of white birdlime on either side of the face give his eyes, nose and mouth the appearance of a mask, detached from the rest of the head. Over the years rainwater, flowing from a crease in the brim of his farmer's hat, has eaten a large, rusty hole in his right leg. People stroll past uninterested, unseeing - in the very heart of the city that once honoured him with the most extravagant state funeral in its history.[76]

The statue that was once the totem of imperial heroic masculinity is now an invisible, ignored wreck. The man himself - who once represented everything British people aspired to and defined who they were (common sense, determination, boundless energy, expansionism, ruthless capitalism) - is now regarded by some as a murderer, briber, cheat and corrupt opportunist. Masculinity of an imperial kind is indeed the victim of opprobrium, at best old-fashioned. The present state of affairs calls for new types of masculinity to emerge, and old heroes, some feel, need to be replaced by gentler, kinder, more 'feminine' types of men. Yet, not all men seem to welcome this trend with the same enthusiasm. Smith, like many other fiction-makers, acknowledges the crisis of imperial masculinity, a crisis which shows underneath the tough façades of even the harshest of his fictional heroes. But his heroes are totems of old-style masculinity nonetheless. Old conceptions of masculinity may be heading towards destruction, but Smith's fiction is here to keep them alive, even if in his 'desperation' to endow them with life, he shows the selfsame 'intimations of their mortality' he so systematically tries to hide or counter-effect. In what follows, I provide an account of how he creates these icons of masculinity, and the traits - both physical and behavioural - that characterise 'essential manhood' and which Smith's heroes display. Also, I deal with how he uses his heroes and narrative strategies to defend patriarchy and patriarchal ways of familial organisation. Finally, I explain how Smith provides

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[76] Anthony Thomas, *Rhodes. The Race for Africa* (London: BBC Books, 1996) 16.

his heroes with 'appropriately' adventurous spaces that allow for their display of heroic masculinity unhindered by the burden of Political Correctness that would render them unworthy, despicable men in other (bureaucratised or domestic) contexts.

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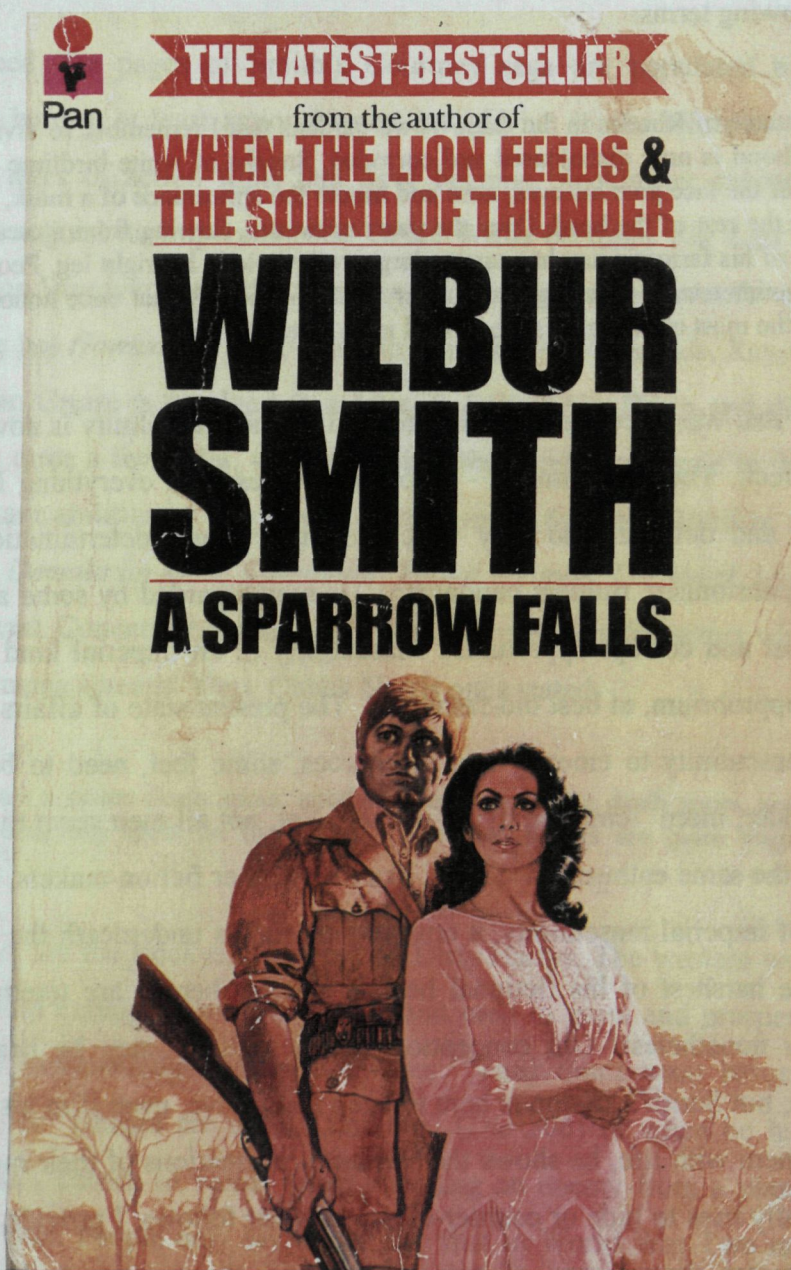THE SOUND OF THUNDER
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SMITH
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Figure 6. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *A Sparrow Falls* (London: Pan, 1978)