

**Representations of Masculinity in Wilbur Smith's Courtney Saga.
Contextual Causes and Strategies of Authorial Control**



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Chapter 7: Courtney bodies. Bodily perfection, strength and sexuality. Bodies with a cause

7.1. Bodily perfection: embodying the ‘essential man’

During the nineteenth century, and due to the development of biology, health reform, and the optimistic belief that it was within the capacity of men to improve themselves, the masculine body was elevated to a position of enormous importance. ‘Body-building’ came to be associated with ideals of perfection and virtue and muscular bulk in men became a highly prized cultural value. Unsurprisingly, the heroes of nineteenth century imperialist adventure narratives were portrayed as muscular and young,¹ their physical perfection, bodily vigour and tanned complexion becoming an expression of their virility. The relevance of physical perfection has remained ingrained in our western society. We live in a world obsessed with images and appearances and where sheer physicality is very likely to determine successful performance in society as is exemplified by the new myth-like quality physically-perfect top models such as Naomi Campbell or Claudia Schiffer have acquired; or by the fame of actors such as Sharon Stone, Brad Pitt, Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone, whose bodies more than their acting skills granted them widespread social recognition; or by the idol-like status of sport figures such as Ronaldo, Moyà or Agassi who have become modern society’s new demi-gods, not only admired for their sports achievements but for their bodies, which have become icons of physical perfection as can be appreciated in a recent advertising campaign for a well-known Swiss watch trade mark. The stress modern society places on physicality has even led to a transgression of the values that had traditionally been associated with

¹ Nineteenth century novelists and illustrators, for example, depicted the Crusoe figure, the quintessential imperial hero in the following way:

He was made of bone, muscle and nerve, like an English race-horse. He was spare: he had practically no cheeks, that is to say, there was bone and muscle but no sign of fat; his complexion was clear, darkish, and without sign of red in it; his eyes were expressive, though slightly green. (qtd. in Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male*, 157).

physical appearance. In the past, physical beauty was generally assumed to be in inverse proportion to the amount of grey matter that a person was supposed to possess. Nowadays, physical beauty bespeaks healthy habits, sporting skills, energy, intelligence and enterprising spirit and, therefore, is not regarded as a superfluous adornment, but as a necessary requirement; some companies even appreciate the youth and good-looks of their employees, which are assumed to reflect the energy and vigour of the company.

Stress on physicality has led to the objectification of the male and the female body. This objectification, and eroticisation, of the female body has indeed been a widespread phenomenon. In our patriarchal culture, women have often been subjected to a masculine gaze that has transformed them into objects of desire, praised for the badges of female beauty (breasts, bottoms and thighs). The male body has also been subjected to objectification, especially in the last decades. As Paul Smith phrases it:

There exists a whole cultural production around the exhibition of the male body in the media - not just in film, but in television, sports, advertising, and so on - and this objectification has even been present throughout the history of Hollywood itself, while evidently having been intensified in recent years.²

And yet there is a difference in men and women's objectification. Whereas women's objectification demands appropriation by the masculine gaze fixed upon them, men's is supposed to demand identification and, of course, to exclude any sort of desire on men's part, very often by stressing elements of anti-homosexual significance. The pleasure the masculine body is expected to give to men is that of voyeuristic admiration of a non-erotic type; as Willemsen explains, men are offered as spectacle activating the "pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is walk, move, ride, fight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes, or more abstractly history."³ Male bodies, therefore, are often objectified so as to highlight those attributes which reflect their virility: basically their physical bulk, unambiguously heterosexual potency, and vigour, while removed from sight are the elements that could put the selfsame manliness into

² Paul Smith, "Eastwood Bound," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 82.

³ qtd. in Paul Smith, "Eastwood Bound," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 80.

jeopardy. The masculine body thus looms large in the representational arts, probably as an unsubtle response to the impact of feminism, and other anti-patriarchal trends, in our culture.

The same objectification of the masculine body can be found in Smith's novels, in which the awesome physicality of the heroes conveys unambiguous messages of their power, vitality and sexual glamour. Smith's heroes are presented as manly examples of physical perfection: lean, muscular, tanned and vigorous, they epitomise physical excellence, inscribing onto the narratives the solidity of masculine presence. In *When the Lion Feeds*, for example, Sean Courtney I is described as having a vivid colouring with "black hair, skin brown from the sun, lips and cheeks that [glow] with the fresh young blood beneath their surface, and blue eyes, the dark indigo blue of cloud shadow on mountain lake." (6) The same vivid colouring still characterises him in *A Sparrow Falls*; old age has only 'snowed' a few splashes and strands of grey onto Sean I's "thick curls of dark wiry hair" and "short thick beard" (4) while he retains the "clear and dark cobalt blue" (5) eyes under his "sleek and unmarked" (4) black curved eyebrows. Sean I's muscular body and 'considerable' bulk is also emphasised on various occasions. In *When the Lion Feeds*, for example, Sean I's back as he works on the edge of a trench appears "shiny with sweat; each individual muscle standing out in relief, swelling and subsiding as he moved;" (259) and in *The Sound of Thunder* we are reminded of his "two hundred pounds of muscle and bones and scars supporting a face like a granite cliff" (35) or of the fact that he is a man of "muscle and moods and unexpectedly soft places." (229) Michael Courtney I, Sean I's bastard son, is also characterised by his good looks and muscular, virile body, "tall and lean in tight black riding boots, and an open shirt accentuating the breadth of his shoulders." (*Thunder* 540) Mark Anders, although he does not have Courtney blood running through his veins, is also breathtakingly handsome with "pale golden brown" eyes "set wide with the serene gaze of a poet or a man who had lived in the open country of long distant horizons" (*Sparrow* 9) and a "finely drawn" body. (*Sparrow* 10) The same applies to Colonel Blaine Malcomess, the British administrator appointed by the Government of the Union of South Africa, and who becomes Centaine's lover and, eventually, husband as the narratives develop. His

features are large, “the bones of his jaw and cheek and forehead” seem “weighty and massive as stone.” (*Sword* 149) His nose is big, “with a Roman bridge to it, his brow [...] beetling and his mouth [...] big and mobile.” (*Sword* 149) His dark hair is cut short and his neck is “strong but not bulled, pleasingly proportioned and smooth.” (*Sword* 232) Of course, he is also tall and lean, and his muscles are “flat and hard-looking,” (*Sword* 206) all in all resembling a “younger more handsome Abraham Lincoln,” (*Sword* 149) “the Michaelangelo statue of David,” (*Sword* 206) or, “with [his] imperial nose and wide commanding mouth,” a “Roman Caesar.” (*Sword* 412) Again, and like Sean I before him, although he ages, he still maintains his healthy and athletic look even as he approaches his sixty years of age. Thus, although he has “shining silver wings” in his hair and “deep creases in his tanned face, around the eyes and at the corners of his mouth and his big aquiline nose,” his body is still “hard and flat-bellied from riding and walking.” (*Sword* 603)

Third and fourth generation Courtneys do not differ much from their ancestor, Sean Courtney I. Shasa, Centaine’s son, may be as “beautiful as a girl, with flawless skin and dark indigo eyes,” (*Sword* 19) as an adolescent, but he is tall, lean and lithe, has broad shoulders and “fine muscle in his brown arms.” (*Sword* 144) Injured during the military campaign in Abyssinia during World War II, he has to wear an eye-patch on his eye. Yet, it does not disfigure him in the least. With his six-foot-one tall body, “his dark waving hair and good looks,” (*Rage* 11) the eye-patch gives him a “dashing piratical air.” (*Fox* 18) In fact, he is constantly being described as a “conquering hero,” (*Sword* 302) “impossibly handsome,” (*Rage* 5) “tall and debonair,” (*Sword* 608) “comely,” (*Sword* 292) and “magnificent,” (*Sword* 426) and his piratical outlook is highlighted by being compared to Errol Flynn, whom he even surpasses in good-looks and panache. Thus, when David, one of Shasa’s friends, is first introduced to Shasa, he is strongly reminded of the film *The Sea Hawk* “though the eye-patch [makes] Shasa look even more piratical than Errol Flynn had done in the title role;” (*Rage* 28) and Kitty Godolphin asserts, “You look better than Errol Flynn on film.” (*Rage* 90) Sean II, Shasa’s first-born, retains the Errol Flynn look of his father - at one point Cuthbert, one of his contacts, tells him, “You in like Flynn” (*Die* 301) - and then some, for Sean II is even a more handsome and tougher version of his father; Smith

has Shasa acknowledge that “[Sean II is] impossibly beautiful, like a romantic painting of himself, and he [moves] with the unforced grace of a hunting leopard.” (*Rage* 336) His eyes are green, and his hair is “shining dark” and he wears it “in a page-boy almost to his shoulders, but bound up around the forehead with a patterned silk bandanna to keep it out of his eyes,” (*Rage* 545) later on substituted by a “Comanche-style leather thong” that can hardly “restrain the shimmering jet-black locks that [dance] and [flutter] like a flag around his head.” (*Fox* 368) His arms are “sleek and glossy with muscle,” (*Rage* 545) his belly is “flat [like a] greyhound,” (*Die* 24) his buttocks “round and hard as a pair of ostrich eggs in his khaki shorts,” (*Die* 24) and his body muscles are “tanned and glowing with abundant health as though they had been oiled.” (*Fox* 368) On the whole, and after such a description, one feels Rambo has jumped off the screen and into the pages of Smith’s adventurous narratives. In fact, Sean II closely matches Hoberman’s description of Rambo for, like him, he is a “superb icon: a hippie he-man [...] a patriotic loner [...] a sort of Apache *Übermensch* or a Prussian noble savage.”⁴

Even Garrick II, Shasa’s second son, asthmatic, skinny, fragile, myopic and, with his pale face and wispy hair that “[sticks] up in spikes,” (*Rage* 15) absolutely ungainly as a child, turns his body into a truly Courtney icon as he grows up. This he does by working out until he manages to develop his muscles, which he needs if he is to stay alive in the tough scenarios Smith fashions for his heroes. Again, although indirectly, Garrick II’s story recalls Rambo, or more specifically, the life of the actor who impersonates Rambo, Sylvester Stallone. As Yvonne Tasker explains, Stallone was an underdeveloped child, suffering from a variety of physical disabilities and teased for his girlish name. His story, therefore, like that of Garrick II, is one “in which body-building provides the key to the successful achievement of a masculine identity.”⁵ Garrick II’s ‘musculinity’, like that of Stallone, points towards the constructedness of masculinity and ironically undermines Smith’s claims of masculinity as a stable essence. Yet, it grants him the membership card that permits access into the club of physical power and erotic glamour some men, and women,

⁴ qtd. in Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 106.

⁵ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 122.

regard as badges of true masculinity and which any man can obtain with self-discipline, self-sacrifice, perseverance and determination. Smith describes Garrick II's transformation as follows:

From the runt of the litter, myopic, weedy and asthmatic, he had transformed himself [...] into [a] bull of power and confidence. [...] His bulk threatening the fragile legs of the genuine Chippendale chair, his thumbs were hooked into the pockets of his discretely brocaded waistcoat. His dress shirt was a showy expanse over the great chest, and the starched wing collar too tight for a neck swollen not with fat but with muscle and sinew. (*Fox* 182)

All Courtney heroes, therefore, are prodigies of healthy and handsome masculinity and physical toughness. It cannot be otherwise for they are the progeny of a wholesome vintage ancestry that Smith brings to life in the two latest instalments of the saga. In these two novels, Smith recreates the lives of late seventeenth-century Courtneys - Hal, Tom and Dorian. Hal, the son of an outstandingly gainly Courtney specimen, Sir Francis Courtney, is also handsome, with emerald green eyes and glistening blue-black hair which he wears "tied to a thong behind his head;" (*Birds* 8) he is furthermore "robust and broad-shouldered [...] and long in limb." (*Birds* 8) His naked body, carefully scrutinised by a female predator - Katinka - so as to dispel any anxiety that such a close examination might produce coming from another man, or even from the narrator himself if unaided by a female 'gaze', is "a thing of striking beauty." (*Birds* 70) With his torso and his legs "carved in pure unsullied white" in sharp contrast with his arms and face "bronzed by the sun," (*Birds* 70) together with his flat belly "ridged with fine young muscle like the sands of a wind-sculpted dune," (*Birds* 71) he is like a Michaelangelo's David-with-a-difference, for, unlike the statue, his genitals, "rosy [...] full and weighty," have an authority that "Michaelangelo's David [...] lacks." (*Birds* 71) Finally, Tom and Dorian, two of Hal's sons, are equally impressive. Tom is described as "pleasant but not handsome, for his mouth and nose [are] too large," but he has "a strong, determined face and heavy jaw" (*Monsoon* 23-24) and is equipped with the compulsory hard body that so characterises the Courtney line, "with the wide shoulders and the brawny arms of a swordsman." (*Monsoon* 258) And Dorian has a "red and gold head as innocent and lovely as [a] carved seraphic angel" (*Monsoon* 49) as a child, but grows to be a truly masculine lad, with his green

eyes, wild golden-red curls and “firm young muscle and breadth of shoulders.” (*Monsoon* 467)

The beauty and fitness of the Courtney heroes is so impressive that they are even likened to gods or mythical figures. Sean I, for instance, appears as a “god of storm, with long powerful legs braced apart and the muscles of his chest and arms standing out proudly beneath the white silk of his shirt;” (*Thunder* 26) Candy, on seeing him enter her suite through the doorway, exclaims, “You look like some sort of God.” (*Thunder* 246) Blaine, pictured playing polo, changes from “impressive on his feet” to “imperial in the saddle” for “mounted he [becomes] a centaur, part of the horse beneath him,” (*Sword* 187) “invincible and indefatigable,” (*Sword* 198) drawing admiration wherever he goes and even becoming “Shasa’s particular demi-god.” (*Sword* 290) Like Blaine, Shasa playing polo sits tall in the saddle and becomes “a beautiful young centaur, lean and lithe, white teeth flashing against the dark tan of his face.” (*Sword* 465) Sean II is likened to “the great god Pan in his manifestation as a young boy” (*Rage* 273) and is endowed with god-like qualities for he is “hard and competent and tough-looking [...] [brimming] with [...] sublime confidence in his own strength and immortality.” (*Fox* 500) The heroes’ god-like quality is particularly emphasised if attired in military garments, their image becoming closely bound up with the preservation of national territory and thus invested with the significance of serving the country and glorifying its name. Michael I, therefore, dressed in “glossy boots and immaculate riding breeches of a lighter colour than his khaki uniform jacket,” with the “RFC wings and a row of coloured ribbons” on his left breast, “the badges of his rank” sparkling on his epaulettes, and his cap “carefully crushed in the manner affected by veteran fighter pilots,” is the most beautiful person Centaine has ever seen, towering over her “like a young god.” (*Burning* 62)

Hard muscle and good looks act as Smith’s Courtney heroes’ badges of masculinity, but Smith does not rely on these alone for his imagining of heroic maleness. Schilder writes: “Whatever article of clothing we put on immediately

becomes part of the body-image.”⁶ Schilder considers clothes as part of the body schema. In his opinion, the costume we wear clearly bespeaks behaviour and attitudes. Smith does not seem to be indifferent to this notion and makes sure he equips his heroes with outstandingly ‘male’ paraphernalia in order to indicate their masculinity as definitely as their physical constitution or the actions they perform. The attire they wear, therefore, immediately suggests their manliness and the fact that they belong to wild spaces where there is room for heroic and manly activities to be performed. Thus, if not attired in military garments, they wear breeches, white open shirts, jackets, shaggy and battered outfits and fancy hats. Blaine, for instance, wears “khaki gabardine riding breeches and polished brown boots [...] [together with] a field officer’s tunic over his shirt and suspenders.” (*Sword* 184) Otherwise, he wears “khaki shorts,” (*Sword* 282) a “wide-brimmed Panama hat canted over an eye,” (*Sword* 290) or “cream-coloured tropical suit with his green and blue regimental tie.” (*Sword* 315) Shasa wears “a short-sleeved khaki tunic, khaki shorts and [...] velskoen on his bare feet” when he flies during the Abyssinian campaign. (*Sword* 519) Sean II appears as an uppermost example of tough manliness in his bush jacket with sleeves cut off, short khaki pants and “a strip of plaited leather around his forehead.” (*Die* 55) Hal is shown in all his splendour posing as an earlier version of Lawrence of Arabia in breeches of fine cotton, high boots with pointed upturned toes, dolman tunic, *ha’ik* turban and burnished steel onion-shaped helmet, spiked on top and engraved and inlaid with Coptic crosses. (*Birds* 503) And Tom, to mention another example, appears less ‘orderly’ but no less masculine in his rags coated with “accumulated dust and filth” when he comes back to ‘civilisation’ after one of his hunting escapades in the east African jungle. (*Monsoon* 604)

The heroes’ commitment to the wilderness shows even when dressed in formal attire. Thus, Blaine is dressed in “uniform, dark blue and gold with a double row of medal rings,” (*Sword* 149) when he is first introduced to us, but the formal uniform does not manage to contain his strength, which shows when he holds Centaine’s hand and she exclaims, “He could crush my hand like an eggshell.” (*Sword* 149) Centaine

⁶ qtd. in Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins / Black Masks. Representation and Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 227.

has him display a kinky robe when at home, which is described as “full-length brocaded China silk, royal blue lined in crimson with a belt of embroidered seed pearls and velvet lapels.” (*Sword* 413) But this over-decorated outfit does not manage to feminise or domesticate him; in fact, it simply appears as “outlandish” on him for it is “different from his usual severe style of dress;” (*Sword* 413) furthermore, he only wears it when he rises from bed after having proved his manliness by engaging in sexual activity with Centaine - which is described as “mindless frenzy, [...] writhing sensual marathons that [explode] at the end in a great burst of light and colour like [a] Turner.” (*Sword* 413) Similarly, Shasa may be formerly attired on most occasions, but Smith brings to the fore the little irregularities that enhance masculinity and belie artificiality or complete commitment to civilisation. Thus, he has Shasa drift into a formal suit to attend a boxing match, but he has “a white silk scarf draped *casually* over the shoulders of his dinner jacket” and his black tie is “minutely and artfully *asymmetrical*.” (*Sword* 426, emphasis added) Or he has him dressed in a “cream tropical silk suit;” (*Fox* 458) yet, he has his piratical eye-patch on and his body is all bruised and scraped from a life-and-death fight with a huge marlin during one of his fishing escapades. Furthermore, we are told, Shasa abhors “all manner of theatrics and affectation of dress.” (*Rage* 552) Sean II wears a flamboyant costume on one occasion - “gilet of kudu skin [...] bright silk scarf knotted at the throat [...] mosquito boots and cartridge belt.” (*Rage* 552) - and yet, he wears his costume “with such panache” that it appears “natural and correct.” (*Rage* 552) When he changes into a suit, his bumped-up body can hardly accommodate it so his dinner jacket is “a little tight around the chest;” (*Rage* 552) furthermore, it “[smells] of moth balls,” (*Rage* 552) which bespeaks his lack of commitment to the ‘civilised’ world of dinner parties. Not even his long hair feminises him or makes him less wild for “oddly the thick glossy locks [seem] to enhance rather than detract from his overpowering masculinity.” (*Rage* 552) Hal is also dressed ‘formal’ for his initiation ceremony to become a Nautonnier Knight of the Order of St George and the Holy Grail: white silk stockings, breeches and doublet of midnight-blue satin, sleeves slashed with gold, shoes with buckles of heavy silver and a Cavalier officer’s hat decorated with ostrich feathers. Yet, this overdone costume does not encompass and contain his muscled body for it is, of course, “tight on the shoulders.” (*Birds* 102) Finally, and to mention one last example,

Tom and Dorian are forced to wear Arab tunics as disguise - in Tom's case - and as part of his process of accommodation into the Arab world where he is brought up after his capture by the Moorish pirate Jangiri - in Dorian's case. Long skirts do not feminise Tom for, being truly manly as he is, "the skirts of his robe [hamper] him." (*Monsoon* 277) Dorian, on the other hand, is rendered no less manly in his tunic for the outline of his muscles and the breadth of his shoulders show "beneath the *kanza* that [he] wears so naturally." (*Monsoon* 467)

Smith's Courtney heroes, all in all, are described in such a way as to highlight their wholesome, hard-edged physiques and masculine attires, performing their masculinity through 'externals' (build-up and dress) and becoming, in this way, ideal images, what Laura Mulvey calls the "ideal ego."⁷ a more perfect, more complete, more powerful imagining of masculinity men identify with and to which they aspire. They are comfortable role-models that - although apparently mythical, ideal fantasies in their excessive build-ups and their 'masculinity-exuding' paraphernalia - men can imitate by working out, building up their bodies and / or covering their 'fragile nakedness' in openly aggressive masculine attires. Ironically, though, such an emphasis on externals turns Smith's heroes into objects or spectacles, a position that women have traditionally occupied in the representational arts, as is for example the case in the extreme eroticisation of Marlene Dietrich in Sternberg's films such as *The Blonde Venus* or *The Scarlet Empress*,⁸ a position which, by the way, icons such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone also occupy in action films, in which their bodies are offered as objects of spectacle and commodified in order to foster a new 'cosmetic' industry - that of body-building within muscle culture. Furthermore, this obsession with external appearance dangerously dramatises an excessive narcissism or intense concern over one's own body - which has traditionally been regarded as a feminine trope - and reveals, at the same time, and as I have previously pointed out with reference to Garrick II's self-reconstruction of his body, the

⁷ qtd. in Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle. Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema." *Screening the Male*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 11.

⁸ In these films, Dietrich's body is carefully scrutinised; as the camera moves closer and closer to her body and moves over it, Dietrich becomes an object of desire, seduction and provocation. See: Mary Anne Doane, *Femmes Fatales. Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 71-75.

artificiality and constructedness of the type of masculinity Smith insistently presents as 'essential', relying, as it does, on external characteristics men can purchase by visiting a gym on a regular basis and / or acquiring the right clothes in the right shops.

7.2. Counter-effecting threats: authorial strategies

7.2.1. The intermediate gaze: counter-effecting narcissism

Given the fragility of masculinity that Smith's loving descriptions of his heroes' physical appearance and attire may reveal, Smith puts his pen to work to counter-effect any suspicion about the maleness of his heroes or the artificiality of their masculine persona in different ways. The threat of self-centred narcissism is dispelled by making use of an intermediate gaze that negotiates the exchange between narrator/author and reader. The heroes are seldom presented as preoccupied by their own body and attire, which they display with natural casualness. If they look at themselves in a mirror, it is often to discover the damage that age, weather or rough circumstances have wreaked on their faces or body, which they scrutinise with the frank astonishment of men who do not have time to indulge in careful self-study and are thus surprised to find that time has altered their self-image so as to render them almost unrecognisable to themselves. So when Hal, for example, looks at himself in the mirror, he exclaims, "Sweet heavens [...] I look such a pirate that I do not even trust myself." (*Birds* 452) On another occasion, Smith writes: "When [Hal] looked in the mirror, he barely recognised the darkly tanned face that stared back at him, the nose as beaky as that of an eagle, and there was no spare flesh to cover the high-ridged cheek bones or the unforgiving line of the jaw. His eyes were green as emeralds, and with that stone's adamantine glitter." (*Birds* 461) Such a careful scrutiny of his face comes not from self-satisfaction, but is shot through with amazement at seeing the changes operated on his face after a few months in the wilderness.

The heroes, therefore, are not self-appreciative of their bodies. And yet, Smith needs loving descriptions of their awesome physiques if he is to provide his readers

with vivid images of handsome masculinity. This he does by introducing an intermediary character - often female - who conveys the beauty of the heroes with frank admiration, who discloses the erotic power such bodies possess, and manipulates the readers' reactions towards these bodies. Thus, for instance, it is through Centaine that we get to see Blaine for the first time. As her eyes admiringly linger over Blaine's body, we appreciate his hardness and his overpowering masculinity, which has the effect of sweeping Centaine off her feet. When she looks at Blaine, she involuntarily digs her fingernails into the soft inside of Abraham Abrahams' elbow, whose arm she is holding; his voice alone lifts "a little electric rash of pleasure on her forearms and at the nape of her neck;" (*Sword* 149) and the touch of his hand gives her "a delicious little chill of apprehension." (*Sword* 149) Smith also has Sean II's body appreciated by another ravenous female, Claudia Monterro, who, although reluctant to give in to Sean II's charm and what she calls his "masculine conceit," (*Die* 24) catches herself "surreptitiously contemplating his muscled arms, or his flat greyhound belly or even his buttocks;" (*Die* 24) or finds herself "admiring the heroic figure he [cuts]" as he prepares himself for a long march into the wilderness. (*Die* 55) Or, to mention another example, Hal's body is carefully scrutinised by Katinka as he dives naked into a lagoon "unaware of her scrutiny." (*Birds* 71) Katinka's eyes move over his body as if a camera, 'zooming up' the sexiest parts of his anatomy: his genitals and the "lean, round buttocks, which [tighten] erotically with every kick of his legs, as though he were making love to the water as he [passes] through it." (*Birds* 71) The erotic effect of his body is immediate and she conjures up an image of his "hard young body all white and glistening above her and those tight young buttocks bunching and changing shape as she [digs] her sharp fingernails into them." (*Birds* 71) If men are used as intermediaries, Smith is careful to annul the erotic effect of their bodies. So, for example, when Sean II's body is admired by General China's men - who exclaim, "He has the body of a warrior," (*Die* 221) - they consider him "frankly, discussing his physique as though he were an inanimate object." (*Die* 221) Yet, their appraisal is bereft of any erotic implication. They look at him with awe, not with desire, and immediately measure up their strength against him by engaging in competition with him. The trial gives Smith the opportunity to show off Sean II's body and his victory over them reveals his superior power. Narcissism, therefore, is dispelled in Smith's

fiction. Through the intervention of a character who assumes an admiring perspective, the heroes' bodies are revealed in all their splendour without compromising the carelessness with which heroes carry themselves along the adventurous path Smith fashions for them.

7.2.2. The 'natural man': counter-effecting artificiality

The heroes' bumped-up bodies bespeak manhood. Their representation as holders of power is translated into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body, harshness, flat bellies, hard edges, rough surfaces. Like the heroes in action films, Smith's heroes display their awesome physiques for readers to 'visualise'; they, therefore, become spectacles and their bodies are turned into icons of masculinity. As Yvonne Tasker explains with reference to the muscular heroes in action films:

Along with the visual pyrotechnics, the military array of weaponry and hardware, the arch villains and the staggering obstacles the hero must overcome, the overblown budgets, the expansive landscapes against which the drama is acted out and the equally expansive soundtracks, is the body of the star as hero, characteristically functioning as spectacle.⁹

The heroes' bodies are turned into objects of display, figures to be lovingly examined, scrutinised, assimilated. While functioning as icons of masculinity, their hard bodies acting as boundaries that envelop what is masculine and exclude what is not, the spectacularity of their awesome, over-determined physiques and 'musculinity' generate another set of anxieties that Smith has to counter-effect if they are not to destabilise his construction of muscular masculinity. Muscularity, as Dyer explains, is part of a long tradition of masculine representation that covers classical art; Californian life-style "with a characteristic emphasis on ideas of health, energy and naturalness,"¹⁰ the representation of barbarians in comic books, which have reached cinema screens in films such as *Conan the Barbarian*, *Conan the Destroyer* or *The Barbarians*; and Christian imagery of crucifixion. Yet, the built-up body is not natural but "an achieved body, worked at, planned, suffered for."¹¹ The artificiality of such

⁹ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 76.

¹⁰ Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 148.

¹¹ Richard Dyer, *White*, 153.

muscular bodies reveals the constructedness of masculinity as opposed to the essential attributes of masculinity that some men like to regard as biologically determined. Furthermore, it shows the insecurities of modern men, who are drawn into a process of muscular armouring in an attempt to assert their masculinity in times of crisis. As Yvonne Tasker puts it:

Bodybuilding is offered as a form of protection which speaks to insecurity. Within this discourse, the body itself functions as a sort of armour against the world. The discourse of bodybuilding aspires to make the body signify a physical invulnerability, but the fact of vulnerability always remains a key part of the bodybuilding narrative.¹²

Very importantly, for critics such as Barbara Creed, the sheer physical excess of the heroes “indicates the performative status of the masculinity they enact.”¹³ Masculinity, therefore, emerges as a masquerade; as Tasker phrases it with reference to the bodies of actors such as Stallone and Schwarzenegger, their figures are sheer “simulacra of an exaggerated masculinity, the original completely lost to sight, a casualty of the failure of the paternal signifier and the current crisis in master narratives.”¹⁴

Smith, however, - aware of the suspicion with which muscle is regarded by feminist critics - does not allow space for artificial build-ups in his narratives. Only Garrick II, as I have pointed out before, transforms his body into a vast network of interconnected muscles, which allow him to rub shoulders with other Courtney heroes. Together with his entrepreneurial spirit and his sharp, inquisitive mind, his overdeveloped body becomes a marker of masculinity. Yet, Smith highlights, there is something grotesque in his overall appearance. His body, he writes, is “almost grotesquely overdeveloped in shoulder and chest and upper arms,” and his skinny legs give him “an unfortunate anthropoid appearance;” (*Rage* 260) the swell of his muscles makes his suit’s lapels “flare unevenly and the material [rucks] up around his biceps,” (*Rage* 523-524) so that he makes “an expensive suit of fine wool look like a bag of laundry.” (*Rage* 525) Yet, in Smith’s conception of the masculine body, bumped up muscles, even when artificially chiselled into the hero’s body, are better than fat.

¹² Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 123.

¹³ qtd. in Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 78.

¹⁴ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 78.

Being called 'fat', in fact, becomes a terrible insult, the implication being that a fat person leads a hedonistic life which is completely alien to the sort of outdoors and / or active existence that so characterises Smith's heroes. This accounts for Sean I becoming so upset when Duff calls him 'fat' and telling him that he has a backside on him "like a hippopotamus," (*Lion* 295) forcing Sean I to answer back by resorting to the following gross, visceral witticism: "I need a heavy hammer to drive a long nail." (*Lion* 295) This accounts as well for Smith's stress on muscled bodies carved out of flesh. Thus, Sean II, for instance, has gaunt features, "all trace of fat and superfluous flesh burned away;" (*Die* 437) and Hal has "no spare flesh to cover the high-ridged cheek-bones or the unforgiving line of the jaw." (*Birds* 461)

Except for Garrick II, Smith's heroes' muscles are not the product of conscientious or planned exercise. Smith makes sure he dispels any doubts about the artificiality or constructedness of his heroes by highlighting that their bodies are naturally developed - the outcome of their continuous strivings in the wilderness - fashioned in or by nature, or through work - which become the heroes' basic keep-fit kit. Sean I, for instance, develops a belly after his stint in the Witwatersrand, but he regains his manly shape as soon as he abandons his Epicurean existence in Johannesburg and goes back to the veld. After his long stay in the area across the Limpopo, Sean I is the same old muscular guy he had been when living on his family farm in Natal, and, thus, the suit that had been made to "encompass the belly he had acquired on the Witwatersrand" now hangs "loosely down his body" but bunches tightly around "his thickening arms;" his face is now "burnt black by the sun" and his beard bushes down onto his chest concealing the fact that "the stiff collar of his suit" can no longer "close around his neck." (*Lion* 521) Contact with nature has the same beneficial effect on Mark. After his clerical experience in the grim offices of a Fordsburg's mining company and after his salesmanship period in Natal, his long stay in Chaka's Gate, a natural preserve, operates a spectacular transformation on Mark's body, who at the end of ten days climbing and descending "the rugged rim of the basin, hard going against the grain of the natural geological formations" is "lean as a greyhound, arms and face burned to the colour of a new loaf by the sun and with a dark crisp pelt of beard covering his jaw." (*Sparrow* 179) Like Sean I, Mark finds

mechanised urban life oppressive, so when he goes back to 'civilisation' he feels his suit "unfamiliar and confining on his body;" the starched collar "like a slave's ring about [his] throat;" the pavement "hard and unyielding to his tread;" and "the clank of the trams and the honk and growl and clash of train and automobile [...] almost deafening after the great silences of the bush." (*Sparrow* 229)

Shasa, on the other hand, leads a hedonistic and philandering existence in the business and political circles of Johannesburg and Cape Town, but is constantly referred to as "a creature of the desert." (*Sword* 94, 132) Having been born in the vast desert expanses of Namibia, Shasa is presented as naturally equipped to thrive in the desert; thus, while travelling in Centaine's Daimler on their way to their mining company in Namibia, he seems "unaffected by the heat and the dust and the merciless jolting of the chassis." (*Sword* 92) Sean II, like the other Courtney heroes, does not belong to stiffening closed spaces. Although he is Shasa's eldest son and, thus, the rightful inheritor of the Courtney financial empire, he defers his position to Garrick II and runs a safari concession in Zimbabwe after a successful period as a guerrilla soldier for Ballantyne's Scouts in that country. Like Sean I and Mark Anders before him, his body flourishes in nature and, for example, after his adventurous experiences in the Moçambiquean wilderness, he has "no vestige of fat on him, each individual muscle [...] outlined clearly beneath the sun-darkened skin;" he is "like a thoroughbred racehorse brought up to its peak by a skilful trainer on the eve of a major race [...] at the very pinnacle of physical fitness;" (*Die* 225) he is also described as "hairy and hard as a wild animal [...] [and] as dangerous." (*Die* 342) Hal, like Tom after him, is restless and impatient when contained in domestic scenarios at High Weald, England. Even when middle-aged and converted into a contented farmer and country squire, he belongs to the sea and longs to escape from domestic boundaries so that he can put his muscles to work in wild open spaces. Finally, Tom and Dorian undergo impressive transformations after their incursion into the world of piratical adventure on the open sea or the desert expanses of eastern Africa. Tom "[toughens] and [matures] beyond all recognition;" his shoulders "[fill] out from the constant exertion of climbing in the rigging and handling canvas and sheets in a heavy blow;" and his arms are "muscled from the hours of sword drill with Aboli each day."

(*Monsoon* 102) Likewise, Dorian is “lean and hard, his flesh pared down and tempered by the desert,” where he has been living ever since he became a soldier for al-Malik, his adoptive father. (*Monsoon* 523)

Some critics may define muscles as “baroque [...] largely non-functional decoration.”¹⁵ But Smith’s heroes’ tan and muscle do not come from the pot, the solar bed or the gym. They are not only the cosmetic adornments Smith uses to highlight the heroes’ beauty, but symptoms of their involvement in outdoors life. Muscle also highlights the heroes’ inexhaustible energy and is, thus, an effect of their commitment to action of whatever sort - whether it is work, warfare or sports. Sean I, for example, is described as a man “born to run,” (*Lion* 66) enjoying work more than anything else already in his early adolescence: working “in the early morning when the sunlight was tinted as a stage effect, all golden and gay,” or “in the midday sun,” or “in the rain,” or “in the mist that swirled down grey and damp from the plateau,” or “in the short African twilight.” (*Lion* 66-67) Sean I’s healthy and muscular body bespeaks his energetic spirit and vigour, which he keeps alive throughout his life. Never overpowered by negativism, never conquered or subdued by ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’, never rendered helpless or ineffective, he fights the Zulu War; makes a fortune in the Witwatersrand; participates in the erection of the gold empire in Johannesburg; makes a fortune hunting elephants for their ivory across the Limpopo; fights the Boer War; gets involved in politics, playing an active role in the creation of the Union of South Africa; and builds a vast personal fortune in land, cattle and timber. As a triumphant epilogue to his heroic life, promoted to Brigadier-General, Sean I takes part in the First World War, not only taking care of logistics at the headquarters, but actively participating on the front line. And his energy, even in old age, remains intact:

‘The old bastard thinks he’s still fighting the Boer War. Can’t you keep him in a cage back there at H.Q.?’

‘How do you cage a bull elephant?’ (*Sparrow* 1)

¹⁵ qtd. in Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 78.

Sean I is the epitome of unrestrained activity and all other Courtney heroes are also magnificent examples of active heroism, their muscles being both cause and effect of their resilient, inexhaustible spirit. Blaine, for example, may appear cool and relaxed in official celebrations but he seems “to be balanced on the balls of his feet as though he could explode into movement at any moment;” (*Sword* 148) he is also presented as always “businesslike and competent.” (*Sword* 185) Shasa begins to work for his mother’s company as an adolescent; although he starts from the bottom, his shift comes on at five in the morning and he is “at that stage of growth when sleep is a drug and rising in the morning a brutal penance,” (*Sword* 97) he decides to start his working day half an hour earlier than the other workers. Furthermore, he is not a reluctant or lazy worker but finds his jobs in the inner recesses of the diamond digs “fascinating” and “absorbing” to the extent that his interest “[grows] more intense as the day [goes] on” and not “even the heat and the dust [daunts] him.” (*Sword* 104-105) His energy never deserts him. Thus, he may indulge himself in dancing sprees and erotic games during the night, but he is the first man to arrive at work for he “[likes] to keep everybody on their toes.” (*Rage* 24) Sean II is also a real action-man-and-true, “a man in full physical flower, a trained fighter and an athlete in perfect condition.” (*Rage* 337) When he touches Claudia lightly on the hip with one finger she cannot but feel “the disconcerting male strength in his single finger.” (*Die* 9) For Sean II, inactivity is anathema and it is only working that he enjoys himself. (*Die* 352) Hal is an equally inexhaustible worker; after his experience on his father’s galleon, he is “tampered to [...] hardships” and every muscle and sinew of his body “[stays] proud beneath the tanned and weathered skin,” the palms of his hands are “tough as leather and his fingers powerful as a blacksmith’s tongs” so he could “drop a big man to the paving” with “a single blow from one of his scarred fists.” (*Birds* 308) And Tom, like his father, is hardened by the ways of the sea and thrives in hardship conditions so, for instance, while for lesser men marching across the wilderness becomes “an endless torture of thirst, aching muscles and blistered feet,” Tom “[makes] light of the hardship, forging along behind the trackers, with the heavy musket over his shoulders.” (*Monsoon* 596) Also like his father, Tom finds in work the only solace that prevents him from brooding over the problems affecting him. (*Monsoon* 324)

7.2.3. The hard versus the soft body: dispelling doubts

All in all, Smith makes sure to highlight that his heroes' bodies are not an artificial creation, a cosmetic adornment, but are forged and toughened in the wilderness and the product of their commitment to action and hard work. Their hardened bodies envelop strength, labour, determination, courage; they stand for a tough and healthy masculinity and emerge as a response to the emasculating trends in western society that have led to the feminisation of masculinity and which might eventually lead to a deterioration of society at large. In order to further stress this idea, Smith constructs his healthy, hard-edged heroes against 'soft villains' such as Governors Kleinhans and van de Velde, consul William Grey, Zayn al-Din and Kush. These are all presented as fat - or ridiculously thin - ulcerous and / or ill and become walking cautionary tales: physical representations of the decay threatening to overcome society if it falls prey to the designs of anti-masculinist campaigners.

Thus, Governor Kleinhans is described as a "tall, dyspeptic man in late middle age, his skin yellowed by a life in the tropics and his features creased and wrinkled by the cares of his office;" his frame is "skeletal, his Adam's apple so prominent as to seem deformed, and his full wig too young in style for the withered features beneath it;" (*Birds* 148) all in all, he is a "sad and sick old man." (*Birds* 222) Governor Petrus van de Velde is even more disgusting. A greedy, gluttonous overdressed, overweight man, he is qualified as a "fat old man," (*Birds* 28) "a porcine figure" (*Birds* 44) with a back and belly larded "as to wobble with every movement the man made," rolls of fat "[swaddling] the back of his neck and [hanging] down his pendulous jaws;" (*Birds* 44) and as "so soft and white as unrisen dough." (*Birds* 300) He is, furthermore, sexually malfunctioning, not capable of assuaging the fires of his passionate young wife and thus carrying "a pair of horns on [his] head [...] too large for even [his] grossly bloated body." (*Birds* 329) Apart from being constantly described as grotesque, Smith makes him look ridiculous in all situations in which his body comes to the centre-stage of the narrative action. Thus, when his ship is attacked by the Courtneys, he "collapses on the deck," "wriggles like a puppy" and, when prodded to stand up, he has "only enough strength and courage to reach his knees;" (*Birds* 44) unable to descend

unaided from the boat, he is “hoisted from the deck, swung outboard in a boatswain’s chair;” (*Birds* 205) when he eats, he stuffs his mouth and talks while he is chewing so that particles of food escape “from between his pendulous lips and [run] down his chin as he [guffaws];” (*Birds* 194) and when overpowered by Aboli and hurled over the door of his carriage, he “[lands] in an ungainly heap on the floorboards and [struggles] there like an insect on a pin” while “every inch of his huge frame [...] [quivers] with despair.” (*Birds* 320-321) Smith also emphasises his grotesque status by making him produce all sorts of disgusting noises: he snores abominably; (*Birds* 28) screams shrilly; (*Birds* 44) his stomach growls like an angry dog; (*Birds* 48) stands wheezing in the sunlight; (*Birds* 87) grunts and scraps his plate noisily; (*Birds* 215) belches; (*Birds* 245) whinnies; (*Birds* 318) and grasps for breath like a stranded fish. (*Birds* 351)

Van de Velde’s body, therefore, in its bland shapelessness, softness and openness, resembles Kristeva’s definition of the abject, which she identifies with the waste the body expels and society hides for it “disturbs identity, system order,”¹⁶ and which she places on the side of the feminine, the maternal body which “lacks corporeal integrity; it secretes [...]; it changes size, grows, and swells; it gives birth in a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides.”¹⁷ As Barbara Creed explains, in many horror films such as *Dressed to Kill* and *The Silence of the Lambs*, “in the process of being constructed as monstrous the male is feminised,” a process which stems from “the very nature of horror as an encounter with the feminine”¹⁸ and the abject the feminine stands for. Similarly, van de Velde - soft, swelled and open - is constructed as monstrous by being feminised. The same applies, in an even more obvious way, to William Grey, the consul of Zanzibar. He, in fact, becomes the epitome of the monstrous feminine. His fat body is “monstrous” (*Monsoon* 172) and “ruined;” (*Monsoon* 173) he has “elephantine legs,” (*Monsoon* 173) “eyes weak and rheumy” (*Monsoon* 174) and a

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.

¹⁷ Barbara Creed, “Dark Desires. Male Masochism in the Horror Film,” *Screening the Male*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 122.

¹⁸ Barbara Creed, “Dark Desires. Male Masochism in the Horror Film,” *Screening the Male*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 121.

“pasty, oleaginous smile.” (*Monsoon* 175) Ravaged by dropsy, he lays upon his back, “his swollen limbs spread, his huge belly distended as though he were in the last stages of child-bearing, his chest covered with an animal skin of coarse, curling black hair.” (*Monsoon* 214) Furthermore, he secretes different nauseating substances: his legs are studded with open red ulcers and the room reeks strongly of “the yellow discharge from [the] uncovered sores.” (*Monsoon* 214) When he is attacked by Hal, he subsides “like a punctured bladder” and sweat breaks out “in a rash of droplets across his chin and forehead.” (*Monsoon* 215) Finally, and before being hanged by his neck and becoming the ultimate abject, a corpse, there is a “bubbling, spluttering sound” and his liquid faeces, “brown as tobacco juice, [stream] down his bloated legs to puddle on the floor between his feet.” (*Monsoon* 217)

Kush, the cruel *castrati* who guards the zenana where Dorian is kept as a child, is likewise presented. Lacking the basic masculine identi-kit, he is described as a “thing with no balls,” (*Monsoon* 458) and is feminised: he has a “high, feminine voice” (*Monsoon* 422) and his screams are “high and girlish;” (*Monsoon* 577) he has “fat white hands,” (*Monsoon* 458) “soft, womanly breasts,” (*Monsoon* 577) and a great belly that “[bulges] forward over his loincloth.” (*Monsoon* 582) Like Grey before him, he excretes inner juices and organs profusely: he has his belly opened up “from side to side at the level of his navel [...] the way a fishwife splits the stomach of a grouper,” (*Monsoon* 582) so his “entrails bulge out between his fingers like slippery ropes” and the “hot, fetid stink of his ruptured gut [fills] the little room” where he is killed. (*Monsoon* 582) Fresh blood trickles from his wound, and as he is dragged out of the room, he leaves “a long slippery mark of blood and gastric juices on the flags.” (*Monsoon* 586) Zayn al-Din - al-Malik’s son and Dorian’s rival in the zenana - is less disgustingly described but equally presented as soft, shapeless and feminine. He is large and plump; has a “swallow caramel complexion;” his mouth is “pouting and petulant;” the skin around his eyes is “discoloured, as though it [is] bruised;” there are “livid patches of prickly heat on the inside of his elbows and knees;” and he walks “splay-legged to prevent his thighs rubbing together and the skin between them chaffing.” (*Monsoon* 425) His voice is “high-pitched, almost girlish” (*Monsoon* 545) and he does not laugh, he giggles. His feminine demeanour is stressed by Dorian, who,

when addressing Zayn, uses “the feminine form of address, as though he were speaking to a woman.” (*Monsoon* 545) Although he only secretes sweat and tears, he is defined as “abject,” (*Monsoon* 561) and becomes an abject feminine victim, rendered absolutely ineffective, stultified by immobility, when faced with truly masculine heroes / antagonists. When Dorian confronts him at the end of *Monsoon*, Zayn is “paralysed with fear;” falls from his saddle rolling “like a boulder down a steep hillside, until he [lays] still [...] in a dusty heap, like a pile of old clothing;” and he begins to weep, tears cutting “runnels through the dust that [powders] his face,” and his mouth is “slack and his lips [quiver] and [drool] with fear.” (*Monsoon* 561)

In a clear reference to the New Age Man that stands for the corruption of the masculine values Smith adheres to in his saga, Kush exclaims, “I am a man of sentiment, and soft-hearted.” (*Monsoon* 577) Although not precisely soft-hearted, the villainous characters, unlike the hard muscled heroes, are certainly soft, and yet monstrous, shapeless, ulcerous, corrupted, gross, smelly. In Smith’s adventurous milieu, the soft body stands for decay and decadence, offering a meaningful comment on the decay and decadence overcoming a society which he increasingly perceives as assailed and conquered, run and ruled, by soft men. Against this pervasive atmosphere of ‘decay’, he offers a healthy alternative: the wholesome, contained body of his heroes that, with its hard and rough edges, encompasses and contains the masculinist values and manly life-styles Smith favours and which, in his perception, has to be resuscitated if the symbolic law of the father, the patriarchal ethos that has so far determined the structuring of ‘civilised’ societies, is to be protected from the tidal wave of (soft and sensitive) New Age guys.¹⁹

¹⁹ It is worth emphasising that not all villains are physically soft or deformed. Colonel Cornelius Schreuder, for instance, has an awesome physique; he is described as “the romantic poet’s image of the gallant and debonair soldier.” (*Birds* 230) He is not only handsome, but also determined, courageous, knightly and valiant. He is furthermore endowed with an outstanding prick - “hard and thick, swollen furious red and so hot that [seems] to sear [Katinka’s] fingers.” (*Birds* 260) Now, Smith has to provide his heroes with worthy opponents, ones that can match the heroes’ strengths and whom, of course, the hero will systematically overcome so that he can emerge victorious, his strength superior to that of even the worthiest of his opponents.

However, even when villains are handsome and strong, they have flaws. These flaws determine their inclusion in the category of lesser men. In fact, the Courtney saga is pregnant with these flawed characters that emerge as both dreaded foils and worthy opponents. The flaws they display threaten to destabilise the masculinist ethos Smith defends in the saga. Colonel Cornelius Schreuder, for instance, may be valiant and courageous, yet he is presented as too vain, displaying the self-conscious concern for his appearance that characterises the New Man propagandised in television commercials and romantic

7.3. The heterosexual body

7.3.1. Erotic power and the heterosexual norm

The heroes' hard bodies - apart from signalling their ultimate belonging to wild open spaces, their commitment to a world of action and activity, and functioning as clear markers of masculinity as opposed to the feminised soft bodies of the villains - are vehicles of what I have previously referred to in my dissertation as compulsory or hierarchic heterosexuality. Together with their good-looks, the heroes' connection with wilderness and physical activity have a powerful aphrodisiac effect on women, who cannot help but feeling electric shocks, losing their heads or feeling the ground move under their feet when the heroes are around, kiss or touch them, such is the power of their sexuality. When a sudden violent gust throws Ruth off balance as she stands up quickly, for example, she staggers against Sean I and feels "the lean, rubbery resilience of his body and [smells] the man smell of it;" after this brief contact with Sean I's body, her eyes are "wide and grey with fear of the thing she [has] felt stir within herself." (*Thunder* 26) Michael Courtney I produces the same effect on Centaine who feels "the world lurch beneath her feet" when Michael I smiles at her; after this smile, nothing is the same again for she feels that the world has altered its orbit and is "on a new track amongst the stars." (*Burning* 62) Claudia Monterro is similarly aroused by Sean II, whose single light finger touch on her hip feels like a hot iron so that the spot where he has touched her burns "as though he [has] branded her with his finger." (*Die* 10) His smell - his "fresh, male sweat," (*Die* 10) - is so overpowering that makes her "feel restless" and finds herself "breathing deeply, trying to pick up the faint intermittent wafts of his odour." (*Die* 10) On another occasion, when his fingers close on her upper thigh, she is surprised to experience "tension in her lower belly, [a] hardening thrust of her nipples against the cotton shirt and the

comedies world-wide. He is furthermore a Boer, and, thus, a natural enemy of British South Africans who, in Smith's account, are the rightful and benevolent rulers of the country and under whose tutelage, he defends, the apartheid framework would never have been conceived.

warm flooding of her loins,” (*Die* 43) and feels “an almost irresistible urge to let her thighs relax and fall open under Sean’s fingers.” (*Die* 43)

Invariably, the body of the hero has the effect of depriving women of their individuality. No matter how strong, competent, individualistic, intelligent or even reluctant to yield to the hero’s romantic / sexual advances, women cannot but succumb to the hero’s charm and aphrodisiac effect. Shulamith Firestone wrote: “Love, perhaps even more than child-bearing, is the pivot of women’s oppression today,”²⁰ an idea that Smith underwrites in his fiction. In his conception of the world, the powerful bodies of the heroes operate an erotic response on the heroines that is immediately transformed into love and consequent submission, elaborating the kind of relationships that Anne Cranny-Francis identifies as characterising romantic fiction, which she defines as follows:

Romantic fiction seems to be predicated on the elaboration of a relationship between a powerful, active male character and a weak, submissive female character.²¹

The response the body of the hero provokes in women, therefore, guarantees the maintenance of the heterosexual norm - understood as the compulsory submission of women within the heterosexual familial structurings that so characterise our patriarchal world. Thus, in Smith’s milieu, women systematically voice their submission to the hero once they fall under their spell. Claudia, for instance, is besotted with Sean II. After capture by General China and her consequent separation from Sean II, she “[sways] towards him and [lifts] her hands, palms upward in a gesture of supplication” (*Die* 232) when they are finally reunited. Periods of separation, in fact, are frequent in Sean II and Claudia’s relationship. These have the effect of making her longing for Sean II grow and of bringing to the fore her need for him in a world of adventure where she is at a loss without the protection of Sean II’s arms. After a second period of separation, she exclaims, “Nothing else matters any more, now that you’re back,” (*Die* 339) and she explains that she only feels “safe and

²⁰ qtd. in Flora Alexander, “Prisons, Traps and Escape Routes: Feminist Critiques of Romance,” *Fatal Attractions*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker, 69.

²¹ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, 28.

invulnerable” under his body. (*Die* 348) Judith Nazet is presented as a paradox of femininity. An Ethiopian army general, she wears a “heavy, masculine, warlike garb,” but underneath her masculine attire she is feminine, with small but shapely breasts and lean hips “sculpted into the sweet sweep of her waist.” (*Birds* 543-544) After falling in love with Hal, she gives up her military career and decides to follow Hal. When he calls her General Nazet, she says, “I am a general no longer. I am only a common maid named Judith,” and she follows, “Wherever you go, my lord, I go also.” (*Birds* 554) Yasmini’s submission to Dorian is so complete that she agrees to pose as his slave boy to be able to follow him in his adventurous campaigns against the Turks; she desperately pleads, “Promise me I’ll be your slave forever. That you will never let me go.” (*Monsoon* 588) When her self-effacing resolution to be Dorian’s slave begins to be painful for her to bear, Dorian jokingly reminds her, “remember that you are [...] Yassie, the slave-boy, and that you must show me duty and respect.” She agrees, “Yes, master,” and bows “low with her palms together touching her lips.” (*Monsoon* 637-638) Even strong and determined Sarah Beatty cannot escape the Courtneys’ love-spell. She falls in love with Tom as a child and never gives up her intention of becoming his woman, even after a long, and to all appearances final, period of separation. When their paths cross again, she is ready for him. Scooping out one of her breasts and pushing it into his hand, she says, “I have loved you since the first day I laid eyes upon you, Tom Courtney. Even though I was only a child, I prayed that one day I would be your woman.” (*Monsoon* 491) Her submission is complete; she follows, “I am your woman forever. [...] I will follow you to the ends of the earth. Nothing matters but you and me, and our love.” (*Monsoon* 495)

7.3.2. Penis-power

Although the hero’s strong and muscular frame is powerfully erotic, having the effect of turning women into willing slaves, the full strength of his erotic power is to be located in one particular spot of his anatomy: the penis or phallus, which in Lacanian psychoanalysis stands for power and is a clear marker of gendered difference. Now, the penis has traditionally been regarded by men, or so the myth goes, as the focal centre of their existence. As Joe Orton playfully puts it, “A man is

just a life-support system for his penis;²² an idea that Norman Mailer adhered to when he said, "In adolescence, [...] I only had to say God and I would think of my groin,"²³ and which writers such as Ernest Hemingway popularised in their fiction. Hemingway, in fact, became one of the chief exponents of penis-centred machismo, a fact that antagonised women with feminist tendencies such as Zelda Fitzgerald. In the act of dismissing Hemingway's life and work - which she often qualified as "bullfighting, bullslinging and bullshitting"²⁴ - Zelda Fitzgerald, in fact, identified Hemingway's leitmotifs - roughly, his faith in penis-power, the ever-present urge to flash the credentials of machismo and the existential dread of the fallible phallus. At the gateway to a new millennium, with myths concerning phallus-power and penis-size being subjected to consistent de-mythification by feminist campaigners, Hemingway's obsessive concern with the penis seems slightly anachronistic. Yet, the Hemingway theme lingers on, surfacing intermittently in all domains of culture and very prominently in Wilbur Smith's fiction.

The identification of power with the penis, Easlea argues, is a clear consequence of our socially constructed reality, built around the supposed superiority of men over women. He writes: "Since the male is, of course, a male because he finds himself in possession of a penis instead of a clitoris, vagina, womb and breasts, typically male activities will come to be associated with the power of the penis."²⁵ In our phallogocentric societies, therefore, organised around the idea that those with a penis can have access to power and those without cannot, the penis emerges as a symbol of power. As Richard Dyer phrases it:

There is no doubt that the image of the phallus as power is widespread to the point of near-universality, all the way from tribal and early Greek fertility symbols to the language of pornography, where the penis is endlessly described as a weapon, a tool, a source of terrifying power.²⁶

²² qtd. in Rosalind Miles, *The Rites of Man. Love, Sex and Death in the Making of the Male* (London: Grafton Books, 1991) 1.

²³ qtd. in Rosalind Miles, *The Rites of Man*, 82.

²⁴ Jeffrey Meyers, *Hemingway: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) 164.

²⁵ Brian Easlea, *Fathering the Unthinkable* (London: Pluto Press, 1983) 11-12.

²⁶ qtd. in Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 83.

As a result of the process of identifying power with the penis, men come to regard penis-size, particularly when erect, and sexual potency as markers of masculinity and virility and as expressions of their power in society, building fantasies of a penis which is “two feet long, hard as steel, and can go all night.”²⁷ A lack of sexual potency and sexual malfunction in all their different variations, on the other hand, is identified with a lack of virility and consequent lack of power. The fear of phallic failure, therefore, looms large in men’s psyches for it is translated into malfunctioning, inadequate masculinity and regarded as proof of the fragility of male privilege, based as it is on the possession of an organ that, when not erect, is a rather flabby, unaesthetic object that, Reynaud explains, is “more reminiscent of the udders of a half-starved goat than the instrument of power [a man] wants to have between his legs.”²⁸

Given the conscious and subconscious perception of the penis as power in our western society, and given the lack of virility a malfunctioning penis comes to represent, Smith makes sure he highlights the potency of his heroes’ penises in order to assert their virility and ratify their superior position over women, who, not equipped with the basic piece of equipment, are only a blank, a vulval shape, a void that only men can fill. Thus, Centaine, for instance, while still a virgin, feels “there [is] a void within her that [aches] to be filled;” (*Burning* 60) when she makes love with Michael I for the first time, she experiences “no pain [...] only a breathtaking stretching filling sensation;” (*Burning* 85) and when, after Michael I’s death, the rest of his squadron leave and, with them, the last of her memories of Michael I, she feels “an empty hole in her existence.” (*Burning* 195) Women’s status as empty recipients of male penises can also be appreciated when Centaine makes love with Blaine; she ceases being herself and “it [is] her breath that [fills] her lungs, his thoughts that [gleam] and [glim] through her brain, and she [hears] her own words echo in his eardrums.” (*Sword* 322) The heroes’ filling function is so intense that Claudia, after love-making with Sean II, passionately says, “I don’t want it to end. I want to keep you inside me for ever and ever.” (*Die* 343) Similarly, Sarah, contented with Tom inside her, feels “a strange

²⁷ Ethel S. Person qtd. in Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 76.

²⁸ qtd. in Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 46.

sense of triumph and possession, as though she had achieved something of almost mystical importance, something beyond mere flesh;" when she feels him shrivel inside her, on the other hand, she experiences "infinite regret" and a "sense of aching loss," and, "though she [aches] where he [has] forced his way into her," she "[tightens] her muscles and tries to hold him in." (*Monsoon* 491)

In contrast with the heroine's powerlessness and 'voidness', the heroes' penises are invariably presented as powerful, tumescent and often inexhaustible, endowed with a life of their own and responding of their own accord to sexual stimuli - which in Smith's masculinist parameters bespeaks the heroes' healthy lust and their powerful virility. Thus, for instance, Shasa has a "quick and hard erection" when he thinks of Annalisa and "before he [can] prevent himself," (*Sword* 101) slips his hand under the sheet, prises his penis out of the fly of his pyjamas and masturbates. Sean II makes love to Marjorie to the point of exhaustion, leaving her "lying in the bed like a wax doll that had melted in the sun." (*Rage* 319) Yet, his penis is still "fully tumescent" (*Rage* 320) and he slips into Marjorie's daughter's room to assuage his still burning desire. Hal's penis also comes alive of its own accord on many occasions, "hard as bone and endowed with a throbbing life of its own," (*Birds* 57) "[stretching] out and [thickening], thrusting out, his prepuce peeling back of its own accord;" (*Birds* 113) its erection is minutely described as Katinka orders Hal to draw the full length of his penis through the peephole he had opened on the wood panel so as to spy on her while she bathed. Through the peephole, the disembodied penis is described as "swollen," "large," "the prepuce [...] like a monk's cowl," the head swelling "harder as though on the point of bursting" and "the shaft [jumping]" as Katinka holds him in her hands and eventually ejaculates, "the hot glutinous spurting against her sensitive breasts [...] so powerful," that it startles her. (*Birds* 94)

Apart from hard and tumescent, the hero's penis is incredibly big. Michael I's, for instance, is "so big and hard" (*Burning* 85) that Centaine feels daunted on beholding it and fears she is not going to be capable of the task she has taken upon herself, i.e. making love to him. Garrick I's, after love-making, is "long as a sword, hard as granite." (*Burning* 365) Sean II's is "long and white and rigid," (*Rage* 276) so

big that he calls it “King Kong.” (*Rage* 550) Garrick II has “a wanger on [him] that would make old General Courtney himself turn in his grave with envy,” (*Rage* 529) and his arousal is so “massive and hard” (*Rage* 529) that Holly exclaims, “Oh dear God” when his clothing falls around his ankles. (*Rage* 532) Hal’s genitals hang “full and weighty,” (*Birds* 71) and Katinka nicknames his sex “Lord Cyclops [...] after the one-eyed giant of the legend.” (*Birds* 166) Tom’s is a “wondrous man-thing” and when he wrenches his breeches down to his knees, Sarah gasps aloud for “nothing her sister had told her [about a man’s penis] had prepared her for this.” (*Monsoon* 490)

With a penis so big and alive, the groins become the focus of the heroes’ deepest emotions so that they “carry [their] mind around in [their] underpants.” (*Sword* 499) It is the organ located in the lower half of the heroes’ anatomy that reacts, and not the heart, when a beautiful woman is around. When Sean I, for instance, listens to Ruth’s voice and the husky bursts of laughter that punctuate it, he feels “the seed that was planted at their first meeting sinking its roots down into his lower belly and loins, spreading its tendrils up through his chest.” (*Thunder* 22) The same sort of “shameful reaction” can be appreciated when Mark Anders beholds Helena and feels “his loin clenching, the tight swollen hardening of his flesh beyond his reason - far beyond his control;” (*Sparrow* 79) or when the sudden realisation of his feelings towards Storm strike him “like a physical blow in his groin.” (*Sparrow* 179) When Shasa sees Annalisa, his voice cracks treacherously, his heart beats so wildly that he thinks it may spring into his throat and choke him, “his loins [swell]” and he “[puts] up a tent” for her. (*Sword* 113) Similarly, when Sean II sees the dark coarse hair glistening with sweat that bushes in Clare West’s armpit, he has a “hard and [...] painful erection;” (*Rage* 270) and when he observes Claudia’s nipple silhouetted under her thin cotton tee-shirt, he has a “blinding hard-on.” (*Die* 45) The same happens when Hal scrutinises Katinka’s naked body and regards her as a miracle that “[tears] at his loins with the claws of lust,” (*Birds* 91) or when Dorian feels Yasmini’s small naked and wet body against him, the warmth of her skin through the cold drops of sea-water giving him a “strange feeling [...] in the pit of his stomach.” (*Monsoon* 456)

Finally, the heroes are not only magnificently endowed, but also wondrous lovers, natural philanderers, invariably satisfying and consistently manipulating women's wills with their erotic spell, guaranteeing women's eternal commitment after they have had a taste of their amatory skills. When Tara, for instance, finally succumbs to Shasa's continuous attacks on her knickers, she gazes up at him with wonder and whispers huskily, "I never thought - I never dreamed it would be like that. Oh, Shasa, I'm so glad you came back to me." (*Sword* 555) Even violent exertion is forgiven for the heroes' sexuality is so overpowering that women systematically comply with their demands in the end. Thus, when Shasa forces Kitty Godolphin after an argument that ends with Kitty trying to claw out his single eye, she is so aroused that, even though she fights and struggles without let up, at the same time she "[lifts] her hips slightly and [arches] her back to make it easier for him;" only when "it happens" does she stop fighting and pushes back hard against him, "sobbing with the effort of keeping pace with him." (*Rage* 253) Sean II's seduction by Clare West, which starts with Clare predated after him and teaching him all her sexual tricks, ends up with the pupil surpassing the teacher and becoming so skilful that her whole existence "[seems] to centre around the summer-house" where they have their amorous encounters. (*Rage* 277) He similarly manipulates Marjorie Weston, an older woman and his father's lover on the side. With the philanderer's sure and certain instinct, Sean II senses her arousal and smells the change in her body odour that the average male would not have noticed. Marjorie plays the predator; yet, the moment he kisses her she knows she is not in control. She turns to putty in his hands for no man "had ever kissed her like this, so masterfully and yet so skilfully" and her need of him is "so intense that waves of giddy vertigo [wash] over her and without his arms to support her she [is] certain she would [sag] to the floor." (*Rage* 317) When he exerts his physical power to force Lana to have sex with him, he drops on his knees between her long loose limbs, cups his hands under her buttocks and, as he lifts her lower body, he sees "that her fluffy blond mount [is] already sodden as the fur of a drowned kitten." (*Rage* 550) Sarah, to mention one last example, is also smitten by the erotic power of Tom's penis and staring at it, she falls "back on the hard deck and her legs [fall] apart weakly as if she had no control of them." (*Monsoon* 490) It is not surprising that she reacts in this way for Tom's amatory skills are so good that even

one prostitute he has sex with acknowledges, “I should be the one who pays you, Master Tom. [...] It’s been many a month since my porridge pot was so well stirred.”
(*Monsoon* 349)

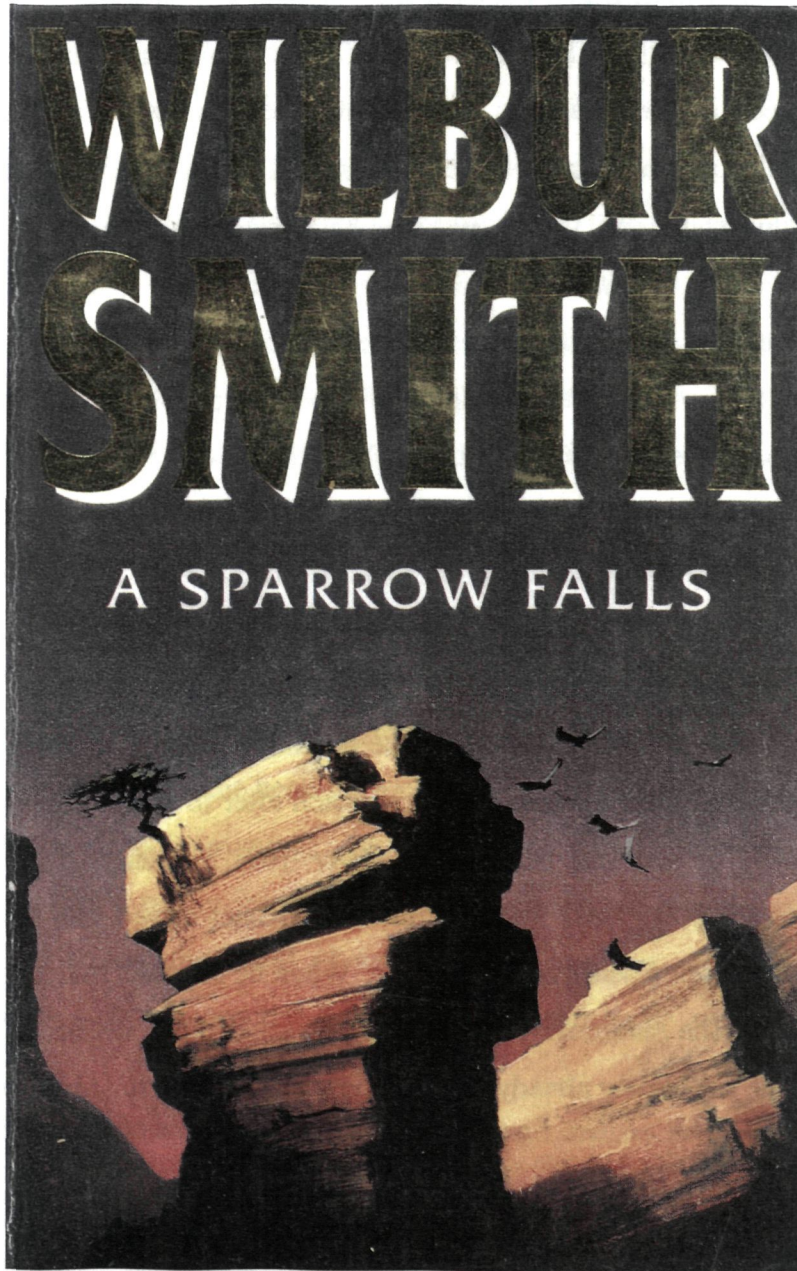


Figure 7. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *A Sparrow Falls* (London: Mandarin, 1992). Illustration by John Harris.

Penis-power is not only highlighted by the continual references to the heroes' groins and awesome genitalia but it is also emphasised by the use of phallic symbols. The heroes are always manipulating weapons, rifles, slingshots, guns, knives, whips or swords, which are a clear expression and an articulation of their masculinity. Given a weapon, men become whole "since a man is not a man unless he is armed."²⁹ Thus, when Sean I loads a rifle and cocks it after a long period of business activity in Johannesburg, he feels the rifle gives him comfort, it "makes him a man again." (*Lion* 425) And when his great-grandson, Sean II, receives his own Winchester from his father, it is welcomed with rapturous enthusiasm; the rifle, "[seems] immediately an extension of his body, and within minutes, he [masters] the art of controlling his breathing and letting the shot squeeze away without effort." (*Rage* 123) All other implements used to kill are regarded as unmanly, especially poison, which has always been considered a feminine way to dispose of unwanted people, as can be appreciated when Lothar expresses his indictment of the San people, whom he detests, by asserting that "the filthy poison that these little pygmies [brew unman] him," for bullets and bayonets are the real manly tools of his trade. (*Burning* 528) The phallic nature of guns and other weapons becomes obvious in erotic scenes where men's "cobra-headed" penises are likened to weapons perforating the woman's body, like Sean I "bayoneting through the soft veil and into the warmth of [Candy's] body;" (*Lion* 346) or when what has happened inside Ruth's stomach after love-making is described as "burst shotgun - or was it a canon?" (*Thunder* 162) Similarly, Shasa's powerful erection is described as "sharp and painful as a bayonet driven into his intestines." (*Sword* 102) And Tom's penis is like a sword. When he suggests that he should teach Sarah sword-play, she humorously retorts as she reaches down his body, "Here is my trusty sword and, sir, I know already full well how to play with it." (*Monsoon* 493)

²⁹ Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire*, 26.

7.4. At the edge of the abyss: the homosocial // the homosexual // the perverse

7.4.1. Women the 'entrappers' and men the 'friends'

In Smith's formulation of the masculine, heterosexuality is regarded as a clear marker of manhood and it is firmly inscribed, as I have shown so far, onto the male body, expressed in their potent and tumescent penises and their overwhelming amatory skills. Smith is a firm supporter of the heterosexual state and utilises the heroes' potent sexuality to prove their virility and to dramatise their power over women, guaranteeing the patriarchal structuring of society and ensuring women's subordination to men and their consequent confinement within the domestic. Yet, and as Duff explains in *When the Lion Feeds*, relationships with women are dangerous. Although I go back to this in chapters 8 and 9, it is worth highlighting at this stage that in Smith's conception of heterosexual relationships, women play the role of 'domesticators', polishing the rough edges of the heroes' potent hard bodies and opening up profound trenches in the heroes' hearts, invariably leading to marriage. Marriage is never frowned upon by Smith, who, happily married to Danielle, dramatises his ideal of familial bliss in his narratives. Yet, Smith seems to have misgivings about marriage as the 'perfect state', which surfaces in the Courtney novels in spite of his claims to the heroes' contentment once their commitment to the 'right' woman materialises in marriage. Women, in fact, emerge as entrappers, intent on smothering men's manly instincts, feminising them and preventing their escapades into the wilderness (the world of wars, politics, business or hunting, which Smith regards as the rightful masculine spaces). As Duff phrases it:

Select any woman, slap a ring on her third finger and she becomes a wife. First, she takes you into her warm soft body, which is pleasant, and then she tries to take you into her warm, soft mind, which is not so pleasant. She does not share, she possesses - she clings and she smothers. The relation of man to woman is uninteresting in that it conforms to an inescapable pattern, nature has made it so for the very good reason that it requires us to reproduce; but in order to obtain that result every love, Romeo and Juliet, Bonaparte and Josephine not excepted, must lead up to the co-performance of a simple biological function. It's such a small thing - such a short lived, trivial, little experience. Apart from that man and woman think differently, feel differently and are interested in different things. (*Lion* 230)

Smith's choice of ill-fated lovers - Romeo and Juliet, Bonaparte and Josephine - suggests an inner, maybe subconscious, conception of love and women as ultimately lethal, emasculating; depriving men of their natural adventurous spirit, exhausting their energy, rendering them 'domestic' - the ultimate 'castration' - which comes to signify death in Smith's formulation of the masculine, for men would prefer to die "rather than [face] emasculation." (*Monsoon* 551) The effect women have on men is depicted, for instance, in Smith's description of Sean II and Claudia's relationship. When he realises that Claudia has entered his life, he knows that his time for adventure has come to an end. (*Die* 384, 386-387) In fact, when he embraces Claudia into his life, she comes full with progeny - Mickey and Minnie, the Shangane kids she adopts - so with Claudia, Sean II dives blindly into the dangerous waters of both marriage and family. And he seems to be happy with the arrangement. Although it presupposes "a life together thereafter, a settled existence with home and children and responsibilities, all the things that [Sean II] had avoided over a lifetime," it does not startle him. Instead, it "[makes] him feel warm and comfortable." (*Die* 511) Indeed, Sean II becomes soft, warm and comfortable with Claudia's promise of domesticity. Yet, the fact that such a life of domestic bliss is not regarded as safe in Smith's masculinist milieu comes to the fore in the instalment of the saga he wrote after he happily coupled Sean II and Claudia in *A Time to Die*. Sean II's adventurous persona is killed off after he embraces domestic responsibilities. Consequently, if Smith is to resuscitate Sean II into adventure in *Golden Fox*, he can only do so by jumping back in time and focusing on the years previous to Sean II's meeting Claudia - when he could still sustain the ideal of adventurous masculinity completely unhindered by domestic ties and burdensome, home-making responsibilities.

Smith, conscious of the emasculating effect women have on men, promotes men-to-men relationships, what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the homosocial moment, the healthy bonding of men with other men, never, of course, allowing these friendships to develop into homosexuality - which in Smith's perception is one of the worst sins for it threatens the masculinist ethos he favours in his fiction. Yet, the fear of homosexuality that intense male-to-male friendships produces in his mind surfaces on many occasions, as is, for example, the case in the exchange between Sean I and

Duff that I mentioned above. Duff, almost paraphrasing Robert Bly's Iron-John-ideas, asserts:

Nature, in her preoccupation with reproduction has planted in the mind of man a barricade; it has sealed him off from the advice and experience of his fellowmen, inoculated him against it. (*Lion* 230)

Sean I's reaction to these words is one of fear; he says, "You frighten me." Yet Duff relentlessly follows, "The interesting relationships are those in which sex the leveller takes no hand - brothers, enemies, master and servant, father and son, man and man." (*Lion* 230) The suspicion such close male bonding produces emerges when Sean I immediately asks, "Homosexuals?" Duff makes haste to dispel the suspicion and establishes the perspective with which readers are to regard the intense male friendships Smith develops in his saga. At Sean I's mention to homosexuality, Duff immediately retorts:

No, that's merely sex out of step [...]. When a man takes a friend he does it not from an uncontrollable compulsion but in his own free choice. Every friendship is different, ends differently or goes on forever. No chains bind it, no ritual or written contract. There is no question of forsaking all others, no obligation to talk about it - mouth it up and gloat on it the whole time. [...] It's one of the good things in life. (*Lion* 230-231)

After such a defence of male / male friendships - and after having dispelled the ghost of homosexuality - Smith seems to feel no misgivings about indulging in open descriptions of the admiration men feel for their male friends' bodies. This, as I have explained before, gives him another opportunity to furnish readers with the admiring perspective he needs to highlight the beauty of the heroes' wholesome body. In fact, the narratives are pregnant with mentions of men's awareness of the masculine body: Sean I watches Duff's naked body and notices that although "he [is] slim as a boy his body is finely muscled;" (*Lion* 195) Duff regards Sean I's sweaty and muscled back as he works (*Lion* 195) or as he stands naked in front of a mirror; he even applauds with an effervescent "Olé" as Sean I puts on trousers and a shirt; (*Lion* 295) Saul, to mention just another example, studies Sean I's body "with frank appraisal." (*Thunder* 71) The admiration men feel for other male bodies, however, is not sexual, but a narcissistic recognition of the power of the masculine body; an overt appraisal of

perfect masses of bone and muscle that is supposed to mirror the sort of reaction these powerful examples of masculinity produce on male readers, not wishing to possess them, but to be like them.

7.4.2. Eradicating the threat of homosexuality

Male relationships, however, are sometimes allowed to go too far in the narratives pointing towards possible homosexual feelings between men. Sean I's feelings towards Duff, for example, are sometimes 'questionable'. When an old acquaintance of Duff comes onto the scene and they both make a showy display of affection, Sean I, in a queer display of playful jealousy, bursts out, "An old lover of yours?" (*Lion* 206) These slips of the pen are certainly dangerous; we have to take into account that Sean I and Duff share the same room and see each other's naked bodies on several occasions. Consequently, those whimsical comments may be regarded with suspicion in our post-Freudian society. Censorship is required. Sean I emphasises he is not a homosexual by saying, "Candy, my dear, we like each other that's all, there are no deep and dark motives in our friendship. Don't you start getting jealous of me now." (*Lion* 347) Anyway, something more drastic than a mere declaration of intents is needed. The relationship cannot endure. Duff, bitten by a rabid jackal, is ridden to a screaming, gibbering death.

Death is ultimately the fate that awaits Saul, Sean I's new friend. Sean I saves Saul's life and, from that moment onwards, Saul becomes Sean I's shadow, attendant, confident, companion and mentor. He sticks to Sean I wherever he goes and they sleep together, sit together, travel together. Saul's admiration for Sean I is huge, and his feelings towards this big man, Smith tells us, surpass friendship. (*Thunder* 229) Their relationship becomes too claustrophobic and Smith has to make sure he dispels any doubt which might have arisen in the readers' mind. First of all, he disembodies them when they are together. As they talk on into the night while they are travelling to Johannesburg, their "physical forms" are "unseen [...] no longer limiting them" and their minds (not their bodies!) "freed to move out and meet in the darkness to combine into a cushion of words that [carry] each idea forward." (*Thunder* 230) Smith also

makes sure he establishes that friendship is the only feeling men can share: "How can you define your feelings for another man. All you can say is - because he is my friend." (*Thunder* 116) Furthermore, he makes Sean I entertain doubts about the nature of their friendship; when Saul is hit in the head in combat across the Tugela river during the Boer War, Sean I goes back across a bridge where British soldiers are being massacred by Boer fire, gets Saul, and crosses the river again carrying Saul with him. He carries out this heroic action moved by a strong sense of duty, but the only feeling he is allowed to show is hatred for a man who forces him to risk his life and to face the terror of death that all men find so difficult to grip. (*Thunder* 102-105) Sean I's feelings towards Saul are always mixed, especially when he finds out the woman he is in love with is Saul's wife. So while Saul hero-worships Sean I, Sean I's attitude towards Saul is hesitant and questioning: he finds his physical make-up ridiculous, like a "skinny little monkey;" (*Thunder* 96) his devotion embarrassing; (*Thunder* 149) and "the poor little bastard's" attempts to emulate Sean I's heroism ludicrous. (*Thunder* 286) Saul is a figure of contempt through and through: ridiculous, clown-like, impotent, unheroic, henpecked, cuckolded. And yet, for all the fears he provokes on the straight white man's mind, he cannot outlive the heroic figure that confronts him: he finally dies, hit by a bullet, his "whole head distorted by the impact, swelling and bursting like a balloon." (*Thunder* 351).

Similarly, Riccardo Monterro and Sean II's friendship is not allowed to prosper in the narrative. Their relationship is too close, too claustrophobic. Sean II both admires and loves Riccardo, to the extent that he is prepared to do anything for him, even risk his career by consenting to put the spotlight on an animal after dark and shooting it on the beam - which is "[i]llegal, highly illegal" (*Die* 40) and could cost Sean II his hunting concession. Sean II admires Riccardo's courage. Because of Claudia's foolish intervention, they err a killing shot and wound a lion in the stomach, so they have to pursue and kill it. This is described as one of the most dangerous hunting activities - "This was probably one of the most dangerous activities in which a man could engage. They don't come much worse than a gut-shot lion in close cover." (*Die* 58) Pursuing the wounded lion is the kind of chore Sean II would have to do on his own, for this is his job. Yet, Riccardo insists on leading the march, and he

undertakes the task with courage, without showing fear, so Sean II “[feels] a stir of admiration for the man.” (*Die* 58) But admiration is not the only feeling Sean II displays towards Riccardo. When they hunt together, “there [is] nothing else in their universe” and they are “perfectly in tune” for “a bond of companionship and shared endeavour [welds] them.” (*Die* 179) Claudia knows of “their mutual regard for each other.” (*Die* 189) The depth of Sean II’s emotions surfaces when Claudia tells him that Riccardo is dying of cancer, and he “puzzles himself by the depths of his [...] sadness.” (*Die* 162) Again, and as happened before in the saga with Sean I’s friends - Duff and Saul - Riccardo cannot be allowed to remain in the narrative. Of course they are only friends; yet, the depth of their regard for each other threatens their homosocial bond with suspicions of homosexuality that Smith makes haste to dispel by having Riccardo killed in a paroxysm of homosexual terror. Cancer could eventually consume Riccardo from within. Smith, however, makes him die penetrated by the tusk of the elephant he is chasing, Tukatela. Mortally wounded itself, Tukatela impales Riccardo and, after piercing his torso, the ivory point goes to bury itself deep in the soft sandy earth, so that man and beast are locked together like lovers in a mortal embrace; meanwhile, Riccardo’s blood oozes profusely from the terrible wound. (*Die* 185) By killing Riccardo in this way, Smith not only eliminates the suspicion of homosexuality between him and Sean II, but he demonises homosexuality itself on the side by conjuring up imagery that likens homosexuality to death. Smith’s choice of words is obvious enough: the tusk is a shaft of ivory and it impales Riccardo; it drives into his body; it enters his belly and comes out through his spine just at the point where it merges with his pelvis; it pins him to earth; it skewers him as cleanly as a whaler’s harpoon while his lower body is twisted up under the bull’s coiled trunk; his wound oozes blood and eventually he is killed in a lover’s embrace. (*Die* 184-185) Indeed, the idea of male being penetrated, of having the closed body perforated, is a sacrilege and it deserves nothing but death - but a death coming from the profane penetration itself, which like AIDS itself, comes as ‘rightful’ divine retribution for daring to jeopardise the heterosexual sanctity of the male body.

Masculine bonds outside the family, therefore, are never allowed to endure in Smith’s Courtney novels. Smith is intent on maintaining his masculine hold on the

narrative spaces he creates and cannot allow the homosocial to become homosexual. The heroes' sexuality cannot be fallible, for any sort of sexual disturbance would put the masculine ethos into question, which explains Smith's convenient 'strokes of the pen', his conscious effort to get rid of the heroes' affectionate male friends. And Smith does more than just dispelling suspicions of homosexuality that could endanger his construction of the heterosexual, ultra-masculine body. While defending the heterosexual state the hero epitomises, Smith simultaneously engages in a continuous attack on homosexuality. Next to emasculation, the accusation of homosexuality is one of the worst threats that jeopardises the masculinist ethos Smith creates in his novels. This accounts, for instance, for Hal being so outraged when Jangiri asks him if Dorian, his brother, is his bum-boy, that his "sword hand [trembles] with anger at the insult." (*Monsoon* 284) This also accounts for Tom's vicious attack on a transvestite assailant. Caught in a trap that Black Billy has prepared for Tom and Aboli, both men fight courageously against the pack of men surrounding them, cleanly getting rid of the riffraff killers with their swords. Yet, only one of the assailants stands out, the one who poses as a whore to entice Tom and Aboli into the place where the assault is to take place. While the other assailants are faceless and impersonal, described as a "knot of men," (*Monsoon* 399) the man-whore is described in all his / her grotesque demeanour: the "repellent patches of rouge on her cheeks and the thick paint on her broad mouth, [...] blue as a corpse's lips in the poor light." (*Monsoon* 397) Also, while the other men are swiftly done with, Tom thrusts his sword twice into the whore, who is finally left lying, "his skirts pulled over thin hairy white legs." (*Monsoon* 398) Finally, the disgust Smith feels for even the suggestion of homosexuality accounts as well for the discomfort of the heroes when they are dangerously aroused by women posing as men - before finally detecting their real sex. Thus, Sean I's relief is huge when he identifies the lad accompanying him, and whose buttocks and feet he had subjected to careful scrutiny, as Ruth, a woman. Hal's relief on discovering that Nazet is a woman is even more intense for his arousal on contemplating her is more explicitly formulated than Sean I's first encounter with Ruth had been. On first seeing her eyes, he feels "a pressure in his chest that [makes] it difficult for him to draw the next breath;" (*Birds* 509) and as he feels the odour of the other *man's* body, he finds himself "savouring deeply." (*Birds* 509) Guiltily, "he [acknowledges] how unnatural

[is] this sinful attraction he [feels] and [draws] back from the General as far as the hard, low stool [allows] him;" (*Birds* 509) yet, he cannot help himself and has to "make an effort to consider the words and not the speaker." (*Birds* 509) When Hal identifies her real sex, he is so relieved that he placatorily condescends to fight under her command, restraining himself from offering a masculinist backlash against her feminist retorts, and anachronistically acknowledges his admiration for her leadership skills. (*Birds* 510)

Homosexuality is indeed presented as a threat to the hero's heterosexual body and, by extension, to the heterosexual state Smith defends in the Courtney saga. Consequently, male homosexuals are demonised in the novels. Regarded as contaminating agents, adulterating elements that destabilise the heterosexual framework that guarantees the patriarchal rule of men in society, homosexuals deserve nothing but opprobrium in Smith's fiction. This indeed explains why Michael II, being a comely Courtney - he is described as a "likeable-looking lad, with a strong determined jawline and clear intelligent eyes" (*Rage* 437) - is not granted heroic status in the narrative. Being a homosexual, Michael II destabilises the fragile masculinist ethos Smith creates and, thus, he is described negatively in the saga. Unlike the truly manly Courtney heroes, he is compassionate, sweet, gentle. He prefers reading and daydreaming to engaging in really manly activities. He, for instance, feels no enthusiasm when his father presents him with a gun; the idea of killing makes him sick; and he pretends he has hurt his wrist in order not to have to play polo. In contrast, he is an excellent cook. Also unlike his brothers, other worthy ancestors and heroic men in general, his "financial and administrative instincts [are] underdeveloped" and his political judgement is "naive, perhaps irreparably flawed" (*Fox* 185) - he supports communism and anti-apartheid campaigners which, as I show in part III, is one of the worst drawbacks if one is to achieve some sort of heroism in Smith's milieu. Furthermore, he lacks the glamour and panache that so characterise other Courtneys: he drives a battered car; wears a cheap digital watch (all other contemporary Courtneys display Rolex watches on their wrists); and his house is dilapidated, rusty, shabby and dirty - he keeps a flock of chickens that wander into the kitchen and defecate on the sink and down the refrigerator door. To further stress his

deviant nature, Smith makes him feel attracted to coloured men in a literal articulation of the insult pro-apartheid supporters directed against liberal whites - that of being 'nigger lovers'. Smith qualifies his deviance as monstrous, the stuff nightmares are made of: Smith has Bella, Michael II's sister, find him in the act of copulating with a black man, Nelson Litalongi. His features, while being penetrated by Nelson as Michael II lies on his hands and knees, are "contorted with a deep and particular anguish," reminding Bella of "a stricken animal on the very point of a dreadful death." As he notices Bella looking at him, his face "[seems] to dissolve and run like molten wax, and re-form in an expression of terror and deadly shame." (*Fox* 107) After this 'dreadful' sight, Bella has "disjointed and confused dreams," in which she sees Michael II "struggling naked and terrified in the grip of some fearsome dark monster," and she shouts out in her sleep so wildly that she wakes herself. (*Fox* 107) The monstrosity of his homosexuality is even acknowledged by Michael II himself, who regards his inclinations as "a beast inside [him] [...], a ravaging beast over which [he has] no control." (*Fox* 110) Because of his flaw, Michael II is the only of Centaine's grandsons who does "not fit into [her] scheme of things" (*Fox* 184) and is "really [...]" the odd man out in his family." (*Fox* 198) His homosexuality is not only translated into behavioural, life-style and ideological flaws. It is also inscribed onto his body which, although "hard and warm and strong," is "completely devoid of sexuality." (*Fox* 196) Indeed, "he is not a true Courtney [...] Even Bella," who is 'only a woman', "has more steel in one of her little fingers than he has in his entire body. Michael is a waverer and a bleeder." (*Fox* 186) Ultimately, he has to be eliminated from the narrative. Manipulated by Ramon de Santiago y Machado, Michael II participates in a terrorist plot to further the advance of communism in South Africa; he is eventually found out and killed, his body penetrated by a branch as his plane crashes against a tall blue-gum tree. As in Smith's account of Riccardo Monterro's death, Michael II dies in the act of penetration: the tree-branch goes through his throat "with the ease of a hypodermic needle, transfixing his upper torso and coming out between his shoulder blades;" the momentum of the falling aircraft snaps the branch off and the jagged butt protrudes "from his throat like an ugly twisted lance," his mouth "wide open in a silent shriek" while a "fountain of his blood [spurts]" from the wound. (*Fox* 573) The ghost of AIDS (with Smith's reference to hypodermic needles and blood) lurks over

the description of Michael II's death; homosexuality itself, the act of penetrating a male body, is presented as lethal.

7.4.3. 'Otherising' sexual perversions

Homosexuality is not the only sexual deviation that could impair the potent heterosexual masculine body Smith fashions in his novels. Smith ensures that the heroes' sexuality is never in danger. Consequently, he transfers sexual disturbances into the villains of the narratives. Dirk, son of Sean I and Katrina, the daughter of Oupa Leroux, an original Boer trekker, is the offspring of two hostile races in South Africa, Boers and Britons. Unsurprisingly, Dirk eventually emerges as Sean I's arch-enemy, intent on depriving his own father of the empire he has erected in Natal and of his political power. To further stress the evil nature of this character he is offered as sexually perverse and depraved in the narratives. Already in his early adolescence, he has a sexual affair with Mary, an ugly solitary maid, and threatens to tell Ada, his grandmother and Mary's employer, if she refuses to grant him her favours; she eventually gets pregnant and commits suicide. His sexual depravity develops as he grows up: he visits prostitutes on a regular basis; finds himself to be suffering from a "painless but evil smelling condition," 'whites', a venereal disease; (*Thunder* 491) and he ultimately gets his own back by hitting the "dimpled and white" buttocks of the prostitute who infected him, which gives him "a sensation of giddy power" that buoys "him upwards to the level of gods." (*Thunder* 493) Unable to feel love for women, he keeps his house, Great Longwood, well-staffed with the prostitutes he plays with and systematically discards when he becomes tired of them, and who move around the house like sleep-walkers: naked, drugged, and already wasted in their early teens, their faces smeared with running make-up, giving them a haunted consumptive look, with lopsided "depraved whore's smile[s] on the smeared and inflamed lips." (*Sparrow* 197) Dirk's depravity reaches its summit in unsubtle examples of zoophilia; the affection Dirk shows for his horse, Sun Dancer, is overtly erotic, as can be seen when he caresses it with "the gentle hands of a lover." (*Thunder* 538)

Sexual depravity also characterises Hobday, a killer Dirk hires to eliminate stubborn landowners who refuse to sell the lands Dirk wants to acquire. Hobday is responsible for the death of Mark's grandfather, and, consequently, Mark is intent on capturing him so that he can be punished for his misgivings. But Mark makes a mistake. Having become aware of Hobday's interest in Storm, whose body he scrutinises, his eyes "busy on [her] like insects crawling greedily to the scent of honey, moving over the thin sunbleached cotton that covered her breasts," (*Sparrow* 566) Mark lets Storm act as a bait to capture him. But Hobday is swifter than they had expected. He chases Storm, enjoying every minute of the hunt, and pushing her into a "paroxysm of terror;" (*Sparrow* 572) he gets hold of her and rapes her before Mark can come to the rescue, drops her "slim abused body" (*Sparrow* 574) and repels Mark's attack turning his thick and rubbery muscled body against him with unbelievable speed. He is finally reduced, captured and imprisoned, but not before his sexual depravity has been clearly brought to the readers' realisation.

All other villainous characters have some sort of sexual 'malfunction'. The Buzzard, Lord Cumbrae - a British traitor who betrays Sir Francis Courtney and is ultimately responsible for his capture and execution - is not literally described as deviant, but he is indirectly presented as homosexual, - at one point he says, "I have got the Prince with his bum in the air and his pantaloons round his ankles. I intend to tup him full length, but not the way he likes it" (*Birds* 520) - and as a *castrati* - when he fears Hal Courtney is going to shoot his balls away, the Prince tells him he must have lost them long ago, but he makes a fine eunuch. (*Birds* 520) Hugo Bernard, the cruel warden of the garrison where Hal and Sir Francis are held captive, lives with a Hottentot girl, breaking the taboo of inter-racial intercourse, one of the worst crimes in South Africa. (*Birds* 313) Slow John, the Cape Colony executioner, is a maniac who gets his hard-ons subjecting prisoners to slow, painful death and who worships Katinka - a sexual pervert who "would make love to a pig or a poisonous snake if the fancy came upon her." (*Birds* 311) When they have sex together, there is no love involved; sex for them is just a sublimation of their perversions, venery of the most sordid kind, like the obsessive sadistic relationships in a David Lynch film. (see *Birds* 358-359) Consul William Grey has to resort of slave girls to gratify his sexual needs so

he takes two at a time, one kneeling above his face, the other straddling his body so they all lie in “a tangle of bodies, white limbs and brown entwined.” (*Monsoon* 214) And Guy Courtney, Tom’s twin brother, is impotent. Although he is a Courtney, he betrays his family, does not respect his father, puts the interests of the East India Company - for which he works - before his familial alliances, and, blinded by the jealousy he feels for his twin brother, does not hesitate to betray him and send the authorities against him when he finds out he is accused of murder in England. Guy is not intrinsically evil; yet his character is irremediably addled by the jealousy he feels for Tom. Furthermore, he is not a worthy inheritor of the Courtney blood. Although he is good-looking, “with delicate, rather feminine features” and has a “graceful body,” he lacks physical power and force. (*Monsoon* 25) In nature, he is cautious to the point of timidity, and he does not enjoy the manly activities his other brothers thrive on; he dislikes life on a boat, gets sea-sick, and prefers studious seclusion and the artistic world of music to the healthy outdoors, warlike activities that so characterise the Courtney lineage. Unsurprisingly, he lacks sexual appeal, finds the sexual act repugnant and beastly, and resorts to physical and psychological abuse to compensate for his lack of sexual power. Like Garrick I, he is not even the father of his son. Christopher is legally his, but it was Tom who ‘put the cake in the oven’.

Indeed, only villains are allowed depraved sexual tendencies in the narratives. The heroes, although sexually alive, and in spite of their misgivings about entrapment in marriage, ultimately become orthodox, happily married heterosexuals, their masculine bodies at the service of the happy and devoted family: with a male breadwinner, a full-time home-maker wife, several dependant children, and a general contentment. Through the villains’ sexual degeneracy, Smith probably sublimates his and the readers’ depraved sexual fantasies that western civilisation keeps on restraint, without putting into jeopardy the masculine body whose function is to protect the traditional patriarchal family and the espousal of western family values. In this way, we, readers, are given the opportunity to explore in fantasy the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden, to experience the possibility of stepping across the boundary of Political Correctness, while remaining essentially innocent and blame-free: by wishing for the villain’s final punishment, which will eventually be delivered,

we never go against the patriarchal law of the father Smith so consistently defends in the novels under analysis.

7.5. The 'body politic': strategies of supremacy

7.5.1. Endangering the body

The powerful male bodies Smith creates in his narratives, therefore, are not only icons male readers look upon for identification, but influential agents at the service of the patriarchal super-structure and of the state, what Andrew Ross calls the "willing recruit[s] in the ever-shifting struggle for hegemony in the field of ideas and values."³⁰ Smith uses the mighty, handsome, muscular bodies of his heroes to defend the white patriarchal ethos of the South African locale at the time the narratives were produced. At the same time, Smith protects the conception of masculinity that patriarchy relies on to entrench its legal and economic structures. The masculine body, therefore, reaches Elizabethan proportions in the narratives for it emerges as a microcosm of the body politic. Consequently, Smith cannot afford any serious impairment of the masculine body he creates since it would put the patriarchal ethos this body stands for into jeopardy. Thus, the invulnerability of Smith's heroes; their capacity to outlive dangers, accidents and scores of mishaps Smith confronts them with, which are many indeed.

Sean I's body, for example, is endangered on various occasions. In *When the Lion Feeds*, Smith has a mine collapse over Sean I's head, entrapping him in "the warm womb of the earth" in a tiny space with only "six inches of head room and perhaps twelve inches on either side, warm mud underneath him and rock and steel all around." (*Lion* 304-305) In the same novel, Sean I is confronted with a leopard which hooks its claws into his chest, scrapes his ribs, rakes his stomach and finally tears down his thigh, but which Sean I eventually manages to stab to death. In *The Sound of*

³⁰ Andrew Ross, "The Great White Dude," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 172.

Thunder, Sean I saves Saul's life by carrying his injured, unconscious body across the enemy lines during the battle of Colenso; but as Sean I and his burdensome cargo reach British territory, he is badly injured, shrapnel tearing into his flesh stinging "like the cut of a razor" and leaving him lying on the ground, "his leg twisted at a ridiculous angle from his trunk." (*Thunder* 119) In the same novel, Sean I is injured again during the final battle between Boers and British at the end of the Boer War; he is first thrown from his horse, hitting "the ground with his chest and shoulder and the side of his face;" (*Thunder* 346) the skin of one side of his face is smeared away, his nose bleeds, the blood turns the earth in his mouth "to a gritty paste" and his arm is numb to the shoulder. (*Thunder* 347) In such a pitiful state, Sean I still finds strength to reach the Boer positions and engage in a hand to hand fight with Jean Paulus Leroux, not before being hit by a bullet in his belly.

The bodies of Smith's other heroes are similarly wrecked. In *A Sparrow Falls*, Mark is shot by a German machine-gunner from behind and made to suffer "the mighty strokes of [...] two bullets [smashing] into his back" (*Sparrow* 28) during World War I; his bullet-damaged lung is furthermore attacked by pneumonia and he is made to undergo fourteen months of hellish, hot feverish delirium until the pain finally abates. Later on in the narrative, and back in the South African veld, Mark is chased by a pack of angry, cold-blooded killers intent on making him bite the dust; he falls heavily on the ground and feels his ankle go, the pain of it exploding up his leg into his groin and lower belly. His vision starting to "break up and star," nauseated by the pain, rifle bullets disrupting the air about his head, "white-hot shooting agony [bursting] the roof of his skull," soaked with sweat, swerving as he runs, sobbing and hobbling on the damaged leg, (*Sparrow* 68) Mark manages to reach a running locomotive, climb on and escape. Still in *A Sparrow Falls*, Mark falls victim to a severe bout of malaria while he is being pursued by the same riffraff murderers that had tried to kill him earlier in the narrative. He manages to kill one of his pursuers, but is shot by another; the bullet does not hit him; it smashes into the wooden stock of the rifle he is holding in his hands but the violent impact hurls him backwards into the swirling brown waters of the Tugela River, where he almost perishes. Michael I's body is similarly physically damaged in *The Burning Shore*. His Sopwith catches fire

after raiding the most feared and hated German targets: the hydrogen-filled, silk balloons. Michael I is forced to make an emergency landing; his plane hits the ground, and his head slams against the edge of the cockpit, stunning him. The flames crackling and leaping all around him bring him back to consciousness and he manages to claw himself out of the cockpit, his greycoat flaring as he rips at the buttons to rid himself of the agony. The flames finally burn through across his shoulder and down his arm. (*Burning* 32-33)

Third and fourth-generation Courtneys receive their compulsory share of lacerations. Shasa, for instance, loses an eye, which is a dreadful mishap indeed if we take into account that the Courtneys' piercing indigo blue or emerald green eyes are one of their most valuable assets, representing, as they do, the imperial gaze, the power with which they control narrative action and assert their authority over space and people. Shasa loses his eye when he is hit in the head during the military campaign in Abyssinia; the injury is dreadful: the top ridge of the eye-socket is depressed on the outside corner, the empty eye-socket is sunken and the eyelids droop apart, "exposing wet red tissue in the gap between his thick dark lashes." (*Sword* 541). But worst of all, his participation in the war, his opportunity for heroism, is truncated after the injury. While the other men are fighting, he is "here in the dirt, a cripple, grovelling in the dirt." (*Sword* 542) Sean II is not physically wounded or injured in the saga, not even during his long stay in Moçambique and his capture by Renamo guerrillas and consequent escape. Although often bruised and gaunt with exhaustion, his body is never maimed. Yet, he is subject to psychological wounds. Being as he is the last Courtney action hero,³¹ he is often tormented by a sense of fatality. His lack of economic solvency in a materialistic society that judges men according to their capacity to earn money, makes him despair at his situation: he has lost his safari concession in Zimbabwe, owes almost fifty thousand dollars to his brother and his overdraft at the bank in Harare is touching ten thousand. In such circumstances, he fears he will have to go back to his father and brother and beg for a position in the

³¹ Sean II is indeed the last contemporary Courtney hero. As I discuss in length in chapter 10, Smith seems to find it increasingly difficult to sustain Rambo-like heroism in contemporary society. Consequently, his latest Courtney adventures recreate the origins of the Courtney lineage in pre-imperial, pre-colonial Africa and make use of the Arthurian romance narrative mode.

Courtney offices. This option - for a man who hates “air-conditioned offices, neckties and dark business suits, interminable meetings with lawyers and engineers, rush-hour traffic and the smell of the city” (*Die* 98) - would be worse than death. His sense of inadequacy is sometimes overwhelming and he finds himself losing his stamina and his leadership skills when he most needs them, such as when he is leading an attack against a group of Frelimos armed to the teeth and, with self-disgust, realises that he is “avoiding facing up to his own indecision and lack of any plan” and that he “[has] lost control and it [is] all blowing up in his face;” he feels “confused and uncertain” as “panic [wells] up from deep inside him [...] [and] he [doesn’t] know what order to give next.” (*Die* 309) At moments such as this, Sean II is the epitome of the postmodern man, lost in a sea of indecision, psychologically traumatised, unable to cope with a world that seems to be disintegrating before his eyes.

Hal, Tom and Dorian are also inflicted physical and psychological wounds. Hal is made a prisoner in the Cape Colony, has to stand trial and is sentenced to hard labour in the fortress Boers are building around the colony. His body - offered as a spectacle in the tradition of Hollywood prison / torture action films such as *Lock-up*, *Fortress*, *Tango and Cash* and *Lethal Weapon* - is terribly lacerated: the palms of his hands and both his shoulders are “rubbed raw by the rough, undressed stone blocks;” one of his fingertips is “crushed and the nail [is] the colour of a purple grape,” (*Birds* 250) and his back and flanks are latticed by whip marks. (*Birds* 304) His leg is also injured during his escape from the garrison, so it swells and stiffens, (*Birds* 330) making it very difficult for him to follow the march “through the pain and the quivering weakness that [spreads] slowly up his thigh.” (*Birds* 344) Eventually, his injured leg can no longer bear his weight, and he staggers and collapses in the opening of a crevice; the fever in his blood from the festering wounds boils up and fills his head with darkness and heat until he finally lapses into unconsciousness. (*Birds* 350-351) Tom’s body is also the recipient of multiple injuries. He almost drowns, enmeshed in a tangle of ropes, as he tries to save Dorian, who has fallen into the sea; a few days later, he twists his ankle climbing the walls of the fortress in Flor de la Mar where Dorian is held captive by the Arabs, the pain shooting “up from his ankle into his groin like the stab of a giant hornet’s sting;” (*Monsoon* 244) he also receives a

sword wound across his thigh by Jangiri, a pirate, whom he nonetheless manages to kill; (*Monsoon* 295) he receives a musket shot on his ribcage from his own brother, Black Billy; (*Monsoon* 400) and has his body torn by thorns and branches as he marches across the jungle. (*Monsoon* 600) Yet, these injuries are nothing compared to the terrible pain he experiences when he thinks his brother, Dorian, captured by the Arabs, has died. When he receives the terrible news, his face is “blenched with shock,” his eyes “haunted,” (*Monsoon* 506) and he lies in Sarah’s arms “broken, devastated.” (*Monsoon* 508) Dorian is similarly ‘unmanned’ by pain as he receives the news of Yasmini’s pending death in the hands of Kush, the zenana keeper and *castrati*, so he feels “the strength go out of his legs so that he [can] not move them, and his mind [goes] blank, as though trying to hide from the horror of it.” (*Monsoon* 579) Yet, the most serious injuries he receives are once in the hands of the Turks and another time in the hands of Tom, who fails to recognise him as his own, long-lost brother. On both occasions, Dorian is tormented by physical pain until he eventually loses consciousness. Yet, his injuries are just the physical expression of his inner turmoil. Brought up among Arabs since his capture as a kid, Dorian has problems of adaptation to the Arab world and Muslim beliefs. During his first trance, however, he embraces the Koran and regains consciousness converted into a Muslim. This act of treachery to his British and Catholic ancestry deserves a punishment, so that his newly-acquired beliefs can be purged out of his body. His second trance serves this purpose. As he lapses in and out of consciousness, trying to win a battle against death, he is also “tormented by the emotional forces that [tear] at his heart and [threaten] to render it apart.” (*Monsoon* 654) As if in an act of exorcism, he slips back into consciousness having expelled the ‘obnoxious beliefs’ from his body and he embraces his ancestry and his original alliances.

7.5.2. The body triumphant: masochism and recuperative power

In spite of the large number of injuries, traumas, abrasions and lacerations the heroes are forced to suffer, their bodies are never seriously impaired and, after an often short convalescence, they recover their full strength and are ready to face up to new challenges against which to prove their manhood. So Smith follows the exigency

that characterises Hollywood habits and formulae, making his heroes undergo the passage from eroticisation, through destruction, to re-emergence and regeneration in the mythical tradition of the story of Christ's ascent after crucifixion. Although his heroic men are brought to breaking point, Terminator-like they recover their strength, the only traces of the physical injuries inflicted being a few scars that men proudly display for women to admire - such as when Sean I's naked, scarred body is scrutinised by Ruth after love-making and she exclaims, "You're covered with scars, like an old tom-cat who fights too much," (*Thunder* 161) - or which men show to one another and which they regard as markers of virility and strength - as can be appreciated in the humorous scene in which Colonel Acheson irrupts into Sean I's room just to find him and Major Peterson, their clothes dishevelled, Peterson's trousers round his ankles, comparing their scars and feels strongly tempted to join in the exhibition, "for he also had some fine scars." (*Thunder* 367)

Masochistic lacerations on the male body of the kind Smith's heroes are inflicted with have been interpreted by critics such as Bersani³² and Silverman³³ as "disavowal of the paternal function, a sort of escape from it, and a way of punishing its imposition."³⁴ As Silverman puts it: "What is beaten in masochism is not so much the male subject as the father, or the father in the male subject." Thus, in her account, the masochist "remakes the symbolic order and 'ruins' his own paternal legacy."³⁵ Both critics exploit the notion of masochism as a perversion in order to suggest that it subverts, undermines, defers or invalidates the phallic law and the fixities in both subjectivities and meanings that depend upon the phallic law. Silverman, for instance, summarises her position in her claim that the male masochist:

[...] loudly proclaims that his meaning comes to him from the Other, prostrates himself before the gaze even as he solicits it, exhibits his castration for all to see, and revels in the sacrificial basis of the social contract. The male masochist magnifies the losses and divisions upon which cultural identity is based, refusing

³² Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

³³ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992)

³⁴ Paul Smith, "Eastwood Bound," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 89.

³⁵ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 211-212.

to be sutured or recompensed, he radiates a negativity inimical to the social order.³⁶

However, the claims of Bersani and Silverman cannot really be applied to Smith's narratives. As I show in the following chapter, and as I have suggested before, Smith does not only rescue and popularise heroic models of masculinity in order to counter-effect the crisis of masculinity (supposedly) assailing modern men, but, in his Courtney saga, he provides a defence of the patriarchal law. Consequently, alternative readings have to be provided to account for the number of lacerations, abrasions, injuries and traumas Smith's suffering heroes have to endure. Susan Jeffords in *Hard Bodies*, Yvonne Tasker in *Spectacular Bodies* and Ina Rae Hark in her article, "Animals or Romans. Looking at Masculinity in *Spartacus*,"³⁷ seem to agree in their views. For these theorists, and as Richard Dyer has also pointed out in his book *White*, the suffering male body as spectacle is part of a tradition spawning centuries of Christian iconography. Ever since ancient times, the representation of the suffering white male body is seldom defeatist. The emphasis lies not in pain, but in endurance and resistance, as is exemplified in the action films produced in the last decades. In these films, the apparently invincible bodies of Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis or Arnold Schwarzenegger are constantly lacerated, yet they systematically overcome their injuries as is exemplified in the scene in the film *First Blood* in which Sly impassively sews up a nasty gash with a needle and thread stored in the handle of his monster knife. Indeed, injuries are nothing to these action men, as can be appreciated in Brandon Lee's piece of bravado; "I've gotten hit, kicked and punched, I broke my toe, got some stitches in my head, nothing too serious."³⁸ These lacerations, therefore, signal how truly hard those bodies really are. Also, these lacerations give audiences / readers the opportunity to indulge into voyeuristic admiration of the male body without jeopardising the heterosexual matrix that so characterises our patriarchal constructs. Although the injured male body may produce discomfort for it belies the impenetrability of the steely muscular armour with which 'mucho macho' men cover up their bodies - and it therefore exposes the intrinsic fragility of masculine identity

³⁶ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 206.

³⁷ Ina Rae Hark, "Animals or Romans. Looking at Masculinity in *Spartacus*," *Screening the Male*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 151-172.

³⁸ qtd. in Marshall Julius, *Action!*, 144.

and authority the struggling white hero embodies - at the same time, it gives men the opportunity to examine the beefcake on display - the muscles, sinewy arms, powerful shoulders, tight buttocks of the hero - while focusing their interest in the wounds and the panache with which they bear them. Any erotic interest such a powerful body may produce is thus eliminated and viewers / readers are free to scrutinise a male body without relinquishing the heterosexual gaze.

Finally, these injured bodies give men the opportunity to experience the pleasures of masochism as defined by Freud. According to Freud, masochistic expressions of physical pain on male bodies are exhibitionist, histrionic and designed to provide punishment. The punishment comes in the shape of an intensification of superego activity. For him, masochism is characterised by the need of the subject to do something inexpedient in order to bring upon itself the gratifying punishment of the superego. The pleasure of masochism, therefore, is deferred for it comes, not while physical pain is being inflicted, but afterwards. When the pain and humiliation are over, superego activity starts again, and men regain the power that the masochistic moment had deprived them of. Masochism emerges, in this way, as a fantasy of empowerment after being physically injured and humiliated, when men can reinstate their power in society, giving them the possibility of physically and actually staging an accession to a power which, otherwise, they receive as given. So the humiliating lessons of masochism, as Paul Smith phrases it, "do not last, they come and are gone, forgotten as part of the subject's history of struggle in learning how to triumphantly reach symbolic empowerment."³⁹ Freud's interpretation explains the pleasure readers are to obtain from the physical pain the heroes in the narratives undergo: that of seeing them emerge triumphant, their potent masculine bodies unimpaired, after being subjected to discomfort, malaise, distress, hell and abasement; that of seeing the potent masculine bodies reptile-like regenerate themselves and regain control of their lives and of the narrative action after a brief period of suffering and distress.

³⁹ Paul Smith, "Eastwood Bound," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 91.

Thus, in Smith's narratives, the heroes may experience all sorts of physical torments; yet, these never endanger their heroic stature. These physical (or psychological) lacerations create suspense; they make us feel empathy with the suffering hero; they exacerbate our hatred of the perpetrators of those injuries; they bring to the fore the perversity of a world intent on hindering the advance of truly manly men. However, they ultimately produce pleasure: the pleasure of allowing us readers to lovingly linger on the images of the heroes' awesome physiques and, above all, of seeing the heroes endure, regain their strength, and re-occupy the centre-stage of the narrative after having conquered and defeated pain and injury in a clear formulation of Freud's account of masochism's deferred pleasure. This explicates Smith's insistence on highlighting the resilience of the heroes; their capacity to regain control of the situation after periods of intense suffering - which would certainly break and irremediably impair lesser men. Thus, for instance, Hal becomes *a man* in the dungeons where he is held a prisoner. Torture and other forms of physical abuse do not unman him; Big Daniel marvels, "What the Dutchies are doing to him here might have put a lesser man up on the reef but, by God, all they have done to him is filled his main sail with a strong wind." (*Birds* 305) Hal's leg injury caused by a hound during his escape from the dungeons heals marvellously; Sukeena exclaims, "You have been fortunate. The bite from the fangs of a hound is always poisonous, and then the abuse to which you put the limb during our flight might have killed you or crippled you for the rest of your life." (*Birds* 363) Hal smiles at her strictures, and so does Smith; one can hear him chuckle to himself at Sukeena's words. Smith knows there is much more than fortune at work here. Being, as Hal is, the hero of the narrative, he is determined by the hermeneutic of adventure to overcome distress - a maimed hero, Smith knows well, would make a poor kind of hero, indeed.

Dorian's resilience is also continually highlighted. During the attack against the Turks, Dorian finds himself leading a small group of men against an army of hundreds. Fighting shoulder to shoulder in the pack and surge, Dorian and his men hack, stab and shout desperately. His men fall around him in the few moments it takes him to appraise the situation and think up his fighting tactics. After a while, all the men who have not already perished are wounded, but "although Dorian [has] been in

the thick of the fighting all that day his injuries [are] the least grave.” (*Monsoon* 547) His determination, even when injured, does not falter. There is a deep cut on the back of his left arm and a sword-thrust through the same shoulder; however, he does not despair; he says, “But I still have my right arm to wield a sword.” (*Monsoon* 547) Tom is similarly injured on several occasions; yet he systematically leaves his doubts, misgivings and injuries behind and feels “strong and invulnerable;” (*Monsoon* 412) he even exclaims, “I am immune to musket-balls.” (*Monsoon* 518) After Shasa’s eye-injury, he is assailed by self-pity, gives up his duties at his mother’s company, takes up a drinking habit and even forsakes personal hygiene: he lives in a shack in Smitswinkel Bay and Blaine beholds the dirt surrounding Shasa with horror - the frying pan greasy with congealed left-overs on the Devon stove, the dirty plates and mugs cluttering the central table, the column of black ants climbing one leg of the table to reach the uneaten food. However, he immediately recovers his dignity: he shaves, has a bath and goes back to his duties; the eye injury never prevents him from undertaking his heroic pursuits again; the eye-patch only makes him more glamorous. (*Sword* 540-544) Shasa is, therefore, another example of the heroes’ resilience, their “extraordinary recuperative powers.” (*Rage* 507) These self-same recuperative powers also characterise, to mention one last example, Sean II, who after a brief but overpowering moment of panic and despair while leading an attack against Frelimo guerrillas, feels the “hot effervescence of panic” subside; he has his voice become “crisp and decisive” again; feels “cold and resilient as a knife-blade;” and “knows exactly what he [is] going to do.” (*Die* 310) Not even our Politically Correct state of affairs manages to make Sean II redundant in Smith’s saga. His action-man capabilities, his recuperative resilience, his Rambo-like indestructibility are still invaluable assets as can be appreciated when the Courtneys have to undertake a rescue operation in order to free Nicholas, Bella’s son, from his father, Ramon, who has held him captive since he was a baby in an attempt to bring him up in communist beliefs and to manipulate Bella. Garrick II, who epitomises rational, business-like efficiency, leads the operation. Yet, he cannot do so without Sean II. In a defence of the muscular body for its own sake, Smith makes him exclaim, “Sean will come with me. I might need some muscle.” (*Fox* 553)

7.5.3. Getting things right: the masochistic stage as a 'masculinity test'

For characters to reach authentic heroic status, therefore, they must be able to overcome masochistic lacerations on their body so that they can reinstate their power and superiority in society, and thereby the power and superiority of patriarchy. The characters who, after being subjected to the masochistic moment, remain physically impaired are regarded as unworthy representatives of manhood and are deprived of any heroic stature, turned into figures of ridicule and contempt; emasculated and disempowered, they become patriarchy's leftovers, children of patriarchy's lesser gods. That is what ultimately happens to Lothar de la Rey.

Lothar is the son of a German mother living in German West Africa (Namibia) and of Petrus de la Rey (brother of Koos de la Rey, the legendary South African Boer general). Lothar's father had fought the British during the Boer War and refused to surrender after the Boer defeat in South Africa. He hereafter moved to German West Africa and helped the Germans against the British and South African Unionists during World War I. After Petrus' death, Lothar continued with his father's personal campaign against the British, conducting acts of sabotage and helping German troops to enter African territory surreptitiously or refuel and revictual their vessels on the Skeleton Coast, eventually becoming an outlaw. Lothar's outlawry and maverick spirit make him the perfect bearer of masculinity; aloof, solitary, wild, strong, living away from the constraints of civilisation and orthodox behaviour, he is the ideal rebel with a cause that we often identify with heroism. His good-looks further highlight his heroic stature: he is "tall and sungilded and handsome;" (*Burning* 266) his hair is golden, "hanging to his [...] shoulders, streaked white by the sun, yet as lustrous as raw silk, offering a startling contrast to his deeply tanned features [which] might once have been as beautiful as those of a comely girl, but [from which] all softness had been burned by the flames of life's furnace." (*Burning* 518-19) His outfit, he often wears a wide-brimmed hat with ostrich feathers in it, boots and riding-breeches, bespeaks his communion with nature and reveals his lean, muscled body, well-equipped with a "great bulge in his breeches" (*Burning* 612) which women cannot fail but to notice and which makes other, lesser men feel inadequate and foolish (such as Captain Kurt

and Garrick I, who are reminded of everything they are not when in Lothar's presence).

But Lothar's heroic status in Smith's narratives is doomed to be short-lived. Being a Boer, and thus the object of Smith's sneer, he cannot be granted a stardom position among the bearers of authentic heroism in the saga. Eventually, he is physically injured: he ambushes Centaine while she is travelling alone in the Kalahari Desert on her way from Windhoek to Cape Town, carrying her diamonds with her. Lothar wants to steal her diamonds in order to take revenge on her for her ruining his fishing business. But Centaine offers resistance, kicks and hits him in a desperate attempt to repulse his attack, and finally bites through an artery in his wrist. Although Lothar manages to escape with the precious booty, his wrist is seriously injured and gets infected. When he is finally captured, his arm has to be amputated. This corporeal removal prevents the path from objectification of the masculine body to destruction and regeneration from being followed. After the masochistic moment, there is no hope of triumphalist re-emergence. When he appears again in the narrative (in *Power of the Sword*), therefore, Lothar's body has undergone alarming degeneration. No longer the handsome desperado, he is dressed in a faded blue workman's shirt and dark slacks. The clothes seem too large for him and one sleeve is pinned up loosely over his stump. He furthermore shuffles like an old man, his hair is completely white, is impossibly thin, his skin has a "greyish lifeless look [hanging] in little loose folds under his jaw and on his scrawny neck," and his tan has faded to the "yellowish colour of old putty." (*Sword* 269) But the extreme deterioration of his body is not the only misfortune he is forced to suffer; a fate worse than death awaits him: he is brought to justice and sentenced to hard labour. Lothar, a hard and lean creature "with pale eyes that looked to far horizons shaded blue by distance, a creature of those great spaces washed with white sunlight," (*Sword* 279) is now "bowed and broken and grey," (*Sword* 274) locked in a tiny cell, deprived of the sun and desert wind; unmanned, ridiculed, a figure of sheer contempt. Although he is freed in old age, he never regains his dignity again.

A similar fate awaits Garrick I, Sean I's twin brother, doomed to unmanliness and disrepute because of his inability to overcome the masochistic stage successfully. His unheroic status in the narrative is established from the very beginning of the saga. Already in his childhood, Garrick I is presented as a faded version of Sean I, "as if an artist had taken a portrait and with a few subtle strokes had altered its meaning completely so as to make it an entirely different picture." (*Lion* 129) Whereas Sean I's colouring is vivid, Garrick I's is dull, his hair "an undecided brown that grew wispy down the back of his neck;" his skin is freckled, "his nose and the rims of his pale blue eyes [...] pink with persistent hay-fever." (*Lion* 6) He is furthermore sickly and cowardly; dislikes guns and hunting and war; does not enjoy work on the farm or outdoors activities; does not face up to problems and difficulties, and finds an alternative fantasy world into which to retreat in the books he reads, which become the opium that helps him escape from the uncongenial masculinist ethos in which he finds himself contained.

Garrick I's weaknesses are indeed many. Smith, however, does not allow for the drawbacks in his mental and physical constitution to be surmounted; instead, he gloats over them, delivering him a fatal blow that renders him incapable of reaching the heroic stature other male protagonists are granted in the saga. In his early adolescence, he becomes the victim of a hunting accident when Sean I takes Garrick I with him on one of his bushbuck-chasing escapades. Sean I falls to the ground and the gun he is carrying flies out of his hand, goes off and hits Garrick I's leg, the blast smashing into it and churning the flesh below his knee into tatters. As a result of this, Garrick I's leg has to be cut off. After this corporeal removal, Garrick I becomes a cripple, physically impaired and, thus, permanently excluded from the usual objectification, destruction and regeneration routine. As happens with Lothar, the masochistic moment is not a temporary test of the male body; the wound inflicted is a lifelong one and does not serve the end of heroic triumph. Garrick I's impaired, flawed body becomes ridiculous and absurd, less dramatic than comical, incapable of reaching heroic proportions. Garrick I never manages to become the idealised figure readers look upon for identification and recognition. He is to remain a clown-like figure, sad and pathetic, whose only possible role in the masculinist ethos Smith

creates is to set off, by contrast, the heroism and capacity to overcome difficulties and problems of other stronger, handsomer, more capable, and 'full-limbed', protagonists.

From the moment the amputation takes place, Smith turns Garrick I into one of his 'walking cautionary tales', a reminder of the fate awaiting males who cannot reinstate their power into society, emerge triumphant after the masochistic stage, and regain a position of superiority among lesser beings that genetically belongs to men. His body undergoes extreme degradation; his illnesses multiply by the hundred, heightening his prostrate condition and highlighting his social invalidism: he is often afflicted with "one of his colds" (*Lion* 51) or "hay fever-again," (*Lion* 60) he gets sick on trains (*Lion* 62) or is granted permanent leave "on grounds of ill-health." (*Thunder* 260) Above all, his body is made to suffer the ultimate chagrin: the removal of his leg actually becomes a castration for it renders him impotent. Garrick I is unable to perform successfully in bed with women, as can be appreciated when Anna I, his first wife, finds "slackness and uncertainty" where there should have been "hardness, male and arrogant" (*Lion* 140) when she allows him to make love to her after a period of revulsion at his stump. After this flawed attempt at love-making, Garrick I is not granted a second chance for a long time and is forced to remain a virgin still at forty-two. (*Thunder* 412) He is, therefore, deprived of men's most precious treasure, his sexual potency, the 'one and only' marker of masculinity; he is, thus, emasculated, an eunuch usurped of his manhood. Consequently, Garrick I has to resort to other sources of sexual indulgence for the sexual urge is not gone, only the ability to gratify his own appetite with women: he turns to masturbation for some sort of sexual gratification (*Lion* 59) or satisfies his repressed sexual drive by watching his stallion mounting his mare, whispering to her, "Wait, my darling," (*Thunder* 309) in a voice tight with his own excitement.

Sexual potency is not the only attribute he is deprived of, for with it are gone self-confidence and willpower. After the amputation, therefore, Garrick I becomes even more vulnerable and child-like; (*Burning* 300) is incapable of making decisions; (*Burning* 302) has a tendency to procrastinate; (*Burning* 342) and there is an aura of negativism about him reflected in his shaggy appearance - he ages, his hair thins and is

covered with dandruff,⁴⁰ and he becomes increasingly fragile, small and bird-like - and in the state of absolute decay and neglect in which he keeps his farm, Theunis Kraal, - the outside walls are flaking and mottled with patches of dampness, the thatch is shaggy, one of the shutters tilts slightly from a broken hinge, the lawns are brown and ragged, and the dairy behind the house has crumbled. (*Thunder* 58) Unable to face up to the challenge of assuming authority and control over his body, wife and household, Garrick I finds alternative worlds into which to retreat in literature and drinking. Fiction-reading had already been his favourite pathway of escape during his childhood, but it is during his adulthood that he turns to writing to escape from the "whole turmoil of his life." (*Thunder* 131) He writes about great historical figures, men whose deeds and heroic actions he has not been able to emulate; stories of real men that give him the opportunity to live in fantasy his repressed needs and desires; stories that become a substitute for an uncongenial reality in which he has not been able to attain the sort of relevance and significance other male protagonists have achieved. Drinking, on the other hand, allows him to forget; it blots out all sight and sound, enveloping his head in a soft, misty greyness that is warm and safe, that wraps and protects him. (*Thunder* 446)

One could claim that Garrick I is allowed some sort of heroism in the narratives since he is awarded the Victoria Cross for his deeds at Rorke's Drift during the Zulu War, and is promoted to lieutenant-colonel during the Boer War. But Smith does not allow his readers to be deceived by medals and nominations, which, he reminds us, are most unworthily won and used. The circumstances that led to his being awarded the precious Victoria Cross, for example, were fortuitous and unheroic. Garrick I had remained at the garrison because of a squirting dysentery while Chelmsford led a flying column into Zululand. The garrison, with only thirty sick men and sixty more to hold the Drift while Chelmsford and his army were away, was raided by ten thousand "impis of Zulu in the formation of the bull." (*Lion* 119) The men at the Drift managed to contain the attack, but would all have perished had it not

⁴⁰ In Smith's fiction, hair is a marker of healthy masculinity. While the heroes have lustrous, thick, glossy hair, villains or lesser men would do better hiding their hair under a cap. Thus, Joe Cicero's hair - he is a communist and a KGB agent - is described as "black and lank and lifeless" (*Rage* 577) and as "dead black hair;" (*Rage* 607) and Jakobus Stander, who kills little girls with bombs, has hair which is "long, flecked with dandruff." (*Rage* 579)

been for Garrick I, who, unable to react, benumbed by fear and cowardice, happened to be next to the door, which was being assailed by the Zulus at that moment. He fell as he was trying to escape and hide, and he unwillingly put out his hand, which prevented the Zulus from battering down the door for a while, which allowed the gunners poised at the windows to come to the door and clear the Zulus away. So his accidental fall turned out to be fortunate indeed; his putting out the arm was interpreted as an heroic attempt to stop the Zulus from penetrating the garrison. His role as an army lieutenant-colonel during the Boer War was also unheroic. He drank too much to hide his terror, often becoming a pathetic figure of ridicule before the disgusted eyes of his subordinates; was inefficient and took unwise decisions; was cowardly and reluctant to be at the front; and abused his power every time the opportunity presented itself.

Garrick I, therefore, is a poor little man through and through, and is never allowed to appear otherwise. Not even in old age is he completely redeemed. Although he finally manages to have a steady sexual relationship with a woman, Anna II, Centaine's assistant, whom he eventually marries, and appears as a benevolent grandpa at the end of *The Burning Shore*, he is still weakly, cowardly, and even henpecked, always at the ready to obey Anna's every wish and desire. The sexual roles are reversed and it is in bulldog-like, snorting, strong, massive Anna II that the real site of authority is to be located, not in Garrick I, subjected and perfectly comfortable in his secondary, submissive position. Even Smith's last attempt to endow him with some sort of patriarchal authority in order to counter-balance the anxiety that Centaine's centre-stage importance in *Power of the Sword* produces, is futile. At this stage of the saga, Centaine is not only presented as the founder and director of the Courtneys' vast mining empire; she is also bringing up Shasa, Michael I's son, on her own without a parental figure to guide and direct Shasa into patriarchy. In an attempt to provide Shasa with a rightful - i.e. less feminine - Cicerone, Smith undusts Garrick I's curriculum and displays it for readers to see, without ever recalling the shameful circumstances in which such curriculum was constructed. Thus, for incautious readers - or for readers who have not been acquainted with the previous instalments of the saga - he is presented as a paragon of heroism: "Knightly Commander of the Order of

the British Empire, a holder of the highest award for valour that the Empire could offer, the Victoria Cross, [...] one of the most eminent military historians of the age, a man so rich and careless of worldly wealth that he seldom bothered to count his fortune.” (*Sword* 38) To further confirm his newly gained authority, Smith reintroduces him into the narrative paired with General Jan Smuts, the leader of the South African Party, whom Smith admires for his liberal policies and his attempts to unite the two white races in South Africa and create a strong and peaceful nation.⁴¹ Garrick I is presented as his informal counsellor, a position that Sean I had formally occupied before his death. Both appear in friendly intercourse, discussing the future of the country with the nostalgic approach that characterises old heroes, men who have been functional to the development and progress of the nation, who have reached the pinnacles of power and that now behold the future with distress, turned into passive ‘witnesses’ of the advance of the evil forces of the racist National Party.

Yet, and for all Garrick I’s newly-acquired heroic aura, he does not ultimately fit into the parameters that make up a true hero. The hermeneutic of adventure prevents it. Centuries of heroic stereotyping determine that the body of the hero has to be physically powerful. Woody-Allen-look-alikes may be characters we sympathise with; but they are not and cannot be heroic. Garrick I’s build-up does not undergo a physical transformation to go with his new ‘charismatic coating’. In old age, he may display a “scholarly mien” (*Sword* 509) and a “small silver goatee beard” that adds “a touch of distinction to his pale aesthetic features.” (*Sword* 509) However, he is still a skinny - “so lean as to appear half starved” - cripple, limping “slightly on an artificial leg,” (*Sword* 38) so puny that when he sits Anna II - his wife - on his lap, she “[submerges] him beneath her abundance.” (*Sword* 44) The muscular bodies of Smith’s heroes are more than sheer aesthetic objects; the heroes’ bodies are carved in iron; they are real men of steel who can withstand the attacks of anti-masculinist campaigners and dispel any doubts about the future of real macho men in society (or

⁴¹ Smith describes Smuts as poor and careless of his debts, but emphasises his political stature. He writes, “He was without question the cleverest, wisest, most charismatic and influential man that South Africa had ever produced. It was almost as though his spirit was too big to be contained by terrestrial borders, as though he were a true citizen of the wide world.” (*Sparrow* 39)

at least in adventure) by the sheer force of their physical excess. Garrick I's lovable persona, with his endearing old-man fragility, cannot serve this function.

Ultimately, he is not even a suitable patriarchal role-model, and is soon replaced by the impressive Blaine Malcomess, who, with his awesome good-looks, sports record and military and political achievements, becomes the father-figure Shasa looks to for recognition. At one point of the narrative, Smith emphasises the empathy Shasa and Garrick I share, for the fact that they "had both suffered mutilation [...] seemed to have forged [a strong] bond between them." (*Sword* 580) When Shasa is with Garrick I, he feels "a rush of deep affection for this wise and gentle old man." (*Sword* 580) However, it is Blaine whom Shasa regards as his "particular demi-god;" (*Sword* 386) Blaine who has "come to stand in the place of the father [Shasa] had never known;" (*Sword* 441) Blaine whom Shasa wants to be like and whom he has always relied on for "good counsel and experience." (*Sword* 542) Garrick I's pixie looks preclude not only his heroic, but also his fatherly status in the narrative, and Blaine is introduced to fill up the parental space that Michael I had left vacant. By marrying Centaine, in fact, Blaine not only domesticates Centaine and secludes her in the domain of the domestic; he also formalises his patriarchal status by becoming an institutionalised father. After that, Garrick I is surplus to narrative requirements, an expendable patriarch, a father too-many, and can thus be eliminated. Dignified, killed by the 'White Sword' - one of the militant, *Ossewa Brandwag* members plotting against Smuts' South African Party - Garrick I looks like a Caesar in his death - only that with his "features [...] fallen in" and his closed eyelids "in deep cavities," there is nothing military and powerful in him. Indeed, he makes a very poor Caesar after all; in fact he only manages to "[resemble] the death mask of a fragile Caesar." (*Sword* 588)

At the other end of the post-masochistic, recuperative spectrum is, of course, Garrick II, who, as I have mentioned before, manages to overcome his physical drawbacks and operates a drastic transformation on his body. By working out, Garrick II manages to build up his body and develop his muscles, becoming the epitome of the deferred pleasure of masochism Freud writes about. His process of reconstruction is painful. He has to endure the opprobrium and vicious attacks of his big brother, Sean

II; and he has to struggle to overcome his handicaps - his asthma, his fragile constitution, his myopia - by subjecting his body to self-inflicted torments, ranging from weight-lifting through the night, to spending “long uncomfortable [nights]” (*Rage* 125) sleeping on the floor. Yet, there is pleasure in his torture: the pleasure of seeing his body excel and develop, change and transform itself into the kind of steely armour heroes necessitate in Smith’s fictional landscape. Garrick II becomes a successful businessman as well. He is in the top three in his year at university; he begins working for his father when he finishes his degree; he learns fast and climbs up the ladder to become top manager and eventually the director of his father, Shasa’s, financial empire in a clear formulation of success via determination. Yet, it is his physical transformation that grants him acceptability in Smith’s adventurous world. He can only be likened to “Al Capone or Captain Blood” (*Fox* 419) when his resilience is expressed in physical terms; when his body is “tanned and sleek with muscle;” (*Fox* 549) and he can deliver “[thunderbolts], with two thousand pounds of muscle and bone and determination.” (*Fox* 372) Only then can he become the recipient of Smith’s ultimate eulogy, that of being truly manly. As Bella phrases it in sheer admiration, “You know, Garry [...] You are one hell of a man.” (*Fox* 376)

7.6. Final comments

Smith impregnates the pages of his narratives with masculinity. He provides obvious masculine ‘narrative-scapes’ (wild untamed territories, western-like drinking places, uncivilised frontier towns, battle grounds, hunting areas, natural preserves) against which his tough guys, his crack all-terrain fighters, have ample opportunity to perform acts of showy heroism. It cannot be otherwise; Smith endows his heroes with mighty, perfect, enviably fit, highly sexually-charged bodies, equipped to withstand the obstacles and difficulties envisioned by the cunning mind of their creator. Their capacity to overcome dangerous situations further highlights their awesome strength, while, at the same time, turns them into the perfect paladins of patriarchy, the ideal warriors for the cause of masculinity that Smith defends in the narratives. Their bodies, therefore, are put to the service of patriarchy and masculinity. Objectified and

eroticised so that they become totems or icons the 'family of men' identifies with, the bodies of our heroes become the dams that breast the tide of feminism in our culture, representing masculinity at the historical moment of its deprivileging. So Smith cannot allow any weaknesses in the heroes' physical build-up if they are to become worthy representatives of masculinity. Male characters who fail to fulfil their masculine role are consequently despised, allowed to remain in the narratives for as long as they serve the function of highlighting the heroes power and strength, or as 'deterrents', their misfortunes used to warn males outside the narratives of the shameful conditions in which they will have to live if unable to meet the challenge of masculinity. The stress Smith places on physical perfection and bodily strength, and to conclude with this chapter, is not to be considered as an adornment embellishing the narratives; or as an attempt to furnish female readers with the stuff erotic dreams are made of. The heroes' bodies are totemic representations aimed at resurrecting, defending or validating the solidity of the masculine presence in society at a time when this selfsame masculine body is being increasingly deliquesced.

Chapter 8: The patriarchal body. Fathers, sons and the Law of the Father in the Courtney saga

8.1. The Father and patriarchy in Smith's Courtney saga: the death of the Father?

In Smith's Courtney saga, as in other forms of male-oriented fiction, the hero operates as what Frank Krutnik terms "an idealised figure of narcissistic identification who will ultimately unite authority, achievement and masculine-male sexuality."¹ As I have explained in the previous chapter, the hero, with his awesome physical presence and his ability to survive even the most dreadful physical and psychological drawbacks, functions as an ideal ego men can identify with and who Smith uses to promote an ideology of masculine omnipotence and invulnerability at a time when masculinist values are increasingly deprivileged. The hero in Smith's saga also functions as the upholder of patriarchal values, defending and propagandising a power-based cultural hierarchy that relies upon the maintenance of gender-structured disequilibrium. In his narratives, therefore, Wilbur Smith not only promotes the masculine body as an icon of masculine values, but the patriarchal body, the Law of the Father, a patriarchal social structuring organised around the figure of the (often) white-bearded, towering Courtney patriarch who stands for authority and knowledge in the saga.

Ever since ancestral times, the figure of the Father or patriarch has traditionally been identified with power. In most pre-industrial societies, the patriarch, as the head of the family clan, was the one who regulated production, acted as provider and defender of the family, and guaranteed the subservience of women by manipulating reproduction, encapsulating women within the domestic in their mothering and child-

¹ Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street. Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 87.

bearing functions. Even though capitalist economic development “has long since done away with the practical power of the father” and “the anonymous order of multinational corporations has replaced the intimate tyranny of the family firm,”² patriarchy - understood as the dominance of men over women and the supremacy of men in all areas of public and domestic life - is maintained as a principle of social organisation. In Brittan’s words: “What has changed is not the *fact* of male supremacy, but its expression. Instead of being vested in the authority of the *pater famialis*, it is now vested in the authority of the state. [...] We can still, therefore, speak of male domination in terms of [patriarchy].”³ Indeed, the patriarch as such may have disappeared in contemporary society, but not his symbolic power. The figure of the Father, furthermore, has been endowed with transcendental, a-historical substance by psychologists such as Freud and Lacan, the so-called ‘theorists of the Father.’ Both Freud and Lacan formulate a theory of male-child development based on the Oedipus complex, an undesirable attachment of the child to his mother that is the role of the father to break so that he can save the child from “the paralysis of maternal enchantment [...] [and] bring rationality, independence and order to the life of his son.”⁴ In both Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalysis, therefore, the Father is presented as a site of authority, a regulating force that guarantees the organisation of cultural and gendered behaviour and the maintenance of patriarchy in even the innermost recesses of a child’s subconscious mind. As David J. Tacey puts it, “Men overcome their incestuous ties to the mother by ‘embracing’ the father and becoming *like* the father in a *puer-senex* reunion.” This embrace, he follows, “leads to conventionality, conservative politics, regression to patriarchy, and the restoration of [...] hegemonic (sexist, homophobic and conquistadorial) masculinity.”⁵ Patriarchy, all in all, pervades our inner and outer reality and is, therefore, notoriously resistant to change, as is well-represented in Greek mythology by the figure of Chronos-Saturn, “the recalcitrant and static ogre who devours his own offspring lest they pose a threat to his hegemonic rule.”⁶

² Jon Cook, “Fictional Fathers,” *Sweet Dreams. Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction*, ed. Susannah Radstone (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988) 150.

³ Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 106.

⁴ Jonathan Rutherford, *Men’s Silences. Predicaments in Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 145.

⁵ David J. Tacey, *Remaking Men*. 149.

⁶ David J. Tacey, *Remaking Men*, 2.

8.1.1. The dying patriarch

Smith contributes to the perpetuation of the patriarchal order in his narratives and gives it factual expression through the creation of his fictional patriarchs, the parental figures who are the upholders of power and who control both domestic and public scenarios in the Courtney saga. They are the ones who are responsible for the education and instruction of the Courtney children, the ones who deliver authority and warrant the replication of patriarchal systems of organisation. Ironically, however, all such patriarchs are prematurely and cruelly excised from the narratives. They may start their narrative lives as young, independent heroes; yet, once time snows white on their hair, they are all sentenced to inevitable death. None of the Courtney patriarchs (except Shasa, whose heroic status is, nonetheless, progressively undermined as he grows old) dies a natural death. Not even non-Courtney patriarchs are spared.

Waite, for instance, is killed at Isandhlwana, near the Tugela River, during the Zulu War. Sean I, his son, finds him unburied, lying on his back with his arms spread open, his face taken down to the bone by birds, disembowelled and with the empty pit of the stomach swarming with big, metallic green flies. (*Lion* 163) Sean I is killed by his own son, Dirk, who ambushes his car, provokes an accident in which he is badly injured, finishes him off by smashing his temple with a club, and then throws him into the waters of the Baboon Stroom, while an injured and incapacitated Mark Anders, whom Sean I loves like a son, impotently beholds the whole macabre scene. Eventually, Mark finds Sean I's body, cleansed of blood by the river waters, looking like "a carved stone effigy of a medieval knight laid out with his armour and sword on a sarcophagus in the dim depths of an ancient cathedral." (*Sparrow* 605)

Garrick Courtney I and Blaine Malcomess, on the other hand, are both the hopeless victims of the convoluted events that took place in the apartheid period in South Africa. Garrick I, as I have mentioned before, is killed by Manfred de la Rey, the 'White Sword', a Boer extremist member of the *Ossewa Brandwag*, who, intent on eliminating General Smuts, shoots Garrick I dead by mistake as Shasa, his grandson,

tries in vain to stop Manfred. Blaine is killed by Moses Gama, an ANC leader who, after a failed attempt to blow up the parliament in Cape Town, guns Blaine down in his hurried, although frustrated, escape. Again, Shasa, Blaine's wife's son, cannot save Blaine in spite of his efforts, and he dies in his arms muttering, "Shasa, my son - my only son." (*Rage* 396) Riccardo Monterro, Sean II's client in his hunting concession in Zimbabwe, but also a friend and a father (he is a father figure for Sean II and Claudia's - Sean II's wife-to-be - father), dies, as I have explained before, impaled on Tukutela's tusks. Al-Malik, Dorian's adopted father, is poisoned by his natural son, Zayn al-Din, so he dies a convulsive, painful death.

The cruellest deaths fathers are inflicted with in the Courtney narratives are those of Sir Francis and Hal Courtney, the patriarchs of *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon* respectively. Their sons become the powerless witnesses of their long-suffering deaths. Sir Francis is captured by the Boers in the Cape Colony, falsely accused of piracy, imprisoned in the garrison in the Colony, tortured and sentenced to death. Hal, his son, cannot prevent it from happening. He beholds the harm inflicted by the executioner, Slow John, on Sir Francis' already-emaciated body after long confinement. He is then forced to watch the dreadful spectacle of Sir Francis' execution as he is hanged by the neck, beheaded and neatly quartered, and as his body, left on public display for four days, falls prey to ravenous seagulls that squabble raucously over the feast. (*Birds* 287-293) Hal's death is equally painful. Both his legs are terribly injured as a result of a dynamite blast so that their flesh is "mangled as though caught in the iron teeth of a revolving capstan" and "splinters of white bone [protrude] from the bloody mess." (*Monsoon* 275) Both legs have to be amputated and Tom, his son, has to aid the doctor as he cuts them off and to witness Hal's slow degradation as he is reduced to the level of an infant and the stumps left after the amputation fester, are "swollen purple red" and release intermittent gushes of "greenish yellow pus, which [drip] thick as cream," (*Monsoon* 303) filling the room with "the stench of corruption" rising "in a thick cloud, strong enough to make Tom gag." (*Monsoon* 303) Hal's body undergoes a dreadful transformation and he is turned into "a frail old man, with silvering beard and crippled body." (*Monsoon* 327) Eventually, he is brought back to his home in England, High Weald, where he dies a

slow death as the gas gangrene takes hold of his thighs and lower belly and follows its dreadful advance, “[burning] through all his body like a fire in dry grass.” (*Monsoon* 357)

8.1.2. Smith's flawed experience of fatherhood

Such a systematic, open and increasingly virulent attack on the Father may point towards and even explicate Smith's dissatisfaction with his own relationship with his father, which, although not completely failed, fell short of meeting the ideals of father/son mutual understanding and sympathy favoured in our Politically Correct state of affairs and presented as ideal in populist, pseudo-psychological tracts such as Robert Bly's *Iron John*. In an interview in Tim Sebastian's BBC World programme *Hard Talk*,⁷ Smith qualifies his relationship with his father as Victorian and accepts Tim Sebastian's perception of what a Victorian father used to be like - “cold, distant [...] not exactly known for warmth and the milk of human kindness.” In the same interview, Smith acknowledges his father gave him a sense of values, ethics and duty that still pervades his whole existence and determines his interaction with friends, workers and relations. He also states he is grateful for the work-ethic his father instilled in him and which has helped him to become a disciplined and prolific writer, as his extensive (and expansive) body of work demonstrates. Yet, and although he acknowledges he still misses his father immensely after the ten years that have elapsed since his death, Smith offers an image of his father that is far from homely and warm. Smith's father emerges as a patriarch-of-old - he even calls him a god-like figure - who was always suspicious of the written word or people who worked with their mind for “his idea of work was manual work,” and who called his son “bloody fool” as a form of address for forty-five years. He also explains that he never kissed his father until Smith was forty-five years of age and that, when he did, he “recoiled in horror.” Such a cold and distant relationship with his father may have originated resentment and a wish to castigate his father for his lack of affection. This, speculative as it is, may still account for the havoc Smith wreaks on his patriarchal figures in the saga, on whom he exerts his cruel revenge, turning them into the recipients of his hatred,

⁷ *Hard Talk*, dir. Tim Sebastian, BBC World, 9 Apr. 1999.

undermining their authority, and eventually making them vanish from the narrative space.

This self-same sense of parental deprivation and Smith's discontentment with his father's stern education may also explicate Smith's progressive reformulation of parental love in the saga. His early stern and authoritarian parental figures are increasingly mollified and softened as the saga progresses to the extent that he has his latest patriarch, Hal, reflecting about his relationship with his son, Tom, and reaching self-satisfied conclusions about the lenient and loving education he has given him. He notices that "the boy [is] not terrified of him - respect[s] and admire[s] him, perhaps, love[s] him, certainly, but [feels] no terror when they [stand] face to face." (*Monsoon* 108) He wonders whether he should have made Tom fear him, but realises that the affection he has given him has really made him a man and feels rewarded by the gratitude Tom feels when he is forgiven rather than punished for mistakes. (*Monsoon* 109) Consequently, in Smith's conception of fatherly affection, love and understanding is presented as a better alternative to the old Victorian model his father epitomised.

Drawing on Smith's personal experience as a father, the cruel physical deaths he inflicts on his patriarchal figures may also be interpreted as a form of self-punishment for his failed relationship with his own son, Shaun, and, very particularly, his daughter, Christian, who has been one of his most consistent detractors and with whom he lost contact after he divorced his first wife. In an interview with Graham Lord published in *The Daily Telegraph*,⁸ Smith admits that he failed as a father. Graham Lord explains that Christian "accused him publicly [...] of rejecting her, and of penny-pinching after he left her mother and even claimed that she had to go into an orphanage each day while her mother worked as a secretary to support her and Shaun." In the interview with Tim Sebastian mentioned above, Smith explains that he tried to establish a relationship of authority with his daughter, like the one he had with his father, but that she rejected it and that, when he and his wife severed their

⁸ Graham Lord, "From Taxman to Millionaire," *The Daily Telegraph* [United Kingdom] 17 Feb. 1996: A4.

relationship, she decided to go with her mother. To Smith, this amounted to high treason and he has never forgiven her for that. Nowadays, he does not see her and does not even know whether he has grandchildren or not. In Lord's interview, he also claims he feels no regrets; that his children belong to a compartment of his existence he has left behind, and that he regards them as "intrusive elements" from "a terrible time of [his] life."

In spite of his acrimonious denials of regret, Wilbur Smith obsessively depicts ideal father / daughter relationships in his saga. Claudia, Riccardo Monterro's daughter, for instance, explains that the reason why she is not married "at twenty-six years of age, despite the way she look[s], despite her own singular achievements, despite having had countless proposals," is because "she [has] never found another to compare with her papa." (*Die* 7) Knowing that her father is dying of cancer, she is appalled at the prospect of losing him and cries, "Oh, God, [...] what will I do without him? What will my world be without him?" (*Die* 9) Bella's, Shasa's daughter, attachment to her father is equally strong. After a failed relationship with Lothar de la Rey Jr., she goes back to her father and exclaims, "Oh Daddy [...]. Why aren't all the men in the world like you?" (*Rage* 626) Smith even dramatises his failed relationship with Christian in the relationship between Sean I and his daughter, Storm, in *A Sparrow Falls*. In this novel, Sean I disowns his own daughter after her secret marriage to a man Sean I disapproves of, Derek Hunt, a flamboyant womaniser. Pregnant by Mark Anders, but too proud and money-minded to marry him, Storm finds herself in dire straits. She fears her pregnancy is going to upset her father, whose "attitude to his daughter [is] bound by iron laws of conduct, the old-fashioned view of the father that [leaves] no latitude for manoeuvre." (*Sparrow* 454) She also fears Sean I's reaction if he finds out Mark is the father the baby Storm is expecting; she muses, "Mark Anders [has] contravened [his] iron laws and Sean [will] destroy him, and in doing so he [will] destroy a part of himself." (*Sparrow* 454) Afraid of becoming a social outcast - Derek tells her, "The word's out about you, old girl. Mark of the beast, condemnation of society, and all that rot, I'm afraid." (*Sparrow* 456) - Storm agrees to marry Derek, whom she despises and who does not love her in return; in fact, he acknowledges soon after their wedding that he only married her for her father's

money. When her father repudiates her, Storm finds herself in a trap of her own making: ostracised from society, disavowed by Derek, living alone with her son and having to fare for herself without her family's support. Finally, Sean I excludes her from his will:

To my daughter STORM HUNT (born COURTNEY), who took lightly her filial duties, I, in turn, discharge my paternal duties with the bequest of a single guinea.
(*Sparrow* 607)

All in all, for a man who claims he feels no regrets for his flawed relationship with his daughter, and who overtly expresses his lack of concern for the situation he left her and her mother after his divorce, Smith seems to be obsessed with and deeply affected by his failed parental obligations. This could explain his compulsive portrayals of ideal father / daughter relationships in his saga, together with his exacerbated attempt to provide an apology for Sean I's decision to exclude Storm from his life, which, he explains, was caused by Storm's betrayal of her filial duties towards her father. This, perhaps, could also explain his attacks on the parental figures in the saga, fathers who can erect vast financial empires but cannot always provide love and understanding for all their progeny.

8.1.3. The crisis of patriarchy

Finally, Smith's continual attack on the parental body can be read as an expression of the perceived crisis of patriarchy that seems to concern men so much in present-day society. As I have explained in chapter 6, the changing economic structure of modern society, together with the higher mobility of women in the public arena, has undermined patriarchal authority in both the public and the domestic spaces. Some men feel that the figure of the Father is no longer in the ascendant. As Lynne Segal puts it, "men's actual power and control over women is declining." While in the fifties "the father *was* essential [...] for financial support, status and legitimacy: his wife and children relied upon him even when he totally ignored them," contemporary men, assailed by unemployment and women's higher public profile and economic solvency, can no longer assert their authority over their family on solely economic grounds. As a

result of “slight but significant shifts in relations between men and women,” therefore, “some women are better placed to question any automatic assumption of paternal rights.” Consequently, “[m]en’s hold on their status as fathers is less firm and secure than ever before.”⁹ Men’s status, furthermore, is not only questioned within the family unit, but also outside in the public space, where men find they have to compete with a growing rank of highly-educated women who, favoured by the demands of positive discrimination, can gain access to the labour market on equal terms with men. All in all, patriarchy, understood as men’s brotherhood in authority, is perceived as seriously jeopardised.

8.1.4. The crisis of patriarchy in the representational arts

This perception of patriarchy in crisis is dramatised in the representational arts in different ways. In recent action films, for example, the tough action hero not only has to fight single-handedly against an array of increasingly bureaucratised and technologised villains in order to protect his individuality, job, and / or status in society (and save the world from the forces of chaos on the side); at the same time, he has to contend with uncongenial familial situations that exemplify the unfavourable condition in which the Father (as an exponent of masculinity and upholder of patriarchy) finds himself nowadays. John McClane (Bruce Willis) in *Die Hard*, for instance, is ostracised from his wife, a top executive in a Japanese corporation. Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) in *Lethal Weapon*, finds himself alone, trapped in a shabby trailer with a gun to suck on experimentally when the pain is at its worse. Joe Hallenbeck (Bruce Willis) in *The Last Boy Scout* is an ex-secret service agent whose life has hit rock bottom, earns a meagre salary as a detective and looks like “a guy who seems to have lived in his clothes.” Joe has not only lost faith in heroic ideals, but in love (which he likens to cancer for they are both diseases) and family values: his wife is unfaithful to him and his foul-mouthed daughter is hostile and abusive in the extreme (she calls him things such as ‘fuck-head’ and ‘asshole’). Foul-mouthed, sceptical daughters who refuse to consent to their father’s authority, in fact, seem to be staple figures in recent action productions. Joe Hallenbeck’s daughter has milder counter-

⁹ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 26-27.

parts in films such as *True Lies* and *Face/Off*, and can be read as the emancipated modern women who fail to comply with patriarchal social structurings and who assert their individuality and right to autonomy in society at large.

In two recent adventure productions, *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *The Mask of Zorro*, to mention two other filmic examples that reflect this perceived crisis of patriarchy, the utmost patriarchal figures, d'Artagnan and Don Diego de la Vega, are ageing adventurers who cannot sustain an ideal of heroic glamour. D'Artagnan is no longer the independent and reckless youth he used to be, and has now given up his marginalised oppositional status to conform to institutionalised superstructures as the Captain of Louis XIV's Musketeers. He does not even rely on action and strength to settle disputes. At one point in the film, Aramis accuses d'Artagnan of passive indifference towards the injustices performed by the king by saying, "When we were young men and we saw an injustice we fought it;" d'Artagnan responds, "Now we know that some problems can be sorted out without a sword." Don Diego de la Vega, on the other hand, is too old to maintain the legend he created as he set out to fight oppression in the disguise of the masked horseman, Zorro, whose name alone was enough to strike fear into the hearts of his enemies. Now Don Diego must find a successor to stop Rafael Montero, the corrupt official who had "undermined the power of the town's magistrates and proclaimed himself the sole authority over military and civil matters."¹⁰

8.1.5. The recuperative father

The representational arts, therefore, reflect a perceived crisis of patriarchy as ageing or battered-down fathers find themselves the victims of an uncongenial destiny intent on undermining the authority they had so far undisputedly held. Yet, it would be over-simplistic to assume this insistence on portraying 'declining' patriarchs is symptomatic of a new state of affairs in which social structurings are no longer organised around patriarchal authority. Rather, it should be viewed as an awareness of a changing social climate that can no longer be indifferent to the claims of feminist or

¹⁰ James Luceno, *The Mask of Zorro. A Novelisation* (London: Coronet Books, 1998) 17.

other anti-patriarchal groups that seek a redistribution of power based on meritocratic, rather than on simply gender-determined, grounds. These social trends have led towards both a redefinition of patriarchal authority and its reactionary reassertion, and not towards its dismantling. Thus, the representational arts dramatise the increasing discomfort with which men view the continuous attacks against patriarchal constructs. Yet, they do not contemplate a complete destruction of patriarchy. In quite a few romantic comedies and television sit-coms, for example, men maintain their patriarchal power by taking up parental responsibilities they had previously deferred upon women. Thus, while women assume positions in the public space, men maintain their professional status and, at the same time, gain control of the domestic space by turning it into a new arena from where to re-negotiate their status as fathers. In comedies such as *Three Men and a Baby*, *Parenthood*, *Kindergarten Cop* and *Look Who's Talking*, for example, men find in familial structurings a place of security, paternal authority and stability. As they learn to be better fathers, men also assume a position of power within the household that had previously belonged to women.

In the action films mentioned above, on the other hand, men systematically overcome their crisis symptoms, 're-animate' their muscles, put their bodies to work to counter-effect the forces of chaos that threaten to destabilise the whole social framework, regain their heroic status and systematically reassert their familial authority. Thus, John McClane recovers his wife's respect after he rescues her from the villains that have taken the Nakatomi Building, the site of the company she works for. After having consistently defended her independence from her husband, to the extent of even using her maiden name when at work, Holly accepts her encapsulation within patriarchal frameworks by recovering her husband's name at the end of the film. Similarly, and to mention another example, Joe Hallenbeck regains patriarchal authority after he uncovers a plot involving blackmail, extortion and a very real threat to the future of professional football. His wife asks for his forgiveness after having been unfaithful to him and his daughter becomes a submissive devoted daughter; when Joe tells her to watch her mouth, her mother echoes her father's reprimand by saying, "If your father says 'watch your mouth', you do so;" she obediently responds, "Yes, Sir."

Patriarchy is also restored in *The Mask of Zorro* and *The Man in the Iron Mask* as ageing patriarchs find younger replacements that guarantee the continuation of patriarchy into posterity and paternal affiliations are reasserted. Thus, in *The Mask of Zorro*, Don Diego de la Vega recovers his daughter, whom he had lost to his arch-enemy, Rafael Montero; and finds a substitute, Alejandro Murieta, whom he teaches and instructs so that he can become the new Zorro,¹¹ the “masked avenger of the people,”¹² and who guarantees the continuation of a just patriarchal system after Don Diego’s death. Likewise, in *The Man in the Iron Mask*, patriarchal bonds are disrupted as Athos loses his son, Raoul, whom he loves dearly,¹³ and d’Artagnan, Louis and Phillippe’s father, is killed. Yet, parental alliances are re-established through Athos and Phillippe, who find consolation for their loss in each other. Phillippe tells Athos at the end of the film, “Let me love you like a son to his father. And I pray you live for this - to love me like your son.”

8.2. Sustaining the Law of the Father in the Courtney saga: authorial strategies

In Smith’s fiction, fathers appear in very bad shape indeed; fathers are lacerated, wounded, subject to pain and injury, both physical and psychological, and ultimately inflicted painful and untimely death. However, and as is also the case in the action and adventure films just mentioned, Smith does not contemplate a direct attack on the patriarchal body; or, for that matter, and if we draw into his personal experience with his father or as a father, a definitive critique of or an apology for his own flawed parental relationships. Smith’s ‘wounded’ fathers give proof of his awareness of the relative loss of patriarchal authority in society. Yet, Smith does not sound a death-toll for patriarchy in his saga. On the contrary, his Courtney novels ultimately endorse and sustain the Law of the Father. They can, in fact, be read as an

¹¹ Don Diego tells Alejandro, “When the pupil is ready the master will appear. [...] I am that master.” James Luceno, *The Mask of Zorro*, 89.

¹² James Luceno, *The Mask of Zorro*, 45.

¹³ Before Raoul is killed, Athos tells d’Artagnan, “You don’t know what’s like to have had a son; to have kissed his hair and smelt his breath as he slept; to have watched him grow. [...] I’ve never known a finer man than you nor cared more for a friend, but if this king harms my son merely to take a lover, then this king will become my enemy - and so will any man that stands between that man and me.”

attempt to resuscitate the patriarchal body at a time when it is subject to continual attack by anti-patriarchal oppositional groups, and as a defence of strong father / son bonds as a solution to modern man's loneliness and lack of purpose in feminised familial structurings characterised by what Robert Bly terms the "absent" or "remote" father.¹⁴ As I will attempt to prove henceforth, Smith toys with the idea of showing patriarchy in decline, only to engage in its systematic and consistent defence by placing a strong accent on the patriarchal bonds that exist between fathers, sons and brothers as the elemental foundation that sustains traditional patriarchal arrangements in society.

8.2.1. Tight bonds: loving fathers / loving sons

To start with, Smith never allows the bonds between father and son to be disrupted in any significant way. Examples of father / son antagonism occur throughout the saga, as exemplified with Sean I's violent reaction against his father's, Waite's, attempt to beat him up; Shasa's outrage at his son, Sean II's, wild instincts and the events they trigger off; and Tom's single act of filial disobedience. Yet, none of these 'unlawful' acts manages to deteriorate the patriarchal ethos Smith portrays in the saga. The former, Sean I and Waite's quarrel, is triggered off by Sean I's lying to Waite about the incident that results in half the cattle on Waite's farm being massacred. While Waite is away on a business trip, Sean I is in charge of the farm and is supposed to supervise all the tasks being conducted there. Mixing the dipping tanks for the oxen is Sean I's main chore; cattle branding, a more disgusting but easier task, is Garrick I's responsibility. But with Garrick I sickened by the branding business, Sean I relieves him from the task and entrusts him with the dip mixture. Out of laziness, Garrick I empties all the dip into one tank and, as a result, the mixture is

¹⁴ Robert Bly explains that men lack strength and authority, and criticise patriarchy because they are brought up by mothers alone. He writes:

[...] if the son does not see what his father does during the day and through all the seasons of the year, a hole will appear in the son's psyche, and the whole will fill with demons who tell him that his father's work is evil and that the father is evil. [...]

When the demons are so suspicious, how can the son later make any good connection with adult male energy, especially the energy of an adult man in a position of authority or leadership? [...] As a citizen he will take part in therapy rather than politics. [...] He will go to northern California and raise marijuana or ride three-wheelers in Maine. Robert Bly, *Iron John*, 21-22.

explosive and poisons half the cattle on the farm. When Waite comes back, he requests an explanation for what has happened and Sean I lies to him, putting the blame on himself in order to protect Garrick I from Waite's violent reaction and subsequent punishment. Waite detects the lie and proceeds to mete out punishment on Sean I for lying, fetches the sjambok and tries to beat him up. But Sean I retaliates; no longer a submissive child, Sean I revolts against paternal authority and fights back. Waite's "scales of paternal blindness" drop and he realises he is fighting a man "who match[es] him in strength and height, and who [is] superior in speed." (*Lion* 93) At this point in the narrative, the old pastoral patriarchal and masculinist ethos that Waite epitomises is put into danger. Sean I knocks Waite unconscious and, by allowing Sean I to do so, Smith entertains the possibility of disrupting patriarchy and turning Sean I into an outcast, maverick individual who turns his back on the orthodox parameters of acceptable masculinity. But the patriarchal order is reinstated. The readers' sympathies are not allowed to side with Sean I, who, the moment he decides to direct his violent impulses against his own father, is endowed with devilish characteristics and becomes an unpalatable figure of horror, his face twisted in "an expression of satanic fury." (*Lion* 93) Furthermore, Smith manipulates the action so that Waite does not condemn his son's outburst of violence; in fact, he admires Sean I's ability to fight a competent opponent. Finally, Sean I repents for what he has done, "the anger gone from [his face] and in its place worry that was almost panic." (*Lion* 94) After the fight, the bonds between father and son are strengthened and Waite develops a new respect for his son, whom he regards as an equal and who he will no longer treat as a child, abstaining himself from displaying demonstrations of affection that could endanger the ideals of masculinity both he and his son stand for. Sean I emerges from the fight as the new standard bearer of patriarchy and masculinity: younger and stronger than Waite and yet the same old self, only with renewed strengths.

Shasa and his son, Sean II, share an altogether friendlier relationship characterised by mutual affection and strong companionship. Yet, Sean II has a wild streak in his constitution that makes him challenge all forms of institutionalised authority (school, monogamous heterosexuality, work ethic and the law), which systematically places him in direct confrontation with the patriarchal Law of the

Father his father epitomises. At school in Bishops, Sean II displays nothing but laziness and disinterest, and he is only roused from his self-inflicted stupor when Clare West, a promiscuous and sexy art teacher, enters the scene. He ends up responding to her sexual advances, which he himself propitiates; eventually, he even organises sexual encounters with Clare that his friends at school can watch if they pay the two pounds he charges for the spectacle, which leads to his expulsion from Bishops. After he finishes his matric at Costello's Academy, he obeys his father's will and enters articles "with the object of one day becoming a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants." (*Rage* 313) Sean II manages to fulfil his obligations by never being more than an hour late in the morning, arranging for female staff to cover up for him when he 'misbehaves', and handing in imaginative reports to the senior partner. At the same time, he leads a wild nocturnal existence, of sex, risk and adventure. Although he manages to hide his double life from his father, disguising the traces of the previous nights' debauchery, drinking sprees and sexual escapades behind "gold-framed aviator's glasses and his brilliant smile," (*Rage* 313) Sean II eventually gets out of control. He arranges for his disreputable friend, Rufus, to rob the home of one of his married lovers - Marjorie Weston - while Sean II has sex with her. However, he is caught. His father manages to save him from imprisonment; yet, he is finally exiled from both the family unit and the country.

Again, and as happened with Sean I's disruption of the patriarchal Law of the Father, Smith manipulates his readers' sympathies by never allowing them to regard Sean II with sympathy while he upsets the system and destabilises the patriarchal ethos. Sean II's attitude is condemned by the headmaster at Bishops, who finds him "precocious and mature" and "stronger than the other boys," but asserts he "has no qualms in using his strength to win, not always in accordance with the rules of the game;" he bluntly states, "Sean seems to have a vindictive and vicious streak in him." (*Rage* 268) Sean II's actions are not depicted in a good light. His treatment of Clare West is nothing but sadistic. When she playfully throws him off her during one of their sexual games, Sean II becomes angry, punches her in the head so that her lips are "broken against her teeth" and "blood [drips] from her nose," catches her by the tresses of her hair, and kneels over her while he forces her "to take him through her

split and bleeding lips.” After that, “there [is] no question that he is her master.” (*Rage* 278-279) When he has sex with Marjorie Weston in her and her husband’s bed, “his face [is] no longer beautiful, but swollen and flushed so that his features [seem] coarsened.” (*Rage* 318) When his thieving ‘adventure’ is discovered, his own father admits, “He’s dirty rotten, right to the core,” (*Rage* 335) and is shocked by the panache and casual indifference with which Sean II assumes his father is going to save his “thieving hide.” (*Rage* 337) Finally, Shasa accuses him of not understanding the words ‘family honour’ and ‘decency’, which, in Smith’s milieu, is a heavy indictment indeed.

However, Smith does not allow Shasa and Sean II to shed the bonds of affection that tie them together. When Shasa first hears of Sean II’s affair with Clare West and his expulsion from Bishops, he arranges to beat Sean II up. Yet, when he is faced with his son, “his rage evaporate[s].” He is immediately reminded of his own first ‘real woman’ and feels “a strange nostalgic glow.” Even though he is angry at Sean II “for being caught out,” deep down he is “rather proud of his eldest son’s now proven virility,” he muses, “It’s the de Thiry blood, we all have to live with it.” (*Rage* 283) Furthermore, he is moved by the honesty and openness with which Sean II acknowledges his mistakes and admires the tranquillity with which his son accepts his punishment - he says to himself, “Not a trace of fear, no whining. No, damn it, he [is] a good boy. A son to be proud of.” (*Rage* 284) Finally, he finds he cannot blame him for being attractive and sexually active; being so “fine-looking [...], straight and tall and strong, so handsome and courageous,” it is only natural that women prey on him, and, after all, “if boffing a pretty girl is mortal sin, there is no salvation for any of us.” (*Rage* 284) Later on, after Shasa discovers Sean II has been fooling him for all these years and admits to himself that his fatherly love prevented him from noticing the signs of Sean II’s instincts, he is so furious that he wants “the satisfaction of physical violence.” Yet, he cannot bring himself to fight with his son. He realises that “Sean [is] a man in full physical flower, a trained fighter and an athlete in perfect condition,” and that he “could toy with him and humiliate him.” (*Rage* 337) This realisation does not make Shasa resent his son’s energy and youth as opposed to his own declining physical condition. On the contrary, he admires the resilience his son shows and the

optimism with which he plans a new future estranged from his family and their support: When Shasa sends his son away, Sean II is not daunted at the prospect and says he is going to start a safari business in Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe). Furthermore, Sean II does not hold any resentment against his father. Shasa says this is the end of the road for him and Sean II; Sean II disapproves. He declares, "You and I will never reach the end of the road. I am part of you, and I love you too deeply for that ever to happen. You are the only person or thing I have ever loved." (*Rage* 339) Sean II may renounce bureaucratised city life; yet he never gives up his filial respect for his father and he reasserts his commitment to paternal authority.

Finally, Tom's single act of filial disobedience is an altogether mild, even naive, example of father / son antagonism. Written in 1999, *Monsoon* is the latest instalment of the Courtney saga and a product of the New Right trends assailing our western world, as well as of the most recent developments in the constant reformulation of masculinity. In our present-day society there has been a renewed entrenchment of familial values. The family unit and monogamy are prioritised and offered as a fortress that protects individuals from the ills affecting modern society, from unemployment and the threat of despondency to venereal diseases, AIDS not excluded, that can affect men and women who indulge in promiscuous sexual activity. Masculinity, on the other hand, is mostly formulated through parenting. The New Man propagandised in films, magazines and television commercials is the one who does not fly from parental responsibilities and embraces the so-far motherly function of bringing up and educating his children. Consistent with this social atmosphere, Wilbur Smith carries on with his presentation of the family as a repository of love, shelter and instruction that had so characterised the earlier instalments of the saga. And very importantly, he places special emphasis on the father as the instructor and provider of love and affection for his sons. In *Monsoon*, therefore, the relationship between Hal and his sons is completely self-contained and hermetic. Hal is the sole role-model, nurturer and comforter. The bonds that tie father and sons together are sacred and unshakeable. Family honour is even re-defined to mean full commitment to the father and what he stands for. In such a context, antagonism between father and loving sons is minimised. However, there is one example of filial disobedience. After Dorian,

Hal's youngest son, is captured by the Arabs and held prisoner in a fortress in Flor de la Mar, Hal and one of his son, Tom's, main concern is to organise a rescue operation to free Dorian from captivity. While Hal and his faithful black side-kick, Aboli, explore the fortress's surroundings, Tom is instructed to remain on the ship. However, moved by brotherly love, Tom defies his father's orders and decides to do some territorial exploration on his own. Such a wholehearted desire to help his father rescue his brother is presented as an act of treachery in a diegesis where fatherly authority is depicted as sacred. Consequently, Smith explains that it takes Tom "all his courage to defy his father, deliberately to flout his direct orders." (*Monsoon* 240) Furthermore, this single act of direct opposition proves almost fatal. Although Tom manages to locate the exact place where Dorian is held, he is caught out and pursued by a group of Arabs intent on killing him. As a consequence, Aboli has to risk his own life to divert the Arabs' attention so that Tom can escape. Hal is outraged and accuses him, "You left your post [...]. You could have got us all killed. Your pig-headed stupidity has put Aboli in dire danger." Although he is proud of Tom's courage and contented with the information Tom retrieves, Hall follows, "You did well, Tom, but never disobey me again." (*Monsoon* 245) Indeed, he never does. Tom is chastised and does not jeopardise patriarchal alliances by daring to question the authority his father stands for ever again.

Apart from these three examples of parental opposition, the bonds between father and son (and thus patriarchy) remain strong in the novels. Waite, for example, loves Sean I dearly, to the extent that he is often "embarrassed by the strength of his feelings for his son." (*Lion* 66) And the affection is mutual for Sean I's love for his father is overwhelming as can be appreciated by the sorrow he feels when Waite is killed during the Zulu War, his death leaving him empty, hollow and desolate; without him, he states, "I have nothing." (*Lion* 163) The same mutual affection characterises Sean I and Michael I. Michael I is Sean I's bastard son, whom he meets when Sean I comes back to Ladyburg after the Boer War campaign. Sean I decides to invest the fortune in ivory he had made during his long stay in the wild area across the Limpopo, near the Moçambiquean border, in wattle; he builds himself a homestead, Lion Kop, near Theunis Kraal, where Michael I lives; and he starts erecting his wattle empire.

Michael I does not know who his real father is for he thinks that Garrick I, Sean I's twin brother, is his father. He does not even know Sean I personally, and the only information about him he has is biased, tainted by the bitter memories of a rejected lover and a resentful brother. But when Sean I and Michael I meet, they like each other from the start. They meet by chance, when Sean I helps the boy to free a bogged animal. They do not know each other but there is immediate recognition: Sean I knows he is looking at his son (*Thunder* 216) and Michael I has the impression that he has seen Sean I before. (*Thunder* 217) As soon as they begin to talk, they feel as if they had known each other all their lives and between them there is "something so strong - so good and strong as to be almost tangible." (*Thunder* 219) Sean I discovers Michael I to be intelligent, and proudly observes he is a rightful bearer of the Courtney name, for Michael I is not only handsome and hard-working, but proud of his patrilineal origins, as can be seen when he says:

I love this place. I was born here. To me it is not a piece of land and a house. It is part of a tradition to which I belong - built by men of whom I am proud. After pa, I will be the only one left to continue it. (*Thunder* 219)

Not even after introductions have been made and Michael I is brought to face the painful realisation that Sean I is the 'uncle' both his parents hate, is the affection between them quenched. In fact, Michael I becomes Sean I's staunch supporter, friend and assistant in his wattle plantation. Michael I even argues with both his parents, for he is ready to sell his part of Theunis Kraal when Sean I runs into financial difficulties after Dirk sets his plantation on fire. (*Thunder* 444) Their bonds become increasingly strong: they develop a "language of their own, notable only for its economy of words" (*Thunder* 459) since they do not need to talk in order to understand each other; they work together, "each [taking] charge of a separate sphere of Lion Kop activity;" (*Thunder* 459) and their comfort when they are in mutual company is so great that Michael I grows to hate the claustrophobic atmosphere of his own house and joins Sean I each morning for work "with the joy of a released convict." (*Thunder* 459)

When Michael I is killed in France during World War I, something dies inside Sean I. But the hollow space Michael I leaves in Sean I's chest is promptly filled, for a

convenient replacement is provided. Mark Anders is a young South African soldier whom Sean I meets in France during the war and who becomes Sean I's personal assistant when they return to Natal. Mark is an orphan and he finds in Sean I the father figure he had longed for throughout his life; he develops for this big man feelings which are described as "a mixture of respect and awe, of pride and affection," what he would feel if he had a father. (*Sparrow* 328) Sean I, on the other hand, finds in Mark the son fate had many times deprived him of (two of his sons died, Michael I during the war and the other stillborn in the great wilderness across the Limpopo River, and Dirk was unworthy of his name and affection). Mark gives Sean I a new strength and vitality, freshness of thought, energy and enthusiasm that go slightly stale and seem no longer worth the effort if there is no son to share them with. (*Sparrow* 245) After years of devotion, Mark has his role as Sean I's son made official when he finally marries Storm, Sean I's daughter, and eventually inherits part of Sean I's patrimony.

The bond of "understanding and trust" (*Sword* 468) between Blaine and Shasa is equally strong. Shasa is brought up without a father because Michael I, Centaine's first lover and Shasa's father, is killed in France during World War I before their wedding. Blaine is Centaine's third lover and, eventually, her husband. When Shasa first realises Blaine and his mother are lovers, he experiences "a flush of jealous and moral indignation" for Blaine is a "pillar of society and government" and his mother "is always frowning and shaking her head" at Shasa's sexually alive nature. (*Sword* 441) But rage soon vanishes for, "of all men in the world," Blaine is the man Shasa would have chosen as a father and, furthermore, he realises that Blaine has "come to stand in the place of the father he had never known." (*Sword* 440-441) Blaine, on the other hand, is estranged from his wife, Isabella, who, paralytic since she fell from a horse soon after their wedding, makes him pay with exquisite refinements of cruelty for his lack of love. Also, Blaine and Isabella have two daughters - Tara and Mathilda Janine - but no sons. Thus, he finds in Centaine and Shasa a surrogate family over which he can exercise his parental authority and one that enables him to establish the masculine alliances between father and son that patriarchy relies upon for its continuation. Shasa, in fact, becomes "the closest he would ever get to having a son of his own." (*Sword* 432)

Shasa is equally doting as a father. He is a compulsive worker and a bright businessman, responsible for Centaine's empire, which he inherits and under whose direction expands and diversifies. Yet, he always finds time to be with his children (Sean II, Garrick II, Michael II and Bella). While Tara neglects her maternal duties, engages in an illicit sexual affair with a black revolutionary, is a direct participant in a terrorist attempt to blow up the parliament in Cape Town, is indirectly responsible for her own father's death, and is eventually made to vanish from the narrative for her disruptive potential, Shasa does his best to fulfil his fatherly obligations; he plays with his children, takes them for rides and even arranges a safari for himself and his sons in order to show them the land and make them feel proud of their country and their ancestors. His love for them is so strong that he often has to restrain himself from embracing or hugging them, an unmanly display of affection that would embarrass him and his sons. Kids, apart from money, are the only things "Shasa Courtney [is] sentimental about." (*Rage* 142) Sean II is his favourite, for he is the one who most resembles him in looks and nature, and Bella, being a girl and the youngest of the family, he spoils with gifts and flattery. Yet, he also feels affection for Michael II, the dreamer of the family, and even develops a strong admiration for Garrick II, the weakest of the 'breed'. Garrick II, in fact, wins his father's respect inch by inch, overcoming his physical deficiencies by subjecting his body to strenuous body-building exercises, and compensating for his lack of beauty by developing his mind and becoming his father's assistant and the inheritor of the Courtney empire. Everything Garrick II does is for his father; he says to Shasa, "Everything I do is for you," (*Rage* 453) and is always described as desperate "to retain his attention and to obtain his approval." (*Rage* 322) Shasa ultimately becomes "accustomed to his middle son's close attendance," and even finds it "familiar and comforting to have him there." (*Rage* 323) Garrick II manages to obtain his father's total admiration by giving continual proof of his sharp business mind. Garrick II cannot be more satisfied for his father's approbation is "worth more to [him] than all the townships and every grain of gold on the Witwatersrand." (*Rage* 453)

In the two latest instalments of the saga, *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*, father / son bonds reach a centrality unlike anything seen before in the saga. Wilbur Smith constructs essentially male family units from which women are excluded. Sir Francis' wife and Hal's mother, is merely Sir Francis' ship's name, the *Lady Edwina*, and a miniature painting Sir Francis keeps as one of his most sacred treasures. Hal marries three times, but his three wives are all done within a few paragraphs at the beginning of *Monsoon*. No information about them is provided, except the love Hal felt for them, a few physical traits, and the way they died. Fathers, therefore, are left alone to educate and nurture their sons, guaranteeing the perpetuation of patriarchal alliances and the maintenance of what Robert Bly terms "Zeus energy" and which he defines as "male authority accepted for the sake of the community,"¹⁵ or "the respect for masculine integrity that every father, underneath, wants to pass on to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren."¹⁶

In *Birds of Prey*, therefore, Sir Francis emerges as the sole provider of his son's instruction. "Under his father's tutelage," (*Birds* 2) Hal learns about subjects such as the geography of Africa, swordplay, Latin and other cultivated languages, the esoteric art of gunpowder, or the skill of calculating the ship's position reading the language of the stars (i.e. astronomy). Sir Francis also instructs him on how to become a true warrior, giving him advice such as, "You will die before you ever make a swordsman, unless you find steel in your heart as well as in your hand." (*Birds* 13) He is the one who fashions his son's character, who chaperones his process of growth and teaches him to endure in a world where a man's life is fragile, threatened as it is by uncongenial forces a true man has to learn to shield off if he is to stay alive. Smith has Sir Francis muse over his son's education:

For the boy's own sake - nay, for his very life - he must force him to learn, to strive, to endure, to run every step of the course ahead of him with all his strength and all his heart. Yet, without making it apparent, he must also help, encourage and assist him. He must shepherd him wisely, cunningly towards his destiny. (*Birds* 17)

¹⁵ Robert Bly, *Iron John*, 22.

¹⁶ Robert Bly, *Iron John*, 23.

Subsequently, Hal passes on his knowledge to his own sons, instilling in them the fraternal values of family loyalty - "Us against the world" (*Monsoon* 78) - that all Courtneys subscribe to and bequeath to their sons in a patrilineal way, guaranteeing, in this way, what Bly terms "a second birth [...] a birth from men."¹⁷

Mothers are excluded from these two narratives. After giving birth to the Courtney sons, they do not live long enough to exert any real influence on them. Like Victor Frankenstein, Smith propitiates a 'second birth' for his fictional men, one that comes from the fathers, who are the only real 'parents' sons are allowed to have. In *Rage*, Shasa, admired by his son, Garrick II's, inexhaustible energy, jokingly exclaims, "My God, I've sired a monster." (*Rage* 453) In *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon* he elaborates on this premise and stretches it to its limits. It is only fathers who 'sire monsters' (understood as Nietzschean Super-men) and who become the centres of their sons' existence. Hal, for instance, cannot "imagine an existence without [his father's] towering presence at the centre of it," (*Birds* 84) and Tom "love[s] the warmth and smell of his father's body, the hardness and strength of him" for it makes him "feel safe from all harm." (*Monsoon* 19) He also regards Hal as "the vigorous centre of his existence for as long as he [can] remember." (*Monsoon* 292) Fathers, and not mothers, are the providers of love and the 'displayers' of sentiment. Sir Francis often feels "his heart might burst with love and pride" (*Birds* 229) and Hal has to "cough to clear the constriction in his throat" (*Monsoon* 109) when the flood of sentiment he feels for his son Tom threatens to overwhelm him. He also experiences pangs of sorrow when Guy, Tom's twin brother, decides to leave him to start a new life in India, and is almost unmanned by despair when he loses his youngest son, Dorian, captured by the Arabs. (*Monsoon* 200-204) In return, sons love their fathers dearly. Hal declares, "I love you, Father," (*Birds* 275) and preserves his memory after his death. And Tom worships his father and expresses the affection he feels for him on many occasions. When he realises his father is going to die because of the injuries inflicted during the failed operation to rescue Dorian, Tom's vision swims "as tears [threaten] to overwhelm him" and "kisse[s] his father on the lips." (*Monsoon* 293) Dorian also preserves his father's memory even after his long years of captivity in

¹⁷ Robert Bly, *Iron John*, 25.

Oman. Although he develops a very strong affection for his adopted father, al-Malik, he never gives up his family ancestry, “glories in the religion of his own people and boasts that he will be inducted into [...] the Order of St George and the Holy Grail, like his grandfather and father before him,” (*Monsoon* 465) and promises he “will always be true to [his] real father.” (*Monsoon* 467) Patriarchy, all in all, is continuously ratified; as sons maintain their alliances with their fathers and parental bonds are reasserted, its continuation is ensured and its validity endorsed in the saga.

8.2.2. Punishing unruly sons

Apart from endorsing patriarchy by emphasising the strong affective bonds that tie together different generations of men, Smith legitimates it by turning himself into a severe judge who sentences to death or exile all the sons who fail to sustain the Law of the Father. In his patriarchal milieu, fathers become totems of authority at whose shrine sons pay their respects. Men enter into what Foucault terms “systems of marriage”¹⁸ so that they can become fathers and establish kinship ties that permit them to transmit names and properties, as is well-exemplified in the episode in *Birds of Prey* in which Sir Francis, intimating his mortality, hands down his legacy to his only son, Hal. He tells him, “I want to hand over to you, this night, your inheritance, those legacies, both corporal and spiritual that belong to you as my only son.” (*Birds* 156) Holding Hal’s head between his hands, Sir Francis bequeaths him the symbols of his authority. First, he gives him his barony, “the rank and style of baronet” accorded to his great-grandfather, Charles Courtney, by queen Bess after his participation in the destruction of the Spanish Armada. (*Birds* 156) Secondly, he gives him a ring and a chain with a seal that has the lion rampant of England engraved on it. These are part of the regalia of the order of knights Sir Francis belongs to, as have his ancestors before him - the Order of St George and the Holy Grail - an exclusivist club of male warriors. Then he gives him a locket containing a miniature of his wife, Edwina Courtney, which together with the barony and the knighthood paraphernalia, constitute his spiritual legacy and can be regarded as the symbols of patriarchy: power and status passed on in a patrilineal way, exclusivist brotherhood with other men, and dominion

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1981) 106.

over women. To these, Sir Francis adds his earthly possessions: "High Weald, [the] family manor in Devon" and "the prizes [they] have taken" during their sea voyages. (*Birds* 157) By giving Hal wealth and fortune, Sir Francis further substantiates the patriarchal ethos that, still nowadays, characterises our western societies in which men manipulate production and establish their authority over women on economic grounds.

However, not all Courtney sons are rightful inheritors of the patriarchal legacy. In order to be worthy perpetuators of the patriarchal ethos, there is one basic condition Courtney sons have to uphold: they have to respect the Law of the Father; they have to accept the authority of the patriarch and replicate it after his death, and, thus, guarantee its continuation. The sons who fail to do so, those who oppose their father's authority, are systematically eliminated. They are also deprived, endowed with at least one insurmountable flaw that immediately determines their exclusion from the club of heroic masculinity Smith privileges in his saga. Thus, they are sexually 'malfunctioning', cowardly, dishonest, and / or have tainted blood - that is, threaten the ideal of white purity civilisation relies on in order to maintain its superiority over coloured peoples. These flawed Courtneys, therefore, are not only despicable because they oppose their father and question patriarchal authority, but because they fail to conform to the parameters of ideal masculinity Smith offers as role models men can identify with.

Dirk Courtney is probably one of the most obvious examples. Dirk is the product of miscegenation. He is the 'hideous progeny' of two hostile races, British and Boer, and, as such, he is the bearer of a generic inheritance that immediately prevents him from achieving heroic status. Smith subscribes to the idea of British superiority and self-righteousness and, consequently, equates Britishness with superior civilisation. Following the schema adopted by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of the Nations* (1776), which, by the way, is Sean I's main bedside book, Wilbur Smith conceives stages of civilisation in categories of economic development: hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce. And it is the British, farther advanced in the road to perfection, refinement and order, who Smith presents as the culminating examples of excellent and most advanced civilisation. Boers, on the other hand, are

regarded with contempt. Smith admires their agrarian values and strong sense of national identity, but he sneers at them for their lack of enterprising spirit and for their claustrophobic commitment to Biblical notions of purity and morality. Furthermore, Smith writes from the vantage point of historical perspective and makes them the exclusive architects of the abominable apartheid super-structure.¹⁹

Boers, therefore, are, if not utterly condemned, at least a tiresome, burdensome presence that disrupts the perfect working of the socio-political order that the British have implanted in South Africa. It is in this sense that we can say that Smith endorses Herder's censure of colonisation, not on the basis of unjustified oppression and exploitation of other peoples, but rather because he considers that it decimates the colonising nation. Herder claimed that "every nation is one people, having its own national form, as well as its own language." He further stated that states composed of a wild mixture of various races and nations under one sceptre "appear in history like that type of monarchies in the vision of the prophet, where the lion's head, the dragon's tail, the eagle's wings, and the paws of a bear, combined in one unpatriotic figure of a state."²⁰ Like Herder, Smith opposes such hybridised, forced unions between nations, which, he argues, are bound to disintegrate and degenerate from the original Adamic European form. Dirk, being a hybrid of Boer and British blood, becomes a personification of such hybridised states Herder condemns; he contains the seeds of evil that ultimately brought the British socio-political ordeal in South Africa to its, relative, demise, and, consequently, he is doomed to condemnation in the novels, emerging, not as the enemy of patriarchy or masculinity, but as the enemy of the (enterprising) pastoral ethos that British colonisers had dreamed up for South Africa, and which Courtney heroes epitomise. As such, he is presented as a figure of horror and contempt in the narratives.

¹⁹ This is not to say that Smith endorses black and white equality for, as I show in part III, blacks are presented as either barbarian or child-like in the narratives. This is not to say that he condemns apartheid in the saga either; although he disapproves of most of the legislation passed during the apartheid period by Afrikaners, he ultimately endorses the separate development of blacks and whites and never questions the superiority of whites over blacks.

²⁰ qtd. in Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 39.

From the very beginning, therefore, Dirk is characterised in such a way as to highlight the evil aspects in his constitution. As a child, for instance, he is presented as extremely handsome, the beauty of his face “almost indecent, the innocence of his eyes and faultless skin should have belonged to a girl.” (*Thunder* 3) He has masses of dark curls from which the sun “[strikes] ruby sparks;” (*Thunder* 3) his eyes are spaced wide apart “framed with long black lashes and overscored by the delicate lines of the brow;” (*Thunder* 4) his face is fashioned by a jewelsmith, with emerald eyes, gold skin and rubies in his hair. But there is something evil in it; the mouth is too big, the lips too wide and soft; the shape of it is wrong, “as though it were about to sulk or whine.” (*Thunder* 4) Dirk grows to be more and more handsome, becoming a sort of “elegant buccaneer,” (*Sparrow* 59) but the same sensation of evil persists. When Mark, for instance, faces Dirk for the first time, he is struck by the man’s fine looks: his head, he finds, is “the noble head of a Michaelangelo statue, the beauty of his David and the magnificent strength of his Moses;” (*Sparrow* 254) he is also tall, towering three inches over Mark with a body “so well proportioned that its height [does] not seem excessive.” (*Sparrow* 254) But when Mark introduces himself as the grandson of John Anders, for whose death Dirk is responsible, Mark witnesses a remarkable transformation passing over his features, his face changing from extravagant beauty to grotesque ugliness and back to beauty. Also, Dirk is always likened to dangerous animals in order to highlight the aura of evil about him: he reminds Sean I, for instance, of “some beautiful glossy and dangerous animal;” (*Sparrow* 395) Mark, on another occasion, likens Dirk’s touch to the kiss of a mamba’s “little flickering black tongue” (*Sparrow* 421) and finds he is like a “glossy cat, one of the big predators, not the tabby domestic variety. The leopard, golden and beautiful and cruel.” (*Sparrow* 422)

Dirk’s flawed physical make-up mirrors his dark inner self, his cruel, ruthless, blood-thirsty character. Already as a child, his malevolence becomes obvious on various occasions, such as when he plays war games with other children: according to unspoken laws that governed the children’s games, pain could not be inflicted on enemies who had already been defeated; but Dirk obeys no rules and uses all opportunities available to him to give free vent to his murderous instincts. When he

finds Bertie (a small delicate child who insists on joining other children in games beyond his strength) alone below the bank where their mock-battle is being fought, kneeling and sobbing softly, he loads his lat with clay and shoots at short range, the clay hitting him across the bridge of his nose. (*Thunder* 142-143) As he grows up, his misdeeds multiply by the hundred: he sets his own father's wattle plantation on fire; (*Thunder* 418-421) the jealousy he feels because of Sean I's affection for Ruth and Storm eats into him like canker and he tries to hurt Ruth by torturing little Storm with a snake; (*Thunder* 479) he visits prostitutes with Archy, a British exilee of dubious reputation and loathsome appearance, to whom Dirk has been apprenticed at his father's factory; (*Thunder* 490-491) he develops a drinking habit and has sex with married women; (*Thunder* 502) and he eventually kills a man who had dared to insult his father, hitting him in the centre of his forehead with a heavy wooden stool, splitting his skull cleanly and enjoying it with violent pleasure. (*Thunder* 505) Dirk's cruelty reaches alarming proportions and his perversity sends thrills of horror down readers' spines; this prevents us from feeling any sympathy for him and prompts our utter condemnation.

Dirk loves his father enormously, most of his showy displays of violence and cruelty being aimed at capturing his father's attention. He does not question his filial love. Although his is a love gone sour, it is love all the same and Smith constantly reminds readers of Dirk's reverence for his father, how he hero-worships him, bases his life on him, and even mimics his actions and tries to be like him. Yet, he does not manage to win Sean I's heart. In fact, Dirk's outrageous behaviour deals a fatal blow to their relationship to the extent that Sean I abhors his own son, blaming his alien blood for his contemptible conduct. Eventually, Dirk leaves Natal on a stinky, wrecked sailing ship, only to emerge again as the ultimate villain and Sean I's main antagonist in the third Courtney novel, *A Sparrow Falls*. It is in this novel that Dirk's cruelty reaches its peak. Smith narrates his exploits as a first mate of a beaten-up old coal-burning tramp steamer running dubious cargo to the 'bad spots' of the Orient. He explains that while Dirk and the rest of the crew were sailing along the Yellow River to discharge their cargo, the port of Liang Su was attacked by the Communist warlord, Han Wang, who threatened the port's rich merchants with death. Dirk offered the

merchants the opportunity to escape on the boat and set the passage money so high that only the very richest could afford it. Still, ninety-six of them came aboard, forty-eight of them children. Once on board, Dirk drove them from the open deck into the holds, opened the sea-cocks, and flooded the holds, drowning them dead. He then pumped out the hold and took the sodden sacks where the merchants kept their possessions, a treasure that had taken them a lifetime to accumulate: gold, diamonds, emeralds and rubies worth over a million sterling. (*Sparrow* 204-208) He was nineteen when he committed this dreadful crime; he then came back to Ladyburg, bought himself a bank and a newspaper, built himself a replica of Rhodes' house, Great Longwood, and began to purchase land from local landowners, killing the ones that were reluctant to sell, in order to build his empire. He planned to plant the land with cotton, sugar and maize, and water it with a gigantic dam built in the Bubezi Valley, a proclaimed area, most of the ground around it being tribal trust land, Crown land or forestry reserve.

Sean I had not kept in touch with his son since he moved in to Ladyburg, but Dirk needs his father to make his ambitious dreams come true, so he approaches Sean I to make a deal with him. Sean I is now an influential figure in Natal's government and Dirk expects him to force through parliament legislation repealing the proclamation of the lands he needs for the dam, but Sean I refuses. From this point onwards, Sean I and Dirk's hostility reaches alarming proportions for Sean I promises to fight him with his life, (*Sparrow* 400) an ominous statement, for Sean I, together with his wife, Ruth, die in an accident that Dirk provokes.

Dirk's murderous actions are motivated by ruthless personal ambition and deal a fatal blow on the relationship he has with his father, ultimately leading to their estrangement from each other. Therefore, Sean I sheds the bonds that tied him to his son as soon as he becomes aware of his evil nature, strangling and burying "the elemental affection of son for father and father for son," finally exhuming it "like some loathsome rotting corpse" (*Sparrow* 257-258) and mourning Dirk "as though he was dead." (*Sparrow* 266) Sean I refuses to regard Dirk as his son and even exiles him physically from his 'patriarchal empire' and, by doing so, he keeps it aseptically clean

of his malevolent influence, which, in fact, is concentrated in an altogether different place, Dirk's Great Longwood, an aura of evil shimmering about it, "even in the daylight an almost palpable thing." (*Sparrow* 394) Dirk's tainted blood turns into an alien incubus in the perfect British ordeal. His Boer blood pollutes his body and, thus, the British body politic, and, consequently, he emerges as a threat that has to be excised if British values, policies and ideals are to remain safe in the narratives. Yet, Smith's utter condemnation of Dirk's persona does not only stem from the discomfort the threat of eugenic pollution originates; it also stems from his direct opposition to his father. By fighting his father and giving free vent to his pervert's instincts and personal ambitions, Dirk threatens the patriarchal ethos in Smith's milieu and, therefore, he has to be eliminated in the end.

The same applies to Black Billy, William Courtney - the son of Hal Courtney and his first wife, Judith Nazet, a Northern African army general. As I show in part III, the products of miscegenation, the offspring of whites and blacks, are not allowed to grow and prosper in the saga, lest they destabilise the colonial ideals of white purity and white supremacy Smith endorses. Smith unfailingly sentences to death all children resulting from interracial couplings and, by doing so, perpetuates the ideals of separate development for blacks and whites which is the basis of apartheid in South Africa. Black Billy's flawed behavioural make-up, his malevolence and cruelty, is a direct result of his tainted blood, which, according to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pseudo-scientists such as Gobineau, Agassiz and Vogt, could only lead to a deterioration of the purity of the white race. In their view, "miscegenation produces a mongrel group that makes up a 'raceless chaos', merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate and degraded, threatening to subvert the vigour and virtue of the pure races with which they come into contact."²¹ Black Billy's elimination from the narratives, therefore, is predetermined on racial grounds only. Yet, his death also results from his failure to comply with the Law of the Father. Like, Dirk Courtney, he is supposed to love his father enormously; Smith writes, "William Courtney loved nobody but his father, and he was fiercely jealous of him as a panther." (*Monsoon* 4) Being the eldest son, and, thus, the rightful inheritor of the Courtney estate, Black Billy will succeed

²¹ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire*, 18.

his father and occupy a patriarchal position of authority and power in society. Yet, he is not worthy of his father's legacy. As the narrative progresses, we do not see much of the love and respect he supposedly professes for his father. He fails to obey his father's dictates with regard to his half-brothers, whom he is expected to love and protect but whom he intimately hates for he regards them as rivals for his father's affection and earthly possessions. When in his father's presence, he puts on a mask of brotherly concern. However, his real feelings show underneath. When his father, for instance, is about to depart for Africa, taking his youngest sons with him, Black Billy says, "Father, [...] while you are away I wish you to know that the affairs of the family here will receive my unstinted care and attention." (*Monsoon* 62) These words are followed by "sonorous praises and hearty wishes for his [father's and his brothers'] safety and well-being." (*Monsoon* 62) However, his cold dark eyes are "so much at odds with the warmth of his words that Hal [knows] that little of what he [has] said [is] sincere." (*Monsoon* 62) Although he "mask[s] his malevolence" and his expression is "affectionate," Hal becomes aware of his son's real nature, which will eventually be fully revealed and confirmed to him on his return. Black Billy is shown not to care for his father's well-being. He is, in fact, only interested in his father's earthly legacy. Before Hal departed to Africa, he was promised a barony if he managed to succeed in the mission he was commissioned to fulfil. When Hal returns to England after his objective has been accomplished, however, he is weak and ill and Black Billy fears he will not live long enough to be granted the barony he was promised. Although Black Billy displays an exaggerated concern for his father's health, his real feelings are quite different. He muses, "By Jesus, [...] if the old pirate dies before the investiture, the barony will be lost." (*Monsoon* 338) Consequently, and in spite of the doctor's advice, Black Billy ensures his father takes his seat in the Lords. Once his barony is established and his succession to it assured, his "concern for his father's health [swiftly abates]." (*Monsoon* 343) When his father finally dies, Black Billy's only feeling is relief. He says, "So it's over at last [...] Sweet Jesus, but the old rogue took his time. I thought he would never move over for me." (*Monsoon* 360) He even refuses to pay for the funeral food and drink for the men who come to honour his father; he declares, "I will not spend my hard-earned guineas on food and drink for every loafer and tippler in the land." (*Monsoon* 360) Finally, he betrays his

father's memory and the trust he had placed in him by going back on a solemn oath. Before he died, Hal made him promise he would finance Tom's expedition to rescue Dorian, his youngest brother, from the Arabs. Yet, when Tom approaches Black Billy to obtain his approval for the manifest for the expedition and the bills for the expenses, the latter retorts:

It would be folly to squander my inheritance on the whim of a dying man. [...] You must have lost your senses if you think for a minute that I will hand [nineteen thousand pounds] over to you so that you can go chasing off to the end of the world. No, dear brother. Put it out of your head. (*Monsoon* 365)

Black Billy, therefore, does not fulfil his obligations as the patriarch of the family, disowns his own youngest brother, and goes back on an oath to his father. Black Billy's faults (he is also a womaniser, a wife-batterer and a cruel-task master who does not care for anybody but himself) render him unheroic. Unlike Sean II, whose love for his father redeemed him from his behavioural flaws, there is no redemption for Black Billy. He betrays the Law of the Father; he does not show respect for his father and what he stands for and takes his own patriarchal duties towards his subordinates lightly. Eventually, he is punished. He meets his death at the hands of his own brother, Tom, who kills him by accident and yet makes him pay the penalty he deserves for daring to jeopardise the patriarchal ethos.

Similar destinies await two other disrespectful sons: Michael II and Guy Courtney. Michael II, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, is an unworthy Courtney. Fragile, soft, emotional, sensitive, a communist and a homosexual, he epitomises everything masculinity is not in Smith's perception. Consequently, he is denied the heroic status other Courtneys are granted and is ultimately inflicted untimely death. Yet, he is not only punished for his lack of steel or for his betrayal of Smith's ideals of entrepreneurial, capitalist Britishness. Michael II loves his father dearly; yet, he is his mother's son. Unlike Sean II, his eldest brother, who "had always been Shasa's child, strong-willed and thoughtless of others," (*Rage* 267) Michael II is never so committed to his father. He does not enjoy the masculinist activities his father favours: when he is given a rifle as a present and his father offers to take him and his brothers on a hunting safari, his father asks him if he is interested. Michael II

glances apologetically at his mother before unenthusiastically replying, "Gee, thanks, Dad. It should be fun." (*Rage* 123) The idea of killing beautiful animals makes him "feel physically sick." (*Rage* 123) Furthermore, he is the only son who loves his mother more than his father. When she is away from home, all her other children are indifferent when she calls to inquire about their health; Michael II, in contrast, "reads her a poem of his own" and whispers, "I love you so much, [...] Please come home soon." (*Rage* 302) Michael II also betrays his filial duties towards his father when he gives up his studies and decides to take up a professional career his father disapproves of. Shasa tells him, "You know the rules [...]. I've made them clear to all of you. If you do things my way, there is no limit to the help I will give you. If you go your own way, then you are on your own." (*Rage* 377-378) Michael II, however, is determined and follows his own dictates rather than his father's, and Shasa qualifies his decision as "disloyalty" (*Rage* 378) and "treachery." (*Rage* 379) Finally, Michael II not only affronts his father with his disloyalty, but he betrays his whole family by becoming a communist and participating in an anti-apartheid plot devised by KGB revolutionaries. For all his lack of commitment to his father and his family, as well as for all his other faults, Michael II is also killed in the end.

Finally, Guy Courtney, who also fails to obey his father's dictates and privileges his own personal ambitions over his familial obligations, is also inflicted heavy punishment in the saga. Guy disappoints his father by betraying the early Courtneys' seafaring blood. He tells his father, "Forgive me, Father, but I do not want to be a sailor." He follows, "I hate it [...]. I hate the stink and cramped space aboard a ship. I feel sick and unhappy when I am out of sight of land." After this declaration, his father, Hal, steps back involuntarily, "as though his son had denied his faith in God," for the Courtneys "have always been sailors. For two hundred years the Courtneys have put out to sea." Guy rejects the destiny his father has set up for him on the grounds that it will not make him happy. Hal cannot be angrier because, by placing personal happiness before familial obligations, Guy is in fact denying his responsibilities as a man. Hal retorts,

A man follows the path laid out for him. He does his duty to God and to his king.
He does what he must do, not what pleases him. [...] God's truth, boy, what kind

of world would this be if every man did what pleased him alone? Who would plough the fields and reap the harvest if every man had the right to say, 'I don't want to do that.' In this world there is a place for every man, but every man must know his place. (*Monsoon* 79)

Guy is stubborn, abandons his father and accepts a position with the Honourable East India Company as an apprentice writer. From that point onwards, he sheds the bonds with his family; his father, of course, withdraws his support - he says, "I pray for your sake that you have made the right decision. Your fate is now out of my hands." (*Monsoon* 266)

Guy not only disappoints his father; he also betrays his brothers, Tom and Dorian. Guy falls in love with Caroline Beatty, the daughter of the director of the East India Company in Bombay, while the family travels on Hal's ship as far as the Cape of Good Hope. Yet, Tom, his twin, and Caroline become lovers and, when Guy finds out, he blames Tom for corrupting Caroline. When Caroline is found to be pregnant by Tom, Guy marries her while patiently awaiting an opportunity to take his revenge on Tom, whom he regards as Caroline's despoiler. Eventually, he is granted the opportunity to try to bring Tom to his demise. Promoted to consul of Zanzibar - a post he would not have obtained if Mr Beatty had not arranged it for him (*Monsoon* 481) - Guy is now in the position to find out about Dorian's exact whereabouts for he has access "to the most reliable sources of information." (*Monsoon* 472) Tom, at the same time, is in deep trouble for, having killed his brother, Black Billy, in England, he is now a wanted criminal. When Tom approaches Guy in order to obtain information about Dorian, Tom senses he cannot "rely on his twin to shelter him from justice." (*Monsoon* 471) Although Guy has not heard of Tom's 'criminal offence' yet, Tom knows he would not hesitate to betray him. Guy is furthermore reluctant to help Tom recover Dorian from the Arabs for fear that such interference will destabilise the commercial arrangements he has established with the Sultan; on Tom's prompting him to arrange a meeting with the Sultan, he retorts, "I have managed to establish cordial relations with him. He is now favourably inclined towards England and the Company. I do not wish to have that state of affairs disturbed by making accusations against his sovereign lord, Prince al-Malik." (*Monsoon* 475) Finally, and when he is informed of Black Billy's murder in England, he tells the Sultan and plans to have

Tom arrested and “sent back to England in chains, to his trial and execution.” (*Monsoon* 514)

Like Michael II, Dirk Courtney and Black Billy before him, Guy disavows the Law of the Father by failing to prioritise his father’s will before his own and by betraying the loyalty he should have felt towards his brothers. Therefore, he is punished for his treachery. Although his punishment is less final and subtler than that inflicted onto other treasonous Courtney sons (who are all killed), it is no less mild. He is deprived as a man, deprived of authority and turned into a pathetic figure of contempt by the end of the narrative, which in Smith’s ultra-macho, adventurous milieu is heavy punishment enough. To start with, Smith does not allow Guy to exert his authority as a consul. When he tries to make Tom comply with legal formalities, Tom retorts, “We are eight thousand miles from London. We are beyond the line, sir, and I do not recognise your authority in English law to interfere with me or question my intentions.” (*Monsoon* 475) When they are granted an interview with the Sultan, Tom is stately and dignified, but not Guy. When the Sultan gestures them to sit down on the cushions placed ready to receive them, “Guy [sits] awkwardly, finding it difficult to manage his sword while he [does] so.” Tom, on the other hand, “[has] spent many hours with the merchants in the markets and [is] accustomed to this position.” (*Monsoon* 505) Also, Guy is a pathetic husband. He beats his wife (*Monsoon* 513) but she does as she wishes so Guy is often forced to give up his attempts to assert his authority over her. (*Monsoon* 483) He cannot control his sister-in-law, Sarah, either. Sarah’s father placed her in Guy’s care when her mother died and, as he is “the master of [the] household,” (*Monsoon* 483) she has to humour him. But she only does so for Caroline’s sake. Sarah is too strong and stubborn to be bossed about and Guy knows that she would retaliate if he dared to lift a hand to her. Sarah only obeys him because she knows that when she upsets him he “takes out his ill-temper on [Caroline].” (*Monsoon* 483) Ultimately, however, she refuses to follow his will. When Tom enters the scene and Sarah and Tom fall in love, Guy locks Sarah in her room and forbids her to see Tom. Caroline helps her escape and Guy cannot ultimately prevent Tom and Sarah from being together. Finally, and when he is informed of Tom’s ‘crime’, he engages some men from the Sultan’s guard and plans

to have him arrested and brought to justice. When they finally reach Tom, he is already on his ship, ready to depart. Guy orders Tom to stop; however, Tom answers back, "Piss on the wind, dear brother, and get it all back into your face." (*Monsoon* 519) Eventually, Tom's ship, the *Swallow*, rounds the point and the harbour of Zanzibar closes behind them, while Guy is left behind, "his shoulders [...] slumped dejectedly, and his face [...] contorted with frustration and hatred." (*Monsoon* 521) A dreadful future awaits him. While Tom's future opens up with love and adventure laying ahead for him, Guy is condemned to live with a wife who does not love him, bring up a bastard son he has not sired, and continue with a claustrophobic job away from the real centres of influence in England. His destiny is inscribed in that of his predecessor in the post, consul William Grey; trapped in the tropical hothouse of Zanzibar, he is sentenced to become another fictional outcast of Almayer-proportions, festering in his own hatreds and regrets, subject to the moral degradation affecting those having to live among natives in the far-flung outposts of the British empire.

8.2.3. Familial brotherhood and sibling rivalry: promoting patriarchy

Smith does not only support patriarchy by presenting alliances between fathers and sons as the strongest possible family loyalties and by punishing all sons who fail to comply with or betray parental authority. He also promotes the brotherhood of men that so characterises patriarchal structurings by depicting and highlighting intense bonds between brothers. These bonds between brothers allow Smith to advance a philosophy of men's communion and solidarity without endangering their sexuality. On the other hand, Smith throws brothers into competition for their father's affection, which enables him to present the figure of the father and what he stands for as the uppermost ideal of perfection, the prize every man strives to achieve; at the same time it lets Smith highlight the heroes' masculinity, which in most meritocratic societies is defined by a man's capacity to win through and get to the top because of his superior abilities and talents; as Brittan expresses this latter idea:

We have grown up in contexts which take masculinity and competitiveness for granted. [...] We are taught that competition is a moral 'good'. [...] It is the bedrock of the theory and practice of the enterprise society, but at the same time it validates the virtues of a masculinity which men [...] supposedly have internalised.

[...] Men must compete with each other, as individuals or in groups, to maximise the common good.²²

In Smith's saga, therefore, brothers share strong affection; they are a tight-knit brotherhood of men, a fraternal clan, interconnected by familial loyalties that safeguard the interests of the family, protect it from external interference, and ensure its survival. Tom and Dorian, for instance, share a great love. Tom is the eldest and takes onto himself the protection of Dorian from the dangers that surround him. He often places his hand protectively on his younger brother's shoulder; (*Monsoon* 50) swears a dreadful oath, sealed with blood, never to leave him; (*Monsoon* 81) and devotes his whole life to rescue Dorian when he is captured by the Arabs. Tom says, "My first concern is always with Dorian;" (*Monsoon* 474) and he follows, "By God! If, to save Dorian, I have to take the little *Swallow* in against the whole Musulman fleet, I will not flinch." (*Monsoon* 476) Manfred de la Rey and Shasa Courtney, to mention one more example, are half-brothers although they are not aware of it themselves. Brought up in different backgrounds - Shasa is a Courtney, a British entrepreneur, and a member of the United Party; Manfred is a de la Rey, traditional enemies of the Courtneys, an Afrikaner educated to hate the British, and a member of the National Party - they are natural enemies. Yet, they are brothers all the same. Shasa's intuition warns him there are "hidden depths in their relationship which still [have] to be plumbed." (*Rage* 112) Manfred feels a "strange almost mystic bond of blood and destiny to [Shasa]." (*Rage* 120) He even muses to himself, "We are brothers, you and I [...]. And beyond the hatred lie the dictates of survival. [...] [N]either of us can survive alone [...] [W]e are so bound together that if one goes down, we both drown in the black ocean." (*Rage* 120) Even though Manfred is, in fact, reflecting on the need to have Afrikaners and British work together for the well-being and protection of the white nation threatened to be swamped by blacks, he is also phrasing one of patriarchy's basic tenets: the protection of fraternal bonds between men if patriarchy is to survive the thrust of oppositional groups intent on deprivileging its authority and bringing it to its demise.

²² Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 98-99.

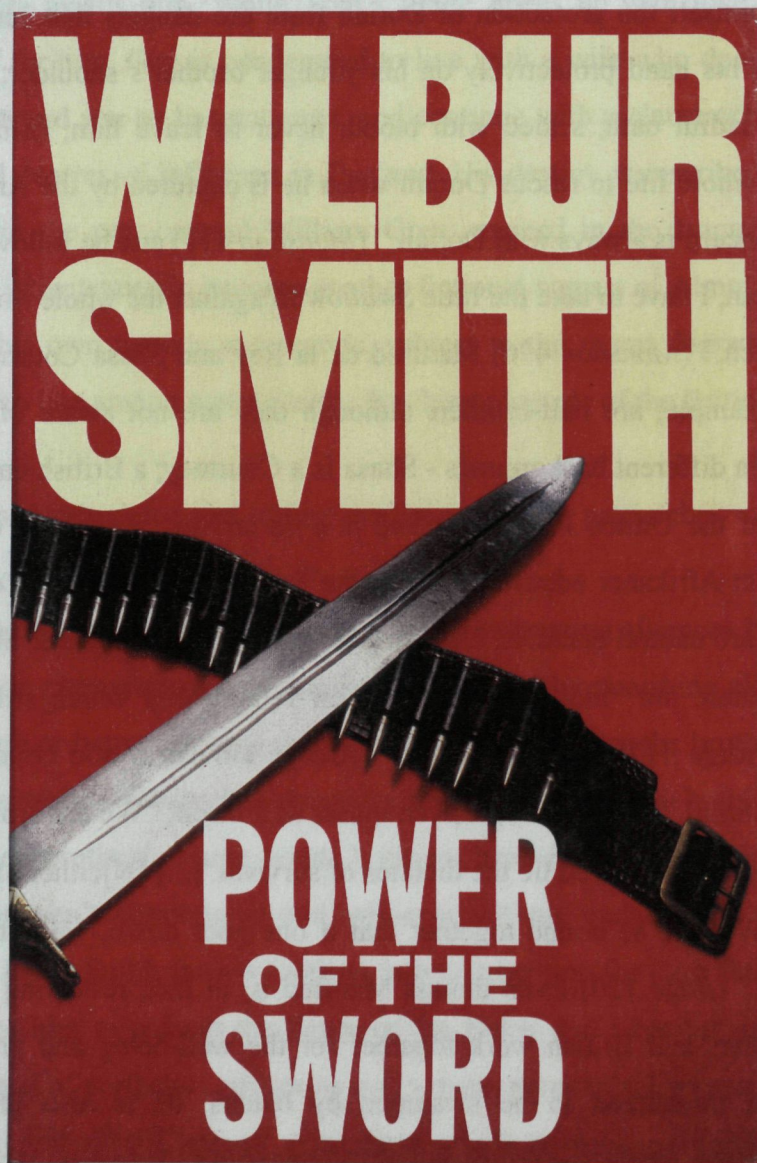


Figure 8. Dust jacket for Wilbur Smith's *Power of the Sword* (London: Heinemann, 1986). Design by Peter Dyer. Photography by David Fairman.

Smith highlights the fraternal bonds between brothers. However, and simultaneously, he also dramatises the ancestral Cain / Abel polarity as brothers vie with each other for their father's affection and worldly inheritance. In *Monsoon*, for instance, Hal's sons - Black Billy (William), Tom, Guy and Dorian - all worship their father and get jealous if he privileges one over another. They are all, Smith explains, "sucked into the primeval conflict of siblings," a "competition in which the odds [are] heavily loaded against the youngest, and from which there [can] be only one possible outcome." (*Monsoon* 19) Black Billy, the eldest, will inherit his fathers' fortune. Because of primogeniture, and "[i]n accordance with the law of England," he follows directly in his father's footsteps and "takes precedence over all his younger brothers." (*Monsoon* 20) Knowing his brothers will succeed him if anything happens to him, though, he regards them as direct competitors, grows to hate them, terrorises them and considers them "[a] nest of vipers [...]. That's what you are, asps and vipers." (*Monsoon* 18) Shasa's sons, to mention one more example, are all also caught in the same primeval conflict of siblings, especially Sean II and Garrick II. All Shasa's sons love their father dearly. When they are little children, for instance, they all come running from the nursery room when their father arrives. As he takes them for a ride, Sean II is too big and grown up to hold hands, but he keeps "jealously close to Shasa's right side;" Michael II is on his left, "clinging unashamedly to Shasa's hand," while Garrick II trails five paces behind, "looking up adoringly at his father." (*Rage* 16) Sean II is the eldest and his father's rightful successor. Yet, he is unworthy of his father's will and is eventually disinherited, while his younger brother, Garrick II, succeeds Shasa as the owner of the Courtney empire. In both cases, primogeniture and inheritance originate conflict and trigger off competition among siblings. Hal's sons cannot accept the idea that Black Billy, being horrible and cruel, will receive their father's fortune. Sean II, on the other hand, considers himself "the first born, the golden princeling, the pick of the litter." He feels he should have "been the prime recipient of his father's favour and approbation" and cannot accept the fact that his brother, Garrick II, has "stolen [it all] away from him." (*Fox* 370)

In both cases siblings fight each other for the privilege of occupying their father's position after his death and, thus, for the privilege of perpetuating patriarchy into posterity. Brotherly enmities, therefore, do not threaten patriarchy, which is never questioned. On the other hand, Smith defends the maintenance of the family estate and abhors the idea of splitting it up. At one point in *Monsoon*, for instance, he defends primogeniture on economic and national grounds. Hal says, "[I]f every time somebody died his land was split between his surviving children, then soon the whole country would be divided into tiny, useless parcels unable to feed a single family, and we would become a nation of peasants and paupers." (*Monsoon* 21) Consequently, brotherly enmities are essential for the perpetuation of the family estate. As siblings fight one another in a re-working of Darwin's dictum of the survival of the fittest, only wholesome Courtneys win the fight and inherit the estate: those who are heroic, manly, entrepreneurial, benevolent and who prioritise family interests at the expense of personal ambitions. Patriarchy, Smith knows well, cannot be sustained by tyrannical, cowardly villains, who stand for a corruption of the system. Patriarchy needs strong men for its survival; sons who squandered the family fortune, tainted the purity of the family blood, or simply tarnished the family's reputation would be a poor help to the cause of patriarchy.

Unworthy Courtney siblings, therefore, are all eliminated. Black Billy is eventually killed, and his estate in England is passed on to his son, Francis. On the other hand, Tom, Black Billy's brother but also his most dreaded opponent, stays alive and creates a parallel Courtney estate in South Africa, the foundation on which the South African Courtney empire is built. Sean II and Garrick II's antagonism, on the other hand, ends when they engage in an actual fight that Garrick II wins, demonstrating, in this way, his dominance over his eldest brother and his right to the Courtneys' estate and fortune, which he has already expanded by the application of his intelligence, determination, acumen and entrepreneurial capabilities. Sean II, of course, stays alive for he is the epitome of a Rambo-like, super-macho maleness, with which Smith aims at defending masculinity at the time of its deprivileging by feminists and other oppositional groups. Yet, he is denied the right to inherit the Courtney empire. His careless, independent spirit, together with his lack of concern

for his father's business, prevent it. However, he is not allowed to escape patriarchal familial strictures for long. Although he remains a wild card throughout most of his fictional life, he eventually falls in love with Claudia Monterro. He then gives up his reckless, adventurer spirit in order to become a husband and a father. The continuation of patriarchy is safe. Even Sean II, we are told, ultimately conforms and gives up his independence to become encapsulated within patriarchal parameters.

8.3. Permanence and endurance: authorial strategies

Another strategy Smith uses to defend patriarchy in his narratives consists in highlighting the permanence of the Father and the family name in spite of the physical deaths fathers are inflicted with. As I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, all Courtney and non-Courtney fathers die an untimely death, which can be interpreted as a reflection of the deterioration of patriarchal familiar arrangements in western societies and which, some men feel, may have wider social repercussions, undermine patriarchy-as-a-system and jeopardise men's power writ large. Yet, Smith does not allow patriarchal power to disintegrate in his narratives. In the Courtney novels, fathers do die; however, the symbolic power they have, the patriarchal system they epitomise, does not die with them. In fact, Smith's Courtney novels can be read as a mammoth project written to keep the Father alive. This he does by using different tactics.

8.3.1. The saga form

Firstly, Smith makes use of the saga form as a framework that envelops the particular exploits of individual Courtneys. The saga, Christine Bridgwood explains, "differs from other popular fiction genres in its lack of drive towards a narrative closure [...] the family saga is, by definition, structured as a long-term process."²³ The use of the saga structure, therefore, allows Smith to follow the development of the

²³ Christine Bridgwood, "Family Romances: The Contemporary Popular Family Saga," *The Progress of Romance*, ed. Jane Radford, 167-168.

Courtney lineage over a long period of time stretching back into the past and forward into the future without apparent end. Even as fathers die, their deaths do not point towards a narrative closure. Permanence is always entertained as a possibility, for, while there is a family member alive to perpetuate the family name and the memory of the father, the saga is alive, and so is the patriarchal system whose trajectory the saga develops. Furthermore, Christine Bridgwood follows, individual characters in the saga “are merely facets of a collective character constructed at a broader narrative level.”²⁴ When reading a saga, we are not only interested in the destiny of individual characters, but in the family as a unit and its dynastic considerations such as inheritance, the continuation of the male line and family duty. The structure of individual drama, experience and change, therefore, is overlaid by a discourse which “speaks in favour of tradition, the family, the heritage, the dynasty. [...] The text rests on an unchallenged basis of tradition, history and family continuity.”²⁵ Consequently, the use of the saga form enables Smith to override the individual deaths of fathers by focusing on the collective fate of the Courtney lineage, which takes primacy over individual Courtneys. The family, therefore, the Courtney lineage, is established as the main centre of interest and Smith manipulates the readers’ perception so that their focus of attention lies primarily on the maintenance of the Courtney family at large rather than on the different individual members by using different strategies.

First of all, and as I have explained before, he punishes all Courtneys who fail to privilege family considerations and give priority to their personal ambitions notwithstanding familial obligations and loyalties. Secondly, he highlights the importance of fraternal and familial alliances and their role in protecting family interests from alien interference. Thus, when one Courtney is in difficulty, the whole family joins forces to fight for the preservation of its members. In *Golden Fox*, for instance, Bella Courtney becomes pregnant by a communist KGB revolutionary of Spanish origin - Ramon de Santiago y Machado. When the child, Nicholas, is born, Ramon kidnaps him and uses him to manipulate Bella and force her to become a spy

²⁴ Christine Bridgwood, “Family Romances: The Contemporary Popular Family Saga,” *The Progress of Romance*, ed. Jane Radford, 168.

²⁵ Christine Bridgwood, “Family Romances: The Contemporary Popular Family Saga,” *The Progress of Romance*, ed. Jane Radford, 177.

for the KGB. When the Courtneys find out, their main concern is to rescue Nicholas rather than punish Bella for her treacherous activities; after all, she has been “singled [...] out as a victim,” (Fox 495) and been craftily manipulated by using her deepest maternal instincts as a means of extortion. Garrick II, her brother, tells her, “If you are in trouble, then it concerns all of us. We are a family. We stand together.” (Fox 492) They put the awesome Courtney machinery to work and prepare a risky rescue operation, which is conducted from the innermost patriarchal centre in the Courtney home: the gun-room at Weltevreden, the family residence. They could have “chosen any of a dozen better-equipped facilities in one of the Courtney conference centres or boardrooms;” yet, “none of them had the secure family atmosphere of this room, which had for so long been the centre of their lives.” (Fox 496) Nicholas’ rescue, furthermore, takes precedence over everything else; Garrick II says, “from now on, that is all that counts. That face. That child.” (Fox 496) Finally, they do not allow external interference for, as Garrick II explains, “This is restricted to the family. We bring in nobody from outside.” (Fox 496) All the Courtney brothers are summoned to sort out the family problem, even if that means risking their individual lives and reputations. As Garrick II graphically phrases it:

First of all, we have to accept that it’s a fully offensive operation. We are sure as hell going to run into heavy opposition. They are going to try to kill us - we’ve got to kill them first. We are not going to mess around. If we want Nicky, we have to fight for him. However, if things go wrong, we might have to face a political and legal storm both here and abroad. We might be deemed guilty of anything from terrorism to murder. Are we prepared to accept that? (Fox 500)

Of course, they all “[nod] without hesitation.” (Fox 500)

Thirdly, Smith makes us readers follow the creation of the Courtney family estate and its maintenance in the Courtney novels. Consequently, as we read about each of the heroes’ adventures, we also trace the development of the family empire, its expansion and its perpetuation. Thus, for instance, in the two latest instalments of the saga, particularly in *Monsoon*, Smith recreates the foundation of the Courtneys’ family estate in South Africa. Hal has many male sons, but only Black Billy, the eldest, is entitled to the family properties in England. The other sons have to learn to fend for themselves without family assistance. Tom and Dorian, the worthiest and noblest of

Hal's sons, are driven to Africa by different circumstances, where they become traders and colonists and eventually settle in the lands where the South African Courtney lineage is planted and flourishes. After a gap of almost two hundred years, we find the Courtney family settled in Natal in Pietermaritzburg, where they have their family farm, Theunis Kraal, a vast pastoral estate where Waite and his twin sons, Sean I and Garrick I, live, and with whom Smith originally started the saga. In *When the Lion Feeds*, *The Sound of Thunder* and *A Sparrow Falls*, Smith narrates the development of the Courtneys' family enterprise: how Sean I originally gave up his rights to the land to become a gold lord in the Witwatersrand, went back to Natal after losing his gold possessions in Johannesburg, and created his own empire in Lion Kop, his farm and wattle plantation only a few miles away from the original Courtney farm; while Garrick I nearly squandered the family fortune and brought Theunis Kraal to a state of decrepitude and ruination. Yet Smith does not allow Theunis Kraal to disappear. The original Courtney estate is eventually expanded when the two brothers join forces and create a common company, Courtney Brothers and Son, which merges the lands of "Theunis Kraal and Lion Kop into one vast estate." (*Thunder* 565) At the end of *A Sparrow Falls*, the family estate is left in very bad shape indeed as Sean I dies without a legitimate son, his daughter loses the rights to her father's fortune when she marries a man Sean I disapproves of, and Michael I, Sean I's illegitimate son is killed in France during World War I. However, Smith goes to considerable lengths to guarantee the continuation of the Courtney lineage and the maintenance of the estate in *The Burning Shore*. In this novel, Michael I is brought back to life for long enough to impregnate Centaine de Thiry, a French aristocrat, before they get married. Centaine, subsequently, gives birth to a son, Shasa, whom Garrick I, Michael I's legal father, adopts. Supposedly, he does so to preserve the good-name of the Courtneys, but it is mostly a "legal device to ensure his status in the world" (*Burning* 604) as the rightful inheritor of the Courtney estate, which Centaine expands when she founds her mining empire and builds a family home and vineyard, Weltevreden - well-satisfied -, as is explained in *Power of the Sword*. Eventually, Shasa inherits the Courtney empire, makes it grow and prosper, and passes it on to the worthiest of his sons, Garrick II, as is depicted in *Rage*, *A Time to Die* and *Golden Fox*. Smith, all in all, recounts the development of the family estate as well as the individual fates of different Courtneys

and their participation in the increase of the family fortune. Furthermore, he acts as the ultimate *deus ex machina* who overrides linear development by travelling backward and forward in time to procure Courtney sons to Courtney fathers; thus, if succession is endangered, Smith stalls the linearity of temporal development, goes back in time, resurrects dead Courtneys, gives them sons, and follows their development in future instalments of the saga.

Finally, the importance of the family over individuals is constantly highlighted in the saga by making each Courtney hero or heroine obsessed with family ancestry and origins. Their sense of identity and status in the world is determined not only by their personal achievements, but by their familial substratum, their family history, that makes them feel part of a long-lasting tradition and guarantees their permanence in the world even after their death for their deeds, achievements, adventures or personal dramas live on as part of what Smith calls “the family lore.” (*Rage* 243) Thus, for instance, Shasa takes all his sons on a safari as part of their “education and understanding of their place in Africa and their inherited duties and responsibilities.” This safari is “to show them the old Africa, primeval and eternal” and “to establish for them a firm link with their history and their ancestors, to engender in them a sense of pride in what they [are] and in those who had gone before them.” (*Rage* 158) Also, he takes the opportunity to tell them “the stories,” the family stories, “reaching back in his memory to bring out for them all his own experiences, and then going back farther, to what he had learned from his own mother, and from his grandfather, trying to make clear to them the extent and depth of their family’s involvement with this land.” (*Rage* 160) In Shasa’s accounts, the lives of long-dead Courtneys are resurrected and their memory is preserved. Shasa, also recounts old stories that are “the weft and warp of the family legend” on every important occasion when the family are reunited for a celebration, giving him the opportunity to remember old times and to pass on the family lore to all the new Courtney incorporations. Bella fulfils this self-same function for her son, Nicholas, whom Ramon, her lover and Nicholas’ father, kidnaps and keeps away from her. While Nicky is with his father, Bella keeps a journal for her son that contains “every memento of [him] that she had accumulated over the years” together with his family tree and heraldic arms. (*Fox* 360) When he is finally rescued,

it is Centaine's (Nicholas' great-grandmother's) function to tell him about the Courtneys' family stories. With these stories, Centaine expects to bridge the affective gap that his estrangement from his family has opened up. Nicholas receives and assimilates the family lore, re-establishes the links with his family ancestry, and guarantees its perpetuation - with him, the family tradition will live on into the future.

The same obsession with the maintenance of family ancestry characterises the modern Courtneys' early predecessors. In *Birds of Prey*, Hal receives the Courtney spiritual and corporal legacy from his father: his possessions in England and the family history. In High Weald, the Courtneys' estate in England, family ancestry is kept and preserved in the chapel built by Sir Charles, Hal's great-grandfather, over a hundred years ago "to the glory of God" and in commemoration of his meritorious participation in the war "against the armada of Philip of Spain." (*Monsoon 2*) In the chapel, "there [are] sixteen, all of the Courtneys and their wives since [Sir Charles]," (*Monsoon 4*) kept in stone and marble coffins arranged around the circular walls of the crypt. It is within these walls that Hal will also be buried, his deeds commemorated and his memory preserved in the inscription on the lid of the sarcophagus. Sir Francis, although dead, is not yet there for he died and was buried in Africa. However, he has his sarcophagus in the crypt all the same and his memory and deeds are safe-kept in the inscription, which reads as follows:

Sir Francis Courtney born 6th January 1616 in the County of Devon. Knight of the Order of the Garter and of the Order of St George and the Holy Grail. Navigator and Sailor. Explorer and Warrior. Father of Henry and Valiant Gentleman. [...] Unjustly accused of piracy by the craven Dutch settlers of Cape de Bonne Esperance, and most cruelly executed by them on the 15th July 1668. Although his mortal remains lie on the far and savage African shore, his memory lives forever in the heart of his son, Henry Courtney, and in the hearts of all the brave and faithful seamen who voyaged the Ocean Sea under his command. (*Monsoon 5*)

Before he dies and is buried in the crypt himself, Hal retrieves his father's body from its burial site in Africa and brings him back to High Weald, for it is his "sacred duty" to do so. (*Monsoon 151*) Also before his death, Hal ensures that Tom, his son, preserves the family history. Hal knows that Tom's destiny is not in England for Sukeena, the first woman Hal really loved, prophesied his descendants would establish

and multiply in Africa. Consequently, he ensures Tom keeps his family ancestry alive and brings it with him to Africa by chaperoning his initiation into the Order of St George and the Holy Grail, an order Hal belongs to as have all other Courtneys before him, so that Hal can maintain “the continuity, the enchanted chain of the knighthood that linked one generation to the next.” As they perform the ancient ritual other Courtneys have followed before them, Hal feels he has “placed the future firmly in the hands of [his son]” and he can see “the future merging with the past and evolving before his eyes.” After that, Hal is prepared to “meet the dark one.” (*Monsoon* 353) He can die in peace for his continuity and the continuity of the family tradition will live in Tom.

8.3.2. The eternal Father

The use of the saga framework, all in all, as a backdrop against which individual Courtneys perform their deeds, allows Smith to unfold the story of the Courtney lineage and to direct the readers’ attention towards the development of the family estate and the preservation of the family name, tradition and ancestry. Individual deaths, therefore, are minimised. In fact, they do not really matter. The bedrock of patriarchal social organisations, after all, - family, tradition, inheritance, male lineage - remains intact, preserved throughout a saga which covers four centuries of the Courtneys’ family history and whose continuation is guaranteed by new Courtney sons, whose sole existence is a promise of the permanence of the system for centuries on end. But this is just one of the strategies Smith uses to emphasise the durability of the Father and the family name in spite of the deaths of old Courtney patriarchs.

As Smith follows the development of the Courtneys’ family history, he periodically emphasises the staying power of the Courtney line. In fact, the early Courtneys’ family motto is “Durabo. I shall endure,” (*Birds* 13) which is both a promise of endurance and a declaration of intent, a reminder of invariability and immutability, of persistence and duration in spite of and beyond the finality of individual death, and a motto all Courtneys subscribe to. Centaine, for instance, tells

Shasa, her son: "We are creatures of the desert [...] and we will survive and prosper when others fail and fall." (*Sword* 132) In spite of the problems and difficulties that threaten the existence of individual Courtneys, the ultimate permanence of the patriarchal system the Courtneys epitomise is a promise Smith never fails to fulfil. Thus, the death of the patriarchal figures in the saga is never presented as final. They never ultimately die because they live on in their sons' memories. Thus, as Hal mourns the death of his father, Aboli tells him: "No, Gundwane, we should not mourn him, you and I. He will never die while he lives on in our hearts." (*Birds* 287) Furthermore, their death is presented as a promise of eternity. Thus, Sir Francis is buried "on his side, his knees drawn up beneath his chin and his arms hugging his legs, the foetal position of the womb and of sleep," and his face is turned "to greet ten thousand moons and all the sunrises of eternity." (*Birds* 293) His body may lie inert and lifeless; yet everything in the way he is positioned suggests rebirth. Finally, fathers live on in their sons who are their "promise of eternal life" (*Birds* 283) and who guarantee both the perpetuation of the line and the continuity of patriarchy, which is invigorated by being periodically renewed. Sons, in fact, become the sources of their fathers' continuity. They perpetuate the family blood, which runs through their veins and determines their behaviour. Thus, for instance, Shasa is ready to forgive his son, Sean II's, amatory escapades for "[i]t is the de Thiry blood, we all have to live with it;" (*Rage* 283) Bella is also an ardent person because of "[a]ll that hot Courtney blood" running through her veins; (*Fox* 84) Nicholas is "a thorough-bred with the blood of champions in his veins;" (*Fox* 576) Centaine has "[t]he burning need to excel [...] in her blood" and passes on "that divine contagion to those she love[s];" (*Fox* 182) Hal is a fierce man for he has "tapped the well of warrior blood" that characterises all the Courtneys (*Birds* 12) so "the Courtney blood runs true" in him; (*Birds* 110) and Tom is a great climber, as his father was before him, so "[i]t must be in his blood," (*Monsoon* 65) and a stubborn man, like his father and "[his] grandfather before him. It runs in the blood." (*Monsoon* 644) They also inherit their ancestors' conduct and mannerisms. Thus, Sir Francis is "a seaman and fighter and an honest man to boot" and his son is a "pup well bred from the old dog;" (*Birds* 452) Hal's sons, Tom and Dorian, are also "[t]wo cubs of the old lion" (*Monsoon* 159) and Tom in particular, like his father, likes to "lead rather than follow" for "the apple does not

fall too far from the tree;" (*Monsoon* 376) Garrick II is a workaholic, like his father, as is acknowledged by his boss, the general manager, who tells Shasa, "It must run in the family, but it's difficult to get the little blighter to stop working, we almost have to tie him down;" (*Rage* 450) and Nicholas, in spite of his name and the fancy Spanish title, "is a true Courtney," and like his ancestors, seems "to have a way with dogs and horses." (*Fox* 574)

Behavioural traits and blood are not the only things sons inherit from their fathers. They, in fact, become their fathers physically. Sean I, for instance, is an almost exact copy of his father, Waite, to the extent that the face of his father in a daguerreotype print is almost Sean I's own, "the same eyes under heavy black brows, the same arrogance about the mouth, even the identical thrust of stubbornness in the jaw beneath the thick spade-shaped beard - and the big hooked Courtney nose." (*Thunder* 62) Michael I, Sean I's illegitimate son, is also an exact replica of his father: though Michael I is not so tall and lean beside Sean I's bulk, "the tone of the skin and the colour of the hair [are] the same" and both have "the big Courtney nose" and a "wide and full-lipped" mouth. (*Thunder* 448) Even Mark, who is not related to the Courtneys, resembles them with his "good bone structure" and "proud strong nose;" (*Sparrow* 247) he even has the "same strength and goodness that Michael had." (*Sparrow* 248) Sean II has "his mother's clear shining skin" but "Shasa's looks." (*Rage* 15) Garrick II, with his hair "sticking up in disorderly spikes," his "massively developed" torso covered with "a coat of dark body hair" and his "bemused myopic look," (*Rage* 325) is like his grandfather and namesake on-steroids; furthermore, he has inherited "one of the Courtney gifts," (*Rage* 325) his big penis, and has the "large Courtney nose." (*Rage* 521) When Bella is brought her child, Nicholas, for the first time, his penis sticks out "half as long as her forefinger in what [seems] to be, to [her] partisan appraisal, a full and impressive erection," which makes her exclaim: "It's a boy. [...] He's a boy and a Courtney." (*Fox* 141) Finally, Tom, to mention one last example, "big boned and strong for his age, with the eye and hand of a warrior," his large mouth and nose and his "determined face and heavy jaw," is the son who is "the closest to [Hal] in spirit and flesh." (*Monsoon* 23-24) Mothers contribute nothing - or very little - to the heroes' physical make-up; they are only the recipients where male

bodies are gestated so that men can leave a faithful imprint of themselves on the world. Indeed, Smith's conception of the Courtney sons is a bizarre form of parthenogenesis, endlessly perpetuating their father's body in a patrilineal line of 'clonic' replicas. They even inherit their father's or grandfather's name so that dead Courtneys are 'resuscitated', given another opportunity in the form of a descendant who has both their physical built-up, behavioural traits and name. Thus, for instance, Sir Francis' grandson inherits his name; and the original Courtneys (Sean I, Garrick I and Michael I) are given another opportunity, a second coming, in their grandsons and great-grandsons, Shasa's sons, who inherit their names and their most outstanding traits.

All in all, fathers emerge as omnipotent, ubiquitous and immortal in the saga. They are the uppermost sites of authority, the bearers of the family name, the defenders of family ancestry, the propagators of the family blood, the guardians of the family fortune. Fathers die but live on; their existence is guaranteed in that of their sons, who replicate and rejuvenate the line, re-live their father's lives and project and expand the Courtney name and fortune into the future. Fathers and sons, furthermore, endorse the continuity of the patriarchal ethos, understood both horizontally as a system of fraternal alliances; and vertically, as a familial hierarchy in which the patriarch occupies the top position and is eventually replaced by a younger son, in a continual line without apparent end.

8.4. Patriarchy, adventure and the domestic: the case of Centaine

8.4.1. Integrating the domestic

Smith does not stop here in his relentless defence of patriarchy in the saga. Adventure, as I have explained in chapters 3 and 5, has traditionally excluded the domestic from its pages; particularly, imperialist adventure stories, which are true to Haggard's infamous boast about *King Solomon's Mines* that 'there is not a petticoat in the whole story.' Adventure takes place in the wilderness, where men have the chance

to distance themselves from the ostensibly feminine interests of domesticity and romantic love. True to the parameters of adventure in general and imperialist adventure in particular, Smith prioritises the male body in his saga and, as I show in chapter 10, makes his male heroes perform in unequivocally manly scenarios against which Smith can set off their real macho attributes in an attempt to defend a supposedly essential form of masculinity. Furthermore, and as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, he favours male-to-male companionships and bonds and regards women with suspicion - as agents of socialisation and domestication; entrappers whose mission in life seems to be to ensnare men and deflect them from life's important purposes of self-discovery and self-assertion. Yet, Smith cannot afford to disregard the domestic in his narratives.

Although I go back to this in the following chapter, it is worth emphasising at this stage that Smith seems to be aware of the systematic deterioration of the family in society at large as a result of women's abandonment of their traditional home-making function and their systematic penetration of the public sphere. Consequently, he introduces the domestic in his adventurous milieu and engages in a systematic defence of the traditional conception of the family as a locus of male dominance over women and as the institution that, headed by men, lies at the basis of the patriarchally constructed society. Thus, although he allows women to penetrate the masculine terrain of adventure and creates powerful heroines who engage in 'masculine' pursuits outside the home-boundaries, he eventually encapsulates them within the domestic where they ultimately fulfil their reproductive function of mothering and child-bearing while men operate single-handedly in the public space. An analysis of Centaine, the most controversial of Smith's heroines, illustrates the point.

8.4.2. Women in action: feminism and the representational arts

Although it would be ludicrous to overstate the case. Female characters have certainly had it tough in the realm of the popular, but this does not mean retaliation has not ensued. From the 1970s a process of social transformation has been taking place in the western world. Under the pressure of liberal feminist movements and

other oppositional groups, borderlines between the sexes are disappearing; laws that govern sexual behaviour are breaking down; and the honoured institutions of marriage, work and the family are being dismantled. Popular fiction has not remained indifferent to these new social trends. For a long time now, feminist writers have not only challenged and questioned the rigid delimitations of male and female roles within the popular; they have also aimed at both demythologising and re-negotiating standardised productions of gender identities by developing what Anne Cranny-Francis calls 'feminist fictions' or "genre fiction written from a self-consciously feminist perspective."²⁶

For some time now, action and other narratives involving adventurous topics, that have traditionally been masculine territories, have integrated a completely new type of heroine. The conjunction heroine / adventure / action has always been problematic both in literary and social contexts. As Dawson explains, even the word 'adventuress' is semantically limiting for "the gendered connotations of *adventurer* and *adventuress* register the limited opportunities for women to become involved in adventures and their close association with sexual forms of risk, excitement and disreputability."²⁷ So far, heroines in action and adventure have been burdened by the double-yoke of their sexuality and domesticity. In these narratives, women remain enclosed within domestic boundaries, guarding the fire-side comforts to which men can return after having accomplished their deeds of self-aggrandisement in the wilderness. If women are allowed to participate at all in the adventurous plot, it is only to confirm the hero's heterosexuality by becoming the object of the hero's romantic interest, and, consequently, they are prized for their sexuality alone. But this selfsame sexuality, so useful to deflect attention from the homoeroticism surrounding male homosocial desire in adventure, activates a series of atavistic fears of female sexuality overpowering the hero. Thus, a variety of narrative devices are systematically put into practice to control and keep female sexuality under surveillance, of which the more obvious are: identification of female sexuality as evil and freedom-curtailling thus leading to the destruction of threatening female figures (Ayesha, the beautiful queen in

²⁶ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, 1.

²⁷ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 59.

Haggard's *She* would be an example); presentation of women in the role of "expendable sidekicks, [...] loved character[s] who will die in order to cement the hero's desire for revenge,"²⁸ like Co Bao in *Rambo: First Blood*, and finally the use of comedy to play up women's attempts at keeping pace with men's adventurous pursuits, as happens with the character Kate Capshaw plays in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

At the moment, however, this stereotyped presentations of women is meeting challenges. As Yvonne Tasker explains with reference to the development of action cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, the heroine has been moved from her position as a "subsidiary character within the action narrative, to the central role of *action heroine*, a figure who commands the narrative,"²⁹ in what I regard as a self-conscious attempt to mollify the 'anger' of anti-masculinist brigades and overcome men's fear of emasculation by condescendingly allowing women to share in men's adventurous exploits. Recent cinematic productions give ample proof of the new centre-stage protagonism heroines have been given, replacing men in action roles that Schwarzenegger, Stallone, van Damme, Willis, Seagal and other such muscle-men had played before. *Thelma and Louise*, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, the *Alien* series, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *G.I. Jane*, are often-quoted examples.³⁰

In responding to feminism, Tasker explains, scriptwriters and film directors seek to present women as powerful and active and, to do so, they have mobilised already-existing types and action conventions, images and patterns that were an established part of popular culture, and thrust them onto the heroine's back in a process of 'female armouring', or women's empowerment through adoption of manly

²⁸ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 23.

²⁹ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 132.

³⁰ As I explain in chapter 6, section 6.4, however, heroines are not so empowered after all. Although they have been 'allowed' to penetrate regions that had been 'men-only' before, they either perish in the attempt to become 'real adventuresses' or they need masculine help in order to succeed. Adventure, furthermore, remains mostly male. We have action heroines, western heroines, science-fiction heroines, detective heroines, but very few adventure heroines. (see note 38, chapter 3) The only real adventure heroine I am aware of is Lara Croft, the Tomb Raider, but she does not accommodate any feminine trait in her behavioural make-up. She is both a very appealing sexual fantasy for men and a female (not feminine) Indiana Jones. Demi Moore in *G.I. Jane* - the film is not even 'adventure' but a war film - does not display feminine traits either. In order to survive in 'the army' she has to change both her physical and behavioural make-up: she has to become the 'best man' in action.

paraphernalia and attitudes. Female heroines have not only been set against adventurous milieux, but they have been endowed with the same 'powers' men used to possess in the selfsame contexts, namely: the ability to turn the wilderness into both a testing-ground of their power and the context against which they progress from ignorance about themselves to knowledge and some sort of strength; physical transformation through body-building to signal their change of status in the world; and delight in transgressing bureaucratic, patriarchal superstructures. Together with examples of literally empowered womanhood, these fictions "take pains to suggest that perfidious male domination pervades and governs social space at virtually every level of mainstream, 'straight' society."³¹

8.4.3. Empowering Centaine

Smith seems to be aware of the new tendencies assailing society and of the new visibility and power women have in it, as well as of the ways in which these trends affect the representational arts. Consequently, he opens up a space for women in adventure and systematically couples his heroes with, to all appearances, strong and independent women who can match the heroes in their efforts and, on occasions, overpower and outlive them. Centaine de Thiry Courtney-Malcomess illustrates the point for she is a tough and powerful female character whose presence permeates the pages of five of the novels that make up the ten-volumed Courtney saga (and we have to take into account that the other five instalments in which she does not appear take place before she is created as a character). She stars as the protagonist of *The Burning Shore* and *Power of the Sword*, plays an active role in *Rage*, and remains a pervasive and influential figure still in her 60s and 70s in *A Time to Die* and *Golden Fox*, featuring as the matriarch of the Courtney family and replacing the white-bearded and omnipotent, although short-lived, patriarch who is the pivot for the narratives of the remaining instalments of the saga: *Birds of Prey*, *Monsoon*, *When the Lion Feeds*, *The Sound of Thunder* and *A Sparrow Falls*.

³¹ Fred Pfeil, *White Guys*, 54.

Smith allows Centaine to play a fantasy of empowerment. In a wrecked World War I France, she falls in love with Michael Courtney I and becomes pregnant. When Michael I dies, his plane shot down by a German Albatross, and her father is killed during a German attack on his castle at Morte Homme, Centaine leaves France with her servant, Anna II, to go to South Africa, Michael I's country; she embarks on a ship heading for the Cape of Good Hope, the *Protea Castle*, a passenger liner converted into a hospital ship transporting the incapacitated soldiers sent back home. Indeed, *homme* are *morte* and Centaine takes up the challenge. The moment she boards the ship she, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, is propelled into adventure. She moves from a *Treasure Island* scenario (she boards a ship that has an officer with a "piratical black patch over his missing eye" and another with "an equally piratical Long John Silver wooden stump," (*Burning* 237) by the way called Ballantyne) to a *Robinson Crusoe* locale: after the *Protea Castle* sinks, torpedoed by a German U-boat, Centaine is stranded in the burning fastness of Namibia's Skeleton Coast where she is aided by Smith's particular Fridays, H'ani and O'wa, two San who save Centaine from death. Armed with only a clasp-knife and with the San's assistance, she manages to outlive a monumental odyssey across the Kalahari to the Place of All Life, a San sanctuary, where she gives birth to her bastard son and, incidentally, stumbles onto a diamond mine which is going to become the basis of her fortune. And this is not all. She returns to 'civilisation', not before she has gotten herself another bastard son by an Afrikaans outlaw adventurer, Lothar de la Rey, whom she refuses to accept; she erects a vast mining empire, the Courtney Mining and Finance, which she protects from such hazards as communist strikers, armed robbers and economic depression; she builds herself a house, Weltevreden, which becomes the public icon of her power and the fortress within whose walls the good-name of the Courtneys is preserved and the lineage perpetuated into posterity; has a life-long adulterous affair with a well-known British politician, Blaine Malcomess; she manages to destroy her enemies, mercilessly ruining Lothar's canning factory for she knows he is responsible for the death of the two San who aided her in the Kalahari; and becomes one of the most influential figures in South Africa, the tentacles of her power reaching business, politics, social life and the media.

“Not too bad for a wild girl’s first effort in a wild place!” (*Burning* 490) writes Wilbur Smith. Not too bad, I rejoin. A beautiful, sexy and eroticised Aphrodite, Centaine does not have to use the “sexual tricks to which women over the ages have been forced to resort” to get what she wants; she does not even have to play the feminist to get the respect from men that “thousands of other women [...] had been burning property, throwing themselves under racehorses, hunger-striking and enduring prison sentences to obtain;” Centaine achieves her ends by “adding logic, cogent arguments and force of character.” (*Burning* 244) She is furthermore endowed with characteristics that had been man’s alone: she is “extraordinarily plucky and intelligent,” (*Burning* 644) “determined and brave,” (*Sword* 221) “cunning and bold,” (*Sword* 99) “the shrewdest financial and political brain,” (*Rage* 51) able to control her empire through “pluck and determination - and ruthlessness.” (*Rage* 101) She is also a formidable character whose exploits are equated with those of men’s; as Bobby Clarke, a British officer, exclaims, “I have six sisters, but I’ve never known a girl like you. Matter of fact, I’ve known damned few chaps that could match you, either;” (*Burning* 209) a ‘truth’ which her son ratifies when he says, “What would I ever do without you. You are tougher and cleverer than any man I know.” (*Rage* 54) Indeed, her code name, Juno, fits her well; like the goddess, she is “powerful, dangerous, mercurial and unpredictable, but endlessly fascinating and infinitely desirable.” (*Sword* 144)

Let me insist on one of the defining traits of her personality: dangerous. Centaine is desirable, powerful, unpredictable, mercurial but, above all, dangerous for she can control both spaces that had traditionally been male-only and men who, in her hands, are turned into puppets she manipulates at will. For all her power, Aphrodite becomes Medusa, which as Kathleen Rowe explains, is “an evocative symbol [of evil woman] in contemporary culture,”³² incarnating the western myth of dangerous female sexuality. Smith does not hesitate to highlight her dangerous potential when he writes, “By God, I’d prefer to tickle an angry black mamba with a short stick than get in Centaine Courtney’s way;” (*Sword* 162) or “She is a hard woman. A woman

³² Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman. Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) 9.

without mercy. She will not hesitate to destroy anything or anybody who stands in her way;" (*Rage* 60) or when he asserts, "Centaine Courtney-Malcomess is the family dragon. She actually breathes fire and crunches up the bones of her victims." (*Fox* 81)

8.4.4. Domesticating Centaine: authorial strategies

Smith incorporates an apparently Politically Correct heroine into a genre commonsensically held to be masculine. Centaine usurps the role of the hero and, sanctioned to penetrate the male domain of adventure, becomes a fantasy figure that facilitates the politicised vision of the New Woman, a vocalisation of the feminist idea of the liberated woman who is equal to the male role. However, for all her danger to men, Smith keeps her under restraint and engages himself in a battle over masculine territory which eventually, and for all Centaine's power and centrality, he privileges for men. So while Smith carves our heroine into a totem of heroism, he turns himself into a hysterical and maniac surgeon who, scalpel tight in his hand, eviscerates and amputates, and plastic-surgery-like modifies, so that she will ultimately fit into the mould of acceptable femininity patriarchy favours. At one point in the narrative she is referred to as an "avenging angel." (*Sword* 118) But Smith finds the dichotomy avenger / angel difficult to sustain and basically asserts patriarchal ideology by disentangling the angel from the avenger, and favouring the angel over a defeated army of masculine-avenger capabilities. In order to do so he resorts to, at least, three different devices: preservation of and abrogation for the truly feminine core Centaine keeps underneath her manly armour; the systematic deprivileging of the areas in which Centaine succeeds over men; and the ultimate constraining operation, what I call 'surrogate genres' or the use of more befitting genre conventions that will engulf the heroine and eventually 'unrobe' her of the masculine paraphernalia she had necessitated in adventure.

First of all, therefore, Centaine is revealed as just a sheep in wolf's clothing. Beneath the masculine structures of agency and aggression she has appropriated; beneath her unrestrained mobility; beneath the breeches, men shirts and boots she is occasionally allowed to wear; she is only a woman, a motherly, weak and fragile

woman who can still sustain the imagining of dominant heroic masculinities. For all her glittering Amazon-like characterisation, Centaine is ultimately presented as an essentially passive female who is unable to cope with problems on her own. Heroic deeds are for men to perform and, consequently, she is constructed as weak, trembly, forlorn, crying and girlish every time something nasty occurs, giving men the opportunity to rise to the occasion and play their knightly roles of valiant rescuers of damsels in distress. Lothar, for instance, saves her from a man-eating lion; and Blaine, to mention another example, rescues her from a ferocious crocodile and saves her from bankruptcy by giving her secret information about the gold standard. In case we had any doubt about Centaine's essentially fragile core against which tough masculinity can be constructed, Smith makes her exclaim, "A girl always feels weak and giggly after Prince Charming saves her from a fire breathing dragon." (*Sword* 232) She is in this way returned to the role of the passive heroine who continually needs the assistance of Prince Valiant.

With regard to the deprivileging of the areas in which Centaine excels, Smith is categorical. Centaine is a smart business woman who has been able to erect, maintain, enlarge and control a financial empire of De-Beers proportions. But while Smith highlights Centaine's enterprising spirit, he, at the same time and throughout his narratives, deconstructs and debases the world of business, which, as I explain in chapter 10, he pictures as unreliable, tenuous, greedy and evil; a world in which intelligence and cunning alone can grant any person success but in which truly masculine characteristics such as brute force and instinctive blood-lust, which Smith values above all other qualities, come as surplus to requirements. Finally, Smith resorts to a surrogate genre, romance, to retrieve Centaine from the so-far dominant genre, adventure, and constrain her within women's proper scenario: the home and the family. Now, and as I have emphasised throughout my dissertation, no text is an unequivocal construct of a single genre; as Anne Cranny-Francis argues, "one can never not mix genres; texts almost inevitably carry traces of other genres."³³ And romance is often written into texts dominated by other genres for the purpose of confirming the hero's heterosexuality and providing him with an excuse for action or

³³ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, 206.

revenge. Currently, romance is even used to bring the readers' attention to the soft spots underneath the steely armour of the hero's action / adventurer persona, and to render him a more palatable, Politically Correct individual than his historical counterpart in a blatant attempt to respond to the demands of feminists and other anti-masculinist groups. Now, Smith has an altogether different objective in mind when he switches into a romantic discourse in the purest Mills and Boon's tradition. After elevating Centaine to the status of action heroine who moves confidently and successfully in the masculine locales of the wilderness and business, and after having rendered her independent from men, family and marriage and other such patriarchal institutions, he makes her fall in love with Blaine Malcomess, a married man.

Suddenly, and through the use of romance, Smith makes our interests move from Centaine's plans and plottings to keep her company alive in spite of the pressures operating against her, to whether the romantic couple will eventually get married after overcoming the obstacles that keep them apart. Interestingly, the romantic plot returns Centaine to the subservient position heroines traditionally play within the patriarchal structuring of heterosexuality. She becomes a vacuum, a void dedicated to being receptive to the hero, she craves for unity and identity through identification and union with the man; and she readily focuses on marriage as the ultimate site of happiness and fulfilment. At the same time, romance, more than softening the hero, becomes the perfect context where his power can be reinstated. In our western world, and as I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, we have witnessed a steady erosion of patriarchal authority. Smith, conscious of the continuing deprivileging of patriarchal authority within economic premises, resuscitates masculine power by delimiting his sphere of action within the violent world of action, adventure, jungles, wars, guerrilla operations, hunting grounds and politics. At the same time, he recreates his potency within one of patriarchy's basic loci of power, the family, over which he has absolute authority. So while romance indoctrinates Centaine into subservience, at the same time, it magnifies male dominance and ratifies the hero's role as head of the family.

Romance, therefore, deprives Centaine of her power and control, characteristics which, in passing, the hero appropriates. The reigns of power change

hands the moment Centaine and Blaine meet. While Centaine shakes, stares, cannot muster two intelligent words in a row, has her wits deserting her and stands before him “like a schoolgirl, blushing and gawking at him,” (*Sword* 149) he is introduced in such a way as to bring to the fore his stature and sway, which is translated into physical terms:

He was tall and lean, and he stood well over six feet. [...] He seemed to be balanced on the balls of his feet as though he could explode into movement at any moment. She took his hand. The skin was dry and warm, and she could feel the restrained strength of his fingers as they pressed hers gently. ‘He could crush my hand like an eggshell,’ she thought, and the idea gave her a delicious little chill of apprehension. (*Sword* 148-149)

Smith also highlights his sport achievements, military deeds and economic solvency. To further confirm Blaine’s superiority over Centaine, she is bankrupt at the beginning of their relationship, which serves Smith two complementary purposes: in the first place, it legitimates Centaine’s dependency; and, secondly, it gives Blaine the opportunity to save her from destitution and, thus, assert his dominance over her.

Smith does not stop here to further confirm Centaine’s subservient position within romance. In the first place, Centaine becomes “an empty aching place” (*Sword* 240) whose main objective in life seems to be possessed by the hero to the extent that she “[agrees] meekly” (*Sword* 196) to go forward with their passionate affair in spite of the fact that he is already married; becomes “limp in his arms” (*Sword* 195) when he kisses her; or yells pressing commands like, “I can’t wait,” “Oh please, Blaine - quickly come to me,” (*Sword* 236) to urge him to make love to her. Her desire to be in Blaine’s control is so strong that she even exclaims, “Look, Blaine, see how every flower turns its head to follow the sun as it moves across the sky. I am like one of them, and you are my sun, my love.” (*Sword* 287)

Secondly, Centaine is “cut off from the diachronic process of the material world;”³⁴ she is removed from the transcendent historical, political and economic events recounted in the narrative to be thrust into what Lynne Pearce defines as the

³⁴ Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey, “The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance,” *Romance Revisited*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey, 34.

“romantic chronotope: a spatio-temporal continuum which exists apart from the ‘historical’ lives of the characters, but into which all are liable to be swept into a black hole;”³⁵ an empty space in which nothing else matters apart from the love between the couple. This space absorbs women completely for it is within it that they find absolute happiness; for men, instead, it is only a respite, a temporary refuge where they can obtain the nurturing affection they need to replenish their strength so that they can go back to the public arena with renewed vigour. In the novel, this romantic chronotope appears for Centaine every time she is with Blaine, such as when they are stranded alone while travelling along the Okavango river and she exclaims, “Anything is possible here, even dragons and princes. This is never-never land. Santa Claus and the good fairy are waiting just around the next bend.” (*Sword* 232) Eventually, she gives material shape to their romantic chronotope in the form of the “perfect love nest” (*Sword* 411) of a house she decorates and furnishes and in which she waits in thrall for him while he is outside, in the public arena of politics where he spends most of his time.

Finally, Centaine is turned into a ‘wife’ in a contemporary rewriting of *The Taming of the Shrew*, her sexuality confined, via marriage, within the domestic. Centaine already enjoys playing the wife before they get married. She prepares his breakfast, kisses him good-bye in the morning when he goes to work and she does her toilette in front of him before they go to bed. In fact, she thrives on her wifely role and prides herself on her wifely virtues; she gloats, “I am more faithful than any wife. [...] More dutiful, more loving.” (*Sword* 413) After their marriage, she moves to his place, giving up Weltevreden to her son and his wife, and she is steadily made to vanish from the narrative. Although Smith assures us she is still a “formidable force” (*Fox* 122) after her marriage, she hands her chair in the company to her son, and the only things we see her organising are family celebrations, receptions and sports tournaments. However, she is perfectly happy in her ‘wifehood’ confirming, in this way, women’s utopian fantasies of harmony, community and integration within marriage which patriarchy relies on for its maintenance into posterity.

³⁵ Lynne Pearce, “Another Time, Another Place: The Chronotope of Romantic Love in Contemporary Feminist Fiction,” *Fatal Attractions*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker, 99.

All in all, adventure and action are and have always been masculine prerogatives and Smith, like other adventure writers before him, has to make sure they remain so. As happens in recent film productions in which heroines are granted a starring role, Smith allows Centaine to cross-dress as a man and experience adventure. He seemingly builds a liberal citadel of political tolerance in which women can give up their traditional angel-in-the-house role and hide their Linda Evans' face under a Joan Collins' mask. However, if male social structures are to be sanctioned; if the white man's virility is to be heightened, no woman can move too far from her enforced role of endless, available and selfless domesticity; and, of course, no woman can be allowed to beat men in their own terrain. Her role in adventure is to propitiate male quests and to heighten, by contrast, male's superiority. Consequently, no matter how emancipated and adventurous a woman may appear to be, adventure writers and film producers make sure they foreground it is just a brilliant disguise for, underneath the wolf's clothing, there is always a meek sheep; a Sleeping Beauty waiting for the life-giving kiss; the sexy nymph waiting to be startled by the satyr; the not-so-modern modern woman. We are not to be fooled by the apparently progressive discourses incorporated in Smith's adventure for, as Margaret Atwood puts it, "The truth about knights comes suddenly clear; the maidens were only an excuse. The dragon was the real business."³⁶

³⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Bodily Harm* (London: Cape, 1982) 211-211.