

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



M. Isabel Santaulària i Capdevila



**Chapter 9: Men behaving like men. Masculinity, reason and their problematic relationship with domesticity, sentimentality and femininity in Smith's Courtney saga**

**9.1. Men behaving 'badly': Smith's 'essential' men**

9.1.1. Challenging the 'domestic' man

As I have argued so far, masculinity is no longer considered a universal, monolithic concept which deserves no scrutiny at all as a social and historical experience. On the contrary, masculinity has become an object of critical analysis; its traditional parameters - and very particularly the equation of masculinity to aggressiveness, competitiveness, stiff-upper-lippery or lack of sentimentality - have been questioned and subject to deconstruction. Indeed, the impact of feminism, together with the recent developments in our western society, have led to systematic re-elaboration of the characteristics that formed men's traditional make-up. One of the changes that have taken place in our society, and that has most affected the standard views of masculinity, has been the destabilisation of the emotional-feminine / rational-masculine dichotomy. In the past, the split between reason and emotions was clear-cut. Men were supposed to repress their emotional side for "softness means weakness. It means that masculinity is in question."<sup>1</sup> At the moment, sentimentality in men, the profusion of soft spots in their solid armour, is no longer scorned at and, in fact, is something women supposedly expect in a man and men have come to accept, not always without reluctance. Male identity has been redefined through a reconciliation of values associated with the traditional myth of masculinity and more feminine principles. This redefinition of values has also affected the representational arts, which

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<sup>1</sup> Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity. Reason, Language and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 50.

teem with a proliferation of New Men who have incorporated feminine sentiments within their constitution or learnt to come to terms with their feminine side.

Indeed, man has been left with no option but to domesticate his habits or perish from the wounds inflicted by feminists' slings and arrows and by the latest trends in our society, regulated by a myriad of social, Politically Correct codes. As a result of this relentless process of domestication, men have become more 'civilised', but also more feminine. The traditional split between domestic and public space has been bridged and the bridges, in turn, have been burnt down, or so it seems, leaving man alone, and apparently defenceless, before a long road to systematic feminisation. Man has taken as his own values, attitudes, approaches and concerns that had been left in the hands of women in the past. New home-related responsibilities, from which he had fled before, have stifled his adventurous, reckless spirit. As in Disney's animated film version of the story *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle has penetrated the so-far-impregnable castle of the masculine self and subjected the 'hideous beast' to a systematic process of transformation. But the individual that has emerged from this civilising ritual, although far more palatable, is, nonetheless, less comfortable in his Politically Correct attire, forced as he has been to domesticate and feminise his codes of behaviour, mannerisms and habits, and dislodge the concept of masculinity he had previously assimilated. As a result, man has become more repressed, or so psychologists claim, and his instinctual, essential urges, developed and institutionalised throughout centuries of social evolution, latent but subjugated, hide beneath a feminine attire in an act of transvestism or emasculation.

The condition of many men, therefore, is traversed by tension, conflict and confusion, what I have in chapter 6 termed 'male hysteria' or 'the fear of losing control'. Men are still "half-shackled to the old beliefs and practices"<sup>2</sup> while trying to adapt to the demands of our present socio-political context, which has burdened men with a double-yoke. On the one hand, they have to learn to accommodate themselves within a social system that has institutionalised the demands of oppositional groups and brought in measures to rectify injustices, including formal legislation for equal

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<sup>2</sup> David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 85.

opportunity, the removal of discriminatory clauses and official bans on sexist or racist language and behaviour. On the other hand, they have to learn to live with the 'enemy within': men's feminine side that they had so far denied and repressed and the social conscience men have developed and which Robert D. Hare defines as the "pesky little voice that helps us resist temptation and feel guilty when we don't" or as "the internalised norms and rules of society [that] act as an 'inner policeman', regulating our behaviour."<sup>3</sup> All in all, the soaring motion that had characterised imperial expansion and its energetic, virile heroes has given way to an increasingly sinking motion. Men's essential sexuality is universally pitted and scarred, marked by absences where familiar landmarks of masculinity had once stood. This condition has left men lost amid uncertainties and blind allies at a time characterised by chaos and dispersion, a time when old assumptions are no longer valid, old ideologies turn rancid, and old borders are superseded. Not all men, however, have let themselves be sucked down into a pit of dark depression or have accepted the new roles they are expected to subsume. This agony or hysteria has activated men's survival instincts and led to consistent reaffirmation and rearticulation of man's essential, presumably genetically-inherited, attributes in an attempt to reinstate the masculinist / patriarchal idiom as it existed in old, imperial times.

Smith is a case in point. As I have argued before, his oeuvre in general and his Courtney saga in particular are a single totemic monument erected to celebrate masculinity. Smith provides men with a secure foothold that allows them to stay afloat amidst society's shivering sands. He reactivates the solidity of the masculine body by creating potent, finely muscled heroes at the service of patriarchal / masculinist values, whose regenerative potential enables them to outlive the attacks society directs against them. But he does more than that. He also furnishes men with a single, unproblematic code of behaviour unperturbed by the new attitudes towards equality in gender relations; or by the civilising constraints that force men to abide by the domestic laws of family love, mortgages and school fee payments, childcare, nine to

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<sup>3</sup> Philomena Mariani, "Law-and-Order Science," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 150.



five office jobs, and the orthodox sedentary pleasures of television-watching, Sunday-newspaper-reading, car-washing and lawn-mowing.

The manly code of behaviour Smith celebrates in his narratives is expressed in the following quotation from *The Sound of Thunder*:

There was a guileless simplicity in Sean's approach to life - in his mind any problem when met with direct action disintegrated.

If you became obsessed with a woman, you tumbled her. If that didn't produce the desired effect, then you married her.

If you wanted a piece of land or a horse or a house or a gold mine, then you paid your money and took it. If you hadn't got the money, you went out and found it.

If you liked a man, you drank with him, hunted with him, laughed together. If you disliked him, you either punched him in the head or subjected him to a ponderous sarcasm and mockery. Either way you left him in no doubt of your feelings.

When a son got out of hand you whaled the tripe out of him, then gave him an expensive present to demonstrate your affection. (*Thunder* 484)

The same code of behaviour remains intact throughout the saga as can, for instance, be appreciated in the following quotation from *Rage*, written in 1987, twenty-one years after the publication of *The Sound of Thunder*. In *Rage*, Smith's heroes are presented as:

Strong men, untroubled by unnecessary scruples, men who knew what they wanted and how to go about getting it [...] they were hard and unrelenting [...], prepared to destroy anything that stood in their way. (*Rage* 559)

These two quotations, in a nutshell, contain Smith's heroes' basic approach to life, which is offered as an unproblematic alternative to the nuances, intricacies and existentialist complexities of western man's life, saddled as it is by the burdensome bestowal of feminist and post-feminist, postcolonial, postmodern, and post-Freudian (to mention just a few) suspicions and mores. Smith seems to conceive the world as being formed by a series of clear-cut manichean oppositions. Not unlike the Romantics, he sees life as a continuous struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, civilisation and barbarism, heroes and villains, men and 'no-men'. For him, there is just one acceptable code of behaviour for men, which they have to abide by. Inability to stick to the rules that regulate such a code of behaviour inevitably leads to

disrepute, condemnation and scorn. Those unruly uglies who fail to fulfil Smith's masculinist expectations become the villains of the story and are eventually eliminated, sent to the guillotine. And yet, their presence is not gratuitous: they are the Other, the opposite, the negative that, apart from providing the source of narrative conflict necessary for the development of the plot, contain the unacceptable values that could be associated with and threaten masculinity. Villains highlight, by contrast, the heroes flawless, essentially virile, behavioural make-up. Once they have served their function in the narratives, they are dispensed with, without ever attempting an understanding of their natures or the dreams, desires or objectives that might have conditioned their behaviour. The same fate awaits the multiple examples of unmanly secondary characters introduced in the narratives. They are the cowards, the namby-pambies, the adjunct characters that, characterised by their lack of stoicism and heroism, set off the hardy manly virtues of the heroes they accompany and are systematically eschewed and dismissed once they have served their function.

Indeed, Smith provides male readers with what he conceives as a 'truly manly' code of behaviour to abide by, a lifeline to grasp in order to stay afloat in a society intent on 'home-training' men and keeping their supposedly deep-rooted manly instincts under restraint. Smith's intimation of what it means to be a real man and behave as such, therefore, is what I proceed to analyse in this chapter, the essential characteristics and attitudes that define 'real men' as Smith conceives them in the narratives and which enable them to gain and occupy a particular space where they can behave 'like men' and display all sorts of gross behavioural mannerisms, macho poses, and patriarchal attitudes that have so far been sanctioned as 'essentially male' but which are now in the process of being domesticated or eradicated. At the same time, I focus on how Smith progressively incorporates an anti-masculinist backlash, translated into a profusion of soft spots and weaknesses that perforate the apparently impenetrable armour in his heroes' constitutions, only to dismiss them as it damages his conception of 'true masculine behaviour'.

9.1.2. Coarseness and social imperatives

The behavioural markers of true manhood with which Smith endows his heroes are manifold. To start with, Smith's men are essentially and instinctively unmannerly, coarse and brutish. They lack the 'touch of finesse' or the 'gentlemanly patina' that years of social evolution have imposed upon men. This is not to imply that Smith's men are inadequate social performers, or that, as social beings, they cannot abide by the codes and rituals required to move about, interact and prosper in the social spaces Smith places them. Quite the opposite. Although Smith's heroes - with their finely muscled bodies - are fashioned to thrive in the wilderness, they are also endowed with a 'James-Bondian' *savoir-faire* that enables them to operate successfully in mundane centres of glamour such as the world of multinational business and corporate finance, political and ambassadorial circuits of influence and power, or as social guests / hosts in a multifarious array of parties and other social occasions. Blaine is a case in point. An influential politician "educated at St John's College Johannesburg and Oriel College Oxford," (*Sword* 154) he nonetheless won promotion and success by applying his 'inner' warrior capabilities during various World War I military campaigns. Blaine, for instance, nostalgically recollects his feats of courage when, seized by fighting madness, he went "out into no-man's land, alone with only a grenade in his hand, straight into the winking red eyes of [...] German Maxim guns." (*Sword* 298) Yet, Blaine keeps his 'warrior' core under restraint when operating in the 'civilised world'. Thus, he is as effective in a ballroom as he had been in France's war-torn scenarios. While hosting a reception at the Ink Palace, the administrative building in Windhoek where he has recently been appointed administrator, Blaine is given ample opportunity to show off his social skills. He is a great conversationalist, with an "educated and cultivated voice;" (*Sword* 148) when introduced to Centaine, he is stunned by her beauty and studies her "as openly and intently as she [does] him." (*Sword* 149) However, while she gawks and blushes and is distracted by the effect his overpowering presence has on her - to the extent that she has to rouse herself out of her stupor by telling herself, "Say something witty, something intelligent - he'll think you a clod." (*Sword* 149) - Blaine pursues his conversation easily. He is also a "marvellous dancer;" (*Sword* 150) he takes Centaine "on one spinning whirling circuit

of the floor” and begins “a complicated series of dips and counter turns,” which she follows without conscious effort, “seeming to skim the ground, yet totally under his control, responding to his every whim.” (*Sword* 150) A successful performance, indeed; when the music ends “the other dancers [form] a ring around them and [applaud].” (*Sword* 150) Blaine also appears equally at ease as a guest at Centaine’s abode: he accepts Centaine’s invitation to carve the roast and displays his knowledge of current South African affairs by talking about the *Ossewa Brandwag* and the *Afrikaner Broederbond* with Centaine. Blaine is also presented as a *connoisseur* of fashion. As he waits for Centaine to finish her toilette in front of him, he sprawls in one of the armchairs, “already in his dinner jacket.” They are dressing up to attend a boxing match and Centaine is not sure whether they are properly dressed; she enquires, “Aren’t we terribly overdressed?” He is ready to contribute with the following fashion-statement, “I assure you that black tie is *de rigueur*.” (*Sword* 425)

Shasa is an outstanding social performer as well as a famous socialite. Although, like Blaine, he has an unrestrained warrior core that emerges, for instance, when he fights with Manfred and is elated at the sight of Manfred’s blood, which “[evokes] a primeval response deep within him,” (*Sword* 25) he is equally endowed to succeed in the social spaces where Smith places him in the narratives. When, as an adolescent, he joins his mother as a host at one of her parties, he “[offers] a beautiful but urbane face to his elders, deferring attentively to them with the old-fashioned manners drummed into him by his mother and his school.” (*Sword* 290) When introduced to Centaine’s subordinates on the H’ani mine, he conducts himself “with just the correct amount of deference for their age, [shows] no discomfort when Abraham [Centaine’s faithful legal adviser] over-effusively embraces him and then [returns] Twentyman-Jones’s [Centaine’s mine prospector] greeting with equal solemnity.” (*Sword* 60) He also pursues his political career, appearing tall and debonair, smiling charmingly and sincerely, even when addressing a crowd of angered, British-hating, Afrikaner Nationalist supporters. (*Sword* 608-610) He takes up his parental responsibilities - he dotes on his children and is capable of risking “the possible investment of something over ten million pounds in the development of [his] company’s options on the new Orange Free Sate gold-fields,” (*Rage* 13) in order to

attend his eldest son's rugby match. He manages to win the sympathy of Manfred's (Shasa's 'rival-in-politics') family with his easy manners and natural charm. (*Rage* 113) He contrives to survive political eclipse after a "serious miscalculation" as a result of which he is withdrawn from the centres of power in South Africa and removed to the South African embassy in London; using his "gifts and natural abilities, his shrewd business acumen, his presence and good looks, his charms and powers of persuasion," he manages to "deflect from his homeland the building wrath and contempt of the world" and is rewarded with the job of Chairman of Armscor - "the biggest industrial undertaking that had ever existed on the African continent" - on his return home. (*Fox* 20) Also, Shasa is described as a perfect host. Every winter, for instance, at the commencement of the hunting season, Shasa invites a party to Dragon's Fountain, the family's sixty-thousand-acre sheep-ranch in the Karoo, to join the annual springbok cull. When he entertains his guests during the evening, he displays his natural charm again; has "three of the prettiest wives grouped around him, giggling at his wit;" and, with Bella, his daughter, at his side, he becomes "the centre of the elegant little gathering." (*Fox* 282)

Like Blaine and Shasa before them, and to mention just two more examples, Garrick II and Hal Courtney are outstanding social performers, able to keep their overpowering, brutally masculine, rough ways under surveillance and to play by the rules dictated by different social circumstances. Garrick II, as I have explained before, manages to turn himself into a muscular Courtney icon able to fight and defeat even his Rambo-like elder brother, Sean II. (*Fox* 373-375) But when he takes his wife-to-be, Holly, on their first date, he can also behave 'adequately'. He discusses the wine list with the *maitre* with aplomb; he is a great conversationalist and discusses the Sharpeville crisis "and its implications, social and economic" so that Holly is "amazed at the depth of his political insight," and when they dance, he is "agile and light on his feet with an excellent sense of timing." (*Rage* 528)

Hal is introduced as a wealthy commoner and land-owner turned adventurer and privateer in seventeenth-century England and Africa in *Monsoon*. Yet, Hal is not overwhelmed when summoned to the elegant centres of power in London. He is, for

instance, invited by Nicholas Childs - the chairman of the governors of the English East India Company - to have supper at Bombay House with him and Oswald Hyde - the Chancellor of His Majesty King William III. Hal is ushered into Bombay House by a *major-domo* who leads him "on a march through a succession of grand rooms, hung with mirrors and huge oil paintings of ships, battles and exotic landscapes, and lit by forests of candles in crystal chandeliers and gilt oil lamps held aloft by statues of nymphs and blackamoors;" he is then thrust into "a small but richly decorated cabinet" with "panelled walls [...] hung with tapestries from Arabia and the Indies" and a large table "piled high with silver chafing dishes and gilt tureens." (*Monsoon* 32) The rooms are impressive, but Hal is not flustered or distracted by them. As soon as they are settled for supper, the three men begin to discuss the question of the Irish war, how "the deposed King James had sailed to Ireland from France to raise an army among his Catholic supporters there, and was attacking the forces loyal to King William." Hal does not feel excluded from the conversation for, "[e]ven though he [lives] in the country," he keeps "himself well informed on the events of the day" and "is able to follow the weighty twists and turns of the discussion and even to make his own noteworthy contributions." (*Monsoon* 33)

A 'man of the world', Hal is equally at ease when he is invited to the Court at St James Palace. The building is a "fantasy toy-soldier castle with battlements and towers;" when Hal's carriage pulls up, two footmen come forward to open the carriage door and he is led by Lord Hyde's secretary through the palace gates and the courtyard. There are pikemen in steel helmets and half-armor at the entrance to the stairway leading up to the Long Gallery. The footman announces him and the guards salute with a flourish of pikes as Hal files up the staircase behind the Spanish ambassador and his entourage and he finds himself in a gallery "crowded with a splendid assembly of gentlemen, and such a collection of uniforms, medals, stars, plumed hats and periwigs," that Hal feels "like a country bumpkin" and is left "at a loss as to what he should do next." (*Monsoon* 50) Yet, he composes himself for "he [has] no call to feel out of place" and is dressed in "the new burgundy-coloured velvet suit that he had had tailored for the occasion;" his shoe buckles are "solid silver;" he wears the "massive gold chain" with the "golden lion of England with ruby eyes,

holding in its paws the globe of the world with diamond stars of the heavens,” which signals his belonging to the “order of a Nautonnier Knight of the Order of St George and the Holy Grail” and which “[matches] in splendour any of the myriad other orders and medals that [glitter] down the length of the gallery.” (*Monsoon* 50-51) He is soon joined by Hyde and the men in the room “[note] him as someone of importance simply because he [is] the protégé of the Chancellor.” (*Monsoon* 51) He is then introduced to the King - described as a short man with a hunch-back. Hal behaves admirably, bows low before the King, and assures him of his devotion. The King, meanwhile, assesses Hal with amusement and recognition of his worthy deeds and is pleased with Hal’s ability to address him in his own language, Dutch. Again, a perfect performance. As happened with Blaine after his performance at the ball and the applause it received, Hal is similarly praised for his successful introduction before the King. Hyde appreciatively states, “That was good. The King has a remarkable memory. He won’t forget you when the time comes to claim these rewards of which we spoke [Hal has been promised a barony if he succeeds in one of his missions].” (*Monsoon* 52)

### 9.1.3. Drinking habits

However, and in spite of their ability to play by the rules dictated by polite society and to succeed in different areas of social interaction, Smith’s men retain an untamed core which they are allowed to display in the narratives as a way of asserting their wild identity. Thus they indulge in a series of brutish, unmannerly (yet popularly regarded as manly) ‘rites’ that enable them to give proof of their manly essence, the ‘masculine imprint’ or ‘genetic code’ that sets them apart from ‘milder forms of humanity’ (i.e. both women and ‘lesser men’ who have internalised codes of behaviour regarded as feminine but have lost their ‘masculine essence’ and have become ‘wretched’ human beings as a result).<sup>4</sup> One of such central forms of

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<sup>4</sup> These soft, unhappy men are described in the following terms by Andrew Samuels:

Analysts are beginning to meet a new kind of man. He is a loving and attentive father to his children, sensible and committed marital partner, concerned with world peace and the state of the environment; he may be a vegetarian. Often he will announce himself as a feminist. He is, in fact, a wholly laudable person. But he is not happy. [...] This man [is a] casualty of a basically positive and fruitful shift in consciousness [and] will stay a mother’s boy. He is a mother’s boy because he is doing what he does to please Woman.

instinctive and brutish masculine activity is drinking alcoholic beverages. For some bizarre reason,<sup>5</sup> the ability to swallow great quantities of alcohol is 'natural' in men, a true emblem of masculinity. Consequently, Smith makes sure alcohol remains one of the heroes' basic 'survival kits' in his narratives, always readily at hand when comfortable and relaxed at home or when content and with other men. Thus, Blaine "[holds] a whisky and soda in his hand" (*Sword* 425) when he is at ease at home. Shasa goes through a phase of 'alcoholic' abstinence and becomes a teetotaler for a while - which prompts Blaine to exclaim, "How are the mighty fallen." (*Sword* 560) Yet, he comes 'back to normal' after a while. He makes sure, for instance, that proper red wine is served at the welcome dinner for Harold Macmillan (the British Prime Minister) held at Groote Schuur (the official residence of the South African Prime Minister) by "making a gift of his own *cru* for the banquet," which he judges "the equal of all but the very best Bordeaux." (*Rage* 367) Or he accepts a nightcap and cigar that Bella fixes for him after entertaining some guests at Highveld (his ambassadorial residence in London) and having "done full justice to the claret and the port" with his guests - which, of course, does not show for "his single eye [is] still clear and bright" after all those drinks. (*Fox* 82) Hal, on the other hand, drinks in company of Childs and Hyde as they discuss politics around the dinner table, chooses hock instead of Madeira to go with his food for he knows "from past experience that it [is] to be a long evening, and that the Madeira [is] deceptively sweet but powerful," (*Monsoon* 33) and proceeds to drink the good red claret that replaces the hock, which he "[sips] sparingly [...] for the conversation is fascinating" and does not want to be numbed by the wine. (*Monsoon* 34)

But Smith's heroes are not always so moderate in their consumption of alcohol. Improvident alcohol-drinking is in fact one of the major ritualistic ceremonies men perform when in group, giving them the opportunity to form masculine bonds and give free vent to their latent homosocial instincts, making permissible a personal

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Andrew Samuels, introduction, *The Father*, ed. Andrew Samuels (New York: New York University Press, 1986) 3.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Easthope provides a psychological explanation for men's 'drinking instincts'. He argues that drinking spirits provides men with the sort of oral pleasure that little boys derive from the maternal breast but which they have to give up when growing up for fear of incest, and they redirect towards other activities, such as drinking alcohol or kissing or sucking their lovers' breasts when making love. See: Anthony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 74-77.



intimacy between men otherwise frowned upon, as can be appreciated when Sean I engages in one of his showy displays of masculine comradeship with a Commandant and four junior officers in Nova Sofala, a Portuguese fort in Moçambique: they sample the Commandant's wines; drink toasts to Queen Victoria and her family, to the King of Portugal and his family, to absent friends and to each other; they embrace and dance the Dashing White Sergeant jig on a table together; and swear mutual oaths of friendship and perpetual loyalty in a blatant proclamation-of-masculinity ceremony. (*Lion* 499-500)

Over-consumption of alcohol is not only used at moments of contentment or comfort, but comes as a very manly medicine to the rescue of depressed, desperate or frightened men, helping them to withstand and combat unmanly states of intense, and unacceptable vulnerability, such as when Sean I drowns in alcohol the sorrow he feels when Ruth abandons him at the beginning of their relationship; or when he desperately and steadily drinks two full bottles of brandy to "quieten the violent struggles of his brain" (*Thunder* 451) caused by his bankruptcy after losing his wattle plantation. Michael I also resorts to booze to help him survive battle fatigue and shell shock during World War I, often becoming "slightly pissed" (*Burning* 52) and feeling damn "bloody" after being "severely attacked by a bottle of cognac." (*Burning* 55) Shasa, to mention another example, takes refuge in the cabin the Courtneys keep at Smitswinkel Bay and gives free vent to the sorrow he feels after having been injured and maimed (he loses an eye) during the World War II Abyssinian campaign, by indulging in self-pity and drinking huge quantities of alcohol. When Blaine eventually visits him, he finds him asleep, with "[an] almost empty bottle of whisky and a tumbler [standing] on the sandy floor within reach of Shasa's dangling arm." (*Sword* 540) Once he is stirred from sleep by Blaine, the first thing Shasa does is to pour what remains of the whisky into the glass, for "[his] mouth tastes like a polecat pissed in it," (*Sword* 541) and raises the glass to his lips, swishes the whisky through his teeth, then he swallows and shudders as "the raw spirit [goes] down his throat and [exhales] the fumes noisily." (*Sword* 542)

Similarly, Sean II overcomes a severe bout of depression by swallowing alcohol profusely. When he finds out his business is in bankruptcy, that he is about to lose his safari concession and that Shadrach, one of his friends and an employee at the safari concession, is about to have his leg amputated, he goes to his office, takes a glass and a half-empty bottle of Chivas, sags onto the sofa and pours himself a jolt of whisky. When the whisky is gone, he moves to the Monomatapa Hotel, chooses a blond teutonic Valkyrie tourist in full *Out of Africa* costume, and lays her down, not before ordering a bottle of Mumm from the room service, which they drink in bed. (*Die* 75) And Tom, to mention one last example, fights off the anger he feels at his brother, Black Billy's, brutal ill-treatment of his wife, Alice, by joining his men in a tavern, drinking the tavern's surplus of ale and bedding a prostitute. Much later, Aboli prevents him from accepting a challenge to arms from another over-refreshed seaman, and drags him out of the tavern, helps him up onto his horse, and leads him swaying in the saddle, singing lustily, to High Weald. His behaviour is given full approval by his men. Although his eyes are bloodshot the following morning, he is as capable as ever, and Aboli shakes his head in mock wonder and exclaims, "The joy and folly of youth." (*Monsoon* 349-350)

#### 9.1.4. 'Outside the social' and men with other men

When not performing on social occasions, men display other coarse behavioural traits, such as, for instance, bad table-manners: heroes do not eat; characterised by a great appetite, they devour food; stuff their mouths; have the manners of a pig at the table swallowing without chewing or talking with their mouths full; and, of course, belch noisily after a good meal while women smile indulgently taking men's belches as appreciative approval of their culinary skills. And these are just some of the niceties that men display for us to appreciate their manliness, to which we could add: cigar- / cheroot-smoking, chewing tobacco, spitting, grinning (men never smile, they grin), behaving noisily, talking shop or playing poker. Although men moderate their behaviour when moving around glamorous scenarios such as ballrooms, public gatherings or birthday parties, Smith ensures readers never forget that instinctive coarseness lies latent inside them. To do so, Smith resorts to two

basic strategies. In the first place, he often removes his heroes from 'civilised' centres and places them in locations in which there is no necessity for them to abide by the rules and regulations that dictate their interaction with others. These locations where men can display their 'coarse' core are the following: the distant world of pirate adventure and seafaring life on ships where men live packed into reduced spaces with no washing or toilet facilities and where men have to become "inured to [...] discomfort," (*Birds* 1) sleep on the deck in the open air or eat soup and hard biscuits 'seasoned' with weevils; (*Birds* 23) the present-day depopulated jungles where men are left to their own devices for survival, eating 'niceties' such as caterpillars (*Die* 470) or lizard (*Die* 473) when no wild game is available; the psychological space of manly dark depression resulting from strenuous, traumatising experiences, so men can indulge in 'animalistic' regression and display the instinctual coarseness that society keeps on restraint by not shaving or washing, drinking or spluttering rude language; (see *Sword* 542) and the masculine spaces such as seedy taverns where men can liberate the excesses of testosterone that respectable society only approves of if displayed in the form of light sweat resulting from sport or strenuous work sessions; one of such taverns is described in the following terms in *Monsoon*:

The trapsroom of the tavern was noisy and crowded with lobstermen and fishermen, and the crews of the Royal Navy's men-o'-war. The air was thick and blue with tobacco smoke. Tom ordered jugs of ale for his lads, and he and Aboli retired to a corner where they could watch the room and the door. Jim Smiley and one or two of the others started a boisterous conversation with a trio of women in the far corner, and within minutes they slipped away in couples. (*Monsoon* 408-409)

Another is described in *The Sound of Thunder* as a place full of "the smell of snowdust, liquor, tobacco smoke and men. It was a place of men. A place of rough voices and laughter, of crude humour and companionship." (*Thunder* 501)

And secondly, Smith allows his men to bond with other men without the surveillance of restraining social agents - conspicuously women - so men can give free vent to their brutish manners and enjoy the liberating freedom of sharing the masculine behavioural rites that only other similar men can appreciate and enjoy. When in a group, therefore, men become a noisy, boisterous bunch of chain-smokers,

heavy-drinkers, tobacco-spitters, patriotic-songs-singers, poker-players, and 'politics-talkers'. They fill each and every room they are in with smoke, cigarette butts, empty glasses and uproar, and turn even the most unusual place, such as a sick room, into a saloon:

Then the room began to fill in earnest: the rest of the crowd from the Exchange arrived, someone had brought a case of champagne, a poker game started in one corner and a political meeting in another. [...]

'All right, you two - stop that. If you want to fight go outside - this is a sick room.'

'This bottle's empty - break open a new one, Duff.'

Sean lost another hundred to Duff and then a little after five Candy came in. She was horrified. 'Out, all of you, out!'

The room emptied as quickly as it had filled and Candy wandered around picking up cigar butts and empty glasses.

'The vandals! Someone's burnt a hole in the carpet and look at this - champagne split all over the table.' (*Lion* 318-319)

If present at all when men interrelate with other men in wild, uncivilised scenarios, women are both excluded from and/or unable to understand the bonds of companionship that draw men together and the codes and signals, language or attitudes men share so naturally. Claudia, for instance, is flabbergasted when listening to the patronising tone Sean II uses when addressing her father, Riccardo, and the coarse language they indulge in. As they talk into the night at Sean II's hunting concession, preparing the following day's schedule, Sean II refers to a lioness as an "old whore" and orders Riccardo not to shoot her if there is no good reason to do so, otherwise, Sean II asserts, "I'll shoot you." After this exchange, they "[grin] at each other in the half light." Claudia listens to them "with disbelief" and realises the two of them are enjoying themselves, that "[t]hese two crazy oafs [are] actually having fun." (*Die* 17) The following night, Sean II and Riccardo resume their bonding session. The two men, "as on every other evening," begin to talk about "rifles and hunting and the killing of wild animals" over "their cognac and cigars." Claudia cannot possibly join in. To her, "[t]he gun talk [is] mostly unintelligible gibberish." (*Die* 26)

## 9.1.5. Wisecracking and tough-talking

Another behavioural characteristic Smith's men share is their use of wisecracking and tough-talking. Language, Victor Seidler points out, "does not constitute individuality in the way structuralism has assumed."<sup>6</sup> The Kantian dictum that language is a set of categories - or a framework - that we place over the social world to make sense of it and which we can use to our own advantage to express our individual consciousness as different from that of other people has long been dismissed. Ever since Marxist scholars began to delve into the relationship language has with power and subordination, language has progressively emerged as discourse, as "a vehicle whereby people are forced to believe ideas which are not true or in their interests."<sup>7</sup> Thus, for instance, language has been seen as contributing to the creation of an apparatus of oppression whereby women and other 'lesser beings' are consigned to a less powerful position, even when they are, in fact, in a position equally as powerful as powerful white men.<sup>8</sup> These forms of abusive and oppressive language can, in fact, be seen as a false sense of consciousness for while, on the one hand, they allow men to assume a position of authority over 'lesser humans', on the other it opens up a space where struggle can be acted out. As Foucault points out, "as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle."<sup>9</sup> Yet, Smith does not allow his masculinist discourse to be challenged in his narratives. As Seidler explains, "men grow up within the dominant white heterosexual masculinities which have been framed within modernity to use language as a means for self-protection."<sup>10</sup> From early in childhood, Seidler goes on, men learn to be careful with what they say because it can be easily used against them within the competitive terms that so often rule white boys' relationships with each other, with females and with coloureds. Within the competitive relationships that govern men's

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<sup>6</sup> Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity*, 134.

<sup>7</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London and New York; Routledge, 1997) 42.

<sup>8</sup> The use of words such as 'weather-girl' to refer to a female weather forecaster, for example, contributes to the subordination of women by failing to give women an adult status and using the term normally assigned to a child.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *Untying the Text. A Poststructuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: RKP, 1981) 52-53.

<sup>10</sup> Victor J. Seidler, *Man Enough. Embodying Masculinities* (London: Sage. 1997) 135.

lives, therefore, men learn to use language as a weapon or to treat language instrumentally as a way of presenting themselves in acceptable ways to the others. Smith's men do not depart from this pattern. They systematically resort to sexist and obviously racist wisecracking and tough-talking in what Scott Christianson calls "an exercise of power,"<sup>11</sup> both as a way to give their assent to a masculinist / racist status quo that systematically constructs women and coloured men as inferior and white powerful men as superior and in control; and as a "mode of address, a style of self-presentation, and an affirmation of [...] manliness."<sup>12</sup> Smith's men, thus, make use of wise, apparently coarse, maxim-like remarks and threats of violence that prove their intelligence, toughness and their control over lesser beings, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of the masculinist discourse of oppression that so characterises our western world.

Four examples will illustrate the point. Sean II both displays his superior strength and assumes control over Claudia by resorting to wisecracking; when Claudia interrupts Sean II's chase for a dangerous lioness - Snarly Sue - by saying, "If I can't pee right now, I'm going to burst," Sean II responds, "We could always point you at Snarly Sue like a fire-extinguisher and wash her away." (*Die* 23) Riccardo immediately shows his approval of Sean II's wit by letting out a delighted guffaw. Claudia, meanwhile, is left resentful, unable to demonstrate against "the total humiliation she [has] suffered." (*Die* 23) Sean II also makes use of tough-talking (backed up by the promise of violence) to assume a superior pose over his black subordinates. When Matatu, his Ndorobo assistant, sneaks up on Sean II as he tries to escape unnoticed from a Frelimo patrol, Matatu grins merrily, "You are getting old, my *Bwana*. I could have stolen your socks and boots without you knowing." Sean II does not allow Matatu to keep the upper hand for long and counter-attacks, "And I could have shot your brown backside full of holes." (*Die* 289) Lesson well learnt; tough-talking serves its purpose. After Sean II's remark, Matatu nods and "his smile [slips]." (*Die* 289) Gaining authority over and the sympathies of a bunch of rough

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<sup>11</sup> Scott Christianson, "Talkin' Trash and Kickin' Butt. Sue Grafton's Hard-Boiled Feminism," *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, ed. Glenwood Irons (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1995) 130.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime. Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 139.

seamen may not have been an easy task for the young, pretty son of the boat's captain. Yet, Hal knows how to go about it by using coarse wisecracking to give proof of his wit and to prove he is 'one of the guys' for he has the same sort of tough humour as his men. When one of the men comes to relieve Hal at the lookout, Hal tells him, "Watch for the red flag - it'll mean they have the chase in sight." Offended by Hal's piece of advice and instruction, the sailor resentfully tells him, "You'll be teaching me to fart next." Hal quickly grins at him, "God's truth, but you need no teaching, Master Simon. I've heard you at the bucket in the heads. I'd rather face a Dutch broadside. You nigh crack every timber in the hull." (*Birds* 7-8) Resentment ends. The sailor is mollified, lets out an "explosive guffaw" and amiably punches Hal's shoulder and tells him, "Down with you, lad, before I teach you how to fly like an albatross." (*Birds* 8)

Finally, another example of the heroes' masculinist use of language to demonstrate their power occurs when Smith sends Shasa to pre-World War II Germany, conspicuously to participate in the 1936 Olympics, but importantly to show the racist climate pervasive among Nazi soldiers and give Shasa the opportunity to brandish his lack of sympathy for the cause of racism. Shasa is made to travel with his Jewish friend, David Abrahams, who is immediately singled out by a group of Nazi storm troopers as a victim for their scorn. Again, Shasa resorts to tough wisecracking to show his moral superiority and to challenge the storm troopers to fight. These, in turn, are presented as clods, unable to understand Shasa's witty comments. When a sergeant accuses David of being a Jew, Shasa retorts, "He isn't a Jew at all, he's a Zulu." The sergeant looks puzzled and inquires, "How's that possible? [...] Zulus are black." Shasa follows, "Wrong again, old chap. Zulus are born white. They only go black when they've been left out in the sun. We've always kept this one in the shade." (*Sword* 475) The sergeant stares in disbelief, unable to make out whether Shasa is telling him a lie. Shasa does not stop here. He then proceeds to prove it is Shasa himself who's the Jew and goes on to convince the sergeant he is privy to all the age-old secrets of Judaism by delivering the following spiel about what Jews do with that "little piece the rabbi snips off the end of us:"

We pack them in salt, like kippers, and send them off to Jerusalem. There in the sacred grave on the Mount of Olives on the day of the Passover, the chief rabbi

plants them in rows and makes a magic sign over them and a miracle takes place - a miracle! They begin to grow. [...] Higher and higher they grow. [...] When they have grown into really big thick schmucks, we send them to Berlin where they join the Nazi storm troopers. [...] And they teach them to say [...] *Heil* - what is that fellow's name again? (*Sword* 476)

This time, banter and wit are not acknowledged with any sort of delighted or explosive guffaw; the insult sinks home and is taken for what it is. Shasa has demonstrated his superiority and his courage and the German troopers retaliate in the only possible form left. Being so 'stupid', their response is physical; Shasa is overpowered and badly beaten. But even this unfortunate incident works to his favour. Wisecracking serves Shasa literally right. On his return to South Africa, he is invited to speak at a luncheon of the Friends of Zion, which is good for his political career for, as Blaine points out to Centaine, "How many Jewish voters do you suppose there are on the rolls?" (*Sword* 479)

## **9.2. Control over emotions: the 'rational' man**

### **9.2.1. Reason, civilisation and masculinity**

Another behavioural marker of true manhood Smith uses for the characterisation of his heroes, and which conditions their conduct, attitudes and their relationship with others in the novels, is their determination never to allow emotions to surface, take control over their reason and expose their vulnerability to the world. Men have traditionally taken control over public and private spaces alike, and endeavoured to silence the voices of others (the social groups over which they exert their power and control) by providing a rationale to support the superior position men have assumed in the social construct. Ever since the Age of Reason in the seventeenth century, reason has been the 'pet word' that has supplied such a rationale. It was in that period that humanity began to be defined and power relations began to be established in terms of possession or lack of reason. White men presented themselves as rational and reasonable, in possession of science and progress, so defining others (namely children, women, people of other races, and animals) and their experiences by



default, that is, as lacking reason and being closer to nature. As Victor J. Seidler has argued, this belief in reason and progress as masculine domains has structured our philosophical traditions since Descartes, who legitimised reason as the only source of valid knowledge, and has been given an ethical dimension by Kant, who crucially established reason as an independent faculty which is separate from emotions, feelings and desires (by no means genuine sources of knowledge!), and who identified morality with impartiality and reasonable behaviour. By equating the reasonable to the moral, Kant derogated the personal as the subjective and lacking morality. From that point onwards, desires and feelings were experienced as threats to the self-control men had to sustain as moral beings, perpetuating and validating the Christian tradition that proclaimed humans cannot trust instinctual feelings and emotions, which we have to obliterate for they are part of a beastly nature that we have to learn to disregard.

These identifications have become the “cornerstones of what we have inherited as ‘the modern world’.”<sup>13</sup> The very notion of civilisation was and has remained identified with reason, and any questioning of the place of reason in our lives is tantamount to a challenge to the basic values of civilisation. This compulsive commitment to reason has been less than positive. It cannot be denied that reason has been fundamental for scientific progress and the advance of civilisation.<sup>14</sup> However, it is also to blame for the ills and evils of this selfsame civilisation: it has been used to legitimise the imperialist and colonialist practices of Europeans and other world powers; it also explains the crimes and atrocities committed against other humans regarded as less than human; and is fundamental to our understanding of the traditional view of masculinity. Historically and socially constructed as the bearers of

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<sup>13</sup> Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> As Thomas Docherty explains, the Enlightenment and its belief in reason was fundamental for the development of civilisation:

The Enlightenment aimed at human emancipation from myth, superstition and enthralled enchantment to mysterious powers and forces of nature through the progressive operation of a critical reason. [...] The Enlightenment can be summed up in two words: criticism and power [...]: criticism would become creative precisely for its capacity for empowering the individual and enabling her or his freedom. In Thomas Docherty, “Postmodernism: An Introduction,” *Postmodernism. A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 5.

There is, certainly, an enormous amount of good, emancipatory thinking and practice associated with modernity, progress, civilisation and reason, and the development of history over the last two hundred years has not only been an inexorable progress towards evil.

reason and self-control, men have grown up to disregard, marginalise or denigrate significant aspects of their experience: their emotional side; their feelings, emotions, intuitions and fantasies; their vulnerability, fears and weaknesses.

Although this identification of masculinity with reason, together with the consequent conception of men as superior to other beings, has been and is being challenged both in theory and in practice, it remains firmly ingrained in man's psyche. It is still regarded, at least by some, as a historical, social and genetic given, and, consequently, a prescriptive practice and performative model men have to abide by if they do not want to lose self-control, to become vulnerable, beastly or base, or to be considered unmanly, no-men. Wilbur Smith is very aware of the derogatory implications any false step may have, and, therefore, constrains his heroes to stick to his inherited conception of masculinity and to put into practice the behavioural prescriptions men have learnt to assimilate and which Seidler phrases in the following way:

As men we often learn to hold ourselves tight. We learn to maintain control in whatever situation we are in. We will not let things get to us, but choose to stay cool. This also means holding our bodies in a particular way - blowing out our chests and keeping our bums tight. This is what we take to be a masculine notion of strength. We have no sense of bigness in our feelings. [...] We assume that power is a clenched fist rather than an ability to experience a whole range of feelings and emotions.<sup>15</sup>

Smith heroes, therefore, are faithful to these preconceived assumptions: they constantly parade their reasonability and self-control and, thus, their manliness. They lack the components that could jeopardise their mastery and superiority, render them vulnerable or incapacitate them to be the spokesmen, example and precept of Smith's triumphalist celebration of masculinity.

#### 9.2.2. Smith's men and emotions: an exercise in self-control

Smith's men endeavour never to allow emotions to take control of them. The whole area of emotion and feeling is a minefield for them and, consequently, it is

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<sup>15</sup> Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity*, 148.

displaced, denied or repressed. Showing emotions would render them unmanly in terms of masculine discourse; it would show that there are soft spots in their iron shield, that they are vulnerable and penetrable; it would prove that they cannot be relied upon as 'real men'. Emotions are not part of their make-up, or rather, an acknowledgeable part of their make-up so heroes regard them with derision and disgust. Sean II, for instance, is ready to murder Miriam, a black Moçambiquean girl whom Sean II and his travel companions encounter as they are trying to escape from Renamo pursuers. Sean II knows Miriam would be an extra burden and would hinder their progress. Claudia, in turn, is besotted with the girl and wants to keep her with them so she disapproves of Sean II's intention to kill Miriam. Sean II, however, retorts, "This is a hard, cruel land. If we are to survive, we have to live by those standards. We can't afford the folly of compassion." (*Die* 477) He does not kill her in the end, but his condemnation of emotion in Africa's cruel and hard terrains is fully revealed. Dorian, on the other hand, does not let emotions overpower him when he finds himself compelled to kill one of his men, Jaub, who has his shoulder shattered by a blow from a Turk battle-axe. Jaub wants Dorian to kill him because he does not want to be left behind to face the Turks or to be a burden for Dorian. With "ice in his heart," Dorian does as requested, stands up and, without even looking back, runs back to his post to fight another rush of howling Turks. (*Monsoon* 547) In Smith's masculinist world, men prove their manliness by not letting their emotions destabilise their imperturbability and rationality, so "physical display[s] of affection" from lovers, friends or family are "rare" (*Sword* 16) and emotions are presented as a very "intimate thing" never to be acknowledged in public. (*Sword* 194)

In such a diegesis, therefore, when emotions appear, they are immediately dismissed and denigrated. When Sean I, for example, starts to experience worry over Anna I during one of their amorous encounters, he represses this feeling: Sean I is fishing, his hat down to shield his eyes from the sun, leaning on his elbows, his legs stretched out in front of him in a very masculine pose of passive indifference, while Anna I pesters him because she is getting bored. When she suddenly disappears from view, Sean I starts to be concerned about what she is doing, fearing something might have happened to her; but he does not look around, he does not move because "if he

looked around it would be a show of weakness.” (*Lion* 54) Showing concern for other beings is embarrassing enough, but affection is particularly embarrassing for it brings to the fore men’s dependency, their need to find comfort in other human beings and, therefore, problematises their individuality, self-reliance and self-resourcefulness. So when affection surfaces, it is ridiculed or rejected. Waite, for example, is embarrassed by the “strength of his feelings for his son.” (*Lion* 31) Sean I cannot put up with the affection Saul feels for him and when he receives a letter from Saul in which the deep gratitude he feels for Sean I is phrased, Sean I is embarrassed to such an extent as to scowl and skip each of these sentimental references in the letter when re-reading it. (*Thunder* 148) Lothar shakes his head “with annoyance and a quick sense of his own ridiculous sentimentality” when he experiences tender feelings towards Centaine. (*Burning* 553) Sir Francis loves his son, Hal, dearly but restrains himself from making an open display of what he feels. Even though he is proud of his son, he never embraces him or caresses him; on one occasion, Sir Francis is about “to caress Hal’s cheek,” but then contains himself, sighs and drops his hand. (*Birds* 83) Shasa makes an effort not to hug his son after a successful rugby match. (*Rage* 21) And Sean II admits to himself the depth of his affection for Claudia and his longing for her just to “[suppress] it firmly” for “there [is] no time nor opportunity [in his world] for such self-indulgence.” (*Die* 196) Similarly, when Claudia is held captive by China, Sean II contains himself from enquiring after her for it would be regarded as a “weakness.” (*Die* 217) Twentyman-Jones goes so far as to embrace Centaine in an outburst of sentimentality when he goes to fetch her after her escape from Lothar’s attack, but he is “immediately embarrassed” so he releases her and steps back “scowling to cover it.” (*Sword* 182) Displays of affection from others are equally embarrassing. Thus, Dorian finds himself sitting between Sarah and Agnes during dinner at High Weald; the girls “[giggle] and [whisper] to each other during the whole meal,” so Dorian is “left squirming with embarrassment and terror that the footmen waiting at the table [will] recount his agony in the servants’ quarters” and fears that “even the stable-boys, who [are] usually his bosom pals,” will then “despise him as a ninny.” (*Monsoon* 61) He is similarly so embarrassed by Yasmini’s obvious devotion and affection for him that he often “[makes] an excuse to leave the walls of the zenana simply to be away from her.” (*Monsoon* 436) And Tom, to mention one last example, “[flushes] with

humiliation” when Sarah, who hero-worships him, presents him with a paper rose as a bookmark in front of everybody while Dorian, standing behind Sarah’s back, holds “an imaginary baby in his arms and [rocks] it.” (*Monsoon* 95)

### 9.2.3. The problems around masculine rationality and stiff upper-lippery: narrative ‘conundrums’

Men’s self-control cannot be impaired and affected by base emotions. As David Buchbinder explains, “stiff upper-lippery is thus not the prerogative only of Englishmen.”<sup>16</sup> All men are supposed to be stoic and to hold emotions captive and secret, bearing any sort of misfortune or intense feeling with dignity and reserve. Smith’s heroes, therefore, remain cool and unperturbed by emotions and face the challenges of outrageous destiny with manly forbearance. This prerogative, however, brings Smith face to face with three different, although interrelated, conundrums. In the first place, his construction of tough, imperturbable heroes who keep emotions and sentimentality at bay clashes with our present-day concern with man’s feminine side and the emphasis society - in response to the demands of feminist and anti-patriarchal oppositional groups - places on the redefinition of both masculinity and patriarchy by incorporating what are regarded as feminine qualities. For some time now, tough and rational masculinity has been deprivileged and condemned as being, on the one hand, burdensome for men; and, on the other, functional to the creation of the ills affecting our civilisation. At the same time, there is a pervasive feeling in society that patriarchy as an institution is in dire need of transformation. The ‘Hamlet dilemma’ has become particularly conspicuous of late. The old king, read patriarchy, is sick; there is something very obviously rotten ‘in the state of Denmark’. As Tacey phrases it;

No matter what institution we put our nose into these days, there is always the faint or strong whiff of corruption in the corridors. The *putrefactio* really does mean that the patriarchy stinks. The father-king is rotting and being robbed of his glamour and former majesty by the revelation of atrocious and corrupt elements. His once-sublime rule is now being exposed as a tyrannical dictatorship, and being responded to with disgust and distaste.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> David J. Tacey, *Remaking Men*, 40.

There is, indeed, a need for a new leader who is alert to the injustices and corruption that abound and who endeavours to set them right; a new Hamlet who recognises the problem and his responsibility towards it. But this new Hamlet is no longer a man of action; a soldier who resorts to violence to redress injustices. The 'New' Hamlet favoured by society to affect a transformation to the system is that whom I have previously defined as the Sensitive New Age Guy: not torn by indecision, he is, nevertheless, soft - a feminine, hard-working family man who disapproves of violence and who takes up responsibilities at home so that women can be granted freedom to pursue their careers in the public space. He is the New Man, the sentimental hero, who can approach problems with sensitivity and compassion and who can be seen systematically replacing the tough, stoic, hero that has so far been privileged in the representational arts.

Secondly, Smith's formulation of unemotional masculinity clashes with his simultaneous construction of what Janice Radway terms "ideal romance," that is romance that women will regard as successful and, thus, enjoyable, and that will, therefore be read by them.<sup>18</sup> As I have previously highlighted when explaining how Smith bends Centaine into submission and eventually confines her into the realms of the domestic via her change of interests from career-development to the romantic pursuits of love and marriage, Smith does not only rely on adventure to bring his plots to their denouement. Romance features prominently in his narratives as strong, courageous heroes find ideal, intelligent, independent partners whom they marry and subsequently enclose in ideal home environments where they fulfil their roles of lovers of the heroes and mothers of their offspring. Centaine is not the only heroine who abandons her career to become a wife; Ruth, Storm, Claudia, Holly, Bella, Judith, Yasmini and Sarah follow the same path as they fall in love with wholesome Courtney heroes. Smith formulates such a pattern of submission in the form of a romantic plot in the purest Harlequin or Mills and Boon's tradition. In fact, he relies on this romantic plot in order to win the favour of a female readership that will read Smith's fiction primarily as a form of romantic gratification and escapism.

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<sup>18</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance. Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Now, in order to provide his readers with enjoyable romantic plots, Smith has to construct successful romantic heroes as well as truly masculine adventure heroes. As Janice Radway explains, women are still contained in a system that insists on their domestication and dependence on men:

In a culture that circumscribes female work within the domestic sphere by denying women full entry into the public realm, any woman who cannot attach herself to a member of the culture who is permitted to work runs the risk of poverty, if not outright annihilation.<sup>19</sup>

Although in the last two decades women have increasingly gained access to the arenas of production in the public space, not all women are economically independent from men and many more, even when economically independent, look upon 'wifehood' and 'motherhood' as acceptable, desirable options, and even as ways of overriding the risk of poverty if they become unemployed. Most romantic plots both feed off and rely on this premise and revolve around women finding an ideal partner who will protect and nurture them for life. However, not all fictional men fulfil women's ideal of a perfect 'nurturer'. Radway's ethnographic research proved that the romances that were successful among women offered a coherent prototype of ideal masculinity. The hero of the romantic fantasy is not all tough and hard. Although he is always characterised by spectacular masculinity, has a muscular physique, and almost everything about him is angular, hard and dark, the "terrorising effect of his exemplary masculinity is always tampered by the presence of a small feature that introduces an important element of softness into the overall picture."<sup>20</sup> For most women, "explicit preoccupation with male violence [is] nauseating."<sup>21</sup> Although the hero has to be courageous, for the "central vision [of romance fantasy] is one of total surrender where all danger has been expunged [by the hero], thus permitting the heroine to relinquish self-control,"<sup>22</sup> readers do not want to see their heroines left in the hands of brutal men. So if Smith wants the romantic plot to meet the demands of his (female) readership, he has to present heroines who are desired, needed and loved by - and

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<sup>19</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 139.

<sup>20</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 76.

<sup>22</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 97.

eventually married to - men who are strong and masculine, but equally capable of unusual tenderness, gentleness and concern for their pleasure.

Finally, Smith has to make sure that the hermetic conditioning of stoic masculinity does not render his heroes inhuman, flat stereotypes of imperturbable heroism in the tradition of chivalric romance, perpetuated through comics, adventure books for boys and some action and adventure films such as the *Rambo* or Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* series. Although the masculine prototypes favoured in these narratives help advance the "propagation of heroic manliness,"<sup>23</sup> they emerge, nonetheless, as wooden, flat heroes, lacking credibility as real human beings; becoming only muscular icons "in perfect readiness for whatever comes next, despite the wounds, burnmarks and other signs of mortification marring the muscle-rippled skin;"<sup>24</sup> trapped in the hermeneutics of a body suited only for violent and action plots such as those which Sylvester Stallone eloquently describes in the following terms: "It's chop-chop-chop-chop, chop-chop-chop-chop. It's almost like a diced salad. You have to keep it going."<sup>25</sup>

### 9.3. Integrating the New Man? Authorial strategies

In order to override these three problems, Smith develops two different strategies which allow him to preserve men's intrinsic rationality and stoicism, without jeopardising his heroes' complexity and credibility or risking the loss of a possible female readership craving for soft spots in men, while, at the same time, rendering his narratives in tune with the demands for sensitivity and compassion in men in our western world. In the first place, Smith progressively endows his heroes with what could be regarded as a Politically Correct approach to life, making them display New Man attitudes designed to show their depth and complexity, their capacity to show tenderness and compassion towards less fortunate beings, and their

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, *Men's Silences*, 175.

<sup>24</sup> Fred Pfeil, *White Guys*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> qtd. in Pat H. Broeske, "Rambo: First Blood. Part II," *Magill's Cinema Annual 1986*, ed. Frank N. Magill (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Salem Press, 1986) 323.



propensity to make good, faithful, nurturing husbands. These New-Man-capabilities which Smith's men display are the following:

### 9.3.1. The rights of the oppressed

Firstly, Smith's heroes have a soft spot for the rights of the oppressed, which is translated into the utter condemnation of slavery in the latest two instalments of the Courtney saga. In these two novels, the slave trade is presented as an ordinary practice, but one that is only approved of, sanctioned and undertaken by Boer colonialists, African tribesmen, Arabs and immoral men such as Lord Cumbrae, the Buzzard, one of Sir Francis's enemies. Although Lord Cumbrae's slave-trading activities are only mentioned in passing, the enormity of the implications of his trade are brought to our attention: how the slaves are shackled to the ringbolts in the deck of the long narrow slave hold in his boat; how the slaves cannot be released until the ship docks at the end of her voyage in the ports of the Orient; and how the creatures who succumb during the tropical passage of the Ocean of the Indies must lie rotting with the living in the confined spaces of the decks, the effluvium of decaying corpses mingling with the waste odour of the living giving his ship a distinctive stench. (*Birds* 5) Smith's heroes, unlike the Buzzard and other lesser men, object to the slave trade. Hal, for instance, fights for the freedom of the slaves Boers keep in the Cape Colony. When, captured by the Boers and held as a slave in the Cape's dungeons, Hal inquires about the identity of Althuda, another of the prisoners, the latter responds, "I am Althuda, and my crime is that I strive to be free and set other men free." Hal joins in, "Then we are brothers, Althuda, you and I and every man here. We all strive for freedom." (*Birds* 211) Tom similarly disapproves of slavery. Aboli, his faithful assistant and companion, we are told, had been captured as a slave in childhood and Tom had grown up with his descriptions of the heinous trade. Furthermore, Tom's father had accumulated first-hand knowledge of the trade, and he had helped instil in young Tom an abhorrence of its inhuman practices. Also, since he had rounded Good Hope, Tom had come into regular contact with slavers and their victims and he could not ignore the misery slavery inflicted:

[...] the wailing of children torn from their parents' arms, the weeping of bereaved mothers, and the dumb suffering in the dark eyes of young men and women deprived of their free, wild existence, chained like animals, abused in a language they did not understand, spreadeagled on the whipping-block, flogged with the vicious hippo-hide *kiboko* until their ribs showed white in the wounds. (*Monsoon* 498)

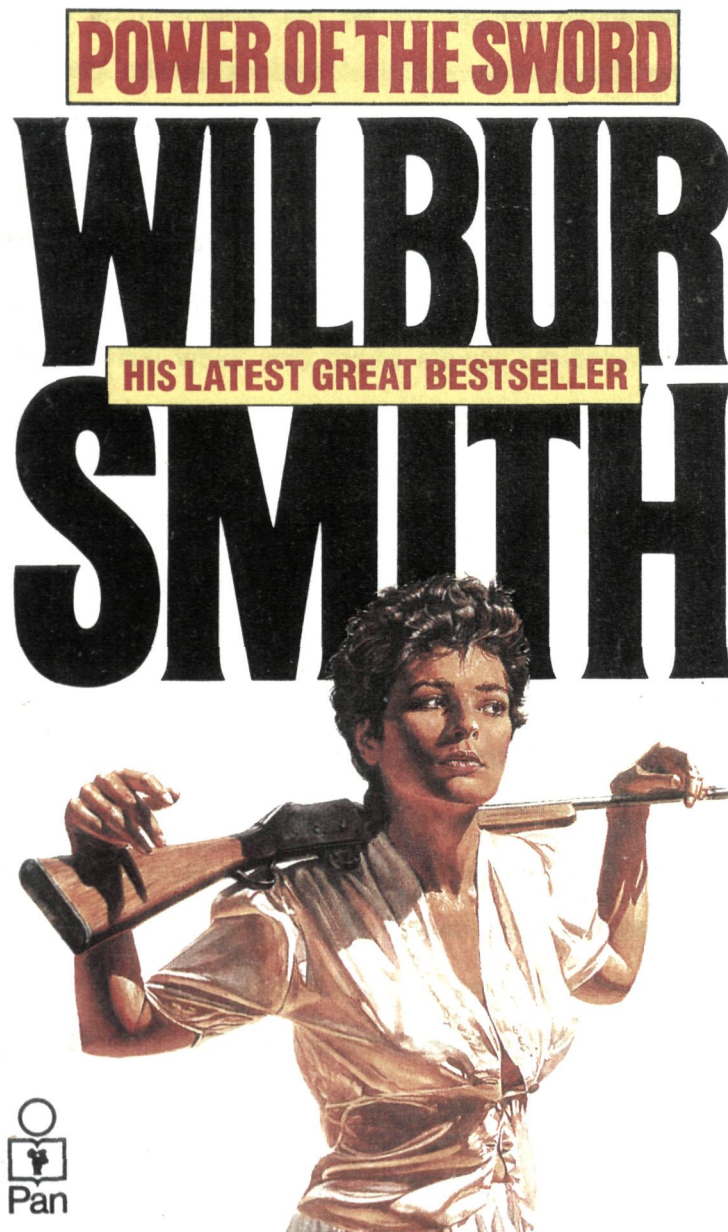


Figure 9. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *Power of the Sword* (London: Pan, 1987). Illustration by Kevin Tweddell.

In spite of Tom's qualms about slavery, however, Tom becomes an occasional slave runner himself, but it is only when he decides to sell the Arabs he captures after the attack to Flor de la Mar; after all, these Arabs are only the blood-smeared pirates responsible for Dorian's capture. Furthermore, he convinces his elders "to exempt the women and children of the garrison from the sentence of transportation into slavery" and spares the doctor who treated his brother during his capture. Also, he feels "a certain squeamishness at the thought that he [is] sending these men into a life of captivity" among the Dutch, who are "not famous as the gentlest of gaolers." (*Monsoon* 301) This is Tom's only incursion into slavery but he makes up for it later in the narrative. Eventually, he decides to set himself up as the protector of the Lozi - a once peaceful and prosperous tribe which had been forced to flee when the slavers "[fell] upon them, like the cheetah on the gazelle herds of the plains." (*Monsoon* 611) Now they live "in terror of the slavers whom they knew were slowly driving their raiding columns deeper into the interior." (*Monsoon* 611) Dorian, to mention one last example, is brought up among the Arabs and is thus "exposed to the savagery of the trade." (*Monsoon* 638) However, he is forced to support the activity himself for his adopted father commissions him to protect the raiding columns from attacks as they cross the interior of Africa. Consequently, Dorian finds himself "torn by his own humanity, and his love and duty to his adoptive father, the Caliph." (*Monsoon* 639) A man of honour, Dorian understands that the prosperity and well-being of the nation depends on this trade, so he does not "shirk the duty of protecting it." However, Smith emphasises that Dorian takes "no pleasure in what he [has] to do;" furthermore, he rejects fifty of the women, "the weak old crones and the women far gone in pregnancy" for the rigours of the march would kill the old and bring those pregnant into labour long before their time and Dorian cannot take on his conscience the inevitable deaths of their infants. (*Monsoon* 639)

### 9.3.2. Opposing violence against the weak

Secondly, Smith's men are occasionally made to reject violence as a form of self-expression by brandishing arguments against brutality when directed against the weak. Thus, they oppose issues such as the abuse of women, children and animals,

wife-battering and rape. These are problems that have received a public hearing of late (especially in television chat-shows) as feminists have integrated them into their discourse against the ills and excesses of patriarchy. By joining in the public outcry against these forms of violence and acknowledging the role men have played in their perpetuation, Smith aims to give his men a Politically Correct edge and, thus, to make them more palatable individuals, morally equipped to rub shoulders and share fictional space with the soft men favoured by a readership supposedly concerned about the issue of Political Correctness. His heroes in general, and very particularly those in his latest instalments of the saga, therefore, are turned into standard-bearers of the rights of the weak, animals and women. Dorian, for instance, is outraged when he sees Zayn al-Din, the Caliph's first-born and a large, plump child, taller than any of his siblings, victimising one of his little half-brothers. As he tortures the little boy, the reaction of Zayn's other brothers is euphoria so when the boy falters "they [join] in the beating." Eventually the boy collapses and Zayn and his bullies "[leave] him to drag himself up and limp away." Dorian's reaction, in turn, and as befits a noble hero, is quite the opposite. This display of violence does not elate him and he feels "his sympathy go out to the little boy." He furiously tells his nursemaid, Tahī, who has also been privy to this display of abuse, "I would like to take [Zayn] for a ride and see how much he likes it." Ironically, Tahī, who is a victim of oppression herself, does not commiserate with the little boy; as she makes the sign to avert bad luck, she warns Dorian against getting into Zayn's way: "Do not even think the thought. Walk wide of Zayn al-Din." (*Monsoon* 426) Dorian is given other causes to fight for as the plot progresses. He becomes a real animal-rights activist as he sets off to save Jinni, a little monkey Yasmini keeps as a pet, from Zayn's murderous intentions. Zayn wants to kill Jinni for it has stolen and eaten some of his favourite sweets. Yasmini is helpless; although she puts on a show of defiance, she cannot outmatch Zayn and her "bravery [starts] to crumble and tears [well] in her eyes." (*Monsoon* 441) Dorian saves Jinni, gallantly gets Yasmini out of the fix, and beats Zayn up. He similarly protects Yasmini and Tahī on other occasions. Tahī fears for her life since she is "only a poor old nursemaid" who has "no standing at all" and knows that "people die here in the zenana, especially little people of no consequence who give offence to those above them." Dorian dutifully tells her, "Don't worry. I will protect you," to which she responds, "I feel

safer in your care.” (*Monsoon* 427) Yasmini, on the other hand, is only the prince’s daughter and, as such, is supposed to marry a wealthy nobleman who will add her to his harem and enclose her in just another zenana. Dorian’s duty in the story is obviously to save her from her fate and take her with him.

Tom is also given the chance to display his New Man credentials as he is made to witness the ordeals women have to endure in a patriarchal society in which violence is often perpetrated against them. He cannot stop four of his men who gang-rape an Arab woman; they shout “with excited laughter” at each other and they encourage the guy who first gets at her, “Grease the pink lane for us!” (*Monsoon* 280) Yet, Tom is given the opportunity to express the disgust he feels; he “had never imagined anything so horrific” and would have prevented it from happening if it had not been for Aboli, who cuts him short by arguing, “We can’t stop them. [...] They will kill you if you try.” Furthermore, at the time, he is conducting an offensive operation against an Arab fortress in order to try to save his younger brother from captivity, so he cannot risk his own life and those of his other men by further delaying the attack. He cannot stop his brother, Black Billy (William), from beating his wife, Alice, either. His father, Hal, tells Tom:

There is one thing you must remember for the rest of your life, Tom. You must never interfere between a husband and wife. Alice is William’s chattel, he can do with her as he wishes, and if you try to step between them he is within his rights to kill you. (*Monsoon* 348)

However, he can at least commiserate with Alice and is given the opportunity to feel anger at the injustice of a system that sanctions such forms of domestic violence. Eventually, Tom is even given the opportunity to tell Black Billy what he thinks. At the same time, he discloses the darkest secrets about wife and child abuse within the home boundaries that society keeps in hiding and proves that the traditional family does not shine so brightly as the establishment pretends given that there is a story of male violence recorded in the walls of the patriarchal home. Tom tells Black Billy,

You are a fierce, hard man when it comes to bullying servants and women, brother. [...] Have a care, Billy. Alice might hit back. You would be no match for her in a fair fight. You might be reduced to beating her baby. That should give

you pleasure. Turning little Francis' face purple and blue with your whip.  
(*Monsoon* 365)

A fight follows this exchange and Tom is finally ready to make Black Billy pay for his evil deeds with his life. Ironically again, it is Alice who stops Tom, at least on this occasion. Holding her baby in her arms, she pleads, "No, Tom. You must not kill him. [...] He's my husband, and Francis' father. Don't do it, Tom. For my sake." (*Monsoon* 372)<sup>26</sup>

### 9.3.3. Women's needs, home-making and family

Thirdly, Smith proceeds with his construction of his heroes' Politically Correct profile by increasingly making them focus their interests on women's needs, home-making and family, which are supposed to be New-Man-concerns but which confront Smith with the problem of having to integrate domesticity into a world of adventure and super-wild masculinity from which women (together with domestic issues) have traditionally been excluded. As I explain in the next chapter, throughout the saga, Wilbur Smith favours what I describe as masculine spaces for the development of his heroes, that is, spaces that set off men's manly qualities and capabilities. The domestic

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<sup>26</sup> As these examples demonstrate, Smith uses arguments against violence when perpetrated against the weak in order to endow his heroes with a New Man sensibility in an attempt to soften them and make them more appealing to a readership who, for different reasons, might expect some sort of sensibility in the heroes' build-ups. Yet, at the same time, and as I will proceed to demonstrate in this chapter, Smith makes sure he gives his men some soft spots but never lets them become too soft, ultimately endangering the patriarchal system, or disclaims the importance of violence as one of men's basic behavioural characteristics.

As happens with all other weaknesses or soft spots that endanger men's essential toughness or put the patriarchal system into question, therefore, Smith endeavours to fight them off just as he constructs them. To start with, by making men protect women from an unfair system, he denies women the right to fight for themselves. His women, furthermore, never oppose oppression but sanction, forgive or fear it, so, by omission, they participate in the maintenance of a system that victimises them. Also, the system is not so bad as one might think; as long as there are men who, like Smith's heroes, fight for its maintenance by eliminating the ills that threaten to destabilise it, justice is left in the hands of men and men only. Also, men have to resort to some sort of violence if injustices are to be redressed, which validates Smith's militaristic ideals and his belief in violence as an intrinsic male characteristic and as a worthwhile prerogative. Finally, he offers male readers the opportunity to indulge in, even enjoy, violence perpetrated against women and other 'lesser beings' while never endangering their integrity. Men can enjoy seeing poor Alice being battered, an Arab woman being raped, an animal being almost butchered, or Yasmini being tortured as a punishment for having tried to escape her destiny; but they are supposed to side with the hero, nonetheless, and, thus, to identify with him and to live the fantasy that they, like the hero himself, are the ones who would also stand up for what's right: a system of justice that exists beyond, and in spite of, the presence of some wrong-doers who soil its otherwise pristine principles.

can hardly be constructed as a masculine space since home-making has traditionally been a woman's prerogative only. Yet, as a consequence of significant social changes, home-boundaries have been expanded to encompass men as well as women. Men are expected to fulfil the roles of dutiful and affectionate lovers and fathers and to take up responsibilities within the domestic from which they had fled before. Any successful romantic hero, furthermore, has to be able to perform within the home if he is to meet the expectations of a readership that has assimilated the demands of Political Correctness in our society. Also, the domestic cannot be really scorned at given that it still remains the locus of marriage and subsequent wifedom and motherhood, not to mention the fact that the family remains a major controlling agent for the maintenance of the patriarchal superstructure favoured by the New Right. Marriage, furthermore, still guarantees women's encapsulation within the domestic, acts as a measure to keep unemployment under restraint by conditioning and limiting women's access to the public sphere, and serves the interests of the capitalist system by promoting stability through consumption (of, for example, mortgages, loans, bigger family cars, or school fees).

The domestic, with its interconnected discourse of love and marriage, therefore, is an area that Smith cannot afford to disregard if he is to promote patriarchy as well as masculinity. Consequently, he develops four strategies to allow his men to meet the standards of domesticity New Men are supposed to display, while, at the same time, ensuring that his men are never trapped in any domestic, freedom-curtailing fix or become too soft to become the icons of tough masculinity that Smith promotes in the saga and that are presented as role models in times of crisis, emasculation and feminisation. The first strategy Smith uses to achieve these objectives is to deflate the softness men display when engaging in amorous intercourse with women by turning all amorous encounters into sexual encounters. Men may wax lyrical about how much they love women and how lonely they are without them, but smooth-talking is not so much intended to reveal their sensitivity as to propitiate sexual intercourse, which gives men the opportunity to display their inexhaustible sexual appetite and prowess (supposedly markers of true masculinity). Thus, for example, Claudia has the effect of softening Sean II. A Rambo-like adventurer, Sean II

remains imperturbable even when faced with the most dangerous situations. However, when Claudia is captured by guerrilla soldiers, Sean II becomes a nervous wreck, obsessively concerned about her well-being and safety and unable to think of anything else except the feelings Claudia evokes in him. With a shock, he becomes aware of the fact that, even though he cannot remember what the other women he had laid with looked like, the image of Claudia is so clear in his mind that he can even “count the individual lashes around those big honey-brown eyes, and the tiny laughter lines at the corners of her mouth.” (*Die* 188) When he lets “his mind wonder, [...] all those wonderings [seem] to return in the end to Claudia Monterro at the centre,” (*Die* 188) and he “[finds] himself looking forward to taking the role of her comforter and protector.” (*Die* 189) When he eventually finds her, therefore, Sean II has been building up feelings he is no longer able to contain so he bursts out, “My darling, it’s all right now.” (*Die* 232) When after a while they are left alone, he confesses, “I thought I couldn’t stand you. Then I realised I just couldn’t do without you,” (*Die* 246) and he adds, “Whatever happens, I’ll be able to say I loved Claudia Monterro.” (*Die* 249) However, these outbursts of sentiment are not what Smith privileges, but the effect they have on Claudia. After a passionate, “long, lingering kiss,” she demands, “I want you now, this minute. I won’t ... I dare not wait. Oh God, Sean, my darling, now we are alive and in love, but tonight we could both be dead. Take me now.” (*Die* 249) Sean II’s arousal is immediate, he begins to “[glance] around their leafy arbour” to ascertain they are alone and proceeds to make a wondrous display of sexual prowess as Claudia “[presses] herself to him,” her nipples “hard with wanting him” and blurts out, “Oh God, my darling. You are so big, so hard. Oh please, quickly, quickly.” (*Die* 250) As he goes “sliding full length into her,” her body goes “rigid and her golden eyes [open] so wide they [seem] to fill her face.” (*Die* 250-251) All is over “very swiftly” but it is a successful performance anyway; when they finish, “she [hangs] around his neck exhausted as a marathon runner at the end of a gruelling race.” (*Die* 251)

Love swiftly becomes sex as well in Elsa and Shasa’s relationship. Shasa, unlike Sean II, is middle-aged, melancholic and weakening when he meets Elsa, a condition that falling in love aggravates, as is demonstrated by his vanishing hunting



lust. As Shasa and Elsa wait together for a leopard to make an appearance during a hunting expedition, Shasa realises that “his [...] hunting of the cats [is] over for ever.” Like so many old hunters, he has had “his surfeit of blood;” although he loves the “hunting game as much, probably more, than he ever had,” he now sees that “it [is] enough,” that he has “killed his last elephant and lion and leopard.” The thought makes him sad, a “kind of sweet warm melancholy that [mingles] well with the new emotion he [has] conceived for the lovely lady who [sleeps] on his shoulder.” (*Fox* 405) Sexual responsiveness seems to have deserted him of late as well; he is “no longer young and there [have] been one or two occasions recently with other women that [have] shaken his confidence.” (*Fox* 412) He is also turning soft, finds happiness and contentment in Elsa’s company and the relationship seems completely devoid of sexual undercurrents, as can be demonstrated when, after their hunting escapade, they melt into an embrace that “[is] strangely innocent, almost child-like, devoid as yet of sexual passion.” (*Fox* 408) However, Smith soon propitiates a sexual encounter between the couple that guarantees to rescue Shasa from the threat of becoming too feminine. When they make love, Elsa “[mans Shasa] as no other woman ever had.” (*Fox* 413) When they wake up, she sighs and smiles with slow languorous contentment and confirms his masculinity by kissing him and muttering, “My man.” (*Fox* 413)

The second strategy Smith resorts to in order to propitiate men’s incursion into a romantic / domestic discourse without endangering their masculinity or their freedom is to make his heroes focus on marriage as one of their main concerns, thereby never allowing love to be pursued outside sanctioned patriarchal institutions. Loneliness is presented as “the most corrosive and destructive of all man’s ills.” (*Fox* 402) Shasa, for instance, before meeting Elsa and after his unsuccessful marriage with Tara, is “a very lonely and a basically unhappy man [...] incapable of a lasting relationship with any woman;” (*Fox* 166) he is “sick to his soul of the loneliness and afraid of the greater loneliness which he [knows lays] ahead.” (*Fox* 402) Although he has had lots of affairs with other women after Tara, “fifty or a hundred others,” not “one of them [has] been able to [...] alleviate the loneliness.” (*Fox* 402) Indeed, in Smith’s Courtney saga, men, like Shasa, need women to make them happy. Loneliness

is not contemplated as an option and love is one of the basic ingredients men need to enjoy stability and contentment. Yet, sexuality alone (even when involving affection) does not cure men's loneliness or guarantee their complete satisfaction if not confined within marriage or the promise of future marriage. Thus, Smith makes sure the heroes' concern about finding the right woman is systematically turned into a 'chase' for a wife and progressively and craftily deflects his readers' attention from the heroes' to the heroines' process of domestication.

Blaine's relationship with Centaine will illustrate the point. He falls in love with Centaine at first sight. Although he is already married to Isabella (a crippled and vindictive 'witch' who has not even been able to fulfil her duties as a wife and has given Blaine two daughters but no sons), he starts a passionate relationship with Centaine, who, to make things better, comes full with a son, Shasa, from a previous relationship. Blaine regards Centaine and Shasa as a surrogate family but he does not give up Isabella and his daughters for "[h]e is that kind of man - he [would] never desert a crippled wife." (*Sword* 152) When Isabella dies and Blaine is free to marry Centaine, however, it is Centaine who does not want to marry Blaine. Before she died, Isabella cursed Centaine as a way of punishing her for having destroyed her family:

I curse you, and let my curse blight your adulterous passion. I curse every minute the two of you spend together when I have gone. I curse whatever seed he places in your womb, I curse each kiss and touch - I curse you and I curse your brat. I curse all your issue. An eye for an eye, Centaine Courtney. Heed my words - an eye for an eye. (*Sword* 518)

The curse comes true for Shasa loses his eye during a World War II campaign. After that, Centaine is scared and is reluctant to marry Blaine for Isabella seems to "assert some malevolent power over them" from her "long-cold grave." (*Sword* 539) Although, after almost a year of patience and gentleness from Blaine, Centaine recovers sufficiently from the damage Isabella has done "to take up again the role of [Blaine's] lover and protectress which she had so revelled in before," this is not enough for Blaine. His gentleness and patience would be wasted if Centaine failed to become Blaine's wife for "[t]here [is] nothing in life [Blaine wants] more than to have Centaine Courtney as his lawful wife, his wife in the eyes of God and all the world."

(*Sword* 539) Once he finally marries her and, as I have explained before, Centaine is removed from the public circuit of influence, power and control she has so far occupied, readers are made to follow her relentless domestication as she is increasingly encapsulated in the roles Blaine has managed to thrust upon her.

Centaine is not the only heroine who is thus domesticated into submission within patriarchy. As soon as Smith's heroes fall in love with the woman they want to keep for life, they wear their hearts on their sleeves and are prone to burst into romantic speeches every time the occasion presents itself. Yet, Smith does not waste too much narrative space displaying his heroes' sentimentality. Indeed, he swerves away from the romantic plot and makes his heroes continue with their perusal of adventure in the wilderness. Simultaneously, he follows the process of the heroines' domestication, how they progressively abandon their pursuits in the public space to become ideal wives, taking care of the home and breeding more or less profusely to guarantee the perpetuation of the Courtney line.

Ruth is a case in point. She is presented as a transgressive heroine. Ruth is Jewish and married to Saul Friedman, one of Sean I's friends. During the Boer War, she challenges patriarchal authority (which is represented by her wealthy uncle, Isaac Goldsberg, who keeps her at home while her husband fights against the Boers) by cross-dressing as a man and following Sean I across a war-torn scenario from Johannesburg to Natal in search of her husband. Yet, her gender is revealed and she undergoes an instantaneous transformation from "gawky masculinity to stunning womanhood." (*Thunder* 17) Once her femininity is exposed, she becomes a sexual prey. The breeches that had been a completely natural and unrevealing garment when she posed as a man, now uncover a very fine pair of sexually appetising thighs. Sean I is immediately besotted as Ruth stirs his sexual desire. As Ruth starts an adulterous affair with Sean I, he becomes increasingly obsessed with her. Yet, their future together is doomed for she loves her husband and does not want to leave him; so Sean I and Ruth part. Sean I joins the Mounted Rifles, makes a name for himself as a valiant, courageous soldier, and is soon promoted to the highest military echelons. After the war, he goes back to Natal covered in glory and wealth and sets up his wattle

plantation. The first thing he does is to build himself a homestead: Lion Kop. But the household lacks life; it is only a “vast empty shell.” (*Thunder* 383) He does not even take an interest in the house, which he regards as only “a place to eat and sleep, it [has] a roof that keeps the rain out, a fireplace for warmth, and lamp-light so that he [can] indulge his new appetite for reading.” (*Thunder* 383) So Sean I needs a woman to embellish the house and serve him in it. Saul being now dead, Sean I summons Ruth to him; and she readily complies. When she sees the house, she is “in ecstasy” and lets her imagination go wild:

[A] shell, a magnificent shell of a house, with no trace of another woman in it, waiting for her to bring it to life. She could imagine the curtains she wanted, her Persian carpets sent down by uncle Isaac from Pretoria and now in storage, would look just right once she had the yellow-wood floors polished to a gloss. The kitchen, of course, would have to be rebuilt - with a new double Agar stove. The bedroom ... (*Thunder* 398)

Sean I then asks her to marry him, and Ruth, “who had planned to hesitate and ask for a little time to consider,” readily replies, “Oh, yes please!” (*Thunder* 399) Well-equipped with a husband, a home and a daughter, Ruth becomes a perfect example of domesticity: she decorates the house, cooks, takes care of their daughter, socialises, and, sometimes, she even goes for rides in order to keep her body in good shape. Sean I, meanwhile, continues with his career as a wattle planter and becomes an influential politician. Gender-role division remains firmly in place. When, at the beginning of their married life, Ruth takes the reins of the household, she is overwhelmed by her responsibilities and constantly “[appeals] to [Sean I] for him to make the fifty decisions that each day [brings] forward.” Yet, he firmly establishes which is to be her area of influence soon enough. When she approaches him to ask him about a sideboard she does not know where to put, he bursts out:

I’ll make a bargain with you [...]. You don’t tell me how to grow wattle and I’ll not tell you how to run the house - put the damn sideboard where it looks best.  
(*Thunder* 475)

Ruth is not the only heroine who is thus domesticated. The same fate awaits all other heroines, even the most recent ones. Storm, for instance, ends up trapped in a log cabin in Chaka’s Gate after her marriage to Mark, where she can give free vent to her

“housekeeping instincts.” (*Sparrow* 561) Claudia is a fully liberated law graduate working in a civil rights agency in Alaska and devoting part of her time to work “without remuneration for the Alaskan Nature and Wildlife Conservation Society.” (*Die* 8) She is even endowed with a wild violent streak that emerges when under pressure, although it is presented as alien to her constitution, as a “savage stranger who [usurps] her body.” (*Die* 396) Yet, she is also domesticated in the end. As she falls in love with Sean II, she finds in him a protector and a father-figure, since the memory of her deceased father has “been absorbed in [Sean II].” The two men “[seem] to have merged in one body” so that Claudia can “concentrate her love in one single place.” (*Die* 438) She is furthermore presented with two child charges, Minnie and Mickey, with whom she can play at being a mother, so Sean II realises her “maternal instincts [are] thoroughly aroused.” (*Die* 480) Finally, she plays at being a wife and treats the superficial burns on Sean II’s back and chest “with a gentleness that [reflects] her gratitude and complete love.” (*Die* 505) Similarly, once she marries Garrick II, Holly Carmichael gives up her career as “one of the leading architects of the country” whose “designs had won international awards” to become “a full-time wife and mother.” (*Fox* 476) And Sarah, to mention one last example, is turned into a homely wife when she marries Tom. As he pursues his exploits in the African jungle, she is left in the fort they build, Fort Providence, to turn their hut into a home, using “cotton cloth from the bolts of trade goods to sew curtains and bedclothes” and having the ship’s carpenters build the furniture she herself designs. (*Monsoon* 592) Unable to have children of her own at the beginning of their married life, she adopts four orphans from the slave caravans and she lavishes “her maternal instincts upon them.” (*Monsoon* 530) But her complete domestication is eventually fulfilled as she finally becomes pregnant at the end of the narrative. As Tom and Sarah are forced to leave Fort Providence, a new world of adventure opens up for Tom, who is supposed to start a new life in the Cape of Good Hope. Before him lays uncertainty, mystery, endeavour, fights. But not so for Sarah; with the baby Tom has planted in her belly, there is only one possible path for her to follow, that of content motherhood enclosed in whatever abode Tom provides her with in the, not-yet written, new instalment of the saga.

But Smith does not stop here. In order to ward off the readers' attention from the threat of domesticity that seems to so endanger the heroes' wild instincts, the third strategy he uses consists of eliminating women who oppress men and curtail their mobility, or who are sexually unsatisfactory, failing to give men the opportunity to display their sexual prowess. The women Courtney men keep at home never prevent men from undertaking pursuits in the wilderness and never fail to be sexually gratifying. The ones who do not fulfil these prerequisites are made to undergo terrible deaths. Katrina, for instance, dreams up a domestic / farming future for her husband, Sean I, which would hinder him from undertaking the adventurous pursuances Smith has in store for him in future instalments of the saga. Moreover, she is a Boer, so Sean I cannot remain married to her if Smith is not to jeopardise the pro-British / anti-Afrikaner discourse he develops throughout the saga. So Katrina needs to be excised from the narratives; her slow process of destruction has to commence. Her body is inflicted with a severe bout of malaria: blackwater fever, malaria in its most malignant form, attacking her kidneys and turning them to fragile sacks of black blood. As a consequence of this, she has a miscarriage and her body and mind are completely wrecked:

The damage the fever had done to her body was hardly credible. Her limbs were so thin that Sean could completely encircle her thigh with one hand. Her skin hung in loose yellow folds from her face and body and pink blood still stained her water. This was not all: the fever had sucked all her strength from her mind. She had nothing left to resist the sorrow of her baby's death, and the sorrow encased her in a shell through which neither Sean nor Dick [her other son] could reach her. (*Lion* 516)

Sean I takes her - empty, wrecked and with a weakened mind - to Johannesburg where he comes across an old lover of his: the lovely and still sexually-appetising Candy. Katrina, her inadequacy highlighted by Candy's voluptuousness and by her frustrated attempts to become pregnant again, is afflicted with "some sort of paralytic hysteria." (*Lion* 550) Finally, strained of all physical and mental energy, inadequate as a wife and as a lover, her rationality questioned by Sean I who thinks that she must be unbalanced, Katrina moves at a relentless pace towards her demise: she commits suicide.

A similar fate to Katrina's is suffered by Marion. Marion's oppressive domesticity and malfunctioning sexuality are awarded another sordid death. Marion is Mark's dutiful wife, but she is also too docile and dull, making Mark restless instead of contented when he comes home every day from his world of adventure in Chaka's Gate. Her silly prattling and cheerful, but boring, house-managing skills would be bearable if Marion were not frigid. She fails to satisfy Mark because she finds sexual activity painful and turns all love-making scenes into sordid little ceremonies that Mark finds difficult to stomach:

[...] she initiated their love-making; rolling comfortably on to her back in the double-bed, drawing up her night-dress to her waist, and spreading her warm womanly thighs.

'It's all right, if you want to, dear.' And because she was kind and loved him so, he was as quick and considerate as he could be.

'Was it good, then, dear?'

'It was wonderful,' he told her, and he had a sudden vivid image of a lovely vital woman, with a body that was lithe and swift and - and his guilt was brutal like a fist below the heart. He tried to thrust the image away, but it ran ahead of him through his dreams, laughing and dancing and teasing, so that in the morning there were dark blue smears beneath his eyes and he felt fretful and restless. (*Sparrow* 465-466)

So Marion, another inadequate heroine, unable to satisfy the hero's steaming fantasies and stifling in her torpid domesticity, is also made to suffer a dreadful death. She dies devoured by a lioness who, confused at her own anger and the unfamiliar taste of her prey, "[tears] and [bites] and [rips] for almost a minute before she [finds Marion's] throat." When the lioness stands up, her head and neck are a "gory mask, her fur sticky and sodden with blood." Marion's broken and torn body is left abandoned in the jungle until her servants find her. (*Sparrow* 545-546)

The fourth strategy Smith uses to prevent men from turning too domestic has to do with how men approach family life once they are married. As I have explained in chapter 7, Smith promotes male-to-male relationships in his novels as a way of protecting the horizontal structuring of patriarchy understood as a brotherhood of powerful men. Friendship between men, therefore, is privileged in the narratives and men often display sentiments of love for other men. Gentleness and love, however, especially between men, threaten to destabilise the heterosexual matrix with the

suspicion of homosexuality. Consequently, Smith finds other ways to perpetuate the brotherhood of men patriarchy needs for its subsistence without having to worry about the homosocial being turned into the homosexual in the narratives. This he does by delimiting love between men within the family unit. Fathers dote on daughters whom they spoil with gifts, but it is sons they value, love and respect since it is sons who guarantee the perpetuation of the Courtney lineage and, thereby, the continuation of patriarchy understood as a hierarchy of men who pass down power and fortune in a patrilineal way. The love they feel for their sons is given material expression in the narratives by having men and their male progeny performing bonding rituals together, ranging from hunting, attending sporting matches, riding across the estates or giving and receiving instruction. Women, in turn, are vanished from sight. Once they are married, they are either killed or lost in the recesses of their home-making chores. Men, therefore, are given an opportunity to show their concern for domestic duties without compromising their power and to reassert patriarchal alliances at the same time. Simultaneously, as men learn to become better fathers, they also assume a position of power within the household that had previously belonged to women only.

#### **9.4. Integrating and counter-effecting weaknesses: authorial strategies**

So far, I have focused on how Smith gives his men an apparently New Man approach to life by making them adhere to a Politically Correct discourse built around the defence of the rights of the oppressed, the rejection of violence as a form of self-expression when directed against the weak, and an emphasis on the domestic concerns of monogamous love and long-term commitment to women and family. Although Smith ultimately uses these issues to the advantage of patriarchy and never relinquishes his conception of tough masculinity, he does give his heroes a few 'soft spots' that make his heroes more complex individuals, turn them into 'acceptable' romantic heroes and help them 'survive' as tenable possibilities in a narrative space that has become increasingly receptive to the demands of Political Correctness in our society. But the elaboration of this Politically Correct discourse is only the first of the strategies Smith uses for his construction of more palatable versions of heroic,



patriarchal and rational masculinity. The second strategy Smith develops consists in including some weaknesses in the heroes' constitutions, such as fear when in the face of impending danger (which I consider separately in the following chapter), dread of suffering, intense sorrow and distress, or strong sexual desire. As I have explained in chapter 3, section 3.2.10, any adventure hero, to be successful, needs to have some flaws for the hero's ultimate human nature cannot be disregarded if identification with the readers is to ensue. A completely faultless or virtuous hero would be too detached from the readers whose ideals he serves. Weaknesses such as the ones I have just mentioned bring forward the heroes' ultimate humanity, turn them into sustainable flesh-and-blood possibilities whose verity readers can believe in. However, these selfsame weaknesses are dangerous in a diegesis designed to safeguard and propagandise unshakeable manliness. Smith cannot afford to render his heroes too weak, and thus irredeemably lost to the opprobrium of a potential male readership who approaches Smith's fiction in order to have their sexist delusions confirmed and their fantasies of imperturbable masculinity ascertained. Consequently, Smith systematically strives to counter-effect the weaknesses he endows his heroes with. He engages in a veritable *tour de force*, allowing weaknesses to exist so as to make his heroes more human, and thus, closer to the readers, while counterbalancing the negative effects such weaknesses may produce and keeping them in constant check by various means, which I proceed to analyse.

#### 9.4.1. The 'crying game'

The heroes are, for example, shown crying on some occasions, which, popular wisdom has it, is not a manly thing to do. Men have not always been forbidden to break into tears in public. The cult of sentimentality in the eighteenth century, for instance, gave men *carte blanche* to demonstrate the range of their emotions. But such relaxed views on sentimentality are not common currency anymore. In our present-day society it is a widespread assumption that 'big boys don't cry'. Although some might applaud men's public display of personal grief and sorrow, and approve of men finally being able to express emotion openly, such congratulatory responses are scarce. Instead, the most common response to such public disclosures of sorrow is to

immediately regard the poor affected guy as a wimp and the whole crying performance as degrading. Smith, consequently, does not let this particular weakness put the heroes' masculinity into question. Sean I is only allowed to cry twice in the four novels. The first time he does is when, after he has provoked the accident that leads to Garrick I's leg being cut off, he is overwhelmed by loneliness and guilt and fears Garrick I is going to die. But although he cries, although his feelings come swelling up into his throat and choke him into sobs, Smith makes sure he is not unmanned: to start with he is very young, only in his early teens; also, Smith highlights he cries "for the last time in his life," (*Lion* 20) so it is a weakness, we are assured, that is not going to be repeated again; and thirdly, he cries "as a man cries - painfully, each sob tearing something inside him," (*Lion* 20-21) not like women, who are supposed to cry naturally for absurd reasons and with no promise of prospective maturation after the painful experience.

In spite of Smith's reassuring promise that no such shameful scene is going to be repeated, we have to bear Sean I crying once again. After Dirk has irrupted into Sean I's private room at Emoyeni to try to convince him to favour his moneyed interests and allow him to drain the Bubezi Valley to build a dam, Mark enters the room to find Sean I weeping: bright tears swamping and blinding his eyes and streaming "down the lined and sun-seared cheeks, clinging in fat bright droplets to the coarse curls of his beard." Mark feels it is one of the most distressing sights he has ever witnessed, "so harrowing that he want[s] to turn away from it." (*Sparrow* 265) Indeed, it is harrowing: manly Sean Courtney I, a heroic general in the autumn of his life, crying! The sight is distressing and Smith makes haste to rescue Sean I from this embarrassing situation, providing a brisk explanation to account for such unmanly behaviour: Sean I cries for he is in mourning. He had already mourned his son, Dirk, as if he was dead when his vicious nature had forced Sean I to exile him from his life. Dirk's 'second coming' and display of unrepentant evil, forces Sean I to excise him from his life and mourn him again. So crying is just a natural response, or so Smith claims. Smith allows some morbid brooding and melancholy to affect Sean I for a few days (dispensed with in one paragraph) but he is soon restored to his old, energetic, grunting self. This time Smith does not let readers down; this scene is never repeated.

All other distressing circumstances in Sean I's life, which are not few, naturally affect him and bring him to breaking point, but do not manage to make him lose self-control or burst out in tears. The negative effect the 'crying games' might have had on the hero's manliness is offset by sheer weight of numbers; Sean I manages to surmount the scores of misfortunes and tragic events in his life with manly stoicism. When Duff, Sean I's closest friend ever, for example, is bitten by a rabid jackal, Sean I knows he is ridden to a harrowing death. Sean I has 'mistakenly' let Duff get too deep inside himself and shares his agony in every excruciating detail. Eventually, when the illness finally takes control of Duff, Sean I takes the right course of action. Although he had promised Duff not to shoot him dead to end his suffering, he takes his gun and finds "the weight of steel and wood in his hands [gives] him comfort. It makes him a man again." (*Lion* 425) Still burdened by lingering doubts about how to proceed, he asks Mbejane for advice, and the faithful servant gives Sean I the cue by saying, "Only a rogue and a brave man can break an oath." (*Lion* 426) From that point onwards, Sean I acts the brave man, stoically shoots Duff dead, wraps him in a blanket, carries him to the shelter, lies him on the bed, gathers a mountain of dry wood, packs it around Duff's bed and sets fire to it. After this tormenting experience, Sean I is full of grief, but his grief is a 'manly grief', "a thing of emptiness, an aching void." (*Lion* 429) When he and his servants start their trek to the Limpopo area, he locks himself in his wagon, does not change his clothes, his beard begins to mat and he stays in his cot throughout the trek, "jolting over the rough ground, sweating in the heat but oblivious to all discomfort." (*Lion* 430) He does not stage his pain for others to see; he does not lose control. When he eventually emerges from his wagon, he is likened to a bear "coming out of its cave at the end of the winter," (*Lion* 430) he washes and goes back to his manly chores "with a single-mindedness that [leaves] no time for brooding." (*Lion* 431) He has finally removed the prickly thorn of Duff's death and goes back to his duties with renewed strength. All in all, he lives through this dark patch with manly forbearance and temperance.

Sean I withstands other sorrowful circumstances with manly self-discipline and 'guts'. When Katrina, his first wife, commits suicide, he is numb with pain and deep

raw ache, but he abstains from crying for, as he says, "Crying never helps very much," (*Lion* 565) he goes back into the wilderness where he can gather enough strength and start a new life. When Ruth first rejects Sean I's marriage proposal since she is already married, Sean I has a few drinks, plays poker and engages in hand-to-hand combat with a few tough guys in the tavern, "the end to a perfect evening," he decides. (*Thunder* 50) When Saul, another of Sean I's friends, dies in his arms, he gives expression to his grief by uttering sounds without form, "the way an old bull buffalo bellows at the heart shot" (*Thunder* 350) and, full of manly rage, immediately engages in armed combat with the Boer soldiers responsible for Saul's death: his eyes glazing with madness, his head hunched down on his shoulders and growling like an animal, he takes his bayoneted rifle, goes up the slope where the Boers are hiding so fast that "only one bullet hit[s] him" and, "roaring and clubbing and hacking with the bayonet," (*Thunder* 351) reaches the summit of the mountain and defeats Jean Paulus Leroux, the Boer leader. When Michael I dies, he similarly roars "a deep, throaty, incoherent sound, like a bull buffalo in a trap" (*Burning* 170) and, blinded with rage, tries to reach out through the flames to Michael I, trapped in the crumpled body of his yellow aircraft. After this manly display of grief, he stoically attends the burial service without shedding a tear. Likewise, Sean I remains stoic, courageous and self-restrained when faced with financial difficulties or terrible dangers. Sean I's few displays of vulnerability, therefore, do not inflict any serious harm on his masculinity for they are outweighed by his manly responses even in the most distressing circumstances. No harm done here!

The same applies to the other heroes. They may appear crying in distress, but it is only occasionally that they are shown like this and, when this happens, it is always in a manly fashion. Moreover, as happens with Sean I, such instances of vulnerability are counter-balanced by the large number of occasions when the heroes remain courageous and strong in distressing or dangerous circumstances. Mark, Sean I's assistant whom he loves like a son, for example, cries once. After Marion, his first wife, is devoured by a lioness in Chaka's Gate, Mark decides to take revenge by putting the lioness and her cubs to death. However, he is unable to do so. The cold stillness of hatred and guilt with which he has withstood the horror of Marion's death

breaks, and Mark begins to cry. But again, he cries as a man cries, his sobs “scour[ing] and purg[ing]” and thus helping him to grow up after the painful experience. (*Sparrow* 554) Also, this moment of weakness does not jeopardise his masculinity, which has already been substantiated by his ability to control emotions in combat during World War I, when finding out about his grandfather’s murder, and when alone in the wild territories of Chaka’s Gate, affected by malaria and chased by Dirk’s men intent on killing him.

Shasa also remains imperturbable when faced with sorrowful or distressing circumstances. When his grandfather is assassinated by ‘White Sword’, an agent of the *Ossewa Brandwag*, Shasa is outraged, but not distressed; he tells himself, “There [will] be time for grief later. Now [is] the time for vengeance.” (*Sword* 585) When he finds himself obsessed with an indifferent Tara who refuses to accept his marriage proposal, he fights his feelings by “flying [his] Tiger Moth;” by hunting “the red-maned Kalahari lions in the desert wilderness beyond the mystic hills of the H’ani;” by immersing “himself in the multifarious affairs of the Courtney companies;” by playing “the game of polo with almost angry dedication, pushing himself and the horses under him to the outer limits;” or by pursuing and seducing “a daunting procession of women” with “singleminded determination.” (*Sword* 496-497) Similarly, when Kitty Godolphin refuses to be his wife, he feels “angry and humiliated,” for “[h]e had never offered to divorce Tara for any other women.” (*Rage* 100) But he does not break down. Instead, he “[storms] into the offices of Courtney Mining and Finance in Windhoek’s main street” and loses himself in his business, “like an opium-eater with his pipe.” (*Rage* 100)

As he grows older, however, Shasa becomes increasingly sentimental about problems affecting him and cries when in distress or when overwhelmed with emotion. But Smith does not allow these emotions to soil or affect his unrelenting presentation of masculinity as characterised by imperturbability in the face of sentimental circumstances. When Blaine is killed, Shasa “[weeps] for the man who [has] been his friend and his father.” (*Rage* 396) But he recovers immediately and takes violent action against the man who has been responsible for Blaine’s

assassination. When he feels emotional on other occasions and tears “sting [Shasa’s] eyelids,” (*Rage* 173) Smith makes Shasa aware of the unworthy nature of this reaction and stresses the fact that it is a response that cannot be performed in public or acknowledged in any way. Thus, when Sean II sends a birthday present for his father, Shasa feels touched and cries, but he immediately asks his family to leave him alone so that he can blow his nose loudly and wipe his eyes. (*Rage* 512) And when Bella, his daughter, comes to say good-bye when he leaves London to go back to South Africa, Shasa cries again. But he does not acknowledge it. As he blows his nose and dabs at his single eye, he blurts out, “Damned wind! [...] Got a bit of grit in [my eye].” (*Fox* 85)

Sean II only cries when his closest friend, Job, dies. However, Smith does not present tears as detrimental to Sean II’s manliness for “his tears [prove] his strength rather than [betray] his weakness, and [those] rare [demonstrations] of love [...] only [point] up his manhood.” (*Die* 446) Yet, just in case these words of reassurance are not enough to redeem Sean II from the damage caused by his sentimentality, Smith quickly proceeds to show how Sean II puts himself together and regains his manly stoicism after distress. After Job’s death, Sean II continues with his march across the arid Moçambiquean terrains with unrelenting determination; “nimble as a squirrel and as powerful as a bull baboon,” he climbs a mountain “using the brute strength of his arms to haul himself up the smooth stretches of the bole where there [are] no footholds.” (*Die* 446) On all other occasions Sean II puts up with distress with manly forbearance. When Riccardo dies, for instance, Sean II feels “numbed, emptied of all emotion except sadness.” (*Die* 186) Yet, he makes a manly display of coolness. When he finds Riccardo impaled on Tukatela’s (an elephant) tusks, he closes his eyes, unknots the scarf from around Riccardo’s neck and binds up his jaw to prevent it sagging into an expression of idiocy. Then, as he studies Riccardo’s face, he mutters,

It happened at just the right time, Capo. Before the disease [Riccardo had cancer] turned you into a vegetable. While you still had most of your zest and vigour, and it was a fitting end for a man like you. I’m glad you didn’t die between soiled sheets. I only pray that I will be as fortunate. [...] No regrets, Capo [...]. For you it was a good life right up to the very end. Go in peace, old friend. (*Die* 186)

Hal does not cry either when faced with distressful circumstances such as his father's and his first wife's deaths or the capture of one of his sons, Dorian, by Arab pirates. He finds himself "unmanned by sorrow" and eager to "seek oblivion [...] and give himself over to his grief." (*Monsoon* 204) Yet, he never collapses completely and systematically regains control of his nerves without ever shedding a tear. In contrast, his two sons, Tom and Dorian, cry profusely. Tom cries when he loses his brother to the Arabs. Unlike his father, he cannot restrain his sorrow and he gives himself over to grief, sobbing "silently, his hard young body racked with unbearable pain," his voice "broken and desolate." (*Monsoon* 207) Similarly, when he finds Big Daniel's (one of his father's men) dead body, he feels "tears start in his eyes." (*Monsoon* 288) When his father is badly injured and his legs have to be amputated, "Tom's vision [swims] as tears [threaten] to overwhelm him." (*Monsoon* 293) When his father dies, "[t]ears [course] down his cheeks, and drip on Hal's face" as he leans on him to kiss him goodbye. (*Monsoon* 359) Finally, when he is falsely told that his brother has died, he is "broken, devastated," and begins to shake as if "overcome by some terrible fever" as tears "stream down his face." (*Monsoon* 508) Dorian, on the other hand, cries even more profusely. He cries when hit by his elder brother, Black Billy; (*Monsoon* 18) when told he cannot accompany Hal and Tom on their African voyage; (*Monsoon* 49-50) when told that Guy is to leave them to go to India; (*Monsoon* 81) when not permitted to leave the ship to join Tom and Hal in their expedition to retrieve Sir Francis' body from his burial place; (*Monsoon* 148) when kidnapped by the Arabs and held in captivity; (*Monsoon* 244, 276, 290, 299, 303, 307) when one of his trusted men dies; (*Monsoon* 546) and when he is finally reunited with his brother after years of separation. (*Monsoon* 663)

Profuse as they are, these examples of sentimentality are never comfortably assimilated by Smith's men. Crying is, therefore, never constructed as acceptable or unobjectionable. Instead, such displays of emotion are portrayed as shameful, both for men themselves and for the beholders who happen to be present when these occur. Thus, Tom and Dorian cry on occasions, but they always fight back their tears for they "have to act like [men];" (*Monsoon* 50) furthermore, they cannot allow other men to see them "unmanned" (*Monsoon* 359) for "such weaknesses would be a terrible loss of

prestige” and would “invite the scorn” of anybody who happened to see them so weakened. (*Monsoon* 506) Dorian loses control much too often, but Smith constantly reminds readers he does so while he is just a little boy. If they cry as grown-ups, the sight is distressing for beholders; when Sarah, for instance, finds Tom crying, she is aghast for “she had never imagined that he could succumb like this” and she had always thought him “strong and indomitable.” (*Monsoon* 508) Crying, all in all, is presented as a shameful weakness through and through. In Smith diegesis “coolness in crisis” is far more impressive than “humanity” and tenderness (*Sword* 232) and weeping is “a girlish thing” so men should not “let it happen.” (*Sword* 70)

#### 9.4.2. Pain and illnesses

Other weaknesses affecting the heroes are similarly counteracted. The heroes, for instance, hate the sight of suffering and illness, which often makes them sick. Thus, for instance, Hal’s stomach heaves when he sees Ned Tyler performing an amputation on one of his men who has taken a “blast of grape in his leg just below the knee.” (*Birds* 132) And when Tom beholds the carnage in his father’s legs after a blast, he “[blanches] and [feels] his senses swim.” (*Monsoon* 290) However, Smith makes haste to highlight this as a typical manly reaction: the “dread of suffering” is a “masculine” thing. (*Lion* 19) Furthermore, Smith stresses men’s ability to surmount their revulsion and to tend wounds and injuries or assist in operations. Sean II, for instance, takes care of Shadrach after he has been attacked by a lion so his flesh is ripped from hip to knee, his body badly mauled. When he finishes, Riccardo, who has been witnessing Sean II’s proceedings, states that he doubts “a trained doctor could have worked more swiftly or efficiently.” (*Die* 63) Sean II also mends Ferdinand’s (one of his men’s) injured arm so proficiently that Job exclaims, “Another breakthrough for medical science [...]. An elegant and sophisticated procedure, Doc.” (*Die* 331) And, to mention another example, Hal has to perform a rough surgical operation on Big Daniel who has been hit by a musket ball which has passed clean through his chest and lies under his skin, just between his shoulder blades. Armed only with a knife and chained to the wall of the deck where he is imprisoned with all his men, he removes the bullet from Big Daniel’s body. The whole thing is more than



disgusting for, as the blade slides deep into Daniel's back, "a spurt of purple pus [erupts] from the deep scalpel cut," strikes Hal in the mouth and "[splatters] across his chin." Hal's gorge rises, but he swallows back his own vomit and unrelentingly proceeds with the operation. When he finishes, Aboli applauds, "Done like a man, Gundwane." (*Birds* 200)

Pain is particularly unbearable in the heroes' own flesh, often causing them to surrender themselves to suffering and invalidism. It even leads to 'shameful' displays of squeamishness, such as when Sukeena treats Hal's wounds with her potions and Hal exclaims, "Avast! [...] That burns like the devil's breath;" so Sukeena scolds him, "You have endured whip and shot and sword and savaging by an animal. But the first touch of medicine and you cry like a baby. Now be still." (*Birds* 331-332) But, once more, these displays do not impair the heroes' masculinity since Smith makes sure he does not gloat over their pain; instead, and as I have explained before in previous chapters, he stresses the heroes' ability to dominate pain, their anger and disgust at their helpless condition, and their prompt recovery and capacity to re-gain control of their lives. After all, and as Ben Abram tells Dorian before he undertakes to perform a life circumcision operation on Dorian, "Pain is nothing to a man. Honour is everything. Remember that all your life, my son." (*Monsoon* 459)

#### 9.4.3. Lustful instincts

Finally, Smith has to contend with yet another of his heroes' weaknesses: their strong lustful impulses. In Smith's narratives, women's intelligence and spirit, their dreams, wishes and desires, their wish-fulfilment fantasies and ambitions, are consistently ignored, silenced, forgotten or misunderstood. Wilbur Smith stops at the body and never sees through it; he never delves into his women's inner recesses, but pictures them as sexual objects. Beautiful, glittering and openly available, they are transformed, as Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*,<sup>27</sup> by the phallus, the transcendent incarnate, into an object of desire, a goal, a prize. Smith's fictional women, therefore, are not real human beings but the products of the male imagination

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<sup>27</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

that, like Pygmalion or Edison in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *The Eve of the Future Eden*, manipulates matter into life to create masculine ideas of femininity; female life as men would like it to be: pliable, responsible, purely physical; burning with desire to be penetrated by the always satisfactory phallus; yelling 'Oh, yes, please yes' (*Lion* 346) - 'come over me ... quickly, quickly' (*Lion* 87) when men make love to them. Deprived of almost all characteristics apart from the merely physical, introduced in the narrative for the use of men, women are presented as lovely white, round and smooth "bulges" (*Lion* 55) or shapes.

So when it comes to women, Smith cannot see beyond the sexiest parts of women's anatomy, the badges of female beauty: breasts, bottoms and pubic hair, which he presents in a dismembered fashion and describes with almost fetishist obsession. The heroine's breasts, for example, receive a great amount of attention: the thrust of Ruth's breasts (*Thunder* 156) or her two good reasons rising and falling under a blanket; (*Thunder* 23) the shape of Centaine's breasts under her blouse (*Burning* 71) or on Michael I's hand; (*Burning* 84) Storm's big, heavy breasts jutting out into rounded cones; (*Sparrow* 524) the silhouette of the nipple on the one pert, almost girlish breast Sean II can see under Claudia's thin cotton tee-shirt; (*Die* 44) Bella's large and shapely breasts that she has inherited from her mother and whose phenomenal growth Shasa watches with pride and interest; (*Rage* 340) Annalisa's disproportionately large breasts which Shasa fixes his stare on as the wind flattens the thin stuff of her dress against the front of her body; (*Sword* 111) Yasmini's warm and pliant breasts with nipples that harden as Dorian rolls them gently between his fingers; (*Monsoon* 571) Sarah's shapely swell of full breasts whose shape and elastic weight almost make Tom cry aloud as if in pain; (*Monsoon* 489) or Kitty's small and unsupported breasts whose exquisite shape Shasa can see beneath her blouse. (*Rage* 86)

Bottoms are equally central parts of the heroines' build-up: Centaine's pearly little bottom (*Burning* 35) with buttocks as firm and round as a pair of ostrich eggs; (*Burning* 34) Storm's tensed rounded buttocks under a short cotton skirt (*Sparrow* 144) or glowing with a divine ethereal pink while Mark removes from them smudges

of oilpaint with turpentine; (*Sparrow* 407) Tara's cheeky little rump that switches from side to side and makes her skirt swing rhythmically as she walks; (*Sword* 439) Claudia's hard little buttocks oscillating as she walks and reminding Sean II of the cheeks of a chipmunk chewing a nut; (*Die* 154) Bella's cocky little buttocks (*Fox* 8) swinging like a metronome under her abbreviated skirt; (*Fox* 15) or Sukeena's small rounded bottom, pointed skywards as she rummages in her leather bags and which Hal looks at in awe for he finds it almost as enchanting as her face. (*Birds* 331) And pubic hair receives an identical amount of attention: Storm's shockingly abrupt explosion of dark smoky curls, a fat deep wedge that changes shape as she relaxes in a slow voluptuous movement; (*Sparrow* 391) Helena's huge wild bush, dark and crisp against the pale skin; (*Sparrow* 100) Marion's fine as silk, light golden brown and soft as smoke; (*Sparrow* 129) Centaine's dark triangular shadow visible through the thin silk of her panties; (*Burning* 34) Sukeena's treasure that lies between her slim thighs; (*Birds* 300) Kitty's startling burst of thick dark hair at the base of her belly that feels fine as silk and soft as smoke; (*Rage* 96) Claudia's dense triangular bush of sodden hair; (*Die* 145) or Bella's stark black triangle standing out clearly at the base of her belly. (*Fox* 536)

But such objectification of women in the narratives brings Smith face to face with another 'insurmountable conundrum'. By allowing women to materialise before men as sexual objects only, Smith compels his heroes to expose two of their most dreaded weaknesses. Firstly, they are forced to come to terms with their beastly nature; the sexual impulses that, whether they like it or not, they share with lowly beings supposedly devoid of reason and control (namely, children, women, coloured people and animals); a cruel reminder of the intrinsic 'baseness' they struggle to forfeit and which problematises their superiority within the social super-structure. Men's sexual potency brings to the fore men's masculinity as surely as armed combat. Hyper-sexuality is, in fact, an invaluable asset, a badge of true manliness that grants them acceptance in the masculine ranks. Men's legendary 'black diary', containing a list of 'easy women' or women they have had sexual intercourse with, is supposed to be an essential implement during the years of young manhood before marriage. As a matter of fact, it has reached legendary proportions, for each man who prides himself

on being a man needs to boast a long list of conquests in the book if he is to remain a man in the competitive and strenuous masculine world. But even though sexuality connects to men's sense of masculinity, it still remains at some deep structure identified with the animal or base. As Seidler asserts, "even Freud carries this deeper masculine tradition in his writings on civilisation and sexual repression."<sup>28</sup> According to Freud, sex is a natural but dirty need and, consequently, it is only through its repression and control that men can set out to achieve the high tasks they are supposed to fulfil as men. So, all in all, women's sexuality and the subsequent lustful instincts it awakes force men to face a brutish and despicable aspect of their constitution that they do not want to acknowledge they possess.

The perception of sex as base and dirty, for instance, surfaces in two different examples in the narratives in which hot and steaming love-making scenes are followed by clear references to contamination and / or squalor. Mark, for instance, falls in love with Helena MacDonald, a woman who is fanatically committed to the communist cause and married to one of the communist leaders in Fordsburg, Fergus MacDonald. She feels a strong adulterous passion for Mark, who is still a virgin at this stage, and craves for him just like a pederast wishing "to despoil innocence." (*Sparrow* 99) Eventually, aroused by Helena's sexual expertise and maturity, Mark consents to her advances. After love-making, he joins Helena at the breakfast table. As she draws deeply on the stub of the cigarette she holds and then drops into the dregs of her coffee cup, Mark feels an "unnatural reaction of revulsion." He then looks at her and becomes aware of "the shallow skin wrinkled finely in the corners of her eyes as her youth" cracks away "like old oilpaint;" the "plum-coloured underlining" of the eye sockets; the "petulant quirk of her lips and the waspish sting to her voice." Suddenly, the squalid room where they are materialises in his eyes with sharp relief, as well as "the greasy smell of stale food and unwashed dishes" and Helena's "grubby and stained gown and the pendulous droops of the big ivory-coloured breasts beneath the gown." His revulsion is so strong that he feels the imperious necessity to cleanse his body. He scrubs himself in the stained enamel bath, "running the water as hot as he

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<sup>28</sup> Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity*, 47.

[can] bear so his body [glows] bright pink as he [towels] himself down.” (*Sparrow* 103)

Shasa experiences similar revulsion after his affair with Annalisa Botha, the daughter of one of Centaine’s overseers on the H’ani mine, who is described as “a common little hussy, ogling everything in pants.” (*Sword* 98) Titillated by her exuberant breasts and bottom, Shasa makes love to her. And he regrets it immediately after it happens. When he wakes up, he is “half asleep and groggy” and his gallantry only “half-hearted and unconvincing.” She fears her father is going to beat her up and she waspishly demands, “What will happen if you’ve given me a baby, hey? It will be a bastard; did you think of that while you were sticking that thing of yours into me?” Shasa is “stung by the unfairness of her accusation,” (*Sword* 117) for, after all, it is her who seduced him and showed him how to proceed (like Mark, he was a virgin at this stage). When he reaches home, Centaine, his mother, awaits him, aware of what he has been up to. She tells him, “[Annalisa’s] been with half the men on the mine. We’ll have to take you to a doctor when we get back to Windhoek.” Shasa shudders and glances down at himself involuntarily “at the thought of a host of disgusting microbes crawling over his most intimate skin.” He is chastised, but also disgusted, so he gratefully accepts Centaine’s suggestion that he should have “a long bath with half a bottle of Lysol in it.” (*Sword* 119)

Secondly, the heroes are forced to confront vulnerability and lack of control. From early in childhood, men learn to forsake their own needs in order to prove that they have the self-control that makes their masculinity secure. However, sexual needs, often identified as a weakness or giving in to temptation, are particularly difficult to repress and forsake for they are basic human drives. Smith’s heroes, in fact, cannot keep these instincts under restraint and, as a matter of fact, they are not even expected to do so if their heterosexuality and masculinity are to be highlighted and homoerotic suspicions dispelled. Interaction with women gives Smith’s men the possibility of proving their sexual prowess and virility. However, women’s sexuality and the effect women produce on men expose the heroes as weak and fragile since men systematically lose control every time they are attracted to a woman. Sean I, for

example, cannot restrain himself after Anna I has displayed her feminine charms before him, swimming naked and unashamedly standing up without covering herself. After that, Sean I stays bewildered for Anna I is “clearly in control. [...] she [is] giving the orders and he [is] obeying.” (*Lion* 56) Mark also loses control when confronted with sexually alive women. When staying at his aunt’s house after his participation in World War I, he is harassed by Mary Black, his cousin, who surreptitiously crawls into his bed, places her big, heavy, white breasts above his face and engulfs his mouth with a wet and warm kiss which completely appeases his chaste struggles to resist temptation: he is immediately abated, “his sense whirl[ing] giddily” at the shock of this sensation. (*Sparrow* 48) Similarly, Mark’s “thoughts of honour and trust” fade when Helena seduces him and he is unable to contain the “dam wall inside him” which “creaks and strains” against the pressure of his arousal. (*Sparrow* 101) Storm’s slim and sexy body produces similar effects on Mark, who betrays the trust “placed in him by Sean” and abuses his “privileged position” (*Sparrow* 391) by letting his arousal take control of his rationality and responding to Storm’s silent plead to quench her “deep physical ache.” (*Sparrow* 388) Michael I falls victim to the same madness of delirium when he is seduced by Centaine who, in making love with Michael I, gains “power over him” and revels in the knowledge that, at this moment, “he belong[s] to her completely.” (*Burning* 85-86) Blaine, when he falls in love with Centaine, forsakes his duties as a married man and engages in an adulterous affair with her since he can “neither resist her nor steel himself against her wiles,” (*Sword* 234) and makes love to her “with the anger of a man of honour who knows he can no longer keep his vows.” (*Sword* 236) Garrick II, when faced with Holly, has all his “bravado and confidence” collapsing around him and feels “like a performing bear on a chain beside her grace and lightness.” (*Rage* 524) When Shasa sees Annalisa, he is “speechless,” (*Sword* 112) “struggling to find something to say, confused by the rush of his emotions.” (*Sword* 113) Similarly, when Hal first faces Katinka, he feels “strangely weak;” (*Birds* 43) and Katinka gains complete control over Hal so he responds “to Katinka’s summons like a salmon returning to its native river in the spawning season;” when she calls him, “nothing can stop him answering.” (*Birds* 164)

When present, women become disruptive 'elements' that expose men's fragility. But their power persists when they are not physically with the heroes for they become pervasive memories men cannot dispel. Blaine, for instance, longs to go to Centaine, "to be near her, just to smell her perfume and listen to that husky voice with its touch of French accent. (*Sword* 293) Shasa, after a two-month absence from Tara, realises that there hasn't been a day that he hasn't thought of her for, no matter what he does, "Tara's image [pops] uninvited into his mind." (*Sword* 496) Claudia's memory is also with Sean II, "always there in the recesses of his consciousness yet coming to the fore at unexpected moments." (*Die* 187) He even dreams of her; in his nightmare, she is being pursued by a pack of wolves and he cannot run to her; he wakes up "crying and moaning," the "terror of the dream" still upon him so it takes him "seconds to focus on reality and remember where he [is]." (*Die* 199) His need of her is so strong that he craves for her more than for "sweet cool water." (*Die* 218)

This obsessive concern for women affects Smith's heroes in three other ways. In the first place, it affects their rationality. When Sean II, for instance, begins to pursue China in order to rescue Claudia, whom China holds captive, he is only moved by expedience for his only obsession is to find Claudia as fast as possible. As a consequence, he forgets to take "even elementary precautions" and undertakes what he qualifies as a "reckless pursuit" and admits that his "concern for Claudia [has] unbalanced his judgement." (*Die* 196) He cannot think rationally for "Claudia's memory [keeps] intruding and deflecting his reasoning." (*Die* 201) Tom, when he falls in love with Caroline, is "in a stew of emotion;" (*Monsoon* 196) he is so lost in his thoughts, that when his father asks him to determine their sailing position as they are heading for South Africa, he makes a serious miscalculation; as his father takes the navigation slate from his hands, he turns to Ned Tyler and says, "Congratulations, Mr Tyler. During the night you must have sailed us back into the northern hemisphere. Send a good man to the masthead. We should be making a landfall on the east coast of America at any minute now." (*Monsoon* 96) And Dorian, to mention one last example, has his "mind going blank" when he discovers that his illicit affair with Yasmini has had serious consequences for he finds out she is going to be tortured to death for

having given her virginity to a man before marriage. Ben Abram, Dorian's confidante, scolds him, "You must have been foolish, mad, beyond any reason." (*Monsoon* 579)

Secondly, this obsession with women affects men's public lives or hinders men's progress in the wilderness. Blaine, for instance, relinquishes "honour and duty" and betrays the trust that the president of the Republic had placed in him, by giving Centaine secret information about the gold standard in order to help her overcome her economic difficulties. (*Sword* 323) He also postpones important cabinet meetings and other public duties to be with Centaine for, he admits, "Affairs of state can wait [...]. Your happiness is the most important thing in the world." (*Sword* 417) Women can also affect men's involvement in wars and other violent activities. Women have a softening effect on men that is detrimental to their warrior-like nature. Thus, Sean II acknowledges, as he sends Claudia to a safe position with Job and finds that "his hands [are] trembling" with worry, "Love doesn't do much for one's fighting instincts." (*Die* 383) And Hal knows he cannot afford to go near Sukeena as they escape from Boer soldiers chasing them "lest his concern for her affect his judgement - lest his love for her quench the fighting fire in his blood." (*Birds* 442) Finally, women make men wax lyrical and produce all sorts of melodramatic speeches worthy of a Corin Tellado hero, but which are at odds with Smith's overall presentation of Rambo-like stoic masculinity. When with women, therefore, men say things that sound ridiculously sentimental, even obscene, in the mouths of men who are otherwise presented as "Mr Cool" or "the master of *savoir faire*," (*Fox* 409) such as, "I love you, flower of my heart;" (*Monsoon* 584) "When I first met you I thought that you were brilliant and adamant and beautiful as one of your own diamonds;" (*Sword* 207) "I crown you Queen of my heart;" (*Sword* 287) "I love you [...] whatever you did, makes no difference to me and my feelings for you;" (*Sword* 417) or "I can't do without you [...]. You are the most magnificent woman I've ever known [...]. I love you." (*Die* 247)

By allowing women's sexuality to unbalance men's rationality and by forcing men to face up to their 'basic instincts', Smith makes his heroes more alive. But, at the same time, he renders their weaknesses visible and puts tough-and-rational



masculinity into jeopardy. So Smith has to counteract these weaknesses, which is by no means an easy task. Women's sexuality is dangerous, but is nonetheless necessary in the narratives. Firstly, it makes the stories more entertaining, adding the pinch of salt (read sexual excitement) that helps readers get out of themselves and enter fully into the fantasy world Smith creates. And secondly, it highlights the heroes' sexual potency and intrinsic manliness. Smith, therefore, cannot really afford to do without women's sexuality without endangering the readers' expectations and the heroes' unquestionable heterosexuality.

And yet, some sort of retaliation is necessary: women have to be punished for the effect they have on men. Now, Smith does not inflict punishment on all female characters in the narratives. Some of them escape the wreckage: Ruth, Storm, Centaine, Holly, Claudia, Bella, Sarah and Yasmini are saved. These characters fall within the parameters of acceptable femininity. They are sexually responsive but their sexuality is confined, via marriage, within the domestic. Furthermore, they are not threatening since they remain subservient to men, ready to nurse and comfort without overpowering them, never taking up functions outside the domestic environment or curtailing men's mobility. Although they are occasionally allowed to penetrate the adventurous space, they are systematically domesticated, willing and ready to occupy their secondary position in the patriarchal household. Furthermore, they do not threaten to pollute the worthy pure-blooded white heroes with the menace of miscegenation.<sup>29</sup>

Smith, therefore, directs his rage against specific female characters: Anna I, Candy, Irene Leuchars, Helena MacDonald, Annalisa Botha, Clare West, Caroline Beatty and Katinka, who are not to be regarded as individual characters. As a whole,

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<sup>29</sup> Women who are the wrong colour or race (such as Judith Nazet, Sukeena or Katrina) or who trespass the racial boundaries that so determine the complex structuring of South Africa's racialised society (such as Tara) together with their progeny - and as I explain in depth in part III - are all eliminated from the narratives. If one is to trust Smith's narrative conventions so far with regard the fate of coloured women who get involved with white heroes in the narrative, Yasmini (and her offspring if she has any) cannot be contemplated as a possibility in Smith diegesis. He decides to turn her into a heroine in *Monsoon* and he pairs her with a worthy hero, Dorian. Yet, it would really come as a surprise if Smith decided to develop her further in the sequel to *Monsoon* if he writes one. If he is true to his conventions, one can foresee Smith will either kill her or simply forget about or disregard her existence, and he will focus on Tom and Sarah's development as the originators of the South African Courtney line.

they represent women's darkest side; the 'devil' hiding underneath the 'angel-in-the-house-' coating favoured by patriarchy. They stand for the frightening masculine myth of 'womanhood unbound' and 'sexuality unleashed' that patriarchy keeps in restraint, marginalises or ignores. Consequently, they become the recipients of Smith's opprobrium. Through these characters, Smith punishes women for what they do to men, or rather, what their sexuality does to men. In fact, he punishes them in two different ways. First of all, he never allows them to completely control the heroes' rationality. The heroes do succumb to temptation and have sexual intercourse with them, but they come back to their senses, feel repentant, empty, dirty or indifferent and escape from their baleful influence. Sean I, for example, feels "empty inside," sad and puzzled after sexual intercourse with Anna I; (*Lion* 57) the moment he falls into her sexual trap he loses interest in her and avoids seeing her. Sean I feels equally bad after his affair with Candy; he immediately seeks refuge among tough men, whom, he asserts, are "clean inside - even if there [is] dirt under their nails and the armpits of their shirts [are] stained with sweat," and he even considers having a fight, "an honest, snorting, stand-up fight." (*Lion* 350) Mark also feels empty when, unable to take the course of action that is both "moral and safe," (*Sparrow* 289) he succumbs to Irene Leuchars' charms. Both Mark and Shasa feel dirty after their respective affairs with Helena MacDonald and Annalisa Botha. Sean II's attraction for Clare West, his hippie-like, immoral art-teacher, is presented as sadistic, perverse and short-lived. Tom soon sees through Caroline's apparent innocence and sees her for what she is, a "[s]tupid little vixen" (*Monsoon* 92) who is far from "hesitant or modest." (*Monsoon* 100) And Hal discovers Katinka is a harlot who has been manipulating him, so he gives her up. The act of acknowledging his foolish infatuation with her, in turn, makes him a man; as his father tells him, "She was never worthy of you [...]. Now that you have renounced her, you have taken another mighty leap into manhood." (*Birds* 237)

And secondly, Smith does not give these characters the opportunity to remain in the narratives and spoil the effect of his celebration of masculinity. So the second punishment these disruptive females have inflicted on them is exile. By making these characters independent and giving them the opportunity to break free from constraining stereotypes of femininity, Smith renders them dangerous. Their

unmanning, disruptive potential threatens patriarchy and, consequently, the self-same elements that add piquancy to their flesh are also the axe hanging over their head. Irene Leuchars, Candy, Annalisa Botha, Clare West and Caroline Beatty therefore, are rendered invisible after seducing the heroes: eliminated from the narratives by a subtle stroke of the pen. Anna I, Helena and Katinka, who are more independent and purposive, adulterous and reactionary, and thus more disruptive, are made to suffer a hideous, stomach-churning death. Anna I, like Berta Mason in *Jane Eyre*, dies consumed in her own flames when she sets fire to Theunis Kraal: her petticoats get caught in the flames and burn against her legs; eventually, she is turned into a human torch, “a torch that [falls] and writh[es] and [dies] before the flames [reach] the thatch of the roof of Theunis Kraal.” (*Thunder* 561) Helena is also killed in a dreadful way, her pelvis shattered by a bullet shot by Mark during a riot; her body is penetrated by Mark one last time, but the penetration and subsequent bleeding is now mortal, a macabre parody of sex. As happens with Anna I, Helena dies consumed in her own passion and receives punishment for her threatening sexuality:

[The bullet] tore a ragged entry into the soft flesh at the juncture of her slightly spread thighs and plunged upwards through her lower abdomen, striking and shattering the thick bony girdle of her pelvis, glancing off the bone with still enough impetus to bruise and weaken the lower branch of the descending aorta, the great artery that runs down from the heart, before going to embed itself in the muscles high in the left side of her back. [...]

Helena had dragged herself to the piece of timber, leaving a dark wet smear across the platform. The khaki breeches she wore were sodden with blood and it oozed from her still to form a spreading puddle in which she sat. [...]

Suddenly there was a hissing spurt of brighter redder blood from between her thighs as the damaged artery erupted. She stiffened, her eyes flew wide open, and then her body seemed to melt against [Mark] and her head dropped back. (*Sparrow* 375-380)

Katinka, who is cruel like Kali, “the Hindu Goddess of death and destruction;” (*Birds* 276) predatory and lascivious like a “sleek golden cat;” (*Birds* 28) and a sexual pervert who fancies both men and women as sex partners for, “when her fancy dictate[s] and opportunity present[s]” she voyages to “the enchanted isles of Lesbos” to find the “enchantments that no man had been able to afford her;” (*Birds* 221) is also cruelly killed. One of her rejected lovers, Colonel Schreuder, finds her impaled upon Slow John (the executioner at the Cape, as cruel and perverted as herself) “in the act of

passion, riding him like a steed.” (*Birds* 358) Outraged at the sight, Schreuder stabs “her satiny white belly, just above the golden nest of her *mount veneris*” with his sword. (*Birds* 359) She screams in “high, ringing hysteria,” so Schreuder grows increasingly outraged. He stands over her and “stab[s] and hack[s] and thrust[s] at her,” the blade passing “clean through her body” until he finds himself “in the spreading pool of her blood, his uniform drenched with gouts of scarlet, his face and arms splashed and speckled so that he look[s] like a plague victim covered with the rash of the disease.” (*Birds* 359) The wounds in her body are likened to “a choir of red mouths,” (*Birds* 359) and she lies, “limp and boneless,” in a scarlet puddle, “her features [...] turned into a rictus of terror and agony that [is] no longer lovely to look upon.” (*Birds* 360)

As happens with all other weaknesses which threaten the heroes’ masculinity, man’s vulnerability when exposed to woman’s sexuality is counteracted, even if that means massacring sexually-alive women who do not conform to the parameters of domesticity Smith privileges in the saga. So Smith keeps the plot under control, eliminating threats and counter-attacking weaknesses as they come in order to protect the stoic and adventurous type of masculinity Smith propagandises in the saga. But he does more than that. Smith cannot afford to take more risks if perfect, unemotional, rational masculinity is to be highlighted. Consequently, he makes a conscious effort to stress man’s superior rationality and to distance men from ‘lower’ kinds of humanity by other means.

## **9.5. Constructing tough and rational men**

### **9.5.1. Capacity for action and intellect**

In the first place, Smith endows his heroes with what can be regarded as a simplistic and untroubled approach to life. Smith characterises his heroes by their capacity to act. They approach difficult situations with a “guileless” simplicity that

“disintegrates any problem” as can be appreciated in the following commentary about Sean I’s approach to difficulties:

There was a guileless simplicity in Sean’s approach to life - in his mind any problem when met with direct action disintegrated. (*Thunder* 484)

In Smith’s action-packed adventures, words are superfluous, action is everything. As Blaine puts it when Centaine finds herself unable to convey the gratitude she feels for his help into words, “That is the way I want it, Centaine [...]. No words!” (*Sword* 330) However, Smith makes sure his heroes’ privileging of action, their ‘guileless’ simplicity (sometimes verging on carelessness) when approaching problems, does not pose a threat to their mental skills by highlighting the value and the importance that instruction, knowledge, experience and the written word have in the heroes’ lives; as Lothar tells his son, “Every day we learn. Muscles don’t make a man strong [...]. This [the brain] is what makes a man strong,” (*Sword* 13) and “[w]e will survive only by our courage and our wits.” (*Sword* 77) However, not all Smith’s heroes are studious. In fact, only Garrick II and Blaine make outstanding progress at school and university, and Mark is the only hero who considers his school diploma (he does not have the advantage of higher education) one of his most valuable possessions. All other heroes do badly or moderately badly at school and college. Shasa completes his year at university “with a respectable second-class,” (*Sword* 419) which, although it is not a bad result at all, is presented as mediocre for a man who has the natural intelligence to obtain a higher mark and who has to inherit the Courtneys’ financial empire. Sean II becomes “a bit of a rebel” and his grades “[go] to hell;” (*Rage* 261) although he “does have a good brain,” his school marks indicate “that he is not prepared to use it in the classroom;” (*Rage* 268) and eventually graduates “without particular distinction from Costello’s Academy.” (*Rage* 313) And Tom, although he does not lack “in brain or cunning” (*Monsoon* 23) and has “a good brain,” refuses “to make use of its full potential.” (*Monsoon* 72) However, although Smith’s heroes despise formal instruction for they are generally too restless to be contained in the stifling groves of academe, they are all bookish. They do not read fiction, which is considered the province of escapists such as Garrick I and Michael II; yet, if they do read it, it is only ‘masculine’ genres such as adventure and mystery. In turn, they are avid readers of

serious treatises on subjects such as politics, travel, economics, surveying, mathematics, medicine or natural history. Among the readings mentioned in the stories are the following: *The Westminster System of Government*, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of the Nations*, *Jock of the Bushveld*, *Burchell's Travels*, Roberts' *Mammals of South Africa* and his *Birds of South Africa*, and Alan Moorehead's *Blue Nile*, together with works by Stanley, Livingstone, Cornwallis, Harris, Burchell and Munro and novels by Zane Grey, Kipling, Rider Haggard and Agatha Christie. Furthermore, books are mentioned as one of the heroes' "dearest possessions." (*Monsoon* 220) The log books, for instance, that Hal inherits from Sir Francis and which he passes on to his own son, Tom, are described as "the family bible." (*Monsoon* 223) There are eight volumes and they cover over thirty years of Sir Francis' "voyages and wanderings on the oceans of the globe." Although they have "intrinsic sentimental value" and are thus "beyond any price in gold," their real value lies in the fact that they contain "a lifetime's accumulation of knowledge and experience." (*Monsoon* 220) Knowledge and experience, in fact, are highly esteemed by the heroes and become, together with muscle and their ability to respond to violence and physical obstacles with strength, determination and courage, their basic survival kits. Thus, for instance, Hal, Dorian and Tom manage to outlive problems and difficulties not only by relying on their physical strength, but also by applying the knowledge they have acquired both by direct instruction and through experience, and which has made them intimately familiar with subjects as diverse as the seas, ships, navigation, gunpowder manipulation and manufacture, astronomy, longbow shooting, swordplay, wrestling, fortifications, charts, maps and the learned languages such as Latin and Arabic. Sean II, to mention one last example, is a man of "special skills and vast experience" (*Die* 89) who exhibits superb physical condition but is also equipped with additional tools such as a basic knowledge of German and Sindebele, star navigation, technology and weaponry manipulation, flying, wrestling, and all the skills related to hunting, ranging from animal behaviour or tracking and counter-tracking to land surveying and cross-country trekking.

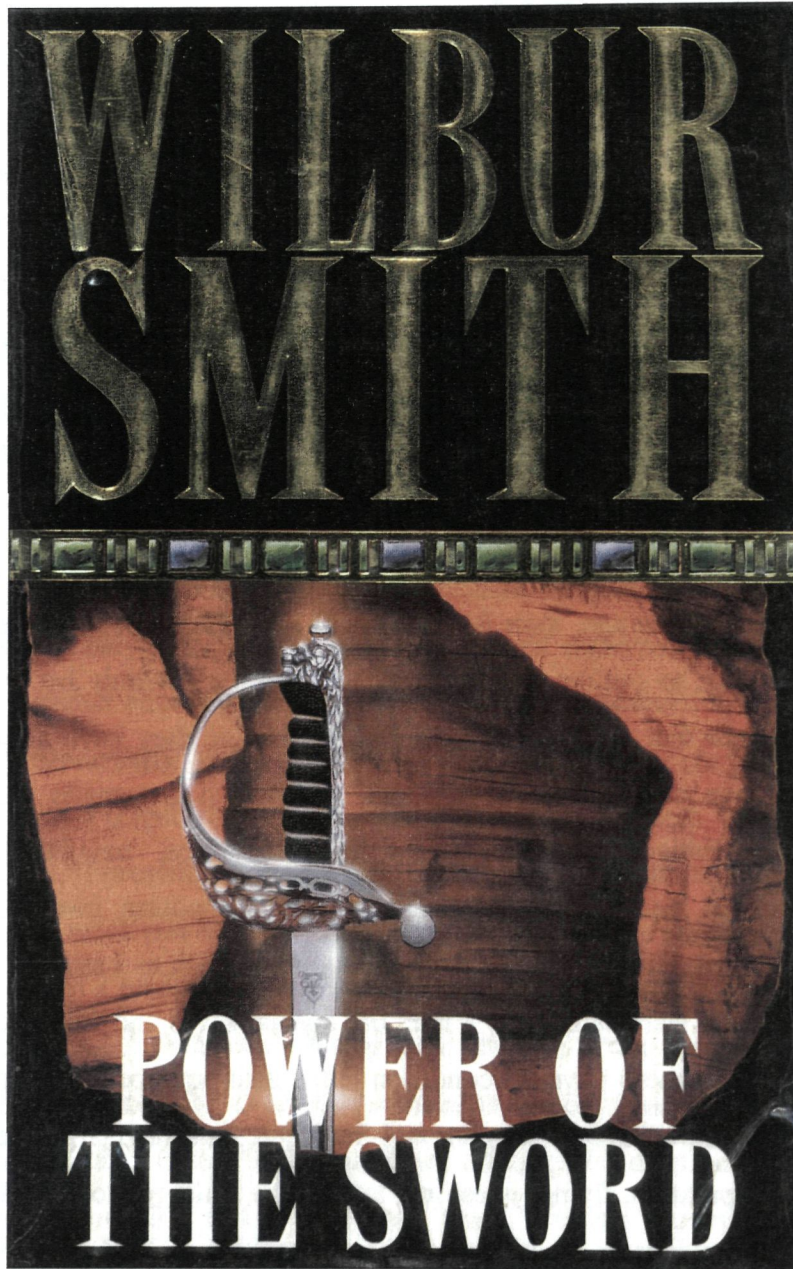


Figure 10. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *Power of the Sword* (London: Pan, 1995). Illustration by Paul Campion and Syd Brak.

### 9.5.2. Charisma and leadership skills

Secondly, Smith endows his heroes with charisma. Their personality is so compelling, charming and magnetic; their deeds so heroic; their leadership skills so great, that other men love, admire and hero-worship them wherever they go. The heroes' flair for gaining other men's admiration and wholehearted support serves Smith the purpose of stressing their superiority and their qualities, which make other men dull in contrast. The respect and admiration that other men feel for them turns out to be a narcissistic recognition of men's superior position in the social construct; a confirmation of men's idealised self-image that all men endeavour to attain and put into practice; and a promise of the respect other men will hold them in if they manage to live up to the standards of true masculinity as propagandised in the saga and acceptable in the patriarchal construct. Examples of Smith's men's charismatic personas abound. Shasa as a young man, for instance, lays out the structure, financing and management of a new company he wants to set up, the Silver River Mine, in front of his executive team; even "these wily seasoned campaigners" glance up from their notepads "in blatant admiration of [the] deft and unusual [touches] he [adds] to the scheme." (*Rage* 27) Sean II is described as a "born leader" (*Rage* 284) and as a "living legend" in the Ballantyne Scouts, "the crack unit of Rhodesia's fighting forces." (*Fox* 428) Sir Francis is an honourable captain respected by both his own men and his enemies; Colonel Schreuder, one of his opponents, tells him, "Sir Francis, in our short acquaintance I have formed a high regard for you as a warrior, a sailor and a gentleman." (*Birds* 192) Hal is introduced in *Monsoon* as a prestigious sea captain whose "distinguished exploits" all "the world is aware of." (*Monsoon* 34) His fame draws men to him. Yet, prestige alone does not make him popular. Like all other worthy Courtney men he is endowed with the leadership qualities that make men trust him completely and accept his ascendancy. In *Birds of Prey* he takes command of the ship after his father's death and his crew naturally "more and more [...] [look] to him for leadership, to give them courage to go on [...] to counsel them, [...] and to keep a spark of hope and courage burning in all their hearts." (*Birds* 305) His men's devotion is such that, when Hal suggests being left behind in the jungle when he is injured and



hinders their march, they tell him, “We need you with us. [...] We’ve put our trust in you [...] We can never find our way through the wilderness without a navigator. You can’t desert us now.” (*Birds* 327) Tom similarly takes command over the ship as a young man after his father’s death. As the captain’s son, “the mantle of command [passes] naturally to him.” He is only seventeen and bears no official rank, yet “the officers and men [like] him” and “[accept] his right to command.” (*Monsoon* 293) Even Edward Anderson, another sea captain who had been commissioned to work under Tom’s father and who resented having him placed in authority, notices the “commanding set to Tom’s shoulders and [the] authority in his voice.” Consequently, and “without questioning his subservience,” he comes to accept Tom’s orders “quite naturally;” he muses to himself, “By God, [...] the pup has become a fighting dog overnight. [...] I would not like to get on the wrong side of [him].” (*Monsoon* 297) Dorian is also described as “a leader of men,” (*Monsoon* 465) has “an air of authority and command in the set of his shoulders,” (*Monsoon* 523) and has his men’s absolute devotion. When during an attack against the Turks, Dorian realises they are being overpowered, he tells his men, “I think we have done all we can here. If any of you wishes to leave, take a camel and ride with my thanks and blessings.” (*Monsoon* 547) One of his men responds, “This is a good place to die;” another joins in as he “refuse[s] Dorian’s offer,” “The houris of Paradise will be sad that we disregard their call.” (*Monsoon* 548)

### 9.5.3. Boys who are ‘Men’

Thirdly, men turn from child to men very early in Smith’s narratives. Childhood, Seidler writes, “has been conceived within an Enlightenment vision of modernity.” Ever since the eighteenth century, if not before, Seidler continues, humanity has been identified with rationality as opposed to nature. Reason, in turn, has been constructed “in the image of a dominant white Christian heterosexual masculinity.” The influence of the Enlightenment’s conception of masculinity (white, Christian and heterosexual) as being identified with reason has been pervasive and has been instrumental in the endorsement of the patriarchal structuring of our western society in which full grown, white, heterosexual, Christian, ‘reasonable’ men have

traditionally been the upholders of power and privilege, to the detriment of children who, “[a]long with women, Jews, and people of colour [...] are regarded as existing closer to nature.” This equation of (adult, white, etc.) masculinity with reason, Seidler concludes, has worked towards the construction of children “as animals who traditionally have to be trained and disciplined if they are to become human.”<sup>30</sup>

Even though Smith delights, as I explain in the following chapter, in stressing men’s essential wild instincts, which he presents as natural, primeval, even animal in them, he never forsakes his presentation of men as simultaneously rational and unemotional. For this reason, and taking into account the widespread perception of children as lacking reason, Smith wastes no time describing his heroes’ infancy or adolescence, a time when men are supposed to be irrational and, therefore, closer to women or coloured people, who in turn are described as childish throughout the narratives. Mark, for instance, is not granted a childhood at all. When he is introduced as a character in *A Sparrow Falls*, he is not quite twenty years of age and has already lived through World War I, killed a few soldiers, survived a mortal wound, and experienced loneliness, deprivation and dispossession of both family and property. If Smith introduces his men as young children or adolescents, he does not pursue their childish exploits but highlights their precocious natures, describes their eagerness to abandon childhood and be regarded as men, and focuses on the experiences (generally sexual or involving violence or business acumen) that speed up their process of growth and thrust them into manhood. Shasa, for instance, proves he is a man when he has his first sexual affair at the age of fourteen and Centaine, his mother, has to acknowledge, “It’s happened [...]. He’s becoming a man.” (*Sword* 120) Sean II is never allowed to appear childish. He is described at eleven as “big for his age;” (*Rage* 15) and at thirteen as “precocious and mature for his age” (*Rage* 268) with a “fully matured,” “long and white and rigid” (*Rage* 276) penis to go with his fully developed sexuality. After his affair, as a thirteen year old, with Clare West, his father tries to deliver punishment by striking him with a stick; then changes his mind, “The stick is for children - and you are no longer a child.” (*Rage* 284) Garrick II proves his manhood when he kills his first lion as a young boy, saving his father’s life to boot! His father

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<sup>30</sup> Victor J. Seidler, *Man Enough*, 141.

confirms his manhood by saying, after painting blood ritual stripes on the boy's forehead and cheeks, "Now you are a man and I am proud of you." (*Rage* 13) Garrick II gives further proof of his maturity when he strikes an impressive business deal as a young graduate from business school. When his father enquires about why he did not approach him for financial help to develop his project, Garrick II says, "I wanted to do this one on my own. I wanted to prove to you that I'm not a kid anymore." (*Rage* 522) Hal becomes a man as he fights Aboli as an equal during one of their training sessions and overpowers him; Aboli has to acknowledge, "This was not the face of the child who had been his ward and special charge for the last decade, the boy he had cherished and trained and loved over ten long years. This was a man who would kill him." (*Birds* 12) Tom is precocious, sexually active from a very early age as befits a young lad with "ball hairs," his "yardstick of seniority." (*Monsoon* 2) Yet, he reaches his full maturity working on the ship so that his father realises he is "looking at a man, not a boy" for he has "toughened and matured beyond all recognition." (*Monsoon* 102) At seventeen, and after a precocious sexual affair with Caroline and several fighting adventures, Tom is "no child" for "with sword and canon he [has] already killed more than one man." (*Monsoon* 218) Dorian is the youngest of four brothers and, as such, he is regarded as a baby by family and crew alike. Yet, before he is even twelve, he kills a man and thereby saves the lives of his father and the crew. After that, his father tells him, "We can never call you a baby again [...]. You have proved tonight that you are a man in everything but size." (*Monsoon* 161)

#### 9.5.4. Men constructed as superior by contrast

Finally, Smith highlights men's rationality and superiority by contrasting them with black men. By presenting coloured people as Other, inferior and depraved, Smith stresses his heroes' excellence while, at the same time, exorcising the fear the Other, as representative of the colonised peoples threatening to overwhelm white men in a postcolonial world, produces in the white man's mind. As Brian Worsfold explains in *South Africa Backdrop*, white South Africans, like other colonisers, utilised and propagandised a series of myths "in an attempt to justify their presence in a land not of their birthright." These myths were fashioned to perpetuate the belief that white South

Africans “had an inalienable right to be where they were, to hold the nationalist aspirations they held and to fight against all opposition for their survival.”<sup>31</sup> In order to validate their status as both possessors and inheritors of South African soil and as absolute law-makers and pay-masters of a major black population, white South Africans not only circulated heroic images of themselves as a superior civilisation that had taken over an empty, arid land and made it productive, but constructed a simultaneous image of blacks as a barbarous enemy and inferior people who were utterly different from whites and who threatened white purity with the menace of miscegenation - and, therefore, needed to be segregated. Smith, as a white South African novelist writing about South Africa, is no exception to the rule and perpetuates these myths in the Courtney saga, thereby validating the ideology at the base of the apartheid regime. Smith’s presentation and celebration of white masculinity, therefore, relies on a parallel construction of blacks as Other, inferior, animalistic, childlike.

A knowledge of apartheid and the myths conditioning the representation of whites and blacks in South Africa, therefore, is essential for understanding Smith’s construction of superior white heroes in his narratives; consequently, I devote the final part of my dissertation to analyse these aspects. Yet, Smith does not use only blacks and other coloured peoples to stress his white men’s superior rationality; he uses women for the same purpose. As products of a supposedly post-feminist state of affairs in which women no longer accept their subaltern, marginal and minority status, Smith’s works acknowledge the threatening potential of women and their increasing power in western society. However, Smith never allows women to get the upper hand in his fiction so he systematically uses representational strategies that allow his men to be perceived as superior relative to women in an attempt to exorcise the fear of manly decline in the face of female power. Smith underlines the fact that the right to control is inalienably a male preserve. Consequently, he subjects his women to a masculinist gaze that consistently refuses to see them in terms of equality with men; thus, he

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<sup>31</sup> Brian Worsfold, *South Africa Backdrop. An Historical Introduction for South African Literary and Cultural Studies* (Lleida: Edicions de la Universitat de Lleida, 1999) 11.

excises from his fiction even the possibility of female retaliation; in Smith's diegesis, it is not in women's nature to overpower, overwhelm or overgrow men.

As I have explained in chapter 7, section 7.3.2, Smith expresses women's inferiority in Lacanian terms since they enter the realm of the Symbolic (the patriarchal ethos of adventure) with one lack: the essential masculine piece of equipment, the phallus (power, which in the narratives is symbolised by the heroes' puissant genitals). Women become aware of their inadequacy for they lack the necessary equipment; Smith suggests one cannot ramble across the wilderness without this accoutrement and, therefore, women feel inadequate. So they crave to be men; Centaine, for instance, exclaims, "Why couldn't I be a man?" (*Burning* 60) They despise their femininity, which they consider a painful obstacle; Centaine again asserts, "I will only have sons, at least six sons, but no daughters. Being a girl is such a bore, I don't wish to inflict it on any of my children." (*Burning* 153) Smith's women cry out to be penetrated, made whole by the phallus, without which they are only a blank, a vulval shape, a void aching to be filled.

Biologically denied a phallus and aware of their inadequacy because of this lack, women are rendered subordinate and deprived of power. But this is not the only resource Smith uses to pin women down to subservient positions in the novels; he uses various other means. Firstly, he deprives them of pride. Although they suffer occasional outbursts of temper and mischief, they always regret them and are constantly asking for forgiveness (if not they are killed). Candy is, for instance, outraged when Sean I bursts into her room and interrupts her amorous encounter with an unnamed subaltern. Sean I's visit is just a farewell gesture; he is leaving the following day to marry someone else. Yet, he overreacts when he sees Candy with another man. Candy does not accept his possessive behaviour and ousts him from her room. Instead of being "guilty and contrite" as Sean I had expected her to be, she is abusive and rightfully offended. Sean I gets hold of her and slaps her bottom as he grunts, "Now, my girl [...] I'm going to teach you some manners." (*Thunder* 372) After that, Candy is chastised and says, "Please forgive me darling. I deserved that. [...] Please forgive me, Sean. I'm so terribly sorry." (*Thunder* 373) When Mark visits

Storm after her divorce from Derek, she is similarly penitent and regretful. Storm married Derek for money and status and Mark is quite insulting during his visit; he reminds her of her moneyed interests by telling her, "You know what they call ladies who do it for money?" Storm should be upset at the insult; yet, it does not seem to sink home; she says, "Oh Mark, please don't be bitter with me. I don't think I could stand that." (*Sparrow* 527) Claudia is also forced to apologise for her lack of jungle-expertise when travelling across the Moçambiquean jungle; she accepts Sean II's constant scolding by saying, "I was being a dismal Jane, I deserved it. You won't have any more moaning and whining from me." (*Die* 430) And Bella is forced to give up her pride after her unfortunate affair with Ramon. Ramon de Santiago y Machado is a Spanish KGB agent intent on helping Russia expand the cause of communism in Africa. Using his vast sex appeal and Bella's maternal instincts, Ramon manipulates Bella into submission. Following his orders, Bella gives up her spoilt-child, socialite-*extraordinaire* pose, to pursue a political career in order to retrieve confidential information for Ramon. Her involvement proves to be fatal; she participates in a terrorist plot that, if successful, would lead to the assassination of thousands of people. Her public profile is exposed as a sham and as disastrous, and she is forced to reveal her carelessness and mindlessness to her family and to ask for forgiveness for her lack of insight. She mumbles, "I'm sorry, Daddy. They told me that I must enter politics, stand for Parliament, use the family connection." (*Fox* 549) Ironically, it is her grandmother, Centaine, who feels outraged and who is made to express the family's condemnation for Bella's involvement in public affairs: "I should have suspected your sudden political aspirations. [...] Don't keep saying you're sorry. [...] It does not contribute anything worthwhile and it is damnably irritating" (*Fox* 550) Indeed, Bella's apologies are irritating. But more irritating still is her attempt to pursue a career. Bella's apologies reveal her lack of judgement for trying to occupy a political niche that, in the saga, belongs exclusively to men. No wonder Centaine suspected her 'aspirations'; in Smith's world, a woman's only permitted ambition is that of securing herself a comfortable and submissive position within a male-dominated household and she should be sorry for trying to cross the boundaries.

Secondly, women are characterised by lack of strength. Although they are often endowed with lean, flexible bodies equipped with muscles, their strength is mostly erotic; their flexible limbs are merely a sexual adornment for the heroes to appreciate. Although women have the power to eroticise men, this is the only power they are allowed to exhibit; furthermore, they ultimately succumb to the charms of the heroes' patently sexy bodies. Women's ultimate physical weakness is not only constructed in relation to men's erotic power, but also in relation to men's strength, which turns men into the natural protectors of women. The role of men as protectors of little, shaky, weakly women is conveyed by likening men to castles, mountains or fortresses, embracing women in their "hard muscular arm[s]" (*Die* 121) or "holding [them] protectively." (*Burning* 102) Ramon's strength as compared to Bella's lack of it, for instance, is portrayed in the following melodramatic terms:

For her he was a great tree and she was the vine that entwined it, he was a rock and she the current of a tropical ocean that washed about it, he was a mountain peak and she was the cloud that softly enfolded it. Her body was light and free, she seemed to float in his arms, and that was all of reality. They were alone in the universe, transported beyond all the natural laws of space and time; even gravity was suspended, and her feet no longer made contact with the earth. (*Fox* 45-46)

Women, who are made to give proof of their energy and vigour on occasions, are turned into trembly and fragile creatures in need of protection. Claudia, for instance, is full of fear in the jungle at night for it is "charged with mystery, with uncertainty and menace." Although her father is with her, Sean II is not, so she feels "alone and very vulnerable," as "vulnerable as an antelope to the leopard in a fortress full of predators." When Sean II eventually returns and joins her, she leans close to his arm for "the feeling of security and comfort it [gives] her." (*Die* 123) As Claudia and Sean II undertake their march across the jungle, she is made to suffer a regular score of mishaps that further emphasise her weakness: Sean II has to rescue her from a crocodile, after which she is "shattered and vulnerable;" (*Die* 145) she falls into a hole so that Sean II has to retrieve her from it and carry her in his arms "as if she were a child;" (*Die* 169) and she is captured by Renamo guerrillas and imprisoned in a dirty cell. Although, we are told, she has "none of the more usual feminine phobias, she [has] no terror of spiders or snakes," (*Die* 273) there is one 'unnatural' terror that afflicts her: that of rats. Conveniently, therefore, she is forced to suffer a rat-attack

during her imprisonment so that Smith can depict her “succumb[ing] to panic” and “[s]creaming on the edge of hysteria.” (*Die* 278) When Sean II eventually comes to the rescue, she feels “safe and invulnerable” again, admitting, “I’m only brave when you are here.” (*Die* 414)

Thirdly, Smith’s women are invariably endowed with lack of political insight. Unlike his men, who understand the nuances and intricacies of political life, women’s judgement is consistently portrayed as “childish and irresponsible.” (*Rage* 8) In Smith’s diegesis, women despise politics for they don’t understand them. Isabella, for instance, “finds politics a total bore [...] and isn’t very perceptive.” (*Sword* 158) Or else they unquestioningly support men in their political endeavours. Ruth, for example, follows Sean I when he travels about Natal attending political gatherings; she rehearses Sean I in his speech; she kisses the babies and plays hostess to the wives, tasks, we are told, “in which Sean [shows] no special aptitude;” she sits beside him on the platform, and helps canvass for votes for the South African Party by contributing with her smiles and by walking in a particularly graceful way amongst the potential voters. (*Thunder* 487)

If women are made to display a political profile at all, it is leftist (and thus wrong) and proves to be fatal for themselves and those around them. Bella is not the only example of ‘fatal involvement’ in politics. Tara, for example, believes in the cause of revolution to resolve the problems of black people and, consequently, befriends communist sympathisers, joins demonstrations and eventually falls for Moses Gama, an ANC freedom-fighter, putting herself under his absolute control and command. Yet, even Moses condemns her lack of real insight into African politics for he understands she is only moved by the sexual attraction she feels for him. Moses accuses Tara of being a “weak, jealous woman, riddled with bourgeois white prejudices,” (*Rage* 74) and regards her as naive and expendable once he has used her to carry out his plans. Tara may rave against the “insensitivity of the privileged rich white ruling classes,” (*Sword* 495) but her attempts to change the system reveal her ideas to be wrong. The consequences of her actions are systematically presented as disastrous. She, for instance, participates in a supposedly peaceful demonstration



against apartheid which eventually gets out of hand as black revolutionaries begin to destroy houses and cars, and to launch a violent attack against peaceful blacks. Tara is arrested and imprisoned and Shasa is summoned to pay for her release. Shasa takes her to the destruction area and shows her how “silly and naive” her “Joan of Arc act” has been by giving her a lesson in the way revolution really works. When Tara tries to blame *skollie* boys, gangsters and the police for the havoc wreaked on the area, Shasa offers her the ‘true’ version of the events:

My dear Tara, this is how the revolution is supposed to work. The criminal elements are encouraged to destroy the existing system, to break down the rule of law and order, and then the leaders step in and restore order again by shooting the revolutionaries. Haven't you studied the teachings of your idol Lenin? [...]

Look, Tara, look down there at the smoke and flames. Those are the people who you say you want to help. These are their homes and livelihoods that you have put the torch to. (*Sword* 508)

Claudia's liberal policies are dismissed as equally naive in the narratives. Her fight for the Eskimo's rights over the land in Alaska is ridiculed by Riccardo, her father, who mockingly describes the methods used by Claudia and her group of preservationist friends in order to determine how much of Alaska should be returned to the Eskimo population. According to Riccardo, Claudia and her commission go down “Fourth Street, in Anchorage, that's where all the bars are, and they grab a couple of Eskimos who are still on their feet,” then, he goes on, they put the Eskimos in an aeroplane, fly them over the peninsula, and ask them to tell the commission to show them their traditional hunting grounds. As the commission members point at different landmarks, asking them if their ancestors used to hunt there, the Eskimos unfailingly say, “Sure” as they squint out of the window, their “eyes full of Jack Daniels.” Riccardo finishes his speech with a celebratory comment on how successful Claudia is when dealing with Eskimos' affairs; he says, “Claudia has never had an Eskimo turn down a lake or a mountain she has offered him, isn't that something else? My little girl has got a perfect score, never a single refusal.” (*Die* 29) Sean II similarly refutes Claudia's support for American sanctions against South Africa and makes her understand that the consequences of the sanctions are detrimental to blacks; millions of them starve as a result; he equally makes her see that the disinvestment of American business from South Africa, which Claudia approves of, is naive for, as Sean II phrases it:

We should be grateful to you for the success of your efforts, you forced your own citizens to sell our assets back to us at five cents in the dollar. Overnight you created two hundred multi-millionaires in South Africa and every one of them had a white face. (*Die* 48)

Finally, Sean II makes Claudia aware of her 'ridiculous' condemnation of organised big-game hunting. He scolds her, "You are an intelligent woman, think with your head not your heart;" and proceeds to explain to her that by having people spending money in safaris, they pay to "[provide] a safe place for [wild animals] to live," which is better than "having the wilderness encroached upon by swarming black humanity and their scrawny herds of goats." (*Die* 28) But Claudia does not learn the lesson well; at least not as yet. When in her attempt to protect a male lion, Claudia ends up being instrumental in the death of a lioness, sending her cubs to lingering death and causing one of Sean II's men to have his leg amputated, Sean II's scorn verges on abuse and Claudia's lack of insight is openly exposed. He severely scolds her, "You understand nothing. You are an ignorant ignoramus from a different hemisphere. You are a citizen of the land of the quick fix, and you come and try your simplistic naïve solutions here in Africa. [...] Sure you [are] wrong. Just as your people are wrong to try and starve an African nation of thirty million souls into acceptance of another one of your naïve solutions." (*Die* 64) Although Sean II's poignant remark is addressed to Americans as a whole, it is significant that it is a woman he picks up as a recipient of his scorn.

Smith further stresses women's naiveté and lack of insight by constantly likening them to children, thereby emphasising their lack of intellectual maturity and rendering them small and vulnerable on the side. Ruth, for example, clings to Sean I "small and warm against his chest" (*Thunder* 28) or sits next to him looking "small and frail like a child." (*Sparrow* 586) Storm has the ways of a spoilt child, pouting and pursing her lips in a childish fashion, (*Sparrow* 135) looks just like a "very young girl in a baggy smock" (*Sparrow* 317) and is addressed in a patronising voice for instructing young children. (*Sparrow* 146) Centaine clasps her hands in an endearing "childlike gesture of delight;" (*Burning* 36) she is referred to as a 'girl' and people address her or deal with her in a patronising fashion, talking to her as if she was a

backward child (*Burning* 235) or sitting her down at the table to eat just like one would sit a little girl. (*Burning* 110) When Tara joins the Black Sash protesters demonstrating against apartheid and is spotted by Shasa and Centaine, Shasa smiles slightly and shakes his head in mock despair, “as though she were a child discovered in some naughty prank;” (*Rage* 5) her selfish possessiveness over Moses is “that of a spoilt child;” (*Rage* 203) and her concern over Moses’ treatment of a hostage makes him complain that she behaves “like a hysterical child.” (*Rage* 389) When Claudia interrupts a conversation between Riccardo and Sean II, Riccardo scolds her, “Little girls should be seen and not heard;” (*Die* 26) he later comes to “fuss over his little girl” when she is injured. (*Die* 342) And Bella, to mention one last example, follows Ramon as “trustingly as a child;” (*Fox* 12) she pouts and produces a “self-pitying whine of a spoilt child” (*Fox* 15-16) when Ramon leaves her after a concert; and she “[scampers] breathlessly as a schoolgirl to obey” (*Fox* 115) when Ramon snaps an order at her.

Finally, Smith consistently likens women to food. The dichotomy women / food has traditionally been sanctioned in our patriarchal society for women are, by way of their anatomy, the natural suppliers of food. So their confinement in the innermost recesses of the domestic space, particularly kitchens, is just the logical institutionalisation of a role women are ‘naturally’ born to fulfil, and in which they are supposed to feel completely at ease; as Rachel Blau DuPlessis metaphorically puts it, “I dreamed I was an artist; my medium was cottage cheese.”<sup>32</sup> Smith, however, does not only confine women in their sanctioned roles as food-manipulators in patriarchal kitchens; he also makes them edible, turns them into food as a way of highlighting their ‘essential’ passivity and availability, and thus, their subservience to men. Examples of how Smith renders women comestible abound. Anna I has a milky flavour, (*Lion* 86) her breasts are white like the skin of an apple (*Lion* 55) and has a ‘bud’ as soft and resilient as a tiny green grape; (*Lion* 87) Audrey is called ‘Strawberry Pie’ because she is ginger and has creamy unfreckled skin; (*Lion* 103) Candy is toothsome and decidedly palatable (*Lion* 211) and when she blushes the peach of her

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<sup>32</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, “For the Etruscans,” *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter, 274.

cheeks turns to ripe apple; (*Lion* 216) Hradsky's daughter is like a bunch of ripe grapes with the bloom on them; (*Lion* 266) Katrina's eyes are as green as *crème-de-menthe* in a crystal glass; (*Lion* 457) Centaine's mouth tastes like ripe apples, (*Burning* 83) she appears coated in sand as if it was sugar (*Burning* 325) and has buttocks like a pair of ostrich eggs; (*Burning* 553) Marion's skin is milky and sugared when she lies on the beach; (*Sparrow* 129) Tara has a cream complexion, chestnut hair (*Sword* 441) and breasts the shape of unripe pears; (*Sword* 442) Claudia has nipples the size and colour of a ripe mulberry (*Die* 45) and big as ripe grapes, (*Die* 250) and her skin is the colour of *café-au-lait*; (*Die* 232) Annalisa's legs are coffee brown at their ankles and smooth cream on the inside of her thighs, (*Sword* 98) and she has buttery skin; (*Sword* 116) Elsa is tanned and smooth like a loaf of honey bread crisp from the oven; (*Fox* 441) Yasmini's eyes are the colour of Devon honey (*Monsoon* 428) and she has a cream body; (*Monsoon* 636) the moisture of Sarah's lips tastes faintly sweet; (*Monsoon* 488) and Kitty has lips soft and sweet like warm chocolate, buttocks white, round and hard like a pair of ostrich eggs and pear-shaped breasts. (*Rage* 96) No wonder that men want to "devour [them], to engulf [them] completely." (*Monsoon* 489)

#### 9.6. Concluding comments

Women are presented as weak, fragile, edible, childlike and irrational through and through, emphasising, by contrast, men's superior strength and rationality, and, thus, their right to manipulate women into submission. In Smith's diegesis, men's superiority is never questioned so women are not allowed to challenge men's power or to impair their rationality. Smith fashions a formidable world of adventure, danger, thrilling political intrigue, mortal combats and bloody wars and, in his landscape, there is no place for soft men of sentiment eager to trade space or power with women. Smith, as I have attempted to prove so far in this chapter, is not indifferent to the claims of anti-masculinist groups, is aware of the visibility of the New Man in the representational arts, and seems to be very conscious of the demands of a female readership that expects heroes to be emotional as well as strong, courageous and

valiant rescuers of damsels in distress. However, Smith never allows softness to 'feminise' his men or love to blind their minds. In the Courtney saga, men behave 'like men' and succeed because they do so, because they remain wild, and brutal and unmannerly; because they outgrow their childish habits and survive all forms of emotional turmoil; and because they never allow women to debunk them from their pillars of power and authority. And, indeed, if we are to trust sales figures for Smith's novels, Smith's celebration of the archetypal masculine spirit in all its rawness and pristine glory is what his readership expects and appreciates which, ironically, reveals the flimsiness of western society's pretensions of Political Correctness and turns the public prattling about the necessity of New Men to replace the hunks *du jour* patriarchy has so far privileged into waggish at best. Smith's eulogy of tough and rational masculinity is handy, indeed, to counter the crisis of masculinity in times of feminisation and emasculation. At the same time, it discloses the vacuity and insalubrity of the New Man and the discomfort this new type of humanity produces among both men and women, who, like Claudia in *A Time to Die*, may rant about how much they like "sensitivity and subtlety" but enjoy their heroes, their fantasy role models or ideal lovers, to be "obvious and overpowering and brutal." (*Die* 43)

## **Chapter 10: The reclamation of masculine space. Spaces for 'Men' in the Courtney saga**

### **10.1. Colonial space: strategies of territorial possession in the Courtney saga**

When the first white British colonisers and settlers arrived in South Africa after an uneasy and uncomfortable sea voyage, they were faced with a territory that was wild and hostile, very different from 'the new Canaan' they were looking for. As Annalisa Oboe phrases it, "the wilderness was not the *tabula rasa* they had expected in which to inscribe their dreams."<sup>1</sup> The southern part of the African continent was a land of rocky hills and sun, of sand and low scrub, of aloes and thorn-trees. The landscape was characterised by rocky soil, monotonous veld, barren desert, empty space and enigmatic distance, opaque and indifferent to the western mind. The land opposed penetration, and, consequently, the exploitation of this arid, sterile, brown-and-white landscape was an awesome task. To make things even more difficult, the land was swarming with hostile peoples intent on obtaining (or in the case of blacks maintaining) their share of the territorial pie. On the one hand, there were the African tribes that did not 'have the decency' to go into extinction or have their numbers decimated when Europeans arrived as had happened in America. On the other hand, there were the strange Boers "looking like silent, powerful giants, through dangerous steep slopes and almost non-existent tracks in the thorny bush."<sup>2</sup> The Boers, who had escaped religious persecution in their country, regarded themselves as the rightful possessors of the territory, guided and sanctioned by God to transform that arid land into their earthly paradise. They saw the British as evil interlopers who destabilised their divine project with their racial policies based on the new ideas of equal rights and opportunities and free competition between individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Annalisa Oboe, *Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa* (Padova: Supernova, 1994) 68.

<sup>2</sup> Annalisa Oboe, *Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa*, 77.

These three broad groups were separately engaged in a struggle with the South African land to make it their own. But in their obsession for conquering and taming the land, while keeping it free from alien presences, their interests came into logical conflict. So, from the very beginning, the history of South Africa was one of both struggle with the land and struggle over the land. The Dutch had to fight the native inhabitants who wanted to protect their territory from foreign expansion. Violence had also characterised the relationship between the different native tribes fighting for power and terrain from the very early times. And the intrusion of the British imperial hordes and settlers greatly increased the scale of violence in the territory. Although the British saw themselves as the paladins of a civilising mission that endeavoured to bring peace to a country characterised by violence provoked by barbarian tribes and semi-barbarised Boers, Britain's economic and strategic imperatives made it essential to defend and expand its interests in the subcontinent. This both required and justified the use of violence and even war. All in all, conflict and bloodshed characterised nineteenth-century South African history, conflict and bloodshed which had major consequences on the South African locale and on black people. Trapped in the cross-fire between Boers and British and their encroachment on South African land, blacks were subjugated, brutalised, dispossessed, displaced and ultimately segregated, confined to the arid lands they were allocated, a mere thirteen per cent of the total South African territory.

British colonials and settlers appropriated physical space by various means: by settlements, farms and field exploitation; by making war against native tribes and Boers; by the application of technology and capitalist methods of production; by establishing networks of capital, investment and trade; or by creating natural reserves to meet the demands of high-class, moneyed tourists. At the same time, space had to be politicised: dreamed, theorised and modelled to suit their aims. As Carter explains, space is a text upon which histories and cultures are inscribed and interpreted.<sup>3</sup> And the British inscribed the space they conquered or took possession of with their own histories, interpreting the land in the light of their broader political aspirations. By doing so, they legitimised ownership of the land while, at the same time, they

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987).

exculpated themselves from the brutality of the taking, they hid their history of violence under a pretence of smoothness, and they silenced the voices of the real inheritors of the territorial legacy: the black inhabitants of the country whose real situation is pushed offstage, distorted or ignored, simply the bottom layer in the large white palimpsest.

Many of the novels written by British subjects or colonials in or about South Africa during the nineteenth century, especially the historical romances and imperialist adventure stories, manipulated or distorted history to consolidate the process of empire building, a process that Elleke Boehmer calls a "textual exercise."<sup>4</sup> These novels, together with an array of other writings such as political treatises, diaries or administrative records, infused ideas of white supremacy and national prowess and legitimised the 'scramble' for South African territory, providing a version of history that endorsed British might and grounded the rights that they had presumably acquired over the land. Wilbur Smith similarly uses history for his own purposes. Writing from the present, Smith rummages through history's old chests to find what he needs to provide a white-British-users-friendly version of South African history, one that endeavours to legitimise the South African segregationist policies that so determined black peoples' lives before apartheid was brought to its demise (dispossession of native land, the creation of tribal reserves, the formation of black migrant labour and their underground existence in mines and compounds, and the passing of an increasingly large number of laws pinning blacks down into their subordinate lives). Wilbur Smith goes as far as to even change history to ratify the violence of the taking and to endorse the rightfulness of the measures the white *man* (women are excluded from the colonial project in the narratives) utilised to guarantee the subjection of blacks.

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<sup>4</sup>Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature. Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 13.



## 10.1.1. Distortions of historical events

In numerical terms, even after the National Party's victory in 1948, "an entrenched white hegemony always remained a minority, which never exceeded more than 21 per cent of the total population, and by the 1990s accounted for only 14 per cent."<sup>5</sup> The maintenance of such a disproportionate white hegemony remained troublesome at worst, tenuous and fragile at best, and required the application of an increasingly stringent apparatus of oppression to maintain it, including justificatory explanations that validated this oppression, such as the one craftily encoded in Smith's apparently innocent chronological manipulation in *Rage*. In this novel, as Maughan-Brown has pointed out, "there are significant departures from history that are purposeful and [serve] very specific ideological ends."<sup>6</sup> In order to disqualify the passive resistance rationale behind the Defiance Campaign,<sup>7</sup> Smith brings forward the date of the formation of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*.<sup>8</sup> In fact, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* was formed in June 1961 and the campaign of economic sabotage was not planned until the second half of the same year. In *Rage*, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* is formed in 1952, when it is proposed by Moses Gama as a "fighting force of trained men, ready to die for the struggle," a "spear" whose edge is honed "to razor sharpness [...] hidden but always ready to strike." (*Rage* 65) By mid-1959, when Moses returns to South Africa after undergoing Russian-sponsored training overseas, *Umkhonto* is well-established, with a high command who have "accepted the principle of armed revolt" and discuss a

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<sup>5</sup> Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall, introduction, *Text, Theory, Space. Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 13.

<sup>6</sup> David Maughan-Brown, "Raising Goose-Pimples: Wilbur Smith and the Politics of *Rage*," *Rendering Things Visible*, ed. Martin Trump (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990) 147.

<sup>7</sup> The purpose of the Defiance Campaign conducted by the ANC, Brian Worsfold explains, "was to protest against six items of discriminatory legislation, namely the 'Pass Laws', the Stock Limitation Regulation which enforced the reduction of livestock in Black rural areas, the Group Areas Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Bantu Authorities Act, under the terms of which Bantu administration was established in the reserves, and the Separate Representation of Voters Act which constituted an attempt to abrogate Coloured franchise rights. The campaign took the form of civil disobedience whereby selected 'defiers' would commit technical offences in terms of the six 'unjust laws'." Brian Worsfold, *South Africa Backdrop*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, operative since December 1961 when sabotage attacks were carried out on government installations in Durban, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg, is the military wing of the ANC. This organisation had avoided the use of violence to fight oppression. However, their tactics changed when they realised that "since the government policy had been to respond to non-violent protest with violence, then government violence would be met with reciprocal violence from that time onwards." Brian Worsfold, *South Africa Backdrop*, 79.

campaign of economic sabotage. (*Rage* 310-311) By bringing these events forward prior to Sharpeville,<sup>9</sup> Smith, Maughan-Brown explains, “discredits the argument that the ANC only took to violence as a last resort after all efforts at negotiation and passive resistance had failed.” Furthermore he justifies the banning of the organisation and the arrest and imprisonment of its leaders, who, after all, “engaged in violent intimidation, the enforcement of boycotts and the planning of bombings.”<sup>10</sup>

#### 10.1.2. *Terra nullius*

In his Courtney saga, Smith also endorses the rights of the white (especially British) settlers over South African territory. Africa is depicted as a vast open space, as *terra nullius*, uninhabited, empty of black people. The African sub-continent was, in fact, a black man’s country in the times of colonial expansion. The great indigenous population inhabiting the territories long before the first white men arrived meant that white settlers were always outnumbered by Africans. Blacks, furthermore, were not passive but opposed white interlopers and responded to the white man’s colonising endeavours with violence. On the east coast, for example, “the defiant Xhosa resisted thrust upon thrust of settler intrusion and were pushed, with difficulty, further north during a number of frontier wars.”<sup>11</sup> In Smith’s account, however, the subcontinent is cleared of black population.<sup>12</sup> In *Birds of Prey*, Smith makes reference to the 1493

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<sup>9</sup> The PAC co-ordinated non-violent campaigns to protest against apartheid in 1960. During the Orlando Conference, a “call was made for a civil disobedience campaign on 21st March 1960 to protest against the Pass Laws.” Participants in the campaign were instructed to leave passes at home and to give themselves up for arrest at police stations. The demonstrations were largely unsuccessful and uneventful in most townships. However, tragedy struck in Sharpeville, a black township in Johannesburg. The ten thousand demonstrators, including women and children, marching to the municipal offices in a festive mood were charged by the police who fired into the crowd. Sixty-nine people were killed (including eight women and ten children). One hundred and eighty people were wounded, the majority shot in the back. Brian Worsfold, *South Africa Backdrop*, 73-77.

<sup>10</sup> David Maughan-Brown, “Raising Goose-Pimples: Wilbur Smith and the Politics of Rage,” *Rendering Things Visible*, ed. Martin Trump, 148

<sup>11</sup> Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall, introduction, *Text, Theory, Space*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall, 12.

<sup>12</sup> The only pre-apartheid conflict involving blacks and whites in South Africa that Smith recreates in the saga is the Zulu War. Smith manipulates events to present the conflict as a Zulu attack against the British territory instead of vice-versa. The Zulu War was, in fact, originated by the imperial desire to advance the grand design of spreading the British flag over the whole of southern Africa. To achieve this end, the British looked for a way to start a conflict with the Zulu and force them to war. An alleged trespass on the border on the Tugela was treated as a major offence by the British and used as a justification for an ultimatum to Cetewayo, the Zulu King. The conditions of the ultimatum were unacceptable to the Zulus, who nevertheless tried to negotiate and seek peace, being unwilling to engage in a conflict with the

*Inter Caetera* Papal Bull in which Pope Alexander VI established a line (the Line) which divided the world into two horizontal halves, the north and the south, between Spain and Portugal. This prompted the excluded nations (notably Britain and Holland) to challenge the Pope's division and to engage in battle against the Spanish and the Portuguese, and between themselves, in an attempt to "encompass the unexplored regions of the ocean" (*Birds* 6) and gain control over 'new' territories. As the globe expanded and revealed its secrets, white colonisers penetrated the terrains of the southern hemisphere and made them their own. So when the British Courtney heroes reach Africa, the only notable presence in the sub-continent they encounter are the Dutch colonisers in the Cape Colony. The rest is a "blank;" (*Birds* 370) a "place that has no name;" (*Birds* 364) "savage, unexplored;" (*Birds* 83) "a land unknown, *terra incognita*;" (*Monsoon* 499) teeming with "myriad life," (*Birds* 154) but only animal life, "creatures never seen before by the eyes of man" (*Birds* 372) because "no civilised man had ever travelled into that awesome interior." (*Birds* 4) And the sub-continent remains empty (at least vast stretches of territory) throughout the saga. In *The Burning Shore*, for instance, nineteenth-century South Africa is described as "wide open," (*Burning* 614) and in *Power of the Sword*, post-World War I Namibia's interior is introduced as "new territory" since "this country has [never] been surveyed" and "[o]nly the river itself has been mapped." (*Sword* 209)

### 10.1.3. Open and alluring land

The sub-continent is not only presented as empty and, thus, available, but as a site of destiny awaiting penetration. Sukeena, Hal's first true love, predicts before she dies, "[T]he fates have reserved a special destiny. You [Hal] will live on. You will have many strong sons whose descendants will flourish in this land of Africa and make it their own." (*Monsoon* 23) So when Tom, Hal's son, first arrives in Africa, he feels that "the warm southern winds seem to whisper [his] name," (*Monsoon* 48) and he regards Africa as the place where his "destiny lies," where "Fate has led him"

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British. But Cetewayo's peaceable response was brushed aside without hesitation, and the British forces entered Zululand in January 1879. (as taken from Annalisa Oboe, *History and Nation in South Africa*, 99) In Smith's version of the story, it is Cetewayo the one who originates the war by expelling the British agent from the Zulu territory and gathering twenty thousand impis with the excuse of organising a buffalo hunt. (see *Lion* 97)

(*Monsoon* 116) - no wonder he calls his first settlement on the eastern coast Fort Providence. Africa is furthermore portrayed as “beckoning;” (*Monsoon* 408) “alluring and enticing;” (*Monsoon* 420) smelling of “biscuit hot from the oven” (*Birds* 23) or of “the peppery scent of spice;” (*Birds* 464) full of promise, “wonders and adventures;” (*Monsoon* 170) or luxuriant with unused and wasteful riches ready for the taking. The land is “swarming with wild creatures” that far from being decorative and exotic are there “to hunt,” especially elephants “with ivory tusks longer” than a man. (*Monsoon* 100) Deserts proliferate with “diamonds the size of apples” that “glitter in the sun like water;” mountains are “made of solid gold;” (*Monsoon* 28) river gorges are “treasure houses of captured diamonds.” (*Sword* 57) Land is turned into matter, esteemed for its worth more than for its beauty; it is a place of “gold and ivory and slaves and other treasures, all waiting for [men] bold enough to seek them out, and, perhaps, to perish in the endeavour.” (*Birds* 3-4) In order to legitimise the act of possessing the territory, the land is also feminised, described as beautiful and mysterious attracting men to penetrate it. Yet, land is never likened to a virtuous lady; instead, it is “wide open as the legs of a whore.” (*Lion* 262) Smith, by ‘whoring’ the land, naturalises its receptive function and exculpates men who “force their way” and “press on into the interior.” (*Monsoon* 492) After all, theirs is a rightful penetration and never an obscene rape since it is committed on a whore-land whose function is that of permitting, even propitiating, possession.

#### 10.1.4. White man’s land: the Courtneys’ possessions and ownership rights over the land

All in all, South African soil is depicted as open, empty and available in the saga. White settlers, particularly British settlers, in turn, are pictured as clever, hard-working entrepreneurs endowed with the inner capabilities and the technological means to take possession of the territories and raising them from the level of savagery and anarchy to which blacks would have subjected them if they had been allowed to dispute and gain control over the territories that the white settlers inhabit. Hence, in Smith’s account, white settlers are the ones who have tamed and improved the land and made it productive, and, consequently, it belongs to them. Thus, they regard the

South African soil as their own and consider interference from blacks unlawful and foreign. In *When the Lion Feeds*, for instance, Waite Courtney is ready to fight Cetewayo's impis to protect Theunis Kraal, his farm; as he sweeps his arm in a circle that takes in the whole of Theunis Kraal, Waite says, "Anything worth having, is worth fighting for [...]. Cetewayo has raised twenty thousand spears to *take this from us*. [...] I think it's worth fighting for." (*Lion* 99, emphasis added) Similarly in *Golden Fox*, Michael II, defends the contention that whites should share South African wealth with blacks, but only because "[t]hey are human beings, just like us," not because they have any other claim to the land, which is "the country of *our* [white British] birth." (*Fox* 103, emphasis added) And Shasa is always ready to provide clinching arguments to defend the myth that the land was empty before the whites arrived and that white ingenuity created the wealth of the nation. When Kitty Godolphin, a fresh-faced, intelligent American reporter, questions Shasa about how much of the proceeds of his new mining complex, the Silver River mine, will go back "to people from which it was stolen [...] the black tribes who once owned the land," (*Rage* 86) Shasa responds,

The black tribes who once owned the land on which the Silver River mine is situated were slaughtered, to the last man, woman and child, back in the 1820s by the impis of Kings Chaka and Mzilikazi, those two benevolent Zulu monarchs who between the two managed to reduce the population of southern Africa by fifty per cent. [...] When the white settlers moved northwards, they came upon a land denuded of all human life. The land they staked was open, they stole it from nobody. I bought the mineral rights from people who had clear undisputed title to it. (*Rage* 86-87)

An argument that President Verwoerd elaborates upon and everybody applauds when he delivers his speech during the opening session of the parliament in Cape Town:

We are not newcomers to Africa. Our forefathers were here before the first black man [...]. Three hundred years ago when our ancestors set out into the interior of this land, it was an empty wilderness. The black tribes were still far to the north, making their way slowly southwards. The land was empty and our forefathers claimed it and worked it. Later they built the cities and laid the railways and sank the mine-shafts. Alone, the black man was incapable of doing any of these things. Even more than the black tribes we are men of Africa and our right to be here is as God-given and inalienable as is theirs. (*Rage* 390)

Smith, all in all, is obsessed with space and the possession of this space, which, in his account, belongs to whites and whites only. He produces a literary discourse about the past and the white settlers' incursions into the South African interior that vindicates their rights over the territory and he gives these claims material expression through the figures of his manly figures, the Courtney heroes whose lineage he develops throughout the saga. His heroes' quests, therefore, are mostly endeavours to take and maintain control over South African territory, inscribe it with their presence and validate their entitlement to the land they conquer. Waite, for example, possesses "fifteen thousand acres of good grassland;" (*Lion* 32) he has successfully inscribed the wilderness with sweat and toil and honest work and is consequently eager to defend his vast expanse of territory against 'alien' interference: he participates in the Zulu War, helping the British army to defeat the Zulus that still control the lands beyond the Tugela river in Natal. Sean I's life is also a continual struggle for territory. Although he gives up his share of Theunis Kraal (the farm where he was born) and he abandons his comfortable life in Natal in order to move to the Northern, wild hinterlands, his quest falls short of being a journey within. Instead, it is to be regarded as a conscious effort to stretch his possessions further beyond the province of Natal. The journey he undertakes is very productive for he erects the Johannesburg mining and trading complex in the province of the Transvaal. When he is forced to abandon Johannesburg, he moves further north, following the Hunters' Road up to the Limpopo area, assimilating and mastering the African flora and fauna as he goes and imprinting his presence on even those far-flung corners of the South African locale. Eventually, he abandons the northern territories to become engaged in another struggle for land: he participates in the Boer War, helping the British to defeat the two Boer provinces (the Transvaal and the Orange Free State). Simultaneously, he purchases Lion Kop, a farmhouse near Theunis Kraal, Natal, where, after the war, he erects his wattle empire. At forty-one, he estimates, "I have fifteen thousand acres, with an option to purchase as many more. I have ten thousand acres of standing wattle which, in another year, will be ready for cutting." (*Thunder* 380)

Lion Kop is a place of beauty and peace which Sean I describes in the following terms:

It is truly an excellent and beautiful farm. The water is sweeter than the juice of the sugar-cane, the earth is richer than the flesh of a young ox, the grass upon it as thick and as full of promise as the hair on a woman's pudendum. (*Thunder* 206-207)

It turns out to be a prosperous business as well. Sean I and his son, Michael I, modernise and expand the farm and eventually create the Ladyburg Wattle Co-operative Ltd, a self-sufficient association of all wattle growers in the area, which Sean I chairs and which becomes "well enough established to meet the needs [of seedbeds] of the whole valley." (*Thunder* 486) After Anna I's death, Sean I and Garrick I merge the lands of Theunis Kraal and Lion Kop into one vast estate. By doing so, Sean I expands his empire and legitimates his rights over the land by incorporating the place where he was born, his roots and past tradition, into his newly acquired territories. Following Margaret Atwood's dictum, "part of what you are is where you've been,"<sup>13</sup> Sean I integrates his past inheritance to consolidate his present circumstances and his ownership of a land where his roots are to be found, lands that, as Michael I puts it, are not just lands but "part of a tradition to which I belong - built by men of whom I am proud." (*Thunder* 219) Sean I's territorial empire grows and becomes stronger as years elapse, covering "thousands upon thousands of acres" that he has now planted to timber, (*Sparrow* 393) and Lion Kop remains the heart of Sean I's empire, both origin and perpetuator of Sean I's fortune, the "inner sanctum," (*Sparrow* 394) "centre and fortress" (*Sparrow* 381) of his life.

Sean I's interest in South African territory stretches far beyond his timber plantation. He becomes an active participant in South African politics: he heads the South African Party in Natal, helps Smuts and Botha to flesh out the contours of the Union's body politic, and is eventually elected minister during Smuts' government. From his parliamentary seat, Sean I uses his political power and military skills to help Smuts protect the Union against the 'communist threat' which Smuts defines as "a small ruthless band of adventurers who call themselves trade union leaders, representatives of organised labour - or quite simply international communism" who want to steal the government from "the duly elected representatives of the people" by

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) 112.

starting a civil war. (*Sparrow* 163) Finally, Sean I becomes a staunch supporter of the conservation of nature. Sean I is very aware of the havoc industrialisation has wreaked on the once lush tropical flora and on African wildlife. Consequently, one of his main political endeavours is to make sure that the Bubezi Valley (or Chaka's Gate), a natural preserve, is ratified in parliament. The Bubezi Valley has been protected from human interference by the dangerous tsetse fly and has remained a "vast primeval world," (*Sparrow* 172) "Eden." (*Sparrow* 415) Sean I wants to make sure it stays as it is and that no one "turns it into a sugar-cane or cotton field, or floods it beneath the waters of a dam." (*Sparrow* 280) After Sean I's death, the Bill confirming and upgrading the proclaimed lands of the Bubezi Valley is passed and Mark is appointed first Warden of Chaka's Gate, becoming, in this way, the richest man in the world for he is "the *owner* of paradise." (*Sparrow* 562, emphasis added)

The Courtneys' assets and possessions, together with their power and influence in South Africa, proliferate and expand as the saga develops. Apart from Theunis Kraal, the original seat of the Courtney family, standing proud "amongst its sprawling lawns and unruly gardens of palms and bourgainvillaea and pride of India trees at the front of the Ladyburg encampment," (*Rage* 185) they own Weltevreden, Centaine's abode, "purchased from the illustrious Cloete family," (*Sword* 44) which is surrounded by "two hundred acres of vines," (*Sword* 44) and which Centaine "built as a fortress against the world;" (*Sword* 510) Centaine and Blaine's love-nest-cottage in Cape Town, whose renovation Centaine herself "planned and executed;" (*Sword* 411) Rhodes Hill, "a rambling Victorian mansion built at the turn of the century by one of the old mining magnates from the Witwatersrand" and situated only twenty minutes away from the vineyards of Weltevreden; (*Sword* 604) a sheep-ranch in the Karoo, Dragon's Fountain, "[spreading] over sixty thousand acres of [the Karoo's] fascinating wilderness;" (*Fox* 280) Maison des Alizés in Mauritius, a plantation house built a hundred years ago by one of the French sugar barons, sitting "like a glistening wedding-cake in twenty acres of its own gardens;" (*Fox* 456) Garrick II and Holly's home in Sandton, Johannesburg, an opulent and spacious mansion standing near a miniature lake with its own "man-made island in the centre;" (*Fox* 477) Highveld, the ambassador's residence in Chelsea, London; (*Fox* 17) a five double-bedroom family



flat occupying “the first two floors of a listed red-brick Victorian house” in Cadogan Square, London; (*Fox* 85) a 150,000 acre concession in the Kalahari; (*Fox* 295) a hunting concession in Zimbabwe, the Chizora, “[spreading] over ten thousand square kilometres;” (*Fox* 365) and “extensive ranches in Rhodesia.” (*Fox* 18)

Together with landed property, the Courtneys’ businesses, stocks and shares, investments and revenue, grow increasingly impressive over the years. Centaine stumbles upon a diamond field in the Kalahari desert. The mine, the H’ani Mine, is described as “the source, the spring from which it all [flows].” (*Sword* 46) But Centaine does not stop here; she buys “land and mining concessions, fishing concessions and guano concessions, buildings [including] the Alhambra Theatre in Cape Town and the Coliseum in Johannesburg [...] and options to buy more land, tens and hundreds of thousands of acres.” (*Sword* 100) Eventually, Centaine creates the Courtney Mining and Finance Company, with headquarters in Windhoek. The company expands and diversifies under Shasa’s direction until he is “forced to move the executive headquarters from Windhoek to Johannesburg,” (*Rage* 13) - the company’s financial and administrative headquarters, in turn, are in Cape Town. When Shasa becomes South African ambassador in London, the multifarious companies that make up the Courtneys’ financial and business empire are well-managed by Garrick II, Shasa’s son, who makes “an amazing success of it for one so young,” even managing to steer the company “through the recent collapse of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange which had stripped up to sixty per cent of the value off some share prices.” The Courtney companies not only survive the collapse, but they “come through the ordeal even more powerful and cash-liquid.” (*Fox* 21) After the Oppenheimers and their Anglo-American Company, the Courtneys are “probably the most wealthy and influential in southern Africa.” (*Fox* 29) Among the Courtneys’ financial assets are the following: thirty per cent of the equity in the Carlton hotel company; (*Sword* 425) a chemical factory at Chaka’s Bay; paper pulp mills in the eastern Transvaal; (*Rage* 82) fertiliser factories and coal deposits; (*Rage* 91) diamond concessions in the *Sperrgebiet*; (*Rage* 94) a pilchard-fishing industry at Walvis Bay; (*Rage* 101) thirty-five per cent of the shares of the *Golden City Mail*’s parent corporation; (*Rage* 402) the Silver River gold mine in the Orange Free State; (*Rage*

22, 449) shipping lines; (*Fox* 18) fifty-one per cent of the issued shareholding of Century Estates, a company that owns some of the prime property in the Witwatersrand and in the Cape Peninsula; Anglos and Vaal Reefs gold shares; (*Rage* 521) the Courtney Fishing and Canning Company at Lambert's Bay; (*Fox* 175) the Courtney Mineral Exploitation Company; (*Fox* 295) businesses in Rhodesia; (*Fox* 416) Capricorn Chemical Industries, the largest manufacturer of agricultural fertilisers and pesticides in the African continent; (*Fox* 457) and Courtney Communications, an electronics company. (*Fox* 501) Apart from economic power, the Courtneys have conduits to the highest levels of the ruling National Party. Shasa becomes Minister of Mines and Industry for the Party and, after his successful ambassadorial stint in London, he is offered the job of chairman of Armscor, the country's answer to the arms boycott begun by America's President Dwight Eisenhower in an attempt to leave South Africa defenceless and vulnerable. Armscor - Armaments Development and Production Company - is the entire defence industry of the country under single management, state-sponsored to the extent of billions upon billions of dollars, which Shasa can steer in the direction of the Courtney companies so he has "the additional pleasure and comfort of warming his patriotic ardour at the fire of capitalistic rewards." (*Fox* 21) All in all, Smith makes sure that his heroes *own*, manipulate and control South African land till the end of their fictional lives, a land that belongs to them for they have domesticated, improved and preserved it from all sorts of human and non-human interference.

The heroes' control and possession of physical space and political power serves Smith the purpose of validating the right of British citizens who left England for good to establish in South Africa and make it their own country. Now, space has always been a multidimensional entity with social, cultural and political as well as territorial dimensions. In colonial societies, space is systematically politicised, mapped and reshaped to suit the ends of the colonial masters using both force and culture, which have always been functional for the definition of physical space. As Richard Phillips explains, in times of the British empire, maps were used to "circumscribe geography, by enclosing, defining, coding, orienting, structuring and controlling space [...] [while] ignor[ing], suppress[ing] and negat[ing] alternative

geographical imaginations.” Imperialist adventure, in turn, was used to naturalise constructions of geography and “normalise the constructions of race, gender, class and empire these geographies inscribe.”<sup>14</sup> Smith’s imperialist adventures serve similar purposes. As he narrates the struggles of his heroes for and over South African territory, Smith naturalises the British’s birthright over the country while he simultaneously shapes up the contours of the South African colonial society with white (especially British) entrepreneurial men occupying the pinnacles of power and privilege, a position they ‘naturally’ deserve for they have been able to tame the territory and make it economically sound. Smith’s adventure space, therefore, emerges as what Linda McDowell, quoting Doreen Massey, terms a “web of relations of domination and subordination” or “power-geometry,” which determines that people are differently located in space or, as McDowell phrases it, that “there are radical inequalities in the spatial spread of individuals’ lives.”<sup>15</sup> In Smith’s oeuvre, all in all, it is white British (and Afrikaner) men who control South African territory; they have the freedom to move about the land and imprint their power over the terrains they occupy, excluding blacks, but also women, from the centres of influence and delimiting their sphere of action within marginal geographies.

## **10.2. Gendered space: postmodern reconfigurations and Wilbur Smith’s narratives as a response**

Smith’s manipulation of space, therefore, is not only racialised but, very importantly, gendered. In the narratives it is men who are constructed as the agents of territorial expansion, which, within the broader context of western policies, reaches significant dimensions. In western societies, and as I have emphasised throughout my dissertation, men and women have traditionally been assigned different areas of influence. As Elizabeth Ermarth phrases it, “At some fatally auspicious moment between 1500 and 1700 [...] Western culture began to be invested in a dualistic

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Linda McDowell, “Spatialising Feminism. Geographic Perspectives,” *Bodyspace. Destabilising Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Duncan (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 31.

separation between public and private.”<sup>16</sup> Reason began to be constructed as the essential tool in order to systematise, comprehend, explicate and improve the world we inhabit and men, who occupied positions of power within patriarchal familial structurings and the public space, saw themselves as the possessors of reason. Women, in turn, began to be constructed as emotional, maternal, meek, docile, nurturing beings suited to perform roles within domesticity. By the nineteenth century, a widespread and fundamental set of assumptions about gender division was firmly established, which Simon Dentith summarises as follows,

Men and women have different aptitudes and capacities, which fit them for different spheres of activity. Men are best suited to the active, public world, whether this be the world of work or the market, political institutions, or the various institutions of civil society. Women, by contrast, are better suited for the domestic sphere, where their talents for loving care and self-sacrificing management especially qualify them to act as the guardians of the home.<sup>17</sup>

This broad perception of gender coalesced into solid space differentiation with the public and the private domains constructed as separate spheres and endowed with characteristics commonly associated with masculinity and femininity respectively. By the time of the British empire, the notion of separate spheres was firmly established, with the domestic constructed as feminine, apt for womanly development, and the public as masculine, apt for manly development. Simultaneously, and as the British empire reached its peak of geographical expansion, the notion of separate spheres was expanded so that Britain as a whole began to be constructed as ‘home’ and thus feminine; F.R. Roper in his *By Track and Trail* (1895) has one of his heroes say,

I am determined not to go back to England, to be a drudge in an office, in a bank, or something of that sort, the very thought of which disgusts me. Just think of what most of those fellows are at home; they spend one half of their lives at a desk, the other half fadding about their dress or their appearance. Why, they are mostly as soft as girls, and know nothing but about dancing, and theatres, and music-hall singers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *The English Novel in History 1840-1895* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 183.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Macmillan, 1998) 129.

<sup>18</sup> qtd. in Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 55.

In turn, the colonies were constructed as a space for adventure and manly enterprise, a masculine space where men could put their 'inner', 'natural' abilities to work. The concept of home (feminine) and away (masculine) ratified women's domestic confinement in Britain and served to construct imperial expansion as a masculine endeavour, a dichotomy that the overtly masculinist imperialist adventures produced at that time endorsed and propagandised.

Nowadays, however, the construction of gendered spaces is meeting strident challenge.<sup>19</sup> Our postmodern world is characterised by flux and fluidity. As a result of postcolonial processes of national fragmentation based on issues such as race, ethnicity, skin colour, language and religion, the world is changing its 'familiar' shape. Apart from the formation of new national boundaries, postcolonialism has also propitiated the movement of vast numbers of peoples from the formerly colonised periphery to the centre of what was once termed 'the civilised world', which has brought about the collapse of the prevalent distinction between the 'west' and the 'rest', so now a "multiplicity of peoples of different colour, religion and nationality make up the 'West.'"<sup>20</sup> Cultural globalisation, on the other hand, has led to what McDowell terms "transnational attenuation of 'local space,'"<sup>21</sup> which means that spaces that were 'local' and specific are now increasingly open to ideas and messages, visitors and migrants, tastes, goods and experiences to a previously unprecedented extent. As a consequence of these parallel but interrelated developments, old boundaries are being transgressed and disrupted, and are being replaced by new divisions. The west can no longer be identified with a particular set of spaces or geographically defined people. Simultaneously, women, actively or passively, through the changing nature of their everyday lives, their position in the family, the household and the workplace, are challenging the gendering of space and disrupt conventional

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that challenge had not occurred before. Women travelled to the colonies on occasion and traversed the boundaries of home and hearth they were assigned. Furthermore, notions of femininity and masculinity varied widely between town and country, and between one kind of industrial labour and another. The working factory women of the cotton towns of Lancashire, for example, represent a very different tradition even from the pit-brow women of Wigan in the same county. (see Simon Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms in Nineteenth-Century England*, 131)

<sup>20</sup> Linda McDowell, "Spatialising Feminism. Geographic Perspectives," *Bodyspace*, ed. Nancy Duncan, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Linda McDowell, "Spatialising Feminism. Geographic Perspectives," *Bodyspace*, ed. Nancy Duncan, 30.

associations between, for example, “whiteness, masculinity and the workplace, [...] between gender and political power, between femininity and accepted definitions of sexuality.”<sup>22</sup> All in all, women, together with people of colour, undermine traditional assumptions about the relationship between identity and space, a condition that is reflected in the representational arts. Action movies, for instance, that had been the exclusive province of the tough guy, have opened up space for the integration of ‘action heroines’. As Brian Burford explains,

A change in social attitudes has persuaded producers, writers and directors, to improve the roles for women in the action genre. No longer just the damsel in distress, or a bed mate for the hero, the heroines now get to kick ass with the boys and remain intelligent and competent under pressure. [...] It’s doubtful that there will ever be true equality between the sexes, but with women boxing, racing cars, and holding down jobs of power, it’s clear that their social standing is only going to improve.<sup>23</sup>

These changing perceptions, however, have not resulted in a profound shift in gender relations, at least not yet; as Hanna Wolfe, the lucid feminist detective created by Sarah Dunant, sarcastically puts it, “since when did equality of the sexes mean women get what they wanted.”<sup>24</sup> However, these postmodern reconfigurations of space have generated a set of anxieties in the white man’s psyche, who sees his spatial monopoly and power threatened as the lines that had previously kept separate phenomena and objects apart are progressively erased. These postmodern tendencies towards flux and revision, the porousness of spatial division, the fluidity of boundaries are viewed with terror, at least by some, as if they were a grotesque carnival that has got out of hand; Kathleen M. Kirby expresses it in the following way: “surfaces and borders are put into a derealising play reminiscent less of the frontier-bursting transgressions of laughter than of the out-of-control feeling of a carnival ride.”<sup>25</sup> The most widespread response to this ‘carnavalesque’ obliteration of boundaries, especially

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<sup>22</sup> Linda McDowell, “Spatialising Feminism. Geographic Perspectives,” *BodySpace*, ed. Nancy Duncan, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Brian Burford, “Parting Shots,” *Impact. The Action Movie Magazine* Feb. 99: 66. However, I have already emphasised before that adventure still remains a ‘male preserve’ (see notes 38 in chapter 3 and 30 in chapter 8). Also, I still find that heroines are not really as empowered as Brian Burford pretends (see chapter 6, section 6.4).

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Dunant, *Birth Marks* (London: Penguin, 1992) 99.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen M. Kirby, “Re: Mapping Subjectivity. Cartographic Vision and the Limits of Politics,” *BodySpace*, ed. Nancy Duncan, 51.

to the erasure of the distinctions between centre and margin, public and domestic, has been angst and a defensive backlash.

Smith's gendered manipulation of space needs to be viewed within these broader postmodern revisions and reconfigurations of space. In a world that seems to be posed to challenge and reduce white men's sphere of action, Wilbur Smith resorts to the cultural landscape of imperialist adventure, which as Richard Phillips explains, "[appears] committed to continuous reinscription of dominant ideologies of masculinity and empire,"<sup>26</sup> and articulates a particular type of uncompromisingly, uniformly masculine hero described as romantic, brave, manly, white and European. Smith responds to postmodern anxieties by giving his heroes *carte blanche* to move freely in all directions, by providing them with adequately rough terrains against which their masculinity can be tested and by reclaiming space for the essential, generic male. He confines women within a ghetto of domesticity that they are seldom allowed to trespass and, once he has exiled women to the peripheries of the narrative space, he undertakes the task of creating what David Bunn calls "hegemonic male space:"<sup>27</sup> a space that allows for the formation of true masculine identities; a space that is free from the constraints of western civilisation and the Politically Correct pressures that so affect modern men; a space where men can put their manly skills to work without having to bother about western morality or post-feminists mores and suspicions; a 'truly, madly, deeply' masculine space. This space is pictured in the narratives in five different forms: war; enterprise, politics and wilderness (which I analyse together); and the distant past in the romance genre, which are offered as masculine spaces.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> David Bunn, "Comparative Barbarism. Game Reserves, Sugar Plantations and the Modernisation of South African Landscape," *Text, Theory, Space*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall, 49.

### 10.3. War as a masculine space

#### 10.3.1. Violence and masculine identity

It is doubtful whether men are generically violent and pre-determined to use aggression to assert their power in society.<sup>28</sup> As Lynne Segal has pointed out, “‘Violence’, it seems clear, cannot simply be equated with ‘masculinity’. Neither are unitary phenomena.”<sup>29</sup> However, it cannot be denied that, in our western world, “violence suffuses male identity.”<sup>30</sup> Men, still nowadays, resort to violence to shore up a sense of identity, reassert their power in society and present an heroic image of themselves to the world. Men are supposed, even expected, to use and enjoy using violence in order to establish male dominance. The feeling prevails that violence, the desire to fight and use physical force, encompasses male identity; as Thomas Hume put it in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857):

After all, what would life be without fighting, I should like to know? From the cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business, the real, highest, honestest business of every son of man.<sup>31</sup>

The social sciences, as formulated by scholars with feminist or Marxist tendencies, have striven to provide an explanation that can account for the widespread equation masculinity / violence. In an attempt to elucidate the workings of patriarchy and the way men have assumed authority over women, territory, family or systems of production by displaying and making use of violent behaviour, these critics have disclosed how patriarchy has been functional to men’s construction as aggressive by

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<sup>28</sup> Some psychologists and biologists claim that propensity towards violence is essentially male (see Philomena Mariani “Law-and-Order Science,” *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 135-156). This idea is refuted by Anne Fausto-Sterling. She asserts: “Although based on evidence, scientific writing can be seen as a particular kind of cultural interpretation - the encultured scientist interprets nature. In the process, he or she also uses that interpretation to reinforce or build new sets of social beliefs. Thus, scientific work contributes to the construction of masculinity, and masculine constructs are among the building blocks for particular kinds of scientific knowledge.” (see Anne Fausto-Sterling, “How to Build a Man,” *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 133).

<sup>29</sup> Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 269.

<sup>30</sup> David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> qtd. in Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 106.



favouring the creation of “social contexts which positively evaluate aggression and competitiveness.”<sup>32</sup> According to critics such as Lipman-Blumen, aggression is assimilated in a context in which men learn that it is rewarding and expected of them to behave aggressively and in which it is assumed that society’s proper functioning depends on the inculcation of aggressive patterns of behaviour in young boys:

Even as small boys, males are trained for a world of independent aggressive action [...] males are groomed to take the universe by storm, to confront the environment directly. Males learn that society’s goals are best met by aggression, by actively wrestling their accomplishments from the environment. Force, power, competition and aggression are the means.<sup>33</sup>

Simultaneously, these scholars have engaged in two parallel endeavours. On the one hand, they have highlighted the role history has played in gender-formation, particularly emphasising how empire, nation-making and public school mentality in nineteenth-century Britain determined present-day conceptions of masculinity (at least in the Anglo-Saxon world). Ideals of aggressive masculinity, according to these critics, are a direct result of “public concern about men’s physical weakness at a time of expanding imperial conquests and increasing demands on the defence of existing colonial territories,”<sup>34</sup> which led to a glorification of a more muscular, militaristic masculinity. In turn, such a form of masculinity was instilled in public schools, especially after the great expansion of the education system for middle-class boys in the mid-nineteenth century, which was fundamental for the maintenance of obligatory National Service, which was designed to include all young boys and make men out of them. On the other hand, social scientists have disclosed the implications of male violence and the massacre and destruction men have inflicted upon the world, undermining heroic pretensions of male aggression. As Brittan explains, the writing of history has been a privileged male activity which has celebrated the violence men have used against other men. However, Brittan stresses, “the presentation of the past as the unfolding of male history [gives] men a view of themselves which [is] often unflattering.” The reading of history, he follows, “pinpoints the sheer irrationality and bloodthirstiness of [...] combatants.” Estimates of “man-made” deaths throughout

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Lipman-Blumen, *Gender Roles and Power* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984) 55.

<sup>34</sup> Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 107.

history, he concludes, give us a scale of violence that is “beyond any empathetic understanding.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite the success of the social sciences to account for socialisation as a learning and social process, and for disclosing the negative implications of traditional gender-constructions, the idea of an original, underlying basis for human behaviour remains a central aspect of much academic and everyday thinking. For some essentialists, for instance, aggression in men is “the result of testosterone levels in the individual man.”<sup>36</sup> Some others assert gender behaviour is rooted in biological imperatives which serve evolutionary purposes. Sociobiologists, for instance, argue that “aggression has an evolutionary significance for primate societies - it allows dominant males to pass on their genes to suitable female partners, thus ensuring the survival of the group. What is functional for the baboon or chimpanzee is, therefore, equally functional for human males.”<sup>37</sup>

Whatever the cause used to account for male violence, whether that be the presence of testosterone or innate impulses men are born with, the idea prevails that men are naturally more aggressive than women, and this assumption is used to ratify the supremacy of men in patriarchal constructs. Man is constructed as the central actor of the evolutionary process: a fearless, aggressive, creative and dominant male who generates civilisation and, through his bonding with other men, protects the passive, dependent, subordinate female, who generates babies. Animal experiments are used to prove that men are programmed for the exigencies of the chase and to compete with other men for territory and women. When they are not engaged in open warfare, therefore, they channel their aggression into alternative competitive behaviour (such as sport). Even in civilised societies, aggression is just below the surface, waiting for an appropriate outlet. This assumption is validated in the representational arts, especially in action films, that confirm what men have assumed about masculinity and canonise it, namely “that it is manly to be strong, that the strong conquer, that victory

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, 7.

is better than defeat and so on.”<sup>38</sup> So action films become what Jonathan Rutherford calls “a fantasy of pure masculine omnipotence.”<sup>39</sup> The ideological resonance of these crude forms of social Darwinism are no longer fashionable, but they are still with us. It appears with monotonous regularity in the literature of the New Right or in the arguments of anti-feminist backlash. Furthermore, it is given credibility by politicians who see aggression as being a law of nature underpinning economic life. Masculinity is still measured by a man’s capacity to win and the traditional model of masculinity prevails as forceful, violent, utterly militaristic, powerful, aggressive. Men have grown up to take for granted that it is by displaying their strength and their capacity to defeat even the most courageous and frightening enemy that they prove both their masculinity and their superiority over other beings; that man’s capacity to fight and score victories over powerful enemies proves their virility. Consequently, violence, fighting-rage and the ability to inflict heavy human and material loss on foes and hostile forces are regarded as essential constituents of true manhood, at least there are some men who still think so.

However, in urban, industrial societies, Segal explains, “the pursuit of manhood via displays of physical prowess and courage seem increasingly obsolete. Mind rather than muscle, manipulation rather than endurance, are the more likely attributes of men with power today.”<sup>40</sup> In our present-day world, there are very few occasions available for men to be heroes. Man-the-hunter/warrior has been transformed into man-the-breadwinner and the family-man, who is supposed to enjoy, or at least contribute to, childcare and domestic work. The strength of anti-militarism, furthermore, has undermined the acceptability of war and the military as successful means to initiate men to manhood. This ‘cushioning’ of modern life, some men complain, frustrates the essential aggressive instincts of men, their ‘primordial’ urges or ‘archaic’ memories. As the various mythopoetic movements endeavour to demonstrate, the result of these social trends have left planet Earth, at least the western scene, populated by an array of confused, insecure, anxious makeshift males who find themselves forced to repress instincts and urges of aggression that had so far

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<sup>38</sup> David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities*, 74.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, *Men’s Silences*, 186.

<sup>40</sup> Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, 130.

been regarded as essential, constitutive male traits while, on the other hand, still forced to compete furiously in order to reach positions of prominence within capitalism.

### 10.3.2. Man-the-warrior: fantasies of masculine aggression in Wilbur Smith's Courtney saga

Against this dry, milk-and-water panorama, Smith, in his Courtney saga, provides his male readers with fantasies of masculine aggression and endeavours to create a space where men can give free vent to their essential drives and parade their intrinsic violence, and offers this space as a respite for modern man who cannot find many opportunities to be heroic in industrialised contexts. War-torn scenarios have traditionally been the ideal locale for the emergence and formation of secure, powerful and virtually omnipotent masculinity. We may have qualms about the 'virtues' of war; we may have integrated pacifism as part of our everyday discourse; but, deep-down, some men, and women, believe in man-the-warrior and military glory. We have only to remember the enthusiasm of British men who flocked to defend their territorial rights over the Falklands in 1982 and, as Graham Dawson explains in his *Soldier Heroes*, how men were mobilised on behalf of the nation by tapping onto their inner 'veins' of dominance and aggression in a shocking recapitulation of the nation's imperial past. The idea prevails that it is in war that men accomplish heroic deeds of conquering might. Wars, whether we like it or not, are still the nutritive substance that nurtures true heroic masculinity; wars give men the possibility to become real men if they successfully overcome fear and exhaustion, and manage to confront battles, enemies, and bloodshed with manly courage.

Smith is very aware of the importance of war for the assertion and creation of heroic / hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, he gives his heroes the opportunity to use their manly traits (courage, killing instincts and blood-thirst) and to test their manhood against the background of an array of military conflicts ranging from the Zulu War (*When the Lion Feeds*), the Boer War (*The Sound of Thunder*), World War I France (*The Burning Shore* and *A Sparrow Falls*), the World War II campaign in

Abyssinia against the Italians and the local *shufta* (*Power of the Sword*), Mau Mau Kenya (*Rage*), the war of independence in Ian Smith's Rhodesia (*A Time to Die* and *Golden Fox*), the fight between Frelimo troops and Renamo guerrillas in post-independence Moçambique (*A Time to Die*), the seventeenth-century fights for supremacy over the Atlantic and Pacific oceans between the British and Dutch (*Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*), the war in Ethiopia to contain the imperial thrust of the Great Mogul (*Monsoon*), or the war against the Caliph of Oman in Muscat (*Arabia*), who has surrendered his nation to the authority of the Turkish Ottoman empire (*Monsoon*); not to mention a series of 'minor' violent conflicts involving rescue operations of family members or lovers (*A Time to Die*, *Golden Fox* and *Monsoon*); escapes from imprisonment (*A Time to Die* and *Birds of Prey*); or terrorist attacks of various kinds (anti-apartheid, nationalistic anti-British, communist anti-capitalist) in all their multifarious shades of atrocity (*A Sparrow Falls*, *Power of the Sword*, *Rage* and *Golden Fox*). By placing his heroes in these armed conflicts, Smith gives them the opportunity to provide proof of their unquestionable masculinity and overpowering manliness; they can perform heroic actions that render them superior to their enemies and to inferior masculinities and femininities; they can prove their exceptional knowledge, skills or physical abilities; and they can be at the very centre of events and influence the development of those events.

In the Courtney saga, therefore, armed conflict is constructed as a solely masculine space where Smith's manly, aggressive heroes can give free vent to their urge to compete, fight and kill, which are qualified as manly, heroic and honourable activities. Consequently, killing, that is, participating in human hunts, is presented as essentially male in the narratives for "in order to live a man must occasionally kill," (*Lion* 107) and the prospect of killing and being killed is depicted as a tester of true masculinity because it is by killing that "manhood [has] its full flowering." (*Monsoon* 157) After all, the desire to inflict violence is presented as "natural," (*Rage* 337) "primeval" and "atavistic" (*Fox* 539) in men and killing and cruelty as an essential part of life given that blood, shed blood, "is life [...] with all life's beauty and cruelty and passion." (*Fox* 69) Heroic men are instinctual fighters; thus, Sean II is "a natural fighter;" (*Rage* 337) and Tom is a "killer," (*Monsoon* 120) prepared by training, but

also by “vocation,” (*Monsoon* 218) to inflict violence so, when he singles out an enemy as prey, he cannot be called off since “it would be like trying to call off a hunting leopard.” (*Monsoon* 120) By contrast, men who cannot fight are “yellow,” “snot-nosed whining” babies, “yellow-bellied whimpering little” boys, because to be a fighter one has to be a man. (*Sword* 257)

Men are not only instinctual fighters, they also enjoy the fight, especially if the prospective combat involves difficulty and danger, if it is “hot guns all the way;” (*Fox* 509) if it “[erupts] with gunfire and flame and [...] mortal thrill.” (*Fox* 528) Easy missions are not interesting since they do not demand probity and courage and, thus, do not give men the opportunity to show off their strength. When men are involved in difficult combats, therefore, they are “elated,” with “the adrenaline of violence [...] like a drug in [their] blood” (*Sword* 92) and the wild exhilaration of battle lust.” (*Monsoon* 153) In Smith’s milieu, “living dangerously is half the fun,” (*Rage* 558, 566) so men “[thrive] on risk” (*Die* 22) and “[relish] the sensation of fear” that “[throbs] in [their] blood and [beats] in [their] brain” so they are never “more alive than [when] going into battle and mortal danger.” (*Fox* 525) They regard life-risking operations as “heading for Disneyland” (*Fox* 516) or a “Sunday school-picnic,” (*Fox* 522) and they much prefer action and the thrill of adventure to the drudgery and monotony involved in any sort of ‘civilised’ job.

Although, in Smith’s diegesis, heroic men are natural-born killers, they are also constructed as honourable and the deaths they inflict as justifiable. Unlike blacks (and villainous whites), who, as I explain in the final part of my dissertation, are cruel and vicious and resort to stomach-churning practices without flinching or showing remorse, white heroes feel sorry or nauseated by the acts they commit when they are blinded by fighting rage. When Hal, for instance, kills his first man, he feels “breathless with shock as he [looks] [...] at the carnage” and “his stomach [heaves] with sudden nausea.” (*Birds* 33) Also, they despise dishonourable fights; they would never kill a man “while he is unable to defend himself,” which “would not be honourable,” (*Birds* 340) and are “sickened by [...] slaughter” when the enemies are outnumbered or unprepared to meet the heroes’ fighting thrust. (*Birds* 547)

Furthermore, the heroes never resort to gratuitous violence. When they fight and kill it is always within sanctioned combats that they have joined in but never propitiated. Also, when they fight or retaliate, they are not motivated only by “dreams [...] of battle and glory,” (*Monsoon* 73) “martial glory and enrichment,” (*Birds* 355) or “the pleasure of plucking out a prize from under the enemy’s nose,” (*Birds* 138) which are secondary. Instead, what motivates them is the honourable urge to protect themselves from ‘unlawful’ interference; to protect the weak from cruelty and subjection; to exact revenge for acts of cruelty committed against friends, family or peaceful peoples; or to act in self-defence, when retaliated to fight or when coerced into interfering in conflicts that do not concern them by circumstances beyond their control. Thus, for instance, Sean II helps “[clean] up the last of the Mau Mau gangs” (*Rage* 559) in Kenya because they commit dreadful acts of murderous violence against peaceful white settlers. (*Rage* 513-519) Similarly, Sean II does not hesitate to chase black poachers across the Moçambiquean border and kill them because many of them have “been bush fighters in the guerrilla war” so they are “hard men and killers of men as well as of the great animals on which they [prey].” (*Die* 88) He also gets involved in the civil war between Frelimos and Renamos in Moçambique, which he regards as equally vicious and despicable, only because a Renamo general, China, captures Claudia, Sean II’s lover, and threatens to kill her if Sean II does not agree to help Renamos fight enemy Frelimos. (*Die* 190-191) Shasa approves of using nuclear bombs or developing Cyndex gas - which is “terrifying stuff” and “eleven times more toxic than the cyanide gas used in American execution-chambers” (*Fox* 386-387) - in order to protect South Africa from alien interference. He assures he disapproves of “weapons of mass indiscriminate destruction,” (*Fox* 384) but, when considering the protection of the nation, he cannot waste time “deciding which weapons are morally acceptable;” (*Fox* 385) after all, the threats endangering the nation are many, indeed:

There is a groundswell of hatred running against our little country. It is being cunningly orchestrated by a small vicious group of our enemies. They are brainwashing an entire generation of young people around the world to regard us as monsters who must be destroyed at all costs. [...] One day we could see an American naval task-force blockading our coast. We could face a military invasion of, say, Indian troops backed by Australia and Canada and all the members of the Commonwealth. (*Fox* 385)

Even testing the gas on innocent animals is necessary for they are “considering the defence of the country, the safety of [their] nation.” Consequently, Shasa concludes, “We must test. Better that some animals should die than our own people. It is not a pretty thought, but it is essential.” (*Fox* 465) Hal, on the other hand, kills many gaolers and pursuers when he escapes from the Cape’s dungeons, but he does not do so for pleasure; he is forced to do so “in self-defence.” (*Monsoon* 128) When he kills Hugo Bernard, the prison’s warden, it is to revenge the death of one of his men, Oliver, whom Bernard killed cruelly. (*Birds* 323) Also, Hal puts to death Rachid and the other Arab pirates responsible for Dorian’s capture “without remorse;” (*Monsoon* 212) he hangs the Arabs and he throws Rachid, who is more directly involved in Dorian’s capture, overboard to feed the Tiger sharks surrounding the ship; meanwhile, Hal “[watches] dispassionately as the shark’s jaws [close] over the man’s head, engulfing him to the shoulders.” (*Monsoon* 212) Even though this could be regarded as a sordid act of revenge, it is conducted within the sanctioned limits of legality. Hal states, “I am a servant of the English King, charged and empowered by His Majesty with ridding these seas of such offals as you.” (*Monsoon* 210) Smith painstakingly justifies each of the deaths caused by white heroes. Those he does not bother to provide an explanation for are the ones committed during combat; he does not need to justify these because, as he asserts, “no death in war is murder. The object of warfare is the destruction of the enemy by all means possible.” (*Burning* 149)

The deaths the white heroes inflict are justifiable, never gratuitous, so they highlight their honourable nature; but Smith has still another purpose in mind when portraying his heroes in fights. Fighting gives Smith’s men the opportunity to measure up their strengths against other men, and, if successful, to demonstrate their superiority over them. According to essentialist theorists, competition can be explained in biological terms since it has its roots in the evolutionary imperatives of human behaviour, an idea that is reinforced by the contemporary study of animal populations and behaviour. The observation of struggles between dominant males and competitors that dispute their territorial domination and their sexual control of females demonstrate that the winners take the prize, the losers are left with the scraps or perish in the attempt, a fact which, in turn, exemplifies the cardinal principle of natural



selection, the survival of the fittest. These principles are operative in human males, or so essentialists claim, and explicate their competitiveness, which is manifested differently throughout history. If in pre-industrial times men competed for the best game and sexual prizes, in industrial societies they compete in the political and economic arenas. Those who get to the top do so because of superior ability and talents; those who fail do so because of poor natural endowments. Accordingly, “the prevalence of competition and conflict in industrial society is not accidental, but is an essential requirement of evolutionary progress.”<sup>41</sup> The fact that men compete with each other at all sorts of levels is the means whereby society guarantees that the successful occupy positions of power and generate the wealth and the technology necessary to lead societal groups / nations to progressive stages of development.

Smith seems to retain these essentialist principles at a very crude level in the saga. Competitiveness is presented as natural in men. Dominant males, particularly siblings and dominant men belonging to different racial / national groups, seldom bond. Instead, they experience an atavistic urge to eliminate one another that materialises in physical struggle, which serves the purpose of certifying the dominance of the successful male. Consequently, and within a broader context of male aggression at all levels, Smith propitiates the encounter of dominant males who ascertain their power by engaging in hand-to-hand combat or overtly physical competition. An example will illustrate the point. When Shasa and his half-brother, Manfred, first meet, they “[bridle] and [stiffen], like dogs meeting unexpectedly; silently, they [scrutinise] each other;” (*Sword* 22) immediately, they begin to fight. Although Manfred overpowers Shasa on this occasion, he does not kill him because Lothar, Manfred’s father, manages to separate them, not an easy task since it is like “trying to separate a pair of mastiffs.” (*Sword* 31) However, this first encounter determines the nature of their relationship. Although Manfred and Shasa remain dominant in different areas of influence (Shasa becomes an influential tycoon; Manfred an influential National Party minister), when their paths cross they systematically fight each other, whether in combat, in the political arena or in any other area where competition is possible. Manfred even tells Shasa, “Is it not strange how you and I seem doomed

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<sup>41</sup> Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* 78.

always to confront each other?" (*Rage* 30) Being, as they are, dominant males, they cannot but fight. Even when after years of confrontation Manfred and Shasa decide to pool their strengths for the well-being of the nation and Shasa accepts Manfred's offer to join the National Party, they find occasions for competition. Manfred, for instance, invites Shasa to a springbok hunt on a ranch belonging to one of Manfred's friends. Paired together during the hunt, Shasa teases, "What about a small wager on the bag?" (*Rage* 32) Manfred is a puritan Calvinist, so he declines, "I do not gamble [...] That is a device of the devil, but I will count the bag with interest." (*Rage* 33) As they proceed to count their scores, Lothar proclaims, "Eight [...] and two wounded." Shasa expressionlessly tells him he has shot twelve. Manfred, hiding "his chagrin well enough," asks, "How many wounded?" Shasa has outmatched Manfred, so he responds, "Oh [...]. I don't wound animals - I shoot where I aim." The answer is humiliating enough; he "[does] not have to rub in salt." (*Rage* 34)

Smith does not question man's intrinsic urge to kill or the values and ideals behind war and other armed conflicts or fights. Consequently, he portrays war as the ideal locale for the emergence of heroic masculinity. However, Smith does not romanticise about war and shows its bleakest side. The most dreadful aspects of the Boer War, for example, are exposed in detail: massive killings, (*Thunder* 176-177, 299) and the terrible consequences of the war of attrition on the South African locale and peoples: the systematic destruction of farms and fields (*Thunder* 302-303) and the conditions in which people had to live in British concentration camps where there was shortage of beds, food, sanitary and medical facilities, as a result of which many people died, ravaged by illnesses such as the *witseerkeel*, dysentery. (*Thunder* 314)<sup>42</sup> World War I is presented in no better terms. It is depicted in all its monstrosity: the mechanised warfare in the trenches and the mass slaughter of cannon-fodder by artillery, tank and machine gun, filling everything with death; (*Sparrow* 2) the trapped and immobilised soldiers in a nightmare landscape drained of life and beauty; (*Burning* 19, 153) the highly-disciplined hierarchy that instils unthinking obedience to

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<sup>42</sup> In Arthur Keppel-Jones, *South Africa* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), we are provided with the following information about mortality rates in British concentration camps: "In all the camps together the deaths in October, 1901, reached a rate equal to 344 per thousand per annum. The child mortality was much worse, in some camps reaching and surpassing the rate which, if continued throughout the year, would have extinguished the whole child population." (37)

decisions made elsewhere; (*Burning* 119-120) not to mention battle fatigue or shell shock (*Burning* 52) or the premature ageing of youngsters having to survive in stressing battle conditions. (*Burning* 119) The idea that war is “a great game” is disowned as heroes confront war’s grimmest aspects such as “the ripped guts and the terror and how dead men smell on the fifth day in the sun.” (*Sword* 451) Not even the technicolor world of pirate adventure is saved from Smith’s realistic account of the barbarity, brutality, filth, stench and other grim living conditions seething underneath the glamorised version of seafaring life Hollywood has got us accustomed to. As Tom witnesses the gang-rape of an Arab woman by four of his own men during the attack on the fort in Flor de la Mar where the Arabs hold Dorian captive, his ideals “that war [is] noble and all true warriors [are] gallant” crumble to the ground. (*Monsoon* 280) But blinkers fall from readers’ eyes, too, as Smith follows the development of colonial British heroes fighting their way across the oceans or the African continent in the pursuit of fame, glory, justice or a territorial niche from which to initiate the settlement and colonisation of the continent. Smith spares no ink to portray the nightmare behind the dream: the rotten teeth and bleeding gums of scurvy-afflicted mariners; (*Birds* 132; *Monsoon* 99, 126) the crude operations performed on wounded sailors by brutal butcher-doctors who do not know yet about the existence of anaesthesia; (*Birds* 132, 290-292) the high number of men packed into the vessels; (*Birds* 4) the stench of the vessel’s stinking humanity; (*Birds* 22) the frightening possibility and implications of mutiny; (*Birds* 24, 37) the fact that mariners’ lives are expendable; (*Birds* 45) the existence of homosexuality among men forced to spend months at sea without women; (*Birds* 8) the acts of piracy, rapine and murder committed by privateers; (*Birds* 6) the widespread practice of slave-trade by privateers who resort to this dreadful trade to make some extra earnings; (*Birds* 5) the condition in which captured enemy soldiers are kept by the victorious side; (*Birds* 194-195) the brutality of the assaults; (*Birds* 31-42) or the savagery of the seamen when dealing with the defeated enemies or the corpses of the dead. (*Birds* 189, 504)

And yet Wilbur Smith grants scope for the emergence of heroic military values such as honour, initiative, recklessness and bravery. The personal qualities of the heroes in action allow for the development of desirable masculinity even against

the nightmarish background of death and destruction in wartime conditions. Heroes remain somehow detached from institutionalised military authority,<sup>43</sup> offering an image of liberation to set against the dehumanising and devaluing war conditions in which they find themselves contained. Trained to the outside wild locale of the veld, Smith's heroes are equipped to survive in the equally wild war scenarios. With their "hunter's eye for ground," (*Sparrow* 21) their "hunter's cunning," (*Sparrow* 27) and their intimate knowledge of the territory if they operate in lands they have inhabited before the conflict, they are able to move about the terrains without the aid of a map, select ideal positions, hit the right targets without missing a shot, kill enemies and save their own lives. They fight with "the excitement of the hunter," with "a fire and a passion in their blood which they [never attempt] to suppress," (*Die* 378) turning every single "pursuit" into a "hunt." (*Die* 441) Their commitment to the 'human hunt' is so intense that they lose themselves to the rapture of the fighting madness, "the furious ecstasy of battle" (*Monsoon* 625) and they become oblivious to the threat of death, as can be appreciated in the following quotations:

Michael was lost in the raptures of fighting madness, the berseker's wild passion, in which the threat of death or fearful injury was of no consequence. His vision was heightened to unnatural clarity, and he flew the damaged Sopwith as though it were an extension of his own body, as though he were part-swallow skimming the water to drink in flight, so lightly did he brush the hedgerows and touch the stubble in the fields with his single remaining landing wheel, and part-falcon, so

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<sup>43</sup> They are often in command of their own group and thus operate following their own initiative, or they are independent (mercenary) fighters undertaking personal missions against a background of war; authorities, in turn, especially black military authorities in independent African countries - which I consider separately in the final part - and British officers in colonial times are portrayed negatively. Smith defends the British settlers' rights over South Africa, which he regards more as an independent country than as a British colony. In his particular revision of South African history, the country would have benefited from rule by British citizens without the interference of Afrikaners, whom he presents as the artificers of apartheid. Yet, he never entertains the possibility of South Africa remaining a British colony. In order to disentangle British settlers from British colonial authorities, who do not have an intimate knowledge of the territory they administrate and who do not deserve to maintain their direct control over the country, Smith offers an image of the latter which is far from flattering. In *The Sound of Thunder*, for instance, British commanders conducting the offensive operations against the Boers during the Boer War are presented as "agitated and confused," taking unfortunate decisions that bring thousands of British soldiers to their deaths; (*Thunder* 110) or as "pedestrian and completely predictable." (*Thunder* 167) If the British succeed at all, it is thanks to the ingenuity of British South Africans such as Sean I, who knows his opponents personally and can offer intelligent advice about how to lead the conflict to a favourable denouement. (*Thunder* 254-257) In *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon* Courtney heroes serve the British King, whom they respect and obey. Yet British authorities are not presented positively either. His heroes' continual references to the King and the respect they have for their sovereign are to be read within the parameters of the Arthurian romance narrative conventions Smith uses in the stories and not literally, and, thus, need to be interpreted as an endorsement of the status quo more than as a particular endorsement of British rule in colonial times.

cruel was his unblinking gaze as he bated the ponderously descending balloon.  
(*Burning* 27)

[Sean II] dived the Hercules through the barrage of rockets, they flashed past his head, a storm of smoke and death, and the Hind was only two hundred meters ahead, still rising to meet him, firing rockets at point-blank range but not allowing for his violent manoeuvre. [...] The killing rage was on him, sweet and hot in his blood, there was no fear at all, just the marvellous urge to destroy. (*Die* 323)

Although heroes lose themselves in the “fog of killing rage,” (*Monsoon* 122) and are prepared to risk their lives in combat, they also experience fear. However, and as happens with all other weaknesses affecting the heroes, Smith makes sure that fear does not unman them; he manipulates it in such a way that it simply makes them human. Although courage is regarded as an essential masculine characteristic, the heroes find their courage about to fail them on various occasions. Michael I for example exclaims, “I’ve lost it [...] My nerve has gone. I am a coward,” (*Burning* 138) and finds that terror settles upon him “like a dark and terrible succubus, draining him of his courage and manhood.” (*Burning* 158) Even Rambo-like Sean II feels “confused and uncertain” on occasions when “[p]anic [wells] up from deep inside him,” (*Die* 309) a “hot effervescence of panic that [threatens] to swamp him,” (*Die* 310) as if it was “a grotesque black beast upon his back that weighed him down and choked his breathing.” (*Die* 390) But Smith ensures that fear is pictured as a natural feeling men experience when faced with the horrors of war because “only a madman knows no fear.” (*Thunder* 169) So men are sanctioned to feel fear, although they are not allowed to show it, of course, “for fear spreads among men like the white sore throat diphtheria.” (*Thunder* 169) Smith further counteracts the unmanning effect of fear by depicting it as a pleasurable sensation that makes men feel elated, an elation that feels different from anything they have experienced before, “sharper and more poignant, seasoned by [...] red pepper;” (*Thunder* 91) by highlighting fear as a necessary response that triggers off fighting rage and “burning hatred;” (*Burning* 21) and by showing that, although fear characterises all men, it is only “men who are truly men,” (*Die* 381) “those of [...] the warrior blood,” who can “subdue fear,” (*Birds* 22) enjoy the sensation of terror and thrive on it, like Sean II:

The feeling was so familiar. No matter how many times Sean waited like this, he would never be able to ignore or control the tension that pulled like rubber bands

across his guts. It was the heady anticipation of the draught of terror which soon he would drink to its dregs. He longed for it as the addict for the needle. (*Die* 381)

By propitiating their involvement in wars and combats, Smith exhibits his heroes in all their aggressive, testosterone-charged, masculine splendour. Smith, furthermore, uses war-torn scenarios and armed conflict to highlight three other aspects of his heroes' masculinity apart from their natural (heroic) aggressiveness. Firstly, he places them against a panoramic landscape of technicolor explosions, fights and expansive combat so that he can underline the probity and courage that distinguishes them from other men. As fights and mayhem take place in the background, Smith's heroes are singled out at the front, their bodies disproportionately zoomed up, larger-than-life, in action. Thousands of faceless men die around the heroes; the latter, by contrast, manage to stay alive when others die. Michael I and his friend Andrew, for instance, are not like other soldiers overwhelmed by dreadful circumstances and conditions in World War I France; unlike lesser men, they manage to outlive air combats, while others are systematically eliminated, at least for longer than the rest:

[...] they were not normal men and the alcohol did not seem to affect them, it did not dull their eyesight nor slow their feet on the rudder bars. Normal men died in the first three weeks, they went down flambing like fir trees in a forest fire, or they smashed into the doughy, shell-ploughed earth with a force that shattered their bones and drove the splinters out through their flesh.

Andrew had survived fourteen months, and Michael eleven, many times the life span that the gods of war had allotted to the men who flew these frail contraptions of wire and wood and canvas. (*Burning* 2)

They also manage to conduct attacks and ferocious fights almost single-handedly against a context of violence and when outnumbered. Sean II, for example, attacks the Third Brigade garrison, which holds almost a thousand crack veterans on base, plus two additional full para-commandos of a hundred men each from the Fifth Brigade - the élite of the Zimbabwean army, "ruthlessly efficient killing machines." (*Die* 300) Sean II captures their Stinger missiles without aerial or terrestrial back-up, and with the only assistance of the twenty Shangane he has trained himself in two weeks. He then has to take the Stingers back to Renamo-held areas in Moçambique while pursued by aircraft of the Zimbabwean and Moçambiquean air forces. On another

occasion, Sean II chases a bunch of Shona guerrilla terrorists, “first-class soldiers, doughty and brave and dedicated,” (*Fox* 437) with the group of Ballantyne Scouts he commands; when they find the terrors’ hiding place, they wipe them out in less than two minutes, an action which is likened to “pitting Pekinese puppies against a pack of wild dogs.” (*Fox* 438) In order to rescue Nick, his nephew, from his terrorist father, Sean II and his Scouts have to conduct another dangerous operation. They have to travel to northern Angola, an area protected by MiGs, and attack an ANC training-base near the Chicamba river without any sort of back-up. Hal is also the protagonist of an impressive number of heroic deeds. He, for instance, rushes to defend Ethiopia’s empire of the Prester, “one of the most ancient citadels of the Christian faith,” (*Birds* 494) from the attack of the armies of Islam led by the Mogul. He not only saves the emperor, the Prester John, Iyasu, from his kidnappers, he also protects the country from the forces of Islam. “Single-handed” he “[blockades] the entire coast of Ethiopia.” He “[whales] into El Grang’s transports with a vengeance” and sinks and captures “twenty-three sail” in one week. His feats are so mighty that “no Mussulman captains [put] out to sea while he is in the offing.” (*Birds* 519) When the war ends, General Nazet, a woman warrior, thanks God for their victory in the following terms:

We thank you [...], Lord God, for sending to us your good and faithful Henry Courtney, without whose valour and selfless service the godless would have triumphed. May he be fully rewarded by the gratitude of all the people of Ethiopia, and by the love and admiration that your servant, Judith Nazet, has conceived toward him. (*Birds* 543)

Indeed, the heroes’ courageous performance in action, their “magnificent [...] famous [victories],” (*Die* 415) their “superhuman,” (*Sword* 586) “supernatural strength,” (*Birds* 11) turn them into living legends. (*Fox* 428, 432) Their prowess “[makes] the news headlines” (*Die* 332) and / or gains them the admiration and respect of both friends and enemies, who are “panic-stricken” when they see them and try to escape their “terrible approach.” (*Birds* 523)

Secondly, involvement in war serves Smith the purpose of highlighting the heroes’ self-sacrificing nature, the fact that they are ready to give their own lives in order to attain victory or to save a friend. Michael I, for example, is prepared to fly

kamikaze-like into a German balloon to blow it up if there is no other option. (*Burning* 25) Sean I, on the other hand, does not hesitate to challenge his fortune and rescue Saul Friedman when he is wounded at the battle of Colenso: British troops are ambushed when crossing a bridge over the Tugela river, and they desperately try to escape. Dead and wounded men fall over the low guard rail, splashing into the brown waters of the Tugela while the unfaltering fire from Boer positions wreaks havoc among them, so that the bridge is now blocked with the bodies of the fallen. Saul is hit and Sean I goes back to get him, crosses the river swimming while holding on to Saul, and delivers him to the other bank where someone collects him and brings him to hospital after Sean I himself is hit and taken to hospital as well. (*Thunder* 119) And Sean II refuses to leave Job behind when he is badly injured during their escape from Moçambique. Their situation is difficult. They have to reach South Africa on foot (a trek of three hundred miles), crossing territories held by two opposed armies, Frelimo and the southern division of Renamo, while being pursued by General China's men, and carrying no food with them, so that they have to find "enough to eat [...] in a land that has been burned and devastated by ten years of civil war." (*Die* 422) In spite of the problems facing them, Sean II does not hesitate to try to carry Job on his back to take him to a hospital in South Africa.

Finally, the heroes' participation in war allows Smith to disclose the one virtue that differentiates them from enemy troops: compassion, which, Smith writes, tempers their strength; (*Monsoon* 305, 341) unlike enemy troops, Courtney heroes always bury the bodies of the defeated enemies and those of their own men; (*Monsoon* 160, 219, 296, 618) and treat the captured enemies with leniency and pity. (*Monsoon* 166, 237, 248, 286-287) Their compassion, combined with their courageous and honourable nature, turns them into real warriors. When Tom, for instance, manages to defeat Jangiri, a dangerous Arab pirate, he beheads him because he has to take his head to England. Jangiri's head is worth a barony. Tom's father was promised this title if he defeated the dreaded enemy and brought proof of his death. Yet, when Tom delivers Jangiri's head to the authorities, he finds that they are going to sell it in an auction. He bids for it and buys it because he does not want it "to become a bizarre side-show in a travelling circus." (*Monsoon* 341) Once he has it, he gives it a proper burial on top a



hill because he feels that, although he was a bandit, Jangiri was also a “brave man.” (*Monsoon* 350) Aboli, Tom’s black assistant, expresses his admiration for Tom’s integrity and honourable behaviour in the following terms:

You killed a man in single combat, [...] and you have treated his corpse with honour. You have become a warrior indeed, Klebe. (*Monsoon* 351)

Smith’s heroes are true warriors, indeed. Their unrelenting courage never fails them and they move across the battlefields performing all sorts of heroic actions and trying out all sort of fighting techniques, their unwavering resolution allowing them to reach their objectives even when injured, and their intelligence and intuition allowing them to plan perfect attacks and guess even the most intricate enemy plans, such as when Sean I guesses the Boer attempt to take Cape Town and the previous rendezvous of Boer leaders on the Padda river, enabling the British troops to inflict the final *coup de grace* on the weakened Boer forces during the Boer War. (*Thunder* 319) All in all, war emerges as a completely manly space where men are given the chance to shine with glittering light; where maverick individuals can become full men by performing heroic actions, by controlling their fear and by giving free vent to their killer instincts.

But Smith does more than simply place his heroes against war-torn landscapes and in armed conflict to highlight their courageous natures and allow them to display their manly virtues. Smith ensures the war scenario is presented to readers as a truly masculine space by manipulating the images he uses to depict the heroes’ manliness in war. So it is not only what the heroes do that renders them manly, but Smith’s choice of words to depict these actions. Smith aims at creating a pervasive image of men’s control, dominance and potency and, to do so, he feminises (that is, renders open for men’s penetration) the weapons, aircraft and boats that the heroes manipulate in war so that men can exercise their potency and virility when using them. When Michael I, for instance, asks Andrew how ‘she’, the new SE5 air-plane, handles, he responds, “Just like a young lady I know in Aberdeen - quick up, quick down and soft and loving in between.” (*Burning* 90) Sean II tells the Hercules he is flying, “You are a pussy cat, darling,” for he knows that “like a woman an aircraft always [responds] to loving flattery,” (*Die* 314-315) and he “[babies] the controls, coaxing her with gentle

fingers.” (*Die* 323) The *Resolution*, a Dutch boat, is “[s]weet as a virgin, and twice as beautiful” (*Birds* 27) and Big Daniel rips through her metal and wood with his “iron bar” to get into the interior of her strong room while the spectators, the crew watching him, let out a “hum of delight” as the contents of her compartment are revealed; (*Birds* 76) she is, indeed, “[a] lovely sight” which “makes one’s mouth water to behold her.” (*Birds* 138) Hal can drive the *Golden Bough*, one of his vessels, “to the limit” (*Birds* 463) and her bottom beneath the waterline is “tight and sweet as a virgin’s slit.” (*Birds* 551) The *Seraph*, another of Hal’s ships, is a “beauty” so Hal runs “his eyes over her in almost lascivious pleasure as though she were a naked woman;” (*Monsoon* 6) and when she faces a storm, she “[quivers] eagerly” and “[frolics] away.” (*Monsoon* 162) And the *Shallow*, Tom’s ship, with her new canvas, is “as pretty as a maiden in her wedding dress” (*Monsoon* 388) and her mainsail in the wind is “swollen tight and white as an eight-month pregnant belly.” (*Monsoon* 412) In order to further masculinise war and the endeavours of men in action, Smith also likens killing to eating. By making his heroes ‘devour’ or ‘cook’ their enemies, he highlights their mastery: enemies are therefore ‘food’, which allows men to exert their right to possess, control, assimilate, and subordinate, as is exemplified in the following quotations:

‘Ngi dla!’ Michael howled triumphantly. ‘I have eaten!’ - the ancient Zulu war cry that king Chaka’s warriors had screamed as they put the long silver blade of the assegai into living flesh. (*Burning* 94)

As he crossed, he laid off his aim for the deflection of their combined tracks and speeds, and fired for the radiator in the junction of the scarlet wings above the German pilot’s head, attempting to cook him alive in boiling coolant liquid. (*Burning* 131)

The final image of war that emanates from the narratives is one of men’s supreme power and control. The heroes’ actions and ability to perform heroic deeds stress their masculinity. Smith’s crafty use of images further highlights their supreme power over a world open to men’s penetration and manipulation. War is thus a masculine space through and through; a space where real men acting like men succeed; a space that reactivates the reader’s faith (especially male readers) in violent assertion of male dominance and total control over the elements.

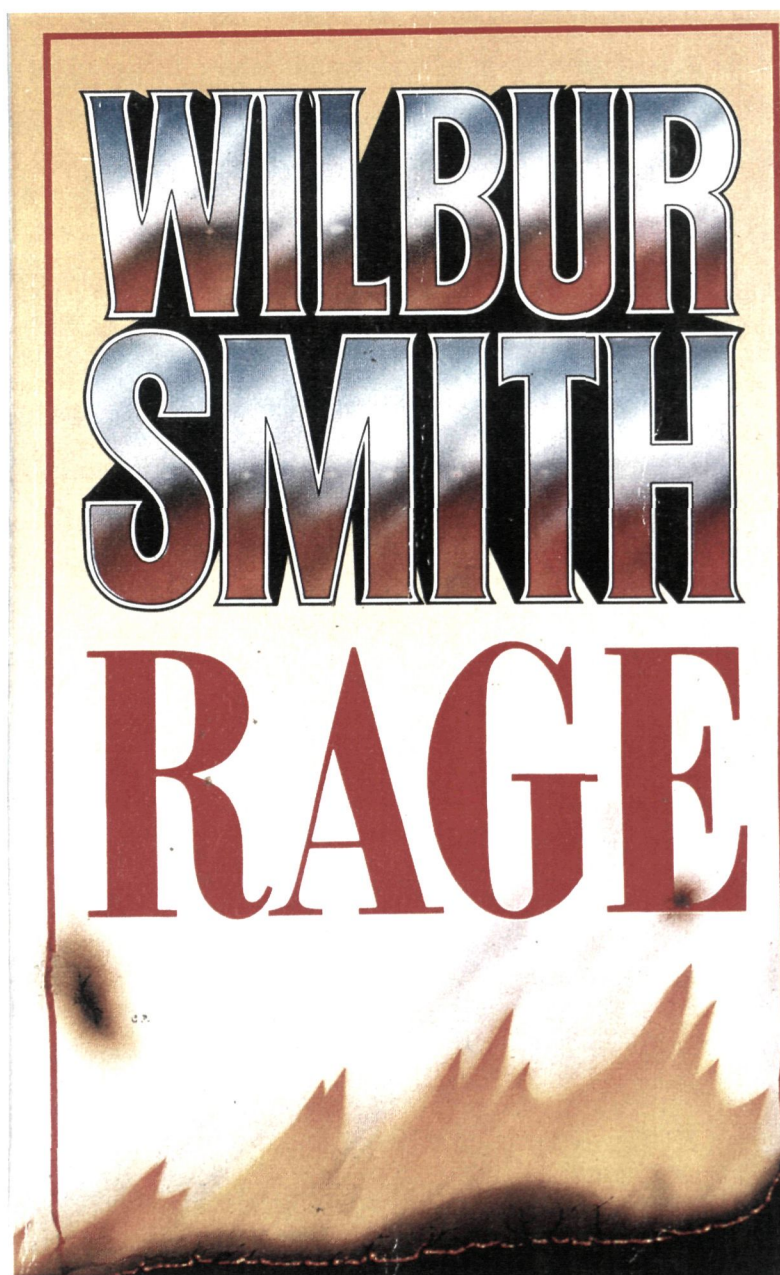


Figure 11. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *Rage* (London: Pan, 1988). Illustration by George Sharp and Chapman Bounford.