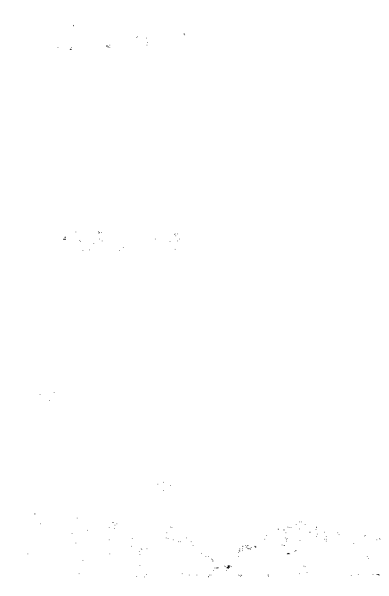


**Representations of Masculinity in Wilbur Smith's Courtney Saga.
Contextual Causes and Strategies of Authorial Control**



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10.4. Enterprise, politics and the wilderness as masculine spaces

10.4.1. Masculinity, work and competition

To be a man, Rosalind Miles writes, "as popular music and mythology have it, is to be 'king of the town, cock of the walk, top of the heap.'"⁴⁴ Manhood is closely linked to an obsessional insistence on phallic power and supremacy, what could be termed a *droit de seigneur* of dominant males over other weaker men and women in general. As I have stressed in the previous section of this chapter, competition, the desire to excel and gain authority over others is supposed to characterise male identity; as Dustin Hoffman eloquently put it when asked to explain what he had learnt about masculinity when playing the starring role in *Tootsie*:

Part of manhood is not to be taken advantage of. Poker is the classic masculine sport where the whole thing is bluff and knowing where someone's vulnerability is, so you can attack and try to take something away from them.⁴⁵

Indeed, most institutions in our western world are organised around hierarchies, methods of competition and elimination, and inexorable systems of rewards and punishments. Men, in order to 'triumph', must be able to perform successfully within power hierarchies and reach top positions in the social pyramid; those who hesitate, show weaknesses or fail are thrown to the jackals. In a world built around systems of production that guarantee the working of capitalism and nurture the ambitions of political leaders, the ability to generate wealth, as well as the talent to manipulate and distribute this wealth, have been turned into two of the main definers of masculinity. Wealth and power - or rather, the power that goes with wealth - are constructed as major prizes men must aim at if they want to become worthy, successful men. These prizes, in turn, are achieved through the application of hard work and enterprise. In western, industrialised societies, therefore, definitions of masculinity are highly bound up with definitions of work; work has become a potent source of validation in the eyes of men and remains a primary definer of adult manhood; as Lynne Segal expresses it,

⁴⁴ Rosalind Miles, *The Rites of Men*, 121.

⁴⁵ qtd. in Rosalind Miles, *The Rites of Men*, 124.

“a successful man is measured by his ability to achieve at his job,”⁴⁶ which offers the benefits of money and status, as well as of power.

10.4.2. Man-the-achiever: fantasies of masculine political and economic power in the Courtney saga

Given the importance of work and the ability to succeed in it for the definition of manhood in our capitalist world, Smith places his men in two areas which he fashions as masculine preserves and which give his heroes the opportunity to prove their strength by making use of highly-esteemed values within capitalism (hard work, initiative and unwavering determination): the world of hard-core capitalist business and the world of politics. These are presented as manly spaces where there is no room for the faint hearted; where men have to play to win, keep winning and keep rolling in the money; where a pervasive macho climate ensures that only the most aggressive and competitive succeed; and where men must always be on their heterosexual macho guard in order not to become losers left to the opprobrium of other men who could regard them as sissies or ‘women’. The worlds of business and of politics, furthermore, are closely connected to the idea of risk and passing beyond the limits of the known and secure (the world of adventure), so men’s involvement in business and politics, therefore, clearly underlines their recklessness and adventurous spirit. Given the enormous potential of these two areas of influence and the opportunities they offer men to prove their manhood, Smith characterises his heroes as capable of succeeding in these two broad areas of influence so that he can stress their power and masculinity.

Sean I will illustrate the point. He is allowed a ‘walk on the business wild side’ in what was to become Johannesburg in Kruger’s Boer republic. Sean I and Duff Charleywood (an assistant engineer Sean I meets in Dundee, a coal mining area) erect their gold empire by the application of technical skills, physical strength, perseverance and hard work. They are a perfect partnership: Duff is the one who negotiates, “pour[s] the oil on the storm waters churned up by impatient creditors,” and who possesses the technical skills, for he is a “storehouse of mining knowledge;” Sean I, on

⁴⁶ Lynne Segal, *Masculinity and Power*, 84.

the other hand, is the one who, with his perseverance and no-nonsense approach to life, brings Duff's designs to fruition: he rejects "the least likely Charleywood brain children" and adopts the more deserving, and once he has made himself stepfather of Duff's schemes, he rears them "as if they were his own." (*Lion* 267) Both of them take risks, for risk-taking is an essential ingredient of adventurous masculinity; but their risks are never unlikely dreams, but down-to-earth plans based on logical thinking. Sean I, who is likened to "a wall to put [one's] back against" or "a friendly mountain," (*Lion* 267) is especially operative in bringing dreams to a happy conclusion for it is his solid devotion to hard work that makes Duff's plans work.

The application of Duff and Sean I's masculinity and manly traits to the world of business is successful and they manage to build their enormous financial empire (described in *When the Lion Feeds*): they buy twenty-five claims from Doc Sutherland (262) and a hundred more on the other side of Cousin Jock; (263) they put up new buildings around the mill; (267) they buy new mills; (271) they pay back all their debts; (272-273) they build 'a modest little office' in town - two stories, stinkwood floors, oak panelling and twenty rooms; (273) they buy land - one thousand acres at Orange Grove and another thousand around Hospital Hill; (273) they start a transport business with almost four hundred wagons which "ply in daily from Port Natal and Lourenço Marques" (273) and they have brickfields which work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to try to meet the demand for building materials; (274) they join up with most of the members of the Diggers' Committee to build a special type of pleasure house, a brothel, which they call the Opera House; (274) they participate in the formation of a Stock Exchange as the nearest they have is the one in Kimberley, which is too far removed to be of practical use to the millionaires in Johannesburg, who need to seek avenues for investment; (275) they survive Kruger's efforts to behead the gold-laying goose (277) and his high taxes on gold to finance the new development on the East Rand; (360) they become important men who receive deferential treatment wherever they go; (277) have over fifteen hundred human beings who depend on them for their livelihood (278) and build a house which becomes a symbol of the possessions and fortune they own, Xanadu, (284) which they decorate with materials coming from all parts of the British empire - carpets from Persia and

wood from the Knysna forests. They finally combine their strength with Hradsky's, pool their resources and go on together to new greatness by merging their vast financial ventures, (326) so Central Rand Consolidated is born. (332)

The narration of Sean I and Duff's exploits in the Witwatersrand, serve Smith the purpose of highlighting their capacity to generate wealth and create cities and big companies; indeed their great power and virility. Furthermore, it brings to the fore their rationality and lack of sentimental softness. They appear to readers as cool and unemotional. True to the masculinist dictum, "Play the game without mercy, play to win," (281) Sean I and Duff show no remorse; they are sharks who smell out vulnerability in men and close in on them: when Karl Lochtkamper, for example, lays himself open by borrowing too much money which he cannot immediately pay back, they do not hesitate: they call the loans in on the last day of the quarter and give him twenty-four hours to meet them, which is certainly not time enough. Karl is weak, a "quitter," (280) and, consequently, he takes fright and commits suicide. Sean I and Duff show no pity; they are very aware of the fact that in the world of business men have to take chances and accept loss with dignity if they are knocked down; so Karl's death is not their fault, but his: he went for the greasy pig and was not manly enough to face defeat with courage and manly dignity. In the world of enterprise, men have to act like men, rationally and unemotionally, and weaklings and no-men cannot play the game to win.

Sean I has the capacities a man needs to erect a vast financial empire and to prove his worth as a competitor in the highly masculinist world of hard-core capitalism. His descendants and predecessors, at least worthy ones, are equally capable businessmen. Smith makes sure he endows them with the manly virtues that turn them into successful participants in the world of business. Their business acumen guarantees that every venture they undertake is blessed with the Midas touch so they manage to erect a mining empire with ramifications in all areas of business, influence and power and they become one of the most important generators of wealth in South Africa. It cannot be otherwise for Courtney heroes are fashioned to succeed. They have an air of power and self-assurance: they are "big-headed and cocksure;" (*Sword*

465) “men of power and strength;” (*Die* 248) full of “self-confidence,” they are men “to reckon with.” (*Monsoon* 337) Living and making their progress in Africa - a continent that Smith qualifies as a place where “there are no good guys or bad guys, there are simply winners and losers,” (*Die* 346) Courtney heroes are winners: they are characterised by their “will to win,” which is presented as “the single most important asset;” (*Sword* 290) it is “their nature always to strive towards the highest pinnacle,” (*Rage* 54) “greedy [...] for wealth and power,” (*Sword* 56) with a “burning and unrelenting ambition and hunger for power,” (*Rage* 611) fighting only when they know they can win; as Centaine tells Shasa,

You only fight when you are sure you can win. [...] we are Courtneys. We don't have to fight with our fists. We fight with power and money and influence. Nobody can beat us on our own ground. (*Sword* 34)

The Courtneys do not understand the word ‘impossible’ (*Birds* 302) and revel in “seemingly hopeless” situations. (*Rage* 102) Their success does not depend on luck. They succeed because they apply the characteristics they are endowed with, namely charisma and wit; (*Sword* 292) competence; (*Sword* 185; *Fox* 500) enterprise and heart; (*Birds* 373) cunning and resourcefulness; (*Monsoon* 39) determination and impatience; (*Monsoon* 269) duty and responsibility; (*Monsoon* 638) not to mention the fact that they all have a sharp business mind. (*Rage* 451, 551; *Fox* 182-183) But they also succeed because they undertake their job with a “devotion and dedication that few men are capable of” (*Rage* 100) and “a total dedication to detail.” (*Rage* 103) They are always “the first man on the job,” (*Rage* 376) keeping “everybody on their toes;” (*Rage* 24) and they forsake “none of [their] determination to take up [their] duties and responsibilities” with their jobs. (*Sword* 425) They never lose interest in their job, it simply “[grows] more intense;” (*Sword* 105) they find what they do “fascinating,” (*Sword* 138) and develop “love” for work. (*Rage* 326) Shasa epitomises the idea:

By the time he crossed the road in front of St George's cathedral and went into the revolving glass front door of Centaine House, he was thinking of finance and mining, juggling figures and choices, weighing factual reports against his own instincts, and enjoying the game of money as hugely as he had the rituals and confrontations on the floor of the houses of parliament. (*Rage* 12)

They do not love money for its own sake - avarice does not move them - but for the power it gives them. Money holds "endless fascination" for them; as adepts, they know that money is "neither good nor evil, but simply amoral;" that "money [has] no conscience" but that contains "the most powerful potential for both good and evil;" and that it is the man who possesses money who makes the ultimate choice between good and evil, and "that choice [is] called power." (*Rage* 100)

The Courtneys' ability to succeed in business is proved generation after generation. Even though they are born into wealth and privilege, they find ways to build their own reputation. Sean I, as I have explained before in the chapter, gives up his share of his father's farm to start anew and manages to build a gold empire in Johannesburg and, when that fails, a wattle empire in Natal. Like Sean I after him, although for different reasons, Tom finds himself deprived of his father's financial empire in England. Yet, he is "clever and tough;" learns to fend for himself and goes into the world as a trader and colonialist in order to amass "treasures and wealth;" (*Monsoon* 21) after all, he is a man who "can make [his] own way in the world." (*Monsoon* 331) Shasa and Garrick II, on the other hand, do not need to start anew for they become the inheritors of the vast Courtney empire in South Africa. Yet, they do not take their birthright over the Courtney fortune as given. They take a degree in business and administration at college and learn the basic workings of their family's empire from the bottom, rapidly making their way up to the top by applying their sharp business minds to the development and expansion of the empire. Garrick II, for instance, uses his "hard-earned cash" (*Rage* 452) to buy a land option he expects to develop into a township, which will eventually make "twenty million profit." (*Rage* 451) He researches the project himself, digs up an approval, negotiates the option with the owner, does all the work and takes all the risks. He then negotiates the terms of a joint venture to develop the property with Courtney Mining; the negotiations start tough and as Garrick II "[gets] his first taste of blood, they [grow] tougher." (*Rage* 453) Eventually, he makes a success out of it. Both Garrick II and his father, Shasa, gain their right to become chairmen of the company because they work hard for it and manage to increase the company's capital and assets. Under Shasa's direction, the

company expands and prospers; Garrick II is not even thirty years of age when he succeeds his father as chairman and chief executive officer, and he runs “a multi-billion dollar complex of companies with [...] formidable application to detail and insatiable appetite for hard work;” (*Fox* 89-90) his achievements are impressive; since he has inherited the business, we are told, he has “presented his shareholders with record company profits.” (*Fox* 92)

Although they are ruthless businessmen - they relentlessly destroy enemies and make surplus workers redundant without flinching - they are always “prepared to make [their] decisions and live with the consequences,” (*Rage* 251) so they are not the sort of men who elude problems and deflect responsibilities. Furthermore, their intentions are ultimately and invariably good. Although I elaborate upon this aspect of the heroes’ personality in the final part of my dissertation, it is worth mentioning at this stage that their ruthlessness does not render them insensitive to the needs of the country and the situation black people find themselves in under apartheid. Gold is presented as a blessing for South Africa, its guardian-angel, that protects the country when other countries desert them and withdraw their support:

Of all the blessings that have been heaped upon this land, gold is the greatest. It has stood us through the bad times, and made the good times glorious. It is our treasure and more, for when all else fails, when our enemies and the fates conspire to bring us down, gold glows with its bright particular lustre to protect us. A guardian angel indeed. (*Rage* 449)

One should question whether gold shone so bright for black people in South Africa as it did for whites, but in Smith’s milieu, it not only enriches whites; its benign effects can also be felt among blacks, who benefit from the Courtneys’ entrepreneurial spirit because the wealth they generate provides blacks with hospitals, housing and education. The Courtneys, therefore, do not only benefit themselves when undertaking financial ventures; they also keep the country’s economy alive, as can be appreciated in the following quotation in which Manfred praises Shasa’s success in the following terms:

In a few short years after Sharpeville, you have helped rally the economy. Foreign investment is pouring in, thanks to your efforts. The value of property is higher

than it was before the crisis. You have done an excellent job building the armament industry. (*Rage* 562)

The South African political arena, with its centre in the houses of parliament in Cape Town, where the National and the United parties conduct their battle for supremacy and lay out the policies that dictate the destinies of the South African population, is also presented as a man's world from which women are excluded. In fact, the houses of parliament, with "the grandeur of white columns and lofty halls, the exotic tiles on the floors, the panelling and the green leather-covered benches," are likened to "an exclusive men's club." (*Rage* 257) The pictures and sculpted busts of famous men decorating the rooms - "Merriman and Louis Botha, Cecil Rhodes and Leander Starr Jameson," (*Rage* 258) - further confirm and safeguard the masculinity of the place, whose bastions are and have been protected by great men, "heroes and rogues, statesmen and adventurers" who have made South Africa's history. (*Rage* 258) Only successful men can penetrate the parliament's walls; and Smith's Courtney heroes, characterised as they are by their will to win, manage to get a foothold in parliament from which to pursue their political aspirations within this fortress of masculine power.

Shasa is an outstanding example. Although he starts his political life as the United Party candidate for the parliamentary by-election of Hottentots Holland and snatches a close-fought victory from his National opponent, he manages to obtain his political niche as a member of the National Party. Manfred, who holds the office of Minister of Police, offers Shasa the option to become Minister of Mines and Industry using the following argument:

What this country needs desperately is the wealth to make our vision come true. It is a massive undertaking for which we lack the skills. We need a special type of man. [...] We need a man with the vigour of youth but the experience of age, a man with proven genius for finance and organisation. We can find no member of our party with those attributes. (*Rage* 37)

In spite of his misgivings about joining a party whose racist policies he abhors, Shasa accepts the offer. After all, he joins a club of professionals conducting a "slick, highly-tuned political machine," while the United Party is led by "complacent and lethargic"

amateurs who never want “to appear to try too hard.” (*Rage* 256) Also, his turn-coat act does not make him a traitor to the liberal ideas he seemingly believes in; he joins the National Party in order to help them “restore calm and prosperity” (*Rage* 363) to the country by contributing his ideas about equality and capitalist endeavour as a means to build up the economy of the nation. And he turns his alliance with the National Party into a definite success. As the National Party candidate for South Boland, Shasa “[woos] across at least five hundred erstwhile United Party voters” and, much to the delight of the “Nationalist hierarchy,” he “[increases] the majority most handsomely.” (*Rage* 257) Although his former comrades howl their contempt when he delivers his first parliamentary speech as a National Party minister, Shasa, “[t]all and elegant, smiling with scorn, switching easily from English to Afrikaans,” gradually quietens the benches opposite him with his riveting oratorical style; once he has their attention, he makes them “squirm uneasily as he [dissects] their party with an insider’s surgical skill, then [holds] up their weaknesses and blemishes for them to contemplate.” (*Rage* 258) He not only obtains the respect of the opposition, but also that of the other National Party ministers who had been “hostile to his appointment.” (*Rage* 259) Not even the English-speaking press, who turn Shasa into one of their favourite targets, can undermine his power or find fault in the way Shasa undertakes his job in parliament. All their attacks seem “to consolidate his position in the National Party” and, “by their pettiness and subjectivity,” they point out “the efficiency and effectiveness with which he [runs] his ministry.” (*Rage* 327) Not even a severe political miscalculation, when he backs “the wrong horse when John Vorster [comes] to power in South Africa,” (*Fox* 167) manages to eclipse Shasa’s power. Although he is shunted into an ambassadorial post in London, he exonerates himself and is rewarded with the appointment to “such a responsible position as head of Armscor.” (*Fox* 167)

Although Shasa does succeed as a National Party minister, he never betrays his ideals and remains an honourable hero throughout his fictional life. He expresses his disapproval of apartheid openly, not only because he finds it an unfair system, but also because it is “financially unsound.” (*Rage* 54) After Sharpeville, a state of emergency is declared in almost half of South Africa’s magisterial districts, the PAC and the

ANC are banned and those supporters suspected of incitement and intimidation are arrested and detained under the emergency regulations. Shasa disapproves of these measures and “[risks] his political future by rising to address a plea to Dr Verwoerd for the abolition of the pass book system” that originated the problem. (*Rage* 502) Shasa similarly denounces Verwoerd’s decision to withdraw South Africa’s application for continued membership of the Commonwealth after attaining the status of a republic. He is among the “very few” who realises “just how many doors Verwoerd [has] locked behind him and just how cold and bleak [would be] the winds that Macmillan [has] predicted would blow across the Southern tip of Africa in the coming years.” (*Rage* 504) Finally, Shasa condemns Verwoerd’s obsession with race, which he does not find “logical and rational.” (*Rage* 562) Although he never defends the blacks’ rights to vote and he considers they should never be given all the information about what is going on in the country, Shasa never discriminates against or abuses blacks. He furthermore suggests that the white government should encourage the emergence of a black middle class that would become the white man’s “buffer against revolutionaries,” because, he explains, “I never saw a man yet with a full belly and a full wallet who wanted to change things.” (*Rage* 119)

Both politics and the world of capitalist entrepreneurial activity, all in all, are constructed as terrains where Courtney heroes can display their virtues and prove their manly worth by their capacity to succeed without ever trading their integrity. Furthermore, in order to ratify these two broad areas of experience as masculine, Smith ‘adventurises’ them, imbues them with an atmosphere of risk, danger, excitement so that any activity undertaken within their boundaries becomes an adventure and men can be glamorised into adventurers, the highest epitome of tough masculinity. Business deals, therefore, are turned into a “great game,” and participants into players who “don’t [only] play for the monetary prize,” but “for the thrill of winning;” (*Fox* 419) or into fights so that participants become “shrewd and merciless financial predators locked in a contest of minds and wills.”⁴⁷ (*Fox* 417) Courtney

⁴⁷ In *When the Lion Feeds*, Smith describes Sean I and his involvement in the Witwatersrand mining area in the following terms, combining the ideas of playing and fighting that so characterise adventure:

“Sean was twenty-two. The power he held was a more deadly weapon than any rifle, and much sweeter, more satisfying to use. It was a game at first with the Witwatersrand as a chessboard, men and gold for pieces. A word or a signature on a slip of paper would set

heroes are likened to adventurers when involved in business; Garrick II, for instance, finds the participation in risky business ventures “exciting and romantic” for they make him feel “like Al Capone or Captain Blood. Yo ho ho, and a bottle of rum.” (*Fox* 419) Participation in business, in turn, is described as adventurous. Shasa instils in the sprawling Courtney Mining and Finance a “new spirit of youthful vigour and adventure;” (*Sword* 605) he takes decisions based on feelings located “deep down in [his] guts;” (*Rage* 27) and he undertakes new ventures with a “prickle of anticipation” for he “thoroughly [enjoys]” mysteries. (*Rage* 14) Garrick II feels he is not good at undertaking pursuits involving action yet makes his job as chairman of the Courtney empire resemble a Rambo film; he exclaims, “Give me a hectic day on the Stock Exchange or a nice bloody takeover deal any day.” (*Fox* 570) Finally, the world of business often involves penetrating the liminal areas of outlawry that so characterise adventure; when Centaine, for example, decides to use secret information about the gold standard in order to recover her financial empire, she knows that what she is about to do will “place her far beyond the laws of society and the courts” and feels she is “at the beginning of a journey into uncharted territory, a lonely dangerous journey which could end for her in disgrace and imprisonment.” (*Sword* 324)

The world of politics is also romanticised in the saga. The government protects the peace and prosperity of the country, which is threatened by “[h]ard and dangerous men, well versed in death and violence, adepts in the subtle shifting world of political power and intrigue;” (*Fox* 28) or by enemies “as vicious as the Nazis” such as “the *Ossewa Brandwag* and the Black Shirts and the Grey Shirts, the *Deutsche Bund* in South West Africa” that “fight [the government] every step of the way.” (*Sword* 514) Consequently, the political arena is turned into a “dangerous and exciting world of espionage and intrigue” (*Fox* 119) and parliamentary debate into a “rough and tumble” exercise which participants undertake with “sparkling” eyes filled with “battle lust.” (*Rage* 327) The Courtneys, by getting involved in the world of politics, do not only have to contend with political opponents in parliamentary debate, but have to invest some muscle in the job by literally activating their warrior-like abilities to

the gold jingling and the men scampering. The consequences were remote and all that mattered was the score.” (*Lion* 279)

stop terrorist plots endangering the security and prosperity of the nation. Shasa, for instance, has to discover the identity of 'White Sword', an *Ossewa Brandwag* member, intent on assassinating general Smuts. The 'White Sword' plot involves Shasa in a hand-to-hand fight with 'White Sword' himself and an operation to prevent 'White Sword' from stealing guns from the gun factory in Pretoria. Shasa also has to fight Moses Gama, an ANC terrorist, who plans to blow up the parliamentary building in Cape Town and who places the nation and Shasa's family attending the parliamentary session in "danger, mortal danger." (*Rage* 391)

10.4.3. 'Not manly enough' spaces: deconstructing business and politics

Smith, by and large, turns capitalist enterprise and politics into areas of masculine adventure and uses them to his heroes' advantage to highlight their entrepreneurial spirit and political stamina, their power and manliness. Yet, Smith conceives the power attained in the world of business and politics as tenuous. Unlike in other contexts, where men's application of their brute force and instinctive blood lust can guarantee personal success, in the world of politics and business, changed social or economic conditions can frustrate individual achievement of masculinity. Symptomatic of this assertion is women's higher public profile in our western societies, which undermines and challenges men's supreme control over areas of influence; or the fact that a simple stock exchange fluctuation can bring potent financial empires to their demise; or the fact that muscle and nerve do not guarantee political success. Smith's heroes are often successful in both their business and their political pursuits, but not always completely so. Sean I, for instance, joins the South African Party platform to defend the federation of the Cape, the Transvaal, the Orange Free State and Natal under government responsible to Whitehall, and he is invited to head the Natal branch of the party. However, his brother, Garrick I, who is just a malfunctioning, imperfect copy of Sean I, decides to oppose Sean I's party for he regards them as a group of traitors to their King and England who defend the Boers "plotting to take over the whole country." (*Thunder* 494-495) Sean I manages to win the election but only after a recount of the votes that had first given the victory to his brother and that now confirm Sean I's advantage of only ten votes over his opponent, a

fact that proves Sean I's honest approach and his physical force can be easily challenged by a malevolent weakling when the fight takes place in the political arena. Shasa's involvement in the political sphere also proves men's stakes in politics are far from solid. Although his political trajectory is, on the whole, successful, the one single mistake he commits results in exile and political eclipse which, although temporary, is a political eclipse nonetheless.

The power attained in the entrepreneurial world of hard-core capitalism is even more tenuous, as the fall of Sean I's gold empire in Johannesburg demonstrates. Sean I plays the game to win, but the game is not ultimately played to his advantage and he finds himself dispossessed of his fortune, shares and premises, and left utterly alone. As Smith graphically puts it, Sean I flies "the fever flag of failure," so he has to take an "isolation berth" while the other ships "[steer] wide of him." (*Lion* 383) Acting like a man grants him success for a while, but he is eventually beaten by a man, Hradsky, a gold and diamond tycoon, who is hardly masculine. Unlike the heroes, who stand for masculinity, Hradsky's actions are far from virile. He is sly, cunning and wicked, with a "brain as quick and merciless as a guillotine." (*Lion* 266) He is vindictive, but never takes revenge openly. He is also pictured as physically weak: he stutters and needs an assistant, Max, to do things for him; as Duff comically puts it, "Rumour has it that after Hradsky has finished hanging it out, Max shakes it for him." (*Lion* 266) And his physical outlook both highlights his femininity (he is soft and round) and his evil nature (he is monstrous):

[Hradsky] was a man with a body that had been shaped in wax then held near a hot flame. Shoulders rounded to the verge of deformity drooped down over a pear-shaped body; with difficulty they supported the great Taj Mahal domed head. His hair was styled in the fashion of Friar Tuck, thick only around the ears. (*Lion* 265)

Candy, who is 'only a woman', also manages to outlive the competitive capitalist world of Johannesburg and becomes a successful businesswoman: her eating-place for miners grows and expands to become the most important luxurious hotel in Johannesburg, "ornate as a wedding cake with its fancy iron work and corniced roof" and decorated with "crystal chandeliers, velvet curtains roped with

silver, palms and bronze urns, marble tables, [and] fat plush chairs.” (*Thunder* 242) So in Smith’s narratives, a woman and a feminine-looking villain manage to succeed in the tough world of business, while the most masculine of Smith’s masculine heroes is pushed offstage, forced to walk off, dignified but defeated, into the sunset (metaphorically-speaking, of course, for Sean I leaves Johannesburg at the crack of dawn). Similarly, Centaine manages to erect a vast financial empire by applying her innate intelligence and cunning, together with the recklessness and strength which she acquired during her stint on the Skeleton coast, which further substantiates the idea that the world of business can allow space for women as well as for men to succeed and demythifies the perception of business as a solely masculine scenario.

Aware of the tenuous position men occupy in the world of business and politics Smith puts his pen to work in order to deconstruct and undermine these spaces. By doing so, he deflects our attention from the heroes’ performance and presents their (rare) failures to these spaces’ discredit and not to the heroes’. Smith’s deconstruction of the business and political scene in South Africa is done in various ways. In the first place, he shows that the political scene does not discriminate against moral and immoral, fair and unfair, political activity. After all, it is through political contest that the National Party achieves the premiership in South Africa and undertakes to build the evil apartheid tapestry of horror and discrimination. Political performance in newly independent African countries is also detrimental to black peoples in general. Political contest leads to the implementation of Marxist governments and / or internal struggles for power that result in misery, hunger, lack of economic development and / or civil war. Post-independence Moçambique, for instance, is pictured as a place “in a state of flux” where there is opportunity “for the cunning and the ruthless to seize upon.” (*Die* 453) Ethiopia is under the control of “fuzzy-wuzzies, bunch of bandits and *shufta*” that force benevolent Haile Selassie to abdicate. (*Fox* 282)

In the second place, Smith shows the bleak underside of the cities / industrialised areas where the wealth of the nation is built, highlighting their rotten cores and rendering them as sore blisters that destabilise the harmony and perfection of the South African wild scenery. By showing the savagery, brutality, squalor, stench

or filth seething underneath the glittering Dynasty-façade of luxury and comfort wealthy Courtneys inhabit, Smith presents industrial areas and urban sprawls as hardly desirable places to live in and business endeavours as scarcely worth fighting for. Thus, Johannesburg during the consolidation of the gold-mining empires is graphically pictured as a place where there is no peace and order. Not even Kruger dares to interfere with the thugs and riffraff who skulk in town in search of fortune giving it the appearance of a typical frontier town in Westerns:

President Kruger wanted no part in policing the nest of ruffians and cut-throats which was growing up just outside his capital and he contented himself with placing his spies among them and leaving them to work out their own salvation. After all, the field was far from proved and the chances were that in another year the veld would again be as deserted as it had been nine months before. (*Lion* 242)

Although the gold business consolidates in Johannesburg and even Kruger recognises it as a proper city with its own Stock Exchange and brothel, deposes the Diggers' Committee and sends his own police force, social order is never really established in the city: clubs and hotels are full of loud, boisterous men looking for trouble; drifters are always ready to cause problems; many men are unemployed and workers are discontented and threaten to go on strike. Smith also makes Johannesburg South Africa's most painful political blister: it is the greed for wealth accumulated in the Witwatersrand area that, in Smith's account, triggers off the Boer War, a conflict that put an end to the relatively peaceful co-existence of Boers and Britons in South Africa. Johannesburg is also depicted as the place where communism originated, one of the most serious political threats to white moneyed interests in South Africa and which placed the country on the brink of a civil war in the 1920s. (depicted in *Sparrow*) Eventually, it is in Johannesburg as well where black communism develops. Moses Gama manipulates black workers in *Goldi*, the Witwatersrand mining area, and forces them to become members of the African Mine Workers Union, which he founds and which the Chamber of Mines does not dare to fight for they understand "what havoc a labour battle could wreak amongst their interests." (*Sword* 372) Once Moses has the Chamber's tacit acceptance, he develops a revolutionary discourse that he uses to spur blacks into bloody action:

If they come down upon us with their full strength while we are still weak, we will be destroyed for all time. This man Smuts is the devil, and he is truly the steel in the government's spear. He did not hesitate to send his troops with machine-guns against the white union strikers in 1922. What would he do to black strikers, my brothers? He would water the earth with our blood. No, we must lull them. [...] In time the black ants of the veld build mountains and devour the carcass of the elephant. [...] Patience, my brothers, and one day the white man will discover that we are not oxen to be yoked into the races of his wagon. (*Sword* 372-373)

Other areas of urban and industrial sprawl are also depicted as places of dirt and disease. A tavern in the seventeenth-century Cape colony is described as crowded, its "windowless interior [...] dark and rank with tobacco smoke and the fumes of cheap spirits and unwashed humanity;" the whores in the tavern are mostly Hottentots, but there are also one or two white women who have "grown too old and pox-ridden to work in even the ports of Rotterdam and St Pauli," so they have moved southwards aboard ships that have brought them "ashore, like rats, to eke out their last days in these squalid surroundings before the French disease [burns] them out entirely." (*Birds* 353) The boats Lothar uses in his canning factory in Walvis Bay are "grubby and ugly, with streaks of human excrement down the sides where the crew [squat] on the gunwale," stinking of "bilges and fuel oil and unwashed humanity living in confined quarters." (*Sword* 21) The poor whites - "a great mass of itinerant beggars and starvelings, unemployed and untrained, without skills, without hope," (*Sword* 304) - during the depression following World War I in South Africa, live in encampments around the cities in "clusters of untidy shanties" (*Sword* 59) where enteric fever "[spreads] [...] like fire in the winter-dry veld." (*Sword* 64) Black townships around Johannesburg house hundreds of thousands of blacks who flock in from rural districts in search of 'the good life' and swelling the ranks of the unemployed, "finding instead of the good life, crime and illicit liquor and prostitution." (*Sword* 305) Otherwise, blacks live confined within barbed-wire fences in compounds around mining areas. (*Sword* 363) Industrial / urban areas, all in all, are described in all their dystopian gloom; the white mine dumps in nineteenth-century Johannesburg are likened to "postules on the earth's surface;" (*Lion* 362) the mist hiding the scarred earth and the mills is described as "a most appropriate cloak for that evil, greedy city;" (*Lion* 389) and the earth surrounding the dumps is "poisonous yellow," "barren and sterile." (*Sparrow* 76) Twentieth-century Johannesburg is still "a bleak, heartless and

unattractive city.” (*Rage* 13) The relationship between man and nature is lost in places such as these. Men lose their individuality and become ants, sheer cogs in the “spidery steel structures” and “huge steel wheels” spinning “endlessly, back and forth.” (*Sparrow* 76)

10.4.4. The wilderness as a ‘truly manly’ alternative space

Politics and business are pictured in all their wastelandish gloom in the saga, substantiating the perception of these spaces as hardly adequate locations for men who are truly men. Indeed, the world of business and politics have traditionally remained a man’s world where successful men can assert and project their virility and manly attributes. But, at the same time, they are portrayed as places of greed and evil, squalor and misery. Consequently, Smith offers an alternative, more valid location where ‘true men’ can develop and exercise their masculinity: the wilderness (the South African veld and wide open spaces) which is a very masculine space where men are fully licensed and expected to act manly; where men do not have to depend on one another for survival; where broader social changes do not affect them directly; and which is a space that, in the representational arts, has remained largely unpolluted by women. Traditionally, men have never regarded the city and the domestic as safe places and have consequently sought freedom against domestic slavery, cleanliness against the city’s dirt. The borders of empire in the nineteenth century, therefore, offered men the possibility to escape from the stifling cities of the old continent or the feminine prison of the home. In the wildest parts of the empire, manhood could be tried out, failure redeemed and faith in masculinity restored. In the wilderness, men could find ‘Man’. The reactivation of the wilderness as a truly masculine space is even more imperative nowadays, a time when civilisation has triumphed and rules supreme, frontiers are being erased so there is no space for pioneers and explorers anymore, and men’s traditional markers of true manhood (strength, brute force, courage, blood-lust, and so on) are being deconstructed and men subjected to a relentless process of feminisation. So Smith rescues wild open spaces from nineteenth-century adventure stories in his narratives and offers them as a shelter for contemporary man, a fantasy-scape where

he is given the chance to experience 'true manhood in the wilderness', safe from western society's civilising constraints.

But Smith does more than simply opening up the wilderness for his heroes' use. In order to turn wild open spaces into terrains apt only for truly strong men, he 'endangers' the landscape; he constructs it as a place of nameless threats, strangeness, mystery, impossible immensity, overwhelming enigma, unbreachable jungles, contamination and infection. The imagery Smith uses to convey the idea of terror and uncertainty, danger and peril of the African continent is overwhelming in its vastness. The land is "harsh and unforgiving," (*Sword* 596) "cruel and savage," (*Die* 148) "a terrible nightmare," (*Die* 249) "harsh, untamed," (*Birds* 136) "savage and terrible," (*Birds* 157) "strange and barbaric;" (*Birds* 473) the earth is "talking, groaning, protesting, with little muffled shrieks;" (*Lion* 303) the mountains are "cruel;" (*Birds* 303) the South African coast is "forbidding and dangerous;" (*Birds* 67) as the dusk falls upon the hills, they change colours "like monstrous chameleons;" (*Birds* 473) the trees are "monstrous" and seem to "pierce the very heavens" like "great arrows," (*Birds* 427) or "strange [...] with swollen trunks;" (*Monsoon* 596) "treacherous" (*Rage* 167) swamps stink "like an animal cage" and "marsh gas [erupts] sullenly" from their waters; (*Thunder* 547) papyrus have "razor leaves" that lash at people's flesh; (*Thunder* 547) a channel the heroes explore is surrounded by papyrus plants and stands of mangroves that "form a high wall down each side of the channel" limiting their vision and offering "the same dreary view" all along as if it was "a maze;" (*Birds* 469) Elands' Kloof, a valley, is "clogged solid with [...] a seemingly impenetrable mass" of dark green bush, with creepers and vines "[l]ifting like the tentacles of a giant squid" to "overpower [the heroes] and drag them down;" (*Thunder* 407) the Kalahari is described as "bad country where the wagon wheels [sink] into the sandy soil and the marches between water [become] successively longer;" (*Lion* 396) the ocean is "an ancient enemy far more dangerous than [...] any man alive." (*Birds* 449) The land is furthermore infested with wild animals and other "loathsome beasts" (*Monsoon* 49) ranging through lions and leopards, "foul and ugly," (*Birds* 407) "villainous-looking" (*Monsoon* 591) crocodiles producing a chorus of "roaring and monstrous grunting;" (*Monsoon* 591) flocks of "shrieking, bleating wildfowl;"

(*Monsoon* 591) giant reptiles; (*Die* 249) deadly snakes; (*Die* 213) and “swarming insects” (*Monsoon* 591) such as “[t]iny black flies” that crawl into people’s “ears, eyes and nostrils,” (*Monsoon* 596) and lay their eggs on dead people’s eyes, looking like “tiny grains of rice.” (*Thunder* 104)

As if animals were not ‘frightening’ enough, there are also inhospitable tribes (*Birds* 366; *Lion* 144) and cannibals (*Birds* 134) crawling and prowling for human prey, which, in passing, disclaim the myth of the empty land Smith apparently so carefully constructs, and “fevers and plagues” that “[strike] down the white men who [venture] into those tropical climes” (*Birds* 157) and “humid pestilent” coasts (*Monsoon* 566) harbouring malaria (*Birds* 468; *Monsoon* 167) and blackwater fever, (*Lion* 512) which turn “the African mainland into a death-trap.” (*Monsoon* 167) The weather is equally unforgiving: the sun “[beats] down like a hammer on an anvil;” (*Monsoon* 596) the “big winds” roar in October across the plains in Colenso; “the dust races brown on the wind and the trees lean away from it, threshing and churning their branches;” the “vast roaring” envelops men with “murderous rage” and “all [...] preparations are nothing when it hits.” (*Thunder* 105-106) The rains “[open] their annual offensive with a [...] broadside of thunder;” the wind “[frightens] the trees so they [thrash] their branches in panic;” then the rain comes “striking like hail, drowning the wind and turning the air into water.” (*Lion* 464) Finally, rivers flood; the “mad water” is “so thick with mud it [looks] solid” and “[races] so fast it [appears] to be standing still;” it “[humps] up over piles of submerged rock,” gulling “through the deeps” and “[hissing] in static waves through the shadows.” (*Lion* 464) All in all, Africa becomes a “land of savage extremes where heat follows icy cold, and draught succeeds flood, and the earth turns bountiful or hostile with neither rhythm or reason.” (*Fox* 313)

The use of imagery of danger and uncertainty to describe territories is a distinctive feature of imperialist adventure and other colonial texts. As Elleke Boehmer explains, travellers moving through unfamiliar landscapes tried to come to terms with the new locales by grafting their own hermeneutic structures on to the colonised environment, striving to contain the effects of a new locale by attaching to it

recognisable narrative and metaphoric patterns in their writings. Yet, their attempt to interpret the new geographies from their cultural and geographic standpoint did not eradicate their unfamiliarity; they could not “erase from view the tenebrous spaces, impervious blockages, and gaps in knowledge which persisted despite all their efforts at interpretation.” Boehmer goes on, “Even at the time of established Empire, difference or alterity remained shocking, vertiginous, a source of distress.” Explorers and interpreters repeatedly found that their geographic terminology did not suit the land they sought to name; and they reflected the insecurity surrounding colonial interpretation in imagery of the vastness and shapelessness of the other land using “metaphors that connoted mystery and inarticulateness.” The Africa depicted in Haggard’s *She*, for instance, is filled with swamps, mazes and cavernous mountains, and the heroes, Leo Vincey and Holly, seem constantly to lose their bearings, be swamped or be in danger of drowning. Imagery such as this was used to override the threat of the “not-yet-interpreted by naming it as such,”⁴⁸ as if by doing so they could exorcise the fear the new lands produced so that they could proceed to their conquest and exploitation. Wilbur Smith, as an exponent of imperialist adventure, similarly turns the land he describes into a place of danger, an unfamiliar territory. Yet, his main objective when making use of this type of imagery is not only to come to terms with alterity and difference. By depicting the land as harsh and unforgiving, cruel and threatening, he sets off the strength of the heroes who make their progress against these rough terrains; he heightens the virility of men who not only enjoy the wilderness, but engage in combat against it (its wild beasts, its fatal illnesses, its meteorological ‘attacks’, its jagged edges) and emerge victorious. Smith graphically expresses the idea when he describes Shasa’s feelings when flying over the “immense, lion-tawny continent.”

Only up here, high above it, did Shasa truly realise how much he was part of [the continent], how deep was his love for it. Yet it was a hard land and cruel, and it bred hard men, black and white, and he knew that he was one of them. There is no place for weaklings here, he thought, only the strong can flourish. (*Rage* 21)

Indeed, Courtney heroes survive in the wilderness because they are not weaklings. Instead, they are endowed with the characteristics that enable them to

⁴⁸ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 93-94.

engage in the contest against the wilderness and win it. They are ruthless; (*Rage* 26; *Die* 9; *Monsoon* 20) hard; (*Die* 9; *Fox* 500; *Monsoon* 20) savage; (*Sword* 300; *Birds* 487; *Monsoon* 561) courageous and valiant; (*Rage* 259; *Fox* 537; *Monsoon* 35, 102) fearless; (*Sword* 290; *Fox* 397; *Monsoon* 2, 23) wild; (*Fox* 181; *Monsoon* 65) strong; (*Die* 191; *Fox* 500) dangerous (*Die* 9, 342, 487) and addicted to danger; (*Rage* 89, 261, 317; *Die* 22; *Fox* 181; *Monsoon* 499) brutal; (*Rage* 318) tough; (*Die* 62) indefatigable; (*Die* 191) invulnerable; (*Monsoon* 412) formidable; (*Monsoon* 466) heroic; (*Sword* 300; *Fox* 427) reckless; (*Fox* 537) fierce; (*Monsoon* 542) merciless; (*Monsoon* 561) restless, bored by routine; (*Monsoon* 23) resourceful; (*Monsoon* 35) oblivious to discomfort; (*Birds* 1) they are men who never walk, always run; (*Die* 86) there is nothing that can hamper their ebullient spirit; (*Monsoon* 446) they show no hesitation; (*Monsoon* 3) and, of course, they have an edge of steel. (*Birds* 305)

For men such as these “inactivity [...] is insupportable.” (*Fox* 507) They “[have] every reason to feel smug” when they are enclosed in domestic / urban scenarios of power, wealth, land and family. (*Monsoon* 23) Yet, they experience a “feeling that [niggles], like grit in the eye, at [their] contentment,” (*Monsoon* 23) if they are not in contact with the wilderness: they feel “restless, consumed with the need to move on,” (*Monsoon* 346) and grow “increasingly restless and impatient.” (*Monsoon* 355) In turn, the promise of adventure makes them experience “the tingle of excitement [running] through [their] veins;” (*Monsoon* 31) they feel blood “charging, [their mind racing], flitting from idea to idea like a sunbird on a flowering tree, darting from bloom to bloom to drink its nectar,” (*Monsoon* 38) or “wild exhilaration.” (*Monsoon* 63) Consequently, Smith places his men in open wild scenarios where they regain their manly shape, energy and vigour; where they can operate on the basis of their male intuition and instinct, oblivious of the codes and mores that so determine life in society. It is in nature that men are allowed to display and develop their true manhood: living out in the jungles, reading meaning from the smallest signs and foot-tracks; looking after their own well-being without the assistance of doctors or other institutionalised organisations; facing dangers such as attacks from animals, climbing insurmountable mountains without the assistance of specialist gadgets and equipment, passing through dust storms, floods or other equally devastating weather conditions, or

encountering dangerous poachers or escaped terrorists on the rampage; hunting for food, tracing the spoor of the animals and giving full expression to their natural blood-lust. Men such as Mark Anders, Sean II and to a lesser extent Sean I, turn the wilderness into their home. Sean I builds his own wattle empire and ends his days living a contented life in his farm house, Lion Kop; but his wealth depends on constant attention to his plantations, fighting natural disasters and animal predators that threaten his land. Mark Anders becomes the warden of Chaka's Gate, a natural preserve, so he lives in a hut in the wilderness. Sean II, on the other hand, is the epitome of the wild man. He owns a safari concession in Zimbabwe, the Chizora, which is presented as an artificial "Tarzan setting in the jungle," (*Fox* 384) with "all the refinements of what [is] known as a 'Hemingway' camp," (*Fox* 365) where moneyed tycoons are sold "an illusion" and can play at being "eagle scouts and Ernest Hemingway." (*Die* 79) Although the facilities Sean II offers to his customers are artificial, life at the safari lodge is far from easy for Sean II. It involves hunting dangerous animals, leading the chase, sleeping in the open air and even trespassing legal territorial boundaries or penetrating war-torn terrains if the chosen quarry decides to head towards this direction. Furthermore, Sean II remains a member of the Ballantyne Scouts and he joins them or requests their services every time there is terrorist action that requires Sean II's muscle, capacity for action and survival skills in the wilderness.

Even 'urbanised' Courtneys who live comfortable lives in 'civilised' spaces never shed the bonds that tie them to wild Africa completely and use all the opportunities available to them in order to escape from confined domestic, business or political spaces to exercise their 'primeval maleness in the wilderness'. Blaine, for instance, does not hesitate to pursue Lothar de la Rey across the northern wilderness in Namibia in order to recover the diamonds Lothar has stolen from Centaine, even when his political duties are "being sadly neglected" and he incurs "the justified wrath of [his] superiors in Pretoria." (*Sword* 227) He rides alongside the soldiers accompanying him and Centaine, "straight and tall in the saddle." (*Sword* 198) His assistance is invaluable because he has a profound knowledge of the area since "he had been ordered here when serving with General Smuts' expeditionary force in 1915 and had

since returned often to hunt and study the wildlife of the region." (*Sword* 230) Shasa thinks that one cannot live in Africa without being in contact with the bush and the animals; (*Rage* 122) consequently, he takes his sons to a hunting expedition, a "magical adventure" into a territory where man's depredation has not yet wreaked havoc on its lush scenery so they can be part of Africa's "grandeur and savagery." (*Rage* 159) Apart from hunting and painting ritualistic signs with blood on their foreheads, Shasa and his sons confirm their alliance with their wild ancestors, "tough men [...], incredible shots and natural athletes" equipped to "survive the hardships and the tropical disease." (*Rage* 161) Shasa's commitment to the wilderness is pervasive in the saga so he returns to wild open scenarios every time he has the opportunity to do so. Before he takes up his post as ambassador in London, for instance, he goes "on a four-week safari in the Zambezi valley with his eldest son" so he can hunt "lion and buffalo and a magnificent old bull elephant." (*Rage* 623) The wilderness is not only man's repository of strength and vitality in the saga. It is also far more preferable than any other sort of space, especially the domestic, which the heroes regard as confining and soul-depriving, an idea that is contained in the following words by Luke Jervis; when asked to accompany Tom on his African adventure leaving wife and children behind in England, he exclaims, "If I never hear another brat squeal or a goodwife scold it will not break my heart." (*Monsoon* 344)

It is in the wilderness, furthermore, that heroes can hunt, which is one of the most powerful expressions of masculinity and male dominance, showing man's capacity to subdue the environment. It requires the application of the most 'virile' attributes: courage, individualism, sportsmanship, resourcefulness or mastery of environmental signs. Hunting is, indeed, "a man's thing." (*Rage* 122) All Courtney heroes are big-game hunters. (*Sword* 420) Both Hal and Tom hunt in pre-colonial Africa; Sean I becomes an ivory hunter after his mining experience in the Witwatersrand; Mark hunts for food or tracks lions in Chaka's Gate; Sean II earns his living as a professional hunter; and Shasa, Garrick II, Michael I and Blaine hunt for sport. In fact, they thoroughly enjoy the hunt. Sean I, for instance, is elated by the chase:

Within a week's trek they saw elephant sign: trees broken and stripped of their bark. Although it was a month's old - already dried out - nevertheless Sean felt the thrill of it and that night spent an hour cleaning and oiling his rifles. [...] They closed in, each minute strengthening the certainty of the kill [...] They went on again. There were Mopani flies swarming at the corners of Sean's eyes, drinking the moisture, and he blinked them away. Their buzzing was so loud in his ears that he thought it must carry to their quarry. His every sense was tuned to its limit: hearing magnified, vision sharp and even his sense of smell so clear that he could pick up the taint of dust, the scent of a wild flower and Mbejane's faintly musky body-smell. (*Lion* 398-400)

In some contemporary men, Smith writes, the deep atavistic passion of the hunter has "cooled or been suppressed." For the Courtneys it "still [burns] brightly." (*Rage* 163) They experience "the lust of the huntsman [...] an addition as powerful as opium or strong spirits." (*Sword* 1) The pleasure of the hunt is erotic, almost orgiastic, for Courtney heroes: they shiver with intense excitement; (*Die* 36, 42, 176, 177; *Monsoon* 593) they feel the pulse of their blood pound in their ears at each pump of their heart; (*Monsoon* 598) they take up the slack in the trigger, feeling the final resistance under their fingers before the sear releases and the rifle fires; (*Die* 52) they feel vividly, vibrantly alive when they achieve the kill, especially if the quarry is dangerous because "the fear of death [is] so pleasurable as to be almost unbearable," and they have "an emotional orgasm" when the animal "is coming." (*Die* 59) The hunter's "passion [eclipses] all other emotions [...] rendering everything else in their lives effete and tasteless" for the hunt is "primeval, sprung from the very wells of the soul" and it affects them "as great music might affect others." (*Die* 179)

The experience of hunting lets Courtney heroes release their atavistic blood-lust; however, they are compassionate hunters. Hunting, according to them, is not the same as killing. Hunters do not just kill animals indiscriminately. They know all about the animals, understand their habits and life cycle, and they respect them and hold them in high esteem. When they choose an animal, they make sure it has already fulfilled its vital cycle and that it is not a breeding female. (*Sword* 422) Also, they would never use unethical methods; they chase their prey armed 'only' with their gun; they do not grind around in a Land-Rover, for, as Sean II puts it with reference to elephant hunting:

A true hunter should kill a great elephant with his legs. He should walk him down.
That's the respectable and proper way. (*Die* 155)

Furthermore, Courtney heroes feel sorry for the animal they kill; they are overwhelmed by guilt, feel sad and strangely elated, dwelling on the majesty and beauty of the beasts they reduce since "only the true hunter knows [the] anguish of the kill." (*Birds* 395) When Tom kills his first elephant, for instance, he feels "overwhelmed by a strange, almost religious melancholy" and understands "the beauty and tragedy" of hunting. (*Monsoon* 602) Ethical hunting is not only beautiful. It also contributes to the preservation of animal species. Men who hunt for the love of the creatures protect the breeding females and the young, threatened by unethical poachers and the advance of the plough of the peasants. According to Smith's code of ethics, therefore, restricted hunting areas should be safeguarded by the authorities, who, by devoting time and effort to the subsistence of the animals, become heroes; as Smith puts it, "Robin Hood was a dirty poacher. The sheriff of Nottingham was the real hero." (*Sword* 422)

Smith, all in all, constructs the wilderness, self-enclosed and capable of satisfying all men's needs and desires, as the ideal locale where men can feel comfortable at home, where they can give expression to their manly instincts that, otherwise, they have to hide underneath a 'false' veneer of civilisation. However, in the saga, as in real life, the wilderness is receding to the advance of civilisation. Seventeenth-century South Africa is depicted as "a temple of Pan;" (*Birds* 154) "a prodigy of wild flowers [...] and [...] sunbirds, setting the air afire with their sparkling plumage;" (*Birds* 309) "a vision of paradise;" (*Birds* 364) as Hal puts it, "Thus it must have been in Eden before the fall." (*Birds* 393) Images of beauty proliferate:

The peaks that surrounded them were wild and splendid. The cliffs and gorges were painted with lichens that were all the colours of the artist's palette. The late sunlight fell full upon the mountain tops across the deep valley and crowned them with a golden radiance. The long shadow thrown by the peak behind them was royal purple. The water of the stream below was clear as the air they breathed, and Hal could see the fish lying like long shadows on the yellow sandbanks, fanning their dark tails to keep their heads into the current. (*Birds* 364)

Yet, the African wilderness is Eden no more. In *A Sparrow Falls*, for example, Smith describes the devastating effects of civilisation in great detail. The land has been ploughed and immense fields of sugar-cane, criss-crossed by “hundreds of miles of red dirt roads,” (*Sparrow* 277) planted. The sugar mill, which is presented as “an ungainly structure of steel and galvanised sheet iron,” (*Sparrow* 393) pours “hot, steaming discharge [...] in a continuous stream” (*Sparrow* 63) into the Baboon Stroom, which is now covered with scum that coats the dead stems of the reeds; the water bubbles “with sullen beads of gas;” (*Sparrow* 62) and fish float upwards, with “swollen bell[ies]” and “rotting opaque eyes bulging from [their] head[s].” (*Sparrow* 63) Wild animals have been decimated to “a small fraction of [their] original numbers” (*Sparrow* 183) by white hunters, poachers, pests and the relentless advance of civilisation symbolised by the railway line crossing the sub-continent; (*Sparrow* 279) the “great herds of game that once had covered the open grassland to the full range of the eye” are gone and have been replaced by “small scrub cattle, multi-coloured and scrawny” grazing in “mindless bovine herds.” (*Sparrow* 83) Wide open spaces are now full of fences and “barriers of barbed wire,” (*Sparrow* 83) offering a picture of devastation. And Johannesburg is presented in no better terms. Fordsburg, a squalid suburb of the city, is depicted as “an area of mean cottages, tiny workers’ houses of galvanised iron on timber frames, each with a bleak little garden” (*Sparrow* 75) under the “majestic sway” of the mine dumps towering “table-topped mountains of poisonous yellow earth.” (*Sparrow* 76) And the built-up complex of mines and towns of the Witwatersrand are surrounded by a low false cloud of a sombre purple hue, which is in fact “the discharge from the hundreds of chimneys of the power stations and refineries, of the coal-burning locomotives and the open fires of tens of thousands of African labourers in their locations, and of burning buildings and vehicles.” (*Sparrow* 338)

Images of devastation are also common in the other volumes of the saga that develop in contemporary Africa. The Kalahari, once so vast and empty, is full of “thatched rondavels and windmills,” the traffic is so heavy that vehicles “cut deep ruts in the soft earth and [churn] up the crossings in the dried riverbeds.” (*Sword* 93) The H’ani mine built over the San’s sanctuary in the Kalahari, the Place of All Life, offers

a bleak and grim appearance with its steam boiler, “hungry as some infernal Baal for cordwood” so the forests along the foot of the hills have been “cut down to satisfy it” and the second growth has “formed a scraggly unsightly thicket in place of the tall grey-barked timber;” (*Sword* 97) on the whole, the H’ani is a dreary place with “desecrated forests, the deforming scar of the workings on the hillside, the graceless square iron buildings and the stark skeletal girders of the washing gear.” (*Sword* 102) The Limpopo, “despite Mister Rudyard Kipling,” is “neither grey green nor greasy” and there is “not a single fever tree on either bank.” (*Rage* 338) The wilderness is going fast, “trodden under the greedy rush for power by the thoughtless hordes of the emerging nations, by the unbridled tribal rivalries and the lawlessness of this new age.” Africa is becoming “the dark continent” again, but this time “without the glory of its natural treasures” for the wild game has been “decimated, the forest hacked down for fuel, the very earth abused by primitive agriculture and animal husbandry, and the Saharan deserts each year marching southwards.” (*Die* 95)

Indeed, Shasa muses as he looks ahead into the future, there will soon come a day when there “[will] be no more wilderness, no more retreat for the wild things, when the roads and the railway lines [will] criss-cross the land and the endless villages and kraals [will] stand in the desolation [civilisation] has created.” (*Rage* 159-160) Tukutela, an old bull elephant born in 1915, is presented, in the mid 1980s, as “part of the old Africa [...] one of the very few remaining treasures;” (*Die* 95) he had moved freely throughout the African veld and jungle but now his “world [is] shrinking in upon him.” (*Die* 140) The wilderness only exists in a few pockets of territory “protected by their remoteness [...] natural barriers of forest and river from men’s over-exploitation.” (*Rage* 161) It is only preserved in areas such as Chaka’s Gate, in the Bubezi Valley, a sanctuary of wildlife protected from human appropriation by the tsetse fly - “the saviour of Africa” (*Sparrow* 172) - which Sean I saves through parliament by proclaiming it a natural reserve and a national park; and which Mark Anders, its first appointed warden, protects “from the poachers and despoilers by dedication and sheer bloody-mindedness.” (*Rage* 185) Or at Victoria Falls, “the cathedral of Africa,” the one place “that truly embodies all of the grandeur and mystery and savagery of this continent.” (*Fox* 411) The advance of civilisation, which

John Anders, Mark's grandfather, graphically describes as "the great emptiness," (*Sparrow* 183) has turned the African wild landscape into a post-industrialist dystopia and has reduced its 'wild things' into tiny pockets of territory.

But the advance of civilisation not only threatens wild territories and animals, but also essential, atavistic, instinctual, wild men, the true specimens of masculinity that would rather die than see everything they love - the land, the animals, and the people that function as backgrounds against which they can perform their adventures and test their masculinity - "all of it destroyed." (*Die* 493) The 'great emptiness', therefore, is not only to be taken as the destruction of nature by civilisation, but as the emasculation of modern man, deprived of his essential, primeval instincts, lost in the gears of a mechanised industrial world intent on domesticating and annihilating him. Mark, for example, finds himself deprived of his manhood when he works on the mines. He feels his life there is "drudgery, not nearly enough to engage a bright and active young brain;" (*Sparrow* 83) that the narrow confines of his office are "a cage for a spirit that [is] at home in the wide open sweep of the sky and veld;" (*Sparrow* 83) and that the workers, ant-like attending to their work on the mines, are insignificant no-men that will "leave no footprints, no ripple on the surface, no monument, except perhaps a few sons to repeat the meaningless cycle, all of them interchangeable, all of them dispensable." (*Sparrow* 95) In Smith's diegesis, the wilderness is necessary for modern man. It is a truly masculine space that he offers as a shelter where men (his heroes, his readers, and probably even himself) can go and gather enough strength to "return to their lives cleansed and refreshed," and go back to their subsequent strivings in 'civilisation' "more attuned to the groundswell of nature." (*Sword* 172) We should not be surprised when Smith insists the wilderness is Eden - a place where "you too can go, for a short time, into Eden." (*Sparrow* 610) Eden is, after all, the primeval man's only real space. This perception explains Smith's ecological discourse in the saga, which is not only to be read as a defence of nature and wild life, but as a proclamation of the wilderness as a truly masculine space that needs to be protected from the advance of civilisation and the emasculating, annihilating effects that civilisation - the real great emptiness - has on men.

To conclude, the destruction of the wilderness by the advance of civilisation also explains why Smith has to construct 'alternative wildernesses' in the saga, understood as spaces beyond the control of civilisation and the law where there is opportunity to live at risk. A South African writer writing about South Africa, Wilbur Smith has an intimate knowledge of the frontiers and boundaries that separate the legal from the unlawful. In South Africa, the body is the ultimate frontier, the one that delimits the boundaries where the permissible ends and the taboo begins. A whole apparatus of oppression was built around the white and the black body, constructing the black body as taboo and spatially segregating it in order to protect the purity of the white body. The forbidden black body is dangerous but also exciting, the ideal locale for adventure. Yet, as I show in the final part of my dissertation, Smith is wary of allowing his heroes to disrupt racial boundaries for the pleasure of risk does not preclude the psycho-sexual fear of losing white privilege and white purity in the attempt. Consequently, Smith builds alternative wild spaces of risk and adventure where men do not have to conform to the rules of society. Although Smith fears the chaos that characterises spaces where 'the law' does not hold sway, he allows his heroes to penetrate the unlawful on occasion in order to experience the thrill of risk. Garrick II, for instance, directs an operation to rescue Nick, his nephew, from an ANC training base, even if this implies breaching the law for he could be accused of anything ranging from terrorism to murder. (*Fox* 500) Sean II, before he starts his safari business, leads a double life: a diurnal life sanctioned by society working as an articled clerk for the Instituted of Chartered Accountants; and a nocturnal life "of excitement and danger, full of colourful fascinating beings, of eager women and satisfying companions, of deliberate risks and wild adventures," (*Rage* 314) often involving theft, violence and sexual activity. Seventeenth-century Courtneys are given the advantage of 'the Line', the makeshift division that separates the northern from the southern hemispheres, but also the lawful from the unlawful for "[t]here is no law beyond the line [...] civilised law [does] not [...] apply at the ends of the ocean." (*Monsoon* 392-393) Finally, Hal even becomes an outlaw: captured and imprisoned by the Dutch under the false accusation of piracy, he escapes imprisonment and kills a few gaolers and pursuers during his escape, so he becomes a "convicted felon, with a life sentence hanging over his head." (*Monsoon* 128)

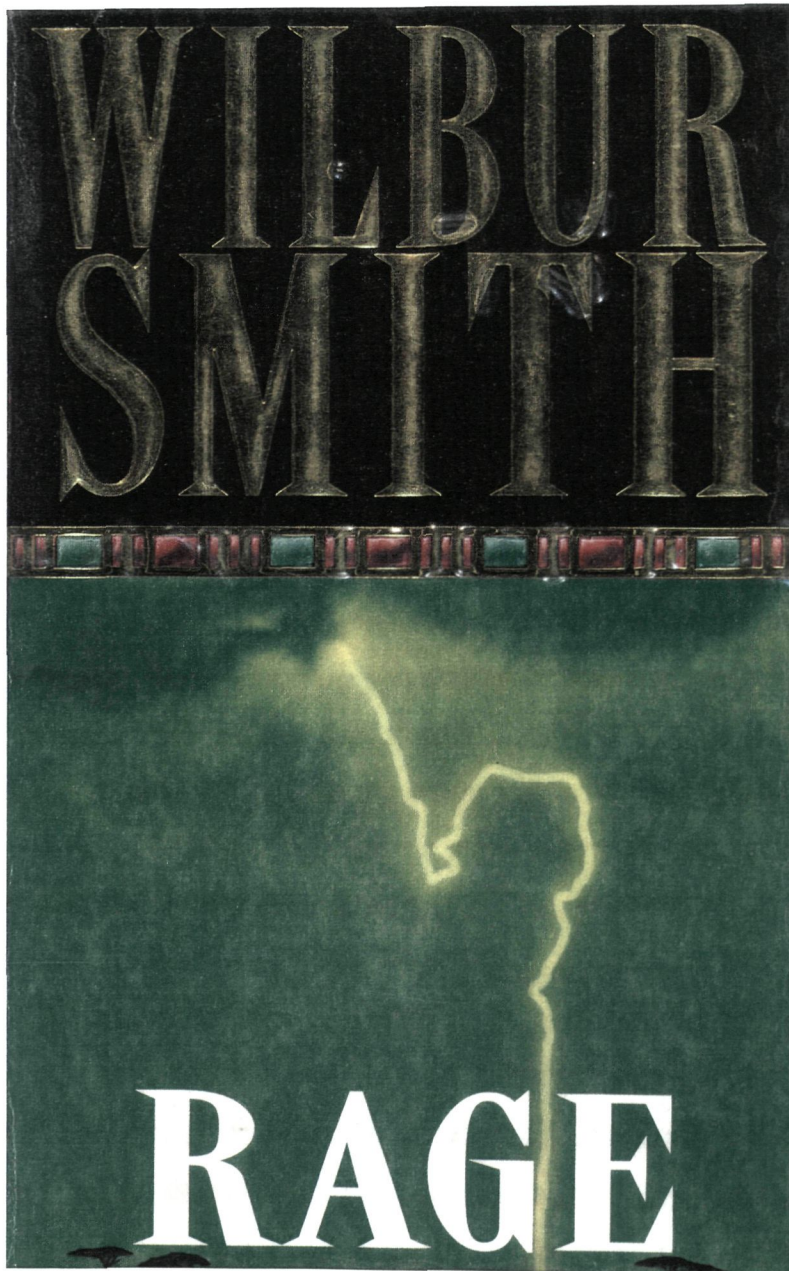


Figure 12. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *Rage* (London: Pan, 1988) Illustration by Paul Campion and Syd Brak.

10.5. Masculine space no more? The distant past and the chivalric romance genre

Wilbur Smith traces the lives of his fictional heroes against the historical background of South Africa, its colonial origins, its development into an independent republic, and the implementation of and resistance to the racist apartheid state. In a way, therefore, he is re-telling the history of South Africa. As he himself asserts, "I am riding on the wave of history, yes, against its background."⁴⁹ The emphasis Smith places on history has led some reviewers to catalogue his novels as 'historical romances', a genre which, as Annalisa Oboe explains, aims at "a contemporary, fictional re-creation of the comprehensive and variegated historical world - which is just one of the possible, infinite ways of treating the past, of writing history."⁵⁰ Historical fiction claims to be faithful to reality and society; so it presents itself as fact and its contents as realistic as opposed to fiction, fantasy and fallacy. The concept of realism, though, is problematic for, as Jeremy Hawthorne points out, "there is by no means any universal agreement as to what constitutes realism [...] in the novel."⁵¹ Some critics assert that realism implies that the writers have to make an effort, often involving lengthy and painstaking research, to ensure that factual details are 'correct', capable of being checked against an external reality by empirical investigation. However, realism in a pure form is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve because the facts that are presented as 'truth' are always filtered through the mind of an author who shapes events in such a way as to make them fit into the perspective from which s/he approaches reality. As George Eliot expressed the idea in *Adam Bede*:

[My strongest effort is to give] a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what the reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath.⁵²

⁴⁹ John A. Stotesbury, "Popularising Late Apartheid South Africa. An Interview with Wilbur Smith," *Teaching and Learning*, 76.

⁵⁰ Annalisa Oboe, *Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa*, 15.

⁵¹ Jeremy Hawthorne, *Studying the Novel. An Introduction* (London: Arnold, 1997) 74.

⁵² qtd. in Dennis Walder, "The Genre Approach," *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (London: Routledge and The Open University, 1995) 25.

And this is just one of the aspects that problematises realism's aspiration to truth, to which we could add, among others, the fact that distortions of the 'facts' of history are sometimes acceptable within realism for as long as the story has an appearance of verisimilitude; or the fact that elements of romance, extremes of feeling or exotic landscapes are often included in novels which are regarded as realistic because they try to unveil the 'truth' of the human soul or of human nature.

Realism is a difficult enough concept, but the pretensions at truth to which historical fiction to all appearances aspires is also questionable because history itself is nothing but fiction, or so some scholars claim. Historians and philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Hayden White see the writing of history as a basically poetic art, thus leaving no margin of difference between history and fiction. Roland Barthes, for instance, claims that historical discourse is essentially a product of ideology, or rather, imagination:

[T]he only feature which distinguishes historical discourse from other kinds is a paradox: the 'fact' can only exist linguistically, as a term in a discourse, yet we behave as if it were a simple reproduction of something on another plane of existence altogether, some extra-textual 'reality'. Historical discourse is presumably the only kind which aims at a referent 'outside' itself that can in fact never be reached.⁵³

Foucault rejects the validity of the 'documents' that historians use as their only access-key to the past. According to him, documents are not mere sources that divulge facts about reality, but discourses that supplement or rework reality; thus, it follows, "we can have no access to a full and authentic past, unmediated by surviving textual traces [...]; what we are left with are simply texts, not history, but histories."⁵⁴ White further stresses the non-scientific or proto-scientific nature of historical discourse; he asserts that invention plays a part in the historian's operations because the same event may be assigned different meaning and value in different histories and for different purposes, which, in turn, may vary depending on the period when the event is narrated. From his analysis of historical discourse, therefore, history emerges as meaningless in itself;

⁵³ Roland Barthes, "Historical Discourse," *Structuralism: A Reader*, ed. M. Lane (London: Cape, 1970) 153.

⁵⁴ Annalisa Oboe, *Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa*, 12.

furthermore, he concludes, "all meanings which we impose on the past" are "politically dangerous, culture-specific, discursive constructs."⁵⁵

Given the problematic nature of history and realism, the events described in historical novels should be taken, at best, with a hefty pinch of salt, an 'exercise in disbelief', which readers do not often do. Smith's fiction is a case in point. His novels, there is no denying, are carefully researched. Smith, as befits a writer working within the parameters of imperialist adventure which relies on realism and history to create a sense of verisimilitude, provides a great amount of information about the flora and fauna of the landscape he describes; he includes historical figures who share space with his fictional creations; he traces the development of the 'history' of South Africa; mentions historical events that did certainly occur. Even his fictional creations, his potent heroes, are believable in their adventurous, but down-to-earth, characterisation. Of course Wilbur Smith manipulates historical events to suit his ideological approach to South African history. Yet, he claims he does so in order to make sense of history. He asserts, "History's an untidy old bag and you have to sort it out in fiction."⁵⁶ His narratives have an apparently solid ground on which to stand, so they appear, to most readers, as facts, true 'versions-of-what-really-happened' in South Africa, which is, in fact, one of the main objectives of historical discourse:

[T]he power possessed by history, whether that of the professional historian, the journalist, or the man-in-the-street, to sustain or alter prevailing value systems depends on the success of the story it tells.⁵⁷

Smith's two latest instalments of the Courtney saga, however, *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*, depart substantially from the realist mood that Smith sustains in the other eight volumes of the saga. In these two volumes, Smith recedes further into the past and, as he does so, he also recedes into the 'primitive' narrative mode of chivalric romance, which, Susan Aronstein explains, originated as a genre in twelfth-century

⁵⁵ Bob Chase, "History and Poststructuralism. Hayden White and Frederic Jameson," *The Expansion of England. Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History*, ed. Bill Schwarz (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 64.

⁵⁶ John A. Stotesbury, "Popularising Late Apartheid South Africa. An Interview with Wilbur Smith," *Teaching & Learning*, 79.

⁵⁷ D. Attridge, qtd. in Bob Chase, "History and Poststructuralism. Hayden White and Frederic Jameson," *The Expansion of England*, ed. Bill Schwarz, 79.

France, “the product of the French aristocracy in [...] a culture in transition, struggling against deep-seated historical interests, to redefine itself [...] in the face of an increasingly centralised monarchy, new systems of law and justice, and the move toward a money-based economy.”⁵⁸ These romances sought to rehabilitate the passing feudal order by reminding their audiences that ‘Arthur’s’ glory depends on ideal knights, defined as aristocratic warrior subjects (polished versions of the old aristocracy). These stories constituted what scholars have termed the French Vulgate Cycle, which progressively introduced the grail-quest into the Arthurian cosmology of magic and fantasy in order to validate Christianity and became increasingly concerned with history and saga. The Vulgate Cycle, when translated by Malory in the fifteenth century, became the foundation of the Anglo-American Arthurian tradition, a tradition which, as Mark Girouard explains in his *The Return to Camelot*,⁵⁹ was called upon and given new force in periods of transition simply as a way of reasserting established mores or re-circulating old values that were being superseded by revolutionary ones; Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, for example, proclaims the glories of the British empire and the establishment, and the work of William Morris argues for a return to a simpler and less regulated life in the face of industrialisation. Although the chivalric romance tradition lost popularity in England with the emergence and development of the novel in the eighteenth century, with the appearance of novelists such as Defoe, Richardson, Sterne and Fielding, the Arthurian romance still remains alive and is developed in the novels of, for instance, Molly Cochran and Warren Murphy, in films such as *Excalibur* and the *Indiana Jones* trilogy, or in television mini-series such as *Merlin*. And, indeed, it is also present in the two latest volumes of Smith’s Courtney saga.

Smith never uses magic or the supernatural; he situates the stories within a historical framework, that of the expansion of England during the reigns of Kings Charles II and William III; he mentions real-life characters and historical events; he does not even romanticise seafaring life, battles or the slave-trade. Yet, his narrative landscape becomes increasingly ‘fantastic’. Africa is described as a “mysterious

⁵⁸ Susan Aronstein, “‘Not Exactly a Knight’: Arthurian Narrative and Recuperative Politics in the *Indiana Jones* Trilogy,” *Cinema Journal* 34.4 (1995): 4.

⁵⁹ Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot. Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

hinterland" (*Birds* 379) and the possibility is entertained that there could be fire-breathing dragons, (*Birds* 3, 80, 379) monsters (*Birds* 80) or unicorns and griffons in its interior. At one point, Hal exclaims that in the continent "[the] earth pig flies, dances the hornpipe and tells fortunes by cards." (*Birds* 332) Africa emerges as a land in which the strange, the bizarre, the impossible live side by side the ordinary, the commonplace, the 'natural'. And Smith does not stop here; he drinks in the romance tradition and introduces elements which seem transplanted directly from Camelot and the Round Table.

Although defined as warriors, harsh and brutal, Smith's heroes do not see themselves as soldiers or as barbarian colonisers, but as knights errant (*Birds* 24) in the purest chivalric tradition. Tom, in his dreams, conjures up images of himself saving Caroline Beatty from a ship in flames and the decks swarming with pirates, "leaping overboard with her in his arms and swimming to the snowy beach of a coral island." (*Monsoon* 74) Hal similarly imagines "devoting his life to playing Lancelot to his Guinevere," Katinka; (*Birds* 47) he "[sees] himself humble and submissive to her every whim" and "inspired to deeds of outstanding valour by his pure love for her." At her behest, he even plays with the possibility of undertaking "a knightly errant search for the Holy Grail and place the sacred relic in her beautiful white hands." (*Birds* 47) These dreams are just figments of the heroes' adolescent imagination and are proved to be futile pretensions when the erstwhile knights find that the urges that move them are far from pure, but motivated by lust, and that the objects of their affection are sexually experienced predators, pliant and responsive to the heroes' sexual advances. Pure love devoid of sex is soon enough eliminated from the chivalric equation, which makes sense within Smith's masculinist narrative framework, since, as I have underlined before in my dissertation, sexual probity is one of the aspects that most determines the heroes' masculinity. Yet, this is about one of the only constitutive elements of chivalric romance Smith seems to disregard. Most of the other ingredients, as outlined by Susan Aronstein, remain constant presences which merge with Smith's broader imperialist narrative and even endow it with a metaphysical dimension, so that colonisers become valiant knights whose function is that of

romantically taking England's "flame of beneficent glory"⁶⁰ to the farthest parts of the globe.

Early Courtneys are Nautonnier Knights of the Order of St George and the Holy Grail, direct descendants of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon; in 1312, Smith explains, the Knights Templar had been attacked by the King of France, Philippe Le Bel, in connivance with his puppet Pope Clement V of Bordeaux. Their vast fortune in bullion and land was confiscated by the Crown, and most of the knights were tortured and burned at the stake. Warned by their allies, the Templar mariners slipped their moorings in the French channel harbours and went out to sea. They steered for England and sought the protection of King Edward II. From then on, they had opened lodges in Scotland and England under new names, but with the basic tenets of the order intact. (see *Birds* 73; *Monsoon* 354) The right to be a knight of the Order of St George is hereditary, so the young Courtneys are initiated into the order by their fathers, who instruct the novices in the Strict Observance, two hundred esoteric questions and answers that constitute the catechism of the Order and that have been passed down by word of mouth for nearly four centuries. The actual ceremony of initiation can only take place when there are no less than three Nautonnier Knights together to make up a Lodge, for this is the smallest number it takes to admit an acolyte. The prospective knight, dressed in the Order's full regalia, has to answer the two hundred questions and is then entitled to become a full member and to use the arcane words of recognition (*In Arcadia Habito*; I dwell in Arcadia) and the handshake that identify the knights to each other. Knights are chosen, so they are "not as other lads," (*Birds* 22) and once they become knights, there is no going back, their "only escape from it is death." (*Birds* 22)

The narrative of Arthurian romance, Susan Aronstein explains, exposes the dangers faced by both the culture and the individual when a subject refuses to be constructed and controlled by the proper authority. As an individual who bows to no cultural codes and recognises no master, a subject is dangerous; he plunders and destroys. As a mercenary, he could fall into the wrong hands and become a tool in the

⁶⁰ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 41.

hands of an evil power. William Grey, the consul of Zanzibar and, as such, His Majesty's consular representative, exemplifies what happens when an individual fails to conform to the status quo. Grey is a Christian apostate who has embraced Islam, "more for financial and economic considerations than from his religious convictions;" (*Monsoon* 173) he has made a vast fortune from the slave trade and the sale of licences and commissions from the Sultan of Oman; moved by avarice, he is even in league with Jangiri, a pirate, to whom he passes on information in exchange for monetary reward. Grey lacks integrity and morals; as a traitor to his king and his country, he is functional to the advance of Islam; he is indeed a putrescent blister within the English body politic, an idea that is further emphasised by his ruined and elephantine body, covered in running ulcers and the ravages of dropsy.

Other traitors that fail to conform to the established order are also presented negatively. Sam Bowles, for instance, is one of the mariners Sir Francis employs on his ship. He plans a mutiny and is moved by personal ambition; therefore, he is described as an animal: he is a "craven swine," (*Birds* 36) "a scared rabbit," (*Birds* 38) "treacherous vermin;" (*Birds* 62) he wriggles his whole body "like a whipped dog;" (*Birds* 407) he has "ferrety features twisted with malice;" (*Birds* 445) from his soul burns out a "nimbus so feral and evil" that when one looks into his eyes he has the impression that he is not staring at a "human being" but at a "wild beast." (*Birds* 455) He forsakes his allegiance to the rightful authority and puts personal interest before those of the community. As a consequence, he wreaks havoc on the adventurous landscape: he tries to desert his shipmates and to escape taking the ship with him during a battle, almost causing the massacre of his fellow mariners; he becomes a pirate in the service of a treacherous captain, Lord Cumbrae, 'the Buzzard'; he inflicts violence cowardly and indiscriminately, avoiding honourable combat but resorting to treacherous means in order to release his penchant for torture and bloodshed; and he kills the hero, Hal's, first love, Sukeena, out of hatred for Hal. Lord Cumbrae, to mention another example, is a member of the Order of St George and the Holy Grail, yet, "[t]he stink of treachery is strong upon him," (*Birds* 108) for he is a traitor to his King and to the Order. He comes from a Scottish clan of "sheep thieves and border raiders, who had made their fortunes by murdering and robbing not only Englishmen

but members of other Scottish clans as well.” (*Birds* 145) His great-grandfather had been a famous outlaw, astute enough to back the Earl of Moray and the other Scottish lords against Mary, Queen of Scots; after the battle of Carberry Hill, they forced Mary to abdicate and placed her infant son James upon the throne. For his part in the campaign, his ancestor had received his earldom. His ancestors’ blood runs true in Lord Cumbræ, so he is a pirate at heart who is always looking for easy prey; his *nom de guerre*, ‘the Buzzard’, suits him perfectly for, like the animal, “he prefers to pick out the eyes of the weak and the dying and scavenge the leavings of fiercer creatures rather than to kill for himself. He is no falcon.” (*Birds* 519) He is, all in all, a cowardly creature, “like a hyena scenting the blood of the battlefield,” (*Birds* 404) who does not hesitate to sell his services to the highest bidder and to betray the other members of the Order to their Dutch enemies to increase his personal fortune.

Unlike those treacherous creatures, who stand for chaos and disorder, Courtney heroes are proper knights, faithful to the establishment the King stands for, and they pay strict obedience to the code of honour of the Order, the two hundred arcane questions that make up the rules they abide by. Although they fight and despoil ships for booty, they are not pirates who keep the spoils of battle for themselves; they navigate under Letters of Marque that entitle them to fight for their King but oblige them to pass on a substantial part of the proceeds to the Crown. As Sir Francis eloquently phrases it when he is asked to explain the difference between a privateer and a pirate,

[A] privateer sails under Letters of Marque issued by his sovereign in times of war, and so is a legitimate man-of-war. A pirate is a robber and an outlaw, carrying out his depredations without any sanction, but that of the Lord of Darkness, Satan himself. (*Birds* 238)

Courtney heroes pledge their allegiance to the King and to the King only, since “[o]nly a rogue would seek to cheat his sovereign;” (*Birds* 157) they are “the King’s servant[s],” (*Monsoon* 215) which means that they carry the King’s commissions and act on his behalf, so they maintain the order the King represents, including “the power of summary trial and execution of any person taken in the act of piracy, or in aiding and abetting any person in the crime upon the high seas.” (*Monsoon* 257) Their

personal quests are secondary; they place the “duty to [their] King and to the men who [place] their trust in [them]” before anything else. (*Monsoon* 327)

Also, as knights, Courtney heroes disregard their personal ambitions and abide by an elaborate code of honour which establishes that they should devote their lives to serve the interests of the ‘wretched of the earth’. Hal, for example, swears, “I will protect the weak. I will defend the pilgrim. I will succour the needy and those in need of justice. I will take up the sword against the tyrant and the oppressor.” (*Birds* 115) Within this broad group of ‘weaklings in need’, Smith’s men put their fighting skills at the service of three particular kinds of people who need the heroes’ assistance: women, Christians under threat of the ‘ungodly’ and captives or weak peoples who fall prey to evil political practices. The distressful situation these people endure allows Smith to develop, in turn, three different motifs typical of chivalric romance. The motif of the maiden kidnapped and imprisoned by a monster, an ogre, a giant or an evil knight is typical of Arthurian romance, and a motif that Smith perpetuates in *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*. In these novels, three heroines, Sukeena, Sarah and Yasmini, are imprisoned by evil, monstrous characters who subject them to heinous acts of torture, sexual abuse and / or simply prevent them from joining their lovers. Sukeena is kept as a slave by governor Kleinhans, who tries to force her to comply with his sexual advances without success; when he is replaced by governor van de Velde, Sukeena falls into the hands of the governor’s pervert wife, Katinka, who forces her to participate in sordid lesbian games in exchange for the freedom of Sukeena’s imprisoned brother. Sarah is prevented from joining Tom, her lover, by her brother-in-law, Guy, who keeps her locked in a room. Yasmini is imprisoned in the zenana; when Kush, the monstrous *castrati* who guards the zenana, finds out about Yasmini’s escapades to engage in sexual activity with Dorian, her lover, he tortures her by inserting bags of raw pepper into her vagina, which her inner juices are supposed to melt so that the pepper is released and she can be subjected to agonising pain and, eventually, death. Although the three maidens-in-distress are active and play a part in organising their escape, it is through the heroes’ prompt and valiant intervention that they are saved from their dreadful destinies.

Another Arthurian romance motif is that of the evil custom or practice, in which a passing knight encounters a castle or kingdom in which a knight or knights perpetuate heinous practices. In this situation, a proper knight strides into the melee, offers combat, defeats the hostile enemy, ends the evil custom and integrates the kingdom into Arthur's empire. In Smith's two latest novels, the heroes have the opportunity to fight such evil practices when they encounter captives or slaves, oppressed peoples whom evil tyrants victimise. Hal liberates the slaves and prisoners that the Dutch keep in the Cape, a colony ruled by an evil governor who is "the only god in this little heaven called Good Hope" and where there is no justice for, "[h]ere justice is that which pays a profit to the Dutch East India Company or a bribe to its servants." (*Birds* 243) Although Hal does not manage to integrate the Cape into 'Arthur's (the King of England's) empire', at least he saves innocent slaves and prisoners who subsequently join Hal in his fight for freedom and justice. Tom, as I have explained in the previous chapter, fights evil Arab slavers, liberates the captive slaves and integrates them into his group of fighting men, eventually erecting himself as the protector of enslaved African tribes whom he liberates and immediately employs in his own colonial settlement, Fort Providence.

The other Arthurian motif Smith integrates in the narrative is that of the quest for the grail. During his initiation ceremony, Hal promises, "I will defend the Holy places. I will search out and protect the precious relics of Christ Jesus and his Saints. I will never cease my quest for the Holy Grail that contained his sacred blood." (*Birds* 115) In Arthurian romance mythology, the grail stands for Christianity, the only religion that is supposed to save sterile wastelandish lands fallen to evil, ungodly practices and return them to a state of prosperity and fertility. True knights obey only the King and the Christian God, whose doctrines they spread. Hal states, "I renounce Satan and all his works. I eschew all false doctrines and heresies and schisms. I turn my face away from all other gods and their false prophets;" (*Birds* 115) Tom proclaims, "These things I believe. That there is but one God in Trinity, the Father eternal, the Son eternal and the Holy Ghost eternal." (*Monsoon* 354) Their duty in Africa is, therefore, that of defending the continent from "the heretic and the apostate," as well as from "the benighted followers of the son of Satan, Martin

Luther.” (*Birds* 53) As in Arthurian romances, the grail is not only given symbolical but also factual existence in the narratives. The legendary Christian priest and king, Prester John, is identified as the King of Ethiopia, who is the keeper of the grail and of “jewels and other treasures sent in tribute to the empire over a thousand years” together with “the treasures of the Coptic churches - the relics of Jesus Christ and the Virgin, of the apostles and the saints.” (*Birds* 495) Now the empire is threatened by the Muslim Great Mogul, who attacks Ethiopia because he believes that if he can wrest the grail from the Prester, his dynasty will be invested with untold power in order to “herald the triumph of Islam over all the false religions of the world.” (*Birds* 495) Hal, as a knight, sails to Ethiopia to assist the Prester and his people and, through his involvement, the grail is protected and the evil forces of Islam are kept at bay. Hal, therefore, becomes a cultural saviour. Not moved by personal interests, Hal restores order and fertility to the third world and assumes the role of saviour and protector of the wretched of the earth.

Now, damsels in distress, third world people in need of cultural saviours and tyrants or oppressors who victimise and enslave innocent peoples are typical elements of adventure. Yet, Smith does not treat them as adventure elements in *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*. By turning his heroes into questing, grail-searching knights errant who subscribe to a chivalric code of honour, forsake personal interests to protect those in need of assistance, and are faithful servants to their king and their God, Smith steers away from the realist mood that characterises his previous adventures and moves into the realms of romance: a proto-medieval, back-to-basics fantasy-scape that seems remote, detached from reality. The historical background information Smith provides and his realistic approach to seafaring life and battles seem somehow gratuitous, wasted in a narrative space of holy quests, grail-searching pursuits, treasures, myth-like beasts or monster-like villains.

Smith’s flirtation with chivalric romance, which is a genre that, by integrating magic, legend or the impossible, presents itself as unrealistic, may respond to different authorial intentions. Romance, Susan Aronstein points out, is “the ideal vehicle for reintroducing, or redefining, a positive vision of authority in times of crisis” through

both “its successful construction of the ideal subject and its identification of the court at the centre of the romance as the locus of historical and typological privilege.”⁶¹ Written in 1997 and 1999 respectively, *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon* can be said to serve the same historical function. In times characterised by the emergence of the New Right, which is, nevertheless, assailed by oppositional groups of various political and ideological hues intent on destabilising reactionary trends in society, Smith recreates a feudal world based on static property-relationships and exalts an unchanging God-ordained hierarchy in Church and State, the maintenance of the body politic and the privileged position of the white hero as cultural and colonial saviour. By romanticising authority in a mythical past, therefore, Smith’s latest two volumes can be read as an attempt to propagandise and glamorise New Right policies and their ideological slant, thus perpetuating a right-wing, colonial and authoritarian status quo in times of crisis. Within the South African socio-political framework, as I explain in the following part of my dissertation, Smith’s use of romance reaches another meaningful dimension. Smith seems unable to cope with a post-apartheid South Africa where black men not only outnumber whites, but hold political power that, before the first democratic elections in 1994, belonged exclusively to whites.⁶² Consequently, Smith travels further back into the past in an attempt to find a completely safe locale where white men are not only entitled to control, manipulate and exploit the land they occupy, but are sanctioned by God to do so and where their exploits are turned into knightly quests aimed at spreading civilisation over the dark continent.

⁶¹ Susan Aronstein, “‘Not Exactly a Knight’: Arthurian Narrative and Recuperative Politics in the *Indiana Jones* Trilogy,” *Cinema Journal*, 4.

⁶² Smith’s deliberate attempts to escape uncongenial political conditions in South Africa while finding safe territories from which to propagandise the white man’s might does not only characterise *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*. The first four volumes of the Courtney saga, for instance, were written between 1964 and 1977, the time when black action against apartheid reached its peak. *When the Lion Feeds* was written in 1964, when the wounds of Sharpeville had not yet healed and the ANC was launching its sabotage campaign; *The Sound of Thunder* in 1966, the very same year of president Verwoerd’s assassination; and, significantly, *The Burning Shore* and *A Sparrow Falls* in 1976 and 1977 respectively, the years of Soweto and its aftermath. So while South Africa was ‘riding on the whirlwind’, Smith took the action of his narratives to a colonial, pre-apartheid South Africa and carefully neglected the traces that, already in colonial times, bespoke the dystopian hell to come. Smith’s other post-apartheid novels are not only removed in time, but also altogether removed from South Africa. *River God* takes his characters to ancient Egypt; *The Seventh Scroll* takes them treasure-hunting in Ethiopia. In *Power of the Sword*, *Rage*, *A Time to Die* and *Golden Fox*, Smith faces apartheid and shows it for what it was, highlighting its unfair, discriminatory policies. Yet, as I show in part III, he ultimately defends the racist apartheid ideology in the saga and endorses the might of his white heroes by constructing them against ‘inferior’ blacks.

If analysed taking the historical function of romance into account, Smith's latest two adventures emerge as an attempt to divert his readers' attention from socio-historical trends Smith regards as uncongenial in order to manufacture an idealised past in which authority (white, patriarchal, colonial) still holds sway. Yet, the historical function of romance does not satisfactorily explain why Smith decides to resort to romance motifs in order to propagandise a pro-colonial, patriarchal status quo that he has so far systematically, and effectively, conveyed within the imperialist adventure framework. Consequently, another explanation needs to be provided, an explanation that the narrative conventions of romance itself afford. Arthurian romance serves a historical function but is, nonetheless a fantasy of chivalry and exciting adventures, of gallant men and charming women, of evil monsters and Christian gentlemen *sans reproche*. It builds what Arnold Kettle terms, "a pseudo-world seductive or sad, delightful or hostile" whose main objective is "not to sum up experience, not to enlarge the imagination, and not merely to provide an escape from the sordid [...] but to provide sensation for sensation's sake." Kettle follows:

[Romance] thrives on the boredom and cynicism, the blasé and jaded unfulfilment of people who have too little to do or too little purpose and satisfaction in what they do. Its crudest form is pornography: but it has many other forms less crude though scarcely more desirable.⁶³

The tone with which Kettle approaches romance is, indeed, condemnatory. Yet, he hits the nail on the head when he suggests that romance, unlike the realist novel, turns a blind eye on reality and the world we are in; it does not have any pretension at realism; it may glamorise authority, but does not try to justify it. It is not ashamed of its fantastic elements and offers itself simply as an escape, an exercise in oblivion, whose only objective is to transport people "to a world different, idealised, *nicer* than their own."⁶⁴ And it is against the fantastic, unashamedly escapist nature of romance that the latest two volumes of the saga should, in my opinion, and to conclude, be read.

⁶³ Arnold Kettle, "Realism and Romance," *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder, 209.

⁶⁴ Arnold Kettle, "Realism and Romance," *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder, 208.

As the saga develops, Smith finds it increasingly difficult to sustain his imagining of true masculinity and to provide ideal locales for his heroes to display their overdeveloped bodies and super-masculinist approach to life. His Courtney heroes progressively feel they do not belong to the world that encompasses them. Mark Anders, the protagonist of *A Sparrow Falls*, which takes place in the early 1920s, is described in *Rage*, which develops in the 1950s, as “an anachronism, a son of the English Queen Victoria, a soldier who had fought in two world wars, and the warden of Chaka’s Gate National Park [...] one of Africa’s most celebrated wild-life sanctuaries.” (*Rage* 185) Shasa realises that old Africa, with its natural beauty, profusion of wild beasts and opportunities for adventure has disappeared with the advance of civilisation, so he takes his sons to a safari because he thinks he “[owes] them a glimpse of the past. They must know a little of the Africa that once was, before it has all gone, so that they will understand something of its glory.” (*Rage* 160) And Sean II feels he has “been born too late,” (*Die* 95) a notion that Riccardo, his friend, confirms when he says, “That [the past, pre-independence Africa] was the golden age. [...] You and I should have lived then, Sean. We were born after our time.” (*Die* 155)

In a world that is increasingly deprived of real masculine spaces; where the wilderness recedes under the advance of industrial progress; where the army and the military are, on the one hand, frowned upon and, on the other, penetrated by female soldiers; where women occupy more and more positions in the public space and progressively refuse to play the ‘heroines-in-distress’ to be rescued by their masculine masters; Smith moves back into the past. But his heroes, unlike the many time-travellers populating films such as the *Back to the Future* or the *Terminator* series, do not travel into the past to rewrite the present. Smith seems to regard the present as a world beyond redemption; he seems to have lost faith in the recuperative potential of ultra-masculinist men in an emasculated society where even tough guys such as Wesley Snipes and Patrick Swayze (in the film *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*) and Kurt Russell (in the film *Tango and Cash*) have to adopt feminine poses and even dress like women in order to make their progress in the representational arts. Consequently, Smith utilises the primitive form of romance and offers it as a fantasy, an imaginary repository of value forms lost in the process of

modernisation, and, by doing so, he delimits the realm of the imaginary, the fantasy world of adventurous knights, as the only place where men can be allowed to be 'real men', brutish, courageous, macho, bad-mannered, essential, without becoming anachronistic 'remains of the days' of masculinist glory that are no more.

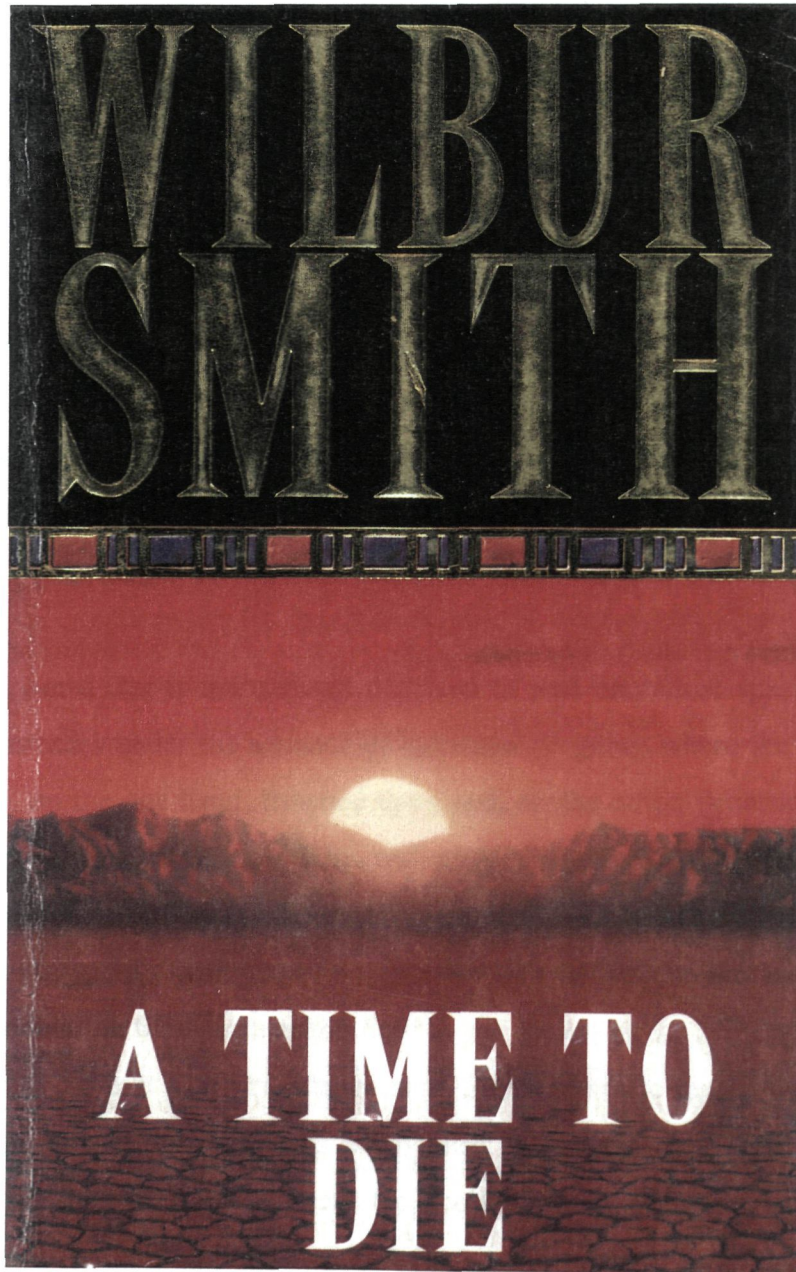


Figure 13. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *A Time to Die* (London: Pan, 1995). Illustration by Paul Campion and Syd Brak.

Part III

**Apartheid, paranoia and Wilbur Smith's
representation of black men**

Chapter 11: Uncomfortable doppelgangers. Apartheid and Wilbur Smith's representation of black men

11.1. The black man as a representational strategy

In Freud's discussion of the doppelganger, as in Otto Rank's before him, the focus is strictly inner: the doppelganger is created out of the psyche, as the paranoid projection of a narcissistic crisis for Rank, as the uncanny manifestation, for Freud, of a threatened return of the repressed.¹

The representations of alien peoples in much of this literature were based on now outdated scientific theory and on the limited experience of travellers, many of them unsympathetic to other ways of life. Such descriptions thus tell us more about the Victorian themselves than about the people they purport to describe.²

As I have attempted to prove so far in my dissertation, Wilbur Smith's Courtney saga is mainly concerned with white masculinity and the creation of a safe masculine space. His main objective is to furnish readers with prime examples of white masculinity: men who occupy what Jan Nederveen Pieterse calls a "top-dog-position"³ and whose profile is approximately defined in our western societies as follows: white, civilised, male, adult and heterosexual. More specifically, Smith gives shape to a western idea of masculinity through the figure of the adventurer: a handsome, fit and tanned individual; a strong, wild, restless and intelligent tough-guy who engages in adventurous endeavours which involve going into unknown terrain and undertaking risky pursuits (physical, intellectual, enterprising, or otherwise) in an attempt to defeat adversity and assert his own identity, individuality and power over 'lesser' specimens of humanity (such as women, people of other races or men displaying 'deviant' sexualities). The figure of the adventurer is particularly appealing

¹ Diane Stevenson, "Family Romance, Family Violence, and the Fantastic in *Twin Peaks*," *Full of Secrets. Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995) 76.

² Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature. Representations of Primitive Society in English Fiction, 1858-1920* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) 2.

³ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black. Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 223.

for he is an individual characterised by action, mobility, instinct and a capacity to apply skill, reason and strength to overcome the most difficult obstacles. Adventure implies danger, the threat of the unknown, and the ability to put both body and mind to work in order to achieve victory and gain profit. Any description of risk engages the reader's interest; it speaks directly to our senses, our primary instincts of survival, our most basic emotions of fear and parallel desire to fight this fear. The reader identifies with the adventurer hero and, through him, experiences emotions as diverse as fear, terror, anxiety and, above all, the relief and exhilaration that comes after having defeated dangers and threats through the application of force and reason.

The adventurer is, therefore, a comforting figure in a changing world; a figure that upholds masculine values at a time characterised by the disintegration of western perceptions of white hegemonic masculinity in a society that is increasingly perceived as feminised, multi-racial, and more sexually permissive. He is a figure of power and control but, ironically, he is also a figure of anxiety, revealing the white man's fear of being disempowered and deprived of the traits that have traditionally defined western masculinity. The need to assert white man's power (in Smith's case through the reactivation of the imperialist adventure hero) is a direct response to a perception of a loss of control in specific social, cultural, economic or political conditions. This perception of the white man's disempowered position demands positive and assertive representations of white men, but it also generates other representational practices: the creation of negative counter-images, threatening opposites that, like the doppelganger in Rank's and Freud's accounts of the uncanny, emerge as projections of fear: weird manifestations that threaten the white man's power and which disclose and reveal a crisis in his self-perception. These doppelgangers are given physical form through the figure of the Other: the negative against which positive images of white manhood can be constructed.

Now, representation, Stuart Hall explains, "is a complex business."⁴ Meaning ensues from difference. Difference matters because it is essential to meaning; without

⁴ Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage and The Open University, 1997) 226.

difference, meaning could not exist. Meaning depends on the existence of a negative, a binary opposition with which it establishes a dialogic relationship, an interaction and an interplay that determines the connotations the extreme poles of a binary opposition are going to display. Meanings, therefore, are created by contrast: white acquires meaning through interplay with black, men with women, masculine with feminine, upper class with lower class, British with alien. However, and as Derrida has argued, there are few neutral binary oppositions. One pole of the spectrum is usually the dominant one, the one which includes the Other within its field of operation. Furthermore, this opposite is also regarded as threatening, a “site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression.”⁵ It threatens to destabilise the unity and authority of the dominant term. Representation emerges as a strategy to fix meaning; the representational arts intervene in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one at the expense of another. And in the representational arts authors have often tried to fix and privilege white masculinity as opposed to an inferior and threatening black Other. In fact, the black man has traditionally (especially in the imperialist adventure tradition) served as a foil, the essential opposition, giving substance to the superiority and fixity of meaning of the white man. Africa has, therefore, been depicted as a site of negations against which the Europeans’ state of spiritual grace is manifested. Non-western peoples, therefore, are often presented as negatives, symbolising wrong or inappropriate behaviour. This happens consistently in fiction, as can be appreciated in the highly acclaimed Mary Poppins books. A few examples from *Mary Poppins* (1934), *Mary Poppins Comes Back* (1935) and *Mary Poppins in the Park* (1952), illustrate the point for they reveal the negative conception of blacks or other races, continually used as examples of inadequate behaviour against which Mary Poppins constructs adequate behaviour for white children:

“I would rather [...] have a family of Cannibals to look after.”

“A Zulu would have better manners.”

“You look like a couple of blackamoors.”

“I understand that you’re behaving like a Hottentot.”

⁵ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’,” *Representation*, ed. Stuart Hall, 238.

“A pair of Golliwogs - that’s what you are!”⁶

Images of Others, thus, do not circulate because of their truthfulness but reflect the concerns of the image-producers. At a time when the white man’s manliness is threatened, the black man exists to provide the essential contrast with white manliness, ‘true’ manliness. The black man emerges as an imperfect state of manhood against which the white man’s superiority can be constructed and highlighted. As Chinua Achebe has noted, “the European view of the Other has never been innocent.”⁷ The characteristics black men display in white men’s accounts are not essential, but culturally constructed and fixed in the representational arts in an attempt to build positive images of white manhood. They reveal the white man’s perception of himself, together with their fear of being overpowered by other masculinities they have so far repressed, subjugated and assimilated within an empowered conception of white masculinity constructed as universal, dominant, omnipotent, essential. Blacks are only threatening doppelgangers, foils and enemies, the products of the white man’s tormented psyche, the victims of the white man’s psycho-killer attempts to get rid of anybody and anything that stands in their way towards hegemony.

In the representational arts, therefore, blacks are seldom granted individuality and authority. And Wilbur Smith’s oeuvre is not an exception. Like many other imperialist adventure writers before him, Smith asserts white authority at the expense of black identity and activates different representational strategies to guarantee the black man’s subject position as Other (negative, demon, threat or underdog). In this part of my dissertation, I analyse the representational practices Smith uses to endorse the white man’s superiority by continually diminishing, subordinating or debasing black men. More specifically, I focus on how Smith perpetuates popular myths and widespread stereotypes about black men in order to stress, by contrast, the might of white men in general and his Courtney heroes in particular. Before delving into the strategies Smith makes use of in order to debase black men, though, I analyse the particular social and historical determinants that account for Smith’s obsession with

⁶ qtd. in Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, 167.

⁷ qtd. in Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, 169.

both diminishing and demonising black men and / or exiling them to the periphery of his adventure diegesis.

11.2. Wilbur Smith's particular conditionings: paranoia and apartheid

11.2.1. The apartheid context

The tradition of 'hegemonic whiteness' built against a debased Other that has so characterised western thought and writing throughout the centuries, and which reached a peak during the period of the British empire, is still firmly established in western societies. We are often told that our society is multi-racial, postcolonial and multi-cultural but we have not yet reached a situation in which white people and white cultural agendas are no longer in the ascendant. The media, politics, economy, education are still in the hands of white people; still speak for the whites while claiming to speak for humanity. As Richard Dyer phrases it:

Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West, but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them. We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without [white] hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to - but we aren't there yet, and we won't get there until we see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put in its place and end its rule.⁸

And, I would like to add, we are not going to get there while the same racist ideas about white superiority over an inferior Other continue to be propagandised in the realm of popular fiction in general and fictional adventure in particular. Adventure writing is built on the racist foundations of imperialism and racial thinking and perpetuates the debasing presentation of blacks that so characterised nineteenth century imperialist adventure. In fact, any example of contemporary adventure cannot be understood without taking into account the imperialist adventure heritage and a western tradition of racist representation which explicate its characteristics. Smith is no exception and his representation of blacks in his Courtney saga can be accounted

⁸ Richard Dyer, *White*, 3-4.

for by taking into consideration the racist literary and ideological substratum I have outlined in chapter 4, section 4.1. However, this racist tradition alone does not explicate the poignancy with which Smith both debases and demonises blacks and the perpetuation of racist representations of blacks in his particular adventurous diegesis.

As I have insistently emphasised throughout my dissertation, Smith's presentation of white men and his defence of white masculinity cannot really be fathomed without taking into account the perceived crisis of white masculinity in the western world which forces 'real macho men' to take up positions and strengthen their lines of defence against the attacks of oppositional groups; and more specifically, it cannot be grasped without considering the particular South African political / historical situation against which Smith's works have been produced, which is the backdrop against which his white heroes perform their adventurous deeds in the Courtney saga and which determines his formulation of black masculinity. In fact, Smith's representation of white heroes and blacks cannot be understood without apartheid. Apartheid (and its aftermath) is one of the utmost determinants of Smith's fiction; one which explains Smith's necessity to construct white heroes and his idea of white masculinity against inferior blacks.

The concept of apartheid originated with the 1948 election victory of the National Party in South Africa, but it was not a new creation. The idea of separate development for whites and blacks had always characterised and determined colonial policies in that country and had already been phrased by Rhodes in 1887 when he was Prime Minister of Cape Province, during a discussion on the Parliamentary Registration Bill:

I will lay down my own policy on this native question. Either you have to receive them on equal footing as citizens, or to call them a subject race. I have made up my mind that there must be class legislation, that there must be Pass Laws and Peace Preservation Acts, and that we have to treat Natives, where they are in a state of barbarism, in a different way to ourselves. We are to be lords over them [...]. These are my politics and these are the politics of South Africa [...]. The native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise. [...] We must adopt a

system of despotism, such as works so well in India in our relations of the barbarians in South Africa.⁹

Apartheid, as well as the empire policy that originated it, was a programme of domination. It was devised to guarantee white hegemony through the promulgation of a series of discriminatory acts that ensured that black men and women were marginalised, debased and altogether exiled from the sources of power, which remained in white control. Ironically, apartheid was also a programme of fear, a fear that had always determined the white man's interaction with the Other in South Africa.

An anonymous mid-nineteenth-century commentator stated that "[t]he history of the Cape is already written in that of America and the gradual increase of the white race must eventually though slowly ensure the disappearance of the black."¹⁰ However, as more lucid historians such as G.M. Theal predicted, this progressive 'disappearance of the black' did not ensue:

The European race has no guarantee of being permanently on South African, as it is on Canadian, soil. [...] Great as the increase of white people has been of late years, the increase of the blacks has been enormously greater ... think where will the white man find himself a century hence if there is not a very large immigration. Swept away - at least from the open country - by the sheer passive force of the amazingly prolific Bantu people. If a leader of influence were to rise among them even today, and teach them their strength and how to use it for their own ends, there are many districts in South Africa in which such land difficulties as have already been experienced to a slight extent would be felt in a tenfold aggravated form. How will it be when the Bantu are three or four times as numerous as they are now?¹¹

Blacks did not only 'refuse' to disappear (of the total estimated population in South Africa, nowadays, over 76 per cent is black, 8/9 per cent coloured and only about 13/14 per cent white), but they proved to be 'particularly troublesome', responding to every attempt to discriminate and subordinate them by increasingly violent means. Fear of being overwhelmed by black people generated a series of discriminatory

⁹ qtd. in Hossea Jaffe, *European Colonial Despotism. A History of Oppression and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Kamak House, 1994) 117.

¹⁰ qtd. in Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past. Major Historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988) 37.

¹¹ qtd. in Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, 37.

policies and a parallel reaction by black men to these policies, which in turn generated more fear and more stringent discriminatory policies. The country was, therefore, left trapped in a vicious circle of fear and oppression, an endless catch-22 without apparent escape. The stringent and despotic measures against blacks applied by the South African white government proved to be extremely detrimental for both blacks and whites. W.M. Macmillan was right when he wrote it was like “[sowing] dragons’ teeth that must soon spring to dreadful life.”¹² And, indeed, Macmillan’s metaphor has not proved too far-fetched after all; the dragons’ teeth did certainly germinate in South Africa and minority white rule has come to its demise. Theal’s prediction came true after the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, when power was returned to the black South Africans who, after all, make up the majority of the country’s population.

The whole white colonial and postcolonial approach in South Africa has thus been characterised by fear. In South Africa, a small white population has had to assert its domination over a mass of ‘unruly’ blacks lurking around them, poised and ready to jump down their throats and claim back what ‘rightfully belongs to them’. And a ‘prolific’ race they have been, indeed, doubling their numbers generation after generation and progressively increasing their ranks of freedom-fighters against white oppression. The white man in South Africa lived, and still lives, under the threat of extinction, in fear of being outnumbered and overpowered by black men, in a constant state of paranoia.

The assertion of white masculinity in Smith’s Courtney saga is a direct response to this psychotic state of mind and explains Smith’s representation of blacks in his narratives. His assertion of true and rightful white masculinity demands a demonisation of blacks and a defence of the discriminatory apartheid policies that, in the past, guaranteed that blacks were kept in subordinate positions. In his account of black people, therefore, Smith re-activates racist imperial and apartheid images and myths about blacks in order to make sure they never overshadow his white heroes who, after all, are the protagonists, the starring actors, the ones who, in the end, have

¹² qtd. in Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, 69.

to emerge victorious over the hordes of lesser (read 'black') men who, positioned as threats, enemies or sidekicks, are condemned by adventure generic conventions to the margins of the adventurous milieu.

11.2.2. Anti-apartheid messages in the Courtney saga

It is interesting to highlight, however, and before proceeding, that Smith seems to include anti-apartheid messages in his saga. Sean Courtney I, for instance, acknowledges that government policies are a white-man's creation and he qualifies them as "white man's madness," (*Sparrow* 352) a statement that Pungushe, a Zulu, endorses when he says: "the madness of white men does not concern me." (*Sparrow* 513) Smith's whites defend liberal political tendencies. In fact, Jannie Smuts is introduced as a character and defends less stringent legislation and an opening-up of the fields of development for blacks. He, for instance, supports the need to employ black people on equal grounds with whites for, if they don't actively recruit native labour, "it will result not only in fewer jobs for white men, but, in the long run, it will mean, finally, no jobs at all for the white men of Africa." (*Sparrow* 326) He defends the idea that blacks and whites "travel the same road, to the same goal, bound together irretrievably by destiny" (*Sparrow* 327) and that if they do not want to have black against white they must give "all of them, black, white and brown, a place and a share." (*Sparrow* 162) Sean Courtney I, as well as all other heroic Courtney heroes, assimilates Jannie Smuts' philosophy and even believes in the black man's rights over the South African soil, which "belongs to a people, to many peoples - Zulu, and Englishman and Afrikander." (*Sparrow* 399)

Also, Smith seems to have no scruples about showing the dreadful conditions in which blacks lived both before and during apartheid, highlighting the extent of the discrimination they endured under white rule. He states that the "cornerstone of the South African way of life" was that "[b]lacks don't take part in politics. That's white man's business." (*Sword* 109) Smith explains that from their superior position, white politicians legislated against black people, passing laws that were "some for rich, some for poor, some for white and some for black," (*Sparrow* 474) the most drastic of

which were passed during Dr Malan's presidency and which "ranged from making mixed marriages a crime, to the physical segregation of the whites from men of colour, whether Asiatic or African, and disenfranchising all coloured persons who already had a vote while ensuring that those who did not have it, remained without it;" (*Sword* 501) all in all creating a "world of suffering and injustice, where the oppressed masses wept and struggled and cried out for succour." (*Rage* 39)

Smith also describes the segregationist policies that, ever since the beginning of the colonisation process, guaranteed the separate development of blacks and whites. Blacks lived in separate quarters, never occupying the same spaces as their white overlords. When the first mining complex was built in Johannesburg, for instance, we are told that "the location for the Natives sprawled haphazard down the back slope of the ridge, retreating a little each week as the white mountain of the mine dump grew and pushed it back." (*Lion* 268) So the locations for blacks on the mines were not only kept apart from white residential areas, but were conditioned by the whites' need for more space. This situation was systematised by the enforcement of the compound system, which decreed that "black mine workers were strictly confined within the barbed-wire fences of the compounds." (*Sword* 363) Mining complexes, therefore, with their separate spheres for blacks and whites became a "microcosm of the [...] nation:"

The orders of society were strictly observed on the [mine]. [...] The black labourers lived in the fenced and guarded compounds where whitewashed buildings resembled rows of stables. There were separate, more elaborate quarters for the black boss-boys, who were allowed to have their families living with them. The white artisans and shift bosses were housed in the avenues laid out at the foot of the hills, while the management lived up the slopes, each building larger and the lawns around it more extensive the higher it was sited. (*Sword* 98)

The segregation of blacks did not take place only on the mines but was made extensive to all areas of public life. By means of "banning orders, five hundred of them" the men and women to whom they were addressed were "driven from society into the wilderness. Prohibited from attending a gathering of more than three persons, physically confined to a single magisterial district, prohibited also from publishing a single written word and prevented from having their spoken word published by anyone

else.” (*Rage* 212) More particularly, Smith highlights the effects of the Group Areas Act (1950), which prefigured the segregationist policies that were consistently going to be applied to guarantee the exclusion of blacks from all areas of South African public and under whose “bizarre conditions [...] the entire country was divided up into areas reserved for each of the racial groups.” (*Fox* 200) All in all, the blacks were secluded in separate spaces and denied any freedom through “the monumental framework of interlocking laws and regulations which was the Verwoerd-inspired policy of apartheid.” (*Fox* 206)

Working conditions and options for blacks were similarly dreadful. Blacks were employed to do menial tasks and were underpaid, given wages that “only a black man could live on” (*Sparrow* 294) and forced to lead miserable lives, like the Zulu Mark encounters travelling on the train and who tells him: “I am a poor man without the money to pay to ride the steamer. My father is sick and dying in Tekweni, Durban Town.” (*Sparrow* 71) The only work choices available to them, apart from working as servants, are working on the mines or in the canes, and both options are equally dreadful. In the canes men “worked like ants, half-naked and burnished in their own sweat, as they stripped the branches and piled them in windrows for burning” (*Sparrow* 564) and were “extracted [...] effort beyond [their] wage.” (*Sparrow* 568) Work on the mines is not described in better terms. It implied working “deep in the earth, where you [could not] see the sun nor feel the wind” (*Sparrow* 476) and “pounding the rock with sledgehammers, breaking up the lumps.” (*Burning* 624) The treatment workers received in *Goldi* (the gold mines in the Witwatersrand) was debasing. First they had to approach Wenela (the acronym for the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association) where they were packed into “overloaded coach[es] and squeezed onto [...] hard wooden benches.” (*Sword* 334) They were then sent to the Wenela staging posts. There they waited for recruitment and once they were employed they were sent to the mining area on the steamer, supervised by cruel overseers who systematically humiliated and abused black men both psychologically and physically. Once in *Goldi*, they were forced to live in compounds without their families and were deprived of their own language, forced to speak Frankalo, “the tongue by which all men, whether black or white, and of whatever tribe, speak to each other.” (*Sword* 359)

Finally, they were assigned to their jobs in the mines and had to learn to break rock under threat of having their “head” and their “arse” broken if they did not fulfil their tasks in the right way. (*Sword* 359) Apart from the appalling working conditions and the treatment they received there, black miners were also afflicted by all sorts of mining-related illnesses, such as the hammer boy affliction, which caused the workers’ skin “to itch and burn” as a result of using a drill for long hours, which “scrubbed [their skin] back and forth a thousand times a minute by [its] violent shaking motion;” (*Sword* 361) or miners’ pthisis which “turns [lungs] to stone” as a result of inhaling dust while working breaking the stones. (*Sword* 105)

Living conditions in black townships surrounding industrial areas, with their “slum[s] of shanties and hovels [...] on rutted unmade streets,” (*Sword* 591) are also described in all their grimness and bleakness in the saga. The township of Nyanga, for instance, is portrayed as comprising “row upon row of identical brick cottages with asbestos sheet roofs separated by dusty lanes.” (*Rage* 45) The shanty town that sprung up beyond the township proper and that housed the overflow of black migrants from the impoverished rural areas is described as an area of “hutments of rusty corrugated iron and cardboard and tattered plastic sheeting,” lacking reticulated water, sewage and heating facilities in winter so children “are always full of colds and flu and pneumonia.” (*Rage* 46) Drake’s Farm is described as having been “a collection of squalid hovels, built of scrap lumber and wattle poles and old iron sheets, flattened paraffin cans and tarpaper on the bleak open veld, a place of open drains and cesspools, lacking reticulated water or electricity, without schools or clinics or police protection, not even recognised as human habitation by the white city fathers in Johannesburg’s town hall.” (*Rage* 128) After the government decided to recognise reality, they expropriated the land, declared it an official township set aside for black occupations, fenced it off and “covered the greater part of it with monotonous lines of small three-roomed cottages [...] crowded close together and separated by narrow lines with dusty untarred surfaces.” (*Rage* 128) However, Drake’s Farm managed to maintain its ‘rotten core’ for, “[b]eyond this Orwellian vision of bleak and soulless order, lay the original section of Drake’s Farm, its hovels and *shebeens* and whorehouses.” (*Rage* 128) Soweto is presented as “thick with the smell of wood-

smoke from the cooking fires” which “turned the sunset a diabolical red,” with “narrow unmade sidewalks [...] crowded with black commuters [...] back to their homes after a long day that had begun before the sun [...] and that now ended in darkness.” (*Rage* 146) And the New Brighton township, to mention another example, displays a hardly better atmosphere with its “rows of identical low-cost housing laid out in geometric squares of narrow roads, some of them paved and others rutted and filled with muddy puddles in which the pre-school children and toddlers, many of them naked or dressed only in ragged shorts, played raucously.” (*Rage* 199)

Other consequences of the white man’s discriminatory policies are also portrayed in the saga. For instance, black people have been deprived of their own traditions and culture (they only resort to old tribal customs on special occasions like weddings, and they are forced to celebrate a Christian ceremony as well). Traditional tribal roles (chief, warrior, hunter) have also been eliminated and youngsters living in townships have been forced by circumstances to adopt alien roles, most of them imported from America (pimps, prostitutes, cannabis users, jazz players, rogues, street gangs). The invisibility of black people in their own country is also underlined: black men “all [...] look the same” to white men; (*Sword* 241) they do not even acknowledge the existence of some of the townships, “daunted by the prospect of closing them down and finding alternative accommodation for thousands of vagrants or illegals.” (*Sword* 369) All in all, Smith depicts the “inhumanities of class and racial discrimination,” “the terrible abyss that separates the poor and dispossessed black proletariat from the enormous wealth and evil of the white *bourgeoisie*,” and “all the gross ills of the human condition” that “[flourish] as though in a hot house, exaggerated until they [are] almost a caricature of evil” in this “rich and beautiful land.” (*Sword* 354)

11.2.3. Fear, paranoia and the representation of black men in the Courtney saga

In spite of Smith’s apparently sincere portrayal of the ills of apartheid and the conditions in which black people were forced to live under this abhorrent system of race discrimination, the presence of an increasingly large black population in South

Africa is only a source of terror and anxiety for Smith. This fear is apparent throughout the saga. It explicates, for instance, Smith's obsession with the number of black people living in townships. While he seldom mentions the number of white people in South Africa, the number of blacks is constantly being referred to: the dark shapes scurrying furtively into the shadows, "hundreds of them and the presence of thousands more sensed," in Drake's Farm, (*Sword* 365) which grow from less than 250,000 (*Rage* 128) to almost a million souls. (*Fox* 199) Or the "fifty thousand lonely men at Goldi;" (*Sword* 367) or, to mention another example, the half a million black people in Soweto. (*Rage* 146)

This fear also explicates Smith's constant references to the tenuous position of whites in this country. The possibility of having "a million blacks [...] on the rampage" (*Fox* 388) is entertained, together with their revenge if they managed to defeat whites. When Victoria Gama, for instance, visits her husband in prison and complains about the deliberately rude and obstructive treatment she receives there, the prison governor answers: "I wonder how you will treat us, madam, if you and your brothers in the ANC ever seize power. I wonder if you will allow us even the courtesy of a trial or whether you will slaughter us in the streets." (*Rage* 413) Smith did not seem to anticipate the peaceful finale of the apartheid period in South Africa, so his blacks are continuously planning their vindictive revenge on whites. Moses Gama, for example, an ANC leader, exclaims: "Time is our weapon, and time is the white man's enemy. Patience, my brothers, and one day the white man will discover that we are not oxen to be yoked into the traces of his wagon. He will discover that we are black-maned lions, fierce eaters of white flesh." (*Sword* 373)

The white man's paranoia, his fear of eventually being swallowed up by a mass of 'angry black men' is further dramatised in the saga in two different ways. In the first place, South Africa is presented as threatened from without by what Smith calls the Red Terror Plot: an attempt directed by foreign communists and led by Russia to bring the South African white government to its demise by using black South African revolutionaries; by destabilising other colonial powers in the African continent that supposedly cushion South Africa from communist interference;

Once we have Angola, we will have South Africa surrounded, with bases on her very borders from which our black freedom fighters can strike with impunity. South Africa is the treasury and economic power-house of the whole of Africa. Once we have it, the rest of the continent will fall into our laps. (*Fox* 342)

and finally by propagandising a negative image of South Africa, exaggerating its ills in order to further ostracise it from western countries, already predisposed to condemn it on the grounds of its apartheid regime. The effects of the Red Terror Plot in other African countries and, above all, the cruel methods used by communist revolutionaries are vividly portrayed in the saga in order to emphasise the nature of the impending danger threatening South Africa and to justify the expeditiousness with which revolutionary activity needs to be eradicated in the country. Smith, for example, exposes the effects of the Red Terror Plot in Ethiopia in vivid detail. He describes how Colonel Getachew Abebe, supported by Russian leaders and Cuban guerrillas, directs a dreadful attack on the rightful rulers of the country (General Aman Andom, the head of the army, and Haile Selassie, the benevolent emperor). General Andom is shot in the head at point blank and his children are executed as well because, as Niccolò Machiavelli said, "if you kill Brutus, then you must kill all the sons of Brutus." (*Fox* 327) Haile Selassie is suffocated with a pillow in his bed. All nobles and petty chieftains are also killed and their corpses are piled like garbage on the street corners. The heads of the churches of Ethiopia are brought to order and obedience by having their children tortured and killed before their eyes. The rebel armies put out the eyes and tongue of the imam's fourteen-year-old daughter, then they place two ounces of raw chilli pepper in her vagina and lock her in a room with guards at the door; her parents are forced to squat outside the door and listen to their daughter's death agonies. The sons of the abuna have their hands and feet crushed in steel vices and their bodies burnt with electricity; their eyes are gouged out and left dangling by the optic nerves on their cheeks and their genitalia are cut off and forced into their mouths. (*Fox* 329) Similarly, they deprive the nation of any sense of self or determination by killing huge numbers of people to set an example: they take whole villages, drive children, women and old men into their huts and set them on fire; then they march men to the fields, force them to lie face-down in rows and then have the

tanks drive over them. (Fox 329) The immediate after-effects of the Red Terror Plot are also described:

There had been no hygienic services since the Red Terror began. The rubbish clogged the streets and the sewage-buckets overflowed and puddled in gutters. The bodies of the victims of the Terror were heaped like cords of firewood at the street corners. They were so bloated and bullet-riddled that they were no longer recognisably human. [...] The only living things were the crows and kites and vultures that hopped and picked at the piles of the dead, and the fat gorged rats. (Fox 330-331)

After the revolution is over, all the opposition is eliminated, the voice of dissent silenced and the government is left in the hands of unscrupulous rulers skilled “in the enforcement of pragmatic democracy on a recalcitrant population.” (Fox 333) Hardly a pleasant prospect, indeed, if the selfsame situation were to take place in South Africa.

And in the second place, Smith’s paranoia comes alive in the saga by presenting the country as threatened from within by thousands of blacks who - led by ANC, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, PAC and Poqo leaders - are portrayed as increasingly politically-minded and can easily move from passive to violent resistance against the white government. Smith’s fear of having white power seized by black revolutionaries is dramatised, for instance, in his depiction of the Sharpeville events in 1960. The anti-pass demonstrations are in fact presented as an attempt to overthrow the white government and not only as a campaign to put an end to the dreadful pass-laws that were so detrimental to the dignity of the black population. The real motivations of black leaders come to the foreground when Smith explains what they felt just before the demonstrations started:

The radicals were filled with a feeling of infinite hope, however irrational, and with a certainty that the Nationalist government was on the verge of collapse. They felt that the world was with them, that the age of colonialism had blown away on the winds of change, and that after a decade of massive political mobilisation by black leaders, the time of liberation was at least at hand. All it needed now was one last shove, and the walls of apartheid would crash to earth, crushing after them the evil architect Verwoerd and his builders who raised them up. (Rage 478)

The demonstrators are depicted in a threatening way as “the *swartgevaar*, the black danger,” their presence awakening atavistic memories of previous confrontations with blacks, when they heard “the battle chant of the tribes in the night and the drumming of assegai on rawhide shield, the stamp of bare feet and the crash of war rattles on wrist and ankle as they came upon the wagons for the dawn attack.” (*Rage* 480) They are described as crowds eventually growing into “a river of humanity” (*Rage* 484) and becoming a monster, something not human, “a creature with ten thousand throats and twenty thousand legs, a sprawling insensate monster that roared a meaningless word and had no ears to hear nor mind to reason;” (*Rage* 488) or a mob “puls[ing] and contract[ing] like some giant black amoeba.” (*Rage* 492) The fact that whites are outnumbered is constantly emphasised. The police station, for instance, becomes a “tiny rectangular island in a noisy restless black sea” as the crowd grows into a dense throng. (*Rage* 492) The violent intentions of blacks are highlighted for they utter the murderous “long, deep, drawn out war cry” ‘Jee!’ that “no Nguni warrior can resist” because it makes “their blood smoke with the fighting madness.” (*Rage* 497) Once the battle lust has possessed them, the “crowd [is] no longer contained” and they come bursting into the station, trampling over whites in a “rush of frenzied bodies.” (*Rage* 497) The tension is so intense and the violence so palpable that the infamous reaction of the white police can even be exonerated. After all, the police are young and inexperienced, (*Rage* 492) frightened and “with the heat and the thirst and the dust and the chanting,” (*Rage* 495) they have reached the point of nervous exhaustion long before the actual shooting. (*Rage* 496) Furthermore, their reaction is accounted for with reference to the psychic history of the Afrikaner. As the police captain faces the crowd, he experiences “the nightmare of the Afrikaner people that had recurred for almost two centuries, ever since their ancestors moving up slowly from the south through a lovely land populated only by wild game had met suddenly upon the banks of the great Fish river the cohorts of this dark multitude;” (*Rage* 492) he feels “his nerves crawl like poisonous insects upon his skin as the tribal memories of his people [assault] him;” (*Rage* 492) and he turns the cries of a restless child in a nearby cottage into “the death screams of the little Boer children at Weenen, where the black impi had come sweeping down from the hills to massacre all in the Boer encampment.” (*Rage* 480) When he shoots on the crowd, therefore, it is “without his conscious

volition” and in the grip of the ancestral nightmares “over which he [has] no control.” (*Rage* 498) Sharpeville is defined as a “massacre” (*Rage* 502) but as Maughan-Brown puts it, “Smith’s fictionalisation of the events cultivates sympathy for the police, reveals the black host at the gate to be, indeed, barbaric, and seeks consent to the proposition that police action in such circumstances is never brutal or callous, but simply the result of fear, difficult working conditions and troubling ancestral memories.”¹³

Black masses produce nothing but fear, a fear that explicates Smith’s perception of blacks and their subsequent representation. This fear, which was what generated the apartheid project in the first place, has not yet disappeared and determines Smith’s two post-apartheid Courtney novels as well - *Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*. The aftermath of apartheid was peaceful and ended with the democratic victory of blacks over whites and the establishment of a democratic government in South Africa. The perpetrators of apartheid are, more often than not, granted amnesty after confessing their crimes before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and, in general, blacks have been non-vindictive towards the white population. Yet, Smith is not yet capable of coping with an actual black-dominated society and, in these two instalments of the saga, he travels back in time to present the origins of the Courtney lineage in South Africa. Furthermore, he still finds a reason in genetics to fear the extinction of whites in the country. While his heroes in the novels are constantly asserting their durability and permanence in South Africa (the early Courtneys’ family motto is ‘Durabo’, ‘I shall endure’), Smith fears their fate is already inscribed on their racial / genetic make-up. After all, blacks are genetically ordained to remain after the Europeans have gone for they are:

[...] inured to hardship and less likely to be affected by heat and sun, or by cold and wet. They [are] hardened against the fevers and plagues that [strike] down the white man who [ventures] into these tropical climes, and they [survive] on less food. They [are] able to live and fight on what frugal fare this savage and terrible land [provides], whereas European troops [will] sicken and die if forced to undergo similar privations. (*Birds* 157)

¹³ David Maughan-Brown, “Raising Goose-Pimples: Wilbur Smith and the Politics of *Rage*,” *Rendering Things Visible*, ed. Martin Trump, 156.

All in all, Smith's presentation of blacks is motivated by paranoia. He sees that whites are outnumbered and fears they will eventually be overwhelmed in all areas of human experience in South Africa. Consequently, and in his paranoid attempt to defend white masculinity against a crowd of black men increasingly perceived as dangerous and powerful, he activates a series of strategies to guarantee that blacks never rise from subservient positions and to maintain the superiority of whites over blacks in the Courtney saga. The strategies he uses and which I proceed to analyse are the following: 'backgroundisation', emasculation and sexualisation, which I consider together in the following chapter; reactivation of colonial stereotypes (chapter 13); and perpetuation of apartheid-generated myths (chapter 14). In the last chapter I consider how Smith gives some individual black characters a starring role but never forsakes the discriminatory perception that pervades his presentation of blacks as a race.

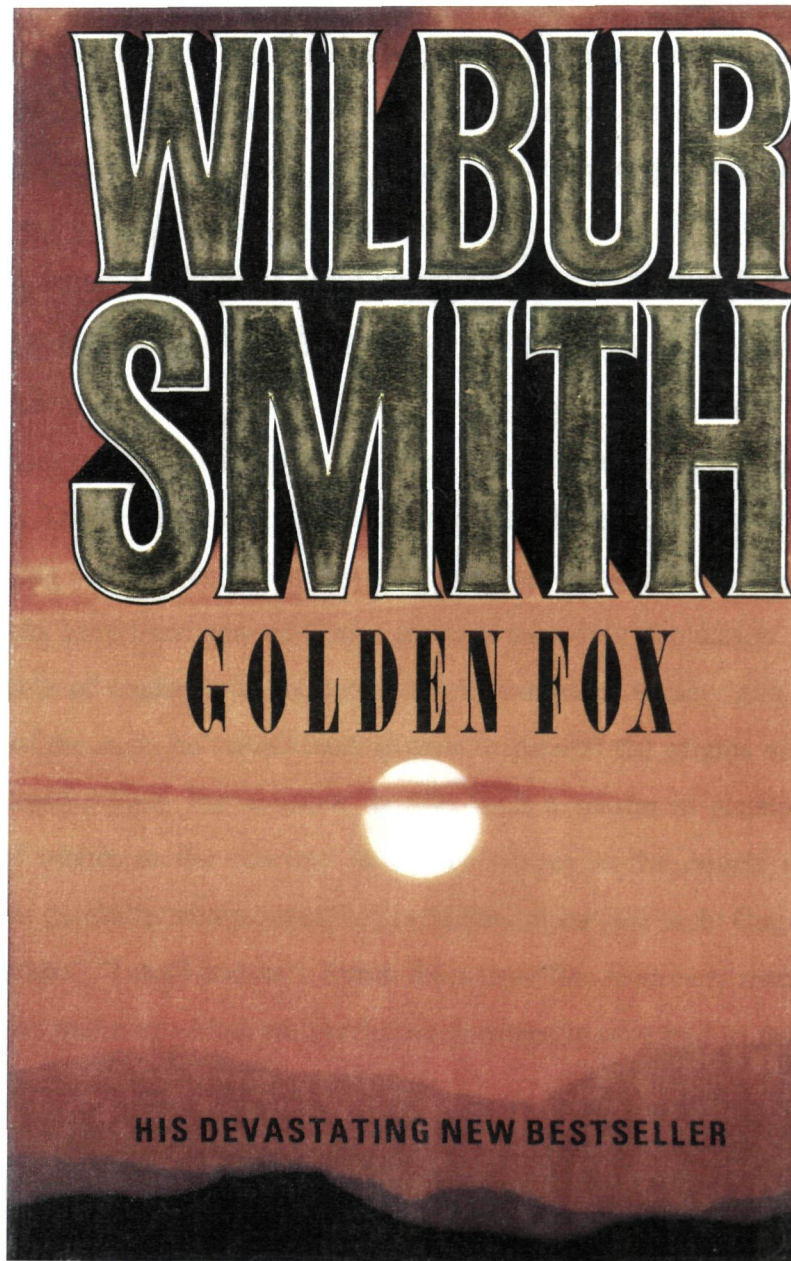


Figure 14. Cover for Wilbur Smith's *Golden Fox* (London: Pan, 1990). Illustration by Chris Moore.

Chapter 12: Backgroundisation, sexualisation and emasculation of black men in the Courtney saga

12.1. Backgroundisation

The image building of apartheid seeks to render the majority of the population, the millions of African labourers and miners, invisible - just as the architecture and the road signs of South Africa make the black townships virtually invisible.¹

Third world people are background to Tarzan, John Wayne or other western heroes. They are part of the landscape and they are used for a function - like to bring an orange juice to the master - and they walk out of the scene. We are never human beings. We are underdeveloped characters. Our sex life, our feelings of love or hatred are not explored because they don't see us as part of a society.²

Throughout history white images of Africans have varied depending on their degree of involvement with or hostility towards the white people they have interacted with. As a consequence, there has been a bifurcation in racial representations of black people, what Stuart Hall calls the 'splitting in the imperial eye',³ so, as Kobena Mercer puts it, "for every threatening image of the black subject as a marauding native, menacing savage or rebellious slave, there is the comforting image of the black as docile servant, amusing clown or happy entertainer."⁴ Representations of blacks, therefore, have been positive or negative, but they have seldom been accurate. Whether enemies or friends, servants or warriors, assistants or terrorists, blacks have been trivialised and backgroundised, exiled to the peripheries, turned into extras in their own continent, mere stage props. As Pfaff phrases it,

Africans merely function as a symbolic part of a hostile universe which the great white hunter has to tame. [...] The focus is on the white hero, with little concern

¹ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, 107.

² Haile Gerima qtd. in Françoise Pfaff, "Hollywood's Image of Africa," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 116.

³ Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes. Racist Ideologies and the Media," *Silver Linings. Some Strategies for the Eighties*, ed. G. Bridges and R. Brunt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982).

⁴ Kobena Mercer, "Reading Racial Fetishism," *Representation*, ed. Stuart Hall, 287.

for its surrounding African background and its natives, who are denied their humanity.⁵

Smith is not an exception and in his portrayal of his adventurers' exploits, he tends to turn blacks into background figures, elements of décor that populate the locations about which whites move but who have no individuality. In his adventurous milieu, they are often positioned as threats, especially when hostile to white domination. Thus, the Zulus fighting against the soldiers at Rorke's Drift are depicted as "bloody savages," a "single surging horror," (*Lion* 123) a "black howling pack" (*Lion* 119) or "a mob." (*Lion* 124) When in formation, they are a particularly awesome crowd:

They came, the impis of Zulu in formation of the bull, the great black bull whose head and loins filled the plain and whose horns circled left and right across the river [...]. The bull stamped with twenty thousand feet and sang with ten thousand throats until its voice was the sound of the seas on a stormy day. (*Lion* 119)

The black crowd demonstrating in New Brighton during the arrest campaigns are similarly presented as threatening when the mood of the demonstration changes from friendly to savage as the instigators begin to urge them into action. At first the demonstrators are "children, mischievous but at the bottom good-hearted and dutiful." (*Rage* 204) Once the instigators manage to drive the crowd "into the berseker's passion" by the cry 'Jee!', they are turned into the "mob," "a struggling mass of humanity" full of "atavistic fury." (*Rage* 205) Smith completely de-humanises them and they become "black faces, swollen with anger," (*Rage* 206) their cries are just "an animal growl" (*Rage* 206) and their fury is "incoherent and deafening." (*Rage* 207)

The enemy image of black masses is maintained even when blacks are acting in a friendly way. The threatening potential of a black mass is never allowed to disappear from view. Thus, when the heroes are surrounded by blacks or traditional weapons are used by blacks, they are often reminded of previous confrontations with them. Sean I, for instance, beholds a group of Zulus he has just recruited to work with him in the Candy Deep; they are "simple people, tall and big-muscled, completely

⁵ Françoise Pfaff, "Hollywood's Image of Africa," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 115.

defenceless against a well-timed jest," (*Lion* 218) but he is nonetheless reminded of the battlefields of Zululand during the Zulu War and the state in which Zulu impis left the white enemies they killed. The same image recurs when Mark Anders finds a dead buffalo at Chaka's Gate, an assegai stuck into the bull's shoulder. He immediately recalls Sean I's accounts of his participation in the Zulu War and of the effects of a Zulu assegai in a body:

They can put one of those assegais into a man's chest and send the point two feet out between his shoulder blades, and when they clear the blade, the withdrawal seems to suck a man as white as though he had his life blood pumped out of him by a machine. [...] As they clear they shout 'Nghidla!' - I have eaten! Once you have heard it, you'll not forget it. Forty years later, the memory still makes the hair come up on the back of my neck. (*Sparrow* 468)

The fear produced by black crowds turns them into enemies. However, in spite of the fear, or probably because of it, Smith populates his pages with a huge number of friendly background blacks, whom he positions as either labouring gangs or servants (the only acceptable roles for blacks within the apartheid economic and political framework). Labouring gangs are often lining up for approval (*Lion* 217) and are recruited in large numbers to work on the mines, in the wattle or sugar plantations, in the vineyards or in other minor jobs. Their subservience is substantiated by the alacrity, docility and contentment with which they undertake their chores. Unlike the labouring gangs in other countries, like the gangs cutting hardwood trees in Moçambique, who sing "doleful work chant[s]," (*Die* 507) labouring black South Africans demonstrate their consent to subservience by singing or chattering happily as they work: like the "twenty sweating, singing Zulus" (*Lion* 242) working at the Candy Deep; or the "long ranks of sweating, singing black men" (*Thunder* 382) working in Sean I's wattle plantation; or the "one hundred and fifty black workers in ragged dusty overalls and helmets of bright unpainted metal, laughing and ragging each other in boisterous horseplay" working in the H'ani Mine and singing, "their deep melodious voices echoing in the dark confines of the tunnel, a marvellous chorus raised in an African work chant;" (*Sword* 103) or, to mention another example, the small coloured newsboys swarming over the bundles of newspapers, "chattering and laughing as they [divide] up the bundles for delivery." (*Sword* 329) Blacks are, therefore, presented as accepting cheap labour, a status their white masters never question: when coloured

couples hide in the vineyards to engage in sexual intercourse during a celebration at Weltevreden, Sir Garrick I remarks complacently, "Shouldn't think Weltevreden is going to run short of labour in the foreseeable future. Sounds like a good crop being planted." (*Sword* 328)

If not labouring gangs, blacks emerge as background servants. Smith reproduces the old imperial myth of blacks' inferior position in a scale of progress which fixed them into the roles of servants of superior whites. Thus, the heroes' houses come equipped with household servants of different types: grooms, (*Thunder* 481; *Sparrow* 495) houseboys, (*Sparrow* 250) butlers, (*Sparrow* 252) valets, gardeners or chefs. (*Sword* 412) While the heroes of the stories undertake their adventurous pursuits, their basic necessities of life are being taken care of by their servants, who fulfil a great variety of roles in the background. They deal with the food and food preparations: clear the table, (*Lion* 96) bring the coffee, (*Thunder* 71; *Sword* 102) or serve meals or breakfasts. (*Lion* 206, 487; *Thunder* 304; *Sword* 102) They are sent on errands: they carry letters to their destinations (*Thunder* 276) or spy on somebody as instructed. (*Thunder* 413) They deal with the cattle. (*Lion* 165; *Sparrow* 192) They handle the horses. (*Lion* 113; *Thunder* 403; *Sword* 102) They drive (*Thunder* 3, 220, 221, 224) or accompany drivers in case the vehicle gets stuck in the sand or breaks down in the jungle and they have to help the driver. (*Sword* 33) When the heroes go into the wilderness, they take their servants with them to put up the huts, (*Lion* 415) hack down the jungle undergrowth, (*Thunder* 394, 403) act as bearers (*Sparrow* 448) or both set up or break camp. (*Burning* 582; *Rage* 174; *Die* 20; *Fox* 364-365) When the heroes are in hot pursuit of animals or enemies, they send their servants ahead to track them down. (*Lion* 452; *Thunder* 342; *Sparrow* 65) The housemaids, meanwhile, fulfil their domestic chores at home, like doing the ironing, (*Thunder* 301) or follow their white madams while they do the shopping. (*Sparrow* 229) Children are taken care of by nannies (*Sparrow* 557; *Burning* 616; *Fox* 22, 23, 190, 281) who seem to have been transplanted from *Gone with the Wind*. They are characterised as maternal, gossipy and bossy and are deeply concerned about their female charges' love life, acting as guardians and protectors of their virginity. Their chores range from washing underwear and picking up the clothes their mistresses leave carelessly about as they

undress, to unpacking suitcases, running baths or brushing hair. Servants are often dressed in white jackets or long kanza robes (*Sparrow* 153, 452; *Sword* 62; *Rage* 544) in the stereotypical iconography of servanthood endlessly reproduced in imperial films and novels.

Servants are not allowed a dissenting voice. Their white masters' authority over them is presented as "a right of birth" (*Thunder* 6) and, consequently, they never question their subservience within the South African social hierarchy. They obediently sit around their masters to be given their chores (*Lion* 486) and seldom speak if it is not to acknowledge orders. (*Thunder* 5) Blacks have so assimilated their underdog status that they put their masters' interests before their own. Thus, Dirk's servants, for instance, would do anything, "steal and cheat and lie to ensure that [he has] whatever he desire[s] at the exact moment he desire[s] it." (*Thunder* 5-6) They even risk their own lives to save that of their master's or to protect their master's possessions: they, for example, unquestioningly fight a fire in Sean I's wattle plantation, (*Thunder* 423-431) "working shoulder to shoulder, chopping in wordless frenzy, trampling the fallen saplings as they [move] forward." (*Thunder* 426) What servants must have felt about their situations is seldom acknowledged; instead, we have them parading their subservience every time the opportunity presents itself: they assemble to greet Storm when she arrives and laugh and utter excited murmurs when she salutes each of them individually; (*Sparrow* 270) they are similarly paraded to be introduced to Centaine and her son and they "[clap] their hands respectfully and [beam] with white teeth;" (*Burning* 596) they line up respectfully on the front veranda in their immaculate white livery to welcome Centaine when she arrives at the H'ani Mine; or they "[come] pouring from the kitchen and outbuildings to give [Bella and Shasa] a riotous welcome" (*Fox* 281) when they arrive at their homestead in the Karoo, Dragon's Fountain.

Although some blacks are aware of their underdog position, abhor their subservience and even take advantage of it (Miriam Afrika poses as Tara's servant to be able to travel with her to Britain and Moses Gama pretends he is Tara's chauffeur to be able to gain entrance to the houses of parliament in Cape Town), readers are

made to identify dissenting attitudes with a lack of gratitude. After all, servants are never abused by their white masters. On the contrary, “they are part of the family” (*Fox* 17) and treated with paternalistic generosity. Masters always talk, chat, laugh and joke with their servants, participate in the celebrations of their coloured staff and bring gifts for them. Furthermore, they still support them at old age, giving pensions to the servants who are too old to work. (*Sword* 327)

All in all, Smith populates his pages with thousands of background blacks, mere figures in the landscape. They are pictured as enemies if uncooperative but, more often than not, turned into grateful servants and labourers who have assimilated and accepted their servile position and who, unwillingly, support and guarantee the maintenance of the whole apartheid economic and political framework. These become a ‘voiceless chorus of approval’, accepting their marginalisation and their workforce status as given, and thus enabling the white heroes to enjoy “great fortune” and “enormous power” unquestioningly and to visualise themselves as “[strongmen] at the circus, in leopardskins and leather wristbands, standing with arms akimbo, huge biceps flexed, upon a pyramid of golden sovereigns, while a congregation in white robes [kneel] and [make] obeisance before [them].” (*Sword* 101)

12.2. Sexualisation and emasculation

Sexual dynamics crucially underpinned the whole operation of British empire and Victorian expansion. Without the easy range of sexual opportunities which imperial systems provided, the long-term administration and exploitation of tropical territories [...] might well have been impossible. This, however, was far from being an uncontested proposition in late-Victorian Britain itself, when it was increasingly urged that, if the British empire was to survive, the imperial race must exercise sexual restraint, and government must intervene to enforce it. Through a fanatical Purity Campaign, sexual opportunity was from the mid-1880's gradually reduced [...]. The result was that in the British empire after 1914, outside the fighting services, almost no sexual interaction between rulers and the ruled occurred.⁶

Apartheid, by restricting the social connection of inter-racial mixing, hampers the potential for narrative fiction to authenticate the inter-racial moment.⁷

⁶ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 1.

⁷ Dominic Head, *Nadine Gordimer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 17.

For centuries, Africa was depicted in European lore as libidinally eroticised. This conception, that can be traced back as far as the second century AD when Ptolemy wrote of Africa that “the constellation of Scorpion, which pertains to the pudenda, dominates that continent,”⁸ was especially extended during the times of European exploration by the fifteenth century. Travellers’ tales abounded with visions of the monstrous sexuality of these far-off lands and found an eager and lascivious audience in England long before the era of high Victorian imperialism. In that period, and as a consequence of the systematic exploration of Africa, the sexualisation of the continent was firmly consolidated in the European psyche. Ever since the Enlightenment, knowledge had been presented as the male penetration and exposure of a veiled female interior. This idea was applied to the explorers’ undertakings in the interior of Africa, which was viewed as a passive, inviting, wild, dangerous and deadly female spatially spread out for male penetration. Africa became the backdrop for the white man’s testing of himself and the metaphor of the continent as a female object to be opened up, penetrated and conquered served to underline the virility of the white man.

Other aspects contributed to the sexualisation of the continent and its peoples. To start with, and as Hyam explains, exploration and subsequent colonisation was not only “a matter of Christianity and commerce, it was also a matter of copulation and concubinage.”⁹ Africa, together with the other continents the British took possession of and colonised, gave them ample opportunity to escape the ultra-squeamishness and hyper-prudery that so characterised Victorian England and to give free vent to the sexual fantasies dictated by their soft underbelly, which were not condemned in these less inhibited, better sexually adjusted societies. Ironically, the selfsame prudery that characterised Victorian England was often exported to the continent. The British brought with them narrow, blinkered, defective and intolerant attitudes towards sex which they imposed on the rest of the world and which, on the other hand, determined their attitude towards the sexual customs among the tribes they encountered.

⁸ qtd. in Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 22.

⁹ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 2.

Uninhibited, sexually extrovert and naked or semi-naked, the alien tribes were regarded as barbarian, lascivious and animalistic. This helped to shape the stereotype of black men and black women as all body and no brain and served to substantiate the idea of their primitiveness based on a supposed lack of morality. Subsequently, native tribes came to be regarded as great propagators and by the end of the nineteenth century “popular lore had firmly established Africa as the quintessential zone of sexual aberration and anomaly” where “men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminised men’s breasts flowed with milk and militarised women lopped theirs off.”¹⁰

Little by little, the imperial representational apparatus constructed the black through his body and his sexuality. The bodies of Africans, and very particularly, their sexual organs, became their identifying traits and, consequently, began to be read, analysed, and subjected to scientific study in order to reach conclusions about their character. A notorious example took place in 1809, when an African woman (Saartje Baartman), known as the Hottentot Venus, was brought to England by a Boer farmer from the Cape region of South Africa. She was regularly exhibited in London and Paris over five years and in her early performances, she was presented on a raised stage like a wild beast. Both in London and Paris, Stuart Hall explains, she became popular amongst naturalists and ethnologists “who measured, observed, drew, wrote learned treatises about, modelled, made waxen moulds and plaster casts, and scrutinised every detail, of her anatomy.”¹¹ What attracted her audiences were her protruding buttocks (a feature of Hottentot anatomy) and what was described as her ‘Hottentot apron’, an enlargement of the labia. Her difference was pathologised. She did not fit into the ethnocentric norm which was applied to European women and she was constructed as Other. Also, she was reduced to Nature; her body was read like a text for the living evidence it provided of her absolute ‘otherness’ and, therefore, of an irreversible difference between the races. In her “Nature and Culture coincided [...]. What was seen as her ‘primitive’ sexual genitalia signified her ‘primitive’ sexual appetite.”¹² Similar interpretative strategies were applied to black men, whose

¹⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 22.

¹¹ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other,’” *Representation*, ed. Stuart Hall, 265.

¹² Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other,’” *Representation*, ed. Stuart Hall, 266.

perceived-as-large penises were regarded as proof of their bestial sexuality and of their primitiveness, giving birth to the myth of the large black penis. This myth turned black men into walking phallus possessed with insatiable sexual appetites, which Fanon explains is the subject of a widespread fantasy which fixates the black man at the level of the genitalia: "One is no longer aware of the Negro, but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis."¹³ The myth of the large black penis was one of the most recurrent representational practices of black men in the past, one which helped to construct them as more primitive on the grounds of their immoral sexual practices, and one that still exists nowadays as a recurrent source of anxiety for the white man.

The construction of the black man as a walking penis was not actually based on any factual truth about the size of the black man's penises, but was a response to the white man's psychological fears.¹⁴ Confrontation with black men in a supposedly savage, openly sexual state in the tropics produced revulsion and anxiety. The black man became a living reminder of the sexual instincts that all men share with animals and which western men tried to repress and hide underneath a veneer of civilisation, morality and reason. Europeans in Africa and other 'barbarian' continents found that their savage impulses were never far from their civilised surfaces. The white man's potential for being defiled, going native and falling out into the abyss of moral and social regression, led white men to displace these impulses onto Africans and other native peoples in an attempt to separate themselves from blacks and ratify their superiority over them. But by displacing sexuality onto the Africans, they generated another set of anxieties. The black men began to be perceived as more sexually active and potent than the white man and, thus, as a competitor and as a threat to the white man's virility, to white womanhood and to civilisation itself with the possibility of miscegenation, eugenic pollution and racial degeneration. The sexuality of the black man, therefore, was regarded as a menace that threatened, via inter-racial intercourse,

¹³ Frank Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (London: Paladin, 1970) 170.

¹⁴ As Kobena Mercer explains, "The myth of penis size - a 'primal fantasy' in the mythology of white supremacy in the sense that it is shared and collective in nature - has been the target of enlightened liberal demystification as the modern sciences of sexology repeatedly embarked on the task of measuring empirical pricks to demonstrate its untruth." Kobena Mercer, "Reading Racial Fetishism," *Representation*, ed. Stuart Hall, 290.

to disrupt the symbolic boundaries of racial and cultural purity that hegemonic cultures relied on to ratify their power and protect it from 'alien' interference.

The particular emotional hostility towards black men in general is very much related, therefore, to the possibility of miscegenation, especially in South Africa, where the whole apartheid system was devised to keep the two races apart in a desperate attempt to maintain white hegemony and to avoid being swamped by the superior numbers of a culture perceived as alien and inferior. As William Beinart phrases it, the possibility of miscegenation in South Africa "adresse[s] the formal concerns about racial electoral power which might be diluted by the long-term arithmetic of mixing and [plays] on deeply set notions of purity [...] and Social Darwinist fears that mixing [will] result in racial decline."¹⁵ The existence of an aggressive black sexuality in South Africa, therefore, was a great cause of concern for it threatened the maintenance of Afrikanerdom, white power and the white race. Consequently, the political apparatus of apartheid was set in motion to legally protect the white race from racial contamination. One of the first acts of the National Party in government was to pass the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949). Previously, under the Immorality Act (1927) casual sex between blacks and whites had been illegal; now it became a criminal offence for Europeans to marry non-Europeans. These acts guaranteed the separate development of races even in the most intimate spheres of human contact: those of the bed and the bedroom, the inner sanctum of family life. The whole apartheid system, consequently, was partly conceived as a response to the presence of super-sexed blacks perceived as endowed with the attributes of strength, brute power, force and, above all, sexual potency. And this presence explicates, as well, Smith's obsession with the male and female (but very specially male) black bodies in his fiction. In his attempt to highlight their primitive nature, he focuses on physical qualities more than on intellectual ones, so he turns them into bodies.

¹⁵ William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 141.

12.2.1. The black man and the black woman's body

In Smith's fiction, thus, black men, as well as black women, are mainly defined through the body. The heroes' most faithful black friends and assistants have an outstandingly well-proportioned physical build-up and are endowed with superior strength. Aboli, Hal and Tom Courtney's mentor and servant, is presented as "five inches taller than Hal;" he is of a warrior tribe from the eastern coast of Africa and, as befits his warrior blood, displays a "lean, supple frame" and "long muscular legs, swaying from the waist like some huge black cobra." His torso is usually naked, showing his muscles which "[seem] to have a life of [their] own, serpents slithering and coiling beneath the oiled skin." (*Birds* 9) If dressed, clothes can hardly "encompass his broad chest and massive arms." (*Birds* 256) His size and strength are monumental, emphasised by Smith's choice of words, he likens him to a "black colossus" (*Birds* 34) or a "bull" (*Birds* 193) or presents him as "huge and indestructible," (*Birds* 39) "big" (*Birds* 105) or "naked and magnificent." (*Birds* 253) Aboli is never overwhelmed by physical strain; his great muscles "[make] light of [heavy work]" (*Birds* 436) and he can move "at the ground-eating trot of the warriors of his tribe" even when carrying a heavy burden. (*Birds* 291) Mbejane, Sean I's assistant, is similarly endowed with a broad chest and an "exquisitely muscled body" (*Lion* 150) with belly muscles that stand out "like the static ripples on a windswept beach" (*Lion* 143) and move "beneath the black velvet of his skin." (*Thunder* 2) Pungushe, Mark's servant, is also physically impressive. Even when Mark first finds him, ill and unconscious in the wilderness at Chaka's Gate, he cannot but notice his magnificent physique: he has a "great chest" and his loin-cloth, which allows his body to be revealed, exposes the "solid bulge of his buttocks, and the sinewy thews of his thighs and the flat hard plain of the belly." (*Sparrow* 471) And Hendrick, Lothar's Ovambo, to mention just another example, is likewise described as a "huge black bull of a man," (*Sword* 6) a "purple-black giant" (*Burning* 516) who revels in physical effort for it allows him "to flaunt his superior strength in the faces of his crew." (*Sword* 12) Background blacks are also excessively physical; dressed in "loin cloths" (*Lion* 561) and, thus, "half naked," (*Thunder* 56) their bodies "[gleam] with sweat in the sunlight" (*Rage* 176) and display almost god-like physical perfection; like the

paddlers who carry Centaine and Blaine on the Okavango river who are described as “amiable coal-black giants of the river tribe” with “the balance of gymnasts” and “bodies [...] forged and hardened to Grecian perfection by a lifetime of wielding their paddles and their long punting poles.” (*Sword* 229)

Black men display beautiful physiques and huge penises, indeed. The herdboys Sean I spots guarding the cattle are “completely naked, youngsters with the thin legs and the disproportionately large genitals of the Africans.” (*Lion* 151) Some of General China’s men have “elephantine members” and are “truly remarkable in their physical development.” (*Die* 513) Mbejane, which means rhinoceros, is named after this animal “for [his] horn,” of course, and (Alphonso Henrique) Mabasa’s name means “the one who strikes with a club,” a “war club on [his] enemies and a meat club on their wives.” (*Die* 259) Aboli’s penis is likened to “a long black python” (*Birds* 14) and, when he is displayed naked at the slave market, Lord Cumbrae, a British privateer responsible for Aboli’s slave condition, exclaims, “The buyer will be getting full measure. There is no makeweight in that load of blood-sausage.” (*Birds* 253) Moses Gama’s penis is similarly outstanding. It is described as “a pinnacle of black granite;” (*Rage* 194) it is “so thick” that it cannot be “encompass[ed] with the circle of [a] thumb and forefinger” and it is “hot and hard as a shaft of black ironstone that had lain in the full glare of the sun at midday.” (*Rage* 347) Women’s reaction to his penis confirm his sexual might: when Tara makes love to him he is “so huge that he [terrifies] her” and feels as she is being “split asunder as his blackness [fills] her;” (*Rage* 48) and Victoria, his wife, experiences the same awe when she first makes love to him for nothing has “fully prepared her for the power and skill of his man, or for the sheer magnificence of him.” (*Rage* 187)

The black man’s genitalia bespeak his sexual nature, which is further emphasised by his promiscuity, lasciviousness and reproductive skills. Thus, Smith emphasises that black slaves are much in demand in the Cape colony for they are “good workers and breeders.” (*Birds* 214) When black men see a beautiful woman they “[roar] like bulls and [drum] their shields,” freely parading their lustful instincts. (*Rage* 182) They cannot understand the moral codes that prevent some white men

from having sexual intercourse with their brides before marriage. Thus, Mbejane, who witnesses Sean I's bad-mood as a consequence of restraining his sexual appetite for too long and waiting for Katrina to consent, exclaims, "It's a stupid stallion that doesn't know how to kick down a fence." (*Lion* 477) By tribal custom, black men are not allowed to penetrate their brides before marriage but they are sanctioned to play sexual games: men explore with their fingertips and hunt for the "little pink bud of flesh hidden between soft furry lips;" and women hold them "between [their] crossed thighs, avoiding only the final penetration," skilfully "milking [them] of [their] seed." (*Rage* 472) Otherwise, women allow men to have intercourse with other women for, as Amelia tells Raleigh, "If I am not allowed to sharpen your spear, let the joy-girls keep it bright for the time when I am at last allowed to feel its kiss." (*Rage* 474-5) Their sexual appetites are so huge that they are not solely satiated by a single woman. Thus, they visit *shebeens* where they drink *skokiaan* and "stab all [the] girls;" (*Rage* 133) and take more than two wives for "three wives are the very minimum a man needs for contentment." (*Rage* 138) Mbejane has four wives; (*Thunder* 205) Hendrick has six town wives (*Sword* 592) when we first find him settled in Drake's Farm and nine when he reappears again in the narrative. (*Rage* 129) Josia Nrubu, a famous witchdoctor, has twenty-five wives; (*Fox* 207) and the Monomatapa, a Zulu king and brother of Aboli, has a hundred royal wives. (*Birds* 485) Aboli, a little bit more restrained, has two wives, who nonetheless give birth to a numerous progeny, six children, in a very short period of time. (*Monsoon* 612-614)

Black women, like black men, are also defined through their body, particularly through their breasts and buttocks, which are the only features they are allowed to present. Mbejane's youngest and prettiest wife displays her buttocks "bare except for the strip of cloth that [covers] the cleft" (*Thunder* 207) and when all his wives walk behind him, they appear "stately and tall, their naked backs glistening with oil, rumps swaying together beneath the brief loin cloths." (*Thunder* 436) Amelia, to mention another example, has "buttocks swinging and jostling each other beneath the yellow European-style skirt" she wears. (*Rage* 471) Background women in "the tropical hot-house of Durban" are "bare-breasted under their cloaks, big stately breasts fruitful and full as those of the earth mother, to which their infants [cling] like fat little leeches,

and the short leather aprons high on their strong glossy dark thighs swinging as they [walk].” (*Sparrow* 229) Mbejane and Pungushe’s wives are also bare-breasted, exhibiting flat dugs “empty as leather pouches” (*Sparrow* 479) or “pendulous and empty” (*Thunder* 205) if middle aged; and “jolly melon breasts” (*Sparrow* 480) or “firm, round breasts” (*Thunder* 205) if young. This reductionist strategy turns them into sexual objects, which befits their lascivious nature, constantly emphasised throughout the narratives. The Hottentot women in the Cape colony are characterised by their “wanton whoring” for they “lift their short leather skirts for a handful of beads or a trifling trinket.” (*Birds* 288) The women of Aboli’s tribe ogle him with “huge dark eyes, liquid with awe” and display their plump pubescent breasts “shining with cow fat and red clay” and their “bare and round and [joggling]” buttocks, hoping to tempt him for they would enjoy prestige if he chose them as bed-mates. (*Birds* 477) The tribe girls eventually sent to gratify Aboli and Hal kneel on hands and knees with their buttocks turned towards them, exposing “the deepest folds of [their] privy parts” to their gaze. (*Rage* 479) During Victoria and Moses’ wedding ceremony, the unmarried girls welcome the guests by parading themselves, forming a line and coming forward “singing and undulating their hips,” their bodies oiled and stark naked over their short beaded skirts so “their pert young breasts [joggle] and [bounce] to the rhythm of the song of welcome,” (*Rage* 178) “giggling in response to the knowing looks and sly sallies of the men.” (*Rage* 179) Their lustfulness is instinctual and they immediately respond to sexual appreciation with titillation. Victoria, accustomed to extravagant male attention because of her beauty, does not even glance in the direction of a driver who whistles softly at her, but lifts her chin an inch and assumes a haughty expression; however, she notices that the driver is attractive and masterful and, despite herself, “her hips [begin] to swing as she [strides] on, and her large perfectly round buttocks [oscillate] like the cheeks of a chipmunk chewing a nut.” (*Rage* 229) Black women’s intrinsic lust is finally confirmed when Pig John, one of Lothar’s men, swears on his sister’s virginity that he has not drunk and Lothar states, “That is a mythical beast.” (*Sword* 86)

Blacks are not only presented as overtly sexual, but as depraved, displaying corrupt and degenerate sexual tendencies that confirm their animal instincts and brutal

nature. Moses does not hesitate to bed other males to reach his political objectives (*Sword* 374) and Hendrick is acknowledged to have “used men in the same fashion” although “never as a loving relationship but as a form of torture of a captured enemy.” (*Sword* 374) Oliver Kendrick, a famous dancer, has a hidden camera in his apartment to record his encounters with other men. When Kendrick is engaged by Raleigh to set up a trap to Michael II and to consent to be recorded having sexual intercourse with Michael II, Kendrick readily accepts. Although, Smith writes, it is odd “that a man of Kendrick’s talent and fame would consent to take part in an arranged tableau such as this,” he not only does so willingly, but he actually offers his equipment and his services to Raleigh; in fact, he participates “with such unfeigned enthusiasm and inventive delight” that it is obvious that this “[is] very much to his particular taste.” (*Fox* 134) Victoria Gama, “the black Evita, the mother of the nation,” (*Fox* 214) has sado-maso tastes and on one occasion she is presented naked to the waist in the kitchen, “her breasts [...] beautifully shaped. Smooth as velvet, black as the fur of sable, large as the ripe tsama melons of the Kalahari desert.” She holds a supple whip made of cured hippo hide, the terrible African sjambok, “slim as one of [her] elegant fingers and as long as her arm,” with which she is flogging a “naked body pinioned down upon the table” held by two of the eldest and biggest of all her bodyguards, “[b]oth of them [...] in their late teens [...] also bared to the waist.” (*Fox* 214-215) The extent of her perversity is emphasised by the detailed description of the flogging Smith provides:

The flogging must have been in progress for some considerable time. The whip weals were latticed closely across the shiny black skin, raised and purple. Some of them had cut through into the flesh and were bleeding. The blood formed a puddle under the body and spilled over to drip on to the tiled kitchen floor. (*Fox* 215)

Finally, and to mention another example, Smith highlights that General China can “take a boy or a girl with equal enjoyment” (*Die* 459) and, to further endorse his depravity, he has him gloating over a revenge plan on Sean II. Although he does not have the opportunity to put the plan into practice, he conjures up the plan vividly in his mind. He plans to arrange for Sean II to watch as Claudia, his lover, is raped by different men: first by Tippoo Tip, another equally perverted African General; and then, after having enjoyed her to the full, he will hand her to the most repulsive of his

men, those “with hideous features, deformed bodies and elephantine members;” after that, “he will bring on the sick and the diseased, the men with open venereal ulcers and virulent skin disorders, covered with scabs and tropical sores;” then at last he will “give her to the men with the slim sickness, the most dreaded of all.” (*Die* 513)

12.2.2. Fear and emasculation

All in all, Smith’s fiction reduces blacks to their body and their sexuality, which serves him the purpose of confirming their physicality, their animalistic status or their depravity and, as a consequence, their inferior stage of development. But this reductionist perception ironically brings to the fore the superior strength and physiques of blacks, their uninhibited and highly developed sexuality and their reproductive potential, both among themselves and with white women, whom whites fear blacks regard as specially palatable treats. This fear is specially seen in *A Time to Die*. In this novel, Claudia Monterro, the daughter of an important American tycoon, is captured by Moçambiquean rebel guerrilla soldiers. Sean II is in love with her and in his mind the fate that awaits Claudia is worse than death, for in his tortured subconscious she becomes the object of the black man’s depraved sexuality. In a dream, he sees Claudia “running naked through a dark forest” pursued by “a pack of wolves [...] black as night but with glistening white fangs and red lolling tongues.” (*Die* 198) The sexual imagery used is clear enough to deserve any explanation, and is further emphasised by Sean II’s conscious thoughts; he imagines the black soldiers studying her, ogling her body and “[puffing] up their imagination and their courage.” He also finds he cannot “bear the possibility of what might [happen] to her if the leader [...] lost control of his men.” (*Die* 193) The sexual nature of the threat black men pose on Claudia is further substantiated by the black rebels’ actual attitude towards Claudia. Sean II manages to rescue Claudia from the guerrilla soldiers but China, the guerrilla commander, who hates Sean II, pursues them. China asks for Tippoo Tip’s co-operation. China emphasises that the woman is not as important as the white man, but Tippoo Tip contradicts him and says, “[t]o me a woman always has value [...] especially if she is white and young. I like a change of flesh occasionally.” And he proceeds, “[l]et us make another bargain, my brother [...]. If I help you to capture these runaway whites,

you may have the man, but I will keep the woman.” (*Die* 463) Also, as I have explained above, China’s revenge plan on Sean II consists of having him watch while Claudia is being raped by different black men.

Black men, therefore, are perceived as threats to white womanhood that menace to ‘defile’ white purity with the possibility of miscegenation. Implicitly, they also threaten white masculinity with their super-virile physiques and hyper-active sexualities, which is a source of permanent anxiety for Smith. He also seems to be aware of the fact, supported in Nadine Gordimer’s fiction, that the ‘rainbow family’ or inter-racial couplings are a good way to attack the mighty apartheid building at its very foundations. Smith appears to know that sex can actually be an act of racial conciliation; that, as Hyam puts it, though sex “cannot of itself enable men to transcend racial barriers, it generates some admiration and affection across them, which is healthy, and which cannot always be dismissed as merely self-interested and prudential” and can in fact “actually mitigate the harshness of race relations.”¹⁶ Awareness does not lead to endorsement in Smith’s fiction. The possibility of black men marrying or simply having sex with white women is only a source of terror, and, therefore, Smith roots out or condemns the possibility for it destabilises the concept of white purity apartheid relies on for its maintenance. Therefore, he engages in a hysterical effort to counter-balance and minimise the black man’s sexual potency and hamper the inter-racial moment by using different strategies, which I proceed to outline.

To start with, he introduces the portentously ominous AIDS pandemic upon the scene. In his novels, AIDS is presented as a widely spread illness among Africans, an assumption that his white men consider as given. When Sean II, for instance, visits a black club on the Zimbabwean border, he is accosted by a child prostitute “with a tender immature body [...], the face of a black Madonna and ancient weary eyes.” She seizes Sean II’s arm and says, “Take me with you and I’ll give you something you’ve never had before.” Sean II answers back with the poignant remark, “What have you got that I’ve never had before, sweetheart? AIDS?” (*Die* 298) The possibility of an

¹⁶ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 214-215.

AIDS-infected black population looms large in the novels and the horror of this possibility is emphasised by providing a graphic description of an AIDS-infected woman, who is presented as:

An apparition with an ancient skull-like head. The hair had fallen out in tufts, leaving shiny black patches on the scalp. The lips had shrunk and peeled back to expose teeth that were too large and white for that ruined head. [...] Her body reminded [Sean II] of the horror pictures he had seen of the survivors of Dachau and Belsen. She was a skeleton covered with baggy skin, her empty dugs dangled over the rack of her ribs, her stomach was drawn in so that her pelvic girdle was an empty bony basin. Her arms and legs were fleshless, the bony elbows and knees grotesquely enlarged. [...] [The lesions in her abdomen] were blind boils, hard and shiny as ripe black grapes beneath the skin, covering her lower belly and disappearing into the wiry mob of her pubic hair. (*Die* 370)

The possibility of interracial sexual acts that spring from love, or from lust for that matter, is thus eradicated by introducing the positively catastrophic consequences they may have: AIDS.

Secondly, Smith makes a conscious effort to divest black men of their masculinity by likening them to women. Hlubi, one of Sean I's servants, has a "well-rounded paunch bulging out above his loincloth," which makes Sean I exclaim, "If you come to work for me, we'll soon have you delivered of your child." (*Lion* 217) When Sean I's black servants are lazing about, they are "standing round like a bunch of women." (*Lion* 444) Mbejane sleeps in the sun "like an old woman." (*Lion* 485) When Sean II captures the mighty General China he tells his captain, "Treat him like your new wife," (*Die* 106) and addresses him as "little darling." (*Die* 108) Sergeant Alphonso's men may "dress like warriors" but "fight like women." (*Die* 283) Job, Sean II's black associate in his safari business, acknowledges he has been "nursemaiding [Sean II]." (*Die* 298) The terrifying Frelimo rebels are baboons escaping from a Renamo attack "screaming like virgins feeling the prong for the very first time." (*Die* 363) An injured black trooper, humiliated by Sean II's inquiries about his health, tells him, "Do you think I am a woman?" (*Die* 332) an assumption Sean II does not contradict. Haile Selassie, in spite of his status as Supreme Emperor of Ethiopia, is described as "small and delicately boned, with tiny feminine feet and hands and delicate facial features." (*Fox* 315) And, to mention another example, the

awesome Amadoda warriors lose all their dignity when recruited as sheep crew and begin to puke, which makes Aboli exclaim, "Look at these pretty virgins. I thought at first there might be a man among them, but I see they should all squat when they piss." (*Birds* 488)

Their intrinsically feminine core is also emphasised by their maternal instincts. Black men, particularly Zulus, would do anything for children who, after cattle, are the things they love the most. (*Sparrow* 560; *Burning* 602; *Birds* 428) White boys are particularly favoured among blacks. Thus Dirk as a baby has "nearly two dozen Zulus to spoil him" and who compete "hotly for his affection." No effort is too much when it comes to gaining Dirk's love: dignified Mbejane, down on his hands and knees, is ridden mercilessly in and out among the wagons by Dirk; Hluby scratches himself under the arms and gibbers insanely in his celebrated imitation of a baboon to make Dirk laugh; and Kandhla raids Katrina's store of fruit preserves to make sure Dirk is properly fed. (*Lion* 517) Baby Shasa, to mention another example, has a bunch of servants hovering expectantly over him and, eventually, when given permission, bearing him away "like a prince to the kitchens." (*Burning* 602) Black men are equally affectionate with their own children; thus Aboli loses "his dignified reserve and regal bearing when he [holds] a chubby drooling son on each knee" and his "scarified visage that [had stricken] terror into a thousand enemies [becomes] benign and close to beautiful." (*Monsoon* 612) This internal femininity is given material shape through their bodies. Unlike white heroes, who seldom lose their muscles, not even in old age, the blacks' bodies tend to become round and soft once they are happily settled in domestic routines, like Lothar's men who, after twelve years of easy living, are "fat and soft and middle-aged." (*Sword* 75)

Not only does Smith feminise black men, but he actually turns them into *castrati* when around white women, diluting, in this way, their sexuality and their threatening potential, especially faithful servants who, having positioned themselves as assistants to the white man, share the white man's space. Mbejane, Pungushe and Aboli are left alone with the white hero's woman for long periods of time while the white hero is away. They are never titillated; a 'bad thought' never crosses their mind,

even when isolated and away from civilisation or after long periods of sexual restraint. Smith makes sure he emphasises the black servant does not covet his master's woman. Thus, for instance, when Sukeena, Hal's bride-to-be, dies, Hal is distressed. Aboli tells him that he too loved Sukeena, but Smith makes haste to make him specify "as a brother." (*Birds* 484) When the white masters are actually around, blacks become passive and encouraging witnesses of their love-making scenes; never aroused themselves, they defer sexuality to the whites while they "[shout] loud encouragement after [them]" (*Lion* 473) and praise their amatory skills once they are finished. Aboli, for instance, who has been waiting while Hal and Katinka have sex, tells Hall when he finally finishes and joins him, "I thought you might never pull your root out of the sugar field [...]. I feared I might have to come up to the cave, and prise you loose with an iron bar." (*Birds* 173)

Even when black men do actually contemplate the possibility of having sex with a white woman, it is only a passing thought, which serves Smith the function of bringing to the fore their threatening potential to white womanhood, but not a factuality. As I have mentioned previously, Claudia's captors ogle her and consider raping her, but the actual rape never takes place. Furthermore, these references to black men's threatening potential to white womanhood are functional in the representation of white men as defenders of white women, white honour and the white race. They also justify Smith's symbolic castration of black men by likening them to women. This symbolic castration, in fact, is just an expression of Smith's very real desire to actually castrate them once and for all, a desire which is even actually vocalised in the narratives. Sean II, for instance, after a Shangane trooper has struck Claudia in the centre of her chest with his AK butt, exclaims, "Do it again, you son of a syphilitic hyena [...] and I'll hack off your *mtondo* with a blunt axe and make you eat it without salt." (*Die* 256)

12.2.3. Fear and inter-racial relationships

In spite of Smith's misgivings about miscegenation, actual inter-racial sexual encounters, most of them extra marital, recreational and / or involving exchange of

money or abuse of power, do actually take place in the saga. Although Aboli is mentioned to have left “a plague of bald brown babies born in [Plymouth],” (*Monsoon* 44) this is the only reference to inter-racial sex outside Africa. Africa is in fact the continent that emerges as a hothouse of passions and hidden sexual undercurrents which surface in the form of a myriad of sexual affairs of various kinds between people of different racial origins. Governor van der Stel, the ruler of the Cape colony, likes “a slice of dark meat” occasionally (*Monsoon* 142) and the governor of Zanzibar, Consul Gray, is surprised being serviced by two slave girls. (*Monsoon* 214) When Luke Jervis leaves England for Africa, his wife calls after him, “You will not go running off to Afriky to rut on them black savage whores.” (*Monsoon* 405) This accusation is not merely hot air; black prostitutes who serviced white men were common both in colonial times and during the apartheid regime, a fact that Smith reflects in the saga. Smith mentions the Hottentot prostitutes at the Cape colony, offering their services at the hovels on the waterfront where white seamen could spend “evenings of debauchery” (*Birds* 292) or the girls in District Six, which is visited by “daring white revellers [...] to listen to the jazz players in the crowded *shebeens* or to look for a pretty coloured girl - more for the thrill of danger of discovery than for any physical gratification.” (*Rage* 372) White prostitutes also consent to have sex with black men on occasions; like Annetjie, who agrees to “milk a pint from any of [the] black bastards” (*Monsoon* 142) if paid for it. Black girls are also offered as gifts. Hal, for instance, is presented with a young girl with a “plump and glossy” body and naked breasts and buttocks. (*Birds* 483) Although he is reluctant to take her at first, “the great spear of [his] manhood” betrays his arousal and he promptly lifts her in his arms and encompasses her in “the fury of his passion.” (*Birds* 484) The existence of multi-hued hybrids populating the pages of Smith’s novels gives further proof of the existence of inter-racial couplings. Jan Oliphant, for instance is the son of Hannah, a Cape Colony prostitute, and Xia Nka, a powerful Hottentot chief; (*Monsoon* 140) Sukeena is the daughter of a Balinese woman of high breeding and an English trader; (*Birds* 223) and Nanny is a Cape Coloured, “her Hottentot blood mixed with that of most of the world’s seafaring nations.” (*Fox* 22)

The existence of inter-racial matings and their outcome, the hybridised progeny resulting from these affairs, is acknowledged in Smith's fiction. In fact, two of his protagonists, Tara and Hal Courtney, have long-lasting relationships with coloured partners and have children with them. Given Smith's obsession with racial purity and with creating a purely masculine space free from alien interference, the fact that he provides whites with coloured partners and that he devotes considerable narrative space to them would really undermine his objectives were it not for the treatment such couplings receive in the saga. The anxiety these relationships produce determines the outcome of these affairs; inter-racial couplings remain ill-fated and tragic of necessity. If anything, these stories serve as cautionary tales that highlight the nefarious consequences that result from indulging in unacceptable sexual practices and allowing the white body (politic) to be contaminated by polluting aliens that threaten personal stability in particular and the political stability of white power in general.

The story of what happens to Tara Courtney in *Rage* constitutes one of the most explicit cautionary tales in Smith's fiction. Tara is involved in anti-apartheid activities ever since the beginning of the novel, when we see her participating in one of the Black Sash demonstrations at the opening of parliament to protest against "the blatant gerrymandering of this perverse government, the erosion of the rule of law, and the abrogation of the basic human rights of the majority of [...] South Africans merely on the grounds of the colour of their skins." (*Rage* 2) Although she is committed and sympathetic to the anti-apartheid cause, she rejects violence as an option. She is not only politically pure, but also physically. Dressed in white like a bride, she is beautiful for "although she [has] carried four children, her waist [is] slim as a virgin's" and her "thick chestnut hair [...] crackle[s] with ruby lights in the bright Cape sun-shine." (*Rage* 1) Then Moses Gama, handsome and charismatic, enters the scene; Tara is enthralled and becomes his lover. With this act she is turned into a 'sacrificial lamb', washing away her guilt for her participation in the apartheid project and "redeeming the sins of her own race." (*Rage* 48) From that moment onwards, Tara's persona is considerably altered for the worse. She loses the sexual innocence that had characterised her sexual life with Shasa; putting her life at Moses' command, she says

“I will make any sacrifice you ask of me;” (*Rage* 49) and becomes an insatiable nymphomaniac “[hurling] herself upon [his pinnacle of black granite] to impale herself [...] [thrashing] and [churning] above him as he [lies] quiescent and unmoving, and she [goes] beyond physical endurance, beyond the limits of flesh, insatiable and desperate for him.” (*Rage* 194) Her commitment to him is so strong that she accepts violent struggle and becomes an active participant in Moses’ revolutionary activities. She is, in fact, even ready to help him conduct a terrorist attack on the houses of parliament in Cape Town even though she knows that her own father and husband are in the building. Tara’s sexual involvement with Moses operates drastic changes in her character, but these are not the only means Smith uses to bring to the fore the magnitude of her ‘crime’.

Her transgression is depicted as unnatural. Tara’s “soft pale flesh,” (*Rage* 301) “soft as putty,” (*Rage* 306) quickly begins to revolt Moses who each time finds it “more of an effort to feign passion.” (*Rage* 301) She may feel love and devotion but this is not what Moses experiences; he says, “Love? [...] That is not an African word. There is no word for love in my vocabulary.” (*Rage* 220) Moses is only using her cynically and calculatingly as an instrument to obtain information and infiltrate himself into the parliament building in Cape Town. In fact, Moses’ “vast sexual appeal” is just “another weapon in his arsenal; another means of manipulating people” which he uses “on men or women, young or old, no matter how attractive or unappealing.” (*Rage* 50) The unnaturalness of miscegenation is also emphasised by Tara’s pregnancy by Moses. When Tara tells Molly Broadhurst, “a militant liberal, as colour-blind as Tara [...] herself,” she is stunned by the idea. Through Molly and her reaction, the gravity of Tara’s crime and the consequences it will have come into sharp relief. Molly immediately disapproves of Tara’s lack of common sense, for she knows that miscegenation is an “an offence punishable by imprisonment” and that this penalty is “as nothing compared to the social outrage it [will] engender. She [will] become an outcast and a pariah.” (*Rage* 142) Molly voices Smith’s condemnation, which in terms of the context of wealth and glamour which characterises the Courtney heroines, immediately disqualifies her as an acceptable character.

All in all, Tara loses both dignity and moral integrity by consenting to become involved in an 'unnatural' sexual affair. Her insatiable sexual desire and the outcome of this desire, her pregnancy, transgress Smith's ideal of white womanhood and threaten white masculinity and the white race. Consequently, she has to be punished and Smith does not hesitate to inflict his punishment and her fate, as Maughan-Brown puts it, "in terms of the desiderata of popular fiction is worse than hanging."¹⁷ Romance demands a happy ending; tragic but intense love demands death. Tara is not allowed any of those. Moses does not even love her. So while her love for him "multiplie[s] a hundredfold," (*Rage* 209) he regards her as just a "besotted woman" and he would not even care if the police "tried and hanged her." (*Rage* 385) Furthermore, she is deprived of her beauty and any sense of decorum or self-awareness about personal hygiene. When Bella, Tara's daughter, visits her in the boarding house she keeps for ANC refugees in London, Bella becomes aware of the transformation her body has undergone. She has become "an old bag," (*Rage* 572) a "blowsy middle-aged drab." (*Rage* 627) She has "put on weight, her backside in the faded blue jeans [is] huge, and her bosom [hangs] shapelessly in the baggy man's sweater" she wears. (*Rage* 572) Her once beautiful hair is now grey "streaked ginger and violent mulberry red;" (*Rage* 572) her features have "sagged almost to obscure the bone structure" and the skin around her eyes has "creased and bagged." (*Rage* 572) Finally, she is not even clean. Bella realises that her mother, who "had always had an air of freshness and neatness," now smells of "some cheap and flowery perfume, of cigarette smoke and boiled cabbage and [...] of underclothing that had been worn too long without changing." (*Rage* 572) The morale behind the cautionary tale, Maughan-Brown ironically explains, is that "white women who sleep with blacks must not expect the process to allow them to retain enough decent values to remain concerned about washing their underwear."¹⁸

The fate that awaits other women who engage in inter-racial relationships is similarly dreadful. Sukeena, the Balinese woman Hal Courtney is about to marry, is

¹⁷ David Maughan-Brown, "Raising Goose-Pimples: Wilbur Smith and the Politics of *Rage*," *Rendering Things Visible*, ed. Martin Trump, 146.

¹⁸ David Maughan-Brown, "Raising Goose-Pimples: Wilbur Smith and the Politics of *Rage*," *Rendering Things Visible*, ed. Martin Trump, 146.

killed by an assassin's blade, the groove filled with poison. (*Birds* 458) Before dying, though, she is left agonising long enough for her to have a miscarriage and lose the child she had in her entrails, which, "a tiny pink mannequin, glistening wet and bound to her still by a tangle of fleshy cord," Hal finds dead, not yet formed, between "her bloody thighs." (*Birds* 460) Hal's first wife, Judith Nazet, an Ethiopian princess and a fierce warrior, is also made to vanish from the narrative. She dies "under the flying hoofs of her own wild steed." (*Monsoon* 20)

Likewise, the children that result from miscegenation are short-lived and / or deformed, morally or physically. Smith perpetuates one of the oldest and most widespread colonial misconceptions generated by cultural and racial anxiety, which established that hybrids were "defective and barren"¹⁹ or "degenerate and, literally, degraded."²⁰ Thus, Hannah and the Hottentot chief Xia Nka's bastard son, Jan Oliphant, has a "formidable physique and strength" but has an "horribly mutilated [swarthy visage], his nose twisted and his mouth riven through by the shining white scars that [start] in the thick woolly mat of his hair and [run] down to his chin." (*Monsoon* 141) Although not actually barren, his sexuality is defective. When he makes love to a white prostitute, he snorts and exhorts himself to greater effort with loud cries, "Yah! Yah! Like a hurricane! Like Leviathan spouting! Like the father of all elephants tearing down the forest! Yah! Here comes Jan Oliphant." His efforts are wasted, though, for Annetjie, the prostitute, clearly renders him impotent by qualifying his performance as "[m]ore like a goldfish blowing bubbles than a whale spouting." (*Monsoon* 143) As befits an imperfect hybrid, he is also made to vanish from the narrative; he is killed by Tom Courtney, who thrusts the point of his sabre straight into Jan Oliphant's throat. (*Monsoon* 158)

William Courtney (Black Billy), the son of Hal Courtney and Judith Nazet, follows a similar development. He is neither ugly nor stupid; quite the opposite. He is "clever, ruthless, handsome, in a dark wolf-like way." (*Monsoon* 2) He looks "more Mediterranean than African;" his hair is "jet black, dense and shining;" his skin is

¹⁹ Edward Long qtd. in Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire*, 8.

²⁰ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire*, 16.

“light amber in colour” and he has a “thin, straight Ethiopian nose and the flashing dark eyes of a predator.” His physique is “formidable” so women “[become] flustered and fluttery in his presence.” (*Monsoon* 12) A Cambridge scholar, his skills are not confined to books, for “at Cambridge he had wrestled for King’s College;” (*Monsoon* 15) he is “a superb horseman;” (*Monsoon* 11) and at High Weald, the Courtneys’ estate in England, he has proved his “worth as an administrator and entrepreneur,” (*Monsoon* 22) to the extent that he now runs the estate and the tin mines single handed. However, he has inherited “something of the wildness and cruelty of that dark, mysterious continent that nothing could tame,” (*Monsoon* 20) and, thus, there is a patent dark streak in his moral make-up, further emphasised by the dark pigmentation of his skin and hair, and his black attire and horse:

Although today he was bare headed, he usually wore a wide-brimmed black hat decorated with a bunch of ostrich feathers. His high boots were black; his saddle and bridle were black. Sultan was a black stallion, groomed until he shone in the pale sunlight. (*Monsoon* 11)

He is ruthless and cruel with his brothers, whom he abuses both physically and psychologically, and with his workers, many of whom die at the tin face because he would not bother to make it safe. (*Monsoon* 20) He does not love anybody, not even his father. His only concern is fortune-building, acquiring status by getting himself an aristocratic title and prestige. He does not mourn his own father’s death and goes back on a solemn oath he had given him to help Tom, his half-brother, to save their little brother, Dorian, captured by the Arabs. Sexually, he is also defective. His only way to get aroused is by hitting women, (*Monsoon* 14) so he beats his own wife, Alice, on a regular basis. Being a hybrid he is degenerate and ‘deserves’ death: he is killed by his pure-blooded, more physically developed, half-brother - Tom - in a re-run of Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest.

Finally, there is Ben Afrika, the son of Tara and Moses Gama. As a baby he is impressively beautiful, weighing nine pounds and a half and with a head that is “covered with pitch black hair, thick and curly as the fleece of an Astrakhan lamb.” (*Rage* 235) He has “Moses Gama’s fine Nilotic features” and he is the colour of “hot toffee,” (*Rage* 235) “honey and ivory” except for the soles of his tiny feet which are

“the palest, clearest, coral pink.” (*Rage* 245) He grows to be a fine lad, “his natural African grace [combined] [...] with his mother’s more delicate features,” (*Fox* 99) with skin which has a “coppery tone” and hair that is “a neat woolly cap of tight dark curls.” (*Fox* 99) His academic qualifications are impressive: he has “four A-levels and a BSc in chemical engineering from Leeds University with two years’ experience as a scientific assistant with Imperial Chemical Industries at one of their factories in Liverpool.” (*Fox* 469-470) And yet he is a hybrid and, as such, he is endowed with a moral flaw. He has a communist training and approves of the use of violence to achieve revolutionary objectives. He pledges absolute obedience and places unfaltering faith in communism and its leaders and obeys all their orders, no matter how violent. He, for instance, agrees to steal a cylinder of a poisonous gas, Cyndex, which ANC terrorists plan to spray from an aircraft over the Rand Easter Show, “the biggest, glitziest industry show in the country,” (*Fox* 555) attended by half a million people. The effect of this action would mean the “slaughter of half a million lambs [...] half a million corpses twisted and contorted in piles of hideous death.” (*Fox* 563-564) Because of his defective nature, and as is the case with all other hybrids in Smith’s narratives, Ben is short-lived. Again, he dies killed by his half-brother, Sean II, a pure-blooded Courtney, a real steel man who shows no remorse whatsoever on beholding Ben’s corpse; he says, “He is not my brother. He is just a lump of shit.” (*Fox* 569)

All in all, and to conclude with this chapter, Smith’s psycho-sexual nightmares about the white man being out-sexed by black men and the purity of the white race polluted by inter-racial couplings forces him to adopt representational strategies, mostly derived from racist misconceptions developed and popularised during imperial times, that ensure the castration of black men, and to present miscegenation as unnatural and the offspring of miscegenation as imperfect, morally and / or physically degenerate, short-lived hybrids. His black men and black women come alive through their body, their impressive physiques and hyper-active sexuality. But Smith does not allow them to overwhelm the white man, who, as I have shown in chapter 10, section 10.1, is presented as the rightful inheritor of the South African locale. The same obsession with the black man’s sexuality and the consequent fear of the white man

being offstaged by black men accounts for Smith's portrayal of black men as background figures. Blacks are a threatening or servile mass, but they are not allowed to overshadow the white man around whom the narrative action develops, acting out Smiths' ideal of omnipotent, essential and utterly virile white masculinity.

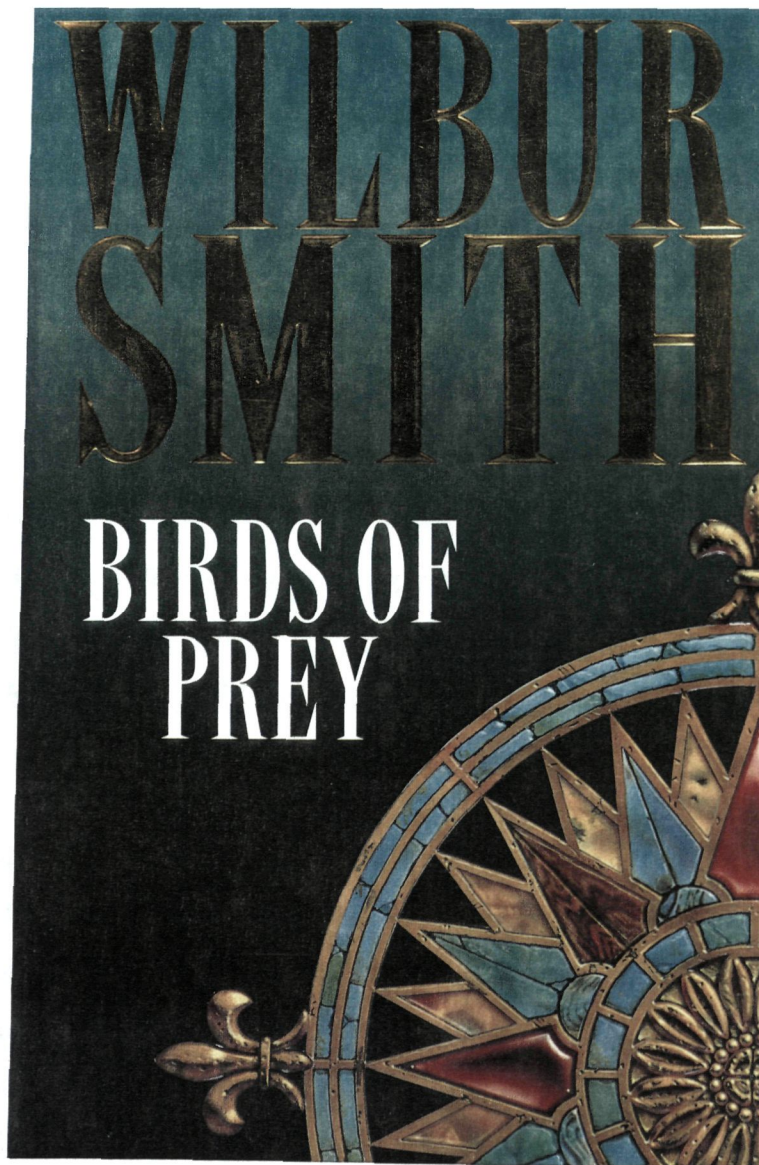


Figure 15. Dust jacket for Wilbur Smith's *Birds of Prey* (London: Macmillan, 1997). Illustration by Syd Brak.

Chapter 13: Perpetuation of colonial stereotypes in the Courtney saga

13.1. Stereotyping and representation

We are trained to deal in stereotypes because there's just so much information to assimilate in the modern world that you cannot take in the complexities of every situation.¹

Propaganda does not often come marching towards us waving swastikas and chanting "Sieg Heil"; its real power lies in its capacity to conceal itself, to appear natural, to coalesce completely and indivisibly with the values of accepted power symbols of a given society.²

In adventure narratives an overemphasis on the individual undercuts an understanding and appreciation for politics. Superman leading the worshipping African hordes off to slay the dragon of apartheid [...] is less a positive appreciation of politics than a compensatory adolescent romantic fantasy of omnipotence.³

One of the most consistent claims that Smith makes about his fiction is that he does not write about politics or history. He stresses that he regards himself as "a storyteller and an entertainer"⁴ and not as a historian. Although he acknowledges he manipulates history on various occasions, he emphasises that he does so "for dramatic effect,"⁵ otherwise he provides authentic detail that makes the story believable. However, and as I have explained before in chapters 11 and 12, Smith's presentation of blacks is far from objective. His main aim is to build fantasies of omnipotent white masculinity in order to substantiate the white man's hegemony over blacks and legitimate the separate development of the black and the white races at the root of the

¹ Wilbur Smith in John A. Stotesbury, "Popularising Late-Apartheid South Africa. An Interview with Wilbur Smith," *Teaching & Learning*, 79.

² A.P. Foulke qtd. in Richard Peck, *A Morbid Fascination. White Prose and Politics in Apartheid South Africa* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1997) 17.

³ Richard Peck, *A Morbid Fascination*, 6.

⁴ Isabel Santaulària, "Lost Among the Stars' Uncoded Messages. In Conversation with Wilbur Smith," *Multi-Cultural Voices*, ed. Brian Worsfold, note 2, 118.

⁵ Isabel Santaulària, "Lost Among the Stars' Uncoded Messages. In Conversation with Wilbur Smith," *Multi-Cultural Voices*, ed. Brian Worsfold, 116.

apartheid regime. As a consequence, and as Richard Peck asserts, "Smith's very popular pot-boilers [project] a mythology of apartheid more extreme than that promulgated by government-sponsored propaganda."⁶ His construction of blacks is devised to underline their essential otherness. In order to do so, Smith perpetuates or resuscitates stereotypes about blacks that had in the past justified colonial and imperial interference and the subjection of the black races and which Smith now uses to justify their exclusion, in the terms dictated by apartheid.

Stereotypes, colonial or otherwise, are never innocent. Although they may contain grains of truth, their overall function is not merely to simplify concepts that could be difficult to assimilate given the multifarious and complex nature of individuals or national or racial groups at large. Stereotyping is an aspect of the struggle for hegemony. Ruling groups attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world-view, value-system, sensibility, ideology and political or economic interests. In order to guarantee their pre-eminence, they tend to establish barriers which expel everything which does not fit, which is different and which disrupts the social order. And stereotyping is one of the strategies hegemonic powers make use of to fix difference and thus erect symbolic barriers between the naturally hegemonic groups and the others, the ones that do not belong or that threaten hegemony. Through stereotyping, the Other is reduced to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are presented as fixed by nature and which establish his essential 'otherness', his difference. Stereotypes, therefore, are just distorted images that exclude the unique to construct an oversimplified generalisation dictated by the interests of the ruling groups.

Colonial stereotypes of blacks reduced them to characteristics that served the objectives of the colonisers. The stereotyped native was never important as an individual, but rather as an example of what the Englishman had to overcome and suppress, separate and marginalise. The British stereotypes of blacks were, thus, debasing, only highlighting and naturalising the aspects that justified white superiority and interference. Smith, in his fiction, resorts to these stereotypes of Africans,

⁶ Richard Peck, *A Morbid Fascination*, 3.

moulded primarily through images conveyed by the British through their history books or romantic tales. These stereotypes perpetuate and essentialise the inferiority of blacks and provide an implicit rationale for the political strategies which seek to enforce separateness and to guarantee the repression of blacks within the parameters of the apartheid superstructure. In what follows, I describe the stereotypes Smith uses in his narratives which have to be viewed as an attempt to underline the baseness of blacks and, consequently, to justify their underdog status below the British white man, whom he positions as superior.

13.2. Animalisation

Animal images have always been recurrent in the representation of black people. In colonial times, especially after Darwin, the belief that black people were the missing link between apes and humans was firmly established and, as a consequence, the iconography of empire popularised representations of blacks as animals or with animals, often apes, in an attempt to highlight the similarities between them. Smith perpetuates this colonial assumption. By turning them into specimens belonging to the animal rather than the human kingdom, Smith highlights the superiority of whites. In *The Burning Shore*, for instance, he provides a harrowing account of the San's history of deprivation, dispossession and extermination. He highlights that European settlers, colonial or imperial hordes regarded the San as "little yellow killers," (*Burning* 527) "swine," (*Burning* 532) "terrible thieves, like monkeys," (*Burning* 564) "dangerous and treacherous little blighters," (*Burning* 601) halfway between animals and human beings "for they have the cunning of man without being human." (*Burning* 535) He explains that even the English, "with their sickly sentimentality towards black races, had realised that there was no place in this twentieth century world for the San," and that the standing orders of Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Police "contained instructions that all San and wild dogs encountered on patrol were to be shot out of hand" since "the two species were considered as one." (*Burning* 446) This selfsame imagery of blacks as animals that have to be hunted down is perpetuated in Smith's account of the laws that the

apartheid regime makes use of to reduce black people. In *Rage*, Manfred de la Rey, an Afrikaner politician, is described as a hunter who uses banning orders and warrants of arrest as his snares and weapons to capture his quarry, blacks, and drive them back “from society into the wilderness.” (*Rage* 212)

In spite of the condemnatory tone with which Smith addresses the animalisation of blacks by early colonisers and apartheid politicians and the methods used to reduce them as if they really were wild animals, he uses the same animal imagery, likens them to animals and questions their humanity. Sean I, for example on beholding a group of natives dressed in rags waiting near a pool, asks Mbejane, “Are they men?” (*Thunder* 268) Shasa, astonished when he sees a group of wild Bushmen for the first time in his life asks, “Human beings?” (*Sparrow* 129) and colonel Schreuder says that natives, “being animals themselves [...] seem to have a rapport with all wild and domestic beasts.” (*Birds* 256) Even when Smith does not directly liken natives to animals, they are animalised by using terms only applied to animals in current speech. Groups of fierce Zulus become a “black howling pack,” (*Lion* 119) a “pack closing in” (*Lion* 155) or “Cetewayo’s herds.” (*Lion* 165) Blacks do not have skin or buttocks, they have ‘hides’ (*Rage* 306; *Birds* 255) and ‘rumps’. (*Thunder* 436) They are not people but ‘specimens’ (*Birds* 134, 256) and they do not give birth, they ‘breed’. (*Birds* 256) Also, they have animal abilities; they are like night apes who can see in the dark (*Lion* 145, 157) or like baboons, climbing where no man dares; (*Sparrow* 174) they have eyes like those of a vulture for they see all; (*Die* 379) they trot like horses; (*Lion* 165) they have the smell of the hyena to scent out weaknesses; (*Die* 459) and when in pursuit of a prey, they hunt the ground like hounds taking the scent to the chase. (*Lion* 565; *Die* 488)

More often than not, references to the animality of blacks in Smith’s fiction are direct comparisons. Smith likens them to animals in different degrees of ‘unworthiness’ or ‘danger potential’ in human appreciation. As Parker points out with reference to the depiction of the San, Khoikhoi and Xhosa in the narrations by travellers in Cape Province, “representation of these people [depend] dominantly upon perceptions of the nature and extent to their resistance to dispossession and

incorporation.”⁷ Likewise, the animals blacks are likened to in Smith’s account very much depend on their degree of assimilation in a white-regulated world. Thus, faithful or subordinated Zulu, Matabele, Shangane, Ndorobo or San are likened to defenceless, unthreatening or insignificant animals. They are cheerful shipdogs, (*Lion* 17) greyhounds, (*Lion* 432) good dogs, (*Sword* 75) puppies, (*Die* 207, 349, 374) guinea fowl, (*Die* 37) little black fleas (*Die* 502) and even animal cartoons, like the two Shangane children Sean II rescues from guerrilla soldiers and whom he names Mickey and Minnie. (*Die* 480)

Blacks who resist assimilation into the white world, on the other hand, are likened to threatening or despicable animals. The animal-related insults directed to uncooperative Zulu, Shangane, Ovambo, Herero, Khoisian and Bondelswart Hottentots become an imaginative showcase of the racist undercurrents that Smith has not been able to negotiate into his discourse, which he claims is progressive and liberal, and reveal the extent of his disgust for uncooperative blacks. Thus, Lothar’s savage assistants become a wolf-pack (*Sword* 26) or half-tamed wolves; (*Burning* 527) sleeping lizards, pups of desert jackals, devourers of hyena dung; (*Burning* 260) swine, bitch-born sons of Hades; (*Burning* 516) yellow-bellied black-faced apologies for blue-testicled baboons (*Burning* 517) or sons of the great hyena. (*Burning* 527) When they follow Lothar it is not out of love or loyalty because, as Lothar ironically points out, they come to him “the way the vulture and the jackal come for love of the dead, not of the feast.” (*Sword* 76) The rebel Shanganes in *A Time to Die* receive an equal share of animalistic ‘appreciative’ comments. They are sons of a syphilitic hyena, (*Die* 256) baboons, (*Die* 363) flea-infested, thieving venereal apes (*Die* 433) or killer dogs. (*Die* 108) China, the Renamo commander, is a black monkey, has the humourless reptilian smile of a cobra, (*Die* 407) hisses like a cobra (*Die* 491) and has a foxy slant. (*Die* 415) Although often threatening, Shanganes become ineffective and aimless during attack and are, thus, turned into a mass of struggling humanity like a pit full of rats, (*Die* 103) little black ants scurrying about (*Die* 392) or slaughtered chickens. (*Die* 397) And enemy Zulus are often monkeys (*Lion* 495) and jackals. (*Lion* 146; *Sparrow*

⁷ Kenneth Parker, “Fertile Land, Romantic Spaces, Uncivilised Peoples: English Travel-Writing about the Cape of Good Hope, 1800-50,” *The Expansion of England*, ed. Bill Schwarz, 202.

212; *Sword* 360) Blacks have so assimilated their animality in Smith's narratives that even when they abuse one another they resort to animal-related insults as can be appreciated in the following exchange between Zulu and Xhosa:

'Hey, you eaters of the hyena dung,' [Joseph Dinizulu] called. 'We smelt you from a thousand paces against the wind. The smell of Xhosa makes even the vulture puke.' [...]

'I cleanse the air of the Zulu stench with a good clean fart!' [Raleigh Tabaka] shouted. 'Sniff that, you jackal-lovers.' [...]

'Your fathers were women, your mothers were monkeys,' Joseph Dinizulu cried, scratching his own armpits. 'Your grandfathers were baboons [...]' (*Rage* 135)

Finally, Smith fixes the blacks' animality into their names. Mbejane, for instance, means 'rhinoceros' and Pungushe 'jackal'; and Moses' code name is Cheetah, a large feline mammal. Names are a form of social address but they are also supposed to reflect the character of the people who bear them. Thus, by naming his blacks after animals, Smith naturalises their animality and ensures it is maintained and perpetuated at the social level of human exchange. There is no escaping their animality. Even their names confirm their status.

13.3. Blacks as villains

In Wilbur Smith's adventure stories, the white hero emerges as the standard bearer of heroic qualities; he is generous, honest, faithful, valiant, trustworthy, reliable. He epitomises heroism and displays only honourable qualities. The fate of his society is in his hands; he is the restorer of order, the upholder of justice, the fighter for freedom. As happens in all examples of imperialist adventure, the white imperial hero stands for everything that is good and superior against everything that is bad and inferior - chaos, anarchy, disorder, violence for violence's sake. But for the hero's endeavours to be worthwhile, he needs to be surrounded by villains who threaten the stability of the system that the hero has to maintain. There are no heroes without the villains who provide the heroes with a cause to defend, a wrong to right, a problem to overcome or eliminate. In Smith's fiction, villains come in different shapes and colours, but black villains are the ones who receive more narrative space. In fact,

villainy is presented as an essential characteristic of blacks, perpetuating one of the most widely accepted colonial stereotypes about blacks. During the colonisation processes, blacks were situated as villains in order to justify the white man's enforcement of repressive measures to keep them in control. Smith does the same in his fiction. In the Courtney saga, therefore, blacks have a natural inclination for everything that is base and mean; they are the natural perpetrators of violence, the harbingers of anarchy, and, as such, they have to be restrained, controlled, subjected by the use of force; after all, blacks understand "only the whip and the goad," (*Burning* 264) respect only cruelty. (*Sword* 92) Throughout the narratives, therefore, Smith makes sure he presents them as villains to justify repression and their marginalisation from the imperial project.

Thus, Smith highlights blacks are "born thieves" (*Burning* 264) or have "sly thieving ways." (*Birds* 288) Their thieving nature is taken for granted and, consequently, when Michael II, for instance, leaves his car in a black township he is "surprised to find that his car [is] still standing where he [left] it" when he returns. (*Fox* 216) Furthermore, they are naturally untrustworthy and "[inspire] no great confidence." (*Burning* 365) Lothar, for example, has four black riflemen who help him and who have been with him since the days of the rebellion in German West Africa (Namibia); although they "[have] fought and bled together, shared a looted bottle of Cape smoke, or a woollen blanket on a frosty desert night, or the last shreds of tobacco in the pouch, and he [loves] them a little, [...] he [trusts] them not at all." (*Burning* 527) Anna II, Garrick I's second wife, says she feels far more useful in the kitchen than attending a dinner celebration at Theunis Kraal for this gives her the opportunity to "[keep] an eye on those grinning black rogues" (*Burning* 611) for no one "would [ever] trust such [creatures]." (*Birds* 257) Not even blacks themselves trust one another. General Tippoo Tip and General China are brothers-in-arms, both Renamo rebels fighting the Frelimo government in Moçambique but, when they meet each other and they embrace, they do so "with the utmost insincerity of two fierce rivals who knew that they might one day have to kill each other." (*Die* 457)

Their 'untrustworthiness' is further emphasised by their lack of commitment to just causes. The natives engaged to support whites in different dangerous situations systematically give them up once the opportunity presents itself. Kali Piet ('kali' is the Swahili word for 'bad' or 'wicked') is the Bondelswart Hottentot Anna II and Garrick I employ as a guide to carry them across the burning fastness of Namibia's Skeleton Coast and is described as "villainous-looking with a single malevolent eye." (*Burning* 345) True to his name, he abandons them after the fifth day of march, taking with him "a rifle and fifty rounds of ammunition, a blanket and five water-bottles, and as a final touch, the gold hunter watch and the coin case with twenty gold sovereigns in it that Garry [Garrick I] had carefully placed beside his blanket roll the previous morning." (*Burning* 347) And to mention another example, the Shangane who agree to accompany Sean II in his flight from General China in Moçambique also give him up in the end. Although they claim they are tired of living "like animals in the bush" (*Die* 422) and want to follow Sean II to South Africa where they can learn "to live like men, [...] [and] find good wives to bear [their] sons," (*Die* 422) they desert him for they "[don't] fancy the walk or the destination." (*Die* 426) Before they leave, though, they hit Alphonso (the only faithful Shangane) on the head and they take their equipment and their weapons with them.

The blacks' intrinsic thievery and dishonesty are given further expression in the presentation of the townships which, with their endemic poverty, ill-health conditions and the slide of some black communities into a culture of drugs, alcohol, guns and intra-violence, constitute cesspools of criminal activity in the saga and give further proof of the blacks' villainy. Townships, therefore, are populated by "footpads, pickpockets, muggers and other small-time entrepreneurs" (*Sword* 369) and "tsotsies and skelms gangsters and rogues," (*Rage* 466) and are characterised by a high "incidence of murder and robbery and other serious crimes." (*Sword* 369) District Six, for instance, is described as an open territory for "street gangs [...] pimps and [...] prostitutes." (*Rage* 372) One of its dark streets has graffiti on the walls that declare it "the territory of the Rude Boys, one of the most notorious of the street gangs." (*Rage* 372) During one of the peaceful demonstrations against the apartheid regime in District Six, the street is seized by "blatantly criminal and opportunistic gang

members,” (*Rage* 505) the “*skollie* boys and gangsters,” (*Rage* 508) who take the opportunity to wreak havoc, smash shop windows and loot the stores.

Apart from highlighting the blacks’ essentially thievish, dishonest and criminal nature, Smith makes them display two other characteristics that traditionally belong to the villains in fiction. To start with, they are presented as intrinsically cowardly. In spite of their acts of apparent bravado, they are mice at heart. When attacked by the terrible Hercules helicopters, Renamos are “panic stricken,” they drag themselves onto the sand-bars and collapse in sodden heaps, “their expression dull and bovine from the after-effects of terror and exertion.” (*Die* 327) During another attack, the Shanganes are “panicky and unsure in the dark.” (*Die* 387) On another occasion, to mention one last example, during an air raid on a communist training camp in Angola, the African troopers get so panicky that they begin to shoot at shadows or at each other, which makes Sean II chuckle softly, “Nothing like a nervous gook with a rifle in his hand for burning up ammo.” (*Fox* 545) Unlike the white heroes, blacks never recover their self-control.

Finally, they are presented as a pack of drunkards and cannabis-smokers, again, characteristics that only villains and criminals display in Smith’s fiction. In the saga, consumption of alcohol is a widespread habit among blacks to the extent that the assumption that a black man does not drink makes whites “[laugh] at the improbability.” (*Sword* 86) Drinking, together with sex, are defined as the black man’s favourite pastimes so “palm wine and jig-jig” (*Die* 425) are the only rewards that can motivate a black man into action. When drunk, blacks lose their composure, dignity and capacity to reason and, given the ease and eagerness with which they get themselves drunk, whites often use alcohol as a strategy to render them defenceless against an attack; like the coloured troops Lothar sells alcohol to, who become useless clowns after a few drinks:

They were reeling around the fire, colliding and clinging together, then separating, collapsing in the dust and crawling on their knees, or with enormous effort heaving themselves to their feet only to stand swaying with legs braced apart and then collapse again. One of them was stripped naked, his thin yellow body gleaming with sweat as he pirouetted wildly and then fell into the fire, to be

dragged out by the heels by a pair of his companions, all three of them screeching with laughter. (*Sword* 88)

Consumption of alcohol among blacks is so widespread that it cannot even be controlled by whites and the apartheid laws that strictly control and prohibit its sale have no effect; this prohibition only causes illicit *shebeens* to flourish. (Rage 457) *Dagga*, or cannabis, is similarly profusely used by blacks, who, “once they start on that stuff [...], become totally useless.” (Rage 198) Although cannabis is common in rural areas, it is particularly widespread in townships, where gang leaders act as suppliers (Rage 473) and where *shebeens* are “hazy with [...] the sweet smell of cannabis.” (Rage 372) All in all, Smith turns blacks into villains and criminal, marginal figures and, by doing so, endorses the need to keep them confined to separate areas that whites systematically patrol in order to prevent them from polluting the leafy suburbs where whites live.

13.4. Bloodthirst and violence

The more Europeans dominated Africa, the more savage Africans came to be seen. In order to justify the often violent and repressive measures that the British used to keep the subjugated African peoples under control, imperial iconography and representational practices circulated an image of Africa as the centre of evil, part of the world possessed by demonic darkness, populated by bloodthirsty devils who systematically offered human sacrifices, killed each other using gruesome methods and cannibalised other people. Although real encounters with Africans dispelled the image of the natives as bloodthirsty savages and human-flesh eaters, this conception of the black-as-savage had wide popular appeal and survived well into the twentieth century. The African-as-bogeyman was and has continued to be a useful perception, one that turns blacks into the ‘unknown’, the ‘heart of darkness’, so to speak, of humanity, the living expression of our darkest violent selves, and one that generates anxiety, demands exclusion and justifies the application of force to guarantee this exclusion. And this image of the intrinsically violent black survives intact in Smith’s

fiction, which, again, he uses to condone the use of force to keep the black masses subjugated and marginalised.

In the saga, therefore, and as I explain in chapter 11, section 11.2.3, and chapter 12, section 12.1, blacks relish violence and resort to gruesome practices that sicken even Smith's battle-hardened whites. They are cruel and savage, go crazy with bloodlust, are subject to killing madness and are susceptible to being enraged by the sight of blood and goaded by cries of agony. His main aim is to highlight "how close below the smiles [blacks often display] lies the violence of the African heart." (*Rage* 488) Individual blacks, thus, may adopt a friendly and peaceful pose, but are savage at heart. Mbejane, for instance, becomes a demon when he has the "fighting madness on him." (*Lion* 152) Lothar's men are "as bloodthirsty as hunting dogs, as wild and savage and unpredictable as the desert that had spawned them." (*Burning* 260) Moses is invested by "a sense of African cruelty." (*Rage* 6) Job's Matabele features may be solemn but he cannot "conceal the battle lust in them." (*Die* 88) Matatu is often defined as a friendly puppy, docile and wriggling with pleasure when he is with his master, Sean II; but not when he is fighting for he becomes a "bloodthirsty little bugger;" (*Die* 400) he slits the throat of his enemies with a single stroke of his skinning-knife, his head "heady with the euphoria of violence and blood." (*Fox* 438) Victoria Gama accepts the idea that the struggle is fierce and freedom must be won through rivers of blood, but for her, "the spilling of blood [is] a pleasure and not a duty." (*Fox* 216) And Aboli, when fighting, becomes a "great predatory animal," (*Birds* 8) roaring and bellowing, his face "alight with the prospect of seeing blood spurt." (*Birds* 9)⁸

If individual blacks are violent and cruel, the African mob is infinitely worse. Smith underlines that Africans let themselves be carried away with fighting madness, even without motivation for "in Africa [...] you don't have to have a reason for killing somebody, other than a loaded gun in your hands and a fancy to fire it off." (*Die* 165)

⁸ White heroes are also characterised by their capacity for violence; unlike whites, however, blacks use violence in a way which is unheroic. Whites enjoy fighting but do not relish unnecessary and gruesome violence. Not so blacks who, when blinded by fighting madness, become 'vicious monsters' craving for blood.

This idea is illustrated by the Amadodas to whom Aboli teaches fighting techniques. When Aboli teaches them to fight with the spike, they plunge into the exercises with such gusto “that two of their number [are] speared to death before Aboli [can] impress upon them that these [are] mock battles and should not be fought to the death.” (*Birds* 489) If blacks in groups are prone to engage in violent activity without motivation, the existence of such a motivation makes them even more violent and terribly awesome. The Zulus fighting the British at Rorke’s Drift, for example, utter the “shrill ululation of the charge - high-pitched frenzy of the blood squeal” as they attack. (*Lion* 120) They become a “solid black [column] [...] screaming halfway across the yard;” (*Lion* 121) and they never abandon the charge but seem to double their numbers as they fight. (*Lion* 123) Another, even more vivid, example of the violent potential of Africans when in group is provided in Smith’s account of the demonstrations in Port Elizabeth during the Defiance Campaigns. The demonstrators are first portrayed as “twenty-abreast, arms linked, filling the road from pavement to pavement, singing as they [come] on, and behind them [follows] a solid column of black humanity.” (*Rage* 203) But once a single voice calls out ‘Jee!’, the battle cry that turns blacks blind with fighting madness, the mood of the demonstration begins to change. They work themselves up “into the killing madness,” (*Rage* 205) their eyes “glazing and engorging with blood, their faces turning into shining black masks,” their skins “[crawling] and [itching] with atavistic fury.” (*Rage* 205) When sister Nunziata, a beautiful blonde nun, is sent to help mollify the mob, they throw a stone that hits her on the side of the head. Enraged by the sight of blood, a forest of black arms reach up to her and drag her down from the vehicle she is in. For a while, they fight over her, dragging her along the road, “worrying her like a pack of hounds with a fox.” (*Rage* 208) Then an old crone, a *sangoma* with a “necklace of bones and feathers and animal skulls” around her neck, draws out a curved-blade knife and as men hold sister Nunziata pinioned, she “[cuts] through the nun’s grey habit and [splits] her belly open from groin to rib cage.” (*Rage* 208) Then she pulls out “something wet and glistening and purple [...] [cuts] a lump from the still living organ [...] [thrusts] the purple lump into her toothless mouth and [chews] upon it.” Then she throws the rest of the organ to the crowd, that fight “for the bloody scraps like dogs.” (*Rage* 208) The account of this ‘incident’, with the graphic and detailed description of the murder of Sister Nunziata;

and the disturbing portrayal of the 'screaming', 'bestial', 'howling', 'insensate' mob with its 'mindless animal roar' and its faces 'contorted in a cruel rictus of excitement'; all contribute to evoke the savagery of the African.

Smith rounds off his master account of African violence by providing a myriad of examples of black men's violence both against whites and among themselves. The South African pilots captured by the Abyssinian irregulars during World War II - the *shufta* or wild hill bandits - are given to the women of the village. They are first emasculated, then flayed with hot irons and disembowelled so skilfully, that they are still alive as their viscera is drawn from them. Finally, their jaws are wedged open with thorn branches and the women urinate into their open mouths until they drown. (*Sword* 520) The white overseer, who had abused Hendrick Tabaka, meets his end at the hand of the black man on the train that takes them to *Goldi*. Hendrick catches the overseer in a double-lock and holds him dangling in the air until his spine snaps like a dry branch; then he throws him off the train directly into the path of the racing wheels so that he is sucked away "like a scrap of meat into the blades of a mincing machine." (*Sword* 349) In Kenya, the Mau Mau warriors take the little children of the white settlers and hold them "up by their feet and [chop] between their legs with razor-sharp pangas and [throw] the pieces into the pit toilets." (*Rage* 311) On another occasion, they disembowel a white overseer and stuff his severed genitals into his mouth and chop off his wife's limbs, "beginning at wrist and ankle and working gradually towards the trunk of her body, until they [hack] through the great joints in her shoulder and groin." (*Rage* 514) A Russian pilot captured by Renamo soldiers has his buttocks drawn sharply apart and a burning metal rod thrust into his anus so that the metal "smoke[s] and sizzle[s] and splutter[s]" as it goes deeper and deeper into the Russian's body until he dies. (*Die* 409-410)

The atrocities committed against other blacks are hardly less disgusting. Cetewayo killed his own brother, Mbejane's father, by thrusting a sharpened stick "into the secret opening of his body, until it pierced his gut and touched his heart." (*Lion* 146) Chaka is reported to have killed the Inyosi by standing twelve hundred of them against a cliff and carrying out a shattering charge against them. The ones who

were not stabbed by Chaka's assegais, threw themselves from the cliff top rather than face Chaka's wrath. (*Sparrow* 175) A San captured by Lothar's men is first tortured with a burning twig with which they burn his penis. Then he is mounted by every man in turn, "ravished as though he were a woman," before they kill him. (*Burning* 537-538) A woman pointed out as a police informer during Moses' funeral is stripped naked by the multitudes and they whip and beat her until she falls unconscious. Then they douse her with petrol, set her alight and kick her while she burns. Afterwards, the children urinate on her charred corpse. (*Rage* 623) The purification process in Angola conducted by Admiral Rosa Coutinho consists of "torturing all other factions of the party to death [...] by gradually tightening a wooden frame around their heads until the skull collapses. (*Fox* 304) And General China, not satisfied with inflicting torture and death on the living, mutilates the dead enemies, which is described as an ancient Nguni custom that "[allows] the spirit of the vanquished to escape so that it would not plague the victor." (*Die* 466) In China's case, however, this form of mutilation is not merely conducted for ritualistic purposes, for he watches the process with "ghoulish delight" and "vindictive satisfaction." (*Die* 466) Furthermore, he goes beyond mutilation for he orders his men to chop the body of the dead into mincemeat and feed it to the hyena. (*Die* 467)

Smith uses still another device to highlight the intrinsic savagery of the black man: cannibalism, which, as Maughan-Brown puts it, is "the ultimate device for consigning the Other to the outer darkness of barbarism and savagery."⁹ Sister Nunziata's cannibalisation is the most obvious example in the saga, but is a one-off moment of madness on the part of an enraged crowd. Consequently, Smith includes other examples to convey adequately the casual acceptance of this savage practice by blacks. In *Birds of Prey*, Africa is described as a land of "dark-skinned savages who [eat] men's flesh and [wear] their bones as decoration." (*Birds* 3) What in this novel is a passing mention, is clearly exemplified in other instalments of the saga. In *Rage*, we are provided with a detailed description of what the Baluba in the Congo, who "have always been cannibals," (*Rage* 374) did to three Simba agents they caught. First, they

⁹ David Maughan-Brown, "Raising Goose-Pimples: Wilbur Smith and the Politics of *Rage*," *Rendering Things Visible*, ed. Martin Trump, 152.

paraded the men naked through the market-place and the local women bargained for the various parts of their bodies. Then they took them to the river and shot them in the head so as not to damage the meat. Finally, they butchered them there on the river bank and the women “queued up to claim their portions.” (*Rage* 374) Cannibalism is not only found in the Congo, however, but, according to Wilbur Smith, is common in South Africa, where human flesh is naturally accepted as part of the Africans’ diets. In *shebeens*, for instance, blacks drink *skokiaan*, which contains “carbide and methylated spirits and dead snakes and aborted babies to give it kick and flavour.” (*Sword* 367) Their potions are made with parts of human bodies, from samples of all bodily excretions (*Rage* 131) to the liver of an infant drowned at birth by its own mother (*Rage* 131) and the hymen of a virgin. (*Fox* 207) Even if metaphorical, the war cries blacks use to goad themselves into action when fighting are also cannibalistic in essence. The Zulu warcry when they have killed an enemy is ‘Ngidla’ (I have eaten). Xhosa warriors call out, “I am thirsty. Give me Zulu blood to drink.” (*Rage* 134)

Finally, the essential violence of the African is underlined by making it extensive to an “all-subsuming tribalism to which all blacks inevitably subscribe”¹⁰ and which throw them continuously against each other. In Smith’s fiction, therefore, “Africans [...] [are] [...] natural racist[s] and tribalist[s],” (*Fox* 35) “splintered by language and tribal enmities.” (*Fox* 241) Thus, “the intertribal hatred in Africa [is] as fierce as any Corsican vendetta” (*Die* 265) and “tribal barriers, like mountain ranges, [are so] difficult to cross” (*Sword* 262) that even if “all blacks [...] were given white faces, they would still think of themselves as Zulus and Xhosas and Vendas.” (*Rage* 250)

Outside South Africa, Smith pictures the continent as divided by tribal hatreds that turn the emerging postcolonial nations into war territories as the different tribes fight for supremacy over the others. In Rhodesia, for instance, Matabele and Shona live in precarious equilibrium after the war against the British colonial power. After the Lancaster House Agreement, Robert Mugabe, a Shona, became the ruler of the

¹⁰ David Maughan-Brown, “Raising Goose-Pimples: Wilbur Smith and the Politics of *Rage*,” *Rendering Things Visible*, ed. Martin Trump, 153.

country and he systematically got rid of Matabele dissidents by imprisoning them or barring every door of advancement to them. (*Die* 95) In Moçambique, Matabeles and Shanganes abhor each other. Job, a Matabele, considers himself “genetically superior” to Shanganes, (*Die* 355) who in turn are “warrior[s] with a deep sense of tribal loyalty.” (*Die* 373) When Job is injured, Alphonso, a Shangane, suggests leaving him behind for “[he] is only a Matabele and he is dying anyway, it will be no great loss.” (*Die* 422) When Sean II eventually persuades Alphonso to help him carry Job, he consents but only for a little while for he soon gives up; he tells Sean II, “He’s your Matabele dog. If you want him, you carry him, I’ve had enough.” (*Die* 434)

South Africa is similarly described as “split by twenty tribal divisions,” (*Sword* 304) which Smith illustrates by describing the traditional enmity between Zulus and other African tribes in the country, especially Xhosas and Ovambos. This tribalism inevitably extends to personal relations. Zulus and Ovambos insult each other when forced to work together in *Goldi*. (*Rage* 360) Hendrick, an Ovambo, has many wives, “Pondo and Xhosa and Fingo and Basuto but no Zulu. Hendrick would never trust a Zulu in his bed.” (*Rage* 129) Raleigh, an Ovambo, returns Vicky’s, a Zulu, greetings with reserve for even though she is the wife of his uncle, she is a Zulu and his father “had taught him to distrust all Zulus.” (*Rage* 403) The wedding of Moses, an Ovambo, and Vicky, a Zulu, is reluctantly accepted by members of both tribes, but the elders cannot see it as a first step towards tribal reconciliation for this would mean the destruction of the customs that had kept them apart since the beginning of time. (*Rage* 181)

Some black leaders are aware of the tribal rivalries that set them apart and think that in order to fight white men their only prerogative is to fight against them together. Moses, for instance, says: “Tribalism is the one great obstacle in our path. [...] If we were one people, we would be like a black ocean, infinite in our power;” (*Sword* 371) or, “What pride we do have, the little hatred that we do have, is mis-spent and ill-directed. We waste it on each other, on other black men. If all the tribes of this land took all their pride and all their hatred and turned it on the white oppressor - then how could he resist us?” (*Rage* 139) Smith, however, does not allow these tribal

enmities to be overridden in his fiction and undermines all attempts to do so by various means. First of all, all the ANC attempts to create a single front against whites are vitiated by the individualism and private ambitions of its executive, who will always put personal before national interests:

There was not a single black man present who did not cherish, somewhere in his soul, the dream of one day leading all the others, of one day being hailed as the permanent chief of all southern Africa. Yet [...] they were all different. Mandela was a Tembu, Xuma was a Zulu, Moses Gama himself was an Ovambo, and there were half a dozen tribes represented in the room. [...] They were all rivals. (*Rage* 62-63)

Secondly, blacks in general are depicted as “simple souls with not the least vestige of political awareness [...] separated by tribal loyalties [...] [and who do] not consider themselves as part of a single nation.” (*Sword* 371) So blacks in general do not even consider the possibility of fighting together towards a common objective. Finally, even blacks themselves are made to acknowledge that the maintenance of the white government is imperative in South Africa; whites, after all, protect the country from the violence and tribal faction fighting that would ensue if the white government was replaced. Hendrick Tabaka words this idea in *Rage*:

Hendrick remembered that when the faction fighting between the Zulus and the Xhosas had swept through Drake’s Farm [...] it was the police who had separated them and prevented many more than fifty dead. [...] Now Hendrick wondered just who would prevent them killing each other after the police had been burned, and just what day-to-day existence would be like in the townships when each man made his own laws. (*Rage* 308)

In Smith’s fiction, therefore, the maintenance of the white man’s power is depicted as a necessity for, given the natural violence of the peoples in Africa and South Africa in particular, any attempt to dislodge the state apparatus can only result in a return to the dark ages of cannibalism, tribal warfare and anarchy.

13.5. Blacks as primitive

When Smith writes about the Ndorobo tribe and their extermination, he does so in the following terms:

[They were] a people famous for their magical bushcraft, adepts of forest law who had unfortunately been unable to withstand the impact of progress which had destroyed their forests and contaminated them with all civilisation's ailments and diseases, from tuberculosis to alcoholism to venereal disease. (*Fox* 393)

In this account of the Ndorobo's finale, Smith draws on one of the most widespread colonial assumptions that circulated during imperial times and served to endorse imperial might and right on the basis of their supposedly superior civilisation based on progress. Ever since Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, the term 'civilisation' came to be regarded as the superior stage of evolution that western societies, particularly the British - with their intellectual refinement, education, improvement, progress and industry - epitomised. Within Tylor's evolutionary system, on the other hand, the so-called primitive peoples were regarded as fossilised survivals of earlier evolutionary stages and were characterised by their closer relationship to nature and supposedly primitive social, cultural, agricultural or political systems. In Tylor's scheme of European superiority, civilisation was identified with race and white skin became a marker of civilisation as opposed to 'dark' races that were primitive and, thus, brutal, rude, unmannerly, base, nude, in a state of nature, what Pieterse calls "human[s] degree zero."¹¹

In Smith's brief portrayal of the Ndorobo these assumptions about whites and blacks are perpetuated. Whites stand for civilisation and progress and blacks are primitive and belong to nature. When the two opposed poles meet, the Ndorobo are made to vanish because they are unable to "withstand the impact of progress." Smith brings to the fore the ills of civilisation - a civilisation that was supposed to be the harbinger of light and advancement to the 'dark' races but which more often than not deprived them of their means of subsistence, destroyed their environment and infected them with fatal diseases. But at the same time, he highlights the Ndorobo's inferiority

¹¹ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, 33.

based on lack of adaptability and resistance, and inability to win the struggle for survival that determines which races are equipped to remain once the weakest have been defeated. Now, as I have explained previously, not all African tribes were devastated by their encounter with civilisation. On the contrary, they grew and multiplied profusely, threatening to overwhelm both whites and their 'civilisation' by sheer force of number, and, therefore, became a great source of anxiety for whites. This anxiety explains Smith's obsession with primitivism in his portrayal of blacks. Intimately aware of the overwhelming black presence in South Africa and the continent in general, Smith refuses to grant them the category of 'civilised peoples', which only superior whites enjoy. They may have survived the impact of progress; some of them may have adapted to western, 'civilised' forms of society - but in his fiction, they remain essentially primitive.

Smith fixes blacks into what Anne McClintock calls "the anachronistic space," a place outside "history proper" in which people exist "in a primeval anterior time within the geographic space of modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational [...] the living embodiment of the archaic 'primitive'."¹² They are collectively viewed as "atavistic throwbacks to a primitive moment in human prehistory, surviving ominously in the heart of modern imperial metropolis."¹³ By presenting blacks as primitive, Smith highlights the yawning gulf that exists between 'barbaric' peoples and white civilisation and substantiates the imperial idea that "the world might contain many stages of social evolution and many seemingly bizarre customs and 'superstitions' but there [is] only one civilisation, one path of progress, one true religion."¹⁴ Smith articulates a meaningful comment on the superiority of white civilisation by opposing it to the instinctual life of the primitive peoples. In Smith's depiction of the Africans, he perpetuates, therefore, the old colonial stereotype of the blacks' intrinsic primitiveness, by highlighting those aspects of their character that bespeak their inferior stage of social development.

¹² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 30.

¹³ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 43.

¹⁴ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness. British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988) 173.

To start with they are constantly being referred to as ‘savages’, (*Lion* 123, 343, 315; *Birds* 246, 447, 487) characterised by an instinctual rather than an intellectual life. Lothar’s men, for instance, move about the desert steered by the sun and “the instinct of the desert creature;” (*Sword* 202) the two African paddlers that carry Blaine and Centaine along the Okavango river trim “their narrow unstable craft with a relaxed, almost instinctive ease;” (*Sword* 229) Matatu follows a bull to his river-crossing “on instinct alone” (*Die* 110) and tracks a group of fugitives “from five hundred feet above the canopy of trees [...] by a weird intuitive sense;” (*Fox* 432) and Pungushe knows by instinct that a lioness he is following has gone north. (*Sparrow* 549) Their bushcraft or “understanding of the land and its creatures” (*Burning* 367) is outstandingly marvellous. Aboli can talk to elephants and make them obey his orders (*Birds* 68) and has a deep knowledge of forest herbs; (*Birds* 95) Matatu can work the spoor with a “superhuman sense of sight, smell and hearing” (*Rage* 513) or can recognise a particular buffalo out of a herd of five hundred and “know that animal again two years later just by a glance at the spoor.” (*Die* 32) Their instinctual knowledge of the natural world renders blacks magical, (*Fox* 393) genies, (*Fox* 434) or chocolate-coated miracles, (*Fox* 435) but, at the same time, it highlights their primitiveness, their belonging to the natural, rather than the ‘civilised’ world, their closeness to “the wild animals of the forest” rather than to mankind. (*Rage* 513) Their reverence for nature further endorses their primitiveness. The San, for instance, are thankful for everything nature kindly bestows upon them, whether it is rain, plants or wild game; animals are particularly honoured for “in each of them repose[s] a special part of the godhead of nature” (*Burning* 378) and they give their lives so that the San can feed. Similarly, Aboli’s tribe “sing and dance to give thanks to propitiate the spirits of the game they have slain.” (*Birds* 395) Blacks may live in communion with nature, but their special wisdom, respect and understanding makes them fit into Lévi-Strauss’ definition of primitive beliefs “denoting [...] [acceptance of individual and ecological limits, reverence for nature] which savage races [practice] spontaneously.”¹⁵

¹⁵ qtd. in Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 188.

In Smith's presentation of blacks, their belonging to the natural world has other implications. Being 'natural' and not 'civilised' means that they have not risen above an instinctual level of development and are thus intellectually and socially lacking. Their lack of intellectual sophistication can be observed in their inability to grasp abstract ideas: they cannot visualise physical reality from a two-dimensional drawing; (*Die* 284) they can count accurately to twenty but, after that, they become vague and any greater number is described "progressively as 'many' or 'a great deal' and finally as 'like grass on the Serengeti plains';" (*Die* 350) or have a descriptive language not suitable to convey abstract ideas. (*Burning* 433) Their mental skills are underdeveloped so they can be classified into the "'oxen' the strong and stupid, the muscle and cannon fodder" and the other with "varying degrees of intelligence and adaptability." (*Die* 360) But even those who are "at the top of the heap" can only learn things through "repetition and reinforcement," (*Die* 360) for most of them are "cattle [...] and stupid." (*Rage* 307) Even the 'intelligent specimens' are mentally handicapped. Mbejane, for instance, cannot pronounce Sean I's name because "it is a difficult name" (*Lion* 144) and decides to call him *Nkosi* instead; and Aboli's handwriting "despite all [Sir Francis] and Hal's own instruction" has "never been better than large, sprawling and malformed." (*Birds* 296) Their lack of intellectual development is also emphasised by the fact that they do not "measure time as a white man does, or record [their] history in the written word," (*Sparrow* 173) which renders their history inaccurate and imprecise, and by their lack of artistic sophistication. The San's primitive paintings, for instance, are characterised by "childlike simplicity of form" (*Burning* 467) and African music is described as "a weird cacophony of primitive musical instruments and discordant human voices." (*Birds* 478) Finally, they are "lackadaisical and happy-go-lucky" (*Rage* 211) since they lack determination, a trait which Smith regards as "more Anglo-Saxon than African," (*Die* 123) and they are easily manipulated. Intelligent whites can win their sympathies easily by making "the most of their sense of humour and of fun" (*Die* 222) for they are "simple people, completely defenceless against a well-timed jest." (*Lion* 218) Because of their gullible character, they fall easy prey to foreign communist instigators and revolutionaries, without whom, on the other hand, they would never show any initiative and would never be able to plan an attack against whites. When Manfred, for instance, reflects on

the ANC campaign against apartheid, he is surprised by its “extraordinary precision” and “unusual thoroughness and foresight in its execution” but, he reflects, this is thanks to “the advice and assistance of their white communist comrades” although, even with assistance, “their [essential] naïveté and amateurishness [shows] in their almost total lack of security and secrecy.” (*Rage* 211)

Their lack of civilised refinement in social life is especially shown in their eating habits. They cook anything from caterpillars to lizards (*Birds* 476; *Die* 474) and eat “noisily with an open mouth.” (*Rage* 44) Greasy gravy runs down their chins and they make no attempt “to moderate the conversation during mastication, so that small particles of food [are] sprayed from their mouths.” (*Die* 344) The San are reported to eat and fast in gargantuan fashion when they manage to kill wild game, and then they clap off resounding farts and squealing blasts, the “natural reaction of a people accustomed to privation faced suddenly with a mountain of food and no means of preserving it.” (*Burning* 416-417) Their social inadequacy is also emphasised by the fact that they cannot really stand western clothes and feel far more comfortable in their traditional loincloths. (*Sword* 243) Furthermore, they are dirty and stinky. The Africans’ smell is constantly underlined, rendering them unpleasant to our fastidiously squeamish white noses accustomed to disguising odours under flowery perfumes and deodorants. The San, for instance, smell like elephants; (*Burning* 454) the Ovambos are “stinking bastard spawns of diseased whores;” (*Burning* 516) when a group of Africans arrives at *Goldi*, they are washed with carbolic soap for, as the boss-boy tells them, “Your mothers may think that you smell like the mimosa in flower, but even the goats shudder when you pass upwind;” (*Sword* 351) and the smell of a black crowd is “the musky African odour” and the air is thick with “the [strong] odour of hot African bodies.” (*Rage* 496) In Smith’s depiction of South African townships, the deprivation and poverty in which blacks lived show. But Smith manipulates our sympathies by emphasising only those aspects of the townships’ landscape that are of the Africans’ own doing: their dirtiness and stench. Smith does not delve into the causes that are in part responsible for the townships’ sanitary conditions - or lack of them (their lack of reticulated water and adequate sewage systems are only mentioned in passing). He focuses, instead, on their effects, which, again, are vividly depicted so as to render

them offensive to our western perception, with its obsession with cleanliness and horror of the dirtiness that poverty generates. Thus, in Smith's portrayal of townships it is their stench and dirtiness he emphasises, as can be appreciated in his description of Drake's Farm:

The odour of the amorphous sprawling aggregation of humanity was woodsmoke and sewage, old sweat on hot bodies and charred food on the open wood fires. It was the smell of garbage mouldering in the rain puddles and the nauseating sweetness of blood sucking vermin in unwashed bedding. (*Sword* 365)

The fact that dirt and smell are racial, caused by blacks' supposed aversion to washing, rather than of social creation is emphasised in the saga in two different ways. To start with, stench and dirtiness are not exclusive to townships but can be found in all black dwellings or spaces they occupy. The Ethiopian encampment in *Birds of Prey*, for instance, is described in the following terms:

The horses, camels and bullocks stood in great herds amongst the rude dwellings, and a cloud of shifting dust and blue smoke from the fires of dried dung blotted out the blue of the sky. The ammoniacal stink of the animal lines, the smoke and the stench of rubbish dumps rotting in the sun, the dunghills and the latrine pits, the ripe odour of carrion and unwashed humanity under the desert sun rivalled the effusions of the battlefield. (*Birds* 504)

And, to mention another example, the crowded coach and train used to carry blacks to *Goldi* stink "like an animal cage," the logical consequence of having a hundred bodies squashed into a tiny space with no washing facilities available, one should assume; but in Smith's account, the stench is caused by the blacks themselves for, when the men use the latrine cubicle, they miss the hole and "the floor [slops] dark yellow urine and splattered faeces," (*Sword* 345) so the effluvia the latrine produces is wondrous. Secondly, the 'racial dirtiness' of primitive blacks is emphasised by Smith's presentation of other, more civilised races: the Muslim peoples of Oman and Lamu. Although equally savage and bloodthirsty, their higher level of social sophistication is inscribed in their obsession with personal hygiene for they "wash five times a day, before they [go] through the ritual of their prayers." (*Monsoon* 308)

Another marker of the blacks' primitiveness is their reliance on weird rituals and potions rather than on science and 'proper' Christian beliefs. Under the "vener of western manners" (*Rage* 205) they occasionally display, they are essentially primitive and 'African' underneath, gladly putting "aside all the manners and the mores of the west" and slipping into their African origins as easily as they slip off their western clothes. (*Rage* 176) Moses and Vicky, for all their western upbringing, for instance, marry in the traditional African ceremony, which allows for a display of traditional African customs and savagery. Men dress in full regimentals, with plumes, fur and feathers on their heads and war rattles on their wrists and ankles; as they sing and their hearts pump and thrill to the rhythms and the pulse of the harsh African continent, they stamp and brandish their weapons. (*Rage* 176) They also engage in ritualistic fighting games with the men "whistling and hissing" while the women wail and ululate. (*Rage* 183) Raleigh and Wellington Tabaka, to mention another example, undergo the circumcision ceremony, "the final stamp on [their] special sense of Africanism." (*Rage* 462) They have their foreskins cut away and then gathered up by the witchdoctors, salted and dried and added to their tribal totem. In this way, a part of them remains forever with the custodians and no matter how far they wander, the witchdoctors can call them back with the foreskin curse. (*Rage* 463)

Blacks do not "worship exclusively the crucified lord but other gods whose abode [is] in the deep dark forest" (*Birds* 15) and, consequently, they decorate places with "Christian symbols side by side with those of the animists and witch-worshippers." (*Rage* 129) In spite of their mixed beliefs, we never see them resorting to priests or praying to God. They still believe that "all sickness [is] caused by demons that [invade] the blood" - which Smith qualifies as "groundless superstition" (*Birds* 189) - and, thus, they resort to *sangomas* (tribal medicine men) and witchdoctors to cure all their ills. These *sangomas* and witchdoctors are presented as the epitome of savagery. One of Hendrick's wives, for example, is a *sangoma*. She prepares her tricks and potions in a secret room, which Smith calls the 'sorceress's liar' and describes as full of a "terrifying assembly" of "gods and goddesses carved in native woods and dressed in feathers and skins and beads" and of the "gruesome accoutrements of [her] craft," the "nameless substances which [fester] and [bubble] and [stink] [...] foully."

(*Rage* 131) The witchdoctors, “in their skins and feathers and fantastic head-dresses,” are similarly “weird and terrifying figures.” (*Rage* 463) The ceremonies they perform further highlight their savagery. They have their bodies “daubed with coloured clay and painted in fantastic patterns” and “hung with charms, amulets and magical fetishes, skins of reptiles, bones and skulls of man and animal, and all the gruesome paraphernalia of the wizard and the witch.” Then they “[crawl] and [wiggle] like insects” and “[whine] and [howl] and [gibber], and [roll] their eyes and [chatter] their teeth, and beat on drums and [twang] single-stringed harps.” (*Birds* 478) Even though their charms and potions are discredited by Smith, who presents them as ridiculous - blacks, for instance, try to cure abdominal cancer with porcupine dung (*Rage* 93) - they persistently believe in them; ironically, they are not seen to have any effect other than making witchdoctors terribly rich - Josia Nrubu, a famous witchdoctor, lives in a pink mansion, has four new Cadillac motor-cars, and his sons go to university in America. (*Fox* 207)

Another aspect of the blacks’ primitiveness is their lack of agricultural skills and of technological development. On a scale of civilisation based on progress and technology, blacks inevitably occupy the bottom position. Presented as inherently lazy, their laziness, indolence and ignorance are both cause and effect of their condition; they do not advance because they are lazy, indolent and ignorant and they are presented as lazy, indolent and ignorant because they do not advance, as their agricultural methods demonstrate. Some blacks do not even cultivate the land or breed cattle, like the San, who are “adept in the bushcraft and lore of the desert” and track and hunt wild game or gather and forage the plants that are the San’s “staples of life.” (*Burning* 424) When blacks do breed cattle, their farming methods are primitive and detrimental to the environment. For blacks, especially the Zulu and Xhosa, “cattle [is] wealth” (*Sparrow* 173) and their extensive herds are responsible for most of the damage inflicted on the land; extensive grazing has resulted in the open land being grazed short; as a consequence, running ulcers of erosion have opened and the rivers are becoming “browned and sullied by the bleeding earth.” (*Sparrow* 173) Furthermore, they have chopped forests down for firewood. (*Sparrow* 173) In their attempt to empty space for their cattle, blacks have also killed most of Africa’s wild

animals, for, as Sean II puts it, "When [wild animals] and [wild blacks] come into competition for living space, the wild animals always come off losers." (*Die* 28) African poachers have also contributed to the extermination of African wildlife, for they have been "busy over the years, with bow and arrow, with snare and pit, with spear and dog pack, and with high-powered rifled weapons." (*Sparrow* 176)

Blacks are also inadequately prepared to cope with technology. Being mainly rural, they "come to the cities unskilled and untrained," (*Rage* 88) which makes it difficult for them to find a job, they swell the ranks of the unemployed, gangsters and rogues that populate the cities; their only options are prostitution and crime. (*Sword* 305) In Smith's perception, however, training programmes would not help much for blacks are not racially equipped to handle technology or even to understand it - most blacks still think that technology is magic; Shanganes in Moçambique, for instance, think that Russian *henshaws* (helicopters) can "speak from the sky [...] [and] have magic that turns [...] bullets and rockets to water." (*Die* 359) Their relationship to technology, therefore, is characterised by lack of skill and fear: they are, for example, appalling marksmen and have poor fire control; (*Sword* 82; *Die* 313, 332, 400; *Fox* 437) they are unable to "adjust well to the complexities of supersonic flight;" (*Fox* 301) and they are so frightened of aircraft or boats that they become sick and puke every time they travel on any of those. (*Die* 100, 317, 432; *Fox* 508; *Birds* 488)

Also, Smith highlights the blacks' primitiveness by likening them to children as a way to bring to the fore their inferior stage of development. While white men outgrow childhood and become 'men', blacks can never advance beyond childhood. Sean I's black men, for instance, laugh and chatter "like children going to a picnic." (*Lion* 218) The San's feet and footprints are childlike (*Burning* 397) and their joy "spontaneous and childlike." (*Burning* 496) Matatu is a childlike figure, has an endearing wrinkled grin and bright mischievous eyes, (*Die* 306) and when he laughs he claps his hands, bouncing in his seat like a child at the pantomime. (*Die* 111) General China may usually be cold and restrained, but is frequently overcome by childlike excitement; (*Die* 336) when he plans raids he makes helicopter and machine-gun noises like a small boy at play; (*Die* 337) and when he handles weapons, he plays

with the controls. (*Die* 455) And a doctor who accompanies Sister Nunziata is trapped in the cab of his burning pick-up while the black crowd chants and dances round him “like children round the bonfire on Guy Fawkes night.” (*Rage* 209) This presentation of blacks as children has traditionally validated the whites’ attitude towards blacks and justified the white man’s refusal to grant them self-determination. This attitude is criticised by Moses Gama, who is aware of the fact that in the white man’s books, “even the most sympathetic and charitable of the authors [...] referred to his people as children, unable to reason or think for themselves, children who must be sternly protected but prevented from taking part in the decisions that govern their lives.” (*Rage* 415) But this critical approach does not carry much weight in Smith’s fiction for even black people acknowledge their child-status: Vicky says that without Moses, the people are “children without a father.” (*Rage* 430)

The blacks’ primitiveness is finally highlighted by juxtaposing it with white society, which Smith equates with civilisation and positions as superior. The wilderness, with its primitiveness, is a necessary space for Smith’s wild white heroes and heroines. Smith upholds the idea that savagery is an inner disposition common to both ‘civilised’ and ‘primitive’ humanity, especially essential men - who are ‘wild men’ within. White heroes, in fact, are specifically defined as wild men at heart, instinctual men who need to give free rein to their essential nature in spaces such as the desert, the forest, the jungle; in short, those parts of the physical world that have not yet been domesticated or marked out for domestication in any significant way. Smith furnishes his men with such spaces like the Chizora concession Sean II has in Rhodesia, with its Hemingway camp, an expanse brimming with wild game for men to hunt and its “Tarzan setting in the jungle,” (*Fox* 384) or the “vast primeval world” at Chaka’s Gate, a natural preserve. (*Sparrow* 172) In spaces such as those, men can act ‘like men’ unhindered by the anti-masculinist pressures operating in the stifling atmosphere of domesticated western cities; they are allowed to express what could be called their ‘essential masculinity unbound’. And yet, civilisation is still conceived as a necessary marker to distinguish ‘primitive’ men from white men. White men need vast, primitive, undomesticated spaces where they can test their manhood, but civilisation, in spite of all its ills, is still superior to the ‘primitive’ world of blacks and

a necessary foil Smith needs to bring the superiority of whites to the fore. Thus, Smith constantly highlights the dichotomy civilisation / primitive societies in his fiction. When Sean I, for instance, spends a period of time in the wild expanses across the Limpopo river and eventually comes across a group of Boer trekkers, he is shocked to find “that little fragment of civilisation in the wilderness,” (*Lion* 435) and is immediately drawn to it for he longs “for the company of his own kind” and seeing “a white face again.” (*Lion* 436) Centaine, who is allowed to penetrate the wilderness for a while and live with and like ‘savages’, eventually follows the tracks left by “civilised men” (*Burning* 496) which hold “the promise [...] of salvation and the return to her own world” and escapes “from this harsh existence that would at last turn her and her infant into savages.” (*Burning* 499) White civilisation, furthermore, is essential to maintain the rule of law and order and guarantee a peaceful subsistence in the continent. If left on their own, blacks in South Africa would “tear down the whole structure of government [...] [and] plunge [the land] into anarchy and the same savagery of Africa which rent the land before [...] whites arrived.” (*Rage* 412) White civilisation, therefore, emerges as a guarantee of equilibrium, progress and advancement; and even prominent black leaders implicitly accept its superiority: when told about the violence and anarchy that rules in Moçambique without whites, Nelson Mandela - introduced as a character in *Rage* - states, “We will never sink to such barbarism.” (*Rage* 311)