

A RECLAMATION OF MASCULINE SPACE: WILBUR SMITH'S MANIPULATION OF SPACE IN THE COURTNEY SAGA

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The oeuvre of Wilbur Smith –the South African blockbuster adventure writer– is often analysed from a post-colonial perspective in order to disclose the colonial and racist undercurrents that pervade his narratives. In this paper, I analyse Smith's gendered manipulation of space in his ten-volume Courtney saga and how he constructs what could be termed a 'hegemonic male space'. My objective is to show that Smith's spatial configurations in the novels are not only conditioned by his particular geo-political affiliations or by the specific cultural landscape of adventure in which he inscribes his dreams of omnipotent masculinity. In fact, the way in which Smith manipulates space in the saga needs to be viewed alongside broader postmodern revisions of space that have led to the erasure of 'comfortable' distinctions –centre and margin, public and domestic– for the construction of 'safe' masculinity.

As a white, Anglo-Saxon, adventure writer living in and writing about South Africa, Wilbur Smith's manipulation of space in his Courtney saga is conditioned by his particular geo-political affiliations, as well as by the literary tradition –that of imperialist adventure writing– which Smith follows in order to trace his revisionist formulation of South African history. Smith interprets the land in the light of his white supremacist political alliances and depicts the South African territory in such a way as to both legitimise the allocation of space before and during apartheid and to endorse the ownership rights that white –especially British– settlers claimed to possess over the South African terrain. In order to justify the legitimacy of the white man's claims over the territory, therefore, Smith articulates two potent political myths with regards to South African land derived from the imperial literary tradition and colonial political orthodoxy,¹ and also from the mythology that sustained the

¹ For imperial ideology and its popularisation in imperialist adventure stories by writers such as H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling see Green (1980), Katz (1987), McClintock (1995), Eldridge (1996), and MacKenzie (1986).

apartheid regime since its implementation in 1948.² In the first place, Smith subscribes to the idea that the land was empty before the white man arrived, and thus describes it as a "blank" (1997: 370),³ "savage, unexplored" (1997: 83), "a land unknown, *terra incognita*" (1999: 499) because "no civilised man had ever travelled into that awesome interior" (1997: 4). And secondly, Smith sustains that it was the white man's ingenuity that created the wealth of the nation. In the Courtney saga, he pictures white settlers as powerful entrepreneurs endowed with the inner capacities and the technological means to take possession of and improve the land; he gives them absolute freedom of manoeuvre to take and maintain control over South African territory, inscribe it with their presence and validate their entitlement to the land they conquer, tame and make productive. Both myths are succinctly summarised in the following quotation:

We are not newcomers to Africa. Our forefathers were here before the first black man.... Three hundred years ago when our ancestors set out into the interior of this land, it was an empty wilderness. The black tribes were still far to the north, making their way slowly southwards. The land was empty and our forefathers claimed it and worked it. Later, they built the cities and laid the railways and sank the mine-shafts. Alone, the black man was incapable of doing any of those things. Even more than the black tribes we are men of Africa and our right to be here is as God-given and inalienable as is theirs. (1987: 390)

By integrating these two myths into his narratives, Smith not only undertakes to naturalise the whites' birthrights over the country; simultaneously, he establishes the contours of South African society and the position blacks and whites occupy in this society. By presenting whites as the rightful inheritors of South Africa's territorial legacy, he subscribes to the white man's right to occupy the pinnacles of power and privilege, and substantiates blacks' underdog status. After all, blacks are positioned as unlawful pretenders, a 'savage' and 'uncivilised' herd of exiles descending from an indeterminate northern *diaspora* and forcing their way into the cracks and crevices of a technologised, industrialised society which holds the promise of material and intellectual advancement. In his adventure narratives, therefore, Smith activates what Linda McDowell, quoting Doreen Massey terms "power geometry" or "a web of relations of domination and subordination" which

² By 'political myth' I understand Leonard Thompson's definition as quoted in Richard Peck: "a tale about the past to legitimise or discredit a regime; and ... a political mythology [is] a cluster of such myths that reinforce one another and jointly constitute the historical element in the ideology of a regime and its rival" (1997: 17). Peck believes that tales told about the present also legitimize or deligitimize a regime and should be taken into account since, if widespread, have a great potential for ideological reinforcement. The novels by Wilbur Smith, therefore, should also be taken into consideration since they articulate a potent pro-apartheid mythology that readers, consciously or unconsciously, take in and assimilate.

³ For references to novels by Wilbur Smith I use a key word from the novel's title and page number instead of author's name and year of publication in order to avoid repetition and facilitate identification of the novel cited.

assumes that people are differently located in space or, as McDowell phrases it, that "there are radical inequalities in the spatial spread of individuals' lives" (1996: 31).

Yet, in the Courtney saga, Smith does not only ratify racial gaps and underwrite unequal racial relations. True to the imperialist adventure tradition in its Victorian form—which, as Longhurst explains, "had little to do with the domain of the private, with emotional commitment, personal relations and the domestic" (1998: 210)—Smith subscribes to the myth of the separate spheres. The domain of the private—what lies within home-boundaries—is regarded as feminine, and the public—what lies outside home-boundaries and, more particularly, the colonial wilderness—is seen as a space of adventure and manly enterprise.⁴ According to Richard Phillips, adventure stories "share with other maps ... a measure of authority, a power to naturalise constructions of geography and identity". Their authority lies in their ability "to circumscribe geography by enclosing, defining, coding, orienting, structuring and controlling space" and in their "propensity to negate alternative geographic imaginations" (1997: 14-15). Wilbur Smith uses adventure in exactly this way. He manipulates space in such a way as to naturalise gender differentiation, circumscribing the space of adventure as a solely masculine terrain and denying women the opportunity to compete for territorial occupation on equal terms with (white) men, if at all. Smith even denies women the possibility of imagining alternative geographies in which they could interact with men in the process of controlling, manipulating and administering the land. In fact, and in order to eliminate women as participants in the struggle for and maintenance of territorial control in South Africa, Smith utilises three different strategies which allow him both to endorse the idea of men's absolute control over the land and, at the same time, to ratify an old-fashioned, reactionary ideal of masculinity based on violence, aggression, domination and (sexual) potency.

In the first place, Smith feminises the land. Not unlike nineteenth-century imperialist adventure writers such as H. Rider Haggard in his *King Solomon's Mines*—in which the sketch of the map that leads the three white Englishmen to the diamond mines of Kukuanialand in Southern Africa reveals, if inverted, the diagram of a female body—⁵ Smith imagines the African mainland as female. In the Courtney saga, the land is described as beautiful and mysterious, "beckoning" (1999: 408),

⁴ In nineteenth-century Britain, the notion of home (feminine) and away (masculine) became widespread. It was used to ratify women's domestic confinement and served to construct imperial expansion as a masculine endeavour. This notion is, for instance, expressed in the following quotation from *By Track and Trail* (1895), in which F.R. Roper has one of his heroes say: "I am determined not to go back to England, to be a drudge in the office, in a bank, or something of that sort, the very thought of which disgusts me. Just think what most of these fellows are at home; they spend one half of their lives at a desk, the other half fadding about their dress or their appearance. Why, they are mostly as soft as girls, and know nothing but about dancing, and theatres and music-hall singers" (Phillips 1997: 55).

⁵ Haggard's sketch reproduces a female body which is spread-eagled and truncated, the only parts drawn being those that denote female sexuality. The head is represented by the shrunken "pan and water". At the centre of the map lie the two mountain peaks called "Sheba's Breasts". The body's length is inscribed by the royal way of "Solomon's Road", leading from the threshold of the breasts over the navel "Koppie" straight into the pubic mound, named the "Three Witches" and figured by a triangle of three hills covered in dark heather (McClintock 1995: 1-3).

"alluring and enticing" (1999: 420), with "grass upon it as thick and as full of promise as the hair on a woman's pudendum" (1966: 206-207), attracting men to penetrate it. Fields are "wide open as the legs of a whore" so that men can "go in and take [them]" (1964: 262). The rich, cavernous interior of the earth is turned into a "warm womb" (1964: 305) and, to mention another example, the language Smith uses to describe one of the main characters' diamond mines is pregnant with female imagery: the entry that leads to the mine is "an almost perfectly round hole" leading "through [a] tunnel" to the centre of the excavation, where the diamonds are "brought up in the fiery lava" (1986: 104). Smith, by feminising the land makes it receptive to men who "force their way" and "press on into the interior" (1999: 492). In turn, white heroes are endowed with "full and weighty" (1997: 71), "big and hard" (1976: 85) genitalia, which equips them for the act of penetrating an open land whose function is that of permitting, even propitiating, possession.

Given the highly sexually charged, heterosexual ethos that pervades the Courtney saga,⁶ women's interaction with the wilderness cannot even be contemplated. Not equipped with a penis,⁷ women lack the implement that could entitle them to fit comfortably in the feminine wilderness and take possession of it. Thus, their immediate response to the wilderness is discomfort, often fear. While the wilderness satisfies all men's needs—to the extent that they feel at home in it, often seek to commune with it and even forget their sexual urges since nature is, for them, both a repository of energy and an escape valve that allows them to release repressed desires—women feel isolated, vulnerable and threatened by what surrounds them. Claudia—the heroine of *A Time to Die* (1989)—, for instance, is full of fear in the jungle, for it is "charged with mystery, with uncertainty and menace". She feels "alone and very vulnerable", "as vulnerable as an antelope to the leopard in a forest full of predators" (1989: 123).

Not even Centaine—one of Smith's apparently tougher heroines and the female protagonist of two of the ten-volume Courtney saga, *The Burning Shore* (1976) and *Power of the Sword* (1986)—is completely assimilated in the wilderness. After a shipwreck, she is stranded in the burning fastness of Namibia's Skeleton Coast. Armed with a phallic clasp-knife, she penetrates the wilderness and is allowed to take a literal long walk on the wild side of life: she undertakes a journey from Namibia's coast to the Place of All Life, a San sanctuary in the heart of the Kalahari Desert, and back to civilisation. Centaine not only survives the ordeal, but it also enables her to toughen herself to an almost masculine degree and is furthermore the occasion that propitiates her subsequent wealth when she casually stumbles over a diamond mine that becomes the foundation of her fortune. Yet, Centaine, unlike

⁶ In the Courtney saga, the heterosexual interplay between heroes and heroines is consistently used to provide sexual excitement, as well as to guarantee women's confinement within domestic scenarios once they fall for mightily-endowed Courtney heroes. Lesbianism and homosexuality are presented as perversions that destabilise the patriarchal superstructure. Thus, it is mostly villainous characters who are made to display sexual deviance. These villainous/deviant characters are unfailingly punished—that is, they are made to suffer heinous deaths that parody the act of homosexual penetration.

⁷ In the narratives, Smith emphasises that women are only a blank, a vulval shape, a void that only men can fill.

Courtney heroes, cannot accommodate herself to the strictures of life in the wilderness. She manages to survive only because she is aided by Smith's particular Fridays H'ani and O'wa, the two San who rescue her when, out of despair, she "[lies] down to die" (1976: 339) and who become the assistants that accompany her in her long descent into savagery. Even with the San's assistance, though, Centaine's only feeling is one of discomfort and exhaustion, "weariness and weakness" (1976: 376). She experiences her sojourn in the wilderness as "[days] of torment and suffering" (1976: 363); the land as a "cruel and ... malicious" (1976: 389) being she has to "fight ... off as though it were a living adversary" (1976: 396); and her relationship with the San as "[l]iving each day like an animal, living like a savage, living with savages" (1976: 396). Ultimately, and even though Centaine learns to appreciate the beauty and bounty of a land that she had regarded as arid and sterile at first, her only desire is to escape to a domain that can really contain and assimilate her. She exclaims: "I won't give in, and when this is over I will never want again. I'll never thirst and starve nor wear rags and stinking skins again" (1976: 396). After this Scarlett O'Hara-like oath, Centaine goes back to 'civilisation'. She follows the tracks left by "civilised men" (1976: 496), which hold "the promise ... of salvation and return to her own world", and escapes "from this harsh existence that would at last turn her ... into [a savage]" (1976: 499). All in all, Centaine has to recoil in terror from a locale that axiomatically excludes her –as it does all women. Smith, by imbuing the land with female qualities and making it compliant and receptive to men only, renders it open to men's power, mastery and total gratification while, at the same time, as Nina Baym phrases the idea, "puts it outside women's reach" (1986: 72).

The second strategy Smith uses in order to ascertain men's mastery over the adventure space consists in delimiting women's sphere of action within marginal geographies. Although he occasionally allows his female protagonists to out-step domestic boundaries, he simultaneously makes them conform to a prototypical (and sexist) idea of 'woman' that restrains their mobility, hinders their independence and ultimately determines their confinement within the domestic sphere. Basically, he imposes a domestic role on his heroines and prevents them from escaping this role by making them intrinsically incapable of performing successfully in terrains other-than-domestic. To begin with, women are characterised by lack of strength. Their physical weakness is constructed in relation to men's physical power, turning men into their natural protectors. In turn, this role of men as protectors of shaky, weakly women is conveyed by likening men to castles or fortresses women can find shelter in, or mountains they can lean on;⁸ or by having men embrace women in their "hard

⁸ The strength of Ramon de Santiago y Machado, as compared to Bella's lack of it is described in the following melodramatic terms: "For her he was a great tree and she was the vine that entwined it, he was a rock and she the current of a tropical ocean that washed about it, he was a mountain peak and she was the cloud that softly enfolded it. Her body was light and free, she seemed to float in his arms, and that was all of reality. They were alone in the universe, transported beyond all the natural laws of space and time; even gravity was suspended, and her feet no longer made contact with the earth" (1990: 45-46). Bella may feel light and free, but it is only in relation to Ramon's protection that she is allowed to experience these feelings. For Bella, as for all other heroines, men become natural shelters. Once they are involved in a love affair with

muscular arm[s]" (1989: 121) or "holding [them] protectively" (1976: 102). The heroines' lack of strength renders them impotent to survive in the wilderness on their own and makes them dependant on men's role as rescuers of damsels in distress. Claudia, for instance, cannot travel through the Mozambican jungle without Sean's—her lover—assistance, in *A Time to Die* (1989). He has to rescue her from a man-eating crocodile, after which she is "shattered and vulnerable" (1989: 145). Later she falls into a hole so that Sean has to retrieve her from it and carry her in his arms "as if she were a child" (1989: 169). Still later she is captured by Renamo guerrillas and imprisoned in a dirty cell. It is only after Sean comes to the rescue again that she feels "safe and invulnerable", admitting that, "I'm only brave when you are here" (1989: 414).

Secondly, Smith pictures women as naive, "childish and irresponsible" (1987: 8), incapable of grasping the nuances and intricacies that characterise South Africa's complex social and political panorama. Thus, he renders them fatally short-sighted, unable to have a say in the task of managing and administering the public domain, as is demonstrated, for instance, by Tara and Bella's infelicitous participation in politics. Courtney heroes rule supreme over the political scene in South Africa. Through their participation in politics, they develop the gold-mining industry as the foundation for a modern state; they dictate the policies that determine the protection of the nation from inner and outer enemies; they organise the distribution of space; and they flesh out the contours of the country's body politic by establishing who the enemies are and how to seclude them in safe, policed spaces. As Shasa—one of the protagonists—puts it, men wield power "like a bright sword against the demons that [plague the South African] people and [their] land" (1986: 319), namely, black revolutionaries, who threaten white power, and the Afrikaner radical nationalists, who hamper the creation of wealth by relying on a system, apartheid, which Smith condemns as economically unviable, "feudal" and "primitive" (1990: 420).⁹

powerful heroes, women are systematically removed from transcendent historical, political and economic events—even from the spatio-temporal laws that dictate our positioning in the space/time dichotomy—to be thrust into what Lynne Pearce defines as the "romantic chronotope: a spatio-temporal continuum which exists apart from the 'historical' lives of the characters, but into which all are liable to be swept into a black hole" (1998: 99); an empty space in which nothing else matters apart from the love between the couple. This space contains women completely, for it is within it that they find absolute happiness. For men, on the other hand, it is only a respite, a temporary refuge where they can obtain the nurturing affection they need to replenish their strength in order to go back to the public arena with renewed vigour. The same circumstance can be observed, for instance, if we analyse the relationship between two other characters, Centaine and Blaine. The romantic chronotope appears for Centaine every time she is with Blaine, such as when they are stranded alone while travelling along the Okavango river and she exclaims, "Anything is possible here, even dragons and princes. This is never-never land. Santa Claus and the good fairy are waiting just around the next bend" (1986: 232). Eventually, she gives material shape to their romantic chronotope in the form of "the perfect love nest" (1986: 411), a house she decorates and furnishes and in which she waits in thrall for him while he is 'outside', in the public arena of politics where he spends most of his time.

⁹ Smith does not condemn apartheid's philosophy of separate development for blacks and whites. He never contemplates full democracy as a viable system in South Africa. Yet, he disapproves of apartheid's economic policies. When he elaborated the first volumes of the Courtney saga, he seemed to believe that granting blacks the opportunity to acquire an education or some sort of formal training would have been beneficial for the system. It would have given blacks stability—which in turn would have led to the eradication of black revolutionary activity—and would have contributed positively to the economic development of the country.

Heroines, in turn, if interested in politics at all (Isabella, for instance, "finds politics a bore and isn't very perceptive"; 1986: 158) let themselves be guided by personal sympathies—or passions—and end up striking alliances that prove to be fatal for themselves and for those around them. Tara, for example, believes in the cause of revolution as a means to resolve the problems of black people, and, consequently, befriends communist sympathisers, joins anti-apartheid demonstrations, and eventually falls for Moses Gama, an ANC freedom fighter, putting herself under his absolute control and command. Yet, even Moses condemns her lack of political insight. He understands that Tara is mostly moved by the sexual attraction she feels for him, accuses her of being a "weak, jealous woman, riddled with bourgeois white prejudices" (1987: 74), and regards her as expendable once he has used her to carry out his plans. Tara can rave against the "insensitivity of the privileged rich white ruling classes" (1986: 495), but her attempts to change the system reveal her ideas to be flawed. The consequences of her actions or the activities she supports are systematically presented as disastrous. She, to mention one example, participates in a supposedly peaceful demonstration against apartheid which eventually gets out of hand as black revolutionaries begin to destroy houses and cars, and to launch a violent attack against peaceful blacks. Shasa, her fiancé, takes her to the destruction area, shows her how "silly and naive" her "Joan of Arc act" has been, and gives her a lesson in the way the revolution 'really' works. When Tara tries to blame *skollie* boys, gangsters and the police for the havoc wreaked on the area, Shasa offers her the 'true' version of events:

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

Look, Tara, look down there at the smoke and the flames. Those are the people who you say you want to help. These are their homes and their livelihoods that you have put the torch to. (1986: 508)

Bella's participation in politics proves to be equally disastrous. In *Golden Fox* (1990), she falls in love with Ramon de Santiago y Machado, a Spanish KGB agent intent on helping Russia expand the cause of communism in Africa. Using his vast sexual appeal and taking advantage of Bella's maternal instincts, Ramon manipulates her into submission. Following his orders, she gives up her spoilt-child, socialite-*extraordinaire* pose, to pursue a political career in order to retrieve confidential information for Ramon. Eventually, he forces her to participate in a terrorist plot that, if successful, would lead to the assassination of thousands of people. Her public

Smith's inability to cope with a post-apartheid, democratic South Africa is demonstrated by the fact that all his post-apartheid novels take place in the distant past or are removed geographically from South Africa. His latest Courtney novels—*Birds of Prey* and *Monsoon*—take place in sixteenth-century England and Africa; his most recent novel—*The Warlock*, to be published in May 2001—continues with his Egyptian series, which, so far, comprises *River God* (1993) and *The Seventh Scroll* (1995).

profile is exposed as a sham, and she is forced to reveal her carelessness and mindlessness to her family and to ask for forgiveness for her lack of insight. She mumbles, "I'm sorry Daddy. They told me that I must enter politics, stand for Parliament, use the family connections" (1990: 549). Ironically, it is her grandmother Centaine—an apparently successful career woman—who is made to express the family's condemnation for Bella's involvement in public affairs. Centaine says, "I should have suspected your sudden political aspirations.... Don't keep saying you are sorry.... It doesn't contribute anything worthwhile and is damnably irritating" (1990: 550). Indeed, Bella's apologies are irritating. But more irritating still is her attempt to pursue a career. Bella's apologies reveal her lack of judgement for trying to occupy a political niche that, in the Courtney saga, belongs exclusively to men. No wonder Centaine suspects her political aspirations; in Smith's world, a woman's only permitted ambition is that of securing herself a comfortable and submissive position within a male-dominated household and Bella should be sorry for trying to out-step the boundaries that have been established for her.

In Smith's adventurous milieu, gender differentiation is, indeed, acute and determines not only the roles men and women are to play, but also the spaces they occupy in the narratives. Women's aptitudes, as well as their blatant 'lacks', make them adequate for domestic confines. One after another they try their luck outside home-boundaries. In fact, they seem to be perniciously placed outside the domestic and granted a public career and / or a reckless spirit just to be made aware of their inadequacies as 'single white females' in a masculine plot of action and adventure. They belong to the domestic pursuits of home-making and childbearing and Smith incorporates a romantic plot into the narrative to secure women's return to domestic domains that can really encompass them. As heroines fall in love with wholesome heroes, they experience a change of interest from career-development to the romantic endeavours of love and marriage and they immediately give up their aspirations in the public arena. Subsequently, they marry Courtney heroes and they breed more or less profusely to secure Courtney sons to Courtney fathers, perpetuating, in this way, a patriarchal status quo which establishes separate spheres for separate genders.

Apart from consigning men and women to separate spheres, Smith articulates another strategy to substantiate men's control over the narrative space. He undertakes to create what David Bunn calls "hegemonic male space" (1996: 49) or a space that belongs to men completely and which allows for the formation of 'true' masculine identities. Basically, he constructs uncompromisingly and uniformly manly heroes described as romantic, brave, virile, heterosexual, white and European and places them in locales that set off their manly attributes and where they can put those manly attributes to work without having to bother about women's competing claims for control or about the post-feminist mores and suspicions that riddle contemporary western civilisation. This 'manly' space is pictured in the narratives in four different forms that become the main focus of narrative attention and plot development: war and conflict, the world of enterprise and politics, the wilderness,

and the distant past in the romance genre. The analysis of how Smith constructs these 'spaces' as exclusively male is beyond the scope of this paper. Yet, and in order to exemplify the idea, I focus on how Smith presents war and conflict as a solely 'masculine' terrain.

It is doubtful whether men are genetically violent or pre-determined to use aggression to assert their power in society.¹⁰ As Lynne Segal has pointed out, "'Violence', it seems clear, cannot simply be equated with 'masculinity'. Neither are unitary phenomena" (1990: 269). However, it cannot be denied that, in our western world, "violence suffuses male identity" (Buchbinder 1994: 40). Men, still nowadays, resort to violence to shore up a sense of identity, reassert their power in society and present an heroic image of themselves to the world. Men are supposed, even expected, to use and enjoy using violence in order to establish dominance. The feeling prevails that violence, the desire to fight and use physical force, encompasses male identity. The assumption that men are naturally more aggressive than women is even used as an argument to endorse the supremacy of men in patriarchal constructs. Man is often pictured as the central actor of the evolutionary drama: a fearless, aggressive, creative and dominant male who generates civilisation and protects the passive, dependant, subordinate female, who generates babies. This idea is ratified, for instance, in action films, which confirm what men have assumed about masculinity and canonise it, namely, "that it is manly to be strong, that the strong conquer, that victory is better than defeat and so on" (Buchbinder 1994: 74).

Wilbur Smith underwrites this assumption in his fiction. He presents killing as an essentially male activity, for, as he writes, "in order to live a man must occasionally kill" (1964: 107), and depicts the prospect of killing as a tester of masculinity because it is by inflicting death that "manhood [has] its full flowering" (1999: 157). The desire to use violence is, therefore, presented as "natural" (1987: 337), "primeval" and "atavistic" (1990: 539) in men, and killing and cruelty as an essential part of life, given that blood, shed blood, "is life ... with all life's beauty and cruelty and passion" (1990: 69). Since in Smith's milieu violence and aggression 'make the man', the author highlights that his heroes are "natural fighter[s]" (1987: 337) and "killer[s]" (1999: 120), prepared by training, but also by "vocation" (1999: 218), to inflict violence; and that they thoroughly enjoy a fight since "living dangerously is half the fun" (1987: 558, 566), and men "[thrive] on risk" (1989: 22), "[relish] the sensation of fear" (1990: 525), and are never "more alive than [when] going into battle and mortal danger" (1990: 525).

Given the equation of masculinity with violence and aggression, Smith ensures he provides his men with an adequate terrain where they can give free rein to their killing instincts and deadly atavistic urges –and thus prove their masculinity–

¹⁰ Some psychologists and biologists claim that propensity towards violence is essentially male (Mariani 1995: 135-56). This idea is refuted by Anne Fausto-Sterling. She asserts: "Although based on evidence, scientific writing can be seen as a particular kind of cultural interpretation —the encultured scientist interprets nature. In the process, he or she also uses that interpretation to reinforce or build new sets of social beliefs. Thus, scientific work contributes to the construction of masculinity, and masculine constructs are among the building blocks for particular kinds of scientific knowledge" (1995: 133).

without compromising their morality or their heroic stature. Consequently, he gives his heroes the opportunity to test their manhood and exercise their manly aggression against the background of an array of military conflicts that function both as sanctioned spaces for violence and as thoroughly masculine terrains where men can put their battle lust into practice, measure up their strength with other men and show off their courage and self-sacrificing nature since what motivates them is the honourable urge to protect themselves, their families and their country from 'unlawful' interference.¹¹ Their acts of courage in war do not only prove the heroes' virility, but have the secondary effects of elevating their stature to that of national heroes and of canvassing the admiration of an array of female spectators who are titillated by the heroes' power and grateful for the service they perform as protectors of the nation. After Hal Courtney –the hero of *Birds of Prey* (1997)–, for instance, single-handedly blockades the Ethiopian coast and saves the country from a Muslim invasion, Judith Nazet –an Ethiopian general and one of the heroines of the novel– expresses her gratitude in the following terms:

We thank you ..., Lord God, for sending to us your good and faithful Henry Courtney, without whose valour and selfless service the godless would have triumphed. May he be fully rewarded by the gratitude of all the people of Ethiopia, and by the love and admiration that your servant, Judith Nazet, has conceived toward him. (1997: 543)

But Smith does more than simply place his heroes against war-torn landscapes in order to highlight their courageous nature and to allow them to display their manly 'skills' of aggression. He ensures the war scenario is presented to readers as a truly masculine space by manipulating the images he uses to convey the heroes' manliness in war. So it is not only what the heroes do that renders them manly, but Smith's choice of words to depict these actions. Smith aims at creating a pervasive image of men's control, dominance and potency and, to do so, and as happens with his depiction of the wilderness in the saga, he feminises –that is, renders open for men's penetration– the weapons, aircraft and boats that the heroes use in war so that they can exercise their power and virility when utilising them. When Michael, for instance, asks Andrew in *The Burning Shore* (1976) how 'she', the new SE5 aeroplane, handles, the latter responds, "Just like a young lady I know in Aberdeen –quick up, quick down and soft and loving in between" (1976: 90). Sean tells the Hercules he is flying, "You are a pussy cat, darling", for he knows that "like a

¹¹ In order to justify men's urge to kill, Smith makes sure he creates an ethos of potential threat to the security of the nation and / or to the lives of the heroes' families and to their material comfort. In *Golden Fox*, for instance, Smith justifies his hero's participation in the manufacture and testing of weapons of mass indiscriminate destruction by depicting South Africa as the target of international hatred, which, in turn, is orchestrated by black revolutionaries whose only objective is to bring down the stable political and social edifice that the whites have constructed in South Africa: "There is a groundswell of hatred running against our little country. It is being cunningly orchestrated by a small vicious group of our enemies. They are brainwashing an entire generation of young people around the world to regard us as monsters who must be destroyed at all costs.... One day we could see an American naval task-force blockading our coast. We could face a military invasion of, say, Indian troops backed by Australia and Canada and all the members of the Commonwealth" (1990: 385).

woman an aircraft always [responds] to loving flattery" (1989: 314-315), and he "[babies] the controls, coaxing her with gentle fingers" (1989: 323). The *Resolution*, a Dutch boat, is "[s]weet as a virgin, and twice as beautiful" (1997: 27) and Big Daniel rips through her metal and wood with his "iron bar" to get into the interior of her strong room while the spectators, the crew watching him, let out a "hum of delight" as the contents of her compartment are revealed (1997: 76); she is, indeed, "[a] lovely sight" which "makes one's mouth water to behold her" (1997: 138). Hal can drive the *Golden Bough*, one of his vessels, "to the limit" (1997: 463), and her bottom beneath the waterline is "tight and sweet as a virgin's slit" (1997: 551). The *Seraph*, another of Hal's ships, is a "beauty" so Hal runs "his eyes over her in almost lascivious pleasure as though she were a naked woman" (1999: 6); and when she faces a storm, she "[quivers] eagerly" and "[frolics] away" (1999: 162). And the *Shallow*, Tom's ship, with her new canvas, is "as pretty as a maiden in her wedding dress" (1999: 388) and her mainsail in the wind is "swollen tight and white as an eight-month pregnant belly" (1999: 412). The final image of war that emanates from the narratives, therefore, is one of men's supreme power and control, potency and virility. The heroes' actions and their ability to perform heroic deeds stress their masculinity. Smith's crafty use of images further highlights their power over a world open to men's penetration and manipulation. War is thus a masculine space through and through; a space where real men can exercise their masculinity; a space that reactivates the reader's faith (especially male readers) in violent assertion of male dominance and total control over the elements.

Smith's manipulation of space in the Courtney saga, therefore, and to conclude, is not only racialised, but, very importantly, gendered, which within the broader context of what geographers call our postmodern reconfigurations of space reaches significant proportions. In contemporary western societies, old dualistic assumptions about the relationship between space and gender identity are questioned. Through the changing nature of our everyday lives and men and women's position in the family, the household and the workplace, conventional associations between, for instance, "whiteness, masculinity and the workplace, ... between gender and political power, between femininity and acceptable definitions of sexuality" (McDowell 1996: 39) are being undermined, resulting in what is known as the porousness of spatial divisions and the fluidity of boundaries. This situation has generated a set of anxieties in the white man's psyche. White men see their spatial monopoly and power threatened as the lines that had previously kept separate phenomena apart are progressively erased. Wilbur Smith's narratives can be viewed as a response to this carnivalesque obliteration of boundaries. In a world in which old spatial differentiations between centre and margin, public and domestic, are disappearing, Smith undertakes to create a thoroughly masculine space in which old patriarchal –not to say sexist and even racist– assumptions still hold sway and dictate the positions that men and women, blacks and whites, are to occupy in society. Smith's narratives, all in all, attempt to reclaim the kingdom of the novel for male writers, male readers and men's stories, and, paraphrasing Elaine Showalter, represent a yearning for escape from a society that no longer accepts the white man's power and

control as a given, to a mythologised space where old gender and racial distinctions still apply.

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