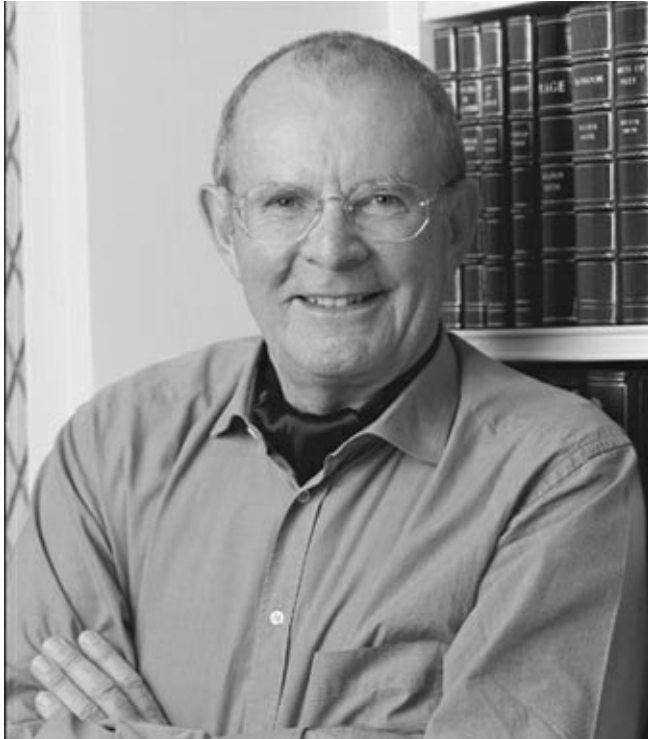


# Wilbur Smith

## The author and his work



Pan Macmillan

**W**ilbur Addison Smith was born on 9th January 1933, in the central African country which is now called Zambia. At that time, the country was called Northern Rhodesia and it was governed by Britain. All the important jobs in the country were done by white people, from British families. The black African people of the country had no power. Most of Africa was governed by people from European countries. While Wilbur was growing up, things began to change in Africa. Africans wanted political freedom – they wanted to control their own countries. These were difficult times in Africa, before the countries received their independence. But when he was a boy, Wilbur knew nothing about this. He was happy to walk in the countryside with his black African companions. He learnt about the animals, birds, trees and plants of his country.

Wilbur's father was a farmer. When his son was six years old, Wilbur's father sent him to a boarding school. Wilbur had to live there during the school terms. But his father encouraged the boy to hunt animals and fish during his holidays. Wilbur enjoyed doing these things, but he enjoyed reading too. His mother encouraged him to read all kinds of books. His favourite writers

were the Americans, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. But he also enjoyed the work of the British poet and novelist, Rudyard Kipling, and many nineteenth century travel writers.

After he left his boarding school, which was called Michaelhouse, Wilbur studied at Rhodes University. When he finished his studies, the young man wanted to become a journalist. But his father did not think that this was a good idea. So, to please his father, Wilbur became an accountant. Wilbur got a job as a tax accountant with the government Revenue Service. His job was to find out how much money people owed to the government. But he was bored and unhappy in this job.

Wilbur began to write fiction. He wanted to escape from his boring life as an accountant. And his own imagination gave him the chance to make that escape. He wrote an adventure story that was set in Africa. It had interesting characters and an exciting plot. The novel, which was called *When the Lion Feeds*, was published in 1964. It was an immediate success, and soon a movie company wanted to make a film of it. Wilbur had found the work he wanted to do. And although his father didn't understand his decision, Wilbur gave up his job as an accountant. Since 1964, Wilbur Smith has earned money as an author.

### Stories about families and Africa

*When the Lion Feeds* is about two brothers, Garrick and Sean Courtney. They grow up together, having the kind of life in the African countryside that the young Wilbur himself had. But later, the Courtney brothers quarrel and become rivals, when they fall in love with the same girl.

Wilbur Smith's novels are nearly always about Africa, and they are very often about families and their troubles. He is interested in what happens to families over long periods of time. And he is interested in the quarrels and strong feelings between members of a family.

Since his first novel, Wilbur has written many other books about the Courtney family. The first few books are set in the twentieth century, but in

later books about the Courtneys, Wilbur goes back to the seventeenth century. In telling the story of this fictional family, Wilbur is also writing a history of Africa.

As well as ten novels about the Courtneys, Wilbur Smith has written a series of novels about another family, the Ballantynes. But his novels don't all belong to these series. There are many novels with different plots, about different characters.

Recently, Wilbur Smith has written three novels that are about Ancient Egypt – a subject he first wrote about many years ago in *The Sunbird*. The first and third of these new Egyptian novels – *River God* and *Warlock* – are about a slave who was living at the time when the Hyksos invaded Egypt, about 3800 years ago. This slave, whose name is Taita, writes about his adventures, and these writings form the text of the two novels.

The middle novel of this series of three – *The Seventh Scroll* – is a modern thriller about the people who find Taita's writings in the twentieth century. They use these writings to search for some hidden treasure.

#### **Wilbur Smith today**

Wilbur Smith has been married several times. He has two sons by his first marriage. He has a stepson from his third marriage. His third wife already had a son when Wilbur Smith married her. The author looked after this boy until he was an adult.

Wilbur Smith writes a book almost every year. He begins a new book each February and works on it for about eight months. Then he takes a holiday. He goes hunting and fishing, and travels all over the world. His books have been printed in twenty-six different languages.

### A selection of works by Wilbur Smith

#### **The Courtney novels**

1964 *When the Lion Feeds*  
 1966 *The Sound of Thunder*  
 1977 *A Sparrow Falls*  
 1985 *The Burning Shore*  
 1986 *Power of the Sword*  
 1987 *Rage*  
 1989 *A Time to Die*  
 1990 *Golden Fox*  
 1997 *Birds of Prey*  
 1999 *Monsoon*

#### **The Ballantyne novels**

1980 *A Falcon Flies*  
 1981 *Men of Men*  
 1982 *The Angels Weep*  
 1984 *The Leopard Hunts in Darkness*

#### **The Taita novels**

1993 *River God*  
 1995 *The Seventh Scroll*  
 2001 *Warlock*

#### **Others**

1965 *The Dark of the Sun*  
 1968 *Shout at the Devil*  
 1970 *Gold Mine*  
 1971 *The Diamond Hunters*  
 1972 *The Sunbird*  
 1974 *Eagle in the Sky*  
 1975 *The Eye of the Tiger*  
 1976 *Cry Wolf*  
 1978 *Hungry as the Sea*  
 1979 *Wild Justice*  
 1991 *Elephant Song*

(For a list of Wilbur Smith's stories that have been simplified for the Macmillan Guided Readers Series, see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)