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Soul-brother Eugène N. Marais: Some notes towards a re-edit of his works

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The intention is to survey the current condition of the works of the South African Eugène Marais (1871–1936). This is with a view to alerting the general reader to certain inherited disorganisations which, in the light of professional scholarly and editing standards, need to be recognised and rectified. Marais's output as a poet and short story writer, as well as the pioneer populariser of nature studies conducted particularly in the Transvaal Highveld after the Second Anglo-Boer War, in both official languages of his day (English and Afrikaans), have ensured him the status of a unique cultural icon. Yet the publishing opportunities open to him in his hand to mouth, haunted career, especially as a journalist, meant his contributions were assembled into book form haphazardly, or remained unrecovered from often neglected periodicals of the mid-1890s to the mid-1930s to which he contributed. **Keywords:** Afrikaans poetry, biography, drug abuse, editing etiquette, Eugène N. Marais, nature studies.

“There is something of the Silver Latin poets in Marais; of the men who lived in a time of breaking, aware of the ultimate cold and darkness; and yet sang, a little sadly perhaps, but still impeccably, as they watched the lights go out.”

F. D. Sinclair in *Trek* (1948)

The following article surveys some of the published output by Eugène N. Marais (1871–1936) with the intention of asserting that it has often been more in the hands of mythmakers and icon-builders than objective scholarly editors. Suspecting that Marais himself was a deft confidence-trickster given to duping his devotees, as is evident from the play by Nicky Rebelo, *Prophet of the Waterberg* (2004), the fresh reissue of his selected stories and in the well-received feature film *Die Wonderwerker* (“The Wonder Worker”, 2012), the author of the following notes takes what may be construed as a disillusioning exposure of Marais's work.

Dwaalstories

Beginning with the genre of folk narrative which Eugène N. Marais made his own is not to pick holes in a superb article such as Sandra Swart's "Mythic Bushmen in Afrikaans Literature", which summarises the portrayal of Bushmen in a vast range of all languages. The bibliography here gives the reference to her work. Yet, even though Swart refers to a Marais piece on the topic published after his death in *Standpunte*, she is timid about drawing any telling conclusions from it.

Firstly, the *Standpunte* appearance, although it does not record the fact, is actually a reprint of a piece called "The Yellow Streak in South Africa", which originally appeared in the unconsulted *The Independent* (Volume 1, number 1) in 1919. Thus it gave a reliable preview of, rather than a footnote to, Marais's decidedly pseudo-anthropological attitude towards the subcontinent's first inhabitants. For example, he writes of "this ape-like being with the small brain [...] the pinched lower maxilla; with general tubercles no more developed than those of a baboon [...] (in 50 per cent of skulls they are mere monkey pits)—it is singular that the first cousin to the Chimpanzee", etc. (see "Yellow Streak" 40). So much then for the "yellow streak" in our genealogy, derived from the "satyrus Ourang", which has "polluted the stream of 'higher' South African blood", to the extent that it should now be exterminated.

Secondly, the *Standpunte* appearance includes a footnote indicating that this piece was due to be republished in an anthology in preparation with the publisher Human & Rousseau, presumably the collection of mostly English-language essays by Marais, *The Road to Waterberg* of 1972. But there it is not included in the contents, just as it would be omitted in the two-volume *Versamelde Werke* published by Van Schaik in 1984. The implication is that a declaration of 1919 advocating eugenic racial hygiene had become too unpalatable, even for high apartheid readers, to be embraced once again.

Nor does Swart stress that contradictory Marais was nevertheless bemused by these "designated human beings" with their supposedly different "structure of the sexual organs", which served to separate the Bushmen "from all other human races". For paradoxically the Bushman "is our true and only Bohemian. With a broken-backed fiddle, a hoarse concertina and a bottle of virulent brandy he can still at will transform the wilderness into a joyous paradise." In the same article there follow many quotations from letters written by Massouws and Witboois, as well as by Grootman Flermuis and Chief Mareme, to illustrate their dexterity with the vocabulary of nineteenth-century Afrikaans.

In the same piece, as other scholars have noted but not pursued, Marais refers to the late Dr W. H. I. Bleek. Many of his articles had appeared in the same journals to which Marais contributed and his *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore* had at last been published in 1911 for all to consult. In his introduction to *Dwaalstories* Marais describes Bleek's work as a "collection of beautiful folk tales, poems and songs [which] suggest

infinite possibilities." Indeed, it is directly from the Bleek and Lloyd archive that Marais derives one of his four pieces, "Die Reënbul". See their translation of "A Woman of the Early Race" and the "Rain Bull" on pages 182–99, dictated to them in 1878 by Hankasso, who had heard it from his mother.

Thus the pretence that all four "Dwaalstories", as when they first appeared in *Die Boerevrou* over May–August, 1921, were actually narrated to the recorder by one Outa Hendrik, is suspect. Supposedly he was over a hundred years old, making his annual visit to Rietfontein Farm to augment his dagga-supply, and was drawn, or is it sketched, by the young Erich Mayer in 1913 (who was thirty-seven!); he was actually as fictional as "H. v. R. V. O.", the pseudonym Marais used to duck all responsibility there for his amusing fabrications. (See the first Dwaalstorie in *Die Boerevrou*, May 1921, page 3.) When *Dwaalstories en Ander Vertellings* was first issued as a book by Nasionale Pers in 1927, Marais did decide to collect royalties under his own name, again making due acknowledgement to German Bleek. (See page 4 of the often reprinted 1959 Human & Rousseau edition.)

Marais also picked up from Bleek that *verdwaal* or *verdwalen* could mean 'to lose one's way' in a literary sense (Bleek and Lloyd 383). This suggests a story which went nowhere, or which wandered or rambled off without apparent purpose, and hence the intentional formlessness of his pieces. But he also knew from the same source, if not from personal experience, that 'Grass' Bushmen once spoke a different indigenous language from 'Flat' ones, and that Korannas, as Kabbo insists in his well-known account describing his arrest by the magistrate for sheep-stealing and being sent to the Breakwater with a bunch of them (see Bleek and Lloyd 293), were incomprehensible to him. The second piece of Marais's group, "Die Lied van die Reën", is specifically subtitled a "Koranna-dwaalstorie", while in a footnote to "Klein Riet-Alleen-in-die-Roerkuil" Marais does note the influence of Sesotho, so that it is stretching the reader's credulity to maintain that all his items derive from any common narrator. By 1927 when Blaise Cendrars put together his *L'Anthologie Nègre* of African folklore, it was known as far away as Paris that the Bushman-Hottentot peoples spoke 19 different languages with 6 dialects, Bantu-derived languages excluded. To suggest these were all now coalescing into the burgeoning Afrikaans is deluding.

Rather the obvious inspiration is Marais's precursor, who also freely acknowledges her indebtedness to Bleek: Sanni Metelerkamp, the first woman reporter on *The Cape Argus*. From October, 1912, she had published her adaptations as *Outa Karel's Stories* in the monthly journal *The State*, with Mayer-like illustrations by Constance Penstone. Published as *South African Folk-lore Tales*, she explains in her preface written in Cape Town, the series had purported to have a real character as storyteller—one Outa Karel—whom she had allegedly encountered just before serialisation began. Yet he appears as much influenced by Kabbo (whose name incidentally means 'Dream') as by Aesop the fabulator of old.

The height of in-jokes is that Outa Karel is also, in the second sentence of his very first tale, able to quote from none other than Eugène Marais's most famous poem up to that date, "Winternag" of 1905. ("A *skraal windje* blew from the distant mountains, bringing with it a mingled odour of karroo-bush, sheep-kraals and smoke from the Kafir huts [...]", (see Metelerkamp 1). From Metelerkamp Marais in turn lifts the idea of inserting into the prose occasional songs, which are incantations to personified natural forces (rain, daybreak). From there he also derives the deodorising habit of sprinkling ground buchu in the armpits, which Outa Karel had maintained was a *Hottentot* custom.

Then again, another source for Marais could well have been Tielman Roos, whose home in Pretoria's Sunnyside he shared for a while after the Great War. Apart from being an astute politician, Roos was also known for his Bushman researches conducted with a grant from the University of the Witwatersrand (see, for example, his account in *Bantu Studies*).

If Swart fails to pick up any of the above, she is in good company, as neither have her many distinguished sources, although Michael Wessels does concede in *Bushman Letters* on his page 263 that Marais "indiscriminately included materials from different Bushman languages as though they all belonged to a homogeneous tradition." But that is as far as he is willing to go.

In the recent rendering of *Dwaalstories* into English by Jacques Coetzee, such literary-critical dilemmas are avoided simply by entitling the work *The Rain Bull*. But then the subtitle spoils it all—*And Other Tales from the San*—because 'San' in our time is unacceptable as a racial classification for "Bushmen", and why is a near extinct 'Koranna' included as one of them? Purporting to be a 'translation', in Coetzee's version many a term yet remains untranslated into comprehensible English. For example, *ramkie* is footnoted as 'a stringed instrument', when Marais himself does better with that 'fiddle', while the dictionary gives 'guitar'. "Jacob Makding" from "Das-se-Kant" remains in the Afrikaans, which are translations anyway, and as for "Tonteldoos" from "Tuit-Miershoop": surely Tinder-box from Spouting Ant-heap would at least have referred Afrikaans-deficient readers to other Marais works.

Worse still, several details are *mistranslated*: for example, the crucial last line of "Die Lied van die Reën" of Joggom Konterdans, described as "Krom", which must mean one who speaks broken Afrikaans rather than is hunchbacked, is given as "O, the dance of our Sister!" But the original reads "O, die dans van ons Ou Sus!", respectfully suggesting an elder to whom obeisance should be tendered.

If in his *Gedigte*, published by Nasionale Pers in 1925—one of the first dozen volumes of poems in what was now officially Afrikaans—Marais extracted this piece to stand on its own, with his source now playing a proper violin and the title changed to "Die Dans van die Reën", this has become the preferred text of many previous translators. The sequence was initiated by Uys Krige (in the SABC's journal *Radio Week*, on

23 January 1948), in a version he admitted had run away with him, with some flora and fauna added (buffalo, springbuck and so on). This was reprinted in the launch number of *African Drum* in March 1951, as an example of what budding African poets should emulate; soon, however, the name was cut to *Drum* and the policy changed. More literal versions of “The Dance of the Rain” followed: from Anthony Thorpe (1956), C. J. D. Harvey with Guy Butler’s version of “Winter Night” (1962), through to an admirably faithful John Mateer (1997). Musical settings have ensued: from Hubert du Plessis and Priaux Rainier (1968).

There have been several other translations of Marais’s work as well, from Sarah Goldblatt herself with part of “Klein Riet” (1962), through Barbara Mackenzie with “The Honey-brown Pipit” (1969), Madeleine van Biljon, Johannes Meintjes and Wilma Stockenstrom (1973), with David Schalkwyk attempting “Little Reed-Alone-in-the-Whirlpool” in full (1985) and Hugh Finn (1989) with “Deep River”—Marais’s second most popular poem. None of the above revelations and distortions should detract from Marais’s reputation as a highly creative and skilful adapter, though to maintain his claim to a single source and an uncomplicated transmission at face value is no longer tenable.

The Soul of the White Ant

The next Marais work needing retitling is his *The Soul of the White Ant*, which was kicked off with an article in the New Year edition of *Die Burger* of 1923. Thereafter he contributed fifteen articles on the same topic to *Die Huisgenoot* over 1925–26 and, after a five-year break, concluded the series in 1931. Collected as *Die Siel van die Mier* for Van Schaik in 1934, it recorded his observations made particularly during a Waterberg drought some decades before and it was to prove the leading popular work of its kind in Afrikaans. The English version, published by Methuen in 1937, has taken Marais’s reputation wider afield, complete with illustrations supplied by Rentokil, including reprints in 1971, 1973 (Penguin) and a stripped down version in 2002, with several further translations, into Dutch (1958), German (1973) and Italian (1975) and so on.

Encomiums for this compelling work take off from Robert Ardrey’s often quoted rip-roaring punt: “As a scientist he was unique, supreme in his time, yet a worker in a science yet unborn.” They range from Doris Lessing (“Marais was solitary, but one of a scattered band of South Africans born of the veld, self-hewn, in advance of their time—and paying heavily for it”) through to Morné du Plessis, the local CEO of the World Wide Fund for Nature, who voted it as essential reading for those with an interest in conservation (“the keen observer who grasped nature’s evolutionary framework long before others did”, 12). At the same time it was listed as one of Africa’s 100 Best Books.

Other reviews from the blurbs of ‘this world famous classic’ are worth recuperating as well: “Eugène Marais was a scholar and a man of culture” (*The Times Literary*

Supplement); “His search is for the force that controls and determines the physical actions” (*The Scotsman*); “Marais is far more convincing than Maeterlinck” (*John O’ London’s Weekly*) and more.

Even *National Geographic* gives *The Soul of the White Ant* a commendatory mention in Glenn D. Prestwich’s “Dwellers in the Dark”, although the writer, based in Kenya, takes his title rather from S. H. Skaife (1889–1976), the government-employed naturalist, who published his *Dwellers in Darkness* on the same topic in 1955, making a point of ignoring Marais. In the extensive survey of the literature called *The Lives of Ants* by Laurent Keller and Elisabeth Gardon of 2009, there is no reference to Eugène Marais either. The termites themselves also get no mention, on the grounds that so-called ‘white ants’—apart from being similarly socially colonial creatures—are not ants at all, but actually real ants’ worst enemies.

In 2007 J. C. Kannemeyer and his team of student editors at Stellenbosch University at last published a definitive edition of *Die Siel van die Mier* (“The Soul of the Ant”, with Protea Bookhouse in Pretoria), with extensive notes on sources. This gathers together three further pieces on ‘white ants’ that Marais and his original publisher had neglected to assemble, nor ever worked into a final edit. But still, even Kannemeyer’s admirable recuperation is incomplete, for further pieces on the same subject by Marais, probably because they were inconveniently written in English and published in Johannesburg, are not integrated here, or even referred to, despite the fact that these were included among the *Waterberg* essays mentioned above, and one placed in dubious *Psyche* in 1926 is nowhere to be found.

Other extraordinary omissions as regards the Marais texts themselves, which may be gleaned from Skaife articles published before Marais got round to putting pen to paper, are glaring: that ‘white ants’ are seldom white; that they are not ants because they descend from cockroaches; and that on their famous nuptial flight the future queen (called an *alate*) is not only blind, but emits pheromones so that her entire totalitarian society of soldiers and nurses is guided by her smell. Nor does he remark that their spectacular ant-heaps, or more correctly termitaries, are armour-coated in their excreta, as surely every myrmecologist should note without even having to excavate them.

Despite Marais’s claim to extensive field-work in the Waterberg, he was only there intermittently, not immediately post-war, but from 1907 until 1915, while it was not until several years later, right next door to his lodgings in central Pretoria, that he got down to inspecting the inner sanctum of his fat *Isoptera* grubs. He might also have remarked that on St Helena island in the 1870s the public buildings had collapsed into ruins, thanks to another of his 2 600 species being inclined to assimilate the cellulose brought ashore from Brazil in a wrecked slave-ship made of wood. Having been imprisoned there during the Second Anglo-Boer War, the German Mayer would have known all about that.

In addition, it is simply not true that, with rainfall after a dry white season, his species were not preyed upon, especially by birds, even eagles, waiting to harvest them once they appeared. Humans are also known to gather them up as protein. Marais as a researcher was certainly sluggardly, so that it is not surprising that in the list of sixty sources for her *Guide to the Termite Genera of Southern Africa* Vivienne Uys also overlooks Marais.

The first translator of this work was one Winifred de Kok, who was hardly still a 'girl', as Clive Walker (128) calls her. Dr de Kok generally receives little credit for the public relations campaign she so effectively undertook. Born in Bethlehem in the Orange Free State (in 1893), where her father had been the magistrate, she was one of the first women to gain a doctorate overseas in Child Psychology. Surely she was known to Marais, while in other sources her achievements are disregarded, because in 1933 she had begun publishing articles in *The Outspan* on how to discuss sex and other questions with one's offspring. As South Africa's ever popular pre-war 'Dr Spock', she continued with her submissions there into the 1950s. She also produced travel pieces with photos, such as "We Go to Italy" from Berkshire to Alassio, accompanying the offspring of her husband's first wife and one of her own, the indomitable 'Tommy'. 'Daddy', her spouse, was A. E. (for Alfred) Coppard (1878–1957), the self-taught British author renowned particularly for his numerous volumes of Gothic-style fairy-tale stories. After a home visit to the couple in rural Essex, the editor of *The Outspan* managed to persuade Coppard to contribute to his magazine as well (on 17 April 1936).

What triggered De Kok's interest in Marais was his Coppard-like volume of half a dozen short stories of the day, *Die Huis van die Vier Winde* ("The House of the Four Winds") published by Afrikaanse Pers in 1933, one of several such collections. This she doubtless wanted her husband to promote. But once the correspondence between her and Marais was underway, he persuaded her that an English so-called *The Soul of the Ant* would make a better debut for him over there. So he proceeded to feed her the kind of embroidered tosh which was reflected uncritically in her preface once the word was out, which occurred for him posthumously. For example, Marais was not qualified as a medical doctor and thus his practice was fraudulent; he had never tamed baboons sufficiently to walk among them, but rather shot them with his Mauser to claim the bounty of five shillings a scalp. How the regent's escape from an imagined composite, a spiritual animal, was like a squirt of spermatozoa also beggars belief. At all events, De Kok's version of the main text, fifteen chapters long, is efficiently reliable, insofar as one may judge, Marais having insisted on last-minute emendations which never made it back into the Afrikaans original.

But the biggest scam of all was Marais's insistence, which De Kok faithfully repeats, and which has been recycled ever since as a fillip to Marais's international standing, that his *Siel van die Mier* had been rottenly plagiarised. Allegedly the guilty party was

none other than Count Maurice Maeterlinck, Nobel prize-winner of 1911, born in 1862 and the central figure of the Symbolist Movement. Both Maeterlinck and Marais started out as qualified lawyers rather than as ethologists, so the latter argued that, a year after he had published the first episodes of his work in *Die Huisgenoot*, Maeterlinck had lifted them to produce his crib, *The Life of the White Ant*. Furthermore, as Maeterlinck was originally Belgian, of course he could sneak a reading of the Afrikaans, thanks to Flemish: case closed ... even though Maeterlinck was born in Ghent and devoted his life to creating the new Belgian literature in French.

If one were to bother to retrieve the Marais pieces written after Maeterlinck's synthesis, moreover, one would note that the exact opposite is the truth. See "White Ants and their Communal Mind" in *The Star* (18 February, 1928), with "The Wonders of the White Ant" (25 February, 1928) and "How the White Ants Battled against Drought" (3 March, 1928), both in the same, in the last of which Marais actually cites Maeterlinck as a source. These demonstrate some convenient borrowings running quite the other way.

The fact is that Marais was generally saturated in Maeterlinck's mystical enigmas of the dream-world and knew his essay published in English in 1896 while Marais was in London, "The Tragic in Daily Life", which attempted to combat superficialities by tracing all life to its mysterious connecting links. Without Maeterlinck's fantastic *The Blue Bird* of 1909, Marais could hardly have written one of his own plays, in this case about children as well ("Waar die Blomme Geur", 1929), let alone many of his painstricken, morbid lyrics. In spite of the fact that Maeterlinck considered South African beetles rolled dung forward with their foreheads (see page 91 of his essay translated as "The Insect World", published in 1919), he was generally scrupulous about acknowledging his sources—especially Jean-Henri Fabre, the founder figure of both writers' insect-spying hobby.

Marais had also forgotten to stress to De Kok, as her preface makes evident, that he, too, was indebted to over a dozen such sources, as he does freely admit passim in his pages. While Marais's reputation as a populariser must remain supreme, Ardrey's fatuous promotional claim, quoted above, that Marais was really some pioneering lone individual out there pushing the frontiers of the developing sciences, must fall flat.

In addition, unremarked even by Marais himself and by all his subsequent biographers, he did in his lifetime fall victim to a copycat, who was an Italian blackshirt working hard at his English. He was Attilio Gatti, who also liked to claim he spent "most of [his] life among the wild animals of Africa". From *The Star* pieces mentioned here, as well as Marais's "How the Honey-guide Delivered a Man into the Coils of a Python" (in *The Star* of 5 March 1927), in his Chapter Ten of his *Tom-toms in the Night*, published in 1932, under the title "A Bird Full of Humour and an Insect Full of Ambition", Gatti went ahead and summarised Marais's so-called primary observa-

tions, without acknowledgement and in places verbatim. Because it makes a good story, he falls for the myth of that chattering, cerophagous, brood-parasiting *Indicator*'s habit of getting frantic if ignored by beehive-pillagers, and so leading them to venomous pythons in revenge. Alas, this is as apocryphal as that antbears are not supposed to engorge ants. (See Terry Oakley's "Waxing Lyrical" for calling the necessary bluffs.)

The Soul of the Ape

Because in Afrikaans *aap* refers to both monkeys and apes, this title has come to be used for Marais's baboon studies. Yet in English baboons are classified on the 'monkey' side of the family; 'apes' include bonobos, chimpanzees and gorillas which are not found wild in South Africa. The troops of chacmas of the famous montane gorge at Diepkloof where Marais conducted his observations were foraging in ever decreasing numbers, yet during his *annus mirabilis* of 1932 he churned out many pieces on them for *Die Vaderland*. These were collected as *Burgers van die Berge* in 1938 after his death, and a year later published in English as the beguiling *My Friends the Baboons*, edited with translations by his son, Brits-resident Eugène Charles (1895–1977), with a Methuen edition in 1939 and German translation following. The 1930s were indeed boom years for such translations both ways, with everything from *Tarzan* to *The Communist Manifesto* going into newly expanding Afrikaans, and the pick of Afrikaans-language work in reciprocation transferred into English and on.

In his preface to *My Friends* Eugène Junior maintained this work was merely "sparks from the anvil" of the "more detailed and scientific work", *The Soul of the Ape*, which his father had been struggling over since his Waterberg period, which he had attempted to finalise in the 1920s, but which was now lost.

However, the excerpts from *The Soul of the Ape* included in *My Friends the Baboons* duly turned out to have been a preview, as by 1969 the original monograph, written in impeccable English, had been dramatically 'discovered'.

Its fate was to be logrolled again by Ardrey, the American dramatist and Hollywood screenwriter. By then Ardrey had expatriated himself to Kalk Bay and was deeply into bloodthirsty hominids and the evolution of territoriality in Western aggression, and so, posing as a paleoanthropologist, he produced his 55-page introduction to support the 160 pages of his lone genius. Accordingly *The Soul of the Ape* went into an Anthony Blond edition in London and was in Penguin by 1973 (reprinted the same year).

Perhaps it was naïve to anticipate that Marais and devotee Ardrey would present elementary details such as that baboons have red eyes, cinked tails, their rumps show pink callosities, and in times of dearth that they do cannibalise their own progeny. On the contrary, this team was more into hierarchical domination and the phobic fear of primitivism, if ever African independence should cause a reversion to the state of nature. Cantankerously Ardrey kept maintaining that "Man is a predator whose

natural instinct is to kill with a weapon”, as he had asserted in all of four books before (especially in *The Territorial Imperative* 353).

In fact, the problem is that almost every detail of *The Soul of the Ape* is bogus. “Shortly after the War” it begins, though Marais did not arrive at Diepkloof till several years later. He continues that he had the opportunity “of living in very close proximity” to his troop, although the huts he had built nearby by Hereros escaping the South West genocide were soon under the slime-dump of the tin-mine he had failed to prospect for, with his workers buried in a landslide. Rather, he hived off to the monkey house at Pretoria Zoo to test if their captured specimens, like himself, would become addicted to cigarettes and booze. Nor is Diepkloof with the neighbouring Rietfontein farm actually *in* the Waterberg. For that one still had to slog up the Bokpoort, which he did only for the annual game-culling hunts intended to clear the region for settlement.

The Soul of the Ape also contains blatant contradictions: on the one hand baboon offspring are never to be separated from the bellies or backs of their parents, yet on the other, in the chapter “Baboons and human beings” in *My Friends*, a horde of baboon young plays miles away from its tribe around a clay-pit, mixed in with ‘piccanins’, between whom it is apparently hard to distinguish, even with binoculars. Of course Marais could never provide a conclusion to such a diffuse farrago.

Nonetheless, as an entry into the study of primate behaviour *The Soul of the Ape* received a fine press generally. For example, warmly reviewing the “old-fashioned tone” of the Atheneum edition in New York’s *Saturday Review* (on 23 August 1969), Roger Masters took exception to only one detail—that the sex-drive which cohered such primitive communities, owing to phyletic memory, could manifest itself among the blades as homosexual. Apparently this is a mere ‘mounting response’ construed as a ‘social greeting’ at cocktail hour, when that Byronic Hesperian depression takes hold of them too.

Better known, perhaps, was the tooth and claw attack launched by Marais’s nemesis, Lord Zuckerman, spurred by *My Friends the Baboons* published by Blond and Briggs in London, after a reissue to celebrate Marais’s centenary of birth. Born in 1904, young Solly had observed baboons on Table Mountain through his bedroom window in Rondebosch. Instead of sports at school, he developed an interest in their skulls. The owners of these he studied in dismal captivity for years when the administrator of the London Zoo, so that by 1932 he had formulated his *The Social Life of Monkeys and Apes*. Not surprisingly this established that, more than the environment, feral passion was the cement of any such society. On a return visit to his homeland in 1975, in a public lecture given at his alma mater, the University of Cape Town, he had the nerve to refer to the latecoming Marais as “a scientific impostor whose skilful pen had been steered by a lively imagination fuelled by drugs” (455). This sacrilegious assault on our legendary shaman led to a furore in the press and among the people such as would require a

separate article to describe. But not to be overlooked is *The Rand Daily Mail's* summary of the vendetta (on 29 September, 1975), "Bust-up among the Boffins over Marais".

This in turn cued an ongoing exposé of Marais's unreliability in *The Star*, culminating in E. A. Galpin of the then Naboomspruit remarking (on 30 March 1978) that Marais's claim that the *apiesdorings* growing on the banks of the Magalakwêna River were the largest trees in the world was "a rather puerile tall story". Besides California redwoods, they resembled stunted dwarves; and anyway, they were not even *Acacia galpinii*—a remark which closed the correspondence.

In retaliation, then, Marais's niece, Dr Inez Verdoorn (81), in *The Soul of the Waterberg*, went and named an early gymnosperm, which her uncle had apparently been the first to discover in 1926 in a stand of ramshackle cycads, *Encephalartos eugène-maraisii*. Anyhow, on 30 August, 1971, Anton Rupert you would have thought had put the cap on the entire debate, by endowing the Chair of Nature Conservation at the University of Pretoria—in the name of Eugène Marais.

But even though whiz Zuckerman later admitted he had made a gaffe, once when he was out of reach he was to continue the imbroglio into total onslaught in *The Times Literary Supplement* (on 16 January 1976). Under the title "Apes, Ants and Fantasies" he scathingly let rip, over a full page and a half, against all such charlatanism, point by point, even contradicting claims that Marais himself had never made (for example, that as every vivisectioning anatomist should know, baboons have no appendices). He concluded with a quote from Skaife himself to the effect that, if both troops of baboons and nests of termites were spiritual composites, then so were New York, London and even Cape Town.

In 1974 when Leon Rousseau completed his mildly hagiographising biography of Marais, understandably he skirted details of this demolition job, and continued to do so thereafter once the English-language version, *The Dark Stream: The Story of Eugène Marais*, was out in 1982. In the local Nationalist-supporting *News/check* meanwhile, Ardrey's fulminous hooey in *African Genesis*, dedicated to Marais with cute illustrations by Ardrey's wife, the actress Berdine Grunewald, was unreservedly welcomed (on 24 February 1967), although, when the recovered *Ape* was out, Peter Wilhelm (on 26 December 1969) displayed more reserve.

Yet the plaudits maintaining the eminence of Marais as the unique anima of formative Afrikaner culture continue unabated. For example, see Don Pinnock's tribute (in *Getaway* of October 2000) called: "Worker in a Science Yet Unborn", where Marais's portrait appears the wrong way round, so that his parting is on the right hand side like that of the Hitler he admired, whereas he actually preferred the left side, until he took to wearing fashionable hats. See also Elza Miles reviewing the two unaltered volumes of the *Versamelde Werke*, together with facsimile editions of both the *Ant* and the *Ape*, in the *Mail & Guardian* (on 12 May 2006). There she buys the whole package of the "natural scientist far ahead of his time" who, his limbs like a pincushion, suffering

yet more harrowing withdrawal, gave himself one last shot into the arms of morphia—in 1936 at Pelindaba (which means End of Story).

The Soul of the Snake

Unremarked in Rousseau's biography, and excluded from his hardly collected works, is the fact that, prior to his veld-work duo, even before he resorted to the Waterberg, Marais attempted, in his always spotless English, to write his *The Soul of the Snake*. The first chapter was entitled "Snakes and Snake-poison" and placed in Grahamstown's pro-Imperial periodical, *The African Monthly*, in September 1907 (in Volume 2, Number 9). Quoting always from German, but also from French and Italian sources dating back to 1781, as well as bytes from the King James Bible, Marais surely knew that his pastiche should none the less not be taken as a serious study. After all, it was written with all the skill and drive of an Edgar Allan Poe horror tale and is replete with humorous and entertaining comparisons (for instance, the fang is a hypodermic syringe, "the perforation in the needle never issuing at the point itself or the orifice will be blocked when inserted into living tissues" 359). Clearly this was also his way of advertising for a job, as he notes that one Lacerda had received £15 000 from the Brazilian government for his researches over there into antidotes to snake-bite toxins.

Regardless of these obvious gags, the po-faced response was immediate and venomous, principally in *The Port Elizabeth Telegraph* from Frederick Fitzsimons. He was the natural historian, director of the local museum and founder of the world-famous Port Elizabeth Snake Park, who in 1910 was to publish *The Snakes of South Africa*, and also to invent various lifesaving sera himself. Others, notably one 'Sjambok' in the next number of *The African Monthly*, decried the author's "mesmeric power".

Undaunted, Marais struck back with his lengthy second chapter, entitled "Some Additional Notes", which carried straight on with his own thesis, hardly taking the trouble in an aside to state that the Irish Mr Fitzsimons seemed "quite ignorant—and yet has the temerity to pose as an expert. A case of refusing to stage my play, but not disdaining to use my thunder" (592–93). With all its preposterous uncoiling, this retort was gleefully carried in that next number as well, but for the moment Marais seems to have left off there. Rather he moved to advise his ideological guide, Gustav Preller, who was then translating a version of *Jock of the Bushveld* into their new language as *Bosveld Jock*, for use in schools. While some are lifted into the canon, others become cannon-fodder, it seems, their *tour-de-force* becoming a *tour-de-forcené* (i.e. passionate derangement).

But the evidence that Marais did continue his snake studies, this time in the safer realm of Afrikaans, is found in *Die Brandwag* of 15 March, 1911, where in his "Slanggif" piece—while injecting badgers with the poison of ringed cobras—he ransacked Andrew Smith's five volumes on zoology of 1838–49 for further instances of ophidian

lore. Then more extracts were to be included in the magical volume of his 1933 journalism, collected by Rousseau from *Die Vaderland* as *'n Paradys van Weleer*, published in 1965. There at least two further chapters survive: “Die wêreld se mees gevreesde slang”, which continues the vendetta against Fitzsimmons (wrongly spelled) and “Gevleuelde dood”. All that is lacking in this missing volume is a mention that his malignant tamed mambas devoured termites, and were ingested in turn by those endearing baboons.

Gedigte

Important omissions in the coverage of Marais’s scattered output continue—too many to list here, but some at least should be recorded. In gathering together the recent re-edition of Marais’s poetry, the team of Kannemeyer et al. advertise that their edition of 2005, ironically entitled *Die Volledige Versamelde Gedigte*, goes beyond the original *Gedigte* and the *Versamelde Gedigte* of 1933, which had reached twelve impressions by 1945. Indeed, a bonus here is the incorporation of nine early poems contributed by our Swinburnian decadent in his adolescence—in English over 1885–87—to a previously unexpected source, the bilingual *Paarl District Advertiser*.

Yet a trawl through other hitherto equally unlikely archives would have revealed more. For example, from *The Cape Illustrated Magazine* (of Volume 8, Number 7 of March, 1898) may be recovered an early impressive short story Marais (also in English) called “The Brand-wacht” (old spelling). This is a part-documentary, obviously written in Pretoria before his departure for the metropolis of London. It concerns General Joubert’s campaign of a decade before in the then Eastern Transvaal to smoke out Sekhukhune and his Mapochs in the caves about Steelpoort and Magnet Heights. The sentry in question recounts that one night he was holding a streamlet which tribal warriors needed to reach to replenish their water supply, a theme which would recur in later fiction and with apocalyptic implications. Here the massacre continues with the hanging of Chief Mampoer in 1885—with the survivors held in Pretoria’s state prison. These, it is implied, are chivalrous and well-disciplined, not to mention are Marais’s informants.

For all that, with the poetry recapturing programme seemingly finalised, there are similar startling lacunae. Considering that in *De Kat* of June, 2001, Paul Zietsman revealed that, in the same year that he wrote the immortal protest poem, “Winternag”—foundational text of the Afrikaner struggle for independence, although it may well really be about morphine withdrawal—Marais also penned a magnificent poem (in English) about “England and a golden age.” This was to be established post-war in the pristine Magaliesberg. Reproduced on page 38 of Zietsman’s article, this was actually typed out and sent by Marais to Lord Milner himself, the sponsor of Marais’s *Land en Volk*, as a placatory gesture intended to declare his loyalty to the new regime,

source of his funds. Doubtless other such ambiguous fawnings have been preserved. To have excluded such items, on the grounds that they dent the constructed image of Marais as a struggling nationalist patriot, amounts to flagrant censorship.

Instead the Kannemeyer team ducks into pages of notes about orthographic problems, which, as it is now exactly a century since the publication of Charles Pettman's glossary of Afrikanerisms, are admittedly invaluable, but serve only to baffle the Marais story further. Why, for example, in the annotations to "Waar Tebes in die stil woestyn" did the editors not take the opportunity to record that 'Tebes' and 'Mara' mentioned in the poem appearing in the *Boerevrou* on 25 March, 1919, as a column-stopper to his article about his epigraphical researches in London and Cairo into deciphering hieroglyphics, undoubtedly does not refer to some koppie on the Springbok Flats and a railway siding in the Zoutspanberg, as Rousseau was wont to claim? Obviously Marais means the actual Thebes, a renowned source of opium and its alkaloid derivative, and hence the bitter waters of the original Mara of Exodus XV, 23. Since Marais as a Justice of the Peace was wont to ride into a dorp called 'Nylstroom' for a beer and in a hand of poker to wield his favourite Skoppensboer, the false, deceitful knave of spades, one may assume that these geographical mislocations will persist.

Another aspect needing commentary is that a high percentage of their items (16 out of 63) are translations or adaptations from other languages. Marais's juvenile readings of Longfellow set the course with his very first poem (from the German, a language he will become obsessed with once his fascination with fascism sets in). Then there is Swinburne again with a summary of his "The Garden of Proserpine" and, interestingly enough, versions of other non-establishment poets, like the Scottish Romantic, Robert Burns, and the Irish Anthony Raftery and Emily Lawless. Motifs are taken even from Rudyard Kipling in doubting mood. So only a handful of poems are original and often as not mere *rymelary* to fill space in a newspaper or periodical at that; hardly sufficient to constitute any poet's debut volume, and a mere fraction of the output of another bilingual poet, his near coeval and legally practising Bushveld doctor, C. Louis Leipoldt, to whom Marais always referred respectfully (see his "Regte Spoke in Natuur" in *Die Huisgenoot* of 17 and 24 September 1926).

A further detail of memorabilia that could have been noted is that the manuscript of that charming villanelle, "Hoe gaan die jare verby", first published in *Die Huisgenoot* on 9 October, 1931, was scratched out with a pencil stub and burnt matches on borrowed paper and is preserved under 091 MS in Johannesburg Public Library's Strange Collection. There it was deposited by his collaborator, Joan Couzyn, sculptor of the very bust of Marais which presides over their card catalogue, forever unconsulted, it seems. Yet every scholar would resent not having in hand what is now established as Marais's devastating final line (in "Let Me Not Die" on page 117): "I always loved the wild things best."

An additional footnote to be made about what we will have to call Marais's (*Almost*) *Complete Collected Poems* is that examples available in Rousseau's *The Dark Stream* have also not been copied. Undoubtedly the following needed to be inserted into the sequence: see the 1999 English edition's page 57 for "Die Sprinkaan en die Droogte", page 193 for "Die Afrikaanse Pop" and page 469 for "Die Townenares", with fragments from other poems on pages 98, 128 and 131. Only then would Marais achieve his full position as the key poet of the pre-Dertiger generation, as Kannemeyer himself was inclined to claim (see, for example, his survey of Afrikaans-language poetry in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia* (Preminger and Brogan 1183).

Short stories

Marais's numerous short stories also merit full retrieval and sorting. The failure to capture examples like "The Brand-wacht" in English has been mentioned above. For the rest the Afrikaans examples remain clustered as per the early selections and only available in the *Versamelde Werke*, grouped piecemeal according to the needs of the old Trekker mythology of nation-building within the syllabus. Only in 1948 did the first of three selections reach a more adult readership, once the more progressive Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel (APB) of Johannesburg took over the task. Their *Keurverhale* of that year, however, had Marais's name wrongly spelled on the cover, with an acute accent for the grave on Eugene.

Even so, their inclusion there of an extraordinary science fiction tale in the style of H. G. Wells, "Ondergang van die Tweede Wêreld", originally published in *Die Vaderland* in three episodes in May 1933, should not have appeared without some responsible editorial attempt at contextualisation (mention of factors like the impact of the Depression, with unemployment and starvation looming, the massive retreat of country folk to the cities due to the recurring drought and the racist bent of *Mein Kampf*, etc.). Purporting to be pieced together by the narrator's compatriot, one Dr de Kok surviving over in where else but Europe's Hamburg, from fragments surviving in a leather bag of documents found on an escaped native, one Buffel, the story recounts the effects of climate change bringing about the end of the civilised world. The last days of the drying up for the planet, owing to the Spenglerian decline of the West, had always been a hot topic in the macabre, malarious vision of old tramp Marais, but here the line he shoots is practically intolerable. Certainly it is not merely, as Elza Miles suggests in her review, about the collapse of civil services once termination is nigh. Scenes of utter horror include the burghers of Pretoria rounding up the entire Coloured population of men, women and children, and surrounding and disposing of each and every one of them with antiquated roers and bayonets. When the last three refugee blacks are discovered in the wreckage, the narrator and his glamorous sidekick execute them point blank in cold blood. So a raging racial holo-

caust of hatred caused by terrifying societal breakdown is what Marais predicted, consequent more on his addiction to grains of illegal substance than to truth.

At Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel Marais's works fell into the hands of the next rising talent attempting to foster a bilingual South African literary tradition. He was Herman Charles Bosman (1905–51), who, if anyone did, knew the impact London's Yellow Fin de Siècle of the 1890s, and then the Expressionist 1920s, could have on a sensitive colonial. In his early poetry he also followed the credo that intuition and the imagination should be stressed above scientific fact. All those literary ballads with neat envoys they had in common could not have derived from any other source.

In fact, Bosman had heard of Marais before from another poet, a colleague convict in Pretoria Central Prison called Beauty Bell. His lines were less aesthetic ("I done my nut in / And punched a bastard screw"), as Bosman records in his tongue in cheek memoir of 25 December 1931, in *The New L. S. D.*, where in subsequent pages a crucial fall-out between Bosman and Marais's guru, Preller, is also enacted. Bell was the attempted safeblower Marais the lawyer had come to know, but failed to defend, in Bronkhorstspuit in September 1921; as a result he was serving the indeterminate sentence. Once, as Rousseau fails to trace, he had even purloined the Orange Free State's mace of parliament in order to melt it down for charity.

As a result of the wounding Preller fracas against young rebels, Bosman omits any mention of Marais in his summary of the achievements of early Afrikaans-language writing (in *The South African Opinion*, carried over January to March 1946). Also, in the *Trek* of September 1948, having recently returned from the Low Countries himself, he slams the concept maintained by Marais of there being a 'Dietse Kultuur' of Low German-speakers, whereby any Belgian, for example Maeterlinck, could without difficulty appropriate Afrikaans. Bosman pointedly reclassified Afrikaans as an African language and that was that.

At all events, albeit sneakily, as Bosman fell in with APB, he did devote two of his greatest short stories to topics dealt with by Marais. Both appeared in *The Forum* in July 1950, showing that Marais's *The Soul of the White Ant* and *My Friends the Baboons*, recently reprinted, were very much on Bosman's mind. The first is actually called "White Ant" and hilariously satirised Marais's sobersided take on that destructive vermin which even has ingested the pages of the handbook describing how to eradicate them. It is an entertainment relished by audiences to this day. The second is more jibing still, now that the apartheid Population Registration Act was being enacted to make ethnic separation legal. Called "Birth Certificate", this one demonstrates that, without discrimination, parental humans really do cherish their descendants, no matter that their eyes are somewhat close together and their faces hairy snouts.

Finally, Bosman understood that Marais's fabulous derangements—and his anthropomorphising of the animal kingdom—had inhibited the function of his common sense. For that he turned to the works of C. R. Prance (1872–1955), the writer

and journalist who was settled in the Waterberg for far longer than Marais. Prance wrote more reliably about it as well, pioneering the useful technique of deploying a single storyteller (in his case, Tante Rebella) to organise into a credible whole the disparate experiences of that former borderland.

In conclusion, this article proposes that a re-edit of the entire oeuvre of Eugène N. Marais would be appropriate in order to assert professional scholarly standards. Initially this would include all hitherto unretrieved items, without language prejudice. Reorganisation should then proceed, not according to the former categories of interim packages for cash and hand to mouth delivering to deadline, forever recycled, but with genre divisions and historical timelines respected and critically in place. An edition of his uncollected letters would also serve to substantiate the chronology. The rich, unrivalled trove of heritage Marais still offers all South African readers deserves no less.

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