

admire as a seminal work that really affected them. I always look for Anglo-Irish works, and for Anglo-Indian works to some extent, for the same themes that are being mined.

When you boil it all down, I think that I'm a very self-conscious writer, but I'm a very uncontrived writer in the sense that I could never sit down and write a thriller. I'd find it a waste, so I would have to write something that was meaningful, and what's meaningful to me is very narrow. Of necessity I would probably be reworking those neuroses in one form or another, with a few literary sleights of hand, maybe, but the themes would be the same.

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Mythic Bushmen in Afrikaans Literature The *Dwaalstories* of Eugène N Marais¹

Sandra Swart

"*Dwaalstories* [Wandering Tales] are among the greatest stories in Afrikaans."
N.P. van Wyk Louw (1961: 112-113)

"[Wandering Tales] is the right name. The man's mind is wandering."
Reverend A J Louw² (Roussseau 1982: 379)

Abstract

Previous debate around Eugène N Marais' *Dwaalstories* [Wandering Tales] has been about their 'authenticity'; Marais maintained that an itinerant Bushman, whom he had met while in the Waterberg, had narrated them, and that he had then written them up as a series of prose-poems. More interestingly for the present, the stories fill a gap in the analysis of western writing on Bushmen. They shed light on Afrikaans depictions of Bushmen, and they reveal the role played by Marais in laying a foundation for modern discourse on the Bushmen. White settler images of the Bushmen in popular writings have received historiographical analysis, but writings in Afrikaans have been omitted, distorting the chronology and content of the historiography. In Marais' tales the 'Bushman characteristics' known to us from later writers such as Laurence van der Post are first displayed.

"I want to try to recount a few wandering tales of Old Hendrik's. Unfortunately I never transcribed them word for word. I did jot down a few after he told them..." noted Eugène N Marais at the beginning of *Dwaalstories*, his anthology of Bushmen poems (Marais 1959:7).³ He maintained that an itinerant Bushman, whom he had met during his sojourn in the Waterberg, had narrated these stories, which he had then written up as a series of prose-poems. These poems, "Riet alleen in die roekuil" (Riet alone in the whirlpool), "Die vaal koestertjie" (The grey pipit), "Die lied van die reën" (The song of the rain), and "Die reënbul" (The rain bull), have had enduring success since their publication from May to August 1921 in *Die Boerewou*, a prominent Afrikaans cultural magazine. Marais himself told Gustav Preller that the poems had brought a "sea-breeze over the sand dunes [to his] 'arid desert-life'" and that there was a surge of public interest in his work from "complete strangers".⁴ In 1927 they were anthologised as *Dwaalstories en Ander Vertellings* (Wandering Tales and Other Tales), and had three printings as a children's book in the series 'Ons Kinderrakke' (Our Children's Bookshelf). M S B Kritzinger called them a "beautiful exploration of the primitive mentality" (1936:41). In 1959 they were published separately as *Dwaalstories*, with sketches by Katrine Harries, as

one of the first publications of the then recently established publishing house, Human & Rousseau. In his critical discussion of Afrikaans literature, N P van Wyk Louw celebrated the *Dwaalstories* as representing some of the "best writing in Afrikaans" (1961: 112-113). Their popularity has continued – a recent critic called them "one of the most exquisite books in Afrikaans" (Van Rensburg 1987: 80) – and their lasting success is also demonstrated by their repeated inclusion in canonical anthologies and in other kinds of production.⁵

Previous debate has been over the authenticity of the poems (as to whether or not Old Hendrik really related them), but more interesting for my purposes is the gap that they fill in the analysis of representations of Bushmen, the light they shed on Afrikaans depictions of Bushmen, and particularly the role played by Marais in laying the foundation of modern discourse.⁶ Here, I explore the content and context of Marais' Bushman tales, revisiting historical understandings of the *Dwaalstories* from their publication until the present. Although white settler images of the Bushmen in popular writings have received historiographical analysis, there is a striking lacuna in this analysis in that Afrikaans writings which achieved popularity have been omitted and the chronology and content of the historiography has been distorted.⁷

After centuries of being regarded as vermin in need of extermination, Bushmen have come full circle to represent pristine, authentic humanity. This image has seeped into public consciousness, particularly through the writings of Laurens van der Post.⁸ Wilmisen (1995) has recently argued that the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s–60s produced the conditions under which investigations of the Bushmen proliferated and that in this environment of imminent nuclear annihilation, civil existence and cultural life as the West knew it seemed under threat; techno-democratic modernity no longer seemed invulnerable and regression to prehistoric social forms appeared likely. Attention was thus increasingly directed towards humankind's primordial roots. The anthropological-forager studies were explicitly framed in apocalyptic terms, thus preparing for a post-nuclear return to the Stone Age (Lee and De Vore 1968:3). Ethnographers, film-makers and writers responded by imagining a primitive past as a foil to the apocalyptic present. By the 1970s and 80s, a regulation-issue 'Bushman tracker' was standard equipment in most Border War fiction (Maughan Brown 1987:116) for a sympathetic Bushman portrayal provided insurance against accusations of racism.⁹ In post-apartheid South Africa, Bushmen still have political currency as Tomasejli (1992) has argued. Masiela (1987) has made the romantic contention that the San (as he calls the Bushmen) could be used to mediate between white and black South Africans, just as Van der Post believed the Bushman could be a mirror in which both black and white could see themselves and find that "neither of us is better than the other" (1961: 11). The mythic Bushman was not, however, something invented in the 1950s – there already existed a strong Afrikaans tradition of 'Bushman literature'.

Historiographical contextualisation

Marais' mythic images should be located within the historiography of western images of the Bushman. There are two major traditions, although many variations exist between the two poles which may be loosely classified as derogatory and sympathetic, but their composition is complex. The first is based on early nineteenth-century reports of the Bushmen, and from the 1860s (after the 1859 publication of the *Origin of Species*) it draws on Social Darwinist ideas of survival of the fittest race. The Bushmen are described as non-human, savage, and their extinction is deemed a good thing. The second school, propagating what Voss, for example, calls the modern myth, subscribes to the neo-Romantic modern image of the Bushman – "independent, noble, gentle, and as adaptable to Nature as he is wise in her ways" (1987: 34).

A brief chronology will reveal the diachronic nature of the Bushman image and its dependence on changing white needs. Several early commentators were sympathetic. At the beginning of the nineteenth century they were seen as "an illustration of the freedom, simplicity and general closeness to nature which the age admired" (Fairchild 1928: 362). From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, there had been an ongoing dialogue on the Noble Savage created by poets, travellers and artists; it was a discourse of natural goodness versus corrupt European society, oneness with nature versus alienation from it, untutored wisdom versus false sophistication, social community versus alienation, and equality versus European hierarchy. The myths of the golden age were transmuted to the New World. There had also been a counter imagery of the savage: ugly, stupid, beast-like, irrational and degenerate (Liebersohn 1994). Several generations of historians have reconstructed the intellectual origins of Noble Savagery and its antithesis, as a set of fictions that reveal more about their authors than their subjects (Fairchild 1928: 299) – but not in South Africa as Pringle's poems demonstrate (Voss 1982). Thomas Pringle, who travelled to South Africa in 1820, projected a sympathetic image, as did John Philip, who wrote in 1828 that the Bushman was not irredeemable; both argued that the Bushman had suffered a fall from a previously pastoral existence. These writings placed the Bushmen in genetic and cultural isolation – Pringle, for example, likened them to Ishmael. But as the century wore on and broader public contact with Bushmen increased, the image changed. Voss has demonstrated that the dominant image of the Bushman from the 1850s to the 1920s is of a barely human, duplicitous, cruel savage. When a group of Bushmen were exhibited in London in 1853, Charles Dickens noted:

Think of the [Bushman] who have been exhibited about England for some years. Are the majority of persons – who remember the horrid little leader of that party in his festering bundle of hides, with his filth and antipathy to water... and his cry of "Qu-u-u-u-ai!" (Bosjesman for something desperately insulting, I have no doubt) – conscious of an affectionate yearning towards

that noble savage, or is it idiosyncratic of me to abhor, detest, abominate, and abjure him?
(1853: 337)

The Times wrote, "in appearance they are little above the monkey tribe, and scarcely better than mere brutes of the field" (Maughan Brown 1987:117) and an anonymous commentator said that they were inferior to the beaver (which could at least build) and had "scarcely any attribute of humanity" (Anon. 1847:39). In 1850, Livingstone suggested that they were the most "degraded specimens of the human family" (Voss 1982:26). In the immediate post-Darwin era, the Bushmen were found to lack humanity, their minimal technology being insufficient to distinguish them from animals.¹⁰ In the late 1870s, Anthony Trollope, who was visiting southern Africa, called them "cruel, and useless" cannibals (Voss 1982:27). John Philip had suggested it was possible to civilise the Bushmen but a century later G.M. Theal wrote, "It can now be asserted in positive language that the Bushmen were incapable of adopting European civilization" (Voss 1982:28). Sarah Gertrude Millin wrote of them as "little, yellow, monkey-like people" (Coetzee 1987:41).

Voss (1987) and Wright (1978) both suggest that literature may have functioned to deal with guilt generated by the process of the Bushmen's extinction, a phenomenon that persisted until the 1920s. This approach is epitomised by William Charles Scully:

Dust are those fugitive pygmies, blown by the winds of the desert,
Crushed and heedlessly trodden 'neath heels of hurrying change:
Hunters and haters of men, their hatred has crumbled to ashes...
Clumsy weapons of stone, rough bows and a handful of arrows –
Relics of hunger and hate – only remain of their lives... (1898: 13)

And the derogatory attitude could serve this process too, as in Francis Carey Slater's *The Karroo* (1924) where he denies that the Bushmen are human:

In the far days that are gone there dwell in the ways of the desert,
Scattered and wandering pygmies, hideous, filthy, and squat;
Fitting kindred of Ishmael – their hands against all men were lifted –
Hating all that was human with blind inveterate hate. (1947: 97)

The image of the Bushman changed in specific circumstances. Necessity could lead to alliances between white settlers and Bushmen which resulted in an ideological shift. The dyad of settler-Bushman solidarity against the Nguni-speakers may be traced from the Eastern Cape frontier wars of the 1840s to the Namibian border war of the 1980s. For Harriet Ward, wife of a colonial officer, Bushmen were "the real Aborigines of the land... and... a keen-witted race" (1848:140). Ward's image is dictated by the ideological needs that followed the military needs of the time. Among their "allies employed with the army [in the Frontier War of 1846-47] are 150 Bushmen, with poisoned arrows" (1848:176). Perhaps as important as the Bushmen's military assistance was their ideological enlistment on the colonial side:

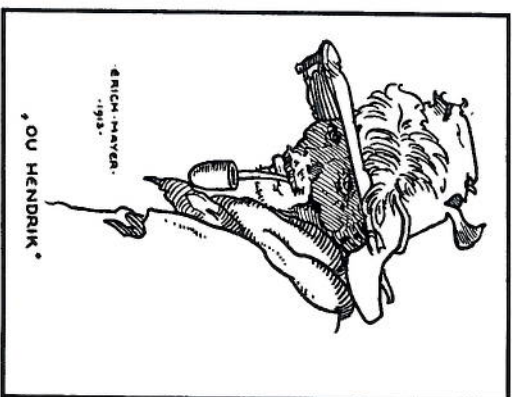
Notwithstanding the broad assertion of our mock philanthropists at home, that we are not justified in taking from the Kaffir "the land of his fathers", the country is only his by might – no more his than ours, he having driven the aborigines from the dwelling-place God originally led them into. Where are those poor Bushmen, now? Far up the country among the steep recesses of the mountains, where they form a link between the animals of the wilderness and human nature. Another civilization may follow them when the land of their forefathers shall be under British rule! (1848: 176)

Ward's view was not typical of the nineteenth century, but it is an early example of the use of Bushmen as justification of white land-ownership. The earliest and in many ways the most explicit example of such justification is George William Stow's *The Native Races of South Africa* (written in 1880, published in 1905)¹¹ which helped lay the foundation of the modern myth. It was subtitled *A History of the Intrusion of the Hottentots and Bantu into the Hunting Grounds of the Bushmen, the Aborigines of the Country*, and consolidates the modern view that white settlers were only as guilty as the Nguni, both were intruders.¹² In this way, the fear that whites did not belong was assuaged. Similarly, in 1898 William Charles Scully mentions the possibility of a "still older race" driven out by the Bushmen as we ourselves might be driven out "by some race developing a 'fitness' superior to our own" (1898:13).

Maughan Brown has asked why sympathetic accounts of Bushmen did not appear as soon as the Bushmen no longer posed a threat and could prove useful as collaborators (1987:118). The answer is that they did, but in the Afrikaans literary tradition. Although Afrikaans poetry perceived itself as of white culture only, this did not mean that other cultures were unmentioned.¹³ On the contrary, sympathetic portrayals of other races abounded. Marais' protégé, A.G. Visser, for example, wrote using Xhosa and Zulu motifs; ID du Plessis wrote about the Malay community; D.J. Opperman in the 1940s and Van Wyk Louw's *Klipwerk* in the 1950s used rural folklore.¹⁴ Many 'Hottentot' stories were published in *Ons Kynjiti* from 1896 to 1906 and 'Bushman Animal Tales' were common. Marais' "Die vaal koesterfijie" and G.R. von Wieligh's "Die Wind en die Windvoël"; G.C. and S.B. Hobson's "Kalaharë-Kaskenades"; G.P. Lestrade's "Die leu, die wolf en die jakkals"; and C.L. Leopoldt's "Die wit hondjie" (Nienaber and Nienaber 1946).¹⁵ The iconic Bushman was discovered as storyteller by G.R. von Wieligh (1919-1921) and by Marais in particular, and from their writing grew a genre of Afrikaans literature: folklore, especially animal tales, transmitted from Bushmen to white, especially Afrikaans, children.¹⁶ In 1946, two nationalist literary historians accepted that as 'Hottentots' spoke Afrikaans as their mother language, these stories were part of the Afrikaans literary heritage (Nienaber and Nienaber 1946: 13).

Just as Van der Post was to claim to have memories of bedtime stories recounted by his Bushman nurse,¹⁷ Marais claimed to have heard the stories from the nomadic Bushman, Old Hendrik, in order to give authenticity to his poems. He

certainly did come into contact with Hendrik, who visited Rietfontein annually from 1913 to 1921, and Marais may have heard the story outlines from him.¹⁸ Although Marais was not averse to using fictional narrators in his writing, the origin of these stories has been the subject of debate. He admitted drawing on the writings of G R von Wielligh (1919-1921) and W H I Bleek (1827-1875)¹⁹ who fifty years earlier had investigated Bushman languages and 'literature'. The work of both was available in the Cape Library. The often sophisticated Afrikaans idiom in Marais' stories has led some critics to contend that he invented them (Du Randt 1969: 36). Interestingly, Van Melle thought, in contrast, that the use of the high idiom militated against Marais' having written the poems as he was not capable of high, poetic prose (1953: 41). His first academic biographer, Du Toit, contended that Marais used his (white) talent to give primitive art a naïveté and thereby deliver something of beauty to which the Bushman-civilisation, using the stories of Bleek as yardstick, had not yet ascended (1940:193). Similarly, the critic Van Melle noted that they were stories told for "hundreds of years by parents to children" and begun in a time when Bushmen had a "greater measure of civilisation than [they have] today" (1953:43).²⁰ Interestingly, in connection with the issue of representing the Bushman through a western lens, Marais was ambivalent about Old Hendrik himself. He refused to let a photograph of Old Hendrik be used in the revised edition, but was happy with a sketch by Erich Mayer:²¹



The image created by Marais was of a pristine, innocent figure built on neo-Romantic principles. (It may also be argued that there was a political need for a real aboriginal, or first, inhabitant of the land, as justification for removing it from Nguni-speakers.) The rise of this modern image, which replaced the Bushmen's

portrayal as inhuman vermin, coincides with the rise of industrialisation and urbanisation. Whereas the justificatory myth was specific to settler circles, this later existential crisis was part of a wider Euro-American or western anxiety. There was – and is – a nostalgic need for a vision of the utopian past in contrast to modern, alienated individualism. The 'wild' Bushman – as the last of the South African societies to be proletarianised – functioned as an icon of authenticity, being innocent, pristine and child-like (Wilmsen 1989). This was encouraged by the Bushmen's endearingly paedomorphic features (appearing neotenus, childlike and diminutive), and is indicated by repeated use of the diminutive in approval.²² This school is best represented by the writings of Laurens van der Post. His Bushmen became the Jungian archetype of authentic humanity, in that "his conscious mind corresponded in some sort to our dreaming selves" (1989:10; Wilmsen 1995). Van der Post believed that modern civilisation was degenerate and that "[t]he Bushman was a walking pilot scheme of how the European man could find his way back to values he had lost and he needed for his own renewal" (1988:26). In 1926 the literary magazine *Voorslag* appeared, with Van der Post, the junior '*Voorslagter*', claiming literary-historical descent from Stow.²³ Van der Post was certainly aware of Marais, indeed praising him for avoiding too close an involvement with politics (1985:39-43).

Marais' work helped lay the foundation of this school. He, too, saw the Bushmen as little windows into innocence, explicitly urging anyone interested in the psychology of the child to read his poems.²⁴ His folkloric poems helped render the Bushmen prisoners of their reputation – so that they were regarded not as a poverty-stricken rural proletariat, but as a romantic template; his was a static, synchronic view of a society frozen in time. Marais did not simply repeat verbatim Bushman stories in the manner of Von Wielligh (1919-1921) and Bleek (1911). His stories were entirely different in structure from the Bushman stories previously collected, with their long sentences, repetitious style, and circular rather than linear plot and lack of adjectives (Watson 1991:14-19).

As Kannemeyer (1978:234), Van Wyk Louw (1961) and others have argued, the story structures were derived from western fairy stories. Although Marais probably did draw on such stylistic resources, he used the *faux-naïf* Bushman world to represent the idea of 'simple' people thinking 'simple' thoughts.²⁵ Kannemeyer (1978:297) notes that the stories were unique in that they did not slot into any known genre of Afrikaans literature pre-1930.²⁶ Although similar to, for example, the stories of Sangiro and P J Schoeman, in that they used animal characters and Bushmen as subject matter, they were the first to present the Bushman as aesthetically beautiful rather than in a comical light.

The first story, "Riet Alone in the Whirlpool", concerns the eponymous Riet whose name was given to him by his grandfather for his impatience ('riet' means reed). There comes a time of great terror for the clan which requires immediate

action. (This terror is never named, but it may be the threat of another tribe.) Riet is a good runner, used by his group to deliver messages, so the elders decide to send him to enlist the help of Red Joggun. (Gilfillan (1996:151) suggests he may be a neighbouring clan leader or this may be a corruption of 'Kaggen', the Supreme Being.) It is a journey that Riet could make in a day, and he leaves before sunrise. But Riet exhibits the sin of pride, being too sure of his skill as runner. Before he leaves, he is warned to watch out for the magic of the evil Nagalie. Riet ignores the advice and opens himself up to her witchcraft – she blinds him to dangers, costing him valuable time. She sends a whirlwind in the guise of a young woman to mislead him and then a buck in the shape of a young Bushman to challenge him to a race – in the wrong direction. In his arrogance and desire to win, Riet forgets his mission. Night overtakes him and he arrives at daybreak back in his own village, which he mistakes for that of Red Joggun. His people's fury ends in his execution: "*En daar het hulle die vuurtjie doodgemak van Riet alleen in die roerkuif*" (And there they killed the fire of Riet alone in the whirlpool). The story thus fits the discernible pattern of a hero's quest narrative in the fairy stories of western Europe. Indeed, Gilfillan notes that it is an almost textbook example of the European 'wonder tale', particularly in its initial stage. Whether this means that Marais superimposed his own narrative structure upon the story is debatable; certainly the other poems follow a more traditional 'Bushman' form. It is also debatable whether this superimposition renders the work of art less 'authentic' and, further, less valuable as a work of art. (Less controversially, if this were the case, the work would unquestionably be less useful as a historical source.)

The second story, "The Grey Pipit", revolves around a young girl, Nampiti, who receives power from a magical little bird she once helped. This power enables her to turn into a lion at night so that she can hunt food to feed her enfeebled grandmother. When Nampiti finally marries a local man, Ouktep, he comes to realise her ability, which Nampiti then loses. This story is closer to Watson's description of Bushman oral narratives in which there is no closure and the story simply peters out (1991:14-19).

The third story, "The Rain Bull", is of an old woman, Galepa, who lives with her two granddaughters in the mountains. Fearing her witchcraft, the community exiles them and the three live a lonely, outcast existence. One of the granddaughters, Nampiti, is driven insane with solitude and begins to hear voices in the pond where she draws their water. Her grandmother gives her potions to rid the pond of the corruption. The following day she throws the herbs into the water and a young hunter arises, full of sweet words. The next morning Nampiti arrives dressed as a bride and she joins the hunter in the water. Her sister and grandmother find only her footprints.

The fourth story, "The Song of the Rain", tells of the law that in times of desperation each would help his neighbour. One village, Bessebone, was blessed with water and food in abundance but their new leader, Jakob Makding, was a

hard, arrogant man, who refused to help the villagers during an unexpected famine. This ruthless man had one soft spot, for music. An old woman, Nasi-Tgam, declared that Heitsi-Eibib (the lawgiver) had said the dead awaited the master songmaker, which would mean the end of Jakob Makding. There was in a nearby town an unknown musician who was very diffident and modest, and of whom no one had ever heard, called Joggom Konterdans. He constructed a fiddle out of elements of the veld; his playing was overheard by Nasi-Tgam and she thought he was perhaps the one the dead awaited. Joggom then played the song of the rain. Makding was powerless before him. He called on his vultures and his great snake, his soldiers and his subjects, but his people simply danced to the song of the rain. This story illustrates the gyrating narrative structure, with a non-linear sense of causation, that Watson says is typical of oral Bushman narratives (1991:14-19).

Marais observed that Afrikaans children had always had an affinity for the Bushman stories, as so many were supervised by Bushmen domestic servants; the historian Irving Hexham has, in his study of rural oral tradition, unearthed successive retellings of the initiation of white Afrikaans-speaking children into the narrative world of the Bushmen. In the introduction to the *Dwaalstories*, Marais describes the Grobler children as all more or less raised by an old Bushman, Outa Flip, who was a famous storyteller. He notes too that the stories by Outa Flip that rhymed revealed their western influences, as Bushmen know nothing of rhyme. Marais claimed that his recounting was unadulterated and had a deeper meaning than stories of the Grobler-type (by which he meant Outa Flip's stories) with their bastardised rhymes. His poems appeared at the juncture when society no longer feared the Bushmen (indeed, after near genocide, it could afford to pity and begin to romanticise them) and when the growing urbanisation of the Afrikaner contributed to a renewed interest in their vanishing rural heritage. As Voss has observed, "[b]y virtually removing the historical people it purports to re-create, it has made the a-historical myth-figure possible: by materially changing the land and society of South Africa, it has generated the sophisticated nostalgia that demands the myth" (1987:34). The discourse on other races, particularly in fiction, reveals much about the Afrikaner. It may be argued that the Bushman poems were part of the literature of a dying rural order, filled with nostalgia for the rural past. They were poems for the generation that left the land, under various economic pressures, and their popularity reflects nostalgia for childhood experience. From 1920 to 1940 and for the same reason (the painful transition from farmer to townsman), the Afrikans novel concerned itself almost exclusively with the farm (*plaatroman*) and *platteland* society.²⁷ The urbanising Afrikaner remembered the farm as a sacred place, and the poems conjured up those stories told in childhood (Coetzee 1988: 175). Also, as Shula Marks observed of the Bushmen: "[n]ow that they pose[d] no threat either as an external enemy or an internal proletariat, it is perhaps easier to view their activities in a positive, if not heroic, light" (1981:15-21).

Marais' poems were novel in their subject matter, which has caused some critics like André P Brink and Jack Cope to see them as radical departures from the norm (Brink 1983: 23). Cope contends that because Marais adopts a Bushman's perspective he created

a fusion of African and western: Writing the *Dwzalsstories* Marais not only committed himself and every subsequent reader to an act of faith, but he achieved in literary form a statement of humanism undercutting the sorry record of racist bigotry and intolerance that has bedevilled the race of mankind. (1982:17)

Marais' relationship with his subject matter was more complex than this analysis admits in that writing sympathetic poems from a Bushman perspective did not make him an anti-racist. (Similarly, Van der Post campaigned against apartheid but stereotyped people on the basis of race.) Marais had a layered approach to matters of race (Rousseau 1982: 313). Indeed, his view may be seen as relatively liberal – his son went so far as to call him, half-jokingly, a *Kafferboeijie* (in effect 'nigger-lover') (Swart 1998). The Nationalist mainstream minimised these leanings of Marais, whereas those who would see Marais as subversive over-emphasise them. Rousseau, for example, contends that Marais had a common bond with Indians, as they provided his drugs (1982: 264). But this ignores Marais' earlier, vitriolic anti-Indian writings for *Land en Volk*, where editorial policy was to lambaste Pretoria's Asian community. However, as happened in Ward's descriptions, Marais felt a different relationship to Bushmen from that with other indigenous black peoples. Cope ignores the fact that Marais, even if he romantically regarded Bushmen as 'artists', did not regard them as human, as Marais who died in 1936 had indicated in an article published posthumously in *Standpunte*:

The profound somatic differences between the Bushman and the lowest human race preclude all idea of a common species... Everything points to a near ape-ancestry and to an ape-ancestry different from that of the rest of the human race... And it is a singular thing that this ape-like being... the first cousin to the chimpanzee, should yet be the only true native South African artist. He was the first and only engraver and painter; the only musician; a poet and storyteller whose genius would compare favourably with that of any human race of a far higher degree of culture. And wherever the yellow streak has polluted the stream of 'higher' South African blood it has prepotently carried with it this masterful strain of artistry. The so-called 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. (1965: 40)

This predates Van der Post's depiction of a "gay, gallant, mischievous, unpredictable, and to the end unrepentant and defiant" Bushman (1961a:11). Its emphasis on the artistic side of the Bushman, his talent for music and painting, was built on past references and helped propagate an attitude which ranged from the grudging – "[t]he Bushmen, wretched as their condition was, seem to have had

the faculties not incapable of cultivation, and in the matter of artistic talent at least they stood higher than any of the races around them" (Cappon 1901:80) – to the enthusiastic, "But looming from cave and Krantz are inscribed colours that fade not, /Hints from the heart of their secret – symbols and signs of their dreams" (Slater 1947). The one factor, as Voss contends, that is accepted in mitigation of the sentence of the Bushmen to extinction is that they are artists (1987: 34).

Conclusion

This paper has addressed two issues: firstly, Maughan Brown has asked why sympathetic accounts of Bushmen did not appear once the Bushmen no longer posed a threat and could prove useful as collaborators (1987: 118). The answer is to be found in Marais' writings: these sympathetic accounts did exist, but in the Afrikaans (rather than in the English) literary tradition, and Marais' stories formed their basis. Marais' work also illustrates the early foundation of the attitude towards the Bushman that later historians, like Wilmsen, have tended to ascribe to Van der Post and the anthropological studies of the Cold War era. By looking at Marais' writing, we can see that such notions were in evidence far earlier. Secondly, white writers' descriptions of Bushmen have ranged from vermin to innocent noble savages. They have been necessary to white power both materially – as military allies, for example – and ideologically, as important elements in the justificatory myth of white land ownership and in providing an example of 'pristine' primitive humanity. Highlighting Marais' writings helps fill the historiographical gap in the account of western writing on Bushmen: popular Afrikaans writing created a foundation upon which the literary tradition of the 'good Bushman' is based. In Marais' *Dwzalsstories* the 'Bushman characteristics' better known to us from later writers (notably Van der Post) are displayed: innocent, simple, childlike, highly artistic, naively cunning people closely linked to nature. The profound ambivalence towards Bushmen has been built on dyads, which simultaneously entertain the idea that they are savage but innocent, uncivilised but artistic, powerless but a useful ally. There is a remarkable consistency in this approach – the lineage has proved enduring.

Notes

- 1 My grateful thanks to Stanley Trapido, Annie Gagliano, the anonymous readers for *Current Writing*, and to Sarah Duff, for editorial assistance. This paper comes out of my doctoral thesis (Swart 2001), and was presented at the Graduate History Workshop, Oxford University, in 2000. The identification 'Bushman' is used in preference to 'Soaqua' or 'San' which has been interpreted recently to be a derogatory Khoikhoi label meaning 'those without cattle' or 'non-people'. The name of the specific (but in this case unknown) dialect group would be preferable to either. It has been argued that the Bushmen/Soaqua/San and the Khoikhoi were one and the same people, with the latter differentiated by their ownership of cattle (Elphick 1977). Feminist critics have condemned the androcentrism of the label 'Bushman'.

For the question of ethnicity, see Barnard (1998).

2 The Dominie (pastor) disapproved of Marais, largely because of his morphine habit and also because of his acceptance of the theory of evolution, and confided these sentiments to Marais' doctor and friend, Andries Visser.

3 "Ek wil probeer om 'n paar dwaalstories van ou Hendrik weer te gee. Ongelukkig het ek nooit een van hulle woord vir woord opgeskryf nie. Ek het 'n paar nee-geskryf onmiddellik na die vertel."

4 "... ons dorre ou lewe-woestyn, 'n seelugie oor die sandduine." A787 Preller Collection, p.40, Marais to Preller, 12 April 1923.

5 They were published again in 1962 and 1998. In the late 1950s *Die Lied Van Die Reën* was set to music by the Afrikaans composer, Hubert du Plessis; this tone poem was first performed by the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra and the Stellenbosch Student Choir in 1959. Arnold van Wyk produced the poems as a song cycle named *Van Liefde en Verlatenheid* (Of Love and Loss). They also form part of many South African university syllabi. The popular Afrikaans women's magazine *Sarie* recommends *Dwaalstories* for their simplicity and purity (see www.sarie.com). The University of Stellenbosch produced the *Dwaalstories* as a drama in 1999.

6 For a close-reading, textual analysis see W S H Du Randt (1969:23).

7 This paper discusses only writing in Afrikaans that achieved popularity. In Afrikaans universities, Bushmen have a central role in *volkekunde* (ethnography) in the paradigm set by E F Potgieter (1955) who described them as people intrinsically incapable of undergoing change. The present paper is not an attempt to restate the critique of *volkekunde* and the role of Afrikaans ethnologists and anthropologists, partly because this has been much discussed but mainly because the focus is on writing. See Gordon (1991) and Sharp (1981).

8 This image was used more recently in the Jamie Uys film, *The Gods Must be Crazy*, and its sequel, starting the 'real-life' Bushman, Xao.

9 See, for example, Wilbur Smith (1974; 1988).

10 Darwin noted "At some future period...the civilized races will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world" (1871:118) and Ballantyne contended, "The highest type of monkey suggests – thanks, or rather, blame to Darwin – the lowest type of man in Africa. This is the Bushman..." (1876:113).

11 Stow was a geologist who studied the Bushmen from 1867, and has been quoted by liberal Africanists to suggest that the dispossession of the Bushmen by the 'Bantu' paralleled that effected by whites. See Wilson and Thompson (1969: 194, 233).

12 The dichotomy in sentiment toward Khoikhoi and Bushman is interesting. Fredericksen (1981) has argued that the Khoikhoi did not come up to the aesthetic ideal required of a Noble Savage – unlike the American Indian in late eighteenth century. It seems likely that because they were incorporated into the Cape settler economy as herdsmen, ox-trainers, wagon drivers, they were regarded as menial

rather than savage, and were discussed in a discourse which focused on their idleness and uncleanness (Coetzee 1988:12-16). Not all were incorporated, as Shula Marks has demonstrated (1972:70).

13 For a general account of race in Afrikaans literature, see F J van Rensburg (1987).

14 In the 1940s coloured voices found themselves in Afrikaans: Petersen (1944) and Philander (1955).

15 See also the writings of G H Franz, P J Schoeman, Minnie Postma, Jan J van der Post and S J Pretorius.

16 G R von Wielligh (1859-1932) joined the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners at sixteen and worked as a land surveyor in Paarl and the ZAR. In 1884 he was appointed land surveyor of the ZAR. Between 1875 and 1895 his contributions were published predominantly in *Die Patriot* and *Ons Kynji*, especially his sketches from the lives of Bushmen and Hottentots. These appeared in book form in 1918 as *Jakob Platji*.

17 Van der Post comes out of the Afrikaans nationalist literary tradition: he says that his father refused to take the oath at Vereeniging and, like Marais, considered himself a *bitereinder* (1957:25). In *White Bushmen* the nurse is a "stone age Bushman" (1986:3) while in the earlier *Heart of the Hunter* she is simply "coloured" (1961: xv).

18 Rousseau, Marais' biographer, has speculated that Marais heard the poems as 'dagga rhymes' – that Hendrik related these stories in the traditional manner, while smoking dagga (marijuana) – and that Marais wrote them up under the influence of morphine (1982: 263). See H du Randt (1968; 1976).

19 Letter to Spilhaus, 11 December 1926, quoted in Du Toit (1940:221). Marais also consulted fragments of lore which were jotted down by the traveller Dr H Lichtenstein, garnered from the missionaries working among the Bushmen; Dr Bleek's "Brief Account of Bushman Folk-Lore and other Texts" and L C Lloyd's "Short Account of Further Bushman Material Collected" (1911). These essays were published with the stories which were translated into English with a scientific attempt at orthography. Bleek studied the language and folklore of Bushman convicts captured in the north-west Cape and condemned to work on building the breakwater in Cape Town harbour.

20 Alternatively, they represent a remarkable phenomenon – that a race so backward carries not only the ability to create detailed drawings, but also possesses a fine literary taste, which allows them to create wonderful stories. Van Mele leans to the first theory, noting that Bushmen remind him of people who have sunk from rich to poor but who always use the manners and speech of more prosperous times (1953).

21 Preller Collection, p.40, Marais to Preller (12 April 1923).

22 Olive Schreiner makes a sharp qualitative distinction between Hottentot and Bushman in *From Man to Man* (1926). Ayah 'the Hottentot woman' is portrayed unsympathetically while the diminutive stature of Griet 'the little Bushman girl' is

- emphasized to indicate sympathy. Gordon noted that the "paedomorphic features tug at the boy scout in some of the more romantic scientists" (1992:217).
- 23 Ironically, William Plomer noted that the 'Voorslagters' were like "twentieth-century Bushmen, [leaving] a few vivid paintings on the walls of that dark cave, the mind of the White South African" (1984: 172). See Campbell, Plomer and Van der Post (1985).
- 24 "Iemand wat belang stel in die sielkunde van die kind, sal gou besef waar die aantrekkingskrag van die storie sit" (Marais: Inleiding (Introduction)).
- 25 See particularly Chapter 5 in Coetzee (1988).
- 26 They were the first example of non-metrical verse in Afrikaans, a form later adopted by Uys Krige and Breyten Breytenbach. With their fantastical elements and imagery, the stories had closer links to the later prose sketches of Jan Rabie and Breyten Breytenbach written in the 1950s and 1960s.
- 27 See the writing of D F Malherbe, Mikro, Jochem van Bruggen, Johannes van Melle, C M van den Heever, and Abraham Jonker. As Coetzee points out, in the same period only two English-language novelists, Schreiner and Pauline Smith, used rural life as their subjects (1988:63).

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White South African and Latter-day Bohemian Two Editions of Herman Charles Bosman

Margaret Lenta

Abstract

This article surveys the publication history of Bosman's works and the roles that he has played as author in his own eyes and those of his readers. During his lifetime, his stories appeared in periodicals which tended to be ephemeral, and he published in volume form only an early novel, his prison memoir and one volume of stories, which by his own account were hastily selected. His former pupil and friend, Lionel Abrahams, took on the task after Bosman's death of compiling a large selection of the rest of the work into volume form. Since at this stage Bosman was known as a writer to a relatively small circle, Abrahams could not justify the publication of anything but a generous selection of his work; but the resultant publications have been all-time best sellers in the South African market. Readers of this edition have often taken from the stories a perception of Bosman as in sympathy with the racism of his characters, an impression which the new, more complete edition edited by Stephen Gray and Craig Mackenzie will correct. Though the edition is not yet complete, and volumes will continue to appear until 2005, the centenary of Bosman's birth, it is already possible to understand more of his beliefs and ambitions than the Abrahams edition allowed for.

The decision taken by Stephen Gray and Craig Mackenzie in 1997 to re-edit and re-publish the works of Herman Charles Bosman, so that all his writings shall be in print on the centenary of his birth in 2005, implies that they are asking his readers to grant him a status that in his lifetime he was never able to achieve. Bosman's short life, the small size of the reading public in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s, the consequent reluctance of publishers in his lifetime to republish stories and articles in collections, and his difficulties in leading a life that would allow him to be productive until his last five years all led to a situation in which his literary reputation had to be constructed posthumously for him by others. When he died at the age of forty-six in 1951, only three volumes of his work had been published. An early novel, *Jacaranda in the Night*, had appeared in 1947, as had a collection of stories, *Mafeking Road*. His prison memoir, *Cold Stone Jug*, had appeared in 1949. He left an unrevised novel in manuscript, eventually published in 1977 as *Willemsdorp*. The rest of his work – stories and articles – remained buried in the magazines in which they had first appeared, though Lionel Abrahams, Bosman's first editor, tells us that Bosman, shortly before his death, was contemplating a second collection (Abrahams in Bosman 1963: np).