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# The Construction of Eugène Marais as an Afrikaner Hero\*

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*Eugène Marais (1871–1936) is remembered as an Afrikaner hero. There are, however, competing claims as to the meaning of this ‘heroic’ status. Some remember him as the ‘father of Afrikaans poetry’, one of the most lionised writers in Afrikaans, and part of the Afrikaner nationalist movement. Yet a second intellectual tradition remembers him as a dissident iconoclast, an Afrikaner rebel. This article seeks to show, first, how these two very different understandings of Marais came to exist, and, secondly, that the course of this rivalry of legends was inextricably bound up with the socio-economic and political history of South Africa. We look at his portrayal at particular historical moments and analyse the changes that have occurred with reference to broader developments in South Africa. This is in order to understand the making of cultural identity as part of nationalism, and opens a window onto the contested process of re-imagining the Afrikaner nation. The article demonstrates how Marais’s changing image was a result of material changes within the socio-economic milieu, and the mutable needs of the Afrikaner establishment. The hagiography of Marais by the Nationalist press, both during his life and after his death, is explored, showing how the socio-political context of the Afrikaans language struggle was influential in shaping his image. The chronology of his representation is traced in terms of the changing self-image of the Afrikaner over the ensuing seven decades. Finally, in order to understand the fractured meaning of Marais today, the need for alternative heroes in the ‘New South Africa’ is considered.*

## Remembering Marais

All the bad things can wait until after my death ...

(Marais in a letter to Gustav Preller)<sup>1</sup>

I always find it somewhat terrifying to see my own name, even in print. Please be merciful with the biography.

(Marais to Preller)<sup>2</sup>

Eugène Marais once asked Gustav Preller: ‘Tell me, Gustav, was it just a dream that I ever did anything for the cause and literature of Afrikaans?’<sup>3</sup> It is a question worthy of

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1 ‘Al die slegte goed kan maar wag tot ek dood is.’ Transvaal Archives (hereafter TAD) Preller Collection, A 787, 41, Marais to Preller, 24 April 1923.

2 ‘Dit is [vir] my altyd bietjie skrikwekkend om my eie naam selfs in druk te sien; wees dus genadig met die biografie!’, TAD Preller Collection, A 787, 46, Marais to Preller, 11 May 1923.

3 TAD Preller Collection, A 787, 184, Marais to Preller, 21 March 1927. The letter is composed solely of this sentence. Gustav Preller himself played an important role in the creation of an Afrikaner national identity, as a historian and newspaper editor. See I. Hofmeyr, ‘Popularising History: The Case of Gustav Preller’, *Journal of African History*, 29 (1988), pp. 521–535, and P. J. Du Plessis, ‘Die Lewe en Werk van Gustav Preller, 1875–1943’ (DPhil thesis, University of Pretoria, 1988).

consideration by historians of nationalism, particularly those interested in the creation of Afrikaner identity and the ways in which Marais has been remembered. Marais had characteristics unexpected in a mainstream Afrikaner hero. His home language was English; he was educated in London. He openly professed pantheism and maintained that he only entered churches for weddings. He was something of a snob, alienated from his backveld contemporaries, whom he derided as *takhare* (hayseeds or hicks).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, he was not actively involved in *kultuurpolitiek* (the politics surrounding the production of a recognised Afrikaans culture).<sup>5</sup>

Marais is remembered in a variety of ways. There is the Anton Rupert-endowed chair of zoology at the University of Pretoria.<sup>6</sup> There is the Eugène Marais prize for literature. A rare Waterberg cycad has been named after him: *Encephalartos eugene-maraisii*.<sup>7</sup> *The Natal Mercury* honoured him as one of the '100 people who made South Africa'; he made it in at number 79.<sup>8</sup> The leader of the AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging), Eugène Terreblanche, has likened his own poetry to that of Marais.<sup>9</sup> In the Nylstroom public library there is an alcove devoted to Marais's bust.<sup>10</sup> At Lekkerrus in the Waterberg, the owner of the local hot springs resort guides hikers to the old Union Tin Mine in the kloof where the descendants of the troop of baboons that Marais studied, still live.

Marais (Pretoria 19/1/1871 – Pelindaba 29/3/1936) was one of the intellectually heterodox, socially liminal and culturally innovative individuals whose imagination was significant in the making of Afrikaner nationalism. He was born to English-speaking parents in the Cape. His father was, however, disgraced in a white-collar corruption scandal, and the family relocated to Pretoria before Marais's birth, although Marais returned to the Cape to be educated. By nineteen he was editing his own newspaper, *Land en Volk*. He was an opponent of Paul Kruger's regime and a supporter of the opposition, the self-baptised 'Progressive' faction. Marais studied law sporadically in London during the late 1890s, returning to the Transvaal after the South African War to edit a newspaper briefly. He spent the rest of his life writing intermittently for the popular press, while he relied on a group of literary friends, particularly the historian and newspaperman, Gustav Preller, for financial support. His addiction to morphine and his increasing depression resulted in his suicide in 1936.

Primarily, Marais is remembered as an Afrikaner hero.<sup>11</sup> There are, however, different claims as to the meaning of 'hero' in this case. Some remember him as the 'father of Afrikaans poetry', one of the most canonised writers in Afrikaans and part of the Afrikaner nationalist movement.<sup>12</sup> Yet a second intellectual tradition remembers him as a dissident iconoclast, an Afrikaner rebel. This article seeks to show, first, how these two very different understandings of Marais came to exist, and, second, that the course of this rivalry of legends was inextricably bound up with the socio-economic and political history of South Africa. The prism of biography is used to capture the complex social identities of its

4 L. Rousseau, *The Dark Stream – the Story of Eugène Marais* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1982), p. 9.

5 *Kultuurpolitiek* may be defined as the politics of culture, the debates and institutions surrounding the propagation of Afrikaans language and 'civilisation'.

6 A. Rupert, *Eugène Marais Kom die Eer toe, 'n Huldeblyk* (Stellenbosch, Rembrandt-tabbakkorporasie, 1971).

7 Inez Verdoorn was alerted to the cycad by Marais, and named it after him in 1945. Thank you to the Agricultural Research Council, National Botanical Institute, Pretoria.

8 *The Natal Mercury*, 1 December 1999.

9 The AWB is a right-wing revolutionary faction dedicated to the ideal of white hegemony. See the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging's website, <http://www.lantic.co.za>.

10 Sculpted by Willem Nezar in 1975.

11 One who is a hero to Afrikaners, but also, in this case, one who was both Afrikaans and a hero to a broader, scientific community.

12 R. Marais, 'Die Kanoniserings van Eugène N. Marais as Digter', *Afrikaanse Letterkundevereniging*, 1, 1 (March 1993), p. 11.

subjects without reducing them to ciphers of the larger historical process. This is in order to understand the making of cultural identity as part of nationalism, and opens a window onto the contested process of re-imagining the Afrikaner nation.

The methodology of this study is to look at Marais's portrayal at particular historical moments and analyse any changes with reference to broader developments in South Africa. In particular, this discussion shows how his shifting image was a result of material changes within the socio-economic milieu, the mutable needs of the establishment and various inputs from individuals, for reasons that were not always nationalist or even political. The hagiography of Marais by the Nationalist press, both during his life and after his death, is explored, showing how the socio-political context of the *Taalstryd* (language struggle) was influential in the 1930s in shaping his image. The chronology of his representation is traced in terms of the changing self-image of the Afrikaner over the ensuing seven decades. Finally, in order to understand the fractured meaning of Marais today, the yearning for alternative heroes is considered.

### Marais in his Own Lifetime

The nationalist magazines for which Marais wrote, represented an attempt to create a distinct Afrikaans cultural identity, to establish and then maintain standards of *taal* (language) purity.<sup>13</sup> It was the project of middle-class cultural entrepreneurs to de-emphasise factions within the imagined community in favour of mythologising cultural unity.<sup>14</sup> Much as Massimo D'Azeglio declared, 'We have made Italy, now we must make the Italians', the intellectuals of the Second Afrikaans Language Movement set out to consolidate a workable Afrikaner identity.<sup>15</sup> Although Marais's work was solicited by these same intellectuals, he did not play a significant role in their ranks. He briefly edited the Pretoria-based *Land en Volk* from 1902 until 1905, when his interest waned, and he sold *Land en Volk* in 1906; it closed the following year. Although he continued to contribute to newspapers, Marais withdrew from the political race, moving to the Waterberg in 1907.

Marais worked instead within the power network of the Nasionale Pers (National Press) and Nationalist politicians. He asked, for example, for a directorship of the Zoological Council, urging Preller to use the influence of Nationalist politician Carl Jeppe and reminding him: 'The Huisgenoot [Afrikaans magazine] people will also undoubtedly be willing to use their influence with Malan [Minister for the Interior]. It might be a good thing if you could write them a letter, if you would be so kind.'<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Marais was not given the jobs by the Nationalists that he frequently requested. In a letter soliciting civil service employment on behalf of Marais, Preller reminded Malan that Marais was 'a good Nationalist'.<sup>17</sup> Yet the extent of Marais's political involvement had been limited to editorials

13 This period saw the creation of the *Afrikaanse Taalgenootskap* for the Transvaal (1905), the *Afrikaanse Taal Vereniging* (1906), the founding of the *SA Akademie* (1909), the recognition of Afrikaans by provincial councils in 1914, including the schools, and its acceptance by the churches between 1916 and 1919, and by parliament in 1925 as the joint official language with English.

14 The publishing house Nasionale Pers promoted the idea that it had been established by a 'number of fervent nation-feeling Afrikaners' from 'all classes' who wanted not to make a profit but rather to 'see better provision being made for the supply of Afrikaans reading material to the Afrikaans volk'. 'Waarde vir u Geld', *Die Huisgenoot*, July 1921.

15 The Second Language Movement comprised a loosely associated, predominantly male group, working to foster a sense of Afrikaner identity, chiefly through post-war promotion of the entrenchment of Afrikaans as an official language.

16 TAD Preller Collection, A 787, Marais to Preller, Heidelberg, 11 December 1926. Malan probably refers to D. F. Malan. Jeppe had been active in *Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR) politics and by this stage had become Judge of the Water Court.

17 TAD Preller Collection, A787, Preller to Malan, 14 December 1926.

in *Land en Volk* promoting the use of Afrikaans, and was entirely peripheral after 1907. It is thus not for his parliamentary or lobbying role that he is remembered. But, for all this, Marais is celebrated as a powerful figure in the establishment of the Afrikaans language and culture. The answer lies in the culture-brokers' need for an 'Afrikaner poet'.<sup>18</sup>

## The First Poet

Marais is one of the most lionised writers in Afrikaans, but his categorisation within the canon is problematic.<sup>19</sup> There are two schools of thought on his poetry. The first considers him a poet from the Language Movement's stable. These critics place Marais firmly in the post-Boer War generation of poets, along with Jan F. E. Celliers, Totius and C. Louis Leipoldt.<sup>20</sup> The second school portrays him as a maverick genius, appearing at the turn of the century as a 'lone star' in the Afrikaans literary firmament.<sup>21</sup> The contested categorisation is partly a result of the difficulty of classifying poetry produced by Marais not only intermittently but in different languages over four poetic 'generations'. He first published his poetry in the 1880s and 1890s, during the First Language Movement; then in the years immediately after the Anglo-Boer War, in the early days of the Second Language Movement; then again after 1919; and, finally, in the 1930s.<sup>22</sup>

Marais's first poem, 'The Soldier's Grave', was written in 1883 when he was twelve.<sup>23</sup> He published two more English-language poems in 1885.<sup>24</sup> Over the following two years, he published seven more English poems, in the style of the English Romantic movement, in the *Paarl District Advertiser*.<sup>25</sup> Four years elapsed before he began to publish poetry again, this time in Afrikaans, in *Land en Volk*.<sup>26</sup> Fourteen years later, Marais published Afrikaans verse again, this time under the pen name 'Klaas Vakie' (the Sandman): 'Piet van Snaar', 'Die Smit' (The Smith) and 'Winternag' (Winter Night).<sup>27</sup> 'Winternag' has come to be remembered as the first Afrikaans poem of any literary worth, which fosters the second image of Marais as 'maverick genius' rather than simply as a member of a poetic movement. As a pioneer in the use of the popular vernacular, Marais is thus venerated as 'a founder of Afrikaans as a literary language', 'whose poetry had proved that Afrikaans

18 The term 'cultural entrepreneur/broker' is used and theorised by C. Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), p. 45.

19 Marais, 'Die Kanoniserings van Eugène N. Marais', p. 11.

20 Lindenberg, 'Herout of Twintiger? in 1965', *Inleiding tot die Afrikaanse Letterkunde* (Pretoria, Academica, 1972), p. 20; J. L. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur* (Pretoria, Academica, 1988 [1984]), pp. 222–240.

21 Marais, 'Die Kanoniserings van Eugène N. Marais', p. 11. Dekker and Antonissen, for example, adopt this image of Marais as the first significant Afrikaans poet, independent and unaffiliated. G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1947), R. Antonissen, *Die Afrikaanse Letterkunde van Aanvang tot Hede* (Cape Town, Nasou, 1964).

22 It is debatable whether his poetry falls over three or four generations. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis*, p. 222, maintains only three, while René Marais contends four generations in 'Die Kanoniserings', p. 12. Kannemeyer himself, however, has labelled the 1930s as a new phase in the development of Afrikaans literature.

23 F. G. M. Du Toit, *Eugène Marais – Sy Bydrae tot die Afrikaanse Letterkunde* (Amsterdam, N. V. Swets, 1940), p. 102.

24 'Ode to the Paarl' and 'The Soldier's Grave', *Paarl District Advertiser*, 14 October 1885 and 7 November 1885.

25 See *Paarl District Advertiser* for 'South Africa', 26 March 1886; 'Majuba', 29 September 1886; 'There Shall be no More Sea', 13 October 1886; 'On Revisiting a Spot where the Author met his Girl Sweetheart, Years Ago', 29 January 1887; 'Hymn for a Stormy Night at Sea', 23 February 1887; 'Anglified Afrianders', 15 March 1887 and 'Love', 11 May 1887.

26 'Gert Senekal', *Land en Volk*, 8 September 1891 and 'Di Meisies', *ibid.*, 15 September 1891, under the pseudonym 'Afrikanus Junior'. These poems fall within the tradition of the First Language Movement.

27 *Land en Volk*, 5 May, 19 May and 23 June 1905.

was a language in its own right'.<sup>28</sup> Published in 1905, the poem captures the parallels between a bleak Highveld night and the post-war world. The Afrikaner Nationalist historian, D. W. Krüger, noted in the otherwise prosaic, widely prescribed school textbook, *The Making of a Nation*, that 'The soul of the people was as starved as the arid plains of the upland plateau, and when in 1905 a young poet, Eugène Marais, made the first real contribution to Afrikaans literature it sounded like the first raindrops after a prolonged drought'.<sup>29</sup>

The poem, however, was put to an entirely different polemical use when it was first published in *Land en Volk* in 1905 under the pseudonym 'Klaas Vakie'.<sup>30</sup> On 17 June 1905, Preller appropriated it to end a series of articles he had written on the use of Afrikaans in *De Volkstem*. Preller, certainly with Marais's approval, invented a more polemically useful author for his purposes: 'The writer is an unlettered Boer who can never write in Dutch, but who is undoubtedly a poet. It is a fragment, titled "Winter night", but you can listen to it'.<sup>31</sup> This mere 'fragment' was later 'rediscovered' by Preller, when an accomplished Afrikaans poet proved more useful to his nationalist discourse than an 'unlettered Boer'.<sup>32</sup> Shifting his argument diametrically, Preller praised the sophistication of the poem: 'It has been a little too much said that in AD 2139 there will only be ten lines remaining of all that has been written in Afrikaans, but I always thought that the ten lines of Eugène's *Winter's Night* will be among them.'

In his introduction to an anthology of Marais's poems in 1934, Preller noted that the verse provided 'hope' for a revived Language Movement, as it demonstrated 'the Mother language's ability to express subtle concepts'.<sup>33</sup> By the 1930s, *Die Vaderland* labelled Marais the 'one genius produced so far in the Afrikaans literary world'.<sup>34</sup> Marais came to be included in the 'Big Four' along with Jan Celliers, Totius and C. Louis Leipoldt.

There were efforts to remember Marais as a solely Afrikaans-medium poet. The nationalist and compiler of the Afrikaans dictionary, M. S. B. Kritzinger, hotly denied rumours that Marais wanted at first to write '*Winternag*' in English.<sup>35</sup> In later publications of '*Winternag*', the words were further 'Afrikanerised' (the Dutch spellings were removed): '*gras-zaad*' became '*grassaad*', '*vrouw*' became '*vrou*' and '*zoo*' became '*so*'. His fifteen English poems (published in the *Paarl District Advertiser*) were ignored in anthologies and in works of literary criticism.<sup>36</sup> After its newspaper publication, '*Winternag*' appeared in

28 Marais is venerated in D. Denoon, *A Grand Illusion – The Failure of Imperial Policy in the Transvaal Colony during the Period of Reconstruction* (London, Longman, 1973), p. 84, as 'a founder of Afrikaans as a literary language', and by H. H. Hewison, *Hedge of Wild Almonds* (London, Heinemann, 1989), p. 234, as a writer 'whose poetry had proved that Afrikaans was a language in its own right'.

29 D. W. Krüger, *The Making of a Nation* (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1969), p. 20. He also wrote a hagiographical account of Marais's attempt to carry weapons and ammunition to a Boer commando in 1902. See D. W. Krüger, 'Dr. Schultz en Eugène Marais Probeer om deur Oos-Afrika die Boerelinië te Bereik', *Die Huisgenoot*, 11 January 1946.

30 Marais was in fact later to write a poem 'Klaas Vakie' in *Die Brandwag*, 15 July 1910.

31 '*Die skrywer daarvan ... is 'n ongeleerde Boer, wat nimmer of nooit Hollands kan skryf nie, maar hij is ongetwijfeld 'n digter. Dit is maar net 'n brokkie, getiteld, " 'n Winternag", maar jij kan daarna luister.*' See M. S. B. Kritzinger, 'Eugène N. Marais as Digter', *Ons Tydskrif*, May 1936 and Du Toit, *Eugène Marais*, p. 120.

32 In 1936, Kritzinger attempted, in 'Eugène N. Marais as Digter', to explain away this political stratagem by contending that the political climate prevented Marais from revealing his identity. This is clearly not the case, as Marais openly published direct criticism of the Milner regime, and '*Winternag*' has no overt political content.

33 Preller's 'Introduction' in E. N. Marais, *Gedigte* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1934), p. 8. Indeed, C. M. van den Heever, 'Critique of Die Swart Verraad', *De Vaderland*, 10 June 1933, maintained that its publication heralded the beginning of the Second Language Movement.

34 *Die Vaderland*, 31 March 1936.

35 Kritzinger, 'Eugène N. Marais as Digter'.

36 A. Thorpe, *Eugène Nielen Marais – Gedigte/Poems* (Pretoria, J. L. Van Schaik, for Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1956).

*Gedigte* (Poems), a collection of sixteen of Marais's poems, compiled by his son, Eugène Charles Gerard Marais, Preller and Charlie Pienaar, and first published in 1925, then reprinted in 1932, 1934 and 1943. The introductions by Preller are hasty affairs – the 1934 edition, for example, bears the date 1925. The 1943 edition perpetuates the earlier errors and it carries the date 1937.<sup>37</sup> Accepting Preller's version, later commentators repeat (and entrench) these errors: D. F. Malherbe, for example, dates 'Winternag' to 1904 rather than 1905 and labels it Marais's first poem whereas it is his fourteenth published verse, maintaining the myth of Marais as an Afrikaans-only poet.<sup>38</sup> The first nine poems are ignored as they detract from 'Winternag'. The intellectual establishment wished to see it as the first poem, to reinforce it as the start of the Language Movement. *Die Vaderland* asserted, for example, that 'Winternag' began the lyric tradition in Afrikaans.<sup>39</sup> As the *Nuwe Brandwag* pronounced in 1933, 'if ever an artist was a *volksdigter* (people's poet) then is it Marais with his "Winternag", giving expression to the deepest pain of the *volksiel* (soul of the nation/people)'.<sup>40</sup> As *Die Burger* declared in 1936: 'He was a poet before any other Afrikaans poet. And yet, in spite of having travelled widely, he was so intimately linked to the Afrikaner soil, that one can always see the poet of Afrikaans spirit'.<sup>41</sup> Marais thus became known not only as the originator, but also the producer of some of the greatest poetry in Afrikaans – and also very much a *volksdigter*, producing poetry of and for the Afrikaans people. As D. F. Malherbe acknowledged, 'Winternag' was 'a powerful propaganda tool in the increasing struggle for recognition of the mother language'.<sup>42</sup>

Yet the extent to which the *public* knew and loved him for his poetry, as the 1930s culture brokers maintained, is debatable.<sup>43</sup> He was a representative of an elite corps of male intellectuals who were attempting to reach a mass audience, and it is difficult to measure their success. Moreover, his poetic *oeuvre* was relatively slim, his output sporadic (after the 1907 publication of 'Klaas Vaakie', twelve years elapsed before Marais published poetry again), and he seldom published more than a few in the same publication,<sup>44</sup> often under a pseudonym.<sup>45</sup> Marais never attempted a complete anthology of his poetry.<sup>46</sup> Fifty-four poems exist in total; however, by 1925 only sixteen had been published under Marais's own name in *Gedigte*. Until 1932, these sixteen were the only ones anthologised, compared with Leipoldt's three anthologies between 1910 and 1923 and Celliers's nine anthologies between 1908 and 1924.<sup>47</sup>

37 In the 1934 edition, for example, Preller refers to 'n *Winternag*' rather than the correct 'Winternag'; he also refers to its ten lines, whereas it consists of eighteen lines; and he quotes Marais's birthdate as 1872 instead of 1871.

38 D. F. Malherbe quoted in P. J. Nienaber (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers, 1947), p. 12.

39 C. M. Van den Heever, 'Die Eensame onder die Afrikaanse Kunstenaars', *Die Vaderland*, 3 April 1936.

40 G. Dekker, 'Review of *Gedigte* and *Versamelde Gedigte*', *Die Nuwe Brandwag*, May 1933.

41 'Hy was digter ... voor enige Afrikaanse digter. Maar tog is dit alles, ten spyte van sy bereisheid, so innig verbonde met die Afrikaanse grond, dat 'n mens hierin en in ander gedigte nog altyd die digter van Afrikaanse bodem sien.' A. H. Jonker, 'Eugène N. Marais', *Die Burger*, 1 April 1936.

42 'as kragtige propagandamiddel in die toenemende stryd om die erkenning van die moedertaal'. D. F. Malherbe, *Die Volksblad*, 11 April 1936.

43 The use of pen names was common practice during the First Language Movement. See, for example, the poems in S. J. du Toit's *Afrikaanse Gedigte, Byeenversamel uit wat in di Laaste 30 Jaar Verskyn is: 1876–1906* (Paarl, Paarl Drukkers, 1906).

44 *Paarl District Advertiser* (9), *Land en Volk* (5), *De Volkstem* (1), *Die Boerevrou* (1, reprinted from *De Volkstem*), *Die Brandwag* (2), *Die Burger* (1), *Die Huisgenoot* (5) and *Ons/Die Vaderland* (3).

45 He used the pen names 'Klaas Vaakie', 'Eugène, O.F.S.', 'Afrikanus Junior', 'H.v.R.v.O.', 'V.R.' and 'Niggie van A. G. Visser'.

46 Today there exists no complete collection of the poems published in his lifetime, let alone the nine poems discovered posthumously. Certain poems are even omitted from his collected works edited by Leon Rousseau, E. N. Marais, *Versamelde Werke* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1984).

47 In 1933, Van Schaik published Marais's *Versamelde Gedigte*, consisting of 30 poems, the first to be selected and edited by Marais himself. *Versamelde Gedigte* underwent changes as it was reprinted – the 1934 edition,

Was Marais a literary legend in his own lifetime? He was something of a hero, thanks to Preller's promotion of him as creator of the first Afrikaans poem, yet most of that image was fostered in the 1930s, long after the publication of 'Winternag', particularly immediately after his death in 1936. He was better known for his popular science writing on termites and baboons than for his poetry. This was particularly the case after 1927, when Marais attracted attention after the Maurice Maeterlinck episode.<sup>48</sup> He accused Maeterlinck of having used his concept of the 'organic unity' of the termitary in his 1926 book, *La vie des termites* (*The Life of the White Ant*). Marais had published his ideas on the termitary in the South African Afrikaans-language press, both in *Die Burger* in January 1923 and in *Die Huisgenoot*, which featured a series of articles on termites under the title 'Die Siel van die Mier' (The Soul of the Ant), from 1925 to 1926.<sup>49</sup> Supported by his coterie of Afrikaner Nationalist friends, Marais sought justice – promoting his side of the story through the South African press and attempting an international lawsuit. This was to prove financially impossible and the case was not pursued. Marais, however, won a measure of renown as the aggrieved party, and as an Afrikaner researcher who had opened himself up to plagiarism because he published in Afrikaans out of national loyalty.<sup>50</sup> Thus, despite the use of his poetry for the *taalstryd*, Marais was better known for the plagiarism scandal than for his 54 published poems, in any language or under any pseudonym. Ironically, Marais brooded at the time of the scandal: 'I wonder whether [Maeterlinck] blushes when he reads such things [critical acclaim], and whether he gives a thought to the injustice he does to the unknown Boer worker?'<sup>51</sup>

## The 1930s – the Myth Machine and the 'Good Afrikaner'

The 'Boer worker' was the focus of the culture-brokers' attentions in the next decade as the urban labour market became an arena in which Afrikaner intellectuals sought to capture the cultural allegiance of the urbanising Afrikaans-speaker. The 1930s were a period of economic insecurity, the worldwide Depression exacerbated locally by the drought and increasing urbanisation.<sup>52</sup> The perceived need for Poor White 'upliftment' – both educational and economic – was infused with ideas of ethnic identity and history.<sup>53</sup> This economic quest required unity. Dr N. Diederichs, a nationalist politician and chairman of the Broederbond, agonising about the abyss between Afrikaner 'haves' and 'have-nots', argued that it was 'essential to create

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### Footnote 47 continued

for example, included 'Wanneer dit Reën op Rietfontein' and the 1936 edition saw the addition of 'Diep Rivier'. The definitive version of 1936 contained 32 poems, omitting 22. Rousseau's *Versamelde Werke* uses all of these and adds two to the total, 35 of them in English. See also Kritzinger, 'Eugène N. Marais as Digter'.

48 See D. van Reybrouck, *De Plaag – Het Stille Knagen van Schrijvers, Termieten en Zuid-Afrika* (Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 2001) and S. Swart, 'A "Ware Afrikaner" – an Examination of the Role of Eugène Marais (1871–1936) in the Making of Afrikaner Identity' (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 2001).

49 The collection of articles appeared in book form as *Die Siel van die Mier* in 1934 and by 1948 had undergone four reprints. This article uses E. Marais, *The Soul of the White Ant* (London, Penguin, 1973 [1937]) and M. Maeterlinck, *The Life of the White Ant* (London, George Allen, 1928 [1927], trans. Alfred Sutro).

50 For a discussion of these points, see Swart, 'A "Ware Afrikaner"', chapter four.

51 Quoted in du Toit, *Eugène Marais*, p. 184.

52 In Johannesburg alone, the number of Afrikaners increased from 86,700 to 163,575 between 1926 and 1936, the year of Marais's death. E. L. P. Stals, *Afrikaners in die Goudstad, II* (Pretoria, Haum, 1986) p. 17.

53 As D. F. Malan declared at the Great Trek Centenary celebrations on Blood River Day, 16 December 1938, 'Your Blood River lies in the city'. Quoted in A. Grundlingh and H. Sapire, 'From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The Changing Fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industrializing South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 21 (1989), p. 23. Grundlingh and Sapire have shown how the Great Trek proved a changing reference point to meet changing historical exigencies. They analysed the Great Trek mythology over a period of 50 years against a backdrop of successful ethnic mobilisation of Afrikanerdom in the 1930s and the subsequent mutations of the mythology in an increasingly industrial society as the material basis for beliefs changed.



unity so that the poor can identify with us and feel one with us'.<sup>54</sup> Shared heroes were necessary to promote social unity, a fact demonstrated by the proliferation of historical works produced by nationalists in this period. It may also be argued that in any situation of social stress (the drought and depression had rendered this a time of social anxiety), there is a socio-psychological craving for heroes, which facilitated the intellectuals' agenda.<sup>55</sup> In order to mobilise Afrikaners, nationalism needed to have mass appeal. As Tom Nairn has noted, wherever nationalism was manufactured, the new middle-class intelligentsia had to 'invite all the masses into history; and the invitation card had to be written in a language they understood'. In the 1930s, in the run-up to the Great Trek celebrations, Afrikaner culture-brokers (a class consisting of teachers, clergy, academics, lawyers, newspaper editors and lower level civil servants) had perfected this part of the enterprise. Benedict Anderson has pointed out, however, with respect to Nairn's formulation, that 'it still has to be explained why the invitation came to be seen as so attractive'.<sup>56</sup> This is a harder question to answer. Why did the public welcome Marais in the way they did?

While Afrikaner nationalism was not the only discourse available for Afrikaners, it proved successful with the majority.<sup>57</sup> Alienated by the values and culture of the new urban environment, they turned predominantly to the 'balm of traditional culture'.<sup>58</sup> Mobilisation had to be through that which was there, as Nairn has noted, so '[t]he middle-classes, therefore, had to function through a sentimental culture sufficiently accessible to the lower strata'.<sup>59</sup> Having made a slight economic advance, the intellectuals led through aggressive cultural assertion and mobilisation.<sup>60</sup>

They used the Great Trek Centenary to manufacture a period of heightened nationalism.<sup>61</sup> Romantic versions of *voortrekker* history were promoted, men grew long beards, women adopted *voortrekker* dress, and many babies were baptised 'Ossewania', 'Kakebenia' and 'Eeufeesia'.<sup>62</sup> Central to these activities was the idea of the 'imagined

54 Quoted in Grundlingh and Sapire, 'From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual?', p. 23.

55 B. Butler, *The Myth of the Hero* (London, Rider and Co., 1979) p. 7.

56 T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London, New Left Books, 1977), p. 340 and B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, Verso 1991 [1983]), p. 80. This argument was used in Grundlingh and Sapire, 'From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual?', p. 24, when asking why the public responded to the Centenary celebrations, probing popular motivation.

57 Other appealing alternatives existed – such as socialism and 'South Africanism', promoted by both state and capital. Both failed, perhaps because they lacked reference to a communal past. The historical dimension was missing, and neither ideology could provide the body of historical mythology made available by Afrikaner nationalism. For a discussion of 'South Africanism' as an ideology, see B. Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa 1890–1933* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 204–205, 243.

58 This phenomenon has received great attention – see, for example, Grundlingh and Sapire, 'From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual?'; Stals, *Afrikaners in die Goudstad, II*, p. 17, and J. Joubert, 'Blanke Arbeid in die Sekondêre Industrieë aan die Witwatersrand 1924–1933' (D. Litt thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, 1987).

59 Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, p. 340. Grundlingh and Sapire have used this argument in their review of the changing fortunes of the Great Trek myth, 'From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual?', p. 22.

60 See H. Adam and H. Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1979), p. 110. For an example, see S. W. Pienaar and J. J. J. Scholtz (eds), *Glo in u Volk: Dr D.F. Malan as Redenaar 1908–1954* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1954), pp. 122–123.

61 In describing how the upper level was dispossessed of power, dominees lost control, lawyers lost clientele, teachers were trapped in the '50–50' (50 per cent Afrikaans, 50 per cent English) educational system, and civil servants needed English skills to get ahead, O'Meara has argued that they promoted Afrikaner Nationalism as a way forward to regain control. D. O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital, and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934–1948* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 55; see also Adam and Giliomee, *Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*, pp. 110–111 and T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975).

62 Meaning 'Ox-wagon', 'Jawbone' (representing a kind of ox-wagon) and 'Centenary Festival'.

community' – the *voortrekker* republics, rooted in the heroic, rustic past – promoted in works of popular history by Preller and J. D. Kestell.<sup>63</sup> Marais was also co-opted to produce such articles as 'Enige Merkwaaardige Afrikaners' (Certain Noteworthy Afrikaners) and 'Twee Dapper Afrikaner Meisies' (Two Brave Afrikaner Girls) and 'Van Oudae en Oumense in Pretoria' (About the Olden Days and People in Pretoria).<sup>64</sup> He was called upon to defend the Boer image against the criticism levelled decades earlier by John Barrow, who perceived them as backward and unprogressive farmers.<sup>65</sup> The works of *voortrekker* hagiography by Preller, Kestell and Marais created a climate of ancestor worship, the *platteland* equivalent of Shintoism, that functioned as foundation myths that defined and legitimised the polity.

Just as in the case of the Great Trek celebrations, the Afrikaner intellectuals promoted the celebration of *volksdigters*. The Language Movement cultivated emerging writers and provided a publishing space for their work. Popular magazines like *Die Huisgenoot* and *Brandwag* created a personality cult around selected literary figures.<sup>66</sup> Marais was vigorously promoted by Preller as the 'first poet', as has been discussed, from the mid-1920s onwards. His work was eagerly solicited and enjoyed by the public, one editor asking: 'when is there going to be something by Mr Marais in the paper?'<sup>67</sup> By the 1930s there was public interest in his work from complete strangers and Marais was coming to be thought of as a 'Good Afrikaner'.<sup>68</sup>

The idea of the 'ware', 'true' or 'good' Afrikaner gained prominence and discursive power from the 1910s, particularly after the 1912 split by Hertzog from the more conciliatory South African Party (SAP) of Smuts and Botha, the ensuing formation of the National Party (NP) and the 1914 Rebellion. Frequent mention was made of a man's role in the South African War. Ostensibly 'True Afrikaners' were required to have fought in that war, speak Afrikaans and share the Calvinist religion. But few of the nationalist intellectuals fitted this mould exactly. Some like Preller, Kestell and Marais spoke in English when in serious debate. Neither Marais nor Preller had seen active service during the South African War, and, while some infused their nationalism with Calvinism, like S. J. Du Toit, others, like N. P. van Wyk Louw, Preller and Marais, were non-believers.

Preller was Goethe to Marais's Schiller – encouraging him, soliciting his writing, getting him work. Preller played the most powerful role in defining Marais's identity and moulding him into an Afrikaner hero. Marais continually missed deadlines,<sup>69</sup> and editors relied on Preller to ensure his articles got written.<sup>70</sup> An article in *Die Burger* maintained that the public would never have seen even one anthology of Marais's poems without Preller.<sup>71</sup> Even in Marais's obituary, Kritzingler observed that the deceased's work was only published

63 J. D. Kestell, *Die Voortrekkers – 'n Kort Geskiedenis Verhaal* (Pretoria, J. H. de Bussy, 1926). Preller's biography of the *voortrekker* Piet Retief had already run into ten printings and 25,000 copies by 1930; his six volumes of edited *voortrekker* reminiscences and his edition of the diary of Louis Trichardt and biography of Andries Pretorius were also very popular. See G. Preller, *Piet Retief* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1930); *Voortrekkeremense*, 6 vols (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1918–1938); *Dagboek van Louis Trichardt* (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1938) and *Andries Pretorius* (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers, 1940).

64 'Van Oudae en Oumense in Pretoria', *Ons Vaderland*, 15 January 1930. 'Oumense' refers to ancestors in a cultural sense.

65 Barrow (1764–1848) was an English traveller and geographer who made derogatory observations of the Boer farmers in the Cape. Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, p. 319.

66 I. Hofmeyr, 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London and New York, Longman, 1987), p. 109.

67 Translated. TAD Preller Collection, A787, S. P. Auwyk to Preller, April 1936.

68 TAD Preller Collection, A787, Marais to Preller, 12 April 1923.

69 Y. Jooste, 'Eugène Marais, my Uncle', *Jaarboek Africana Vereniging van Pretoria*, 10 (1992), pp. 1–3.

70 J. H. Viljoen, 'n *Joernalis Vertel* (Cape Town, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1953).

71 A. H. Jonker, 'Eugène N. Marais', *Die Burger*, 1 April 1936.

'thanks to Preller'.<sup>72</sup> Preller also collected Marais's writings for the journal he edited, *Die Brandwag*.<sup>73</sup> He often maintained that Marais was 'not concerned with publicity'.<sup>74</sup> Yet Preller himself was vigorously involved in promoting Marais's reputation. Having transformed him into an iconic figure – that of the 'first poet', from 1925 Preller took every opportunity to place Marais in the limelight. His political dissidence under Kruger was noted briefly (Preller conceded that his newspaper was so rabidly anti-Kruger that it appeared to be *against* the Republic and *for* the English opposition) but Preller hastened to add that Marais always remained a 'good Afrikaner through and through'.<sup>75</sup> While Preller noted that their long-standing friendship might render him subjective, he devoted an entire chapter to Marais in his 1925 *Historiese Opstelle* (Historical Essays), creating a national historical figure.<sup>76</sup> He argued that Marais's greatest service lay in the realm of Afrikaans poetry.<sup>77</sup> He shaped a stereotypical heroic framework for Marais's biography: his attempt to bring aid to a commando in the Anglo-Boer War; his old and established family; and his early rural upbringing.

Just as Anderson has observed, in nationalist discourse there is not only a need to remember, but also a need to 'forget'.<sup>78</sup> Preller ignored Marais's identification with the decadence and aestheticism of George Moore and Thomas de Quincey,<sup>79</sup> his cosmopolitan tastes and leanings towards morphine and the *avant garde*. Instead, Preller promoted the image of a 'typical Boer of simple tastes',<sup>80</sup> a good rider and shot,<sup>81</sup> a 'man of the veld', who taught everyone to make biltong from wildebeest or kudu, although having 'moral dislike' for the hunt itself.<sup>82</sup> Later the myth-making continued – as *Die Suiderstem* observed in 1937: 'He always remained a Boer ... at home on a horse'.<sup>83</sup> In 1940, F. G. M. du Toit's thesis, *Eugène Marais – Sy Bydrae tot die Afrikaanse Letterkunde*, was published.<sup>84</sup> It was based on interviews with Marais just before his death and had a significant contribution by Preller, who observed in his introduction to the thesis that Marais was 'n *beste Afrikaner*' (a consummate Afrikaner).<sup>85</sup> The thesis itself was simply a more sophisticated version of Preller's vision, the language of literary analysis used to perpetuate the icon. As Preller had it: 'Marais earned the honour of his *volk* through an indestructible contribution to our intellectual heritage.'<sup>86</sup>

72 M. S. B. Kritzinger, 'Te Danke aan Preller', *Volkstem*, 4 April 1936.

73 *Die Brandwag* was published from 1910.

74 W. de Kok, in Marais, *The Soul of the White Ant*, p. 13.

75 Translation from the Afrikaans. G. Preller, *Historiese Opstelle* (Pretoria, J. L. Van Schaik, 1925), p. 183.

76 G. Preller, *Historiese Opstelle* (Pretoria, J. L. Van Schaik, 1925).

77 *Ibid.*, p. 180.

78 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 204–206.

79 Discussed in Swart, 'A "Ware Afrikaner"', chapter five, '“Bushveld Magic” and “Miracle Doctors” – A Discussion of Eugène Marais's and C. Louis Leipoldt's Work in the Waterberg, c. 1906–1913'. See also M. Grobbelaar and H. Roos, 'Eugène Marais: Estetisisme en Dekadent?', *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 30, 4 (November 1992), pp. 64–74.

80 'Sy smaak was eenvoudig, soos ons almal s'n'. Preller quoted in du Toit, *Eugène Marais*, p. xiv.

81 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

82 'Hy wou in die veld wees, in die wilde natuur, en hoe nader daaraan hoe liever, maar om waar te neem en te bewonder, nie om dood te maak nie'. Du Toit, *Eugène Marais*, p. xiii. This corresponds with the argument that at this time there was a need to re-invent the Afrikaner as a man of the veld, explored in Swart, 'A "Ware Afrikaner"', chapter four, 'The Ant of the White Soul – Popular Natural History and the Politics of Afrikaner Identity, with Particular Reference to the Entomological Writings of Eugène Marais'.

83 'Hy het altyd Boer gebly... tuis op 'n perd.' C. A. Groenewald, 'Enkele Herinnerings aan 'n Groot Digter: Eugène Marais', *Die Suiderstem*, 7 September 1937.

84 Du Toit, *Eugène Marais*.

85 *Ibid.*, p. vii.

86 'EM het die erkenlikheid van sy volk verdien deur onverwoesbare werk aan ons intellektuele besit.' G. S. Preller, 'Vroeë herinneringe aan E. N. Marais', *Ons Tydskrif*, May 1936.

## War, Wine and Women – in Pretoria

Marais's attainment of the standing of 'Good Afrikaner' is demonstrated by the role he played in an incident four years before his death. In 1932, Marais participated in a court case – his last case as an advocate – that is illustrative of his own stature as Afrikaner icon and provides a lesson in the politics of defending a recently imagined identity.<sup>87</sup> The recently forged Afrikaner nation was becoming sensitive about protecting its public image. As early as 1914, for example, Preller had lectured on '*Anti-Afrikaanse Tendense in ons Roman-literatuur*' (Anti-Afrikaans Leanings in our Novels).<sup>88</sup> But Henry P. Lamont, a senior lecturer in French at the University of Pretoria, had written *War, Wine and Women* – purportedly the experiences of 'Wilfred Saint-Mande', a soldier in the First World War. The soldier is advised that: '[t]he back-veld Boer bathes only for baptism, marriage and burial. He has no notions of sanitation... Many [of the *voortrekkers*] were illiterate boors, surly and morose. Their favourite pastime was begetting children, both with their wives and their numerous black concubines'.<sup>89</sup>

Published by the London firm, Cassell, it duly appeared in South African booksellers in the middle of 1931. Eight months elapsed before Sannie Broers, housemother of the women's residence at the University of Pretoria and chairperson since 1916, raised the matter at the *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie* congress, held in Pietersburg from 29 March to 2 April 1932.<sup>90</sup> In the climate of ancestor worship created by the *voortrekker* hagiography discussed above, this precipitated an uproar. The novel threatened one of the foundation myths. Johanna 'Hannie' Preller, wife of Gustav Preller, wanted the book suppressed by D. F. Malan and the author's identity revealed.<sup>91</sup>

There was a public outcry at the desecration of recently created heroes. Preller's editorial in *Ons Vaderland* called it 'simply disgusting'.<sup>92</sup> Lamont reacted in the *Pretoria News*, still under his pseudonym, offering to remove the offending parts in later editions.<sup>93</sup> A few days later, however, some of his colleagues at the University of Pretoria signed a petition asking that the book be suppressed.<sup>94</sup> The Afrikaanse Studentebond asked that the author be identified and, if a lecturer, dismissed.<sup>95</sup> The English-language press damned it as a 'heresy hunt',<sup>96</sup> and even Preller's *Die Vaderland* criticised *Die Volkstem* for fomenting irresponsible racial conflict.<sup>97</sup> On 13 May, Malan decided not to commission an inquiry into the suppression of the novel, and the younger NP and SAP supporters became rash with rhetoric. Four young nationalists decided to take the law – and Lamont – into their own hands. Taken to a garage, he was stripped (but modestly re-clad in a bathing suit), tarred

87 W. Saint-Mande, *War, Wine and Women* (London, Cassell and Company, 1932). This incident is comprehensively discussed in J. C. Steyn, *Trouwe Afrikaners – Aspekte van Afrikaner-nasionalisme en Suid-Afrikaanse Taalpolitiek* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1987). See also E. Kahn, 'When the Lion Feeds – and the Censor Pounces', *South African Law Journal*, 83, 3 (1966), p. 311, and D. Joubert, *Teer-en-Veer* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1972).

88 To the Academy in Pietermaritzburg. Quoted in Steyn, *Trouwe Afrikaners*, p. 149.

89 Saint-Mande, *War, Wine and Women*, pp. 295–296.

90 *Die Volkstem*, 11 April 1932.

91 The role of women in defending ethnic identity through women's institutions has been examined by J. Butler, 'Afrikaner Women and the Creation of Ethnicity in a Small South African Town, 1902–1950', in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London, James Currey, 1989).

92 Translated. *Ons Vaderland*, 15 January 1932; repeated in *Die Vaderland*, 6 April 1932 ('Ons' had changed to 'Die' in the newspaper title).

93 *Pretoria News*, 5 April 1932.

94 *Pretoria News*, 9 April 1932.

95 *Die Volksblad*, 9 April 1932.

96 *Pretoria News*, 26 April 1932.

97 *Die Vaderland*, 21 April 1932.

(albeit only in wagon grease) and feathered, and deposited unceremoniously in Church Square – carrying a placard that read ‘War, Wine and Women’.<sup>98</sup>

The four perpetrators immediately contacted the offices of *Die Volkstem* and *Die Vaderland*. The English-speaking public and many Afrikaans-speakers were appalled.<sup>99</sup> But Preller, for example, felt that Lamont had bruised the nation’s honour,<sup>100</sup> and Langenhoven contended that a nation had to be concerned with defending its honour.<sup>101</sup> It became an issue of popular debate, both in the classroom and from the pulpit.

The young men came before the court on 7 June on charges of assault. Dr Hjalmar Reitz and Marais were asked to defend them.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, Marais was called upon not as an advocate (he had not practised law for several years), but as a ‘great Afrikaner’. A contemporary commentator, Wim Hartman, observed: ‘We all wanted to hear what he would say’.<sup>103</sup> Marais had come to represent the Afrikaner establishment as a lawyer and the Afrikaner as a man. The defence adopted was that as Afrikaners and descendants of *voortrekkers*, the defendants felt personally affronted by the novel. One of the defendants was the grandson of Carolus Johannes Trichardt;<sup>104</sup> two of the defendants maintained that Kruger was their great-grandfather and the last argued that his father was a Dutch *predikant* (clergyman).

Marais was out of practice and presented an incoherent defence – he lost the case and the magistrate imposed the maximum penalty: a fine of £50 each or six months’ hard labour, to a chorus of approval from the English press and a cry of outrage from the Afrikaans press at Lamont’s apparent exoneration.<sup>105</sup> *Die Volksblad* and *Die Burger* started a fund to pay their fines, accepting only small donations so that more people had a chance to participate. Lamont sued the young men in a civil action and was awarded £750.<sup>106</sup> A significant ramification, which was at least partly the result of the *cause célèbre* that split the University of Pretoria and heightened nationalist sentiment, was the decision on 7 September to make Afrikaans the university’s official language.<sup>107</sup>

Four years after the case, in 1936, while in semi-retirement on Preller’s farm, Marais borrowed a gun, ostensibly to shoot a snake, and committed suicide. His increasing bouts of depression, which he had called ‘an hesperian melancholy’ or ‘the sadness of twilight’,

98 *Die Burger*, 24 May 1932. *The Pretoria News* reported erroneously that Lamont was both a professor and released naked into Church Square. Lamont later emigrated.

99 *The Star*, 23 May 1932, was indignant; *Die Volkstem* 24 May 1932 was critical of the incident; *Die Vaderland*, 25 May 1932, maintained that not only was the tarring-and-feathering un-Christian, it was also un-Afrikaans (although in a later article, 28 May 1932, it was more critical of the English press and less apologetic); *Die Weste*, 27 May 1932, the nationalist paper from Potchefstroom, was highly critical of the English press; and the Free State *The Friend*, 2 June 1932, regarded the men as heroes.

100 *Die Vaderland*, 25 May 1932

101 *Die Burger*, 17 August 1932.

102 Reitz (1877–1946) was the eldest son of President Reitz, brother of Deneys Reitz, and an author and politician. He fought in the South African War and was exiled to India, later elected to the Transvaal Provincial Council and then to the House of Assembly as Nationalist member for Brits. In 1932 he co-published, with Harm Oost, *Ons Land en Ons Volk: 'n Nasionale Jaarboek, 1931* (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, 1932).

103 ‘*Ons wou almal hoor wat [Marais] sou sê.*’ He added that Marais was very out of practice and his ramblings caused his popular image to crumble. C. J. Mieny, *Leipoldt en Marais – Onwaarskynlike Vriende* (Pretoria, Lotter, 1988), p. 50.

104 Carolus ‘Karel’ Trichardt was a celebrated early trekker.

105 See, for example, *The Star*, 21 June 1932 and *Die Burger*, 24 June 1932.

106 Lamont was to write in 1933 from Oxford to *The Star* that he did not receive the full amount and was busy with a new book, *Halcyon Days in Africa*, which would deal with the ‘experiences of a lecturer at a university’, *The Star*, 6 July 1933. *Halcyon Days* was duly published (London, Eric Partridge, 1934). Safe from wagon grease, Lamont has one of his characters refer to Nationalists as ‘fanatical, uncultured, mendacious, double dealing boors...’ and offered the advice: ‘Keep clear of a cobra, a toad, a viper and the Nationalists’ (p. 93).

107 The debates within the University of Pretoria are discussed in Steyn, *Trouwe Afrikaners*, p. 150.

had been well known. A reviewer of one of his scientific papers commented wryly on Marais's view of ultimate earthly ruin through global drought and desiccation: 'We would not regard Mr. Marais as a pessimist, but he evidently finds optimism difficult.'<sup>108</sup> His death was, however, a shocking surprise. Shortly afterwards, *Die Huisgenoot* sent an urgent telegram to Preller asking him to write a eulogy.<sup>109</sup> The obituary mentions neither the morphine addiction nor his suicide. Preller received a number of letters afterwards from members of the public. One noted: 'Although I never knew Adv. Marais, I loved him. Why? After your piece I loved him even more.' An accompanying wish was expressed that there be one or other means by which Afrikaners could commemorate a great Afrikaner.<sup>110</sup>

Marais's memorial service was just such a commemoration. Held on 15 May 1936, at the University of Pretoria, it included speeches by notables, selections of Marais's poetry and a rendition of '*Die Stem*'.<sup>111</sup> There was, indeed, some confusion as to who would erect a suitable gravestone: the Marais family or *Die Vaderland*.<sup>112</sup> Preller was aware that the right publicity had to be generated, especially after discussions with a colleague over the fact that Tielman Roos, the Nationalist politician and lawyer, had already been forgotten, his funeral unattended.<sup>113</sup> The editor of *Die Vaderland* started a fund: the 'Eugène Marais-Fund for Inexpensive Afrikaans Books'.<sup>114</sup> Joan Couzyn, the sculptor, was commissioned to sculpt Marais. A fund was started by the *Afrikaanse Skrywerskring* (Afrikaans Writers' Circle) in Johannesburg to bronze the plaster cast of Marais, to which schools and private individuals donated. The *Volksblad* noted that 'the sentiment existed to honour [Marais] as one of our purest and [most] fêted artists. The most fitting manner is to commission a bust and to place it in the Afrikaans room in the Johannesburg public library, available to the Afrikaans public'.<sup>115</sup> Even in death Marais's public image was pragmatically orchestrated by Preller for nationalist ends. Preller was anxious over one of the two statues that were produced, in which Marais's eyes were closed in sleep. He feared that the appearance of rest resembled rather too closely one of morphine stupor. The statue was destroyed.

The 1950s were quiet for Marais's ghost; only Thorpe's anthology of his poems appeared. With the Nationalist victory in 1948, the 1950s saw less need for Afrikaner hagiography. Grundlingh and Sapire have shown that other symbols such as the Great Trek celebrations also lost support. Arguably, as a distinct group, Afrikaners had material interests to pursue, and were secure enough not to need continual reminders of their own identity, unity and potential. Rapprochement between English- and Afrikaans-speakers accounts for Thorpe's bilingual anthology of translated poems, as English-Afrikaans ethnic differences became less significant than the racial divide between black and white in South Africa.<sup>116</sup> With the attainment of Afrikaner political hegemony and economic strength, it

108 Editorial Notes, *The Agricultural Journal of the Union of South Africa* vii, no. 2, Pretoria, February 1914, p. 151.

109 TAD Preller Collection, A787.

110 Translated. TAD Preller Collection, A787, 128, V. A. van der Spuy to Preller, 24 April 1936.

111 C. J. Langenhoven's poem, '*Die Stem*' (The Voice), had been set to music in 1921 and had been used by the South African Broadcasting Corporation in addition to 'God Save the King' (it was played in addition to 'God Save the King' at the opening of parliament in 1938).

112 TAD Preller Collection, A. Eloff to Preller, 18 June 1936. Apparently the Marais family wished to raise their own; his son negotiated unsuccessfully with the editor of *Die Vaderland*.

113 TAD Preller Collection, Albert van Ginkel to Preller 25 April 1936. '*En wat word ons gou vergeet. Wie praat nog oor Tielman Roos? Tog seker 'n figuur wat populêr was. Ek was op sy Memorial Service... 't Was pynlik om die leë saal te sien.*'

114 TAD Preller Collection, A 787, A. Eloff to Preller, 18 June 1936.

115 'Eugène Marais Borsbeeldfonds', *Die Volksblad*, 17 November 1944.

116 Thompson has shown that as Great Britain ceased to be a major power, anglophobic rhetoric was replaced by anti-black ideology. L. Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985), p. 40.

was not a time that needed ethnic heroes. Marais might have been allowed to rest in peace, becoming increasingly of concern only to historians of literature, had it not been for renewed interest from an unexpected direction.<sup>117</sup>

## The 1960s – The Scientist Triumphant

The year 1961 saw both South Africa's transition to a Republic and a great change in Marais's image, a transformation effected by Robert Ardrey for reasons alien to *kultuurpolitiek*. Although initially there had been little interest in Marais's primatological writings, he had always longed to be remembered as a scientist, hoping that his writing on animal behaviour would live on. His work had not, hitherto, been celebrated in this way. After a brief burst of fame during the Maeterlinck scandal, he settled into general scientific obscurity. *Die Huisgenoot* afforded (the posthumously published) *Burgers van die Berge* a lukewarm reception in 1938. It was damned as fragmentary and full of errors, and it was recommended that 'the theory' side be left out if a second edition came to be published, as it was built on ideas that were 'already old-fashioned in 1938'.<sup>118</sup> In 1960, the literary critic, Dekker, noted that, although Marais wrote a few interesting natural history studies, he was of importance really only as a poet.<sup>119</sup> Another reviewer did observe that Marais's popularity was growing slowly but steadily abroad and asked whether his dismal reception in South Africa was a case of a prophet not being appreciated in his own land.<sup>120</sup>

Developments in Europe and America were to catapult Marais back in his own country's esteem.<sup>121</sup> A disciplinary turf war had erupted in the field of ethology (animal behaviour). Crudely put, there were two warring camps in contention. Konrad Lorenz's writings – culminating in *On Aggression* (1966) – maintained that aggressive impulses are innate, and drew analogies between human and animal behaviour. In his 1961 *African Genesis* and his 1966 *The Territorial Imperative*, Ardrey, the populist wing of the Lorenz camp, contended that *homo sapiens* had built a society predicated on territoriality. He dismissed Freud's idea of sex as societal pivot, postulating the aggressive drive as fulcrum.<sup>122</sup> As Stephen Jay Gould observed, 'With Konrad Lorenz as godfather, Robert Ardrey as dramatist, and Desmond Morris as raconteur, we are presented with man, "the naked ape", descended from an African carnivore, innately aggressive and inherently territorial'.<sup>123</sup>

Lorenz and Ardrey had dismissed Freudian theory about the primacy of sexuality and argued instead that the key to behaviour lay in territorial aggression. In attacking Freud, Ardrey needed to undermine those ethologists who used sexuality as the theoretical foundation for behaviour. He used the example of Solly Zuckerman's research on primates, *Social Life of Apes and Monkeys* (1932), in which he alleged Zuckerman had argued in terms of a Freudian analysis of the basic motivating force of primates as sex not aggression,

117 There was interest from a few academics: P. J. Nienaber, *Eugène Marais – Die Groot Eensame* (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, 1951); J. van Melle, 'Die Boesmanverhale van Eugène Marais', *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 3, 3 (1953).

118 Review of *Burgers van die Berge* by C. G. S. de Villiers, *Die Huisgenoot*, 3 June 1938.

119 Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 55.

120 M. S. B. Kritzinger, front page review of *Burgers van die Berge*, *Die Volksstem*, 23 April 1938.

121 It is interesting that this chronology elegantly models Thompson's hypothesis in *The Political Mythology of Apartheid*, p. 206, that there is usually a time lag of a generation before events translate into myth.

122 Robert Ardrey (1908–1980) studied natural and social sciences at the University of Chicago, producing *African Genesis* (1961), *The Territorial Imperative* (1966), *The Social Contract* (1970) and *The Hunting Hypothesis* (1976). See University of California, Los Angeles, University Research Library, Department of Special Collections, Robert Ardrey Papers (Collection 957). Ardrey was married to an Afrikaans-speaking actress.

123 S. J. Gould, *Ever Since Darwin – Reflections in Natural History* (Middlesex, Penguin, 1980, [1977]), p. 238.

and particularly the constant sexual receptivity of the female.<sup>124</sup> Zuckerman had been dismissive of Marais in his work.<sup>125</sup>

Ardrey championed Marais, awakening international interest in Marais with his popular works on socio-biology. Dedicating his 1961 *African Genesis* to 'The Memory of Eugène Marais', Ardrey devoted a considerable portion of his book to praising Marais, 'the purest genius that the natural sciences have seen in this century', arguing that 'no discussion of animal societies can begin without homage to his name'.<sup>126</sup> To Ardrey, Marais's significance lay in his criticism of Freud – overtly in correspondence and implicitly in the paradigm of his work.<sup>127</sup> Marais rejected what he called the 'greatest fallacy' of sex as pivot – locating the drive in territoriality and pain.<sup>128</sup> This became a popular theory, adopted by social commentators and filtering into public consciousness through, for example, films such as Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange* and *2001 – a Space Odyssey*.<sup>129</sup> Following Marais's new (posthumous) fame, his 50-year old unpublished manuscript, *The Soul of the Ape*, was published in 1969, with a foreword by Ardrey, while there was a sudden interest throughout the 1960s in publishing academic analyses of Marais's work, by the likes of Nienaber-Luitingh (1962), Cloete (1963), Lindenberg (1966) and Du Randt (1969).<sup>130</sup>

It may be argued that the image of Marais conjured up by Ardrey resonated particularly well in the 1960s. The economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s entrenched the Afrikaner urban bourgeoisie. With political dominance and economic might, anti-capitalist elements of nationalist rhetoric were discarded. There was much soul-searching in magazines such as *Die Huisgenoot* into the social implications of prosperity for Afrikaner identity.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, the lonely rural genius was particularly welcomed in the 1960s as this was a period of anxiety over the dangers of consumer culture and rampant materialism. The simple figure of the solitary genius in the bushveld resonated with intellectuals who sought a return to rural values. This icon had managed to combine being an authentic bushveld Afrikaner with being a genius.

124 Zuckerman argued that constant female receptivity was the very foundation of primate society. See *Functional Affinities of Man, Monkeys and Apes* (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1933). He quotes Freud in S. Zuckerman, *The Social Life of Monkeys and Apes* (London, Kegan Paul, 1932), p. 290.

125 Zuckerman, *The Social Life of Monkeys and Apes*, p. 205.

126 Ardrey, *African Genesis*, pp. 64, 70.

127 Marais had read Freud's *Studien über Hysterie* (1895), in which it was averred that hysteria could be treated with hypnosis, and his *Traumdeutung*, on the significance of dreams, and it has been suggested that he also read *Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens* (Psychopathology in Daily Life) and *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (Three Treatises on the Sexual Theory). See L. Rousseau, *Die Dowwe Spoor van Eugène Marais* (Cape Town, Ibis Press, 1998), p. 33. In *Natuurkundige en Wetenskaplike Studies and Sketse uit die Lewe van Mens en Dier*, Marais explored the treatment of medical conditions through hypnosis and dreams. See 'Die Pad van Drome' (*Laramie, die Wonderwerker*).

128 The centrality of pain to existence is the central theme in Marais's work, recurring in 'Salas Y Gomez' (*Die Huis van die Vier Winde*), 'Die Woestyn trek van die Herero's' (*Sketse uit die Lewe van Mens en Dier*), 'Die Lied van Suid-Afrika' (*Die Siel van die Mier*), and 'De Boom in het Midden van den Hof'.

129 *Life* magazine serialised *The Social Contract*, and *The Territorial Imperative* proved very popular in US secondary schools. See D. Haraway, *Primate Visions – Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London, Verso, 1992), p. 395. Arthur C. Clarke made use of Ardrey's work in Kubrick's *2001 – A Space Odyssey*. See A. C. Clarke, *Lost Worlds of 2001* (New York, New American Library, 1972).

130 T. T. Cloete, *Eugène N. Marais* (Cape Town, Nasionale Opvoedkundige Uitgewery, 1963); W. S. H. Du Randt, *Eugène N. Marais as prosais* (Cape Town, Nasou, 1969); E. Lindenberg, *Versamelde Gedigte van Eugène N. Marais* (Pretoria, Academica, 1966) and M. Nienaber-Luitingh, *Eugène Marais* (Cape Town, Human and Rousseau, 1962).

131 'Die Nuwe Afrikaner: sy Hede is in die Stede' (The New Afrikaner: his Present is in the Cities), *Die Huisgenoot*, 28 May 1965; 'Word ons Afrikaners te Ryk?' (Are we Afrikaners becoming too rich?), *Huisgenoot*, 12 July 1968; 'Stand en Klas by die Afrikaners' (Standing and Class among Afrikaners), *Die Huisgenoot*, 10 November 1961 and 17 November 1961.



## The 1970s and 1980s – Doubt and Dissent

The 1970s were years of accelerated socio-economic change in South Africa.<sup>132</sup> As Hobsbawm has contended, invented traditions are usually reworked during periods of the ‘most bewildering and rapid change’.<sup>133</sup> In this decade, the country faced economic upheaval, a severe balance of payments deficit, climbing unemployment and inflation, and a decline in the gross domestic product. There were subsequent internal challenges to hegemony: some Afrikaner businessmen and intellectuals doubted the system’s ability to function if it remained predicated on racial division and state intervention in the economy.<sup>134</sup> Under the broad political label of *verligte* (enlightened), they began to pressurise the government to reform, believing in the need for moderate black and English-speaking support, which meant the unifying idea of the *volksiel* (people’s soul) was disappearing as a useable concept and old symbols were under threat. Posel has shown that a new political vocabulary based on technocratic rationality came to replace apartheid orthodoxy.<sup>135</sup> But old ideological language and images persisted because, as she has demonstrated, the new language of legitimation could not provide answers to ‘issues concerning the ethics of apartheid and the status of the *volk*’.<sup>136</sup> Old heroes endured for those for whom the new technocratic state was not enough. A *broedertwis* (fratricidal conflict) erupted as certain factions attempted to retain the traditional mythology. There was declining interest among Afrikaner matriculants in taking history as a school subject.<sup>137</sup> Yet when an Afrikaans-speaking historian, F. A. van Jaarsveld, dared to challenge traditional interpretations of the Day of the Vow, he was tarred and feathered by the AWB.<sup>138</sup> This was a manifestation of the polarisation of Afrikaner opinion: as the NP won increasing support from English-speakers, they alienated many right-wing Afrikaners, particularly small farmers and urban workers whose chief identification was still ethnic and who tried to cling to traditional heroes and iconic events. In this period of doubt and re-evaluation, Marais was reborn as a dissident icon and the two great historiographical traditions began to diverge in earnest.

There was a need for icons of dissidence to unite those English- and Afrikaans-speakers jointly opposed to the government’s conservatism, and to inspire the dissident Afrikaners themselves.<sup>139</sup> Marais received support through the *verligte*, rather than the *verkrampste*, camp within the *kultuurpolitiek*. Anton Rupert, who had fallen out with Verwoerd in 1959 and become part of *verligte* opposition to the conservative faction, endowed the Eugène Marais Chair of Zoology at the University of Pretoria.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, N.

132 S. Jones and A. Müller, *The South African Economy, 1910–1990* (London, Macmillan, 1992).

133 E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (London, Canto, 1997 [1983]), pp. 4–5.

134 S. Greenberg, ‘Ideological Struggles within the South African State’, in Marks and Trapido (eds), *Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism*, p. 393.

135 D. Posel, ‘The Language of Domination, 1978–1983’, in *ibid.*, p. 419.

136 In the face of the growing espousal of consumerism, the soul-searching of some factions continued as Afrikaner prosperity increased. Adam and Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*, pp. 7–8, capture the divergence in self-image by considering two popular images of the Afrikaner in 1979: a ‘rugged rifleman of the Boer war’, who still places ‘his beliefs before his pocketbook’ and an ‘Afrikaner elite behind BMW and Mercedes steering wheels’.

137 C. R. Liebenberg, *The Teaching of History at South African Secondary Schools* (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1972), pp. 23–24.

138 The conference was on ‘Problems in the Interpretation of History with Possible Reference to Examples from South African History such as the Battle of Blood River’. Terreblanche told the press: ‘We as young Afrikaners are tired of seeing ... everything that is sacred to the Afrikaners desecrated... by liberal politicians, dissipated academics and false prophets’. *Sunday Times*, 1 April 1979.

139 There were efforts to create a narrative of collective white effort, with a resultant emphasis on Marais’s home language – certainly, the manuscripts of poems like ‘Mabalel’ justify the contention that Marais thought in English.

140 Rupert, *Eugène Marais*. The post has been held by one incumbent since 1971, Professor J. du P. Bothma.

P. van Wyk Louw,<sup>141</sup> who was attacked for ‘political deviation’ by Verwoerd and had championed the muted iconoclasm of the *sestigers*,<sup>142</sup> argued that Marais’s bushman poems were among the best in Afrikaans.<sup>143</sup> In 1974, Leon Rousseau published his authoritative biography of Marais, the result of twelve years’ painstaking research.<sup>144</sup> It was serialised in *Rapport*, which won Rousseau praise from one faction for his candid portrayal of Marais’s drug abuse, and some public outrage at the besmirching of his memory. The playwright, Athol Fugard, wrote and produced the film, *The Guest – an Episode in the Life of Eugène Marais*, centring on Marais’s failed attempt to break his addiction.<sup>145</sup> Fugard noted ‘...[Marais’s] vision was essentially one which was produced in an interaction with Africa, and we wanted very much to make a film that had its roots here, in the country in which it would be made’.<sup>146</sup>

Almost paradoxically, considering his earlier significance in the nationalist mainstream, Marais was adopted as a symbol of the Afrikaner conscientious objector, refusing to be co-opted by the Afrikaner establishment. As André Brink noted in 1971, more than 90 per cent of Afrikaans writers were ‘pro-government, pro-establishment and pro-system’, so the anti-apartheid movement increasingly sought out historically subversive writers.<sup>147</sup> For example, Jack Cope, the literary critic, described Marais as a lonely genius, averring ‘[a]n almost stone-walled lack of communication between this one artist of brilliant and searching mind and the plodding, blinkered people around him – this was the key to his life, and to his failure’.<sup>148</sup> Du Toit contended that Marais chose the lonely and select path.<sup>149</sup> Cope likened Marais to Jan Rabie in their common call for modernism against an antiquated patriarchy, and to Etienne Leroux, in their mutual escape from the limitations of *volk en kerk*, through mysticism and the occult.<sup>150</sup> The lonely genius image is perpetuated in Fugard’s *The Guest*. Doris Lessing maintained that ‘his isolation was the saving of an original genius’ of ‘intellectual loneliness’.<sup>151</sup>

In 1975, Zuckerman returned to South Africa and delivered a public lecture at the University of Cape Town on ‘Direction and Misdirection in Science’, in which he called Marais a ‘scientific impostor whose skilful pen had been steered by a lively imagination, sometimes fuelled by drugs’. Afterwards, Zuckerman noted ruefully that he ‘should have been warned. The accounts of my lecture in the papers next day made it clear that I had committed something like sacrilege in the way I had referred

141 G. Olivier, ‘N.P. van Wyk Louw and R. F. A. Hoernlé’ (unpublished paper, Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, 30 May 1994). For other views of van Wyk Louw’s role see, for example, M. Sanders, ‘“Problems of Europe”: N. P. van Wyk Louw, the Intellectual and Apartheid’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25, 4 (December 1999).

142 The *sestigers* (literally: ‘the Sixties generation’) were young urban Afrikaners who voiced opposition to their conservative elders through literature. The significance of this development was not lost on a people whose political identity had itself grown out of a linguistic and cultural movement.

143 ‘*Van die grootste prosa in ons taal*’, quoted in F. I. J. van Rensburg, *Die Smal Baan* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1971), p. 83.

144 Interview with Rousseau, Cape Town, November 1998. Rousseau’s biography remains the most important source on Marais.

145 With Fugard as Marais and Marius Weyers as Dr A. G. Visser, the poet Marais discovered in the course of attempting to get him to supply morphine.

146 A. Fugard, *The Guest – an Episode in the Life of Eugene Marais* (Johannesburg, Ad Donker, 1977), p. 8.

147 J. Cope, *The Adversary Within – Dissident Writers in Afrikaans* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1982), p. 39.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

149 Du Toit, *Eugène Marais*, p. xix, noted ‘*hy ’n eensame en afgesonderde weg uitgekies het*’.

150 Cope, *The Adversary Within*, p. 99. Indeed, Cope adopts a Freudian approach in interpreting Marais’s opposition to Kruger in terms of his hatred of the father figure. He contends that Marais’s scorn for his own ineffectual, absent father was projected onto Kruger.

151 D. Lessing, ‘Ant’s Eye View’, *New Statesman*, 29 January 1971, reprinted in D. Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), pp. 145–146.

to an Afrikaner who had entered South African folklore as a literary and scientific genius'.<sup>152</sup>

The apocrypha of dissidence – the anecdotes of individual opposition to authority – accompanies these discussions of Marais as a subversive. These focus, for example, on his opposition to the Krugerites of the *Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR). Marais himself relished what he represented as his own family's disdain for authority, telling how Paul Kruger – then Commandant-General of the Republic – once dropped by, and Marais's mother, having no idea who the visitor was, asked him to wait on the *stoep* until her husband returned.<sup>153</sup> Cope retells the questionable anecdote about Marais's perennial adversary, the Reverend A. J. Louw, a dour Dutch Reformed Church clergyman, nicknamed 'the Pope of the Highveld'. Marais purportedly responded to Louw's denunciation of Darwinism: 'Don't pick on me, Dominee. It's a matter between you and the Almighty. I really had nothing to do with the creation of the universe'.<sup>154</sup>

Yet the image of Marais as iconoclast is as distorted as his mainstream heroic identity. André Brink contended that when the young poet Marais clashed with Kruger, it represented the 'universal struggle of morality against corruption'.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Cope has misconstrued Marais's opposition to Kruger as an act of solitary dissension. In the 1890s, the ZAR was a realm where 'progressive' and 'conservative' were relative states; only in the Volksraad Chambers did they crystallise into two unambiguous nuclei.<sup>156</sup> Even there, it was not uncommon to vote for the 'opposite side'. It must also be remembered that Marais had never been an outsider, drawing freely upon the self-labelled Progressive network as a journalist-editor in Kruger's ZAR from 1891–1896; likewise, following his return in 1902, under the Milner regime, he leant on a network of powerful men in editing *Land en Volk*. After his withdrawal from the role of editor after 1905, until his death in 1936, Marais relied heavily on a network of colleagues and nationalist intellectuals to get his writing published, and indeed to accommodate him.

The distortion by Cope and Brink is exacerbated by the ahistorical notion of a monolithic 'Afrikaner establishment'. The early Afrikaner nationalist movement was neither Afrikaans nor nationalist nor a movement.<sup>157</sup> A combination of individuals who spoke variously English, Dutch or an amalgam of Dutch and other languages, operated in ways too varied and idiosyncratic to be called a movement, in order to work towards ideals that varied, but seldom included a straightforward vision of a nation-state. 'Afrikaner' was a construct; it signified a series of relationships rather than a synchronic entity. Historians of nationalism concede that the wider audience held views that were contradictory and diverse, as well as loosely grasped. The corresponding fallacy is that the middle-class culture-brokers offered a tightly knit programme of views and goals. But, in reality, there were contradictions within the 'core', and a lack of homogeneity among the culture-brokers. The idea of a monolithic unity of the *volk*, organic *volkseenheid*, has been a teleological imposition, promoted particularly since the 1940s. Historically permeable boundaries and a fragmented nature characterised this group. The image that constitutes dissident and establishment Afrikaners for Cope, proceeds from a reductive view of societal relations that renders the ZAR a bleak political cartoon. Factionalised but powerful blocs characterised Afrikaner communities and while Marais may not always have been in favour with the

152 S. Zuckerman, *Monkeys, Men and Missiles, an Autobiography 1946–88* (London, Collins, 1988), p. 456; see also *The Times*, 26 September 1975.

153 Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, p. 9; personal communication from Rousseau to author.

154 Cope, *The Adversary Within*, p. 2.

155 A. Brink, *Mapmakers – Writing in a State of Siege* (London, Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 17.

156 For further discussion of this point see chapter two in Swart, 'A "Ware Afrikaner"'.  
157 To paraphrase Voltaire on the Holy Roman Empire.

government (as, for example, under the Kruger regime), he certainly was popular with the Pact Government from 1924, and remained in contact with powerful figures both in and out of office. It must also be remembered that when Marais opposed Kruger, it was Marais who invoked the Afrikaner cause as opposed to Kruger's supposed favouritism of the more cosmopolitan sections of the community, such as the Hollanders or other continental Europeans.

Marais was certainly not the 'lonely rebel' of this iconography. In reality, he was incorporated into the network of intellectuals and politicians. From 1912, Marais supported Hertzog in the Nationalist breakaway. During the 1914 Rebellion, Marais evinced unequivocal support for the Rebellion, donating his stallion to the rebel Jan Wessel Wesels.<sup>158</sup> Following the Rebellion, the Pretoria bar was the domain of nationalists: Colin Steyn, Oswald Pirow, Charles te Water, Danie de Waal and Tielman Roos. The network was close-knit – there is evidence to suggest, for example, that Roos and Marais were close friends.<sup>159</sup> His friend Charlie Pienaar appointed Marais special justice of the peace in the Waterberg. In 1919, Marais encouraged Mabel Malherbe to establish the first Afrikaans magazine exclusively for women, *Die Boerevrou*. Marais was friends with the influential Miemie Rothman and C. Louis Leipoldt.<sup>160</sup> A series of letters to Preller show that Marais was desirous of work in the civil service, and anxious that Preller use their mutual friends' influence.<sup>161</sup> Marais was not a recluse – for example, he loved attending tennis and dinner parties.<sup>162</sup> The figure of a genius driven to suicide by a quixotic quest for perfection is also false. Marais published as an active pragmatic newspaperman accustomed to meeting deadlines. He wrote many brief light-hearted stories for cash.<sup>163</sup> Even Preller conceded that Marais indulged in writing potboilers for profit-hungry publishers, and made slighting reference to Marais's headline-hunting contributions to the vulgar and sensational yellow press.<sup>164</sup>

## The 1990s – the Re-invention of the Afrikaner

Flexible symbols are the ones that endure. What currency did the figure of Marais have for Afrikaners in a society that increasingly identified itself with international consumer culture? In the early 1990s, there was a need to reinvent what it meant to be an Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa. Reflecting the competing factions within Afrikanerdom, key Afrikaner symbols underwent radical alteration, while others persisted, entrenched by those with vested interests.

Thus, the romantic image of Marais as neglected scientific genius has persisted. In 1999, the *Natal Mercury* commended him as one of the '100 people who made South Africa' for having 'increased the international status of the Afrikaner and natural science in South Africa'.<sup>165</sup> His memory has also been promoted internationally via Rupert Sheldrake's works of popular science. Since the end of the 1960s, Marais has no longer been

158 There were personal links to rebels – his tie to martyred rebel Jopie Fourie as an old family friend and to rebel leader C. F. Beyers through his niece and Marais's late wife, Aletta Beyers, may have influenced him as much as their overtly nationalist rhetoric.

159 TAD Tielman Roos Collection, Roos to Miss D. E. van Reenen, 18 April 1921, 3 June 1921.

160 Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, p. 340.

161 TAD Preller Collection, A787, pp. 93–99.

162 Jooste, 'Eugène Marais, my Uncle', pp. 1–3.

163 'Die Wegraak van Sannie' (*Magriet van Laastelust and Die Wegraak van Sannie*), 'Die Brief van Nootgedag', 'Die Mielies van Nootgedag' (both from *Sketse uit die Lewe van Mens en Dier*), 'Die Leeus van Magoeba' (*Die Leeus van Magoeba*).

164 Du Toit, *Eugène Marais*, pp. ix, x.

165 *The Natal Mercury*, 1 December 1999. A survey of those people who had 'exercised the greatest influence on the shaping of South Africa in the twentieth century', was opened to the public on the Internet in 1999.

remembered chiefly for his poetry, but for his science – celebrated as a genuine Afrikaner ‘tragic genius’. Marais was once again re-deployed as an icon of alternative chic, anthologised in a collection of ‘Green poetry’, as an early ‘ecological poet’.<sup>166</sup> In order to foster reconciliation, there was still a need for icons of dissidence to demonstrate that not all Afrikaners should be tarred as racists. This is epitomised by Nelson Mandela eulogising Ingrid Jonker in his first presidential address to parliament. The historian O’Meara included Marais among the Afrikaner dissidents to whom he dedicated his book, describing Marais as having fought against the ‘nationalist mainstream’ in opposing the ‘obscurantism’ of Kruger.<sup>167</sup> O’Meara maintained that Marais, Uys Krige (who opposed fascism in the 1930s) and Ingrid Jonker (a martyred suicide – like Marais or ‘Johannes Kerkorrel’ [Ralph John Rabie]) were ‘*ware Afrikaners*’. Nevertheless, the radical right has not forgotten Marais either. Terreblanche likens his own poetry to that of Marais and the Boerestaat internet listserv remembers him as a hero.<sup>168</sup>

Nations need heroes and the aesthetics of heroism are wrapped up in changing discourse.<sup>169</sup> In the years since Hobsbawm and Ranger published *The Invention of Tradition*, the central idea – that national traditions are often the invention of intellectuals seeking to create national unity – has been widely accepted and applied. A side effect of this is a tendency to assume that if an account of history can be proven to be invented, it no longer matters.<sup>170</sup> This article has sought to show that, while subject at times to the vagaries of fashion, an ‘invented’ account of a prominent individual life matters enormously, as it reflects the changing socio-political milieu. As such, it can be a window into understanding different trends in public opinion, the politics of unofficial discourse in South Africa. The politics of official discourse may be systematically analysed through published government material – unofficial discourse is harder to capture, and one way is through heroes.<sup>171</sup>

## Conclusion

Marais has not suffered the fate of most sacred cows – to be milked as long as they yield and then to be butchered. Other Afrikaner ‘heroes’ have received revisionist attention – C. J. Langenhoven, for example, was long venerated and then vilified.<sup>172</sup> Marais is described in the historiography in two very different ways: he is popularly known as a nationalist hero, a founder member of the coterie who established Afrikaans as a literary language.<sup>173</sup> Yet he has also been adopted as a symbol of the Afrikaner conscientious objector, refusing

### Footnote 165 continued

Marais was placed at number 36, well after Danie Craven at 8, but before Albert Luthuli at 44. This survey was published as *They Shaped Our Century* (Cape Town, Human and Rousseau, 1999).

166 Marais has been celebrated recently in ecological or ‘green’ poetry collections. See J. Lodewyk Marais, *Groen: Gedigte oor die Omgewing* (Pretoria, HAUM-Literêr, 1990) and J. Lodewyk Marais, *Ons Klein en Silwerige Planeet: Afrikaanse, Nederlandse en Vlaamse Gedigte oor die Omgewing* (Pretoria, J. L. Van Schaik, 1997).

167 D. O’Meara, *Forty Lost Years: the Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948–1994* (Randburg, Ravan Press, 1996), p. 125.

168 Unsurprisingly, there exists no pristine organic *volk* vision of Marais: the Boerestaat group list recommends Rousseau’s book.

169 J. Baird, *To Die for Germany – Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992).

170 Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, p. 1. See the discussion by J. Willis, ‘Whose Shaka? A Review of Carolyn Hamilton’s *Terrific Majesty*’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 April 1999.

171 For an example of an analysis of the official discourse, see A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990).

172 As fellow Afrikaner hero, Langenhoven has, for example, been dubbed ‘a disturbing example of what can happen to a writer if he has to write in order to serve a group’, by A. Brink in *The Argus*, 4 August 1997. Adam Small labelled him simply a ‘racist’, quoted in J. C. Kannemeyer, *Langenhoven* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1995), p. 56.

173 Hofmeyr, ‘Building a Nation from Words’, p. 109.

to be co-opted by the Afrikaner establishment. The key lies in the changing nature of factions within the establishment itself and its ability to incorporate and refashion Marais in its own image. There is no single and unitary discursive realm in Afrikaner nationalism. There are many Afrikaners, many Afrikaner factions and many Afrikaner heroes. It is interesting, however, that they may often be found occupying one body. As Thomas Carlyle observed in his 1840 disquisition on heroes and hero worship: 'Alas, the hero from of old has had to cramp himself into strange shapes: the world knows not well at any time what to do with him'.<sup>174</sup> Heroes are necessary for a nation to imagine itself. If Marais had not existed, he would have had to be invented, and to a certain extent he was.

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174 T. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History*, annotated by M. Goldberg (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), p. 133. Recent dissidence towards establishment orthodoxy within Afrikanerdom has received investigation from J. Louw-Potgieter, *Afrikaner Dissidents: A Social Psychological Study of Identity and Dissent* (Philadelphia, Clevedon, 1988).