

‘BUSHVELD MAGIC’ AND ‘MIRACLE
DOCTORS’—AN EXPLORATION OF EUGÈNE
MARAIS AND C. LOUIS LEIPOLDT’S
EXPERIENCES IN THE WATERBERG,
SOUTH AFRICA, c. 1906–1917*

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ABSTRACT: This article contributes to the critique of a particular historiographical construction of the rural socio-intellectual world of the Afrikaner, which portrays that world as narrowly Calvinist and culturally circumscribed, with rigidly patrolled racial borders. This challenge is effected through an investigation into the world of the Bushveld Boer through the work of Eugène Marais (1871–1936) and Christiaan Frederick Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947). The article seeks to show that the practical workings of agrarian race relations allowed for a certain measure of cultural osmosis, facilitating Afrikaner interest in African and traditional healing practices. Afrikaner interest in the paranormal and psychic, with an emphasis on European trends, is also investigated, to demonstrate that the image of intellectual isolation has been exaggerated. This is a contribution to the ongoing project of historians interested in Afrikaner identity, who probe the image of a monolithic, Calvinist past and stress variety and often secular thinking.

KEY WORDS: South Africa, intellectual, environment, local history, medicine, identity, nationalism, rural.

HISTORIANS have shown that in the early years of the twentieth century, orthodox belief in the West faced a crisis. Gone were the old certainties, the old codes of behaviour, the deference to nineteenth-century authority. Nietzsche had declared God dead; Freud said sex could be more powerful than reason; Darwin had threatened the foundations of Christian doctrine, and a world war was imminent. In this crisis, as in the fourteenth century, when vitiated papal control and societal upheaval allowed witchcraft and magic to sweep Europe, there was great popular interest in abnormal psychic phenomena – spirit messages, telepathy, clairvoyance and poltergeists – and in new ways of seeing the modern world.¹ Yet the socio-religious life of Afrikaners, particularly in rural communities, has long been described chiefly in terms of the strict unadulterated Calvinism of their beliefs. Such

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¹ For a brief discussion of the ontological composition of ‘modernity’, where this comparison is made, see Paul Johnson, *A History of the Modern World: From 1917 to the 1990s* (London, 1991).

writings, predominately from the Afrikaner Nationalist and Liberal historiographical traditions maintain, respectively, that this faith was both impregnable and narrowly parochial. In a typical example, Sheila Patterson contends, 'South African Calvinism grew out of the veld like an aloe, unmoved by the mellowing breezes of liberalism that blew from Europe'.² Conventional wisdom has shaped an image of Afrikaans rural communities as stagnant backwaters of isolation and racism in stark contrast to the progressive towns – where there was modernity and at least a measure of racial mixing. This is epitomized in C. W. de Kiewiet's image of the 'isolated, introspective frontiers of the *fons et origo* both of impoverishment (both black and white) and of racial exclusiveness and animosity'.³

This article contributes to the questioning of this historiographical construction of the rural socio-intellectual world of the Afrikaner. It does so as an extension and exploration of ideas suggested by Irving Hexham on white–black socio-religious interactions, drawing on and attempting to contribute towards the challenge presented to the conventional historical stereotype of the Afrikaner by André Du Toit and Charles Van Onselen.⁴ This is explored through an investigation into the world of the Bushveld Boer

² Sheila Patterson, *The Last Great Trek – A Study of the Boer People and the Afrikaner Nation* (London, 1957), 178. Patterson is a non-guild historian, but such images are common in both amateur and academic texts. See also David Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa* (Ariel, 1981, 1985), 25; G. H. L. Le May, *The Afrikaners – An Historical Interpretation* (Oxford, 1995); Graham Leach, *The Afrikaners – Their Last Great Trek* (London, 1989); and W. A. de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa* (London, 1975). This has been challenged by, for example, André Du Toit, 'Captive to the nationalist paradigm: Professor F. A. van Jaarsveld and the historical evidence for the Afrikaner's ideas on his calling and mission', *South African Historical Journal*, 16 (1984), 49–80. Lazar and O'Meara argue that the Liberal school falls into the same trap of approaching Afrikanerdom as though it were a discrete and unified nation. J. Lazar, 'Conformity and conflict: Afrikaner nationalist politics in South Africa 1948–1961' (D.Phil., University of Oxford, 1987), 15, and Dan O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital, and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934–1948* (Cambridge, 1983), 7. This seems too condemnatory, as there are historians who may be defined as liberal historians, or at least as drawing heavily on the liberal school, who delineate the complex cleavages in their analyses. See, for example, Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town, 1979); A. M. Grundlingh, *Die 'Hensoppers' en 'Joiners'* (Pretoria and Cape Town, 1979); John Bottomley, 'Public policy and white rural policy' (Ph.D., Queen's University, Kingston, 1991). They have not, however, concentrated on the socio-intellectual world of the Afrikaner.

³ C. W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic* (Oxford, 1941), particularly chs. 8 and 9, and W. M. MacMillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History* (London, 1930).

⁴ André Du Toit, 'No chosen people: the myth of the Calvinist origins of Afrikaner nationalism and racial ideology', *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983); Irving Hexham, 'Modernity', in William Nichols (ed.), *Religion and Modernity* (Waterloo, 1988); Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, 'The spread of Christianity among whites and blacks in Transorangia', in Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa – A Political, Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1997), 121–34; Charles Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914*, 1: *New Babylon*; II: *New Nineveh* (London, 1982), and Charles Van Onselen, 'Race and class in the South African countryside: cultural osmosis and social relations in the sharecropping economy of the South-West Transvaal, 1900–1950', *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 99–123.

through the work of Eugène Marais (1871–1936) and Christiaan Frederick Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947). The respective experiences and writings of Marais and Leipoldt in their 1906 and 1913 sojourns in the ‘Bushveld’ or Waterberg Magisterial District, usually considered a distant hinterland, are traced.⁵

First, the very different outlooks of Marais and Leipoldt are contrasted in order to show the heterogeneity of Afrikaner experience and consciousness, to contest further a monolithic historiographical construction.⁶ The second objective of this article is an attempt to explore a facet of the popular Afrikaans departure from Calvinist theology and Western medicine, towards an interest in African beliefs and traditional medicine – captured in Leipoldt’s term ‘bushveld magic’.⁷ As historians of the rural Transvaal have noted, the practical workings of agrarian race relations allowed for a certain measure of cultural osmosis. This phenomenon has been most thoroughly documented in terms of white influences on black culture.⁸ White–black interaction over ‘magic’ and healing have also received some historiographical attention. There was a widespread practice of tacitly sanctioning traditional healer/‘witchdoctor’ powers as being less disruptive than Christianity,⁹ although healers could prove dangerous in their ability to mobilize public opinion.¹⁰ Colonial regimes also manipulated witchcraft as a local idiom of power – a variant on the Comaroffs’ notion of the ‘colonization of consciousness’.¹¹ Yet what has not been explored sufficiently is the

⁵ The Bushveld consisted of the eastern and northern sections of the Transvaal, drained by the Crocodile River in the west and the Olifants River to the east.

⁶ Additionally, the history of the occult, witchcraft and alternative healing is particularly important in a country like South Africa, which today has approximately 500,000 traditional healers. For modern research on this topic see I. Niehaus, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld* (Cape Town, 2001).

⁷ Beidelman’s differentiation between ‘magic’, ‘witchcraft’ and ‘sorcery’, which imputes moral qualities, are not employed here, because the genres ‘witchcraft’ and ‘magic’ are used interchangeably in the white Bushveld vernacular, and the word ‘sorcery’ is seldom used. T. O. Beidelman, *The Kaguru: A Matrilineal People of East Africa* (New York, 1971), 31.

⁸ There exists a long historiographical tradition on the introduction of Christianity to the black population. See Jean and John Comaroff, *Revolution and Revelation: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991).

⁹ See Karen Fields, ‘Political contingencies of witchcraft in colonial Central Africa: culture and state in Marxist theory’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 16 (1982), 584.

¹⁰ Healers, with their ability to mobilize public opinion, were criminalized when they presented a threat to the colonial government. On the ability to mobilize public action see, for example, the Xhosa prophet in J. B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856–7* (Johannesburg, 1989), and Sean Redding, ‘Sorcery and sovereignty: taxation, witchcraft and political symbols in the 1880 Transkeian Rebellion’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22 (1996), 249–70, and, for modern examples, David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (London, 1985), and Sean Redding, ‘Government witchcraft: taxation, the supernatural, and the Mpondo Revolt in the Transkei, South Africa, 1955–63’, *African Affairs*, 95 (1996).

¹¹ Jean and John Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago, 1993). See, particularly, Ralph Austen, ‘The moral economy of witchcraft’, 89–110, in that collection.

reverse process: the colonization of white consciousness by indigenous belief, a theme to which this article seeks to contribute.¹²

A third intention of the present discussion is to explore public interest in the paranormal and psychic, with an emphasis on the absorption of European trends. This is in order to challenge the conventional wisdom that there was 'in the Transvaal Boer a strong suspicion of all novelty' and to demonstrate that the image of intellectual isolation has been exaggerated.¹³ This is a contribution to the ongoing project of historians interested in Afrikaner identity, like André Du Toit, Hermann Giliomee and Charles Van Onselen, who have probed the image of a monolithic, Calvinist past and stress variety and often secular thinking.¹⁴ This is of historiographical importance because, as Heribert Adam and Giliomee have shown, one of the 'most recurrent perspectives used to explain apartheid policies stresses the primitive Calvinism of backward Boers who, in an isolated corner of the world, missed the Enlightenment by being exposed only to the Old Testament rather than to Voltaire'.¹⁵

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Olive Schreiner in her essay, 'The psychology of the Boer', noted, 'It has been said of the Boer that he is bigoted and intolerant in religious matters. That this accusation should ever been made has always appeared to us a matter of astonishment'.¹⁶ Why the accusation was made, possibly by ill-informed or hasty urban observers, is less astonishing than the fact that it has been reiterated by historians and that the image still persists of the isolated, suspicious Boer.¹⁷ Thus, the liberal school's De Kiewiet and W. M. Macmillan were anxious to find an explanation for poverty and, drawing on the 1929 Carnegie investigation into the poor white predicament, presented an image of the stagnation and backwardness of the countryside in stark contrast to the progressive towns.¹⁸ Although they make for strange bedfellows, both liberal and Afrikaner Nationalist schools have reiterated this doctrine, arguably because it corresponds with their own explanatory agendas. The liberal school has needed an explanation for the 'irrational' racism of the Afrikaner.¹⁹ The Afrikaner Nationalist school requires, and

¹² See, for one of the few examples, Van Onselen, 'Race and class'.

¹³ C. T. Gordon, *The Growth of Boer Opposition to Kruger, 1890-1895* (Cape Town, 1970), 7.

¹⁴ André Du Toit and Herman Giliomee, *Afrikaner Political Thought: Analysis and Documents, 1: 1780-1850* (Los Angeles, 1983).

¹⁵ Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town, 1979).

¹⁶ Olive Schreiner, *Thoughts on South Africa* (London, 1923), 282.

¹⁷ This image of the backward Boer may, of course, be traced back much further, into the colonial records upon which these historians have drawn. See J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing - On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (Yale, 1988).

¹⁸ See Union Government 49-1923 *Final Report of the Drought Investigative Commission and Carnegie Commission Report on the Poor White in South Africa* (Stellenbosch, 1932).

¹⁹ For a discussion of the motivations of the historiographical schools, see Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town, 1988).

particularly required under apartheid, an image of staunch unity and a firm Christian foundation – cultural osmosis between black and white had to be denied unconditionally as it threatened the imagination of a rigidly separatist apartheid state. There was a need to emphasize the barrier between black and white in the countryside and to insist that, while a civilizing influence may have been wrought by white on black, it was a one-way process. Yet, as the work of revisionist historians like Timothy Keegan demonstrates the existence of a greater degree of rural economic flexibility and progressiveness, a parallel picture emerges of a more progressive, less isolated social milieu.²⁰ Concurrently, the black–white boundary of interaction has received increasing attention.

Robert Redfield's model of a Great Tradition and Little Tradition has proved useful in this kind of analysis, as Hexham has suggested.²¹ The Great Tradition is the officially sanctioned discourse of the educated elite – a literate tradition that is transmitted through a formal education system, concentrating particularly on the interpretation of scripture. The Little Tradition, on the other hand, is religion experienced by ordinary people – non-literate, rich in mythology, oriented to cosmic rather than historical time, focusing on experience rather than on theology. It is transmitted by family and community rather than by a formal system of education. There is continual interaction between the traditions: the Little Tradition adopts the Great Tradition's symbolism, but adapts the symbols to its own lived reality. The Great Tradition looks upon the Little Tradition with contempt, but incorporates it to buttress itself. In the representative case of the rural Afrikaner, and to an extent the urban Afrikaner, the Great Tradition is Calvinism, the Little Tradition a mixture of African, Malay, Bushman and European folklore – augmented by innovations from Europe regarding the paranormal.²²

In Europe, the First World War, that 'most "modern" of wars, triggered an avalanche of the "unmodern"'.²³ The anxieties produced by the threat of war, and the devastation produced by the reality of war, resulted in a widespread resurfacing of mid-Victorian ideas of spiritualism, manifested in séances, meetings and publications. Amidst the crazies and charlatans were free thinkers, using spiritualism, Jay Winter argues, to reconcile science, deism and socialism. The work of Charcot on hypnotism popularized the paranormal, as did Freud's theory of the unconscious – a European trend which was imported, at least in part, by Marais, as this essay will explore later.²⁴ There was widespread interest in the occult from intellectuals, and an epidemic of interest amongst soldiers; as Winter notes, 'the presence of pagan or pre-rational modes of thought under the appalling stress of combat should surprise no one'.²⁵ He also records a strong overlap between folklore

²⁰ Timothy Keegan, 'Crisis and catharsis in the development of capitalism in South African agriculture', *African Affairs*, 84 (1985), 371–98.

²¹ Irving Hexham, 'Modernity or reaction in South Africa: the case of Afrikaner religion' (Consultation on Modernity and Reaction, Columbia University, Dec. 1981), 2.

²² See Robert Redfield, *Human Nature and the Study of Society: The Papers of Robert Redfield* (Chicago, 1962), and Robert Redfield, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago, 1989).

²³ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning – The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 56.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 65.

and conventional religious modes of expression. It was this overlap that found reflection in the South African context, which we can explore through the influential work of Marais and Leipoldt.

MARAIS AND LEIPOLDT

The work of Marais and Leipoldt presents a useful framework for investigation.²⁶ They share characteristics and yet are sufficiently different to broaden the window through which the rural world, particularly that of the Waterberg, is viewed. Naturally, it might be questioned whether these two men represent a sufficient sample to contest the formulaic monolithic Afrikaner image. In fact, these two present the ideal model. First, their work was popular and disseminated to a wide audience. Secondly, Afrikaner Nationalist culture-brokers drew heavily upon them and their work. Moreover, while Leipoldt and Marais are the article's chief focus, other sources are also used to create context.

Leipoldt and Marais were friends and colleagues, at one stage sharing a house in Pretoria.²⁷ They shared a network of contacts within the Afrikaans-speaking political realm.²⁸ Leipoldt was staunchly South African Party (SAP), while Marais was passionately Nationalist Party (NP).²⁹ They were both educated in the Cape and in London. Both worked as medical practitioners in the Waterberg – Leipoldt legally as the appointee of the government, Marais illegally to support himself while prospecting for minerals. Both Leipoldt and Marais loved nature, investigating natural phenomena and describing them for the popular press.³⁰ Both were formerly English-speaking, and felt more comfortable in that language. Yet there were significant dissimilarities. As a gentleman scholar in a period of professionalization of South African science, Marais followed the Victorian tradition of the amateur polymath scientist, whereas Leipoldt was a qualified medical doctor. Marais had fled the world of newspapers in Pretoria – in order to conquer his morphine addiction and to get over a failed love affair – to go prospecting, and acted as a justice of the peace. Less romantically, Leipoldt toured the Waterberg for a year in 1913 as a government medical inspector

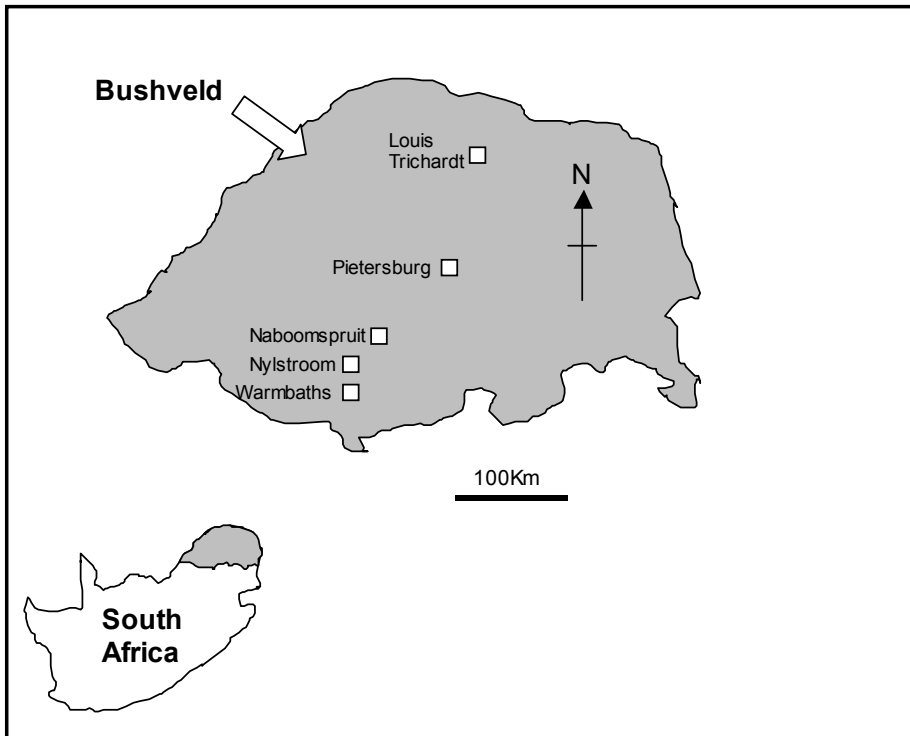
²⁶ Elize Botha, 'Oor raaisels en rillings: Leipoldt se spook- en speurstories', in M. P. O. Burgers, *C. L. Leipoldt* (Cape Town, 1960), discusses the literary worth of Leipoldt's prose, but its historical value has been neglected. See also J. C. De Villiers, 'Leipoldt as geneesheer', *South African Medical Journal*, 58 (1980).

²⁷ Leon Rousseau, *The Dark Stream – The Story of Eugène Marais* (Johannesburg, 1982).

²⁸ For example, Leipoldt's uncle, Ewald Esselen, was Marais's mentor as a young man. Leipoldt worked on *Die Volkstem*, becoming a close friend of its editor, Dr. Engelenburg. He joined *Die Volkstem* in 1923 at the request of both Engelenburg and Jan Smuts, and his fellow assistant editor was Gustav Preller, Marais's best friend.

²⁹ Leipoldt was accused of political bias, 'As if one needed to be a Botha-man or a Nationalist... to detect malnutrition so glaringly apparent, feeble-mindedness so obvious, and physical deterioration so evident!' C. Louis Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor* (Braamfontein, 1980), 14.

³⁰ Indeed in the 1920s Marais had occasion to correct one of Leipoldt's ornithological assertions in *Die Huisgenoot*. C. J. Mieny, *Leipoldt en Marais: Onwaarskynlike Vriende* (Pretoria, 1988), 9.



Map 1. Location of the Bushveld and major centres in the early twentieth-century northern Transvaal.

investigating school conditions, and made recurrent journeys there afterwards.

While Leipoldt wrote *about* the Bushveld Boers, Marais wrote, at least in part, *for* them.³¹ For example, while Marais contributed popular science articles for the popular *Die Huisgenoot*, Leipoldt incurred the ire of *Die Huisgenoot* with his 1920 book *Dingaansdag*, for ‘lowering the name’ of the Afrikaner.³²

Leipoldt presents a more substantial figure than Marais. He spoke Afrikaans, English, Dutch and German. At the age of fourteen he became a reporter for the *Cape Times* and subsequently *De Kolonist*. When the South African War of 1899–1902 broke out he became the Dutch correspondent for the pro-Boer *South African News* and various overseas newspapers.³³

³¹ For a discussion of Leipoldt’s writing see, for example, G. M. S. Boloka, ‘A pragmatic approach to C. L. Leipoldt’s early dramatic monologues’ (M.A., University of Potchefstroom, 1997), and Leon Strydom, ‘n Studie van C. Louis Leipoldt se Slam-pamperliedjies’ (M.A., University of Stellenbosch, 1969).

³² *Die Huisgenoot*, July 1921. See ‘NL’’s review in *Die Huisgenoot*, 18 Feb. 1938. The reviewer was upset by Leipoldt’s liberal attitude to the ‘Kaffervraagstuk’.

³³ These included the *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily Express* (Britain), *Chicago Record*, *Boston Post*, *Petit Bleu* (Belgium), *Hamburger Neueste Nachrichten* (Germany) and *Het Nieuws van de Dag* and *De Telegraaf* (Holland). He was briefly editor of the *South African News*, after the editor was arrested under martial law.

In 1902 he travelled through Europe for the *Manchester Guardian*, before enrolling in Guy's Hospital in London in 1903.³⁴ In 1907, having completed his degree in medicine, he became a houseman at Guy's and made a further study of children's diseases in various European centres. In 1909, on a six-month luxury yacht cruise, he acted as personal physician to the son of the millionaire newspaper magnate, Joseph Pulitzer. Between 1910 and 1911, he was attached to a London children's hospital, publishing on hygiene and nutrition. In 1912 he worked as ship's doctor to the Dutch East Indies. During the war in the Balkans from 1912 to 1913, he acted as war correspondent and doctor for the Greeks in their struggle against Turkey. On his return to South Africa, he was appointed chief medical inspector of schools in the Transvaal. In 1915, he acted briefly as Premier Louis Botha's personal physician, but in June 1915 returned to his post of school medical inspector. He continued to publish plays and to contribute to *Ons Moedertaal*, *Die Boervrou*, *De Volkstem* and *Die Huisgenoot*, acting briefly as assistant editor of *De Volkstem* in 1924.³⁵ He adopted a son and opened his home to foster children. In 1926 he became secretary of the Medical Council of South Africa and editor of the *South African Medical Journal*, while lecturing part time at the University of Cape Town. His prose works were often murder and detective mysteries concerned with the supernatural, and with abnormal psychology.³⁶

THE WATERBERG

After studying in London at the Inner Temple for five years, Marais returned to South Africa in 1902, hoping to help the Boer forces. He purportedly attended some lectures at Guy's Hospital while studying in London, and later propagated the rumour that he had studied at a nerve clinic, but his biographer Rousseau has demonstrated the unlikelihood of this.³⁷ He did, however, travel with a group of German students and may have encountered the latest developments in psychology through discussions with them. After an abortive effort to return to journalism, hampered by his addiction to morphine, Marais retreated to the Waterberg region, where he prospected from 1907. His friend, Charlie Pienaar, secretary for justice, secured him a job as justice of the peace in 1911. He also started practising as a doctor, although he did not carry out operations. From 1907, Marais served ten years as the *Wonderdoctor* of the Waterberg, practising medicine and experimenting on the health of the residents of the Bushveld.

As a medical man, Leipoldt saw the area as a malarial, bilharzia-ridden breeding ground of poor whites. To Marais, as a prospector first, it was the

³⁴ In 1904 he began editing *The Hospital*, travelling Europe and America to collect material, and editing *School Hygiene*, the official organ of British school doctors.

³⁵ This is discussed in ch. 3, in Sandra Swart, 'A "Ware Afrikaner" – an examination of the role of Eugène Marais (1871–1936) in the making of Afrikaner identity' (D.Phil., University of Oxford, 2001).

³⁶ For a discussion of Leipoldt's writing see, for example, Boloka, 'Leipoldt's early dramatic monologues', and Strydom, 'Louis Leipoldt se Slampamperliedjies'. Leipoldt's autobiographical fragments may be found in *Die Huisgenoot*, 5 Nov. 1926, 1 Dec. 1933, 6 Dec. 1940. The University of Cape Town has his collection of letters, manuscripts and books, while the South African Library has his Cookery Collection.

³⁷ Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, Part 3, 112–35.

'ideal theatre of manly adventure ... and the possibility of princely wealth'.³⁸ The local community was larger than might be imagined from Marais's descriptions of empty wilderness, and composed of both blacks and whites. Leipoldt observed that, on the whole, 'the white settler has kept himself reasonably pure in blood. He has not consciously bred a race of half-castes, although hybridism is not altogether unknown, and is probably more prevalent than is admitted'.³⁹ He contended that the upper and lower limits of the white and coloured communities were difficult to determine, and '[e]very school teacher can quote cases where it was impossible to decide if the child was "coloured" or European'.⁴⁰

MEDICAL PRACTICES

This notion of racial ambiguity was extended into the medical realm. In the 1910s and 1920s, there were repeated attempts to separate science from superstition, medicine from 'quackery' and white from black – culminating in the Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Act of 1928, which banned African healers throughout the Union.⁴¹ Still, while there were repeated attempts by the white medical board to prevent it, white and black unlicensed medical practitioners were often utilised by the Bushveld white community. *Slamaaiers* (members of the Cape Muslim community involved in the supernatural), Indian physicians, Malay healers, Bushman diviners, African *izinyanga* (diviners) and *izangomas* ('witchdoctors'), and white unlicensed healers selling patent medicines found ready custom among the poor white population.⁴² Indeed, as Isidore Frack, a contemporary medical practitioner, observed, 'one of the greatest evils which keeps [the poor white] poor is his inordinate love for quack and patent medicine'.⁴³ More covertly, there were

³⁸ Eugène Marais, *The Road to Waterberg and Other Essays* (Cape Town, 1972).

³⁹ Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 138. He had the attitude that '[w]herever there are white men and native women living under conditions that make miscegenation possible but easy, such miscegenation will occur', Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 138.

⁴⁰ Leipoldt insisted that with his missionary background he was of those who could see 'no specific distinction in the human race'. He conceded that he had to modify this outlook and he learnt to sympathize with a community that had to live in fear of a 'crude, savage reality'. Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 138.

⁴¹ It is worth recording that there was significantly more faith invested in Western medicine and official derision directed towards 'alternative' healing practices than is the case today.

⁴² Terminology must be cautiously applied, as Harriet Deacon has noted. Classifications based on race into 'folk medicine' versus 'indigenous medicine' are based on teleological dichotomy. Deacon, 'One piece of the puzzle: indigenous herbal medicine and settler practitioners in the Cape Colony, Conference on Recovering the History of Indigenous Medicine in Africa', Oxford Brookes University, 12 June 1999. For contemporary perceptions by a white English-speaking doctor see J. B. McCord, 'The Zulu witchdoctor', *South African Medical Record*, 16 (1919), 116–22. For further discussion see Karen Flint, 'Diagnosing their ills: competition between African healers and white medical practitioners in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1920s and 30s', *History and African Studies Seminar Series*, 28 (1998).

⁴³ Isidore Frack, *A South African Doctor Looks Backwards – And Forward* (Cape Town, 1943), 118.

also patients among the middle classes.⁴⁴ Frack noted that qualified doctors were often dismissed on the grounds that 'we have our own medicine'. Henry Taylor, a doctor who had trained at London's Guy's Hospital before moving to South Africa and practising in rural Basutoland and the Orange Free State, also recorded the high preponderance of quacks, who 'fleece the Boers to an enormous extent'.⁴⁵

Every home had a *huisapotheek* (home pharmacy), a tin box containing a number of twenty-ounce bottles of 'Dutch remedies' – ranging from the 'innocuous' to the 'nasty'.⁴⁶ There were also books available like D. J. Smal's *Die Afrikaanse Huisdokter*, a compendium of traditional remedies.⁴⁷ *Boereraadjies* (traditional Boer remedies) shared space with patent cures like Zam Buk ointment, Buchu Rub, Blue Butter, Evan's throat pastilles, Staaldruppels and Dr. Kiesow's Essence of Life.⁴⁸ Home-remedies, quacks' wares and indigenous beliefs were often combined in treatment.⁴⁹

Van Onselen has noticed a similar phenomenon a little further south in the Southwestern Transvaal. Here, the herbalist-sharecropper Kas Maine gained renown as a *ngaka* (herbalist) and routinely aided white farmers in the 1920s by spreading a magic potion around their fields to protect them from birds.⁵⁰ Maine also used a fusion of Christian symbols and traditional herbs to cure the backache of his white business partner. Taylor also recorded many Afrikaans adoptions of African belief, 'this sort of story is told by the Boers, seriously and gravely ... and it would be thought the height of rudeness to laugh, or seem to disbelieve'.⁵¹

In his 1918 *Praatjies met die oumense* (conversations with the old people), Leipoldt discussed common Bushveld complaints like malaria, and warned against charlatans and 'cancer healers'.⁵² In a 1935 speech at a Congress in Grahamstown, entitled *Medicine and Faith*, published in the *Lancet*, he noted: 'There is no country in which itinerant quackery is more rampant than in South Africa; none where the consumption of quack remedies is so high per head of white population, none where the charges for quack treatment are higher'.⁵³

Social and environmental forces encouraged the utilization of black medical practitioners. The force of nature itself drove the poor white to

⁴⁴ Paul Kruger, for example, admits in his autobiography to having used a 'Boer remedy' to heal the wound left by his self-amputated thumb. Paul Kruger, *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger – Four Times President of the South African Republic* (London, 1902), 37.

⁴⁵ Henry Taylor, *Doctor to Basuto, Boer and Briton 1877–1906*, ed. Peter Hadley (Cape Town, 1972), 128.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 130. An observer noted that the Afrikaners who trekked from the Bushveld to Rhodesia in the first two decades of the twentieth century had homemade medicines. Patrick Guilbride, 'Pawpaw picnic', Rhodes House Library, MSS Afr.s.1315, 85.

⁴⁷ D. J. Smal, *Die Afrikaanse Huisdokter* (Pretoria, 1921).

⁴⁸ Van Onselen, 'Race and class', 116.

⁴⁹ Taylor often found their final resorts farcical: like tying a frog to one's chest to cure pneumonia. Taylor, *Doctor to Basuto*, 128.

⁵⁰ Van Onselen, 'Race and class', 115. See also Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine, the Life of Kas Maine – A South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (Cape Town, 1996), 110, 439.

⁵¹ Taylor, *Doctor to Basuto*, 128.

⁵² Leipoldt wrote widely on quackery. See his *Skooldgesondheid, Die Afrikaanse Kind in Siekte en Gesondheid* (Pretoria, 1923), and *Gesondheidsleer Vir die Laerskoolkind* (Pretoria, 1923).

⁵³ *Lancet*, Christmas edition, 1935.

desperation.⁵⁴ Poor white farmers and *bywoners*, already forced into arid regions, now faced an almost biblical succession of plagues: locust, stock disease – anthrax, *gallamziekte*, *lamziekte* and *sponsziekte*. People began to make anxious comparisons with the devastating 1896 rinderpest epidemic. In 1910, a five-year drought set in. With the drought and the plagues, farmers were unable to make their debt repayments. The 1913–14 labour agitation and fear of war in Europe also caused the economy to decline, prompting the money market to call in unserviced bonds. People began to call vainly for a moratorium on debt. Now, labourers were beginning to work for 2s. 6d. a day, whereas previously a *bywoner* would have laughed scornfully at less than 5s. a day.⁵⁵ Impoverished rural areas suffered malnutrition and disease.⁵⁶ Disease became seen as inevitable, something ‘boys were bound to get’.⁵⁷ Leipoldt recorded a not uncommon case, of a father compelled to send his son to school on only a cup of coffee and a twist of tobacco.⁵⁸ Droughts, rinderpest, locusts, upheaval and lingering social dislocation precipitated by the South African War also disrupted communities and fostered anxiety.⁵⁹ Post-traumatic stress syndrome may have been a further factor in creating mental instability and neuroses. This hypothesis gains weight from anecdotal evidence of ‘sun-stricken’ or ‘dazed’ ex-combatants. Leipoldt, for example, described a man who was a ‘stray from some patrol during the Boer War. He was not wounded but “sun-stricken” ... he had forgotten his English, and could give no details about his regiment’. He also heard another story of a man returning from the war only to have his black farm manager report a ‘tame Englishman at the huts’, whom they had found in uniform and had hidden – he could no longer understand English, speaking only ‘broken Afrikaans’ and ‘fluent Shangaan’.⁶⁰

Various factors attracted a white clientele to both African healers and white unlicensed practitioners: lower prices, familiarity and proximity. Another factor may have been the lack of faith in SAP government doctors when the local residents were predominately NP supporters. Embarrassment may have prevented others from consulting medical doctors, especially in the case of sexually transmitted diseases.⁶¹ There were many remedies upon which the medical board would have frowned, like *Ndiyandiya*, which was designed to confuse a judicial officer and ‘sway him to one’s favour’.⁶² Sol Plaatje observed that

lower middle-class Boers attach great weight to the guesses of native bone-throwers. It is strange sometimes when a Malay charmer is prosecuted ... to find Dutch witnesses giving evidence of [his] healing powers ... and emphasising the

⁵⁴ An ecological approach to history was advocated by Leipoldt in 1937, ‘For no historian of the Transvaal can afford to neglect the influence of disease and climate upon the men who played a conspicuous part in shaping that history’, *Bushveld Doctor*, 103.

⁵⁵ Land and Agricultural Bank Report, UG 20-1915, 1914, 177. Cited in Robert Morrell (ed.), *White But Poor* (Pretoria, 1992), 39.

⁵⁶ There were two parasitic diseases in particular that debilitated their sufferers: malaria, which causes kidney damage, and bilharzia, which causes debilitating tiredness and impaired liver functioning. ⁵⁷ Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 94. ⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 39.

⁵⁹ Charles Van Onselen, ‘Reactions to rinderpest in southern Africa, 1896–1897’, *Journal of African History*, 13 (1972), 473–88. ⁶⁰ Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 55.

⁶¹ Van Onselen, ‘Race and class’, 115.

⁶² Flint, ‘Diagnosing their ills’, 8.

absurdity of prosecuting a man who benefited them ... more than many a certificated medical man.⁶³

A mail order company was even created, the *House of Israel Alexander and Mafaruke Ngcobo*, in the 1930s.⁶⁴ As the medical board noted apprehensively:

The native doctor has attractions for the ignorant European by virtue of there being something mysterious about him ... Hence the native will always get a small following of Europeans to stimulate his ambitions to go further, and if allowed to go on unhampered ... we Europeans will soon be the exploited and our hopes of a pure white race will soon be gone.⁶⁵

Healing traditions were not static and were transformed over time.⁶⁶ Cross-cultural sharing of knowledge has been documented by, for example, Helen Bradford, who notes that agrarian communities acquired knowledge from hunter-gatherers, and whites from blacks.⁶⁷ Moreover, Catherine Burns has shown that healers occupied overlapping zones and were able to traverse boundaries between the 'Western' and 'traditional'.⁶⁸ As the twentieth century wore on, however, models of healing were increasingly imposed from above.⁶⁹ Inevitably, white chemists and patent medicine sellers would end up being brought to court for 'practising as a doctor'.⁷⁰

Indeed, Marais himself practised without a licence. He was widely known to have had an understanding of indigenous beliefs.⁷¹ Similarly, Leipoldt also maintained an interest in indigenous practices, and had, unlike Marais, objected to race prejudice, arguing that the 'Native is integral to communities'.⁷² Leipoldt took a scholarly interest in what he called 'Bush magic'. He acknowledged that as a boy he had heard many Bushmen tales of Heitsi Kabib (Heitsi Eibib), whom he contrasted favourably with Jesus – after all '*He never disputed with the doctors in the Temple, but he ran races against the sun, and he had a wonderful and alluring dog*'.⁷³ Leipoldt adopted an irreverent tone, pointing out Jan van Riebeeck's interest in Bushman belief and noting that the first settlers believed in 'witchcraft'.⁷⁴ Leipoldt recorded that native belief and imported superstition had become mixed in

⁶³ Sol. T. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1982), 373.

⁶⁴ SAB (National Archives Repository; Central Archives Depot, Transvaal) GES, 1788, 25/30M.

⁶⁵ J. A. Du Toit, 'The native doctors and European patients', *Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa*, 2 (1928), 45. ⁶⁶ Flint, 'Diagnosing their ills', 2.

⁶⁷ Helen Bradford, 'Herbs, knives and plastic: 150 years of abortion in South Africa', in T. Meade and M. Walker (eds.), *Science, Medicine and Cultural Imperialism* (London, 1991), 124.

⁶⁸ Catherine Burns, 'Louisa Mvemve: a woman's advice to the public on the cure of various diseases', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 23 (1996), 108–34.

⁶⁹ Bradford, 'Herbs, knives and plastic', 132.

⁷⁰ See, for contemporary commentary, A. W. Burton, 'Medical practitioners and dispensing', *Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa*, 1 (1927).

⁷¹ 'Naturellegelowe en –gebruik het hy goed geken.' C. A. Groenewald, *Die Suiderstem*, 7 Sept. 1937. M. S. B. Kritzinger, 'Eugène Marais as Digter', *Ons Tydskrif*, May 1936. There has been speculation that Marais may have used *dagga* (marijuana) himself. Certainly, he did say that brandy was more dangerous than dagga, Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 263. ⁷² *Cape Times*, 24 Sept. 1896. ⁷³ Leipoldt, *Bushveldt Doctor*, 150.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 153.

a melting pot of 'animism, Hinduism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Lhamanism, Mohammedanism and Christian Gnosticism'.⁷⁵ In this, there was a link between the African natural world and the world of the paranormal. For example, Hexham's study of rural oral tradition unearthed successive retellings of the initiation of white Afrikaans-speaking children by an African, Bushman or Malay servant, into the workings of the natural or supernatural world.⁷⁶ Certainly, ghost stories were told simply for entertainment, but with the inclusion of Malay myths, for example, religious connotations were also incorporated. At the same time, Arthur Conan Doyle travelled South Africa in 1928, lecturing on spiritualism and communing with the 'Other Side'.⁷⁷ European scholarly journals, like the *Occult Review* and the *Light*, were also generating interest in the paranormal.⁷⁸ Significantly, between 1906 and 1912 the Dutch Reformed Church dealt with several cases of 'witchcraft'. Two church elders even wrote a booklet expounding the evils of anti-Christian superstitions.⁷⁹

Leipoldt noted that in the Bushveld white and black did not doubt the existence of ghosts.⁸⁰ Herman Charles Bosman, writing of his experience of the frontier Marico district, satirized the rural belief in the supernatural, each time emphasizing the shared beliefs with Africans. He noted that 'when it comes to having to do with ghosts, a Mtosa can be almost as educated as a white man' and wrote of the occasional necessity of sending for a 'good Malay ghost-catcher up from the Cape'.⁸¹ Similarly, Leipoldt (who while in England had become a member of the Society for Psychical Research) wrote of the 'Shangaan witchdoctor, who throws the *dol-os* bones' (to predict the future) and the 'white baas, who in public derides both, [but] is privately a little afraid of what either might be able to do'.⁸² Marais displayed a more cavalier attitude towards scientific accuracy in investigations of the paranormal, observing that, 'In my opinion a ghost story is a story ... The

⁷⁵ For an examination of 'Malay magic' see W. W. Skeat, *Malay Magic – An Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula* (Singapore, 1984).

⁷⁶ Hexham, 'Modernity or reaction in South Africa', 5.

⁷⁷ *Die Volksblad*, 4 Dec. 1928.

⁷⁸ See, for example, W. F. Barrett, 'Aspects of psychical research', *Contemporary Review*, Nov. 1922; E. J. Dingwall, 'Recent work in psychical research', *Psyche*, Jan. 1922; a journal called *Occult Review* and 'Science or superstition: the other side', *Cornhill Magazine*, May 1921.

⁷⁹ Hexham, 'Modernity or reaction', 12.

⁸⁰ Leipoldt, *Bushveldt Doctor*, 154.

⁸¹ In another of Bosman's stories one of the Marico's less intellectual citizens, Dawie Ferreira, a former policeman, encountered a 'ghostly Bechuana' carrying his head under his arm and promptly asked him for his pass. H. C. Bosman, 'Ghost trouble', in *Jurie Steyn's Post Office* (Cape Town, 1971), 21, 28, 138.

⁸² Leipoldt, *Bushveldt Doctor*, 154. Afrikaans authors published ghost stories for popular consumption. Reenen van Reenen, for example, published anthologies in 1919 and 1920 in the vein of Edgar Allan Poe. T. L. Kemp published stories with a very Afrikaans flavour of ghostly interludes concerning 'Oom Faan' and 'Oom Flippie'. *Die Huisgenoot*, July 1921. Leipoldt and Langenhoven wrote traditional (in the Western sense) ghost stories but set in Afrikaans communities, as P. C. Schonees, observed. P. C. Schonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging* (Pretoria, 1927), 52. Langenhoven's ghosts were very rational. Marie Linde and I. D. Du Plessis also wrote short ghost stories for popular magazines.

aim of the ghost story is to frighten – nothing else'.⁸³ Marais's taste for illusion and showmanship manifested itself when, at the age of forty-two, and a resident justice of the peace, he fabricated a spectral figure, which appeared at full moon. He later reported this hoax as a supernatural phenomenon.⁸⁴

PROPHETIC VISIONS

There was a popular belief that people 'born under a caul' had prophetic powers. *Siener* (seer) Van Rensburg (1864–1926) of the western Transvaal, for example, won fame with his visions during the South African War and the 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion. Messianic visions that come to people in times of desperation permeated his rhetoric.⁸⁵ His visions were invested with the twin virtues of bulk and ambiguity. In this instance, Leipoldt dismissed the NP-supporting *Siener* as merely schizophrenic.⁸⁶ Yet even the sceptical Leipoldt found an *isanusi* (diviner) he found hard to discredit, a 'wizened little ochreous-coloured fellow' who communed with the dead. Leipoldt asked to speak to 'Baas' Theophrastus von Hohenheim.⁸⁷ The diviner was worried that this was a missionary – 'they are difficult to call up. I don't think ... they like it'.⁸⁸ Reassured, the diviner continued, lapsing into a deep trance and speaking in 'draggled German', which Leipoldt recognized as in the style of Paracelsus.

MODERNITY AND ITS ENTHUSIASTS

At another level, the conventional notion of Afrikaner antipathy towards scientific progress is conjured out of a few stock caricatures. Gordon quotes the example of the *Volksraad* member who protested against a museum, arguing that every schoolboy has seen a scorpion, a chameleon and 'other such nonsense'.⁸⁹ These anecdotes were invariably repeated by those with a political stake in emphasising the antediluvian dimensions of the Transvaal. Percy Fitzpatrick, for example, made much of the anxiety felt by the *Volksraad* in generating rain by firing into the clouds because it was in defiance

⁸³ In 1879, the eight-year-old Marais and a friend draped themselves with sheets and not only terrified the neighbourhood children, but scared themselves and created more tumult by tripping over roots and pursuing the children in bloodied sheets. Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 13.

⁸⁴ Later Marais wrote an article on this phenomenon, even contending that he had confirmed its paranormal nature 'experimentally'. *Die Boerevrou*, Dec. 1927.

⁸⁵ See A. Snyman, *Stem van 'n Profeet* (Mossel Bay, 1993), and A. W. B. Raath, *Siener van Rensburg* (Pretoria, 1994). Interestingly, both works assume that Siener really was blessed with a prophetic gift. Grundlingh has postulated a case of schizophrenia or epilepsy and places his visions in their socio-economic milieu. A. M. Grundlingh, 'Probing the prophet: the politics and psychology of the Siener van Rensburg phenomenon', *South African Historical Journal*, 34 (1996), 225–39.

⁸⁶ Leipoldt, *Bushveldt Doctor*, 159.

⁸⁷ Known as Paracelsus, a German-Swiss physician and alchemist who developed chemistry in medicine in the 1500s.

⁸⁸ Leipoldt, *Bushveldt Doctor*, 165.

⁸⁹ Notulen, Eerste Volksraad, 1898, arts. 231, 262. Gordon does not, however, stereotype the Afrikaner as a monolithic body, sensitively analysing factionalization between Afrikaans-speaking groups. Gordon, *The Growth of Boer Opposition to Kruger*.

of God, and of the idea that locusts should not be resisted as they were sent by God.⁹⁰ Such recalcitrance was answered summarily by progressives like Lukas Meyer, who asked simply why no one had objected to the extermination of jackals and leopards.⁹¹ Indeed, Paul Kruger himself defended science as long as it did not endeavour to overthrow religion.⁹²

In reality, every new scientific theory that shook Victorian conservatism and heralded modernity resonated in the South African periphery. As N. P. Van Wyk Louw, the Afrikaans critic and poet, noted:

By about the nineties of the previous century, shall we say ... our people [the Afrikaners] ... 'started dreaming in a different key'; chiefly as a result of the advent of new scientific, mainly biological, concepts. And in all these figures the old peasant world was broken, the almost sixteenth-century world in which we had lived.⁹³

Far from being a stagnant backwater, suspicious of innovation, as represented by liberal critics, the 'Boer' countryside embraced a measure of modernity. Olive Schreiner condemned the notion of the Boer's organic incapacity to adapt and change – the 'Boer leaps in one generation from the rear of the seventeenth century thought and action to the fore front of the nineteenth', accepting with enthusiasm (after studying abroad) 'all the latest inventions, an advocate of new ideas and an upholder of the newest fashions'.⁹⁴ Marais was just such an advocate. Part of his material had a European rather than an African origin, and was novel rather than traditional.⁹⁵ As previously discussed, post-traumatic stress syndrome may well have contributed to a number of cases of mental instability and inexplicable neuroses in the Bushveld. It was these deep psychological scars that Marais was able to ameliorate through a crude form of psychoanalysis, the rudiments of which he had learnt through his reading of Charcot and Freud.⁹⁶ Marais also spent several weeks at the house of Tant (aunt) Francina Du Toit, near Nylstroom, a famous local interpreter of dreams, thereby fusing the modern with the 'traditional'.⁹⁷ He had first encountered the

⁹⁰ P. Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from Within: A Private Record of Public Affairs* (New York, 1900), 311.

⁹¹ Notulen, Eerste Volksraad, 1896, arts. 870–2. *Press*, 11 July 1896.

⁹² *Press*, 7 Dec. 1892.

⁹³ Quoted in Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 43.

⁹⁴ Schreiner, *Thoughts*, 259.

⁹⁵ Marais was familiar with Freud's *Studien über Hysterie* (1895) – and the treatment of hysteria with hypnosis. He was also introduced to *Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens* (Psychopathology in Daily Life) and *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (Three Treatises concerning Sexual Theory). Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 300–1.

⁹⁶ *The Soul of the White Ant*, trans. Winifred de Kok (London, 1971), 27. He contended that humans possessed 'two souls' and that it was possible by means of hypnotism to 'imbue one of them with an activity which it does not possess normally'. Letter to Spilhaus from Marais, 24 Mar. 1926, quoted in François Guillaume Marais Du Toit, *Eugène N. Marais: Sy bydrae tot die Afrikaanse letterkunde ... Met inleiding deur Dr. Gustav S. Preller* (Amsterdam, 1940), 180. See also *Vaderland*, 9 Sept. 1933, an article entitled 'Wanneer die Onbewuste Geheue die Bewuste Siel Genaak' (When the unconscious memory affects the conscious soul). Preller later disseminated the story that Marais had practised medicine free of charge, but it seems likely that he was recompensed. Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 209.

⁹⁷ Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 215.

idea of hypnosis while studying in London. Freud's 1893 *Studien über Hysterie* (Studies of Hysteria) came out in English translation in 1895.⁹⁸ Freud's mentor was Charcot.⁹⁹ The late eighteenth-century Austrian doctor Franz Mesmer had taken Paris by storm, purporting to cure illness by means of animal magnetism. By the 1880s, 'mesmerism' started to be applied scientifically. In the Salpêtrière, a mental home in Paris, Charcot applied hypnosis to the insane. From 1885, Freud used Charcot's techniques in treating insanity. Freud hypnotized his early patients, curing through the power of suggestion, and used electrotherapy.¹⁰⁰

While in London, Marais acquired medical knowledge and probably worked in a laboratory.¹⁰¹ Hypnosis was to become a crucial part of his 'cures'. In his typical approach of the intermingling of the academic and the popular, Marais drew upon the work of both Charcot and Freud, and developed his own theory about the animal deep within humankind.¹⁰² He argued that '[t]he animal soul within the human is like the appendix, a remnant of a past evolutionary state', and that 'it only surfaces under unusual circumstances [like hypnosis]'.¹⁰³ Marais made use of the power of autosuggestion in health science to cure particular illnesses.¹⁰⁴ Rousseau found oral evidence to show that Marais treated patients by discussing their dreams in the Freudian manner.¹⁰⁵ Marais quickly became known as a 'miracle doctor', after hypnotizing patients who had failed to get relief from authorized doctors.¹⁰⁶ This was a sharp marriage of indigenous belief with modern Western psychology.¹⁰⁷ He lent scientific verisimilitude to his 'cures' with sophisticated terminology and by asserting that his findings were supported by 'American experiments'. It was this application of international developments in the rural Waterberg that helped Marais make

⁹⁸ There is evidence to suggest that Marais spoke German, and was certainly in London when the English translation came out and was aware of its controversial reception.

⁹⁹ It is also worth noting that while in London, Marais met Gerald du Maurier, son of George du Maurier, author of *Trilby*, the famous novel of the 1890s in which Svengali hypnotizes a young woman for villainous ends.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry* (New York, 1997).

¹⁰¹ Later Marais was to maintain that he had actually studied at Guy's Hospital, but their records reflect otherwise. Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 140.

¹⁰² Marais wrote to Spilhaus that 'I am quite satisfied that Freud's psycho-analysis is simply so disguised that he does not recognise it himself'. Quoted in Du Toit, *Eugène N. Marais*, 276.

¹⁰³ 'n Nuwe Sielkundige Teorie', *Die Banier*, in *Die Brandwag*, Feb. 1921.

¹⁰⁴ Hessian van Deventer of Rooiwal, Waterberg, was Marais's equivalent of Freud's 'Anna O', the case that established his reputation. She had suffered the total paralysis of her legs until hypnotized, when she walked again. *Die Banier* in *Die Brandwag*, Sept. 1920, Eugène Marais, *Natuurkundige en Wetenskaplike Studies* (Cape Town, 1928), 5.

¹⁰⁵ This trend from the Metropole had other supporters, from within the authorized medical profession. For example, the physician, Frack, encouraged the medical profession to learn from the psychotherapeutic developments based on the work of Freud, Jung and Adler. Frack, *South African Doctor*, 125.

¹⁰⁶ Marais occasionally made light of *Boererate* like the skin of black chickens for snakebite. 'Slanggif', *Natuurkundige en Wetenskaplike Studies and Sketse uit die Lewe van Mens en Dier* (Kaapstad, 1920).

¹⁰⁷ *Soul of the White Ant*, ed. Marais, 1.

a name for himself, with leading writers like Gustav Preller publicizing his *wonderwerke* (miracles).¹⁰⁸

In effect, Marais transgressed the boundary between insight and quackery. Human gullibility has cash value, and served to inflate both his prestige and his pocket. He conducted ‘experiments’ on young Boer girls on the farm Rietfontein – after hypnosis the girls were found to be able to do ‘wonderful things’ – they could ‘scent like dogs’, and they had the ‘homing sense of a namaqua partridge’. One of the items of medical apparatus he brought back from London was an appliance that could administer electrical shocks, the type of ‘medical equipment’ which Leipoldt had damned in his *Lancet* article, ‘we have all kinds of quackery ranging from the semi-scientific electrical treatment to the pretentious cancer cure’. Whereas Leipoldt despised quacks, Marais was one. Marais employed the ‘electrical treatment’ to great effect, as an eyewitness recounted:

Then he had an electrical thing, but we called it a shock-fish ... It was electric shocks, you see. Then the people would touch hands and they would twitch all around, oh, it was great fun for the old people.¹⁰⁹

Marais was also always willing to pay half a crown to any African willing to touch it.

PATROLLING THE CULTURAL BORDERS

This article has contended that the picture of rural black–white as discrete social entities bounded by borders of racism is a false image conjured up by many classic liberal historians. Another producer of this image is the Afrikaner Nationalist school – which raises questions as to motivation. The literary vehicles of Afrikaner nationalism encouraged a wide diversity of subjects to cover a variety of regional, class and intellectual traditions, as Isabel Hofmeyr has shown.¹¹⁰ The intelligentsia needed to capture the attention of a broader audience, as language advocates confronted a factionalized community.¹¹¹ In this regard, newspapers and publishers went to unprecedented and even unethical lengths to get hold of Marais’s work. Thus, the publisher Van Schaik purportedly manipulated Marais’s morphine addiction to extort contracts from him.¹¹² It may be conjectured that nationalist magazines appropriated practices and beliefs of ‘mixed’ origins and stamped them *Ou Boeremiddels* (Old Boer remedies) and *Afrikaanse Veldkuns* (Afrikaans bush skills), possibly in an attempt to solidify the permeable cultural boundaries between rural blacks and whites and to mask an ongoing socio-cultural osmosis.

There was an analogous process between the way the language movement attempted to purge the ‘creole elements’ from the *Taal* (officially sanctioned

¹⁰⁸ ‘Hipnotisme’, *Die Brandwag*, Sept. 1920. Gustav Preller, *Historiese Opstelle* (Pretoria, 1925), 205, and A 787 Preller Collection, SAB (Central Archives Bureau, Pretoria), 116, refers to Marais as ‘die Wonderdokter’.

¹⁰⁹ Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 215.

¹¹⁰ Isabel Hofmeyr, ‘Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and “ethnic identity”, 1902–1924’, in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, 1987), 109.

¹¹¹ Hofmeyr, ‘Building a nation’, 111.

¹¹² Rousseau, *Dark Stream*, 484.

Afrikaans) and the nationalist press's discussion of healing practices, which was moving towards appropriating and reclassifying hybrid systems. Indeed, Marais's work went one step further and diverted popular rural interest in 'bushmagic' into a direction he invested with a European nomenclature and the *avant-garde*. This is paralleled by a similar process in the *Taal* movement, particularly assertions by members of the Language Movement of the Graeco-Roman basis of Afrikaans. Significantly, the same clique of culture-brokers was involved in purifying both the *Taal* and health practices. The superstitions could not be appropriated. So, the myths that were published concerned the exoticization of the Other: they reinstated the hierarchy of belief, structured to reinforce the notion that African superstitions were not believed in by whites.¹¹³ The nationalist press eagerly solicited Marais's work as it helped to foster the *leeslus* (love of reading) by appealing to rural readers' lived experience – but, it could be contended, it also helped to purify traditional healing practices and to exoticize African superstition. Subsequent studies might demonstrate that Marais's work was prized because it went further by introducing a continental gloss over these practices.

CONCLUSION

Marais and Leipoldt used the young Afrikaans press to write not only about Afrikaans heroes and nationalist politics, but also about superstitions, miracle cures and the existence of ghosts. On their very different levels – which serve to emphasize the heterodoxy of Afrikaner outlook – both Leipoldt's and Marais's work is of significance to historians attempting to understand the rural socio-intellectual world of the Transvaal. Their work presents a dual challenge to the historiographical construction of the Bushveld as entirely racially circumscribed and parochial, and of the Afrikaner as a nation slouching toward modernity, by exploring the popular departure from a European *zeitgeist* rooted in Calvinist theology, towards an interest in African superstitions and medicine as well as a rising public interest in fashionable European psychology.

Although Leipoldt presented a more scientifically sound and substantial contribution, in their heterodoxy he and Marais illustrate the same two points. First, Afrikaners, even in the Bushveld, were not narrowly confined in outlook, instead embracing new ideas from Europe. Both men reveal in their very different ways the surprising extent to which Bushveld healing practices provided an entrance point for both the innovations of Western 'modernity' and traditional indigenous practices. Far from being unmoved by the breezes of liberalism that blew from Europe, the Bushveld was the recipient of a vast amount of hot air from European fashions. Intellectual isolation was not as severe as has been imagined. Secondly, there is evidence of intimate cross-racial intellectual traditions. The hybridity of healing

¹¹³ See 'Volksgeondheid' (People's national health), *Die Huisgenoot*, Feb. 1919; 'Ons veldmiddels' (Our bush remedies) *Die Huisgenoot*, Dec. 1918. Questions about health in the agony column – 'Om die Koffietafel' (Around the coffee table) in *Die Boerevrouw*.

practices reveals that the cultural groups of the Waterberg were not discrete entities. The cultural *cordon sanitaire* did not extend to the sickroom and the different Bushveld communities shared relationships based on a configuration of cultural and religious exchanges that went beyond the purely material.