

The Function of Genocide in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction: 'Ondergang Van Die Tweede Wêreld' ('Destruction of the Second World') by Eugène N. Marais (1933)

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Abstract

In an effort to gain greater clarity about the purpose of the deployment of genocidal elements in what is probably the earliest post-apocalyptic text written in Afrikaans, entitled 'Ondergang van die Tweede Wêreld' ('Destruction of the Second World'), this article offers a careful reading of the story against the background of the larger oeuvre of author Eugène N. Marais. Although the story develops as a thought experiment drawing on racial tensions that existed in South Africa during Marais's lifetime (1871–1936), an environmental disaster that threatens all life on Earth with extinction finally connects local exigencies with global concerns. With reference to the work of Norman Angell, who argued that violent interventions often merely lead to the perpetuation of the political injustice that they aim to eradicate, Marais introduces a 'spectroperiscopic' vision in his story that challenges the logic that underlies the genocidal motivations of his characters and, also, projects local concerns onto a global canvas. The emphasis on the survival of human life and the preservation of written testimonies finally function as counterpoints to the disconcerting view of an indifferent natural world that apparently fosters a relentless and cruel competitiveness among humans in their battle for survival in a post-apocalyptic landscape. Ultimately, in defence of Marais's story, the article challenges the arguments of earlier critics about the presumed dark subconscious urges of a morphine-addicted writer to account for the shocking scenes of genocide in 'Destruction of the Second World'.

Keywords: Afrikaans literature, drought, environmental disaster, global catastrophe, post-apocalyptic fiction, race, science fiction, speculative fiction

Introduction

Most probably the earliest example of apocalyptic fiction in Afrikaans is a short story by Eugène N. Marais (1871–1936), 'Ondergang van die Tweede Wêreld' ('Destruction of the Second World'), that was published for the first time in 1933. The many contradictions displayed by Marais in his life as a writer, poet, advocate, ethologist, and editor of the newspaper *Land en Volk* (Heydenrych 2014; Swart 2003) continue to preoccupy his biographers (Du Toit 1940; and notably Rousseau in *The Dark Stream* 1982; and, recently, Hansen 2013) and a growing number of creative writers (Barnard 2012; Fugard and

Devenish 1977; Van Reybrouck 2001). Sensationalist revelations about his addiction to morphine and even speculations that Marais was the biological father of author Herman Charles Bosman are further testimonies to the ongoing fascination that Marais holds for his readers. Chris Barnard's screenplay *Die Wonderwerker* was filmed by Katinka Heyns and was released in 2012 to general critical acclaim. Furthermore, the position of Marais within the canon of Afrikaans literature was affirmed once again in the 2013 anthology *Die Gewildste Afrikaanse Gedigte* (compiled by Leserskring after a survey by the Afrikaans media) when his 'Winternag' ('A Winter's Night') was voted the most popular poem in Afrikaans. This development is hardly surprising, as 'Winternag' routinely appears in nearly every anthology of Afrikaans poetry, notably *Groot Verseboek*, which was reworked for publication in 2008 by André P. Brink.

In 1933, three years before his suicide in 1936, Marais published 'Ondergang van die Tweede Wêreld' ('Destruction of the Second World') in the newspaper *Die Vaderland*. In 1948, the year when the National Party came to power and started implementing the notorious apartheid policy, the story was included in a posthumously published collection of Marais's stories, *Keurverhale* (55–109). Since its publication, the story has confounded critics repeatedly – in fact, most critics and literary historians preferred to remain quiet about this science fiction story focused on a global environmental catastrophe brought about by unprecedented seismic activity leading to the drying up of all the water sources on earth.

One of the earliest critics who wrote about the story is Du Toit (210–11). He has appreciation for Marais's achievement in imagining the possible consequences of the drying-up of water sources on earth – an issue which apparently preoccupied Marais throughout his life. Yet, Du Toit chose to remain silent about the mass killing of the black population of the city of Pretoria, as described in the story. Leon Rousseau, Marais's biographer and editor of his collected works, tries to make sense of the 'revolting massacre' ('afstootlike slagting') of all the black people in Pretoria during the struggle for access to the diminishing water sources in the story as a possible prediction of the Nazi holocaust ('Aantekeninge' 1272). In *The Dark Stream*, Rousseau (470–74) points out that the story appeared shortly before the Stalinist killings in the Soviet Union from 1937 to 1938. Rousseau also provides a valuable contextualisation of Marais's interest in drought by referring readers to his poem 'There shall be no more sea' (*Volledige* 30–1), 'Notes on Some Effects of Extreme Drought in Waterberg' (*Versamelde* 1195–205), 'Die verwoestingsgang van droogte' ('The Destructive Course of Drought', *Versamelde* 279–83) and his well-known article "'n Paradys van Weleer' ('A Paradise of Yesteryear', *Versamelde* 250–53). Less convincing is Rousseau's attempt to explain the scenes of genocide in the story as a 'morphine nightmare' written by Marais under the influence of the drug to which he was addicted. Rousseau's interpretation represents a significant departure from Antonissen (83) who appreciated the stories of Marais as narratives that develop without any hitches, written with chilling sobriety and conciseness, building up to irresistible tension and mostly

some sensational resolution. For Rousseau the word 'sobriety' is clearly no longer appropriate:

There seems little doubt that the varying subject matter and quality of the stories written by Marais during this period bear a relationship to the degree of his morphine consumption. In some of the stories one seems to be able to see directly into the dark stream of Marais's subconscious, with the Freudian lid lifted off, so to speak, for the protective action of what Freud called the 'censor' was frequently suppressed by morphine during the process of creation.

(Dark Stream 472)

In 1989, during the trial of Barend Strydom, the 23-year-old right-wing Afrikaner who shot and killed eight black people on Strijdom Square, Pretoria, on 15 November 1988, author and critic Jeanette Ferreira (17) drew a parallel between these racist killings and the elements of genocide in 'Destruction of the Second World'. Ferreira was not bold enough to suggest that 'Destruction of the Second World' directly inspired Barend Strydom to commit his atrocities, but she intimated that the prejudice that underlies the racist killings in Marais's story also informs the values shared by many Afrikaners. Although her reading of Marais's story is not entirely convincing, Ferreira's article is an interesting example of a somewhat desperate and self-scrutinizing attempt by an Afrikaans literary scholar who, in opposition to the racism that pervaded government and society in the 1980s, tried to explain the roots of racially inspired violence.

In a recent article, Stephen Gray describes 'Destruction of the Second World' as a prediction of 'a raging racial holocaust of hatred caused by terrifying societal breakdown' that is consequent more on Marais's addiction to morphine 'than to truth' (78). Gray seems to have a fairly general definition of genocide in mind as opposed to the more narrowly circumscribed definition offered by Manus I. Midlarsky, who states that genocide amounts to the state-sponsored and systematic mass killing of innocent people (men, women and children) who are distinguished by a particular ethno-religious identity (10). The purpose of the murder is to eradicate the group in question from a particular territory. Martin Shaw offers a similar definition of genocide, adding that the targeted civilian groups are regarded as enemies as such or in themselves, and not simply through their relationship with an armed enemy group (5). Writing about the collected work (*Versamelende werke*) of Eugène Marais, Gray points out that the story should have appeared in subsequent editions with some editorial attempt at contextualisation, including 'mention of the factors like the impact of the Depression, with unemployment and starvation looming, the massive retreat of country folk to the cities due to the recurring drought and the racist bent of *Mein Kampf*' (77). Regrettably, Gray does not avoid Rousseau's obfuscating view of Marais's later work as little more than morphine-inspired fantasies.

The various critics all realized that any reading of the story by Marais had to take into account both the period when it was written and the geopolitical setting called up by the events it depicts. Yet, what is also needed is a reading that considers the implications of the story as an example of apocalyptic (or, indeed, post-apocalyptic) science fiction. Clearly, 'Destruction of the Second World' has a speculative dimension that is represented in its elaboration of a future. Like most science fiction, it is an example of 'What If Literature', a literature that positions itself between possibility and impossibility so that any expectation of finding hard and fast truths is likely to be disappointed (Gray 78). It is helpful to recall David Seed's reminder that science fiction is 'an embodied thought experiment' (2) in which aspects of familiar reality are suspended, transformed or, as in the case of Marais, pursued to their most chilling possible consequences. In this article, I reconsider the episodes of genocide depicted by Marais in a careful reading of the story against the background of his other works that deal with race, extermination and preservation. My reading acknowledges the fact that the term 'genocide' was first used in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin ('What is Genocide?'), that is, some years after the first publication of 'Destruction of the Second World'. As Midlarsky's historical overview of genocides points out, other mass killings which predated the Holocaust – which were full-blown genocides – cannot be denied. However, as the term did not yet exist when Marais wrote his story, he clearly did not have the benefit of the conceptual clarity that the term brought to subsequent literary and scholarly work.

My article aims to shed light on the value and limitations of genocide as a narrative strategy that conforms to the genre convention of extreme fantasy both in apocalyptic literature and science fiction. What are the possible gains and pitfalls attached to the reception and canonization of the work of authors who dare to write texts about destruction and extermination, often conceived as warnings against the possible consequences of ideologies that suppress the prospect of freedom and a peaceful future? In South Africa, contemporary speculative texts that present elaborations of a future that revisits the painful history of racial conflict run the risk of eliciting irate responses from readers who, since the end of apartheid, have sought simply to celebrate the accomplishment of a non-racial dispensation. These texts fuel the rhetoric of political groups at both ends of the political spectrum who, for opportunistic political gain, frequently resurrect aspects of the discourse of racial conflict and prejudice that still scars the present. Readers of novels such as *Trencherman* and *Wolf, Wolf* by Eben Venter or *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee may recoil from any prolonged engagement with situations that seem to dwell on populist fears that, 20 years after the end of apartheid, still enjoy currency in some political quarters. A study of 'Ondergang van die Tweede Wêreld' by Eugène N. Marais as a historical text from the period that immediately preceded the rise of apartheid in South Africa presents an intriguing view of racial divisions and tension that may seduce one to speculate about a prophetic vision in the story, or, as did Ferreira, to dismiss the post-apocalyptic story as a chilling imagining of violent action in the enforcement of racial segregation. As a somewhat forgotten text about a post-apocalyptic future South Africa, it seems as if the narrative

presentation of the story prevented most readers from considering it as worthy of any serious engagement. I will also discuss possible reasons for the relative obscurity of the text in the literary canon.

The narrative

In 'Destruction of the Second World', the narrative of the white Afrikaner, Willem, who recounts his experience of the environmental disaster that hit the earth, is presented as an edited version of partly degraded documents discovered on a mountain in the Bushveld by a black man, Buffel, and subsequently restored in Hamburg by a South African chemist, Dr S. de Kock. These reflect that, in the remote Bushveld town of Nastergal, Willem becomes aware of reports from other parts of the world where the effects of the loss of all the available water sources were first experienced. One day the local Jewish shopkeeper, Apie Cohen, anxiously reports that the pump connected to his borehole, which also supplied water to the rest of the town, has broken down. It soon becomes clear that the borehole itself has dried up. Derided by the townspeople, Apie Cohen retorts that he has a full tank of water for his own use. Frequently referring to biblical episodes about survival and apocalypse in his story, Marais presents the derided Apie Cohen as a latter-day Noah, who expects to survive the water crisis thanks to his timely precautions.

However, it is only Willem who finally survives thanks to his discovery of a water source, on a mountain close to the town, that was not sucked into the core of the earth. Eventually, after two years, the rain starts to fall again and Willem makes his way to a deserted Pretoria, where he is nearly shot by a young white woman, Marie de Lange, who had survived on water stored in a hidden reservoir in the office building where she worked as an accountant. Traumatized by being the only person to escape the bloodshed in Pretoria when the inhabitants fought for access to the remaining water sources, she no longer trusts anyone. Willem manages to gain her trust and as a post-apocalyptic Adam and Eve, the two prepare themselves to eke out a living in the desolate land. Marie reports that the (exclusively white) city council had rounded up the entire black population in the city and proceeded to kill them mercilessly in a mass extermination performed by 20 000 armed men. The carnage only aggravated the crisis when the surviving white city dwellers descended in a desperate mass on the last remaining water source in the nearby Fountains Valley. Only four days after the extermination of the black population, the city was deserted.

One day Willem and Marie are roused by the singing of three black men walking through the streets of Pretoria. One of them, apparently a miner from Portuguese East Africa, dressed in a white shirt and top hat, sings: 'White people where are you, you who have repressed us for so long? We are looking for you all – you who are seeking death'.¹ (Marais, *Versamelde* 941; all translations from Afrikaans are mine). Resolute that they cannot share the earth with three people of colour (940), Willem and Marie shoot and kill the three men, ignoring their desperate pleas for mercy, which are couched in the subservient language of racial inequality.

The scene of this massacre is followed immediately by a narrative retreat by the narrator Willem. Adding to the ambivalence in the story's presentation, it ends with Willem's account which calls into question whether all the dramatic events actually took place as they may be, in fact, the images that he saw as he peered through the 'spectroperiscope' designed by his friend Norman Angell. Angell created this instrument as he believed that the human conception of time was a mere illusion and that everything – present, past and future – is already at hand in the here and now. His instrument enabled him and his friend Willem to look into the so-called future. Frightened by the power of the spectroperiscope, Angell decided to destroy the optical instrument. Willem concludes his narrative with the following words:

And now I no longer know if I had seen all of this through the 'periscope' and if it had actually happened. But what does it matter? There is no future; if I had seen it through the Angell instrument or if I had experienced it in actual fact, all amounts to the same thing. All has come to pass already; therefore everything that I have written is true.²

These final sentences suggest that whatever it is in which time and reality consist (perhaps they are merely an error of perception), it ultimately makes no difference to the truth about human existence.

'Destruction of the Second World' within the oeuvre of Eugène Marais

As evidenced by the reception of the 'Destruction of the Second World', it was a risky undertaking by Eugène Marais to have included a genocidal fantasy in his story. Anthologies containing highlights from Marais's fictional work, *Uit die Verhaalskat van Eugène Marais*, *Die Beste van Eugène Marais* and *Die Beste Verhale van Eugène N. Marais* routinely omit the story. Unwilling to engage with its shocking content, critic Gerhard J. Beukes regards the 'Destruction of the Second World' as the worst example of popular fiction in Marais's *Keurverhale* (148). He dismisses the story as 'naïve' and 'amateurish', and laments Marais's tendency to resort to the *deus ex machina* technique to conclude his stories. Du Randt deems the story worthy of mention in his study of Marais's prose (22), but in the critical work of Rob Antonissen, Gerhard J. Beukes and Felix F. Lategan, G. Dekker, J. C. Kannemeyer, E. Lindenberg, Johann Lodewyk Marais and P. J. Nienaber there is no mention of the story whatsoever. The critical work of Du Toit, Ferreira, Gray and Rousseau offers the most elaborate critique of 'Destruction of the Second World', although their work also testifies to the general reluctance of critics to engage with the disconcerting representation of racism and genocide in the story.

Speculative fiction responding to controversial issues that preoccupy a society may easily be construed as expressions of a hidden desire harboured by the writer. The strong sentiments evoked by any speculations about genocidal possibilities may lead to condemnation and even (as is evident in the disputable piece written by Ferreira) intimations of a strengthening of genocidal impulses in society. Elizabeth Anne Leonard remarks that science

fiction tends to deal with racial tension by ignoring it: 'When sf writers, white or not, include racial issues in their fiction, they enter a territory bounded on one side by readers who feel that the work does not go far enough to address the social ills of the culture they write in and on the other by readers who think it goes too far' (254). It is not my intention to represent Eugène Marais as a shining example of an Afrikaans writer who persistently challenged the racial prejudices that prevailed in first decades of 20th-century South Africa. Rather, in an effort to gain a more nuanced understanding of 'Destruction of the Second World', it is important to read the story in the context of Marais's other writings, as well as that of the literary sources that informed his text.

However, this discussion needs to focus first on the episode in the story that most manifestly brings to the fore racial attitudes. The genocidal and racist behaviour of Willem and Marie, in their cold-blooded assassination of the three black men who enter Pretoria as fellow survivors of the global drought, goes beyond the general violence, including whites behaving murderously towards other whites and whites killing the entire black population of Pretoria, which preceded the final evacuation of the city. The motivation that Willem offers for the merciless shooting of the three black men is formulated in terms that recall Adolf Hitler's ambition to find *Lebensraum* (living space) for the German people: 'On earth there was no space for myself and the white girl, on the one hand, and the three men of colour, on the other hand'³ (940). The defiant chant of the migrant worker from Portuguese East Africa, proclaiming that white people are the ones who are seeking death, causes him to be the first to be shot. His murder is followed by the assassination of the two black Sesotho-speaking South Africans in his company. Willem lures the two out of their hiding place with the false assurances that they can engage in talks about their mutual survival. However, their remonstrations that, unlike the mineworker from Portuguese East Africa, they were not 'wild Kaffirs' ('wilde Kaffers' 941), but servile black men who had grown up among whites, have no effect. They are both shot and killed, uttering their final pleas for mercy in a register of racist servility which is in sharp contrast to the defiant chant that marked their entry into the city. One of the men pleads: 'Don't kill me, young mistress. I grew up among white people. I will work for you until my dying day. I will be your dog. Save me, young mistress. I pray to you as I pray to God'⁴ (941). Willem describes the assassination without any indication of their hesitation or remorse. Before the narrative retreat to the concluding remarks about a spectroperiscopic vision, the only indication in Willem's narration that the scene should be viewed through a fabulatory or theatrical lens is his description of the formal *crêpe-de-chine* outfit that Marie wears during the shooting. Willem notices how her white dress is smeared with the blood of her defenceless victim (941). Willem's and Marie's racist murders affirm, in their iteration, the genocidal intent of the whites in Pretoria who massacred the entire black population of Pretoria during the final days of the drought.

As I indicated in the introduction to this article, Marais had a persistent interest in drought as is evident in 'There shall be no more sea' (*Volledige* 30–1), 'Notes on Some Effects of Extreme Drought in Waterberg' (*Versamelde* 1195–205), 'Die Verwoestingsgang van

Droogte' ('The Destructive Course of Drought', *Versamelde* 279–83) and 'n Paradys van Weleer' ('A Paradise of Yesteryear', *Versamelde* 250–53). Indeed, the global drought in 'Destruction of the Second World' reverberates with Marais's view of the cruelty and indifference of nature as expressed in his poem 'Lied van Suid-Afrika' ('Song of South Africa') that represents the land as a cruel and infanticidal mother (Kannemeyer 104) who inflicts eternal pain on her human inhabitants: 'I cast them away over the mountains, / and smother them in a desert of sand'⁵ (*Volledige* 85). In his poem 'Is daar nog tranes?' ('Are there anymore tears?'), Marais offers a lament about the cruelty of life on earth that tolerates the inexplicable suffering of children with terminal illnesses (*Volledige* 89). The core of existence is pain, and in 'Destruction of the Second World' the survivors of a global disaster caused by indifferent nature are swept into an existence devoid of compassion, as life reverts to a kind of Hobbesian competitiveness. During his journey from Nastergal to Pretoria, Willem discovers the bones of a number of refugees strewn around a stationary train – evidence that the passengers had killed one another in their unrestrained and selfish scramble for the water stored in the locomotive (927). With nature revealing itself as indifferent or even hostile, humans turn upon one another in their struggle to survive.

Although they do not mention 'Destruction of the Second World', literary historians and critics W. S. H. du Randt (23), J. C. Kannemeyer (105), E. Lindenberg (34) and Johann Lodewyk Marais, with co-author Renée Marais (663), all regard Marais's *Dwaalstories*, written in 1921, as a highlight in his literary oeuvre. This collection consists of a number of stories that Marais based on the tales of a San (Bushman) storyteller only known as 'outa Hendrik'. With this book Eugène Marais added to the work of Bleek and Lloyd, who devoted many years to the transcription of the language and folklore of the /Xam, one of the San groups who struggled in vain to survive the genocidal campaigns of the settler communities in South Africa. His *Dwaalstories* can be read as one of a number of works that he wrote to preserve the memories of people who suffered violent eradication in the colonial history of southern Africa.

In 1933, Marais also wrote the remarkable short story 'Diep Rivier', a searching account of the conflict that a woman, Juanita Pereira, had to endure as a result of her mixed-race descent. Even more interesting for a discussion of 'Destruction of the Second World' is an essay written by Marais in 1921 ('Die Woestynvlug van die Herero's', eventually published in 1928 in *Sketse uit die Lewe van Mens en Dier*, reprinted in 1937 as *Die Mielies van Nooitgedacht*) about the flight through the desert of a group of nearly 4 000 Herero refugees from German South-West Africa (Namibia), trying to escape the war of extermination that the German Empire waged against the Herero and Nama populations (killing an estimated 24 000 to 100 000 people between 1904 and 1907). About 80 per cent of the Herero and 50 per cent of the Nama had died by 1911 in the war and in subsequent actions by the German colonial power led by General Lothar van Trotha (Midlarsky 31). Marais interviewed some of the survivors of the desert flight of the Herero and, in his essay, he states his explicit intent to inform his South African readers about the plight of the

Herero refugees that evoked very little public attention in South Africa – a fact he attributes to the general (racist) neglect in South Africa of the plight of black people (*Versamelde* 338). It is remarkable that Marais wrote about the mass killing of the Herero people as early as 1921 and that he even interviewed some of the survivors. In *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, Olusoga and Erichsen (2010) argue that the violent campaign waged by Imperial Germany against the Herero and Nama peoples paved the way for the Holocaust that led to the death of millions of Jews during World War II.

By 1933 Marais had engaged (intellectually and personally) genocides, mass killings and the variety of genocidal ideologies that marked the first decades of the 20th century. The memory of the thousands of South Africans, black and white, who died in British concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War was still fresh, and as Stephen Gray surmises (77), Hitler's anti-Semitism in *Mein Kampf* (1925–26) was starting to cast a shadow over the future of the Jews in Europe when Marais wrote his story. An interesting finding by Midlarsky in his comparative study of 20th-century genocides is that heightened levels of uncertainty tend to increase reliance on prior knowledge or memory (369). In the minds of perpetrators, a recent history of loss looms large and plays a significant role in the actual implementation of genocidal policies in a time characterized by uncertainty. Loss has historically consisted in the transfer of territory, population or authority to another political entity, or considerable casualties in war or related forms of political violence (Midlarsky 9). A memory of loss among the perpetrators of mass killings did not always feature prominently in the massacres that took place in southern Africa from the 18th to the 20th century. Writing about German South-West Africa, Olusoga and Erichsen do not share Midlarsky's view that loss is a necessary condition of genocide. Indeed, the massive loss of life inflicted on the Herero and the Nama in German South-West Africa, the killing of thousands of San people during Dutch and British rule in the Cape, and the deaths of thousands of civilians in British concentration camps in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War all entailed genocidal behaviour, although a memory of loss did not inspire these scourges. The massacre that takes place in 'Destruction of the Second World' is not linked to any form of perpetrator loss, yet it may be that Marais recognized that the memory of loss among the Boers after the Anglo-Boer War (both the loss of land and sovereignty to the British and the loss of the lives of women and children in the British camps) had the potential to fuel genocidal impulses. The vulnerability of the disenfranchised black population increasingly presented this group as potential targets of genocidal behaviour by the Afrikaner-dominated governments that rose to power in the Union of South Africa after independence from Great Britain in 1910. As such, the genocidal fantasy in 'Destruction of the Second World' may be an expression by Marais of the explosive potential of existing tensions in the first decades of the 20th century, that could be precipitated by a scramble for resources (such as the period of protracted drought South Africa experienced from 1932 to 1933). Although it should be noted that not even the most racist of apologists for

segregation or apartheid considered genocide as an option, Marais clearly unleashed the full hyperbolic potential of his thought experiment about mounting racial tensions.

Yet, the complexity of the genocidal situation in Marais's story should not be reduced merely to local South African circumstances. In 'Destruction of the Second World', Marais attempts to link his account of the catastrophe at a local level, the isolated Bushveld village Nastergal and Pretoria as the administrative seat of government, with the greater context of a calamity that ravages the entire planet. At different levels, the story gives expression to a 'spectroperiscopic' vision, a dispersive vision that suggests that Marais's account of racially inspired genocide is by no means limited to a perspective on societal tensions and stratifications in South Africa. The modern usage of the word spectrum, which features in the neologism 'spectroperiscope', found application in the field of optics to denote the range of colours that become visible when white light is refracted through a prism. The word periscope, normally associated with submarines, contains the prefix 'peri-' that means *around*. The periscope offers an encompassing view and the spectral vision of the so-called 'spectroperiscope', invented by Willem's friend Norman Angell, is furthermore suggestive of a vision that is varied and multifaceted.

Apart from the biblical references in Marais's story, there are also allusions to at least two other texts that articulate the story with a wider context. Leon Rousseau may be correct that Marais was inspired by *Omega: The Last Days of the World (La fin du monde, 1893–94)* by French astronomer and science fiction writer, Camille Flammarion, who speculated in his well-known novel about the end of the world after a narrowly averted collision with a comet ('Aantekeninge' 1272). The comet passes and the novel then moves swiftly through millions of years to the eventual evaporation of all water on earth, the death of the sun and the freezing of the world. The last human survivors are Omegar and Eva, a man and a young girl who are finally transposed in a purified spiritual form to the utopia offered by the planet Jupiter. Flammarion ends his novel with the speculation that the universe will continue to be recreated *ad infinitum* (Roberts 114–15), because in eternity 'there can be no end and no beginning' ('Car il ne peut y avoir ni fin, ni commencement', Flammarion location 3243). As surmised by Willem in 'Destruction of the Second World', all past, present and future events are simultaneously present in time. The spectroperiscopic vision in Marais's story implies a vision that is able to look beyond past, present and future.

The 'second world' in the title of the Marais story may be a reference to the French title of Flammarion's book, which means 'the end of the world'. However, I think it is more likely that Marais imagined his apocalypse as the second end of the world after God flooded the first world leaving Noah, his community of family members and the creatures assembled on the ark as sole survivors. The great drought in the story by Marais is not only a reference to the severe drought that ravaged South Africa from 1932 to 1933, but also an inversion of the destruction of life on earth by water in the biblical book of Genesis. In similar vein, Willem invokes divine intervention in his account of his survival: 'I think it must have been

part of a divine plan! It was foreseen that I alone among the living had to escape the disaster'⁶ (925).

Religion as an explanation embraced by the characters in the story to understand the cruelty of the disaster that hit the Earth, is also present in the outbreaks of religious and apocalyptic fanaticism mentioned by Marie in her account of the quest for survival in Pretoria. Groups of people dressed in white garments appeared in several parts of the city proclaiming that the second coming of Christ was imminent (937). Their religious hope in a Christian apocalypse was erased in the subsequent massacre of the black population of Pretoria and the final evacuation of the city.

In addition to the religious doctrine so often secularized or satirized in apocalyptic science fiction (see Lovegrove 98) and *Omega: The Last Days of the World* by Camille Flammarion, Marais's story also refers to the work of Norman Angell, the British Member of Parliament who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933. The friend of Willem who designed the spectroperiscope is called Norman Angell. In 1909, the historical Norman Angell published a pamphlet bearing a title that also employs the visual as a metaphor: *Europe's Optical Illusion*, a text that Angell reworked and published many years later as *The Great Illusion*. Marais inserts his reference to Norman Angell immediately after his account of the murders committed by Willem and Marie de Lange. Ostensibly, the optical instrument designed by the character Norman Angell is a deliberate reference by Marais to *Europe's Optical Illusion*, written by the historical Norman Angell to guide readers of the story toward an exploration of the ideas of Angell about the failure of violent solutions to conflict.

Europe's Optical Illusion deals with the futility of conquest and warfare, with frequent reference to the dangers posed by Germany. Writing about the outcome of the Anglo-Boer War without the benefit that hindsight would eventually bring to historiography, Angell (75–88) points out that the war – which was, among other things, intended to liberate the black population from the yoke of Boer repression – only led to the establishment of a union of South African states that saw the return to power of the Boer generals and the continuation of racial discrimination. In his book Angell did not yet give serious consideration to British interests in the Boer Republics, notably the huge profits generated by the gold mining industry that involved many British citizens, as one of the causes of the war. The conclusion that he reaches after considering many examples of modern warfare is that the promising solutions that inspire violent interventions routinely rely on an optical illusion, as warfare and conquest seldom lead to a desirable outcome.

By abruptly steering Willem's narration away from genocide and murder with the introduction of the optical discovery of Willem's friend, Norman Angell, Marais seemingly wants to underline the futility of violent interventions, notably racially inspired genocide. The white population of Pretoria only hastens its own ruin by deciding to kill the entire black community. Furthermore, the account of the global disaster (including Willem and Marie de Lange's killing of three black men) is framed by a narrative that explicitly mentions the

discovery by a black man, Buffel, of a leather bag containing Willem's story of the apocalypse. This discovery is most likely part of the spectroperiscopic vision Marais employs in his narrative – a vision that begs a more encompassing consideration of the interplay between different narrative levels, by eroding the boundaries between time periods and, in so doing, casting doubt on the summative truth value attached to the events within any individual narrative strain. Apparently, the genocidal logic pursued by Willem and Marie does not lead to their sole survival in a post-apocalyptic South Africa because black people, as represented by Buffel, seemingly survived the catastrophe.

The 'spectroperiscopic' vision that ultimately calls into question the narrative status of the calamitous events recounted by Willem, is already evident in the frequent references to mistaken identities in the story. Marais's emphasis on clothing and costume conveys Willem's ongoing struggle to disentangle appearances from realities. When he first encounters Marie she is dressed in men's shorts and a collared shirt, all covered by a luxurious woman's coat laced with fur. To ward off the winter cold she wears stockings. Heavy jewellery and an immaculately curled head of hair complete the picture (933). Marie's androgynous appearance foregrounds the ubiquity of optical illusion in the story. Wandering through the place where Marie used to work, Willem stumbles into the outstretched arms of a mannequin that he confuses for a moment with a young woman in evening dress (935). One of the three black men who appear one morning in the deserted streets of Pretoria also wears formal evening dress. Eventually, Willem identifies him as a mineworker from Portuguese East Africa (940). It is telling, however, that there is little or no mention of the clothing worn by Willem, suggesting that the white male focalizer is in a privileged position to observe deviations in accepted dress code among women and black men, without extending the loosening up of conventions to himself. This detail, in addition to the fact that it is Willem's version of the story that is recorded and preserved, is suggestive of the authority accorded to an immutable white male position as the normative vision that traverses a variety of impressions, including new permutations of gender, race and class, ultimately with the prerogative to transcend all of these without any revision of its own power or premise. The matter-of-fact tone in the story may seem to erase any explicitly gendered narrative position, but the theatricality of the lavish costumes in which Marie and the black male characters parade, disrupts and makes visible the privileged universality associated with the often unmarked presentation of the white male perspective. As one of the sole survivors, Willem's response to the global disaster is captured as dismissive of the futile pursuit of earthly goods by humankind in a world where the emphasis on basic survival skills has led to a revision of formerly entrenched hierarchies of value. Upon his arrival in Pretoria he smashes the display window of a jewellery store, whereupon he disdainfully scatters the diamonds, watches and other precious jewels in the deserted street with the thought that these 'useless toys' ('nuttelose speelgoed') have little value for him as one of the sole survivors on earth (929). In contrast, Marie adorns herself lavishly with the jewels and expensive clothes that were formerly only available to the rich.

The theatricality of the costumes that Marie and the other characters wear seems symbolic of a new freedom to adopt the wealth and privilege previously afforded to white men. This adds to the play of optical illusions and make-believe that is later introduced at a higher narrative level, with the revelations about the spectroperiscope and the reference to the work of Norman Angell. The spectroperiscopic levelling out of present, past and future in the Einsteinian conception that the separation of past, present and future is an illusion (942), however persistent, is complemented in the story by the disruption of gendered assignments and class hierarchies.

In the story the preoccupation with preservation apparently counters the murderous barbarism of the characters in their recourse to genocide. To illustrate this point I wish to elaborate briefly on two aspects of the text that ostensibly point to the issue of preservation, which may be helpful in considering the function of genocidal violence in the story. Firstly, the editorial frame that presents Willem's account as a narrative that was reconstructed by Dr de Kock from a number of damaged documents, evidently places emphasis on preservation and memory rather than death and destruction. The editor acknowledges the scientific work of Dr de Kock in the restoration and preservation of the documents: 'I thank the recovery of some of the illegible parts to the helpful assistance of our compatriot, Dr S. de Kock, chemistry expert working in the laboratory of the firm Benger and Co., Hamburg'.⁷ However, the introduction of the spectroperiscope as the instrument that made Willem's apparent glance into the future possible (and that was subsequently destroyed by its creator, Norman Angell), seems to caution against any form of blind optimism about the potential value of science to preserve humanity or provide clarity as to its fate. On the one hand, the 'editor' of Willem's documents seems to acknowledge the value of science in the preservation of cultural artefacts; on the other hand, Norman Angell's discovery of the spectroperiscope, attributed to the discoveries of Albert Einstein and Enlightenment philosopher Kant about the nature of time (942), is finally destroyed as Angell concluded that the instrument would only compound the misfortune of humanity (942). The ambiguous and even contradictory value of science in the preservation of civilization is reminiscent of the conclusions by John Docker in his literary research involving the Enlightenment and genocide (307). Docker acknowledges that exactitude, classification, measurement and comparison became very important in the Enlightenment with its legitimisation of science as the new orthodoxy. Yet, the practices of exactitude of instrumental reason that later became so evident in the Holocaust were in tension with modes of writing and reflection that embraced a 'wayward textuality' displaying openness to a variety of cultures, civilizations and arts that clearly went beyond a simple affirmation of the exactitude of scientific investigations. Similarly, in the face of barbarism, Marais could only affirm the value of science for preservation, with due acknowledgement that it was regularly implicated in barbaric practices.

The second reference to the importance of preservation in 'Destruction of the Second World' that I wish to consider, albeit briefly, is the possible parallel that Marais establishes

between his text and *Van den vos Reynaerde* (*The Fox Renard*), the Middle-Dutch animal epic written by a certain 'Willem'. The 'editor' in 'Destruction of the Second World' presents the unknown author and narrator of the reconstructed documents simply as Willem or Wimpie, an individual whose background is completely unknown. It is possible that Marais assumed that with this little ruse his informed Afrikaans reader would establish a link between his story and *Van den vos Reynaerde*. In the Middle-Dutch text the author of this now seminal epic identified himself in the opening lines simply as Willem, who had made Madoc. Scholars of Middle-Dutch literature are still mystified by the identity of Willem who had apparently written another text bearing the title *Madoc* (*Reinaert* 23). Unlike the mysterious text *Madoc*, the tale about Renard is, just like the narration by Marais's Willem, an example of a text that has survived the ravages of time. Just perhaps, the name Willem may be another pointer in 'Destruction of the Second World' to the possibility that survival, preservation and memory are ultimately the concerns of the narrative.

Conclusion

Although the arguments that I have presented in this article may be helpful to understand more fully the function of genocide in Marais's apocalyptic text, it is doubtful whether 'Destruction of the Second World' will overcome the resistance of future readers who are unwilling to undertake more than a superficial reading of the text. The scenes of genocidal behaviour and the blatant racism displayed by the characters will continue to repulse those who are not likely to be seduced by the rather too subtle indicators that Marais wished to warn against the dangers of violent solutions to overcome differences along racial lines. As the body of mainly dismissive critical work suggests, not many readers will be patient enough to consider the extreme situations imagined by Marais against the background of his entire oeuvre that presents a picture of a man who, although a product of his time, remained open to engagement with the other and to addressing cruelty against his fellow man.

'Destruction of the Second World' as a speculative text is a thought experiment that dares to pursue the thinking that inspires racial hatred to the bitter end, before refracting the specificities of the genocidal situation onto a broader canvas through the deployment of a spectroperiscopic vision. Essentially, the story responds to the circumstances that Marais witnessed in South Africa in the 1930s. Arguments that resort to the presumed dark subconscious urges of a morphine-addicted writer to account for the shocking scenes of genocide in the story should not substitute a thorough reading of the text, which also considers the historical circumstances that prevailed in the 1930s. Evidently, Marais was bold enough to link his fears about societal tensions in South Africa to similar concerns about the survival of humanity elsewhere in the world. His text becomes far more than a timid local imitation of the science fiction writings that emerged in Europe in the 19th century and the other technologically advanced societies of the north. As the oeuvre of Marais (particularly his homage in *Dwaalstories* to the tales of the marginalised San people

and his investigation into the massacre of the Herero and Nama peoples) suggests, he was deeply aware of the history and dangers of racial genocide. The references in 'Destruction of the Second World' to the survival of both human life and textual testimony suggest that the racial and genocidal elements in Marais's post-apocalyptic story are finally censured in favour of the preservation of life and human memory in the face of the harsh indifference of nature.

Notes

¹ 'Ek vra, ek vra, waar is julle wit mense almal wat ons so lang, so lank vertrap het? Ons soek julle almal – julle wat die dood soek'. (941)

² 'En nou weet ek nie of ek dit alles deur die "periskoop" gesien het en of dit werklik plaasgevind het nie. Maar wat maak dit saak? Daar is geen toekoms nie; of ek dit deur die Angell-toestel gesien het of werklik beleef het, kom op dieselfde neer. Alles het reeds gebeur; daarom is alles wat ek geskrywe het waar'. (942)

³ 'Daar was op aarde geen ruimte vir die blanke meisie en my aan die een kant en die drie gekleurdes aan die ander nie'. (940)

⁴ 'Moet my nie doodmaak nie, nonnie. Ek het by wit mense grootgeword. Ek sal vir jou werk totdat ek doodgaan. Ek sal jou hond wees. Red my, nonnie. Ek bid jou soos ek God bid'. (941)

⁵ 'ek smyt hulle oor die berge weg, / en smoor hulle in die sandwoestyn'. (*Volledige* 85)

⁶ 'Ek dink dit moes' 'n bestiering gewees het! Dit was voorbestem dat ek alleen van lewende mense die ramp moes ontkom'. (925)

⁷ 'Die herstelling van sommige onleesbare gedeeltes het ek te danke aan die bereidwillige hulp van ons landgenoot dr. S. De Kock, skeikundige aan die laboratorium van die firma Benger et Cie, Hamburg'. (919)

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