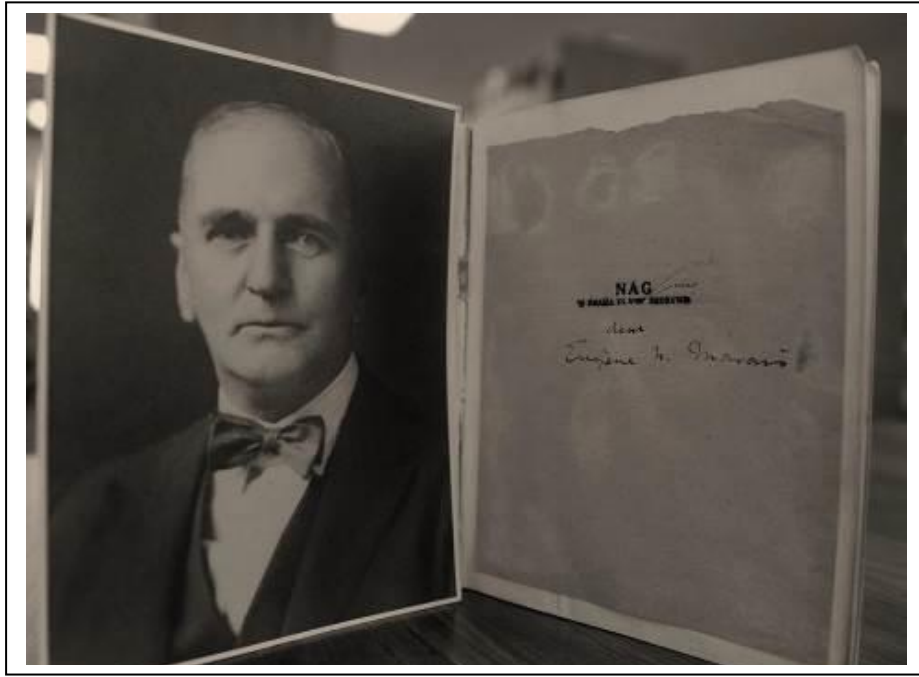


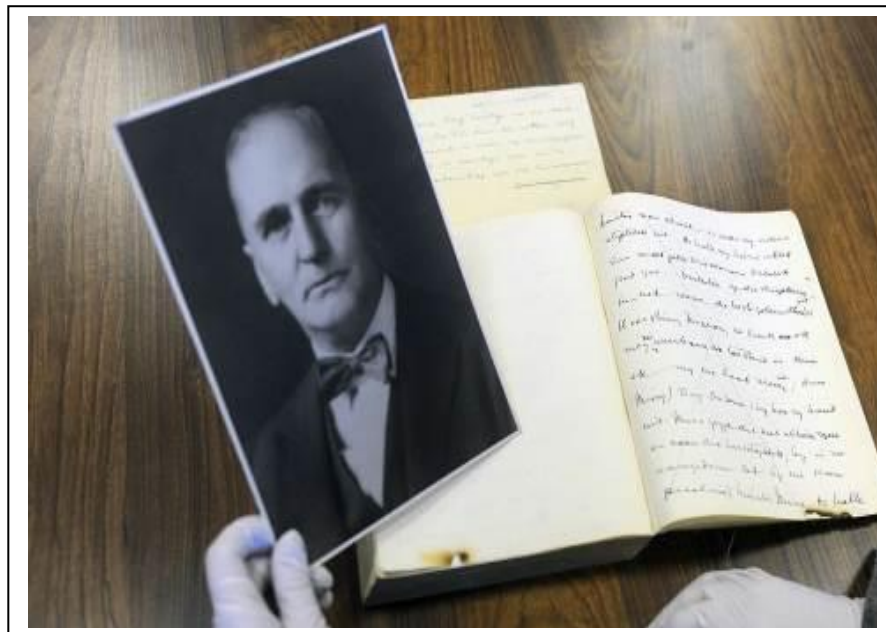
Eugène Marais: *Nag*

The Special Collections Department of the UJ Library has acquired an important item of literary Africana: the autographed manuscript of this famous Afrikaans author's last play *Nag: 'n Drama in Vier Bedrywe*. Marais wrote the play on 162 unlined, small pages in a thick, clothbound "exercise book", mainly on one side of each page.



NAG - ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPH EUGÈNE MARAIS MANUSCRIPT

There are in addition a further 13 handwritten pages of notes at the end of the book. The manuscript has editorial corrections throughout in green ink and many corrections and deletions by Marais himself. The title of the play has been rubber-stamped on the first page and beneath this is Marais' signature. A few of the pages at the end of the volume have some burns on the lower edges, probably caused by a cigarette. (See image below.) These may be indicative of Marais' state of mind, not long before his untimely death by suicide.



A loose note in the book, probably written by the first owner, indicates that the book was found after Marais's death amongst his unpublished writings. It was later published by Van Schaik in 1937 (the year after Marais' death) as a "spiritual bequest" by the author. The play is set during the Boer War. This work is discussed at length (7pages) in the scarce book *Eugène N. Marais - Sy Bydrae Tot die Afrikaanse Letterkunde* by Francois G. Marais Du Toit (1940).

Marais' Work

Eugène Nielen Marais, probably best known for *The Soul of the White Ant*, *The Soul of the Ape* and his poem *Winternag*, was also a journalist and editor of *Land en Volk*. He only wrote two dramas: *Die Swart Verraad*, published in 1933 and *Nag. Outa Hendrik* of the Waterberg inspired him to write *Dwaalstories*, an important contribution towards Afrikaans short stories. His books on baboons and the white ant are ground-breaking research into the behaviour of animals. Marais' extremely perceptive study of animal behaviour has earned him the title of Father of Ethology.

Marais' Life in short

Eugène Nielen Marais was born near Pretoria on 9 January 1871. After the first Anglo-Boer War in 1881, his mother sent him to Boshof in the Orange Free State, to stay with his older brother - a lawyer. Towards the end of 1884, he was sent to Paarl with his oldest sister. After his final school year in Paarl, he began his career as a journalist in Pretoria.

By 1890, he was already the editor of *Land en Volk* and in 1892, at 21 years old, he took over the reins of the newspaper. He campaigned for Afrikaans in the ZAR and his first two Afrikaans poems appeared in *Land en Volk* in 1891.

In 1894, he married Aletta Beyers. Marais tragically lost his young wife in 1895, nine days after the birth of their only son. Marais moved to London and stayed there for the duration of the Second Boer War. Between 1896 and 1902 Eugene Marais obtained his Law degree in London.

On his return to South Africa, he once again took up his journalist profession. By this time he was addicted to morphine. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Rietfontein, a farm in the Waterberg area and began his studies on baboons and published his book about this research in 1938.

He moved back to Pretoria and started practicing as an advocate. He also began his study on termites, wrote *The soul of the white ant* (*Die Siel van die mier*), and published various articles in newspapers and in the *Huisgenoot* magazine.

Marais's friend, Dr Gustav Preller, took pity on him and let him stay in a rondavel on his farm at Pelindaba, between Pretoria and the Hartebeespoort Dam. Marais died during the night of 29th March 1936 by suicide.