

“Angry Young Men”: F.A. van Jaarsveld, T.S. van Rooyen and the Afrikaner Historiographical Polemic of 1953-1954

F.A. Mouton and Albert van Jaarsveld*

historians mistrust and hate each other perhaps
more than any other species of academic¹

Returning from his studies in the Netherlands in 1950, F.A. van Jaarsveld was scathing about the apologetic and subjective attitude of historians at the University of Pretoria (UP). His attack was not only based on concerns about the state of Afrikaner historiography, but also reflected the hostility between him and his *alma mater's* History Department. In the process he acted as a surrogate for the historian G.D. Scholtz, a close friend, who had an axe to grind with the historians of the University. The main counter-attack came from T.S. van Rooyen, then a temporary history lecturer at the UP. Although they debated the nature of Afrikaner historiography, it was very much a personal clash, fuelled by mutual jealousy and loathing. It was a polemic that ruined Van Rooyen's reputation, deeply wounded Van Jaarsveld, and had a stultifying effect on Afrikaner historiography.

Floris Albertus van Jaarsveld was born on 5 June 1922 on the farm Rooiwal in the Heidelberg district, the fifth of seven children of farming parents. After matriculating from Hoër Volksskool Heidelberg, he studied at the UP where his MA dissertation on the role of the *veldkornet* (field-cornet) in the history of the South African Republic until 1870 was accepted with distinction in 1945. A highly intelligent, intense student, he was passionate about his subject and had a low opinion of the intellectual and teaching abilities of his history lecturers, especially of I.D. Bosman, the head of the department, and his MA supervisor with whom he had a bitter disagreement over the topic for his doctoral studies.² Van Jaarsveld's contempt for his supervisor intensified when he

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1. Nicholas Lezard quoted on the back of Anthony Grafton, *The footnote. A curious history* (London, 2003)

2. For Van Jaarsveld's family background and student years, see F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Van stamvader Adriaan tot Ernst Jacobus van Jaarsveld 1702-1986. 'n Stukkie Familiegeskiedenis van Onder* (Sigma-Pers, Johannesburg, 1989), pp 107-108; J.W.N. Tempelhoff, "Ideë, Narratief en Diskoers: Die Vroeë Intellektuele

befriended the prolific historian and prominent journalist, G.D. Scholtz³, who was unimpressed by the quality of academic historians – especially Bosman because of his unproductiveness.⁴



F A van Jaarsveld

Van Jaarsveld regarded S.P. Engelbrecht with even greater contempt. Engelbrecht, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology (Section A, *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk*), a church historian and an expert on Transvaal history, was intolerant, cantankerous, allegedly dishonest (he apparently stole documents from archives) and prone to intrigue. As a part-time but influential lecturer in the History Department, he was unpopular. His intolerance, prejudices and emotional behaviour antagonised students.⁵ Van Jaarsveld resented the History Department's lack of intellectual freedom and the fact that lectures presented only a nationalistic view of the past, not allowing any deviation from the Department's orthodox version. Engelbrecht was a powerful censor and academically silenced anyone who dared to deviate from what he deemed to be politically acceptable.⁶

Vorming van F A van Jaarsveld 1922-1950", *Historia*, 40, 1, Mei 1995 Also see National Archives of

3 South Africa, Pretoria, F A van Jaarsveld Collection (hereafter VJC), volume 58, Diary, 29 December 1947
Scholtz did his doctorate at the Gemeentelike University of Amsterdam and became Verwoerd's right-hand man at *Die Transvaler*. D Richard, *Moedswillig die Uwe. Perspersoonlikhede in die Noorde* (Perskor, Johannesburg, 1985), pp 91-92; F A van Jaarsveld, "G D Scholtz: Historikus van en vir die Afrikaner" in *Die Evolusie van Apartheid* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1979)

4 F A van Jaarsveld, *Afrikanergeskiedskrywing: Verlede, Hede en Toekoms* (Lex Patria, Johannesburg, 1992), p 53

5 C J Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography V* (Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1987), pp 242-243; Personal communications, F A Mouton and Dr P W Venter; F A Mouton and Dr W T H Beukes; F A Mouton and Prof P S Dreyer; F A Mouton and Dr M Hugo

6 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – Dr M Versfeld, 25 May 1953; F A van Jaarsveld –

A.N. Pelzer⁷ was the only history lecturer Van Jaarsveld found stimulating,⁸ and they had a close relationship. After Bosman’s death in 1947, Pelzer became Head of the Department but failed to get Van Jaarsveld appointed to the vacant permanent lecturership. The selection committee held the view that he was too young for the post. He then offered Van Jaarsveld a temporary lectureship and encouraged him to apply for a bursary to study in the Netherlands.⁹

In 1948 Van Jaarsveld entered the University of Groningen in the Netherlands where he received his doctorate in September 1950 for a study on the desire for Afrikaner unity, published in 1951 as *Die Eenheidstrewa van die Republikeinse Afrikaners Deel I, Pioniers-hartstogte (1836-1864)*. After the stultifying atmosphere at the UP, his years in the Netherlands as a student of P.J. van Winter, H. Plessner and Jan Romein, had a profound effect on him. It made him aware of the shortcomings of Afrikaner historiography with its mission of service to Afrikaner Nationalism. It also drew him to the philosophy of history, historical methodology and theory, which was reflected in his work. In his dissertation he reinterpreted the relationship between the Free State and Transvaal Republics by focusing on the history of the Afrikaner mentality to unity.¹⁰ He did so by making use of factors such as the mobility of people, geography, psychology and the actions of leaders.¹¹

Van Jaarsveld’s low opinion of Afrikaner historians was fuelled by Scholtz, who regarded most of his fellow historians as subjective, apologetic, unable to be analytical and, because of their local training, ignorant of modern trends, especially about the philosophy of history.¹² In addition to Scholtz’s personal contempt for academic historians, Afrikaner historiography had serious shortcomings. This resulted from the fact that the main task of Afrikaner historiography, with its focus on the struggle against British Imperialism, was to legitimise and mobilise the *volk*’s cause. Afrikaner historians believed that through research and the presentation of facts, without any embellishment, they would reinforce and strengthen the case of the *volk*. The result was historical writing that lacked analysis and coherence, often doing no more than uncritically and mechanically reproducing knowledge without any attempt at solving a clearly defined problem. Afrikaner historians had elevated the notion of “scientific-objective” history to an inviolable principle and were prepared to use this principle to denigrate Afrikaner historians who dared to depart from the fold.¹³

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- 7 Prof P J van Winter, 28 February 1953
For Pelzer’s career see F A Mouton, “A N Pelzer: A Custodian of Afrikanerdom”, *South African Historical Journal*, 37, November 1997, pp 133-155
- 8 J W N Tempelhoff, “Idee, Narratief en Diskoers: Die Vroeë Intellektuele Vorming van F A van Jaarsveld 1922-1950”, *Historia*, 40, 1, Mei 1995, pp 35-39; F A van Jaarsveld, *Afrikanergeskiedskrywing: Verlede, Hede en Toekoms* (Lex Patria, Johannesburg, 1992), p 55
- 9 VJC, volume 58, Diary, 29 December 1947; VJC, volume 16, A N Pelzer – F A van Jaarsveld, 9 June 1947 and 20 June 1947
- 10 This was in contrast to other Afrikaner historians with their microstudies on the Afrikaner in the Free State and Transvaal. For Van Jaarsveld this type of history created studies which were nothing more than lifeless factual storerooms, and confirmed his philosophy that a macro approach was the only way to explain trends in the past. The history of the Afrikaner *volk* had to be seen in its totality
- 11 J T du Bruyn, “F A van Jaarsveld: Afrikanerhistorikus en Vernuer”, *Historia*, 27, 1, Mei 1982, pp 57
- 12 VJC, volume 16, G D Scholtz – F A van Jaarsveld, 20 March 1950 (The authors are grateful to Johannes du Bruyn for this letter)
- 13 A Grundlingh, “Politics, Principles and Problems of a Profession: Afrikaner Historians and their Discipline, c 1920-c 1965”, *Perspectives in Education*, 12, 1, 1990, pp 1, 8, 10

Van Jaarsveld had to make sacrifices to complete his studies and financial difficulties resulted in his wife's return to South Africa at the end of 1948. He endured these hardships to ensure an academic post back in South Africa so that he could lead Afrikaner historiography to new heights.¹⁴ He conveyed this vision to his impatient wife:

Ek het sulke hoë ideale gestel en is so entoesiasies om in S - Afrika 'n nuwe rigting in ons wetenskaplike geskiedsbeoefening te bring My studie hier was nie tevergeefs nie en as ek terug is, sal ons die vrugte daarvan pluk¹⁵

On his arrival in South Africa in late 1950, Van Jaarsveld was impatient and ambitious to change, improve and make his mark on Afrikaner historiography. These hopes were dashed when he was unable to secure an academic post because in the introduction to his dissertation, he had commented on the apologetic and subjective nature of historians associated with the UP, while he used his footnotes to reprimand Pelzer and Engelbrecht for their shortcomings. To advertise his return, and his credentials, Van Jaarsveld sent copies of his dissertation to leading Afrikaner historians. He was apparently unaware that his criticisms would be ill-received,¹⁶ that his approach to the past would be viewed with suspicion and that established historians would object to his arrogant messianic approach to save Afrikaner historiography from itself. Ultimately it was Van Jaarsveld's abrasiveness, rather than his new approach to the past (the conservative and ultra-nationalistic Scholtz encouraged him in this) that alienated some fellow Afrikaner historians. Moreover, resentment to his intellectual arrogance was also fuelled by the shortcomings of *Eenheidstrewê*, for example, its clumsy and occasional disjointed approach.

Van Jaarsveld's criticisms immediately led to rumours in Pretoria that he was a supporter of the opposition United Party,¹⁷ despite the nationalistic character of the dissertation.¹⁸ Such rumours could only have weakened his chances of being appointed to an academic post, as Afrikaans universities only appointed 'true' Afrikaners with impeccable nationalistic credentials. With no academic offers, burdened by student debts and with his wife expecting their first child, Van Jaarsveld had no choice but to live with his parents-in-law and to become a high school teacher in Johannesburg. Van Jaarsveld loathed school teaching, especially as it offered no intellectual stimulation and he feared stagnation. His burning ambition was to write history,¹⁹ but he found his work exhausting and time-consuming, which meant that he was only able to find the opportunity to work late at night.²⁰ He especially resented being subservient to autocratic

14 J W N Tempelhoff, "Idee, Narratief en Diskoers: Die Vroeë Intellektuele Vorming van F A van Jaarsveld 1922-1950", *Historia*, 40, 1, Mei 1995, pp 43-52

15 J W N Tempelhoff, "Idee, Narratief en Diskoers: Die Vroeë Intellektuele Vorming van F A van Jaarsveld 1922-1950", *Historia*, 40, 1, Mei 1995, p 52 [I have set such high ideals and am so enthusiastic to bring about a new direction in our scientific historical practice in South Afrika My studies here were not in vain and once I am back, we will reap the fruits thereof]

16 In the Netherlands, Van Winter urged Van Jaarsveld to tone down his criticism as he feared a backlash from South African historians {See his correspondence with H B Thom in P Kapp (red), *Verantwoorde Verlede. Die verhaal van die Studie van Geskiedenis aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch, 1866-2000* (Privaat gepubliseer, Stellenbosch, 2004), pp 64-65} Van Jaarsveld's inability to anticipate the negative consequences of his outspokenness would be a hallmark of his stormy academic career

17 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – T T Cloete, 18 September 1954

18 J W N Tempelhoff, "Beeld en Teorie Sosiale Ruimte en die Filosofiese Diskoerse van F A van Jaarsveld", *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 36, 1, Maart 1996, p 29

19 J W N Tempelhoff, "Idee, Narratief en Diskoers: Die Vroeë Intellektuele Vorming van F A van Jaarsveld 1922-1950", *Historia*, 40, 1, Mei 1995, p 42

20 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – J Romein, 7 June 1954

principals, and what he described as the slave-driving and Gestapo mentality of the Transvaal Education Department (TED) with its encouragement of a herd instinct.²¹ To add insult to injury, the TED’s remuneration policy did not recognise his doctorate, which meant that he remained financially strapped.²² He became bitter that after all his sacrifices, as well as his proven ability, he had been unable to secure an academic post.

Van Jaarsveld’s intense frustration and self-pity gave an increasingly personal edge to his sharp criticism of the works of fellow Afrikaners. This culminated in the alienation of Pelzer, who had been trying to find him employment. Initially Pelzer expressed his disagreement with Van Jaarsveld’s interpretations in a friendly way,²³ but their relationship was eventually ruptured when Van Jaarsveld became involved in Scholtz’s feud with Pelzer.

Pelzer regarded Scholtz’s publications as highly suspect. For Pelzer, history demanded long years of labour to ensure scientific and well-reasoned studies. In 1944 he wrote a contemptuous review of Scholtz’s *Dr Nicolaas Johannes van der Merwe 1888 - 1940*. He took him to task for being too prolific and attacked him for having written a book that was not history. Pelzer alleged that it did a disservice to the discipline. He concluded that most of Scholtz’s books would have to be rewritten. This led to an acrimonious correspondence, with Pelzer refusing to back down.²⁴

Scholtz had a long memory and got his own back when he reviewed Van Jaarsveld’s *Eenheidstrew*e in 1951. Van Jaarsveld’s in-laws were his immediate neighbours in Orchards, Johannesburg, and the two historians often met to discuss their subject and the state of Afrikaner historiography.²⁵ It can be assumed that their resentment of Pelzer, and the poor standing of the UP’s History Department were regular topics of discussion. Subsequently, in his review, Scholtz lauded Van Jaarsveld, while castigating the works of other historians of the Transvaal for their lack of innovation and promotion of rigid dogma. Although not identifying Pelzer by name, it was obvious whom he was attacking.²⁶

Van Jaarsveld added fuel to this dispute in an article for the respected literary journal, *Standpunte*, on the teaching of the theory of history at Afrikaans universities. He argued that in order to comprehend the underlying principles of their subject, historians needed to be more knowledgeable about historical theory. He lambasted the universities for their ossified *curricula* and uninspired teaching. He also pointed out that too many Afrikaner academics with doctorates had no understanding of the basics of their subject. As a result, most historical works were nothing more than mechanical and fragmented catalogues. Moreover, they were too apologetic in their determination to further Afrikaner Nationalism. He urged history lecturers to be more dedicated to their subject and avoid involvement in cultural and political activities, a criticism aimed at Pelzer who followed Bosman’s example of concentrating on cultural activities.

21 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo, 17 February 1955

22 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – J Lövgren, 12 September 1953

23 VJC, volume 16, A N Pelzer – F A van Jaarsveld, 22 and 24 Januarie 1951

24 *Historiese Studies*, 5, 2, 1944, pp 124-126

25 Personal communication, Albert van Jaarsveld and Mrs H van Jaarsveld

26 *Die Transvaler*, 10 November 1951; G D Scholtz, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kroniek, 1951”, *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 7, 1953, pp 300-301

In addition, Van Jaarsveld attacked an apologetic and subjective northern school of history, with Engelbrecht as the leading figure. He accused historians associated with the UP, namely Pelzer, J.H. Breytenbach, J. Ploeger and F.A.F. Wichmann of being subjective, because they defended preconceived ideas. He also took Pelzer to task for his *Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek Deel I Wordingsjare* (which was published in 1950 to critical acclaim) for being lifeless. By contrast, Van Jaarsveld praised the southern school of historians at the University of Stellenbosch (US), with which he linked Scholtz, for being more objective. He believed this was so because most of them had had their training in Europe and their writing attempted to understand and explain the past.

Van Jaarsveld also had harsh words for the Afrikaner *volk*, accusing them of being too isolated and reluctant to digest hard intellectual work, requiring historians to tell them only what they wanted to hear. He made it clear that history could no longer serve to justify the will of the *volk*.²⁷

Van Jaarsveld's article exposed the shortcomings of Afrikaner historiography, but his identification of two history schools obscured this aspect and created the impression of personal animosity. His criticisms of the northern school could equally be applied to southern historians. His identification of two schools was also artificial. Scholtz, for example, had no link with Stellenbosch, nor could he be seen as a paragon of objective historiography. On the other hand Breytenbach had done his doctorate at Stellenbosch with H.B. Thom, respected Head of the Department as his supervisor.²⁸

Eenheidstrewé's new approach and Van Jaarsveld's attacks on fellow historians caused a stir among Afrikaner historians and led to a backlash from those he had criticised. The first reaction came from Breytenbach in a review for *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, a journal for the *Hervormde* Church's ordained ministers and seminary students. He mocked what he called Van Jaarsveld's infatuation with the totality of the past, rejecting it as immature. He accused Van Jaarsveld of using philosophical speculation to mask his ignorance. He also listed a string of alleged factual and interpretative errors in *Eenheidstrewé* and condemned Van Jaarsveld's lack of judgement. In addition, he chastised him for his dismissal of Afrikaner patriots. Breytenbach concluded that the book was one of the most one-sided studies he had ever encountered as a historian and declared that Van Jaarsveld had done himself, and Afrikaner history, a disservice. He urged him to return to conventional ways of writing history, based on archival research.²⁹

The effect of the review seemed, however, to have been limited, since Breytenbach was a young and relatively junior archivist in the Pretoria State Archives and his review appeared in a theological journal with limited circulation.

By contrast, Pelzer's review was devastating. Through his position in various cultural organisations, especially the *Afrikaner-Broederbond*, Pelzer had built up a power base, making him a highly respected and powerful, but also feared figure in academia. He used this position to defend and preserve orthodox Afrikaner historiography and to prevent any revision of its standardised views. To earn his displeasure could harm a career, since

27 F A van Jaarsveld, "Oor die Teoretiese Aspek van die Geskiedeniswetenskap in Afrikaans", *Standpunte*, 6, 1, Oktober 1951, pp 12-22

28 F A van Jaarsveld, "Dr J H Breytenbach, 1917-1994", *Historia*, 39, 1, Mei 1994, p 2

29 J H Breytenbach, "'Nuwe Benaderingswyse' van Ons Geskiedenis", *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, Mei 1952, pp 101-105

he played a crucial role in determining what qualified as “good” history, and also who a good and true Afrikaner was. As a result, few Afrikaner historians dared to challenge the parameters set by the *volksleiers*.³⁰ In his review Pelzer dismissed *Eenheidstrew*e as a disappointing study. He claimed that it made no real contribution, because it dealt with a well-known period that had already been researched, and that, in the absence of any new information, it had to rely too much on interpretation to make it appear different. Moreover, Pelzer argued that to justify his study, Van Jaarsveld mindlessly opposed the conventional and general interpretations of Transvaal history. Even more damaging was his conclusion that the book lacked objectivity. To be accused of subjectivity was fatal in the small Afrikaner community with its strict adherence to “objective-scientific” history. Such an accusation cast doubt on Van Jaarsveld’s abilities as historian. Pelzer concluded on a paternalistic note by pointing out that Van Jaarsveld was talented and could still go far if he could be more self-controlled and forget his fictional grievances.³¹

That Pelzer’s attack deeply wounded Van Jaarsveld, is clear from the underlined passages in his copy of the review.³² He felt that it was an emotional attack without any basis.³³ His perception that Pelzer was targeting him personally, must have intensified when Thom (Afrikanerdom’s most respected historian of the time) wrote a complimentary review, making special mention of Van Jaarsveld’s quest for objectivity.³⁴

In March 1953, the Pelzer–Scholtz–Van Jaarsveld feud intensified when Scholtz reviewed the published thesis of T.S. van Rooyen, Pelzer’s protégé. Thomas Stephanus van Rooyen was born in Pietersburg on 22 February 1922, one of four children. His father, a railway worker, died when Van Rooyen was seven and left his widow and children in impoverished circumstances. Through hard work and gritty determination, Van Rooyen entered the UP in 1940. In 1943, he was awarded a BA degree and then taught in rural towns such as Pietersburg, Potgietersrust and Middelburg. While teaching, he registered for an MA at the UP, which meant that he had to travel weekly from Middelburg to Pretoria for the examination part of this degree.³⁵ With his MA, and later with a D Phil, Van Rooyen attempted to inaugurate a new approach in South African historiography by focusing on black and white relations. He argued that any study of this relationship could not just be based on archival documents, as most of the documents had been written by whites who were prejudiced towards black cultures. He firmly believed that an image of the past based solely on documents produced by whites, would be a false image. The other (black) side of the story also had to be told. It was thus essential to have a sound knowledge of indigenous cultures before attempting any such project.³⁶ He was, moreover, opposed to the attitude among Afrikaner historians

30 For Pelzer’s career as a cultural leader see F A Mouton, “A N Pelzer: A Custodian of Afrikanerdom”, *South African Historical Journal*, 37, November 1997

31 *Inspan*, Desember 1951

32 VJC, volume 84, reviews of *Eenheidstrew*e

33 F A van Jaarsveld, “Oor Beginselgrondslae in die Geskiedeniswetenskap”, *Standpunte*, 8, 3, Maart 1954, p 31

34 *Die Huisgenoot*, 9 Mei 1952

35 For Van Rooyen’s early years see Albert van Jaarsveld, “Dr T S van Rooyen (1922-1967) en die Historiese Geleerdheid”, *Historia*, 30, 1, Mei 1985, pp 50-53

36 T S van Rooyen, “Die sendeling Alexander Merensky in die Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek”, *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, 17, II (Die Staatsdrukker, Parow, 1954), p 99; T S van Rooyen, “Die Verhoudinge Tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die Geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882”, *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, 14, I, (Cape Times, Parow, 1951), p x

that blacks should be shifted to the periphery, or characterised as mere problems in South African history.³⁷



T S van Rooyen

Even before his masters degree had been awarded in April 1948, Van Rooyen, as a hard and fast worker, started his D Phil, with Pelzer as his supervisor. He analysed the relations between the Boers, the Pedi and Zulu before the era of British Imperialism in the Transvaal in 1876, and showed how this new arrival led to the destruction of the Pedi and Zulu armies.³⁸ He completed his D Phil, “Die verhoudinge tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882”, in October 1950, and the degree was awarded in April 1951. He was now regarded as one of Afrikanerdom’s rising historical stars. This was a remarkable achievement because, in contrast to Van Jaarsveld, he completed his thesis as a full-time teacher in Johannesburg, living in Benoni and researching in Pretoria.

Van Rooyen and Van Jaarsveld had much in common. They were the same age and were both highly intelligent, frustrated teachers with ambitions to follow an academic career. They also shared the characteristic of being complex personalities, volatile mixtures of egocentricity, insecurity and abrasiveness. They were hypersensitive to real or imagined

37 C de Jong argues that by not studying in Europe, Van Rooyen was more sensitive to the need for closer cultural relations between white South Africans and the rest of Africa “Nabeskouing oor Dr T S van Rooyen”, *Pretoriana*, 9, November 1986, pp 55-56

38 Albert van Jaarsveld, “Dr T S van Rooyen (1922-1967) en die Historiese Geleerdheid”, *Historia*, 30, 1, Mei 1985, pp 52 - 53

slights to their status or criticism of their writings, and they lashed out wildly at critics. They were especially prone to see criticism or the writings of their “enemies” as conspiracies.³⁹ Despite these similarities, their relationship was marked by mutual jealousy and even loathing, as they were competitors for any future post at an Afrikaans university.

In July 1951, Van Rooyen seemed to be in the inner lane to such an appointment when he became a temporary lecturer in the UP’s History Department. Van Rooyen was so eager to take up an academic career, that he paid for the move from Benoni to Pretoria himself.⁴⁰ As a temporary lecturer he was a success. Pelzer found him a pleasant colleague and he was popular among students.⁴¹ His career was further boosted by the publication of his D Phil in the *Archives Year Book for South African History*. Since only the most outstanding theses and dissertations were supposed to be published in the *Year Book*, students’ reputations were enhanced if their work was accepted. While Van Rooyen’s career was on an upward course, a bitter Van Jaarsveld languished as a school teacher.

Van Rooyen’s ambitions as a historian and academic, however, received a devastating blow as a result of Scholtz’s review in *Die Transvaler* on 5 March 1953. In a short and crushing article, Scholtz bluntly concluded that Van Rooyen was no historian.⁴² His main complaint was that Van Rooyen’s thesis focused on the Eastern Transvaal only, without taking note of the rest of the Republic, and that it was too fragmented. He castigated Van Rooyen for slavishly accepting the views of other historians. Although he did not name them, it was obvious that Scholtz had Pelzer and Engelbrecht in mind. Scholtz scathingly concluded that the problem with the thesis resulted from Van Rooyen’s lack of theoretical knowledge of his subject. He listed works by Huizinga, Hofer and Collingwood that should be consulted if Van Rooyen hoped to become a historian.

The attack on Van Rooyen’s lack of theoretical knowledge is significant, as Van Rooyen regarded himself as an expert in this field and Van Jaarsveld as something of a joke.⁴³ It is possible that this part of Scholtz’s attack was encouraged by Van Jaarsveld’s resentment, as well as his envy and anger at Van Rooyen’s appointment as temporary lecturer at the UP. Normally such an appointment would have been the first step to an academic career. For Van Jaarsveld it must have been a bitter pill that despite his Dutch qualification, he had not been approached by Pelzer.

Scholtz added salt to Van Rooyen’s wounds in a second review in his overview of South African publications of 1951 for the journal, *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*. He again condemned the thesis as immature.⁴⁴ That the thesis was not as bad as Scholtz had suggested, is clear from the respected Dutch historian, W.Ph. Coolhaas’s balanced and positive review. Coolhaas was impressed by

39 Personal communication, F A Mouton and W A Stals
40 Archive of the University of Pretoria (hereafter UP Archive), T S van Rooyen’s personnel file, A N Pelzer – Prof G Cronje, 26 November 1953
41 UP Archive, T S van Rooyen’s personnel file, Testimonial by A N Pelzer, 26 April 1954; A N Pelzer – Prof G Cronje, 26 November 1953
42 The review appeared under the damning heading, “Afrikaanse historici is dun gesaa”
43 Personal communication, F A Mouton and J W Kew
44 G D Scholtz, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kroniek, 1951” in *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 7, 1953, p 297

Van Rooyen's focus on the role of Africans.⁴⁵ Ultimately, "Die verhouding tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle" was, despite being too fragmented and long-winded, an important contribution.⁴⁶ Scholtz's review was based on prejudice, rather than intellectual reason. Van Rooyen was ambushed for being Pelzer's protégé, having a local doctorate, and for being a temporary lecturer at the UP. To see his dissertation being dismissed so contemptuously in the leading Afrikaans daily in the Transvaal, was a shattering blow to Van Rooyen's self-esteem. He became embittered.

Van Rooyen's public humiliation did not soothe Van Jaarsveld's resentment at his marginalisation. The latter felt that Engelbrecht had made use of Pelzer and Breytenbach as surrogates to destroy him, without dirtying his own hands.⁴⁷ Although Van Jaarsveld seemed oblivious to the possibility that other historians could take offence to public attacks, he was not wrong in suspecting Engelbrecht of wanting to use others to destroy him. Pelzer, for example, was close to Engelbrecht who had promoted his career. Engelbrecht's testimonial had been crucial to Pelzer's appointment as Head of the History Department.⁴⁸ In private, however, Pelzer had doubts about Engelbrecht as a person and historian. When he accidentally bumped into Van Jaarsveld in Johannesburg at a rugby match in June 1955, they had a heart to heart discussion. Pelzer claimed that his anger towards Van Jaarsveld had been sparked by his resentment at being publicly linked to Engelbrecht. Then, according to Van Jaarsveld, he proceeded to badmouth Engelbrecht.⁴⁹

Apart from the Pelzer connection, Engelbrecht made use of other historians to counter Van Jaarsveld. After the publication of *Eenheidstrewê*, Engelbrecht invited Dr Maria Hugo, who had studied with Van Jaarsveld in the Netherlands, to tea. He launched a personal attack on Van Jaarsveld, and then offered Hugo the use of his personal library if she criticised Van Jaarsveld in a review. Hugo, who loathed Engelbrecht, refused to do so.⁵⁰ Engelbrecht, however, found in Van Rooyen the perfect surrogate to get at Van Jaarsveld. Years later, a bitter Van Rooyen confided to Van Jaarsveld that he had been egged on by Pelzer and Engelbrecht with promises of a permanent appointment.⁵¹ Van Rooyen, however, was straining at the leash to attack Scholtz and Van Jaarsveld, and to prove his worth as a historian.

By then Van Jaarsveld, in a self-published pamphlet, *Van Apologetiek en Objektiviteit in ons Kerkgeskiedskrywing*, mercilessly dissected Engelbrecht's subjectivity and dishonest manipulation of sources in his *Geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika* (1936). Van Jaarsveld regarded it as a work that had influenced historians such as Pelzer, Wichmann, Breytenbach and Van Rooyen.

45 *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis*, 66, 1953, pp 291-293

46 The dissertation's importance is reflected in Peter Delius's extensive use of it in his revisionist study of the Pedi, *The Land Belongs to Us* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983). For more on Delius's use of "Die Verhouding Tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle" see Ken Smith, "The Pedi polity: a New View But No New Ground", *Kleio*, 16, 1984, pp 52-59

47 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – P J van Winter, 28 February 1953

48 UP Archive, A N Pelzer's personnel file, S P Engelbrecht's testimonial, 17 April 1947, S P Engelbrecht – C H Rautenbach, 30 April 1947

49 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo, 21 August 1955

50 Personal communication, F A Mouton and M Hugo

51 VJC, volume 58, Diary, 30 November 1958

Initially, the Van Jaarsveld pamphlet was well-received. The University of Cape Town philosopher Martin Versfeld appreciated Van Jaarsveld’s argument that historians had to have a knowledge of philosophy to assist them in reflecting on their work and to avoid superficiality and dishonesty.⁵² More importantly, the pamphlet was welcomed by the Dutch Reformed Church, Afrikanerdom’s biggest church, which was involved in a dispute with the *Hervormdes*, the second largest Afrikaans church, on the competing histories of their churches in nineteenth century Transvaal. Van Jaarsveld’s criticism was welcomed as neutralising the effectiveness of Engelbrecht’s book.⁵³ In an article in *Die Voorligter*, H.D.A. du Toit, an influential professor in the UP’s Dutch Reformed Church Theology Department urged congregations to buy the pamphlet. He reiterated Van Jaarsveld’s claim that Pelzer and Van Rooyen had simply repeated Engelbrecht’s interpretations of Transvaal history.⁵⁴

Pelzer and Van Rooyen were upset that their reputations as historians had been so dismissively treated in a respected organ. Pelzer made an appointment with Du Toit to deny Engelbrecht’s influence on his work.⁵⁵ Pelzer, however, was in a difficult position as he was beholden to Engelbrecht. He came to Engelbrecht’s defence in a measured review of *Van Apologetiek en Objektiviteit*. He avoided any reference to personal differences, instead taking Van Jaarsveld to task for his artificial division of a northern and southern school of history and for pursuing a personal feud against Engelbrecht. He also claimed that the book contributed nothing new to the methodology of history.⁵⁶ Pelzer moreover effectively countered Van Jaarsveld’s criticism by spreading the word that Van Jaarsveld was angry for not being appointed by the UP.⁵⁷

Van Rooyen was outraged by Du Toit’s comments in *Die Voorligter*. In contrast to Pelzer, he wrote a lengthy and scathing open letter, published in *Die Hervormer* (official mouthpiece of the *Hervormde* Church and distributed to all its members) of June 1953, upbraiding Du Toit for accepting Van Jaarsveld’s views at face value. Van Rooyen’s reaction was personal and sharp, and could only have created a negative perception among Du Toit’s colleagues at the UP. Van Rooyen thus bolstered the Dutch Reformed Church’s support for Van Jaarsveld as the latter could claim that the attack on him was motivated by *Hervormde* spite, with Engelbrecht as the manipulating puppet master.⁵⁸

By now Van Jaarsveld suspected Pelzer of actively undermining his chances of a post at the University of the Orange Free State (UOFS). Charles Uys, Head of the History Department, offered Van Jaarsveld a temporary lecturership for three months in 1953. Van Jaarsveld was so desperate to escape school teaching that he resigned his post, at a financial cost.⁵⁹ He enjoyed his term in academia, but when there was no offer of a permanent appointment, Van Jaarsveld believed that Pelzer had discredited him at the UOFS.⁶⁰ During this period, Scholtz also fanned Van Jaarsveld’s contempt of academic

52 *Die Huisgenoot*, 1 Mei 1953

53 Review in *Die Kerkbode*, 15 April 1953

54 *Die Voorligter*, April 1953

55 VJC, volume 11, H D A du Toit – F A van Jaarsveld, 8 June 1953

56 Review by A N Pelzer, *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, 41, 1, April 1954, pp 244-246

57 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – J Romein, 7 June 1954; Van Jaarsveld – H D A du Toit, 11 June 1953 (incorrectly dated as 1952); VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – R Antonissen, 30 July 1954 and 18 September 1954; F A van Jaarsveld – T T Cloete, 18 September 1954

58 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – H D A du Toit, 11 June 1953 (incorrectly dated as 1952)

59 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo, 21 August 1955

60 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – H D A du Toit, 11 June 1953 (incorrectly dated as 1952) and 4 January 1954; F A van Jaarsveld – Stoffel (Nienaber), 28 July 1954 Years later Charles Uys told

historians and encouraged his attacks on Engelbrecht.⁶¹ Van Jaarsveld had no choice but to return to the drudgery of school teaching, and his feud with the UP historians, especially Van Rooyen.

Van Rooyen came to Engelbrecht's defence in a rumbustious review of *Van Apologetiek en Objektiviteit* in *Die Hervormer* in which he accused Van Jaarsveld of subjectivity. The most striking feature of the review was his frustration and anger at Van Jaarsveld and Scholtz's contemptuous dismissal of his use of anthropology to cast new light on the history of the Transvaal.⁶²

It was not Van Jaarsveld's nature to turn the other cheek. In an essay "Geskiedenis en Lewe" in *Standpunte* of June 1953, he lambasted Engelbrecht, Pelzer, Wichmann and Van Rooyen, referring to their work as examples of apologetic, lifeless history, representing only storerooms of facts. He also criticised them for their ignorance of the totality of history and portrayed Pelzer as living in a fool's paradise with his rigid and uncritical approach to history, especially his attitude that a final judgement could be achieved in history.⁶³

Van Rooyen retaliated in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* in August 1953 and again attacked Van Jaarsveld's description of a subjective northern school. He argued that Van Jaarsveld's methodology to determine subjectivity was itself subjective and artificial. Van Rooyen justly pointed out that Van Jaarsveld's approach also condemned Thom and Scholtz of the so-called southern school as subjective historians. According to Van Rooyen, Van Jaarsveld's campaign against the UP historians was nothing more than irresponsible opportunism. Van Rooyen, however, spoiled the legitimate points he raised by claiming that Van Jaarsveld and Maria Hugo had been so deeply influenced by Jan Romein during their stay in the Netherlands that they could be regarded as Marxists.⁶⁴ Engelbrecht thus got his revenge for Hugo's refusal to be a surrogate.

That Van Rooyen saw the Romein connection as a chink in Van Jaarsveld's armour, is evident from the fact that he sent a copy of his article to the respected Dutch historian Pieter Geyl.⁶⁵ The ploy was seemingly that Geyl, a leading critic of Romein,⁶⁶ would react and that this could be used to discredit Van Jaarsveld. In the end, the Marxist accusation backfired. In South Africa in the early 1950s Van Rooyen's smear was an extremely serious charge and Hugo wanted to sue him for libel. Van Jaarsveld's attorney, however, advised him not to proceed. Van Jaarsveld knew that his fellow

Van Jaarsveld that Pelzer had actually supported his application for a temporary appointment VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – C J Uys, 12 September 1953; VJC, volume 17, C J Uys – F A van Jaarsveld, 11 May 1958

61 VJC, volume 16, G D Scholtz – F A van Jaarsveld, 30 April and 2 June 1953 (We are grateful to Johannes du Bruyn for these letters)

62 T S van Rooyen, "Apologetiek en Kritiek Enige Apekte i v m die Werkie", *Die Hervormer*, Maart 1953, p 8

63 F A van Jaarsveld, "Geskiedenis en Lewe: 'n Metodologiese-Kritiese Opstel", *Standpunte*, 7, 4, Junie 1953, pp 17-33

64 T S van Rooyen, "Jan Romein in Afrika", *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, Augustus 1953, pp 255-256, 263-264

65 VJC, volume 16, D J Opperman – F A van Jaarsveld, 13 September 1953

66 V Mehta, *Fly and the Fly-Bottle. Encounters with British Intellectuals* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1983), p 155

Afrikaner historians would not be so naïve as to believe such nonsense.⁶⁷ He also felt that Van Rooyen lacked the theoretical knowledge to have authored this attack:

Van Rooyen het eintlik nie self daardie stuk geplaas nie - hy is nie op hoogte met die geskiedeniswetenskap nie en beheers nog geen “teoretiese” taal nie - die inhoud is aan hom gedikteer; hy was maar die spreekbuis om die gedagtes van sekere teologiese professore uit te druk⁶⁸

In the long term, the Marxist smear did Van Rooyen’s reputation as a historian no good. By the end of 1953, his dreams of an academic career was in tatters.

As a temporary lecturer with three children, Van Rooyen found it difficult to cope financially, and he placed his hopes for an increased salary in the Holloway Commission which had been appointed to investigate the financial position of universities. After hearing that the Commission’s proposed increases did not apply to temporary lecturers, a furious Van Rooyen wrote an emotional letter of resignation to the principal in November 1953.⁶⁹ The letter and his departure caused some offence and Pelzer had to intervene to explain his protégé’s behaviour.⁷⁰ He also provided Van Rooyen, who joined the Native Affairs Department as its assistant-chief information officer, with a glowing testimonial.⁷¹

Van Rooyen’s departure from the UP was not the end of his struggle with Van Jaarsveld, as victory over his antagonist in debate could revive his hopes of an academic career. The dispute between the two historians took on the nature of a gladiatorial battle. Van Rooyen wrote a lengthy reaction to Van Jaarsveld’s “Geskiedenis en Lewe” for *Standpunte*, which was accepted on condition that he reduced its length. The original article was published in the *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* of December 1953.⁷² He reiterated some of the points he had raised in August of the same year, and challenged Van Jaarsveld to give a more detailed analysis of his theory on the writing of history. He also confronted Van Jaarsveld over his use of concepts such as subjectivity, the influence of the spirit of the times on the historian, historical judgement and totality. He argued that Van Jaarsveld’s subjective use of historical theory to attack only certain historians was motivated by sensationalism. Van Rooyen alleged that Van Jaarsveld over-emphasized the use of philosophy as a *panacea* in the writing of history. In addition, Van Jaarsveld’s *Eenheidstrew*e was too deterministic as he forced a preconceived idea on his material, which encouraged subjectivity. He linked this to Van Jaarsveld’s approach that the historian had to make use of preconceived historical problems. For Van Rooyen this was unacceptable because the historian had to be led by his sources.

Van Rooyen’s article created the impression of a person who was knowledgeable about his subject. In reality, however, he lacked theoretical and philosophical depth, and his writings were insufficiently nuanced to compete with Van Jaarsveld. The latter had

67 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo, 19 August 1953

68 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – J Romein, 7 June 1954 [Van Rooyen did not really publish that piece himself – he is not conversant with historical science and does not command the ‘theoretical’ language thereof to any extent yet – the contents was dictated to him, he merely was the conduit through which the thoughts of certain theological professors could be expressed]

69 UP Archive, T S van Rooyen’s personnel file, T S van Rooyen – Principal, 11 November 1953

70 UP Archive, T S van Rooyen’s personnel file, A N Pelzer – G Cronje, 26 November 1953

71 UP Archive, T S van Rooyen’s personnel file, A N Pelzer’s testimonial, 26 April 1954

72 T S van Rooyen, “Een Discussie Zonder Eind ’n Antwoord op die Jongste Metodologiese Veronderstelling van Dr F A van Jaarsveld”, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, Desember 1953, pp 10-31

serious shortcomings as a philosopher and a theoretician, he was too deterministic and simplistic in his use of philosophy, while overestimating his own philosophical knowledge,⁷³ but Van Rooyen was too limited to expose these failings. Moreover, he undermined the effectiveness of the article by using a large section to defend his dissertation against the criticisms of Van Jaarsveld and Scholtz. This created the impression that he was determined to settle a personal score. Van Jaarsveld would subsequently exploit Van Rooyen's sensitivity to the Scholtz review.

In the same issue of *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, A.M.T. Meyer of the UP's Philosophy Department, another Engelbrecht surrogate, was more effective in his attack on Van Jaarsveld. He averred that Van Jaarsveld had a limited knowledge of philosophy, offered incorrect interpretations, and possessed a poor understanding of method and historical totality. He also objected to Van Jaarsveld's use of philosophers to attack certain historians, as well as his refusal to see anything positive in the works of those he criticised.⁷⁴ Meyer's criticisms could not be dismissed as easily as those of Van Rooyen and they hurt as he had been a fellow student of Van Jaarsveld in the Netherlands.⁷⁵

Van Jaarsveld ignored Meyer, claiming that he refused to react to anything that appeared in *Die Hervormer* or *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*. Van Rooyen, however, played into his hands when the shortened version of his article appeared in *Standpunte*.⁷⁶ Van Rooyen had created a perfect platform for Van Jaarsveld to take vengeance and to expose the theoretical limitations of the UP's History Department. D.J. Opperman, the highly regarded poet and editor of *Standpunte*, admired Van Jaarsveld and encouraged his writings, persuading *Die Burger* to give publicity to the young historian's opinions. In addition, he kept Van Jaarsveld informed about Van Rooyen's reactions. Van Rooyen suspected Opperman's pro-Van Jaarsveld bias, but could not prove it.⁷⁷

First of all Van Jaarsveld settled an outstanding score with Breytenbach for his critical review in an article on history and politics in *Standpunte* of December 1953. By analysing the first two volumes of Breytenbach's *Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* as a case study, he concluded that Breytenbach's writings were biased, apologetic, emotional and propagandistic. As with his other *Standpunte* articles, Van Jaarsveld's personal attack overshadowed the important statements he made regarding the need for distance in the writing of history.⁷⁸

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- 73 M Hugo, "Waarhede en Verwardhede", *Standpunte*, April 1963, pp 14-20; "Filosoof Tussen Politiek en Geskiedenis André du Toit in gesprek met Pieter Duvenhage", *Fragmente*, 5, 2000, p 113 Also see A M T Meyer's criticism below
- 74 A M T Meyer, "Enkele Kenteoretiese Begrippe in die Geskiedenis", *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, Desember 1953, pp 77-86
- 75 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – H D A du Toit, 4 January 1954; F A van Jaarsveld – J Romein, 7 June 1954
- 76 T S van Rooyen, "Filosofie en Geskiedenis 'n Antwoord op die Jongste Metodologiese Veronderstelling van Dr F A van Jaarsveld", *Standpunte*, 8, 2, Desember 1953, pp 56-62
- 77 VJC, volume 16, D J Opperman – F A van Jaarsveld, 30 October 1951 and 13 September 1953 (We are grateful to Johannes du Bruyn for these letters)
- 78 The article can also be found in F A van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History* (Simondium Publishers, Cape Town, 1964), pp 105-115

After Breytenbach had been put in his place,⁷⁹ Van Jaarsveld concentrated his fire on Van Rooyen. In the issue of *Standpunte* of March 1954,⁸⁰ he denied that his criticisms of certain historians were personal attacks. Rather they were part of a constructive attempt to have an open discussion in order to stimulate good historical writing. He emphasized Scholtz's criticisms of his theoretical limitations in "Die verhoudinge tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle". This created an image of Van Rooyen as a bumbler while flaunting his own expertise in the theory and philosophy of history. A hallmark of the polemic was that despite the copious quotes, numerous footnotes and academic language, Van Jaarsveld and Van Rooyen could not mask their mutual loathing.

In the next issue, an obviously desperate Van Rooyen reacted by claiming that Van Jaarsveld had said nothing that Afrikaner historians were not already aware of. He stated that Van Jaarsveld's approach to history did not differ much from his own and took him to task on issues such as subjectivity and the influence of contemporary events on the historian's view of the past. He categorically denied that the historian had to make use of preconceived historical problems in order to understand the past, and rejected Van Jaarsveld's claims that his attacks on other historians were motivated by his desire to improve Afrikaner historiography. As with his previous articles, Van Rooyen's hurt and anger about the Scholtz review again was evident.⁸¹

Opperman allowed Van Jaarsveld to react in the same issue. He claimed that Van Rooyen's discovery that there were no real differences between them, signified capitulation. To Van Jaarsveld, Van Rooyen's inability to counter his methodological principles revealed his immaturity, ignorance and confusion in his use of theoretical works. He focused on Van Rooyen's Achilles' heel, namely his sensitivity to criticism of his dissertation. Van Jaarsveld concluded that the shortcomings of this study were symptomatic of Van Rooyen's lack of theoretical grounding.⁸² It was a brutal conclusion. Van Jaarsveld was the undisputed victor. Van Rooyen had been humiliated.

Still Van Jaarsveld persisted. In reviewing his antagonist's MA, published in the *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 1954, II, he claimed that Van Rooyen's approach of viewing the past from the Africans' perspective was not as original as he had claimed. He also reprimanded Van Rooyen for being too biased, apologetic and vague, and for repeating large sections of his M.A. in his doctorate.⁸³ Van Jaarsveld was intellectually the victor in the polemic; but it was a pyrrhic victory in that the controversy seriously dented his standing among Afrikaner historians. He was marginalised by Afrikaans universities. Afrikaner historians realised that Van Jaarsveld possessed exceptional talent, and that Afrikaner historical methodology had to be debated, but they were not blind to the fact that he had used this as a pretext for attacking certain historians.⁸⁴ The polemic left a lasting suspicion in Afrikaner academic circles that Van Jaarsveld was unsound and abrasive.

79 Although Breytenbach did not reply, he took revenge in 1979 as a witness in mitigation of sentence for the convicted neo-fascist Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging members who had tarred and feathered Van Jaarsveld

80 F A van Jaarsveld, "Oor Beginselgrondslae in die Geskiedeniswetenskap", *Standpunte*, 8 3, Maart 1954, pp 30-41

81 T S van Rooyen, "Beginsels, Grondslae en Kritiek", *Standpunte*, 8, 4, Junie 1954, pp 33-39

82 F A van Jaarsveld, "Onrypheid in Ons Geskiedwetenskap", *Standpunte*, 8, 4, Junie 1954, pp 40-44

83 F A van Jaarsveld, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kroniek, 1955", *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 1956, pp 281-283

84 J J Oberholster, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kroniek", 1953, *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 1955, pp 317-318

While Van Jaarsveld was still respected as a talented historian, Van Rooyen was denied this solace. His smear tactics and mauling at Van Jaarsveld's hands had destroyed his reputation as a promising young historian. The possibility of an academic appointment therefore seemed extremely remote. Van Jaarsveld's continued marginalisation embittered him even more. Making matters worse was the realisation that the polemic had impacted negatively on his career in the TED. He was afraid that he would never rise above the level of Assistant B Teacher. His sense of persecution was bolstered when his application for a history post at the Normaal Teachers College, Pretoria, was rejected in favour of a person of his age with only a BA. His disappointment was heightened by Pelzer's success at the UP, where he became Dean of the Arts Faculty. To Maria Hugo, Van Jaarsveld gave his frustration free rein:

Pelzer is ongelukkig weer een van ons "groot" - skyngeleerdes wat in 'n land soos Holland dit waarskynlik nooit verder sou gebring het as om voor 'n std. VI - klas te gestaan het nie.⁸⁵

He also resented the fact that the purpose of history at school was to instil propaganda in order to create young Afrikaner nationalists.⁸⁶ Van Jaarsveld became so despairing of the narrow-mindedness and intolerance of Afrikanerdom, that he felt his people had rejected him. This feeling of rejection combined with the political situation in South Africa made him contemplate emigration to the United States of America.⁸⁷

In desperation he applied unsuccessfully for posts at the English-speaking Universities of Natal and the Witwatersrand. Edgar Brookes, the well-known liberal, was aware of Van Jaarsveld's predicament of being rejected by his own people while not being accepted by English-speakers, and would have appointed him at the University of Natal in the 1950s, had there been a vacancy.⁸⁸ Brookes also recommended Van Jaarsveld as a possible assistant to Alan Paton to write his Hofmeyr biography.⁸⁹

Van Jaarsveld's love of history was, however, not stifled and he was determined to prove himself as a historian.⁹⁰ In 1957, his stimulating and thought-provoking book *Die ontwaking van die Afrikaanse nasionale bewussyn, 1868 - 1881* was published. It liberated him from the drudgery of teaching and led to his appointment as a senior lecturer at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 1958, being rapidly promoted to professor in 1960. Moving to Pretoria, Van Jaarsveld purchased a house in Eighteenth Street, Menlo Park, close to Van Rooyen's residence in Twentieth Street. Their wives became close friends and succeeded in bringing the two antagonists together. They also commuted to work in the city centre by the same bus. Their daily meetings led to a friendship and an embittered Van Rooyen confessed to Van Jaarsveld how he had been

85 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo, 22 December 1954 [Pelzer unfortunately again is one of our 'great' pseudo-scholars who, in a country such as the Netherlands, probably never would have made it further than to stand in front of a standard VI class]

86 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo (Letter is addressed to her married surname, De Pauw), 22 December 1954; 5 February 1955; 21 August 1955

87 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo, 14 January 1955; 17 February 1955

88 Apart from Brookes, and J S Marais at Wits, there seems to have been little interest in the polemic among academics at English-speaking universities

89 University of the Witwatersrand, Alan Paton Collection, Edgar Brookes – Alan Paton, 21 February 1955

90 VJC, volume 16, F A van Jaarsveld – J Romein, 7 June 1954

used by Engelbrecht and Pelzer, only to be discarded when he had served his purpose.⁹¹

In contrast to Van Jaarsveld’s rapid rise, Van Rooyen remained a civil servant (in 1957 he was seconded to the Press Commission for two years) and wrote no significant historical publications. He did, however, still have the support of Pelzer and maintained contact with his subject through the South African Historical Association, the editorial board of *Historia*, the Association of Old Pretoria, and as Editor of its mouthpiece *Pretoriana*. These were all institutions in which Pelzer was an influential figure.

Being in academia made Van Jaarsveld calmer and more conformist. He even rediscovered Pelzer’s *Wordingsjare*, praising it as an important and trail-blazing work that he had previously misunderstood.⁹² He became friendly with Pelzer again and confided in Hugo that he had underestimated Pelzer and had not realised how open-minded he was. He also claimed that Pelzer had offered him a senior lectureship in the UP’s History Department.⁹³ It is doubtful that such an offer was sincere. Although Van Jaarsveld had become more conformist, Pelzer’s low opinion of him had not changed, and when he applied for the chair of history at the UP in 1970, Pelzer opposed his candidature.⁹⁴ It is more likely that such an offer had been made by Pelzer, knowing that Van Jaarsveld, about to be promoted to a professorship at Unisa, would not wish to accept it.

As a result of Pelzer’s influence, Van Rooyen was eventually appointed as a senior lecturer at the UP in February 1961. His years at the UP were an anti-climax as his early promise had been dimmed by disappointment. As a historian, he produced nothing but a few unexceptional essays on the philosophy and methodology of history. Although his colleagues recognised his intelligence and ability, they found him unstable and ill-tempered. In 1962, a furious Van Rooyen stormed into Pelzer’s office and verbally abused him for promoting his colleague, F.J. du Toit Spies, instead of him, to an associate professorship.⁹⁵ Van Rooyen also became involved in a fisticuffs with W.A. Stals, a junior colleague.⁹⁶ Although some students found Van Rooyen stimulating, and a model to emulate,⁹⁷ many regarded him to be a bully. On more than one occasion he became involved in ugly confrontations with students. His lectures also reflected a deep sense of cynicism and bitterness.⁹⁸

Van Rooyen’s volatile behaviour at the UP finally alienated Pelzer. Without Pelzer’s support, Van Rooyen realised that he would never be promoted. Deeply unhappy at the UP, he applied for the chair at the newly founded University of the North, and then at the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE). By then his ill-temper was so notorious that no university was prepared to appoint him. These failures only served to embitter him further.⁹⁹ Even more galling was that the prolific Van Jaarsveld came to be regarded as the Afrikaner’s historian who was internationally respected as one of South Africa’s

91 VJC, volume 58, Diary, 30 November 1958

92 F A van Jaarsveld, *Afrikanergeskiedskrywing: Verlede, Hede en Toekoms* (Lex Patria, Johannesburg, 1992), p 56

93 VJC, volume 11, F A van Jaarsveld – M Hugo, 9 November 1959; 21 December 1959

94 Personal communication, F A Mouton, F J du Toit Spies and W Schellack

95 Personal communication, F A Mouton and F J du Toit Spies

96 Personal communication, F A Mouton, Albert van Jaarsveld and W A Stals

97 J L Hattingh and J W Kew, “Dr T S van Rooyen – An appreciation”, *Historia*, 13, 1, May 1968, p 2

98 Personal communication, F A Mouton, D Prinsloo and F J Nöthling

99 Personal communication, F A Mouton and J L Hattingh

leading historians. When Van Rooyen heard in 1963 that the UPE chair had been offered to Van Jaarsveld, who turned it down, he exploded in fury and abruptly ended their friendship.¹⁰⁰ By 1967, Van Rooyen applied for a senior lectureship at Unisa. Van Jaarsveld, then occupying the chair at the newly established Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), was a member of the selection committee. Van Rooyen did not get the post and he blamed Van Jaarsveld, whom he felt had humiliated him during the interview.¹⁰¹ A few months later, Van Rooyen died suddenly from heart failure on 14 December 1967. By then he had been discredited at the UP to such an extent, that Pelzer was considering initiating proceedings to have him dismissed.¹⁰²

The polemic of 1953-1954 had deeply wounded and marred the careers of both Van Rooyen and Van Jaarsveld. It effectively destroyed Van Rooyen's reputation. He never recovered from the mauling he had received at the hands of Scholtz and Van Jaarsveld. In addition, it contributed to the failure of his pioneering dissertation on black and white relations in the Eastern Transvaal to get the recognition it deserved. His appointment at the UP came too late to compensate for his disappointments. For Van Jaarsveld the polemic also left lasting wounds. Despite his successes after 1958, the legacy of the polemic increased his sensitivity and intolerance to criticism. It encouraged his blindness to the fact that scholars do not need to resort to abuse and sneers to establish the validity of their contentions. The knocks Van Jaarsveld took, made him more conformist, culminating in his ultra-conservative and chauvinistic book, *Afrikaner quo vadis* in 1971. It would take the shock of the collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1974 and the Soweto uprising of 1976 to return him to a more enlightened and realistic stance.

The polemic, which degenerated into a feud, also harmed Afrikaner historiography. Van Jaarsveld's comments on its shortcomings, namely Afrikaner historians' involvement in ethnic mobilisation and the need to legitimise the present, as well as the factual character of most studies, became obscured. Instead of encouraging self-examination and innovation, the polemic had a stultifying effect. Van Jaarsveld's subsequent difficulty in securing a university appointment served as a warning to fellow Afrikaner historians not to challenge the custodians of the orthodox interpretation of the Afrikaners' past.

100 Personal recollection, Albert van Jaarsveld

101 Personal communication, F A Mouton and S B Spies, F A Mouton and JW Kew

102 Personal communication, F A Mouton and W A Stals

Abstract

In 1950 F.A. van Jaarsveld returned from his studies in the Netherlands, impatient and ambitious to change, improve and make his mark on Afrikaner historiography. In his dissertation, Van Jaarsveld made scathing remarks about the apologetic and subjective nature of historians associated with the University of Pretoria (UP). The result was that he was unable to secure an academic post. As a frustrated school teacher, he published a succession of articles criticising UP historians. These attacks were not only motivated by Van Jaarsveld's concerns about the state of Afrikaner historiography, but also by enmity towards his *alma mater's* history department. In the process he acted as a surrogate for the conservative G.D. Scholtz, a close friend, who had an axe to grind with UP historians. The main counter-attack came from T.S. van Rooyen, a temporary lecturer in the UP's History Department. Although they debated the nature of Afrikaner historiography, it was very much a personal clash to beat each other, as they were competitors for any rare future post at an Afrikaans university. The polemic not only harmed the personalities and careers of Van Jaarsveld and Van Rooyen, but also had a stultifying effect on Afrikaner historiography.

Opsomming

"Angry young men": F.A. van Jaarsveld, T.S. van Rooyen en die Afrikaner Historiografiese Polemiekie van 1953-1954

In 1950 het F.A. van Jaarsveld van sy studies in Nederland teruggekeer. Hy was ambisieus en ongeduldig om homself te laat geld en Afrikaner historiografie te verander en te verbeter. In sy proefskrif het hy verpletterende opmerkings oor die apologetiese en subjektiewe aard van historici verbonde aan die Universiteit van Pretoria (UP) gemaak. Die gevolg was dat hy nie 'n akademiese pos kon vind nie. As 'n gefrustreerde onderwyser het hy 'n reeks artikels gepubliseer waarin hy die historici van UP gekritiseer het. Van Jaarsveld se aanvalle was nie net die gevolg van sy besorgdheid oor die toestand van Afrikanergeskiedskrywing nie, maar ook van sy vyandigheid teenoor sy *alma mater* se Geskiedenis Departement. In die proses het hy 'n surrogaat geword vir die konserwatiewe G.D. Scholtz, 'n goeie vriend, wat om persoonlike redes die historici van UP wou bykom. Die hoof teenaanval het van T.S. van Rooyen, 'n tydelike dosent in UP se Geskiedenis Departement, gekom. Alhoewel hulle oor die aard van Afrikanergeskiedskrywing gedebatteer het, was dit 'n persoonlike konflik om mekaar te klop, aangesien hulle mededingers was vir 'n toekomstige, en skaars, akademiese pos by 'n Afrikaanse universiteit. Dit was 'n polemiekie wat nie net die persoonlikhede en loopbane van Van Jaarsveld en Van Rooyen geskaad het nie, maar ook 'n negatiewe uitwerking op Afrikaner geskiedskrywing gehad het.

Key Words

F.A van Jaarsveld, T.S. van Rooyen, G.D Scholtz, S.P Engelbrecht, A.N. Pelzer, University of Pretoria, Afrikaner Historiography, 1950s, academic rivalry, destructive polemic.

Sluitelwoorde

F.A van Jaarsveld, T.S. van Rooyen, G.D Scholtz, S.P Engelbrecht, .N. Pelzer, Universiteit van Pretoria, Afrikanergeskiedskrywing, 1950's, akademiese wedywering, destruktiewe polemiekie.

