**Inaugural Lecture: Professor Dirk Klopper**

**16 October 2013**

Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Department, colleagues, students, family and friends of Prof Klopper, ladies and gentlemen – molweni, good evening, goeie nag, welcome.

The University Calendar lists all the current full professors of Rhodes University. Professor Dirk Cornelis Klopper, who is the Head of the English Department, is a recent entry on this illustrious list.

This evening, as is our tradition, we have the presentation of the Inaugural Lecture that follows the University conferring the status of full professor on an academic.

It is an evening on which as academic peers, colleagues, students, family, friends, and the public we celebrate the intellectual and scholarly achievements of one of our professors.

Having spent his childhood between his father’s home in Kroonstad and his mother’s home first in Johannesburg and then Pretoria, Dirk found himself a boarder at Dale College, King Williams Town, where he matriculated in 1974.

Although the boarding school regime on an old frontier was somewhat repressive, it was no more oppressive than the hostels he had stayed in with farmers’ children in Kroonstad.

In the Free State he spent weekends on farms in the district, riding horses and fishing in muddy dams; in the Eastern Cape he visited school friends who lived in interesting places, like the trading station in Idutywa and the hotel in Stutterheim.

Dirk’s academic training started at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, where he was taught, among others, by Paul Walters. A fellow student describes him as “a strikingly handsome, leather wearing biker, with Shelley and Yeats and Byron in his pocket, and Bob Dylan albums to be shared, and says he lived “the quintessential poetic life”. During this time, he attended live music shows by Dollar Brand (later Abdullah Ibrahim) and Philip Tabane, which made an indelible impression on him. (I could add much more but since son Dirk Reinhard is in the audience I will say no more).

He graduated from Natal with a BA degree in English and Afrikaans-Netherlands, and with a Higher Degree in Education. As a conscientious non-combatant, Dirk was posted to an administrative job in Pretoria for his compulsory national service. An informant says he kept busy in the Media Unit producing slide shows with Pink Floyd soundtracks that never saw the light of day!

He enrolled for a part-time Honours degree in English at UNISA, which he obtained at the end of the two-year period. He then taught English at the Pretoria School of Art, Ballet and Music, enrolling at UNISA for a Master’s degree on poststructuralist theory and the poetry of Shelley. For this work he received the Doctor’s Exhibition Award.

In 1985 he joined Vista University in Mamelodi, where he first encountered the music of Vusi Mahlasela. There was also another special encounter – with one Lynda Spencer, then a tutor and now his partner.

At Vista Prof Klopper advanced through the ranks to become Associate Professor. He spent a term as Head of Department, and received the Council Achievement Award for two years running.

During this period Dirk completed a doctoral study on materialist theory and the settler poetry of the Eastern Cape frontier, from Thomas Pringle to Guy Butler. The thesis was examined by, among others, Rhodes Prof Malvern Van Wyk Smith.

In 1995 Dirk took up a post at the Rand Afrikaans University. While here his 2001 article, “Winnie Madikizela Mandela’s Testimony before the TRC”, was published in *Poetics Today*. That particular issue of the journal was recognised by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ) for a Best Special Issue Award.

Then followed 12 months on a Commonwealth Fellowship at Oxford University, where he conducted research on the poet Arthur Nortje, and worked under the postcolonial theorist Robert Young. Shortly after his return from Oxford, he took up a position in 2003 as Professor of English and HoD at Stellenbosch University.

At Stellenbosch, Dirk sat on the Chairs of Department Committee, the Faculty Research Committee, which involved him in evaluating staff research proposals for funding, and contributed to multilingual language policy development and Faculty language planning as a member of the Council Language Committee.

Since joining Rhodes in 2010, Dirk has been an active member of the Humanities Standing Committee, the Institute for the Study of English in Africa Management Board, the Theatre Management Committee, and the Rhodes representative on the National English Literary Museum (NELM) Council.

Dirk’s teaching interests encompass South African travel writing and narrative fiction; transnationalism and cultural translation; place history and kinship; and anthropology, ecology and postcolonial studies.

He has supervised one Doctoral thesis, 13 Master’s theses and 3 postdoctoral fellows, and is currently supervising 5 Masters and Doctoral candidates. He has been an external examiner for several South African universities, and has examined 9 Masters and 3 Doctoral theses.

His current research on South African Literary History seeks to produce a comprehensive digital record of South African literature and to promote archival research. This project has been undertaken in collaboration with NELM and is linked to a special annual issue of the journal *English in Africa*.

Another project on Dwelling and Kinship in South African Writing has Dirk working on a monograph that focuses on the topos of the country in South African narrative fiction.

Dirk holds a Rhodes Mellon Foundation award for a Research Focus area on South African Literature. The project offers undergraduate and Honours courses, postgraduate research opportunities and promotes teaching and research in the field.

A NRF Research niche area focused on the tensions between national and local forms of identification and was titled *Embedded Subjectivities: Language, Ethnicity and the Body in South African literature*.

Prof Klopper has published 29 articles in accredited journals and 11 book chapters on various aspects of South African literature. He is editor of *Anatomy of Dark: Collected Poems of Arthur Nortje*, and is co-author, with Gareth Cornwell and Craig McKenzie, of *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English since 1945*.

He has written reviews for journals such as *New Coin*, the *Southern African Review of Books* and *Staffrider*, has presented some 34 conference papers, and been often invited to lecture, lead seminars and participate in panel discussions and readings and conduct interviews in his areas of expertise.

Most recently he convened a conference at Rhodes titled Interrogating the Human: Literary and Epistemological Interchange.

Dirk has served as an adjudicator for various highly sought-after prizes and awards, including the Sydney Clouts Memorial Prize, the Olive Schreiner and Thomas Pringle Awards and the Alex La Guma-Bessie Head Fiction Award.

He has been an evaluator for NRF research projects and researcher ratings, literary-critical manuscripts for the UKZN and UNISA presses, poetry manuscripts for Ravan Press, and articles for journals such as *English in Africa*, *English Studies in Africa*, and the *Journal of Literary Studies*.

Dirk’s commitments to professional associations have included serving as editor-in-chief of *English Academy Review*, a member of the editorial board of *English in Africa*, and a guest editor of an annual special issue.

He has been a member of the English Studies Management Forum, the executive committee and council of the English Academy of Southern Africa, and executive of the Association of University English Teachers of South Africa.

Dirk has directed a production of *Barnstable* and a workshop production on Athol Fugard; has coordinated and participated in Congress of South African Writers activities, a creative arts society at Vista, and a poetry group and poetry festival for Arts Alive and Rand Afrikaans University.

His community engagement has included the establishment of parent, teacher and student associations and workshops on democratic governance with teacher and student organisations in Mamelodi high schools. He was also an English tutor for the Pretoria-based Education Support Programme.

It is my great pleasure to invite Professor Dirk Klopper to address us on ‘Poverty, Bare Life and the Work of the Imaginary’.