

Profile for Dr Marguerite Poland

An alumna of Rhodes University, Dr Marguerite Poland is a prolific author and writer of fiction and nonfiction works. Over the years, she has enriched the nation's literary landscape with excellent works, which draw on the diverse South African experience.

Born in Johannesburg in 1950, Dr Poland became one of the first 4th generation students to enrol at Rhodes University in 1968 and her great-grandfather Reverend AW Brereton was the first Registrar of Rhodes University.

She received her BA, majoring in Xhosa and Social Anthropology, from Rhodes University in 1970, completed her Honours in Xhosa at Stellenbosch University and attained both her Masters and Doctoral degrees in Zulu Literature from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Dr Poland was the first recipient of the Fitzpatrick Literary Award for Children's Literature in 1979 for her tale *The Mantis and the Moon*, which she received again in 1983 for *The Woodash Stars*. In 1989, *The Mantis and the Moon* received a Sankei Honourable Award for translation into Japanese. Over the years, she has written eleven children's books, many of which draw metaphorically on the African tradition without the retelling of folktales. Fluent in isiXhosa and isiZulu, much of Dr Poland's work reflects her interest in African culture with some of her children's stories in particular inspired by African oral traditions.

Recessional for Grace is a novel which grew out of Dr Poland's research for her doctoral thesis in Zulu Literature on the metaphoric naming of colour-patterns for Nguni cattle. Her book *The Abundant Herds: a Celebration of the Cattle of the Zulu People* is an adaptation of her PhD dissertation. It draws on years of research into the tradition of cattle naming, a field in which there was very little written material available.

Over the years, Dr Poland has received plenty of additional rewards and accolades, including:

- *Train to Doringbult*, her first adult novel, was short-listed for the CNA Award for in 1987
- *Shades*, which has been a matric network throughout South Africa for over ten years, was short-listed for the M-Net Award in 1994
- In 2019 *A Sin of Omission* was shortlisted for the Sir Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction in the United Kingdom
- She was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award for English Literature from the Department of Arts and Culture in May 2005
- She was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the South African Literary Academy (SALA) in 2010
- Through her work on Nguni cattle she was honoured in 2015 with the Ingwazi Award 'in recognition of her passion for and dedication to KwaZulu-Natal'.
- In 2016 Marguerite Poland was awarded the National Order of Ikhamanga (Silver) by the South African president
- *Taken Captive by Birds* was among the 6 books short-listed for the Nielsen Award in 2013, given by the Publishers and Booksellers Association of South Africa

- Her most recent novel *The Keeper* won the Nielsen Award in 2015

Besides writing, Dr Poland also worked as a social worker in Port Elizabeth and in Durban. She also worked as an ethnologist at the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town. She also taught English for a year at St. Andrew's College in Makhanda, where she was commissioned to write a history of the school to mark the 150th anniversary of its foundation in 2005. The resulting publication *The Boy in You: a Biography of St Andrew's College, Grahamstown 1855–2005* was launched in South Africa and London in 2008.

For this, she was honoured by St Andrew's College, who made an Honorary Old Andean. She is the first woman to be elected as the President of the Old Andean Club in 2021.

Dr Poland is currently working with the artists of the Keiskamma Art Project in researching for their proposed COVID-19 Regeneration Tapestry depicting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their community in Hamburg, Eastern Cape. This is the fourth initiative of the Keiskamma Art Project in which she has been involved.

Dr Poland is married to attorney Martin Oosthuizen, and they have two daughters and four grandchildren. She and her husband divide their time between Durban, KwaZulu-Natal and Makhanda, Eastern Cape.

Rhodes University will honour Dr Poland's many and significant contributions to enrich our nation and humankind with exceptional creative works by awarding her an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters (DLitt) (*honoris causa*) at its 2021 Graduation ceremonies in April 2021.