

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S BOOK AWARD
Presented to Dr Dan Wylie
17 April 2009

One of the core functions of a University is to produce new knowledge that enhances humanity's understanding of the natural and social worlds.

The Vice-Chancellor's Book Award seeks to recognize a recent book published by a staff member that advances knowledge and understanding and also brings undoubted credit to the University by virtue of the contribution it makes to scholarly literature, education, science or the humanities and arts.

Professor Dan Wylie's *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History*, published by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Press in 2006, is such a book.

Professor Wylie was born in Bulawayo. After completing his A-levels at Umtali (now Mutare) Boys' High School and two years of military service in the medical corps, he came to Rhodes in 1980. At Rhodes, he read for a BA in English and History and then received an Honours degree in English with distinction.

Two years of travelling overseas followed, before a return to Zimbabwe, where Prof. Wylie first taught at a secondary school, and then worked as a freelance journalist.

He returned to Rhodes in 1990 to begin an academic career which has become progressively more productive and distinguished.

Prof. Wylie's early work at Rhodes was with the Academic Support Programme, which has led to an ongoing professional concern for the challenges experienced by students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

He completed a PhD in English in 1996 and was promoted to Associate Professor in the English Department in 2008. He has supervised 7 Masters Theses, of which 5 have been awarded with distinction, as well as 3 PhD's.

He has published widely both in the creative arts and academic fields, and has to his credit over 40 book chapters, journal articles and review essays.

His 1996 collection of poems, *The Road Out*, won him the Ingrid Jonker Prize for Poetry in 1997 and the Olive Schreiner Prize in 1998.

Original Forest, another collection of poems was published in 2001.

His memoir of his military service, *Dead Leaves: Two Years in the Rhodesian War*, was published in 2002.

He has published extensively on Shaka.

Savage Delight: White Myths of Shaka was published in 2000. *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History* for which Professor Wylie is honoured with the Vice-Chancellor's Book Award, is described by him an "anti-biography", because there are very few undisputed facts about Shaka's personal life and actions.

'Shaka', therefore, seems to exist more as a collection of historical contradictions supporting the contending agendas of those who have written about him.

As Shaun de Waal, writing in the *Mail and Guardian*, puts it, in *Myth of Iron* Professor Wylie 'sets out to determine what it really is possible to know about Shaka'.

The book also highlights the difficulties inherent in writing a biography of a figure whose life, as another reviewer, Sean Redding, has said, has been overshadowed by his own legend.

Since the publication of *Myth of Iron*, three further books have followed. *The Fourteen: Sonnets from amongst the Portuguese* and *Road Work*, both collections of poetry were published in 2006 and 2007 respectively.

And last year a new book titled *Elephant* was published by Reaktion Books in London.

For his outstanding writing and contribution to the arts and humanities, Professor Dan Wylie is a most worthy recipient of the Vice-Chancellor's Book Award.