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UCT law professor wins coveted Afrikaans literature prize

Collection gives a voice to poet's personal traumas of losing best friend and growing up as a queer person in an abusive patriarchal Afrikaner family in apartheid South Africa



Professor Jaco Barnard-Naude

Photo: Supplied

Professor Jaco Barnard-Naude, director of research at the University of Cape Town's (UCT) [Faculty of Law](#), was recently awarded the coveted Ingrid Jonker Literary Prize – widely considered the highest honour for debut Afrikaans poetry – for his poetry collection entitled 'Om my kastele in Spanje te sloop' (To demolish my castles in Spain).

It is rare for a legal scholar to register such an accomplishment.

The title of the collection, published by Human & Rousseau in 2024, is taken from some lines of a letter by Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, quoted in English translation in Ernest Jones's biography.

What inspired this collection?

Barnard-Naude, a professor of jurisprudence and co-director of the [Centre for Rhetoric Studies](#) at UCT's [Department of Private Law](#), says he started writing what would become this collection around 2007, after the sudden death of his best friend. He finished the manuscript early in 2023.

"The 'inspiration' overall came from the need to give voice to my personal traumas up to that point, of which there are many, mostly as a result of growing up as a queer person in the small town of Brits in the last decade of institutionalised apartheid in South Africa – and in an abusive patriarchal Afrikaner family," said Barnard-Naude.

The prize, which consists of a trophy sculpture and a relatively modest cash disbursement, is awarded annually, but alternately, to English and Afrikaans debut poetry collections published in the previous two years. The 2025 prize was awarded for Afrikaans debut poetry published in 2023 and 2024.

"My involvement with literature goes back much further. I started writing Afrikaans poetry around 1995 and have not stopped since, although my writing between 1998 and 2007 was infrequent – relatively speaking, and it still is. My first academic work on Afrikaans literature was published in 2012," he said. Barnard-Naude completed an MA in Creative Writing under the supervision of Emeritus Professor Joan Hambidge at UCT in 2011.

Loved Ingrid Jonker's literature from a young age

The award has a special place in his heart.

"For me, the award is especially special on a personal level, if I can put it this way, because Ingrid Jonker is the first Afrikaans poet with whom I fell in love in the mid-nineties, before I started writing poetry. So, it feels a bit like things have come full circle, at least for the moment," said Barnard-Naude.

"I was obsessed with Ingrid Jonker for many years, as many young poets are. The award of the Ingrid Jonker prize to *kastele* (the collection) has inspired me to continue despite the usual hardships for poetry in South Africa – fewer and fewer readers, an exceedingly high publication threshold, etc). For a debut poet who has always been very unsure about whether I am 'good enough', and who convinced myself that, for several reasons, there is no way that I would win, the award of this prize endows a lot of creative courage, perseverance, tenacity as well as pure and simple joy," he said.

Academic background and research focus

Barnard-Naude joined UCT as a lecturer in the Commercial Law Department at the Faculty of Law in 2004.

"I was eventually promoted to the rank of professor in 2011, having relocated to the Department of Private Law in 2006. Currently, I teach jurisprudence to first- and third-year

law students, a course on spatial justice in the final year of the LLB and I am currently supervising 10 postgraduate students at Masters and Doctoral level.

"On the research front, my current major focus is on the apprehension of justice in modernist visual poetry, including in contemporary South African visual poetry. My other major project continues my focus on post-apartheid psychoanalytic critical jurisprudence. On the level of faculty administration, I am currently serving as its director of research for a second term. I fulfil my social responsiveness obligations through a variety of forms of public engagement focused ever so often on literary criticism, cinema, opera and, of course, the law," he explained.

Barnard-Naude holds a B1-rating from the National Research Foundation (NRF) and is a past recipient of the UCT Fellows Award. In the United Kingdom, he was the British Academy's Newton Advanced Fellow in the Westminster Law & Theory Lab, School of Law at the University of Westminster between 2017 and 2020, and Honorary Research Fellow in the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, University of London in 2019 and most recently in 2025, when he was at the same time a member of the team of tutors for the London Critical Theory Summer School, organised annually by the institute. With effect from 1 January 2026, he is the holder of the WP Schreiner Chair in Private Law and Jurisprudence, established in 1924 in what is now UCT's Department of Private Law.

He is currently working 'very slowly and very hesitantly' on his second poetry collection. At the same time, he is working with celebrated South African poet and translator, Karen Press, on the English translation of *kastele*.

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