



Shades

Marguerite Poland

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St Matthias Mission 1902: 'There are men who know that when you are finished with this war of yours and have raised your flag to the glory of your Empire - the one that we, as black men, are supposed to revere for having bestowed on us education, faith, prosperity and all the other high-sounding gifts - that you will sell us out - perhaps against the advance of metaphorical cattle - and say it is expedient. You will sacrifice our rights in order to secure your peace with the Boers and shrug us off. It is for this expedience that men like Tom and Reuben and Sonwabo Pumami are dead. There will be thousands like them in the time to come.'

Against a backdrop of drought, the rinderpest pandemic, the South African War, the burgeoning gold-mining industry and the complex birth of the exploitative system of recruiting migrant labour, *Shades* explores the growing tensions between cultures in South Africa at the turn of the twentieth century and the deepening awareness of the black mission-educated elite, empowered by the printing press, of the need to articulate their political and spiritual beliefs. Set within the microcosm of an isolated Eastern Cape mission, *Shades* is not only a love story and the chronicle of a family but a sensitive and perceptive insight into the country's wider conflicts. It explores the slow but inexorable destruction of the fabric of a community, the assault on its traditions and the struggle to reconcile two faiths: the Christian and the traditional beliefs of the amaXhosa in their ancestral shades. It is the story of those far-sighted enough to seek convergence and those destined to undermine its wisdom. Primarily, *Shades* is an intimate tale of love, friendship, acceptance and profound loss: of life, of faith and of belonging.

Shades Details

Date : Published October 31st 1994 by The Penguin Group (SA) (Pty) Ltd (first published 1993)

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Author : Marguerite Poland

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Kanyisa says

Found it quite difficult to read. The style of English quite the formal and for and older era. The story was so captivating though, it kept me reading on till the very last page. It's the kind of book you just dont forget after you read.

Yvonne Eloise says

This was at first a horrible, horrible book to read. It truly was an awful set-work book. But then I finished reading it. Not only does it have a beautiful ending, which still gives me butterflies years later, but when I just took a step back and really thought through the intricate details and nuances of the book as a whole, I fell in love with the novel. Head-over-heels in love.

Aneesha says

Phenomenal!

Jeanette says

De proloog moest ik twee keer lezen vanwege het aantreden van zo ongeveer alle personages die een belangrijke rol spelen in het verhaal. Toen ik deze hobbel had genomen, ontrolde zich een prachtig boek met bijzondere hoofdpersonen. Het verhaal speelt rond 1890 met een missionaris in Zuid-Afrika in de hoofdrol. Aan de orde komen: roeping, heidense gebruiken, het christelijk geloof, oorlog en liefde. Zelden las ik zo'n briljante beschrijving van de omgeving. Al lezend ben je zelf in Afrika. Ik ben onder de indruk van het verhaal en de schrijfstijl.

Pamela says

Loved this book. Considering I hated history at school, I now love books that give glimpses into how life was lived in a different time period and how things that happend then can be seen in todays society.

Sue says

This story nearly broke my heart. The tragedy of Crispin and the three Pumani brothers, especially Sonwabo, promises to linger for ages.

I agree with the reviewer who applauds M Poland for her approximation of the great 'British tradition' of C Bronte et al. Her prose is exquisite, poetic and she gets into the very fibre of each of her characters. At all times she and we are sensitive to the landscape, described so meticulously that it seems to participate actively in every drama and mood. The plot of 'Shades' will not be hurried, which works particularly well for the setting in time and place: St Matthias's mission, Fingoland, Eastern Cape in the early 1900s. Then comes the rinderpest, starvation and young men must leave - which changes everything. Brutally contrasted with the rural quiet is Johannesburg's mining industry, where bureaucrats and mine supervisors are cruel and corrupt and war threatens. The link between these two environments is Victor Drake who redeems his selfishness and betrayals at the end, in one stroke. It is a brilliant ending which uplifts the reader.

Despite that, this is a searingly sad story. It is also one of the finest reading experiences I've enjoyed for years.(I had no idea it had been a school setwork for so many years.) Thank you, Marguerite, my contemporary Old Rhodian.

Carmen Rossler says

Excellent book.

Wendy Koedoot says

Zuid-Afrika, 1898. De anglicaanse pastor Walter Brownley arriveert in St. Matthias, een missiepost aan de Oostkaap. Vol twijfels over zijn roeping heeft hij Engeland verlaten, maar op St. Matthias lijkt hij zijn bestemming gevonden te hebben. Charles Farborough, de missiepriester, is een zachtaardig man met warm hart voor de Xhosabevolking.

Tegen wil en dank ontluikt bij Walter een diepe genegenheid voor Farboroughs dochter Frances – een onmogelijke liefde, want zij is voorbestemd voor een huwelijk met haar jeugdvriend Victor Drake.

Je maakt kennis met Walter en de familie Farborough, waar Frances de dochter van is.

Het verhaal leest vlot ondanks de Zuid-Afrikaanse namen. Je kan je goed in de situatie van Frances inleven en voelt haar genegenheid voor Walter. De schrijfster heeft de sfeer van het verhaal goed verwoord. Je voelt bijna alsof je in Zuid-Afrika bent.

Het is een romantisch verhaal met de nodige tragedie erin.

Sindie says

I read this book twice, it was one of our setwork books in high school and I read it on my matric year in 2005 and a few years later. I remember clearly how well I did in the final examination because of how much I loved this book.

A very well told story of love, life and loss; it best chronicles the history in a land of my grandfathers, as it is set where my grandparents lived. I almost felt like I relived most of it, as I recognised some of the landmarks that were narrated in the story.

If I could remember more details, I would have a much lengthier recollection of *Shades*, but even some of the names have since left me.

Katherine Graham says

What an amazingly textured book this is - hauntingly beautiful, very sad, but with a hopeful ending. I loved the way that Poland wove together the stories of her "shades" - her real ancestors - which she imaginatively recreates. The backdrop of turn-of-the-century South Africa with the lure of the gold mines heightened the drama. The ruin of Crispin is inevitable - from the first glimpses, we see that his story will end in disaster - but there is a happy ending in store for Walter and Frances, which lightens the sadness. I'm really getting into SA literature at the moment. This one is highly recommended!

Linda Caddick says

I have been searching for this book all my life as though for a missing nutrient. I can finally say this is the best book I have ever read. What a masterful writer and what a story! Each sentence is just how I would have written it if only I could - the music and rhythm of words, and her deep insight into human nature together with her ability to express it, combine to produce an emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and aesthetically satisfying read that kept me 'heart in throat' till the last sentence. Brilliant!

Del says

I find it difficult to review books I love. I read this book in High School. At first I found it tedious and slow and oh so boring. Until suddenly, I couldn't put it down. And that ending! Goddamnit.

Robyn-Lee Samuels says

I read *Shades* as part of my high school prescribed reading list. Marguerite is an amazing writer. She captured the era, landscape and tensions excellently. I feel in love with many of the Characters and still quote her often.

Kathe Coleman says

Shades by Marguerite Poland

Shades is an historical novel first published in 1993 and is said to be based on the author's ancestors. It is set against the backdrop of the South African war, the drought, the rinderpest pandemic which sent many cattle men to seek work in the gold mines just to survive. Charles Farbourough was a missionary who lived in St. Matias along with his wife Emily, son Crispin, cousin Victor and Benedict their adopted son who was being sponsored by English family. Walter Brownley, Charles's assistant is the protagonist and tells the story of the growing tensions between cultures in South Africa at the turn of the twentieth century and the deepening

awareness of the black mission-educated elite, Shades is beautifully written with themes of friendship, love, loss, wavering faith and belonging. 4. 5

Margitte says

I read this book a few years ago and fell in love with the author's writing style. It will have to be re-read for a proper review, but I just wanted to add it to my book list.
