

Marí Peté (née Greyling) (1964 -) has published three bilingual poetry collections -- *Step Through* (2015), *Amytis* (2007) and *Begin* (2002). She performed poems from these collections at places like the London Book Fair, the Woordfees in Stellenbosch, the Kirkcudbright Arts Festival in Scotland, and the Pierneef Theatre in Pretoria. With Bianca Bothma, Marí was editor of Art for Humanity's book *Women Artists and Poets Advocate Children's Rights*. At the 2010 Poetry Africa Festival, Marí's opening night contribution was amongst those mentioned as exemplary by the *Mail & Guardian*. Her poems were published for the first time in 1983 in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*.



Marí was born in Middelburg near her grandparents' farm Woestalleen (meaning "wild and deserted") in Mpumalanga. She spent week days of her childhood in Witbank, where she lived with her three siblings and parents who were primary school teachers. Weekends were spent with the extended family on Woestalleen -- with cousins she traversed landscapes barefoot and taunted fate through adventure. One Sunday after church while the Greylings travelled to the farm from Witbank, the family station wagon overturned on a bend and Marí's father who was driving, lost his life. From the age of nine Marí grew up in the care of her mother Ina, who raised

her four children on a meager woman teacher's salary of the 1970s, fortified by the foundations of faith, hope and love.

Fruit trees, factory silhouettes, cloud formations, mine dumps, grasslands and thunderstorms of the Highveld offered kinship and a holding space for the solitary practice of writing. Marí cycled up a long hill to school every day on a bike without gears and matriculated from Hoërskool Patriot, Witbank, then enrolled for a BA at the University of Pretoria. During a few cold, dry winter holidays, the poet worked for pocket money in a small strange office at Hendrina Power Station, warmed at night by the yellow coal stove of her aunt Petro's farm kitchen. Marí became a fourth generation teacher in her family by completing a Higher Diploma in Education. That year she fell in love with her first English speaking friend Steve, a young lawyer with Marxist passions, fresh from completing an LLM at UCT. Together they moved to Steve's home town Durban in 1987. In a rusted bakkie during long car trips between Pretoria and Durban, Steve taught Marí English pronunciation by making her read aloud from the *Mail & Guardian*. Marí pursued her love of poetry by enrolling for an Honours degree in Afrikaans and Dutch literature at the University of KwaZulu Natal, where she became part of a small group of "detrified Afrikaansers" who studied the theories of Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, the dramas of Bertold Brecht, Peter Snyders and Hennie Aucamp, the zen Buddhist poems of Breyten Breytenbach, amongst other texts that shaped the young poet's world view. A high moment was a lecture on the research of Achmat Davids into the "Arabic-Afrikaans" genre in literature, showing how Afrikaans was shaped in the beginning of the twentieth century by Islamic religious leaders in the mosques of Cape Town.

Marí taught Afrikaans at Sparks Estate Senior Secondary, a so-called coloured school in Sydenham, Durban, where she was retrenched after two years, and after this at a broad range of schools across the spectrum of the segregated education system of the late eighties. She studied part-time, obtaining a Further Diploma in Education in Computer Studies. In 1991 she moved with Steve to Wolfson, a post-graduate College of the University of Cambridge, England. She worked in the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages while Steve read for an MPhil in Criminology. During this time she was a founder member of EuroCALL, an organisation for the development of Computer-assisted Language Learning. Over a period of four seasons Marí wrote a series of poems, juxtaposing her tranquil and dreamy existence in Cambridge with the build-up to the first democratic elections back home in South Africa. Some of these poems were translated into English by Marí and Steve.

The couple returned to Durban in December of 1993. In April 1994 she wrote a series of poems about the election period. In this month she was employed by the Durban University of Technology (DUT) to install and manage a multimedia computer laboratory for maths, science and English. Her daughter Megan was born on 4 July 1998, while working and studying part-time for a Master's in Education in Computer-assisted Education at the University of

Pretoria. Marí graduated in 1999 and in 2000 she introduced eLearning as an academic service to DUT with colleague and fellow poet Charl Fregona.

2002 saw the light of Marí's first anthology *Begin* (Umsinsi Press). The majority of poems were written in Afrikaans, with a handful in English, marking the beginnings of bilingual writing.

Begin

was reviewed by

[Kobus Moolman](#)

on LitNet.

The poem "voorstedelike oggendritueel" (suburban morning ritual), dedicated to working mothers, was awarded first prize in the 2004 Woordgilde poetry competition.

In 2007, Marí's second collection of poems, *Amytis*, was launched at the London Book Fair by Umsinsi Press, while the anthology was first released at the Cape Town Book Fair in June of the same year. In this book Marí explores dreamscapes, everyday experiences and the thin membrane between these two states of being. In many poems she weaves connections between the realms of Nature and Spirit. In contrasting mood, writing in Iscamtho or Tsotsitaal (an urban South African street dialect), Marí takes the reader on alternative guided tours of her home city Durban, with poems such as "Umgeni Road", "Durban Taxi", "Local is Lekker".

Step Through, Marí's third collection, was published in 2015 [on Amazon](#) by Leopard Press.

The book contains sketches by Dina Cormick, whose artworks can be found in South Africa's Constitutional Court, and the Durban Botanical Gardens, amongst other places. Leon de Kock reviewed the book on Amazon:

"Marí Peté's poems have the magic ability to narrow the gap between things and words, all the while drawing attention to the way in which words refashion the observed world. The poems in this volume are evocative and sensuously rendered, (un)layering the textures of a rich and strange world. The descriptions in these poems include acutely observed moments of travel; personal experience felt in moments of epiphany; wittily rendered senses of parenting; momentary senses of being rendered in haiku; and poetic meditation on a life experienced in elegiac mode. Peté's is a poetically striking voice that is well worth reading."

The title invites the reader to step through a book of poems about life in the 21st century, seeing through the eyes of a university teacher who lives in a South African city. What is it like in ordinary moments and transitional experiences – driving through Durban streets; teaching with new technologies and feeling its impact on the body, values and norms; witnessing birth; losing loved ones to death? To be married for 25 years; to experience a sudden empty nest when a child leaves for boarding school; to parent a teenager? To enter one's 50th year? The poet steps through being disheartened, frivolous, depressed, reaches for anchors – humour, gardening, faith.

The poems are rooted in place – Durban's Warwick Junction marketplace, the stars of the Midlands and rock pools of the Drakensberg mountains (KwaZulu-Natal); Rising Star Cave in the Cradle of Humankind (Gauteng province); the suspension bridge of Storm's River Mouth (Eastern Cape); Robberg, the home of seal colonies (Western Cape); Hyde Park in London; Kirkcudbright and Dumfries (villages of Scotland).

The poem "Warwick Junction" was shortlisted for the Sol Plaatje European Union Poetry Award in 2012.

While the majority of poems were written in English, there are a handful of poems originally written in Afrikaans, with translations into English – some done by the poet, and two poems translated by Karin Schimke, whose debut collection *Bare and Breaking* was awarded the Ingrid Jonker prize in 2014.

Poems in this collection were first published in the literary journals *New Coin*, *New Contrast* and *arapace* ; the research journal *Qualitative Inquiry* ; the *Sunday Tribune* ; The *Sol Plaatje European Union Poetry Anthology* of 2012; The *Art of Human Rights Catalogue* ; the websites of Badilisha Poetry Xchange, Indiefeed Performance Poetry, Art for Humanity and SlipNet. C

Photo's from "Step Through - a Pop-up Performance of Poems"

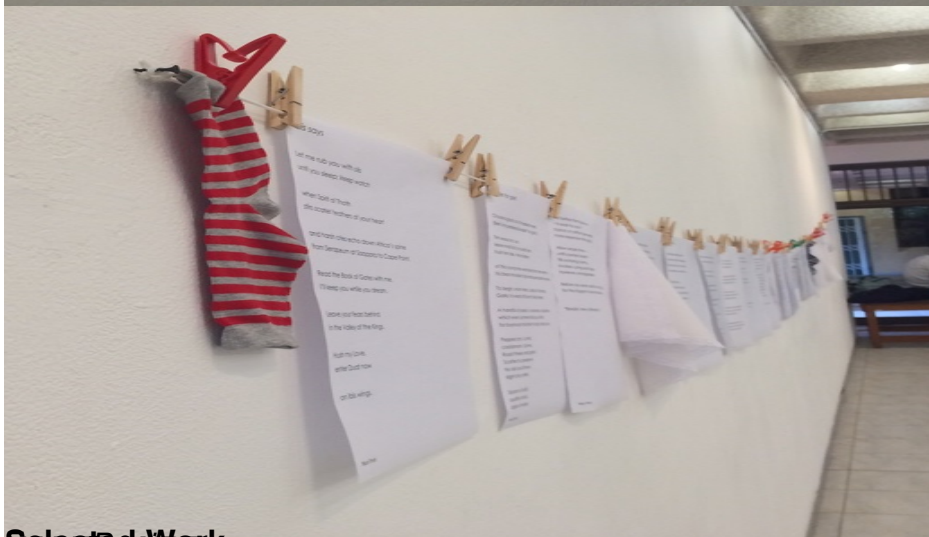
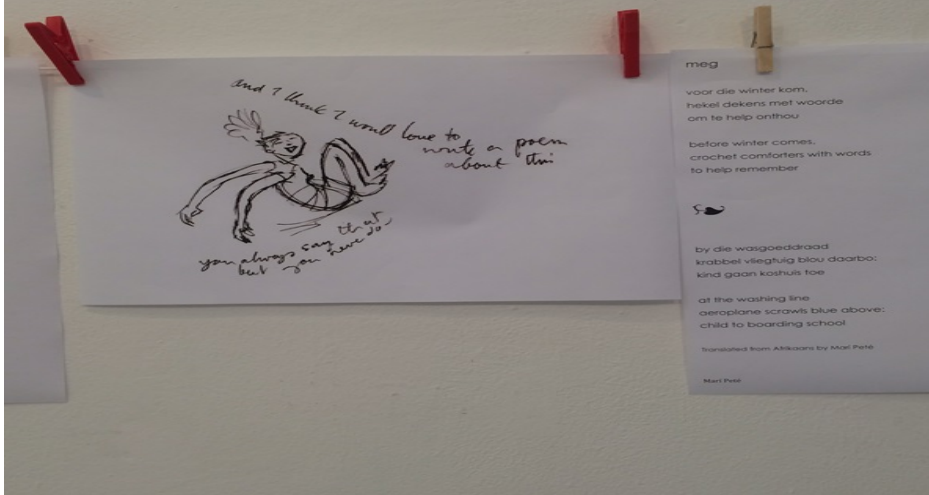
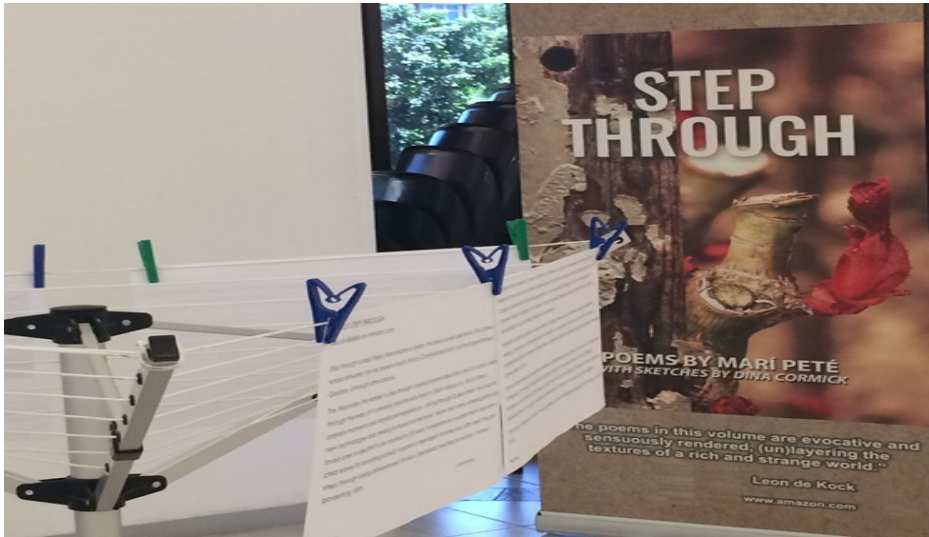
The Gallery of the Durban University of Technology

February 2016

"Marí Peté's presentation is imaginative, with a whimsical quality and a touch of pathos."

-- Brian Pearce

The poet steps us through imaginary spaces wherein she speaks her poems. She uses transitional musical snippets, playing out elements from the poems -- pegging delights, dreams and sorrows alongside exhibited sketches and poems.



Selected Work
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