

Obituary

Daniel Pule Kunene

13 April 1923 to 27 May 2016

Daniel P Kunene, emeritus professor of African languages and literature at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, died peacefully at his home on the evening of 27 May 2016 surrounded by his family. He was 93.

Professor Kunene was a renowned and award-winning author of poetry, short stories and translations, and an acclaimed linguist, scholar, transcriber of South African oral works, and translator of South African writers. He was a civil-rights activist and spokesperson in the long struggle against apartheid in South Africa. He was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, teacher and community leader in Madison.

He was born in Edenville, South Africa. He received a BA in 1949 from the University of South Africa and an MA in 1951 and a PhD in 1961 from the University of Cape Town. He married Selina Kunene (née Sekhuthu) in 1953. In 1963 he left South Africa with his family and found political asylum in the United States after a stay in London, England. He was in exile for 30 years and was only able to return to South Africa in the summer of 1993 with his beloved wife, Selina, for an emotional reunion with their families and a tour hosted by academic institutions in the country. Selina died on 22 October 1993. In 2003 he married Marci Kunene (née Mauricina Ellis) and lived a full, loving life with her through his last days.

He taught for 33 years at UW Madison in the Department of African Languages and Literature, in addition to teaching at the University of Cape Town; University of London; University of California, Los Angeles; and the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. In addition, he travelled extensively with his family and conducted research around the world in countries such as Lesotho, the Netherlands and Zambia.

He published 16 books and monographs in English and Sesotho, as well as hundreds of other publications. His books include the memoir: *Kero Court Chronicles: Memoirs of Daniel P. Kunene* (2015); fiction: *Dawn To Twilight* (2013); *Dithoko, Dithothokiso le Dithohetletso tsa Sesotho* (1996); *From the Pit of Hell to the Spring of Life* (1986); poetry: *The Rock at the Corner of My Heart* (2009); *A Seed Must Seem to Die* (1981); *Pirates Have Become our Kings* (1978); theatre: *The Mandela Saga* (1991); translation: Thomas Mofolo's *Pitseng: The Search for True Love* (2013); CLS Nyembezi's *My Child! My Child!* (2010); Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1981); and scholarship: *The Zulu Novels of CLS. Nyembezi: A Critical Appraisal* (2007); *Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose* (1989); *The Ideophone in Southern Sotho* (1978); *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho* (1971); *The Beginning of South African Vernacular Literature: A Historical Study* (1967); and *The Sound System of Southern Sotho* (1961). His written work is widely anthologised. His narrative poem "Soweto" was set to music by Dutch composer Bernard van Buerden and was performed in the Netherlands and in Madison. He is the composer of a substantial body of songs and music that is archived at the UW–Madison Mills Music Library, some of which will be played at his funeral service.

He received honorary doctorate degrees from the University of South Africa (1999) and the University of Cape Town (2013), as well as numerous other awards and honours, including the Sol T Plaatje Translation Award by the English Academy of Southern Africa (2011), the Karel Čapek Award by the International Federation of Translators (2011), Honorary Member of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters (1997), Shuter and Shooter Prize for Literature (1995), and Honorary Member of the African Language Association of Southern Africa (1993).

He was a committed member of the Madison community, both culturally and politically. He regularly hosted programs on WORT-FM's Radio Literature Collective, and was the reigning chief of the Potluck Poets. His poems are personal and socially engaged; he read them at political rallies at the capital and published them in local publications such as *The Wisconsin Academy Review*, *The Madison Times*, *The Capital Times*, *The Capital City Hues*, and *The Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*.

He was preceded in death by his father, Ephraim, and mother, Martha, and his siblings: Sophia, George, Magdeline, Peter and Phillip. He is survived by his beloved wife of 13 years, Marci; his daughter, Liziwe Kunene Pointer, and her husband, Fritz Pointer, of San Francisco; his sons, Siphon Kunene of New York, Luyanda Kunene and his wife, Linda Fowells, of Los Angeles, and Wandile Kunene of Los Angeles; his grandsons, Somori Pointer and his wife, Tracy, and Thiyane Pointer and his wife, Jackie, of San Francisco; his great grandchildren, Selina and Phoenix; his adopted daughter, Michele Goodwin, and her husband, Gregory Shaffer, of Laguna Beach, California; and extended family in South Africa.

Full of humour and zest for living, he enjoyed engaged discussion about literature, politics and social change.

The family gives its heartfelt thanks to the wonderful staff at Agrace Hospice and Bright Star, particularly Jennifer, Lisa, Melissa, Sarah, Tairu and Tracey for their invaluable assistance to Daniel and us during this final stage of his long and wondrous life.

Supplied by the Cress Funeral and Cremation Service