

## Cyril Nyembezi (1919–2000)

Professor Cyril Lincoln Sibusiso Nyembezi, writer, lexicographer and humanitarian, was born in Babanango on December 6 1919. He went to school at Vryheid and Driefontein near Ladysmith, then trained as a teacher at Nuttall Training College, Edendale, and Adams College, Amanzimtoti.

He began teaching at Newcastle Secondary School in 1938. In 1941 he was admitted to the University College of Fort Hare where he completed his B.A. degree in 1943, gaining distinctions in English and Zulu. He was awarded the College Education Diploma in the same year, and in 1944 was appointed to Dundee Secondary School, where he established the standard eight class.



*Cyril Nyembezi*

In 1945 he went to the University of the Witwatersrand and obtained a first-class B.A. Honours degree. He was appointed language assistant in the department of African Studies in 1948 and was awarded his M.A. in 1950. In 1954 he was appointed professor and head of department of Bantu Languages at Fort Hare university. He held this post until 1959, when he resigned in protest against the introduction of apartheid education.

In 1960 Professor Nyembezi joined the publishing company Shuter and Shooter, where he became chief editor of African languages. He joined the board in 1975. The following year he joined the board of KwaZulu Booksellers and was instrumental in changing its name to Reach Out Publishers. Consistent with his vision, this became a black-controlled company with a majority black shareholding and an all black board. In 1979 he joined the board of *The Natal Witness*, on which he was quietly influential, and was still a member at the time of his death.

A prominent churchman, he was a life president of the Ndzondelelo council of the Methodist Church and a founder committee member of the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre.

As a writer, he was best known for his novel *Inkinsela YseMgungungdlovu* (The Tycoon of Maritzburg) which was adapted for television and became a popular series on Radio Zulu. In all, he wrote overt twenty books, including two other novels and several volumes of poetry. He edited several anthologies and translated Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* into Zulu. He also compiled two dictionaries – *The Compact Zulu Dictionary* and *Scholars Zulu Dictionary* – with G. R. Dent. In 1992 came his definitive Zulu dictionary *Isichazimazwi Sanmuhla Nangomuso*.

Remembered as a knowledgeable and wise, thoughtful and compassionate man, with a profound understanding of his fellow human beings, Professor Nyembezi has left a fine legacy of writing and scholarship in the Zulu Language. He was largely responsible for elevating the status of the study of Zulu and giving it respectability. He contracted meningitis in 1997, and never fully recovered. He leaves his wife and four children.

THE NATAL WITNESS