



**Cecily van Gend**

In 2000, the world-renowned African scholar, Professor Ali Mazrui, compiled a list of the top 100 books produced in Africa in the twentieth century. Among these was the Xhosa novel **Ingqumbo ye Minyana, The Wrath of the Ancestors**. Its author is AC Jordan, father of the present Minister of Arts and Culture, Dr Pallo Jordan.

Dr Arthur Archibald Campbell Jordan has been labelled 'professor; author; scholar; writer; linguist; literary critic; poet; musician; humanist; cricket player; nationalist; freedom fighter; revolutionary; Christian and gentleman'. He is acknowledged, along with figures such as Sol Plaatje, Thomas Mofolo and Dr BW Vilakazi, as one of the pioneers in the field of African literature and languages.

Jordan was born in 1906 in the Eastern Cape village of Mbokotwana, in the district of Tsolo. Like many of his contemporaries, he received a mission-school education, first at the St Cuthbert's Mission Higher Boarding School in the Tsolo district, then at St John's College in Umtata, and the Lovedale Institution in Alice. In 1934, he obtained a BA in English from the University of Fort Hare, where he later lectured.

He married Dr Priscilla Phyllis Ntlantala, an academic in her own right. In 1942, while they were living and teaching in Kroonstad, their son, Pallo was born. During his teaching career AC Jordan served as vice-president and then president of the Orange Free State African Teachers' Association.

He lectured at the University of Fort Hare, and in 1946 he became senior lecturer in African Languages at the University of Cape Town, being the first African member of staff to be appointed to the university. He had received an MA in Bantu Languages (Linguistics) from the university in 1943, and in 1957 he received his PhD. During this period, he developed a new method for teaching Xhosa to non-speakers. In 1960 he was awarded a Carnegie travel scholarship, but was refused the necessary travel documents by the apartheid government.

The 1940s was a time of intense nationalist revival, in a movement led by Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ashby Mda and Anton Lembede. The Jordan family was politically active, and became part of this movement. They joined the Non-European Unity Movement, (the NEUM), and became founder members of the Society of Young Africa. Jordan supported the general strike,

which culminated in the events of Sharpeville in 1960. In 1962 he was forced into exile, leaving the country on an exit permit. The family went first to Tanganyika, (now Tanzania), then to the United Kingdom and finally to the United States. In 1963 Jordan was appointed to the chair of African Languages and Literature at the University of Wisconsin, which he occupied until his death in 1968.

The 1940s nationalist revival was accompanied by a burgeoning of indigenous literature. Along with writers such as Vilakazi, and following in the footsteps of figures such as Thomas Mofolo, Sol Plaatje and the Mqhayi, known as Imbongi Yakwas Gompo, the Poet of Gompo, they produced a number of works in the vernacular. Unlike some of their contemporaries, Jordan and Vilakazi chose to write in their mother tongue, rather than in English, anticipating the work of the present-day Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiongo. As Vilakazi expressed it: 'I have an unshaken belief in the possibilities of Bantu languages and their literature, provided the Bantu writers themselves can learn to love their languages and use them as vehicles for thought, feeling and will. After all, the belief, resulting in literature, is a demonstration of a people's "self" where they cry: "Ego sum quod sum." That is our pride in being black, and we cannot change creation.'

Jordan's novel, **Ingqumbo ye Minyana**, was published in 1940 by Lovedale Press. Jordan himself later translated the work into English as **The wrath of the ancestors**.

Among his other published works are **Toward an African Literature**, published in 1973, as well as translations of Nomabhadri and Mbulu-Xhosa folktales, a revision of Mesatywa's Xhosa Idiom and a Xhosa lessons manual.

In the year 2000 the South African Translators' Institute (SATI) announced the establishment of the SATI Award for Outstanding Translation, intended to encourage translations of original works in the indigenous languages in the country. One of the first recipients, awarded posthumously, was AC Jordan, for his novel which he had translated himself. It is a fitting recognition of the work of this outstanding pioneer of indigenous language and literature. In the words of Manda Nkomfe, deputy Provincial Secretary of the ANC in Gauteng, 'The existence of modern Zulu and Xhosa can broadly be attributed to the contributions of Vilakazi and Jordan.'