

K Sello Duiker

13 April 1974 - 19 January 2005

ANNARI VAN DER MERWE
Former Publisher



News of the untimely death of K Sello Duiker on Wednesday, 19 January 2005, was received with deep sadness and shock by all who knew him. Duiker was well loved and respected by everyone in the publishing world who had the privilege of dealing with him. Despite a relatively small output, he was greatly admired in literary and reading circles and had a wide and loyal following, particularly among a younger generation of readers. For many aspiring South African writers he served as a role model of someone who fearlessly tackled unconventional themes and explored new terrain; for an older generation of writers, for Zakes Mda and Lewis Nkosi in particular, his work epitomised the best of post-1994 South African black writing.

Because of his standing as a writer, he was regularly invited to local and international writers' festivals and offered a variety of residencies in the UK, Germany, Holland and Switzerland, among others.

Duiker published two books and was busy on a third, scheduled for publication later this year. For his debut novel, **Thirteen cents** (David Philip), which deals with street children in Cape Town, he was awarded the 2001 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book, Africa region. His second and more ambitious **The quiet violence of Dreams** (Kwela Books), which challenged ingrained myths about maleness and black sexuality, was awarded the 2002 Herman Charles Bosman Prize. This second novel appeared in Dutch translation in 2004. Asked to comment on **The quiet violence**, Duiker wrote to his Dutch publishers: 'In a South African context I was writing for people between 23 and 30 years of age - people in my age group, because our generation is confronted with different changes happening around us, and I wanted to communicate something of the pressures and contradictions facing us. I think the book is not politically correct although it is a sensitive account of what I think is happening in South Africa right now. It's a young black man's view of what is happening - it explores youth culture and what it means to be young. It is also an overt exploration of current suburban culture. It explores a lot of social geography, from the obscenely rich to the poorest parts of Cape Town. Essentially it's a rite-of-passage novel. It represents young Africans, not as exclusively black, but just as complex as anyone else, and [will make Dutch readers] realise that young people in South Africa have to deal with the same challenges that people in the North do. We in Africa are not all that different.'

K Sello Duiker, the eldest of three brothers, was born in Soweto on 13 April 1974. He spent a large part of his childhood in Soweto but also received part of his schooling in England, where his father worked for an international company. After school he spent a gap year working in rural France. He obtained a BA degree in journalism from Rhodes University and also briefly attended University of Cape Town (UCT). He worked as a copywriter in advertising, a scriptwriter for television and the final position was as commissioning editor at the SABC. He died at his own hand in Johannesburg on 19 January 2005, at a time when he felt his mood-stabilising medication was taking too great a toll on his artistic creativity and joie de vivre.

'I'm sure I will be forgiven for admitting in public that Sello was my most favourite writer. Fun-loving and enormously talented and perceptive, he was blessed with equal measures of gentleness and kind-heartedness on the one hand, and unflinching honesty and a fearless pursuit of what he saw as essential human experience on the other. If he had one shortcoming, it was an inability to protect himself from life,' said Annari van der Merwe, his publisher and friend of long standing.