

# Literary classics

## A reprint in indigenous languages

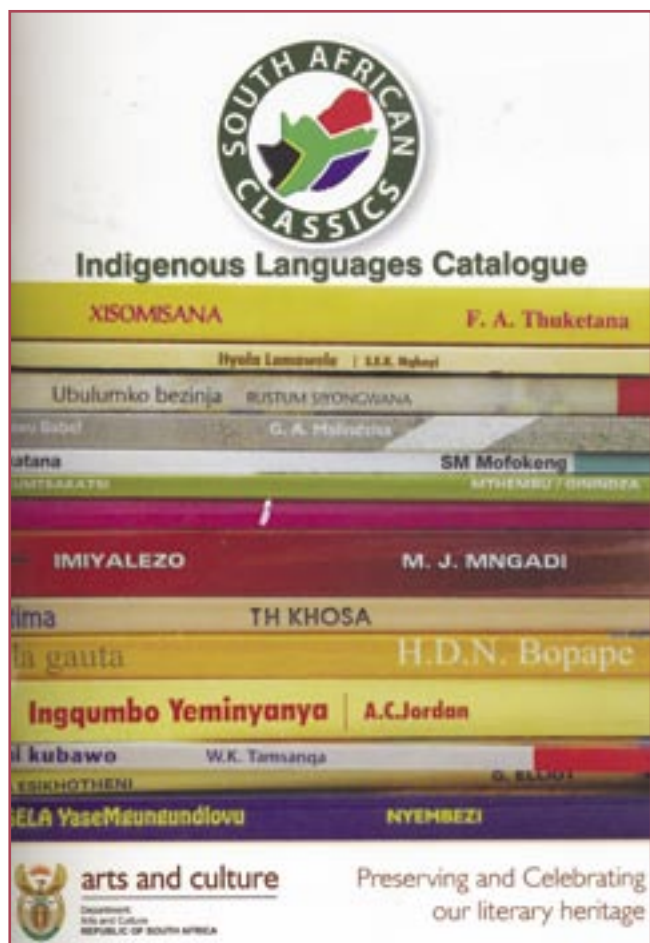
Compiled by GRIZÉLL AZAR-LUXTON

### Background

*'The primary mission of the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) is to "protect, preserve and promote our cultural and natural heritage". The reprinting of our indigenous African languages literary classics is an integral part of the reclaiming, protection, preservation and*

*promotion of our literary heritage. Hopefully, this will also contribute to the promotion of the culture of reading and writing. To this end, DAC entrusted the National Library with the task of reissuing our indigenous languages literary classics that are out of print.*

*'In addition to celebrating our literary heritage, this catalogue marks the beginning of yet another vital component of the transformation process. As I pointed out at the inauguration of the new campus of the National Library in Pretoria last year: 'This project should raise awareness of the works of quality that have been produced over the*



years in previously marginalised languages. Exposure to the entire spectrum of human experience as it is explored in indigenous African literature can only enrich the cultural life of South Africa.'

Dr Pallo Jordan

### Message from the National Librarian

As an introduction to the booklet, *Indigenous language catalogue*, we share the national librarian, John K Tsebe's message.

'The Honourable Minister of Arts and Culture, Dr Z Pallo Jordan, entrusted the National Library of South Africa with the daunting responsibility of managing a project to reprint South African literary classics in indigenous languages. This was no easy task as our written literature dates as far back as the 19th century and a significant number of books have not been in circulation for several decades. Ten publishers were involved in the production of the various titles published in nine indigenous languages, viz, isiXhosa, Ndebele, isiZulu, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.

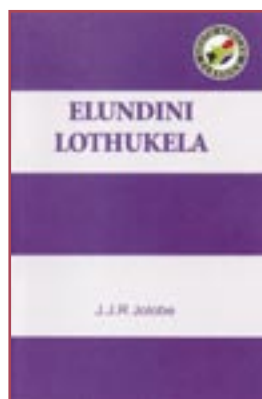
'The definition of a classic is a contentious issue and it was for this reason that we ensured transparency in the selection process, by inviting the public to nominate books that they regarded as classics in our indigenous languages. We had an overwhelming response and the contribution made by South Africans was enlightening as much as it was challenging. Our panel of literary and publishing experts finalised the list and we started negotiating with publishers, who were very enthusiastic to participate in this ambitious project. Today, we have managed to reprint 27 texts out of the chosen titles.

'This is only the first instalment of the project. We will continue reproducing the texts and ensure that knowledge is not lost to future generations. The reproduction of these books is in itself a complicated process, with some of the chosen titles only available on microfilm, while in other cases the original publishers are no longer in existence. Our partnership with the various institutions proved to be a potent force in the success of this project and we are proud to have emerged victorious amidst all the challenges we encountered along the way. This project is yet another milestone in pursuance of our constitutional mandate to ensure the protection, preservation and promotion of South African works.

'The *Reprint of South African Classics* project is one of several endeavours which seeks to enhance the accessibility of books in South Africa and ensure that ours is a reading nation. Our past has left us with the legacy of a glaring dearth of local content in our public libraries. The indigenous languages are even more conspicuous by their absence, having been reduced primarily for usage in classrooms. In the past two years we have embarked on a number of initiatives to profile books in our indigenous languages and we will continue striving towards ensuring long-term availability and accessibility to our knowledge resources.

'We trust that this catalogue will be a useful instrument for the Provincial Library and Information Services and other related institutions to select books in the languages most used in their regions and make them available for public consumption. This is one way in which we can preserve and celebrate our literary heritage while at the same time encouraging the culture of reading and writing in South Africa.'

*Note: The booklet also contains publications in Ndebele, Zulu, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, Siswati, Venda and Tsonga. For the purposes of this article however, we publish a translated version of the Xhosa titles, a synopsis and some background on the authors.*



### IsiXhosa Classic Books

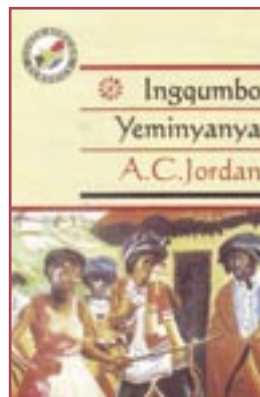
**Title:** Elundini Lothukela  
**Author:** JJR Jolobe  
**Genre:** Story  
**ISBN:** 9780798008518  
**Publisher:** Kagiso Education  
**Language:** IsiXhosa  
**Author:** James James Ranisi Jolobe was born in 1902 and died in 1976 in Xhalanga location, in the former Transkei. He worked as a teacher in a

primary school until he received his BA degree in Theology and became a pastor. His outstanding works include novels, poetry and translations; including his prominent role in the development and translation of a multilingual dictionary in English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans. He received a number of literature awards.

**Summary:** A very interesting story written creatively about love, jealousy, humbleness and heroism, based on the Hlubi tribe. At the death of Mashiya, the only son of the chief of the Hlubis at Buzi, chief Dlomo faced the challenge of bringing up and choosing a suitable son from Mashiya's children who could be chief in Mashiya's position. After Ngwekazi, the firstborn of Mashiya, lost the chief's position against Ntsele, who was not expected to be chosen as chief, Ngwekazi decided to disgrace his tribe and to take revenge for his loss. He forcefully took a girl (Nobusi) of Ngweni with the intention to marry her, although he knew that she was in love with Ntsele. With the assistance of the Zizi's princess Ayanda, Nobusi was found. Ngwekazi was attacked and killed by the Ngweni's for taking their princess and the killers were not found. Ntsele and Nobusi got married just as Nobusi's ancestors predicted to her that her bridegroom would be a hero of the Thukela.

The author uses good language when narrating this story of amaHlubi; telling us about their origins. He does this in a very pleasant way, by narrating the story of a chief that was not biologically born to be chief. His focus is on how this man came to be chief, not by way of overthrowing the existing chief, but through following his heart, sheer courage, and ignoring those who negatively talked behind his back. He listened to his elder brothers, and in doing so, he protected his own dignity as a decent honourable man. While Ntsele's younger brothers refused to get grandfather chief Dlomo water from the fountain when he requested this of them, Ntsele listened to his mother when she instructed him to entertain the old man's needs. Nobody knew that this was the main reason that made chief Dlomo decide on Ntsele as the suitable chief for the Hlubis because Ntsele put the tribe's needs ahead of his own. Chief Dlomo also realised Ntsele's humbleness when he agreed to do the job of fetching water from

a fountain under a small cliff, the job that was seen as something stupid to do by those who didn't know this secret.



**Title:** Ingqumbo Yeminyanya  
**Author:** AC Jordan  
**Genre:** Novel  
**ISBN:** 9780869860097  
**Publisher:** Lovedale Press (Pty) Ltd  
**Language:** IsiXhosa

**Author:** AC Jordan was born on 30 October 1906 in Tsolo, the land of amaMpondomise, in a village called Mbokothwana. He was the son of a pastor of the Church of England. He was the sixth of nine children, and his parents were well educated. He did his primary studies in Mbokothwana and carried on to St Cuthberts School where he received the Andre Smith Bursary on merit. He carried on to Lovedale for his Junior Certificate. Then he was appointed as a teacher at St John's College in Mthatha where he also received another bursary for his university studies in Fort Hare. He received his BA in 1934, his MA in African Languages in 1942 and his PhD in African Languages in 1957 at the University of Cape Town.

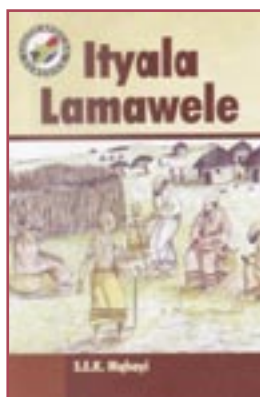
He started teaching in a Bantu High School in Kroonstad in the Orange Free State and stayed there for ten years. He also spent two years at the University of California in Los Angeles, doing developmental research in African languages and literature.

During his time in Kroonstad he showed an interest in writing and started publishing his poems in Imvo Zabantsundu newspaper, and later published in Ikhwezi Lomso. Those poems were in isiXhosa, and he translated some of them into English.

In 1940, he published **Ingqumbo Yeminyanya**, a book that made him popular and one of the best authors in Africa. This book was translated into English with the title **The wrath of the ancestors** as well as in Afrikaans with the title **Die toorn van die voorvaders**.

He died on 20 August 1968.

**Summary:** **Ingqumbo Yeminyanya** is a novel about the conflict between Xhosa culture and westernisation. Chief Zwelinzima marries an ordinary girl, Nobantu, instead of a princess as was expected. The fight starts when his advisors force him to marry a second wife from the Bhaca tribe as it was culturally meant to be. The kingdom breaks into two, namely the educated and the uneducated. The uneducated ones feel that they are left aside and marginalised in their land. This leads to ancestors being upset after Nobantu refuses to obey the rituals of the house.



**Title:** Ityala Lamawele

**Author:** SEK Mqhayi

**Genre:** Novel

**ISBN:** 9780869861387

**Publisher:** Lovedale Press (Pty) Ltd

**Language:** IsiXhosa

**Author:** SEK Mqhayi was born in Alice at Tyhume village, next to a school called Gqumahashe, on December 1875. He had an interest in traditional Xhosa court cases. This helped him to write this well-known book, **Ityala**

**Lamawele.** When he left Lovedale he accepted a teaching position in East London although his heart was not in teaching.

He was once the church secretary under Rev WB Rubusana and also worked for Iliso Lomzi newspaper. He started by sending his articles to a Xhosa newspaper, Izwi Labantu for publication. His first articles were about the Ndlambe tribe and Ntsikane. Soon after that he became the 'Poet of Gomo', and then the 'Nation's Poet'. Mqhayi wrote several books. It is fortunate that among his books there is one about his life (biography) called **Umqhayi Wase Ntabozuko**.

Some of his books' articles appear in the book by WG Benni called **Imibengo**, available from the publishing house and from Lovedale Press (Pty) Ltd, at Dikeni.

He died in July 1945.

**Summary:** **Ityala Lamawele** is a novel about Xhosa courts. The twins, Wele and Babini both regard themselves as firstborn, and they lay charges against each other. They are both satisfied with the court resolution regarding this situation. As the story unfolds and continues, we get to know how amaXhosa handled their cases.



**Title:** Ubulumko bezinja

**Author:** R Siyongwana

**Genre:** Fiction

**ISBN:** 9780195705973

**Publisher:** Oxford University Press

**Language:** IsiXhosa

**Author:** Publisher and author Rustum Siyongwana was born on 10 May 1928 at Sihlabeni in Ngqamakhwe. He did his primary education in Nomaheya and his secondary in Clarkebury where he completed his

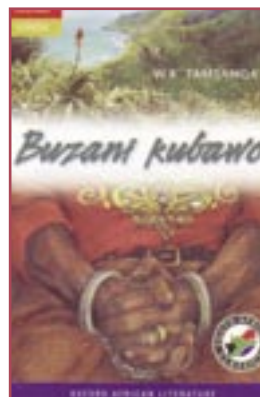
matric certificate in 1948. He started working in 1949.

Rustum Siyongwana had a love for books and newspapers from a very early age until he died in 2005. His love for writing developed

from childhood until he entered high school in Clarkebury in 1944. Here he started to produce articles for the high school magazine. His writing improved as the magazine improved. He wrote about general social life issues. He also wrote several articles for Bona magazine. In 1962 one specific article, appeared at the same time as his book, which was titled **Ubulumko Bezinja**. By this time he was working for Methodist Publishing House, where he was inspired to write books.

This book didn't receive immediate attention from curriculum advisors and book sellers because it revealed apartheid authority. It only received the attention it deserved in university departments of African languages headed by Blacks. University students reviewed and even shared it with those who didn't like studying isiXhosa. The influence of this book is still being felt, because it reveals significant aspects of the roots and nature of democracy.

**Summary:** Dogs are fighting for what they believe are their rights. Unbelievable! Read it for yourself.



**Title:** Buzani Kubawo

**Author:** WK Tamsanqa

**Genre:** Drama

**ISBN:** 97805706727

**Publisher:** Oxford University Press

**Language:** IsiXhosa

**Author:** The elder, Witness Kholekile Tamsanqa was born at Idutywa in 1928. He only started schooling at Zazulwana Primary at the age of ten, starting from Sub A. He passed his standard six with flying colours. From

there he went to Blythswood Senior School where he obtained his Junior Certificate and a teaching qualification. He failed several attempts in getting a teaching job. Then he decided to leave his home town to look for work in Gauteng. There he worked in different places, among others, in mines and furniture shops. He got married to Gcinashe Nginda who was better known by her married name, Nulusapho Tamsanqa. They had five children and 12 grandchildren. After a long time in Gauteng he went back to his home town in the former Transkei and started to participate in political and business activities. He passed away in 1998.

**Note:** Special thanks to our colleagues in the Language Services Section for their assistance with the Xhosa translations.

