



DAVID MEIRING KRIEL (05/11/1930 – 12/03/2019)

IN MEMORIAM: DAVID MEIRING KRIEL (05/11/1930 – 12/03/2019)
A VERSATILE CLASSICIST

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It was with great sadness that the classical world in South Africa learnt of the death of a dearly loved friend and colleague, David Meiring (Dawie) Kriel, on 12 March 2019 at the age of eighty-eight. When the editor of *Acta Classica* requested me to write an obituary in memory of this esteemed and versatile classical scholar and true friend to so many over the years, I was particularly happy to do so. I realised, of course, that there are any number of his past students, colleagues, and good friends who would have been far more capable than I to assume this responsibility, but the special relationship Dawie and I had developed over many years, probably commencing in 1977, when his extremely successful *Latyn vir die Regstudent* was published by *Lex Patria*, prompted me to do so. Dawie presented me with a copy of this book, which I still have and use.

Prior to my commencing to prepare an obituary for Dawie I was happy and honoured to join his family and a number of close friends in celebrating his life and honouring his memory at a memorial held by his four daughters, Annabie, Mala, Tertia, and Suzelle, in Cape Town on 16 March 2019. It was extremely sad that his late wife, Zella, whom we all remember with great respect and affection, was no longer with us to record her thoughts on their lives together. Needless to say we had no doubt that Dawie was smiling down upon us at an event which he had requested should be small rather than large.

In preparing this obituary I was ably assisted by Annabie and Suzelle, who let me have particularly helpful notes on Dawie's life and versatility which prompted my description of him as 'a versatile classicist'. In this regard I was likewise given great assistance by colleagues in the world of classics, including Christoff Zietsman from the University of the Free State,

¹ Formerly Professor of Roman Law and Legal History at the Universities of the Free State and Pretoria and Judge of the High Court of South Africa.

Koos Kritzinger from the University of Pretoria and Jo-Marie Claassen from the University of Stellenbosch.

Although Dawie and I were not classmates (he was thirteen years my senior), we both had the pleasure of studying Latin under Professor Henri Louis Gonin at the University of Pretoria. It was in fact Dawie who edited *Pro Munere Grates: Studies Presented to H. L. Gonin* by former students and colleagues (1971), one of which was my contribution on *mala fide negotiorum gestio* in Roman Law, an excerpt from my doctoral thesis submitted in Leiden, Netherlands, in 1970. Dawie also wrote a truly enlightening and inspiring obituary for Professor Gonin, when this giant in the field of Classics passed away on 10 April 1997, leaving a number of publications which are still in use today for Latin teaching at the secondary and tertiary levels.²

Dawie was born on 5 November 1930 in Pretoria and matriculated in 1947 at the Helpmekaar Hoër Seunskool in Johannesburg. After completing a BA degree at the University of Pretoria in 1950, followed by a Higher Education Diploma in 1952, Dawie began a high school teaching career. He initially served as senior Latin master at the Benoni High School in 1953 and thereafter, from 1955 to 1956, in similar capacity at the Hoërskool Florida.

Dawie then turned to a long and fruitful university career. From 1957 to 1965 he served as a lecturer and subsequently, after completing his MA in Latin at the University of Pretoria in 1961, as a senior lecturer in Classical Languages at the University of South Africa (UNISA), where he worked under the guidance of Professor Gerrit Viljoen, then the Head of the Department of Classical Languages at UNISA. The role Professor Viljoen played in his life is brilliantly illustrated in Dawie's obituary dedicated to him after his passing in 2009.³

During his period of service at UNISA, Dawie also did research, from 1963 to 1964, at the University of Urbino in Central Italy, under guidance of Professor Scaevola Mariotti, with a view to completing a D.Litt. degree in Latin at the University of Pretoria in 1969. This led to his being appointed to a post in the Department of Latin at the University of Pretoria, where he served for some eighteen years (1966 to 1983), initially as a senior lecturer and thereafter as Professor and Head of the Department.

² Kriel 1997.

³ Kriel 2009.

The next step in Dawie's varied career began on 1 October 1983 when, at the instance of the Department of National Education, he became South Africa's Cultural Attaché at the South African Embassy in Rome, Italy. This new phase in Dawie's career was described by Dr M.J. Mans, in the *laudatio* delivered by him on 24 September 1983 at the Annual General Meeting of the Transvaal Region of the Classical Association of South Africa, as one in which he would 'meet the challenges of this entirely new and exciting post', which would require him to 'live and work in the ancient and (to him) well-known surroundings of Rome – what a comforting thought!'⁴

Dawie was accompanied to Rome in September 1983 by his wife, Zella (born Susanna Elizabeth Grobbelaar), whom he had married on 13 December 1958 and who was the mother of their four daughters, Annabie (Kuhn), Mala (Mouton), Tertia (Van Rooyen), and Suzelle (Krüger). These daughters in turn blessed them with six grand-daughters and one great-granddaughter. Their youngest daughter, Suzelle, likewise accompanied Dawie and Zella to Rome, where they lived until the end of 1987. By virtue of his inestimable knowledge of and passion for Roman culture and history, he was frequently requested to accompany South African politicians and other important visitors to well-known historical attractions such as the *Colosseum* and *Forum Romanum*. He also arranged special events at the Embassy for students, visitors, and tourists, ranging from art exhibitions to musical recitals and similar performances. On occasion he also accompanied a South African delegation to the annual International Children's Book Fair held in Bologna, Italy.

From her side Zella proved herself to be an exemplary hostess, treating guests at receptions to her favourite dishes, at times in the style of the Roman Marcus Gavius Apicius, who lived during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (14–37 AD) and was the author of a famous book on cooking. At other times Zella prepared dishes in typically Italian or genuinely South African style. This was sincerely appreciated by their daughters, who made regular visits and were taken by their parents to visit any number of Italian towns and cities, experiences they would never forget.

In his *laudatio* Dr. Mans also pointed out how Dawie had, during his lengthy academic career, dedicated himself tirelessly to the retention and development of Latin at South African universities and schools. This included testimony presented to the *Hoexter Commission of Inquiry into the Structure and Functioning of the Courts*, the final report of which appeared in

⁴ Mans 1984:32.

1983. This was of particular interest to me since, at that time, I was a practising member of the Pretoria Bar and was involved as junior counsel to L.T.C. Harms SC (later the Vice-President of the Supreme Court of Appeal) in a matter which was directed at retaining Latin as a compulsory subject for the LLB degree. To our disappointment the matter was unsuccessful, as was the subsequent appeal.

In this process I developed a great appreciation for Dawie's strong campaign to retain Latin as a prerequisite for law degrees. His attempt to achieve this goal culminated in a meeting with the then Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetzee, during his chairmanship of the Classical Association (1989–1990), when Kenneth Matier served as his vice-chairman.⁵ Once again this was unsuccessful inasmuch as Latin as a compulsory subject for law degrees was removed from the statute book by means of the *Admission of Advocates Amendment Act 55 of 1994*.

On his return to South Africa in 1987, Dawie resumed his academic career by accepting an appointment as the Professor of Legal and Ecclesiastical Latin at UNISA before being appointed as Head of the Department of Classics at this university. On his retirement in 1993 he concluded this final phase of his academic career by taking up the position of temporary lecturer in classics at UNISA for some two years (1993–1995).

In the meantime Dawie and Zella had moved to Kleinmond in the Southern Cape, where Dawie continued to practise his love of Latin by making regular presentations on the Roman world in Hermanus and elsewhere. He also assisted pupils at the Kleinmond Primary School with Latin lessons from *Schola Latina* and even taught chess at their chess club. He and Zella paid a few more visits to Rome, including one in 2002 when they were accompanied by Annabie and Mala and their families. On his eightieth birthday in 2010 Dawie completed the Whale Trail, celebrating this accomplishment with his family in typically Roman style. Sadly, Zella was stricken by terminal cancer and passed away on 1 May 2012, leaving Dawie to spend his remaining years alone in Kleinmond. He nevertheless continued expressing his love of Latin and the classics and paid a final visit to Italy and Sicily in 2014, once again accompanied by Annabie and Mala and their families.

During his remaining years Dawie continued to retain his warm and loving relationship with his extended family and his wide circle of friends. He regarded himself as blessed to be able to attend the weddings of his

⁵ Hilton 2018.

granddaughters, Zella and Nicola (Annabie's daughters), and to experience the happy event of the birth of his first great-granddaughter, Sienna (granddaughter Zella's daughter). He never hesitated to share with family and friends what a happy and blessed life he had always had. His daughters, sons-in-law and granddaughters in turn were eternally grateful for the huge legacy of love and affection he and Zella had left them. They have no hesitation in expressing the Roman sentiment of *pax vobis* to all who have played a role in the lives of Dawie and his beloved Zella.

Christoff Zietsman is a former student of Dawie, to whom he referred as 'Crilius' in a tribute he sent me on 14 March 2019, two days after Dawie's passing. In his first year of the BA (Law) degree at the University of Pretoria he found himself in Dawie's Latin class and was so inspired by him that he decided to abandon a career in law and to make Latin his career. According to Christoff, Dawie was not just an excellent lecturer but managed to inspire his students to develop a special relationship with Latin and Roman civilisation. He did this in various ways, including arranging a once-in-a-lifetime visit (*peregrinatio*) to Italy in the late 1970s. Christoff and his wife followed this up with a visit to Dawie and Zella (and the young Suzelle) in 1984, when Dawie was in Rome. Dawie showed them places rarely seen by tourists, such as the villa of the Emperor Nero at *Prima Porta*, and introduced them to Ostia, the harbour city of Rome, and the villa of the Emperor Hadrian at Tivoli. Dawie soon became Christoff's mentor, role model, and good friend.

Similar views are held by Jo-Marie Claassen, who describes Dawie as an excellent Latinist and a man of great compassion. She served as secretary of the Classical Association (CASA) at the time when he was chairperson (1989–1990) and has a vivid recollection of his arranging a colloquium between CASA and members of the legal profession, including Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke. Jo-Marie saw Dawie as a person who communicated with all persons with consummate ease and had no difficulty in befriending anyone. She regarded this as a token of his unconditional good faith and sincerity.

After his retirement Dawie turned his attention to translating a number of selected mediaeval Latin texts in co-operation with colleagues in the legal profession. In this regard I was privileged to be asked by him to serve as editor of his translation of *The Three Books on Interest-Bearing Loans and Interest (Foenus et Usurae)* by Gerard Noodt (1647–1725) which was published by the Pretoria University Law Press in 2009.

On the topic of Dawie's numerous publications Koos Kritzinger was able to provide me with a list of his most widely read works over and above his translation of Gerard Noodt's *Foenus et Usurae* referred to above. This list commences with the five editions of his *Latyn vir die Regstudent* and continues with a selection of his rhetorical and philosophical works, including Cicero's speeches on age (*De Senectute*) and friendship (*De Amicitia*), the *sententia* as rhetorical concept in Quintilian (*Die Sententia as Retoriese Begrip by Quintilianus*), the speeches in the *Bellum Civile* of Lucan (*Die Toesprake in Lucanus se Bellum Civile*) and the 'Thoughts of René Descartes on the first philosophy in which the existence of God and the immortality of the soul is demonstrated' (*René Descartes se Bepeinsinge oor die Eerste Filosofie waarin die Bestaan van God en die Onsterflikheid van die Siel bewys word*).

Dawie's various publications, to some of which I have already referred, range from 1961 to 2009, as appears from the useful lists made available to me by Koos Kritzinger. Of a general grammatical nature was his consideration of the concept of translation: how literal and free is it? He likewise had regard to translation as an aid in philological research and the contribution of Livius Andronicus as a translator of Homer (from Greek to Latin). Allied to this were his thoughts on the function of epic poetry in classical Latin as illustrated by the epic tradition occurring in Virgil, the function and use of adverbs in Latin, the teaching of the humanities, and the role and function of letters (*epistulae*) in classical literature. He even wrote an article on the subject of 'Afrikaans: a young tree with strong roots'.⁶ The role and function of education and culture generally occurred in his articles on Rome and its geography and, more recently, he touched on the biblical theme of Sodom and Gomorrah in his 'Sodoma in fifth-century biblical epic'.⁷

Needless to say Dawie was highly regarded as a Latinist and classical author by his many colleagues, virtually all of whom were singularly impressed by his warm personality and ever-present smile and likewise by his infectious enthusiasm and energy. His passionate love of the classics, together with his genuine helpfulness, understanding, empathy and loyalty, were unconditionally inspirational to his students and colleagues.

I personally saw Dawie as a man of great virtue and humanity, who practised what he preached and had no hesitation in sharing his sense of

⁶ Kriel 1987.

⁷ Kriel 1991.

justice, fairness, and good faith with all who were privileged to meet up with him. From the above discussion I believe that it is certainly justified to describe him as a versatile classicist. My prayer for him is that his soul will ever rest in truly well-deserved peace.

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