



## **“Life?”: modernism and liminality in Douglas Livingstone’s *A littoral zone***

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### **Abstract**

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*In an attempt to find his place within nature in South Africa and in a global modern context, Douglas Livingstone returns strongly to modernist poetry in his 1991 volume *A littoral zone*. In contrast to his predecessors like Wallace Stevens in “The glass of water” and T.S. Eliot in *The waste land*, this volume at critical moments gets stuck in a liminal stage. Images and poems, and eventually the volume as a whole, despite the highlights they present, say that it no longer seems so possible to end up also within the postliminal stage, so as to complete a rite of passage. Yet modernist poems such as Stevens’s “The glass of water” have the ability to end up in postliminal affirmation through and beyond the liminal stage of the overall process. Here light becomes a thirsty lion that comes down to drink from the glass, with a resultant transcendence of the dualistic between-ness that characterises the liminal stage in the modernist poetic mode, while this further results in the incorporation of a deeper and refreshing, dynamic unity. Even more remarkable is that this poetic rite is not of a closing nature, but open, especially in the sense that it affirms all that is possible and greater than the individual ego or subject, this, while getting stuck within a liminal stage just short of the postliminal stage can be in the nature of closure, as Livingstone shows, for example, when he says in “Low tide at Station 20” that humanity is trapped in its inability to see the original power of unity with and within nature in order to live within it; and while humanity remains an ugly outgrowth on the gigantic spine of evolution. In provisional conclusion this article finds that it will be better to view Victor Turner’s 1979 celebration of what he terms the “liminoid” in the*

place of a “true liminality” critically. Although it is impossible to return to a collective catharsis in watching a play, one cannot feel too comfortable about getting rid of the cosmological, theological and concrete embeddedness of rites of passage (of which a liminal stage merely forms a part). Van Gennep links these matters, and modernist poets are still able to express these interlinked matters with a powerful, sensitive effect of dynamic unity. Livingstone also does this, but in considerably lesser measure, and from within a considerably more uncertain context. The article ultimately shows that for these reasons and more, Livingstone’s volume deserves far more critical reading than it has received to date, and that despite one or two weaknesses – of which the employment of *The waste land in the rather flimsy “The waste land at Station 14”* is the most serious – the volume continues to make a rich contribution to South African life, or within any country that views poetry as an important form of human communication.

### **Opsomming**

#### **“Life?”: modernisme en liminaliteit in Douglas Livingstone se *A littoral zone***

Ten einde sy plek te vind in die natuur, in Suid-Afrika en in ’n globale konteks, keer Douglas Livingstone in sy 1991-bundel *A littoral zone* onder andere sterk terug na die modernistiese poësie. Anders as sy voorgangers soos Wallace Stevens in “*The glass of water*” en T.S. Eliot in *The waste land* – steek dié bundel in kritiese oomblikke vas in ’n liminale stadium. Die beelde en gedigte, en uiteindelik die bundel as ’n geheel sê ten spyte van die hoogtepunte wat hulle verteenwoordig, dat dit nie meer so moontlik lyk om ook in die postliminale te beland nie. Tog toon modernistiese gedigte soos Stevens se “*The glass of water*” die vermoë om deur die liminale stadium in postliminale bevestiging te eindig. Lig word hier ’n dors leeu wat aan die glas kom drink, met die gepaardgaande opheffing van die tweeledige tusseninheid wat die liminale stadium kenmerk, en die inkorporering in ’n dieper en verfrissende, dinamiese eenheid. Nog merkwaardiger is dat hierdie poëtiese rite nie uitsluitend van aard is nie, maar juis oop, veral in die sin dat dit alles bevestig wat moontlik is en groter is as die individuele subjek of ego. Dit terwyl die vassteek in die liminale fase kort voor die postliminale fase juis uitsluitend kan wees, soos Livingstone inderdaad aantoon, byvoorbeeld wanneer hy in “*Low tide at Station 20*” sê dat die mensdom nog steeds die gevangenis is van hulle onvermoë om die oorspronklike krag van eenheid in en met die natuur raak te sien en daarbinne te leef; en terwyl die mensdom maar net ’n lelike uitgroei op die reuse ruggraat van evolusie bly. As voorlopige slotsom bevind hierdie artikel dat dit beter sal wees om Victor Turner se 1979-viering van die “liminoïede” – in plaas van ’n “ware liminaliteit” – deeglik krities te beskou. Hoewel ons nie kan terugkeer na ’n kollektiewe katarsis

*by die aanskoue van 'n toneelstuk nie, kan 'n mens ook nie te gemaklik voel nie oor die ontslaeraak van die kosmologiese, teologiese en konkrete inbedding van rites van oorgang (waarvan 'n liminale fase net deel vorm saam met die postliminale). Arnold Van Gennep koppel hierdie sake nog deeglik aan die liminale, en modernistiese digters gee nog uitstekend vorm aan hierdie opvatting. Livingstone doen dit ook, maar in 'n aansienlike mindere mate en in 'n onsekerder konteks. Die artikel toon uiteindelik dat Livingstone se bundel om hierdie redes veel meer kritiese lees verdien as wat dit tot dusver ontvang het, en dat dit, ten spyte van een of twee gebreke – waarvan die gebruik van The waste land in die betreklike flou “The waste land at Station 14” die ernstigste is – 'n veelseggende en ryk bydrae bly in Suid-Afrika, of in enige land wat die poësie beskou as 'n belangrike kommunikasievorm.*

## 1. The light lion and the littoral zone

That the glass would melt in the heat,  
That the water would freeze in cold,  
shows that this object is merely a state,  
One of many, between two poles. So,  
In the metaphysical, there are these poles.

Here in the centre stands the glass. Light  
Is the lion that comes down to drink. There  
and in that state, the glass is a pool.  
Ruddy are his eyes and ruddy are his claws  
When light comes down to wet his frothy jaws  
(Stevens, 1990:197.)<sup>1</sup>

In the first stanza of this, the American modernist poet Wallace Stevens's poem “The glass of water”, the reader finds a liminal stage within a poetic, metaphorical and modern rite of passage. This first stanza embodies a near perfect betwixt and between condition: one cannot be certain of the nature of the glass or the water, since it is a state, “one of many”, between two poles. If the initiate of a liminal stage must be radically uncertain about what goes on around him in this world, since opposite, topsy-turvy conditions of being neither inside nor outside prevail for the moment, then this stanza embodies a similar experience of modern textuality and thought. It

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1 To avoid confusion about poets's employment of full stops, I separate the bibliographical reference from the poem cited, floating it to the right outside the poem so that it is clear whether the poem or part of it as cited carries a full stop or not.

involves a threshold of understanding between the extremities of solidity and fluidity, objective existence and subjective perception, just as a concrete threshold occupies a space between two other spaces, such as outside and inside.

According to Arnold van Gennep, the liminal stage is a period between two other periods, namely the preliminal period and the postliminal period, within a rite of passage that is embedded (according to Van Gennep) in concrete existence; and this first stanza of "A glass of water" is liminal – on its way to a postliminal return within a rite of passage.

Ultimately, a rite of passage (*including*, but not consisting mainly of, an important but not all-encompassing liminal stage) may be of cosmological and theological importance (Van Gennep, 1960:25, 191, 194). Van Gennep (1960:186) says a coffin being lowered into a grave is an example of the liminal stage, while the actual burial and continuation of life would then be the important and perhaps somewhat theoretically-neglected postliminal stage. The second stanza is a marvellous example of such a stage in the modernist poetic rite of passage.

Crossing the threshold of the liminal stage as part of such a rite of passage – and leaving it behind adequately enough – the imagery in the second stanza actually enters into postliminal re-incorporation and affirmation: a poetic initiation or individuation occurs there, finally, after the various considerations, difficulties and suspensions of the liminal stage as found in the first stanza, as well as in other poems preceding this. When the light lion comes down to drink, everything changes: no longer does subjective perception remain at a vacuous distance from objective existence (the glass) – the two blend impossibly and utterly. Perception and existence return to their integrity of oneness. The dualistic distance between what is light and what is glass no longer matters: what matters is the blending itself – imagination and metaphor come into their own.

Upon entering thus the powerful world of poetry with these images centring on the light lion, one finds that the human and the alien, the monstrous and the delightful, the solid and the fluid, and all kinds of further potentially oppositional betwixt and between conditions co-exist radically (in the root), to the extent of re-affirming their original indivisibility. Here, light is thirsty, and comes down to a standing glass-pool to wet his ruddy jaws with ruddy eyes. "Ruddy" may refer in this context to blood, or the colour of light in the glass as the sun sets or rises – so that the lion must be connected with the warmth of

the sun. It may also refer to warmth itself, as a modernist symbol of the life energy. Wonderfully, light has “claws” – it grabs at things: an aesthetically satisfying perception that light is not a passive object out there, but an active participant in being.

If this re-discovery of a certain unity and affirmation that surpass rational-relational dualisms is typical of modernist poetry, it is necessary to state that a modernist poetic rite of passage takes on a certain character: it involves a full development into a postliminal phase, as I shall explain in detail. I mention this, because I wish to turn to the modernist intertext of the South African marine microbiologist and poet Douglas Livingstone’s relatively neglected but important 1991 volume entitled *A littoral zone*. The character of a modernist poetic rite of passage, may well be one that fluctuates between opposite poles as a liminal stage, and then confirms a movement into a postliminal stage of unifying affirmation. For it has been long known in studies of literature that contrast is necessary for the establishment of unity (Pritchard, 1934:18).

In some cases, for instance in Stevens’s 1923 poem “The snow man”, this affirmation confirms nothing. It moves from logical absence (the nothing that is not there) to a deeper and more positive unity within nowhere (the nothing that *is*) (Stevens, 1990:10). The prevailing sense upon entering this postliminal condition is thus one of incorporation, participation, interaction and open-ended, completely compact confirmation, as in the case of Stevens’s light lion who comes down to drink. Other examples spring to mind in this liminal-postliminal-poetic-rite-of-passage context, such as (say) William Carlos Williams’s (1991:224) dynamic unification of nature and culture in his frequently-read wheelbarrow poem. Or consider Marianne Moore’s (1991:179) perception that the little dragon, the chameleon, is part of the power of heaven, because it is able to digest the colour spectrum, and become part of things to the extent of becoming precisely and perfectly invisible. With a further intensity of modernist poetic resonance and individual aesthetic difference, T.S. Eliot (1991:69) manages to point precisely at a third, unifying position beyond rational-relational and difficult-to-escape-from opposites when *The waste land* concludes – in the most open manner (without a full stop, for instance) – on a third Sanskrit “shantih”. It is the peace that passeth (rational, dualistic) knowing, a peace found in a clarity of unity when nothing separates the world of human understanding and the world of natural existence.

I mention these poets not only because they participate in a complete liminality – that is, a liminal stage that is still willing to

transform into a postliminality, and hence a rite of passage – but also because Livingstone works them into *A littoral zone*. He does so, moreover, as part of a compelling effort to find his position within life. Throughout the volume the speaker finds himself involved in the attempt to understand, find and sustain an interactive place in the natural universe, on current South African soil within a modern, global world. Among other considerations, he has to kill a loggerhead turtle to relieve its horribly unnecessary human-induced suffering (Livingstone, 1991:37), he tries to push a beached dolphin cow back into her element while anglers look on with sharp, exploitative ignorance (Livingstone, 1991:55) and he experiences the holy event of a duiker doe involving herself in predator inspection.<sup>2</sup> She approaches, making physical contact with him where he lies down on a dune for a cigarette, filled with worries and uneasy deliberations about faith, reason and evolution (Livingstone, 1991:54).

Frequently his deliberations about his place end in spaces that occupy the liminal stage of a rite of passage, while the deliberations are unable to leave the liminal stage behind in order to enter a postliminal position. And it is precisely a careful consideration of the modernist intertext within *A littoral zone* which makes this most clear, so that one suspects that a proper understanding of the volume is not possible without taking this modernist intertext into full account.

Livingstone incorporates a feast of modernist poetic texts into the volume; I shall not be able to mention all or even most of the examples here. Importantly, he does not merely refer to the modernist poets: he weaves their poetic concerns and procedures into the very fibres of the volume.

In a scientific paper entitled "Science and truth" (1986), Livingstone praises writings "that afford us the glimmerings of the whole as one" (see Brown, 2002:102). This positive estimation of "the whole" would attract him further to the modernists, who were not only keenly aware of wholeness, but who achieved its modern poetic invocation

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2 Predator inspection is an animal behaviour in which an individual or individuals of a species will investigate its or their predator closely to gain knowledge about it (see Dugatkin, 2004:54). My gratitude to Henk Bouwman and the third year zoology students at the School of Environmental Sciences at the Potchefstroom campus of the North-West University, South Africa, for this insight, offered during my lecture of Livingstone as part of their second year course in animal behaviour.

as I have indicated briefly in terms of unity beyond rational opposites. In his notes that correspond structurally to Eliot's notes at the end of *The waste land*, Livingstone links his work overtly to modernist ideals. His act of making modernist poems not only a thematic component, but in particular a formal and structural pattern in his text, already points at the seriousness with which one must take his modernist intertext. "Ideally," he writes there, "the sequence [of poems in the volume] could suggest one long poem, the record of one daylong mythical sampling run" (Livingstone, 1991:62). With reference to James Joyce's *Ulysses* Livingstone thus evokes Eliot's insistence on a "mythical method" of writing, as opposed to a narrative method, for the sake of attempting to awake from what Modernists held to be the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that was contemporary history then (Eliot, 1980:177). Livingstone continues to seek a mythical, psychic or whole resonance that could bring about the surpassing of an everyday, contra-ecological existence. I shall return to this critical recognition.

Only slightly more playfully, Livingstone is also willing to adopt a voice that sounds like one of the modernist's voices on occasion. For example, the intertext turns Stevens's "Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird" into "Thirteen ways of looking at a black snake". The dense, "difficult" vocabulary in some lines echoes (frequently in scientific jargon) Stevens's abundant employment of strings of colourful and intellectual words, as found for instance throughout Stevens's "Comedian as the letter C". Consider the following description of waking up in *A littoral zone*:

Fading pineal echoes oscillate  
through their own periodic tables down  
orderly progressions of weightings between eyelashes  
and window where the incipient dawn  
taps to enter (Livingstone, 1991:8).

This resonates with the intellectualised, rich strings of precise vocabulary found in spurts and stretches in Stevens's oeuvre.

Moreover, *A littoral zone* re-turns the poetic focus to a particularly modernist liminal stage: the stage betwixt and between physical existence as informed by scientific awareness on the one hand, and spiritual insight or wisdom on the other. His training in microbiology – for which he wrote a Ph.D. thesis that he viewed as the "hard core version" of *A littoral zone* (Brown, 2002:98) – means that he brings into his poetry a keen scientific perception of physical existence on earth. He sees the further prospect of what he calls the *psychic*: an

awareness – still somewhat evolutionary in tone – of the oceanic origins of humanity that point at symbiosis or living-together on a large, inclusive scale between species and elements on earth. However, the critical target of his volume is that humans deliberately fail to see this, and that the failure puts them at odds with nature. Of this uneasy and difficult fluctuation between the opposites of physical survival and spiritual-natural awareness, the littoral zone (which he monitored on the Durban coast for decades) is symbolic as the notes at the end of the volume state:

The littoral zone – that mysterious border that shifts restlessly between land and sea – has, to me, always reflected that blurred and uneasy divide between humanity's physical and psychic elements (Livingstone, 1991:62).

In the volume one would expect imagery of this uneasy, shifting oscillation between the poles of physical and "psychic" being to occur at the conclusions of poems, since that is where a poem reaches its limit, its threshold into the worlds outside it; its "shoreline" so to speak. Indeed, this is the case. "Reflections at sunkist" tells the story of the speaker's internment and improper treatment in a "Cackle college" near Bulawayo, and it ends with a littoral image of the brain as an ocean of sparks that may be turned on again, upon dying or disconnecting, by the intervention of a mysterious intelligence (Livingstone, 1991:14). "An evolutionary nod to God Station 4" considers an "enigmatic principle" that formed cells, and it concludes with another blurred, uneasy image of the speaker who has evolved far down the road, away from the image of this original intelligence (Livingstone, 1991:18). This half-understood recollection of an oceanic origin at the "mysterious border", a border at once terrestrial/physical and aquatic/psychic, is another example of a poem ending at the divide that remains littoral: in terms of a stage in-between opposite potentials, it falls short of an overall potential of confirming unity. In short, it remains liminal.

Still more examples of liminal imagery await the reader who acts on the invitation that the front cover offers. On it a footpath funnels out into the littoral zone on the Durban coast in South Africa. The poet is coming "out" from the picture on his way home after a day's hard work. Now it is the reader's turn to do his and her work, and the picture is an invitation towards collaboration. Part of this collaboration is to read the modernist text with a view to liminal stages, postliminal stages and the notion of rites of passage as we now begin to see. The question arises whether Livingstone, composing his poetry in such a different time and place, as well as



with such a differently deep knowledge of evolution, is still able to complete poetic rites of passage in the manner that his modernist predecessors did. Among other considerations, this question is important not only because it will illuminate Livingstone's volume, but also because times have changed – and they may have changed in a specific and somewhat upsetting way. I have in mind the possibility that the shift from modernist poetry to postmodernist modernist poetry as found in *A littoral zone* shows new inabilities or reluctances to move on beyond the liminal stage, into postliminal affirmation and openness. Part of this consideration is the complicated recognition that the liminal stage may also be in the nature of closure, and this is counter-intuitive in the sense that one would have thought that something more final (the postliminal stage) has to be more closed, by definition, than something less final (the liminal stage). In provisional conclusion, this consideration will turn the focus of this article to a shift that occurs from Van Gennep to Victor Turner: from what Turner (1979:491, 492) calls the “true liminal phases of the past” (before the industrial revolution) to the new term that he suggests in its place, the liminoid. For just as *A littoral zone* must somehow fail to leave the liminal stage behind in important respects, so the liminoid celebrates the fact that it is no longer part of something with *mere* cosmological, theological and concrete proportions – the latter, as we shall see, Turner and the liminoid must view as normative, while the new spirit that Turner champions is supposed to be entirely more relative, rational and democratically open. To my mind, reading *A littoral zone* from a perspective informed by the shift from *truly liminal* to liminoid will give rise to one or two important critical questions: such as whether the liminoid and the failure to enter into the postliminal is always more open, indeed.

Since the term *open* enjoys many meanings, I must paradoxically limit it here to a working definition: consider that *being open* means viewing the future as all that is possible, and not only as what is probable (see Rothenberg, 1993:100). It is probable that the sun will rise tomorrow, since it has always risen in the past, but that is no reason to say it must. When it does rise, it is therefore a miracle, whether one pays attention to the miracle as miracle or not. It is probable that humans will outstay their welcome on earth, but that is no reason to doubt the life force itself too deeply. This brings a further aspect of openness into focus. *To be open* means not to be sealed off to other existences: wholeness and its concomitant openness are essential forms of human sensitivity. They involve the capacity to see further than the boundaries of one's individual

person, and indeed to see that one's ultimate self is an interactive part of a larger whole or dance in which one's own dance is only possible because of the other dancers. In this way *to be open* is connective, rather than exclusive. Let this working definition of openness suffice for the purpose here – it will always be possible to refine it, also with critical refutation. If the possible and the transpersonal are important qualities of openness, then it follows that a postliminal affirmation of all that is possible and a unity of participation can be more open than a (perhaps and apparently more open or relative) getting-stuck in fluctuations between extremities within an indefinite (or "autonomized") liminal stage. Against a Gennepian background, one could say that lowering a coffin is to the liminal stage as accepting death and covering the coffin with soil is to the postliminal completion of a rite of passage. Evidently the birth process brings even more vivid pictures to bear on these notions, with its liminal stage of coming into the world through a passage, and its postliminal stage of actually entering the world. Paradoxically, in both instances of burial and birth, it is the former stage that is difficult, uneasy and in a sense incarcerating, while it is the latter stage (or space) that opens new room of a return to all that is possible, as well as all that goes beyond one's own immediate concerns. These somewhat philosophical considerations become necessary when one looks at the development from modernist poetry to *A littoral zone*, and the development from Van Gennep's rites of passage with their liminal stage to Turner's liminoid position. For in these developments, paradoxically once more, we have reached a time at which relativity might have been gained in direct proportion to a loss of openness.

## **2. Gaia, the referee and the superintendent: "life?" as closure at the liminal stage**

Livingstone's speaker is frequently in dismay about humankind's ignorant exclusion of itself from an inclusive nature. Already in the tone-setting first poem, "Starting out", the speaker sees his monitoring of pollution in the Durban ocean as "scientifically delivered blows at sullage, / against the republics of ignorance and apathy" (Livingstone, 1991:10). The rest of the volume makes the nature of the apathy clear enough: it is humankind's damaging inability to see itself as a radical part of natural life on earth. On a slightly larger scale, the volume of poetry is certainly also one weapon in Livingstone's arsenal in his fight against contra-ecological or counter-symbiotic apathy. The most important aspect of overcoming the ignorance, as the speaker continues to establish

also for himself within the last poem of the mythical cycle, "Road back", is the hovering prospect of faith: "knowledge" of an enigmatic, original force. For this reason the speaker asserts in "Road back" that the sea is "your old ally against psychic apathy, / who saves your soul from atrophy" (Livingstone, 1991:61). It is also what saves one, of course, from the "trophy" at the very end of "Road back". This horrible "trophy" is what one receives as the capping and artificial reward for a superficial, even mindless repetition of modern day to day existence. Although the volume ends on the utterly ambivalent word and question "life?" it envisages the prospect of something more whole, complete and alive: the mythical method of making sense of a lifetime. By insisting on a *mythical* reading, Livingstone brings into focus again Eliot's insistence in his notes to *The waste land* that the mythical, blind seer Tiresias sees the poem as a whole (Eliot, 1991:72). Livingstone joins Eliot in the search for something larger and more significant than our repetitive stories of a modern lifestyle: he is looking for an inner life that would give a meaning to life beyond those narratives of our "bullied lawns", as "Road back" suggests further (Livingstone, 1991:60). *The waste land* further concludes on the littoral shoreline (Eliot, 1991:69), as do various poems in *A littoral zone*. All in all, the reader returns to littoral images of the volume with heightened expectations informed by its substantial modernist intertext.

Among these will be the expectation of what I term here dynamic, open postliminal affirmation: leaving behind the liminal stage of remaining undecided betwixt and between oppositional, rational opposites in order to enter the poetic world of unifying poetic perception, of a kin to the light lion in Stevens's poetry. Livingstone's inclinations to a mythical awareness which includes the notion of "the whole as one" give further prominence to this expectation. The occasional moments or glimpses into unity within *A littoral zone* appear to complete the argument by fulfilling the expectation in one or two unique ways. For instance, when the duiker doe that has made contact leaves, she does so "unhurriedly" (Livingstone, 1991:54). This occurs in a zone of transcendence, the affirmation of a deep living-together or symbiosis which is a key concept in the volume. Indeed, the "quick" sounds as the doe approaches, in contrast to aesthetically satisfying "slow" sounds whenever she considers her caution, is a profound poetic moment in which form and focus blend maximally. Her small hooves "pause for each wave- / break:" the line break finely underscores the mounting tension towards "an impending holy event" (Livingstone, 1991:54). Brevity of actions combines with brevity of sound as her "leaf-stained tongue

flicks / out, licks salt" from the speaker's wrist (Livingstone, 1991:54). A last moment of worry occurs in which "slow" sounds centring on [aʊ] and [əʊ] dominate: "One rust-fringed / brown eye rolls worriedly at the surf" (Livingstone, 1991:54). The "frail shared seconds" (Livingstone, 1991:54) of their contact make all the difference: and the steps that she takes in her own time are the confirmation of having surpassed the apparently entrenched opposite worlds of self and other, trust and distrust, being quick and being slow, moving too soon or too rationally, or moving too slowly and too emotionally or spiritually. This marvellously clear, importantly postliminal or postdoubtful moment has the power to "halt the debate" as the penultimate line affirms (Livingstone, 1991:54). On another occasion the speaker, on having stumbled upon a cave filled with San painting as he crossed a dune, entered the zone beyond the purely littoral when he "called, stroked and dreamed into eland" (Livingstone, 1991:45).

These uplifting incidents occur in the conclusions of poems: where they reach the limits of their liminal stage before ending into the world outside themselves, from a readerly perspective. In these cases the writing at last enters a postliminal incorporation or re-settling. Again, the postliminal moments are confirming and open: they participate in a transgression which allows radical interconnectedness with others within an impossibly vast space of all that continues to remain possible; they are more than (and in this sense outside of) closed borders within a self sealed off from the natural world. Perhaps strangely, the process-nature of the liminal stage thus appears to become clearer only once the process completes itself. In these moments, the *blurred, uneasy, mysterious* aspect of being sheds its nebulous, apparently indefinite cloudiness and difficulties to open into greater clarity.

However, other conclusions at the liminal edges or endings of poems retain their liminality indefinitely, as I have begun to indicate. In "Low tide at Station 20" the liminal doubt reaches an indefinite crisis, to the point of enormous frustration and incarceration. The speaker attempts a haiku of seventeen syllables by uttering the syllables one by one in synchrony with his steps. Consider that the haiku tradition frequently offers momentary, intuitive glimpses into a vivid harmony of natural being. In such a context, the first of the misconstrued or impossible haikus, "games" or "dirges" in "Low tide"

is brutal: “AF/ RI/ CA //<sup>3</sup> AF/ RI/ CA HOW MAN/ Y OF YOUR // CHIL/ DREN WILL YOU KILL TO/ DAY?” (Livingstone, 1991:48). How to keep one’s faith in the face of such knowledge? – the second failed haiku reads: “ARE THE CRE/ A/ TED PART OF THE // CRE/ A/ TOR OR SUN/ DERED ON CRE/ A/ TION?” (Livingstone, 1991:48). This littoral wavering becomes even more ironic and sharp when the third “haiku” stalls in the biblical solidity of twelve syllables: “Take 12: OF ALL THE DEATHS // THE WORST MUST BE THE LOSS OF FAITH” (Livingstone, 1991:48). The low tide then reaches its lowest, “bluest” point in the concluding lines of this poem – lines that follow immediately on this last “haiku”:

Still trapped. I am the mere excrescence  
on a giant’s spine dreamed up  
by seas still veiled to fettered man. (Livingstone, 1991:48.)

Humankind is an ugly, unnecessary outgrowth on the evolutionary spine. And it is trapped, fettered, shackled within its inability to see its natural and spiritual origin: those seas that dreamed it up remain *veiled*. An implication is that they are now more veiled than ever, that the separation or split between the physical and rational on the one hand, and belief, continuation and positiveness on the other, are now at their worst. The inability to move on and see clearly beyond doubt – that is, this indefinitely liminal or transitional stage – amounts to a shackle that makes humankind violent, ignorant, non-participating.

To anticipate the arguments to follow, one must therefore ask: but does the image, the conclusion, the poem achieve participation in its turn? To begin with, the giant spine is not the only image of a larger, intervening force within which humans enjoy or lament their being. There is the “cerebral referee” who clicks (rather mechanically) on new relays to allow the speaker’s ocean of thoughts, waves and electronic sparks to continue, despite a disruption that occurred on the brink of extinction (Livingstone, 1991:14). This overseeing referee echoes the superintendent of the “Cackle college” who intervenes timeously to rescue the speaker from utterly mad disaster (Livingstone, 1991:13-14). (The theme of secular madness deserves further comparison with a similar theme in *The waste land*.) There is, in other words, a kind of intelligence, evolutionary and godly, which or who keeps the fate of individuals and natural history going;

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3 In the instance of this one poem I indicate line breaks with double obliques, since Livingstone already uses single obliques as cited here.

although this "enigmatic principle" is not a "puppet master" (Livingstone, 1991:18), as "An evolutionary nod to God" reveals. Rather, vestiges of that genesis-force remain within the speaker who, being human, has evolved some distance away from the original image (Livingstone, 1991:18) as has been mentioned. Against the background of the image in which humankind is a mere excrescence on the giant spine of the "enigmatic principle" with its oceanic origins, this distance between humankind and the origin is of course as threatening as it is remarkable, a shackle as much as it is a freedom: it gives humans the freedom to interfere devastatingly with the original unity of natural being. The liminal stage, isolated from symbiotic participation, therefore remains an imprisonment also on this level of origins and being. It follows that the sustaining, creative force may also have a face or image of ambivalence, even occasional threat and conflict: being a referee it can decide one's fate, and being a giant it is of massive power. In the final poem of the mythical daylong journey, "Road back", this enigmatic principle therefore reveals an intriguing face:

[...] symbiosis or death  
at the hands of a bright blue cell  
– the only living thing in known space.  
Perhaps you do not need your knights, Gaia:  
in the end, you have to win. (Livingstone, 1991:61.)

It or she is the earth as organism, the mother goddess with a living intelligence far more encompassing and wise than the individual intelligence of humans who live within her, and at the moment humankind lives within the epoch of a critical choice – not the ignorant choice that it believes it must make between its own survival and that of the planet, but the choice that the planet must make between retaining its heroic knight *Homo sapiens*, or not. The locus of choice lies not only inside humans, but outside them, and their *hamartia* is not to see this any longer.

In the face of these indefinitely oppositional notions, the volume seems unable to conclude on any other note than that of the liminal, in the sense that it fails to cross over finally (but openly) into the postliminal stage of the overall process that Van Gennep envisages. The final lines read: the "sound of pounding / hooves drums up the trophy: life?" (Livingstone, 1991:61). There is a question mark behind the very notion of an indefinitely double life, and that question mark is therefore utterly liminal, in the sense that it remains always already *between* stages, like the programmed life of a trained horse galloping a predetermined circuit with only a trophy

in return, within a more generic life force or life energy that is now under threat from that very micro-existence. The prognosis is oppressive, non-poetic, even weak: we can now do little more than to “affirm” life by asking whether it is possible at all. The contrast between the rich, rhythmic sounds of the pounding hooves (recalling the marvellous motif of Cervantian self-irony that permeates the volume) followed by this abrupt immediacy of the *thin*, prosaic, even blandly *ultimate* one-word question is striking, even punishing. It is as if the two textures strive to come together with an unbearable clashing, in which the clashing is the consequence of an inability or reluctance to go any further than the double-betweenness of the liminal stage, trapped in fluctuation, as it were, between the preliminal and the postliminal. The first texture I have in mind is that of the rich poetic approach, especially audially, and the second is its exiting implied situation of a horse race and the prosaic anti-climax in the mere question “life?”. The volume “ends”, apparently inconclusively, on this note that belongs at the liminal stage of an incomplete rite of passage. In this instance, one may envisage one extreme, limit or barrier of the limen upon which one lingers as the poetic possibilities within nature and culture, while the other extreme is a prosaic run-of-the-mill existence that continues to deny and destroy the poetic option. As such, this position is of a more closing nature than it appears at first glance, because it fails to confirm unity of culture-nature existence beyond reasonable doubts. The doubt prevails: it closes the prospect of all that is possible and of all that is more than an isolated, threatened and threatening modern existence with its probabilistic repetitions.

It is therefore also impossible to decide whether the volume ends with a bang or a whimper. In this manner the volume speaks of an immense loneliness, embodying a voice in the desert that has turned so harsh as to be hardly audible. Again, the notion of closure comes to the surface upon careful reading of the volume: this time in the form of isolation. Could this be a reason why Livingstone turns to the modernist voices of the past in the first place, in the quest some sort of forefatherly or foremotherly (whole, earthy) resonance that actually “takes place” or finds its postliminal ground?

### 3. Liminality, isolation and the modernist intertext of *A littoral zone*

Michael Chapman (1984:80) refers to Livingstone as a poet of “the instinct to survive”, and as “a poet of the narrow edge” (Chapman, 1984:100). There is a sense of isolation in his work and in the

volume, as I have begun to indicate. "Starting out", its first poem after the introductory "A Darwinian preface", mentions "the smell of burnt toast / that airs the rooms of the solitary male" (Livingstone, 1991:8). That image dialectically recalls Eliot's *Prufrock* with his "taking of a toast and tea" (Eliot, 1991:4), of course: the sophisticated Prufrock is the opposite of Livingstone's rugged speaker in some respects. But it is critical to remember that Prufrock manages to drown (Eliot, 1991:7). He somehow manages to be immersed, to be rescued abruptly at the outer limits of his world. His life ratifies life after all, by becoming integrated into a force and movement greater than his solipsistic ego. Does the same occur for the speaker of *A littoral zone*? There are the odd sexual encounters with wonderfully wild women, the contact with the duiker, the solitary *seeing* of symbiosis in the eland cave, and so on. On the opposite side of the coin there are several telling occasions in which we share the lone male perspective from within the speaker's Ford Cortina, a typically ordinary car in South Africa. In the volume's context perhaps this may be slightly sordidly resonant of words such as *courtship* and female names such as *Tina* or *Tanya*. And this lingering loneliness sets itself off against the active relationship with nature, and the lingering potential of unity there.

Yet the loneliness and a natural individuation never seem to blend and become affirmative of wholeness as in the case, for instance, of Cummings's leaf poem with its twirling entwinement of the word *loneliness* and the phrase "a leaf falls" into one figure (Cummings, 1994:673). In the case of *A littoral zone*, future ecological doom as carried by a deep evolutionary knowledge casts its long shadow into the present. It reaches the point at which the speaker experiences himself with a self-irony that turns on the brink of self-pity and self-rejection: he sees himself as "any old poet" (Livingstone, 1991:60) in the conclusive poem "Road back". He is tired of "words, words, words / – quite worthless most of them" (Livingstone, 1991:60), and a life of "impossible compromises" and "vile adumbrations" that end with the received, perceived "trophy" of "life?".

I do not know about others, but as a reader I find this diminishment of poetry – of his own poetry by the poet in the volume – hard to swallow, no matter how ironically or playfully it may have been intended. It reminds me of a great musician who refuses to play the moment the audience turns up, with ears wide open, based on the excuse that his notes are mostly inadequate. In other words: to my taste his usually excellent sense of self-distance and self-irony turns a touch too dark here, bordering on self-castigation. In any event, this word-passage is reminiscent again of a passage in Eliot's



(1991:180) last great poem, the *Four quartets*. These words “strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, / Will not stay still”. The context is quite different to Livingstone’s worthless “words, words, words”, however. Eliot continues to foresee in this very passage that “words and music” can have a “pattern” that allows them to “reach / The stillness, as a Chinese jar is still / [while it] moves perpetually in its stillness” which is the “co-existence” (Eliot, 1991:180). *The four quartets*, written before and during the Second World War, is a poem of cyclical reconciliation and compelling harmony. Similarly, in Stevens’s last poems – also peculiarly under-examined like Livingstone’s – “the overriding sense the poems leave with us is not one of loss or defeat, or irony or rage, but of vital interaction with the world, a new sense of being” (Prothro, 1984:347). Of course, that was apparent already when Stevens’s speaker saw in one of his earliest poems not merely the nothing that is not there, but the nothing that is (as I have indicated); just as a similar confirmation and commitment is apparent when the subjective, small *i* or subject merges completely with the Eye afforded by a more inclusive, precise view of natural being in Cummings’s hummingbird poem (1994:827).

Livingstone has a similarly keen sense of love in nature: “I have all kinds of psychic and mystic connections with water,” he says (Brown, 2002:102). But Cummings’s “mysticism” in the hummingbird poem dissolves, becomes clear, finds resonance in the concrete discovery of a minutely sculpted, perfect nest of astoundingly small proportions (Webster, 2001:107), as well as methods of typography, fragmentation and recombination that turn this discovery into something of a concrete experience also for the reader (Cummings, 1994:827). Cummings shapes the poem like a hummingbird’s head (Webster, 2001:107) in the context of a charged accentuation of words emerging as if from nowhere in blank space, words arranged to overcome the dualistic, oppositional distance between self and other.

Taking a larger view: just as Eliot re-activates that Sanskrit root at the end of *The waste land*, after starting with a cruel April that stirs dull roots (Eliot, 1991:53), so does he ultimately take the indications of a positive acceptance at the brittle end of *The waste land* through a conversion several steps further, into the reconciliation, acceptance and dynamic harmony of the *Four quartets*. The point is that, whether we like it or not, Livingstone inverts this direction towards and overcoming into reconciliation and the affirmation of actual belief, including the openness that results from that

affirmative, culminating or postliminal direction. This brings me to a recognition that cannot be ignored reasonably. While Livingstone's evocation of modernist poems is informative and excellent in some instances, they are unfortunate in others, however, much we would want this to be otherwise. The most unfortunate is the staccato imitation of "black" writing (Brown, 2002:111) in a poem entitled "The waste land at Station 14". Its doom-prophecy about an increasing social Karoo (political desertification) (Livingstone, 1991:38) is interesting, and may warrant a recalling of *The waste land*. On balance "The waste land at Station 14" does not do justice to its dense, unforgettable predecessor. To my mind its evocation of that modernist masterpiece has a contrary effect: not of the expected enrichment that the evocation promises at first glance, but of making "The waste land at Station 14" seem poorer. Perhaps it is necessary to make it clear that my high esteem for *The waste land* resides not in a received, canonical inheritance, as if that poem could ever be an inherited, static object of culture; rather, it resides in the stupendous aliveness that an engagement with it gives rise to, as well as its apparently inexhaustive richness of significance and an indelible poetic music, so that one hardly ever returns from a continued reading of it unrewarded with new meaning. To be sure, part of this is its willingness to point at the absence and presence of unity, and a moving on into the postliminal.

In any event, from modernist poetry to its re-writing in *A littoral zone*, a development has occurred that appears to disallow the completion of rites of passage – whether they be of a greater or smaller nature – into postliminality. It is so that we can hardly see (say) theatre performances returning to occasions of collective catharsis as Turner (1979:495) rightly implies. In the remainder of this article, I wish to focus on Turner's take on liminal developments, as found in particular in his long 1979 essay entitled "Frame, flow and reflection: ritual drama as public liminality". I focus on this essay, and not on the perhaps better-known 1974 book entitled *Dramas, fields, and metaphors: symbolic action in human society*, since it is in this essay that Turner celebrates what he calls the liminoid most clearly.

#### **4. Conclusion: towards a critical perception of the liminoid**

Turner (1979:497) makes it clear that he sees the liminoid as an "advance in the history of human freedom". He says (1979:497): "I relish the separation of an audience from performers and the liberation of scripts from cosmology and theology." This is in some

contrast to Van Gennep, who clearly still respects the rite of passage as a concrete and significant phenomenon of cosmological and theological proportions. Consider that it is in this context that Turner suggests that the term *liminal* should be supplanted with the term *liminoid*. To Turner this more recent mode of liminality is more individualistic, fleeting, non-normative, experimental, and so on. It does not occur at some normative social centre, but develops “along the margins” of society (Turner, 1979:492), while it has apparently severed itself from cosmology or theology, as we have seen. Furthermore, according to Turner the liminoid experience is of a more rational nature than a perhaps more “primitive” truly liminal experience. As part of the new-found freedom of the liminoid, as opposed to a more normative “truly liminal” rite of passage in the past, he asserts the liminoid as a period of increasingly cogitating appreciation of art: he says that being in a theatre amounts to a playful mode of reflection, of thought, ponderance, rational problematisation, and so on (Turner, 1979:466, 494). Turner (1979:497) further says that attempts to return to a more normative rite of passage amounts to a brainwashing technique – the implication is that it is in a new progression of the intellectual realm that our awakening into the liminoid has occurred.

What is worrisome is not Turner’s rightful insistence on these new developments, but his fairly unequivocal championing of them: his celebration of what he perceives to be the freedom that it embodies, as found quite emphatically at the conclusion of “Frame, flow and reflection: ritual and drama as public liminality”. For as Livingstone’s volume shows, one can get stuck in the liminoid, that betwixt and between space within which one may hover indefinitely in the form of a doubt that persistently falls just short of actual (postliminal) entrance. In other words, some sort of cosmological, theological and concrete connectivity and participation is necessary if one is to be a sensitive and naturally-mature human being. Livingstone’s way of saying this, would be to say that one should not remain thoughtfully ignorant about symbiosis. That his volume itself gets stuck when it comes to physical existence and spiritual awareness, predominantly precisely within liminoid spaces that are of a betwixt and between nature virtually indefinitely – to the point of incarceration as the images themselves portray – is therefore doubly ironic. It forces the reader to decide whether this double irony is an achievement, or not.

I suspect that the reader’s decision will be contingent. For instance, I must do justice to some highlights of the liminoid spaces in *A littoral zone*, despite my sense that the volume lingers there too indefinitely for comfort overall. Not for a moment can one suggest that the

liminal stage “itself” does not have its place in literature, or within *A littoral zone* for that matter. Some of the best moments in the volume involve the critical edge of a finely honed liminoid vantage point: Livingstone brightly cross-stitches opposites for maximum effect in these moments. The deeper irony of “Carnivores at Station 22” is of such a cross-stitching quality. Firstly, it forms a counterpart to “A visitor at Station 21”, and this loads it with ironic potentials. Secondly, when humans get lost outside their terrestrial element in the ocean, dolphins never attack them, even though they are carnivores. However, now that the opposites turn around, the sharp anglers deliberately refuse to help the dolphin outside her element (inside ours). It is this cross-stitching that drives the speaker’s dismay and frustration home, since it resonates down further conditions of a cross-stitching nature: are we not supposed to be the intelligent ones, Gaia’s “knights”? Yet we act most ignorantly about elements, opposites and symbiosis. Dolphins, probably with their lesser complications, act more intelligently overall, since they act within the bounds of the symbiotic contract in which species live interrelated, interdependent or interactive lives.

This striking pattern of cross-stitching with its critical impact occurs elsewhere in the volume, to my mind brilliantly at the end of “South beach transients”. A lone, early and therefore serious swimmer emerges from the waves one morning. His one leg is a stump. He warms it in the sun, and puts on a prosthesis. Seeing that he must be a devoted swimmer, and for the moment viewing the ocean as the more alien element, the speaker (his own pair of legs now “stamping” self-consciously as they walk) inquires: “Shark?” (Livingstone, 1991:21). This is the obvious question, out perhaps before the speaker could stop it, since everything points at the monster of destruction lurking in the original element now unfamiliar to humans, the element within which we enter as a kind of transgression, risking the loss of limb. With “laconic élan” – terseness of the physically-inclined Laonians (Spartans) (Thompson, 1995:759) – and vivacity, dash or explosiveness of a kin with the French root *élancer* which means *to launch* (Thompson, 1995:434), the swimmer answers in double irony: “Landmine” (Livingstone, 1991:21). The real monster lurks in the familiar element of earth, and even more uncomfortably close: within our very nature, now alienated from nature.

A moment such as this embodies a relatively autonomous liminal stage – the between-stage that allows cross-stitching of opposites as such – doing striking work. They turn our oppositional expectations on their heads with fine critical effect. In the context of

the argument here, it is necessary to say that they do not have the strength to overcome themselves. They are unable to surpass rational relations to enter that properly unifying, staggering and metaphorical zone of the light lion – with the exceptions that I have mentioned. They employ the limits of the liminal stage itself well, but they cannot leave it behind to enter incorporation. As I have demonstrated, this leads ultimately to a predominant sense of getting stuck, of being incarcerated as the volume's imagery makes clear enough. Again, we must confront the notion that the openness of the liminoid should not be taken for granted. Instead, it should be a topic of critical examination.

We have grown virtually instantly accustomed in our “post-modernist” era to view our readings and textual fabrications as *open* and more *free*, partly because we believe that they are more relative as opposed to a more positivist and normative, but rather vaguely defined, “modernism” of yesteryear. For instance, deconstructive readings are meant to “open up” the text against its inherited protective railings (Derrida, 1976:158). Yet there is already a danger of taking the hard-gained new openness for granted, as Edward Said (2002:267) points out when he warns that the “post-modernist” can become as predictable, monotonous – and, one assumes, not open or responsive – as the groove of a boring train ride. A great irony of deconstruction, he says further, is that it becomes as predictable and monotonous with its repetitive theoretical patterns as the very logocentrism that it critiques in the first place (Said, 2002:128). So much, then, for a guaranteed openness within post-modernist thought: hovering in traces, or, as I have tried to argue, hovering within a liminal stage or the liminoid severed from an apparently deeper unity, can be as unresponsive as the supposed *postivism* of yesteryear to which these relativities embody a reaction. In short: relativity may not be a guarantee for openness and responsiveness.

There has been an increasing and worrisome tendency to equate “modernism” vaguely with closure, as if modernist poetry and “modernist” or (more accurately) positivist science are the same. They are not. There is no convincing argument to counter the suspicion, for instance, that modernist poetry is more “post-modernist” than positivist science. Moreover, in at least one important instance, as the readings here demonstrate, a 1991 liminal stage that prefers to remain predominantly doubtful in the face of its modernist intertext may be in the nature of closure: as if we know already that humanity is probably doomed to failure. In fact, the matter of openness and closure, with a view to rites of

passage (belonging on earth), is a vital question that *A littoral zone* with its modernist intertext poses, and embodies. It should lead one to be cautious in adopting and celebrating the liminoid too soon, and too uncritically – do we not still need some kind of connection to nature on a cosmological, affirmatively believing and unifying basis? Is a liminoid response of pondering the world from an indefinite betwixt and between position responsive enough?

In describing a Cummings poem, Norman Friedman (1996:55) writes that it opens out the implications faster than it closes them up. As I hope to have shown all too briefly, this is true of modernist poetry on a more generic scale. Seeing the light lion is an affirmation that actual, unified being with all its tremendous possibilities remains actual and confirms the possible. It is therefore important to remember that a relateness, a doubt or a liminality – a liminal stage isolated between its two boundary-extremes of (say) inside and outside – can turn so intense that it narrows the world, closes it prematurely, postpones an affirmation of the possible within the present; and thus relativity may lose its very relateness.

Against this background, consider carefully Turner's employment of a line from William Blake at the conclusion of his long 1979 essay on the liminoid. It serves inadvertently as an indication that all is not as progressive and free within the liminoid as he may want us to feel within that essay. He ends his assertions thereof the new-found freedom of the liminoid with a frequently-discussed phrase from Blake – which acts as the last sentence of his piece, and hence as the conclusive part of the frame within which one should read the text "One law for the lion and the ox is oppression" (Turner, 1979:497).

But as far as I can see, the Blakian phrase has an effect contrary to the tacitly assumed, neat confirmation of Turner's liminoid celebration. For although it is of an extremely singular nature, the author of Blake's phrase permeates it along with his entire textual universe precisely in cosmologies and theologies. In fact, it is the rise of rationalism and the concomitant beginnings of what would become technocracy – namely industry – that concern Blake. His notion of "one law" targets a rational monotony of non-elevation and non-participation, as his further well-known maxim that we should guard against the single vision of "Newton's sleep" (Blake, 1953:420) asserts, whereas Turner's use of the line may very well leave the uninformed reader with the sense that Blake also had it against some sort of coercive mystical force when he wrote the line.

In fact, for Blake art is the only remaining force that counters a final submission of everything to an approach that is too distanced and systematic:

If it were not for the Prophetic and Poetic character, the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again (Blake, 1953:99).

This comes remarkably close to Livingstone's feeling at the end of *A littoral zone* that the current lifestyle amounts to the meaningless, isolated circuiting of a racing track again and again. As Blake (1953:100) continues to write: "The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round, even of a universe, would soon become a mill with complicated wheels." Is this not the very mill that Livingstone tries to "attack" in Cervantian manner? This question should be investigated further.

Livingstone's volume also shows, even though it is certainly also playful on occasion, and quite liminoid one could say, that something has gone amiss in the meantime. It has gone amiss between the time of modernist affirmation that dares to go beyond rational opposites on the one hand, and the more predominant relativity of the current scenario, of which a betwixt-and-between approach that lifts the liminal stage from its embeddedness within the rites-of-passage process virtually indefinitely, forms part. The modernist intertext of *A littoral zone* makes clear just what it is that has gone amiss, moreover: it is the ability to see the liminal as a means to a more rooted and open end. And as his volume also indicates, a liminality that sees the liminal stage roughly as an end in itself has to do with this development. The findings here show that in fact a certain kind of liminality, the potentially endless fluctuation between poles and conditions, can be incarcerating, infuriating even, frustrating to the point of manacles. It is what leads to – and then strangely stays within – the doubtful and prosaic question "life?".

Moments of contact such as those between speaker and duiker or speaker and eland are therefore at once uncomfortable to our liminoid, "postmodernist" sensibilities, and of decisive importance: those are moments of active reconnection and re-unification; they are postliminal moments of actual entering; they participate in life with unifying stability, trust and maximum openness. They are open, among other things, in the sense of being responsive, transgressive of ego-bound barriers, affirmative of being within the natural universe, and so on. They are modern rites of passage in the full

sense: neither coercive, nor in subtle denial of unity, connectivity or integrity. They are therefore also avenues into the actual complexity and vibrancy of being alive with other creatures on earth.

Livingstone excels in the courage to venture where one "should not", going against the grain or glitter of the overt or covert fashions of his time. He has dared to traverse the divide between science and poetry. He has also dared to write poetry deliberately broader than what he perceived to be "polit-lit". This he did at a time in which there was considerable pressure on and among South African writers to use their work for political change. To this we must now add that he dared to return overtly to Modernism for inspiration and propulsion, probably at a time in which we were supposed to have left it behind if we were to be as postmodernist as we claim. For this alone, Livingstone's poetry deserves more critical respect and attention. Is it not so that in this triple-sense Livingstone has been able to maintain a thoroughly diverging and thoughtful vision, that is, a truly philosophical vision – informed by his natural scientific knowledge to boot – within his poetry? Then he has maintained it to the point of a willingness to sacrifice literary belonging for the sake of his art, collecting literary prizes as spin-offs within the relative margins of his world. If it is possible to belong to one's place and poetry too much, Livingstone manages it. For this reason among others, his work and *A littoral zone* will remain benchmarks for the sensitive in this country, and – given his modernisation of South African English poetry – in any English-reading country that considers poetry to be a vital medium of human communication.

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**Key concepts:**

Douglas Livingstone: *A littoral zone*  
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modernist intertext  
openness  
postliminal stage  
unity

**Kernbegrippe:**

Douglas Livingstone: *A littoral zone*  
eenheid  
liminale fase  
modernistiese interteks  
oopheid  
postliminale fase

