



“To say what you are trying to say”: Douglas Livingstone’s personae in *A rosary of bone* (1975b & 1983)

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Abstract

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This article offers a critical overview of the personae Douglas Livingstone (1932-1996) adopts in two editions (1975b; 1983) of “A rosary of bone”. Following a tripartite structure, it deals with the love poems, the translations, and the Giovanni Jacopo-poems respectively, arguing that the collection breaks new ground as Livingstone here begins to explore new voices and techniques with which to write about his thematic preoccupations. Such personae permit the poet more acerbic, satirical, or even angry stances, with voices not to be found in the earlier volumes of his work.

A comparative list of contents for both editions is given in an appendix.

Opsomming

“To say what you are trying to say”: Douglas Livingstone se persona in *A rosary of bone* (1975b & 1983)

Die artikel bied ’n kritiese oorsig van die personae wat Douglas Livingstone (1932-1996) in die twee uitgawes (1975b; 1983) van “A rosary of bone” aanneem. ’n Driedelinge struktuur word gevolg waarin die liefdesgedigte, die vertalings en die Giovanni Jacopo-gedigte afsonderlik behandel word. Die artikel voer aan dat die versameling bakens verskuif, omdat Livingstone hier met nuwe stemme en tegnieke begin eksperimenteer ten einde

sy tematiese belangstellings vanuit ’n skerper, satiriese of selfs woedende posisie oor te dra. Hierdie nuwe manier van uiting word nie in vroeëre volumes van sy werk gevind nie.

’n Vergelykende inhoudsopgawe van albei uitgawes word in ’n bylaag verskaf.

1. Introduction

In his citation, given when Douglas Livingstone was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Literature by the then University of Natal in 1982, Horton (1982:11) drew attention to two of the author’s major personae – scientist and poet – when he said: “The scientist in him searches for the truth; the poet in him tries to explain it.” Several years earlier, when asked whether the scientist and the poet were conflicting or complementary aspects of his life, Livingstone replied:

Well, they’re sort of two different sphincters! One could phrase it rather pompously as ‘Science is man’s search for the truth and literature is man’s interpretation of the truth’. I think I’d better write that down, it’s quite good! (Ullyatt, 1976:45.)

In her dissertation on Livingstone’s poetry, Stevens (2004:35) takes up Livingstone’s argument:

Livingstone’s rigorously philosophical paper ‘Science and Truth’ examines how thinkers and scientists have viewed truth and, in concluding, asks ‘Is the “truth” attainable?’ (Stevens, 2004:105.)

Stevens (2004:106) gives the following answer:

It is possible we have to reconcile our pursuit of scientific truth – verifying every step of the way, imagining it, longing for it, even dreaming of it, spurring ourselves on with the current theory or available ratiocinative device, alert always for the dissolution of rigidities whose components re-form into new realities which will dissolve in their turn – with never actually attaining it. Einstein’s observation: ‘The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the source of all true art and science’, affords not only comfort but enjoyment while the day to day proper business of science ensues, i.e. seeking after truth, however evasive the truth happens to be.

In quoting Einstein, Livingstone also points to beauty and truth as the source of both science and art. His much-quoted belief that “Science is humanity’s search for truth and art is humanity’s interpretation of the truth” (Fazzini, 1990:142) is a further indication of his belief that science and art are not mutually exclusive.

Livingstone's 1990 response to Fazzini differs only marginally (in terms of diction) from his response to my question in 1976. He was particularly consistent in a good deal of his thinking; he knew how to wear his personae well.

The scientist/poet bifurcation has led to a series of conjunct dualisms to be found throughout the poet's life and work. Together, these dualities constitute parts of a much more complex, yet cohesive and congruent pattern. Livingstone's is a world of boundaries and littoral zones, situated between the either/or territories of land and sea, of science and art, of compassion and disgust, of celebration and mourning, of the sacred and profane. It is a world perched (albeit precariously at times) at indeterminate thresholds, territories requiring the poet to articulate his work and his vision in differing voices, wearing differing masks. It is a world in which the idyll of the prelapsarian world is spoiled and lost through mankind's indifferent and incompetent caretaking of the postlapsarian universe.

Caught at the threshold between the ideal world (as it should be) and the real world (as it is), the writer needs a voice (or voices) to articulate his frustration and anger at his fellow men and the destruction and havoc they wreak in the real world, diminishing and despoiling it, shifting ever further away from the ideal world.

Today, the planet's presently dominant species is in the strange position of possibly effecting unwanted changes in the biosphere from its own waste-products – fouling its own nest, as it were – to its own injury. Fearful of propagating its own destruction, an awareness – occasionally compounded by ignorance and hysteria fed by, at times, an alarmist media – has surfaced in humanity's consciousness of the price invariably attached to modern comforts, the enjoyment of technological facilities and uncontrolled population growth. (Livingstone, 1990:1.)

It is a strange world populated by the "normal", the sane, and the mad – and some who are exceptions to all three categories. There are crucial differences between the "normal", the sane, and the mad. (In what follows, the term *normal* appears in quotation marks since it possesses, in this context, a meaning somewhat different from dictionary definitions.)

The following continuum encapsulates what are generally perceived as the usual assumptions and presumptions about the three terms: *Normality/sanity* in contrast with *madness*. *Normality* is arguably very similar, yet not identical, to *sanity*, while *madness* appears at

the continuum’s other extreme. So, apparently, there is little or nothing “wrong” with those who adhere to or live within the norms, or who strive to be sane. Consequently, going mad would seem to be a state of mind to be avoided.

However, Cooper (1967:16) argues that these presumptions are erroneous; instead, they should assume the following form: *normality* in contrast with *sanity/madness*. He reasons that *normality*, as it is generally known and understood, demands a state of arrested development by virtue of the very nature of behavioural conformity demanded of, and approved by institutions such as families, school and society itself and reinforced by the authority systems embedded in such institutions. The processes of successful socialisation lead relentlessly to the creation of the “normal” citizen, a creature Cooper scornfully refers to as “the well-conditioned, endlessly obedient citizen”, one who is

... so estranged from every aspect of one’s own experience, from every spontaneous impulse to action, from every bit of awareness of one’s body for oneself (rather than one’s body as an object for inspection by others in the world), from all the carefully refused possibilities of awakening change, that one might truly, and with metaphorical sleight of hand, regard this normal person as being *out of his mind* (Cooper, 1971:11).

Which may well lead one to believe, with Hermes, that “anyone who is adjusted to this society is mad and anyone who is not is sane” (Hermes, 1972:29).

In “The sleep of my lions”, Livingstone (1970:17) writes:

save me
from civilisation,
my pastory
from further violation.

It is from the “normal” citizens Cooper describes – such as the one indulging in “sexual intercourse / with Sumerian strumpets / in an inlaid coffin” (Livingstone, 1975b:10) – that Livingstone wishes to be saved for it is in their hands that “civilisation” rests. It is in their hands that the violation of the natural world is perpetrated. If, as Sartre is blamed for saying “L’enfer, c’est les autres” (*Hell is other people*), then most of Livingstone’s scientific work constitutes investigations into aspects of that chthonic universe. There are numerous research papers and reports (cf. Ulliyatt, 1979:37-38), detailing the depredations human beings perpetrate daily on Mother Earth:

In 1964, the city of Durban was discharging $90 \times 10^3 \text{ m}^3/\text{day}$ wastewater from the harbour mouth with the outgoing tides, while the discharge from a sewer on the Bluff into the surf-zone amounted to $20 \times 10^3 \text{ m}^3/\text{day}$. In addition, there existed more than 90 beached pipes and stormwater drains (not all of them legal), about one-third of which carried contaminative material on to the beaches and into the surf. (Livingstone, 1990:i.)

Blithely unaware that thousands of cubic metres of effluent – such a nicely dehumanised scientific euphemism for urine, faeces, and other bodily excretions – were being pumped into the sea, thousands of holidaymakers rush to their favourite beaches and plunge into the sea, going, albeit unwittingly, through the motions, many of them their own. One is reminded of the American satirical comedian, Tom Lehrer's lyrics about San Francisco: "The breakfast garbage you throw into the Bay / They drink at lunch in San José."

Despite the fact that "this is a provenly tough and resilient planet, the only one in the known universe upon which diverse and abundant life exists", it is also victim of pollution which, in turn, "is associated with the more sinister concept of unnatural defilement or contamination; and, here, humanity is invariably the perpetrator" (Livingstone, 1990:1). Livingstone's is a world persistent in its determination to evoke the planet's beauty and its concomitant squalor through the ambiguity and paradoxicality of the truths he uncovers. It is a world that may well require more than "two sphincters" – something more like the sewerage pipes and storm water drains debouching "contaminative material" into the sea – or, perhaps more dramatically, two masks, two voices (or more) to articulate his views of that world. The two sphincters metamorphose into the gaping mouths of the masks the writer wears as he evacuates his truths, whether scientific or poetic in subject and diction. Though the consequences of wearing these alternative guises may be construed as different, even to the point of being unrelated – striving for denotative precision in a scientific article, on the one hand, or for connotative layers of meaning in the imagery of a poem, on the other – both epitomise the master practitioner of language at work. It is this third persona that remains, unobtrusive but constant, behind the scientist and poet masks.

2. *A rosary of bone*: an introduction and the love poems

The appearance of a new book of poems is always an apprehensive moment for poet and audience alike. For the audience, there is a paradoxical desire for sameness and newness. If some part of that volume constitutes a breaking into new territory for both poet and

audience, the moment becomes even more fraught. This was true when *A rosary of bone* first appeared.

*A rosary of bone*¹ first appeared in 1975 as part of the Mantis Editions of *Southern African Poets*, published by David Philip. A second, enlarged edition² appeared under the same publisher's imprint in 1983. In *AROB1*, there are essentially two groups of poems, although the contents of the volume are not arranged in this way. The first contains the love poems while the second comprises a series of poems all purportedly the meditations of Giovanni Jacopo. In every case, the subject of the meditation is always given in italics and within brackets thus: Giovanni Jacopo meditates (*on Aspects of art & love*).

Its publication provided a number of readers with what they perceived as an inherent bifurcation into Douglas Livingstone's poetry: love poems and "the other stuff", for they were uncertain how to define the Giovanni Jacopo poems. It is a "boundary" volume harking back (albeit briefly) and forward. It harks back through the inclusion of two poems from earlier collections: "As I walk with efronterry, alone" from *Sjambok and other poems from Africa* (Livingstone, 1964) and "Steel giraffes" from *Eyes closed against the sun* (Livingstone, 1970). One might speculate that, if readers were not particularly enamoured with the new things *AROB1* contained, they could always fall back into the familiarity of these two texts.

According to the inside of the dust jacket, *AROB* has love as its central theme; it is a subject which, Livingstone said, "makes fools of us all" (Ulliyatt, 1976:49). That same blurb also refers to some "more ribald poems", a reference, presumably, to the so-called Giovanni Jacopo poems Livingstone was incorporating into a collection for the first time. If this second group of poems is indeed "the more ribald ones", the shortcomings of such a label should become apparent later. Thematically, then, *AROB* is announced as a bipartite text, centring on the themes of love and ribaldry.

AROB1 contains 31 poems, of which seven (that is to say, a little less than a quarter) belong to the Giovanni Jacopo series. The second edition contains 46 poems of which fourteen (almost a third) belong to the Giovanni Jacopo series. Never one to publish work

1 Hereafter *AROB1*.

2 Hereafter *AROB2*.

with which he was dissatisfied, Livingstone reveals his increasing interest in the Giovanni Jacopo³ texts. Some differences in the ordering of poems occur in *AROB2*. (A list of contents for both editions is given at the end of the article.) *AROB2* also contains a small number – four to be precise – of translations, a feature that requires the wearing of a mask other than the poet's or scientist's: that of the translator.

Throughout the volumes, Livingstone draws on the extensive potential inherent in the languages of both science and art. He draws on both languages, because each provides a source of metaphor and simile not only for the other, but for the real world too. Thus, in "Steel giraffes", the cargo cranes of Durban Harbour are depicted as "rivetted steel giraffes" that, earlier in the poem, have been compared with "arms as petal-slight as hers" and "wrists as slim". In "The two of you" (*AROB1*:15; *AROB2*:19), the poet constructs a brilliantly evocative metaphor thus:

... the delicate tendons
of her wrist constitute
a dangerously unflawed poem.

The success of metaphoric language lies in the distance and disparity between the origins of its components and the perceived difficulty or unlikelihood of bringing such diverse components together meaningfully.

In "Loving" (*AROB1*:18; *AROB2*:32), love and the prelapsarian world are brought into a telling juxtaposition in the opening stanza:

Loving you I love
drowsy substrata of
an unsullied earth,
the elements and compounds
that shaped your birth.

That a human being, the object of love and desire, passion and loss, is essentially a vast complex of compounds and electrical charges, brings a necessary touch of ironic realism to the inexplicable metaphysics of emotion. It recurs in the brief text entitled "The web" (*AROB1*:20; *AROB2*:34):

3 Hereafter referred to as GJ.

He weaves, shaky as a wavelength
through the invisible stresses
holding apart or tugging in
components of her universe.

Despite the scrupulous objectivity associated with the scientific enterprise's pursuit of truth or reality, the poet acknowledges that "You cannot capture precisely the nature of love" (*AROB1:19; AROB2:34*), not merely because "it is an oblique advance / upon a hill by a skirmishing soldier", but because love is beyond the capacities and capabilities of scientific exploration and investigation as much as it is beyond the language of military assaults. Indeed, love may even be beyond the scope of language itself.

Yet the struggle continues: "everything ahead / is earned with painful slowness" (*AROB1:21; AROB2:36*). The poet acknowledges too that "There is not much can be said / except 'Sorry ...' or 'Welcome ...'" (*AROB1:21; AROB2:36*).

There remains a Hopkins-like sense of inscape, a unique sense of *is-ness*, a non-religious sense of spirituality and mystery that inheres in all things, such as we find in the startling final image of "Wheels" (*AROB1:16; AROB2:26*): "Even your bright white skull is / a rosary of bone."

Of course, such an image possesses an aura of *fin de siècle* decadence rather than of twentieth-century cynicism. Such is the nature of Livingstone the man as much as of his work. Indeed, Cahill (1984:233) writes of "the range and intricacy of his concerns, and of the control required to hold the different aspects of his personality in balance", a view suggesting a sort of psychological instress. The poet himself acknowledges his fondness for the work of C.P. Cavafy, a poet in whom Livingstone finds "a nice touch of erudition and sarcastic gentleness" (Ulliyatt, 1976:47), attributes of his work manifest in Livingstone's own.

Archetypically Romantic is the belief that love offers redemption, if only of a sort and if only temporarily. In "Crossing the barrier" (*AROB1:17; AROB2:35*), "a tentative absolution" is achieved through the touching of fingertips. Hand in hand, the lovers exchange "more than warmth through thin / elastic membranes on each palm"; they touch "a circumstance / of sensing not less than healing" and, in doing so, are "transcending the dissolution / of frontiers policed by skin." The chemical compounds and the electrical charges that constitute the scientist's understanding of the human

body cannot explain the transcendence of human touch the poet explores here.

Redemption, however, is usually temporary. Most of the time, we are compelled to live with, or do our best to survive the pathologies and neuroses we have developed as a result of being human beings in a world that we have allowed to evolve into a place almost unfit for human habitation. Fraught with meaninglessness and anonymity, our lives have lost touch with its old wisdoms, for example the “old awareness of the / agonies of ants” (*AROB1:22; AROB2:28*). Instead, our lives become re-enactments of the myth of Icarus with its delirious rise, its ecstatic moment of omnipotence and freedom, and the inevitable catastrophic fall. We continue to live out the unbearable tragedy of our mythic past to the point where “Humans with / agonies render [us] unsound” (*AROB1:22; AROB2:28*). Part of the irony in these words lies in the reality of the writer’s scientific work of being witness to the profound damage humankind persists in inflicting on Mother Nature, while having to acknowledge, simultaneously, the realities of human existence and all the shit, literal and/or metaphorical, it produces.

Getting older, and perhaps getting wiser too, means comprehending, if not understanding, or accepting that love may not turn out to be the continuing presence one might wish it to be (*AROB1:23; AROB2:37*):

There are times almost free from
certainties of disaster;
from awareness of mangling

by men and machines of men;
from knowledge of domestic
cruelties and suppressions.

There are times I benignly
walk the afternoon sunlight
balancing constellations

in the peaceable kingdom
of my spiritual and
temporal lack of success.

There are times, sometimes, these days
when for one minute or two
I am not even in love.

The world depicted in this poem is, if only by implication, one in which men and their machines are destructive in one way, while domesticity is cruel and destructive in another. Lacking "success", paradoxically, engenders a "peaceable kingdom", one devoid of spiritual accomplishment. The paradox extends further: to know such peace walking "the afternoon sunlight" and thus to be free, may also require one to be out of love, at least in the traditional sense and at least for a minute or two. Love may distort one's perspectives.

Behind the idea of success, that much-sought-after yet highly destructive justification for human existence, lies the unstated idea of fulfilment. Success is manifestation of normality while fulfilment manifests sanity. The rewards of success take the form of public, organisational, and materialistic tokens of recognition and status, while the rewards of fulfilment remain private, individual and intangible. Within this context, Livingstone's poem rejects the normality of success in preference to the sanity of fulfilment.

There are risks, of course, in opting for sanity instead of normality, the most feared and fearsome of which are madness and its institutional consequences (*AROB1:7*; *AROB2:7*):

I know that I am lost and should be kept
Incarcerated somewhere, peacefully
Quiet and padded to recover from
This succubus that now inhabits me,
Or whom I inhabit. And pray the gods
Spare me that exorcism, electro-
Convulsive or other fell therapy.

Electro-convulsive therapy, pre-frontal lobotomies and other damaging "therapies" were the treatments meted out to the people the "normal" world had turned crazy and made incapable of coping with its insanity; people who had literally gone out of their minds – to recall Cooper's earlier phrase – in order to return them to the same "normal" world that had driven them crazy in the first place. Although the exorcism is necessary, even inevitable, it should not require the dire measures of shock treatment or brain surgery. So, it is scarcely surprising to find the poet finding consolatory peace in his absence of "normal" success.

As a poet, Livingstone wishes to write about love "with integrity and originality", two qualities that self-evidently raise different issues. To write with integrity requires the poet to confront what has come to be known as the "reveal-or-conceal dilemma". To write about one's own life – as all poets do – and, more particularly, of its most private

aspects of love, compels a poet to decide whether he/she will simply commit his/her perceptions of the truth to paper, with as much honesty, no matter how destructive or revelatory it may be (and the two are not mutually exclusive), or, alternatively, to omit certain facets of the truth – events, people, names, whatever; concealment for the sake of privacy and concern for those one has loved at some time in one's life. There are no rules for resolving the dilemma. In any case, readers may well misconstrue the persona of the "I" as the autobiographical "me".

To write about love "with originality" is a more daunting task, one fraught with pitfalls, not the least of which is the anxiety of influence, as Bloom termed it. Livingstone himself observes that

... there may be influences, but one, I think, tries to eschew influences. If someone comes along and says 'Oh, there's a line reminding me of Tennyson', one gets into a bit of a flap and one examines the whole poem, whether there's some sort of Tennysonian influence or Rod McKuen influence and ruthlessly excises it. Of course, poems one has loved ... may work at a subterranean or unconscious level. (Ulliyatt, 1976:45-46.)

If it is the persona of the master wordsmith that lies behind the masks of the poet and the scientist, then we may propose that this third mask is also the one the translator is wearing. Somewhat frivolously, Paul Jennings (Cohen & Cohen, 1980:173) has proposed two other possibilities when he remarks that it is difficult to decide whether translators are heroes or fools. They may even be a paradoxical combination of both.

3. The translations

Whether hero or fool, a translator confronts the foreign-language poem with the question: Why do I want to translate this piece? According to Lawrence Venuti (2000:468), "the very choice of a text for translation [is] always a very selective, densely motivated choice". The question is relevant, too, not least, because "normally the translation of serious literature ... is the most testing type of translation" (Newmark, 1995:162). Generally speaking, poets who translate poems do so, because they write poems. Translation, thus, becomes part of what Livingstone calls "a trade, ... a calling, a craft" (Ulliyatt, 1976:46). Sullivan (1960:20) is correct when he argues that "translations ... are genuine creations; at very least, they are re-creations." In discussing his translations of Neruda, Felstiner (1980:32) has written that "translating a poem often feels essentially like the

primary act of writing, of carrying some preverbal sensation or emotion or thought over into words". At the same time, the translation process also constitutes what Heaney (1975:3) has called, in an entirely different context, "the slightly predatory curiosity of a poet interested in the creative processes of another poet".

Obviously, translating is different from writing either scientific prose or poetry. In the former case, according to Livingstone, "one assembles the facts, turns them into some semblance of readability, and bashes it all down, and that's that. Poetry, of course, is running guerrilla warfare with language the whole time to say what you are trying to say, which is the hard secret" (Ulliyatt, 1976:45). Translation carries on that guerrilla warfare by proxy, because the translator is trying to say what he/she thinks/believes/understands the original writer was saying, or trying to say. In some sense is that the harder secret. If we are to believe any of the definitions of, and opinions about, the outcomes of translation, translators know that they are heading for incompetence, failure, or both, even before they start (Ulliyatt, 2001:3-4). Nonetheless, they persist, foolishly or heroically.

In producing a translated poem from an original poem, the translator assumes a variety of roles, including reader, interpreter, critic, writer-poet and creator or re-creator, to use Sullivan's term. Collectively, these personae are subsumed under the mask of the master language practitioner.

In their introduction to their volume of translations of Hebrew poems into English, Yosef and Skinner (1989:7-8) observe: "Relatively little translating of poetry into English from non-African languages has been done by South Africans." They cite the work of Roy Campbell, Patrick Cullinan, Douglas Livingstone and Guy Butler, and conclude that "a case can be made for the need of such activity" (Ulliyatt, 2001:14). With the exception of Campbell, the translation output of these poets has been relatively modest, as has been Livingstone's.

Livingstone (in collaboration with Phillippa Berlyn) published his first translations – eight poems from Shona – in 1968. In *AROB2* are four European-language pieces by three poets: two by Goethe and one each by Góngora and Hérédia.

Translating a text from a previous era almost always raises the question of an apposite register for the target-language outcome: should the translator attempt to create an English version redolent with approximations of the original version's language or should one attempt a version in modern or contemporary English, as Pound has

done with his *Women of Trachis* (1954)? In striving for a contemporary version, how colloquial can, or should, the register be? This issue assumes significance when one comes to translate poets of Goethe's or Hérédia's stature.

Another matter impinging on the translation process, is whether to adhere to the source-language poem's generic characteristics and how, or, alternatively, whether to produce a prose version. Newmark (1995:165) proposes that "[a] successfully translated poem is always another poem". Of course, the adjective here creates a nice ambiguity. Is a poem translated into another language still a poem, albeit in another tongue, or does a poem translated into another language betray the original by using another language to produce an inevitably different text? It is a question that can be answered only by individual translations, and never by rules and theories.

To estimate the success (or otherwise) of Livingstone's translations, it is useful to compare them with others. Success in translating is always comparative and relative rather than absolute. Here, then, is an extract from Goethe's *Faust*, Part 1, lines 1224-1237, translated by Philip Wayne (1956:71):

'Tis writ', 'In the beginning was the Word.'
 I pause, to wonder what is here inferred.
 The Word I cannot set supremely high:
 A new translation will I try.
 I read, if by the spirit I am taught,
 This sense: 'In the beginning was the Thought.'
 This opening I need to weight again,
 Or sense may suffer from a hasty pen.
 Does thought create, and work, and rule the hour?
 'Twere best': 'In the beginning was the Power.'
 Yet, while the pen is urged with willing fingers,
 A sense of doubt and hesitancy lingers.
 The spirit comes to guide me in my need,
 I write, 'In the beginning was the Deed.'

Wayne's version, which was published in 1956, clearly attempts to create a period piece by locating his text historically in a bygone era through the use of archaisms such as "Tis" and "Twere" as well as syntactical inversion such as "A new translation will I try", for example. The word order of the clause, "what is here inferred", with "here" as the penultimate, rather than final, word serves a similar function, while facilitating the rhyme with the previous line's concluding "Word". Wayne employs this strategy of the syntactical reordering of a line several times in the course of only fourteen lines to sustain the

attempt at a translation evocative of its source-language text’s historical era.

This is Livingstone’s version (*AROB2:20*):

It’s writ: ‘In the beginning was the Word!’
I’m stuck there. Who can help? Whosoever heard
Of such high value on one word, today?
I must translate it some other way.
If the Spirit enlightens me I’ll find
The text. Say, ‘In the beginning was Mind.’
Consider that line deliberately,
Don’t move your pen so precipitately!
Does Mind galvanise all, set it on course?
Let’s try: ‘In the beginning was the Force!’
Yet at the moment of writing it down
Something warns me that is not the right noun.
The Spirit moves me! The answer I need
Stuns me: ‘In the beginning was the Deed –’

With the exception of the archaic “writ” in the opening line, Livingstone’s diction indicates that he is not adopting the “period piece” approach with his translation. Although both translators make use of rhyming couplets of decasyllabic lines, Wayne makes no use of enjambment, preferring every line to be end-stopped. While this places strong emphasis on the end-rhymes and may provide a structural rigidity, it can also produce the stiltedness that is the unavoidable outcome of every line containing a single syntactic unit. Livingstone’s version is no less structured but manifests more fluidity not only by virtue of the four enjambments he uses in the course of fourteen lines, but also because he avoids the constraints of the *closed* couplet Wayne uses. Enjambment also lends itself to sentence structures closer to speech, and thus generally devoid of the convoluted word ordering required to produce rhyming end-stopped lines.

In their Spanish and French originals, the texts by Gongora and Hérédia are sonnets. Here is Hérédia’s poem entitled *Antoine et Cléopâtre* (Hartley, 1963:184):

Tout deux ils regardaient, de la haute terrasse,
L’Égypte s’endormir sous un ciel étouffant
Et le Fleuve, â travers le Delta noir qu’il fend,
Vers Bubaste ou Saïs rouler son onde grasse.

Et le Roman sentait sous la lourde cuirasse,
Soldat captif berçant le sommeil d’un enfant,

Ployer et défaillir sur son coeur triomphant
Le corps voluptueux que son étreinte embrasse.

Tournant sa tête pâle entre ses cheveux bruns
Vers celui qu'enivraient d'invicibles parfums,
Elle tendit sa bouche et ses prunelles claires;

Et sur elle courbé, l'ardent Imperator
Vit dans ses larges yeux étoilés de points d'or
Toute une mer immense où fuyaient des galères.

The plain prose translation, which Hartley couches in an approximation of stanzaic format, is as bulky as Antony's armour, while bearing no relationship to the customary divisions of the Italian sonnet:

From the high terrace they both watched Egypt sleeping beneath a stifling sky and the river rolling its oily waves towards Bubastis or Saia through the black delta that it divides.

And beneath his heavy armour, the Roman, a captive soldier cradling a child's slumber, felt the voluptuous body grasped in his embrace yielding and fainting on his triumphant heart. Turning her head, pale amid her dark hair, towards him who was maddened by irresistible perfumes, she offered her mouth and her clear eyes;

And bent over her the passionate Imperator saw in her wide eyes starred with golden specks a whole vast sea where galleys were in flight.

Livingstone calls his sonnet, *A presentiment of the Nile* (AROB2:30):

The pair on the terrace looked down on the scene:
All Egypt slept below the hot sky, stupefied;
The river rolled along its delta's black divide,
Past towns and hamlets, waters oily and unclean.

The Roman felt his heavy armour intervene
Between his triumphant heart and her yielding side.
She stirred in drowsy welcome – not to be denied
The voluptuous body of this childlike queen.

Her white face gleamed, framed by dark hair. The heady mist
Of her perfume inflamed him. Turning to be kissed,
She offered him her mouth; her pupils seemed alight.

The passionate Imperator, the strategist
Bent, seeing in those eyes gold flecks – with one new twist:
The vista of a sea where galleys broke in flight.

The alert reader will have noticed that Livingstone has omitted the references to Bubastis and Saïs – both ancient Egyptian settlements situated on the Nile Delta – preferring to replace such obscure references (which might well be lost on modern readers) by using “towns and hamlets” instead. This is not an uncommon practice among modern translators, who have been inclined to substitute contemporary references in such instances.

Part of our understanding of Livingstone’s accomplishment as a translator resides in Peter Newmark’s (1995:165) observations regarding the processes involved:

... in most examples of poetry translation, the translator decides to choose a TL [target language] poetic form (viz. sonnet, ballad, quatrain, blank verse, etc.) as close as possible to that of the SL [source language]. Although the rhyming scheme is part of the form, its precise order may have to be dropped.

In translating Hérédia’s sonnet, Livingstone has “dropped” the original *ccd eed* rhyme-scheme in the sestet to make use of the even tighter scheme of *ccd ccd*, and, in so doing, makes use of fewer rhymes. He also replicates and sustains the imagery of the original. But such tight adherence to the form of the poem and the organisational structure of the imagery is rare in translations generally. Waywardness in translation is an easier route, requiring less-than-meticulous craftsmanship.

The translator of poetry wears a number of masks, including the actor’s with another’s words issuing from his mouth; the poet’s as he strives to recreate the other’s words in another language with a different vocabulary and syntax; and the mask of the (clinical) reader-interpreter as he dissects the source-language text to comprehend its innermost workings. The outcome of the master language practitioner’s adeptness at executing these roles is a laudable translation.

4. The meditations of Giovanni Jacopo

The third group of poems in *AROB1* and *AROB2* is made up of the “meditations” of Giovanni Jacopo. At the time of the poet’s death, more than 40 such poems had appeared in print, a number suggesting the increasingly important role these poems were assuming in the corpus of the poet’s work since the first Giovanni Jacopo poem came out in 1970.

From the outset, it is evident that the poems are very different from Livingstone's earlier work in form, style and content. Even the titles seem quaint. Each begins with the same three words, namely "Giovanni Jacopo Meditates", while the subject of the meditation is given afterwards in italics and brackets: (*on Suburbia, O suburbia*).

The persona of Giovanni Jacopo himself is worth brief consideration, because he is none other than Casanova himself, torn from his historical and geographic moorings and drawn into the poet's service as the ostensible perpetrator of these meditations.

Jacopo's name has passed into our language as a synonym for 'great lover'; and so he was. But he was also a devout Catholic and a superstitious astrologer; a low-life scoundrel and a fearful snob; a sceptical Freemason and a servant of the Establishment; an ingenious adventurer and an excellent writer. In a life that alternated between extravagant ostentation and abject penury, he met and conversed with Voltaire, Rousseau, Franklin, Catherine the Great, George III, Frederick the Great, and two popes. Jacopo was generous, mean, vindictive, proud, fawning, honest, lying, brilliant, stupid, unstable, and for part of his life his profession can most simply – though not quite accurately – be described as Confidence Trickster Extraordinary. In all this he was the embodiment of Europe at its splendid, decadent peak, and of his age, the Age of Reason and of maniacally spendthrift gambling; the age of satin in the parlour, and excrement in the passage; the age when every day science grew stronger and stronger and faith weaker; the age when the aristocracy was nearing the limit of its power and the peasantry the limit of its patience. (Masters, 2001:10.)

After executing these lifelong balancing acts, Jacopo died a Christian – or so he averred on his deathbed, a not-uncommon place and time for such declarations.

The wonderful paradoxical complexity and inconsistency of the man allowed Livingstone to build a similarly diverse if perplexing persona. The GJ poems serve as the alternative persona. They allow the poet stances that are radically different from his earlier work – whether scientific or poetic – while allowing a wide range of technical approaches to his materials, but also equally diverse subject matters.

Although this is self-evidently not the place to present a detailed disquisition on the problematics engendered by the complex relationship between "personae" and the poet's voice, it is necessary to make one or two remarks that may clarify what follows. The entire

issue of personae remains paradoxical. Taken as it is from the world of drama, the term *persona* proposes a speaking voice, even when none is to be heard. Further, the speaking voice of the persona finds its primary embodiment as a construct of written language rather than oral discourse. The boundaries between writing and speaking are blurred when we speak of a *persona*, for the voice is, paradoxically, silent, yet we assume that words on the page possess a sound similar, if not identical, to their spoken equivalents.

One of the consequences of the persona as a creative strategy is that we make assumptions about the poet on the basis of the persona's utterances because words are always assumed to represent someone talking. The fabricated "I" the poet creates is metamorphosed, through the reader's reading, into the "I" which is all too frequently confused with the writer himself. This metamorphosis is grounded in the individual reader's experience of actual human beings in the real world. Through the poet's persona, the reader generates an image of the writer based on selective insights proffered as poems by the writer himself.

Indeed, Cahill (1984:236) has argued that, at least in the earlier GJ poems, "the voice ... seems to be close to the voice of Livingstone himself". This statement confuses the writer and the persona of the poet. I would suggest that Livingstone's Casanova persona is broadly similar to Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms. The many characters whose biographies Pessoa created, and whose poems revealed their own characteristic style are each different from the others. Livingstone did not have to create Casanova's biography, although he needed a voice through which he could express himself with greater flexibility both substantively and technically and, at the same time, break away from the voice to which his readers had become accustomed.

Livingstone himself possessed a strong satirical streak, an ear well-attuned to mimicry and the imitation of foreign accents, and a capacity for homing in relentlessly on unfounded pretensions and unjustifiably partisan attitudes. Yet, in all of this, he manages to avoid the many pitfalls awaiting the politico-polemico-poetico writer. He has been able to write satirical and critical verse without succumbing to entanglement in the South African political situation. Much of what Livingstone attacks can be found universally; his critiques are of humankind's follies and foibles. As Morphet (1975:iii) has remarked about *AROB1*:

In a culture preoccupied with crisis it is a singular challenge when a poet of Livingstone's calibre publishes a volume of love poetry which steadily refuses direct reference to general crisis. It is a measure of the intensity and force of the poem that they sustain the challenge by directing us through their formal and linguistic integrity, to a range of feeling that embodies textures of both individual and public experience.

South Africa in 1975, it will be recalled, was on the brink of the turmoil generated by the student uprisings. In these comments, Morphet draws attention to both the individual and the public experience, another bifurcation with a useful diversity of implications. At the individual level, the poet may be seen to be investigating his private world, an internal universe of personal experience. At the public level the poet may be seen as a spokesman of a particular school of thought, of an ideology, as an opponent of prevailing trends and circumstances or ideologies, as a reporter of the follies and obscenities which confound and disgust him in the public world – the external world of his fellow human beings. The poet's life and work is lived out in the no-man's-land at the boundary between his internal and external worlds.

Perennially, the poet is torn, as we have noted, between revealing or concealing his life in his work. It is the conflict between authenticity and the duplicity towards readers which privacy requires. Much of the time, as readers, we masquerade as polite voyeurs, peering into the private world of the poems with a mixture of fascination, surprise, and disappointment. We come to associate the poet with revelations of his private concerns, his anguish, and the rawness of his experiences and what they inflict upon him. We watch him in his on-going struggle with language. We become familiar with what the poet presents to us, although there is no predictability inherent in this familiarity. Nor is there completeness in what we see. What the poet presents to his readers, constitutes only those experiences that prove amenable to the mediation of language without compromising the poet's need to keep certain aspects of his life private.

We often presume, albeit erroneously, to "know" the poet through the personae in the poems. While poems may be based on, or deeply rooted in, personal experience, they are not necessarily accurate in a biographical sense, although they may be accurate (that is to say, authentic) in a psychological sense. Perhaps Livingstone's most familiar persona is constituted in the "I" of his poems. It is the persona with which he established his early reputation.

It is our familiarity with a poet's work that causes us to be caught off-guard when he adopts another, unfamiliar voice in order to reveal another persona. If the poet shifts his stance, albeit provisionally or temporarily, from the private to the public world, we may be taken aback, appalled even, by this new position and what it encompasses. We are compelled to confront in ourselves the shock of newness, a shock that may be compounded by the poet's choosing to create a new persona, a new voice foreign to us.

It was Dr Johnson who defined a satire as "a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured". In the course of human history, there has been a more than sufficient supply of both commodities. This has been no less true of South Africa's recent history, peopled as it was with eminently ridiculable, mockable, satirisable politicians possessed of a pathologically abject Calvinist seriousness. (One can but speculate on what Livingstone would have made of present political shenanigans.) However, politicians are not the only unbelievable inhabitants of the country. There is a vast and motley range of poseurs, autocratic liberals insisting that their ideologies are the only ideal worth pursuing; the salvationists whose crusades to redeem the land is matched only by an idealism that persists in remaining untouched by reality; the progenitors of politically-correct works masquerading as the "new literature"; the postmodernist theorist and critics ensnared in the web of their own cleverness and many others. There has, indeed, been much to ridicule in every sort of writing. Yet politico-satirical poetry is as notoriously difficult to write successfully as love poetry. Besides, Livingstone has always been unwilling to write political poetry. At the University of Cape Town's Summer School in 1974, he said in his characteristic manner:

First, in accordance with current fashion, I must make my political statement: the mighty Brecht, no less, knew something all the little post-Brechtians seem to have forgotten or mislaid: modern literature has not changed the heart of even one politician – to my knowledge. Polit-Lit does have one important function, of course: to show the few readers interested that *One's Heart Is In The Right Place*. Like everyone else I have attempted political poems. Unlike everyone else's, mine were complete disasters – bad poetry – and are all happily banned or suppressed, by me. (Livingstone, 1976:142.)

These comments are characteristic of Livingstone's spiky yet indirect criticism. In his sardonic ambiguous manner, he calls his own attempts "complete disasters", but the telling phrase is "unlike everyone else's" for the poet had little time for Polit-Lit in the first place.

In a documentary on his life and work broadcast by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Livingstone, (1979) pursued this issue:

Look, I find most politics and all racism just disgusting but I'm not a politician and I suppose politics being the art of survival – they must all get on with it. I've never read in my life a good political poem. I think they have too much adrenaline in them. I don't think they change the world at all.

Political issues as subjects for poetry usually result in bad poetry. That Livingstone chose to ban or suppress his attempts at political poetry suggests that any intelligent poet would do the same. Consequently, political poems do not appear in *AROB*, even though Giovanni Jacopo might well have been the ideal persona through whom to offer insights into South African politics. To have done so, would, however, have been to acknowledge that what was going on at the time in the South African political environment, was worth investing creative energy in the first place. Livingstone was temperamentally unlikely to do that.

The GJ persona articulates what are, in essence, dramatic monologues, pieces which vary from tightly-structured quatrains found in (*on The egalitarian society*) and (*on Unisex*), through the elegantly sustained couplets of (*on Drifting*) and the intricacies of the tercets of (*on An early European navigator*) to the broad free-flowing rhapsodic structure of (*on David Herbert Lawrence as feminist*) and (*on The old widescreen testament*). The longest and most intricate of the GJ poems is (*on An alabaster Adamastor*), a text of 200 lines, produced as a response to a request from the editors of *Momentum* (1984) for a statement of his position as a poet in South Africa at that time (i.e. circa 1983/1984).

In the same *Momentum* volume, Cahill (1984:236) argues that “From the poems published so far, it would seem that Giovanni Jacopo speaks for the romantic, poetic, heroic side of the poet's personality.” This position would seem to overlook several of the more acerbically cynical “meditations” such as (*on The egalitarian society*) (*AROB1:3*; *AROB2:3*):

All Men are Brothers
– So runs the Fable,
– & the First of these
– were Cain and Abel

To say nothing of (*on That lovely woman*) (*AROB2:27*):

When Lovely Woman stoops to Folly
No Guilty Pacings halt her Skill:
A Double-Scotch soothes Melancholy
& helps in swigging down that Pill.

Or (*on Her shrink*) (AROB2:17):

Analysis!
Analyses?
– He'd rather kiss
Your nyloned Knees

It is scarcely plausible to suggest that any of these poems are "romantic, poetic – [whatever *that* is presumed to mean] –, or heroic". On the contrary, they depict bitter, non-chivalrous, angry, and rather sordid facets of the modern world in a voice that countermands the gentle compassionate voices of the other poems in both *AROB* volumes and his *oeuvre* generally.

One of the values of the GJ persona and voice lies in its scope for allowing the assumption of less restrained, more critical positions in the criticism of contemporary mores and socio-political issues. This is a "meditation" (*on The beatitudes of fidelity*) (AROB2:15):

'Ashes to Ashes,
& Dust to Dust:
If the AIDS don't get you,
The Herpes must.'

This latest addendum
To V D Lore
Ends: 'Eros backwards
Equals Sore.'

This brittle humour, characteristic at times of Livingstone himself, serves to bring wit to a deadly serious subject, one that would be called, in today's politically-correct terminology, sexually transmitted diseases or STDs, although the poet prefers to use the old-fashioned, brutal brevity of VD. The title points to at least one shortcoming in the biblical beatitudes: "Blessed are the faithful for they shall not suffer infection." (One of Livingstone's earliest scientific articles bears the subtitle "The fats of life", a bright pun to disguise the seriousness of his subject-matter: he explains how excessive ingestion of fats kills human beings.)

Although Livingstone has been praised for his brilliant texts on Africa and its landscape, and has not shunned his role as a relentless

observer of the cruelties and natural cycles of life in the wild, the GJ poems add more sardonic, urban and urbane subjects to the poet's corpus. Yet the underlying purpose remains the same in all his work: to illustrate man's crassness, duplicity, stupidity, unjustified and unjustifiable arrogance as he blunders forth and plunders the earth in the name of progress, challenging the enormous power of nature to recuperate if it dares. The poet remains caught, "torn between the Poker and my pen", while "Your Country's a hapless Microcosm / of the Horrors of Existence: Cruelty / & Concrete" (*on An alabaster Adamastor*) (Livingstone, 1984).

The voice of the GJ texts allows the poet to indulge in his wit and passion for word play and word games without losing congruence with the persona. Consider, for example, this third stanza from (*on The old widescreen testament*) (*AROB2:31*):

Eyeless in The Plaza, with less Angina than
 Angst – Hoar, still Biceped – he stoops to tug in ancient
 Balsa-Wood Pillars. Great Gogs & Magogs totter
 & tumble; & we stumble like slow Seconds out,
 Blinking thoughtfully on these lately restored Hair
 Erasing Antics of the still svelte Delilah's.

The intricacy of the poet's puns and intertextual games offers a source of delight and intelligent pleasure in their unravelling as well as a certain admiration for their cleverness. At the same time, the GJ persona allows for what appears to be a more spontaneous, less "crafted" voice one achieved, paradoxically, through the poet's inimitable command of that craft. The master craftsman's persona continues to be occupied with the words.

Most appropriately, the GJ persona demonstrates that, although the pen may be mightier than the sword, the penis is probably mightier than the pen. Of the two apparently diverse subjects of the meditation (*on Aspects of art & love*) (*AROB1:3; AROB2:3*), the first comprises the major part of the poem:

The Poet's or Playwright's Function
 Is to embark physically

 Upon the Consciousness of his Generation;
 Not merely as the Conscience

 Of his Time; nor solely to reflect
 Disintegration, if Disintegration

Is the Shaker of his Time's stormy Seas.
But to anchor a Present,

Nail to its Mast
One Vision, one Integrity

In a Manner so memorable
It fills Part of a Past.

A Poet's or Playwright Enthusiasms,
These. The proper Pursuit

For a Gentleman remains to master
The Art of delaying his Orgasms.

The success of the poem resides, self-evidently, in what one understands the word *art* to encompass. Technique is as crucial to poetry as it is to the mastery of a gentleman's orgasm. The same would be true of rhythm.

Thematically, the other GJ poems in the *AROB* volumes (particularly *AROB2*) deal with a bewildering diversity of subjects including Judgement day (*on His weighting in the last great scorer's book*) (*AROB1:8; AROB2:10*), the loss of love (*on Drifting*) (*AROB1:12; AROB2:9*), the confusion caused by unisex dressing (*on Unisex*) (*AROB2:11*), on becoming corpulent in middle age (*on The transcendental sausage*) *AROB2:15*; and (*on Embraces of the succubus*) (*AROB2:25*). However, before concluding, it is worth drawing attention to what is perhaps one of the most extraordinary poems in the GJ series: the meditation (*on An early European navigator*) (*AROB1:18-19; AROB2:32-33*). Using the conceit of Sir Tongue as an early navigator exploring the new-found world of a woman's body, the poem is surely one of the very few texts decently involving cunnilingus as a subject. A million indecent texts exist, of course.

Behind the voice of Giovanni Jacopo lies a complex persona: crass, erotic, despairing, amused and frustrated, profoundly concerned in an off-handish way, and always in touch with the foibles and follies of humankind, regardless of gender, race, colour, creed and all the other terms of political correctness. There is a deep passion for the full life, despite the pain of its losses, and a profound distaste for the "weakness of society, its greed, lust, and perpetual need for new sensation" (Masters, 2001:290); and one could well add here a disbelief in, and utter sadness about, humankind's capacity for destruction, both of itself and the world in which it lives.

That the GJ poems appeared in a volume devoted ostensibly to love poetry, puzzled some readers, but the satirical stance manifest, overtly or covertly, in these poems can be explained as the obverse of love, the harshly realistic antidote to the emotional idealism of traditional love poetry. Indeed, even Livingstone's love poems are touched with the same irony, paradox, and pervasive sense of the inevitable, for reasons which the poet himself explains:

Even the best artist is no more than an entertainer, pursuing his own marvellous visions, instructing, delighting, reshaping maybe. But his spin-off for the rest of us ... is only entertainment. (Livingstone, 1975a:18.)

The writer as entertainer wears several masks, adopts a variety of personae, and uses a number of vocabularies to present "his own marvelous visions".

5. Conclusion

In both its first and second editions, *A rosary of bone* is a slim volume, yet it is a pivotal work, for it shows Livingstone assuming innovative and inventive personae, exploring the new roles and masks offered by translation, the love poem and the Giovanni Jacopo meditation. Shortly after Livingstone's death, an even slimmer volume appeared: this time of haiku (Livingstone, 1996), revealing his wish to continue exploring personae other than those on which his early reputation had been founded.

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Kernbegrippe:

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Suid-Afrikaanse poësie in Engels

vertaling van gedigte

wetenskap en kuns in die poësie

Appendix

A comparative list of contents: *AROB1* (1975) & *AROB2* (1983)

<i>AROB1</i>	<i>AROB2</i>
To make you	To make you
A morning	A morning
GJ meditates (on <i>Aspects of art & love</i>)	GJ meditates (on <i>Aspects of art & love</i>)
GJ meditates (on <i>The egalitarian society</i>)	GJ meditates (on <i>The egalitarian society</i>)
An afternoon of grass	An afternoon of grass
Crystallogenesis	The eyes have it
As I walk with affrontery, alone	As I walk with affrontery, alone
A consequence of the violation	Incorporeal
GJ meditates (on <i>His weighting in the last great scorer's book</i>)	My dearest love, my lost love
GJ meditates (on <i>Unisex</i>)	GJ meditates (on <i>Drifting</i>)
GJ meditates (on <i>Suburbia, o suburbia</i>)	GJ meditates (on <i>His weighting in the last great scorer's book</i>)
In the street of the professions	GJ meditates (on <i>Unisex</i>)
The indirect apprehension	GJ meditates (on <i>Suburbia, o suburbia</i>)
GJ meditates (on <i>Drifting</i>)	In the street of the professions
Steel giraffes	The indirect apprehension
And now	Crystallogenesis
The two of you	GJ meditates (on <i>The transcendental sausage</i>)
The beech trees of Poland	GJ meditates (on <i>The beatitudes of fidelity</i>)
Wheels	The lover's pledge
The genetic blueprint in roses, etc	And now
Crossing the barrier	GJ meditates (on <i>Her shrink</i>)
Loving	The beech trees of Poland
GJ meditates (on <i>An early European navigator</i>)	The two of you
Map reference	The everlasting she
The web	Ariadne's crown

Corrida	The models
Locus	Steel giraffes
Compass	GJ meditates (<i>on David Herbert Lawrence as feminist</i>)
There are times	GJ meditates (<i>on Embraces of the succubus</i>)
Tidelines	Wheels
End of a world	A consequence of the violation
	GJ meditates (<i>on That lovely woman</i>)
	Compass
	The genetic blueprint in roses, etc
	A presentiment of the Nile
	GJ meditates (<i>on The old widescreen testament</i>)
	Loving
	GJ meditates (<i>on An early European navigator</i>)
	Map reference
	The web
	Crossing the barrier
	Corrida
	Locus
	There are times
	Tidelines
	End of a world

