|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **About you** | **[Salutation]** | Dan | [Middle name] | Wylie |
| [Enter your biography] | | | |
| [Enter the institution with which you are affiliated] | | | |

|  |
| --- |
| **Your article** |
| **Livingstone, Douglas James (1932-1996)** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Douglas Livingstone is regularly cited as South Africa’s pre-eminent poet of the twentieth century. Born in Malaysia, but settling in South Africa at the age of ten, he made Durban, Natal, his home, microbiology his career, and poetry his central passion. He published eight collections of poems, excluding the *Selected Poems* (1984) and the *Collected Poems* (2004), as well as hundreds of uncollected pieces, essays, and scientific articles. His work displays an increasing concern with the ecological health of his home region and of the planet as a whole. |
| Douglas Livingstone is regularly cited as South Africa’s pre-eminent poet of the twentieth century. Born in Malaysia, but settling in South Africa at the age of ten, he made Durban, Natal, his home, microbiology his career, and poetry his central passion. He published eight collections of poems, excluding the *Selected Poems* (1984) and the *Collected Poems* (2004), as well as hundreds of uncollected pieces, essays, and scientific articles. His work displays an increasing concern with the ecological health of his home region and of the planet as a whole.  Douglas James Livingstone was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to Scottish parents. His father having been taken prisoner-of-war by the Japanese in 1941, he was evacuated first to Ceylon, then to Natal, South Africa, where he began writing poems at Kearnsey College. Leaving school in 1951, he worked as a laboratory technician in the then Salisbury, Rhodesia, where he trained as a bacteriologist at the Pasteur Institute. Terrifying holiday work as a contract diver on the dam wall at Kariba, on the Zambezi River, provided the material for striking poems in, as well as the title of, *The Skull in the Mud* (1960). This first collection, while uncertain in voice, already evinces Livingstone’s trademark concerns with personal isolation on a rough and predatory continent, close observation of disaffected city-dwellers, and difficult love. It also foreshadows both Livingstone’s capacity for verbal inventiveness and meticulous craftsmanship.  In 1958 he obtained his BSc degree, and in 1989, his PhD. Livingstone joined the CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) in Durban as a bacteriologist particularly concerned with marine pollution. Over the next twenty years, Livingstone’s voice became more assured and individual. Particularly strong is a tone of ironic detachment, sometimes verging on parody. Little critical attention has been paid to his ‘Giovanni Jacopo’ poems, for which Livingstone adapts a suite of seventeenth-century poetic techniques to send up a wide variety of otherwise serious themes. Livingstone’s gift for evoking the African animal world also emerges in unsparing detail. He was criticised by some for failing to engage adequately with the political ramifications of apartheid; though he often referred to the social consequences of race discrimination.  Increasingly present are scientific images and vocabularies, ranging from the microbial to the cosmic, integral to a compassionate but uncompromising Darwinian vision of life’s struggles. Livingstone deplored the ecological damage he observed humanity inflicting on the planet. His quixotic quest to address this damage is encapsulated in his final collection, *A Littoral Zone*, whose poems are based on the coastal pollution-measuring stations which Livingstone monitored. They range from moving accounts of both human and animal fatalities on the beachfront, encounters with sad individuals trapped by social dynamics beyond their control, to fable-like fantasies (particularly about women). The collection as a whole is testament to the variety of voices and the poetic craftsmanship of which Livingstone became a genuine master.  Livingstone was recognised as perhaps the strongest poetic voice of his day, garnering several prizes. He died of cancer in 1996, aged sixty-four. List of Works *The Skull in the Mud* (1960)  *Sjambok, and other poems from Africa* (1964)  *Poems* (with Thomas Kinsella and Anne Sexton) (1968)  *Eyes Closed Against the Sun* (1970)  *The Sea, My Winding Sheet and other poems* (play and poems, 1971)  *A Rosary of Bone* (1975)  *The Semblance of the Real* (play, 1976)  *A Rhino for the Boardroom* (play, 1977)  *The Anvil’s Undertone* (1978)  *Selected Poems* (1984)  *A Littoral Zone* (1991)  *Giovanni Jacopo Meditates (on the high-IQ haiku)* (1995)  *A Ruthless Fidelity: The Collected Poems of Douglas Livingstone*. Edited by Malcolm Hacksley and Don Maclennan(2004) Translations *Eight Shona Poems* (1968)  *Wilson Chivaura: Dreams* (1974) Selected Critical Works ‘Preface to the poets’, *Rhodesian Poetry* (1967)  ‘On the Writing of Poetry’, *Izwe* (1974)  ‘A Poet Speaks of his Craft’ (1975)  ‘Africa within us...?’ (1976)  ‘The Poetry of Mtshali, Serote, Sepamla, and others in English’, *New Classic* (1976)  ‘Preface for the Readers’, *Rhodesian Poetry* (1977) |
| Further reading:  (Brown)  (Chapman)  (Wylie) |