JONES, STEVEN JEFFREY. The Poetry of Robert Duncan. (1976)
Directed by: Dr. Robert Watson. Pp. 148

The poetry of Robert Duncan is basically derivative in character: that is, composed in accord with certain tenets selected from the tradition he uniquely forms and recognizes. Yet the changing aspect of that tradition, and the poet's imaginative re-interpretation of both stylistic and visionary concepts derived from Blake, Whitman, Pound and Charles Olson, among others, has made his work often seem at once innovative, erudite and, perhaps, deceptively complex. His interests in manifestation of the creative will, mythography and occult knowledge remain almost constant; but the face of his work changes from a meditative, highly rhetorical style to a more fragmented style that purportedly records the process of intuition and psychic perception. In his later poetry there is a fundamental interdependence between the organic principles of form he adopts and the metaphysical range of his vision.

THE POETRY OF ROBERT DUNCAN

by

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A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
1976

Approved by

Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

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March 29, 1976

Date of Acceptance by Committee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Watson, Mr. Kirby-Smith and Mr. Chappell for their advice and benign patience in reading this essay. I am also indebted to Betsy Jones for her loving impatience and generous aid in preparing the final draft.

Most of the poems examined herein are reprinted in the Appendix.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although his work has received no more than sparing scholarly attention, Robert Duncan has been recognized as one of the most accomplished poets to emerge from the 'projectivist' movement, under the guiding hands of Charles Olson, and the Black Mountain school of poets: two closely linked coteries with which he has been popularly, though not unwillingly, identified. Indeed, such varying talents as Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Rexroth and Richard Howard consider Duncan to be among the major poets writing in America today.[1] However, the lyrical, allusive, often erotic character of his verse, which has elicited praise from some, has also been the subject of derogation, or reason for reservation, by other poets and critics. The chief aims of this essay will be to provide a perspective, in view of previous critical opinion, through which Duncan's poetry can be examined and to delineate significant patterns and changes in the development of his work.

[1] These views are expressed respectively in "Allen Ginsberg: 'Isn't Beethoven saying, "Respect the Whale"?'," Selden Rodman's conversation with Ginsberg, in Tongues of Fallen Angels (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 192; Kenneth Rexroth, "Belated Discovery," rev. of The Opening of the Field, by Robert Duncan, Nation, 192 (1961), 35-36; personal conversation with Richard Howard, 10 Feb. 1975, at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

In a review of The Opening of the Field (1960), James Dickey calls Duncan "one of the most unpityingly pretentious poets I have ever come across." His enigmatic blend of myth, legend and mysticism, especially in poems ostensibly about poetry, has led others to the same conclusion. But, whether to achieve a balanced statement or out of mild respect, Dickey also acknowledges Duncan's "original mind--the revery-prone, introspective, willful kind--" which has created some "marvellous poems" that successfully side-step "conventional disciplines." Duncan's mixture of traditional lyric forms and archaic rhetoric with open field methods of composition and colloquial language, his desire to set novelty and convention to the same "dance" of the imagination, may appear to be of questionable value to poets who have already decided upon the "right" diction for their own poetry. Consonant with the tone of similar commentaries, Dickey's appraisal of the visionary scope of Duncan's work mixes conflicting attitudes of skepticism and approval: "His symbolistically ecstatic universe is vague, but it is real enough in its way, in the fashion in which dreams would be real if they occurred in words instead of images."[2]

Aware of the implications of Dickey's review, James F. Mersmann admits that "Duncan's esoteric erudition

[2] "Robert Duncan," in Babel to Byzantium: Poets & Poetry Now (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971), pp. 173-77.

frightens most critics and reviewers into submission"; his reputation for being "not only the most talented but also the most intelligent of modern poets" is at least in part a result "of the unintelligibility of much of his poetry." Quoting from a review of Bending the Bow (1968), Duncan's latest collection of poems, he adds:

> Most readers will agree that Duncan "must certainly be our most difficult active poet," a poet "for the strenuous, the hyperactive reader of poetry; to read Duncan with any immediate grace would require Norman O. Brown's knowledge of the arcane mixed with Ezra Pound's grasp of poetics." In reading Duncan "it simply helps to be familiar with Dante, Blake, mythography, medieval history, H. D., William Carlos Williams, Pound, Stein, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley, and Levertov." To this list we might add Cabalistic literature, Hermetic writings, Indian lore, The Golden Bough, the pre-Socratic philosophers, Christian mysticism, and the Oxford English Dictionary. Lacking these familiarities the reader can penetrate some distance into the complex syncretism of Duncan only by a dogged persistence.[3]

While, indeed, Duncan's poetry incorporates a great deal of knowledge--and occasionally approaches the point of pedanticism--one can easily overestimate the problem. Despite the multifarious references and allusions that permeate his verse, most of the poems stand independently, or within the context of the volume for which they were composed, without recourse to any outside sources. Significantly, Mersmann regards the knowledge of Duncan's later

[3]"Robert Duncan: Irregular Fire--Eros Against Ahriman," in Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), pp. 159-60; Jim Harrison, "Pure Poetry," rev. of Bending the Bow, New York Times Book Review, 29 Sept. 1968, p. 66.

poetry to be syncretic rather than eclectic and foreign to his larger intent.

Still, the apparent difficulty of his poetry explains why most commentators have been content to simply "place" Duncan among his contemporaries. By general consensus his work has been viewed as an extension of the tradition in modern poetry initiated by Pound, qualified and augmented by Williams, and transmitted, rather transformed, through the writings of Charles Olson. Insofar as the idea of influence is of value in literary criticism, these assumptions are relatively accurate, though by no means exact, since they only describe aspects of Duncan's poetics and disregard what he actually makes in his poetry (poesis). Of course, the idea of influence can lead one astray, and become more of a hindrance than anything else, when influence is taken beyond the point of being simply suggestive. For now, let us say that Pound, Williams, and Olson pose sets of criteria that eventually sift into Duncan's understanding of what a poem should be. (Some estimation of their impact on his development as a poet will be given in Chapter IV.)

Duncan's acknowledged debt to Olson has often had too much influence on critics attempting to elucidate his poetry, persuading some to assay his work only as it exemplifies his mentor's theory of "projective verse," convincing others that it illustrates the kind of verse written by the Black Mountain school of poets. The standards

implied in both cases demand qualification. The notion of a Black Mountain school of poets originally emanates from Donald M. Allen's ambitious anthology, The New American Poetry (1960), in which Duncan's work received its first widespread exposure. Edward Dorn, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov and Jonathan Williams are among the ten writers so classified by Allen. It seems to have been the anthologist's desire to recover some unifying principles in the poetic revolution he thought he detected that led him and, subsequently, others to trust such categorizations.

Like Duncan, Dorn and especially Creeley frequently refer to Olson's poetics to illustrate principles behind their own writings.[4] But even the most cursory examination of their poetry points to vast differences that appear to be irreconcilable under any single theory. The sculpted concision of Creeley's verse has no recognizable affinity to either the rhapsodic or incantatory sides of Duncan's, yet, theoretically, they find common ground in such statements as "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT,"[5] or,

[4] Edward Dorn, "What I See in The Maximus Poems," in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, ed. Donald Allen and Walter Tallman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1973), pp. 293-307; see Creeley, "Introduction to The New Writing in the USA," "'I'm Given to Write Poems,'" "Linda Wagner: An Interview with Robert Creeley," in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, pp. 254-73.

[5] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," Human Universe and other Essays, ed. Donald Allen (1965; rpt. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), p. 52; henceforth cited in the text as H U with page number.

as Ms. Levertov would revise the maxim in "Some Notes on Organic Form": "Form is never more than a revelation of content."[6] Perhaps the most reasonable explanation for this phenomenon is that Olson's essay on "Projective Verse" is subject to a wide variety of interpretations, which usually differ according to the degree that each writer views it within the tradition of organicism in poetry, and, specifically, organicism as it relates to the history of free verse.

Blake, Coleridge, Emerson and Whitman--all in some measure anticipate Olson's mistrust of conventional forms, questioning the value placed on various poetic forms by humanist thought during the Renaissance. Granted, except for Whitman, no poet during the nineteenth century would risk attempting to fulfill the platitudes Emerson set forth in "The Poet." But doesn't Emerson's remark that each poem should have "an architecture of its own"[7] in some ways set the precedent in American poetry for Olson's view? In "Ideas of the Meaning of Form" and several other essays, Duncan seems to have a rather comprehensive, though obviously individuated, understanding of organicism and

[6] The Poet in the World (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 13.

[7] "The Poet," in The Literature of the United States, ed. Walter Blair, Theodore Hornberger, Randall Stewart, James E. Miller, Jr., 3rd edition (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1971), I, 1115.

free verse--based on views of Blake, Whitman, Lorca, Sitwell and Pound, among others--so his interpretation of Olson's theory (which I will examine in Chapters IV and V), will be viewed in terms of the tradition he recognizes, and not merely within the scope of the particular school of poets with whom he is identified.

The precepts of "Projective Verse" are designed to bring the activity of the poem closer to the poet--

> Let me put it baldly. The two halves are:
> the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
> the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE
> (Olson, HU, p. 55)

--without calling for a revival of "the Egotistical Sublime" or "what you might call the private-soul-at-any-public-wall" (Olson, HU, p. 51). Olson borrows Keats' term for Wordsworth's lyricism to emphasize his own repudiation of personal lyricism. Instead, the stance he proposes for the poet is an impersonalized immanence within the poem. In attempting to follow Olson's theory, many of his self-professed disciples have unfortunately failed to achieve this impersonalized, immanent perspective he proposes and, consequently, have fallen miserably into the worst kind of personal lyricism, which invariably leads to sentimentality. The core of Olson's poetics and various problems surrounding interpretation of his theory are illuminatingly discussed by Charles Altieri:

> Charles Olson's much maligned "Projective Verse" is the most obvious and influential treatment of the

> energizing power of the poet in the poem. Olson's metaphysics of the breath is dubious, but accompanying it are sharp observations on the possibilities for poetry in an anti-symbolist age. Olson wants the poem to be a "high energy discharge," but he distrusts formal arrangement as a means for generating this second syntax and at the same time fears that sheer objectivism might fall flat. His last recourse is the energizing presence of the poet, not as a psychological being involved in self-expression but as a nexus of energy prehending the energies outside him. Breath is a suggestive concept here because it is at once physical, a concrete aspect of one's involvement in an objective world, and spiritual, both in the etymological sense of "spirit" and "soul" and as principle of measure. Breath is in the natural order, a form of rhythm--in no way a priori creative of the shape of experience--but expressing the patterns of force in the engaged energy of the responder. Composition for Olson, then, is the embodied process of the energies of recognition.[8]

Olson proposed an ontological interdependence between the process of the poet's perceptual activity and the evolving form of the poem.

In 1966, over fifteen years after the "Projective Verse" essay appeared, many of Olson's ideas appear once again in Duncan's essay "Towards an Open Universe":

> It is not that poetry imitates but that poetry enacts in its order the order of first things, as just here in this consciousness, they may exist, and the poet desires to penetrate the seeming of style and subject matter to that most real where there is no form that is not content, no content that is not form.[9]

[8] "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetics," Boundary 2, No. 3 (1973), 625-26.

[9] The Poetics of the New American Poetry, p. 217; henceforth cited as PNAP, when the quotation is taken from Duncan, with page number.

Following Olson, Duncan echoes both Emerson and, in the larger context of the essay, Coleridge, who, in "On Poesy or Art," observes that if the artist were to confine himself to "painful copying" of nature, he would "produce masks only, not forms breathing life." Instead, the poet or artist must "out of his own mind create forms according to the severe laws of the intellect, in order to generate in himself that co-ordination of freedom and law, that involution of obedience in the prescript, and of the prescript in the impulse to obey, which assimilates him to nature, and enables him to understand her."[10] Duncan proceeds by quoting from the "Projective Verse" essay as a source of his own poetics. But he reaches a step beyond Olson, conceiving from his mentor's theory of poetry and a wide range of other sources his own metaphysics of the imagination. Resolving the subject-object dichotomy of experience, as Olson, and realizing the immanence of the universal order within the self, the poet recovers a certain rhythm from which "we have fallen away" (PNAP, p. 218). Apprehending that rhythm, the poet permits the imagination to be directed by it, to enter the primordial dance:

> The dancer comes into the dance when he loses his consciousness of his own initiative, what he is doing, feeling, or thinking, and enters the consciousness of the dance's initiative, taking feeling and thought

[10] Quoted by I. A. Richards in Principles of Literary Criticism (1925; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., n.d.), pp. 257-58.

> there. The self-consciousness is not lost in a void but in the transcendent consciousness of the dance. **** As consciousness is intensified, all the exciting weave of sensory impression, the illustration of time and space, are "lost" as the personality is "lost"; in focus we see only the dancer. We are aware only in the split second in which the dance is present. This presentation, our immediate consciousness, the threshold that is called both here-and now and eternity, is an exposure in which, perilously, identity is shared in resonance between the person and the cosmos.
>
> (PNAP, p. 220)

It becomes apparent that Duncan has taken Olson's theory of poetics and, in raising it to the nth power of the imagination in addition to viewing it within a tradition, turned it into something quite different, a unique vision of his own. The poet continues:

> . . . the poem demanded a quickening of "the HEART, by the way of the BREATH, to the LINE." Here Olson too was thinking of the dance:
>
> Is it not the PLAY of a mind we are after, is it not that that shows whether a mind is there at all? . . . And the threshing floor for the dance? Is it anything but the LINE?
>
> (PNAP, p. 220)

Olson's poetics is meaningful only in view of its interpretation and practical application by a particular writer. Wide-ranging assumptions about 'projectivism' actually beg the question of Olson's theory. Although 'projectivism' does imply a "stance toward reality" (Olson, HU, p. 51)--the poet's immanence in the poem--who could possibly resolve the imagistically concentrated world of Jonathan Williams with that evolving from the

"Hebraic-Melvillian bardic breath"[11] of Ginsberg (both of whom, likewise, acknowledge a debt to Olson)? A curious and unfortunate result of classifications that subsume these several writers is the evident factionalism that has precipitated among poet-critics who have subsequently applauded, condoned or condemned Duncan's poetry in proportion to the degree they have employed or disclaimed Olson's poetics in their own poetry.

To localize matters again: What, specifically, accounts for Duncan's identification with the Black Mountain school of poets?

Certainly Duncan taught at Black Mountain at a propitious point in his development as a poet (1955-56). According to Martin Duberman, he and Olson, who was then rector of the college, were vital forces in preserving the intellectual and creative integrity of the community just before its inevitable dissolution.[12] In addition to several short, relatively minor pieces, Duncan had published one long poem--Heavenly City, Earthly City (1947)--and finished composing the poems that comprise at least three other volumes--The Years as Catches (1966), The First Decade: Selected Poems 1940-50 (1968), and Caesar's Gate (1955)--

[11] Allen Ginsberg, "Notes for Howl and Other Poems," in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, p. 318.

[12] "Olson," in Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community (1972; rpt. New York: Anchor Press, 1973), pp. 389-407.

the best of which are included in his Selected Poems (1959). The poems he wrote after leaving Black Mountain have become the determining factors in establishing his current critical reputation.

Like Olson, Levertov, Williams and Dorn, Duncan published his work in the Black Mountain Review, edited by Robert Creeley. One member of the community remarks that the purpose of BMR was simply "to make available some of the writing and thinking and other works that are being made here,"[13] not to advocate a particular aesthetic viewpoint, as Allen and others have since assumed. (Creeley was not even in residence at the college when the project was initiated, and Ms. Levertov never went to Black Mountain.) Again, according to Duberman, historian of the college, the idea of a school of poets is dubious at best; as a group, they were first associated by no more than a common organ for publication,[14] a review that would, admittedly, publish so-called experimental literature that would have been rejected without question by more reputable journals: i.e., The Kenyon Review, The New Yorker, The Sewanee Review, etc.

Duncan's association with Black Mountain is equally coincidental. Had he remained in San Francisco he might just as easily have been considered a Beat poet, along with Brother Antoninus, Rexroth, Ferlinghetti and Lamantia,

[13] Duberman, p. 411. [14] Duberman, pp. 408-22.

who, individually, have little in common other than place, time, the Evergreen Review and what the literary historian may be willing to fabricate.

This is not to say that Duncan's poetry is unmarked by the influence of writers from Black Mountain and the Beats, nor that commentary from these writers will not prove illuminating. Before proceeding, it's simply necessary to clear the record.

Since the early poems have received almost no critical attention I will examine them at some length in evaluating the development of Duncan's poetry, considering visionary and stylistic aspects of his work as interrelated parts of the same evolution in the poet's imaginative experience. Just what Duncan imbibed from Olson's poetics and a wide variety of other sources will become readily apparent by surveying the evident contrast between the technique of his early poetry (before 1957) and the later poetry and essays.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY POETRY

However ingenuous some of it may seem, even Duncan's earliest verse holds intimations of the sweeping vision and lyrical grandeur that is sufficiently evident in his later work to earn him a place among the major voices of the new American poetry. Many of the themes that emerge in embryonic form in The Years as Catches take on a more definite focus as they become gradually integrated with the broader scope of imaginative experience. Most of the early poems are, he admits,[1] imitations of works written by no less than a score of poets whom he admired, ranging from Rimbaud and the French Symbolists to Edith Sitwell, Eliot and Lorca. Revaluations of the technique of Dylan Thomas, Stein and Pound continue to serve his composition from the beginning through Bending the Bow.

Duncan's first poems are often simply efforts to achieve certain effects or attempts to lend expression to rather uncertain emotions. They do, however, exemplify the complicated metaphorical operation of his thought. Autobiographical references, which, later, he uses with

[1] "Preface," The Years as Catches: First Poems 1939-1946 (Berkeley: Oyez Press, 1966), pp. ii-vii; henceforth cited in text as Years with page number.

considerable skill, tend to constrict or obfuscate his larger intention as he seeks disguises for various personal conflicts. Diffuse forms of knowledge and rather conventional romantic ideas have yet to sift into the framework of poetic understanding and intuition. In the youthful visionary poems one finds him gathering parts for the syncretic order that unfolds in his later work. The style and content of his early writings are essentially derivative.

Evident in such an early piece as "Toward the Shaman" (1940) is a deliberate effort to adapt acquired knowledge into his poetry and develop a language of dream-consciousness, a state of mind that he eventually evokes with greater precision and verisimilitude. Compared with later poems, his conceptualization of the dream is limited and perhaps too obviously derived from Freud.

> Maps are cast of the regions we are to pass thru
> guided by a compass which is allergic to everything.
> A journey thru the unmeasurable regions of the dream,
> a crossing over thru the surd again, the square root
> of human experience.
>
> (Years, p. 7)

Already the poet is conscious of the value of word-play, setting words free for multiple meanings, perhaps through the example of Pound. "Surd" is almost certainly chosen for its double entendre, meaning at once "Not clearly or keenly perceived," as the dream itself, and "a number or quantity (esp. a root): That cannot be expressed in finite terms" (O. E. D.), as the indefinite relation between the

dream and reality. The underlying paradox is further augmented by "the square root of human experience," thereby evoking the skeptical determinism that characterizes Freud's relation of dreams to waking life. "Surd," also meaning "deaf," accounts for the indefinite and ironic references to aural perception throughout the dream.

The passage above follows a rather hazy oneiric allegory in which the dreamer encounters "Joseph, overlord of the lower kingdoms, whose warehouses are full in this time of famines . . . ." Other more obscure details in the narrative point to a shaded resemblance between Joseph of the dream and the Biblical Joseph of Genesis. After being sold to the Midianites by his brothers who were jealous of his ability to interpret dreams, Joseph gains the favor of the Pharoah and interprets one of his dreams, predicting seven years of desolation and famine over the land. An image from the Pharoah's dream of seven kine "poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed" (Genesis xli.19) corresponds to a similar image in the dream-consciousness of the poem: "the lonely cattle going down upon their knees in pools of dust and the great bows of their ribs in starvation." Joseph of the dream has likewise wisely stored quantities of corn in order to withstand the famine. From herein analogues between the dream and historical legend depend upon free association, a process unconsciously at work in

the action of a dream, according to Freud. The landscape of the dream gradually shifts to images of modern desolation as "this son whose father has built a great factory returns after a long absence," as Joseph returned to his homeland, and "wanders among rusted tanks, camps where an arch of fired-brick stands from the rubbish, and at dawn moves on." Interposed between parts of the dream that abide by legend and the modern landscape are intimations of impending evil--"Snakes hide in the rock"--and references to a love affair:

> We put a tango on the phonograph, dancing until desire rises, the orchestra sobbing from the memory of summer loves. Tonight we can find love where we left it.
> (Years, p. 6)

The love affair, by virtue of its contrast with the foregoing narrative, is cast with irony. Similar shifts occur in the narrative of "The Waste Land," as when Tiresias' narrative moves from Spenserian references to pastoral love to the affair between the typist and the "young man carbuncular." In both cases, the mocking contrast and consequent irony reflect the impoverishment and confusion of ideals of love and imply the perversity of desire.

The wandering son's apparent indifference to the modern scene is presumably derived from a feeling of having been alienated, cast out like Joseph, or as Duncan would have it, recalling attitudes that accompanied his own social pessimism when the poem was written, "foreign to the society

into which I had been born . . ." The poet admits to having been repelled by the work ethic and the industrial complex that supported the American war-time economy of the late thirties and forties (Years, p. vii). During these years, Duncan recalls, his social consciousness was emerging for the first time,[2] and, despite the fact that he isolated himself from society, veiled criticism of the status quo frequently finds its way into the early poems. Not until Bending the Bow do social and political matters again enter his work. Imaged forth in "Toward the Shaman" are the net results of what he foresaw for society, corresponding in intensity to the desolation and famine Joseph predicted through the Pharoah's dream:

> The last glimmer of a distant windowglass disappears in darkness. Everything gone, and the great voyage opens: the cities have fallen behind us, flames at the curved roof of the world . . .
> . . . Who saw it slipping? A man enters the room with a gift of keys and we must choose between doors. Stop! we have been trapt. I saw a shadow like a snake over the garden. I saw the last tree discovered by the enemy and the new leaves revolving in their caskets: a dream of origins.
>
> (Years, p. 7)

The process of the dream is reflected in the dreamer's perception. When he met Joseph he saw a snake; as the dream closes he sees a "shadow like a snake . . . ."

Images of apocalypse and destruction recur throughout Duncan's early poetry, frequently combined with the

[2] "Changing Perspectives in Reading Walt Whitman," in The Artistic Legacy of Walt Whitman, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 89-102.

motif of failing or abnormal love, as in "Toward the Shaman." Both motifs are present again in "Passage Over Water," in which they are combined with indications of another theme that continues through the later poems: desire to return to an Edenic state recalled from the past. The persona urges his lover to

> Forget depth-bombs, death and promises we made,
> gardens laid waste, and, over the wastelands westward,
> the rooms where we had come together . . .
> (Years, p. 5).

His lover, however, is unwilling to comply and, like Eve, passes

> into the destructive world.
> There is a dry crash of cement. The light fails,
> falls into the ruins of cities upon the distant shore
> and within the indestructible night I am alone.
> (Years, p. 5)

Chaos is the consequence of an inability to love. Together, they cannot escape "the dark wound closed in behind" and "drift into the heart of our dream . . . ." Rather, their course is "diseased with stars" of fate directing their individual destinies. The persona must either remain content with isolation and try, independently, to create a paradisical state of his own, or return to the ruin from which he and his lover initially sought to free themselves. The choice is evidently made in the later poems as the poet elects to channel Eros into his art in an attempt to recover the awareness man forfeited with the Fall. Complementing this theme is the possibility of renewal

associated with the dream in "Passage Over Water" and the concept of a "dream of origins" presented in "Toward the Shaman." These motifs coinhere throughout Duncan's poetry and, especially in Roots and Branches (1964) and Bending the Bow, become specifically related to the poet's quest for "the Form of Forms from which all Judgement and redemption of events flows."[3]

Upon reflection, Duncan relates his early antipathy toward society and its institutions, in addition to his apocalyptic visions, to a deeper, more penetrating personal crisis: social alienation resulting from his homosexuality (Years, p. i). In view of this fact, the thematic combination of failing love and destruction comes to a more specific light, and, certainly, the literal aspect of some otherwise cryptic images and allusions becomes more apparent. But the poems in which these motifs are joined are thematically self-sustaining, for, indeed, absence of love can lead to destruction.

If, as Duncan would eventually insist, the composition of poetry is a continual process of self-discovery, a process through which man can recover his origins, and in doing so seek to realize his identity, then the poet can hardly afford to ignore his sexuality. Rarely, if ever,

[3] The Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography, 2nd ed. (Fremont, Michigan: The Sumac Press, 1968), p. 62.

however, does Duncan dote on homosexuality in a straightforward confessional vein, nor does he attempt to vindicate his emotional instincts. Unlike Spender, he feels no need to apologize for his passions, yet, unlike Auden, he is unwilling to repress his inner drives and keep his art cerebral. Again, as with dreams, Freudian psychology provides the epistemological framework through which Duncan initially confronts the matter; and, quite appropriately, he takes as models for imitation "the poetry of Swinburne and of Thomas" since it admits "in its tide hints and overtures of a homoerotic lure . . . . This poetry agreed with Freud's concept of the underlying disturbd and disturbing bisexuality of man's nature" (Years, p. iii). Gradually, sexual references in Duncan's poetry become less personal--perhaps more obvious but no longer the matter of conflict--and, later, as with Whitman, a vital part of the expressive language of his larger vision.

Aside from a few poems, Duncan's first efforts to tap "the mute unanswering rock of self" (Years, p. 36) are generally plagued by a want of informed discretion. What he aspires to assert against the impending chaos he vaguely perceives about him is still beyond the reaches of his craft. Questioning the nature of various forms of love, acknowledging and lamenting the inexorable passage of time, the range of his voice is confined in recognitions that are at once too personal and indistinct. These poems are

virtually 'catches' of lingering impressions, a miasma of metaphors, private symbols and allusions that covertly testify to the poet's alienation from society yet elude complete literal understanding.

Several poems in The Years as Catches are quite deliberately religious in intent and others purport to be psychological. Duncan has yet to find the diction and style that will effectively blend the dimensions of his thought; and he has yet, perhaps, to unify his thought to the point of articulation. His expression in the early poems is further hampered by a dependence on such clichés as "the mind's/natural jungle" (Years, p. 33) in addition to a frequent, though specious, usage of religious symbology--pagan and Christian--"golden fleece," "crucifix," "blazing pyre," and the names of various gods--that actually clutters the tenuous progression of his thought.

Significant exceptions to these tendencies are evident in "King Haydn of Miami Beach" and select passages of "An African Elegy" in which the poet, quite consciously following the example of Lorca (Poet in New York, 1940), begins to develop a surrealistic mode in his verse, experimenting with a manner of expression that beneficially fosters his later poems. Blending the substantive noun with irrationally conceived modifiers--this mode is deftly adapted to his own ends in the lyrical voice of Roots and Branches. And, of course, the linguistic impulse of Lorca's verbal automatism develops into a vital aspect of

Duncan's own method of composition as he gradually assimilates Olson's 'projectivist' principles into his poetic theory and practice.

CHAPTER III

HEAVENLY CITY, EARTHLY CITY

Not until 1966 did Duncan authorize republication of Heavenly City, Earthly City, his first long poem. In view of the more innovative, experimental character of the later poetry that has shaped his critical reputation, his reasons for keeping the poem in the background become apparent. The narrative of the poem is couched in the kind of conventions and youthful sentiments that he would perhaps rather forget. One thinks of Williams hiding, intentionally losing (or burning?) his epical imitation of Keats and other early poems; or Pound, gratefully, on the advice of Ford Madox Ford, repressing his Canzoni. Over a decade would pass after his first extended acquaintance with Olson and Creeley at Black Mountain before Duncan would finally admit this poem as part of the longer poem that the poet writes throughout his life.[1] During the intervening years Duncan simply remarks that he could no longer read the poem aloud. No critical survey of his poetry that aims for a comprehensive understanding of development in his work can ignore its presence.

[1] This is one of the major ideas behind the concept of open form, expressed by the poet in Robert Duncan: Interview, April 19, 1969, with George Bowering and Robert Hogg (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1971), n. pag.

Heavenly City, Earthly City combines several elements of the less adventurous early poems and establishes a foundation for the introspective and religious scope that Duncan will repeatedly destroy and reconstruct in his subsequent work. The main body of the poem, following the "Overture," is comprised of three parts, logically ordered, unfolding the poet's exploration of "an inward heaven."[2] Although he mixes both dramatic and distinctly meditative techniques in the narrative, his rhetorical method is still limited to very basic components--statement, exposition, illustration and invention; he has yet to break the rational order of syntax and experiment with the collage-like patterns that formally distinguish the later poems. The language of the poem is both stilted and abstract, generally adhering in rhythm to the iambic foot when the poet consciously follows a specific rhythm. Despite the fact some passages demonstrate acquired skill in phrasing, individual lines, while varied in length, seem to lack immediacy; that is, contrary to one of Olson's later maxims, one perception does not lead immediately and directly to a further perception. Description in the narrative and its reflective arrangement denies the immediacy of the poem as an event, as itself the issue of authentic being, a

[2] Robert Duncan, Heavenly City, Earthly City, in The Years as Catches: First Poems 1939-1946 (Berkeley: Oyez Press, 1966), p. 82; henceforth cited in text as Years with page number.

quality on which Duncan would later insist. Reflecting on the formal values of the poem, Duncan recognizes it as being diametrically opposed to what he aims for in his more mature verse.[3]

Proclamation and lament blend in the "Overture" to reveal the poet's sorrow over the passing of beauty, "our inward heaven," its gradual diminution with age. The "light of the heaven" that once ennobled his being "has dimmd and gone," imparting only scars of time.

> The youth of the man I am now has gone.
> I have passt from its bright glare into its shadow.
> Twenty-seven years have wrought their careful pattern,
> worn in my flesh their inarticulate burden,
> worn in my animal the mark and strain
> of an inward heaven. Some bright and terrible disk
> that lighted once this city of my passion
> has dimmd and gone. Beauty
> is a bright and terrible disk.
> It is the light of our inward fire
> and the light of the fire in which we walk.
> (Years, p. 82)

The tone of the "Overture" is essentially elegiac. However, the poet is not simply mourning the death of his own soul, for his loss is symptomatic--rather, both cause and effect--of a greater, more embracing sorrow, a loss that affects the pronominal "We" as well.

> We are shadows before our fiery selves.
> We are mere moments before our eternities.
> (Years, p. 82)

The poet laments the loss of love, without which "man's possible beauty" cannot be attained. The "stain and age

[3] Robert Duncan: Interview.

that trace in [his] figure/ failure and betrayal of that golden vision" also mar the collectivity, for which the persona becomes a sort of paradigm; thus, "city"--as in "city of my passion"--is an apt metaphor for the poet's inner being and the larger body to which he refers. Compounded with images of "light,""shadow," "dark," and the corresponding degrees of awareness with which each is associated, the sacerdotal language of the "Overture" points to the poet's willful religious intent, his effort to realize such capitalized abstractions as the "Beloved" in the city. The city is also, by implication, the poem itself.

The "Overture" of Heavenly City, Earthly City actually presents a purview of the whole. As the persona continues to explore "the darkened city of [his] perishable age" in the first canto, the dimension of his voice increases. Though not self-effacing, the poet attempts to raise in his character a representative quality that is removed from the personal musings of earlier poems. He aggrandizes the persona through resonating identifications with the forementioned collectivity, the idea of a hero, and the role of the bard in history--all as one trying to recover "the song of its source, the sun." The nature of his travail is further illustrated and romanticized by analogies presented within the poem, many of which call up mythical associations designed to unify the persona's character and the process of his introspection.

So a single bird flying up from its field,
claims above the clamor of a dismal century,
asserts, asserts, in its perishable body
the lone clear cry of its perishable beauty.
In the moment of song--earthly radiant city
of poetry--that golden light
consumes in its focus a world I have suffered,
the darkened city of my perishable age.
(Years, p. 83)

The image of the bird, eliciting in its movements associations with the mythical Phoenix, foreshadows the reference to Icarus in the second canto. Both figures parallel the poet's fiery struggle to behold the sun, the source of energy, and know the "Beloved."

Arising from within "the darkness of the city," the "throng of angry voices" elaborate and, to some degree, specify the internal conflict of the poem. The voices are presented as aspects of the poet's unconsciousness moving in and out of a dream; yet they are unable to "articulate of love" or recall "the paradise of his eyes"--the eyes of the Redeemer--when they wake unto his conscious mind. Again, renewal is conceived with the dream, but love and the divinity of the Redeemer--presumably, the way to the Beloved--cannot be realized unless the poet overcomes his "inarticulate burden," imposed by time, and transforms the message of the voices into the reality of the city. The voices are presented as a source of gnostic awareness. They reveal what the poet has been and could be if he would overcome the burdens of this "dismal century." The heroic stature of the ancient bard is recalled through the final

voice of the first canto as its passage into the poet's psyche is compared with the journey of Ulysses:

> I have heard in hatred's sea the Siren's song and cast myself upon that strand; held in love's cruel counterpart,
> known the warm embrace and the inward cold.
> (Years, p. 86)

But the persona, almost like Prufrock, who also hears the Siren's song, is fixed in his own time, bound by self-consciousness and "the magnet of masst impurity":

> Dumbly, I listen to the Siren's insistent sound,
> that brazen counterfeit of song that charms
> and fixes the soul upon its destruction.
> (Years, p. 86)

The voices of Duncan's poem mourn the loss of the Redeemer in the manner of Donne, who, elegizing the death of Elizabeth Drury (she in whom beauty and perfection "voluntarily grew,/ As in an unvext paradise . . ."[4]), takes occasion to lament changes in his age that have constricted the basis of religious faith:

> He, he is gone; he is gone; and knowing this
> I know the heavy change upon the world.
> (Years, p. 84)

> Shee, shee is dead; shee's dead: when thou knowst this,
> Thou knowst how lame a cripple this world is.
> (An Anatomy of the World: "The First Anniversary," 237-38)

Echoing Donne, Duncan invokes themes from "The First Anniversary" that are pertinent to the import of Heavenly

[4] John Donne, An Anatomy of the World: "The First Anniversary," in Major Poets of the Earlier Seventeenth Century, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski and Andrew J. Sabot (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1973), p. 116; henceforth cited in the text.

City, Earthly City: specifically, abridgement of man's spiritual awareness, which, he further insists, occurs along with devaluation of the bard. The city is forsaken without the guidance of the poet, and the poet is powerless in the darkened city eclipsed from the source of its being. Aside from other echoes between the poems, interesting, too, is Duncan's reversal of Donne's lament. In order to know the Redeemer, Duncan's persona must behold the sun, yet one of the changes Donne laments is the discovery of a heliocentric universe, which, in the seventeenth century, disturbed man's sense of identity with God, undermining the micro-macrocosmic relation between man and the universe. The Icarian identity of Duncan's persona appears in a new light, questing to unify again that micro-macrocosmic relation by receiving the sun's immanence. The first canto ends on an optimistic note--at least a vague definition of desire and fulfillment--preparing for a revaluation of the persona's conflict in the mythical context of Orpheus, Eurydice and Icarus.

> Against the Siren's monotone, the fixt accusing glare,
> your voice, Beloved, rises in praise
> of that fair spirit, my inward heaven.
> I know that my Redeemer lives.
> The light, His sun, is the radiant song
> that consumes in its focus a world I have sufferd,
> asserts, asserts, against the Siren counterfeit,
> the Earthly paradise in which I walk.
> (Years, p. 86)

In the second canto Orpheus, Eurydice and Icarus are presented as aspects of the self, waxing and waning

in their influence, presiding over the "ocean of the soul's resounding deep," and illustrating the persona's process of introspection. The poet obscurely follows the myth in which Eurydice is murdered and taken to the underworld, prompting Orpheus, her husband, to seek her rescue. After begging for her return, Pluto, lord of the underworld, grants Orpheus an opportunity to lead his wife back to life on the condition that he not look at her during their ascent, else she will be returned to death. While negotiating her return, Orpheus charms inhabitants of the underworld with his musical and poetic gifts, originally granted him by his father, Apollo. The love motif opening the second canto brings the psychological aspect of the mythical allegory into focus. Eurydice represents the persona's inward beauty, the loss of which he mourns in the "Overture." She is the "bright spirit that sleeps in my heart" who "returns to meet my inward gaze." In both the myth and the poem, Orpheus fails to keep his eyes averted from her during their escape, so, consequently, she is returned to the underworld; her husband is left to wander alone and bemoan her loss. The poet's sorrow and the suffering he must endure in order to recover his wife from the darkness of the lower regions is revealed through the figure of Icarus, who likewise illustrates the persona's effort to behold the sun.

> He I am who torn in my flesh
> return at last to my Eurydice,
> the inward sea, terror's sister face,
> to receive my Icarus.
>
> (Years, p. 89)

Eurydice embodies both the "bright and terrible" aspects of beauty recalled from the "Overture." Not until Orpheus has been ravaged and torn by the Bacchae can he walk with her again: an ordeal similar, in effect, to the suffering the persona must endure before he can recover the beauty he has lost. Orpheus, Eurydice and Icarus represent portions of the persona's inner self, and their conflict represents his own. The ghost of Orpheus presides over practically all of Duncan's later poetry as does the influence of Osiris, who, like Orpheus, suffers a brutal death; both are torn limb from limb and scattered over the land. However, death is not their end; they return periodically to console or mock the desires of men.

The mythical associations in Heavenly City, Earthly City are generally established by some form of analogy, the persona realizing himself "as" or "like" a mythical figure. Yet the poet's desire to reveal the self through myth still overwhelms his actual ability to do so. Duncan becomes more adept at handling myth once he, like Williams, acknowledges that the coining of similes can be a practice of a very low order, especially when the simile's components--the persona and a mythical figure--have no perceptible relation in modern thought, or when such a comparison is

more commonly used to evince irony (as in Eliot's early poetry). Rendering the self through myth is a common, and accomplished, aspect of Duncan's later poetry. Using the simile more sparingly, he thereby improves the accuracy of his poetic statement, since he recognizes mythical forms as elements of the self unfolding from within, and not fancifully "as" or "like" some comparable identity outside of the individual being.

Looking ahead, Duncan's perspective becomes in some ways similar to Blake's, whose mythopoeia likewise represents activities or states of mind. (He frequently refers to Blake in The Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography.) Also underlying the role of myth in the structure of Duncan's evolving vision is his early faith in psychoanalysis. He is aware of the fact that "myth has been taken as the key to man's psychic life by Freud and the psychoanalytic schools."[5] In accord with Freudian theory, Duncan understands myths to be prime components within the "generative memory" (Truth & Life, p. 14) of the individual and mankind, forms that have been adduced by men from patterns perceived in history. Frazer adopts an almost identical point of view in his speculations on the origin of fertility deities in The Golden Bough. Like

[5] Robert Duncan, The Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography, 2nd ed. (Fremont, Michigan: The Sumac Press, 1968), p. 12.

Blake, Duncan perceives in his mythography patterns that not only represent contending forces within the self but, also, in his vision, reveal the larger aspect of civilization and its progress through the ages. As a form of knowledge, myth becomes the vehicle through which man can seek to recover the source of creation and acknowledge aspects of his individual and collective being.

Heavenly City, Earthly City is a necessary prerequisite to Duncan's later poetry; though a poetic failure, it is a stepping-stone toward the expression of his later vision in the way Vala, or The Four Zoas was for Blake's composition of Jerusalem. Developing a mode of expression for such a broad and eclectic vision is no simple task, and since the seed of that vision is planted in his first long work, it is understandable why ideas in the abstract preside over craft.

In the final canto the focus of the poem is again located in the persona. "The praise of the sun," he discovers, "is a didactic poem," since through the experience one learns "the torturous lesson" of his true identity. Duncan views the sun as a source of creativity, yet, too, a force against which the individual must constantly struggle in order to complete "his incomplete image." The plight of his persona recalls Lawrence's idealized concept of man striving to release his total energy and thereby

resurrect his spirituality.[6] Both poets are mutually concerned with the individual's ability to overcome impositions of time and recover his primitive being. They also use the image of the sun in much the same way: man's spiritual essence is released when he consumes, and is consumed by, the energy of his source, the sun.

For Duncan, the sun nearly always represents some form "of the creative will" from which "this life that imagines"--the life of the poet--"has come" (Years, p. xi). Heavenly City, Earthly City is essentially about the persona's struggle to recover the creative will and all of its component faculties, a process that is comprised of various stages designated in the foregoing cantos. In the process of becoming, the persona, challenging the sun, acquires a new awareness by unveiling hitherto latent, unknown, or unacknowledged aspects of the self in his efforts:

> . . . . in the avenues of his earthly city
> unearthly presences wink,
> unfathomable eyes of an inward vision.
> (Years, p. 90)

Among the "eyes" (also "I's") of "inward vision" he discovers are his fluctuating identifications with Orpheus, Eurydice and Icarus, in addition to other aspects of the self revealed through the imagery of his meditation. Meditating beside the "Turbulent Pacific"--an oxymoron that succinctly

[6] See Joyce Carol Oates, The Hostile Sun: The Poetry of D. H. Lawrence (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1973).

summarizes two predominant aspects of the persona's character--Orphic images continue to develop in his perception even though the poet has abandoned explicit mention of the myth:

> Sometimes the sea seems mild and light
> as a luminous harp upon which the sun plays
> threaded with indolent wires of gold
> across the ruddy music of its waves
> and its voices merge in a pulsing counterpoint
> to sing the wonders of the sun,
> the beasts of the sun and the watry beasts.
> (Years, p. 92.

The situation of the passage recalls that of Orpheus mourning the loss of Eurydice. His seemingly unconscious references to Orpheus' situation and the subjects of his influence--"the beasts of the sun"--serve to reinforce Duncan's presiding notion that certain forces, designated in the form of myth, are always present within the self. Realization of these forces, or myths, depends on the direction of an individual's will; they rise "in the mind's redeeming haze," through "groves of memory." Since the persona has been identified as a poet, it is fitting that his perceptions recall the power of Orpheus; however, the tone of the passage, lamentory, testifies to his inability to exercise that power as he desires. Neither do the beasts respond to him.

As the meditation of the final canto is specifically located in the persona, the residing duality of his character becomes apparent. The "I" is able to "watch"

his "proud and reluctant animal self . . . ." Interacting, the two sides of his character reveal a conflict that is similar to the one Freud perceives between the ego and id. The ego, "his self-consciousness defined," stifles the will striving toward fulfillment and sets it back in an "abject sexual kingdom"; when the will, or id, is contained it is directed through sublimation to some other form of release, which, in Duncan's view, is necessarily inferior to the original desire. The persona's self-consciousness prevents him from receiving the sun's immanence and thereby knowing "the Beloved," or, considering the presence of Orpheus, prevents him from realizing his potential as a poet. In view of the whole, it becomes apparent that the opposition of "light" and "dark" images throughout the narrative lead up to the poet's specification of the persona's duality.

Unlike most of Duncan's later work, the final canto moves toward a definite resolution that goes beyond the previously designated conflict:

> There is a wisdom of night and day,
> older than that proud blaze of sun,
> in which we rest, a passion, primitive to love,
> of perishing, a praise and recreation of the sun.
> My earthly city is revealed in its beauty.
> (Years, p. 93)

In a post-logical manner the poet compromises the two either/or propositions, resolves (or abandons?) the contraries, that define the persona's conflict: 1) either he beholds the sun and recovers the beauty he has lost, 2) or he continues to mourn the loss of beauty and dwell in

darkness. Not until the final stanza is a third possibility introduced. But the fact that a resolution is achieved at all brings up a significant contrast between the 'enclosed' aspect of Duncan's early vision and the unbounded design of his later thought. The organic, evolutionary vision of his later poetry denies absolutes, denies resolution, viewing reality as a process unfolding on a continuous line, the ends of which cannot be known. In Heavenly City, Earthly City, the persona finds something "older," beyond his previous perception, in which his character is finally unified, a still point where all conflicts are resolved.

CHAPTER IV

THE MOUNTING FLAME

> "In this aesthetic, conception cannot be abstracted from doing; beauty is related to the beauty of an archer hitting the mark. Referrd to its source in the act, the intellect actually manifest as energy, as presence is doing, is the measure of our arêté . . ."
>
> Robert Duncan, "Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's Maximus"

To the point of transition: "I met Olson in 1948 . . ., no 1947, because it was before the Venice Poem, when I was working on Medieval Scenes . . ., but I did know him as a poet." And while they sprawled on the lawn, speaking of ecology, the history of the Russian economy, and so forth, there was also time, Duncan recalls,[1] for at least a few words about The Maximus Poems, Olson's work in progress. Although Jonathan Williams would not publish them until nine years later, perhaps it was then, in 1947, that Duncan heard in the voice of Maximus that "polis is eyes,"[2] that a man could address the city about him as the

[1] Robert Duncan: Interview, April 19, 1969, with George Bowering and Robert Hogg (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1971), n. pag.

[2] Charles Olson, "Letter 6," The Maximus Poems (1960; rpt. New York: Jargon/Corinth Books, 1972), p. 26.

city within himself. If not from Olson, then probably from William Carlos Williams ("only one man--like a city"[3]) Duncan would find that the city is indeed an appropriate metaphor for man, his loka. The first book of Paterson, in which the city-man metaphor is presented in its most unified manner, as a concept, appeared in 1946, and Duncan acknowledges having followed the poem from the beginning.[4] Or, then again, if not from Williams, perhaps from Shakespeare, who in The Venice Poem by Duncan, enters "the Carnal City" and conceives Othello, transforming what he sees into art. "Saint William Shakespeare under the true dome"--the dome of the imagination--

> saw in a vision
> the virgin Desdemona,
> whore of Venice.[5]

Regardless of the exact 'source' of the figure, Duncan, in Heavenly City, Earthly City, addresses San Francisco[6] as though it were his inner being. And, though it

[3] William Carlos Williams, "Book 1," Paterson (1946; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 7.

[4] Robert Duncan: Interview, n. pag.

[5] Robert Duncan, The Venice Poem, Selected Poems (San Francisco: City Lights, 1959), p. 42. henceforth cited in text as SP with page number.

[6] Robert Duncan, the Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography, 2nd ed. (Fremont, Michigan: The Sumac Press, 1968), p. 15; henceforth cited in text with page number.

is impossible to positively identify the poem from which the metaphor is derived, it is apparent that Duncan's poetry develops, as he points out, in a "derivative"[7] manner, often following an impulse received from the work of other writers. Whether or not poems by Shakespeare, Olson, or Williams have any direct bearing on Duncan's first long poem is, in the long run, beside the point; more important is the fact that he begins to recognize the poetics of Olson, Williams and Pound to be of more than minor consequence in his development as a poet.[8]

The anxiety of influence, to borrow Harold Bloom's phrase, is felt by Duncan, and in the poetry of the late forties and early fifties he has arrived at a point where he can apply what he has learned from their work. This is not to say that he merely imitates their poetry. That would be a mistaken assumption, for Duncan never writes in the tendentious manner of Olson, nor is he so preoccupied with polemics as Pound in the Cantos (damning "Usura") or Williams in Paterson (scorning academia). Rather, approaching the fifties, he recognizes formal and aesthetic directions in their poetry that he can use, re-interpret and apply in his own work. For instance, in The Venice Poem, and frequently thereafter, Duncan achieves the effect of

[7] Robert Duncan: Interview, n. pag.

[8] Robert Duncan: Interview, n. pag.

echoing conversation that both Williams and Allen Tate consider as one of the major formal distinctions in the Cantos, a means for admitting seemingly arbitrary knowledge into the framework of the whole. Also, during the mid fifties, realizing that free verse is only apparently 'free,' he begins to show an unprecedented concern for the unity of the phrase in his poetry. The art of collage as a means for eliciting the reader's free association, which Williams, perhaps following Crane (The Bridge), brought to the fore in Paterson, is well adapted by Duncan in his later poetry. These are the years of the poet's apprenticeship, without which poems in The Opening of the Field, Roots and Branches and Bending the Bow would probably not have been possible.

The derivative character of Duncan's poetry becomes most apparent in poems composed as responses to other writers. These poems amount to more than simple play of fancy, for the poets 'after' whom he writes generally reflect aspects of his own evolving ideology; they belong to the tradition he follows, and the way he uses their work reveals how he would have their example influence his own. As late as Roots and Branches, poems composed between 1960 and 1964, Duncan writes "After a Passage in Baudelaire," which, by pointing to that "charme infini and mysterieux," and "that suitable symmetry, that precision

everywhere,"[9] illumines certain affinities in his own poetry of that period. Included in the same volume is a re-creation of "Arethusa"--"Shelley's Arethusa set to new measures"--in which Duncan, setting the poem within the context of the whole book, identifies Shelley's spiritual anarchy with his own. Re-casting the poem in "new measures," Duncan demonstrates his preference of a functional rather than a forced metric.

Among Duncan's earliest derivative efforts are "What Is It You Have Come To Tell Me, Garcia Lorca" and "The Drinking Fountain," the latter of which borrows images and subjects that are common in Lorca's poetry--"a childless woman," the "fountain," and "a dead bird" (SP, p. 77). Duncan uses them to illustrate the theme of the poem, which is the necessity of the poet's sacrifice to his art. The fountain holds special meanings for Duncan and Lorca. It is the source "de la canción añeja" (of the antique song) in Lorca's "Ballad of the Little Square," the fountain around which the children play.

Los Ninõs	The Children
¿Qué tiene tu divino corazón en fiesta?	What joy does your divine heart celebrate?
Yo	Myself
Un doblar de campanas perdidas en la niebla.	A clanging of bells lost in the mist.

[9] Robert Duncan, "After a Passage in Baudelaire," Roots and Branches (1964; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 77.

Los Niños	The Children
Ya nos dejas cantando	You leave us singing
en la plazuela.	in the little square.
¡Arroyo claro,	Clear stream
fuente serena!	Serene fountain![10]

Both poets consider the innocence and naivety of childhood to be analogous to the state of mind by which the imagination can freely play, apart from temporal burdens, without self-consciousness. Returning to a child's awareness of things enables the poet to sacrifice himself to the poem and see beyond the limits of rationality. In "Strawberries Under the Snow," Duncan writes,

> Look! Childhood lies here
> at the foot of the ladders of Heaven.
> Here are the strawberries.
> There is no evil here.
>
> (SP, p. 39)

In the first two stanzas of "The Drinking Fountain," Duncan gathers instances from Lorca's Gypsy Ballads, then of the fountain, the source of inspiration, and of his subject, concludes:

> Garcia Lorca stole
> poetry from this drinking fountain,
> sang and twangd the mandolin of
> this slumbering spanish mountain,
> fell down and cried in Granada.
>
> This is the drinking fountain.
>
> (SP, p. 77)

"This" is the poem itself. The theme of the poet's sacrifice to the poem is complemented by Duncan's reference to Lorca's

[10] Stephen Spender and J. L. Gili, trans., The Selected Poems of Garcia Lorca, ed. Francisco Garcia Lorca and Donald M. Allen (1961; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 91

death. The Spanish poet was murdered in Granada (August, 1936) for having composed a poem that offended the military regime of his homeland.

There is another reason why Duncan feels particularly close to Lorca and wishes to commemorate him:

> It seemed to us, Jack Spicer as to me, in our conversations of 1946 and 1947 as young poets seeking the language and lore of our homosexual longings as the matter of a poetry, that Lorca was one of us, that he spoke . . . from his own unanswered and--as he saw it--unanswerable need. It was this that gave to his outcry [in "Oda a Walt Whitman"] . . . the drive of a terrible knowledge. We read it to be from the depths of a shared fate in experience, so that the pronoun You in addressing Whitman was also addressing the true self of the poet . . . .[11]

For Duncan, Lorca is "one of the dead ones/ who inhabit the moon," a poet who has become a vital part of his own muse:

> So the dead in the moon
> return to the living.[12]

The most 'objective' strain in Duncan's poetry emerges around the turn of the decade, when he aims for an unprecedented lucidity in his verse, often equating clarity of statement with beauty. The effort is not as simple as it may seem; indeed, claritas was Pound's prime objective at least up until the composition of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," after he had already completed the first fifteen cantos.

[11] "Preface," Caesar's Gate (1955; rpt. San Francisco: Sand Dollar, 1972), pp. xxii-iii.

[12] Robert Duncan, "What Is It You Have Come To Tell Me, Garcia Lorca?" Poetic Disturbances (San Francisco: Maya, 1970), n. pag.

The equation of lucidity and beauty becomes a focal point in Pound's larger humanistic perspective in later years. Throughout his translations of the Confucian texts, repeated emphasis is given to "finding precise verbal expression for the heart's tone,"[13] which is not only the first step in achieving self-discipline but also a pre-requisite for all forms of organization. Both Pound and Williams regard the government of words to be the basic principle behind all forms of government. Williams discusses the matter in several of his essays, especially "The Basis of Faith in Art." Aware of their view, Duncan gradually abandons what he recognizes as the "San Francisco rhetoric"--elegiac, rhapsodic language of feeling--that, through the example of Jack Spicer, he admits,[14] had directed much of his verse in the preceding decade. His desire to remake the self in the poem is combined with an effort to master the technical means by which he is able to do so--that is, give "precise verbal expression for the heart's tone"--in the later poetry.

Duncan's efforts to adapt a new mode of expression bring qualities of pure poetry into his verse. Although he continues to focus on many themes that appear in the

[13] Confucius: The Great Digest, The Unwobbling Pivot, The Analects, trans. Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 51.

[14] Robert Duncan: Interview, n. pag.

earlier poetry--manifestation of the creative will, the innocence of childhood, revelation of the daemon within--his manner is less deliberate. Thought is conveyed through a sequence of recognitions, or cast into an array of voices (as in The Venice Poem), rather than relayed through exposition. In much of the poetry composed during the early fifties the poet simply delights in the capacity of song.

> Created by the poets to sing my song
> or created by my song to sing.
> (SP, p. 25)

And the poet also begins to view himself as synonymous with the activity of the poem. This identification will prove to be of greater import in the later poetry, when Duncan conceives of the poem as a metaphor for life, considering each poem and the life of every man as "one of the many poems in which the Cosmos seeks to realize its Self."[15] At this point, however, he seems to conclude that introspection and philosophical systems are fine, but, before ideas can be of value,

> "We must understand what is happening"

in the poem, that is,

> watch "the duration of syllables,
> "the melodic coherence,
> "the tone leading of vowels."
> (SP, p. 54)

In The Opening of the Field the fruit of these years is finally brought to bear.

[15] Robert Duncan, "Preface," The Years As Catches: First Poems 1939-1946 (Berkeley: Oyez Press, 1966), p. xi. The "preface" to this volume was composed in 1966.

During the late forties, even though he had yet to begin his extended critical study of her work, Duncan was familiar with H. D.'s poetry and probably a bit awed with the way she develops the mythological scheme behind it. (All parts of the Trilogy had appeared by 1946. Duncan acknowledges having read the poetry of H. D. during the forties.[16]) It was perhaps from her that he learned to activate images in the metaphorical context of his poetry and make apparently abstract terms concrete within a poem. He would discover how such pronouncements as "Spirit announces the Presence"[17]--a statement not unlike what one finds in Duncan's early verse--could be illustrated visually. Whereas the imagists sought to make particulars universal, Duncan, at this point, is more concerned with making universal terms seem concrete; however, the residue of imagism that he apparently imbibes through the poetry of H. D. and Pound does contribute to his developing expression. Although in his own poetry the imagination walks on the edge of the image,[18] that is, continues to be more occupied with ideas than things in themselves, their example may have been what

[16] Robert Duncan: Interview, n. pag.

[17] H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Trilogy: The Walls Do Not Fall, Tribute to Angels, The Flowering of the Rod (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 3.

[18] A Kingsley Weatherhead, The Edge of the Image: Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams and Some Other Poets (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1967), pp. 232-46.

brought him down from the step-ladder mysticism of the early poems to a firmer realization of his own vision.

Around mid-century Duncan's poetry demonstrates an underlying awareness of the maxims for the modern idiom handed down from Williams and Pound. Although he would never write solely from the speech and rhythms of the American language, as Williams would insist, he temporarily abandons the high style of Edith Sitwell and the rhetorical poets that he had previously followed. Resonating sound patterns in the poem are no longer quite so important to him as seizing the right images and color in his diction to convey felt emotions. Inability to realize "love's redeeming fire," for instance, is no longer just reason for "pity," as before, but it means being "tempered to fear and sharpened to a knife-edge cut" (SP, p. 16). He no longer simply responds to one abstract term--"sorrow"--with another--"grief"--but he enacts each one with sounds and images, illustrative images, which, juxtaposed, construct the foundation for the imagined world of the poem. Creating a concrete context for universal terms, and, in some cases, subtracting cumbersome connectives--"and," "but," "when," etc.--Duncan, at times, seems to be aiming for the hardness in language that Pound advocated in his post-imagist years. Although he approaches this standard, he never attains it; such hardness doesn't mix with his less virile, more mellifluous style. And while he creates the effect of phanopoeia in

his poetry, Duncan never turns into an image-oriented poet, in the manner of Bunting or the early Zukofsky, who are often more occupied with the concise definition of first-hand perceptions than ideas. Their precision would elude him; nor does he stress the same economy of language that they do. Rather, Duncan begins to eschew verbose exposition in his poetry in favor of developing one or two images in a poem as a means of pictorially locating an idea or emotion in the reader's imagination. Among his earliest efforts of this kind is "Processionals II" (1950).

> Torches, we light our own way,
> nor, in passing, notice our burnd bodies.
>
> Look, look, I said,
> The heart of the flame
> has gone out, the wick!
>
> Set yourself on fire once more, you said,
> The way is dark.
>
> O dead, to you this flesh
> is no more than wax.
>
> Torches, we appear to ourselves
> flames in the distance
> that extinguish themselves
> before we can reach them.
>
> (SP, p. 78)

Accompanying stylistic changes is the poet's abandonment of the 'static' concept of the self that facilitated introspection in Heavenly City, Earthly City and earlier poems. In this poem "we" exist within the flow of time, not transcended or extracted from it. Thematically, "Processionals II" touches on the paradox accentuated by the Classical empiricists, Berkeley and Hume: the "I" of

one moment has no discernible identity with the "I" of the next. Identity cannot be seized, investigated and defined; the self is continually unfolding beyond the conscious mind of the ego "I" Or, to borrow Wheelwright's observation in The Burning Fountain: "All existence, as we can humanly know it, is in the process of change: an unremitting passage out of what just was into what is just about to be." The introspective pose of Heavenly City, Earthly City tends "to minimize time's . . . power by forming a concept of time: of ourselves existing 'in' the present, with the past behind us and the future ahead. The conceptualization has its uses," Wheelwright continues, but "it distorts the reality of the one kind of time we can ever directly know--the present."[19] Yet even the present cannot be known unless the space-time rationalizations of the ego are abandoned to the underlying rhythm of the will evolving with the flow of time, a necessary step, in Duncan's view, for the poet who wishes to enter the "dance" of the imagination. The rhythm to which the imagination becomes attuned, scoring the "dance," corresponds, according to the poet, to the eternal rhythm of the universe. "Which is why the man said," Olson would

[19] The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism, rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 19-20.

later remark, "he who possesses rhythm possesses the universe."[20]

Emerging in Duncan's view is the realization that we cannot pull ourselves out of the present, place the "I" on a pedestal, and define its characteristics: the "torches" that "we appear to ourselves . . . extinguish themselves/ before we can reach them." The new vitalism developing in Duncan's vision in some ways amends Bergson's view of the flow and flux of reality, and it means for him, as it did for T. E. Hulme and the imagists, interpreting Bergson, a change from the contemplative manner of the earlier poetry to a poetry that concentrates recognitions seized from the fluctuating field of the poet's perceptions.

In accord with the tenets of vitalism is the fundamental understanding that the self exists in time and changes with the flow and flux of reality. Like all other phenomena, the self can be known in one of two ways. "The first," according to Bergson, "implies that we move round" the subject of our speculation; and, "the second that we enter into it."

> The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said

[20] Charles Olson, "Human Universe," Human Universe and other Essays, ed. Donald Allen (1965; rpt. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), p. 10; henceforth cited in the text as HU with page number.

> to stop at the relative; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the absolute.[21]

Language is presumably a way of knowing--perhaps, as some linguists hold, the only way of knowing. But if language is a means for attaining absolute knowledge, then it must enter into its subject or, vice versa, the subject must enter into it. Introspection, insofar as it means looking into one's mind, examining one's emotional state, is, deceptively, a relative kind of knowledge (at least as Duncan proceeds in his early poetry), since it abstracts a concept of the self from the real flow of time in order to engage in its own, consciously separated procedure. In "Processionals II" the poet recognizes that the self cannot be grasped and held, exhibited to the "I" for introspective purposes, thereby negating any further speculation that would yield only relative knowledge. This awareness brings him to the perimeter of Olson's poetics, which proposes a kind of absolute knowledge, having the poet enter into "the process of the thing" (Olson, HU, p. 52), the poem, that is, "from the smallest particle of all, the syllable" (Olson, HU, p. 53) to the sounding, the "kinetics" of the whole.

Olson doesn't settle for descriptive or symbolic language designed to achieve sublime, transliminal effects.

21 "Intuition and Concepts," T. E. Hulme, trans., in Introductory Philosophy, ed. Frank A. Tillman, Bernard Berofsky, and John O'Connor, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 747-48.

That language can be an absolute way of knowing is implied through the written character for Maximus himself--the Man in the Word[22]--and the various ways that Olson, in the "Projective Verse" essay, conceives for relating the poet's experience as perceptor to the language of poetry. Again, we return to his fundamental prescriptions for composition--

> the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
> the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE
> (Olson, HU, p. 55)

--through which Olson, imago Maximus, opposing the tenets of modern linguistics, directly links language with the poet's experience of things. The poet's perceiving catalyzes HEAD, HEART, EAR, BREATH, which act to evoke the SYLLABLE and the LINE. Obviously, Olson's formula is of dubious empirical value, but, in relating language and experience, it is responsible for propagating one of the many alogical assumptions of neo-romanticism.

Having turned from the introspective pose, the descriptive language of reflection, and the relative knowledge imparted through the rhetoric of the earlier poetry, Duncan has arrived at a propitious point where, if he is to again make the self over into the poem, he must devise or adapt the poetics that will enable him to do so, conceive a language that will convey, absolutely be, "the mind's speed" (Olson, HU, p. 54). The direction

[22] Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems (1960; rpt. New York: Jargon/Corinth Books, 1972), p. 162.

of his thought at mid-century brings him to the point where he can use Olson's poetics.

It would take a few years, and several readings, Duncan admits, before he would completely grasp what Olson was advocating in his essay on "Projective Verse." Apart from "Human Universe," the Mayan Letters and other writings in which Olson's primary interest is to revive the primordial sensibility of man, recover it from the codified ways of knowing imposed through the ages, the full import of his poetics is elusive; his prescriptions for creating poetry by breaking the rational order of syntax may seem inane to the mind couched in conventional rhetoric and the 'new' Tate-Ransom-Brooks-Warren tradition of modernism. Olson's poetics subverts traditional critical expectations. Individual aspects of his theory come clear, but, if considered apart from the whole order of his thought, some tenets appear to be insignificant, of no more than minor consequence.

At first Duncan was of the impression that Olson was simply encouraging poets to write their poetry as they wished to have it read aloud. Typographical variations on the page are to be taken as indicative of the kind of pauses, stops, or differing speeds that a reader would convey in the poem's oral presentation.

> It is time we picked the fruits of the experiments of Cummings, Pound, Williams, each of whom has, after

> his way, already used the machine as a scoring to his composing, as a script to its vocalization. It is now only a matter of the recognition of the convention of composition by field for us to bring into being an open verse as formal as the closed, with all its traditional advantages.
>
> (Olson, HU, p. 58)

Thus, a period placed, say, three spaces after the final word in a sentence or phrase denotes a lingering of effect after that word. The tone of the sentence does not totally decline in intensity with the final word, but that word is enunciated so that its after-effect suspends the satisfaction of 'a complete thought.' Also, if the

> poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time. If he suspends a word or syllable at the end of a line . . . he means that time to pass that it takes the eye--that hair of time suspended --to pick up the next line.
>
> (Olson, HU, p. 58)

So, Duncan, over seven years later, in "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar":

> West
>
> from east men push.
> The islands are blessed
> (cursed) that swim below the sun,
> man upon whom the sun has gone down![23]

However, such technical measures simply dust the surface of that "stance toward reality" (Olson, HU, p. 51) Olson proposes for the poet. The way the poem is cast onto the

[23] The Opening of the Field (1960; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 66; henceforth cited in text as Field with page number. The final line of this passage is borrowed from Ezra Pound's interpretation of a Chinese ideogram in Canto LXXIV: "a man on whom the sun has gone down."

page not only directs how it should be read aloud but also reflects the fragmentary, harmonious, balanced or imbalanced way parts of the poem were originally conceived by the poet. Visually, parts of a poem's form serve as gestures of thought.

In the early fifties, before these techniques would appear so common as they are today, all of what Duncan could salvage from "Projective Verse" seemed fine, but not terribly innovative, since he was well aware of what Pound and Williams were doing and already using similar effects in his own poetry. He could brush off Olson's essay lightly. To a poet who, for over a decade, had been reading his verse aloud in the cafes of San Francisco, this isolated facet of Olson's theory was not particularly impressive, suggestive but hardly revolutionary. It seemed to him that they simply shared an interest in reviving an oral tradition in American poetry.

However Olson's essay, like Wordsworth's Preface, is filled with qualifications that paradoxically confuse and elucidate certain aspects of his theory as they point to the various ends of each of its major, though seemingly facile, tenets. And it would evidently take a while for Duncan to understand just what Olson means by saying that a poem should have in its "reading [what] its writing involved . . .," evidence of "the intervals of its composition" (Olson, HU, p. 59) that would at least convey the

illusion of spontaneous composition. The process of composition and the perceptions of the poem should appear as they are first appearing to the poet, then, interacting, evolving, move the poem toward (not in-to) its form.

Several writers have subsequently misunderstood Olson, taking his prescriptions for that illusion of spontaneity--the whole concept of the poet enacting body, soul, mind--and such statements as "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION" to mean that he is simply advocating another brand of automatic writing, and nothing more. Analogous misunderstandings have resulted from Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of emotion" when the reader forgets that the writing occurs when the poet's ebullience is "recollected in tranquility." James Dickey and Louis Simpson, both, during the fifties, strictly adhering to conventional notions of form in their poetry, issued harsh criticisms against Olson. Robert Bly made his reservations about Olson's theory known in a witty parody entitled "Protective Verse." However, Dickey and Bly apparently took occasion to consider the matter further, for their recent poetry, at least since 1967, incorporates several aspects of open form, and, more significantly, develops from variations of that "stance toward reality" Olson proposes.

Considering the directives in "Projective Verse" and his other writings--all of which Duncan, in some

measure, assimilates into his own poetics--Olson would have the poet prehend the field of his perceptions, his Gestalt, and take it inside himself: an act that is theoretically proposed as a means of resolving the subject-object duality of man's experience in the world. The poet acts as trope on his field and transforms what he perceives (topos: the field). Components of the field obviously vary with different writers. Olson, for instance, following Whitehead (Process and Reality), takes first-hand perceptions of the world as reality, evading the problematic interference of Cartesian skepticism regarding perception. Duncan, on the other hand, takes history and a wide range of knowledge as the field of his experience; the natural world, when it enters his perceptions, is generally tinged with a noumenal aura, conceived as an emblem of felt "presences" (Truth & Life, p. 45). The poet's prioperception--the process by which he takes the field into himself--generates a further depth experience, according to Olson,[24] which taps the memory and calls upon the associating process of the imagination, catalyzing in turn transformation of the field. For Duncan as Olson, both steeped in psychoanalysis, perceptions or images of the field are

[24] See Charles Olson, "Prioperception," in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, ed. Donald Allen and Walter Tallman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1973), pp. 181-84.

associated with universal forms that are taken to be innate in the memory of man, imprints on the psyche, usually designated through myth (typos).

> The basic trio wld seem to be: topos/typos/tropos, 3 in 1. The 'blow' hits here, and me, 'bent' as born and of sd one's own decisions for better or worse (allowing clearly, by Jesus Christ, that you love or go down)
> if this sounds 'mystical' I plead so. Wahrheit: I find the contemporary substitution of society for the cosmos captive and deathly.
>
> Image, therefore, is vector. It carries the trinity via the double to the single form which one makes oneself able, if so, to issue from the 'content' (multiplicity: originally, and repetitively, chaos--Tiamat: wot the Hindo-Europeans knocked out by giving the Old Man (Juice Himself) all the lighting.
>
> (Olson, HU, p. 97)

The poem is no longer a medium for discourse. Prehended, the poet's field is one magnanimous, simultaneous event, and its projection into the poem, by way of the breath, should convey the immediacy of that event. Hence Duncan's abandonment of rhetoric-laden exposition in favor of a more fragmented, collage-like presentation of the poem, a presentation that designs itself to overcome the reader's rationality and call intuition into play.

Since the immediacy of the event is the poet's chief concern, it is understandable why the poetry of Duncan and Olson, or, for that matter, any writer following the 'projectivist' aesthetic, rarely provides the modernist satisfaction of an experience completed, or an order

achieved. The poem is truly "the cry of its occasion,/ part of the res itself," to borrow an instance from Stevens ("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"), but, for Olson and Duncan, an occasion without an imposed order other than what the poet, acting as trope on the field, initially perceives in the field. Influx of the field, stirring the depths of the poet's memory and imagination, generally stimulates some recognition of its role in the larger cosmic order inherent in creation, which is recognized as both eternal and ever-present, though fluctuating, in the here-and-now of the poem. Olson's provision for typos as the means for relating the present and eternal is in accord with Duncan's view of myth: Duncan considers "the mythopoeic . . . fundamental to the structuring of man's world . . ." (Truth & Life, p. 12). The mythological aspect of Duncan's poetry may be viewed as a projection of the psychic drama of perception (see Truth & Life, pp. 7-11).

As Charles Altieri observes, prioperception and the complementing concept of the poet acting as trope on his field "reflect Olson's ultimate quest to reappropriate for man the divine prerogative of being at once center and circumference of the cosmos." In order to attain this perspective

> Two conceptual and ethical obstacles must be overcome: man must be defined in such a way that each individual can be a relative creative center of Cosmos

> without that relativity turning Cosmos into Chaos [Cosmos understood in the Greek sense: order], and man must be repossessed of a less egocentric and narrowly willful sense of his own centrality (or Cosmos and Chaos become merely human orders).[25]

The poet becomes source and center of the mandala he creates from his field, then, as if in an instant, issues forth its inherent order.

Summarizing Olson's perspective in The Special View of History, Altieri again remarks:

> Man exists in multiplicity; he gathers that multiplicity into the unity of an event; then he must actively recognize that interpenetration of world and self as only a single moment in a universe he creates as it creates him. **** One can recognize that the possibility of action depends on the fact that the world elicits desire in the very process by which consciousness chooses to do something. In other words what the phenomenologists call intentionality witnesses the fact that choosing is also in a sense affirming and obeying man's tropistic relation to Cosmos. The ideal psyche combines knowledge of the creative father, of the son who in his actions recognizes the father's goodness, and of the spirit of love generated by absolute active knowledge of absolute good. The self freed from the shackles of egoistic desire looks on all creation and rests in the satisfaction that it is good. Man reappropriates the god-like being he created in his noblest image.[26]

Whereas Olson conceives his aesthetic in secular terms, in such a way as to make it accessible to modern thought, Duncan, generally tending toward a more occult vision, explains an analogous poetics in terms of his theological understanding:

[25] Charles Altieri, "Olson's Poetics and Tradition," Boundary 2, II, No. 1 & 2 (Fall 1973/Winter 1974), 181.

[26] Altieri, p. 182.

> Reason falters, but our mythic, our deepest poetic sense, recognizes and greets as truth the proclamation that the Son brings . . . this Wrathful Father [as] the First Person of Love. As Chaos, the Yawning Abyss, is the First Person of Form. And the Poet too, like the Son, in this myth of Love and Form, must go deep into the reality of His own Nature, into the Fathering Chaos or Wrath, to suffer His own Nature. In this mystery of the Art, the Son's cry to the Father might be too the cry of the artist to the form he obeys.
>
> (Truth & Life, p. 24)

In other words the poet issues forth from the field--the Chaos he takes inside himself--potentially, all creation--a world transformed--a Form of Love--as Christ transformed the avenging nature of the Old Testament Yahweh into a loving God for the world.

> For those of us who search out the widest imagination of our manhood . . . God strives in all Creation to come to Himself. The Gods men know are realizations of God. But what I speak of here in the terms of a theology is a poetics. Back of each poet's concept of the poem is his concept of the meaning of form itself; and his concept of form in turn . . . arises from his concept of the nature of the universe, its lifetime or form, or even, for some, its lifelessness or formlessness. A mystic cosmogony gives rise to the little world the poet as creator makes.
>
> (Truth & Life, p. 25)

That Duncan regards his poetics in theological terms points to his belief that the poet's commitment to poetry must be as strong as the commitment anyone maintains who adheres to a religion based on faith. Considering the poet "like the Son," Duncan poses a view that is very similar to the poet's role as conceived by Blake, for whom Christ is the informing source of the imagination. For Blake, becoming infused with spirit of Christ makes poetry possible:

to be a poet is to be like Christ. Yet Duncan and Blake are mutually self-effacing in their idea of what it is to be a poet: "And we write at all," Duncan remarks, "in order that Man, however he can in us, still be a poet" (Years, p. xi). Poetry is a way of knowing, not simply a matter of writing. Being a poet is a matter of knowing reality through a certain level of consciousness.

Ultimately, however, Duncan returns his theological frame of reference back to the act of poetry, implicitly recognizing the form of the poem as an evolving process resembling what he conceives as the evolution of the universe, both obeying certain laws. Aristotle, Plato, medieval Aristotelians, and even Darwin provide models for his syncretic evolutionary vision. Duncan regards the universe as "an enduring design" (Truth & Life, p. 21), forms of which have been recognized throughout history as myths; and, in his organic theory of poetry, the poem unfolds into a linguistic design, following verbal impulses that develop into patterns or laws, forms comparable in the poem to the active forces in the universe recognized as myths. In this context we can understand such phrases as "the syntax of the world of my experience" (Truth & Life, p. 15) and "the unyielding Sentence that shows Itself forth in the language as I make it" (Field, p. 12) to refer not only to the order evolving in the form of the poem, but, also, the cosmic order the poet apprehends.

In "The Structure of Rime I," he writes,

> O Lasting Sentence
> sentence after sentence I make in your image. In the feet that
> measure the dance of my pages I hear cosmic intoxications of the
> man I will be.
>
> (Field, p. 12)

For Duncan, the self, the poem, and the cosmos unfold along lines of an organic, evolutionary design determined by certain eternal forces that will ultimately return to their Original Source, yet the mystery behind that Source cannot be definitely known.

CHAPTER V

ALL IN THE DANCE

One critic has remarked, accurately, though with some dismay, that the line in Duncan's poetry doesn't always follow the length of the breath.[1] Which brings us to envision an eager gentleman, in the most isolated corner of a university library, hyperventilating over the first edition of Roots and Branches, then folding over a cluttered, well-lighted desk, sad, distraught, exhausted. Few poets as immersed in literary tradition as Robert Duncan have taken Olson's directions quite so literally. It would be a mistake to assume that all of Duncan's later poetry is written according to Olson's standards, yet it seems accurate to observe that the 'projectivist' attitude prevails in much of his verse at least into the mid sixties, certainly through The Opening of the Field and up until composition of the poems in Bending the Bow. Still, rather than simply apply his mentor's theory, Duncan reinterprets it, and by making aspects of "Projective Verse" a part of his own poetics, he fits it into the larger construct of his thought.

[1] Samuel Charters, "Robert Duncan," Some Poems/Poets: Studies in American Underground Poetry Since 1945 (Berkeley: Oyez Press, 1971), p. 56.

Reading The Maximus Poems or shorter selections from Archaeologist of Morning, one can sense the thrust of the poet's breath in individual lines. In fact, experiments have shown that the pulsing breath rhythm of Olson's "open" verse stimulate a greater physical response among listeners than the metronomic rhythms of "closed" verse.[2] Duncan, however, when he refers to the breath of the poem, generally considers its significance in terms of inspiration, or the spirit moving among its rhythms and sounds: "the poem moves from the releasing pattern of an inspiration, a breathing."[3]

Aware of Olson's fondness for tracing the etymology of words, Duncan, interpreting the significance of 'breath' in the poem, apparently searches out connotations for the word that come closer to meeting the needs of his poetic sensibility than the most common literal definition: "Hence, breathing, existence, spirit, life; so breath of life, breath of nostrils"; or "The wind blown into a musical instrument. poet." (O.E.D.). Considering, too, the wind as a conventional metaphor for inspiration in Shelley's poetry, Wordsworth's Prelude and "Tintern Abbey"

[2] Marcia R. Lieberman and Philip Lieberman, "Olson's Projective Verse and the Use of Breath Control as a Structural Element," Language and Style, 5 (Fall, 1972), 287-98.

[3] the Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography, 2nd ed. (Fremont, Michigan: The Sumac Press, 1968), p. 24.

Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp"--the wind as an evocation of divine breath--Duncan's interpretation of the word holds broad implications. In the Truth & Life of Myth, he writes:

> The mythteller beside himself with the excitement of the dancers sucks in the inspiring breath and moans, muttering against his willful lips; for this is not a story of what he thinks or wishes life to be, it is the story that comes to him and forces his telling. (Truth & Life, p. 7)

Following a similar urge to interpret Olson and take his prescriptions beyond the literal sense he intended, Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg realize the 'breath' in their poetry as it relates to breathing in the Zen-Yogic exercises to which they attribute their individual spiritual awareness.

The breath with the line--yes, literally, a dubious notion at best; not, as Olson's own verse shows, necessarily at the heart of good poetry--but, conceptually, suggestive. That Duncan turns from the literal breath of Olson's poetics does not imply that he spurns the neo-romantic attitude relating language to experience. Moreover, he re-structures that attitude, much in the way that he alters other aspects of "Projective Verse" to conform to his own preconceptions of what poetry should be. First, he spurns rationality and almost totally ignores the fundamental assumption of modern linguistics, that language is merely an arbitrary code for recording experience. However widely his own poetic method may differ from the reflective

procedure of Wordsworth, Duncan, as Ms. Levertov, seems to agree with his predecessor in regarding "Language" as "not the dress but the incarnation of thought."[4]

In Duncan's poetics, the 'breath,' as a source and means of inspiration, brings the poet in contact with a certain rhythm that potentially unites the soul with a rhythm or process that he considers to be inherent in the order of the universe. Apprehended, that rhythm, in turn, stirs reverie, attunes the imagination to sounds--"a congregation of sounds and figures previous to dictionary meanings" (Truth & Life, p. 13)--that evoke verbal activity. Then the poet:

> Awakening--listening, seeing, sensing--to work with the moving weights and durations of syllables, the equilibrations of patterns, the liberations of new possibilities of movement; to cooperate in the aroused process. Attending. From the first inspiration, breathing with the new breath.
>
> (Truth & Life, p. 24-25)

Verbal sensation establishes the medium of the poet's concentration, activates thought, catalyzes recognitions that bind the event of the poem with the larger order of the universe.

"Writing is first a search in obedience":[5] obedience to patterns evolving in the verbal activity of the poem

[4] Quoted by Denise Levertov, "Some Notes on Organic form," The Poetics of the New American Poetry, ed. Donald Allen and Walter Tallman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1973), p. 308.

[5] Robert Duncan, "The Structure of Rime I," The Opening of the Field (1960; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 12.

to create the dance. Then,

The Dance

from its dancers circulates among the other
dancers. This
would-have-been feverish cool excess of
movement makes
each man hit the pitch co-
ordinate.

Lovely their feet pound the green solid meadow.
The dancers
mimic flowers--root stem stamen and petal
our words are,
our articulations, our
measures.

(Field, p. 8)

Mimicking flowers, the dancers are first of all the words themselves. In its rhythmic and sonic movements, the dance calls intuition and associating processes of the poet's fancy into play. ("Logopoeia, 'the dance of the intellect among words' . . . ."[6]?) Various patterns developing in the poem direct the larger design of the whole and create its sense. In the process of composition memory and knowledge are enacted as the poet apprehends the rhythm of the dance, and, in the activity of the poem, becomes a dancer himself:

Where have I gone, Beloved?
Into the Waltz, Dancer.
Lovely our circulations sweeten the meadow.
In Ruben's riotous scene the May dancers teach us
our learning seeks abandon!

(Field, p. 8)

[6] Ezra Pound, "How to Read," Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (1960; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1963), p. 25.

Becoming a dancer, the poet actualizes Olson's call for him to enter "the process of the thing."[7] The linguistic impulse behind the poem exemplifies Duncan's interpretation of his mentor's imperative to enter the poem "from the smallest particle of all, the syllable" (Olson, HU, p. 53) to the "kinetics" of the whole.

> Maximus calld us to dance the Man.
> We calld him to call
> season out of season-
> d mind!
>
> (Field, p. 9)

Language entering the poem, since it derives from a source other than rational or figurative discourse, creates rather than describes sense, and ideally engages the reader in the presence of the poem as it engaged the poet in composition.

"Language obeyd flares tongues in obscure matter" (Field, p. 95): allowing the verbal impulse to take over, fetters of rationality that normally control thought are broken, and intuition arises to quench the fiery "desire burning" in the mind of "radiant man." In "Food for Fire, Food for Thought," the poet, addressing language as "You," recognizes the role language plays in thought (a matter still disputed by linguists), and realizes how it can stimulate the intuitive faculty of intellection rather than

[7] "Projective Verse," Human Universe and other Essays, ed. Donald Allen (1965; rpt. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), p. 52; henceforth cited in the text as HU with page number.

control it (as the whole relativist tradition in linguistic study maintains it does[8]):

> You have carried a branch of tomorrow into the room.
> Its fragrance has awakend me--no,
>
> it was the sound of a fire on the hearth
>
> leapd up where you bankd it, sparks of delight.
> (Field, p. 95)
>
> ****
>
> flamey threads of firstness go out from your touch.
>
> Flickers of unlikely heat
> at the edge of our belief bud forth.
> (Field, p. 96).

Duncan appropriates for language the same physical and mental properties as Joyce in A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man, when Stephen Daedalus' imagination is aroused by the thingness, the quidditative quality, of the words "kiss" and "suck." In both cases language is "Food for Thought . . . ."

Discussing the impetus behind Duncan's verse, Denise Levertov illumines further the direction of his poetics:

> Duncan . . . pointed to what is perhaps a variety of organic poetry: the poetry of linguistic impulse. It seems to me that the absorption in language itself, the awareness of the world of multiple meaning revealed in sound, word, syntax, and the entering into this world in the poem, is as much as experience or constellation of perceptions as the instress of non-verbal sensuous and psychic events. What might make the poet of linguistic impetus appear to be on another tack entirely is that the demands of his realization may seem in opposition to truth as we think of it; that is,

[8] George Steiner, "Whorf, Chomsky and the Student of Literature," in Literary Criticism: Idea and Act, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), pp. 242-62.

> in terms of sensual logic. But the apparent distortion of experience in such a poem for the sake of verbal effects is actually a precise adherence to truth since the experience itself was a verbal one.[9]

Yet Duncan is not unaware of the possible "distortion of experience" and "opposition to truth" engendered in the means and method of his poetry: "in the living changes of syntax," he recognizes "a snake-like beauty" (Field, p. 12) that is likely to seduce the poet writing for the sake of verbal effects alone.

When he refers to 'breath' as a source of inspiration, relating it to the creation of myths, then discusses the linguistic impulse behind "the Dance that can begin in words"--the poet's obedience "to a voice that descends in the language"[10]--Duncan is certainly commenting on the process of composition, the magic behind all creativity, but, as some have failed to realize, the process itself is, in some measure, intentionally idealized. The meta-linguistic notions behind Duncan's poetics serve the metaphysical construct of his larger vision. He regards the poem, particulars in nature, the life of every man, and patterns in the cosmos in abeyance to the evolutionary process in reality. So,

[9] Denise Levertov, "Some Notes on Organic Form," The Poet in the World (New York: New Directions, 1973), pp. 12-13.

[10] Robert Duncan, As Testimony: the Poem & the Scene (San Francisco: White Rabbit Press, 1966), p. 9.

> The force that words obey in song
> the rose and artichoke obey
> in their unfolding towards their form.
> (Field, p. 60)

Duncan's poetics is designed in such a way as to fit poetry into the order of all creation, the one grand Poem issued through the Beloved. In Duncan's view, the primal force of creation is manifest in various forms--again, myths--all of which evolve throughout history in cycles and ultimately return to their Original Source. Entering the dance, the poet's ontological awareness realizes all ages as contemporaneous--"the living reality of all times in present time, the feeling of continuous identity in creation" (Truth & Life, p. 59)--and cycles of the ages are recapitulated in the self engaged in the poem. The poet not only observes

> How all Forms in Time . . . grow
> And return to their single Source
> (Field, p. 23)

but, also, regards cycles in the evolutionary process of the ages as a part of his own life history:

> --Dionysus in wrath, Apollo in rapture
> Orpheus in song, and Eros secretly
>
> four that Christ-crossed in one Nature
> Plato named the First Beloved
>
> that now I see
> in all certain dear contributor
> to my being
>
> has given me house, ghost,
> image and color, in whom I dwell
> past Arcady.
> (Field, p. 15)

Poetry, being a vital part of the universal order,--directed by the same Source as all other forms, should ideally maintain a paradigmatic relation with the evolution of all forms, reflect their infinite number of cycles in its design, and follow the same autotelic process. Since the poem is "referrd to its source in the act,"[11] like all other forms, the poet realizes himself as belonging to, and possessing, the universal order as well. The whole evolutionary-autotelic process seems less mysterious if we consider analogous expanding-contracting theories of the universe offered by modern science. Duncan idealizes poetry as a way of knowing, a form evolving as part of a larger order of forms. The poem is a thing in process through which forms aligned in the same evolutionary process can be recognized.

Approaching the ideology of Duncan's poetics before giving extended attention to the later poems may seem like prying open the back door of a decadent mansion after having lost the key, but, actually, it is necessary since a thorough examination of The Opening of the Field, Roots and Branches, and Bending the Bow is impracticable. Each of the later volumes holds to a unity derived from images, myths and metaphors that illumine as radiant filaments the larger

[11] Robert Duncan, "Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's Maximus," The Poetics of the New American Poetry, p. 188.

domain of his vision. Most of the themes that appear in the later poems--ranging from the innocence of childhood to the war crimes of Viet Nam--serve to elucidate a larger theme that prevails in his work from the late fifties to the present: the universal integrity of poetry as a way of knowing. Apart from the view of language that has developed in Duncan's poetics and his idealization of poetry as an organic part of the larger evolutionary scheme of the universe, the epistemological value of poetry, as he understands it, would be an awesome issue. But, keeping in mind the metaphysical range of his ideology, perhaps some estimation of the kind of knowledge his poetry imparts can be reached.

The assumptions upon which Duncan builds his evolutionary-autotelic concept of process in the universe, and process in poetry, are ultimately derived from universal patterns in ancient religious thought. "Everything comes to be out of One and is resolved into One"[12]--so Musaios, a student of Orpheus, sometime before Thales and the advent of early Greek science in the sixth century B.C. "This central thought," W. K. C. Guthrie observes,

> that everything existed at first together in a confused mass, and that the process of creation was one of separation and division, with the corollary that the

[12] Quoted by W. K. C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement, rev. ed. (1952: rpt. New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1966), p. 75.

> end of our era will be a return to the primitive confusion, has been in many religions and religious philosophies. The best-known example is our own Bible. 'The earth was without form . . . and God divided the light from the darkness . . . and God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament . . . . And God said, let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.' The next point is to notice that as far as Greek thought is concerned, this fundamental idea appears in two different ages. It is first of all the keynote of the philosophies of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.[13]

Similarities between myths about creation continue to amaze scholars of the wolrd's religions. The most reasonable explanation for the recurring water imagery in many accounts points to reports that were probably spread by Egyptian merchants on the annual flooding of the Nile. After the waters recede the fecund river valley appears as a sort of paradise. Those inhabiting the valley, knowing no scientific explanation, personified the process and, realizing their dependence on the flooding, deified their personification for worship. As communities spread away from the Nile they took their deity with them, and the concept of the One turned into many variations of the original god.

Creation, resolution: curtain rising, curtain falling: between the acts the multiplicity takes the stage: division of the One into many. The parts are

[13] Orpheus and Greek Religion, p. 75.

personified as myths, according to Freud,[14] in order to quell mortal fears of the natural forces they represent. For Duncan, the division of the One into many reveals "the actual drama or meaning of history, the plot and intention of Reality" (Truth & Life, p. 61).

Most of the myths handed down from ancient Greece, especially those pertaining to fertility, originate from patterns perceived in natural history. Persephone, Kore, Demeter--as fertility deities, they take their identity from a larger personification: the Great Mother, or Mother Earth, who "was one of the oldest forms of [Greek] religion," according to Guthrie, "if not the oldest of all."[15] In Hesiod's Theogony, to which Duncan frequently refers, She is the only successfully dominant female. She produces other natural physical orders--Sky, Mountains, Sea--partho-genetically.[16] Correlatives of the Great Mother (Earth) arose in various communities surrounding the Aegean Sea as each sought their local version of Her in order to insure their own prosperity. Variations of the Great Mother

[14] W. D. Robson Scott, trans., The Future of an Illusion, ed. James Strachey, rev. ed. (1961; rpt. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1964), pp. 19-35.

[15] In In the Beginning: Some Greek Views on the Origins of Life and the Early State of Man (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1957), p. 20.

[16] Norman O. Brown, "Introduction," Hesiod's Theogony, trans. and ed. Norman O. Brown (New York: Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1953), p. 17.

appear as one of the unifying myths in The Opening of the Field.

In the poet's invocation, She is the "Queen Under The Hill . . . ."

Often I Am Permitted To Return
To A Meadow

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,
that is not mine, but is a made place,

that is mine, it is so near to the heart,
an eternal pasture folded in all thought
so that there is a hall therein

that is a made place, created by light
wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.

Wherefrom all architectures I am
I say are likenesses of the First Beloved
whose flowers are flames lit to the Lady.

She it is Queen Under The Hill
whose hosts are a disturbance of words within words
that is a field folded.

It is only a dream of the grass blowing
east against the source of the sun
in an hour before the sun's going down

whose secret we see in a children's game
of ring a round of roses told.

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
as if it were a given property of the mind
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission,
everlasting omen of what is.

(Field, p. 7)

The magical, incantatory effect of the poem is evoked quite beautifully through its several parallel constructions and resonating sound patterns. Technically, Duncan aims to "knot" his "sentences . . . to bear the import of associations" (Truth & Life, p. 13), and, here, he obviously succeeds in that effort, for the incremental structure of,

say, the opening sentence of the poem--the indefinite phrases that suggest rather than describe, create rather than declare sense--continually qualifies its meaning, so that it cannot be readily paraphrased. And the tone of the poem genuinely evokes his concept of the "place" to which he returns: the "place" of intuition, "folded in all thought" yet "near to the heart . . . ." Ultimately, Duncan, ignoring reason and rational discourse, places all of his poetic faith in intuition; it is a faculty of mind that is both "made" as it is used yet, in some sense, determined by "forms"--perhaps of memory, life history--that "fall," revealing "all architectures I am . . . ." Duncan creates a vaguely pictorial and syntactic space "that certain bounds hold against chaos . . .," threshing floor for the dance.

The "flowers" that are "flames lit to the Lady" are identified as words, articulations of "forms," in the following poem, "The Dance." Associating the "Queen Under The Hill" with the linguistic impetus of poetry, the manifestation of intuition, Duncan initiates a motif that continues throughout The Opening of the Field, regarding language in vegetative and chthonic terms. In "Yes, As A Look Springs To Its Face," he writes:

> Poems come up from a ground so
> to illustrate the ground, approximate
> a lingering of eternal image, a need
> known only in its being found ready.
> (Field, p. 60).

The 'natural' qualities he assigns to poetry are in accord with the procreative powers traditionally recognized in the pan-Hellenic Great Mother. Yet, in relating poetry to the "ground," and regarding words in organic terms, it becomes apparent that the poet conceives of the Great Mother and her attendant powers in a metaphorical way, as, moreover, the productive force of mind--"whose hosts are a disturbance of words within words"--that gives rise to intuition. In "Evocation," the poet celebrates Kore--

> Earth-mover, tender Thresher,
> Queen of our dance-floor!
> (Field, p. 40)

--in a similar way; however she, being a specialized correlative of the Great Mother, is attributed more specific qualities--Bacchanalian--than her ancestral deity.

Variations of the Great Mother, or the Queen Under The Hill, appear throughout the volume: in "The Maiden," "Four Pictures of the Real Universe," and "The Structure of Rime," an open sequence that continues through Bending the Bow. She is a prototype for a whole series of female figures in Western religious thought, according to Guthrie,[17] ranging from the ancient fertility deities to the Virgin Mother of Christ. Duncan seems to be quite aware of her lineage, since her characteristics adumbrate, when they do not serve as the focal theme, in "At Christmas," "The

[17] See "Mother Earth: The Myths," In the Beginning, pp. 11-28.

Ballad of Mrs. Noah," and the references to the Biblical Ruth and the "old woman" in "The Structure of Rime." The Great Mother paradigm thematically unifies The Opening of the Field, always reflecting some aspect of manifestation of the creative will. Admittedly, the poet takes some liberties with her character: for instance, She is "old Friedl" who "has grown so lovely in my years" in "The Dance." Still, Friedl plays a role analogous to Kore in "Evocation": both serve as the impetus behind the dance of words, of creative consciousness, of the imagination. (Friedl is perhaps an elision of Freyja and another name; Freyja is a fertility goddess in Eddic mythology.)

Associating language with the elements and processes of nature, referring to those processes through myth, Duncan creates a web of metaphors that yields, as nature, subordinate orders (motifs: for instance, the seasonal cycle), that in turn align the process of intuition in poetry--the operation of intuitive thought in general--to the evolution of other forms in the universe, all emanating from "shakings of the center!" (Field, p. 36). "Worlds out of Worlds in Magic grow" (Field, p. 24).

Duncan aims for a comprehensiveness that modern thought denies the poet, stepping beyond the limits of rational thought, almost deliberately avoiding the quotidian world. In the Truth & Life of Myth, he writes:

> . . . the poetic imagination faces the challenge of finding a structure that will be the complex story of

> all the stories felt to be true, a myth in which something like the variety of man's experience of what is real may be contained.
>
> (Truth & Life, p. 12)

Turning from the temporal world, the only reality, in Duncan's view, that the rational mind will any longer admit as truth, the poet endeavors to create another reality that exists solely in the presence of his art; yet he recognizes poetry as a way of thought. Regarding poetry as "a place of first permission," a place where intuition still has and creates value, Duncan sets his own license. Were it not for the fact that his metaphors, allusions and the whole realm of belief in his work are ultimately referred back to the creative act of the poem--with the understanding that poetry is a way of knowing--his verse would, as Ms. Levertov remarks, be totally opposed to truth as we know it. However, in The Opening of the Field, what might so easily be deemed as merely an organic variety of pure poetry is also a poetry that renders an epistemology of intuition, since it does refer to its process; the intuition being the only faculty of mind by which man, entering the poem with the poet, can realize himself as an individual within, and possessing, the domain of other organic orders. Duncan expects a great deal of his art--often, more than he can accomplish. For him, poetry, in some ways a paradigm of intuition, is the only "place," the only active medium, in which man can still recognize himself as part of "the great Longing."

O poet! if you would share my way,
come in under the Law, the great Longing.
Dwell, as the guardian plant does, by appetite
at the shores of the Sun, come
under the Moon, keep
secret allegiance to the out-pouring stars
in Night's courts,

move into the Dance Whose bonds men hold
holy: the Light

life lights in like eyes.

(Field, p. 37)

Because so many of the poems in this volume are intricately bound to the metaphorical context of the whole, they cannot be readily extracted. The Opening of the Field is Duncan's first successfully unified volume. The title alone pays tribute to his mentor's theory, not to mention the poems in which he specifically refers to Olson, regardless of the way the poet has actually interpreted "Projective Verse" and his other writings. Most important is the fact that Duncan has become a writer of books, not merely a collector of poems.

Some poems in The Opening of the Field seem to naturally foreshadow his subsequent volume, especially "Bone Dance" and "Another Animadversion" (see Appendix). In Roots and Branches Duncan continues to refer to language and the creative process in metaphorical terms, adapting, also, an undeniably Blakean perspective in his vision regarding the manifestation of the Divine Will in the consciousness of man. Stylistically, too, Duncan and Blake are mutually distinguished from their classifiably romantic traditions in the way that they turn from meditation in their poetry

and favor more oracular voices in order to support their mythology. Again, Duncan derives the unity of his book from myth. The legends of Adam and Osiris are used for illustrative purposes; the latter is first evinced in his reference to "an imaginary tree" in the title poem of the volume.

> Sail, Monarchs, rising and falling
> orange merchants in spring's flowery markets!
> messengers of March in warm currents of news floating,
> flitting into areas of aroma,
> tracing out of air unseen roots and branches of sense
> I share in thought,
> filaments woven and broken where the world might light
> casual certainties of me. There are
>
> echoes of what I am in what you perform
> this morning. How you perfect my spirit!
> almost restore
> an imaginary tree of the living in all its doctrines
> by fluttering about,
> intent and easy as you are, the profusion of you!
> awakening transports of an inner view of things.[18]

Throughout Roots and Branches the poet equates his efforts to gather the limbs of Osiris, and recover the powers he harnessed from Isis, with his desire

> to release the first music somewhere again,
> for a moment
> to touch the design of the first melody!
> (Roots, p. 6)

As Blake adopts paradigms from traditional religious thought and fits them into his own mythography--viewing Christ, Sol, Adam as equally pure, though betrayed, embodiments of Divine

[18] Robert Duncan, "Roots and Branches," Roots and Branches (1964; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 3.

Will--so Duncan creates a paradigm encompassing Adam and Osiris, seeing in their unfallen state ideals of the imagination, pure manifestations of Eros, the Source of all creation in the Orphic rhapsodies. The poet, attempting to realize their powers in his own being, to project their will into his art, is actually "seeking to release Eros from our mistrust" (Roots, p. 6). Mistrust of Eros has resulted from the impositions placed on the flowing of "the design" (Roots, p. 6)--Urizenic fetters, to borrow Blake's terms--"bindings upon bindings" that encumber authentic realization of the Divine, in Duncan's view, and, consequently, keep the poet from "the dance."

The antithesis between the Law of the enduring, though fluctuating, design of the universe to which the poet refers and the false laws men vainly impose upon the enduring design is most clearly articulated in the poem appropriately entitled "The Law."

There are no
final orders. But the Law
constantly destroys the law,
erasing lightly or with turmoil
coils of the snake
evil is, referring to
imagined goods where they
radiate. What
hurts and what heals?
What hinders what intent
and what reveals?
New needs are new commands.
And this hurt good
that prescribes
the otherwise unwonted quest.

Ad-
just the law
to fit where the eye
sees what fits? or the heart
skips a beat un-
expectedly? Have these a court? Yet
hurt may a melody to the course of plain speaking give
necessary disarrangements, have been
anticipated, rememberd, thus
expected in eternity--no other
move will satisfy.

Song's fateful. Crime
fulfills the law. Oedipus is a
ravishing order in itself.
His tearing out his eyes--
a phrase, secretly prepared,
that satisfied.

(Roots, pp. 26-27)

In the second part of "The Law," the poet, cleverly punning on his own name yet keeping with the lineage of kings in the volume, refers to the murder of Duncan in Macbeth. The law of the play--"Shakespeare must play it out" (Roots, p. 28). Clearly, Duncan sets the Law that the artist must obey and the Law of "The Authors . . . in eternity" (Roots, p. 48) in opposition to the laws of reason, false imitations of Divine Law, that men have cunningly devised and imposed through the ages. He joins Blake in denouncing Moses and other artificers of moral and civil codes that, in his view, betray the natural evolution of Divine order and sacred Love as it is exemplified through Christ.

At every stage
law abiding or breaking the law
(disobedience is not careless)
needs a code. What's the score? keys
previous to the music
not given by nature.

> Justinian or Moses, whoever directs, must
> propose "unnatural" restrictions
> and say with a loud voice:
> "Cursed be he that
> confirmeth not <u>all</u> the words of this law
> to do them"--designing therein
> nets to please Satan. The Judge
> must have justice as His left hand,
> mercy as His right, to hold them,
> if He be, Love to whom we pray is,
> Fisher of Men from the cold living waters
> --for the laws are nets in the seas
> of men's will
> that teem with such
> cravings, seekings of redress, protests,
> bindings upon bindings,
> fates that men tie to imitate
> knots that cold, hunger, hurt and disease tie;
> visible defections of what is, that stir
> old roots in fearful desire and throw forth
> prodigies of judgment--monsters,
> disastrous congregations, "acts
> of God," we call them, strokes
> that disable. Yet call
>
> upon Love too, Who by Law's naild
> to a cross. "Hail,
> Christ, and make good
> our loss."
>
> (<u>Roots</u>, pp. 28-29)

The most pronounced conflict in <u>Roots and Branches</u> sets forces of reason, totalitarian rule, bureaucratic codes--all "the deceitful coils of institutions" (<u>Roots</u>, p. 30)--against the Law of life itself, Love, and the way of the imagination, the latter of which is embodied in the figure of Osiris. At times, as in the title poem, the poet identifies himself with the ancient Egyptian deity. And when he does, that identity, so conceived, is generally plagued by some kind of dualism, a separation of body and soul. Attempting to overcome this dualism, and thereby

unify the faculties of the imagination again, is, practically speaking, a nearly impossible task, since the body of Osiris was supposedly scattered in several pieces over the land after his coffin was found lodged in a tree near the Nile basin. Imitations were made of parts of his body and placed in temples surrounding the river, held as objects of worship. The poet-persona's quest, at least as it is portrayed in "Apprehensions," is also in some ways reminiscent of Isis' search for her husband's remains, which is, in effect, another way of illustrating the same split between body and soul. The "excavation" motif in the poem is appropriate for recounting the recovery of parts of his corpse. In the third part of the poem, we are reminded of the disinterment of Osiris' sacred body:

> They had taken him out of time.
> He had taken them, parts of him,
> out of what he was, left
> detaild record of his form.
>
> So that the earth
> bereft of him
> kept a crude resemblance.
> The lowest room, at least,
>
> stood for the head,
> joind by a neck
> to the trunk of the cave above.
> It was not a grave then.
>
> It was a place where a flood
> had passionately dug out
> his substance, leaving only his boundaries.
> And it seemd a grave to me,
>
> for I thought he was dead. No. .
> it seemd a series of caves as I said.
> Certainly, there were no arms or legs
> clearly defined.

It did occur to me
that the hideous gleam of a crawling thing
there at the bottom
was in the mind--
that the figure was head downwards.
(Roots, pp. 37-38)

****

In the grievous excavation he remains,
as if an empty place waited
body to my soul.
(Roots, p. 38)

The reason-imagination conflict, the dualism of body and soul, and the mythical context of Roots and Branches converge in "Osiris and Set."

Feeling and motion, impression and expression,
contend. Drama
is the shape of us. We are
ourselves tears and gestures of Isis
as she searches for what we are ourselves,

Osiris-Kadmon into many men shatterd,
torn by passion. She-That-Is,
our Mother, revives ever His legend.
She remembers. She puts it all together.
So that, in rapture, there is no longer
the sensory-motor homunculus
subduing the forces of nature, Horus contending with Set,

but the sistrum
sounds through us.
The Will wherein the gods ride
goes forward.
(Roots, pp. 68-69)

Punning on "remembers" (re-members: "puts it all together"), the poet wittily refers to his own task through the figure of Isis: that is, to gather parts of the consciousness of his race, unify them, and create in a derivative manner "the complex story of all the stories felt to be true, a myth in which . . . the variety of man's experience of what

is real may be contained" (Truth & Life, p. 12). In referring, through Isis, to the process by which the poet's task is accomplished, and in relating all of the mythical figures in the volume to the lineage of Osiris, Duncan has taken a step toward realizing that unified consciousness. Writing that "We are . . . gestures of Isis" points again to his belief that poetry, poetic consciousness, is a way of knowing to be adopted by every man, not simply a matter of composing verses.

Set, Osiris' brother, who "seduced the boy Horus (Roots, p. 68), Isis' son, and plotted against the king, is aligned with the perfidious forces and personages--Justinian, Moses, etc.--that contend against the imagination and actually hinder realization of the Divine Will in man. In "What Happened: Prelude," the "argument" for a verse play in which "The Muse" is "Isis, and the body of the work [is] . . . Osiris," Set is the one who edits the drama, in the guise of "Mr Fair Speech," a "hired hack of the theater-world," and turns it into "the musical comedy style of the day" (Roots, pp. 97-98). Set and others like him offer only temporal solutions, usually for their own benefit, and betray true inspiration in man. He is one among the many of an eternal form that, in Duncan's view, keeps man from living life in accord with the Universal Will, obstructing creative consciousness, turning against the grain of "the Law."

> This is an old story. We realize that not only in the writing but in the betrayal of the play higher orders contend. I am moved to speak, remembering that my own patron, Thoth, has the title He-Who-Decides-In-Favor-Of-Osiris-Against-Set.
> (Roots, p. 98)

The mythography of Roots and Branches is far more complex than that in any of Duncan's previous work; and, surprisingly enough, it presents a coherent thematic unity. In some poems, Duncan demonstrates a mastery in the handling of myth that is equalled in modern poetry only by Pound in the later Cantos. Yet in other poems, some of which I have necessarily chosen to demonstrate the unity of the volume, Duncan, again like Pound, seems perhaps too didactic and overly dependent on the work of other writers, such as Blake. In the title poem, however, several in the sequence "The Structure of Rime," and in "After a Passage in Baudelaire," Duncan achieves an unprecedented grace that is lyrical, though impersonal, and as fascinating for its novelty as it is for his ability to selectively paraphrase the poetry of other writers, often changing the rhythms of cribbed passages, and doing so successfully, in order to maintain the tonal unity of his own poem. "Night Scenes," derived in parts from André Breton's "Au regard des divinités," achieves the surrealistic ideal of blending dream and reality, while, thematically, it reinforces several ideas presented in the volume, posing innocence against forces "ruining our innocence" (Roots, p. 68), holding the imagination to be one of man's most sacred qualities.

In "Night Scenes" and several poems that are too long for quotation, Duncan demonstrates some mastery in collage as a technique for eliciting "a free association of living things" (PNAP, p. 196). From his first successful experiments with collage, originating, I think, with "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar," the metaphorical technique Duncan employs has generally remained within the concept of metaphor popularly advanced in modern poetics by Hart Crane. That is, parts of the collage are arranged "less for their logical (literal) significance than for their associational meanings."

> Via this and their metaphorical inter-relationships, the entire construction of the poem is raised on the organic principle of a "logic of metaphor," which antedates our so-called pure logic, and which is the genetic basis for all speech, hence consciousness and thought-extension.[19]

Referring to speech, Crane seems to mean the dislocated, fragmented articulation of thought in conversation as opposed to formally structured, 'correct' patterns of expression in expository writing.

But Duncan's talent with collage in poetry is not to be separated from his more subtle achievements in prosody. In a review of Roots and Branches, Hayden Carruth remarks:

19 "General Aims and Theories," in The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane, ed. Brom Weber (1966; rpt. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1966), p. 221.

> Duncan's metrical usages are extremely various, extending from tight lyrics to looping paragraph structures; yet in them all the ear detects the ostinato of the standard English iambic, and the falling intonation of liturgy; the masculine and feminine of our poetic tradition.[20]

Duncan employs several techniques to achieve the various lyrical effects he desires--particularly assonance, inversion (as in "Often I Am Permitted To Return To A Meadow"), and internal rhyme. And while the iambic often echoes as the dominant rhythm in his verse, his lines generally elude scansion. Although his erudition and occasional mysticism may at times seem repellent to some, it would be difficult to deny that Duncan demonstrates a significantly innovative application of derived technical skills. He can do more than simply

> watch "the duration of syllables,
> "the melodic coherence,
> "the tone leading of vowels."
> (SP, p. 54)

At last these matters seem to be under his control.

Again, in Bending the Bow, one of the focal points in Duncan's vision is the persistent conflict between the Law of the eternal imagination--its revelation of the "enduring design"--and the laws imposed upon the flow of the design. In Passages, an open sequence he begins in this volume, the poet adapts one of the Orphic myths of creation--Eros (Phanes) breaking from the World-Egg--as a touchstone

[20] "Scales of the Marvelous," Nation, 199 (1964), 442-44.

for illustrating his own sense of the primitive. Eros is the Source of the cosmos (order: the "enduring design") and only through the poetic imagination can one understand the evolution of the cosmos as a process unfolding toward Love, the Form of all forms in Duncan's interpretation of Plato. Taking Mnemosyne as his muse--

> Memory,
> the great speckled bird who broods over the
> nest of souls, and her egg,
> the dream in which all things are living,[21]

--the poet, "leaving my self," seeks to "return to" the Source of all things, "the City where/ we Her people are/ at the end of a day's reaches . . ./ the Eternal . . . ." In doing so, he invariably wishes to identify himself with Eros and, ultimately, transform Eros into Love. However, as with Osiris, the poet's identification with "the One in the World-Egg" is occasional--lasting for the length of the "dance" in the poem--and generally plagued with an undesired duality, resulting from imprisonment in time.

> I am beside myself with this
> thought of the One in the World-Egg,
> enclosed, in a shell of murmurings,
>
> rimed round,
>
> sound-chamberd child.
>
> It's that first! The forth-going to be
> bursts into green as the spring
> winds blow watery from the south
> and the sun returns north. He hides

[21] Robert Duncan, "Tribal Memories: Passages 1," Bending the Bow (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 10.

fire among words in his mouth
and comes racing out of the zone of dark and storm
toward us.

(Bow, p. 10)

Like the Queen Under The Hill in The Opening of the Field, Eros is associated with the linguistic impetus of poetry and the creative will. But, also, like Pound mentioning "the egg [that] broke in Cabranez' pocket,/ thus making history"[22] in the Cantos, the reference alone creates the perspective through which the poet can view history in a dialectical fashion, and, specifically, the Law and lesser laws in time. For both poets, in variously referring to the birth of history, "all ages are contemporaneous."[23]

Passages develops from the birth of history, and within parts of the sequence the poet identifies aspects of himself with various ages, mythical figures and personages, perceiving in all relationships or paradigms of thought that ultimately point to a rather vague, deceptively complex, ideology. Only when examined in the context of other poems in the volume, however, does the import of Passages, at least those included in Bending the Bow,

[22] Ezra Pound, "Canto LXXXI," The Cantos of Ezra Pound (1970; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1975), p. 518.

[23] Duncan quotes Pound's remark on the Cantos in the Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography, p. 13.

become accessible. In elevating the poet-persona to the eternal drama he perceives in the cosmos, Duncan expects his audience to take a similar point of view, and from that perspective he poses those who, throughout history, give "way to mortal terror,/ abase themselves to the law without honor" (Bow, p. 55), in opposition to the consciousness that permits us to "bend back the bow in dreams as we may" (Bow, p. 7) and delight in reverie. For Duncan, reverie--which brings us to enter the "dance" of the imagination--is a means for restoring a sense of the past, since it activates memory, and, consequently, realizing the present as part of the eternal drama that, abstract though it may seem, unfolds into a Form of Love. (All too frequently, it seems, he demands our capitalizations.) Cycles evolving within the eternal drama correspond, in the poet's ideology, to the process at work in the poem. That is, pragmatically speaking, both should ideally proceed unimpeded from external restraints, a platitude that in some ways explains his depiction of Eros, prior to birth, "enclosed" as a "rimed round,/ sound-chamberd child."

The poem, history, and the eternal drama of the cosmos are, in Duncan's view, "an increment of associations" (Bow, p. 11) from which the consciousness he desires proceeds. From this perspective the self is realized as part of the One grand Poem--all creation--originating from Eros and in the process of becoming a Form of Love. The

poet's role is to evince this level of consciousness and to restore the virtues he idealizes in older orders in the present.

> The grail broken,
> the light gone from the glass,
> we would make it
> anew
> From the thought of the smasht gold or silver cup
> once raised to lips,
> we would raise shadows to hold the blood the drinkers
> desire so .
>
> (Bow, p. 31)

However, as the poet's fancy wanders from days of chivalry to the present, he in some ways realizes the failure of Love--his prime ideal--in the modern world. His voice flounders in self-mocking outrage against war, coercion, and "the lying speech and pictures" that mechanically control the minds of men:

> The first Evil is that which has power over you.
> Coercion, this is Ahriman.
> In the endless Dark the T. V. screen,
> the lying speech and pictures selling its time and
> corpses of its victims burnd black by napalm (produce,
> --Ahriman, the inner need for the salesman's pitch--
> the image of the mannequin, smoking, driving its car at high
> speed, elegantly dresst, perfumed, seducing, without
> odor of Man or odor of sanctity,
> in the place of the Imago Xristi;
> robot service in place of divine service;
> the Good Word and Work subverted by the Advertiser,
> He-Who-Would-Avert-Our-Eyes-From-The-Truth.

Habit, this is Ahriman.
The first Evil is that which conscripts you.
spreading his "goods" over Asia. He moves in, you let him
move in, in your own interest, and it serves you right,
he serves you as you let him. Glimmers of right mind
obscured in the fires he scatters.
Master of Promises, Grand Profiteer and Supplier!
the smoking fields, the B-52s flying so high no sound no sight
of them gives warning, the fliers dropping their bombs
having nor sight nor sound of what they are bombing.

This is Ahriman, the blind
destroyer of the farmer and his ox at their labor.
The Industrial wiping out the Neolithic! Improver of Life
flying his high standards!
Who makes the pure into wicked men,
Who lays waste the pastures and takes up arms against the righteous.
(Bow, pp. 115-16)

Mocking outrage--the poet can no longer embark on his quest and hope to restore the grail. The imagination, the consciousness of the race, has been sold out to "He-Who-Would-Avert-Our-Eyes-From-The-Truth." Within the context of the whole volume, Ahriman, the Zoroastrian god of darkness, is aligned with Morgan le Fay and other imposters of virtue, who, in the continuing drama, subvert the will of men and thus keep Eros from unfolding into a form of Love. They belong to the same paradigm as Set, Justinian, and Moses in Roots and Branches; and all of them, in Duncan's view, are part of an eternal form that, within the individual psyche and in the process of history, continually overcomes our will to love. They belong to a universal form that

keeps man in "the alien world," separated from what "might have/ been Paradise . . ." (Bow, p. 82). Whenever in Bending the Bow the poet approaches modern history the tone of his voice continues in the same vein of outrage, which is ultimately a kind of resignation accompanying his recognition of the impossibility of realizing Love. In "Up Rising: Passages 25," he aligns President Johnson with "the great simulacra of men, Hitler and Stalin" (Bow, p. 81), who similarly propagate(d) human injustice. They are implicitly aligned with the form of Ahriman.

Bending the Bow generally lacks the structured unity of Duncan's two preceding volumes. Aside from Passages, which, by the way, continues to appear in limited editions and various periodicals, many of the other poems are those of a 'private' yet impersonal voice, testaments to a poet's life as it is lived in language. In "Sonnet 5" and "Bending the Bow" the poet's concerns are almost solely aesthetic; the dream-like, nearly mystical manner of other poems is frequently akin to the kind of reverie one readily recognizes in both Gerard de Nerval and Verlaine, both of whom Duncan has translated. Quite obviously, there is a definite relationship between the poet's historiography and his control of tone in the Passages, but if one demands an explanation for incoherence between parts of this sequence, the continuing sequence "The

Structure of Rime," and the remaining poems in the volume, it may be attributed to the fact that the arrangement of the poems is chronological rather than deliberately oriented around a specific theme.

No attempts will be made to capsulize Duncan's thought and make it any easier to swallow. In doing so, one would invariably end up imposing superficial orders on the open form of the poet's life work. "In his ideas of cosmic order," one critic observes, "Duncan appears to be a Platonist by natural inclination, an Aristotelian by choice, and an evolutionist (Darwin/Chardin) by desire and necessity of circumstance."[24] While, indeed, all of this is true in some measure, isn't it, above all, the play of a mind we're after?

[24] James F. Mersmann, "Robert Duncan: Irregular Fire--Eros Against Ahriman," Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1974), p. 169.

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APPENDIX

The Years As Catches by Robert Duncan

PASSAGE OVER WATER

We have gone out in boats upon the sea at night
lost, and the vast waters close traps of fear about us.
The boats are driven apart, and we are alone at last
under the incalculable sky, listless, diseased with stars.

Let the oars be idle, my love, and forget at this time
our love like a knife between us
defining the boundaries that we can never cross
nor destroy as we drift into the heart of our dream,
cutting the silence, slyly, the bitter rain in our mouths
and the dark wound closed in behind us.

Forget depth-bombs, death and promises we made,
gardens laid waste, and, over the wastelands westward,
the rooms where we had come together bombd.

But even as we leave, your love turns back. I feel
your absence like the ringing of bells silenced. And salt
over your eyes and the scales of salt between us. Now,
you pass with ease into the destructive world.
There is a dry crash of cement. The light fails,
falls into the ruins of cities upon the distant shore
and within the indestructible night I am alone

from TOWARD THE SHAMAN

. . . Where is peace? the regions of light flooding the body, shadows under water quietly and the rustling flight of swallows over fields of grain? where are the looms and the carved pillars of the kingdom I seek, the little forests of trees, green, undisturbd, and the deer passing thru them?

It is thru you that I prepare for the sea.

Joseph, overlord of the lower kingdoms, whose warehouses are full in this time of famines, how silently you come upon me. For on the table of this house a meal has been set for two people of cornpaste and pomegranates. We shall sit down to eat the mysterious fruit from its hives, staining our fingers with it; and we think of the lonely cattle going down upon their knees in pools of dust and the great bows of their ribs in starvation. The wind stinks from that side. Snakes hide in the rock. We put a tango on the phonograph, dancing until desire rises, the orchestra sobbing from the memory of summer loves. Tonight we can find love where we left it.

But we have been waiting. The day slips from us, the levels of water fall, light falls revealing a canyon, and the dog walks thru the rooms of the house searching for someone. One who is not with us.

Some would wait, building a house of stone near a spring in the mountains. But the spring drys, disease eats the stone, and there can be no stopping, no waiting. A man stands on a low cliff of red earth with his hounds seeing a swallow fly up from the ruins of his house. They build their mudness over a wall away from the sun and a time comes to go south. Or this son whose father has built a great factory returns after a long absence, wanders among the rusted tanks, camps where an arch of fired-brick stands from the rubbish, and at dawn moves on.

You have chosen this valley between mountains, lover of deserted seas, of stranded ships, lover of insects, singing at dusk, and the wild young men who gather near the warehouses and light a fire in the dark, light shadows of horns, piping their music under the fallen trestle. You with the dark eyes waiting--your touch uncovers a desire to wander, a geography of migrations.

. . . .

Night comes in forever over the tidal landscapes forever thru waves of saltgrass, and we sigh together finding a shelterd place against a wall that was left standing. A small band of outriders and their women are campd in a hollow far below us. We see their fires and we hear the broken talk on the wind. The last glimmer of a distant windowglass disappears in darkness. Everything gone, and the great voyage opens: the cities have fallen behind us, flames at the curved roof of the world . . .

. . . Who saw it slipping? A man enters the room with a gift of keys and we must choose between doors. Stop! we have been trapt. I saw a shadow like a snake over the garden. I saw the last tree discoverd by the enemy and the new leaves revolving in their caskets: a dream of origins.

Maps are cast of the regions we are to pass thru guided by a compass which is allergic to everything. A journey thru the immeasurable regions of the dream, a crossing over thru the surd again, the square root of human experience.

HEAVENLY, CITY, EARTHLY CITY

Overture

Beauty is a bright and terrible disk.
It is the light of our inward heaven
and the light of the heaven in which we walk.
We talk together. Let our love leaven
and enlighten our talk! O we are dim.
We are dim shadows before our fiery selves.
We are mere moments before our eternities.

The youth of the man I am now has gone.
I have passt from its bright glare into its shadow.
Twenty-seven years have wrought their careful pattern,
worn in my flesh their inarticulate burden,
worn in my animal the mark and strain
of an inward heaven. Some bright and terrible disk
that lighted once this city of my passion
has dimmd and gone. Beauty
is a bright and terrible disk.
It is the light of our inward fire
and the light of the fire in which we walk.
When I see the figure of my lover
--this is the eternal answer that the eye of love
sees in each being--then
from the years that have tried my flesh,
in the stain and age that trace in my figure
failure and betrayal of that golden vision,
man's possible beauty, th'eternal fire
in the guise of my animal burns, burns bright
from the dim of my youth and consumes my youth
in its fiery self.

In the dark of my manhood the flamey self
leaps like the sun's hairy image
caught in the black of an obscure mirror.
This is the apish chiaroscuro of our source, the sun.
This is my age, my inward heaven.
The city of my passion is reveald in its beauty.

I.

Earthly city in which I walk, the light, your sun,
is the golden heart of that deep body,
the darkend city that gleams in the tide
of an inward sea. Dumbly, I hear its voices,
voices that merge in a chaos of other voices,
murmur and surge of a bright confusion.
The song, your voice that in my throat
rises in praise of some pure spirit, lonely
and yet lovely human aspiration, breaks
in the chaos of a masst impurity.
So a single bird flying up from its field
claims above the clamor of a dismal century,
asserts, asserts, in its perishable body
the lone clear cry of its perishable beauty.
In the moment of song--earthly radiant
city of poetry--that golden light
consumes in its focus a world I have sufferd,
the darkend city of my perishable age.

Yet never, never, can the heart meet the gaze
of that earthly paradise in which I walk.
It seems to accuse my heart. Its quiet
and its song, the dappled mien of light and shade,
are like a beloved face that searches its reflexion
and is torn in the rage of an inward flood.

The heart in the darkness of the city sings.
It answers the song of its source, the sun.
The darkness of the city protests, protests;
there is a throng of angry voices.
The heart in the darkness of the city sings:

I have seen the face of my Redeemer.
--This is th'eternal figure that appears
and disappears
in the human flood. Momentary answer!
Never, never, can I meet the gaze
of that inward angel articulate of love;

and yet He touches me in passing.
His touch seems to penetrate and awaken
some answer, pure in its sleep, and is gone.
And now awakend I lie, dumbly changed,
too late, too late, inarticulate of love.

Could I but dream and dreaming gaze
upon the paradise of his eyes, but they are gone.
He, he is gone; he is gone; and knowing this,
I know the heavy change upon the world.
I fear. I fear.
Tell me that my Redeemer will answer.
Tell me that my Redeemer lives.
For there's a kind of world remaining still
tho he who did make animate and fill
that world be gone.

The voices of the night protest:

O lonely heart, too late, too late.
You cry out as if you were
some innocent, foundling of the angelic orders,
awakend by the passing of your Redeemer
to face the last long night alone.

Betrayer of man's possible beauty,
thou art awakened to gaze upon thy dead
and speechless self, toucht by that angel
awakener of the dead.
Thou hast no Redeemer.
The ghost that walks in its reflected glimmer
is but the wraith that you call splendor.
O but you are dim before the fiery self
that is gone from your world.
Wrath is the ghost that walks in its glimmer
and pities, pities the lonely dead,
touches them in passing and awakens the heart
to face its death. Too late, too late.
There is no Redeemer.

The heart in the darkness of the city sings.
It answers the song of its source, the sun:

I cry out as a child in the dark.
I know that my Redeemer lives.

The rage of my lover meets my cry;
feasts upon my inward hell and shakes,
shakes my spirit in his fury; tears
from me the strain of life,

inviolate song; and mocks my dim
inarticulate heaven. Now in my wilderness
where I have been driven by that blind
Avenger, awakener of the damnd,
betrayd by my Demon shall I in turn
betray my Redeemer? I walk alone
in that inward hell, shaken and riven
from my Beloved, the lover of my inward heaven.
Like Satan fallen in the weight of his pride,
speechless I face that punishing spirit
articulate of my own damnation.

This was the lover that answerd my cry,
as a wrathful father might answer a child,
who, dumb in the strain of the wrath inside,
cried out in fear for the comfort of love.

I know that my Redeemer lives
Who loves, Who loves my lonely spirit
and seeks in the darkness of my night
to absolve my torture in His passion.

O my Beloved, in the night of my soul
I have thirsted for some passionate wrong.
I have lain in the arms of the destroying angel.
I have heard in hatred's sea the Siren's song and cast
myself upon that strand; held in love's cruel
counterpart,
known the warm embrace and the inward cold.

Dumbly, I listen to the Siren's insistent sound,
that brazen counterfeit of song that charms
and fixes the soul upon its destruction.
This is the magnet of a masst impurity.

I walk in the eclipse of my Beloved.
But O the Earthly City remains.
In my dismal century the Earth replenishes,
replenishes her beauty.
Against the Siren's monotone, the fixt accusing glare,
your voice, Beloved, rises in praise
of that fair spirit, my inward heaven.
I know that my Redeemer lives.
That light, His sun, is the radiant song
that consumes in its focus a world I have sufferd,
asserts, asserts, against the Siren counterfeit,
the Earthly paradise in which I walk.

This is the measure of my dismay:
to know its beauty like the face of my Beloved
that is torn in the rage of an inward flood.

II

Pity is the wrath in which we walk.

My heart like a burdend Icarus having struck terror
falls from its universe into the dark.
Then gaze deep upon my lover's gleam, feed my soul
upon the damnd perdition of his eyes.
The inward spark, the flamey self
dies, and its shadow leaps forward.
See, it is a demon lover to fill the abyss
as he falls.
Pity is the wrath in which we walk.
Then gaze deep, deep upon the gleam.
This is the true mirror of my face.
"No," I say. "No." in the shadowy room
I seek to disentangle myself from his arms.
Dumbly, unmoving, he lies; having laid bare
his wrath, betrayd, he clings to me.
Pity is the gleam of the wrath inside,
a demon light to illuminate the face
and betray the heart. Like burdend Icarus
I would fall in the weight of my body
and damaged wings, in my knowledge,
into some dark and forgiving sea.
Pity is the unforgiving sea.

Traveler who would bring love's light into hell.
When that shadowy beloved turns from his hell
a face to gaze upon your face, this is a damnd
Eurydice, who catches in her mirroring quest
the gleam of love as a new perdition.
Sweep, then, Orpheus, the wild music from your lyre
as if you sang lost love, but remember
the beauty and charm are hate's machineries,
demonic art that catches the damnation into its disk
and lends to hell its immortal strain.

Sweep, then, Orpheus, the wild love from your lips
and when from the far room your forgiven lover
cries out from the rejection that forgiving is,
remember Eurydice's face because you turnd
is turnd toward her death; remember her cry

cries with love's final breath and is gone;
remember that pity, for the damnd, is hate;
remember his face as your Eurydice
that was the woman's face in the lunar gleam of sleep.
The damnd in the fires of love wrap round themselves
and shriek. AI, AI, Orpheus, the brutal lyre,
beauty and charm to turn her face
toward its perdition.

Where is that dark and forgiving sea, flood
of rage or sorrow to sweep thru my body,
vast poem, ocean of the soul's resounding deep,
where falling Icarus falls to his rest?
In the blaze of his blinded eyes
the disk shows black, burnd in his mind
a charcoal sun.
Torn from his flight among the Bacchae of the sun,
those burning women of exaltation's fury,
he is hurld in the weight of wings and knowledge
into the forgiving depts of sleep.

J'ai dû tomber de très haut, de très haut,
très haut sur la tête.
Où est mon coeur? Où est ma tête?
Eurydice, Eurydice.
Que j'ai peur.

How heavy my heart falls with its burden.
There is no world other than the world of my dreams
where the weight of my knowledge falls so far.
Orpheus of the bleeding wings among the beasts
in the shadowy meadows that extend in sleep
sings his sweet strain. Eurydice, Eurydice.
He closes his eyelids and in that inward light
Eurydice's dark face returns and is banisht by his gaze
into eternity. Nightmare minister to pain!
Pity is the wrath in which he walks.

The bacchae, furious women, drunk with lust,
close their eyes like their clencht fists
and see in the glare of their blinded eyes
a myriad burning destruction of the body.
AI, AI, these are sorrow's witch-like sisters
with their hair in rays like an angry sun; they cry
against Earth's shady consolation, inviolate song.
How in our misery the calm of the grove,
and the calm of the evening's air, Earth's
loving breath, commiserates and increases our fury.
We shall be redeemd and forgiven in passion,
washt thru by the fires of passion's sun,
and find in our bodies an immaculate quiet.

The Bacchae in pure passion's roar
raise their clencht and violent hands
against the lonely and still singer,
Orpheus, who would sing love's praise.
He I am who torn in my flesh
return at last to my lost Eurydice,
the inward sea, terror's sister face,
to receive my Icarus.

The Bacchae tear in my fleshly sleep
fleshly ribbons that gleam like gold.
I lie under the weight of the black water.
Eurydice, toward whom I dare not look
--she is the bright spirit that sleeps in my heart--
returns to meet my inward gaze.

III.

The praise of the sun is a didactic poem.
The ape in his raiment of gold or cloth of fire
apes the categories of the spiritual man,
and, in the teaching, learns from his raiments
the torturous lesson of his apish form.
What man knows more than his cloth of gold
who fixes his eye upon his source? I know no more
than the fleshly life that clothes in its ardor
the bony rigor of my inward form.
The lineaments of my body are
a didactic poem,
the apish chiaroscuro of my source, the sun.

The praise of the sun is a solitary poem.
The lonely man can turn his skull sunwards
until that glory penetrates
and sears the confines of the bone;
can howl, can whirl his reluctant arms
and measure his pride against the sun;
can moan in his incompleted image,
can howl for the bliss of his final mate.
He catches the sun in the mirroring heart
and praises that blazing solitude.
Then in the avenues of his earthly city
unearthly presences wink,
unfathomable eyes of an inward vision.

O with what pain I watch in my vision
my proud and reluctant animal self
where he sings in his lonely monotone;
he turns his beseeching enraptured eyes
and glares upon the heavenly scene,

cries, cries as if hurt by the surrounding beauty,
and apes the sound of a vaster heart.

He mimics the opulence of the sun,
and in that bright confusion, love,
he burns in exaltation's fires,
clutches, clutches at his animal mate
and whimpers against the pit of dark.

I watch with pain my hairy self
croucht in his abject sexual kingdom
writhe in that brief ecstatic span
as if he took the sun within himself
and became a creature of the sun;
became an illumined body of voices;
as if in the pit of his animal dumb
he heard the counterpoint,
the mimic tum-tum-tum of a vaster heart.

The praise of the sun is a nostalgic poem.
The tum-tum-tum in memory
is like the pounding surf in dreams.
The man in the solitude of his poetic form
finds his self-consciousness defined
by the boundaries of a non-commital sea
that washes, washes the reluctant mind,
and carves from its shores its secret coves.

Sometimes our feelings are so mild
they are like a day when rocks
seem mere extensions of the sea
washt in a world of oceanic blue
and continents seem dreams of a watry deep.

Turbulent Pacific! the sea-lions bark
in ghostly conversations and sun themselves
upon the sea-conditiond rocks.
Insistent questioner of our shores!
Somnambulist! old comforter!
You wright in passion's storm and passionate calm
your reasonless change and seek to restore
the aspiring man to your green remote.

The individual ape in the human sea
is worn, is worn by a non-committal tide,
and shows in his unnecessary watching face
the necessary convolutions of that sea,
the memories of forsaken lands.

The praise of the sun is a nostalgic poem.
Sometimes the sea seems mild and light
as a luminous harp upon which the sun plays
threaded with indolent wires of gold
across the ruddy music of its waves
and its voices merge in a pulsing counterpoint
to sing the wonders of the sun,
the beasts of the sun and the watry beasts.

Sea leopards cough in the halls of our sleep,
swim in the wastes of salt and wrack of ships,
and sun themselves upon the resounding rocks,
or lie in the thoughtless shallows of the sun.
These are the tides of the poetic sea.
I drift, I drift. The praise of the sun
is purposeless. I dream of those forsaken shores
wrapt in the mind's redeeming haze.
Sea leopards cough in the halls of our sleep;
disturb the course of the nostalgic sea,
casual hints where harmlessly they swim
of some brooding fear in the fiery deep.

The earth has tides of desolation and of bliss,
of shadows and of amber marbled surfaces,
laments and cries, vague intimations of the sun,
terrors, brightnesses of noon, and groves
of memory: in these her beauty is renewd.
The wandering man returns to his city
as if he might return to earth a light, a joy,
and find his rest in earthly company.

The praise of the sun is a renewing poem.
The earth replenishes, replenishes her beauty
and sings a green praise of her terrible source.
The sea reflects, reflects in her evening tides
upon some lavender recall of some past glory,
some dazzle of a noon magnificence.
The evening hour is eloquent of the sun.
This is no dominion of the pure terror
but soothes, soothes. We walk in the light
of beauty's calm. Our city lies about us
murmuring, drifts in an evening humanity.

There is a wisdom of night and day,
older than that proud blaze of sun,
in which we rest, a passion, primitive to love,
of perishing, a praise and recreation of the sun.
My earthly city is reveald in its beauty.

The Opening of the Field by Robert Duncan

THE DANCE

from its dancers circulates among the other
dancers. This
would-have-been feverish cool excess of
movement makes
each man hit the pitch co-
ordinate.

Lovely their feet pound the green solid meadow.
The dancers
mimic flowers--root stem stamen and petal
our words are,
our articulations, our
measures.

It is the joy that exceeds pleasure

You have passd the count, she said

or I understood from her eyes. Now
old Friedl has grown so lovely in my years,

I remember only the truth.
I swear by my yearning

You have conquerd the yearning, she said
The numbers have enterd your feet

turn turn turn

When you're real gone, boy, sweet boy ..

Where have I gone, Beloved?

Into the Waltz, Dancer.

Lovely our circulations sweeten the meadow.
In Ruben's riotous scene the May dancers teach us our learning
seeks abandon!

Maximus calld us to dance the Man.
We calld him to call
season out of season-

d mind!

Lovely
join we to dance green to the meadow.

Whitman was right. Our names are left
like leaves of grass,
likeness and liking, the human greenness

tough as grass that survives cruelest seasons.

I see now a radiance.
The dancers are gone.
They lie in heaps, exhausted,
dead tired we say.
They'll sleep until noon.

But I returned early
for the silence,
for the lovely pang that is
a flower,
returnd to the silent dance-ground.

(That was my job that summer. I'd dance until three, then up to get the hall swept before nine--beer bottles, cigarette butts, paper mementos of the night before. Writing it down now, it is the aftermath, the silence, I remember, part of the dance too, an articulation of the time of dancing . . like the almost dead sleeping is a step. I've got it in a poem, about Friedl, moaning in the depths of. But that was another room that summer. Part of my description. What I see is a meadow . .

I'll slip away before they're up . .
and see the dew shining.

EVOCATION

At the dance of the Hallows I will tell my love.
There where the threshers move,
the lewdness of women ripening the wheat,
the men in the outer room joking,
how the Holy moves over them!

The Earth shakes. Kore! Kore! (for
I was thinking of her--she
who shakes the stores of ancestral grain)
The Earth does not shake again. Troubled,
the heart recovers. But is moved.
At the dance of the Hallows I will tell my love.
It moves to fill with song, with wine,
the trouble, the quiet, the cup, that follows
the divine Threshers.

Kore! O visage as of sun-glare, thunderous
awakener, light treader!
will you not wake us again? shake the earth under us?

At the dance of the Hallows I will tell my love,
It is my song of the whole year I sing
rendering lovely the fall of Her feet
and there where Her feet spring, even
at the dance of the Hallows I will tell my love,
the melody from whose abundance leaps
the slow rounds of winter, pounds summer's heat.

How the Holy moves over them I will tell my love
that lies a grain among the living grain.
Therefore I join them, dancing, dancing . ..
a thresher among the Threshers. Kore! Kore!
(for I was thinking of her when the quake came,
of radiant desire underground)
Thou hast my heart, a grain, in the Earth's store.

At the dance of the Hallows I praise thee therefore,
    Earth-mover, tender Thresher,
    Queen of our dance-floor!

POETRY, A NATURAL THING

    Neither our vices nor our virtues
further the poem. "They came up
    and died
just like they do every year
    on the rocks."

    The poem
feeds upon thought, feeling, impulse,
    to breed itself,
a spiritual urgency at the dark ladders leaping.

This beauty is an inner persistence
    toward the source
striving against (within) down-rushet of the river,
    a call we heard and answer
in the lateness of the world
    primordial bellowings
from which the youngest world might spring,

salmon not in the well where the
    hazelnut falls
but at the falls battling, inarticulate,
    blindly making it.

This is one picture apt for the mind.

A second: a moose painted by Stubbs,
where last year's extravagant antlers
    lie on the ground.
The forlorn moosey-faced poem wears
    new antler-buds,
    the same,

"a little heavy, a little contrived",

his only beauty to be
    all moose.

YES, AS A LOOK SPRINGS TO ITS FACE

a life colors the meadow.
"This is the place," Abraham said.
The field and the cave therein arose,

even that lies hid in everything,
where nothing was, comes before his eyes
so that he sees and sings
central threnodies, as if a life had

but one joyous thread, one wife, one
meeting ground, and fibre of that thread

a sadness that from that moment
into that moment led.

Poems come up from a ground so
to illustrate the ground, approximate
a lingering of eternal image, a need
known only in its being found ready.

The force that words obey in song
the rose and artichoke obey
in their unfolding towards their form.
--But he wept, and what grief?

had that flowering of a face touchd
that may be after s-ruggle
a song as natural as a glance
that came so upon joy as if this were the place?

It returns. He cannot return. He sends
a line out, of yearning, that might be
in movement of music seen once in a face
reference to a melody heard in passing.

BONE DANCE

The skull of the old man wears a
face that's a rose from the renew'd Adam thrown.
Slack undulations fall,
radiant teachings from the gospel bone,
    fragrance unfolded upon fragrance,
tone twisted within tone, of gold,
    cream, rose, blood, milk--a ruddy paroxysm
flowering from inertia.

Sweet Marrow,
it's the hidden urgency we beggd to sing to us
that were a gathering of his children, bone
of his bone.

The pungent outflowing of dead mind
goes toward a dry music, a sapless alert
piping in which the stink sticks, a
carne vale, the

    old man capering before his makers,
    stripd of idea.

    The Day is my Lord, the Night is my Lord.
    It's fear of the Lord that informs
        courage
    to dance. Have you? O have you?
    the old capering papa sings,

    root to the true corybantic,
    Fear of the Day, Fear of the Night?

The old man is a cave of bones.
The old lady's a cave of bones.
Fear mixd with delight is glee-
fully a chalky face with
    bloody redsmeard mouth
    (human eyes
we almost recognize
    heads that are drums,
    fingers flutes) heh!

sings the old destitute--but he's no more than a figure
  cast away into an everlasting cartoon of fathers--

    have you such
phalanx of fear within the courageous hand that
    music writes?

love of the Night, love of the Day?

ANOTHER ANIMADVERSION

And those who tell us Christ was a higher-type man,
model for self-improvement,
spiritually superior to pain,
pretender to the throne that passion is.

For in the poem, the cry goes up:

    Love's agony in the deprivation of love
    is greater than mine.

Divine Being shows itself
    not in the rising above,
    but embodied, out of
deliberate committed lines of stone or flesh
    flashings of suffering shared.

    Transient beauty of youth
that into immortality goes direct,
    forsaking us? Aye, but bedded in touch,
    ever-rememberd Lord of Sensualities.

Those who are feeble raising feeble Christs,
Those who are kindly raising kindly Christs,
Those who are pure raising pure Christs,
    in order to reach Him!

Can't you see how those others, the soldiers
    throwing dice for His cloak at the foot of the cross,
the crowd of fellow jews and romans
    attending the spectacle,
and His disciples among them,
    draw utterly away from Him?

As I draw utterly away from Him?

The old lady reading the doctrine out of Carpenter and
    Whitman,
that He was the Spiritual Man freed from the bondage of old
    ways,
the not-knowing, the servitude, the crown, the grave-end.

That One! whose likeness we see everywhere bleeding,
or on His first birthday, sucking breast, adored by Kings.
    Death itself raises His legends.

The old lady spirited as a bird in the field chirruping,
    with iridescent glass beads, her quick old
    hands turning over the pages of Leaves of Grass,

    "He knew . . . He knew . . ."

    Her bird-bright eyes
    quick on the page . . .

It's no animadversion, but an affection.
    Because I see something childlike in her pose,
    her keen eye,
    her handkerchief stuffd
between halves of her bosom.

The inbinding mirrors a process returning to roots of first feeling.

The Inbinding

In noise the yearning goes toward tones
because a world in melody appears
increasing longing towards stations of fullness
to release from memory a passionate order:

the inbinding, the return,
where certain vital spirits of an eternal act
are bound to be present,
echoes there in octaves of suffering and joy.

The inhabitants of Love, the inhabitants of Light,
that were Eros and Psyche,
that was Christ at the intersection of two lines,
is each melos of the melody, limbs of the tree are

Mirrors,

high part-voices of the first music,
in a winter nakedness standing up from their leaves,
that once blushd first budding, that put forth
    hints out of natural force
to keep the tips green, fingers at the fresh edge of touching,

: and am now residual bare and black
embracing winter--O hell
is perhaps no more than the naked trunk
    seen as frozen back from its springtide of touching

--as God is a Oneness of all things in turn,
    a Being in touch, so that
in the moving mountain there was a god-ness,
in the sky flashing mirror there was a god-ness,
in the hush of the house where my father died, a god-ness,
    where a likeness of shadow
fell away, residual, from the unlikely brilliance
that enterd and took on raiments of lasting
intimations in the torrents that flow thru the leaves
    that man is a light music,

A Process,

where doctrine against doctrine the noysome poets
babble as if their anger mounting might stand for
one tower of poetry. Let them fall away!
My heart despairs. For the poem
beyond all poetry I have actually heard
has words as natural and expendable
as a cold stream of the first water
thru which rocks of my resistant life
yield to the light cleavages of what seems true,
    white heights and green deeps.

    Now let me describe the agony,
the upward toppling from--was it a simple feeling?
    into stylistic conglomerations of power,
the devouring giant race that mistakes us
    opening certain likeliness
so that the gods that had faces of being
    fell apart into one thought

Returning To Roots Of First Feeling

Feld, græs or gæers, hus, dæg , dung
in field, grass, house, day and dung we share
with those that in the forests went,
    singers and dancers out of the dream.
For cradles, goods and hallows came
    long before Christendom,
wars and the warblers-of-the-word where

me bifel a ferly, a fairy me thoughte
and those early and those late saw
some of them poets,
a faire felde ful of folke fonde I there bitwene.
For the vain and the humble go into one Man
and as best we can we make His song

--a simple like making of night and day
encumberd by vestiges and forebodings
in words of need and hope striving
to awaken the old keeper of the living
and restore lasting melodies of his desire.

FOOD FOR FIRE, FOOD FOR THOUGHT,

                    good wood
that all fiery youth burst forth from winter,
 go to sleep in the poem.
Who will remember thy green flame,
 thy dream's amber?

Language obeyd flares tongues in obscure matter.

We trace faces in clouds: they drift apart,
palaces of air --the sun dying down
    sets them on fire;

descry shadows on the flood from its dazzling mood,
or at its shores read runes upon the sand
    from sea-spume.

This is what I wanted for the last poem,
a loosening of conventions and return to open form.

Leonardo saw figures that were stains upon a wall.
Let the apparitions containd in the ground
    play as they will.

You have carried a branch of tomorrow into the room.

Its fragrance has awakend me--no,

it was the sound of a fire on the hearth

leapd up where you bankd it, sparks of delight.
Now I return the thought

to the red glow, that might-be-magical blood,
palaces of heat in the fire's mouth

"If you look you will see the salamander,"

to the very elements that attend us,
fairies of the fire, the radiant crawling . . .

That was a long time ago.
No, they were never really there,

tho once I saw--Did I stare
into the heart of desire burning
and see a radiant man? like those
fancy cities from fire into fire falling?

We are close enough to childhood, so easily purged
of whatever we thought we were to be,

flamey threads of firstness go out from your touch.

Flickers of unlikely heat
at the edge of our belief bud forth.

Roots and Branches by Robert Duncan

THE LAW

a series in variation
for Toby and Claire McCarroll

I

There are no
final orders. But the Law
constantly destroys the law,
erasing lightly or with turmoil
coils of the snake
evil is, referring to

imagined goods where they
radiate. What
hurts and what heals?
What hinders what intent
and what reveals?
New needs are new commands.
And this hurt good
that prescribes
the otherwise unwonted quest.

Ad-
just the law
to fit where the eye
sees what fits? or the heart
skips a beat un-
expectedly? Have these a court? Yet
hurt may a melody to the course of plain speaking give
necessary disarrangements, have been
anticipated, rememberd, thus
expected in eternity--no other
move will satisfy.

Song's fateful. Crime
fulfills the law. Oedipus is a
ravishing order in itself.
His tearing out his eyes--
a phrase, secretly prepared,
that satisfies

2

To what can we conform?
They go to murder Duncan, who here
is a sleeping King.
"If it were done," the fumbling actor tells us
and just here comes into
immortal "when 'tis done,"
words "then 'twer well
it were done quickly!" here, here,
and here,
there's such a particular law
there can be no other play,

but Shakespeare must play it out.
From the first, in a desert place?
or from the last, "Crownd at Scone"?

The law is everywhere we did not see
but singing
where we were fearful to sing
sang unknowingly.

3

At every stage
law abiding or breaking the law
(disobedience is not careless)
needs a code. What's the score? keys
previous to the music
not given by nature.

Justinian or Moses, whoever directs, must
propose "unnatural" restrictions
and say with a loud voice:
"Cursed be he that
confirmeth not all the words of this law
to do them"--designing therein
nets to please Satan. The Judge
must have justice as His left hand,
mercy as His right, to hold them,
if He be, Love to whom we pray is,
Fisher of Men from the cold living waters
--for the laws are nets in the seas
of men's will
that teem with such
cravings, seekings of redress, protests,
bindings upon bindings,
fates that men tie to imitate
knots that cold, hunger, hurt and disease tie;
visible defections of what is, that stir
old roots in fearful desire and throw forth
prodigies of judgment--monsters,
disastrous congregations, "acts
of God," we call them, strokes
that disable. Yet call

upon Love too, Who by Law's naild
to a cross. "Hail,
Christ, and make good
our loss."

4

Robin Hood in the greenwood outside
Christendom faces peril as if it were a friend.

Foremost we admire the outlaw
who has the strength of his own
lawfulness. How we loved him
in childhood and hoped to abide by his code
that took life as its law!

5

No! took an Other way as its law.
For great life itself uses us like wood
and has no lawsin burning we understand,
gives no alternatives. "Is"
we think of as intransitive,
who are exchanged in being,
given over from I" into "I",
law into law, no sooner breaking
from what we understood, than,
breaking forth, abiding,
we stand.
As Roethke
"breaking down, going to pieces,"
caged in a university as he is
rages as a man should
if he give over his fate to the Muses
commanding as they do
strains of a wild melody against the grain,
knots and hackings of their thread.

It's the sense of law itself demands
violation
within the deceitful coils of institutions.

What is
hisses like a serpent
and writhes

to shed its skin.

AFTER A PASSAGE IN BAUDELAIRE

Ship, leaving or arriving, of my lover,
my soul, leaving or coming into this harbor,
among your lights and shadows shelterd,
at home in your bulk, the cunning
regularity and symmetry thruout
of love's design, of will, of your
attractive cells and chambers .

riding forward, darkest of shades
over the shadowd waters .
into the light, neat, symmetrically
arranged above your watery reflections
disturbing your own image, moving as you are

. What passenger, what sailor,
looks out into the swirling currents round you
as if into those depths into a mirror?

What lights in what port-holes
raise in my mind again hunger and impatience?
to make my bed down again, there, beyond me,
as if this room too, my bedroom, my lamp at my side,
were among those lights sailing out
away from me.

We too, among the others, passengers
in that charme infini et mystérieux,
in that suitable symmetry, that precision
everywhere, the shining fittings, the fit
of lights and polisht surfaces to the dark,
to the flickering shadows of them,
we too, unfaithful to me, sailing away,
leaving me.

L'idée poétique, the idea of a poetry,
that rises from the movement, from the
outswirling curves and imaginary figures
round this ship, this fate, this sure thing,

est l'hypothèse d'une être vaste, immense,

compliqué, mais eurythmique.

Shelley's ARETHUSA set to new measures

1

Now Arethusa from her snow couches arises,
Hi! from her Acroceraunian heights springs,
down leaping, from cloud and crag
jagged shepherds her bright fountains.
She bounds from rock-face to rock-face streaming
her uncombd rainbows of hair round her.
Green paves her way-fare.
Where she goes there

Where she goes there
dark ravine serves her
downward towards the West=gleam.
As if still asleep she goes, glides or
lingers in deep pools.

2

Now bold Alpheus
roused from his cold glacier
strikes the mountains and opens
a chasm in the rock so that
all Erymanthus shakes, and the black
south wind is unseald,
from urns of silent snow comes. Earthquake
rends asunder
thunderous the bars of the springs below

Beard and hair of the River-god
show through the torrent's sweep
where he follows the fleeting light of the nymph
to the brink of the Dorian,
margins of deep Ocean.

3

Oh save me! Take me untoucht, she cries
Hide me,
for Alpheus already grasps at my hair!
The loud Ocean heard,
to its blue depth stirrd and divided,
taking her into the roar of its surf.
And under the water she flees,
white Arethusa,
the sunlight still virginal in her courses,
Earth's daughter, descends,
billowing, unblended in the Dorian
brackish waters.

Where Alpheus,
close upon her, in gloom,
staining the salt dark tides comes,
black clouds overtaking the white
in an emerald sky, Alpheus
eagle-eyed down streams of the wind pursues
dove-wingd Arethusa.

4

Under those bowers they go
where the ocean powers
brood on their thrones. Thru these coral woods,
shades in the weltering flood,
maiden and raging
Alpheus swirl.

Over forgotten heap, stone upon stone,
thru dim beams
which amid streams
weave a network of colord lights they go,
girl-stream and man-river after her.

Pearl amid shadows
of the deep caves
that are green as the forest's night,
swift they fly,
with the shark and the swordfish pass into the wave
--he overtaking her,
as if wedding, surrounding her,
spray rifts in clefts of the shore cliffs rising.

Alpheus,

Arethusa,

come home.

5

When now from Enna's mountains they spring,
afresh in her innocence
Arethusa to Alpheus gladly comes.
Into one morning two hearts awake,
at sunrise leap from sleep's caves to return
to the vale where they meet,
drawn by yearning from night into day.

Down into the noontide flow,
into the full of life winding again, they find
their way thru the woods
and the meadows of asphodel below.
Wedded, one deep current leading,
they follow to dream
in the rocking deep at the Ortygian shore.

spirits drawn upward,
they are divided
into the azure from which the rain falls,
life from life,
seeking their way to love once more.

OSIRIS AND SET

members of one Life Boat are

that rides against Chaos,
or into the night goes, driving back
those darknesses within the dark,
as Harry Jacobus saw them on our mountain,
trolls of the underground.

Set lords it over them,
dark mind that drives before the dawn rays.
He is primitive terror, he is the prow,
he is first knowing
and, striving there, at the edge,
has all of evil about him.

Yes, he fought against Osiris,
conspired, scatterd the first light.
He seduced the boy Horus, hawk-ghost of the sun,
to play the Hand to his cock.
He comes into the court of the law to remind us.
He gives us the lie.

At one time our mother's brother, Set, was "Father"
and taught us--what? ruining
our innocence. The great boat of the gods
penetrates the thick meat,
sending quick nerves out that are tongues of light
at the boundaries. Foot, hand,
lips: a graph in Scientific American, September 1960,
shows the design of sensory and motor intelligences.
We are so much mouth, mask, and hand,
the hidden plan of volition can be read
(a secret that is presented to be seen
remaining secret) in the closed palm,
in the human face.

The radiant jewel of our own sun
held aloft by the dung beetle is the Child,
our About-To-Be, Presence
in what's present. There is nothing else.

Feeling and motion, impression and expression,
contend. Drama
is the shape of us. We are
ourselves tears and gestures of Isis
as she searches for what we are ourselves,

Osiris-Kadmon into many men shatterd,
torn by passion. She-That-Is,
our Mother, revives ever His legend.
She remembers. She puts it all together.
So that, in rapture, there is no longer
the sensory-motor homunculus
subduing the forces of nature, Horus contending with Set,

but the sistrum

sounds through us.

The Will wherein the gods ride

goes forward

*

Hail! forgotten and witherd souls!

Our Mother comes with us to gather her children!

Now it is time for Hell
to nurse at the teats of Heaven

Dark sucks at the white milk.
Stars flow out into the deserted souls.

In our dreams we are drawn towards day once more.

Bending the Bow by Robert Duncan

5th SONNET

Love too delighting in His numbers
keeps time so that our feet
dance to be true to the count,
repeating the hesitation, the

slight bow to His will in each change,
the giving up, His syncopation,
the receiving an other
measure again.

You were not there,
but in love with you I danced
this round, my feet
willingly sped to its numbers,

my glance wed to the glance exchanged,
for the design's sake,
in Love's calling. As if
in the exchange of lives,

that music that most moves us,
unknowing and true to what
I do not know, where other
lovers in intermingling figures

come and go there were a constant
First Caller of the Dance
Who moves me, First Partner, He
in Whom
you are most you.

BENDING THE BOW

We've our business to attend Day's duties,
bend back the bow in dreams as we may
til the end rimes in the taut string
with the sending. Reveries are rivers and flow
where the cold light gleams reflecting the window upon the
surface of the table,
the presst-glass creamer, the pewter sugar bowl, the litter
of coffee cups and saucers,
carnations painted growing upon whose surfaces. The whole
composition of surfaces leads into the other
current disturbing
what I would take hold of. I'd been

in the course of a letter--I am still
in the course of a letter--to a friend,
who comes close in to my thought so that
the day is hers. My hand writing here
there shakes in the currents of . . . of air?
of an inner anticipation of . . .? reaching to touch
ghostly exhilarations in the thought of her.

At the extremity of this
design
"there is a connexion working in both directions, as in
the bow and the lyre"
only in that swift fulfillment of the wish
that sleep
can illustrate my hand
sweeps the string.

You stand behind the where-I-am.
The deep tones and shadows I will call a woman.
The quick high notes . . . You are a girl there too,
having something of sister and of wife,
inconsolate,
and I would play Orpheus for you again,

recall the arrow or song
to the trembling daylight
from which it sprang.

TRIBAL MEMORIES PASSAGES 1

And to Her-Without-Bounds I send,
wherever She wanders, by what
campfire at evening,

among tribes setting each the City where
we Her people are
at the end of a day's reaches here
the Eternal
lamps lit, here the wavering human
sparks of heat and light
glimmer, go out, and reappear.

For this is the company of the living
and the poet's voice speaks from no
crevice in the ground between
mid-earth and underworld
breathing fumes of what is deadly to know,
news larvae in tombs
and twists of time do feet upon,

but from the hearth stone, the lamp light,
the heart of the matter where the

house is held .

yet here, the warning light at the edge of town!

The city will go out in time, will go out
into time, hiding even its embers
And we were scatterd thruout the countries and times of man

for we took alarm in ourselves,
rumors of the enemy
spread among the feathers of the wing that coverd us.

.

Mnemosyne, they named her, the
Mother with the whispering
featherd wings. Memory,
the great speckled bird who broods over the
nest of souls, and her egg,
the dream in which all things are living.
I return to, leaving my self.

I am beside myself with this
thought of the One in the World-Egg,
enclosed, in a shell of murmurings,

rimed round

sound-chamberd child.

It's that first! The forth-going to be
bursts into green as the spring
winds blow watery from the south
and the sun returns north. He hides

fire among words in his mouth

and comes racing out of the zone of dark and storm

towards us.

I sleep in the afternoon, retreating from work,
reading and dropping away from the reading,
as if I were only a seed of myself,
unawakend, unwilling
to sleep or wake.

UP RISING PASSAGES 25

Now Johnson would go up to join the great simulacra of men,
Hitler and Stalin, to work his fame
with planes roaring out from Guam over Asia,
all America become a sea of toiling men
stirrd at his will, which would be a bloated thing,
drawing from the underbelly of the nation
such blood and dreams as swell the idiot psyche
out of its courses into an elemental thing
until his name stinks with burning meat and heapt honors

And men wake to see that they are used like things
spent in a great potlatch, this Texas barbecue
of Asia, Africa, and all the Americas,
And the professional military behind him, thinking
to use him as they thought to use Hitler
without losing control of their business of war,

But the mania, the ravening eagle of America
as Lawrence saw him "bird of men that are masters,
lifting the rabbit-blood of the myriads up into . . ."
into something terrible, gone beyond bounds, or
As Blake saw America in figures of fire and blood raging,
. . . in what image? the ominous roar in the air,
the omnipotent wings, the all-American boy in the cockpit
loosing his flow of napalm, below in the jungles
"any life at all or sign of life" his target, drawing now
not with crayons in his secret room
the burning of homes and the torture of mothers and fathers
and children,
their hair a-flame, screaming in agony, but
in the line of duty, for the might and enduring fame
of Johnson, for the victory of American will over its
victims, releasing his store of destruction over the enemy,
in terror and hatred of all communal things, of communion,
of communism .
has raised from the private rooms of small-town bosses and
businessmen,
from the council chambers of the gangs that run the great
cities, swollen with the votes of millions,
from the fearful hearts of good people in the suburbs
turning the savory meat over the charcoal burners and
heaping their barbecue plates with more than they can eat,
from the closed meeting-rooms of regents of universities and
sessions of profiteers

— back of the scene: the atomic stockpile; the vials of
synthesized diseases eager biologists have developt over

half a century dreaming of the bodies of mothers and fathers
and children and hated rivals swollen with new plagues,
measles grown enormous, influenzas perfected; and the
gasses of despair, confusion of the senses, mania, inducing
terror of the universe, coma, existential wounds, that
chemists we have met at cocktail parties, passt daily and
with a happy "Good Day" on the way to classes or work, have
workt to make war too terrible for men to wage--

raised this secret entity of America's hatred of Europe, of
Africa, of Asia,
the deep hatred for the old world that had driven generations
of America out of itself,
and for the alien world, the new world about him, that might
have been paradise
but was before his eyes already cleard back in a holocaust of
burning Indians, trees and grasslands,
reduced to his real estate, his projects of exploitation and
profitable wastes,

This specter that in the beginning Adams and Jefferson feard
and knew would corrupt the very body of the nation
and all our sense of our common humanity,
this black bile of old evils arisen anew,
takes over the vanity of Johnson;
and the very glint of Satan's eyes from the pit of the hell of
America's unacknowledged, unrepented crimes that I saw in
Goldwater's eyes
now shines from the eyes of the President
in the swollen head of the nation.

PASSAGES 26 : THE SOLDIERS

From the body-remains of the bull Hadhayans
the food! the immortality of the people!

"No-man's land in which everything moving
--from Saigon's viewpoint--was 'hostile'"

They've to take their souls in the war

as the followers of Orpheus take soul in the poem

the wood to take fire from that dirty flame!

in the slaughter of man's hope

distil the divine potion, forbidden hallucinogen

that stirs sight of the hidden

order of orders!

They've to go into the war and have no other

scene to make time to live .

Dieu, dont l'oeuvre va plus loin que notre rêve

Creator mysterious Abyss

from which there goes out a smoke
of men, of beings, and of suns!

so deep that he is blue with depth

containing without deception what so deceives us.

The extent of the shadow the weight of the fullness

measure

parts of a sentence they must make their long march to make

life writes we take as necessity.

And in order to liberate the New China
from Chiang Kai-shek, Presbyterian warlord, his bankers
raiding the national treasury, his armies
paid with bribes (aid) from Roosevelt and Stalin,
against Mao, exterminating cities,

Mao's own mountain of murderd men,

the alliteration of ems like Viet Nam's

burnd villages . . .

(Johnson now, no inspired poet but making it badly,
amassing his own history in murder and sacrifice

without talent)

. . . irreplaceable irrevócable in whose name?

a hatred the maind and bereft must hold

against the bloody verse America writes over Asia

we must recall to hold by property rights that

are not private (individual) or public rights but

given properties of our common humanity.

"The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem"?
Then America, the secret union of all states of Man,
waits, hidden and challenging, in the hearts of the Viet Cong.
"The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth,"
Whitman says--the libertarians of the spirit, the
devotées of Man's commonality.

"To unite ourselves with you we have renounced
All creatures of prey: False gods and men"

l'oeuvre qui va plus loin que notre rêve

Solidarius : solderd this army having its sodality
in the common life, bearing the coin or paid in the coin
solidum, gold emblem of the Sun
tho we fight underground
from the heart's volition, the body's inward sun,
the blood's natural
uprising against tyranny .
And from the first it has been communism, the true
Poverty of the Spirituals the heart desired;
I too removed therefrom by habit.

*

They fight the invader
or cower, fear so striking them, unmannd by hunger or having
no dream of manhood, the Sun
does not last in them;
or conscripted, the pay being no goal, they are not true (soldiers,
not even sold on the war
but from fear of punishment go, compelld, having no

wish to fulfill in fighting

but killing, killing, to be done with it.

O you, who know nothing of the great theme of War,
fighting because you have to, blindly, at no frontier
of the Truth but in-
structed by liars and masters of the Lie, your own
liberty of action
their first victim,

youth, driven from your beds of first love and
your tables of study to die
in order that "free men everywhere" "have the right
to shape their own destiny
in free elections"--in Las Vegas, in Wall Street,
America turns in the throws of "free enterprise",
fevers and panics of greed and fear.

The monstrous factories thrive upon the markets of
the war, and, as never before, the workers in arma-
ments, poisond gasses and engines of destruction,ride
high on the wave of wages and benefits. Over all,
the monopolists of labor and the masters of the swollen
ladders of interest and profit survive.

The first Evil is that which has power over you.

Coercion, this is Ahriman.

In the endless Dark the T. V. screen,
the lying speech and pictures selling its time and
corpses of its victims burnd black by napalm (produce,

--Ahriman, the inner need for the salesman's pitch--

the image of the mannequin, smoking, driving its car at high
elegantly dresst, perfumed, seducing, without (speed

odor of Man or odor of sanctity,

in the place of the Imago Xristy:

robot service in place of divine service;

the Good Word and Work subverted by the Advertiser,

He-Who-Would-Avert-Our-Eyes-From-The-Truth.

Habit, this is Ahriman.

The first Evil is that which conscripts you,

Spreading his "goods" over Asia. He moves in, you let him

move in, in your own interest, and it serves you right,

he serves you as you let him. Glimmers of right mind

obscured in the fires he scatters.

Master of Promises, Grand Profiteer and Supplier!

the smoking fields, the B-52s flying so high no sound no
of them gives warning, the fliers dropping their bombs(sight
having nor sight nor sound of what they are bombing.

This is Ahriman, the blind

destroyer of the farmer and his ox at their labor.

The Industrial wiping out the Neolithic! Improver of Life

flying his high standards!

Who makes the pure into wicked men,
Who lays waste the pastures and takes up arms against the
(righteous.

AN INTERLUDE

My heart beats to the feet of the first faithful,
long ago dancing in Broceliande's forest,
And my mind when it ceases to contend with the
lies and dreams of Generalissimo Franco
delites in the company of defeated but glorious men
who have taken to the highlands or,
in love with the people, striven to keep secret ways
of brotherhood and compassion alive,
spreading truth
like seeds of a forbidden hallucínogen, marijuana or morning
glory hidden away among the grasses of the field.

Love long conceald! Love long suffering!
Love we never knew moved us from the beginning!
Now it may be we are driven to your high
pasture. Hard presst,

my heart opens as if there were a pass in the rock,
   unknown, a by-pass,
close enough to be very like death.

Solitary door, road of solitudes,
the mute song at last sung in the veins among strangers!
I must go to the old inn in the canyon beyond us,
to the roller-skating rink among the pine trees.

For the dancers have come down from the mountains,
and the piano player strikes up such a sound the fiddler
sails away in the waving and waist-clasping rounds of it.
The people, then, are the people of a summer's night over and
the people of a Polish dance hall before the last war, (gone,
in the sweat and reek of Limburger cheese and Bermuda onions,
sweltering in beer and music, Kansas country evangels,
or summer people in the Catskills
who have taken up square-dancing as the poet takes up
measures of an old intoxication that leads into poetry,
not "square" dancing, but moving figures,
the ages and various personae of an old drama . . .

coupling and released from coupling,
   moving and removing themselves, bowing
and escaping into new and yet old
   configurations,
the word "old" appearing and reappearing
   in the minds of the youths dancing

. . . so that I remember I was an ancient man in that
part of the dance, Granpaw, I was nineteen and yet ninety,
taking the hand of Little Nell, dolce-doeing.

and the dance, the grand seance of romancing feet in their
   forward and back--we were the medium (numbers,
for Folk of the Old Days in their ever returning.

*

In the great figure of many figures the four
   directions and empires
change into four times, and opposites of
   opposites meet and mate,
separating and joining, ascending a ladder of litanies
   until they are "sent"--
losing themselves in each other's being
   found again.

Now, because I am Fire and you are Water,
Water and Fire kiss and embrace.

Water and Fire dance together. This,
the grand mimesis,
imitates the wholeness we feel true to What Is.

*

We must go back to sets of simple things,
hill and stream, woods and the sea beyond,
the time of day--dawn, noon, bright or clouded,
five o'clock in November five o'clock of the year--
changing definitions of the light.

And say the dancers take the six unbroken lines of the Chinese
hexagram,
and six dance for the six broken lines, the six gates or open-
in the otherwise stable figure: there are twelve in all.(ings
Dividing into groups of three, they dance in four groups.

What twelve things of your world will you appoint guardians,
Truth's signators?
Salt, Cordelia said. Gold and lead.
The poet, the great maker of wars and states, and
the saint, Burckhardt named as the three creative
masters of history.
But now, let the twelve be unnamed.

The dancers come forward to represent unclaimd things.