1

CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE

I.S.B.N.

THESES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE

National Library of Canada
Collections Development Branch

Canadian Theses on
Microfiche Service

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Direction du développement des collections

Service des thèses canadiennes
sur microfiche

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us a poor photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de mauvaise qualité.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE

National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

73

CANADIAN THESES
ON MICROFICHE

THÈSES CANADIENNES
SUR MICROFICHE

0-315-12045-2

59958

NAME OF AUTHOR/NOM DE L'AUTEUR SABRINA REED
TITLE OF THESIS/TITRE DE LA THÈSE BOUNDS OUT OF BOUND: ROBERT
DUNCAN'S POETICS OF STRIFE
UNIVERSITY/UNIVERSITÉ CARLETON UNIVERSITY
DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/
GRADE POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉE M. A.
YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADE 1983
NAME OF SUPERVISOR/NOM DU DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE DR. J. R. MORRISON

Permission is hereby granted to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF
CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies
of the film.

L'autorisation est, par la présente, accordée à la BIBLIOTHÈ-
QUE NATIONALE DU CANADA de microfilmer cette thèse et
de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the
thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or other-
wise reproduced without the author's written permission.

L'auteur se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la
thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés
ou autrement reproduits sans l'autorisation écrite de l'auteur.

DATED/DATE

MAY 2, 83

SIGNED/SIGNÉ

Sabrina Reed

PERMANENT ADDRESS/RÉSIDENCE FIXE

91 LILlico DRIVE

OTTAWA, ONTARIO

KIV 9L7

BOUNDS OUT OF BOUND:
ROBERT DUNCAN'S POETICS OF STRIFE

by

© Sabrina Reed, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

March 31, 1983

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies acceptance of the thesis

"Bounds out of Bound:

Robert Duncan's Poetics of Strife"

submitted by Sabrina Reed, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'J. C. ...', is written over a dotted line. Below the signature, the text 'Thesis Supervisor' is printed.

Thesis Supervisor

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'W. J. ...', is written over a dotted line. Below the signature, the text 'Chairman, Department of English' is printed.

Chairman, Department of English

Carleton University

Abstract

This thesis examines Robert Duncan's poetics of strife. Because Duncan stresses that his is not a step-by-step development, it discusses manifestations of this theme throughout his career without forcing his work into a strict pattern. To begin with, Duncan views war largely in negative terms. As his confidence in his abilities grows, his attitudes become more positive. From the writing of "An Essay at War" onwards, he sees strife as a means of fostering the change necessary for keeping poetry alive. In that poem, strife is a force the poet uses to break up traditional form. This gives him greater freedom to follow the organic order Duncan feels informs the universe. Later, Duncan sees war more as a part of the world's structure than as a means of approaching order. He describes the world in Darwinian terms--as always changing and in constant struggle.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Legend	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Poems of an Irregularity	11
Chapter Three: The Design Constantly in Reconstruction	45
Chapter Four: Unity in Multiplicity	75
Chapter Five: Passages of a Poetry	110
Chapter Six: Conclusion	135
Bibliography	140

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor J.R. Morrison for his help and encouragement in preparing this thesis. Also, I would like to extend my appreciation to Professor Ekbert Faas, who allowed me to read the manuscript version of his Young Robert Duncan, 1919-1950: A Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society (to be published in late 1983 by Black Sparrow Press).

Legend

- A   Audit/Poetry, IV, No. 3 (1967).
- AT   As Testimony: The Poem & the Scene (White Rabbit Press, 1964).
- AV   The Artist's View, No. 5 (July 1953).
- B2   Faas, Ekbert. "An Interview with Robert Duncan." Boundary 2, VIII, No. 2 (Winter 1980), 1-19.
- BB   Bending the Bow (New Directions, 1968).
- BH   Bowering, George and Robert Hogg. Robert Duncan: An Interview (Coach House Press, 1971).
- BR   A Book of Resemblances: Poems 1950-1953 (Henry Wenning, 1966).
- CG   Caesar's Gate: Poems 1949-1950 with Paste-Ups by Jess (Sand Dollar, 1972).
- CL   Cohn, Jack R. and Thomas J. O'Donnell. "An Interview with Robert Duncan." Contemporary Literature, 21 (1980), 513-48.
- D   Derivations: Selected Poems 1950-1956 (Fulcrum Press, 1968).
- DB   "From the Day Book." Origin, 2nd ser., No. 10 (July 1963), pp. 1-47.
- FD   The First Decade: Selected Poems 1940-1950 (Fulcrum Press, 1968).
- GS   Shurin, Aaron and Steve Abbott. "Interview." Gay Sunshine, No. 40/41 (Summer/Fall 1979), pp. 1-8. Citations from this interview will be given by both page and column number; for example, (GS, 2, 1) for Gay Sunshine, page 2, column 1.

- HD "The H.D. Book." Since the various parts of the H.D. Book appear in several magazines, citations from the H.D. Book will be given by part, chapter and page; for example: HD, I, 1, 21 to signify the H.D. Book, Part I, Chapter 1, page 21.
- IMF "Ideas of the Meaning of Form." In The Poetics of the New American Poetry. Ed. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman, pp. 195-211.
- L "Some Letters to Charles Olson." Maps 6 (1974), pp. 56-67.
- MF "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife." Caterpillar, No. 8/9, pp. 229-49.
- MP A Meeting of Poets & Theologians to Discuss Parable, Myth & Language. Ed. Tony Stoneburner.
- NAP Faas, Ekbert. "Interview." In Towards a New American Poetics, pp. 55-85.
- NSR "Notes on the Structure of Rime." Maps 6 (1974), pp. 42-45.
- OF 1 The Opening of the Field (New Directions, 1973).
- OS Notes on Grossinger's 'Solar Journal: Oecological Sections' (Black Sparrow, 1970).
- PRP "Preface to a Reading of 'Passages 1-22.'" Maps 6 (1974), pp. 53-55.
- RB Roots and Branches (New Directions, 1969).
- SG The Sweetness and Greatness of Dante's Divine Comedy: 1265-1965 (Open Space, 1965).
- T Tribunals: Passages 31-35 (Black Sparrow, 1970).
- TLM The Truth & Life of Myth (The Sumac Press, 1968).
- TOU "Towards an Open Universe." In The Poetics of the New American Poetry, pp. 212-25.
- UO Mesch, Howard. "Robert Duncan's Interview." Unmuzzled Ox, 4, No. 2, 79-96.

WW "Warp and Woof: Notes From a Talk." In Talking Poetics From Naropa Institute. Ed. Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb, pp. 1-10.

YC The Years As Catches: First Poems (1939-1946)
(Oyez, 1966).

Z "As Testimony: Reading Zukofsky These Forty Years." Paideuma, 7 (1978), 421-27.

Chapter One

Introduction

[The artist] strives not for a disintegration of syntax but for a complication within syntax, overlapping structures, so that words are freed, having bounds out of bound. (BB, ix)

"I derive all my forms, and they come from adoration and falling in love with poets" (BH, n.p.). This statement could be interpreted as an admission of slavish imitation. Yet when Robert Duncan talks of derivation he implies not a lack of originality but an assimilation into his own highly innovative poetry of the theories and practices of other artists. Anything Robert Duncan "derives" seems always to pass through the alembic of his own transforming consciousness. His insistence that his writing is derivative, then, lies in his conception of an art which flows from one generation of artists to the next. He stresses the importance of "a kind of continuity moving through poetry and a relationship both of a fellowship of poets and, through time, of an inheritance of spirit."¹ All

¹Robert Duncan, "Early Poetic Community," in Allen Verbatim. Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness, ed. Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), p. 131.

art, all facts, contribute to a field of poetry which each artist can tap. This belief leads Duncan to write an extremely eclectic poetry, one which seeks to include rather than exclude. For this reason, Duncan has often been censured for the arcane knowledge found in his work, his critics feeling that he has made his work difficult for the sake of complexity or learned only to show his erudition. But as Duncan comments himself, his incorporation of a vast spectrum of knowledge springs not from a desire to confuse but to elucidate. He means the "obscure" data he includes to provide other levels of experience beyond that of the literal level of the poem.

Furthermore, much of the seemingly obscure knowledge found in the poetry comes as a result of Duncan's own upbringing. Born in Oakland, California in 1919, Duncan was adopted shortly after the death of his mother in childbirth. He writes in The Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography: "Erudite, I have been called by some, and even, by others, pretentious, for my studious mythologies, but in every seeming learning search I have but sought among things that belong to my unlearned years" (TLM, 44). This knowledge comes partly from his adoptive parents, Edwin Joseph and Minnehaha Symmes, who as members of a group of Hermeticists introduced him to some of the wide range of myths he employs in his poetry. Duncan used the name given him by his adoptive parents, Robert Edward Symmes, until 1941, when he assumed his natural

father's surname. Duncan attended the University of California, Berkeley, from 1936-1938 and from 1948-1950. Although he never received a formal degree, he was successful academically and very nearly decided to continue his studies of Medieval culture at the graduate level. In 1947 Duncan published Heavenly City, Earthly City, his first book of poetry.

The years 1950 and 1951 mark a turning point in Duncan's life. In 1950 Duncan first came to grips with the poetic theories of Charles Olson. While Duncan often discusses his disagreements with the older poet's ideas, he has remarked that he "never really came home and discovered that [he] had a place where [his] soul really belonged till after [he] met Charles Olson. Charles was both a contemporary and at the same time filled a paternal role."² In 1951 Duncan met the painter Jess Collins, the beginning of a relationship which has continued to the present day. In 1956 Duncan accepted an invitation from Charles Olson to teach at Black Mountain College. With the publication of The Opening of the Field in 1960, Duncan joined the first rank of modern American poets. His two subsequent volumes, Roots and Branches (1964) and Bending the Bow (1968), furthered his reputation. After the publication of Bending the Bow Duncan stated that he did not plan to publish another book of poetry until 1983.

²Ibid., p. 133.

Because of the eclecticism of Duncan's work, any one critical approach alone seems inadequate for the examination of his art. For the purpose of this thesis, however, a modified formalist approach, with its stress on the primacy of the text itself, seems most appropriate. The following chapters deal primarily with an analysis of Duncan's work in terms of the poems themselves, their tensions, imagery, structure and development. While statements Duncan has made on what he expects of his readers suggest that he approves of such a close reading, he also insists on the interrelationships between poem and poem, poet and reader. Strict adherence to the formalist approach, therefore, can limit the understanding of Duncan's work. For this reason, this study uses the formalist method only as a base, a center of gravity. From there one must work outwards, drawing conclusions from whatever data may help to explicate the text.

Both in his poems and in his writings on poetry Duncan stresses the need for "poetic community."³ In the continuum of thought which moves from one generation to the next other poets act both as teachers, showing Duncan how to realize his ideas in poetry, and as "familiar," highlighting ideas or techniques that he has realized on a conscious or subconscious level himself. As his "extended study of H.D.'s poetry" (DB, 1), the H.D. Book, shows, he regards Hilda Doolittle as one such teacher and "familiar."

³Ibid., p. 131.

Coming into contact with H.D. for the first time when a high school teacher read him the poem, "Heat," Duncan immediately felt an affinity for her work. As Duncan comments, "Heat" has "something to do with keeping open and unfulfilled the urgencies of life" (HD, I, 1, 15). By describing a hot summer day, H.D. evokes a feeling of unbearable stillness. "Fruit cannot drop / through this thick air"⁴ but remains immovable. Realizing that the heat prevents change and growth, H.D. calls for its destruction. She writes: "O wind, rend open the heat, / . . . rend it to tatters."⁵ The poet requires violence in order to break free.

H.D.'s image of threatening perfection, together with the force needed to destroy it, forms perhaps a central aspect of Duncan's poetics. Writing of his early acquaintance with the poem, Duncan has said: "I did not know that this intense image of fruit, heat and longing for a force that would break the ripening perfection, had a significant concentration for me" (HD, I, 1, 14). As his poetry develops, Duncan becomes more and more aware of the necessity for war in poetry. Even in his first work Duncan begins to evolve a complex poetics of strife, questioning any form of coercive authority.

⁴H.D., "Heat," in Selected Poems (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1957), p. 17.

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

First given full treatment in "An Essay at War,"

Duncan's ideas of strife are two-sided. In its negative form, war seeks to control and dominate. Duncan uses the image of a flawless crystal to show that such "stress on conformation thwarts the true aims of art. When poetry aims at "process, not goal,"⁶ the achievement of "perfection" destroys creativity, while "The imperfection proposed, studied / in the cloudy stone, claims adoration"(D, 15).

Duncan explains: "The difference between the inorganic and the organic, the bios, is that between a crystallized form and a form of unresolved inner struggle. It is to keep Poetry itself alive that we crave the challenge of contradiction" (A, 61). The desire for perfection and the false idea of war seek to solidify forms and barriers, to shape things into an unbreakable mold. In contrast, Duncan sees the poem as "a proposition / in movement"(D, 9) which changes as "the mind dance"(D, 9) of the poet does. Paying careful attention to the world around him, the poet responds to the Heraclitean flux he sees there. For the poem to remain stable in such an environment implies that the poet has lost his receptivity to natural process and has imposed a false, ego-centered order on the larger forces he sees outside himself.

As Duncan's poem, "The Law," indicates, two forms of law contend in the universe: that of natural change

⁶Charles Olson, The Special View of History (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p. 49.

and that of coercion. One law, that of the state, often seeks to impose false orders and to prevent change. The other actively destroys such control. Consequently,

There are no
final orders. But the Law
constantly destroys the law. (RB, 26)

As Duncan's use of the word "law" here implies, he rebels against artificial control so that he can surrender to another order. Concerned with the establishment of a rigid code, the law proposes "'unnatural' restrictions" (RB, 28), "designing therein / nets to please Satan" (RB, 28). The true Law, on the other hand, fosters creation and growth:

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

When creativity rests with the realization of such a natural law, it becomes extremely important for the poet and reader to fight against day-to-day restrictions. Duncan counters the coercive form of war with a battle breaking down existing orders.

As Duncan notes, his theories on form have many correspondences with Darwin's theories of evolution.

"Struggle" was exactly, of course, what Darwin saw central to the nature of creation and to the viability of form: Form had its principle of survival not in its derivation from an eternal paradigm but from its variability and plasticity in functioning in the changing totality. (NSR, 49)

Against the sterility of an "eternal paradigm" Duncan, like Darwin, envisions a "changing totality." Even in

his earliest writings there exists a movement toward such an order. In the poetry of the early period, however, Duncan sees this progression as largely impossible, a dream only. Duncan's first work exists in an Eliot-like wasteland distinguished by the qualities of "loss" and "lament" (GS, 2, 1). In this world the poet strives to find a household, a point of safety, in a threatening environment. At this point in Duncan's development he rarely reaches his goal. "Love is a great sorrow" (YC, 74) rather than a source of stability or happiness. Consequently, the theme of war as it exists in the early poetry is largely a negative one.

As Duncan's poetry matures it moves toward a more affirmative vision, producing a corresponding faith in a more ordered universe. By the time of "An Essay at War" he has begun to integrate war and natural growth, to conceive of a world where disorder and structure can exist together. Similarly, his conception of "a universe of contributing contingencies" (TLM, 13) implies an aggregate whose elements work together to create one whole. In his statements on the need for poetic craft, too, Duncan stresses that order must exist in poetry. The poet is "maker," not merely a mouthpiece for inspiration but the one without whom the poem cannot happen. As Duncan says himself: "I knew about the prohibition that you shouldn't make a poem from the Zohar. You should pour forth God's voices, and that I

went exactly against"(NAP, 66). Duncan rejects neither the concept of order nor the idea that the poet shapes his material. Instead, he conceives of a universe in which disorder can exist within a "changing totality" (NSR, 49).

A central area in which this tendency manifests itself occurs in Duncan's open-ended sequence of poems, "The Structure of Rime." Scattered through several books of poetry, these poems arise from a conception of a poetic form which can admit new data and extend its boundaries. Duncan calls these poems "an open-end series having reference to a constantly changing theory of rime, measure, correspondences"(NSR, 45). At the same time, the very title of the sequence contains the word "structure." In a similar vein, Duncan defines rime as "morphological intuition"(NSR, 44), again stressing structure over formlessness. As he writes in "The Structure of Rime I," "[w]riting is first a search in obedience"(OF, 12). Once more a protean form exists with an idea of order.

In Duncan's poetics war creates the diversity and change necessary for poetic creation, breaking down stationary forms which would keep the world in stasis. Yet by breaking things up war and strife themselves create their own orders. Each disparate element moves toward reinstatement in a grander pattern. As Duncan writes in The Years As Catches:

Poems then are immediate presentations of the intention of the whole, the great poem of all poems, a unity, and in any two of its elements or parts appearing as a duality or a mating, each part in every other having, if we could see it, its condition--its opposite or contender and its satisfaction or twin.
(YC, x)

Chapter Two

Poems of an Irregularity

For I saw the State and the War as diseases,
eternal enemies of man's universal humanity
and of the individual volition. (YC, vii)

Robert Duncan's work illustrates a major trend in modern writing, that of including in poetry ideas and images often considered outside the realm of proper poetic expression. Poets like Charles Olson, Robert Duncan and William Carlos Williams work to expand the limits of poetry, to widen the boundaries of thought and expression. All perceive, to use Williams' phrase, "a mass of detail / to interrelate on a new ground."¹ To these poets, the writer must first be open to the constantly shifting world around him and, secondly, make use of the data found there. They believe that any subject, if looked at properly, can become poetic. Often this broadening of subject matter goes hand in hand with a new assurance and sense of potential. Critical though poets like Duncan, Olson or Williams may be of modern society, their work

¹William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 20.

affirms their own alternative values. Each writes assuming that his poetry will help change existing conditions. Each perceives poetry as a form of action. Duncan's espousal of the theme of war springs from this need for activity. As he explains: "It is to keep Poetry itself alive that we crave the challenge of contradiction"(A, 61).

In marked contrast to the later work, Duncan's early poetic persona sees himself as a victim in a struggle over which he has no control. As this chapter illustrates, such an attitude prevents Duncan from developing the complex poetics of war found in his later poetry. We see glimpses of Duncan's future views as early as 1940, when he writes: "I would evoke a way of being. I would bring a gift of unrest among men"(YC, 10). Even here Duncan feels the need to disturb complacency. His "gift of unrest" foreshadows his idea that men and women must fight to foster change. But in spite of the glimmers of Duncan's later beliefs, the poetry of his early collection, The Years As Gatches, deals mainly with his feelings of self-doubt and depression. He consistently returns to the themes of estrangement from love and the lack of a household. When one looks at poetry by writers like Williams, Olson, or Pound, on the other hand, one finds they write from a position of certainty. Each has found a place (Paterson and Gloucester) or a cause (usura) and works from that base. This chapter shows that in order to advance his theories on strife, Duncan needs similar support. Lacking that base, he regards war in

mostly negative terms. He is a victim, not an aggressor.

Duncan gradually begins to move away from this uncertainty. Of the poetry written before 1950, two poems, "Heavenly City, Earthly City" and The Venice Poem, act as Duncan's own statements on his changing poetics. This chapter continues by discussing these poems in terms of the development of the theme of war in Duncan's work. Trapped in a world where he feels alienated and attacked, Duncan tends in the early work to look toward another, a better, existence. Consequently, he exhibits a strong pull toward the Platonic. By juxtaposing "heavenly" and "earthly" domains, "Heavenly City, Earthly City" charts Duncan's realization that he must live in the actual rather than an ideal world. Writing of his desire to break down "perfect" forms, Duncan in his later work opposes a Platonic world view. "Heavenly City, Earthly City," therefore, marks a step in the development of his theories of strife. The Venice Poem maps a further change of view. Beginning in fear and self-humiliation, the poem transmutes Duncan's individual suffering into a discussion of poetic process. In this poem, Duncan highlights central ideas in his poetics by establishing four propositions for poetry. As they progress, Duncan begins to stress fluidity over formal structure, until, with the final proposition, he has begun to elaborate his theory that strife must inform creation. Having changed his uncertainty into a sense of poetic purpose, he can begin to challenge traditional conventions.

Readers coming from Duncan's later to his earlier work will notice a marked difference in tone. The innate vitality and energy of a book like The Opening of the Field seem supplanted by pain and suffering. In contrast, say, to that volume's first poem, "Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," the opening work of The Years As Catches, "Persephone," takes place in a barren winter landscape, "maimd" (YC, 3) and under siege. Victims rather than aggressors, the poet and his companions identify with Persephone through their common suffering. Moreover, the poem functions in a modern as well as a mythological landscape. Its date, 1939, highlights the poet's unease at the dawn of a new war, so that his grief "shrieks thru the ruins of cities, / whistles in shellholes" (YC, 3). Even spring, we find, has been thwarted by the violence of the time. We expect the return of Persephone from the underworld. Instead, "Spore-spotted Onan" (YC, 3), an image of thwarted creativity, moves through the land. Since the war destroys spring's peacefulness, the season brings not joy but a quickening of life to pain. A later poem, "An Apollonian Elegy," deals with the same ambivalent feelings. Here Apollo mourns for the loss of Hyacinthus, finding "in the year's renewal" his "eternal / lamentation" (YC, 72). With its influx of new life the "funereal Spring" (YC, 8) brings a higher level of consciousness. This, in turn, results in a greater feeling of loss.

Along with much of the early work, "Persephone" and "An Apollonian Elegy" differ from later writings in the

stress they put on a death of the intellect as the only means of escaping painful experience. This pessimism arises largely from Duncan's inability to see himself as an aggressor--not in the sense of hurting others but in the sense of actively changing one's surroundings. In "Persephone," for example, the poet and his companions "wait, [their] wounds barely heald / for the counterattack before sunrise"(YC, 4). Having no volition, they fight because they have to. Similarly, the lovers in "Passage Over Water" "come together bombd"(YC, 5), destroyed by an inner and outer strife. The personae in these poems react passively, fighting only when attacked or, as in "Passage Over Water," trying to evade the "destructive world"(YC, 5) altogether by passing into a world of dreams. Charles Olson's description of Robert Creeley, "the Figure of Outward,"² in The Maximus Poems would not apply to Duncan at this point. Maximus, Creeley, and the later Duncan, stride out into their worlds, seeking an active engagement with them. At this point in Duncan's career he retreats from a hostile environment.

Duncan himself admits that though war pervades his earlier work its creative element is "turn'd to purposes of domination, exploitation and destruction"(YC, viii). He regards love, too, in terms of battle. Particularly noticeable in his poems about his mother, Duncan betrays

²Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems (New York: Jargon/ Corinth Books, 1960), n.p.

mistrust for those whom he loves and who love him. "Among [his] friends love is a great sorrow"(YC, 74), often causing greater pain than it does happiness. Possessing a mind attuned to the subtlest nuances of human motives and actions, Duncan writes not only of the redeeming aspects of love but of its sinister side as well. His often hostile relationship with "that mothering shark in [his] childhood sea"(YC, 59) gives him ample opportunity to analyze the ways in which love can be used to coerce or gain control. "The women, our mothers, advance from the distance, / with terrible weapons, the sirens and nooses of love"(YC, 29), he writes. Continuing in hostility long after Duncan's general mistrust of love has faded,³ his relationship with his mother shows "the unease & wrath of love"(YC, 32) pervading the poetry of this period. Poems like "Persephone" illustrate "the theme of rape, rapture and dread"(GS, 2, 1), their atmosphere one of fear, violent force, and unwilling surrender.

Duncan's comments on his relationship with Jess Collins, his companion of thirty years, exemplify his later change of attitude. He remarks:

I had fixed in my account of falling in love that union of opposites, not here male and female, but of contending forces united in their contention by love; working out a karma struggle. But I broke through that fixation

³Duncan's resentment towards his mother manifests itself as late as "My Mother Would be a Falconress," a poem included in his 1968 collection, Bending the Bow.

to admit that I was in love with him where the sense was of a deep accord, not of winning or losing, but of going on with him in a common life. (GS, 2, 1)

When talking of his life before and after meeting Jess, Duncan contrasts his initial conception of love as conflict with his present sense of love as "deep accord." The difference lies not in chaos versus harmony but in an acceptance of a union between two distinct individuals. Though one cannot simply divide Duncan's career into two separate periods, his meeting with Jess marks a turning point. As mentioned before, he gains confidence in love. In addition, he at last finds the household for which he has been searching. For Duncan, the household or "hearth" leads to a "disappearance of dread" which "itself [makes] suffering unessential" (AV, n.p.). Having found a secure environment, the poet no longer fears the total destruction of his happiness. With both love and a household Duncan, as Ekbert Faas quotes him in his biography, ceases one part of his journey and begins a new stage in his life.⁴

Prior to finding a household, Duncan's poetry often seems to lack a sense of security. "I am not native here" (YC, 17), he writes in "A Spring Memorandum: Fort Knox." Based on the three months Duncan spent in the army in 1941, the poem portrays Duncan's uneasiness in a world he cannot

⁴Ekbert Faas, Young Robert Duncan, 1919-1950: A Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society, quoted from the manuscript version, p. 245.

accept and which rejects him. Once again, psychological factors find their correlative in the physical landscape. "The beginning of this year in spring is twisted" (YC, 16), deformed as Duncan and the world he inhabits are. Trapped in "a map of walls and towers, / painted tents and geometries of distance" (YC, 16), the poet feels his creative promise stifled. He explains:

Here

the tree
that from my heart sprang quick and green
dies at the throat. (YC, 16)

Replacing this stifled poetic impulse, "The guns / are new devices in the mind for absolutes, excite a curious art" (YC, 16). War here supplants all true forms of creative thought.

Oddly tranquilized by this world of war games, the poet and his companions fight a passive battle against their surroundings. Duncan comments:

The cells and the bodies
that hunger for freedom are restless but lie
like rocks in silence and resist the scene.
(YC, 17)

In the camp's "mechanized day" (YC, 17), the men have lost their conscious power to challenge their situation. Their resistance takes place on a visceral level but does not translate into direct action. Yet while the poem's first two sections evoke an atmosphere of unthinking obedience to authority Duncan rebels in the third section of the poem. Alienated by his surroundings, he resolves to

claw /his/ way free
from the flesh, spring the lock at the wrist,

leap out there, leap away, power-dive to
the darkness. (YC, 17)

Like a fox caught in a trap, Duncan will resort to violent, even self-destructive, tactics in order to gain freedom.

Foreshadowing "An Essay at War," Duncan uses the stratagems of war to release himself. "A Spring Memorandum" anticipates Duncan's mature work by stressing action over passivity.

Still, Duncan's flurry of activity leaves him unsure as to whether he really wants to maintain an active engagement with his world. Expressing his unease in the poem's final sections he asks: "Or, because love remains, must there be life / putting out branches to cover its wound?" (YC, 17). In its very insistence that we live, love reopens the scars which our "reasonless / stillness" (YC, 17) produces to mask our hurts. The concluding section of the poem, then, combines Duncan's sense of emptiness and lack of purpose with the hope that the world will be filled through love. Even as he contemplates his emptiness Duncan postulates a force to counteract it. He writes: "Each day the substance rises in the hornlike tree of self, / twists and reaches and seeks to flower in the light" (YC, 18). Love destroys lethargy, reopening wounds, enriching experience. As Duncan remarks, "The rage of Love appeared to [him] to be a convulsion of the sea . . . itself an ocean of molten rock and fire. War, love, and the poem, shaped history as expressions of the deepest forces and cleavings . . . of Man's hidden nature" (BR, vii). In their positive forms, war, love and

poetry fulfil similar functions. All break up closed systems while at the same time providing the sense of true comradeship which comes from fighting for the same cause. The poem ends with a movement away from the desolation of life in the camp. In doing so, it recognizes the world of the psyche and the potential such a universe may hold.

At this point for Duncan, the rich diversity of the human mind provides terror as well as fascination. He writes in his preface to The Years As Catches that "[t]he disregard that subconscious or libidinal forces had for truth or untruth, peace or war, troubled" (YC, viii) him. We learn "from Freud that what we are most ready to call our lies betray in truth contents of our psyches we would deny" (YC, viii). From his first reading of Freud while still in his teens to the present Duncan has made it his business to explore the multiple levels of personality. His awareness of "the secondary levels within any expressed meaning"⁵ gives his work sharpness and clarity of vision.

"An African Elegy" reflects this fascination with the complex workings of the psyche. Duncan begins:

In the groves of Africa from their natural wonder
the wildebeest, zebra, the okapi, the elephant,
have entered the marvelous. No greater marvelous
know I than the mind's
natural jungle. (YC, 33)

⁵Hamilton and Mary Tyler, "In the Beginning, or Recatching The Years As Catches with Robert Duncan, in the Years 1942 and 1945-46," in Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous, ed. Robert J. Bertholf and Ian W. Reid (New York: New Directions, 1979), p. 7.

While the poem's opening highlights the range and diversity of the psyche, it moves towards a more and more negative vision. As Duncan increasingly identifies himself with the mind's darker side, Death becomes the poet. Similarly, Othello is "this towering Moor of self" (YC, 34), an image of destructive jealousy. Because Duncan consistently identifies himself with blackness, the Moor mirrors the darkness in Duncan's own soul. He writes: "I know / no other continent of Africa more dark than this / dark continent of my breast" (YC, 34). Duncan has become the negative force in the poem, but as death becomes more and more identified with the poet it loses much of its power. Early in the poem Duncan posits a time when "all our tortures" will be "absolved in the fog, / dispersed in Death's forests, forgotten" (YC, 33). Once Duncan becomes death, however, we see "nowhere / the final sleep" (YC, 35). Though wanting to die, Duncan appears to have no choice but to live and suffer.

Even escape into the world of the psyche proves untenable:

The halls of Africa we seek in dreams
as barriers of dream against the deep, and seas
disturbd turn back upon their tides
into the rooms deserted at the roots of love.
There is no end. (YC, 35)

The poet again stresses bleakness and loneliness over any feeling of affirmation. The loss of love or, in Duncan's case, the failure to feel true love at all, leads

to a desolation which taints even the imagination. Duncan concludes the poem: "How sad then is even the marvelous!" (YC, 35). As the title suggests, the poem is an elegy, a lament for the loss of the magic of "the mind's / natural jungle" (YC, 33).

Whether involved in physical warfare or enmeshed in the conflicts of his own psyche, Duncan's early persona feels powerless to cope with the world around him. When he tries to use force to free himself in "A Spring Memorandum" he does so only through self mutilation, perhaps like the fox leaving some part of himself still caught in the trap. It is little wonder, then, that Duncan tries to transcend this dim world. While Mersmann may exaggerate when he writes that "in his ideas of cosmic order, Duncan appears to be a Platonist by natural inclination, an Aristotelian by choice, and an evolutionist . . . by desire and necessity of circumstance,"⁶ Duncan's early work does show a marked pull toward the Platonic. Often his poetry seems to present two distinct worlds, that of the real and that of the ideal. But as his long poem, "Heavenly City, Earthly City," illustrates, Duncan moves away from the Platonic, postulating a world in which the ideal has its groundwork in quotidian reality.

Duncan remarks: "In Plato I find preposterous this

⁶James F. Mersmann, Out of the Vietnam Vortex. A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1974), p. 169.

picture that when a man makes this chair he makes it according to a model that exists in the mind. . . . [A]ll ideas come from our actual physical real world"(GS, 6, 2). Beginning in a "metaphysical city"(B2, 10), a world of the mind, "Heavenly City, Earthly City" eventually embraces the idea that "if heaven is born out of anything it is born of the world we live in"(GS, 6, 3). As in preceding poems, Duncan begins by weighing his life in the balance and finding it wanting. He betrays his unease when he writes: "We are dim shadows before our fiery selves. / We are mere moments before our eternities"(YC, 82). In Platonic fashion, Duncan splits his world into two parts, the often disappointing world he inhabits from day to day and an "inward heaven"(YC, 82), housing his "fiery self."

Still separate at this point, these cities merge as the poem progresses. Here, however, Duncan sets up a dialogue between the heart whose source is the sun and "The darkness of the city"(YC, 83) itself. Again, the heart looks not to the world or body it inhabits but to a distant sun invested with the qualities Duncan feels his own place lacks. Having split himself from his city, Duncan searches for a redeemer who can fill the empty world. But "The voices of the night protest"(YC, 84), saying to Duncan that he awakes only "to gaze upon / his / dead / and speechless self"(YC, 84). The whole second section vacillates between Duncan's confidence that his

"Redeemer lives"(YC, 84) and the city's insistence that "There is no Redeemer"(YC, 85). In his choice of terms Duncan echoes Job's "I know that my redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25), establishing a connection between the lover and Christ as redeemers. While not Christian in the traditional sense, Duncan makes much use of Christ in his poetry. He remarks that "/i/t is true that our salvation lies in Christ. That is, in the god who is crucified (lost) and then resurrected (saved)"(AV, n.p.). Since Duncan's conception of poetic form includes a giving up of form so that it can be made new, Christ becomes an example not only for the poet but for poetry itself.

Duncan explains:

So, the poet understands the truth of the anguish of Christ's passion as a truth of poetic form. The fullness of the creative imagination demands that rigor and painful knowledge be the condition of harmony; that death be the condition of eternal forms"(TLM, 76).

Duncan regards Christ as one who, like the poet, surrenders to the law of the universe or the law of the poem. Instead of holding onto life, to the known, he submits to a greater will and goes to his death.

In keeping with his use of the redeemer elsewhere, Duncan perceives Christ not as an aloof deity but as God come to earth. "/T/he Son's sorrow and pain of utter undergoing . . . brings us into the full condition of our living bodies, our utter individuality, our utter humanity"(TLM, 75). Through love, Duncan hopes to be reborn into his own somewhat tarnished self. He writes:

The light, His sun, is the radiant song
 that consumes in its focus a world I have suffered,
 asserts, asserts, against the Siren counterfeit,
 the Earthly paradise in which I walk. (YC, 86)

The redeemer acts to counter Platonism. By lighting the actual earthly city, he stills the poet's need to look for light elsewhere.

Duncan later contrasts this redeeming love with pity. As Duncan sees it, "Pity is the wrath in which we walk" (YC, 87) because it prevents true reciprocal affection. By placing the loved one in an inferior position, pity creates distance. Duncan illustrates his point with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Condemned to hell by Orpheus' backward glance, Eurydice experiences "the gleam of love as a new perdition" (YC, 87). She needs rescue, not pity. In his comments on Orpheus and Eurydice Duncan also discusses the relationship of the poet to his ideal world. When the poet, in the guise of Icarus, flies too close to the sun he falls back, destroyed. Similarly, the poet, Orpheus, cannot look directly at Eurydice. Once again, Duncan erects a wall between himself and an ideal world; yet the barrier provides for its own transcendence. Prohibited from looking directly at his ideal, the poet intuitively it. Where he would have been blinded, he now gains inspiration. Duncan writes:

Eurydice, toward whom I dare not look
 --she is the bright spirit that sleeps in my heart--
 returns to meet my inward gaze. (YC, 89)

When the poet incorporates his ideal into his earthly existence, he gains a vision which merges pedestrian

reality and the magic of the world which lies behind it. Duncan does not deny the existence of another world, but he strongly believes that that world can only be reached through the one we inhabit from day to day.

While stating themes developed in the poem's last section, Part II still possesses the pessimistic tone of the rest of the volume. Part III states Duncan's anti-Platonic theme with new vigour. The poet has himself said this part of the poem resembles Wallace Stevens' writings.⁷ Like Stevens, he believes "We keep coming back and coming back / To the real."⁸ Over the course of the poem the sun changes from an ideal which Duncan seeks to a part of his earthly city. Stevens writes:

You must become an ignorant man again
And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
And see it clearly in the idea of it.

In a way, Duncan, too, must become ignorant so that he may leave behind the Platonic associations that have clouded his vision to this point. Where before Duncan emulated the sun, taking inspiration from it only, he

⁷Duncan states: "My city is a metaphysical city in my mind, and then it gets rescued by being a Stevens fiction at the close. Nothing could be more like Stevens than the whole passage about the sun and so forth"(B2, 10).

⁸Wallace Stevens, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," in The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 336.

⁹Wallace Stevens, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," in The Palm at the End of the Mind, p. 207.

now takes part in a reciprocal arrangement:

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. (YC, 93)

When the poet inhabits the earthly city his poetry illuminates his world. No longer does the poet praise an alien sun. He works with material found where he lives and fosters it.

"The praise of the sun is a renewing poem" (YC, 93), exemplifying in its rising and setting the cyclical nature of creation. Indeed, the poem ends with an intimation of the regenerative nature of the creative process, providing an idea of the stance Duncan will take in his later work. He concludes the poem:

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. (YC, 93)

At the beginning of the poem Duncan's persona would have striven to reach the sun. Now he rejects its unwavering brilliance, choosing instead a "human universe."¹⁰

With its rejection of Platonism, "Heavenly City, Earthly City" marks an important point in Duncan's career. While the poem does not deal with the theme of strife directly, it prepares the ground for later discussion. Duncan's realization that imaginative life begins in our world and not in some other, "perfect," existence goes

¹⁰ Charles Olson, Human Universe and Other Essays, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), n.p.

hand in hand with an acceptance of the periodic nature of creation. No longer striving for an ideal, Duncan can develop his theories on war which, after all, call for the breaking up of established form. Obviously, Duncan's ideas on strife are diametrically opposed to a Platonic world view.

"Heavenly City, Earthly City" works through one hindrance to the development of Duncan's mature theories on strife. The Venice Poem examines the other major obstruction: Duncan's own insecurity with the outside world and with his "hairy self / croucht in his abject sexual kingdom"(YC, 91). Since Duncan uses war as a means of working toward new forms, he realizes that his challenge to poetic convention requires not less but more assurance and craft. Without his own sense of poetry he cannot challenge those of others. Commenting that The Venice Poem "was the first time in [his] writing that [he] had both known what [he] had to do . . . and known as [he] worked that [he] was able to do it"(CG, ix), Duncan tells how the poem gave him new faith in his poetic abilities. This work marks the first step toward the development of a new self-confidence. At this point Duncan is beginning to build his own unique poetics.

The poem's first section, "A Description of Venice,"

sets up a dichotomy between the cruelty and knowledge of the city and the excited, almost naive state of the poet. Famous as a city of love, Venice's reputation also rests on its being "the Carnal City"(FD, 81), a place of betrayal. Venice, and its representative, Iago, have seen much, but what they have gained in knowledge they have lost in spontaneity. In contrast, "Saint William Shakespeare" stands "defiant with love"(FD, 81), worshipping, as Iago, in his "cynic wonder"(FD, 81), cannot. Similarly, while Shakespeare prays to Our Lady: "Heal / my lover and myself"(FD, 82), Venice presents "a vision of rare / exultant cold love"(FD, 82). With its history of adultery and betrayal Venice provides a fitting backdrop for the poem's personae, Othello and Duncan, who have both been wounded in love.

First written as therapy during a period of estrangement from his lover,¹¹ the poem begins with the same unease, hurt and self-disgust found in previous works. Othello sings: "I am like an empty shell / tortured with voices"(FD, 83), while Duncan describes himself as the "cross-eyed king of one thousand lines"(FD, 88). Yet in Venice Duncan finds much to comfort himself. He describes the city as being "Not happy, but in such richness / as delights the eye past hurt / until the heart awakes"(FD, 84). As the poem progresses, Duncan

¹¹Ekbert Faas, Young Robert Duncan, p. 216.

turns more and more to a consideration of art, taking his consolation, as this quotation suggests, in the beauty he finds there.

From the poem's opening Duncan describes Venice as itself generating music. In the blue eyes of a statue in St. Mark's Square Duncan sees "a central sapphire," from which proceeds, as if in rays, "a melody"(FD, 81). Objects pulse with their own life, providing the impetus for creation. But in keeping with his later poetic stance Duncan does not regard the natural music produced by the sapphire as true art. "'These natural sounds suggest music, / but are not yet themselves music'"(FD, 86).

They give inspiration, but the artist must bring the work to its final form. The poem under discussion exemplifies this relation between the forces behind creation and the finished poem. Duncan reflects the poem's genesis as a means of exorcising his jealousy over his lover when he writes, "My jealousy is like a jewel, / . . . from which comes my music"(FD, 87). His envy acts to begin the writing process but, as in the case of the music of the statue or of Venice itself, it must then be refined and transmuted into poetic form. By the second section, "Imaginary Instructions," we have thus moved away from a discussion of raw emotion to an exploration of craft.

Duncan comments on ideas central to his poetics by establishing four propositions for poetry. The first,

proposition, "in the poem as a mirror--the whole world, / an instruction"(FD, 88), propounds a mimetic principle of art. Duncan quickly counters this proposition ~~by~~ introducing Bernini's sculpture of "Louis the 14th's head" (FD, 89), which, unlike "the virgin mirror"(FD, 88), lives and creates. Questioning his vision of Bernini's sculpture, Duncan asks:

/W/hy does it come to mind
now when I say
I no longer know the virgin mirror? (FD, 89)

Part of his answer takes the form of another question, "Why are we never at rest?" While the mirror reflects passively, the mind of the artist moves constantly in his poetic subject. Duncan's elaboration of the first proposition moves from the stillness of the mirror towards a state of flux. His final image of a rose which "never cease[s] unfolding / but grows and unfurls"(FD, 89) gives one a sense of potential and motion.

The second proposition,

in the mirror,
the Part--
consternation of a whole world, (FD, 89-90)

confronts the sexual element of love and creation.

Indicative of Duncan's early "dis-ease"(YC, vi) with his homosexuality, it attempts to reconcile the "unnatural" act of homosexual love ("Nature barely provides for it" (FD, 90)), with a conception of a natural creative process. Duncan's initial unease fades as his discussion continues. After writing of the humiliations of love he concludes:

"Yet this is the noble moment" (FD, 90). Tellingly, the rose first used to describe the flux of creation now serves as an image of the sexual act. In his passion, the lover sees "already" more than Love's mirror shows" (FD, 90). With these words, Duncan rejects the passive reflection of the mirror in favor of a more active perception.

/T/he third proposition:
a realistic image
as if that virgin upon St. Agnes Eve
had seen
old Nobody
wearing a face in the mirror (FD, 91)

further Duncan's movement towards the belief that art should be active. Referring to Duncan's mention of St. Agnes' Eve at the beginning of "Imaginary Instructions," this proposition highlights the sheer variety of experience open to the poet:

/L/ooking into the mirror
may show the astonisht virgin
more than her husband. Surely someday
she will recall how many faces, forms, glances"
the phantom lover had. (FD, 88)

As the propositions progress, they become less mimetic and more interested in what lies behind the actual thing seen. Duncan writes in The Truth & Life of Myth: "The work-a-day world, if we but hear, speaks in tongues; and the waking consciousness casts a spell of its own in awakens, at once revealing the true nature of things and concealing it" (TLM, 17). Even the most simple objects can spark the imagination.

Duncan returns to the Bernini sculpture, "the

inventing head"(FD, 92), to describe the relationship between artist and object. "The invented head / invents" (FD, 93) because it can lead to a myriad of responses in those who behold it. The head also generates meaning by the very fact that it is a created object. Once creation has been set in motion it often determines its own course. In poetry the line before will restrict what can be said in the line following. More importantly, Duncan's concept of the "inventing head" implies his ideas on the nature of the reader's reaction to art. Duncan writes that "A poem . . . is an occult document, a body awaiting vivisection, analysis, X-ray"(AV, n.p.). The poem, in other words, requires the active intervention of the reader. True understanding comes when the spectator recreates the work in his own mind.

Duncan's discussion of art and poetry culminates in the fourth proposition, "the mirror as imitation, as poem" (FD, 94). Here he does not use the term, imitation, to imply servile copying but as William Carlos Williams uses it in "The Desert Music." In that poem Williams writes that the poet must "imitate," not "copy nature."¹² In other words, he should create a work which reflects nature through the medium of invention rather than copying what exists already. As one critic has noted, "the

¹²William Carlos Williams, "The Desert Music" in Pictures from Breughel (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 110.

discontinuities, the interruptions of the discursive movement of the poem, are self-consciously signaled: 'the mirror as imitation, as poem, / STOPS, changes.'¹³ The fourth proposition involves a constant interplay of "stops" which capture the image in poetry or sculpture and a moving on from those "stops" to new ideas. As Duncan writes in the next section, poetry and form are "open and closed, open and closed"(FD, 95). The work opens to receive a new idea, closes to form it into an artistic whole, and expands to admit new meanings. In the creative cycle

/T/he dropt cup reappears from its fragments,
springs to the hand as if from nowhere
complete. (FD, 95)

Restoring things lost to their full beauty, memory plays such a reclaiming role in poetry. The next section, "The Venus of Lespuges," elaborates on the connection between the memory of "first things"(FD, 96) and inspiration in poetry. Although the term "first things" may imply Platonic concern for ideal forms, Duncan does not use the term in this way. Rather, a return to first things involves a stripping away of convention, a concern with a more "elemental" form of art. Yet first things do not reject artifice altogether. Instead, they reject conscious, controlling technique such as meter or rhyme. Duncan wants "Not Chaos, / but first form"(FD, 98). A rejection of artifice does not imply a renunciation of

¹³Jayne L. Walker, "Exercises in Disorder: Duncan's Imitations of Gertrude Stein," in Scales of the Marvelous, p. 25.

poetic craft but rather a more careful attention to it.

"The Venus of Lespuges" section also moves toward the synesthesia of different art forms which characterizes Duncan's poetry. Several of the poems in Letters incorporate drawings, while Caesar's Gate contains "prose poems to illustrate Jess's collages" (BR, x). "Passages 20, An Illustration," also describes a collage by Jess. Duncan's description of Rousseau's "The Dream" in The Venice Poem marks one of the most effective instances of Duncan's combination of the mediums of poetry and painting. As Duncan was probably aware, the painting is itself about hearing. The poem which served as a commentary for its exhibition tells of Yadvigha, who, dreaming in her room, imagines the music of a snake charmer and is transported into an imaginary jungle.¹⁴ Thus, Rousseau's painting places the woman in a "visual jungle" (FD, 99); yet "She waits upon a sounding impossibility, / upon the edge of poetry" (FD, 99). Like the "inventing head" earlier, the painting breathes life. "The image lifts into gesture" (FD, 99)

and the gesture lifts
into the trunk trumpeting
or the throat pulsating
into the duration of syllables.

Looking at a painting about imagined sound, Duncan begins to hear what Yadvigha hears.

¹⁴ Ronald Alley quotes this poem in his book, Portrait of a Primitive: The Art of Henri Rousseau (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1978), p. 77.

As Duncan turns more and more from the visual world of painting into the aural world of poetry his image also changes. Though describing Botticelli's Venus, Duncan stresses sound over visual perception. Venus rises "out of a great bustling of waters, / transformed in the sea roar / within the shell" (FD, 100). From the shell's seemingly meaningless roar arises a coherent shape. The shape, furthermore, exists in the same relationship to sound as does poetry. As Duncan makes clear, the shell of Venus corresponds to the shell-like structure of the cochlea, a part of the inner ear. He asks:

What is happening?

music, magic,
emerging

out of the shell-coil ear

the mimic murmur,
the remembering (FD, 100)

As formulated here, this statement suggests Duncan's complex concept of the relationship between sound and poetry. He writes in The Truth & Life of Myth: "The seed of poetry itself sprang to life in the darkness of a ground of words heard and seen that were a congregation of sounds and figures previous to dictionary meanings" (TLM, 13). Before the birth of words as meanings there existed a vast area of undetermined sound. Like the ear, the poet selects from this sea of sound, interpreting its many tones.

As Ekbert Faas notes, Duncan's consistent use of the syntactical phrase, "back of," in his prose indicates his

tendency to look for what lies behind the actual thing heard or seen.¹⁵ In the case of poetry, what lies behind is the murmur, the constant flow of sounds that make up language. Duncan elaborates this concept more tellingly in "Tribal Memories," the first in the sequence, "Passages." Beginning with an invocation to a muse figure, "to Her-Without-Bounds" (BB, 9), the poem moves to address the mother of the Muses, Mnemosyne, directly.¹⁶ Duncan writes:

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.
                                                                                 (BB, 10)

As has been pointed out, Duncan makes a connection between the Greek word meaning "to murmur with closed lips" and the Greek word for myth. "Implicit in this is the suggestion that myth comes to resonate in one's mind through a murmur, hum, or susurrus of riming images and correspondent rhythms."¹⁷ The same holds true in The Venice Poem where Duncan connects the muse to Memory and then in turn links Memory to "the mimic murmur" (FD, 100). Poetry works through memory, a return to the beginnings of sound and experience.

¹⁵ Ekbert Faas, Young Robert Duncan, p. 8.

¹⁶ Ian W. Reid, "The Plural Text: 'Passages,'" in Scales of the Marvelous, p. 162.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 162.

With this statement of the roots of poetry, Duncan reaches the end of the exploration of poetry and poetic inspiration which characterizes The Venice Poem. It remains for the "Coda" to recapitulate and reaffirm the themes of the three previous "movements." Fittingly, the "Coda" begins with a restatement of the central image of the first section, that of the sapphire. Duncan discusses his use of this image:

The Coda of The Venice Poem brought me to a baby's concentration in delite upon a star-sapphire pendant that was, whatever in memory of some past event it might have been, in the time of the poem the birth of a focus in me. The pattern of rime itself is the pattern of this life-resonance, the rebirth of a sound. (TLM, 44)

As in preceding sections, the sapphire triggers memory, setting the poem's music into motion. In a way which evokes a slight resonance with Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquility,"¹⁸ the poet recalls the image, using it as a starting point. The sapphire represents the crystallized experience which will reach fruition in the poem. When Duncan writes that "Between the sapphire and the sound / unfurls the rose of vision" (FD, 100), he comments on the place of vision between the germinal experience and full realization of that experience. The painting by Rousseau in the previous section has, we remember, evoked the same response. In a sense, the sapphire and the

¹⁸ William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800)," in Selected Poems and Prefaces, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 460.

painting are first forms--first because both are images upon which the poet creates anew.

Duncan associates such images of creativity with fear and death as well as with birth. He continues:

Venice has perisht, fallen into disrepair.
The sapphire has become extreme and cold
as if it took all strength to bear.
Again and again all things return
into the faithless and unfair. (FD, 101)

As noted before, Venice is the city of adultery and decay. A vision of the city which attempts to ignore this must end in disillusionment. Similarly, the goddess from which the city takes its name, Venus, often fosters jealousy and betrayal. As Duncan's own experience tells him, love, too, returns to "the faithless and unfair."

The beginning of the "Coda," then, creates an atmosphere of betrayal and failure. The repeated refrain, "I am barely able to go on" (FD, 100-101), expresses Duncan's sense of futility and thwarted purpose at this point. As he soon makes clear, he has reached a time for reassessment. "When you come to this moment" (FD, 101), he writes, "Your four hundred volumes by the very best authors / will go blank as the paper at which you are staring" (FD, 101). Not even the inspirations of those who have gone before will help to counter this "dark night of the soul." This is the moment of supreme reduction, a moment when one desires the destruction of everything lasting. "BANG. You will lust for the cut of the stone" (FD, 101). Deliberately violent, the poet longs to destroy

what he can no longer trust. But after Duncan's final statement of pain and betrayal, "How deep the violation goes"(FD, 102), comes a new command: "Heal"(FD, 102). Once again, Duncan transmits his unease with human relationships into statements on art. His repetition of the fourth proposition for poetry, "stops. CHANGES"(FD, 102), at this point, indicates his realization of the need for change, in a sense, for unfaithfulness. Referring to the certainty of Shakespeare in his art, Duncan writes that "There must be a moment when that faith returns"(FD, 102). Yet the artist himself destroys what he believes in. "He is violent. He is animal"(FD, 102).

Duncan's stress on violent change and destruction here foreshadows his later concern with the necessity of war for poetic creation. He writes that "Logic forbade this"(FD, 103) smashing of invention. But the forces of "order, remembrance"(FD, 103), are powerless. Duncan asks: "What do they avail when this art / dictates its laws?"(FD, 103) As he will make amply clear in later poems such as "The Law I Love is Major Mover," he wants not a set of hard-and-fast rules but a law of change. As his earlier image of poetry as an unfolding rose shows, Duncan sees poetic form as organic, springing naturally to life according to its own ordained pattern. His poem, "Yes, As a Look Springs to Its Face," makes the connection between organic life and poetry even clearer.

The force that words obey in song

the rose and artichoke obey
in their unfolding towards their form. (OF, 60)

Just as the rose and artichoke obey the promptings of the seeds they spring from, becoming what they were meant from the beginning to be, the poem obeys the promptings of language and unfolds "towards /its/ form"(OF, 60).

Structure can not be imposed by outside factors but grows from the inner promptings of the poem itself.

Duncan writes that in the "Coda" of The Venice Poem he felt he "had come upon an ecstatic promise: that Hell was the womb of ~~Heaven~~; that the extreme passion of painful experience of love in conflict was the formation of a passage in feeling in which a new self was to be born"(CG, ix). From the violent destruction of the previous part springs an affirmation of a new form. The poet

has gone further than this art allows,
losing so many values
just for that sound. (FD, 103)

In giving up the values of "logic" and "order," he has reaffirmed the values of the inner ear. With his ear "fixt on his imaginary shell"(FD, 103) the poet hears a music inaudible to most people.

As Duncan shows in the concluding part of the "Coda," the artist has entered the realm of faith. We are, as he soon makes clear, in "the drama of life"(TLM, 10) itself.

This stage, he said,
is Truth--
never in living

but here, here,
all felt things are
permitted to speak. (FD, 105)

As he later does in The Truth & Life of Myth, Duncan establishes a mythic realm of truth arising from everyday reality. Through the imagination everyday objects, occurrences and emotions lead into this realm. Thus, the realm of the spirit is irrevocably tied to the realm of the actual world. It is on the stage, however, in the world of imagined reality, that "all felt things are / permitted to speak"(FD, 105). As Duncan says in the later essay, "Poetry raise[s] a theater, a drama of Truth" (TLM, 11). It shows the reality of the spirit, making it tangible and realizing it in actual language. In this last section, Duncan speaks of "faith's candle"(FD, 105), a taper lit to the mystery of life and poetry, to the muse herself. Only the mothering aspect of poetry, its creative force, can heal the rifts Duncan feels in himself in the beginning of the "Coda." Duncan writes that "There is no pain / [he] would not bear for her sake"(FD, 105). Undoubtedly a painful process, falling in love or falling into poetry must be endured, since through the act of falling comes "also faith / and surcease from pain"(FD, 106). Paradoxically, the act of invention violates while creating anew.

Art itself, like Venice earlier, seems "not happy, but splendid"(FD, 84). Literally, the months preceding and during the writing of the poem "have passt / like days

of pain"(FD, 106); yet the agony becomes joy at birth and creation. Duncan imagines experiencing the pains of labour in the last section:

Now the most bewildering of all pains . . .

forced

outward

flung out from the fat form. (FD, 106-107)

As Duncan notes in the preface to Caesar's Gate, the end of the "Coda" represents the birth of a new self. Now able to go beyond his own sufferings, Duncan moves towards the discussion of art and creation which plays such a vital role in his later poetry.

Up to the writing of The Venice Poem, Duncan's work exhibits two opposing, yet similar, patterns. Threatened by a hostile world, the poet often escapes into an ideal existence. This happens in the opening sections of "Heavenly City, Earthly City." His only alternative seems to be to deaden his senses to all outside stimuli, as happens, with varying degrees of success, in "Persephone" and "An African Elegy." When forced by circumstances to wake into life, Duncan's persona experiences only suffering. What makes The Venice Poem so important is its transmutation of the personal anguish found in preceding poems into a celebration of life and art. Significantly, the poem also presents the artist as ~~a~~ destroyer, an active agent working out into his world. Instead of seeing strife as something directed against himself that he must escape, Duncan

begins to see it as a way to break up boredom and to foster growth.

The difference in attitude between the poetry in The Years As Catches and what begins to take shape in The Venice Poem is illustrated in two poems from The Opening of the Field: "The Structure of Rime V" and "The Structure of Rime VII." In the earlier poem, Duncan presents a world devoid of hope. "I tried to die, one wretched voice declared. There is no death. I left my body hanging behind me, I sought the void"(OF, 18). In contrast to the living dead of this poem, "The Structure of Rime VII" pulses with life. "Black King Glélé dwells in the diabolical, a tranquil spirit of pure threat"(OF, 20). The embodiment of everything we fear--"corruptions of blood, pustulences, wounds, irruptions"--Glélé lives as the speakers in "The Structure of Rime V" do not. Duncan tacitly condemns the philosophy of the speakers in the first poem while embracing the demonic creature in the second. Here, as elsewhere, Duncan is not so much against barbarism and pain as he is against the boredom which comes from lack of use of one's mental faculties. In the later work war changes from something directed against Duncan to something he uses to keep himself and poetry awake and alive. He becomes "the Figure of Outward," working to revitalize his world.

Chapter Three

The Design Constantly in Reconstruction

Our "wars" today are as trivial a version of War as most of our poetries are of Poetry or Creation; Neither followers of the War nor opponents of the War want to know its creative meaning. (OS, n.p.)

"To be awake is to be alive."¹ Duncan would agree with Thoreau's statement and add, like Thoreau, that most of us are clinically living and psychically dead. Both writers concern themselves with waking us up, but they do it by different means. Thoreau's famous "Simplify, simplify,"² shows his approach to the problem. He incites his readers to dispense with fashionable clothes and "fine living." All hinder clear vision by setting material goals ahead of spiritual ones. "In proportion as [man] simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty."³ Thoreau, of course, follows in a long Western tradition

¹Henry David Thoreau, Walden, in Walden and "Civil Disobedience" (New York: Airmont, 1965), p. 69.

²Ibid., p. 70.

³Ibid., p. 227.

inciting people to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"(1 Pet. 2:11). Spiritual fulfillment comes from stripping life down to its bare essentials. In contrast, Duncan does not simplify. He complicates. His poetry attests to his embrace of the physical world and his love of its multiplicity. Thoreau believes that by simplifying life he will comprehend the true simplicity of nature; Duncan, that by complicating life he will understand the world in all its variety.

As this chapter shows, Duncan complicates his world by fostering a state of strife. Once he has established his "household" and gained a sense of himself as poet, Duncan begins his discussion of the necessity for war in poetry in earnest. No longer does he attempt to escape strife by creating a Platonic world or by trying to avoid consciousness. Instead, he deliberately fosters disorder. Duncan's first major poem to deal completely with his view that strife is needed for creation is "An Essay at War." As a result, this chapter begins with a detailed discussion of the poem which, in Duncan's own words, "proposed pretty much the process of [his] later poetry"(UO, 80). As explained in this poem, Duncan envisions two kinds of war, one which fosters poetry and another which destroys it. One war, that of coercion, has as its object control. It seeks to impose set views on others and to prevent change. Paradoxically, Duncan fights this coercive form of war by postulating a battle of another kind. His form of strife

deliberately breaks up established orders. Where the negative manifestation of war seeks to establish a "perfect" system, Duncan uses strife to avoid perfection.

This chapter continues by showing that Duncan's war poetry works on two levels: social protest and poetic process. Even poems protesting actual wars also discuss war's "creative meaning" (OS, n.p.). Further, one finds that when freed from the discussion of actual wars, Duncan's poetry on strife tends to focus on the inherent order of the universe. Poems like "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita," for example, deal with war in terms of how it affects poetic craft. Though Duncan rejects any set plan for poetry, he still believes that the poem is a carefully crafted organism. His espousal of strife does not imply anarchy. It implies greater concentration on another form of order. Indeed, as this chapter concludes, Duncan more and more begins to integrate war into a total (organized) system. An example of Duncan's "grand collage" (BB, vii), his poem, "The Continent," exemplifies Duncan's integration of strife with a coherent world view. A totality which allows individual elements their own expression, the collage is a particularly apt image for Duncan's belief in strife within order.

"An Essay at War" begins by presenting a central paradox in Duncan's work, that of "The design of a poem / constantly / under reconstruction" (D, 9). While the word "design" implies a crafted pattern, Duncan also believes

that poetic conceptions should change and grow. As he says elsewhere, poetic form resembles that of an oak tree. Developing from an acorn, the tree matures under the direction of its own inner impulse, not according to a set plan requiring a certain number of branches at a certain angle. Like the tree, the poem has "form not by conventions kept but by the pulse of its own life"(HD, I, 1, 13). "[A] conception betrayd, / without a plan"(D, 9), it directs the course of its own growth. Implying a preconceived idea, the words "plan" and "conception" stand for what must be avoided in poetry. One's own notions pale before the poem's inner directive.

Capable of immense variety, yet working in accordance with definite rules, language exemplifies the paradox between design and the "proposition / in movement"(D, 9). Even the most iconoclastic of poets works within the language itself. As Duncan puts it, "language is cosmos"(BH, n.p.). Our means of communication, it defines the limits of our comprehension, becoming "an engagement in which we are finding the universe"(NAP, 81). Words thus themselves become the impetus for creation. As Wendy MacIntyre writes:

In the context of Duncan's speculations on language, the word lives, has an urge to create, and is capable of divine revelation; and therefore it conceptually parallels the divine Logos as it is presented in the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"(John, I, 1).⁴

⁴Wendy MacIntyre, "The Logos of Robert Duncan," Maps 6 (1974), p. 81.

In Duncan's universe words become magical units having their own increment of associations. The poet does not simply use words but allows them the freedom to create.

While the poet may break down existing forms, his careful attention to words prevents him from writing confused or chaotic poetry. "Once you recognize that the language is through and through as formal as it is, you realize that every poem is participating in a form" (NAP, 83). Syntax, punctuation and grammar all serve to delineate an area for expression and to provide a law of meaning. In trying to define what he means by "law," Duncan speaks of the law of the sentence. "[W]hen you write a sentence beginning with the word 'the,' aren't you already under the law of 'the'?" (NAP, 64), he asks. In choosing a word one defines an area of consciousness. One's first choice determines the next choice. To use an expression employed by Creeley, Olson, and Duncan, language reifies, making abstract concepts concrete. As Creeley says in his poem, "Love":

There are words voluptuous
as the flesh . . .

Not to speak them
makes abstract
all desire
and its death at last.⁵

Language acts as a bond to tie ideas to concrete reality. Instead of seeing language as an imperfect tool for

⁵Robert Creeley, "Love," in Later (New York: New Directions, 1979), p. 18.

expressing more complex concepts, these poets regard words as a means of clarifying ideas. As Duncan puts it: "Language, first just at the level of names, is our agency whereby things come close to us and enter our psychic world" (NAP, 83). If we have no name for "table" we have trouble seeing a table as a table. He continues: "I think the name comes along with the focus, it's a reification of the universe. . . . As long as a person is in love with and curious about and searching for the universe, he is engaged in language" (NAP, 83). In Duncan's scheme we define ourselves and our universe through the act of explaining it, through the spoken word.

The next section of "An Essay at War" illustrates that the poet's careful attunement to words makes him the "herdsman of our language" (D, 9). This first narrative section also establishes a key theme for the entire poem: "the work of art as hearth of feeling" (BR, viii). In the bleak world around him the poet conjures up a home, a place where, literally, light shines in the darkness. Implying that the hearth provides both physical and mental comfort, Duncan writes that "We leave a light in the window. / In the mind" (D, 9). "The home is the sheerest product of [his] imagination, a triumph of soul" (AV, n.p.). In contrast to poems in The Years As Catches, Duncan has now found his home. Still, Duncan's writings on the light of the hearth contain a characteristic element of dread. Illuminating "the household kept . . . in the

midst of catastrophe"(BR, viii), it can also be dangerously destructive. A paradox, "i/t is the first named incarnation of Love. We burn with it. The fire of Hell. Pain. But it is also warmth"(D, 11). Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the light is that it enables us to see. "The darkness within which all known things exist reduces them to sameness, so that they are indistinguishable. The light defines, disorders the blackness."⁶ A manifestation of the imagination, the hearth survives in the face of the most hellish surroundings. For this reason, Duncan can write: "So, in Hell, imagine" (D, 11). Much like Williams in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," "Light, the imagination / and love"⁷ are three aspects of a power which "gelds the bomb,"⁸ the destructive elements in our modern world.

From the heat of the fire of the hearth we move to the fire lighting the room of an old man dying from cancer. Forced by his imminent death to live totally in the present, the old man teaches by example. He implies that "The gesture is living"(D, 12), not for the future but for the present. In his very resignation "He / absorbs grandeur. A history"(D, 12). Duncan's next

⁶James F. Mersmann, Out of the Vietnam Vortex, pp. 186-87.

⁷William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," in Pictures From Brueghel, p. 180.

⁸Ibid., p. 179.

statement, "The poem designed so" (D, 13), links poetry with the old man. The poem, too, exists in the present. It absorbs a history in its very refusal to refer to the past or the future. Also like the old man, the poem "emit[s] great snores / or death's confusions" (D, 13). One critic writes that "the dominant mood in open poetry is one of loss. What the poet utters, he abandons to his evolving form."⁹ Writing that "Words open out upon grief" (D, 116), Duncan would seem to agree. "In the poem the music, the melodic strain, arises along some line of anguish" (HD, I, 4, 94). In a sense, Duncan's hatred of perfection means the artist must inevitably fall short of his conceptions.

The ever emptying cup, the vital
source that solaces no thirst's throat.

Poetry is of this natural vacancy. (D, 116)
Its openness to new ideas also involves absence and loss. "I am trying to let everything fall away" (D, 13), states Duncan in "An Essay at War." In its very reductive, uncontrolling capacity, however, poetry presents its vision. In an almost Poundian statement on the nature of coherence, Duncan continues:

The listeners cannot
put it all together. It is so weak.
What information from so infirm

⁹Cary Nelson, Our Last First Poets. Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 112.

a grasp upon the thread? The thread
breaks . . . or the light

breaks thru. (D, 13)

Comprehension comes in spite of the seemingly stronger powers of blackness but the struggle is a constant one. The cold sea is "just breaking at war with the light," or, as Duncan continues, "we are always at war"(D, 13).

With this statement, Duncan reaches the heart of his poem. Once again, he returns to the image of the hearth: "its glow / leads us upward, for we are . . . (D, 14). In the context of the poem the completion of this sentence must surely be "for we are in love." "What do we mean when we say we're in love?" Duncan asks. The "many faces, forms"(FD, 102) of love, vary from "tenderness" to Dante's conception of "the brimstone rain of fire"(D, 14) punishing homosexual love in The Divine Comedy. Yet, Duncan writes, "Beauty / it is they attend"(D, 14). Since Duncan implies that in love we strive to reach an ideal beyond our grasp, this argument seems almost Platonic. Duncan, however, aligns perfect beauty not with love but with terror. Examples of form at its most beautiful, "the Hapsburg's rock crystal / pitchers" are "flawd with /their/ own wonder"(D, 14). "Self-containd"(D, 14), they require nothing to complete their beauty. By comparison, true love never seeks the paradigm or the ideal. Duncan explains:

/T/he passion for the beauty of passion
is not love, but love
is a dimension surrounding the passionate. (D, 15)

Those who desire perfection restrict love by placing it in a set form. "The imperfection proposed, studied / in the cloudy stone, claims adoration"(D, 15), not the final polished product.

In rejecting the perfect, love resembles poetry. Both take form from their inner workings: poetry, "from its words," and love, "from its acts"(D, 16). Paradoxically, their unease with the ideal and trust in the actual leads to "A total vision. Exceeding the sensible"(D, 16). The pursuit of the perfect results in imperfect seeing, while an existence grounded in the actual leads to a wider imaginary life. Still, the "beginning"(D, 16) created by love and poetry seems futile in the light of the horrors presented by war. "[B]ombs, fragments of bodies, / this Japanese woman vomiting blood"(D, 16), stand in sharp contrast to Duncan's poetic vision. As the poem continues Duncan juxtaposes his views with those of the generals. These men, he feels, will stop at nothing for the fulfillment of their aims. They fight for only one end, victory. Duncan, however, will have nothing to do with this kind of domination. Instead, he writes, "Let us resolve / the right surrender"(D, 17). His true victory comes when he capitulates to the dictates of his materials.

After outlining his basic position, Duncan turns to the actual Korean war. "We are fighting over there" (D, 17), he comments, but our fighting lacks meaning and

direction. He continues: "Orderd to stand--there being / no order-- / we do not understand"(D, 17). Duncan puns on the words "order" and "stand" to make his point. Though the leaders of the war have commanded their troops to stand in a regular fashion, the soldiers have "no order" because they fight only through fear of authority. Locked into a single preconceived idea, the soldiers move "as the fanatic mind moves, with a plan"(D, 17). In its negative form war imposes a course of behaviour, destroying free choice.

Opposed to outside control, poetry rejects the war. Yet for Duncan the poet can only triumph over the generals when he uses war's own tactics. He asks:

What medley of voices, what free harmony,
can stand over against or answer
single-minded tyranny?
Only a plan, a unanimous war, can win.
An inspiration
not to be corrupted, not to be turnd. (D, 18)

Duncan here postulates ~~two~~ kinds of war. One fosters sameness and destroys individuality. The other fights to preserve freedom. The perpetrators of the false war cry out for surrender, insisting that we "jein the army not to be turnd, all volition / given over to belief"(D, 18). Since strong belief often rejects alternative modes of thought, Duncan regards such capitulation as a mistake. As he explains elsewhere: "The man of religion must see the world in terms of what he can believe and not believe"(TLM, 71). Like the generals, the religious fanatic classifies the world

according to what will or will not fit his preconceived pattern. Resting on our ability to challenge the grounds of our experience rather than in an acceptance of dogma, "philosophy, like poetry, stops in its tracks where belief or disbelief enters in" (TLM, 71). In Duncan's view, the poet rejects accepted practice, subjecting perfected form to a process of dismantlement. Throughout the poem Duncan consistently uses the language of war to describe poetic process. The old form must be destroyed and replaced by a new order.

In the actual Korean war men kill blindly in accordance to orders. Only occasionally does a glimmer of humanity break through. To illustrate this aspect of war Duncan writes of an "ordinary G.I." (D, 21) who for one moment forgets his place in the plan and takes a "wounded / American soldier" (D, 21) in his arms. Surely not by coincidence, Duncan calls this scene "a pieta" (D, 21). By doing so, he draws a parallel between Christ's passion and "the right surrender" (D, 17). When tempting Christ, Satan offers world dominion and the ability to subjugate others. Christ, however, surrenders not to temptation but to the will of the Father. He chooses to take part in the larger plan of the universe rather than in petty schemes for power. The soldier acts from the same impulse, transcending the boundaries set by the generals' false plan. In doing so, he breaks down the barriers of

communication imposed by the false war. Originally "A young man with no language"(D, 21), he becomes

like a nakedness of speech
shedding its words; or
an imaginary conclusion
of acts or of words; without plan. (D, 21)

The key, Duncan continues, "lies in the speech about us" (D, 21).

It is in the air.
Everywhere. The war is in the air.
The great self-contained war
is there. that we call love. (D, 21)

Because they break down artificially imposed barriers, both speech and love form part of the true battle.

In a letter to Charles Olson Duncan writes: "The struggle now is to disrupt the inertias that fall into place"(L, 59). He admits that he often deliberately plays the heretic with others, challenging ideas for the sake of the argument. As with religious belief, too strong a poetic stance can lead to narrowness of outlook. One ignores what goes against one's own theory. Duncan, therefore, plays "heretic so that ideas are moving"(CL, 517). This practice of "breed[ing] complications in order to enrich"(HD, II, 2, 20) gives his work its vital, energetic quality. Often, however, this energy goes hand in hand with the knowledge of what has been destroyed. "The idea is elegiac. A poem / of things lost or about to be lost" (D, 23). The last image of the poem, "The skull forward. / The flesh having melted into a dew"(D, 24), captures Duncan's ambivalent attitude toward this aspect of strife.

Echoing Hamlet's first soliloquy, Duncan intimates how death strips things down to their most basic elements. Only the skull remains. But, as in the case of poetry generally, death leads to new creation. In an earlier poem, "Africa Revisited," Duncan writes of

the skull in the flesh,
preparing even painfully
to return to full face. (FD, 131)

"An Essay at War" ends with a skull but its argument implies that the spiral of death and creation will continue. "We come to no life unless we are ready to die utterly to let life take over" (TLM, 71).

Like Duncan's later poetry dealing with the war in Vietnam, "An Essay at War" works on two levels: poetic process and social protest. Even at his most bitter, Duncan goes beyond an attack on the wars themselves. Without denying that Duncan strongly condemns the war in Vietnam, one realizes that he also uses it as a base from which to examine other topics. In "Up Rising, 'Passages 25,'" for example, Duncan vents his hostility against the leaders who brought America into the war; yet his discussion moves toward a broader sense of the strife which permeates all of American history. The poem examines what Duncan feels to be the major impetus behind the war: the "terror and hatred of all communal things, of communion, / of communism" (BB, 81). Often, as in the Vietnam war, the state tries to make everyone behave in accordance with its own views of social order. While

ostensibly fostering a unified group, such coercive tactics lead to the breakdown of community. In Duncan's opinion, the communal exists only when people have the right to be individuals, to express their opinions without fear of retaliation.

The roots of America's thirst for domination reach back to the first settlers. Coming to a land "that might have / been Paradise" (BB, 82), they create "a holocaust of burning / Indians, trees and grasslands" (BB, 82). Continuing in a similar tradition, modern man reduces himself "to his real estate, his projects of exploitation and profitable / wastes" (BB, 82). It goes almost without saying that Duncan objects to this false compartmentalization of the landscape, the imposition of man's order on the natural one. "Up Rising" shows America in the grip of the same false plan of coercion Duncan attacks in "An Essay at War."

An example of Duncan at his most polemical, "Up Rising" lacks the consideration of war as a positive element which characterizes most of Duncan's poetry on the subject. "'Passages 26,' The Soldiers," is more in keeping with Duncan's overall treatment of the theme. Even more than "Up Rising," the poem goes beyond political protest, equating war with poetry itself. Contrasting true spiritual involvement with the "devotion" expected of the soldiers, Duncan writes that the men must "take their

souls in the war / as the followers of Orpheus take soul in the poem"(BB, 112). The state forces these men to vent their enthusiasm in patriotism for a bad cause. Imagination once channelled into poetry dies in the war. Pushing his analogy, Duncan calls President Johnson "no inspired poet"(BB, 113). Where a successful writer would let the poem take its own course, Johnson tries to impose form, forcing the Vietnamese people to accept his own views. Satirically, Duncan quotes Whitman: "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (BB, 113). No longer, Duncan implies. Johnson and his compatriots have mangled that poem almost out of existence. Moreover, they now cover Asia with their bad poetry. Conceived in aggression, such false writing must be fought with violence. Duncan speaks of

a hatred the maimd and bereft must hold
against the bloody verse America writes over Asia.
(BB, 113)

For him, the solution to this kind of coercion lies not in "civil disobedience" but in active fighting. Victory comes when we adopt the war's tactics for our own purposes.

As Charles Olson writes in Apollonius of Tyana, "no man should impose his mode of life on others."¹⁰ He, too, believes that forcing one's ideas on others results in bad poetry. The "Naked" in the same work

¹⁰ Charles Olson, Apollonius of Tyana, in Selected Writings, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 151.

possess the proper mix of individuality and communality. While each person in the community has his or her freedom, he also works towards the good of the group. When Duncan writes of "the libertarians of the spirit, the / devotées of Man's commonality" (BB, 113), he imagines a similar situation, where "the individual freedom and the communal commitment of man" (YC, viii) exist side by side. Both Olson and Duncan believe community cannot exist without full attention to the rights of the individual. If, as happens in the Vietnam war, people are made to follow a state-imposed vision of order, one has not community but a homogenized mass of mannequins. "Community implies unity in variety, and is impossible where persons are all alike or coerced into common conduct."¹¹

Playing with the roots of the words soldier, solder, and sodality Duncan connects the word soldier with comradeship,¹² "this army having its sodality / in the common life" (BB, 113-114). Against the state's military force Duncan posits another army:

¹¹James F. Mersmann, Out of the Vietnam Vortex, p. 177.

¹²According to the Oxford English Dictionary the Latin word Solidarius is the root of the word "soldier." Like the word "solder," they derive from L. solidus, solid. Duncan makes use of the fact that these words have the same root to comment on the comradeship needed in war (men joined, "solderd" (BB, 113) together). The words' connection with "sodality" is more tenuous. Derived from L. sodalis, comrade, the word is linked to the others by semantic and aural similarities rather than by strict etymological ties.

tho we fight underground
 from the heart's volition, the body's inward sun,
 the blood's natural
 uprising against tyranny . (BB, 114)

Duncan states that it is the body's natural impulse to rise against oppression. Because of this, the soldiers fighting in Vietnam "are not true soldiers," for they go to war not from belief in a cause "but from fear of punishment go, compell'd" (BB, 114). In contrast to those who "fight underground / from the heart's volition" (BB, 114) these soldiers live in ignorance. Duncan addresses them directly, saying,

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. (BB, 114)

The two kinds of war exist side by side, one fighting for truth while its counterpart is run by "masters of the Lie." Duncan satirizes these men by quoting their own words. Young men are forced to fight so that "'free men everywhere' 'have the right / to shape their own destiny / in free elections'" (BB, 115). Actually, only "The monstrous factories thrive upon the markets of the war" (BB, 115). For others, the war takes its toll in suffering and death.

Using the Zoroastrian spirit of evil and darkness as a symbol, Duncan writes: "The first Evil is that which has power over you / Coercion, this is Ahriman"

(BB, 115). Of all forms of coercion that which controls the mind is most insidious--the images we see every day on

the T.V. screen,
the lying speech and pictures selling its
time and produce,
corpses of its victims burnd black by napalm.
(BB, 115)

Duncan perceptively describes Ahriman as "the inner need for the salesman's pitch"(BB, 115), our desire to be told what to believe or to be seduced into a course of action by a strong voice. Set up as an idol in "place of the Imago Xristi"(BB, 115), Ahriman resembles the Biblical Satan. At first Satan's way seems easier, its rewards more tangible. Thus we "let him / move in, in /our/ own interest"(BB, 115).. We foster tyranny through fear, lethargy or a desire to get ahead.

Duncan's war poems deal with the powers which destroy men and women's individuality. As he writes in "The Multiversity, 'Passages 21,'" there is

no common good, no commune,
no communion, outside the freedom of
individual volition. (BB, 73)

The "great theme of War," then, goes beyond the protest of any individual war. For this reason, one critic's comment that for Duncan "the war is really a kind of 'distraction,' a time-out from his devotion" to a poetry concerned with order and harmony "and an energetic attempt

to correct a bad line that mars the cosmic Poem,"¹³ is somewhat mistaken. Such a position seems to overlook Duncan's continuing engagement with the necessity for war in poetry. Though Duncan may see the Vietnam war as an incident which mars modern life, his poems are not primarily protest poetry. Duncan's writings "are not anti-war poems but war poems, studies in struggle."¹⁴

The theme of strife occurs not only in the poetry specifically about the Korean or Vietnam wars but throughout Duncan's work. When one reads, for example, that the war becomes "the inner law silenced" (BB, 70), one thinks of Duncan's two poems dealing specifically with his conception of law: "The Law I Love is Major Mover" and "The Law." Duncan's conception of two kinds of war, one which supports coercion and one which fights against it, arises from exactly the same philosophy which makes him see two kinds of law. "The Law I Love is Major Mover / from which flow destructions of the Constitution" (OF, 10), he writes, showing in his statement that his Law destroys the coercive regulations of government. As the image of Jacob wrestling with the angel at the end of the poem implies, the true law requires a constant challenge to authority. In a comment on poetry in The Truth & Life of Myth Duncan writes that he has "come to think of Poetry

¹³James F. Mersmann, Out of the Vietnam Vortex, p. 203.

¹⁴Ian W. Reid, "The Plural Text," p. 169.

more and more as a wrestling with Form to liberate Form. The figure of Jacob returns again and again to [his] thought"(TLM, 16). Once realized, a form must be wrestled with, broken down so that a new form can be created. To Duncan, it is "coercion that is the evil. Death isn't the evil at all, it is the shape of your life."¹⁵ Since death occurs naturally as part of the creative cycle it should not be avoided in poetry but deliberately courted. When Duncan writes:

There are no
final orders. But the Law
constantly destroys the law (RB, 26),

he implies the necessity of death. Duncan's idea of form is one of evolution: "It's the sense of law itself demands / violation / within the deceitful coils of institutions"(RB, 30). Here as elsewhere, Duncan uses violent language to describe his art. The law "demands / violation." The poem resembles a

salmon not in the well where the
hazelnut falls
but at the falls battling, inarticulate,
blindly making it. (OF, 50)

In both cases, Duncan makes use of the language of war to prove his point: the importance of strife to poetry and to life itself. With its evocation of growth through privation, the last image in "The Law," that of the serpent, reoccurs throughout Duncan's work. He writes:

¹⁵Robert Duncan in a personal interview with James F. Mersmann, quoted in Out of the Vietnam Vortex, p. 195.

What is
hisses like a serpent
and writhes

to shed its skin. (RB, 30)

Duncan's universe constantly evolves and changes. "What is" alters shape again and again.

"Our sense of completely realizing and being faithful to a form," writes Duncan, is "one of the reasons we withdraw from it. We see the tragedy of fulfilled forms" (MP, 32). While Duncan's stress on strife, on "interrupt[ing] all sure course of [his] inspiration" (D, 91), seems almost to imply a kind of disruptive anti-art, the opposite is true. He writes: "I am a writer, and as a writer, neither in poetry nor in prose, do I proceed without care and design" (WW, 1). Duncan repeatedly reminds us that the meaning of the word, poetry, comes from the Greek "poiein to make" (TLM, 67). Though the poet does not seek to control or consciously shape his art he must train himself to the point where the inspiration, when it comes, has a measure of skill to work through. The poet studies technique in order that he may better realize his inspiration. As Duncan states elsewhere:

Now where does the craft come in, and the ability with words? The poet has to meet it, he can't just be shaken by this divine inspiration that comes, so he prepares at every corner: he's gotta have a massive access to rhyme, to music, to everything,

so when he's filled with it, it comes into form.¹⁶

In spite of his belief that in writing "one follows through a series of events having their own imperative" (TLM, 22), Duncan rejects any conception of art that does not include craft. As Dennis Cooley writes, "Duncan thinks of craftsmanship as coming into play before and during the poem's emergence, not after it has formed."¹⁷ Thus, Duncan rejects the idea of revisions, believing that such rewriting may destroy the intention of the poem. The poet exercises his artifice during the actual writing of the work, not in polishing it after it has effectively been finished. Duncan regards "the poem as a work of art" (NAP, 66), not as an outpouring of the unconscious. He is as strong in his rejection of the belief that "you should pour forth God's voices" (NAP, 66) as he is that the poem must follow a prescribed pattern. As Wendy MacIntyre puts it: "There is absolutely no suggestion in Duncan's theory that his is an automatic writing or that he labours under an oracular master. What he does propagate is the attuning of the ear and opening of the mind to a full appreciation of the word's potentials."¹⁸

¹⁶Robert Duncan, "Advice to Youth," in Allen Verbatim, p. 107.

¹⁷Dennis Cooley, "The Poetics of Robert Duncan," Boundary 2, 8, No. 2 (1980), 65.

¹⁸Wendy MacIntyre, "The Logos of Robert Duncan," p. 96.

Bringing into play whatever learning he has mastered, the poet strives to listen to the voice of the poem itself. His inspiration comes from language, but the final product requires his presence as interpreter.

Taking its title from the first line of Dante's Inferno, "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita," examines poetic craft and its relationship to its materials. In this poem Duncan compares poetry to Simon Rodia's Watts Towers. Built from "shells, fragments of tile, scavenged / from the city dump"(RB, 22), the edifice is an example of art which works with the materials at hand. The towers are "inspired; built up from bits of beauty / sorted out"(RB, 22), as the artist sorts out experience. "/T/aller than the Holy Roman Catholic church"(RB, 22), they are part of a reclaiming and reshaping process which transcends the rigidity of established religion, which "soar/s/ above church doctrine"(RB, 22). In opposition to the "squalid suburbs where the / mind is beaten back to the traffic"(RB, 22), the towers represent a triumph of human ingenuity and perseverance. They transform the debased and the tawdry into art and, in so doing, gather everyone "under one roof of the imagination"(RB, 22).

The poem, too, has these qualities. Quoting from Charles Olson's essay on his work, "Against Wisdom as Such," Duncan establishes that art must look for approval not from outside sources but be true to the inner impulses of the artist. Olson's essay criticizes Duncan for

judging his work according to other people's criteria rather than his own. When, therefore, Duncan writes: "I am a poet, self-declared, manqué" (AV, n.p.), "he chastises himself as either more or less than he is, because of some outside concept and measure of 'wisdom.'"¹⁹ As Duncan quotes Olson in "Nel mezzo del cammin":

"The poet" . . .
"cannot afford to traffic in any other sign
than his one"

"his self," he says, "the man
or woman he is." (RB, 22)

He must rely on his own impulses. "'Otherwise God does rush in'" (RB, 22) and, as the quotation continues in Olson's essay, "art is washed away, turned into that second force, religion."²⁰ To Olson, organized religion requires that its practitioners give up their own thoughts and think in a prescribed way. Olson and Duncan both believe individual perception more important than the voice of authority. Olson writes:

There are no hierarchies, no infinite, no such
many as mass, there are only
eyes in all heads,
to be looked out of.²¹

Similarly, Duncan insists in his statements on war that any state-imposed belief must be challenged and, if found

¹⁹ Charles Olson, "Against Wisdom as Such," in Human Universe and Other Essays, p. 67.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

²¹ Charles Olson, "Letter 6," in The Maximus Poems, p. 29.

false, eradicated.

Deliberately defying accepted standards, the Watts towers are "resurrected against the rules,"

thrown up against whatever
piety, city ordinance, plans,
risking height. (RB, 23)

As Duncan implies here, all great art "risks height," seeking not to meld with its surroundings but to stand out among them. Quoting the historian Burckhardt, Duncan explains that art is

"the most arrogant traitor of all
putting eyes and ears . . . in place of
profounder worship." (RB, 23)

True art, of course, necessitates betrayal, the refusal to hold true to only one idea or cause. Because of this, it places the organs of perception, "eyes and ears" or, as Olson writes, "Eyes in all heads," ahead of institutionalized thinking. Duncan espouses an art of careful attention, of perfect faith in the inspiration that moves him. "Our experience of form throughout is a faith in the principle or voice we follow. If we are not moved in faith, where there is no voice, image, then the prose, the book, history, and the universe are empty" (HD, I, 4, 98). "Nel mezzo del cammin" shows that the true faith the artist must follow springs from within. Once again, it acts in opposition to the forces of organized thought of any kind, striving to establish its own orders.

The artist works with old forms, recreating them in new ways. But since his art thrives on change he is also

destructive. The last poem of Roots and Branches, "The Continent," stresses the discord in poetry; yet it also deals with Duncan's belief in the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate elements. The first lines of the poem, "Under- / earth currents"(RB, 172), immediately establish a feeling of process, of the primeval flow of events. In a way reminiscent of The Venice Poem, it returns to the very beginnings of life, to Gaia, the first goddess. Since they must encompass all of history, the terms of such a vision are necessarily vast. Duncan sees the poet as one who works on the boundaries of history, commenting on what he sees there. "The artist of the margin / works abundancies"(RB, 172), having for his or her subject matter a vast area of human thought and knowledge. Yet

the theme is much too big
to cover all o'er, a decorative frieze
out of earthly proportion to the page. (RB, 172)

The poet, in other words, is incapable of dealing completely with such a theme. One simply cannot recount all the events of history from the beginning of time but must distil, rework. The "mid-Western mind"(RB, 172), however, seems incapable of joining in the flux of time. Because "There's no / Buddhist temple in the mid-West town"(RB, 173), they lack the spiritual dimension necessary for such a leap. As Duncan remarks:

They do not remember the body of
them waters
but stand with feet upon the ground

against the
run to the mythic sea, the fabulous. (RB, 173)

Using the dichotomy of land and water prevalent in the writings of Herman Melville and Charles Olson, Duncan associates the land with ordinary reality and lack of spiritual life. The land-locked Westerners forget the ever-changing nature of the sea. They refuse to join in the life process which the water represents. Myth, to Duncan, is "the story told of what cannot be told, as mystery is the scene revealed of what cannot be revealed" (TLM, 7). The mythic sea is thus the underlying knowledge or story of our civilization. It flows rather than remaining static.

Yet the land, also, can take on the changing quality of the sea. Duncan writes of

A diary poem
to Day, Gaia, Earth
--murderer, murmurer, demurrer. (RB, 173)

A diary poem reflects the flux of life itself, its abundancies and changes. In keeping with his understanding that the world of the spirit is best felt through the world of the real, Duncan writes the poem to Gaia, mother earth herself. When tied to the earth, poetry can be a painful process. It reminds us of struggle. It reminds us of death. Duncan sees himself

climbing the hill as if for rime
his teeth are gnashing, and again
the thought returns
that we conquer life itself to live,
survive what we are. (RB, 173)

In Darwinian terms, the struggle for existence is constant. Everywhere around us we see beings, such as the "sparrow smasht upon the sidewalk" (RB, 173), that have failed in the struggle; yet we also see those who, while labouring under immense difficulties, survive.

Duncan once again returns to the cycle of the death and resurrection of Christ as an image of the continuous process of poetry:

It's still Saturday
before Easter
and Love's hero lies
in the nest of our time. (RB, 175)

We begin before the resurrection; but, as Duncan so beautifully evokes the image, the earth continues to turn. As it does so, light replaces darkness.

Time zone by time zone
across the continent dawn so comes
breaking the shell of flowers
a wave
Earth makes in turning
a crest
against tomorrow breaks. (RB, 176)

The coming of day is not sudden but a process of continuing enlightenment. We are not dealing with sudden changes but with a gradual awakening.

The last section of the poem evokes this sense of continuous process.

There is only the one time.
There is only the one god. . . .

There is only
the one continent, the one sea. (RB, 176)

Just as all times join together to form one time, all

the continents are part of one continent. But the "one continent" is not a static body of land. Instead, it moves

in rifts, churning, enjambling,
drifting feature from feature. (RB, 176)

In the picture of the one great continent, its parts moving together and apart in one great sea, Duncan finds a fitting image for his idea of disorder existing within order. It represents Duncan's "grand collage" (BB, vii), his vision of a totality which encompasses strife. Duncan writes that "[t]he great art of our time is the collagist's art, to bring all things into new complexes of meaning" (HD, I, 1, 21). The artist consciously disrupts normal associative patterns, placing various parts of the whole together so as to challenge his audience's perceptions. While the grand collage, like the continent, has limits, those boundaries are self-defining, refusing to subject themselves to arbitrary restrictions. While the continent of collage has a fixed content, the permutations that may arise from variations within the organism are endless. Thus war does not destroy order but fosters it in a more complex form. Duncan writes: "In the composite of all members we see no duality but the variety of the one" (YC, x). The design is "constantly in reconstruction."

Chapter Four

Unity in Multiplicity

The great art of our time is the collagist's art, to bring all things into new complexes of meaning. (HD, I, 1, 21)

"Everywhere dissenting, contradictory voices speak up, I find. I don't seek a synthesis, but a melee" (AV, n.p.). In statements like this, Duncan illustrates how he allows individual elements to preserve their identities. Not for him the integretated whole, the complete perfection. His theory of poetry as collage illustrates one way in which he connects differing entities while preserving their individuality. In his oeuvre as a whole this leads to his regarding all phases of his work as equally significant. He writes: "I never worry about contradictions in my seeming development. I don't develop in the sense of growing/up" (UO, 79). His statement in The Years As Catches that as once he moved away from his early writings he now sees them as "conditions of /his/ maturity" (YC, xi) also shows how he assimilates rather than eliminates conflict.

Strife is important to Duncan's poetry not as it breaks things down but as it dismantles in order to form

a melee. Earlier writers, such as Thoreau, have simplified in order to understand the universe. Their art imitates the ideal order they see in God. As this chapter shows, Duncan's work, too, imitates order, but he sees a design of a different nature. In contrast to those who regard the world as a series of paradigms, Duncan's universe is Darwinian. Opposing the popular belief at that time in the immutability of species, Darwin believed that species changed in accordance with alterations in their environment. While the universe was a totality, its parts could, and did, evolve. What Darwin called the "struggle for existence" and Duncan calls the war inherent in creation act to keep the world in constant flux. New organisms arise through their struggle with existing entities.

This, then, is war's "creative meaning" (OS, n.p.). When the world is seen as a total system, new creation happens through the disruption of old forms. As it was for Darwin, so it is for poetry. Without struggle, no new species would arise; without strife, poetry could not evolve. "Every order of poetry finds itself, defines itself, in strife with other orders" (MF, 229). For Duncan, war is at the heart of our universe. In imitating the world's order, poetry necessarily absorbs the strife found there. As a result, this chapter deals with several examples Duncan uses to illustrate how strife promotes creation. The structure of the cell acts as a microcosm for the universe at large. Like the poem, the cell contains a multitude of smaller parts, each performing its own function and in

turn working towards the success of the entire organism. As mentioned earlier, Duncan sees many similarities between his poetics and Darwin's ideas, often explaining his work according to the naturalist's theories.

One of Duncan's key images for a form combining individuality with an underlying pattern is that of the dance. As this chapter discusses, Duncan believes that the poet should merge with his subject matter in the same way the dancer moves in his art form. He, too, must obey a pre-ordained pattern while maintaining his own individual life. As the image of the dance and poems such as "After Reading Barely and Widely" and "Bending the Bow" indicate, Duncan sees poetry as a delicate balance between "violence and obedience" (OF, 89). For all his insistence on the abolition of established structures, Duncan also believes in careful form. The problem, as "Apprehensions" implies, is to recognize the order in the world around us and then to imitate its complexity. Duncan's work does not destroy form. It deliberately complicates it as a means of providing greater variety, challenge and excitement. For this reason, Duncan does not reject closed forms but includes them as part of his collage. As this chapter concludes, Duncan believes that "everything fits together in a field you have confidence in" (B2, 14). As opposed, say, to poets like Charles Olson--who in Duncan's opinion desire a break from past ideas--Duncan wants to integrate past and future, closed and open form.

Duncan sees "the very proposition of a new poetry"

(NSR, 50) in Sir Charles Scott Sherrington's description of a cell. To Sherrington, "no static system," the cell is "dynamic."¹ A constant ebb and flow occur as one activity of the cell gives way to another function. A living organism, the cell is not a "homogeneous" solution, since "[a] drop of true solution, of homogeneous liquid, could not 'live.'"² Instead of absorbing all of its elements into one kind of material, the cell contains a variety of smaller bodies. Comparing the heterogeneous nature of the cell to poetry, Duncan comments: "How long our aesthetics has dictated and our art has labored toward homogeneous solutions, toward the seamless garment!" (NSR, 50) Art has for too long tried to create a finished product free from irregularities. The standards for criticizing art have stressed the degree to which the work approaches the perfect, rejecting deviations from the paradigm. Duncan, on the other hand, regards the poem as an ongoing process. He writes: "We do not seek to cure our thought, to bring the propositions of the poem to their end or proof, but to create an arousal of the mind" (NSR, 50). Once more, Duncan implies that the "perfect" art form discourages further creative activity.

In opposition to a "pure solution" which has "surfaces" inside it, the "'internal surface' of the cell is

¹Sir Charles Scott Sherrington, quoted in "From Notes on the Structure of Rime," in Maps, p. 50. Cf. Sherrington's Man on his Nature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 76 ff.

²Ibid., p. 50.

enormous."³ In poetic terms, conflicting elements are not destroyed but permitted to continue. In consequence, the mind cannot glide effortlessly through the form but works to surmount difficulties and to participate in the field of interactions presented there. Reader as well as poet must wrestle with the form. Duncan illustrates his conception of a poem with a large internal surface with the example of Pound's Cantos. Like the cell, the Cantos is broken into numerous sections, each with its own function; yet each part takes on its full meaning only when seen in relationship to the entire work. Because of this, the Cantos "does not homogenize. . . . Its organization is not totalitarian but co-operative" (NSR, 51). Similarly, the cell contains many different processes going "forward at the same time within it." Yet for all its diversity, "the total system is organized."⁴ In the cell and in poetry each function has a set time at which it may carry out its actions. Duncan writes: "Here, here, as we come into this evocation of a society of individual volitions of time, i.e. of events, in time that is the time of a company, I read revelations of how each event of the poem is an initiation of the time of the poem" (NSR, 51). For Duncan, each word, shift of syntax, or line length, becomes a poetic event. These events work together to determine how the poem functions as a whole.

In the midst of Duncan's conception of an organization

³Ibid., p. 50.

⁴Ibid., p. 51.

"not totalitarian but co-operative" lies death. He explains:

Our poem, our human state, our immediate living body, in all its exchanges of living and dying cells, is subscribed thruout by this sentence: Let the catastrophe fall! the command rises. The increasing internal surface of creation is at once the surface of its life and of apocalypse. (NSR, 51)

As life becomes more varied, as it introduces more disorder, it succumbs to the final disorder, death. Continually expanding, the creation may eventually pull itself apart.

"The realized," Duncan writes in "Nor is the Past Pure,"

"is dung of the ground that feeds us, rots, / falls apart / into the false" (OF, 41). What has come to fruition can

never remain static. Each new achievement in art gives way to something even more novel, eventually becoming part of the dung heap of past culture. Far from a negative image, the dung heap "feeds us," providing the means for future growth. Forms die only to be included in the data the

poet uses to create his new form. Duncan writes: "Yet does not our Imagination present it all? This earlier state is a condition of our thought of it" (NSR, 50). As we progress to new forms our conceptions of old forms change. How we see at the present moment colours our perceptions of past events.

Using an image similar to that of Wallace Stevens' poem, "The Man on the Dump," Duncan writes of

the Dump
where we read history, larvae of all dead things,
mixd seeds, waste, off-castings, despised
treasure. (OF, 43)

As in Stevens' poem, the dump represents the "off-castings" of past culture, yet Duncan does not see the elements that

make up the dump as detrimental. From the "vegetable putrifications" come "the plant that provides"(OF, 43). As Duncan remarks in the penultimate line of the poem: "Death is prerequisite to the growth of grass"(OF, 43). In the continuous process of poetic creation the poet rejects stasis; not death. Every art form--indeed, every life form--fulfills a pattern of continuous evolution. Kore, the goddess who brings corn, also functions as "Queen of the Middenheap"(OF, 43). In Duncan's world life and death are reciprocal processes.

By linking the creative process to the myth of Kore, or, for that matter, to Sherrington's concept of the cell, Duncan stresses the parallels between creativity in poetry and the natural life process. His repeated statements of affinity with Darwin's theories also show his tendency to link poetry with natural law. In his comments on Darwin, Duncan speaks of the sense of "Creation as universal Process that underlies Darwin's vision"(NSR, 49). While some may think man the culmination of ages of change, Duncan believes in a non-teleological universe. "The local, immediate event is evolving and that doesn't mean the event perfecting itself and climbing up a ladder"(NAP, 68). Darwin expresses similar opinions, writing that natural selection "does not necessarily include progressive development--it only takes advantage of such variations as arise and are beneficial to each creature under its complex relations of

life."⁵ The world evolves because it is part of a process, not because it has to reach a goal.

Moreover, Duncan writes that he does "not believe in a Creation by Chance or by Predestined Form"(TLM, 46). Instead, he, like Darwin, believes that "there is no predestination. Everything is so much cooperation. Creation is everywhere intending, but only in a cooperation you have particulars emerging. So there is no paradigm"(NAP, 80). Form and creation are determined entirely by environment, not by a plan. When asked in a interview whether his statement that he was Darwinian meant that "everything that grows, everything that becomes, is determined by its surroundings," Duncan answers: "Totally! Survival is determined by how something fits in with everything in space, everything that happens"(UO, 81). Darwin wrote that because all species vary naturally, minute differences occur in any random sampling of individuals. The environment then determines which of these differences makes the organism best equipped to survive. Since the strongest are most likely to reproduce, their traits begin to dominate, leading to a change in the entire group. Similarly, the poet, when starting to write, faces a wide variety of choices. As soon as he begins the poem, however, his alternatives begin to become limited. Thus, forms are "entirely produced by natural selection"(UO, 80). As in Darwin, the poem or

⁵Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species, in Darwin, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), p. 150.

species does not consciously choose the route it will follow but is conditioned by the complex pattern of interweaving elements that make up its environment. Duncan believes that most philosophers conceive of form as an ideal concept, ideas and models taking precedence over actual structures. Lesser copies of the ideal, "all men's pursuits of social being and arts are found to be out of order"(NSR, 48). In contrast, Duncan, like Darwin, develops "an idea of order that reveals itself in the variety of individual lives in the variety of species creating in each life the intent of the life. The principle of governance then must be everywhere in every thing" (NSR, 48). In other words, form, to a large extent, determines itself through its relationship to the struggle that goes on around it. As Duncan explains: "Form had its principle of survival not in its derivation from an eternal paradigm but from its variability and plasticity in functioning in the changing totality"(NSR, 49). Again, Duncan does not deny that order exists; he denies that it can be predetermined. He conceives of a "changing totality" which, like the continent, preserves unity while remaining in motion.

Speaking of why he is neither a neo-Platonist nor a teleological thinker, Duncan connects himself with Heraclitus. He remarks:

It delighted me to come across the Greek criticism of Heraclitus. They couldn't take

it that Heraclitus believed that the universe created itself and that the process of creation was actually going on. That scandalized the neo-Platonists, and it scandalizes the Buddhists. (NAP, 80)

Duncan writes: "Heraklitean, I cannot see poems or persons separate from the process of poetry and humanity in which they are participating forces"(A, 60). Though individuals, poems and persons also form part of a community. Furthermore, Heraclitus "does not propose dialectics"(UO, 85) to Duncan. Rather, he "proposes coexistence in a field of contrasting elements"(UO, 85). Instead of seeing the universe in terms of dualities that lead to synthesis Duncan believes that Heraclitus saw conflicting elements held in contrast, with no element in the universe complete in itself. Duncan writes: "The principle I found in Whitehead's Process and Reality that the intellect seeks to transform conflicting elements into contrasting elements could never be set into action if elements were conceived of as things in themselves complete"(A, 61). Complete entities supposedly have no movement. It requires war and struggle to break things down so that they may form new relationships with other parts of the collage. As Duncan continues, Heraclitus sees

a strife at the heart of the Divine Creative Will Itself. For, until we see the elements in their dynamic strife, as contraries, we cannot begin to transform contraries into contrasts. Syncretic orders are dead once they are to be taken for granted, for they depend upon the dramatic awareness of the divisive forces of the elements bound in the whole for their sense of aliveness. (A, 61)

Duncan seems to believe, with Whitehead, that "we habitually observe by the method of difference."⁶ When this is so, the homogenization of conflicting forces leads to death. We no longer notice what is totally the same. When one makes conflicting elements into contrasts, on the other hand, one shows the dissimilarities without allowing the organism to tear itself apart. Duncan strives for "unity in multiplicity" (MF, 235), an order which will yet allow freedom of movement and expression. He emphasizes that conflicting elements have their life as varieties within a larger structure. His poetics, therefore, distinguish between an art which embraces dissolution as a means to combat death and an art which seeks to destroy for the sake of destruction. While Duncan repeatedly stresses that true poetry exists in a state of strife, he fights for variety rather than for chaos. As Duncan puts it, the artist "strives not for a disintegration of syntax but for a complication within syntax, overlapping structures, so that words are freed, having bounds out of bound" (BB, ix). The artist who works to complicate syntax both works out of bounds by creating new syntactical forms and within the bounds of syntax itself.

"/T/he artist of abundancies" (BB, ix), Duncan delights in "puns, interlocking and separating figures, plays of things missing or things appearing 'out of order' that

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (1929; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 4.

remind us that all orders have their justification finally in an order of orders only our faith as we work addresses" (BB, ix). Creating, the poet has faith in a pattern outside his own conceptions. His use of "abundancies," then, becomes a way of tapping into the larger structures of the universe itself. Duncan's characteristic use of puns springs from his understanding that things form connections. While having one obvious meaning in a sentence a word can also have an equally important hidden meaning.

Duncan illuminates his use of contrast within order in his statements regarding his disagreement with Robin Blaser over the translation of "Les Chimères" by Gérard de Nerval. In Duncan's account of the incident, Blaser's translations changed Nerval to suit Blaser. Blaser had assimilated Nerval into his own poetry, in a sense eliminating the "contraries" which separated Nerval's thought from his own. Upset by the inaccuracies of Blaser's translations, Duncan published his own version of "Les Chimères," first in Audit and later in Bending the Bow. Stating the reasons for his actions, he writes that "the basic misunderstanding between Blaser and [him/self]" (A, 48) lies in the differences inherent in their poetics. While, for Blaser, "the poem is to be authentic, i.e. an expression of what is really his own" (A, 48-49), Duncan thinks of the poem as "a process of participation in a reality larger than [his] own--the reality of man's experience in the terms of language and literature--a community of meanings and forms in which [his] work would

be at once derivative and creative"(A, 49). To Duncan, Blaser's poetics "aims at signature or style"(A, 49), while his aims at participation.

Showing his concern with all that joins things together, Duncan calls one chapter of the H.D. Book "Rites of Participation." Whether discussing Australian tribal customs, the sodality of those against the Vietnam war, or his disagreements with Robin Blaser, Duncan returns to a conception of community. A central image in his poetry, the dance, exemplifies his need for participation. As in poetry, "The dancer comes into the dance when he loses his consciousness of his own initiative . . . and enters the consciousness of the dance's initiative, taking feeling and thought there" (TOU, 219). Duncan's dance has all the intensity and mystery of ancient ritual. Its power comes from loss of self in order to reach a heightened state of mystical awareness. Fittingly, Duncan once again uses Christian imagery. Quoting Christ's statement to St. John at Ephesus, "If you have not entered the Dance, you mistake the event"(OF, 41), Duncan reiterates that one gains total understanding only through becoming a part of the "grand collage." Participation in the dance means a greater knowledge of life in all its aspects. By putting one in the psychic state of previous dancers, it even joins past and future. Thus, in "An Interlude" Duncan's "heart beats" to the pounding feet of those "long ago dancing in Broceliande's forest"(BB, 117). Aware of the dance's association with religious ritual, he calls these

2 2
OF / DE

men and women "the first faithful," connecting them with those who have

striven to keep secret ways
of brotherhood and compassion alive,
spreading Truth. (BB, 117)

Those who participate in the dance have entered a higher reality which sees through "the / lies and dreams of Generalissimo Franco" (BB, 117), the powers of oppression. The poet, of course, is part of this group. Duncan compares the process of poetry to the infectious nature of music on its hearers. One begins to move to the music almost without realizing it.

/T/he 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.
(BB, 117-118)

Through the dance, the poet intuits the cosmic rhythms that lead to poetry. His theme is not "square" but "moving figures," ever varied weavings and designs.

The dance itself shows the union of opposites:

In the great figure of many figures the four
directions and empires
change into four times, and opposites of
opposites meet and mate. (BB, 118)

The dance, the great design, is made up of the figures of the individual dancers, who themselves represent various entities. Each individual starts out separately, then joins with a partner, performs a series of figures, returns to his position. On the dance floor, opposites do literally come together. The dance truly is "the grand mimesis" (BB, 118), an imitation of the union of contrary forces which exist

in the natural world. In contrast to those who seek to divide the world into parcels, its participants are both unnamed and ungrasping. "The dancers come forward to represent unclaimed things"(BB, 119), elements not rigidly defined, which can still permit flexibility. The dance of language and poetry "makes / each man hit the pitch co- / ordinate"(OF, 8), the height of harmony and vision. It requires a loss of individual consciousness in order that the dancer join the greater creative will.

Duncan's work, then, exhibits a continual tension between obedience and the desire to disrupt. Duncan's tribute to Louis Zukofsky, "After Reading Barely and Widely," examines this theme in more detail. "After Reading Barely and Widely," he asks, "will you give yourself airs / from that lute of Zukofsky?"(OF, 88) Considered in relation to Duncan's description of Zukofsky as one of his "Masters" (Z, 421), the question is an important one. Zukofsky's style differs greatly from Duncan's. Indeed, while calling the older man "one of two contemporary poets whose work /he/ knew to be clearly directive of /his/ own attentions" Duncan says that his relation to Zukofsky is "heretical." He explains: "In the face of Zukofsky's process of stripping to essentials, I was working toward a proliferation of meanings"(Z, 421). In spite of their differences, however, Duncan regards Zukofsky as one of his teachers. The poem deals with the many things Duncan admires in the older poet. From Zukofsky, Duncan takes a certain

"discretion," a "mistrust in order to establish trust" (OF, 88). He finds in Zukofsky a consciousness of craft, a care for the elements that go together to form poetry.

"Uncertainty is root of the gentleness" (OF, 88).

Often the extreme care one can exercise in writing may spring from a fear or uncertainty in one's materials.

Duncan compares the fear of succumbing totally to poetry to an uneasiness in human relationships, "As to call some one dear / treads close to what we dare not confess" (OF, 88); our love. In our poetic and personal interactions, we often require a certain distance, a care that one's self be not overcome by an "other." Duncan remains sensitive to the delicacy and tact required if we are to live in harmony with one another. He writes:

Do not touch.

Forbear if you respect the man!

He who writes a touching line dares over much.
(OF, 88)

Just as we are wary of physical touching, the poet must exercise caution in touching emotionally. In a way reminiscent of Sartre's comment that the writer who strives to engage the reader's emotions deprives him of his freedom to choose to believe, Duncan understands that the poet should not seek to dominate his audience.

Zukofsky writes that "If read properly, good poetry does not argue its attitudes or beliefs; it exists independently of the reader's preferences for one kind of 'subject' or another. The conviction is in its mastery

of technique."⁷ Both this statement and Pound's "I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity"⁸ imply similar attitudes to poetry. Both stress the care that must be taken to create art, that craft acts as a yardstick for poetic evaluation. In the end, poetry aims to touch the reader but not to bash him over the head with a message. As when Duncan rejects the idea that "[y]ou should pour forth God's voices" (NAP, 66), he implies an art based on conscious craft as well as on inspiration. It has an existence separate from the author and the reader.

As Duncan realizes, poetry, while requiring a certain distance, requires also a surrender. Even in the physical comparison of the making of poetry to the making of music one has a need for physical contact.

Poetry, that must touch the string
for music's service
is of violence and obedience a delicate balancing.
(OF, 89)

"[D]riven close in, to the edge of the Law" (OF, 89), the poet realizes the tension which must always exist between obeying a form and rejecting it, "For there is that to which we would give ourselves / wholly" (OF, 89). Though we fear touch, though we fear to give ourselves to others, we are required and must do so. Duncan continues:

The poet's art is one of tact and guile, its
boundary.

⁷Louis Zukofsky, "A Statement for Poetry," in Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays of Louis Zukofsky (London: Rapp & Carroll, 1967), p. 28.

⁸Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, ed. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1973), p. 43.

limitless only when it's done;
elsewhere seeming almost to flounder

helpless into meaning, by rime
restricted. (OF, 91)

Constantly taking care that he listen to the impulses that work in the poem; the poet works through "tact," feeling his way carefully. Because the poet must obey a force outside himself, must make choices, the boundary of the poem is "limitless only when it's done," when it takes on its larger polysemous nature.

To quote Zukofsky, the poem possesses a "bottomless perception of relations which, for all its intricacies, keeps a world of things tangible and whole."⁹ Duncan expresses similar sentiments when he writes that "Hate and love may in a song be held / as if they were a scale" (OF, 92). Again, Duncan regards the emotional opposites of hate and love not as irreconcilably different but as points on a connecting scale. Dissonant when considered separately, they are joined by being part of a pattern. When one plays a stringed instrument one produces sound by drawing the strings out of their strict alignment. For this reason, the musician is in a way violent. He destroys the stable perfection of his instrument. At the same time, of course, he obeys the impulses of his music, thus combining "violence and obedience." The poet, too,

sends into the art we share
a tradition, a caution, a string of the lute

⁹Zukofsky, "A Statement for Poetry," p. 27.

from division and union whereon

this air. (OF, 92)

The poem arises from an impulse to unity and disunity. It requires the exercise of sensitivity and tact, being the culmination of a long tradition of careful thought.

Duncan uses the image of the string of the lute vibrating in tension between harmony and disharmony to create song in a later poem, "Bending the Bow." Like the earlier work, it examines how the poet exercises his consciousness to create poetry and, further, how that creation results in a state of "dynamic unity" (TOU, 217).

The poem opens with Duncan in a dreamlike state, distracted in the course of writing a letter to his friend, Denise Levertov. "Reveries are rivers and flow" (BB, 7) from the objects around him, creating a current of energy which disturbs the domesticity of the scene. Duncan writes:

The whole
composition of surfaces leads into the other
current disturbing
what I would take hold of. (BB, 7)

The poet sees two conflicting rivers of energy, that from physical reality and that from his mind. Together, they act to disrupt his thought. In poetic terms, the currents tend to "interrupt all sure course of /his/ inspiration" (D, 91). They force him to reevaluate or, to continue the image of the poem, to shift his grasp so that he can take hold. The act of writing itself forms currents which challenge Duncan's conceptions. Writing becomes a means of establishing psychic contact, of drawing close

to his friend. As Duncan describes it:

[His] 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. (BB, 7)

On one level, Levertov acts as a muse. In any case,
Duncan strives to touch, to take hold, but the currents
around him do not permit this. Quoting Heraclitus,
Duncan says that

At the extremity of this
design
"there is a connexion working in both directions,
as in
the bow and the lyre." (BB, 7)

Duncan's poetry embraces this Heraclitean paradox. All
things, he believes, somehow connect. Even though that
connection is far too vast to be seen as a whole, the
poet senses it in his work. As Duncan tells us in the
notes to Bending the Bow, this quotation was taken from
Heraclitus' The Cosmic Fragments, edited with an
introduction and commentary by G.S. Kirk. In his
explication of this quotation Kirk comments on the
dynamic tension between opposites. When using a bow,
one pulls the string away from its normal position, causing
the ends of the bow to draw together. The two tensions,
horizontal and vertical, act against each other. As
Kirk writes:

That is the real point: the connexion is one
which simultaneously operates in contrary
ways, and it is only maintained so long as
each tension exactly balances the other. If the
outward pull of the arms is too strong the

string breaks; if the inward pull of the string
is too strong the arms break.¹⁰

Instead of avoiding tension, the universe exists in an uneasy balance where things tend toward one extreme or another.

Creation is always beginning. In the idea of change lies the promise of a new form. The last lines of the poem present this image of potential and latent promise. Speaking to his friend, Duncan comments that he "would play Orpheus for [her] again," make the song live as he is now doing in the poem. He will

recall the arrow or song
to the trembling daylight
from which it sprang. (BB, 8)

With its suggestion of contraries, the image itself embodies Duncan's conception of elements held in tension. The words "recall" and "sprang" are in opposition, one bringing back and one moving forward. Here we are not in the fixed noon-day world of "Heat" but in "trembling daylight." Things change. They are recalled and sent forth again. The title, "Bending the Bow," implies that poetry works through such strife. The poem resembles an arrow released by the tensions working upon it.

Duncan writes that "in the exchange of opposites, the indwelling of one in the other, dance and poetry emerge

¹⁰G.S. Kirk, ed., The Cosmic Fragments, by Heraclitus (1954; rpt. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1962), p. 217.

as ways of knowing"(TOU, 217). By setting elements in harmony and strife, both these art forms mimic larger orders, standing as examples of diversity within a single entity. Most of us, however, remain unaware that all opposites exist in unity. As Duncan quotes Heraclitus' remarks on the popular adulation of Hesiod: "They think that he knew many things, though he did not understand day and night. For they are one"(HD, I, 3, 74). The poem, "Apprehensions," opens with such an evocation of the union of seeming opposites. Constantly aware of the coexistence of different levels of meaning, Duncan implies that the poet should bridge the gap between the two worlds, "open Night's eye"(RB, 30) to what can be seen in daylight. Robert Creeley interprets this line: "Here the need is to disclose that vision particular to dreams so that its orders may take part in that waking life otherwise given to us."¹¹ Duncan implies such acuity of perception in the poem's title. We are dealing with the poet's understanding, his "Apprehensions" of the world around him. As a master of puns, however, Duncan also realizes that the word implies fear.

In the process of poetry, the poet often apprehends ideas by association. In this poem Duncan responds to a quotation, conjuring up an image of

¹¹Robert Creeley, "To Disclose that Vision Particular to Dreams," in A Quick Graph: Collected Notes and Essays (Berkeley: The Four Seasons Foundation, 1970), p. 200.

an excavation--but a cave-in of the ground,
hiding in showing, or showing in hiding,
a glass or stone, most valuable. (RB, 31)

As happens so often, what Duncan sees both reveals and conceals its meaning. Though visible, it requires further effort for the stone to be fully revealed. As Duncan puts it, "You've to dig and come to see what I mean"(RB, 31). An active rather than a passive process, apprehension comes when the mind works to perceive.

Yet, on one level, Duncan has intuited the contents of the excavation. He writes: "I did not search it out. / The look was enough"(RB, 32). As in The Venice Poem, where the poet sees "a central sapphire, / cruel and absolute"(FD, 81), Duncan sees in the excavation "what we call a jewel, hidden there, formed / in pressure and the inner fire"(RB, 32). In speaking of this poem Duncan writes of the primeval ebb and flow of life. "Tide-flow under the sun and moon of the sea, systole and diastole of the heart, these rhythms lie deep in our experience"(TOU, 213). When the poet allows such rhythms to take over in his poetry his work takes on a lulling quality. "The rhyming lines and the repeating meters persuade us. To evoke night and day or the ancient hypnosis of the sea is to evoke our powerful longing to fall back into periodic structure, into the inertia of uncomplicated matter"(TOU, 214). While Duncan sees in the strife of nature an example of the disorder necessary for poetry, he realizes that nature also presents powerful images of order.

Heart beats, tide flows, day and night, the seasons, all recur with regularity. These are all periodic structures. Like the crystal, they repeat the same pattern continuously.

As Duncan quotes Erwin Schrödinger: "Living matter evades the decay to equilibrium."¹² Schrödinger contrasts the periodic solid, such as the crystal, with the aperiodic solid, a form "in which every atom, and every group of atoms, plays an individual role, not entirely equivalent to that of the others."¹³ Duncan writes of Schrödinger's conception:

What interests me here is that this picture of an intricately articulated structure, a form that maintains a disequilibrium or lifetime . . . to the poet means that life is by its nature orderly and that the poem might follow the primary processes of thought and feeling, the immediate impulse of psychic life. (TOU, 214)

Again, Duncan stresses that poetry exists in an ordered universe. Further, the human psyche itself exemplifies that order, implying, as Heraclitus, and later Olson say, that "Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar."¹⁴ If we truly listen to what our psyches tell us, we will compose according to aperiodic form.

"Our consciousness, and the poem as a supreme effort

¹²Erwin Schrödinger, What Is Life? (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1944, 1956), in Duncan's "Towards an Open Universe," p. 214.

¹³Ibid., p. 214.

¹⁴Heraclitus, epigraph to The Special View of History by Charles Olson, n.p.

of consciousness, comes in a dancing organization between personal and cosmic identity"(TOU, 214). Aperiodic, personal identity exists, in its most basic human form in the chromosome itself. Cosmic identity, on the other hand, can be periodic. It manifests itself in cycles, continuing, it seems, indefinitely. What Duncan calls the "First Poem" in "Apprehensions," therefore, celebrates the abiding, those elements of the cosmos which change in a cyclical pattern:

The changes of light in which we dwell,
 colors among colors that come and go,
 are in the earth's turning. (RB, 40)

Duncan is constantly aware of the steady change occurring in the world around him, perceiving it in the life of every man or woman. "[I]n the configuration of the living, hidden in the exchanging orders of the chromosome sequences from which we have our nature, the first nature, child of deep waters and of night and day, sleeping and waking, remains"(TOU, 213). While stressing diversified form, the gene has also been programmed with the recurring cycles of the cosmos. To quote Heraclitus again, we have "a connexion working in both directions"(BB, 7). The ebb and flow of creation give us meter and rhyme, while the aperiodic form of the chromosome gives us variety. While the poet needs both, he must be on his guard lest the cyclical nature of some elements of the cosmos overtake him completely, causing equilibrium, "the inertia of uncomplicated matter" (TOU, 214).

"Apprehensions" concerns itself with birth, the genesis of the cosmos, the poet, the poem. "THE DIRECTIVE," Duncan writes, "is a building" (RB, 32). In keeping with Duncan's poetics, this edifice possesses structure without prescription. He explains:

The architecture of the sentence
allows
personal details, portals
reverent and enchanting,
constructions from what lies at hand
to stand
for what rings true. (RB, 32-33)

Molded through the poet's mind, the poem leads into another world the writer can only hint at. Duncan has said that "There is a natural mystery in poetry. We do not understand all that we render up to understanding" (AV, n.p.). Often what the poet knows on a rational level takes second place to what he intuitively feels. Itself an act of cognition, writing clarifies thought and leads to new insights. In "Nel mezzo del cammin" and "The Architecture: 'Passages 9,'" as well as others, Duncan connects architecture and poetry. Joining individuality with an impulse to order, the architect strives for unity of design while allowing for "personal details." As he quotes in "The Architecture," "it must have recesses. There is a great charm in a room broken up in plan" (BB, 26).

While the architect strives to achieve harmony with his surroundings, the poet must also be aware of strife. Here as in "Poetry, A Natural Thing," Duncan uses the image of the salmon "at the dark ladders leaping" (OF, 50) to

represent the poet's relationship to the poem. In contrast to the earlier poem, however, Duncan not only specifies the necessity for constant struggle but admits the need for peace. He imagines his "monument,"

a house built in the ancient time
when man like a salmon swam

in currents of fire and air, in what he was. (RB, 34)

While man battles at the falls, he also requires the peace of the pool in which, to use the simile of the salmon, he can "breed" or create:

There must be a pool, dark and steady mood,
stone and water, where this magic crossing,
this ray of a star, catches in flow
another time of what we always are. (RB, 34)

The pool is abiding, "what we always are;" yet from its calm "we start up into the live jewel" (RB, 34), returning to active life.

A central symbol in two major poems by Duncan, the jewel represents a created form. In The Venice Poem it can itself create; yet its perfection is frightening. In "Apprehensions," too, the jewel is an ambivalent symbol, sinister and beautiful, dynamic and fixed. Duncan speaks of "the orders magnetic of the jewel that is secreted by the toads and coils / of the brain" (RB, 43). Like the earth itself, the brain shifts and moves, forcing things into shape. Part of us, Duncan realizes, always searches for rest, for the perfect. The jewel can represent this rest. While Duncan sees "primeval man [as] a vast dispersed being" (RB, 36) with intelligence located equally

in all parts of his body, evolution focuses intelligence
in the brain. Duncan speaks of seeing the
force of intellectual hunger
focus, ravening towards such rest
a diamond has in structure, sustained by pressure.
(RB, 36)

The jewel thus comes to represent the soul, man's spiritual life formed by the shifts and pressures of the world around him.

The excavation itself takes on anthropomorphic qualities, becoming the impression of primeval man. Although Duncan first believes that this form is a grave, he later realizes that the figure lives. He writes:

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. (RB, 38)

Poised in the position of birth, the figure reveals future promise, the "hideous gleam" of the jewel which also represents Duncan's soul. The impression in the ground thus becomes something Duncan must grow into, an imprint of himself. Writing of the primeval man, he says:

In the grievous excavation he remains,
as if an empty place waited

body to my soul. (RB, 38)

In his mind Duncan has created a new impression of himself, a place he has to fill. The poem stresses that the poet must merge with the earth, taking his roots in the actual as well as in the mind.

Continuing his image of filling up vacancies, Duncan

introduces the fourth section of the poem, "Structure of Rime XIV." Duncan takes as his main symbol the lost wax process of sculpting. In this process the sculptor builds a replica of the desired form in wax and then covers it in clay. When the clay is baked, the wax evaporates, leaving a form for the statue. The sculptor then creates the finished work by filling the clay impression with bronze. "Structure of Rime XIV," then, considers the formation of character and poetry. As Duncan has written earlier, "the poem imitates by admitting a form" (RB, 36). It, too, goes through this process of creation and destruction. The last lines of "Structure of Rime XIV," "lost wax that knew the shaping hand, / O cave of resemblances, cave of rimes!" (RB, 39), are indicative of the poetic process. The cave of resemblances stands for the mirror image of form left when the wax melts. Duncan writes that "a poem is discovering the actuality of the form it is anyway; it is the consciousness in its composition, the indwelling in and discovering the form that's there" (BH, n.p.). As an example of creation which simultaneously loses and gains form, the image of cire perdue illustrates Duncan's poetic theory of flux.

The "cave of resemblances" also has meaning as an example of Duncan's fascination with correspondences. The image of cire perdue implies a certain reciprocity, a belief that people, things, and ideas tend to merge with each other. He writes: "All things are powers within all things . . . / There is only one event" (RB, 41). In Duncan's

world little is completely pure. Everything weaves together in an intricate pattern. To illustrate this, Duncan recounts his discovery of an actual counterpart to the excavation he saw in his mind. He comments: "Because of the dream fragment a month before, the event seems to have been anticipated. A verification of the caves seen in actual life after they had appeared in the life of the poem" (RB, 42). Here a mythical event takes form in actual life. "Wherever we watch, concordances appear" (RB, 42). As long as we pay careful attention to the world around us, we will see these correspondences. Duncan writes elsewhere that "[w]ere all in harmony to our ears, we would dwell in the dreadful smugness in which our mere human rationality relegates what it cannot cope with to the 'irrational,' as if the totality of creation were without ratios" (BB, ix). The mentality which rejects things as irrational because they do not fit into a closed system is severely limited. "Praise then the interruption of our composure, the image that comes to fit we cannot account for, the juncture in the music that appears discordant" (BB, ix-x). Duncan welcomes seeming incongruities because, in his view, the "irrational" affirms the existence of a final order connecting all things. "Everything is continuous and orderly" (UO, 92), but that order is not so simple that it can be analyzed by the rational mind.

Instead, the poet apprehends the universe, understanding it intuitively. Duncan asks: "From the living apprehension,

the given and giving melos, / melodies thereof--in what scale?"(RB, 42). Melos refers to melody, to a song inherent in all things. Both "given and giving," it acts as a gift and a source of inspiration. When Duncan asks, In what scale?" he refers to this greater harmony which connects even dissonant chords. In answer to his question Duncan writes: "Referring to these"(RB, 42), followed by a list of "orders." Each of these is part of the marvelous, the spiritual reality that exists in everything we experience. Duncan ends the poem:

There is no life that does not rise
melodic from scales of the marvelous

To which our grief refers. (RB, 43)

In the end, Duncan affirms the beauty and vitality of life. Everything fits in the "scales of the marvelous." Still, this oneness with a greater cosmic flux can also be frightening. It requires a recognition of forces far greater than those seen in everyday life. Just as the heroes of the Bible can not look directly at the face of God without being destroyed by His terrifying power and beauty, the poet cannot look directly at the forces of creation. "In the expectancy of the poem, grief and fear seem necessary to the revelation of Beauty"(TOU, 218)--not only because the poet must give up his life to the poem in order to create, but because the poet fears his confrontation with the creative power.

Duncan writes: "There is not a phase of our experience

that is meaningless, not a phrase of our communication that is meaningless. We do not make things meaningful, but in our making we work towards an awareness of meaning; poetry reveals itself to us as we obey the orders that appear in our work" (TOU, 218). Poems like "Apprehensions" express Duncan's belief in the essential order of the universe. Poetry comes into being when the poet apprehends that structure, relinquishing his own versions of order. In his belief that the poet should "go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself,"¹⁵ Duncan agrees with the theories of Charles Olson. In his essay, "Projective Verse," Olson proclaims a new kind of poetry, "COMPOSITION BY FIELD, as opposed to inherited line, stanza, over-all form."¹⁶ Like Duncan, Olson seems to regard the field as a network of interconnected ideas and emotions. The poetic field is nothing less than the universe itself. It contains all "creations of nature," or, as Olson calls them, "objects." Contrary to the traditional Western view of man as the center of his world, Olson believes that "man is himself an object."¹⁷ As he loses his feeling of superiority, as he realizes his place in the great scheme of nature, he will gain new insights into his world. As

¹⁵Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in Selected Writings, p. 16.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 24.

in Duncan, however, complete surrender leads to lack of clarity of vision. If a man "sprawl," that is, allows himself to wallow in nature, "he shall find little to sing but himself."¹⁸ As shown in "After Reading Barely and Widely," Duncan would agree with Olson that true insight requires both reserve and discipline. Olson explains: "But if [man] stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share."¹⁹ Like Olson, Duncan is a projectivist in his stress on rigorous attention to the workings of the poem and to the individual life rhythms of the poet. Because it places so much stress on

the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE,²⁰

projectivism is a very personal approach to poetry. Success or failure rests with the author's ability to utilize his own rhythms of breath and thought. He has no stanza form or metre to take some of the onus off his own judgement. This is not to say that poets writing in traditional patterns do not require as much sensitivity to word or breath. Of course they do. But, while requiring another form of care and expertise, a regular pattern does confer some order on the work. Once the poet makes his choice of form, his

¹⁸Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 25.

²⁰Ibid., p. 19.

other decisions have been partially made for him. His form will tell him when to end the line. It will dictate the poem's rhythm. Having no such devices to build from, the projective poet must work to obtain that subtle mixture of "violence and obedience" that makes the successful poem. Too much obedience and work will "sprawl;" that is, lose its own particular flavour as the work of the individual artist. Too much violence, and the poet will lose his sense of the form inhabiting the world around him.

While agreeing with many of the ideas expressed in "Projective Verse," Duncan differs from Olson on one point. He explains: "So, it is continuous for me now. Whereas for Olson, it wasn't to be continuous. It was to be a break" (B2, 11). As one "immensely conservative of everything" (BH, n.p.), Duncan rejects the clear cut distinction he feels Olson makes between closed and open form. He will "make open forms that have closed forms in them and closed forms that are open" (BH, n.p.). The examples he uses to describe his poetry, the structure of the cell, Darwin, all contain an element of strife within a larger system. These forms are both open and closed: closed because the total structure has limits and open because an infinite number of changes can occur within those boundaries. Duncan's is an inclusive poetry, seeking to integrate the strife needed to preserve creativity with a carefully orchestrated vision of order. Strife

creates new forms within the total organism. In a sense,
no living order can exist without it.

Chapter Five

Passages of a Poetry

But now the poet works with a sense of parts fitting in relation to a design that is larger than the poem. The commune of Poetry becomes so real that he sounds each particle in relation to parts of a great story that he knows will never be completed. (BB, vi)

"Form to the mind obsessed by convention is significant in so far as it shows control" (IMF, 197). So Duncan writes in his essay, "Ideas of the Meaning of Form." For him, this concern for control stems from the traditional artist's belief in an essentially chaotic universe having little order of its own. As Duncan sees it, the poet who holds such a world view feels impelled to counteract this disharmony by imposing structure. "[C]onventional art . . . has its ground in a belief that man by artifice must win his forms as models, reproductions, or paradigms, against his nature, in a universe that is a matter of chaos or that has fallen into disorder" (HD, II, 4, 39). Seeing himself and the universe around him in disarray, the conventional artist deliberately suppresses his "chaos,"

often imposing a false idea of harmony on his world.

In contrast, Robert Duncan stresses that the concept of organic form implies a belief in an ordered universe. Aware of the essential coherence of his world, the poet feels no necessity to impose pattern. As Duncan comes more and more to realize, this order is too large to be expressed in any single poem or, for that matter, by any poet. As this chapter shows, he regards his work as a series of interactions between his "orders" and those of the universe and of other poets. Duncan, for example, writes that his poetry is "posited, for one thing, on its coexistence with Olson's and Creeley's very vivid facts. /H/e feel[s] it is a small mosaic existing within a vast mosaic"(UO, 92).

Duncan writes two series which illustrate this net of interconnected meanings: "The Structure of Rime" and "Passages." As this chapter shows, these series are both the proof and impetus of Duncan's theories of strife. Conceived as forms having "no beginning and no end"(PRP, 53), they provide the best examples of how Duncan combines his need to keep poetry in motion with his ideas of order. As illustrated here, both are "open" because they have no set ending. Still, both are also based on carefully held schemes of order. This chapter discusses rime; a concept of order Duncan advances in "The Structure of Rime" series. As Duncan explains, rime is a theory of correspondences. His long poem is structured because things make connections. As the poet writes he draws on a vast field of interwoven meanings. His poetry naturally exhibits this structure.

As this chapter continues, "Passages," too, is ordered, this time on the riming nature of memory itself. When Duncan speaks of rime, he stresses the mind's ability to make correspondences. Such ability rests in memory, for that faculty records and eventually recalls events from the past. The same thing happens when we read a poem. When poetry is ordered through memory, the reader himself, as this chapter continues, plays a vital role in structuring the poet's material. By the time Duncan writes these poems his idea of war has changed from an outside force to something within which he participates. Now, even the reader becomes part of the process.

Conceived as a continuing sequence, the poems entitled "The Structure of Rime" function as a broadly based frame of reference to the whole of Duncan's work. While each poem can be read as a self-contained unity, it only achieves its full significance when considered first as part of the larger sequence and secondly as pieces of Duncan's work as a whole. Duncan wants the reader to make connections, to become part of the actual process of establishing correspondences which form such a central part of his writing. He defines the term "rime" as "the doctrine of correspondences [and of unique individualities]¹ in life feeling" (NSR, 44). The poet must both recognize recurring patterns and realize how those designs differ from others. Rime, then, becomes a means for establishing resonance and texture in a work, for

¹The square brackets here and in other quotations from this essay represent Duncan's own additions to his text.

making it cohere without using "artificial" means such as rhyme scheme or a set measure. Indeed, adherence to such standard poetic practices can destroy rime.

Speaking of the difference between periodic or aperiodic poetry, Duncan writes that "Marianne Moore is a master of poetry that is periodic in its concept" (HD, II, 4, 40). Though Duncan admires Moore's "technical brilliance" (HD, II, 4, 41), her ability to make her form work to further her statement, he remains uneasy about the use she makes of set stanzaic pattern. "[I]n her poetics, in her thought and feeling of the poem, then, she does not evolve as life does but repeats" (HD, II, 4, 41). Once again, Duncan evaluates poetry by the way it conforms to an evolutionary pattern. Poetry should evolve in form, one thought leading naturally to the next. When, as in the case of Moore, one sets the form before beginning to write, one limits the possibilities for such evolution.

Further, Duncan calls Moore's verse "not creative but exemplary in form" (HD, II, 4, 41). While the poem obviously coheres, he believes it does so because it fits a pattern rather than from an indwelling organization. In keeping with his concept of rime, Duncan prefers an internal design to the periodic pattern found in so much poetry. As he often repeats, the mind, through thought or memory, constantly compares the data presented it. Introduced to a new experience or fact, we ask how it differs from previous happenings, how it is the same. From the time of

birth onwards, we perceive nothing completely free of associations or secondary meanings. Instead, our memories compare our experiences, either establishing the uniqueness of what we see or showing how it relates to what we have experienced in the past. To use Duncan's terminology when speaking of rime, we perceive either "unique individualities" or "correspondences" (NSR, 44).

Duncan's conception of rime encompasses more than poetics. Rime occurs on every level of experience, from our hearing of individual phonemes to the complex patterns of day-to-day existence. As Frank Davey writes, it "involve/s/ the correspondence of almost any two or more things: themes, images, syntactic units, phonetic units."² Duncan illustrates one such correspondence when he writes of his reaction to a painting by Bosch. Seeing the work for the first time, he is fascinated by the chords it strikes in his memory. He explains: "[T]he very faces Bosch painted . . . were earlier faces I had seen, long before I saw Bosch. Bosch's painting was a rime" (TIM, 44-45). Even when examining the painting for the first time, Duncan feels that the images portrayed seem familiar. He has noticed such faces before this time. One critic notes that "[w]hat has been seen and said in the past again appears alive and immediate in Duncan's own time

²Frank Davey, "Rime, A Scholarly Piece," in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada. Essential Articles on Contemporary Canadian Poetry in English, ed. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1967), p. 297.

and writing. His poetry builds on those correspondences . . . that represent essential identities or contrasts between there and then and here and now."³ When Duncan sees the painting, he establishes a connection between it and events of his own life. This makes Bosch's work a rime, a correspondence between Duncan's experience and the artist's. Both painting and experience now live anew, coloured by the light their relation casts on the other.

On one level, of course, all art relies on our ability to make these connections. When we look at a realistic painting we compare it to the original. Is it true to life? A surrealistic painting achieves many of its effects through its ability to make us reexamine our surroundings. It shocks us by presenting a foreign conception of reality. The melting clocks in Salvador Dali's painting, for example, are effective because we have not conceived of such an image in quite that way before. We are drawn out of ourselves by the "unique individuality" of seeing something only experienced in dreams.

In poetry, too, we compare what happens in the poem to what we know through experience to be true. When familiar with sounds, words, and sentence structures, we respond to the virtuosity with which the poet uses conventional syntax and style to achieve his effects. At other times we respond to the deliberate distortion of language. Duncan, for example, writes in "A Poem Beginning

³Dennis Cooley, "The Poetics of Robert Duncan," p. 59.

With a Line By Pindar":

damerging a nuv. A nerb.
The present dented of the U
nighted stayd. States. (OF, 63)

Our initial shock at this debasement of language gives Duncan's point more force: our modern-day leaders have undermined life and thought, dulling our capacity for clear thinking.

Poems can cohere through devices as basic as "the tone-leading of vowels and the variation of consonant groupings"(HD, I, 1, 13). To quote another example from "A Poem Beginning With a Line By Pindar," Duncan bridges the gap between the first and second parts of the poem with his use of recurring "i" sounds. The beginning of Part II: "This is magic. It is passionate dispersion," reflects the end of Part I, "Jealousy, ignorance, the hurt . . . serve them"(OF, 63). On a more complex level, Duncan begins the poem with two rimes. He writes in The Truth & Life of Myth that while reading Pindar his

mind lost the hold of Pindar's sense and was faced with certain puns, so that the words light, foot, hears, you, brightness, begins moved in a world beyond /his/ reading, these were no longer words alone but also powers in a theogony, having resonances in Hesiodic and Orphic cosmogonies where the foot that moves in the dance of the poem appears as the pulse of measures in first things. Immediately, sight of Goya's great canvas . . . came to /him/, like a wave, carrying the vision--out of the evocation of the fragment from Pindar and out of Goya's pictorial evocation to add their masterly powers to /his/ own. (TLM, 25-26)

As evident here, the inception of the creative work often rests in rime. Reading Pindar, Duncan feels his mind

move outward to connect the words he reads to other experiences. As Duncan's concept of language would suggest, the words themselves take on creative properties, urging the poet towards his art. Because they make connections, puns are one form of rime. They act here to broaden the context of Duncan's thought from the meaning of one sentence to their meaning on a much broader level. Lifted by the words into a state of intense association, the poet envisions Goya's canvas, itself a rime with the work by Pindar. By rime Duncan gains two additional sources through which to approach his art: Pindar and Goya. Raised to a plane of intense thought, Duncan can now begin to write "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar." Since a rime with Pindar was truly the impetus of the work, the poem's title seems particularly apt.

Duncan comments that "for the poet the common property of man's myths is a resource of working material, a grammar of rimes" (TLM, 27). Writing, the poet obeys a larger story, a myth which exists behind the individual works of the artist. Everything we write refers to this larger myth, giving it meaning and depth. "[T]he 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" (TLM, 12). This relationship to the larger story can be achieved through rime. Rime is, after all, "morphological intuition" (NSR, 44).

The poet must be intuitive to the actual structure of the work. In this way, all events are linked, either by their correspondences with other events or by their dissimilarities with them. Rime requires a particularly fine-tuned affinity with language and poetry. Duncan writes: "/T/he poet is not only to depend upon his ear but . . . what he is doing [today, I would amend this to: what is happening, 'taking place,' in what he is doing]" (NSR, 43). The poet must be able to recognize the subtle changes in the work itself, to take advantage of any correspondences which present themselves to him. "We have a sense of recurrence or of nonrecurrence (that is, of number/measure) at the levels of theme, image constellation, syntactical units, etc. There are rimes of sentence structure. There are rimes of gender" (NSR, 44). All work towards furthering the manifest meaning of the poem, creating levels of ideas which the poet had anticipated all along and events which are discovered only through the actual process of composition itself.

In the place it holds in Duncan's canon, "The Structure of Rime" sequence embodies the careful tension between closed and open form he establishes in his poetry. Because the series has no set ending, Duncan can expand its boundaries as he sees fit. His comment that it is "an open-end series having reference to a constantly changing theory of rime, measure, /and/ correspondences" (NSR, 45) stresses this freedom. As was the case with his conception

of a boundary increasing in size as new information is introduced, "The Structure of Rime" can expand to receive new thoughts and ideas.

Yet at the same time as the sequence is non-restrictive and in constant flux, it remains ordered. The title of the sequence does, after all, include the word "structure." We are dealing with an open form, certainly, but that form also has a place within a total system. Duncan continually indicates that open form poetry can include closed form: "If we have a field, how can we throw out closed forms? They are only forms within a field" (NAP, 61). The field, then, must be large enough to include all the materials necessary for poetry, from the most radical departures in technique to form at its most traditional. Even conservative poetry is open on one level, for "[e]ven if we posit a closed form, its readings aren't closed, and never have been" (B2, 4). Finally, every individual poem in "The Structure of Rime" is a closed form. When asked how he ends a poem, Duncan replies that he stops "when the content of the poem is completely present" (NAP, 79). Thus, he envisages any printed poem as a separate entity. Though they only take on their full meaning when examined as a group, each of the poems in "The Structure of Rime" can function by itself.

Further, as the poet adds each poem to the series, that poem becomes part of a closed form. Duncan has said that "everything happening in the poem is properly apprehended

and therefore not trivial"(NAP, 62). He continues, "So I have a closed form at this point"(NAP, 62). Because there are no trivial events, everything has meaning, fitting into a larger pattern. The poet excludes nothing. Duncan writes:

That one image may recall another, finding depth in the resounding, is the secret of rime and measure. . . . It resembles the time of a dream, for it is highly organized along lines of association and impulses of contrast towards the structure of the whole." (HD, I, 3, 82)

As in a dream, where events connect in ways that seem illogical or improbable to the waking mind, poetry establishes connections on a level other than that of scientific reality. Yet in spite of its lack of coherence to the waking mind, the dream, and poetry, have a deeper meaning serving to illuminate what we usually consider our conscious life. Indeed, this "hidden" meaning may show the actual reality behind a situation. Duncan's choice of language stresses the pull toward harmony. Like the dream, the poem which rimes is "highly organized . . . towards the structure of the whole." Further, rime, to Duncan, establishes order even among dissonant elements. Not only resemblances but "any sense of disresemblance indicates the presence of rime"(UO, 93). The poem's very vagaries of design may work to establish a pattern.

In the structures of the poems themselves order contends with disorder for precedence. They are examinations of the art of poetry, presenting in their totality a theory and an example of poetic composition.

Well aware of the complex variety of experience and subject matter from which he can draw, Duncan sees poetry as a means both of elucidating reality and of preventing solidification.

He explains:

The Divine Will in Poetry is Creative, and its inspiration is never single-minded or strait, but creates a field of meanings. Yet, like the strait way of truth in which the man of religion is sure, the actual realized poem is just the one form that it is. (TLM, 68)

Though the poet starts out with the whole world from which to choose his subject and style, the process of creation itself imposes order and structure. The individual poem cannot possibly embody the whole of experience. Its form is the actual form it has on the page, its meters set by the words chosen by the poet. The poem is always in this sense a conclusion, its order set and unchanging. Duncan comments: "/I/t is crucial in the whole structure of my world that a 'sentence' in a law court and a 'sentence' in grammar are identical" (CL, 534). Like the sentence in law, the grammatical sentence imposes a way of behaviour, constricting choice. Once written, it bears certain associations. The process of rime takes over as the poet learns to be receptive to the correspondences, or lack of correspondences, which the next sentences will embody in relation to the first sentence.

Thus, in "The Structure of Rime I," the poet addresses the "unyielding Sentence" (OF, 12) itself. Paradoxically, Duncan acts as both the master of the sentence and its servant. Since he creates he must have control of his

material; yet "Writing is first a search in obedience" (OF, 12). The artist shapes his art by allowing the sentence to follow its own laws. Speaking of "a woman who resembles the sentence," Duncan writes that "She has a place in memory that moves language" (OF, 12). Rime is, after all, very much a process of recalling past occurrences. One tries to "release from memory a passionate order" (OF, 85). And the sentence is on one level a remembered pattern, much in the same way as DNA provides a gene map for each individual. Like the DNA molecule, the embryonic sentence contains its own conclusion.

In spite of this, the poet is still the master. Without his intercession the poem could never be realized. While the "woman who resembles the sentence" imposes order, she also defines it as "a law of words moving / seeking their right period" (OF, 12). In this respect the poet resembles Jacob, wrestling with an angel in a dream. Since the poem is an act of the conscious rather than the unconscious mind, "Jacob wrestle/s/ with Sleep" (OF, 12). Striving to keep his will intact, he resembles "a man reading a strong sentence." Like the poet, he must battle an adversary of far greater strength than he, but who has to work through him for its plans to reach full fruition. Wrestling, the poet descends and ascends "the arranged ladders of vision" (OF, 17), struggling "with the syntax of the world of [his] experience to bring forward into the Day the twisted syntax of [his] human language that

will be changed in that contest even with what [he] dread[s] there"(TLM, 15).

Jacob combats the angel and emerges with a new name, Israel. In the war of creation the poet surrenders himself to what he dreads most, losing his own identity in the force of the sentence. Yet that with which he struggles also changes. The sentence must necessarily become part of the poet's own voice.

In man's hands all free councils become fateful, as in the poet's hands the free movements potential in language lead into poetic conclusions. . . . [T]he straitness or strictness of even the most universalizing mind imprints upon its works a style, a cruelty, a making us see and feel in this unique personal way. (TLM, 68)

Both master and servant, the poet fears the loss of self but at the same time imprints his self on the work. For this reason, practice and craft are vital to creation. Because the poet indelibly stamps his inspiration with his own style, he must make sure that his knowledge of craft gives him the capability to handle his poetic impulse. Though not consciously shaping the poem, the poet does, in a sense, make choices.

Duncan explains that one of his ideas "of the structure of the poem is that it's a constant closing down of an absolutely protean situation until finally you have only one identity"(CL, 539). At first the possibilities are endless but the process of composition acts to limit the writer's freedom. Duncan examines the numerous avenues open to the poet in "The Structure of Rime II." Since he

writes that "'lion' and 'line' are always analogous to [him]" (CL, 534), the poem again deals with the possibilities poetry can present. Each "lion" has its own message, its own "beautiful compulsion" (OF, 13). As Duncan writes in his preface to Bending the Bow: "this poetry, the ever forming of bodies in language in which breath moves, is a field of ensouling. Each line, intensely, a soul thing, a contribution; a locality of the living" (BB, ii). Aperiodic in structure, each line of poetry pulses with life force.

Duncan elaborates on this sense of interconnectedness when he asks the lion, "What of the Structure of Rime?" The lion answers: "An absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance establishes measures that are music in the actual world" (OF, 13). In Duncan's cosmos, the scale of rime enlarges to include everything. Its harmonies and disharmonies create the music of poetry. Working within such an immense scale no poem exists completely as a separate entity. As Reid writes, "Duncan regards individual poems not as discrete, and perfected products but as incomplete and interracting parts of a mobile whole."⁴ Even long series, like "The Structure of Rime" and "Passages," are not self-contained. Duncan comments that people often ask him why he does not publish the two groups of poems in separate books. He replies that the poems are "not in a book of their own anymore than [he is] in a world of [his]"

⁴Ian W. Reid, "The Plural Text," p. 173.

own"(UO, 85). True to life, the two groups impinge upon other poems or require them to serve as explication.

"Structure of Rime XXIII," for example, comments on the image of "passages of a poetry"(BB, 19) introduced in "The Collage, 'Passages 6.'" Duncan writes: "Only passages of a poetry, no more. . . . /O/nly passages of what is happening. Passages of moonlight upon a floor"(BB, 23). "Passages," then, are moments of composition, extracts from a poetry in constant motion. As such they can, like "The Structure of Rime," intermingle with other works by the poet. Duncan includes "The Structure of Rime XIV" in "Apprehensions," while "A Seventeenth Century Suite" contains "Passages 36." On one occasion, "An Illustration, 'Passages 20' (Structure of Rime XXVI)," the two sequences actually overlap. "[T]hey both are constantly deriving from the other poetry"(UO, 85).

In trying to give some indication of the great design of the universe, the poet must tap every available source. Duncan writes in "Passages 33":

no one

nor poet
nor writer of words

can contrive to do justice to the beauty of that
design he designs from. (T, 11)

Duncan calls his poems "Passages" because they are part of a design far greater than any he can create. While the "Passages" can hint at a "poetry of all poetries" (BB, vii), they cannot show it in its entirety. As Duncan

suggests in "Passages 2 and 4," the passages are part of a tapestry. The poet weaves his images, creating a fabric much larger and more complicated than the individual threads of the pattern. "At the Loom, 'Passages 2,'" shows the way in which the poet builds up the poem, shifting from the "set strings of the music" (BB, 11), the "givens" of his own life, to the material given to him. The mind of the poet resembles "a shuttle," darting back and forth to create "an increment of associations" (BB, 11). Referring to a poem by H.D., Duncan comments: "[T]he poet's mind operates in a field of human mind, again as a thread weaves in a tapestry. . . . Each mind has its 'peculiar ego-centric / personal approach / to the eternal realities' and 'differs from every other / in minute particulars'" (HD, II, 4, 42-43). Poetry is made up of the interaction of the individual mind with the myth of the world that lies behind it.

Duncan's affinity to H.D.'s belief that each mind colours the "eternal realities" in its own way can be seen in "'Passages 31,' The Concert." Once again he bases his poem on a musical image. The universe is a concert. Made up of various notes and diverse instruments, it is yet complete in itself. Duncan speaks of

that lonely spirit

having in its derivation likewise
the quality of the stars and yet

a severd distinct thing. (T, 1)

While the spirit has its origin in-and is part of the universe as a whole, it also has its own individual being.

Like the stars, it is "free to itself / having its own law"(T, 1). While a separate entity, man lives his life as part of an unfolding pattern. Duncan uses the image of speaking in tongues to present this dichotomy.

Possessed by a power greater than his own, the visionary begins to speak as if directly influenced by God. Words transcend their everyday meanings to become spiritual symbols. Duncan writes of

resonances of meaning exceeding what we
understand, words freed from their origins

obedient to tongues (sparks) (burning)
(speech) outreaching the heart's measure. (T, 2)

The regulator of man's life, the heart beat, defines man's internal measure. Transcending the "heart's measure," means "pass/ing/ the count"(OF, 8), going beyond the mechanics of self. One loses oneself to the poem while remaining loyal to one's own distinct life.

"Passages," writes George Quasha,

is an instance of "open form" both in the
sense of open-ended, wherein formal closure
is not predetermined by structural considerations,
and in the more elusive sense of the open middle,
wherein the movement from part to part is not
progressive but pervasively immediate.⁵

In other words, "Passages" does not proceed in a traditional, rational fashion. It moves on many planes at once rather than in one straight line. Such freedom of design presents the reader with a unique opportunity to join in the poem's

⁵George Quasha, "Duncan Reading," Credences, 8/9
(March 1980), p. 171.

unfolding. As Reid notes, "The 'Passages' are participatory in their form,"⁶ requiring much more than a passive acceptance of the text. He continues: "[T]he reader must re-member the images that are passing along and between the lines, must gather what is going on, must assemble parts and phases into a never-definitive unity."⁷ Some form of the act of creation takes place in the reader's mind. As Quasha states: "We ourselves become part of the context and our own experience becomes indistinguishable from the primary text."⁸ The reader creates his own "passages of a poetry." Much of "Passages," of course, is Duncan's own recounting of writings he has assimilated into his work. He has done what he expects of his readers: commented on what he finds important in the works of others by incorporating them into his own life view. In "The Architecture, 'Passages 9,'" books themselves become "keys" (BB, 26) Duncan utilizes to build his mental household.

"Orders," "Passages 24," acknowledges T.S. Eliot as one of Duncan's masters. Duncan writes:

I was
one of his, whose "History has many
cunning passages, contrived corridors"

comes into the chrestomathy. (BB, 78)

As indicated by this quotation, a chrestomathy is a

⁶Ian W. Reid, "The Plural Text," p. 177.

⁷Ibid., p. 179.

⁸George Quasha, "Duncan Reading," p. 164.

collection of passages. The word can be applied on several levels. Duncan creates a chrestomathy when he quotes from other authors, since their work is itself "a collection of passages" (BB, 48). The notes at the back of Bending the Bow present this chrestomathy to the reader, inviting him to participate fully in the poems by researching the thoughts which lie behind them. On another level, the sequence itself is a series which the reader may choose to include in his own collection of passages. In a "Preface to a Reading of Passages 1-22" Duncan tells his audience:

Some of you tonight may be hearing these Passages for the first time, and, rightly, only certain elements will remain in your idea of what you are hearing. These then are in that hearing, in your own re-creation of the realm of the poem, the first things, the first phrases or lines. (PRE, 53)

When reading or hearing the poem the reader will create his own collection of passages.

Along with the idea of a chrestomathy comes that of the lack of sequential order in the passages themselves. While Duncan numbers the first thirty-six passages sequentially, that numbering does not imply precedence or progression. As Duncan writes in the preface to Bending the Bow: "I number the first to come one, but they belong to a series that extends in an area larger than my work in them. I enter the poem as I entered my own life, moving between an initiation and a terminus I cannot name" (BB, v). To insist upon logical progression would be to force order, to control an essentially free flowing form.

Duncan's views on the numbering of "Passages" become clearer when considered in relation to his view of history. Like Whitehead and Olson, Duncan believes that history should not proceed in a straight line between an earlier to a later event. As he quotes Whitehead: "The present contains all that there is" (TOU, 224). When, as Olson writes in The Special View of History, "history is the function of any one of us,"⁹ one cannot separate one's views of past events from one's conception of the present. History has value only as it affects us in the present moment, not as a subject for distanced study. To Olson, history cannot be regarded as "(1) events of the past, (2) as a 'fate' . . . or (3) that we are making it."¹⁰ Because we are in the event we cannot dissect it on an academic level. Like Olson, Duncan believes that we must go through a process of "charging [the past] with meaning" (B2, 4). The poet must come to know not only the events of history, but, more significantly, how these events are important to him. Each event changes and informs what has gone before. When added to the whole, each new passage adds a level of meaning, creating a new poem. Thus, the numbers given to the "Passages" are based on tradition only. Ideally, we should, as Duncan quotes in "Passages 33," "'think of God as doing all things / simultaneously'"

⁹ Charles Olson, Special View, p. 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

(T, 11). Because it is filtered through the mind of the reader, poetry also partakes of this simultaneous creation. "Duncan can speak of his work as 'multiphasic': rather than superseding one another developmentally, phases of awareness are available simultaneously, jostling together in a game of mobile consciousness."¹¹ The passages can be considered in any order, for their order is created through associations made in the mind of the reader as well as in the mind of the poet. As Duncan explains: "If you read the poem at all, however you hear it, you have had to create it"(WW, 9).

As in the case of rime, the controlling factor behind the "Passages" is memory. As quoted earlier, it is indeed fitting that the first poem in "Passages" should be about Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, for Duncan regards the act of recall as central to his poetry.¹² In the "Preface to a Reading of Passages 1-22" he writes:

In the true form of the poem all its parts co-operate, co-exist. What we hear at last has long preceded what remains of what first we heard. It is our own Memory-field as we listen in which the truth of that form is created, in which, as we comprehend the form, all its parts are present in one fabric. (PRP, 53)

Duncan's paradigm for poetry is finally the human mind itself. Ideally, one should keep one's mind open, always striving to admit new ideas and experiences. Poetry changes as "the mind dance"(D, 9) changes. As Duncan is well

¹¹ Ian W. Reid, "The Plural Text," p. 178.

¹² Ibid., p. 162.

aware, the mind selects and annotates experience, giving precedence to some happenings while ignoring others. Certain activities, such as breathing and the beating of the heart, are automatic and, therefore, usually recognized only when they behave irregularly.

True recognition of what is happening involves some disruption of the pattern. What we see daily loses its novelty, becoming a matter of course rather than events to be noticed. Thus, Duncan bases his continuing stress on the need for war and strife in poetic creation on his recognition that true perception comes from seeing something anew. When people, things, and events are lumped together they lose their ability to startle or surprise. Perception becomes faulty through our familiarity with the objects perceived. When, however, the mind assimilates data, seeking to find how those data fit into the larger pattern of all patterns, it avoids the homogenizing process. Though this seems contradictory, one must remember that the pattern of all patterns is in flux. Connections are not stable but change. When one joins things together in this sense one expects those connections to fall apart. While homogenization destroys individuality, thus limiting perception, rime, or the establishment of correspondences, promotes uniqueness by preserving each individual's characteristics.

Memory is such a connector. While it edits and reshapes experience it is itself reshaped by future

happenings. One piece of information may radically change thought patterns, irrevocably altering what has been experienced before. In the mind of the individual all events are "simultaneous," for they occur only in the present instant. As one experiences a fluid movement of perception in life, so one experiences it in poetry. As Charles Olson puts it¹³ and as Duncan quotes in "Passages 31," one perception "must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER."¹³ This continuing movement necessitates the breakdown and reordering of all that has gone before. Nothing remains stable but is part of a never-ending process of changes, of death and new birth.

Part of this process, events are joined in an unstable unity. They, like the figures in the collage referred to in "The Collage, 'Passages 6,'" are "passages of a poetry, passages made conglomerate" (BB, 19). One sees and responds to glimpses of the whole, inferring from these the total design. The very unity of Duncan's poetry, "the great poem of all poems" (YC, x), requires a constant source of disruption. To alter Duncan's own statement, "form . . . is significant in so far as it [does not show] control" (IMF, 197). True form, to Duncan, must flow. It must change, expanding its boundaries. Duncan writes:

¹³ Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," p. 17. Duncan quotes this passage in "Passages 31," in Tribunals, p. 2.

For the poet, It, the form he obeys in making form . . . is not strictly so. Creativity . . . means such a change in the meanings of every part in the creation of each part that every new strictness is also a charm undoing all previous strictnesses, at once an imperative and at the same time a change of imperative. (TLM, 66)

The final form of all forms alters as the creative impetus changes. When the poet writes, he obeys his form; yet, as in the case of "Passages," each new event in the poem or poetic sequence alters the totality of the whole. Each time one obeys the law of the poem, its "strictness," one breaks down "all previous strictnesses." In the "grand collage"(BB, vii) of Duncan's poetry change does not destroy totality but is vital to its life.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Yes, though I contrive the mind's measure
and wrest doctrine from old lore,
it's to win particular hearts,
to stir an abiding affection for this music,
as if a host of readers will join the Beloved
ready to dance with me, it's for the
unthinking
ready thing I'm writing these poems. (OF, 61)

"The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging
and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static,
finished."¹ D.H. Lawrence's striking image defines the
protean quality that he and Duncan attempt to achieve in
their writing. In the same essay, Lawrence distinguishes
between two forms of poetry. One, that of the past or
future, "must have that exquisite finality, [that]
perfection which belongs to all that is far off," while
the other, the poetry of the "immediate present," has
"no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished."²

¹D.H. Lawrence, "Introduction to New Poems," in
Selected Literary Criticism, ed, Anthony Beal (London:
Mercury Books, 1961), p. 85.

²Ibid., p. 85.

Duncan, of course, follows in Lawrence's footsteps by preferring the second form to the first. His concern with open form, his reaction against outworn modes of expression and his awareness of disorder make him part of the Modernist movement in literature.

More specifically, Duncan is often associated with the Black Mountain movement. Though, as Robert Creeley points out, "³/n/one of the so-called Black Mountain writers wrote in a literally similar manner,"³ the movement provided a community where ideas were fostered and could grow. While the poetry of writers like Duncan, Creeley, Levertov or Olson differs considerably in style, they share "a very conscious concern with the manner of a poem, with the form of a poem."⁴ Duncan's place in this group highlights his close attention to poetics and his attempts to "make it new."⁵

Charles Olson, the focal poet of the Black Mountain movement, elaborates a key concern of these writers when he states: "What does not change / is the will to change."⁶

³Robert Creeley, "The Writer's Situation," in Contexts of Poetry: Interviews 1961-1971, ed. Donald Allen (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), p. 184.

⁴Robert Creeley, "David Ossman: Interview with Robert Creeley," in Contexts, p. 5.

⁵Ezra Pound, "Canto LIII," in Selected Cantos of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 65.

⁶Charles Olson, "The Kingfishers," in Selected Writings, p. 167.

Duncan's poetry exemplifies the onward rush of such an evolutionary process. The poet presents a continually unfolding field of knowledge so that, reading, one is drawn into a complex pattern of sound, image and idea. Since, perhaps more than any other movement, the projective way of writing imposes a burden of receptivity on the reader, we must, when reading Duncan, "keep / the ability to respond" (OF, 10). Coupled with the demands Duncan makes as a projectivist is his refusal to alter his expression to make it more palatable for his readers. William Everson praises Duncan for this, stating that "He was absolutely uncompromising in his ideals, and any effort to mitigate these stands in the interest of, say greater audience appeal, he resisted."⁷ Perhaps one characteristic of the modern movement in literature is that it has come to terms with the loss of a massive popular audience. Duncan seems to have taken this step and his work both gains and suffers in consequence. As Everson implies, Duncan's refusal to compromise gives his poetry a depth and originality not usually found in work appealing to popular tastes. But on the other hand, his poetry sometimes suffers from too personal an approach. Readers may find themselves baffled by the sometimes obscure knowledge found in his work and by his writing's often hieratic mode of utterance.

Still, Duncan's frequent references to Ezra Pound

⁷William Everson, "Of Robert Duncan," Credences, No. 8/9 (March 1980), p. 149.

give us a clue as to how one can regard Duncan's poetry. Like Pound, Duncan makes use of a seemingly inexhaustible field of knowledge in his work. Series of poems such as "The Structure of Rime" and "Passages" bear comparison to The Cantos in the way they interrelate to form a pattern much larger than can be expressed in any one poem. As Pound concludes in his Cantos, his work "coheres all right / even if /his/ notes do not cohere."⁸ The same can be said of Duncan. Denise Levertov has recognized in Duncan's work "[g]reat gaps between perception and perception which must be leapt across if they are to be crossed at all."⁹ Yet Duncan's poetry yields much to those willing to make these leaps. As D.H. Lawrence writes: "This is the unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the sheer present, poetry whose very permanency lies in its wind-like transit."¹⁰ Those expecting a totally coherent approach or philosophical system will be disappointed, since, in keeping with his philosophy of strife, Duncan's universe constantly evolves and changes. Indeed, Duncan sums up a concern in his writing when he asks: "Okay, if the biggest generative process is no purpose, how do I remove purpose from a poem when I'm working on it? How do I actually evolve as I begin to understand life does?"(CL, 536) As we have seen,

⁸ Ezra Pound, "Canto CXVI," in Selected Cantos, p. 118.

⁹ Denise Levertov, "Some Notes On Organic Form," Poetry, 106 (1965), 425.

¹⁰ D.H. Lawrence, "Introduction to New Poems," p. 86.

such an evolution involves a "struggle for existence."

Duncan fosters war as a means of approximating what he conceives as the natural life process. In order to maintain a state of strife, he often deliberately undermines his own work; yet his writing gains force by its very uncertainty.

As Duncan puts it:

I'd cut the warp
to weave that web

in the air

and here

let image perish in image,

leave writer and reader

up in the air

to draw

momentous

inconclusions. (BB, 15).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

1. Books and Articles

Duncan, Robert. The Artist's View, No. 5 (July 1953).

----- As Testimony: The Poem & the Scene. San Francisco: White Rabbit Press, 1964.

----- "As Testimony: Reading Zukofsky These Forty Years." Paideuma, 7 (1978), 421-27.

----- Audit/Poetry, IV, No. 3 (1967). [Robert Duncan Issue].

----- Bending the Bow. New York: New Directions, 1968.

----- A Book of Resemblances: Poems 1950-1953. New Haven: Henry Werning, 1966.

----- Caesar's Gate: Poems 1949-50 With Paste-Ups by Jess. 1955; rpt. Berkeley: Sand Dollar, 1972.

----- "Changing Perspectives in Reading Whitman." In The Artistic Legacy of Walt Whitman: A Tribute to Gay Wilson Allen. Ed. Edwin Haviland Miller. New York: New York University Press, 1970, pp. 73-102.

----- Dante. Canton, N.Y.: Institute of Further Studies, 1974.

----- Derivations: Selected Poems 1950-1956. London: Fulcrum Press, 1968.

----- Faust Foutu: An Entertainment in Four Parts. Stinson Beach, Calif.: Enkidu Surrogate, 1959.

----- . The First Decade: Selected Poems 1940-1950.
London: Fulcrum Press, 1968.

----- . Fragments of a Disordered Devotion. 1952;
rpt. San Francisco: Gnomon Press, 1966.

----- . "From a Notebook." In The Poetics of The
New American Poetry. Ed. Donald Allen and Warren
Tallman. New York: Grove Press, 1973, pp. 185-87..

----- . The H.D. Book

"From the Day Book." Origin, 2nd ser., No. 10
(July 1963), pp. 1-47.

Part I: "Beginnings"

Chapter 1: Coyote's Journal, No. 5/6 (1966),
pp. 8-31.

Chapter 2: Coyote's Journal, No. 8 (1967),
pp. 27-35.

Chapter 3: Tri-Quarterly, No. 12 (Spring
1968), pp. 67-82.

Chapter 4: Tri-Quarterly, No. 12 (Spring
1968), pp. 82-98.

Chapter 5: "Occult Matters." Stony Brook,
No. 1/2 (1968), pp. 4-19.

Chapter 6: "Rites of Participation, Part I."
Caterpillar, No. 1 (October 1967),
pp. 6-29.

Chapter 6: "Rites of Participation, Part II."
Caterpillar, No. 2 (January 1968),
pp. 125-54.

Part II: "Nights and Days"

Chapter 1: Sumac, I, 1 (Fall 1968), 101-46.

Chapter 2: Caterpillar, No. 6 (January 1969),
pp. 16-38.

Chapter 3: Io, No. 6 (Summer 1969), pp. 117-40.

Chapter 4: Caterpillar, No. 7 (April 1969),
pp. 27-60.

- Chapter 5: Section one Stony Brook,
No. 3/4 (1969), pp. 336-47.
- Chapter 5: Section two Credences, No. 2
(August 1975), pp. 50-52.
- Chapter 6: From Chapter 11 of the H.D. Book
Io, No. 10 (1971), pp. 212-15.
- Chapter 7: Credences, No. 2 (August 1975),
pp. 53-67.
- Chapter 8: Credences, No. 2 (August 1975),
pp. 68-94.
- Chapter 9: Chicago Review, 30, No. 3 (Winter
1979), 37-88.
- "Ideas of the Meaning of Form." In The
Poetics of the New American Poetry, pp. 195-211.
- "In the Sight of a Lyre, A Little Spear,
A Chair." Rev. of Selected Poems, by H.D. Poetry,
91 (1957-58), 256-60.
- "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife."
Caterpillar, No. 8/9 (October 1969), pp. 229-49.
- Maps, No. 6 (1974) Robert Duncan Issue
- Duncan, Robert. Medea at Kolchis, the Maiden Head.
Berkeley: Oyez, 1965.
- Notes on Grossinger's 'Solar Journal:
Ecological Sections'. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow
Press, 1970.
- "Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's Maximus."
In The Poetics of the New American Poetry, pp. 187-95.
- The Opening of the Field. 1960; rpt. New York:
New Directions, 1973.
- Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's 'Moly'.
San Francisco: The Author's Typescript Edition, 1972.
- Roots and Branches. 1964; rpt. New York:
New Directions, 1969.
- The Sweetness and Greatness of Dante's Divine
Comedy, 1265-1965. San Francisco: Open Space, 1965.
- "Towards an Open Universe." In The Poetics
of the New American Poetry, pp. 212-25.

- Tribunals: Passages 31-35. Los Angeles:
Black Sparrow Press, 1970.
- The Truth & Life of Myth: An Essay in
Essential Autobiography. 1968; rpt. Fremont, Michigan:
The Sumac Press, 1968.
- "Warp and Woof: Notes from a Talk." In
Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute: Annals of the
Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Ed.
Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb. Boulder, Colorado:
Shambhala, 1978, I, 1-10.
- Writing Writing. A Composition Book. Stein
Imitations. 1964; rpt. Portland, Oregon: Trask
House, Inc., 1971.
- The Years As Catches: First Poems (1939-1946).
Berkeley: Oyez, 1977.

2. Interviews

- Bowering, George and Robert Hogg. Robert Duncan: An
Interview. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1971.
- Cohn, Jack R. and Thomas J. O'Donnell. "An Interview with
Robert Duncan." Contemporary Literature, 21 (1980),
513-48.
- Faas, Ekbert. "An Interview with Robert Duncan." Boundary 2,
VIII, No. 2 (Winter 1980), 1-19.
- Faas, Ekbert. "Interview." In Towards a New American
Poetics: Essays & Interviews: Charles Olson, Robert
Duncan, Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley, Robert Bly,
Allen Ginsberg. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press,
1979.
- Mesch, Howard. "Robert Duncan's Interview." Unmuzzled Ox,
4, No. 2 (1976), 79-96.
- Shurin, Aaron and Steve Abbott. "Interview." Gay Sunshine,
No. 40/41 (Summer/Fall 1979), pp. 1-8.

Secondary Sources

- Aiken, William. "Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, and Allen Ginsberg: Modes of the Self in Projective Poetry." Modern Poetry Studies, 10 (1981), 200-40.
- Allen, Donald, ed. The New American Poetry, 1945-1960. New York: Grove Press, 1960.
- Allen, Donald and Warren Tallman, eds., The Poetics of the New American Poetry. New York: Grove Press, 1973.
- Alley, Ronald. Portrait of a Primitive: The Art of Henri Rousseau. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1978.
- Altieri, Charles. Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry During the 1960s. London: Associated University Presses, 1980.
- Appleman, Philip, ed. Darwin. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970.
- Bate, Walter Jackson, ed. Criticism: The Major Texts. 2nd ed. 1952; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970.
- Bertholf, Robert J. and Reid, Ian W., eds. Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous. New York: New Directions, 1979.
- Bertholf, Robert J. "Shelley, Stevens and Robert Duncan: The Poetry of Approximations." In Artful Thunder: Versions of the Romantic Tradition in American Literature in Honor of Howard P. Vincent. Ed. Robert J. De Mott and Sanford E. Marovitz. n.p.: Kent State University Press, 1975.
- Bradbury, Malcolm and James McFarlane, eds. Modernism 1890-1930. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978.
- Brien, Dolores Elise. "Robert Duncan: A Poet in the Emerson-Whitman Tradition." Centennial Review, 19 (1975), 308-16.
- Bromige, David. "Beyond Prediction." Credences, No. 2 (July 1975), pp. 101-13.

Broughton, James. "Homage to the Great Bear." Credences, No. 8/9 (March 1980), pp. 140-45.

Charters, Samuel. Some Poems/Poets. Studies in American Underground Poetry Since 1945. Berkeley: Oyez, 1971.

Cooley, Dennis. "The Poetics of Robert Duncan." Boundary 2, VIII, No. 2 (Winter 1980), 45-73.

----- "Robert Duncan's Green Worl/ds." Credences, No. 8/9 (March 1980), pp. 152-60.

Creeley, Robert. Contexts of Poetry: Interviews 1961-1971. Ed. Donald Allen. Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973.

----- Later. New York: New Directions, 1979.

----- A Quick Graph: Collected Notes & Essays. Ed. Donald Allen. San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1970.

Davey, Frank. "Rime, A Scholarly Piece." Evidence, No. 9 (1965). Rpt. in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada: Essential Articles on Contemporary Canadian Poetry in English. Ed. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1967, pp. 295-300.

Davey, Frankland. "Theory and Practice in the Black Mountain Poets: Duncan, Olson, and Creeley." Diss. University of Southern California 1968.

Dickey, James. "Robert Duncan." In Babel to Byzantium: Poets & Poetry Now. 1968; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1979, pp. 173-77.

Doolittle, Hilda. Selected Poems. New York: Grove Press, 1957.

----- Trilogy. New York: New Directions, 1973.

Everson, William. "Of Robert Duncan." Credences, No. 8/9 (March 1980), pp. 147-51.

Faas, Ekbert. Towards a New American Poetics: Essays & Interviews: Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley, Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1979.

----- Young Robert Duncan, 1919-1950: A Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society. To be published by Black Sparrow Press in late 1983.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

Ginsberg, Allen. Allen Verbatim. Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness. Ed. Gordon Ball. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974.

Haven, Richard. "Some Perspectives in Three Poems by Gray, Wordsworth and Duncan." In Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition. Ed. George Bornstein. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977, pp. 69-88.

Heraclitus. The Cosmic Fragments. Edited with an introduction and commentary by G.S. Kirk. 1954; rpt. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1962.

Hogg, Robert. "The Open Universe of Modern Poetry." In Brave New Universe: Testing the Values of Science in Society. Ed. Tom Henighan. Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 1980, pp. 125-39.

Johnson, Ronald. "Wor/1/ds 24." Maps, No. 6 (1974), pp. 68-69.

Johnstone, Heather Kay. "Robert Duncan as Homosexual and Love Poet." Diss. York University 1979.

Kirk, G.S. and J.E. Raven. The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History With a Selection of Texts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957.

Lawrence, D.H. Selected Literary Criticism. Ed. Anthony Beal. 1956; rpt. London: Mercury Books, 1961.

MacIntyre, Wendy. "The Logos of Robert Duncan." Maps, No. 6 (1974), pp. 81-98.

----- "The Open Universe of Robert Duncan." Diss. Carleton University 1972.

----- "Robert Duncan: The Actuality of Myth." Open Letter, 2nd ser. No. 4 (Spring 1973), pp. 38-54.

Mackey, Nathaniel. "The World-Poem in Microcosm: Robert Duncan's 'The Continent.'" English Literary History, 47 (1980), 595-618.

Malkoff, Karl. Escape from the Self: A Study in Contemporary American Poetry and Poetics. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

Mersmann, James F. Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1974.

Michelson, Peter. "A Materialist Critique of Robert Duncan's Grand Collage." Boundary 2, VIII, No. 2 (Winter 1980), 21-43.

Nelson, Cary. Our Last First Poets: Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.

Nelson, Rudolph L. "'Edge of the Transcendent': The Poetry of Levertov and Duncan." Southwest Review, 54 (1969), 188-202.

Olson, Charles. Human Universe and Other Essays. Ed. Donald Allen. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

----- The Maximus Poems. New York: Jargon/Corinth, 1975.

----- Selected Writings. Ed. Robert Creeley. New York: New Directions, 1966.

----- The Special View of History. Ed. Ann Charters. Berkeley: Oyez, 1970.

Pound, Ezra. Selected Cantos of Ezra Pound. New York: New Directions, 1970.

Quasha, George. "Duncan Reading." Credences, No. 8/9 (March 1980), pp. 162-75.

Quinn, Vincent. Hilda Doolittle (H.D.). New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967.

Robinson, Janice S. H.D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982.

Shapiro, Karl, ed. Prose Keys to Modern Poetry. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Sherrington, Sir Charles Scott. Man On His Nature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940.

Silliman, Ron. "Opening." Maps, No. 6 (1974), pp. 72-80.

Stevens, Wallace. The Palm at the End of the Mind. Ed. Holly Stevens. 1971; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1972.

Stoneburner, Tony, ed. A Meeting of Poets & Theologians to Discuss Parable, Myth & Language. Cambridge, Mass.: The Church Society for College Work, 1968.

Sutton, Walter E. American Free Verse: The Modern Revolution in Poetry. New York: New Directions, 1973.

Thoreau, Henry David. Walden and "Civil Disobedience". New York: Airmont Publishing Company, 1965.

Thurley, Geoffrey. The American Moment: American Poetry in the Mid-Century. London: Edward Arnold, 1977.

Weatherhead, A.K. "Robert Duncan and the Lyric." Contemporary Literature, 16 (1975), 163-74.

Weber, Robert C. "Robert Duncan and the Poem of Resonance." Concerning Poetry, 11, No. 1 (Spring 1978), 67-73.

Whitehead, Alfred North. Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology. Corrected ed. Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. 1929; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1978.

Williams, William Carlos. Paterson. New York: New Directions, 1963.

----- Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems. New York: New Directions, 1962.

Wordsworth, William. Selected Poems and Prefaces. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

Zukofsky, Louis. All: The Collected Short Poems, 1923-1958. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965.

----- Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays of Louis Zukofsky. London: Rapp & Carroll, 1967.

END

1	0	4	1	0	9	1	8	4

FIN