ROBERT DUNCAN:

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD

Joel A. Newberger

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Supervisor of Dissertation

Al Filreis, Kelly Family Professor of English

Graduate Group Chairperson

Zita Cristina Nunes, Associate Professor of English

Dissertation Committee

Charles Bernstein, Donald T. Regan Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Emeritus

David Wallace, Judith Rodin Professor of English

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ABSTRACT

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Joel A. Newberger

Al Filreis

Robert Duncan's writing played a central role in translating the impetus of poetic Modernism into the forms that proliferated during the last half of the 20th Century. This dissertation gives a comprehensive account of the pivotal moment in Duncan's career, when he forged the new poetics that would unfold in his central works. Drawing on a trove of archival materials, this study reconstructs Duncan's reckoning with the limits of Modernism and Romanticism, especially in his reading of Pound, Stein, and Blake; and, in an analysis of the drafts of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," it details how he discovered his new way. This poetics was formed of two contrasting ideas, the "open field" and "the structure of rime." The body of the dissertation shows the decisive role that Duncan's reading of the *Zohar* played in the formulation of these ideas, while the last part explores how Duncan extended his new concept of poetry. A chapter on "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" shows how this poem systematically articulates the expressive range of language, from babble to the periodic sentence, from verse to prose. It discusses this poem's debt to Duncan's reading of Charles Williams' novel *The Greater Trumps* and of Dante's "Letter to Can Grande." A second chapter addresses Duncan's response to the Vietnam War. It gives an account of his special idea of America as "the nation of nations," and of the contributions of Whitman, Dante, and Ernst Kantorowicz to Duncan's thought. The dissertation proposes a "method," which is unusual in the study of contemporary poetry, simply, integrating textual history

and philological analysis into a) the critical interpretation of specific texts and b) the exposition of the ideas of poetry (the "poetics") enacted by the poet's work. Thus, it grounds the radical poetic and political positions, which have been attributed to Duncan, in specific acts of language. It attempts to give a rigorous account of how poetic form might bring to life another "sense of reality."

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CHAPTER 1:

A SEEKER AFTER ORIGINS

The principal events of Robert Duncan's biography are unusually well-known, thanks to Lisa Jarnot's *The Ambassador from Venus* (2012) and Ekbert Faas's *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society* (1983) as well as Duncan's own writings, where those events are the frequent matter of invention and transmutation. His mother died hours after giving birth to him in San Francisco on 7 January 1919; when his father could not care for him and his seven siblings, he was orphaned. In August of that year, Edward Howe Duncan (as he was named at birth), was adopted by Minnehaha and Edwin Symmes based on "horoscopic advice."[1] The parents, and his grandmother, participated in theosophical societies, and the house that Duncan grew up in was filled with discussions of occult matters, and "Greek, Hebrew, and Germanic myth, along with family lore of early pioneer days in the West."[2] In 1927, the family moved to Bakersfield. By the time he was sixteen, he had accepted his vocation as a poet.[3] The next year he began his studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and it seems to have been there that Duncan first openly acknowledged his homosexuality.[4] Having fallen in love with a graduate student, Duncan dropped out in 1938, and lived as an itinerant, mostly on the East Coast, the next few years, a period in which his poetry and essays had their first widespread publication. In 1946, he returned to Berkeley, befriended Jack

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[1] Robert Duncan, *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, ed. Peter Quartermain (Berkeley: University of California, 2019), xxii.

[2] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, ed. James Maynard (Berkeley: University of California, 2019), 140. The citation is from "The Truth and Life of Myth."

[3] The story of his awakening to "a life within life" in the high school classroom of a Miss Keough forms the first part of *The H.D. Book*.

[4] Lisa Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus* (Berkeley: University of California, 2012), 53.

Spicer and Robin Blaser, studied with Ernst Kantorowicz. *Heavenly City, Earthly City* was published in 1947, his first book; *Poems 1948-49* and *Medieval Scenes* followed in 1949 and 1950, respectively.[5]

In 1949, Duncan met the painter and collagist Jess Collins, with whom, two years later, he would exchange wedding vows; that marriage, and their living together, would last until the end of Duncan's life.[6] In the decade that followed, Duncan main efforts were imitations or derivations of Gertrude Stein (*Names of People, Writing Writing*, *Play Time Pseudo Stein*) and experiments in serial form (*Letters*, composed 1953-1956). He taught writing at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State and in 1956, at Black Mountain College. During these years, he was in close correspondence with Helen Adam, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, and Charles Olson.

The year 1956 is, in fact, decisive in the evolution of Duncan's poetry and poetics. It marks the beginning of the writing of *The Opening of the Field.* As we survey the works composed beforehand, we see a poet searching out and testing the various forms of the art. In the works that follow—*The Opening of the Field* (1960)*, Roots and Branches* (1965), *Bending the Bow* (1968)*,* and *Ground-Work I & II* (1984 and 1987)—the forms are no less various or derived but they are no longer experiments; rather, individual poems, sequences of poems, and the books in their order become the diverse articulations of a single poetic principle, which Duncan, in a notebook entry of November 1954, put in these lapidary terms: "unwittingly we achieve our form."[7] This distinction, however, awaits adequate description. While it is conventional to associate Duncan's innovations in the works of this period with Olson's and Creeley's under the rubric of "open form" or "composition by field," the actual relevance to the poems of the propositions about the nature of poetry, let alone the

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[5] As the editor of his *Collected Early Poems* makes clear, the order of publication for Duncan's books and their order of composition often do not agree. *The Years as Catches* was composed between 1939 and 1946, for example, but was not published until 1966. *A Book of Resemblances*, composed 1946-1953, was also not published until 1966. And so on. Duncan, *Collected Early Poems,* xxxvii.

[6] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 120.

[7] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 37.

relationship of one body of work to another, is in most cases yet to be determined. For in this half-century the preponderance of writing on Duncan (and on Olson for that matter) has treated the poems as merely particular illustrations of one general idea or another, whether it be the scholar's or the poet's own; it has been very short on what might be called reading, attending to the operations of language at every level of the poem as it means. What can be said is that Duncan's later books possess an integrity independent of theme or form, that, in other words, they obtain their unity from the complex interrelations of individual poems and sequences; that those poems and sequences are not presented as isolated texts but as linguistic events having their ultimate meaning in the larger event of the book; and that series, far from being coextensive with a book (as in *Letters*) or merely contained within a book (as in "The Venice Poem" from *Poems 1948-1949*), surpass the limits of any one book, binding each book to the next and, ultimately, all of them together into a larger composition.[8] Duncan himself says as much in a letter to Henry Rago, editor of *Poetry*, from June 1959: "I have been projecting not only each poem as an order within itself (as an individual human is a personality) but once each poem was composed projected from it anew the total book, a context with its own laws and form…"[9]

Famously, after *Bending the Bow*, Duncan foreswore publication for fifteen years, although he continued to have poems in magazines and chapbooks. *Ground-Work*, published in two volumes (*Before the War* and *In the Dark*) in the 1980s, was a work stemming from the late 1960s and composed over the following decade. Behind both of these books is the imagination's confrontation with that force or god called War, and the Vietnam War in particular.

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[8] The "Structure of Rime" series begins in *The Opening of the Field* and appears in every subsequent book. The "Passages" series begins in *Bending the Bow* and goes on into *Ground-Work*.

[9] Robert Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, ed. Peter Quartermain (Berkeley: University of California), xxxvi.

Beginning in 1980, Duncan taught in the Poetics Program at the New College of San Francisco. He died in 1988.

*

The same notebook passage already quoted ends with this recognition: "I make poetry as other men make war or make love or make states or revolutions: to exercise my faculties at large."[10]

Despite all we know about the biography of the poet, we do not yet know the biography of the poetry. From Jarnot's book, we have an almost comprehensive map of the life; moreover, she coordinates the making of poems with letters and diary entries documenting events in that life, so that certain passages in poems come forth as ciphers of particular love-affairs, specific evenings. Yet this is not the same as knowing how the poetry came into being and by what processes it changed and evolved. About that, and related questions, we are still very much in the dark. But this is the case not for Duncan only but for most of the main avatars of American poetry after World War II; with important exceptions, writing about their work has been carried out by the faithful who reiterate the poet's claims in other words, or by scholars who appropriate the particulars of the work for one conceptual schema or another. I would consider myself among the former, but in another sense. In the cases of several of the poems this study will discuss, there has been very little of what we might call reading: the mind at the mercy of the poem, no matter the extent of its demands, as even the poem's minutest parts come into higher and higher orders of relation, moving toward and away from meaning.

It is this task that the following study will take up, attending to only a few of Duncan's poems from the 1950s and 1960s. What is sought out is the beginning of a description of Duncan's

[10] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 43.

language and art. That it is this task that Duncan places first in any course of poetic study, in a text announcing the Poetics Program of New College, is not its only justification:

> It's at the level of the basic elements: in oral and in written poetry alike the sounds and silences of language, telling patternings and depatternings of consonants and vowels, the articulation of syllables in measures and utterances toward and from sentences, lines, stanzas—where rime, rhythm, and ratio originate—that creativity in language works. And it is here that poetics must begin. The realized poem will be the vehicle of the poet's emotions, psychological ventures, social urgencies, political and religious vision, philosophical dispositions, and it will be the vehicle of the poet's literary taste and learning—as a work of art it may be judged, admired or rejected, for the artist's craft. But the question of Poetics will remain: the question of what is going on in the makings of the work. It must be grounded in thorough observations and imaginations of the nature of what is happening, in analysis and recreation of underlying processes.[11]

Language, one is almost embarrassed to say, is the medium of poetry, and a poem is a linguistic order in which, by some mysterious agency or another, elements of speech are arranged in patterns of recurrence or non-recurrence. Scholars of the poetry of the past and of poetry written in foreign languages cannot hasten toward interpretation but must labor first to understand the lambent operations of grammar and syntax. When we seek out the poetry of American poets of the last century, no matter who they are, we are tricked by the apparent identity of our language with theirs; yet we are further from it than we suppose, and, in any case, reading it as we would read—in an example close to Duncan's making—something like the Greek of Pindar would open up unseen aspects of the composition, vertiginous and unseen dimensions of meaning.

But this is only part of task of understanding the form that Duncan, in his words, has unwittingly achieved. Even the description of a typical form, of a presiding poetics, from the comparison of several poems would be incomplete. For one poem is not cut off from the others, not cut off from the sources in which the poet is reading, nor is it cut off from what is called the life

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[11] Robert Duncan, *No Hierarchy of the Lovely: Ten Uncollected Essays and Other Prose 1939-1981*, ed. James Maynard (Chicago: Three Count Pour), 91.

or the world of the poet. It is not a closed system at all, but it is a delimited or bounded form in which several factors converge and are transmuted. The origins of a single poem are no less complex than the origins of the cosmos, in a material, as much as a mystical, sense; likewise one does not need to devotee to perceive that the origins of a poet may be as recondite and marvelous as the birth of a god.

It is the genesis of a few crucial poems, written by Robert Duncan in the mid-to-late 1950s, that this essay will seek to describe. On this basis, then, it will attempt to understand the transformation in Duncan's poetry—his sense of poetic form and his sense of the form of the book—that began in this very moment.

There is a general rationale for such an analysis, and a particular one. In the first case, we seek out the beginnings of poems and of the phases in a poet's career not to fix some single origin that would monarchically explain all things, some origin that would prove authoritative in interpretation. Rather, it is as historians of a peculiar sort, or genealogists, that we seek those beginnings, much in the same way that the Kabbalists, confronted with Scripture, in great devotion sought to decipher the preexistence of the divinity of Genesis and the origins of "in the beginning." Drafts and fragments of a poem, correspondence, marginalia in books, diaries and dream-journals, and, on another level, the poet's appropriations of his reading, his revisions of a poem toward equilibria of sound—this all is also, to speak somewhat gravely, Sacred History, the fingerprints or footprints of a Muse. Moreover, when these beginnings are not merely material or textual history but moments or phases in the travails of creation, of the poet's pursuit or discovery of form, their reckoning may generate for us a new idea of poetry, by which we, in our time, may read this poem and others. It will not do to simply take the poem as it appears and suppose that is all we need, thinking that any knowledge of the sources of the poem is merely an imposition on the freedom of reading. For reading is not free. It proceeds from conscious or unconscious presumptions about the

world and about the nature of poems that the poet may not have shared; in scholarly or critical contexts especially acts of reading are controlled by regnant ideas or opinions not only about the world and poetry but also about what reading is for, and what it is most urgent, in any situation, regardless of the poem, for a reader to pursue. Of course, I too have certain presumptions, which will become terribly obvious, if they are not already. The hypothesis of this study is that linguistic particulars and archival materials constitute a discipline of otherness that is an antidote of sorts to the narcissism of theory. The presumption of this hypothesis is that a poet's way in creating, and their notions of what creation is, will be highly idiosyncratic and of unique importance in the reading of the poems.

The particular rationale is as follows. It is twofold. The analysis of poetry into its linguistic elements and the investigation of origins are activities Duncan explicitly claims as his own, and these activities are intensified and set in motion in the reader by the poetry itself. Thus, Duncan's work is unusually sympathetic to such reading.

We have already seen the principal position he gives to "the sounds and silences of language, telling patternings and depatternings of consonants and vowels, the articulation of syllables in measures and utterances toward and from sentences, lines, stanzas."

It is the other aspect that requires more extensive comment. In a very interesting text of 1983, discussing the argument Duncan carried on with Charles Olson throughout the 1950s, Michael Davidson makes this distinction: "The argument between the two men…is an argument over two notions of tradition: one as the archeological (and archetypal) structure of certain dynamic ideas realized throughout history by a few capable imaginations, the other as the open-ended series of variations on a corrupt and corruptible text. Olson's theory of tradition is recuperative; Duncan's is

interpretive."[12] What Davidson says about Olson here is dubious. But the final sentence, proposing that the nature of Duncan's art is hermeneutic, may be the most germane proposition to be found in any discussion of the poet; in my mind, it has an uncanny and proleptic accuracy. Still, "interpretive" could mean many things, and according to the Kabbalistic and Dantean traditions that are pillars in the structure of Duncan's thinking, there are at least four levels or folds of interpretation. We will have occasion to return to this remark. In the present context, it is to a text by Duncan himself, the would-have-been preface to *The Opening of the Field*, we refer:

> In this sense, in that I am concernd with forms and not with conventions, with an art and not with a literature, I may be a modernist. But I do not care particularly about the brandnewness of a form, I am not a futurist—I work towards immediacy. And I do not aim at originality. The meanings in language are not original any more than the sounds are. They accrue from all the generations of human use from the mists of the schwa and first directives to the many vowels and problematic universe of today. They are radical, sending roots back along our own roots. I am a traditionalist, a seeker after origins, not an original.[13]

Duncan often declared himself, in several senses, "a derivative artist."[14] No doubt, there is trickiness or duplicity to this; but it responds profoundly to the orientation of the work. As a poet, he derives his forms from the forms of the past, which he seeks out as the source of his life as a poet. In the 1950s, for example, his usage of "derivative" meant specifically his apprenticeship to Gertrude Stein, his derivation of his forms from hers. And he has few equals among the poets of his century in the breadth and depth of his learning; he derives poems from the recesses of classical poetry and Hellenistic mystery, Renaissance magic, Theosophical lore, fin-de-siecle fantasy novels. Moreover, his imagination presumes a sympathetic universe, a cosmos of influential powers from which the soul derives the pattern of its life. There is, too, and perhaps first of all, the linguistic sense, stressed

[12] Michael Davidson, "Cave of Resemblances," *Ironwood* 22, ed. Michael Cuddihy, (1983): 37.
[13] Preface to *The Field,* no date, Box 24, Folder 13, PCMS-0110, the Robert Duncan Collection, circa 1900-1996, the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York.
[14] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays,* xxxvii.

in the quoted passage, that a poet's language is not his own but common, and whatever forms he makes in language derive from the range of sounds in a language, its grammar, etymology, and the history of "human use."

But it is not only because it is so derived that Duncan's work would be especially responsive to readings that seek out its origins. For the poem, as Duncan comes to make it and understand it, is not so much dependent on sources more or less disclosed in its text; rather, the poem itself is, like the poet, "a seeker after origins." In the most obscure sentence of that passage, Duncan proposes that "They are radical, sending roots back along our own roots." The antecedent of the pronoun is ambiguous; it could refer to "meanings" or "sounds." This ambiguity renders, at least for a moment, the sense of "meanings" unclear, but their equivocation with sounds is not at all errant; for as we will see, Duncan's conception of the sounds of poetry argues for their meaningfulness, indeed, for their status as cosmogonic powers. In any case, the sentence does not illustrate or justify the familiar statement that the meaningfulness of language "accrue[s] from all the generations of human use." It says something altogether different—almost the opposite. For if the accumulation of senses and connotations over time is a metaphor of growth and increase, meaning or sound here adds nothing to the implicit tree. Instead, it grows downward or "back" by roots that are already there and are "our own." But it is somehow more than mere investigation. The suggestion, indeed, is unavoidable: we are the means by which meanings or sounds seek their own origins. Whereas "our" roots are there at the outset of this "sending," the roots of meaning are apparently new and somehow configured in the act of seeking.

It is important to stress, throughout Duncan's statement, the plurality of the nouns, most of all of "origins." He is not a monotheist. He is at least a poet of Heraclitean strife. More often, he will multiply the creative factors like a neo-Platonist or a Kabbalist. In his view, whether in the genesis of

the poem, in the birth and growth of a poet, or in the life of the cosmos, there are some several powers at work.

Although Duncan was one of the great formalists of his century, a poet for whom, as we have seen, the boundaries and patterns of the poem are the prime matter of his work, whether imitating and improvising on old forms or projecting new ones, nonetheless, the discrete entity of the poem is not the terminus of his poetics. Instead, he imagines the realizations of poetic form as events or phases in the unfolding of the poet's "life within life," which is itself the great poetic or mythic form. Thus, individual poems, mysterious donations of language as they may be, have their import not finally in themselves but in the sequence of creative acts that incarnate that greater form; at each moment, they interpret the entire series and together progressively decode that presiding genetic form, "sending roots back along our own roots."

Finally, there is a correspondence—between the present undertaking and a book we know Duncan was reading during this crucial period—that I must mention, although its importance is uncertain. It is a coincidence that amazed me when I discovered it, and it is a book that, afterwards, exerted a measurable influence on this study. The name of that book is *The Road to Xanadu*; its author is John Livingston Lowes. Helen Adam sent it to Duncan in Mallorca sometime in the spring of 1955.[15]

Lowes' book is, first of all, a study of "a small manuscript volume of ninety leaves,"[16] a notebook kept by Coleridge between 1795 and 1798 that is, in his report, an extraordinary document: stray passages and lines of would-be poems, sentences copied and notes from the poet's reading, bits of diaries, recipes, extremely condensed notations of thinking. It is, in Lowes' term, a "jungle," and he is interested in it as such. It reveals a great deal about Coleridge's mind, his life, and

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[15] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus,* 139.
[16] John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1927), 5.

his reading. Yet Lowes' study attempts two other tasks besides. Based on the extraordinary mélange of materials in the notebook, it attempts in great detail (434 pages, plus notes!) to describe the "genesis" of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan"—or, in other words, Coleridge's transmutation of the "multifarious materials" of his reading into the poems. But it is also, as its subtitle announces, "A Study in the Ways of the Imagination," and, from the first, Lowes insists that the "*modus operandi*" of Coleridge's "genius" is "the very abstract and brief chronicle of the procedure of the creative faculty itself."

I have not purposed for myself a study of the psychology of genius or the "ways of the imagination" but rather of the genesis of a poem that seemed at the same time to be the genesis of a poetics. While Lowes brilliantly establishes Coleridge's sources and describes the transmutation they underwent as they were brought into his poems, he leaves unspoken the poetic principle that was the guide for Coleridge's workings; it does not pursue the unconscious or conscious motive behind the poet's decisions. This study will likewise give an account of the many threads of deep and idiosyncratic reading that are woven into Duncan's poetry of the 1960s, especially "Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" and "A Poem Beginning with a Line from Pindar." By contrast, however, it will also reconstruct the transformation in Duncan's notion of poetry that occurred in, and gave rise to, the work of that decade.

From Ezra Pound onwards, the radical strain in 20th Century American poetry has been characterized by restless and brilliant, and often polemical, writings about the nature of the art. In a certain sense this critical fecundity is a hallmark of Modernism; it is seen also in music and the visual arts, film and dance. Duncan was a passionate and erudite student of poetic traditions but also of the other arts in their histories and contemporary developments. In this decisive period, he is making a way forward, for himself and his art, from Pound, H.D., and Gertrude Stein's—i.e. his Modernist precursors'—instructive and yet insufficient innovations. At the same time, he perceives himself

within a Romantic and vatic tradition, including the great English poets of the turn of the 19th Century but reaching back through Dante and the Kabbalists of the Medieval period to classical and occult traditions in antiquity. His reckoning of a new poetics, a new meaning or myth for poetic form, responds to the crisis in his vocation, but it is also an intervention in the ongoing unfolding of poetry up till our time.

*

In the following pages, we will seek to describe the origins and nature of a particular phase in Robert Duncan's career as a poet. It is the period of the emergence and exfoliation of his mature or characteristic work. Our focus will initially be the half-decade or so from the composition of "Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" in 1956 through the publication of *The Opening of the Field* in 1960. Then, we will consider a couple of essential transformations in his work in the course of the 1960s.

It is fitting, first, to establish the relevant circumstances of Duncan's life around 1956. At the beginning of that year, he turned 37. Walt Whitman, born a hundred years earlier, was 36 when *Leaves of Grass* was first published. Charles Olson was 37 when his first book of note, *Call Me Ishmael*, was published, and 40 when he began *The Maximus Poems*.

In 1954, Duncan began teaching at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State University. It was a workshop on "The Writing and Reading of Poetry." Lisa Jarnot's biography, where we are told "the class almost immediately presented a problem for Duncan," quotes Duncan's reflections from a notebook of that autumn: "I have had a deep dissatisfaction…with the course of this Poetry Workshop—amounting to an actual illness on several occasions… the question mainly before us has

been the possible success or failure of poem, whether and how we liked or disliked them."[17] His frustrations with the evaluative or judgmental framework led Duncan, in the same notebook, to "propose…that we explore the rhythmic organization of a poem, beginning with technics but I had better say physics… beginning with the kinds of motion and levels of motion in poetic language: accentual, syllabic, by breath phrase, periodic, by repetition, development, variation, contradiction, dissociation, etc. That rime, meaning, images, color, texture, etc. should be considered as aspects of motion in the poem."[18]

Whatever similarity obtains between this proposal and Josef Albers' teaching of the elements of painting at Black Mountain College may be only incidental. Having been turned away as a student in 1939, Duncan would not return to the college until Charles Olson invited him to teach there in 1956. Rather, the background of Duncan's "technics" is the polemics of Ezra Pound, in "A Retrospect," "How to Read," and especially "The Serious Artist," where Pound, more acerbically, proposed a course of training for the poet, entailing not only the study of poetic tradition but also the scientific analysis of poetic form. For example, in "A Retrospect":

> Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover…Let him dissect the lyrics of Goethe coldly into their component sound values, syllables long and short, stressed and unstressed, into vowels and consonants.[19]

Or:

> Let the neophyte know assonance and alliteration, rhyme immediate and delayed, simple and polyphonic, as a musician would expect to know harmony and counterpoint and all the minutiae of his craft. No time is too great to give to these matters or two any one of them, even if the artist seldom have need of them.[20]

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[17] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 131.
[18] Jarnot, 131.
[19] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 5.
[20] Pound, 5.

These jussives have their place in Pound's early formulations of "Imagism"; these passages were published first in 1913, in *Poetry*, under the title "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste." At least since Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971), what seems in this text and others to be an anti-Symbolist poetics—the verbal presentation of objects as they are, undiluted by subjective consciousness, in which the unruly connotations of words comes under the most severe discipline—has been shown to be a poetics based on what Kenner calls a "Doctrine of the Image."[21] Image, rather than referring to any product of the visualizing function of language, has the Platonic and Theosophical meaning of a Form. Yet it is already the essential point of Duncan's revisionist interpretation of H.D. in the first part of the *H.D. Book*. What must be remarked here is that, in Pound's program, the one who undertakes the analysis of the elements of poetry is named a "candidate" and a "neophyte." It is no different from the study of plants and stones required of the natural or sympathetic magician. By "fill[ing] his mind with the finest cadences," the poet is initiated into a kind of magic that allows him, at any moment, to obtain an "absolute rhythm," that is, a rhythm "in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed."[22]

It is not clear from the available sources if at this moment Duncan understood the new course of his workshop to be an initiation in this sense. But even by the time of "The Venice Poem" (1948) he had tended to hypostasize the medium of his art. In the "Coda" of that poem, he writes:

> There must a moment when that faith returns.
> The artist searches out the deepest roots.
> He is violent. He is animal.
> Driven by the language itself
> alive with such forces,
> he violates, desiring to move
> the deepest sound.

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[21] Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California), 186. And Pound's inheritance of Symbolism is also more complex than it seems. See Scott Hamilton, *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2014).
[22] Pound, *Literary Essays*, 6.

The passive participle and then transitive verb ("violates") with no object are of the grammar of a lover betrayed. P. Adams Sitney, some forty years ago, explicated this poem as the poet's imaginative reckoning not only with his grief and jealousy but also with his formidable precursors in the poetry of erotic despair and "the uncertainties of poetic election."[23] In the context of "The Venice Poem," with Sitney's interpretation in mind, the claim to be "driven by language itself" would be a claim to an authentic vocation, the veracity of which is insured by the ambivalence of its "violence." But it is not really until the Stein experiments of the early 1950s that "language itself" becomes the matter of Duncan's art. There, as in Stein's poetry, the repetition of grammatical elements and the dislocation of syntax foregrounds the operations of language. Certain poems resort to the graphic representation of individual sounds.[24] Moreover, "Language," now capitalized, is explicitly the focus of the poet's meditations. In "Poetry Disarranged," which was composed in 1953, Duncan writes: "Not a derangement of the senses but, yes, there is an occult other sense of meaning in all dis-arrangements (Dis in his arranging). What was it that I imagined the language to be? Not mythy (except as there is the actual mythy evening, an atmosphere or preconception at best of the darkness of the actual night)—Not visionary (except as the seen is real in its intensity; this is a scene wordwise). But a hut of words primitive to our nature. The Language in its natural disarray."[25] The intense punning of this passage poses "the Language in its natural disarray" against the Olympian orders of the periodic sentence and the rectifications of diction. While being reduced to a mere

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[23] P. Adams Sitney, "Figures of the Present Dance: Maurice Blanchot and Charles Olson," PhD dissertation (Yale University, 1980), 114. He finds that Shakespeare's *Othello*, Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and the poems of Wallace Stevens are the main intertexts.

[24] As, for example, in "Africa Revisited" ("bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb/ of the night bird,/ honk and konk of senseless sound") and "Friedl" ("This is a spring of blue temper/ the twang of the everlasting water/ r-r-r-r-r-r that is a metal in language") from *A Book of Resemblances: Poems 1950-1953*. Duncan, *Collected Early Poems and Plays*, 367 and 412. The "bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb" of "Africa Revisited" may have its source in Mallarmé's *Les Mots Anglais*. In an interview with Rodger Kamenetz, in the context of a discussion of the *Zohar* and puns, Duncan says: "Mallarmé wrote a little book, *Les Mots Anglais*, in which he tried to elucidate letter values; so for instance a "b," he'd point out we had "breast" and it's a sucking sound: b-b-b-b." Robert Duncan, *A Poet's Mind: Collected Interviews with Robert Duncan, 1960-1985,* ed. Christopher Wagstaff (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2012), 397.

[25] Duncan, *Collected Early Poems and Plays*, 403.

prefix, modifying—precisely, undoing—the verb, Dis or Hades is also identified with the poet of "dis-arrangements," and the underworld with the "hut of words" as if those words were the throngs of shades.

In the spring of 1955, Duncan and Jess traveled to New York, stopping on their way to visit Charles Olson at Black Mountain College near Asheville, North Carolina. In New York, they stayed with Stan Brakhage, who had been their guest the year before in San Francisco. They also met Denise Levertov for the first time. Then they sailed to Portugal, and from Portugal made their way to Mallorca, where Robert Creeley lived with his family. Jess and Duncan rented an apartment and stayed on the island until July of the following year.[26]

During that year, Duncan completed the last poems and the preface of *Letters*, a book which he had begun in 1953 and worked on throughout 1954. In fact, *Letters* and not *The Opening of the Field* is, as Peter Quartermain writes, "Duncan's first completely planned book, in the sense that, once he'd written the first poem, addressed to Levertov, he wrote the remaining poems specifically with book in mind."[27] What distinguishes it, however, from the books that would follow is that here the boundaries of the book coincide with the boundaries of a single work, in this case, the series called "Letters." The title alone, which equivocates letters as messages sent and letters as elements of the alphabet, indicates a new phase in Duncan's sense of "language itself," and for the first time—but not nearly the last—Duncan's poetics are being nourished by the Kabbalah.[28] For it is the *Zohar*'s vision of the letters as the substance of the cosmos that stands in back of Duncan's April 1956 "Statement on *Letters*": "These *Letters* are the ones between Alpha and Omega who attend our

[26] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 137-138. Duncan, *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, 805.
[27] Duncan, 805.
[28] It seems that Duncan's earliest published reference to the *Zohar* is in "Song for the Jews from Their Book of Splendours" in *A Book of Resemblances*. Duncan, 414. It was written in May of 1953 and published in Autumn of 1954 in *Origin*. Duncan, 788. "Splendours" more or less translates the meaning of *Zohar*.

works, the ones from A to Z, our building blocks."[29] A more extended comment in an advertising flyer for the book, perhaps of 1958, elaborates on the pun of the name:

> The composition of *Letters* begins with "Letters for Denise Levertov" and moves out over almost three years' work to complete a book presided over by an alphabet primary to world creation. These angelic letters then whose powers hidden or discovered are substance of our speech. A naming of my peers too, and an exclamation of joy: Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, James Broughton, Mike McClure, Helen Adam—it is the presence of companions, named and unnamed, that inspires *Letters*. A book of primaries, a book of companions. A book of praises. I have stored here, as best I know how, the song of all I live by. For I adhere to form as the bee obeys the geometry of the hive.

In his calling those poets his "companions" we may hear another Zoharic echo. For the group of Rabbis surrounding Shimon bar Yochai are, in the Soncino translation that Duncan read, called "Companions."[30] The source of the apian analogy may be in Rilke. In a lecture at Black Mountain College in 1956, which we will return to at some length, Duncan comments several times on the German poet's statement, in a letter to a Witold von Hulewicz, that the poet "gather[s] the lost honey of the visible in order to store it, in the vast gold hive of the invisible."[31]

In this period, Duncan was reading in Blake and Coleridge and MacDonald, and remembering Milton, and we will return to these authors in time. However, above all else, it is passages from the *Zohar* to which Duncan's Mallorca notebooks are devoted, and we must say some words here about that extraordinary text.[32] It is not clear when he first read it. In the introduction to *The Collected Early Poems and Plays* Quartermain makes an unsubstantiated, parenthetical suggestion

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[29] Quoted at Duncan, 806. The quoted remark occurs in Box 3, Notebook 19, Robert Duncan Collection.
[30] For example, when, after the initial discourse, the fellowship of the Rabbis makes its first appearance, we read: "R. Eleazar and all the companions came and prostrated themselves before him, weeping for joy…" *The Zohar,* trans. Maurice Simon and Harry Sperling, Volume 1 (New York: The Soncino Press, 1984), 7.
[31] Box 3, Notebook 19, Robert Duncan Collection. This is the same notebook in which Duncan's statement about the relationship of *Letters* to "Alpha and Omega" occurs.
[32] According to an entry in a notebook of the time, he was also reading George MacDonald's *Lilith*, H.D.'s *By Avon River,* Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Dodd's *The Greeks and the Irrational,* Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents,* Riding's *A Progress of Stories*, Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, Sapir's *Language,* Nijinsky's diary, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Harrison's *Themis*, Richardson's *Pilgrimage.* Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 142.

that Duncan "had made a start in 1953."[33] However, in the notes to *Letters* at the back of the same volume, again in parentheses, Quartermain says "he had first done so in 1950-1951."[34] In the introduction to his extraordinary 1985 interview with Duncan on the Kabbalah, Joyce, and puns, Rodger Kamenetz writes, "Robert Duncan in the '40s and '50s was already realizing the implications of Kabbalistic letterism for writing," but again we are not told how he knows this. Duncan says, in the same interview, that while he had been aware of the *Zohar* as a child, in the context of his adoptive parents' Theosophy, he "never dreamed it would be sitting on a shelf somewhere." When Kamenetz asks him if he ever "got to the Kabbalah and the *Zohar* specifically within the context of your parents' religious practices," Duncan responds:

> No. And in general my parents tended towards the ignorance of fundamentalism when they were in the material that was in their mysteries, the literalism that appears in people who are in their religion…I came to the *Zohar* because I discovered it belonged to both an anarchist and poetic tradition. I knew already it belonged to a poetic tradition, but I was confused about whether you had to know Hebrew to get into it. I think that rose in a discussion with Rexroth when I was aware of how much the *Zohar* was in back of Milton and Spenser. And Rexroth said: "It's all there, you can read it yourself, on the shelf over there in five volumes. You don't have to wonder where it is, or join something in order to read it.[35]

But the year of that "discussion" is nowhere stated. Duncan himself, in the same lecture that makes reference to Rilke, says that "it was not until 1954" that he "came upon the work."[36]

In any case, in comments in an unpublished text of 1972, Duncan's estimation of the work is clear: "We all learn at least the fact that Dante was a great poet and that his *Commedia* is a great event of the 13th century; but none of us, I have never found a student to date, has learned in the

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[33] Duncan, *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, xxxiii.
[34] Duncan, 806.
[35] Duncan, *A Poet's Mind*, 391.
[36] Box 3, Notebook 19, Robert Duncan Collection.

curriculum of our public culture that there was in the Jewish world of Europe an equally great poet Moses de Leon and that the Zohar is of the order of the *Commedia*."[37]

What, in fact, is the *Zohar*? We can speak of it only externally at this point. As the Rev. Dr. Joshua Abelson writes in the introduction to Volume One of the Soncino edition, "To call it a book is to misname it. It is a literature—a literature of immense variety and compass."[38] The other source in Duncan's possession by the mid-1950s was Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, a 1946 publication of lectures delivered a very long eight years before. Scholem lays out that "variety and compass" systematically, in the first of two chapters he devotes to the *Zohar*. It would be useful to transpose his summary here, with some abbreviations. The parts of the compendium are as follows, with their Aramaic titles in English translation:

a) an untitled section of commentaries on passages from the Torah, which Scholem describes as a "mystical novel": "Against the background of an imaginative Palestinian setting, the famous Mishnah teacher, Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, is seen wandering about with his son, Eleazar, his friends and his disciples, and discoursing with them on all manner of things human and divine."

b) "Book of Concealments," a "highly oracular and obscure" commentary on the first six chapters of Genesis.

c) "The Greater Assembly": "Simeon bar Yohai assembles his faithful followers in order to reveal to them the mysteries hitherto hidden from their eyes. Each in turn rises to speak and is praised by the Master… As the unravelling of the mystery progresses, the participants are increasingly overcome by ecstasy, and in the final dramatic apotheosis three of them die in a state of ecstatic trance."

[37] Box 12, Folder 5.
[38] Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol 1, xi.

d) “Lesser Assembly,” a summary and continuation of the above, including the death of Simeon bar Yohai.

e) “Assembly on the Occasion of a Lecture,” a continuation of the “Assembly,” focusing on “the mysticism of prayer.”

f) “Palaces”: “a description of the seven palaces of light perceived by the soul of the devout after his death, or by the inner vision of the mystic during prayer.”

g) “Secretum Secretorum”: texts on physiognomy and chiromancy.

h) “The Old Man”: “A romantic story centering on the speech made by a mysterious old man who, under the beggarly appearance of a donkey driver, reveals himself before Simeon ben Yohai’s pupils as one of the greatest Kabbalists.”

i) “The Child”: “The story of an infant prodigy and its own discourse on the mysteries of the Torah and the saying of grace after meals.”

j) “The Head of the Academy”: “A description of a visionary journey through Paradise undertaken by members of the circle, and a discourse by one of the heads of the celestial academy on the destinies of the soul.”

k) “Secrets of the Torah”; “allegorical and mystical interpretations of some passages of the Torah.”

l) “Mishnahs” and “Tosefta.” Imitations of the style of early Talmudic discourse “on a purely Kabbalistic basis.”

m) *Zohar* to the *Song of Songs*.

n) “The Mystical Standard of Measure” a “profound and searching interpretation” of the prayer, *Shema Yisrael.*

o) "Secrets of the Letters": a monologue by Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai on the letters of the names of God and on the origins of creation.

p) A commentary on Ezekiel's vision of the chariot.

q) "Mystical Midrash."

r) "The Faithful Shepherd": a Kabbalistic interpretation of the commandments and prohibitions of the Torah.

s) *Tikkune Zohar*. "A new commentary on the first section of the Torah, divided into seventy chapters each of which begins with a new interpretation of the first word of the Torah, *Bereshith*."[39]

The *Zohar* presents itself as a work of the 2nd Century of our era. It first circulated in Spain in the 1280s or 1290s under this heading. Yet as Scholem shows, and as is now widely accepted, "the Aramaic of the Zohar is a purely artificial affair," the pseudepigraphic invention of a writer of the 13th century.[40] We do not know how deeply Duncan had read in Scholem's book by the mid-1950s; we find him referring to it in a 1958 letter to Robin Blaser.[41] Nevertheless, his sense of the *Zohar* resembles Scholem's description of it as a work of the imagination, "a mystical novel."[42] And, in speaking of de Leon as a "great poet," and implicitly as the single author of the *Zohar,* Duncan sides with Scholem against those who argue that the various parts of the compendium were "written at different periods…by different authors."[43] The latter is indeed the position of Abelson and the editors of the Soncino volumes, who write, "one is drawn irresistibly to the conclusion that the *Zohar*, so far from being a homogeneous work, is a compilation of a mass of material drawn from

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39 Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 159-162.
40 Scholem, 163.
41 Robert Duncan, "Letters to Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer,"*Ironwood* 22, ed. Michael Cuddihy (1983), 127.
42 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 157.
43 Scholem, 163.

many strata of Jewish and non-Jewish mystical thought and covering numerous centuries."[44] Thus, the situation of the *Zohar* recalls Davidson's description of Duncan's notion of tradition: "the open-ended series of variations on a corrupt and corruptible text."

At this moment, it should be noted that Duncan did not possess, let alone read, all of the parts of the corpus. Whenever Duncan evokes it, he refers to passages contained in the *Zohar*'s commentary on Genesis. Moreover, the Soncino edition, although it claims to be complete, is not, for it excludes what it calls "intercalations from other, allied, works," as well as "passages containing plays upon Hebrew words and similar matter unsuitable for translation."[45]

And, again—what, exactly, is the *Zohar*? What does it do? On 21 April 1955, Duncan copied into his notebook this passage from the "Prologue" to the *Zohar*:

> When a new idea is formulated in the field of the esoteric wisdom, it ascends and rests on the head of the Zaddik. The life of the universe, and then it flies off and traverses seventy thousand worlds until it ascends to the Ancient of Days. And inasmuch as all the words of the Ancient of Days are words of wisdom comprising sublime and hidden mysterys, that hidden word of wisdom that was discovered here when it ascends is joined to the words of the Ancient of Days, and becomes an integral part of them, and enters into the eighteen mystical worlds, concerning which we read "No eye hath seen beside thee, O God." From thence they issue and fly to and fro, until finally arriving, perfected and completed, before the Ancient of Days. At that moment the Ancient of Days savors that word of wisdom, and finds satisfaction therein above all else. He takes that word and crowns it with three hundred and seventy crowns, and it flies up and down until it is made into a sky. And so each word of wisdom is made into a sky which presents itself before the Ancient of Days, who calls them "new heavens," that is, heavens created out of the mystic ideas of the sublime wisdom.[46]

The *Zohar* here breathtakingly displaces the authority of the interpretive tradition and of the received text itself, its order and its literal meaning, regarded as old, and seeks by hermeneutic means the "new idea" instead. The books of Moses, of the prophets and the writings, lose their status as sacred

[44] Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar,* Vol. 1, xi.
[45] *The Zohar,* Vol. 1, xxix.
[46] Box 2, Notebook 14, Robert Duncan Collection.

history and become the linguistic matter by which the amorous reader makes or makes up a new heaven and, we are told just before passage quoted, receives the divine kiss.[47] Kabbalistic interpretation is not the rectification of Biblical utterances into moral or legal relevancies. It is a hermeneutics that ought to be called creative in a strict sense, and destructive as well. The *Zohar* is destructive insofar as it regards the fixed structure of the linear text of the Torah and the hierarchical structure of the interpretive tradition as forms of verbal idolatry, and, thus, by any means, seeks to release letters from words, words from verses, verses from narrative, setting loose all of the elements of language. It is creative insofar as, rather than foreswearing new linguistic configurations of the infinite being called *Ein Sof* ("no-end"), rather than playing only an iconoclastic note, it undertakes, paradoxically, the continual innovation of "new ideas" and new myths, the generation of meaning upon meaning, as if that were the ultimate iconoclasm. In this passage, quoted in Duncan's notebook, the Kabbalist's innovation of a "new idea" of Torah is said to create "new heavens." This not only equates his innovation with the labors of the god of Genesis; it also, and more astonishingly, displaces that god and his creation, making him one reader—and his heaven one heaven—among many. But this is characteristic of the *Zohar*, which proceeds in the spirit of Duncan's remark that he is a "a traditionalist, a seeker after origins, not an original." For, again and again, it seeks by means of the received text to project heavens before heavens, divine powers before those called Elohim and Yahweh, and indeed beginnings before "in the beginning,"

[47] Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol 1, 18.

CHAPTER 2:

THE FIELD

"Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" is the first poem in the of *The Opening of the Field,* and it was the first written. It will serve us to present here the entirety of its published version, all of twenty-four lines (including the title):

> Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow
>
> as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,
> that is not mine, but is a made place,
>
> that is mine, it is so near to the heart,
> an eternal pasture folded in all thought
> so that there is a hall therein
>
> that is a made place, created by light
> wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.
>
> Wherefrom fall all architectures I am
> I say are likenesses of the First Beloved
> whose flowers are flames lit to the Lady.
>
> She it is Queen Under The Hill
> whose hosts are a disturbance of words within words
> that is a field folded.
>
> It is only a dream of the grass blowing
> east against the source of the sun
> in an hour before the sun's going down
>
> whose secret we see in a children's game
> of ring a round of roses told.
>
> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> as if it were a given property of the mind
> that certain bounds hold against chaos,
>
> that is a place of first permission,
> everlasting omen of what is.[48]

[48] Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 3.

As we will see, Duncan revised it over several years in response to a series of related problems at the heart of his poetics: the divinity of the elements of language; "the structure of rime"; the relation of inspiration and revision; the nature of the book; and the ambivalent power of the feminine. Scholars have remarked the unusual history of its composition.[49] They have even identified certain important sources of its phrases and images: Duncan's "Atlantis dream" and the Zohar's commentary on an episode from Genesis 23.[50]

Robert Duncan's archive is kept by the Poetry Collection of the University at Buffalo. It contains notebooks and journals, typescripts and galleys, and much of his correspondence; it also contains his library, as it was at the time of his death, with the books classified according to the room of his house in which they were shelved. Unlike, for example, Charles Olson's, Duncan's books are almost never marked, and what marks we find in them are not revealing. Rather, his practice seems to have been to copy important passages into his notebooks—and nothing else. It is very rare to find his own remarks or responses in a series of such passages; considerations and integrations of his reading are reserved for other occasions. Still, the passages he does transcribe may tell us something about what engaged his imagination.

The notebooks and typescripts will be the principal site of our readings. Duncan often sent early drafts of poems to other poets, and thus these will be important as well.

As Quartermain writes of his early work, "Duncan was an inveterate and at times obsessive reviser of his work; in some instances there are as many as five or six published versions of a given

[49] Duncan, xxvi and especially 753. Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus,* 149-150.
[50] Dan Featherston, "A Place of First Permission: Robert Duncan's Atlantis Dream," *Modernism/ modernity* 15, no. 4 (2008) discusses that recurring dream or myth not only as a source of "Often I Am Permitted" but also as the ground of Duncan's poetics. Michael Davidson, "A Book of First Things," in *Scales of the Marvelous*, ed. Robert Bertholf (New York: New Directions, 1979) only remarks the Zoharic origin of the phrase "a field folded." We will return to both of these texts in detail.

poem."[51] However, this obsession became problematic in the late 1950s, as Duncan developed a new sense of poetic form. In texts about this period it is often claimed that Duncan foreswore revision, entrusting the poem to the fate of its first writing.[52] This indeed seems to be the case; moreover, it seems to be a decision taken in response to the tortuous rewritings of "Often I Am Permitted" in 1958. We get a sense of his thinking from a letter to Levertov, dated 8 August 1958, at which time, in Duncan's notebooks, we find him again revising that poem, which is "the opening poem of *The Field*":

> My not revising is linkd to one aspect of the potsherd: that once cast you can't recast it. The more haunting a reflection since I've found myself sweating over extensive rehaulings on the opening poem of *The Field* and right now am at the 12th poem of the book which I want to keep but have almost to reimagine in order to establish it…it's a job of eliminating what doesn't belong to the course of the book, and in the first poem of reshaping so that the course of the book is anticipated. I mistrust the rationalizing mind that comes to the fore, and must suffer thru—like I did when I was just beginning twenty years ago—draft after draft to exhaust the likely and reach the tone in myself where intuitions begin to move.[53]

From what I have seen of Duncan's notebooks, in practice he did not renounce revision absolutely. But it does become extremely scarce.

The archive at Buffalo holds several versions of the poem that will be "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow." In a January 1956 notebook, it appears as the second section of three in a poem titled "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport"[54]:

> 1 This besotted man as if he were dead
> strove against each one reading
> Life! Life! you do not bring me life
> Rubbish! bosh! Miserable stuff.
> Stumbled the length of dim hall
> to blow out – No! No! No! each
> poor candle. Don't

[51] Duncan, *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, xxxv.
[52] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus,* 179, for example.
[53] Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov, *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, e.d Robert J. Beertholf and Albert Gelpi (Stanford: Stanford University, 2003), 131.
[54] Box 3, Notebook 17, Robert Duncan Collection.

hold that miserable candle up to me,
what do I care for a vulgar soul.

Waited for rage then. And
black outwrath rose in me.

Flame not of light! that shows
no flower that life is, but
hell to those that believe in hell!

It is miraculous. When the black rage passed
withdrawal of whatever blind anguish
the dear poor flames linger
light as flowers in a dim meadow.

2 Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
that is not mine, but is a made place
—as if the mind made it up—a poem

Often I am permitted to return to a hall
that is a made place, created by light
wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall,

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

Often I am permitted to return to a poem
where I too stirrd may burn however poor
and turn my face to the shadowless door.

~~3~~ You John Davenport as soon as I
shall come to Heaven who sought wrath.

For the God whose Grace includes all wrath
extends a Life where we think to die.

Great Adam from whom we fall & to whom we rise
must wear your and my poor disguise.

3 But I have learned that I was not a
great poet and came, if the discriminating
could shame me, ashamed to address
a power that was not mine but to which
I belong, in the closet of the speech
the God moves. Miserably miserably
I read what contains me and song

as my Lady teaches me. Rightly dim
is whatever flame here in the light
I reach toward.

No! No! No! miserable rubbish!
Let us say it was an angel spoke thus
and rightly. Loveless in human powers

They never saw in Adam God's image
for God's image was here Love as his
angelic image was power. And
angels move among us, hating the
human image of God, hating the poor
love that is not God's power.

And counseld then that God leave
his Adam—original critics. The
angelic hosts are palaces of critical
    fame and oblivion. Powers
sweep thru us of glory or outrage,
lonelinesses, imbecilities, vanities.

Azrael who is all glory waits—Dark
Death. All the night draws back
from the light of the poor candle.

This is immediately followed, on the next page, by the different rendition of the first lines:

[In the besotted dark]

This darkend man as if he were dead
where his poor eyes caught no light
reddend as if not with weeping,
    glare not of the azure
strove against the poets in their poor reading.

Angry as the dead are that crave blood.

"Life! Life! you do not bring me life.
Rubbish! Bosh! miserable heart!"
~~That~~ Stammerd

A line divides the page at this point. Below it, we read:

When the angels accept the Love
and Man accepts the Power
Then from the seed of the Holy Dead

leaps God's glory flower.

The editors of the *Collected Later Poems and Plays* describe the context of these pages: "In January 1956, in London en route to Mallorca, Duncan and Jess spent an evening at G.S. Fraser's, in the course of which John Davenport, another guest, outraged Duncan by dismissing the work of Ezra Pound as eccentric and insignificant."[55]

The poem's next appearance is in a letter of 1 February 1956 from Duncan to Helen Adam. After confessing his "wish" that "my poor mind could be blossoming again," he writes, "here is a poem which I managed in the middle of a poem which now I dont like entire. But this 'song' I do like."[56] That "song" is the identical to the second section of the poem as it appears in the notebook. Adams responded on 12 February: "You write that that you wish your mind would blossom creatively again, but a few lines further on you send the song 'Often I am permitted to return to a meadow,' and it is flawless, one of the very loveliest things you have ever done."[57] Here, perhaps for the first time, Adams gives the poem the name it will ultimately live by, although it will bear at least one other name on the way. Thus, the familiar doubling of the title as the first line of the published poem, at least in this context, seems to arise from Duncan's suppression of the "enraged" first and third sections.

Duncan sent the same version from Black Mountain College to Denise Levertov in July 1956, without comment.

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[55] Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 753. See also Duncan and Levertov, 33, especially the letter dated 3 Feb 1956.
[56] Helen Adam and Robert Duncan, "Selected Correspondence: 1955-1956," *Apex of the M* 6, ed. Alan Gilbert and Kristin Prevallet (Fall 1997), 154.
[57] Adam and Duncan, 155.

I have not been able to find a copy of the 1956-1957 *Ark II / Moby I*, a little magazine edited and published by Michael McClure, but the editors of Duncan's *Collected Later Poems and Plays* tell us that the poem was published there, along with "The Law I Love is Major Mover."

We know from Duncan's letters that as early as October 1956 he was composing a book under the name of "*The Field* or perhaps *The Opening of the Field*" (as he puts it to Denise Levertov).[58] Another letter to Levertov of 17 December 1957 refers to the manuscript simply as "the *Field*." There Duncan tells Levertov that whereas in *Letters* he had "arranged…[by feel or smell or something like that]" the poems in their order, "for the *Field*" he is "back at the poems 'happen' level"; by this he means that the poems are arranged chronologically. In the same letter, he seems to refer to "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" as "The Field," when he explains its central place in the composition of the book: "for the first time, since the beginning (in London, January 1956) I have had a reference point and a title in one 'The Field' and I find myself going back to certain themes (or their coming back to me)."[59] In a letter to Robin Blaser two days later, Duncan writes, "I want to give the Field another year."[60]

We next come across the text of the poem in a typescript of January 1958, running some twenty-five pages, which is titled "from THE OPENING OF THE FIELD."[61] There the poem has its first line as the title, and, even this late, it retains its original form. It is also remarkable that this typescript, which starts with "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," includes, just after it, the third section of the notebook draft (beginning "But I have learnd…" and ending "my poor candle"), as well as the four lines stanza "When the angels accept the Love…" Next to "Often I Am

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[58] Duncan and Levertov, 48.
[59] Duncan and Levertov, 90.
[60] Duncan, "Letters to Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer," 116.
[61] Box 24, Folder 11, Robert Duncan Collection.

Permitted" a note in Duncan's hand says "rewritten; see appendix"; next to the two other parts he has written "out."[62]

It is not clear what the "rewritten" form of January 1958 was. For, at least by the evidence of Duncan's notebooks, the major revisions that would bring the poem into its published form occurred in early August of that year. These are the "extensive rehaulings" Duncan mentions in the letter to Levertov on 8 August 1958, quoted above. Duncan reports on these labors in a letter to Blaser on the 6th of August: "It's been then, with a vengeance a period of re-writing. For I found myself driven back to a condition previous to all skills in dealing with the open SOMETIMES I AM PERMITTED TO RETURN TO A MEADOW and after at least a dozen copies in full mistrust of all in the mind that wants to 'direct' a poem, to make it consequential came thru in four days work with the enclosed mistrusted still almost beautiful pseudo-casual opening."[63] In the Levertov letter, too, the poem is called "Sometimes I Am Permitted…" The editors of the Duncan-Levertov letters tell us, in a note to this letter, that "Among the Duncan letters is a typewritten sheet with the following version of lines from 'Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow'…prefaced by 'first writing January 1956 and followed by 'rewritten July 1958.'"[64] They then present the poem as it appears on this sheet. What is curious is that this poem is identical to the notebook poem of January 1956. In fact, we find something similar in the issue of *Ironwood* in which the Blaser letters appear. The editor, in his note to the sentence quoted above, writes "I include the original version of the poem for comparison." It is possible that Duncan sent Blaser the revised poem and that the editor is presenting the original version here to give us some sense of Duncan's "re-writing," but it is not clear; it is also possible that the "enclosed" poem is that original, as seems to be the case in the letter

[62] Box 24, Folder 11, Robert Duncan Collection.
[63] Duncan, "Letters to Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer, 125.
[64] Duncan and Levertov, 806.

to Levertov two days later. And this would not be without sense, for Duncan's subject in both letters is precisely the principle of the potter that he writes of to Levertov: that once cast you can't recast it. And in both letters he speaks of his "mistrust"—to Blaser, it is a "mistrust of all in the mind that wants to 'direct' a poem" (in the Blaser letter), to Levertov a "mistrust" of "the rationalizing mind that comes to the fore" in revision. Thus, it may be that at this moment, a few days after having worked out what will be the ultimate form of the poem, Duncan has to trust the original inscription and withhold the new version.

The penultimate event in the evolution of the poem is its 1959 publication in *Noonday* 2, apparently by the agency of Levertov.[65] I have not been able to examine the magazine myself, but the editor of the *Collected Later Poems and Plays* enumerates the peculiarities of this version: it is titled "The Meadow"; it is "repunctuated"; and the second line of the sixth stanza reads "east against the course of the sun."[66] The last of these emendations, which will not be preserved in the published poem—there it will be "the source of the sun"—corresponds to what we find in the August 1958 drafts. But I can find no precedent for the title; it might be an application of the linguistic form of "The Field" to the "meadow" of the first line. And it is not clear what is meant by "repunctuated." The verb itself suggests that an earlier sequence of punctuation, having been deleted, was now restored. I do not think that is the case, but indeed those notebook drafts diverge in their punctuation from the published version—in ways that are hardly noticeable but have a role in Duncan's alterations to the poem's rhythm. There are two notable features in original version. First, it has no stanza-terminal periods; its only full stop is at the end. Second, it uses m-dashes to set off, almost parenthetically, the phrase "as if the mind made it up." The notebook drafts of 1958 retain

[65] Duncan and Levertov, 162.
[66] Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 754.

the m-dashes but have introduced the full stop of a period after "Wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall" and at the end of certain other stanzas as well.

It is not clear from the archive or from the published correspondence when the poem obtained its final form, nor when the title of the book was fixed as *The Opening of the Field*.[67] Jarnot tells us that the manuscript was done by 7 January 1959 and that Duncan sent copies to friends throughout the spring.[68] In July of that year, he wrote a preface to the book that was ultimately not published.

The book's path to publication was not straight. First it was rejected by Wesleyan University Press.[69] Macmillan Press proposed publishing it in its "Pocket Poet" series, but Duncan rejected this offer.[70] Duncan considered doing it himself, through an imprint called Enkidu Surrogate, but in the end the manuscript was taken up by Grove Press and was published in October of 1960.[71]

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[67] A letter to Levertov in April 1959 still refers to it as *The Field*. Duncan and Levertov, 169.
[68] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 182.
[69] Duncan, *The Later Collected Poems and Plays,* 749.
[70] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus,* 187.
[71] Jarnot, 199.

CHAPTER 3:

UNDER THE WING OF THE ADVERSARY

Before we proceed to the poem's revisions, we must return to "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport" and understand what was expurgated or suppressed at the moment "Often I Am Permitted," separated from its original context, became a poem of its own. We will be able to glimpse not only the problems of imagination and form that concerned Duncan at the outset of the book but also what we might call the shadow or the unconscious of the poem, which would be to a certain degree the shadow or the unconscious of *The Opening of the Field.*

As has already been indicated, the context for the composition of this poem is a partly Duncan's intensive interrogation, over a couple years, of the trajectory of poetry as he saw it, provoked and nourished especially by Pound and Blake; it is also partly Duncan's profound, sometimes suicidal, despair of his life and his powers as a poet. These two confrontations, which may be allegorized in Duncan's evocation in "The Structure of Rime I" of Jacob's night-wrestling with the angel—

> *Wake up,* she cried.
> *Jacob wrestled with Sleep—you who fall into Nothingness and*
> *dread sleep—*[72]

should be kept in mind especially when we are immersed in the minutia of the notebooks. Duncan's striving after subtleties of articulation in his definition of poetry, or his syllabic recalibrations of a single line, respond to profound crises in his person and in his art.

The three notebook pages devoted to this poem are but one patch in the fabric of Duncan's working in this period, even in the whole cloth of his career. These pages not only summarize and

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[72] Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays,* 8.

transform Duncan's presiding concerns in the 1950s, but also are of woven of specific words and phrases, many of which are from his reading, which he had been testing out and considering in different reflections for months or years. What we will do is demonstrate the contexts and sources of these pages and attempt to discern the special shape it gives them. This should clarify the terms of Duncan's crisis, and the problems in poetry to which he was responding. It will remain for the following chapter to confront his expurgation of section "1" and section "3" and why, as he told Levertov in the letter of 1956 quoted above, although disdaining the rest of the text, he liked this "song."

If we cast our eyes over the entirety of the text, Duncan's use of the term "song" to denote the second section is apt. It takes its structure from the anaphora of "Often I am permitted to return to a ______" ("meadow" or "hall" or "poem") at the beginning of three out of the four stanzas. And it is composed in tercets, the second and fourth of which are controlled by rhyme: the former between its first and third lines, the latter between its second and third. Some of this picture is complicated by the ambiguous relationship of section "2" to the three couplets that follow, marked by a crossed out "3" as if they are to be included in section "2." Even so, those six lines persist in the high tone and something like the measure of the preceding. Compared to the rest of the poem, this composite section appears as a dense structure of musical and rhetorical recurrences that indeed can be called a "song." In fact, much of the rest of these handwritten pages has us hard-pressed to distinguish between what is lineated and what is not, what is verse and what is prose. I have transcribed them above in the shape in which they appear there. From all of the reading I have done in Duncan's notebooks, on the one hand, these differ from his usual practice of extending prose to the edge of the page; and, on the other hand, the erratic treatment of the line as a unit of sense and sound is uncharacteristic of Duncan. This, as well as the elliptical and awkward syntax, gives us the impression of something written hastily and in the "outwrath" the text speaks of.

In this wider view, we can say something more about the structure of the poem.

The first section presents the scene of the poet's "outwrath." It seems to begin with Davenport's offending remarks. Yet, for reasons we will see, the social circumstance and the inner passion are hardly distinct. On the basis of the British diction, and the inscription of a slightly different form of the same utterance as direct speech ("Life! Life! you do not bring me life./ Rubbish! Bosh! miserable heart") on the third page in this sequence, we can construe the first four lines (up through "Miserable stuff") as spoken by that person or persona, but thereafter it is not clear whether the speech is that of the "besotted man" or the poet. The following three stanzas present the event of the poet's "outwrath" in three discrete instants: in the first, the speaker registers an inward awareness of his anticipation of rage and the rising of the "outwrath"; in the second, which is unmarked by self-consciousness, that rage reaches its climax in an invocation of the "flame not of light!"; in the third, the speaker regards with some amazement the "withdrawal" of "anguish" and the compares the "poor flames" that "linger" to "flowers" in a "dim meadow."

The second section presents in its first twelve lines the "song" discussed above. Its first line transposes the "meadow" from the simile to the center of the discourse and thus, at the same time, the poem manages to actually inhabit the "meadow," at a distance from the confusion and rage of the first section. It is transformed into a self-conscious meditation on, even analysis of, the event, in which the first line ("Often I am permitted to return to a meadow") interprets the final movement of the previous stanza. There will be much to consider in the particular terms of this section, but formally it is a sequence of renderings or revisions of the "return" from "outwrath" to "meadow."

The would-be third section speaks directly to John Davenport and proposes a reconciliation between him and the speaker. Here, too, the immediacy of the incident is diffused, as the event is subsumed into a soteriological schema. The speaker boldly identifies "wrath" as a cipher of divine "Grace" and, seemingly, as a gift of "Life where we think to die." His now prophetic or apocalyptic

vision now reveals that the self is a "poor disguise" worn by the primordial or "Great Adam," such that the distinction between persons, even between John Davenport and himself, is a consequence of the Fall, and in a sense illusory. When the speaker imagines that "we rise" toward that Adam, he is projecting a time to come in which this fallenness will be overcome.

In the third section, however, the rage of the first section turns inward, as the poet "miserably" accepts that he was not "great" and was "ashamed to address a power that was not mine but to which I belong." Although there have been hints of his melancholy in two evocations of "dear poor flames" and "I too stirred may burn however poor," this exasperated confession comes as a surprise. The confusion of tenses ("have learned…was not…belong…moves") and inversion of syntax ("song as my lady teaches me") break the stately measure of the preceding and return us to the opening section. At this very moment, the poet raises himself in defiance of the diminution he has just suffered at his own hands. He cries out (in the last phrase repeating Davenport's words): "No! No! No! miserable rubbish!" Yet it is impossible for the poet to entirely dissolve his doubt. Instead, he makes a myth that fuses Davenport's criticism of Ezra Pound and his own denial of his powers. It draws heavily on Gnostic and Miltonian renditions of the story of Genesis, where angels "Loveless in human powers…hating the human image of God, hating the poor love that is not God's power" labor to corrupt the first humans. We will examine Duncan's myth in more detail, first as it imagines "angels" and "Adam" as projections of God's "image" and then, in the decisive moment, as it identifies the poet with God and the angels with internal "Powers" that "sweep thru us of glory or outrage/lonelinesses, imbecilities, vanities." In the end, "Dark/Death" still "waits" (as the poet had "waited for rage") but, after the various transformations and compensations of the poem, "All the night draws back/ from the light of the poor candle."

The remainder of this notebook passage has two unnumbered sections. The first seems to be alternate version of the poem's opening lines, now with a deeper ambiguation of the identities of the

two men. Here it begins, "This darkend man as if he were dead/ where his poor eyes caught no light," associating Davenport thus with the poet's "dear poor flames." The second is a Blakean stanza proposing that the reconciliation of angels and Man will not be by the casting out the other, but by the former "accept[ing] the Love]" and the latter "accept[ing] the Power"—

> Then from the seed of the Holy Dead
> leaps God's glory flower.

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Let us begin by returning to what we know of the circumstances of this "outwrath." Jarnot tells us that Davenport had offended Duncan by dismissing the achievement of Ezra Pound. In a letter to Denise Levertov a month later, written two days after the initial letter enclosing the second section of "Having Been Enraged"—that is, on 3 February 1956—Duncan writes, "Only one poem in these last two months—and only one section of that I find 'true'—to the mark. It began with a fierce scene I had with John Davenport at the end of an evening at G.S. Fraser's over Pound."[73] So Pound is likely to have been the topic, but we do not know the actual terms of the dispute. Perhaps Davenport had in fact said, "Life! Life! you do not bring me life/ Rubbish! bosh! Miserable stuff." Perhaps he had attacked Pound as a "vulgar soul."

It so happens that Duncan's notebooks, reaching back to 1953 and 1954, show him grappling with Pound's work and influence. Duncan regards Pound as a master of the art and, he writes a decade later in "The Lasting Contribution of Ezra Pound," "as the carrier of a tradition or lore in poetry, that flowered in the Renaissance after Gemistos Plethon, in the Provence of the twelfth century that gave rise to the Albigensian gnosis, the *trobar clus*, and the Kabbalah, in the Hellenistic world that furnished the ground for orientalizing-Greek mystery cults, Christianity, and

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[73] Duncan and Levertov, 33.

neo-Platonism."[74] Till the very end of Duncan's career, Pound will appear in his writing as one of the heroes of Poetry, albeit as a terminal figure "go[ing] back to Ficino and the Renaissance ideas" rather than going "forward with contemporary imagination to a poetic vision of the Life Process and the Universe."[75]

In this period in the notebooks, however, Duncan's thinking about Pound is directed by his doubt of his own vocation and his struggle to formulate a conception of poetry to which he would be adequate. Pound is a symbol of poetic greatness, and thus a standard against which Duncan (painfully) measures himself; yet he is also the frequent object of Duncan's critique. Duncan's ambivalence about Pound may explain some of his wrath at Davenport's offense, and it may be also a hidden link between that wrath and Duncan's shame in the third section. In the same letter to Levertov, Duncan continues:

> And now Pound's *Rock Drill*, 'Cantos 85-95,' come with revelations painful for me that it has not been put all together. It is a failure of imagination (of creating the image) so that some of the poet's voices ascend in ecstatic evocations… and there is a brief, beautiful prayer for compassion ('Canto 93'); and the great bell-tones of ideograms ring *sensibility, foundations*, and the days of the four seasons with the four suites of the deck of 52 cards. But another voice goes on, insistent, pouring out an old man's references and bile."

This passage contains, *in nuce*, the two concerns that dominate Duncan's writings about Pound in these years. On the one hand, Duncan uses Pound to articulate the etymological definition of "Poet" as "Maker" or, as Duncan prefers, "Makaris." On the other hand, for Duncan, Pound—like Blake, as we will see—is sometimes an incarnation of the Accuser, i.e. of Satan. Duncan's judgment here is that Pound has not "creat[ed] the image": in these *Cantos* the "ecstatic" splendor is sundered from

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[74] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 99.

[75] Duncan, 259. The text is "Changing Perspectives in Reading Whitman," written 1968-1969. See also Don Byrd's essay, "The Question of Wisdom as Such" in *Scales of the Marvelous*, 41. Discussing Duncan's early friendship with Charles Olson, Byrd writes, "Olson defines his kinship with Duncan in terms of their reaction to Pound. They were, he says, against Pound, instances of 'post-Christian man.' In one sense, then, Pound represented for them a dead-end. He was the final revelation and embodiment of the paradoxes in the cultural order which his work sought to revive."

the "references and bile." The image of the poem, which for Duncan would be the image of the poet, is divided into Pound the "Makaris" and Pound the culture-builder and prophet.[76]

In a laboratory notebook we find an essay titled "To be called to making   the vocation of poetry."[77] It seems to have been written no earlier than 1954; it was not composed any later January of 1955. It is an early instance of Duncan's effort to define poiesis as a recapitulation of the human being's passage from infancy to speech. Yet he defines not only poetry but also language and "man" as "made-up" things and, as above, the poet as a "maker," telling us that both Pound in *Kulchur* and Stravinsky "remind us that *poiein* means to make."

At first glance, the way that this text proceeds seems to diminish poetry. It doesn't associate the poet as "maker" with the creator-god. Duncan begins by asserting that "poetry is a potentiality of language, not language a potentiality of poetry," in other words, it is a specific but not necessarily superior or primordial function of language. Moreover, he excludes from its definition divine origins and magic effects. Rather, poiesis is the "realization of forms." Form is "the trace in the thing made of its making," rather than shapeliness, symmetry, or beauty. And the "maker," as Duncan wants to define him, is variously defined as the one who "dedicates himself" to "the excitement of making," whose "calling" is "the recognition of the making having taken place,"; he is "man as he is aware of his being in the thing made." There is some compensation for these demotions, if they are such, in the in Duncan's vision of making as arising from the irreducible particularity of one's "underlying rhythmic patterns, the pulse and breath." As we can see from Duncan's definitions, the strategy of the essay is to constrict the temporality of poetry to the present moment, the moment of making. In

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[76] I would guess that Coleridge's propositions about the imagination in the *Biographia Litteraria* are behind Duncan's thought. He had been reading Coleridge, as well the Livingston Lowes' study of the poet, in Mallorca, and wrote at one point a "Homage to Coleridge." Coleridge calls the "Imagination" "esemplastic," that is, its power is "to shape into one." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* ed. W. Jackson Bate and James Engell (Princeton: Princeton University, 1983), 168.

[77] Box 2, Notebook 13, Robert Duncan Collection. The other texts about Pound cited here are all from the same notebook.

this, and in general, the essay to a certain degree repeats the central principles of Charles Olson's "Projective Verse' (1950), which also refers poetic measure to physiological rhythms and insists upon the spatio-temporal bounding of the poetic act. Yet Duncan's main purpose seems to be to free poiesis from any "utility toward gratifications other than its making" and from any external judgment whatsoever ("aesthetic appreciations"). Pound is claimed as an exemplar.

A second essay, which immediately follows, is titled "On the Makaris" and it proceeds by linking the "timeless quality" of making (resulting from "surrounding opportunities for gratification" being "postponed") to a "concept of being a poet" that Duncan calls "vatic." He opposes this to the "ιδιοτηϛ" [sic], who is "a user of the language to supercede in his own personality the image of man."[78] The "vatic" poet by contrast is an "oracle of the language to restore the image of man," which surely is an extension of the thought that "poetry is a potentiality of language." Pound, quoted at length about "the over-emphasis on the individual," is brought in as an example but now also as the "master" who is "dedicated to the wisdom of forms." Again, Duncan's text ends by addressing itself to the criticism of poetry. Returning to the "ιδιοτηϛ," Duncan defines him as "the no-one common man in spite of the human spirit" and thus the representative of what Duncan bitterly (and in a Poundian manner) calls "the cult of the welfare state…social workers, social causes." The third canto of Dante's *Inferno* (lines 34-42) is quoted from the Carlyle-Wicksteed translation at length—

> This miserable mode the dreary souls of those sustain who lived without blame, and without praise. They are mixd with that caitiff choir of the angels, who were not rebellious, nor were faithful to God; but were for themselves. Heaven chased them forth to keep its beauty from impair; and the deep Hell receives them not, for the wicked would have some glory over them.[79]

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[78] See Plato *Phaedrus* 258d, *Symposium* 178b, *Laws* 890a. The Greek word means something like a "private citizen." It comes from an adjective that means "private" or "one's own."

[79] Dante, *Dante's Divine Comedy: The Inferno*, translated by John A. Carlyle (New York: Harpers, 1855), 38. Duncan's edition is the 1946 printing in London by J.M. Dent & Sons.

The ”common man” or the poet as “ιδιοτης” is, in Duncan’s view, one of those “dreary souls.” Earlier Duncan had quoted these words from Pound’s *Kulchur*: “Only in the high air and the great clarity can there be a just estimation of values.” Now Duncan writes, “‘Blame and praise” how relevant to the vocation of the poet who must restore the high air and clarity of human spirit—Heaven and the darkest depths, the volcanic fires of Hell—that measure may be taken of the mind.” The possibility that “measure may be taken of the mind” depends upon the same definitions of a thing made and of maker that we encountered above.

The “measure…of the mind” also connects these texts, in which Pound is almost a proxy for Duncan, to another text from the same notebook that shows Duncan disturbed by Pound’s “spirit.” It is called “Pound’s Cantos: Their Influence.” It must have been written after January 1955; it follows pages dated to then, and it makes reference to the *Rock-Drill* Cantos which were published that year. It is not likely to have been much later than that, since Duncan is writing Levertov about these poems in early February. Here, as he is in the Levertov letter, Duncan is “shaken by the outrage” of Pound’s antisemitism. The line he focuses on is from Canto XCI: “in this their kikery functional, Marx, Freud.” He calls this Pound’s “passion that outrages truth.” There is an ambivalence in the word “outrage” in this context, which reminds us of the crossings of Davenport and Duncan in “Having Been Enraged.” It is the not the antisemitism *per se* that angers Duncan but the “violation of the truth”: “the word,” he says, “cannot conceivably be used to describe the elegancies and clarities of Freud’s mind.”

However, Duncan pursues a notion of poetic “truth” by which the *Cantos* could be justified. “Techniques,” he says, “are not separate from content,” perhaps recalling the public disputes over Pound’s Bollingen Prize seven years earlier or Olson’s dictum in “Projective Verse” that “FORM IS

NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT."[80] He will not save Pound's antisemitism by praise of his art but rather, "following Freud," by distinguishing between "truth at the literal level" (which is the site of Pound's violation: "kikery" simply cannot refer to Freud) and "the truth of the poem." (The latter is the identity of "Truth" and "Myth" that is the theme of Duncan's "The Truth and Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography."[81]) Duncan hesitates between two thoughts about this distinction. On the one hand, he believes that the "misleading surface," like the talk of an analysand," requires a "new method" to disclose the "content" of the poem; thus, Pound's line is "justified" not in the sense Pound meant but as an accurate record of Pound's mind. On the other hand, he wishes to establish the absolute fitness of technique and content in Pound's great poem and claims that Pound's "declared concept of what the poem is" ("an emotional record," which "hews" the line "to his emotional tone") sustains Duncan's thought that "it is the quality of Pound's spirit that is being reveald."[82]

The text's central statement is this: "Because of the techniques pursued in the Cantos we have a more generous and a more concrete picture of Pound's mind than we have of any other contemporary poet—the range is unprecedented—and the attraction and hence the influence is for those who seek to leave such an accurate and detaild trace."

Curiously, Duncan concludes the essay by considering the emotional effects of the poem. It is here that he speaks of his being "shaken." Now the "outrage" of Pound's poem, which has been

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[80] Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 240.

[81] See Sitney, "Figures of the Present Dance," 122, for a partial gloss of that essay: "Arguing against the portrait of the poet in Plato's Republic with a contemporary version of Shelley's A Defense of Poetry. Duncan claims that truth and myth (the continuing body of poetic expression) coincide, and that the truth that Plato would uncover dialectically is to be found in the imaginary theatre of his dialogues."

[82] For an excellent discussion of Duncan's use in the *H.D. Book* of the same "psychoanalytic method" to "rescue" the *Cantos*, see Hamilton, *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance*, 204ff. "For example," he writes on p. 207, "whereas Pound sees history as a conflict between a creative vision embodying order, the 'factive personality,' and the disruptive forces of ignorance, Duncan counters Pound's dis-ease of (dis)order with his own more anarchic vision of chaos as a ground for order in both the cosmos and the individual."

defined as its fidelity to “Pound’s mind”—even the falseness of that mind—, is taken as a measure of the poem’s “truth.” For, Duncan writes, “Eliot’s line outrages no truth, just so it reveals nothing true or false.” It is again the threat of Judgment, as well the notion of poetic technique and content that Judgment presumes, which underlies Duncan’s reflections and guides him to this sense of the “truth of the poem.”

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The passages about Pound have as their background Duncan’s anxiety and deep despair in this time, which have as much to do with poetry in a strict sense as with the fate of his soul. The allusion to Dante’s *Inferno* is not merely to a venerable topos of poetic judgment; Duncan feels surrounded by darkness and in danger of himself being damned to hell. This is the background of “Having Been Enraged.”

A characteristic text of 25 December 1955 (that is, a couple weeks before “Having Been Enraged” was written), called “Pride and Longing as a Poet,” shows Duncan deeply worried by his own motives in publishing a poem in *Botteghe Oscura*.[83] When he thought to send the poem, he writes, “the hounds of hell bayd there at my damnd ulterior motives,” but even “more insidious hounds” attended his instinct to refuse, “the very spectre of my damnable pride and contempt.” “I am quite damnd,” he goes on, “in the assaults of wanting and begrudging, the grinning covetousness that dwells upon such distinction.” We should take his use of such terms as “pride” and “damnd” in the strongest sense, even if his talk of vices and virtues and damnation does not amount to an articulate eschatology.

[83] Box 3, Notebook 17, Robert Duncan Collection.

Here we witness Duncan admitting "the longing of my heart for peace" and "my longing for death."

In another notebook, in an entry dated to 20 December 1954, we read:

> It is from the ideas of you, that you emerge. I return to you from my longing—you are a second image in longing, drawn to you as the painter is drawn to the man he draws; or, as in reading the canto one is drawn to the likeness of death. "I say I shan't live five years," Blake wrote in 1795, "And if I live one it will be a Wonder." Within all daily love—and this is a world—is a huge other world sleeping or an otherness awake in which I am a sleeper. The revealed things of this order appear as omens: within the full dread of death, so that I cry up to die—is an other life. I tremble lest the door be locked or open, for the door is an ununderstandable joy.
>
> But now, across an emptiness of time I see you. I shall never reach you—between me and thee.[84]

In the same notebook, in April of 1955, we find the one passage Duncan has copied out from Livingston Lowes' study of Coleridge's imagination, in which the poet describes himself at a distance from "the poetic impulse," and also expresses his longing for peace:

> Lowes notes from Coleridge: who says that if he ever "should feel again the genial warmth and sun of the poetic impulse" he would transfuse himself into "a rock, with its summit just raised above the surface of some bay or strait in the Arctic Sea…all around me fix and firm…as my own substance, and near me lofty masses…in such wild play with meteoric lights, or with the quiet shine from above…that it was…a place to lie."

We also find there an extraordinary essay on "the Accuser" or the Satanic character of *Finnegan's Wake*, the *Zohar*, and the poems of William Blake. We will return to this below, for the figure of the Accuser is *the* protagonist in the drama of Duncan's psyche. For now, it will suffice to indicate another source of his despair, as it is recorded here. It is what he calls the "contagion" of his reading: "Blake is most contagious…I wish I had brought Arp to redeem my soul."[85] Further on:

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[84] Box 2, Notebook 14, Robert Duncan Collection.

[85] Duncan's shamanistic poetics of "contagion" is the subject of Peter O'Leary, *Gnostic Contagion: Robert Duncan and the Poetry of Illness* (Middletown: Wesleyan University, 2002). Although O'Leary gives an important place to Blake in his analysis of "My Mother Would be a Falconress," he doesn't discuss Duncan's reading of Blake in the 1950s. And Duncan's sense of reading as a vector of contagion is only vaguely implied in the chapter on Duncan's apprenticeship to the poetry of H.D. See O'Leary, 58, for example.

"The Accuser it is Whom we feel present in the nightmares of the Zohar or in Blake—for we are accused thruout of being among the unbelievers." But he perceives demonic presence in a child who asks him how he makes a living as a poet[86] and in a woman in Mallorca who asks him "you play around with magic, don't you?"[87]

If we survey Duncan's notebooks and published writings from this period, we note that his feelings that he is "damnd" and his strenuous efforts to define a poetry adequate to his powers. although they have roots in his earliest writings, rapidly intensify in 1954 and 1955.

It is not a coincidence that in December of 1953 he received a letter from Charles Olson that passed severe judgment on Duncan's work as a poet. It is the text that would eventually be called "Against Wisdom as Such." It was published in the *Black Mountain Review* in the Spring of 1954. Duncan wrote a reply to Olson, dated 8 August 1954: "I picked up Black Mt. Review at the Pocket Book Shop and read the 'Wisdom as Such' piece. If it reprimands in part I ain't going to rise in defense of my bewilderings—this matter of clarification is too important."[88] But, in his own notebooks, Duncan does "rise in defense" and in great consternation.

Olson's text is itself a response to Duncan's "Pages from a Notebook," which Duncan had published in the fifth issue of *The Artist's View* (July 1953). There, Duncan had written, "I am a poet, self-declared, manqué," proposing not only that he has made himself a poet but also that, even in doing so, he has failed to live up his powers as a poet. This sentence is somewhat tinted with

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[86] Box 3, Notebook 18, Robert Duncan Collection. The note is from 21 April 1955: "the source of my money is remote. I am an idle member of a house which can afford to supply me with enough to live? one? And so I am engaged in a work, not to earn a living but to earn a death. When the small son of a friend of mine who lives as I do askd me—what do you do to earn a living? I did not answer nothing; but because I did not want to be thot vicious I answerd that sometimes I had typed manuscripts for a living. As indeed I had before I was privileged to join the idle. The child being the Accuser askd—what good does that do? Then he askd—for there is no end to which these secretly inspired beings may go—if you typd manuscripts for a living why do you call yourself a poet? It is at such times that the terror my idleness all but overcomes me."
[87] Box 3, Notebook 17. These pages (from a "Homage to Coleridge") are not dated but they follow "Having Been Enraged"—thus, early 1956.
[88] Olson, *Collected Prose,* 431.

Duncan's understanding of the self as a fiction, we might even say a performance, something "made up." But it repeats, as well, the moral and spiritual severity that we have seen throughout Duncan's notebooks, the judgment of his own vices and his own prospects for salvation. For Olson, such a conception of poetry, and the self, "damn well has to go," because of the "outside concept and measure of 'wisdom.'"[89] "What's wrong with wisdom," he writes, is that it "does this to persons," that is, it compels them to acts of self-division and self-limitation. As P. Adams Sitney writes, "By declaring a gap between person and inspiration, Duncan falls into the danger of substituting a religion for his creativity, as Olson sees it."[90]

"Wisdom," Olson insists, "is the man." From "Projective Verse" (1950) to his writings about oral performance in Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato*, to *Proprioception* (1965), that is, more or less for the entirety of his career, Olson strove to found a poetics on versions of "the law" he states in "Against Wisdom as Such":

> /whatever is born or done this moment of time, has
> the qualities of
> this moment of
> time

His polemic is against what he understood as abstraction, the estrangement of the human being from himself, from the irreducible particularity of his physical being, by philosophical and verbal generalization (e.g. such a notion as "wisdom"). In "Projective Verse," for example, he defines "OPEN verse" entirely by the act of poiesis, which follows "no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself." Although the temporality of Olson's verbs oscillates, even when he writes "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it," his evocation of "energy" here and throughout the essay is pointedly opposed, on the one hand, to the "inherited line, stanza, over-

[89] Olson, 260.
[90] Sitney, "Figures of the Present Dance," 114.

all form…of the non-projective" and, on the other hand, to any predeterminations of theme or content. But here, as in "Against Wisdom as Such," the key element is "time." In "Against Wisdom as Such," he writes of the poet: "there are no symbols to him, there are only his own composed forms, and each one solely the issue of the time of the moment of its creation, not any ultimate except what he in his heat and that instant in its solidity yield." It is not submission to "time" that Olson demands, but, as Sitney says, "a compact of 'love" with it.[91] In this radical relativizing of "wisdom" (and later "truth") to the instantaneous realization of "forms," Olson says, very much to our theme, "that Duncan, or any writing man who takes it seriously, needn't bother his head with greatness."[92]

We can already see the way in which Duncan's writings about Pound, discussed above, have appropriated the terms Olson's attack on his poetry. In that sense, he did take Olson's letter as an important "matter of clarification." Yet Duncan's response is not so simple. A decade later, in 1965, he will recall the argument in this way, casting Olson as a kind of Satan:

> I had come under the wing of the Adversary and the accusation of falseness, of literary passions and exaggerated pretensions, bit deep. I seemd to have no authenticity; my most moving poems were not mine at all but sprang from the originals of George Barker or Saint-John Perse, Lorca or Milton or Laura Riding. But I knew too that the wing of the Adversary, the accusation of falseness and the derivations must be then true to what I was, must be terms in which I must work.[93]

The last sentence rhymes with Duncan's complex account of Pound's antisemitism, wherein "false" and "true" are both claimed as "true" in "the truth of the poem," that is, in the measure they take of the mind or the man. But we can see now that Duncan is striving to transform his own doubt by means of Olson's concept of necessity, by casting his "literary passions," his "pretensions," and his

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[91] Sitney, 116. He shows that Olson is alluding to a line from Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (LXXX), but, to "temporalize and de-aestheticize poetry," he has substituted "time" for Pound's "La beauté" and "beauty."
[92] Olson, *Collected Prose,* 263.
[93] Duncan, *Collected Early Poems and Plays,* 9. This comes from his introduction to *The Years as Catches*.

"derivations" as "terms in which I *must* work" (my emphasis) or what Olson calls "qualities of/ this moment of/ time."

In a notebook entry, dated 10 August 1954, thinking "Re: Olson's 'Against Wisdom as Such'" he quotes Olson's poem "The Praises" as if it is speaking about Duncan himself: "Thus was he punished for his impiety."[94] A month later, on 18 September, he does "rise in defense," arguing that Olson's position conceals "an effort of consciousness" outside of the instant that in fact resembles the ambition (it "still is will") with which Duncan "prepare[s] for the event."[95] This seems to mean that what Duncan describes as Olson's "verbal" (as opposed to "nominative") sense of "wisdom" should apply to the becoming or incarnation of the poet, not only the discrete act of writing. There is indeed an ambiguity in Olson's poetics, which imply the continuity of the "man" in contradiction to the irreducible particularity of the "moment." In this sense, Duncan, as he makes clear, is a Freudian, whereas Olson is not. A December 1954 notebook entry seeks the same expansion of Olson's spatio-temporal boundaries, so that what is required is now fidelity to "the life in any of us" rather than simply the several energetic factors in the moment of composition. In the text on Pound ("The Vocation of Poetry"), Duncan had put his revised principle this way: "[the thing made] embodies the process of making and hence embodies the coming into being of man:"[96]

> Perhaps it is not the misperception of the artist that comes into play in domination but the dominating spirit—that a world be bent to the participating will. As Everson demanding that God be manifest, exhibits the intimidating drive of the poet. Belief is the whiplash-mark upon self or upon others—or, as in "Science," upon the world of the domination. To use Santayana's reflections upon domination and powers. "Disbelief" as in atheism, or Stan's "there is no love"—like belief is a term of the dominations not of the powers. "No ought" sez Confucius, being thus a power, not a domination. "My kingdom is not of this world" sez Mr. Christ—and here likewise—a power.

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[94] Box 2, Notebook 15, Robert Duncan Collection.
[95] Box 2, Notebook 14.
[96] Box 2, Notebook, 13.

> So the artist asks the "suspension of belief", comprehension. We are not converted to Shakespeare's Tempest; we are enchanted. Jaeger gives this sense of Plato's Republic, of politics as our participation and thru the social world; which not a battleground of beliefs and disbeliefs, submissions and coercions but a field of visions and experiences, a created danceplace of the philosopher. –Aristotle's last book in Politics on music. Or Pound's Kultur which sees the "shape" of a man's activities, the created ideogram. Olson's cautionary moves on my Artist's View re: "wisdom": "I think wisdom, like style, is the man—that it is not extricable as any sort of a statement, even (and here is the catch) tho there be wisdom," that is, that life can be shown to yield "truths"…but Truths are as mortal as the life in any of us…" and later: "I suggest the whole concept of wisdom properly rests on: "Way of being or acting" ex on this wise." Likewise.[97]

We quote this entry now at length, because the distinction between a "domination" and a "power," which Duncan draws from George Santayana's *Dominations and Powers: Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government*, suggests one sense in which Duncan might mean "powers" in "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport."

The final text to collocate in this picture of Duncan's response to Olson's letter is called "From a Notebook." It was published in *Black Mountain Review* 5, but it was written on 1 November 1954. It gives us a clear sense of the ambivalence, the tensions, in Duncan's attempt to think through Olson's argument, but it also shows us the adjustments Olson has provoked in Duncan. Duncan's point here seems to be that Olson's "reject[ion]" of Duncan's work on the basis of a principled rejection of "wisdom as such" conceals, in fact, Olson's belief that Duncan's wisdom "is not real wisdom." Olson's text, in Duncan's view, presupposes a hierarchy of value, which functionally separates true wisdom from Duncan's "pretentious fictions." Turning Olson's principle against him, Duncan points out that Olson's stance would allow back in an aesthetic judgment and asserts that "it is the intensity of the conception that moves me." He "like[s]" "rigor and even clarity" as much as "muddle and floaty vagaries."

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[97] Box 2, Notebook 14.

Michael Davidson's statement that "Olson's theory of tradition is recuperative; Duncan's is interpretive" comments on this very passage; as pertinent as it is to the two poets in general, it is not apt as a summary this argument, for *its* terms are precisely not "tradition" but the qualities of the poetic present.[98] Later in the same text, however, there is an indication of the direction Duncan will take, which will lead him to the "interpretive" sense of form that subtends the later work, especially the serial poems. He makes reference "the persistent idea…that form is Form, a spirit in itself," which, he says, "we owe to the Romantics…" Duncan's idealization of "form" as "Form" or, elsewhere, poetry as Poetry is characteristic. In this context it is significant in general as another version of "the life in any of us," i.e. as the fundamental and enduring entity of which individual poems are instantiations or phases. Duncan's insistence that "form is Form" is noteworthy, insofar as it doesn't allow for a discrimination between one and the other, on any grounds, and implies that essential "Form" never exists except in its particular realizations. This is in line with Olson's insistence that "wisdom" is the "man" only to a certain extent, and it must be noted how greatly it differs from the closely controlled propositions in the texts about Pound. It *does* allow in something other than "man" and his "excitement" or awareness in the act of making: the presiding principle now is "Form;" and it is in reference to "Form" that the various realizations of the poet are assured their veracity and unity.

In this text, which is written more than a year before "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport," Duncan projects a sense of calm or contentment in his status as a poet. We find references to the familiar torments of "hounds of hell," the proximity of death, and the bug-a-boo of "greatness," all of which, with more or less confidence, are said to have been "shaken off:"

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[98] Davidson, "Cave of Resemblances," 35-36. Davidson writes, "The argument between the two men…is an argument over two notions of tradition: one as the archeological (and archetypal) structure of certain dynamic ideas realized throughout history by a few capable imaginations, the other as the open-ended series of variations on a corrupt and corruptible text."

> I am willing to pursue this art in search of itself, because for the time I have shaken off the insistent hounds of the critical posse. I have returned to the privacy of my craft and find that if I am my own judge I will allow the full play. As far as I can go gives me life again on the page…
>
> Then a sense of perspective frees me also—that I am indeed to die, as you are to die, makes life all mine to live. The privacy is absolute and real: none of you, nor your counsels, will stand by me in my dying. And before the fact of my solitude which is my actually being alive—"the goods of the intellect" are clear indeed…
>
> And a sense of perspective again—that making history, even writing a great poem, is out of the way. I don't want it.

Yet we know these very troubles would persist and intensify over the next months. Another example: Duncan writes, later on in the same piece, that he is happy making poems "with all the importance of Arp's stone in a field." But we have already seen, in the April 1955 essay on Blake and the *Zohar*, this sentence, where Arp is not a figure of the self-sufficiency of Duncan's writing but a figure of longing and unavailable salvation: "Blake is most contagious…I wish I had brought Arp to redeem my soul."

*

We should comment on several elements in the poem, before we proceed, because their sources are close at hand. The first is the lines "Let us say it was an angel spoke thus/ and rightly. Loveless in human powers" from the third section. Whether or not Duncan has derived this phrasing from his response to Olson in "From a Notebook," it mimics very closely his admission of Olson's judgment: "He suspects, and rightly, that I indulge myself in pretentious fictions." The second is the reiteration of "poor" in various pairings in the poem: the "poor candle" that stands for the poem the critic would blow out, the "dear poor flames" that "linger" in the speaker after rage has passed, the "poor disguise" that is that is our face that the "Great Adam" wears, and the "poor love" that the angels hate. The essay on Blake, Joyce, and the *Zohar* is the only other instance I have

found in the notebooks of this period that uses the word in this way. Thus, it begins: "Finnegans, Blake and the Zohar until my poor mind is darkend." Although the noun is "mind," this sentence too makes a scene of light and dark.

And the metaphors of light and flame, apart from their formulation, are frequent in Duncan's notebooks, and they are almost always figures of diminishment or impoverishment. On 3 May 1955, that is, two days after the essay was written, Duncan writes, "I learn from the Zohar that being a confirmd Sodomite I shall be utterly extinguished in time—which I see, as I write here late all night by a kerosene lamp—as a guttering candle."[99] This is partly what Duncan means in the essay when he says it is the "presence of the Accuser" he feels in the Zohar, "for we are accused thruout out being among the unbelievers." The immediate context for the sentence is, again, Duncan worrying about Olson's letter: "given my range—which may well be as Olson notes something always more or less than I pretend—I do not do badly at all." In a poem named "Prayer to the Fierce or Offended Angels," from 24 June 1955, we find this stanza: "O fierce Angel, deserved despair,/ cast out the spite from this side-house/ revive the flame that flickers there." It is the self or mind here that is the "side-house" and the poetic afflatus that is the weak "flame." The fierce Angel, singular in the poem, plural and ambiguous in the title, is close to the figures in the "Having Been Enraged" poem, with the difference that here Duncan is bold enough to speak to them and summon them to his aid. As at the end of the poem, though not the beginning, the "Angel" is identified with the human passion, as its person rather than as its cause.

A page earlier, in a text about Blake's "rage," Duncan, perhaps also thinking of himself, and his own "outwrath," writes: "Inspiration or the fire of the imagination sprang lovely in Blake. But his opinion confounded the fire with enthusiasm or the smoke-cloud of self-interest."[100]

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[99] Box 2, Notebook 15, Robert Duncan Collection.
[100] Box 2, Notebook 15.

The form of the second section, that part that will become "Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," comes indirectly from Blake. In Mallorca, Duncan had been reading Blake. His notebooks cite *Jerusalem* (at least the first Book), "There is no Natural Religion," "Mental Traveller," and "Auguries of Innocence." He does not quote from "The Songs of Innocence and Experience," but it is this and the "Auguries" that seem to have been important for Duncan, not only in its calibrations of belief and unbelief, but also in the "innocence" of their rhyming patterns: the traditional ballad forms of the former, and the irresistible, monotonous procession of couplets in the latter.

The distinction between Blake's "Songs" (remember this is the word Duncan uses to describe the second section of his poem) and the prophetic works has great value for Duncan. And the affiliation between the rhyming lines of those "Songs" and their prospects of "innocence," on the one hand, and between what Blake calls in the preface to *Jerusalem* "variety in every line"[101] and that poem's "nightmare" (Duncan says) of vision and accusation, on the other, underlies the opposition between the second section and the others in "Having been Enraged." For the rhymes in Duncan's poem clarify and solidify the structure of the "made place" ("Often I am permitted to return to a hall/ that is a made place, created by light/ wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall") or offer compensation for Duncan's "poor flame" ("Often I am permitted to return to a poem/ where I too stirrd may burn however poor/ and turn my face to the shadowless door"). "A Song for Helen Adam," dated 2 May 1955, is said to be "after Blake":

> I came down to the pit of Hell
> where all the dark is fire
> And saw a Dame beside the Hearth
> where burnd the heart's desire.
>
> I saw from out the livid dark
> the Accuser's eye meet mine

[101] William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor, 1988), 145.

> But the Dame's great eye was quicker still
> and in both our eyes did shine.
>
> My fear was great, my fear was deep
> He followd me before
> And there I heard the Dame who sang
> behind the dreaded door.

And so on, for several more stanzas. There are close connections between this poem and "Having Been Enraged," in its scene, in its evocation of an inner flame and a fearsome and strange "door," in its trinity of Self, Accuser, and Dame or Lady—wherein the Dame, however frightening, opposes the Accuser on behalf of the speaker, and the poem ends with her saying, "since I love thee/ and would all torment heal." In this context, it is remarkable that the second section of "Having Been Enraged" excludes the Accuser altogether.

We must offer a final word on the atmosphere and scene of the poem, for their precedents are also of interest. Duncan's "Atlantis dream" has been the subject of much attention, in particular a richly suggestive article by Dan Featherston, which demonstrates the importance of the dream to "Often I Am Permitted." Simply, Featherston distinguishes three parts to this recurring dream: the first is a meadow in which the grass moves of its own power, moved by no wind; the second is the children's round dance, in which someone has been chosen as "It," but when this person cannot be seen in the center of the dance, the dreamer realizes he is the "king or victim;" the third is a cavern underground, where the dreamer is a lone, "a lonely King in that chair," and when he realizes "all things have gone wrong…Great doors break from their bars and hinges, and, under pressure, a wall of water floods the cavern."[102] In the next chapter, as we consider the published poem, we will treat the matter of the meadow and the children's game in greater depth, and we will return to Featherston's article for its discussion of the poem and Duncan's revisions.

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[102] Featherston, "A Place of First Permission," 671-672.

One thing Featherston does not reckon is the apparent absence of the subterranean cavern from the published poem, and, compared to the detail with which he analyzes the play of Duncan's language, his glance at the "Queen Under the Hill" is superficial. Another is the absence of the elements of that dream from "Having Been Enraged." For Featherston, when he speaks of earlier versions of the poem, is dealing with the "song" sent to Helen Adam in February 1956, not the first manuscript version, and so he does not know of the first emergence of the "meadow" after the rage passes. In general, his text throws its own suggestions into doubt by its footloose relation to the chronology, for the two documentations of the "Atlantis dream" that it cites are from the 1960s, i.e. after the publication of *The Opening of the Field.*

Although we might almost say that the other sections of "Having Been Enraged" take up the subterranean scene of the third part of the dream, in Duncan's notebooks we find a story and two dreams, close in time to the composition of the poem, that are more relevant to the terms and themes of the poem. For, on the whole, Featherston takes "Often I Am Permitted" as a complex ritual in which speaker's participation in the mystery of Kore's descent to the underworld and her ascent to the daylight crosses over his identification with the "King," even Hades, who abducted her to his realm: "the poem is simultaneously a remembering of the Kore and a dismembering of the speaker's ego that would, as king, depose her."[103]

The story is called "The Life of William Carpenter," and it was written in 1955 while Duncan was in Mallorca. William Carpenter was an ancestor of Duncan, although that relationship plays a minor role in the text. On the whole, it is made of narrative elements from George MacDonald's novel *Lilith,* which Duncan had been reading, and which, it is crucial to note, presents a *nekuia* in a psychological, even moral, framework of sin and redemption—those prospects that haunt Duncan's

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[103] Featherston, 683.

poem. Like *Lilith*, it is a dark adventure, in several phases, in an alternate dimension of sleeping, dead, or inchoate beings, which pays an important visit to a city of fantastical isolation. Like *Lilith*'s, its ending is an ambiguous awakening at an apocalyptic threshold: "Then, slowly, dragging a weight of himself up from the inertia of the false waking, he awoke. Stirrd, that is, moved a—flung one arm outward. Would have opend. Then. Opend his one eye and saw. Ceiling. This the room I slept in. Ground. And shut his eye down again."[104] "The Life" has six sections: in the first, William, enraged, wakes to the adventure of his life and the prospect of the Beloved; in the second, a strange figure, like MacDonald's Mr. Raven, convinces him to "spend the night"; in the third, he enters an Atlantean city of "cave like enclosures below the field to sleep" and, meeting a watchman, who, like Duncan, dreads that "not in his lifetime would the great, the heroic moment come," he is told of a dream that hangs over the city in which "gigantic stones reared themselves in circular fields and Bridget the Eater of Children was abroad between sundown and sunrise," in which "the end of the dream—the awakening—was yet to come in the flood of waters" and meanwhile "the watchman stood at the door," as "the prophets of Israel stood at the door of the destruction of the hated Gentile world"; in the fourth, William wakes, tended to by two women who see into his dreams; in the fifth, another William ("of the Red Ford") sings "a song of the heart that drives from its magic circle all false shadows," a ballad, in fact; and the sixth is the false waking.

The transcription of the first dream Duncan titles "Dream of the Chthonic God." It is dated to June 1953. This is the scene: "A door in the entrance hall of the house led into subterranean passages and eventually to the interior cave or hearth of the elemental god." Both Jess and Duncan

[104] Box 4, Notebook 28, Robert Duncan Collection. Lilith ends: "Strange dim memories, which will not abide identification, often, through misty windows of the past, look out upon me in the broad daylight, but I never dream now. It may be, not withstanding, that, when most awake, I am only dreaming the more! But when I wake at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more. I wait, asleep or awake, I wait. Novalis says, 'Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one'." George MacDonald, *Lilith* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans), 1981.

want to be summoned to the god, and all they must do is stand, "extending our arms toward the door to the depths in a manner at once of evocative priest-gesture…and of provocation sacrificial-gesture." Yet, when the door opens, only Jess is able to enter, because Duncan is not ready "to face it alone," and then at the threshold he loses consciousness. Immediately below the dream Duncan appends a "comment" that interprets the dream as a repudiation of "empiricism" on behalf of the imagination, because in the rite one had to call up the presence, in order to be called. Thus, Duncan writes, the imagination, turning from "yielding to the elemental god" (that is "a submission to the existing forces of the world") does not "escape from reality" but invents "new data of reality." In a very interesting manner, which we might derive from Freud, Duncan does not take the dream's accusation (his fear leading to his failure to enter the cave) at face value, but, rather, he understands that accusation as the shadow cast by his desire for fame and fear of judgment. He inverts the order of the dream, by identifying the "elemental god" with the principle of "reality": "Here in the imagination all things are permitted—are fulfilled and may "live"—in reality, in actuality all things must be disallowed."[105]

The transcription of the second dream is titled "Halls of the Dead." It is dated to 26 December 1955.[106] Duncan's mother is dying. There is a doctor attending her, but his aunt "wants to try an experiment." She directs the dreamer to file through his mother's neck, and he does so. He had feared there being blood, but none rushes out. His mother's head is placed on the table "for a séance." He opens the door of the hall, and "revenants enter." Twice in the dream the dreamer is exonerated of his guilt: first, on the grounds that his aunt had convinced him that his act would save his mother; second, and decisively, on the grounds that his mother had already been dead and that the "operation" had been contrived merely for him to "assume the guilt." Strangely, Duncan

[105] Box 2, Notebook 13, Robert Duncan Collection.
[106] Box 3, Notebook 17.

brackets a comment interpreting the maternal figure in the dream as representative of the mother tongue, and the meaning of the dream being his guiltlessness in writing in his native language. Duncan's lasting and troubled involvement with the memory of his mother has been measured elsewhere, especially in Peter O'Leary's analysis of "My Mother Would Be a Falconress" in *Gnostic Contagion*. And, although we will return to it indirectly in our discussion of the feminine figure of the poem, it is not our concern here.

What these three texts offer us is almost a single archetypical scene, seen from different perspectives and in different narrative contexts each time. The common components are the subterranean cave or hall, sometimes populated by the shades of the dead; the threshold or door that the speaker or dreamer waits at or opens; and the threat or event of destruction. Chronologically the scene shifts int this way: in the "Dream of the Chthonic God," the dreamer is an initiate who falters on the threshold and does not enter the cave; in the "The Life of William Carpenter" this person, the watchman in Carpenter's dream, dwells in the Atlantean realm of shades and, rather than guarding the door, "stands" at it, as the "prophet" of the destruction that is yet to come; in the "Halls of the Dead," the dreamer opens the door but it is the shades of the other side, forces of accusation, who erupt into his realm. In each case, the status of the dead, like the status of the sleeper, is ambiguous, and now it seems that the dreamer or speaker is to resurrect or awaken the dead by a creative act, and now it seems that it is the protagonist himself who sleeps or has died and the dead, who are not truly dead, are to revive him. These elements—the "shadowless door" and the hall—together with the "flames" and "candles" of the poem and notebooks, in Duncan's imagination form a veritable iconography of the predicament of the self, its judgment, and its hesitation on the threshold of what awaits.

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Not every poet would have addressed himself to this problem with such obsessive intelligence and reflexivity. But it was in the nature of Duncan's mind, and in the nature of his *habitus* as a poet, to be unsatisfied with a merely poetic, i.e. practical, solution. He needed to devise a doctrine at once of poetry and of the self in relation to the cosmos that would establish the ground of his work. To do so, as we have seen, he tested out a number of postures and ideas, in relation to his own work and to the few more-or-less contemporary poets whose work inspired and troubled him, sometimes revising and distorting their views. This is why the preceding account seems to vacillate and rapidly switch its tack. However, we are now in a position to define, with some precision, the poetic problem at the center of these various reflections, the crisis out of which arose the radical revisions of "Often I Am Permitted" and of Duncan's poetics in general.

We have referred at different points to the figure of the Accuser as the main actor in Duncan's ordeal. It is Olson who becomes the "Adversary" in the rectifications of "Against Wisdom as Such." It is the woman in Bañalbufar, who accuses Duncan of "playing at" magic, and the child who asks "what good does that do?" It is Pound, pouring out his "bile." It is Blake, who, "Tho [he may] rage against the Tree of Good and Evil, and against the War and suffering therefrom…is the Accuser, not the Redeemer." It is the "hounds of hell;" it is John Davenport; and, in the poem, it is the angels who are the "original critics…hating the human image of God." It is Denise Levertov judging Duncan's ballads as "wasteful." Finally, it is Duncan himself who, "ashamed," chastises himself for his failure to be a poet.

Yet, for Duncan, the significance of the Accuser is not exhausted by reference to acts of criticism, negative evaluations of poem or self, and this incorrigible figure will not be appeased by mere self-confidence. Not even the magical (even, we can say now, apotropaic) bounding of the instant of poiesis, the perfect presence of the poet's body and mind to his own instantaneous perceptions, proposed by Olson and deduced by Duncan from Pound's achievement, will keep him

away. For, while Duncan knows the Accuser as a real specter or being, who has visited him in the hour of his despair, he comes to interpret him primarily an element of poetry, a principal force in the "realization of forms." It is a version of the "portion of being" Blake calls "the Devouring" or "the Giants" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and it is akin to the *sefirah* that the Kabbalists call *Gevurah*, meaning Strength and denoting the aspect of divinity that is Severity or Judgment. In Duncan's own words, "It is man who creates and accuses."[107] It is not that one act makes a poem and the other destroys it, but that the two verbs name dimensions of poiesis, and, as in Blake, without both the creative and the Satanic the poem cannot be. The essay on Blake, Joyce, and the *Zohar* shows the degree to which Duncan understood the intimacy of the two aspects. For example, he writes, "The creative imagination, all of darkness, spits like a wise serpent upon the foolish actual imagination." Duncan goes on:

> The Imagination is intimate with Authority—for it needs a giving over of absolute authority to the Creative Will. "if the Sun and Moon should doubt, They'd immediately Go out." and so we sense the totalitarian regime necessary in that soul that he may take counsel of his angels. It is his cries for Freedom that show the joy of his fancy. So it is when the Imagination has Authority that the poet has fear of doubt—as the Dictator has fear of subversion. As poets—Moses de Leon and Blake are churches catholic in themselves and need Flying Buttresses of Faith to insure their Cathedrals.

Duncan gives a different place to 'fancy" here than it has in Coleridge, for it is the freedom of association that is permitted *once* the "the Imagination" has built its cathedral, not a lesser faculty at all. Fancy is not "intimate with Authority," but, in order to realize its forms, "the Imagination" or "creative imagination" must be. It must "giv[e] over…absolute authority" to the Creative Will in order to repress or drive out the doubt that would, as in the couplet unattributed here to Blake, extinguish its "Sun." Doubt threatens the "truth of the poem" insofar as it qualifies or even denies the veracity of the poem's fictions. And this "Sun" is the Sun as Apollo, the source of form as the

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[107] Box 2, Notebook 15.

condition of the image's visibility, the glorious creation of the imagination that depends on the "totalitarian regime" of the Accuser.

As we will see, Duncan takes issue with the "regime" of the Accuser in the imaginative poetry of de Leon, Blake, and Pound. Yet these three authors represent only one pole of the poetic situation in which he finds himself. The other is represented in the notebooks by Gertrude Stein and Jean Arp. In the same essay, Duncan laments Blake's "contagion" and expresses the wish that he had "brought Arp to redeem my soul." In the paragraph following the one quoted at length above, Duncan writes, "Gertrude Stein's clouds and Arp's stones in the field are so casual that our concourse with them seems inevitable, we as little submit to them or are converted to them as we are converted to the air we breathe. This is the nature of an unrevolutionary art." Duncan may be alluding to the motif of clouds in Stein's *Mrs. Reynolds* and, by "the air we breathe," evoking the beginning of her fourth lecture in *Narration*.[108] It is not clear to which of Arp's sculptures Duncan is referring. Of course, Duncan was, in these very years, just barely emerging from an extended apprenticeship to Stein's poetry, which produced several books of what he called "derivations." In retrospect, we can see how Stein's realizations of "language itself" would have seemed to Duncan an antidote for some of his early excesses of Romance, such as *Medieval Scenes* or "The Venice Poem." Yet, at this moment, certainly by 1955, the limits of her poetics were becoming clear. What Duncan means by "an unrevolutionary art" is implied by his indication of its deficiencies: we do not submit to it, and it does not convert it. In another essay, which focused on the figure of the Metatron from the *Zohar* and dated 25 May 1955, he describes Stein as "court[ing] the demon of absolute aesthetics."[109]

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[108] Gertrude Stein, *Narration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2010), 48.
[109] Box 2, Notebook 15, Robert Duncan Collection.

We can begin to understand Duncan's critique of Stein's "casual" art by referring again to Duncan's critique of Olson, where Duncan had asserted a "Form" of which "form" is one realized potentiality, and to Duncan's interpretation of Pound, where the maker is defined as "man as he is aware of his being in the thing made, and where the "vatic" poet is an "oracle of the language to restore the image of man." Unlike Olson, Duncan situates the discrete creative act, i.e. the realization of form, in the processes of the maker's own realization and of the restoration of the image of man. The Imagination, in poetry, Duncan understands as the image-making faculty, yet he is not concerned so much with specific visual images in the course of a poem as with the image, i.e. unity, of a poem that is "the image of man." Stein (as well as Arp) has come to seem to Duncan as a poet who realized "form" but not "Form," in whose work there is no projection of "the image of man" to which the reader might "submit" or "be converted." His aversion to Stein reflects Duncan's mythopoetic inclination, but more essentially it shows his concern for what he calls (in the same essay that names the two aspects or powers of "man") the "continuity between the fiction and the actual." Let there be no doubt that Duncan's poetics here are "moral"; he says so in the notebooks again and again. Man is plagued by the Accuser and cannot transform his condition by "absolute aesthetics." There is a need for conversion that can only happen by means of a poetry of the Imagination, which makes an "image of man" as a "fiction" or "illusion" that then exists in the verbal construct as a possibility that might be actualized.

In the same essay, this "continuity" is defined as "love." The full passage is as follows:

> Art then is actual (whereas the events of religion are not); but it is also unreal—as all created things are, because it is spiritual. Inner keys are needed for even these created things to be significant. Thus it is as a man in his inner life, in his imagination, can "see" the fiction of the object that he not only sees a statue of Brancusi as what it is but recognizes it as what it might be. When Frank Lloyd Wright says—"Go to the arts and to religion. The love is there" it is this inner recognition, this continuity between the fiction and the actual—however it is, that might be "love." Participation

> in the arts, like participation in religion, means an act of faith; it is by inspiration that we see as Soutine saw in a glob of raw paint an image.[110]

It is, undoubtedly, "love" in this sense that appears in the third section of "Having Been Enraged." And it is no wonder that we find in this section that "the human image of God" (for Duncan, the equivalent of the "image of man"[111]) is closely connected to "love." In fact, the entire angelic drama of that passage now seems clear. The angel, although he speaks "rightly," is "loveless in human powers," as Olson seems to Duncan in his poetics that sever the bond of "Form" and "form." The angels "never saw in Adam God's image," because the condition of "God's image" here is "love," whereas his "angelic image was power." For his "angelic image" to be "power" seems to mean unlimited, spontaneous consummation of Will, yet this is not the condition or "image" of man, whose nature is double and who exists (to evoke Santayana's terms) under the "domination" of the Accuser, i.e. the actual.[112] Yet he is the "human image of God" in the sense that, by his creative act, he is "love," that is, the conduit between "the fiction" and "the actual" by which the actual might be transformed. Thus, it could be said that Duncan sees Stein's "absolute aesthetics" not as lower but as higher than the poetry he would undertake—that it is "angelic." But, insofar as it denies what

[110] Box 2, Notebook 15.

[111] Box 2, Notebook 15. In a text on the systematic duplicity of the Torah, Duncan writes, "Adam is created in God's image (but we are aware that he created a god in his own image), Eve is created out of Adam (but we are aware that child came from the Eve)."

[112] Santayana writes, "All dominations involve an exercise of power, but, as I understand the terms, not all Powers are Dominations…the distinction between Dominations and Powers is moral, not physical. It does not hang on the degree of force exerted by the agent but only on its relation to the spontaneous life of some being that it affects. The same government that is a benign and useful power for one class or province may exercise a cruel domination over another province or another class. The distinction therefore arises from the point of view of a given person or society having initial interests of their own, but surrounded by uncontrollable circumstances: circumstances that will at once be divided by that person or society, into two classes: one, things favourable or neutral, the other, things fatal, frustrating or inconvenient: and all the latter, when they cannot be escaped, will become Dominatinos." George Santayana, *Dominations and Powers: Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1. Also see Box 2, Notebook 14, Duncan Collection, where the following is dated December 1954: "Belief is the whiplash-mark upon self or upon others—or, as in 'Science,' upon the world of the domination. To use Santayana's reflections upon domination and powers. 'Disbelief' as in atheism, or Stan's 'there is no love'—like belief is a term of the dominations not of the powers. 'No ought' sez Confucius, being thus a power, not a domination. 'My kingdom is not of this world' sez Mr. Christ—and here likewise—a power."

Duncan calls "Heaven and the darkest depths, the volcanic fires of Hell," it is a kind of verbal idolatry as well.

If we return now to the poets Duncan associates with the Imagination, we can give an account of Duncan's understanding of their error. Their cathedrals of "Faith," Duncan writes, thoroughly "convert" us, yet "in the Sheol of Belief there is no innocence there is only ignorance." Precisely, there is ignorance of that which they accuse of "disbelief," in other words, the notion or being that they cast out in order to found their glorious structures. And Duncan argues that this "ignorance," indeed "every Flying Buttress of Faith," is "evidence of Doubt"; thus, he locates Blake and de Leon in the underworld, as if to suggest that in their visionary worlds the "Sun and Moon" have "gone out." Duncan judges Blake's prophetic works "vitiated poems" for just this reason.[113] And elsewhere Duncan deploys Blake's own terms for man's fallenness against Blake himself, whose "rage" against "the Tree of Good and Evil," and against "Rousseau, Voltaire, Titian, Bacon, Newton and Locke," in Duncan's view, make him false to his own belief. Referring to the first book of *Jerusalem*, Duncan writes: "like Los [he] rages against his Spectral reason—Blake would set up new wars and torments in the name of Imagination." For Duncan, Blake's "rage," although it serves the construction of his visionary cathedral," entails a persistent opposition between Belief and "spectral" Disbelief, and thus his poem remains fatally divided.

Duncan would follow the Blake of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* who says that "without Contraries is no progression" and later that "Messiah or Satan or Tempter was formerly thought to be one of the Antediluvians who are our Energies, that is, the Blake who would admit both "Reason and Energy" as factors in true poetry.[114] As he says in the essay on Blake and de Leon, Blake "has his

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[113] Box 2, Notebook 15, Buffalo.

[114] In a 1968 essay "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," Duncan returns via Dante and Blake to many of these themes. Thinking of Blake's *America*, he writes: "Blake saw the war within clearly. He saw a figure that we are today

offerings of Salvation, sweet water." Duncan adduces these lines from "Auguries of Innocence" to his point: 'Joy & Woe are woven fine,/ Clothing for the Soul divine." When Duncan says Blake, in his "righteousness," has set up new wars, he means exactly that Blake's poem does not sustain the contrary powers of the Imagination *in their contrariness*. His point is subtle. It rests on a distinction between two modes of accusation: one that casts out that which it accuses, and one that bounds, i.e. gives form to, the creative act. The problem is not so much that the poem excludes Disbelief or whatever it is that is stigmatized and accused. Instead, in Duncan's view, Blake's "rage" results in a kind of idolatry, which, dividing the "image of man," resolves the living movement of contraries into the inner dominion of Belief and the outer objectification of Doubt. As Duncan writes in a March 1955 note attacking Blake's "scorn" for Titian, Blake's "intensity" transforms him into an "artifact of elegance" and his poems into "idols for the elegant."[115] This means that the inner Belief has also become fixed and partial. By contrast, if the "image of man" is to be restored in poetry, the poem must allow his twin aspects as Creator and as Accuser both to be realized and transformed.

We may get a sense of what Duncan imagines from an entry in his notebook, dated 25 May 1955, about the figure of the Metatron in the *Zohar*:

> This rod is Metatron, from one side of whom comes life and from the other death. When the rod remains a rod, it is a help from the side of the good, and when it is turned into a serpent it is hostile, so that "Moses fled from it and God delivered it into his hand." The distinction here is between two conceptions of a serpent-rod, between an art whereby what if it had been permitted would have been a serpent, an agency of the maker's malignant will, is not permitted but transformd, restricted: the maker makes instead a rod which is a serpent as a beauty, a hostility or a vitality or an affection "containd." The malignancy is present but not now as an attack, but as a quality of the object. It is aesthetically, not potentially malignant. This against the hostile concept of the serpent-rod which is that its malignancy is not an aspect but a power to be directed. The "rod" is a scepter—a power in this sense. The "serpent" is a weapon.

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involved in, the freedom that the integration of Man demanded. He saw America as the working-ground of all Mankind. There could be no easy victory. Tolerance could be no substitute for love." Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose,* 222.
[115] Box 2, Notebook 15, Robert Duncan Collection.

It may be surprising to find Duncan making resort to the category of the aesthetic to neutralize the malignancy of the serpent. Yet this is consistent with the treatment of man as an "image," in which the serpent and the scepter are "aspects" not "powers." "Containd," too, seems unlikely, but it is a function of Severity as that which bounds, and it is the signal quality of the "meadow" in the poem. Later, he takes Titian as an "emblem" of the poetics he proposes: "Titian is splendid as an emblem—because his sensuality is pervasive, a sorcerer of the powers of colors enchantments and illusions splendors that would shake, corrupt, dissolve, mere art: but the mystery of his aesthetics—the passion for relation and interrelation, for invention, the assertion everywhere of the work thru the sceptre and the serpent, is unsurpassed."

The same essay suggests the true boldness of Duncan's undertaking, as it pursues its defense of poetry as an "art" from the attacks of Robert Graves (the mythologer and novelist, a companion in Mallorca), who has been asserting that "Poetry is a seizure" possessed only of the powers "for blessing and cursing." Graves' statement troubles Duncan insofar as it repeats the division of poetry into its two aspects, albeit here under different names. For Duncan, the function of "aesthetics," specifically the Modernist aesthetics which he associates with Stravinsky and Stein, is its capacity to render those contrary aspects in patterns of relation that "supercede the tree of goods and evils." It is in the "made thing" that what Duncan calls "the organic wholeness" of the "image of man" can be realized, for it promises a permission beyond Judgment. Scott Hamilton concludes his *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance* with a discussion of Duncan's "revisionary ratios," which are "able to recover, both for himself and for a contemporary poetics, a Poundian legacy that has long been under attack…re-scoring the syncopations and intermittences of Pound's 'cosmic rhythm,'…inflecting Pound's poetic so that the many aporias that appear briefly only to be immediately disavowed are made central to his own poetry." In Hamilton's account, Duncan's configuration of Pound and the French Symbolists—Duncan's "living, reading, and writing (post)-

modernism as romanticism"—"provide[s] us with unimpeachable testimony of a live poetic tradition." Insofar as the Pound that Duncan would recover, according to Hamilton the "Symbolist Pound," is characterized by "proliferating correspondences and linguistic free-play within language itself," his account is true.[116] But, in the years with which we are concerned, the French poets were not on Duncan's mind; casting Pound in a tradition which he himself does not call Romantic, Duncan would have associated such a poetics with the art of Stein and Stravinsky. In a sense, then, his effort is to apply the formal ideas of Modernism to the soteriological drama of "man," on the basis of a conception of the unity of man not dissimilar from Blake's: "Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy."[117] In another sense, he is laboring to realize a peculiarly Romantic and eschatological interpretation of Modernist poetics.[118] It is not simply a matter of rescuing Romantic vision with Modernist form, but rather of revealing in the "unrevolutionary" aesthetics of Modernism a dislocated Paradise or the integration of "the image of man" *in potentia*. Thus, it is not going too far to say that, in notebook after notebook, Duncan has been laboring to synthesize the two traditions of poetry most vital to his sense of his art. It remains for our study of the revisions of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," and Duncan's reading of the *Zohar*, to see how. But, as we have seen, the configuration of these elements in "Having Been Enraged" reflects Duncan's problem and is no solution.

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[116] Hamilton, *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance*, 162. The context is Hamilton's discussion of *Cantos* 25 and 29. And his discussion of Pound's reaction to these "proliferating correspondences" is relevant to Duncan's reading of Pound: "Pound's melopoeic strain, once the access to another realm via an absolute rhythm that intersects the cosmos, now runs counter to Pound's project of 'dissociation' and becomes subject to question as the proliferating correspondences and linguistic free-play within language itself threaten to spill over into the natural world, 'the green virid of the jungle,' now seen as a dangerous, feminine principle which threatens to overwhelm and dissolve the Self. In order to escape this narcissistic world fostered by the assimilating power of sympathy, there must emerge from this play of reflection an antipathetical force which permits a regime of similarity to supplant a regime of identity. Although maintains that the form inheres in the thing ('the stone knows the form'), his 'male principle' is nonetheless required in order for the form to manifest itself, and it thus becomes the cornerstone of Pound's effort to escape the visionary *imaginaire* created by his adaptation of the metamorphic tradition."

[117] Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 34.

[118] This is, in effect, the work his *H.D. Book* undertakes from the very beginning, interpreting the aesthetics of Imagism as a Theosophical mystery, and the poetry of Imagism as rites of initiation.

CHAPTER 4:

ELOHIM

Poetic psychology—alongside the related domains of demonology and eschatology—is by far the prime matter in the notebooks of the 1950s. It forms a nexus to which Duncan's thinking obsessively returns in the crisis of these years. Stein and Stravinsky are found lacking because their art does not engage "the image of man," in other words, the soul and its fate; yet their art suggests to Duncan a possibility not contained in the visionary works of Pound and Blake, namely, a polyvalent poetic form that might incarnate this "image" as an undivided whole.

We have already suggested that, between 1948 ("The Venice Poem") and 1953 ("Poetry Disarranged"), "language itself" became the focus of Duncan's practice—and that the decisive factor in this transformation was his apprenticeship to Stein's poetry. Now, as he sought to understand and realize that possibility, Duncan renewed his investigation of language. His interests, characteristically, were both technical and mystical. He read deeply, if selectively, in two scientific analyses of English: Otto Jespersen's *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* and in George Trager and Henry Smith's *An Outline of English Structure*; Edward Sapir, who was so important to Charles Olson, also had a place in Duncan's research. At the same time, Duncan's immersion in the *Zohar* was directing him toward speculations about the linguistic origins of the cosmos and the magical power of sounds. In our more or less chronological schema, we will be preoccupied with the *Zohar* in this chapter, and in the next chapter we will have occasion to discuss Duncan's reading in linguistics proper, since at least the material evidence of that research locates it during the last years of the decade, when he was at last transforming "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport" into "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow."

Let us put it this way for now: Duncan's idiosyncratic understanding of language consisted in interpreting sounds not merely as the material of language, nor as its music, nor as meaningful (in a kind of Cratylism), nor even as the elements of reality, but as *Elohim,* the plural gods of world-creation. As we will see, this doctrine appropriates, with some intensifications, the vision of the *Zohar*.

This theory was not given full articulation until 1956. It will presently serve us to return to 1952, via the now familiar passage from the end of "The Venice Poem":

> The artist searches out the deepest roots.
> He is violent. He is animal.
> Driven by the language itself
> alive with such forces,
> he violates, desiring to move
> the deepest sound.

Duncan's "Pages from a Notebook" (written 1952; published 1953) has already come to our attention as the site of that sentence ("I am a poet, self-declared, manqué") that drew Olson's reprobation. Throughout its pages play the themes of artistic incarnation, damnation, redemption. Its very final paragraph, however, is this:

> WORKING. I notice basic states, senses for language: all of them possibilities for work. Surely, "the line learnd in the hand"; inspiration, "when they seemingly arrange themselves"; confusion, "I do not seek a synthesis but a melee"; violence, "Driven by the language itself/ alive with such forces,/ he violates, desiring to move/ the deepest sound"; intoxication, "losing so many values/ just for that sound"; sight, "She hesitates upon the verge of sound./ She waits upon a sounding impossibility,/ upon the edge of poetry." Despair, grief, anger, fear—invaluable preparations for being seized by the language to work purposes we had not contemplated.[119]

Duncan does not let us know that second and then the last three quotations ("Driven…", "losing…", and "She hesitates…") are from "The Venice Poem." That poem had not been merely a psychodrama; "despair, grief, anger, fear" are everywhere referred to fluctuations in the poet's calling

[119] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose,* 43.

and work. But these lines, and others, there have their meaning in a dynamic psychic event. "Pages from a Notebook" was written early in the transformation or crisis of Duncan's work in the 1950s; nonetheless, we can already perceive him seeking a poetry that would overcome the diremption of the prophetic or, in this case, amative, self. In selecting these verses, Duncan seems to have two purposes. 1) Obviously he has isolated the lines to emphasize the element of "sound." He has also cut them in a way that locates this "sound" at some spatial extreme, whether it is "deepest" or at "the edge of poetry." The status of sound is rather ambiguous in this passage. In the first case, it seems to be an infernal entity, which "language itself" drives the Orphic poet "to move." [120] In the second case, it seems to be a prize or power the poet wins by some sacrifice (not, perhaps, of meaning, but of the coherencies or directions of daylight). In the third case, "sound" itself hesitates between being a place, with the feminine presence (the queen, the guardian, or the embodiment, of that realm) dwelling at its boundary, and being the incipient temporal event of sounding or speaking. This ambiguity marks the first clause of the sentence; but "the verge of sound" itself enters into a triple equivalence with "a sounding impossibility" and "the edge of poetry," which a) displaces sound, so that it merely characterizes a modality of being, and b) makes it the constitutive boundary of poetry. We will come back to these terms. Now we should say but one more thing about the feminine figure. She is not another version of the poet himself. He is never said to be upon that boundary. Rather, thinking of this "deepest" sound, we should associate her with that "Queen Under the Hill" of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" whose "hosts" who "are a disturbance of words within words." Duncan's sense that sound is infernal is implied also by the pun on "disarrangement" already cited: "Dis in his arranging." The sounds, here, "arrange themselves," independent of the thought or will of the poet. In addition to the physical ligatures formed by

[120] We might think of the famous line from *Aeneid* VII.312, which served Freud as the epigraph to his *Interpretation of Dreams*: "*Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo."* If I cannot bend the heavens, I will move hell."

sound, it is this alterity, manifest in the incorrigible otherness of the goddess and the underworld, that makes sound "the edge of poetry," where the shades speak, as if it were the fosse where Odysseus consults Tiresias.

The second purpose 2) will come into view if we compare the quoted lines to the headings that precede each of them, although, again, there is a residual ambiguity in Duncan's thought. It is not clear if the "the basic states" mentioned at the beginning and then paraphrased as "Despair, grief, anger, fear" are, as he says there, "preparations for being seized by the language," or, as he says above, somewhat enigmatically, "senses for language." The banal meaning of the first possibility is more or less clear: the poet is most available to inspiration in passages of extreme feeling. The second possibility needs greater elucidation. It is implied most sharply by the last item in the sequence, which equates even the sense of "sight" with her liminal orientation to "sound." But, in general, the procedure of the paragraph is double: first, to take a line (perhaps, any line) of the poem as referential to the condition of the poet (*not* the speaker of the poem); second, to reduce that condition to one or another relation to "sound." Thus, "Despair" and "grief" and "anger" and "fear" are construed not as subjective feelings but as "senses for language," in particular, qualities of sound.

We keep encountering doubles. In this paragraph, Duncan wavers between a "melee" of sounds and one "deepest sound," with an uncertainty he will not have even five years later. On the one hand, the numerous sounds of the language, in their similarities and differences, "arrange themselves;" and through these arrangements or patterns, the language comes into form. On the other hand, there seems to be a single pure or primary sound that is both the origins of the linguistic event and the entity to which "language itself" drives the poet or speaker. This is the sense of another stanza from the same section of "The Venice Poem":

> The concrete image moves upward

into the coherent
only in sound,
in the tone leading of vowels,
in the humming, the hesitating.

Here, "the tone leading of vowels" is the medium by which "the concrete image" rises into the poem. "The concrete image" is not a discrete visual or verbal image, as we would assume. Rather, in the context, it is used synonymously with "first form" or "first forms," as if it were eidetic. However, the repeated references to it moving upwards or "lift[ing]" suggest that it is something infernal, like "the deepest sound." Then, when we read, a few lines above the lines just quoted,

He hit upon the image when he remarkd
that *the poet slept within the statue*
while the war raged

we are struck by the possibility that the "first form" is the poet as a sort of dormant power or god. Keeping in mind that "hesitating" associates "the tone leading of vowels" with the feminine figure who "hesitates upon the verge of sound," we may recognize the outlines of a dualistic sexual structure for the poetic event, in which the masculine "first form" moves up through the multiplicity of feminine sounds. In any case, the peculiar hermeneutic of the paragraph from the notebook is taken to its radical conclusion: it is "only" through sound that the speaker or poet comes into being; and, in some sense, it is *as* a configuration of sound that he has his existence.

In addition to the reduction of language to sound, there are at least two other aspects of the "Pages" we ought to note, if only because they will return to play an important role in this chapter. The first is the apian metaphor evoked a couple paragraphs above the one on which we have focused; its header is "THE HIVE." Duncan writes, "The hive of human being: it is this in part we work in composing. Poets, we hear languages like the murmuring of bees. Swarm in the head. Where the honey is stored. An instinct for words where, like bees dancing, in language there is a communication below the threshold of language." The feverish associations of these sentences test

explication, but the verb "hear" instructs us to identify the bees as sounds that "Swarm in the head" (but are not the "honey"?), the dance of which (as a whole, perhaps) "is a communication below the threshold of language." Likewise, reading the later paragraph in the context of this metaphor clarifies, somewhat, the relationship between the "melee" of sounds and "the deepest sound." The second is the ambiguous relationship between poetry and language. There are sentences in these paragraphs that suggest that poetry is a special manifestation, or desideratum, of language, but others seem to locate poetry at, or as, the boundary of language, or perhaps even outside of it altogether ("below the threshold of language"). We are not in the position to sort these out. But what Duncan makes clear in this paragraph is that he conceives of the "possibilities for work," i.e. his poetics, according not to aesthetic principles, cultural functions, or the influx of some spirit, but to the elements and structures of language, and sounds—if not yet phonology—above all.

It should be noted that much of the "Pages" do not expound this vision of poetry. "The Gnosis of the modern world," "the soul," "suffering," "Children Art and Love," and other matters are placed, in sequence, at what seems like the center of the poet's concern. In a certain sense, we can read the final paragraphs as revisions not only of "The Venice Poem" but of the preceding notes, such that those matters are rendered as configurations or functions of sound. There is one qualification to this analysis. The very first paragraph of the "Pages" locates the "mystery" of poetry in "the swarm of human speech" and describes the poet's task as "to draw honey or poetry out of all things." He continues: "After Freud, we are aware that unwittingly we achieve our form. It is, whatever our mastery, the inevitable use we make of the speech that betrays to ourselves and to our hunters (our readers) the spore of what we are becoming."[121]

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[121] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose,* 37.

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Duncan, in the early 1950s, was still very much devoted to the poetry of Gertrude Stein, studying out its forms in several books of imitations. This apprenticeship, as we have called it, exerted a tremendous contrary force on Duncan's Romantic position in the late 1940s, not only introducing into Duncan's poetry Stein's favorite strategies (the suspension of the denotative force of the name; syntactical dislocation) but also imposing *repetition* as the principle of composition—repetition not only of sounds and words, but of syntactical elements—independent of the crises of desire and the unfolding "scenes" of fantasy or myth that had structured Duncan's early work. Thus the play of "sound" and "sounding" in the paragraph from "Pages" is a characteristic gesture. But we can also see, in Duncan's ambiguous statements, tensions within his devotion; in particular, the evocation of "the deepest sound" and the implication of a directional movement *through* space by means of sound stand over against Stein's rapture of intersecting surfaces.

Nevertheless, it must be said that, if Duncan's notebooks and other writings are to be our guide, Olson and Pound played larger roles in the development of Duncan's thinking.

The next few years brought a not inconsiderable clarification in Duncan's thinking. In this development, the importance of his earliest experiences in teaching, first at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State and then at Black Mountain College, perhaps cannot be understated. We will discuss at length his teaching—one lecture, which he may or may not have delivered—at Black Mountain (in Asheville, North Carolina), but the significance of his "Workshop" at the Poetry Center can be briefly described. He taught it in the fall of 1954, that is, just before he and Jess departed for Mallorca. In short, his experience in the workshop summarizes the terms of Duncan's crisis, as we have laid them out in the previous chapter. The problem, again, is judgment or Judgment; and the figure of the Accuser is not far behind such a notebook entry as this:

> If I have had a deep dissatisfaction…with the course of this Poetry Workshop—amounting to an actual illness on several occasions, it is that the questions before us has been the possible success or failure of poems, whether and how we liked or disliked them. It has been not a workshop for poetry nor even a laboratory in the sense of research but a display shop of our critical faculties and inclinations; and as is inevitable in such an approach we find ourselves doctors, professors, judges or prosecuting attorneys of poetry: not poets.[122]

The previous chapter will have made us profoundly aware of what these words mean for Duncan, and we will not have a hard time seeing that the juridical tendencies of the workshop, objectionable in themselves, not only repeat Duncan's inveterate evaluation of himself and his own work but also summon, obliquely, that old specter of greatness. Yet, in this case, which, at least outwardly, does not pertain to his own poetry and the fate of his soul, Duncan is able to imagine a way forward. (Remember, this is more than a year before "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport.)

That way is named in the title of the entry: "The Concept of Rime." In *The Opening of the Field*, this concept will become the center of Duncan's new poetics. In this pedagogical context, it is more limited, and is divided into four "tasks," which are immediately practical or function, but nonetheless illuminating:

> Clearly, I am asking for an entirely different direction. And here is as clear a statement of what I propose as I can make.
>
> 1. We must begin again at the heart of the matter and keep to it. I propose for the coming fall that we explore the rhythmic organization of a poem, beginning with technics but I had better say physics—for in our time technics has been interpreted to mean mere techniques in the artful sense. I mean beginning with the kinds of motion and levels of motion in poetic language; accentual, syllabic, by breath phrase,

[122] Box 2, Notebook 15, Robert Duncan Collection. Of course, this continues to be the common disease of such workshops. What is of interest is Duncan's uncommon treatment. We will find much that is familiar in the subsequent paragraphs of this entry: "I suppose it is of the course of things that a forum of this kind is what comes about. Even if one is bored—and there have been those who were bored—with the hearing of others poems: one waits patiently, for soon one's own poem will have its hearing: judge, jury and court-room audience will be involved in an affair close to heart. And then even when one's own delinquencies are not concernd, there is a very human relish for concern in and for the welfare of others…Well, I take some gratification in the display of my insights, the cultivated ability to size up a given poem in order to display what wit, ingenuity, comprehension, and reference to experience I can. I have only put it so, to make clear that—in that I have a concern for poetry itself—as a realm of human experience in which I may participate but which is larger even and more demanding than any gratification—I have been ill when I have been ill with self-disgust."

> periodic, by repetition, development, variation, contradiction, disassociation etc. That rime, meaning, images, color, texture etc. shld be considerd as aspects of motion in a poem.
>
> 2. We will meet with the idea that we may reach a richer and new sense of what we have been taking for granted: for instance, pro and con we take accentual metrics for granted. That we will work out a feeling for the wider possibilities of motion in a poem and for as many levels and energies as we can detect. IN part to become engaged again with what we assume we know, and in part to explore—an empirical approach.
>
> 3. Poems will be brought to workshops only as materials for analysis or as examples of aspects we are discussing or have discussd. As materials—they will engage us just so far as we can work on them toward the discovery of possible factors in kinetics of language. As examples they will be considerd self-evidence and should need hand have no comment at all.
>
> 4. If this course were to be pursued earnestly, it would mean an exploration of not only what other poets have thot about motion in language [as, for instance, Dante in De Vulgari Eloquentia says: "But of all these the line of eleven syllables seems the stateliest, as well by reason of the length of time it occupies as of its capacity in regard to subject, construction, and words: and the beauty of these things is more multiplied in this line; for whenever things that weigh are multiplied so also is weight."] but also what linguists have to say about motion in language and what psychologists and philosophers have to say about the language of motion itself.

Here, all of the elements of poetry ("rime, meaning, images, color, texture") are reduced not to dimensions of sound but to "kinetics." In a certain sense, this reduction, if it can be called that, responds to the narcissism of the workshop: it is an attempt to entrain the participants' attention on, and thus restore to awareness, the "language itself," independent of subjective experience and judgment. As Duncan puts it, it is an attempt to get a "new sense" of "what we have been taking for granted." Yet we ought to take this reduction seriously in its implications for Duncan's poetics, not just his pedagogy. The interpretation of prosody—accentuation, syllabic quality and quantity, and aspects of rhythm— as "motion" and "physics" does not surprise, yet it does remind us of the spatial dimensions of sound, and of the movements of the masculine and feminine figures, described in the "Pages": "the verge of sound," "the deepest sound," and so on. This makes us wonder if something more than the materiality of sound is meant here, namely, that poetry's soundings—and

the movements of the vocal organs on which they depend, and the vibrations of the ear which they enact—entail a descent (even a *nekuia*) or ascent of a kind of spiritual body. Conversely, these notes make no mention of that single liminal or central sound that the "Pages" had contrasted with the "melee" of sounds. The character of this proposal is "technic[al]" or scientific.[123]

More remarkable is the identification of "meaning" and "images" as species of motion. As with the propositions about sound, the notebook entry does not give us much context in which to interpret the meaning of key terms. "Meaning," if we refer to what immediately precedes it ("repetition, development, variation, contradiction, disassociation"), we could understand *as* the spatial event of the recurrence or non-recurrence of *any element,* imagistic or prosodic, within the order of the poem.

"Image" is more difficult, but we will be able to properly interpret it if we now consider Duncan's "Notes on Poetics Regarding Olson's *Maximus*," which will also bring us into the central region of this chapter. The editors of the *Collected Essays* give us a vague date for its composition, "1954-1955," and tell us that it was first published in *The Black Mountain Review* in the spring of 1956. That essay ought to be read in light of Duncan's ambivalent relationship to Olson in this period, which we have already described. Its title is indicative—Duncan's prime concern is "poetics," not Olson—but even the phrase "regarding Olson" overstates the text's explicit engagement with Olson's writing; that matter is relegated to the last of the three sections. Nonetheless, the essay *does* constitute Duncan's attempt to appropriate the principles of "Projective Verse" for his own poetics, and throughout the essay we find Olsonian ideas without attribution. In general, like Olson's polemic, it proposes a poetry of "energy/embodied" rather than "energy referrd to,"[124] deriving

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[123] But Duncan refuses the word "technics" ("mere techniques in the artful sense"); he does mean something more.
[124] Duncan, *Collected Essays,* 48. The immediate referent of this distinction is the difference between Vorticism and Futurism, i.e. Modernism of the 1910s, on the one hand, and Hofmann, Pollock, Kline, et al., i.e. Duncan's own contemporaries, on the other.

poetic form from physiological processes. As for the kinetics of the "image": we may have here a paraphrase of Pound's description of "*phanopoeia,*" one of the three "kinds of poetry" (along with *melopoeia* and *logopoeia*) set forth in *How to Read.* Elsewhere in the essay, Duncan—substituting "mode" for "kind"—quotes Pound's definition of *phanopoeia* as "a casting of images upon the visual imagination."[125] The throwing or projection of the verbal image onto the mind would be one sense of the image's "motion."

We will return to this essay presently. But, in view of Olson, we should comment on one other word from the workshop notes, and it is the key term of "kinetics." Duncan's uncharacteristic use of this concept probably has its immediate source in "Projective Verse," where the first "simplicit[y]" of "COMPOSITION BY FIELD" is "the *kinetics* of the thing." Olson's elaboration of this principle is: "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it…by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader." Perhaps even Duncan's evocation of "energy" derives from Olson. These appropriations will be temporary as Duncan develops and distinguishes his new understanding of poetic form. But in this essay we already can perceive the divergence of Duncan's poetics from Olson's in phrases such as "the rhythmic organization of a poem" and "repetition, development, variation, contradiction, disassociation," for Olson's text everywhere insists on the sequential emergence of the "syllable" and the "line." The coherence of projective poetry, its magical retention and transmission of the poet's "energy," depends upon the linear continuity of poiesis, as "ONE PERCEPTION…IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD[s] TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION." By contrast, Duncan's evocations of "organization" and the various modes of the interrelation of parts bespeak his concern for the total, complex ordering of the poem, both as a structure and as an event, in which anticipation and recollection have parts to play.

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[125] *Collected Essays,* 49.

In the Olson essay, as in the notebook entry, Duncan is not yet ready to declare this divergence, let alone to work out the poetics in which his crisis will be resolved. Yet we find there, too, the foreshadowings of Duncan's break-through. Duncan tells us that it is in Pound's "description of the third mode, *logopoeia*, that I find suggestions of what I am talking about."[126] After describing the two other modes, Duncan quotes Pound's definition of this one ("the dance of the intellect among words," and emphasizes that Pound "describes this new mode (outside of this reference to the "dance") in terms of *placement and displacement*"—Duncan's italics—"as if he were attempting to convey or define the dance *as it is seen* (a series of photographhd positions of the body playing upon one's visual expectations)."

The true importance of this essay, certainly to our current study, rests in a) yet another reductive definition of poetry and b) the first, but not the last, appearance of the myth of poiesis as "the coming into life of the child."

The reduction is easily described. In his account of Pound's trinity of poetic "kinds," Duncan, as we have seen, turns these into "modes" of poetry. More remarkable still, his summary of Pound's position conflates the three "kinds" or "modes" so that, in the end, a single principle rules over all of them. Pound, in his text, distinguishes these "kinds" by reference to their availability to translation, in accordance with the qualities of that discrete element of language this or that kind employs: *melopoeia* ("wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property") "can be appreciated by a foreigner with a sensitive ear" but it is "practically impossible" to translate; *phanopoeia* can be translated "almost, or wholly, intact"; *logopoeia* does not translate directly, but for the "state of mind…you may or may not be able to find a derivative or an equivalent."[127] Whereas, here at least, Pound is engaged in the analysis of poetry into types, Duncan,

[126] *Collected Essays*, 48.
[127] Pound, *Literary Essays*, 25.

following Olson in founding a poetics on the bodily presence of the poet, takes the three "modes" as "disciplines of movement" in poiesis. *Melopoeia* refers, then, to hearing, to "the physiological mastery ear-wise," by which "sound is 'sound'" and the poem "ring[s] true"; *phanopoeia* refers to seeing, "the discipline of the eye, clarity," which is "acknowledged measure." *Logopoeia* is trickier to understand, but if we consider Duncan's interpretation of it as "the dance *as it is seen*" it would seem to denote the poet's total embodiment in the poem. He writes, "Mr. Pound's *logopoeia* seems to be not only a verbal manifestation but a physiological manifestation… the action of language… ambiguities, word-play, ironies, disassociation." Duncan, transforming Pound's most intellectual "kind" into the dance of the body, would establish the "measurings" of ear and the eye (the two, now subordinate, modes), as well as of the hand, as the grounds of the poem's activity. In this vision, the body, the several senses of which Pound's "kinds" had distinguished, is re-integrated, in a way that recalls the redemptive "image of man" from the previous chapter. "The hand," he writes, "is intimate to the measurings of the eye," and he evokes "a speech in which the eye works." In sum, the making of the poem "expresses" the "disciplines" and the "adventure' of "the locomotor muscular-nervous system."[128]

What we have called Duncan's myth overlays his transformation of Pound's categories and, to an extent, sets them in sequence. It is a myth of ontogenesis. It describes poetry as a "recapitulation" of "the coming into life of the child."[129] Thus, *melopoeia* (paraphrased now as "the recurrence of vowels and consonants, the tonal structure") is the earliest differentiation of sounds, the "conquest of babble by the ear"; it is the "passionate system of the poem." *Phanopoeia* is

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[128] Thus, it becomes clear that Scott Hamilton's statement that "Duncan's preoccupation with melopoeia stems from Pound's emphasis on the 'tone-leading of vowels'; his understanding of 'Rime' derives from Pound's 'doctrine of signatures'; and the *grande collage* contained in his sequence of *Passages* is an extension of the ideogramic method and open form of the *Cantos*" must be qualified. See Hamilton, *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance*, 194.
[129] Duncan, *Collected Essays*, 51.

"conquest of passion by the eye," in which "the reality of what is witnessed disciplines the speech." Finally, *logopoeia* is "the locomotor muscular-nervous system…being calld into the adventure." Just below, Duncan repeats this tripartitie development, now identifying each stage with an element of language. First: "that the breath-blood circulation be gaind, an interjection!"—*melopoeia*. Second, *phanopoeia*, "that focus be gaind, a substantive, the level of vision." Third, "the complex of muscular gains that are included in taking hold and balancing, verbs, but more, the movement of the language, the level of the ear, the hand, and the foot." This final sentence, more than any other, demonstrates the integration of the "modes" in Duncan's thought. "All of these," he writes, meaning the three stages of the development of the organism in language and proprioception, are not to be discriminated in the event or structure of the poem but, together, to be "incorporated in measure."

Although these are "notes on poetics," they propose a theory, or perhaps legend of sorts, of the acquisition of language, which identifies parts of language with a) phases in ontogenesis and b) with b) parts of the body.

In the third section of the essay, which comes, at last, to a discussion of Olson, Duncan discovers in *Maximus* a mythological metaphor for this coming into speech: the "conquest of Tiamat." It is telling that against "the original chaos of noises" ("Against Tiamat"), he places Maximus as "a *makar*," who "wrests his life from the underworld" of babble. But Maximus is, for Duncan, as for Olson, more than a persona in the creation of the poem. Maximus is that projected or "incorporated" body of *logopoeia*. "Maximus…is then Olson," he writes; but immediately he adds, with greater accuracy to the physiological propositions of the second section, "or his measure."[130]

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[130] Duncan, *Collected Essays* 52-53. Incidentally, James Joyce makes another appearance here. Three key works of his are evoked to exemplify the three "modes" or phases. *Portrait of the Artist* is identified with "clarity," and thus *phanopoeia*. *Ulysses* is identified with "the conquest of locomotor writing," i.e. *logopoeia*. And *Finnegans Wake* "returns…to the beginnings, not only in reference (intestinal alimentary mythic meaning levels) but in mimesis, as a thing done (the alimentary babbling speech; the gobbling, the breaking down into). Here meanings are being churnd up, digested back into the original chaos of noises, decomposed." Whereas in *Maximus* we witness "the emergence from vitality of faculties," as Olson conquers Tiamat, Joyce in *Finnegans* "retreats from his faculties to his mere vitalities." Yet Duncan is

It is remarkable that each of these texts, whether in name or in form, comprises "notes." He is working towards something, testing out intuitions, especially in relation to the positions of Pound and Olson. Duncan's shifting terminology in particular is a token of his uncertainty as he searches for a sense of language that "rings true."

With that final identification of Olson (or "his measure") with Maximus, however, we can begin to place at least this final text within the crisis we have described in the previous chapter. We will recall that Duncan found himself as if between the Romantic tradition on the one hand and Modernism on the other. The former, to which he felt naturally closer, represented by William Blake, Pound, and Moses de Leon, took on the satanic aspect of "the Accuser," such that its "cathedrals" of faith and splendor were rent by "doubt." In Duncan's thought, the severity of Judgment, entailed a double division, in both the image of redemption towards which their poetry yearned and also the poetic self. The latter, represented in poetry by Stein and in the other arts by Stravinsky and Arp, seemed to offer an antidote to the Accuser in its fidelity to making and the "made thing," yet, for Duncan, it gained this permission at a cost. Although it managed to "supercede the tree of good and evil," it relinquished the powers of transformation by which poetry could restore the "image of man." It was thus, to quote a word we have often cited, "unrevolutionary."

In the texts we have been discussing, we perceive Duncan working at a conceptual structure that would reconcile the two positions, specifically, it seems, by turning the elemental "kinetics" of poetry, the "placements and displacements" of form, into phases in the realization of that "image." That seems to be the significance, in the "Pages," of the establishment of "the primal sound" in

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apparently uneasy with his evaluation of the *Wake,* perhaps because of his instinct to make the phases simultaneous in poetry (rather than evolutionary phases), immediately revises his position, now interpreting Joyce's "return" in this way: "Joyce sets his faculties at work upon his vitalities." The difference between Olson, who says "that you should not be played with" and Joyce, who "plays with his self," is, Duncan says, "moral."

space: it not only postulates a single point, like the "image of man," in which the multiplicity or "melee" of disparate sounds is resolved; it also construes the interplay of sounds as the medium through which the body of the poem moves *towards* that primal singularity. It is, as well, the significance of the complex revision of Pound's three "kinds," which, in a somewhat elliptical way, are made one and, ultimately, a "discipline" for the incarnation of one body in poetry, that is, the "image of man."

None of these texts present an absolute separation of "language itself" from poetry. They are variously concerned with "working," with the discussion or teaching of poetry, with "poetics." Yet, following Olson in grounding a poetics in the physio-psychological act of poiesis, Duncan's thought tends more and more to conceive of poetry as a reflex of the human being's emergence in language. This is, as we have said, in marked distinction from Olson, whose concern can be said, by contrast, to focus on the emergence of the poem from the human being. Let us recall, moreover, that these were approximately the terms in which Duncan responded to Olson's "Against Wisdom as Such." Commenting on Duncan's "Pages," Olson had accused Duncan of dividing himself from "wisdom" and, thus, of dividing both the Self and the bounded act of poiesis; Duncan's (bruised) rebuttal was that the boundaries Olson had declared were arbitrary, and cut off the singular instance of writing from the unfolding of the "Form" of the poet's life, from which such divisions of the self, or, in Duncan's myth, fallenness, cannot be excluded. The science of linguistics, as well as the science of psychology also mentioned in the workshop notes (Duncan has Freud in mind), however indirectly, offers a structure for referring poetic phenomena to the achievement of that "Form," which means, on one level, the individuation of the human being, and, on another level, the poet's initiation into, and realization of, what Duncan in the *H.D. Book* calls "a life within life." In the context of the crisis we have described, we can see here the outlines of a new idea: the identification of "language itself" with the unconscious, which, properly, is neither the entity Freud imagined nor a

secular Muse, but which is, in a sense, the poet's creator—even as the poet, as *makar*, participates in that creation.

It is worth pondering the role that teaching might have played in these initial developments of Duncan's poetics. For students are found, characteristically or definitionally, in an imperfect state, in an awakening not yet realized. Consequently, the student's self-judgment and the judgment of the teacher—Judgment, perhaps—are the shadowy tenants of the classroom, goading and endangering the education (strictly, the *leading out*) of the student. Duncan's proposal for the workshop responds to these dangers in much the same way that his essays in poetics do, in fact, with a scope larger than that of the essays, namely, by evoking the "communion" of poetry and language and by treating the individual participants not as authors but as participants in the life of that greater organism. Of course, Duncan himself had adopted the orientation of a student in the early 1950s, a student or apprentice in the School of Gertrude Stein.

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That is the background. Now, at last, we turn to the *Zohar*. The date of Duncan's first reading is uncertain. He told Rodger Kamenetz that Kenneth Rexroth introduced him to it in 1954. "Songs for the Jews from their Book of Splendor" quotes two passages from the *Zohar*. "*The Zohar tells us: Verily, altho Sarah died, her image did not depart from the* house" quotes from *Zohar* 133a's commentary to Genesis 24:67. "*As the Zohar tells us: in the same way Jacob sent word to Esau, saying 'I have sojourned with Laban and stayd until now' as much as to say: 'I have stayd with him twenty years, and have brought with me a deadly snake who slays people with his bite'*" quotes *Zohar* 167a on Genesis 32:4.[131] We find a

[131] The quotations from Duncan's "Songs" are from *Collected Early Poems and Plays*, 413-414. The *Zohar* citations are to Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, Vol 1., 31 and 139, respectively. It is remarkable that the first quotation comes from the same section of the *Zohar* ("Haye Sarah") that will give Duncan the image of the "field folded."

version of the second section on an undated page in a notebook that spans 1953-1956. There is no page *after* this entry that is dated, but the editors of the *Collected Early Poems and Plays* tell us it was written May 1953 and published by Cid Corman in *Origin* 14 (Autumn 1954).[132] In the notebook, it is collocated with another passage from the *Zohar*, which, although it is not reproduced in the published poem, provides the poem with some of its language and perhaps its mythological content as well:

> [Now on the fourth day the lights were created; but the moon was created without light, since she diminished herself. This is implied in the phrase "Let there be lights", wherein the term meoroth (lights) is written defectively (less the letter vau), as if it were me'eroth (curses); for as a result of the moon's diminution, occasion was granted to all spirits and demons and hurricanes and devils to exercise sway, so that all unclean spirits rise up and traverse the world seeking whom to seduce; they haunt ruined places, thick forests and deserts. (Zohar II, 149) and (150) [For there is no man falls asleep in his bed in the night-time but he has a foretaste of death][133]

Reading the poem itself, we find ourselves again in the courtroom of the Accuser, as the poet, identifying himself now with "the Well of the Hebrews," now with the diminished "Moon of the rising waters," and now with "the World," defends himself against what he calls the Jews' "world contempt." His vindication would be that, as he says twice, "the pollutions of history are over" and that both "the left side of justice" and "the right side of mercy" are "mute." But his response, which derives its own opposition from the mythopoetic exclusion of the moon, amounts to nothing more than an expression of his yearning for "respite" and "ease." This is another version of the yearning he expresses in the May 1955 text on Blake and Moses de Leon ("I wish I had brought Arp to redeem my soul"); that text follows a quotation from a different part of the *Zohar*'s commentary on Genesis 1:3, and it also evokes the Satanic serpent of the imagination.[134] "Ease" does not come: in

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132 Duncan, *Collected Early Poems and Plays*, 788.
133 Box 2, Notebook 13.
134 Box 2, Notebook 13. "The creative imagination, all of darkness, spits like a wise serpent upon the foolish actual imagination."

the speaker, as if disturbed, cries out against "the serpent jews"; and he asks if, while those "jews" "twisted their story into our story," the Moon "shudder[ed]," suggesting to us that his identity with the "beneficent Moon" is no more.

Such is the evidence for Duncan's involvement with the *Zohar* in 1953. Duncan's first intensive reading in it came in April of 1955, and then again in October of the same year. As usual, his reading notes consist almost entirely of passages copied verbatim from the text, with the page number cited. He made it through the first two volumes of the Soncino edition and left off (at least in the notebooks) after a few pages of the third.

In his initial encounter, as we have seen, what the Kabbalists named *sitra ahra* (literally, the "other side," the demon-haunted realm of darkness) was Duncan's prime concern. Now, his reading is more comprehensive, taking account not only of the many dimensions of Zoharic lore and speculation, but also the text's complex structure and the extravagant (yet methodical) inventions of its hermeneutics. And, as we will presently see, the *Zohar*'s extraordinary cosmogonic myth, which gives a principal role to the Hebrew letters, exerted a decisive influence on Duncan's thinking and led him at last to realize "the opening of the field" and "the structure of rime."

Two texts demonstrate clearly the shift in Duncan's understanding from a primarily physiological poetics—derived immediately from Olson, but already with marked differences—to a poetics based on the creative divinity of the elements of language, phonemes above all. The first is an essay of May 1955 called, in its first notebook draft, "The Gift of Tongues or the Imagination" and then, in publication, "Poetry Before Language."[135] The second is a text of April 1956, written as an introductory lecture for Duncan's class at Black Mountain College. Thus, the former predates "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport," while the latter postdates it by a few months.

[135] It was not published until 1965 in *Wild Dog* 18. Duncan, *Collected Essays*, 456.

Between the 1955 and the 1965 versions, the essay remains largely the same, although a few sentences have been significantly changed. For now, since we are trying to establish a process in time, we will be examining the earlier version.

In important respects, "The Gift of Tongues" remains within the world of the "Notes" on *Maximus*; in fact, it can be fruitfully read as an elaboration of the ontogenetic myth which the earlier text presented under the header of "RECAPITULATION." There, we recall, each phase in "the coming into life of the child" was identified with an element of language; this "coming into life" was said to culminate in the "taking hold and balancing" of the parts of language as parts of the body, so that "All these" are "incorporated in measure." Here, Duncan gives a fuller telling to this story and explicitly addresses his thought to the origins of language. It goes as follows.

"Before words," the several parts of the body (lips, stomach, heart, and so on) made sounds "which were later all the alphabets" but which were then "pure phonetics."[136] This was the living "dance" of the body's proprioception. By contrast, "the brain" was "of ordinary service, a mere clearing organ for "inner communications."[137] Thus, the "body"—Duncan is hesitant to use the word—had not yet been integrated in self-awareness or -consciousness: "there was no sense to anything, not even common sense; all sense was in their senses." Nevertheless, there was (or emerged, Duncan is not quite clear) an "act" in common: "The act was dancing, the product of the act was poetry":

> In one kind of dancing the hand and the eye danced together—thus the hand saw the stones and sticks, and the eye felt them; the foot danced with them which measured the ground and the ear heard accurately the measures on the ground as the accents of the tread and the numbers of the steps and the stretches or durations or silences between the steps. The ear dancing with the foot returned to it the balances which reappeared as stops in the measures. The happy brain, thus was the brain

[136] For example: "g-g-g-g-g-g- went the lips delightedly." Compare with the pure sounds of "Africa Revisited" and "Friedl" from *A Book of Resemblances*, cited above.
[137] Which, even though he offers linguistic examples ("Scratch me, right hand. Yours Buttock"), Duncan insists are not to be thought of as "communications."

> before it grew upon itself, and the heart danced in concourse; and as the brain danced hand no longer determined, nor eye determined, nor ear determined but all became attentive to the full complex of the sum of all their dance as it cleard in the dancing circuits of the brain, and heart and lungs beat faster or slower, set the pulse—which is not the "rhythm" but the tempo of the poetry—according to the dance of the brain.

"So there were inner communications," Duncan continues, "and there were poetries, and then too, there were perceptions"—"useful perceptions," he clarifies. Here, for the first time, the body apprehends a world outside itself, but "it is an organic world…with no language of signs or words." Meanwhile, "All the organs liked to dance in themselves when the great dance was not on."

Let us pause here to say that, on one level, the purpose of this story is polemical. The object of its polemic is the supremacy of the intellect and its ignorance of the "vital inner orders." From one perspective, this is a version of the separation of mind and body, but Duncan keeps his narrative at the level of myth, with the result that the reduction of the body to mere matter is forestalled; the divided parts remain powers or actors and, if we take seriously Duncan's remark that these "vital inner orders" are precisely those "calld throughout the sacred literatures lower orders," they are actors in a primal, celestial drama. In poetry, this ignorance seems to exclude "the dance" and instead found a poetry on one or another partisan abstraction: "beauty, or eternity, or meaning."

Let us also comment briefly on the relationship between this account and the earlier texts we have discussed above. Once again, Duncan proposes sound as the fundamental element of poetry, and sounds as the basic configurations (or "senses") of life; and, once again, "sounds" are identified with the inner "motions" of the body. There are, however, important differences. Here, "poetry" as the product of the "dance" of parts, is primary, whereas in the earlier texts (especially the one on Olson) this "dance" represents the culmination of poetry. Perhaps we can distinguish between two "poetries," by reference to the absolute independence of the parts in the primordial body, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the interrelation, if not integration, of these parts in the "dance"

of mature *logopoeia*. To a similar end, we can coordinate the designation of these "vital inner orders" as "lower orders" with the descent of the poet to "the deepest sound." There are strong associations of this idea to the secularization of the Fall in psychoanalytic theories of repression and cure; in the Olson text, Duncan himself makes one aspect of the connection explicit, writing, "We are perhaps as deraild by the excitements of Freudian psychology as the Middle Ages were by the excitements of Aristotelian logic—with psychoanalysts as counterparts of scholastics, with infantology replacing angelology."[138]

As Duncan's story proceeds, the question of how language first arises becomes more pressing. For, in proposing a "poetry before language," Duncan is not content with nostalgically lamenting a lost purity or merely repeating the separation of poetry and language; rather, he is seeking a "sense for language" in which the primordial "dance" of the body might be restored, a "sense" we might call, precisely, poetry after language.

The fundamental structure of Kabbalistic cosmology is provided by the ten *sefirot*, which are at once the ten emanations of the Godhead, the ten aspects of reality, the ten parts of the human soul, and so on. In its extended improvisation on the first verses of Genesis, the *Zohar* imagines, as we have said, beginnings before "in the beginning." And these beginnings consist in the extraordinarily complex drama in which the structure of the *sefirot* unfolds, especially from *Ein Sof*, which is the hidden God, the initial uncreated endlessness (*Ein Sof* means *No End*; it is also called *Keter*, or *Crown*), to *Hokhmah* (*Wisdom*) and *Binah* (*Understanding*), the second and third *sefirot,* respectively, whose emergence is the preliminary emergence of being. Duncan could have found, for example, the following diagram in Scholem's *Major Trends*;[139] the human body (i.e. Primordial Man,

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[138] Duncan, *Collected Essays*, 52.
[139] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 214.

called by the tradition *Adam Qadmon*) and the Tree of Life are other common organizations of the decad.

How being arises from nothing, and how *Ein Sof* descends into the articulated substance of our world, in a thousand subtleties, is not the only obsession of the Kabbalah.[140] The erotic interaction of *Yesod* and *Malkuth* is also a prime matter. They are a sexual dyad: *Yesod,* meaning *Foundation*, is traditionally envisioned as the divine phallus, concentrating and bearing downwards all the active power of the upper *sefirot*; *Malkuth*, identified with the ancient figure of the *Shekhinah* (a feminine noun denoting the *presence* or *dwelling* of God), means *Kingdom*, and is the supernal body of Israel. Their alienation and their reunion, occurring in the lowest parts of the Godhead, are the supernal events most immediate to human life—and most susceptible to human influence, i.e. magic. Thus, for the Kabbalist, while every word of scripture discloses the movement of one or another *sefirah*, the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings are above all inscriptions of the conjugal relations of *Yesod* and *Malkuth*. And it is not uncommon that we find the companions of Simeon bar Yohai weeping over some verse that reflects their estrangement, rejoicing over a verse that shows them together, even in coital happiness.

We return to Duncan and his question of how language first arises from the "poetry" of the pre-linguistic body. His answer, it turns out, derives from two passages early in the *Zohar*. We will quote at length from the final paragraphs of the essay:

> But the poor brain could not dwell in upon itself; every thing cleard thru orders, orders, orders. Then just as within the yolk of an egg a spot of blood begins pulsing,

[140] The tradition's most famous solution to the problem comes from the 16th Century writings of Isaac Luria and his student, Hayyim Vital, who envision the beginning of creation in an act of *tsimtsum*, i.e. "contraction." See Scholem, *Major Trends,* 261. Scholem describes it as follows: "According to Luria, God was compelled to make room for the world by, as it were, abandoning a region within Himself, a kind of mystical primordial space from which He withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation and revelation." Thus, instead of the traditional vision of *Ein Sof* emanating a primordial point of being, Luria and, later, Vital saw a God who, in the first moment, "descended deeper into the recesses of His own Being," as Scholem puts it. Scholem's famously interpreted this new myth (including, in addition to *tsimtsum*, the great messianic symbol of *tikkun*—the restoration of the primal unity) as a radical and vital revision of Jewish tradition on the basis of the historical experience of exile, especially from Spain in the 15th Century.

> and the pulsing becomes an organ of the pulsing—and then the heart and the circulation of the blood, whose full flower is the body! So, in the most intense pulsation of the brain, in the seizure of the dance, there "emerged from the first darkness a point of scintillation." It is in this that the intellect honors light as deity and creator. This light was a node of the full maze of the dance of the organs which in the seizure had enterd the brain, a pressure point of pulsing which became an organ of the pulsation of all communications which appeard as a circuit system of excitements, as ideas. Whose full flower was the mind! an internal world of the brain's self satisfaction which is calld intellect.
>
> But I hurry beyond my story again. For this "light" that dawnd was born of that dance we were speaking of—the mouth and the ear made motions and heard sounds and this was the "light' and here the phonetics became attendant spirits in the light. But we speak only conveniently here for there was no spirit yet—or only "the light" which was just spirit. In the ecstasy of the dance the communications of all the organs instead of clearing thru the brain came to the brain: and so it was a totality, an all that was the "light." Now as the Zohar tells us, the Holy One—this was the area of the brain about the "light" which became drawn to it and out of it a new brain—an intellect—playd with the letters of the alphabet for centuries before creating the alphabet. This refers to the gathering of the phonetics and the communications of the other organs to the magnet until a rose of brain-order was formd. In this rose of brain-order all perceptions that passd at all thru the brain were gatherd and became senses of things and of the body, the sounds which the idle ear delighted in were arranged, sorted in light of the intellect. It was in the final enclosures of the circuits of light that senses and sounds were enclosed and the sounds along the active circuits became alphabet since groups of sounds made words—that is cohered with a sense. There were few enclosures at first and as conglomeration of sound and sense became a single word-image. Then the circuit could be used by the brain, deeper and deeper engraved or infolded—sometimes the new brain workd rapidly, adding circuits so fast that, poorly made, barely consequent, all effort was lost and sense departed from sound…

The editors of the *Collected Essays* tell us that the origins of Duncan's quotation, "emerged from the first darkness a point of scintillation," cannot be found. This is true, if we search for the exact phrasing. The mention of the *Zohar* by name is not the only indication of the debt of this passage but it is our clue to look there for the source of the quotation. And, if we do, we find, at the very beginning of its commentary on Genesis (after the long "Prologue"), the following paragraph.

> At the outset the decision of the King made a tracing in the supernal effulgence, a lamp of scintillation, and there issued within the impenetrable recesses of the mysterious limitless a shapeless nucleus enclosed in a ring, neither white nor black nor red nor green nor of any color at all. When he took measurements, he fashioned colours to show within, and within the lamp there issued a certain effluence from which colours were imprinted below. The most mysterious Power enshrouded in the

> limitless clave, as it were, without cleaving its void, remaining wholly unknowable until from the force of the strokes there shone forth a supernal and mysterious point. Beyond that point there is no knowable, and therefore it is called *Reshith* (beginning), the creative utterance which is the starting-point of all.[141]

It seems likely that Duncan's quotation is really a condensation of this passage, which is reproduced almost in full (omitting the sentence "When he took measurements…") in his Black Mountain lecture of 1956. For "a lamp of scintillation" he has "a point of scintillation." The "first darkness," which appears nowhere in the Zoharic text, and which allows Duncan to transform the paradoxical "tracing" of light in light ("a lamp" in "the supernal effulgence") and of the "shapeless" in the "limitless" into a simpler emergence of light out of darkness, might have its source in a footnote to the phrase "a lamp of scintillation": the editors offer us "darkness" as an alternate translation of "scintillation." In the more recent Pritzker translation of the *Zohar*, Daniel Matt translates the same phrase (*Botsina de-qardinuta*) as "A spark of impenetrable darkness."[142] We might account for Duncan's revision of this phrase by reference to the fact that his myth treats the "lower orders" of the body as original and "light" as a secondary entity that arises from and, to an extent, destroys their "poetry."

Upon reflection, Duncan's distortion of the phrase is only a local reflection of a much more thoroughgoing revision of the *Zohar*'s myth. (In a certain sense, the role that "light" has in Duncan's story is itself an implicit critique of the *Zohar*, for the *meaning* of *Zohar* is "brightness" or "radiance.") The *Zohar* will not, as Duncan will, make a division between the pre-linguistic and linguistic phases of creation: this first point is, as it says, "the creative utterance which is the starting-point of all." And below: "The *Zohar* is that from which were created all the creative utterances through the extension of the point of this mysterious brightness." With even greater significance for present our

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141 Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol. 1, 63.
142 *The Zohar*, trans. Daniel Matt, Volume 1 (Stanford: Stanford University, 2004), 108.

discussion, at least in these passages the *Zohar* does not distinguish *in time* between sounds and letters, between "utterance" and "inscription." The same "point" which is identified with the "creative utterance," we read on the next page, "consists of the graven letters, the secret source of the Torah, which issued from the first point;" and, coming back again, "That point sowed in the palace certain three vowel-points…which combined with one another and formed one entity, to wit, the Voice which issued through their union."[143]

At this moment in Duncan's story, the "light" is said to have become an "organ of the pulsation of all communications which appeard as a circuit system of excitements, as ideas. Whose full flower was the mind! an internal world of the brain's self satisfaction which is calld intellect." This tells us that the "light," having arisen from "the dance," became in some sense a common "organ" (medium, or channel) for "all communications"; at this stage, perhaps, "the poetry" of the body could still go on as it had, "with no language of signs or words." Subsequently, however, this "organ" became a "circuit system of excitements, as ideas." That is, those communications, which had been irreducibly particular bodily events, were turned into signifiers, with fixed significations, integrated in a single "system," the single purpose of which was the "satisfaction" of the brain—in a word, language.

For the second time, however, Duncan is disturbed by the haste of his telling. The first interjection was: "But you see how difficult it is for my intellect to keep to the story!" Now it is: "But I hurry beyond my story again." Both comments register his "hurry[ing]" as the insidious intervention of the intellect, which preempts the natural unfolding of his "story." "For," as he remarks after the first instance, "the point is precisely that the brain knows little of these vital inner

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[143] Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol. 1, 64.

orders today." In the second instance, Duncan's interruption gives him occasion to describe in greater detail the fate of the primordial sounds.

To do so, he welds another, and very famous, Zoharic myth to the one we have already cited. Before we produce that passage from the *Zohar*, we ought to present for comparison two others, which cast light on Duncan's concept of the "brain." The identification of "the Holy One" with an "area of the brain" is not as gross a reduction as it seems. In an entry in Duncan's notebook, dated April 30, 1955, we find the relevant citation:

> And this is the inner meaning of the text: let there be lights in the firmament of heaven. The omission of the vau from the word meoroth (lights) points to complete unity, to the black light and the white light being only two manifestations of one indivisible light… Herein courses the sin of the primeval serpent who united below but divided above, and so aroused the mischief we still lament. The right way… is to recognize diversity below but unity above and afterwards united in respect to its diverse elements, and so is kept away from the evil power.-- --This is hinted in the word meoroth which is made up of or (light) surrounded by moth (death), just as the brain, symbol of light, is enveloped in a membrane symbolic of the baneful power (sitra ahra) which is death.[144]

This is from *Zohar* 12b. We can also bring forth *Zohar* 19b, which presents the doctrine of *klifot* ("shells") not understood, as in the Lurianic myth, as the "shells" in which fragments of the primordial light lie sunken or hidden, but as the concentric spheres of reality, increasing in their materiality as they extend outward from the primordial point of light. Thus:

> The Holy One, blessed be He, found it necessary to create all these things in the world to ensure its permanence, so that there should be, as it were, a brain with many membranes encircling it. The whole world is constructed on this principle, upper and lower, from the first mystic point up to the furthest removed of all the stages. They are all coverings to one another, brain within brain and spirit within spirit, so that one is a shell to another… The same process takes place below, so that on this model man in this world combines brain and shell, spirit and body, all for the better ordering of the world.[145]

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[144] Box 2, Notebook 14.
[145] Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol. 1, 84.

Measuring these passages against the vision of the brain in Duncan's story, we recognize Duncan's now-familiar transvaluation of terms. The brain that had been the primal emergence of being, the purest light, surrounded by "death," in his telling is still the "light" but now as a secondary creation means death to the "vital orders" of the body.

Now we can turn to the central myth. In Duncan's abbreviated (and, once again, reworked) version, we read: "Now as the Zohar tells us, the Holy One—this was the area of the brain about the "light" which became drawn to it and out of it a new brain—an intellect—playd with the letters of the alphabet for centuries before creating the alphabet." We do not find the *Zohar*'s version in Duncan's notebook from this period, but he presents a long passage from it at a crucial point in the *H.D. Book*. Compare *Zohar* 2b. Let us quote from there, since Duncan abridges what is quite a long tale to include only its essential components:

> **In *The Zohar* of Moses of Leon, God Himself appears as Child-Creator-of-the-World:**
>
> When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to make the world, all the letters of the Alphabet were still embryonic, and or two thousand years the Holy One blessed be He, had contemplated them and toyed with them. When He came to create the world, all the letters presented themselves before Him in reversed order. The letter *Tau* advanced in front and pleaded: May it please Thee, O Lord of the world, to place me first in the creation of the world, seeing that I am the concluding letter of *EMeTh* (Truth) which is engraved upon Thy seal.
>
> **One by one the letters present themselves. At the last,**
>
> …the Beth then entered and said: O Lord of the world, may it please Thee to put me first in the creation of the world, since I represent the benedictions (*Berakhoth*) offered to Thee on high and below. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her: Assuredly, with thee I will create the world, and thou shalt form the beginning in the creation of the world. The letter Aleph remained in her place without presenting herself. Said the Holy one, blessed be His name: *Aleph, Aleph*, wherefore comest thou not before Me like the rest of the letters? She answered: Because I saw all the other letters leaving Thy presence without any success. What, then, could I achieve there? And further, since Thou hast already bestowed on the letter *Beth* this great gift, it is not meet for the Supreme King to take away the gift which He has made to His servant and give it to another. The Lord said to her: *Aleph, Aleph*, although I will begin the creation of the world with the *beth*, thou wilt remain the first of letters. My unity shall not be expressed except through thee, on thee shall be

> based all calculations and operations of the world, and unity shall not be expressed save by the letter Aleph. Then the Holy One, blessed be His name, made higher-world letters of a large pattern and lower-world letters of a small pattern. It is therefore that we have here two words beginning with *beth* (*Bereshith bara*) "*in-the-beginning He-created*" and then two words beginning with *aleph* (*Elohim eth*) "*God the.*" [146]

The boldface marks Duncan's own comments, the second of which stands in for the procession of the nineteen letters between *Tau* and *Beth*. Other than a couple changes in the italicization and punctuation, these excerpts are transposed exactly from Sperling and Simon's translation. Duncan quotes it in the rapturous sixth section ("Rites of Participation") of the first Book of his study, and this section, the editors tell us, was not written until 1961 (the *H.D. Book* having been commenced in the summer of 1960); it was later published in *Caterpillar* in parts in 1967 and 1968.[147] It is tempting to illuminate his use of the passage in 1955 by reference to his discussion of it six years later, for he makes explicit there what we have sensed in the earlier context, given one articulation in a quotation from Nietzsche that immediately precedes the *Zohar* citation: "The maturity of man…that means, to have reacquired the seriousness that one had as a child at play." Duncan identifies the deity "toying" with the letters as a version of the "child at play," the letters with "alphabet blocks, the animal and human dolls," the Kindergarten as a "recreated stage set of the mythic Garden." As he goes on, weaving, in his way, lore and wisdom, the discoveries of psychoanalysis and the data of anthropology, he comes to that faculty or power which had given "The Gift of Tongues" its alternate title: the imagination. And it is "in the fullness of the imagination" that letters and sounds

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[146] Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, eds. Michael Boughn and Victor Coleman (Berkeley: University of California, 2011), 158-159.
[147] Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 647.

of language "present themselves" as "powers" and that the "Self…in a rite of play" can participate in the primordial play of the "Child-Creator."[148]

But we are still in 1955, and Duncan is being led to very particular intuitions by his reading. If we compare the Zoharic myth to Duncan's version in "The Gift of Tongues," we find that Duncan has substituted the creation of the alphabet out of the primordial "phonetics" for the unilinear inscription of the Torah out of the free play of the primordial letters. Duncan also retains the scene of judgment: his "In the ecstasy of the dance the communications of all the organs instead of clearing thru the brain came to the brain," seems to be a version of the *Zohar*'s "all the letters presented themselves before Him." Yet the *Zohar* does not have Duncan's ambivalence about this juridical procedure, a) since it does not posit a time or body before language (the letters are already—from the very beginning—divided) and b) since the fates allotted them are proper to their different natures. For Duncan, the emergence of the "brain" constitutes the emergence of judgment out of the excitement of the dance, which does not so much create the world as write limitation all over the primordial body. In a process that follows stepwise from this apparently unaccountable event, first, the sounds become "senses of things and of the body," perhaps in an initial onomatopoeia; then, in the "final enclosures of the circuits" they become the "alphabet," "since groups of sounds made words—that is cohered with a sense." And then the brain not only "used" this "circuit" and "engraved or infolded it…deeper and deeper" but "workd rapidly, adding circuits so fast that, poorly made, barely consequent, all effort was lost and sense departed from sound."

[148] It is notable that Duncan calls the *Zohar*'s myth a "primal scene." And that he finds a description of "the process of a poem" in a passage from Hayyim Vital's principal work, *The Tree of Life*: "The imaginative faculty will turn a man's thoughts to imagine, and picture *as if* it ascended in the higher worlds up to the roots of his soul… until the imagined image reaches its highest source and there the images of the supernal lights are imprinted on his mind *as if* he imagined and saw them in the same way in which his imaginative faculty normally pictures in his mind mental contents deriving from the world." Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 160.

Thus, in contrast with the *Zohar*, and very much in continuity with his concern for "the image of man" we developed in the last chapter, Duncan presents this Adam or infant enclosed by writing. Sounds are no longer the dancers, the irreducible powers, of a primordial poetry but are fixed in signs that, although they initially are the "senses" of things and of the body, entirely "depart" the now intellectual system, even cosmos, to which they had given birth. And that is language after poetry.

It is notable that "engraved"—which here denotes the brain's inscription of its language in the body—is a metaphor in the *Zohar* for the initial creation of the world. For example (the "lamp" is that same "lamp of scintillation," the primordial point of light): "When the most Mysterious wished to reveal Himself, He first produced a single point which was transmuted into a thought, and this He executed innumerable designs, and engraved innumerable gravings. He further graved within the sacred and mystic lamp a mystic and most holy design…"[149] Duncan's use of the word "infolded" here is also remarkable, given the primary role a form of that word will play in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow."

Before we see how this picture of language is brought forward by the lecture at Black Mountain College, we must comment on one peculiarity of Duncan's text. It pertains to the curious absence of writing, and reading, from his story. For the alphabet of which he writes is as if a mystic alphabet like the one envisioned by the *Zohar* and the words which are "engraved" in the primordial body are called by a name suggestive of an interior entity: "word-image." We are left wondering about the various *techne* on which Duncan's own practice depends: the ink-writing with typewriter or pen, the printing of poems on paper. Not only on which his practice depends, but also by which, and only by which, he might restore the "image of man."

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[149] Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol. 1, 6.

Toward the end of Duncan's story, it is revealed that *not all* of the body's communications are taken into the "circuits" of language. In fact, it turns out that it is precisely the exclusion of certain sounds that founds the new order. For, Duncan tells us, there remains "organic experience exclusive of the brain—actual visual pleasures or aural pleasures, or oral pleasures" that are "unintelligible to the intellect." All of this experience is classed by the emergent intellect as "inconsequence" as opposed to "consequence;" "meaningless" sounds or "nonsense" as opposed to "meaning;" and finally mere "phenomenon" as opposed to "the eternal images of the mind." Thus, the primordial sounds which are not "engraved" are not absolutely lost but, surviving the conquest of language, live on as "amusement," a transient "non-sense" that "entertains" the brain. Actually, Duncan divides the category of "nonsense" into that which "entertains" and that "serious nonsense" which "the senses perceive but never communicate thru the precincts of the brain accessible to the intellect." In this, the primordial function of the brain as only a "clearing house" persists. It is as though the Adamic "dance" in some shadowy way goes on, within the body but outside of language.[150]

At last, Duncan tells us, it is writing that sustains this repressive regime. For it reproduces on the "printed page densely word-full" the "eternal images of the mind," allowing the "pleasure" of the intellect to be "the entire pleasure, undistracted by the fancy that the eye might be enjoying

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[150] There is an uncanny resonance between Duncan's account of the emergence of language and that which Roman Jakobson developed in *Child Language, Aphasia, and Phonological Universals*. Duncan owned this book, which was written in German between 1939 and 1941, but his edition is the 1968 translation published in The Hague. We refer to Daniel Heller-Roazen's interpretation of Jakobson in the first chapter of *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*, which is called "The Apex of Babble." According to Heller-Roazen, for Jakobson (as for Duncan), "no limits can be set on the phonic powers" of the infant. But, as the child passes from the "pre-linguistic stage to the first acquisition of words" (Jakobson), not only are the "phonic powers" lost which are not necessary for his mother tongue but also, according to Heller-Roazen, "many of the sounds common to his babble and the adult language also now disappear." For Heller-Roazen, Jakobson's account suggests that the acquisition of language is an "act of oblivion." But he wonders, in the close, "Do the languages of the adult retain anything of the infinitely varied babble from which they emerged?" And he answers: "If they did…it would be only an echo, of another speech and of something other than speech: an echolalia, which guarded the memory of the indistinct and immemorial babble that, in being lost, allowed all languages to be." See: Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 9-12.

pictures or variations of space and dark, or that the ear might be hearing sounds and so having joys unknown to the true reader." Thus, it seems to reproduce as well, in the "circuit" of the internal "world-image" and the written word, the internal "circuits" that had given the brain such "self-satisfaction." Nevertheless, as, within the body the senseless sounds continue their communications, so, too, in reading, the eye and the ear and the mouth have not been utterly vanquished; the control of the monarchic intellect is imperfect and needs, constantly, to be imposed: "he exerts a powerful control to be sure that his mouth does not actually move." Are these survivals portents of a written poetry that invites the eye and ear and mouth into its dance? We hear resonances in such prospects of the Duncan's revised *logopoeia* that would be a dance of the entire body. Even as "Poetry Before Language" strives toward the new poetry, in its final, ambiguous sentence, we are reminded of Duncan's crisis, which is the fraught context of these explorations: "Thus reading aloud to oneself is a sure road to intellectual envy and despair."

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Dated April 4, 1956, the text that Duncan prepared for an introductory lecture at Black Mountain College brings to a close the particular passage of thinking with which we have been concerned.[151] In remarkable ways, it combines and re-casts elements from the essay on Olson, the Workshop notes, and "The Gift of Tongues." It also returns us, in almost every passage, to that crisis in which Duncan found himself, which we saw so acutely expressed in "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport." The danger of Judgment and division on the one hand and of an

151 Box 2, Notebook 19.

“unrevolutionary” art on the other, the definition of the poet as *makar*, the redemptive prospects of poetry—this is the very substance of the lecture, but, here, finally, it is modulated by Duncan’s slow and protean study of *The Zohar*, which has been running parallel to the process we described in the previous chapter. Our sense of recognition is acute when Duncan speaks of “the task” of the poet, not only because he sets at its poles Blake and Stein (as if they were as different as “the African story-teller” and “Joyce”) but also because salvation is brought forth as the ultimate aim of poetry: “But this other concern is ours, it is because we share this task with Blake as well as Stein, with the African story-teller as well as Joyce, that we will study their work. To abolish sentimentality that the thing itself emerge, liberating the man.”

The proposed plan for the course closely resembles Duncan’s revised program for the San Francsico workshop. “We will be detectives not judges, explorers and mappers, not real estate agents; geologists not bonanza seekers. Week by week we will study the following: vowels, consonants, the structure of rime,—these are the elements of tone in writing both what we call poetry and what we call prose…Then three weeks on elements of movement, what is often called “metrics.” The syllable, the word, the phrase, the line, the paragraph, and the sentence….The seventh week you will each of you read and analyze for the group a passage of prose and one of poetry of your own choosing; and a poem and a prose piece which you have written.” As we might expect, we find Duncan anxious to emphasize analysis over “values… ‘good’ or ‘bad.’” When Duncan evokes the “beginnings of language,” in a version of the same story we have read in the Olson text and in “The Gift of Tongues”—

> Now let us return to the beginnings of language or rather even earlier, the beginnings of babel, sound making in the child. The infant explores all the sounds possible and he runs often the gamut of linguistic phonetics—he uses the labials and trills, the clickings and explosives which later he will not find in use, in the speech about him. Many sounds that will never be of use give their useless pleasure. Pleasure and discovery make an individual use even where there many never be a social one. But if we look abroad, somewhere, in Alaska or Africa, we will find there these intimate

> mouthings of our baby, babble-hood, are phonemes, foundation blocks of a foreign language.

we immediately see a homology between the course of the class and the infant's coming into language, as if the class, in its progressive exploration of the structures of language and poetry, is to ritually reenact that primary initiation.

Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, which had provided the Workshop notes with an illustration of "what poets have thot about motion in language" ("But of all these the line of eleven syllables seems the stateliest, as well by reason of the length of time it occupies as of its capacity in regard to subject, construction, and words: and the beauty of these things is more multiplied in this line; for whenever things that weigh are multiplied so also is weight"[152]), furnishes the incipit and central theme of the present text: "what we call the vernacular speech is that to which children are accustomed by those who are about them when they first begin to distinguish words; or to put it more shortly, we say that the vernacular speech is that which we acquire without any rule, by imitating our nurses."[153] When, immediately, Duncan comments, "In search of the makings of poetry we are going to turn back to the very seeds of language, back to that first beginning to distinguish words which is a beginning of nearly distinguishing the world," he is shifting the ground of Dante's discourse, to bring Dante closer to the *Zohar* and to conflate the coming into being of the infant and the creation of the cosmos. In doing so, he does not remark Dante's own words on the origins of human language, not just his analysis of its origins in "natural instinct" (I.iii.1) but also his commentary on Genesis 1 and the divine gift of speech (I.iv-v), as well as on the story of Babel in

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[152] The citation is to *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.v.3. The quotation says nothing of movement, but its coordination of time and weight would appeal to Duncan in his pursuit of "the Dance." Its position in Dante's treatise may be significant, for it is with this section that he leaves behind "the gravity of subject matter" (*gravitate sentiarum*) and turns his attention to "the magnificence of the verses" (*superbium carminum)*. Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia,* edited and translated by Steven Botterill (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 59-60. Duncan's edition, which I do not yet have in my possession, is: Dante Alighieri, *A translation of the Latin works of Dante Alighieri*, translated by A.G. Ferrers Howell and Philip H. Wicksteed (London: J.M. Dent, 1940).

[153] This, of course, is the famous beginning of Dante's treatise, I.i.2.

Genesis 11 (I.vii-viii). This omission retains the implicit identity of the origins of language and the infant's acquisition of language, which Dante dissolves: for him, the origin of language, and languages, especially the division of tongues, strictly precedes and predetermines the conditions of the infant's coming into speech.

Then Duncan cites Mark 10:14 ("Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein") to shift from Dante's terms toward the sense of a second or salvific childhood. Christ's stricture, evoking as it does our distance from the given paradise of childhood and the uncertainty of our entry into the Kingdom, contains, Duncan says, a "bitter reality"—

> but there is also a hint that heaven is like a seed given, implanted—or it surrounds us in our childhood, we read it with a creative will that searches out love in our parents, to learn its ways there, and gradually to enter, however, we can find the means, the world of human meanings, the created world as the imagination grasps it—of all imagined relationships: beauty, orders, heights and depths, rhythms and the music of the spheres.

In these words, and indeed in the Biblical verse (no matter their "bitter reality") the difference between this text and "The Gift of Tongues" already appears. For the earlier text, in its revisions of the Zoharic myth, had told the story of the coming into language as a version of the Fall, culminating in the end in a language (perhaps typically, writing) that is nothing more than a self-satisfied circuit, alienated from the body that gave birth to it. Here, however, the acquisition of language is no loss at all but, instead, the child's initiation into "the created world," an occult reality or "life within life" that must be sought out or read by the keys language provides. We saw that Duncan again tells that myth of the beginnings of language, focusing on the plenary phonetics of infancy. In this context, the sense of this "look[ing] abroad" seems to duplicate the true meaning of the infant's initiation, namely, that the primary paradise of his body, if it is regained, is not regained in the body alone but in the cosmos.

"Love," as what is searched out in the parents and then in the world, ought to be taken in the sense we understood it to have in "Having Been Enraged" and the surrounding texts: that is, as that conduit between life and the "life within life," between the actual and the fiction, by which the actual might be transformed. And, if we are not incorrect, it is the writing of that poem that, in its failure, made all the difference between the pessimism of "The Gift of Tongues" and the optimism we find here. The explicitly nostalgic vision of the limitless sounds of infancy, of the countless defunct Elohim, which repeated the prophetic or Satanic separation of poetry from language, has gone away. This happens because, even though the sounds are still primary, they are now not divided from language but seen (as was implicit before) as "the seeds of language," surviving in the speaking human being. Moreover—and this is decisive—in the union of the Zoharic myth and the pedagogical program (which shows us the passage of the emergent speaker through the grades of language), the independent, yet interrelated, creative power of the primary sounds seem now to be the possession of all of the elements of language, including elements of prosody (e.g. "the line") and syntactical units (e.g. "the sentence"). Now these powers are not outside of language, but within language, even "language itself," and in their "kinetics" their "dance" will be like the "dance" that was placed before language in the earlier text. Such a transformation, we must say, forms the basis of a poetics; and that sense of poetic form, which we will reconstruct in the next chapter, is the basis for the restoration of "the image of man."

The Zohar, once again, plays a central role in Duncan's thought. Before we consider it, we should remark the importance of Rilke for Duncan's sense of the cosmos. Rilke is quoted at length several times. Immediately after the citation of Mark's Gospel, Duncan writes:

> Rilke writes: "if you can manage it, return with a portion of your weand and grown-up feeling to any one of the things of your childhood with which you were much occupied. Consider whether there was anything at all that was closer, more intimate, and more necessary to you than such a thing. Whether everything—apart from it—was not in a position to hurt or wrong you, to frighten you with a pain or confuse

> you with an uncertainty. If kindness was among your first experiences and confidence and not being alone—are you not indebted to it? Was it not with a Thing that you first shared your little heart, like a piece of bread that had to suffice for two?... This small forgotten object, that was ready to signify everything, made you intimate with thousands thru playing a thousand parts, being animal, and tree and king and child—and when it withdrew, they were all there."
>
> Let us think of this Thing as the Kingdom of God of which Christ speaks. Mrs. Carter, a protestant Christian who attended a workshop in poetics in San Francisco in 1954, said that she understood people thru God and this was the heart of her morality, God made her "intimate with thousands." To understand what I am trying to get at about the seeds of poetry in language, we must think of them as the received Kingdom of Heaven in childhood or as the Grace of God in the human soul or the love of parents in the human heart. These are all gifts, our genius is to receive them, and if we write poems it is as a gift in homage to the language, just as, if we come unto Christ as little children, it is a gift in homage to the Kingdom of Heaven. "This Something," Rilke writes, "worthless as it was, prepared your relationships with the world, it guided you into happening and among people, and further: you experienced thru it, thru its existence, thru its anyhow-appearance, thru its final smashing on its enigmatic departure, all that is human, right into the depths of death."

The quotations from Rilke, familiar from his writings on dolls and the "doll-soul," are from one of his essays about Auguste Rodin; it is not clear what edition Duncan was reading in.[154] Later, Duncan quotes Rilke again, this time from a letter to Witold von Hulewicz about the writing of the *Duino Elegies*. Duncan will not accept Rilke's vision entire, but the passage is rife with words and concepts that will resonate in, and direct, Duncan's own thinking:

> We, the men of the present and today, we are not for one moment ourselves in the world of time, nor are we fixd in it; we overflow continually towards the men of the past, towards our origin and towards those who apparently come after us. In that most vast, open world all beings are—one cannot say "contemporaneous," for it is precisely the passage of Time which determines that they all are. This transitoriness rushes everywhere into a profound Being. And thus all the manifestations of the Actual are not to be used as mere Time-bound things, rather are they to be embodied, as far as lies within our power, in that nobler significance which we too share. With a consciousness that is purely, deeply, serenely earthly, it behoves us to bring the things we here behold and touch within the greater, the very greatest circumference. Not into a Beyond whose Shadow obscures the Earth. (This is the religious, other-worldly view, and Rilke contrasts it with the poetic) but into a Whole,

[154] The relevant passage can be found in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces*, translated by G. Craig Houston (London: Quartet, 1986): 44-46.

> into the Whole… Such is our task: to impress this fragile and transient earth so sufferingly, so passionately, upon our hearts that its essence shall rise up again, invisible, in us. We are the bees of the invisible. "We gather the lost honey of the visible in order to store it, in the vast gold hive of the invisible."[155]

Rilke's revelation of that place he calls "the Open," which forms the center of the Eighth of his Elegies, echoes in Duncan's name for *The Opening of the Field*. For Rilke, as for Duncan, poetry surmounts the division of essence from appearance, and of sense from sound, yet it still performs an act of transmutation; it does not do what Duncan's jealous brain does, casting out sound as mere "phenomenon," or, here, "transitoriness," nor does it do what that brain had done at first, taking sound up into an "eternal image" ("a Beyond whose Shadow obscures the Earth"), but it does "bring the things we here behold and touch within the greater, the very greatest circumference"— "into the Whole."

Duncan, in his continued fidelity to sound, does not follow Rilke in those final sentences that reckon visibility and invisibility. But the bees, in the sweetness of their work, and in the coordinated multiplicity of their dance, have been vital to Duncan's vision at least since 1953; we remember that the first section of those notebook "Pages" was titled THE HIVE.

The bees furnish another vision of "the dance" that Duncan had already spoken of in the lecture: "Poetry I would picture now as a dance of the language and we would be among the dancers; as a bursting forth of song among the images and we would join the singers, as a [?] gardening of green forms and we would be among the gardeners." We are familiar with these terms and images, but it is notable that Duncan speaks of "Poetry" and not "the poem," and of "the language" and not "language," "we," not "I." This, again, indicates a) the dispersal of creative power from the individual sounds into all the elements of language and b) the cosmic place of the "image

[155] The edition Duncan was reading was Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke: Volume II: 1910-1926*, translated by Jane Bannard Greene and M.D. Herter Norton (W.W. Norton: New York, 1948). The citation is to page 374.

of man." Duncan's reflexive announcement that "I weave backward and forward…I want you to get these voices of other men, in another time, who knew or who had intimations of the possibilities in the art which dictate our approach to techniques and self," alerts us to the hive-like structure of this text. He also evinces a remarkable self-consciousness when he quotes the "Coda" of "The Venice Poem" as an instance of "our infant creator in a world coming into being," not only rescuing it from retrospective judgment but also setting the poet's vocation in correspondence with the coming into language of the child and the creation of the cosmos.[156]

His statement about "the dance" allows us, at last, to return to *The Zohar*, for it is his answer to the question: what are the seeds of language? As we have said, they seem to be the sounds of language—and, indeed, they are. But later he will quote a passage from *The Zohar* that glosses that phrase and clarifies Duncan's revision of his earlier account of the origins of language. It is from the same section that gave Duncan "the point of scintillation": "This 'beginning" then extended and made for itself a palace for its honor and glory. There it sowed a sacred seed…What is this seed? It consists of the graven letters, the secret source of the Torah, which issued from the first point." The distinction is subtle but important, and its importance rests in Duncan's selection of these sentences. For, in the earlier myth, this seed (which is the equivalent of the "point of scintillation") had marked, in its emergence, the brain's usurpation of the organism's primary freedom, and it had contained the letters which would engrave their "eternal images" in the body. But, in this context, the "seeds" have

[156] The lines are as follows, and they, too, seem to claim a preternatural awareness of the position they will have in Duncan's career:

> The sapphire pendant
> dangled above the eyes
> catching the light
> on the soothing voice
> in whose ambience first
> faith was full:
> these things are earlier
> than we know.

already been identified with the primal elements of language, i.e. sounds, and thus the "sounds" become the source of the letters. We witness the same displacement of the earlier structure of thought in other citations in the lecture ("This 'shining' corresponds to the movement given by the accents and notes to the letters and vowel points which pay obeisance to them and march after them like hoops behind their kings. The letters being the body and the vowel-points the animating spirit, together they keep step with the notes and come to halt with them"), which "The Gift of Tongues" had omitted but which find *The Zohar* projecting a radiant dance of letters and sounds. Or, more precisely, sounding letters, for those "accents and vowel points" are the diacritical marks (*neqqudot*) that, by distinguishing between graphically indistinguishable consonants and by indicating the vowels (which are never inscribed), allow Biblical Hebrew to be read. Although *The Zohar*'s identification of the "vowel-points" with "the animating spirit" suggests a mystical interpretation of the writing of Hebrew, it also reflects the physiological distinction between the consonants that, by means of the teeth or tongue or another organ, obstruct the breath and the vowels that, by the various shapes they give to the aperture of the mouth, permit the breath or are the breath—"the animating spirit."

The lecture concludes in words that, for us, having studied Duncan's reflections in crisis, are as if supercharged with significance. For Pound's Heracles enters to speak, on behalf of his creator, of a coherence to which the divisions wrought by Pound's scorn are naught. Duncan, that is, makes Pound the evangel of Duncan's own poetics, which will consist not in the tripartite division of the art but in the coherent world-creating dance of the Elohim of language. Yet there is more to Duncan's citation. For "Splendor" is the ordinary meaning of *Zohar*. In one sense, *The Zohar* has become, as we have tried to show, "the essence of the art" for Duncan. In another sense, the "splendor," which, in the *Zohar*, shines in the beginning of the world, is no longer (as Duncan previously had it) the product of "the dance" but is drawn down into "the dance" itself, as the radiance of the restored whole:

And we may come back at last to the child who seeks to enter the community of language not to teach or to learn, nor to instruct or to persuade, but to participate in the new medium, thru it to commune with, to come into tune with, that "silk worm enclosed in a palace of its own building, both useful and beautiful", toward the inward realization of a human splendor there. "Splendor," Heracles cries in Pound's Women of Trachis "it all coheres."

This is the essence of the art.

CHAPTER 5:

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD

In a 1954 letter to Charles Olson, Duncan describes his discontent with the San Francisco State workshop in these terms:

> I think I started wrong way round now on the tonal end—that is—I am prone to vowel and consonant development by echoing affinities. But that is so easy to accept and obscures the vital composition by the affinities of dis-resemblance.[157]

We have seen Duncan attempt to revise the direction of the workshop by substituting the analysis of "kinetics" for the judgment of value; the significance of that text ("The Concept of Rime") was that, apparently for the first time in a pedagogical context, Duncan presented the "dance" of language both as a resource against the poisonous division of the "image of man" and also as a context for initiation, i.e. the restoration of that image. The statement to Olson, by contrast, sets forth a different distinction, which anticipates—and summarizes—the long and complex development of Duncan's thinking that has been described in the preceding chapter. It repeats the process we observed in his use of the *Zohar*, as well, for it transposes the principle of "affinities" controlling "tone-leading" in poetry (a poetry "driven by language itself") onto language as a whole, understood as an articulated system of "affinity[y]" and "dis-resemblance."

Duncan's self-censure has its place here, because it represents a very early use of the key term, "dis-resemblance." If there is any statement in Duncan's writing that would define the cosmological basis of the new poetics, it is to be found in "Structure of Rime II":

> *An absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance establishes measures that are music in the actual world.*[158]

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[157] Robert Bertholf and Dale Smith, editors. *An Open Map: The Correspondence of Robert Duncan and Charles Olson* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2017): 45-46. See Adam Katz, "serves them," in *Eight Centennial Essays on Robert Duncan*, edited by James Maynard, *Blazing Stadium* 8 (2021): 111.
[158] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 9.

The hyphen in the earlier usage reminds us of Duncan's pun on disarrangement, which we have already cited: "Not a derangement of the senses but, yes, there is an occult other sense of meaning in all dis-arrangements (Dis in his arranging). What was it that I imagined the language to be? Not mythy (except as there is the actual mythy evening, an atmosphere or preconception at best of the darkness of the actual night)—Not visionary (except as the seen is real in its intensity; this is a scene wordwise). But a hut of words primitive to our nature. The Language in its natural disarray."[159] The difference between dis-arrangement and dis-resemblance may be of great importance, if it represents a movement from a poetry that contrasts "Language in its natural disarray" (the context suggests Stein) with "mythy" or "visionary" order—one of which must be excluded—to a poetry that interprets such opposition or strife in a "scale of resemblance and disresemblance" *and* internalizes the play of "resemblance and disresemblance" as its constitutive principle. That the scale is "absolute" means that all linguistic matter whatsoever, not only sound, comes into comparison.

We find one earlier usage of the word in "The Code of Justinian. A Discourse on Justice," written in 1953, published in *Writing Writing*:

> If every completing acting is in its anticipation a codification of possible conclusions, a system of legal excluding and protruding and deluding; if every determination even in moving and removing all its resemblance to its original beginning is in going and returning, in stopping and conserving, in preserving and enriching, in overthrowing and revising, in devising perfect disresemblances to its own perfection; if every indeterminate doing is determined in not quite moving toward its own moving; if the constant shaping of needs we are filling; then laws are continually absolutely ruling all we are knowing of what we have been doing.
>
> Even stopping defines an end, a sentence, a law of its beginning.[160]

Among the rhymes of sound and grammar, which are characteristic of Duncan's Stein imitations, we can discern an early version of Duncan's paradoxical "affinities of dis-resemblance."

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[159] Duncan, 403.
[160] Duncan, *Collected Early Poems and Plays*, 463. See p. 794 for the date.

"Disresemblance" here seems to denote the continual self-differentiation of a poetry involved in "indeterminate doing" (perhaps akin to Olson's "projective verse") wherein a) repetitions are not pure recurrence but "perfect disresemblances to its own perfection" and b) movements are not pure procession "toward its own moving" but consist in "going and returning," i.e. are bound, even in their "removing" of resemblance, in a relationship of likeness and unlikeness to their "original." What this means is that no "moving" is *not* an expression of the "law of its beginning." And that germinal law, which expresses itself in every "moving," ensures the coherence of the poem.

While these terms do not play a major role in Duncan's writings from the early 1950s, they appear at the center of his thought by 1956, at the same time that he drafts the lecture on the *Zohar*. In a letter to Jack Spicer, undated but apparently from that summer, Duncan describes a plan to write a "GRAMMAR" (its graduated structure reminds us of the plan for his class) and sets "resemblance" and "disresemblance" at the term of its first section:

> I have in mind right now proceeding with chapters on SECTION ONE: TONE STRUCTURE or RIME, chapter 1, vowels chapter 2 consonants (in which to make clear that this is a continuum); chapter 3, tone leading of vowels; chapter 4, consonant clusters… then description of the range between complete resemblance (as in direct repetition or the pun on an identical stress) to complete disresemblance (as in entirely other actual sounds on other stresses and with dissimilar contour)[161]

We find an even stronger statement of this "absolute scale" in a letter to Robin Blaser, dated to June 1958, two months before the revision of "Having Been Enraged":

> In principle it moves from the (nature) structure of rime: from total resemblance (at verbal level the pun—right, rite, and write) (at image level the total recurrence, or doppelgangster) to total disresemblance (in music from which the melodic line of the 12 tone system refers; with a conjoint principle—in a passage with maximum (order) resemblance any disresemblance is heightened. In a series right, ride, rite, wright, write: that ride becomes the significant element in structure. Tho it's not with such contrasts but rather with a continuous melody as reference that I compose. Proust has a melody of what happend that makes Remembrance a lesson in poetics. Built of fragments that have no other continuity.[162]

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[161] Duncan, "Letters to Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer,"*Ironwood* 22, 100.
[162] Duncan, "Letters to Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer,"*Ironwood* 22, 122-123.

Proust's novel, in the rapturous coherence of its metonymy, is an extreme example of what Duncan means by the "law." In Duncan's parlance, in fact, "melody" seems to be synonymous with the "law." Duncan tells Blaser, in a February 1958 letter, that

> The thing enacted is the LAW… But it's not abstract, damn the sentiment of what a poem be! the working of syllables, phonemes, stresses, words, phrases, lines, sentences, stanzas, movements towards, in service of, totality is the only discovery of the law…The interrelationship of parts is just that each particle is subject to each and other particle…[163]

What would be abstract, for Duncan, would be the proposition of a structure of resemblance and disresemblance external to the poem's "discovery of the law" in the emergent, and total, interrelation of its parts. An unpublished "Preface" to *The Opening of the Field*, composed in July of 1959, will condemn the "convention" of "metrics and rime" as "repetition" for "hardly tak[ing] into account either the nature of language (the findings of linguists, for instance, from Jesperson [sic] to Trager and Smith) or the possibilities of form in time (the theoretical extensions from the work of Stravinsky and Schönberg)." And, in terms that can be usefully compared to Pound's *melopoeia*, it will cite Stravinsky's definition of "Melody" in the *Poetics of Music*: "Melody, <u>Mélodia</u>, in Greek, is the intonation of the <u>melos</u>, which signifies a fragment, a part of a phrase. It is these parts that strike the ear in such a way as to mark certain accentuations." Duncan comments: "Verse too has one of its possibilities, thru the tone leading of vowels and the minute pacing of consonants, thru the control of line, a melodic spine where sound and time have been renderd concrete appearing as a clearly defined movement where the qualities of syllables have been <u>located</u>."[164]

Duncan hesitates between, on the one hand, a purely formal conception of what Stravinsky calls the "melody" as fragment or part and, on the other hand, one that is strictly phonological. Of

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[163] Duncan, "Letters to Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer," Ironwood 22, 120.
[164] Box 24, Folder 13.

course, Duncan's statement recalls the earliest conceptions discussed in the previous chapter, where Duncan had proposed an initiatic structure in which the many sounds of the poem, configured as a body, proceed through the space of a poem toward "the deepest sound" or "the verge of poetry." But tone-leading, or the "similarity of vowel and consonant," is now no longer the single principle of composition; instead, it is interpreted as an "independent or contrapuntal element—a spine of sound and a spine of time brought into interplay." Duncan is not perfectly clear on this point, but there seem to be some several "melodic spines," different and similar, that gradually describe the "law" of the poem.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us return to 1956 and 1957. The references to Jespersen and Trager and Smith direct us to an area of Duncan's concern adjacent to his reading in the *Zohar*. An earlier letter to Spicer, also from 1956, identifies Leonard Bloomfield as Duncan's source on "vowels and consonants" and Edward Sapir as his source for "physiological description, philosophy etc," and says that Duncan is "beginning to look around in Jesperson" [sic].[165] Olson also had a persistent interest in many aspects of Sapir's work, and in this context it is interesting to note that, while Duncan never, to our knowledge, composed his "GRAMMAR," the seventh section of Olson's *Proprioception* is called "GRAMMAR—a book" and contains long passages from Sapir's *Language*. Olson mentions his book as early as 1958 in a letter to Cid Corman, and the bulk of it seems to have been written in 1959.[166] We do not have any other record of Duncan's reading in Bloomfield. Sapir's *Language*, however, is quoted once in the *Zohar* lecture at Black Mountain as a representative of the view of "contemporary science" that holds "the task of language" to be "the communication of experience;" in contrast, Duncan insists, the poet's task is "to make an experience

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[165] Duncan, "Letters to Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer," Ironwood 22, 99.
[166] Cid Corman and Charles Olson, *Complete Correspondence: 1950-1964: Volume II,* edited by George Evans (Orono: The National Poetry Foundation, 1991): 155-158.

in the terms of his art."[167] It is perhaps telling that, in the same section of Sapir's book ("Introductory: Language Defined"), we find the exclusion of "instinctive" (i.e. non-symbolic) sounds from language and the proposition that "the mere phonetic framework of speech does not constitute the inner fact of language and that the single sound of articulated speech is not, as such, a linguistic element at all," both of which correspond to the pessimistic myth of "The Gift of Tongues."[168] Nor is Sapir's argument for the primacy of language, in relation to both thought ("language arose pre-rationally") and culture ("it antedated even the lowliest developments of material culture"), out of joint with the mystical theory of the *Zohar*.[169] In fact, the story *he* tells in the beginning of *Language* has undeniable resonances with Duncan's, where the dyad is sound and language rather than language and thought:

> We must imagine that thought processes set in, as a kind of psychic overflow, almost at the beginning of linguistic expression; further, that the concept, once defined, necessarily reacted on the life of its linguistic symbol, encouraging further linguistic growth.[170]

The relation of language and thought would be what Duncan means by "philosophy." It is not clear to what Duncan refers when he cites "physiological description" as coming from Sapir, since Sapir's book, which was the one in Duncan's possession at this time, explicitly excludes "physiology and physiological psychology" from its account.[171] Sapir has perhaps fallen from Duncan's favor by the middle of 1956 not only because of Duncan's sense of poetry as "creation," not communication, but also because Duncan would now posit a continuum of sounds and language, instead of the rupture he had envisioned in "The Gift of Tongues." In *Proprioception,* Olson, in contrast with Duncan, will base his attack on generalization and abstraction in language on a polemical reading of Sapir's central

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167 Box 2, Notebook 19.
168 Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1921): 3 and 43, respectively.
169 Sapir, *Language*, 16 and 23, respectively.
170 Sapir, *Language*, 16.
171 Sapir, *Language*, 10.

concept of linguistic "drift;" for Olson, the historical levelling of grammatical and morphological categories, which Sapir describes, is an index of our estrangement, i.e. the fall.

As for Jespersen, we know the first volume ("Sounds and Spellings") of *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* comes into "Spelling: Passages 15" in *Bending the Bow* (1968, written sometime between 1962 and 1964). The seventh volume ("Syntax") is cited in Duncan's 1961 "After *For Love*" appreciation of Robert Creeley's poetry, where, in particular, a few lines of Creeley's, which translate Dante's "*Guido, vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io*"—

> Guido,
> I would that you, me and Lapo

—are praised in Dantean terms as "evidence of Creeley's care or ear for the natural eloquence of the vernacular," i.e. "the common usage of 'me' in the nominative series." Then: "'Instinctive feeling,' so Jespersen…tells us, seizes upon the similarity or rime of the nominatives *we, ye, he, she*, so that *me* and *thee* follow where the influence of sound governs." That would be an instance of what Sapir calls "drift," but for Jespersen as for Duncan the blurring of the distinction between the nominative and the accusative (*precisely* that process to which Sapir's statement, cited in *Proprioception*, refers: "The distinction between the nominative and accusative was nibbled away by phonetic processes")[172] allows for the play of resemblance and disresemblance. Thus, as Jespersen says, "likeness in form has in part led to likeness in function." What is interesting is that "sound" is "govern[ing]" both within the articulation of Creeley's poem (Duncan: "'Guido' leads to 'me' to form a phonic link") and within the evolution, if we can call it that, of language; but this latter "rime," while permitting the structure of Creeley's line, is manifest in the line as "phonic" disresemblance.

It is remarkable that the source that is most prominent in Duncan's notebooks is not mentioned in the enumeration to Spicer—Trager and Smith's *An Outline of English Structure*. Of

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[172] Olson, *Collected Prose*, 194, corresponding to Sapir, *Language,* 175.

course the letter is dated to 1956, and the long stretch of copyings from that volume are in a 1957 notebook. But Duncan has told Spicer that "as in tone I use phonemes and do not enter into the complexity of phonetic transcription…so in measure I am trying for a hearable conscious level for common analysis." Yet it is precisely the creation of a system for "phonetic transcription" that is the undertaking of Trager and Smith's book, and we find instances of such transcription throughout Duncan's some twenty-odd pages of notes. The distinction Duncan seems to be after is that which linguists (including Trager and Smith) have proposed between "phonetics" as the description and classification of sounds in general and "phonemics" as the description and classification of distinct sounds and combinations of sounds in a particular language, in this case English. The concern in phonemics with the phenomenon of sound in actual linguistic situations agrees with Duncan's "hearable conscious level"; he is interested in the unconscious workings of language but not, it seems, in unconscious or, we can say, imperceptible patterning in poems. And, indeed, if we examine Duncan's selections from *An Outline*, his interests show themselves to be a) subtleties of tone, stress, and volume as they arise in special phonemic and prosodic environments the "phoneme" and b) the "disresemblance" between inscription and pronunciation in English and the phonemic polysemy of particular graphemes. (Jespersen presents the second of these phenomena in great detail, and in its historical evolution, in the first volume of his book.) Duncan copies from the very first section the authors' table of phonetic descriptions but then skips thirty pages or so to the sections on "Stresses," "Weak-stressed vowels," "Pitch," "Terminal junctures," and "Phonemic words, phrases, and clauses." In each case, some of the authors' explanatory discourse is quoted and then Duncan, as if in a workbook, tries out examples of the relevant phenomenon.

These notes, although from a year later, may give us a clearer sense of Duncan's pedagogical program for teaching at Black Mountain College, which we found in the lecture on the *Zohar*: "Week by week we will study the following: vowels, consonants, the structure of rime,—these are the

elements of tone in writing both what we call poetry and what we call prose…" We are aware, also, of a new specificity to Duncan's statement, in that lecture, that "the phonemes of the language—these are the Elohim, the letters of the alphabet as we picture the holy one contemplating them and toying with them," where now not the primal sounds of a "poetry before language" but the distinct sounds of *the* language are the creative elements; and this, in turn, reflects Duncan's abandonment of the pessimistic dualism of his earlier text in favor of the *Zohar*'s own vision of the progressive emanation, the emergence, of "the world of human meanings, the created world as the imagination grasps it." *An Outline of English Structure* shows, again and again, how the hypothetical, abstract sounds take on particular forms as they enter into linguistic patterns. As for the relationship of poetry to language, Duncan's position now seems clear, if it wasn't before: poetry is not a pure embodiment that antedates linguistic abstraction, but the realization of language's own capacity to make wholes out of its own structures of resemblance and disresemblance. As early as 1955, Duncan had identified the plural Elohim with "speech, utterance" but had not realized the implications of this identification. His despair, his crisis, had led him to stigmatize the material plurality of language as "unrevolutionary," apparently because it was alienated from the primordial unity of the body—even though, in his reflections on language, he was sometimes able to imagine the interrelated movement of parts in a poem as a process of transformation. Now, the creators of the poem do not stand apart from the text but enter into its contrasting "dance" as its primal entities, a "dance" which not only changes them and renews them but composes that "splendor" which is the essence of the art.

We must mention the correspondences between Duncan's ideas and those of Roman Jakobson, the Russian linguist and literary theorist. As far as we can tell, Duncan had not read

Jakobson by this time; he would come to lecture on Jakobson in the 1980s in San Francisco.[173] If he hadn't, then his statements about resemblance and disresemblance are uncanny anticipations of Jakobson's definition of the "poetic function" in "Linguistics and Poetics," which was delivered as a lecture in 1958 and first published in 1960.[174] The relevance of a Jakobsonian analysis to post-World War II American poetry is a frequent subject of Joseph Conte's *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry,* and we will come back to his interpretation of Duncan; unfortunately, his comparative study does not enlighten us to the actual encounters between the poets and Jakobson's papers.[175]

In this well-known essay, Jakobson attempts to answer what he calls, at the outset, the primary question of poetics: "what makes a verbal message a work of art?"[176] Later, he'll rephrase this question in different terms: "What is the empirical criterion of the poetic function?"[177] The basis of his answer is implicit in the term "function"—*function*, and not any one verse-form or form as such. For Jakobson, the "poetic" does not constitute a category or activity of its own apart from or before "language" but "may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics."[178]

In Jakobson's account, there are six "constitutive factors in any speech event":

> The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to (the "referent" in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature)…a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee.. and, finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee…[179]

[173] Jarnot, *The Ambassador to Venus*, 396.
[174] Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, edited by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1987): 508.
[175] Joseph Conte, *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1991).
[176] Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 63.
[177] Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 71.
[178] Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 63.
[179] Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 66.

"Each of these six factors," he writes, "determines a different function of language." These are the "referential" or "denotative;" the "emotional" (which "aims at the direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about"); the "connotative" (which is "orientation toward the addressee"); the "phatic" (which aims "to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication" by the deployment of "ritualized formulas"); the "metalingual" (which glosses the communication "whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code"); and, finally, the "poetic," which is "the set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake."[180] Jakobson, in order to identify the poetic function's "indispensable feature," recalls what he has argued are "the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behavior, selection and combination":

> If 'child' is the topic of the message, the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs—sleeps, dozes, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymy and antonymy, while the combination, the build-up of the sequence, is based on contiguity.[181]

In ordinary discourse, in order to communicate the message, one "selects" a term from a group of equivalent terms and then "selects" another term, also from a group of equivalent terms, to "comment" on the initial term: "The child sleeps"; "The youngster dozes." Both the morphology of the terms and their "combination" are determined by the given language's syntax, i.e. the rules for how words must be ordered to make an "operative" utterance. In other words, the principle of "similarity" governs the "selection" of words, while the principle of "contiguity" governs their "combination." But the "poetic function,"—the activity of which is not limited to poems but which can be found, in various degrees, in all kinds of speech—as "the set toward the message as such,"

[180] Jakobson, *Language in Literature,* 66-69.
[181] Jakobson, *Language in Literature,* 71.

recovers this principle from its subordinate position and establishes it as the governing principle in the construction of "verbal structures." Or, in Jakobson's famous words, "*the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*."

It would seem that Jakobson's definition includes "equivalence" and excludes "non-equivalence" but we have already seen that the principle of "similarity" or "equivalence" consists in "selection…on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymy and antonymy." Thus, the "principle of equivalence" can be said to operate even in instances of non-equivalence. For that reason, Paul Kiparsky's mostly apt paraphrase of Jakobson's definition—"the *syntagmatic* recurrence of *paradigmatically* equivalent linguistic elements is the constitutive element of poetic form"[182]—needs a minor adjustment: it ought to say "the syntagmatic recurrence *and* non-recurrence…"

The similarity of Jakobson's formulation (if not his analysis) to Duncan's is clear. Kiparsky's statement that, while "it has been recognized since antiquity that the organized recurrence of linguistic categories is an intrinsic property of verse…one important feature of [Jakobson's] formulation is that it encompasses *all* linguistic categories—not just phonological categories such as syllables, stresses and so forth, but equivalence classes at any level of linguistic structure, including syntax, morphology and lexicon"[183] could apply as well to Duncan's movement from a poetics based on the "tone-leading of vowels" to a poetics based on "*an absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance*."

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[182] Paul Kiparsky, "Roman Jakobson and the Grammar of Poetry," in *A Tribute to Roman Jakobson: 1896-1982* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1983): 29.
[183] Kiparsky, "Roman Jakboson and the Grammar of Poetry," 29.

When, at last, we examine Duncan's 1958 revisions to "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport," we will see that the principle of "recurrence and non-recurrence" governs almost all of his decisions. By the time he came back to that poem, he had already composed many (and many of the most important) poems which would appear after "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" in *The Opening of the Field*. This fact not only establishes the coincidence of the poems with Duncan's investigations of language but also casts doubt on the importance, for the development of his mature poetics, of his encounter with the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead through Olson's enthusiastic agency.

James Maynard provides a statement of this view:

> Duncan often claimed that the notion to organize The Opening of the Field as a cohesive book rather than a mere collection of poems originated while writing the first drafts of the poem "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" in 1956. That may be so, but it was his engagement with *Process and Reality* starting in 1957, when he was less than halfway through the book's composition, that provided him an adequate philosophical framework for his multifaceted construction of a poetic field… In *Process and Reality* Duncan found a sympathetic philosophical approach to process and multiplicity, and he made use of Whitehead's ideas to develop a poetics of organism emphasizing the propositional value of the poem, the emergent patterns of writing, and above all else the significance of form as an act of extension into the complex environment of language.[184]

This is somewhat ambiguous, insofar as Duncan's assertion is explicitly (and tepidly) allowed but implicitly disavowed: as the passage unfolds, Whitehead's book grows in importance, from being, merely, the source of an "an adequate philosophical framework" for Duncan's (antecedent) poetics to being the very device by which Duncan developed his central concepts of poetic form. Even so, it is characteristic; a similar, if more nuanced, appraisal can be found in Michael Davidson's essay on *The Opening of the Field*.[185] It is true that Duncan heard Olson lecture on Whitehead at Black Mountain in 1956, that he invited him to deliver the same series of lectures in San Francisco in February 1957,

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[184] James Maynard, *Robert Duncan and the Pragmatist Sublime* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2018), 76.
[185] Michael Davidson, "A Book of First Things," 67-68.

and that the latter incited him to read deeply in *Process and Reality* during the late spring and summer of 1957.[186] Moreover, there is no doubt that certain poems in the volume that was then still called *The Field* were influenced by this encounter: among those notes, we find the earliest versions of "A Poem of Despondencies," "Poetry, A Natural Thing," "The Propositions," "Four Pictures of the Real Universe," "Of Blasphemy," "Evocation," Nor Is the Past Pure," "Crosses of Harmony and Disharmony," and "A Song of the Old Order." Yet in the account we have presented the essential components of Duncan's poetics are already in place by the middle of 1956, when Duncan transformed the Zoharic play of world-creating letters into "the structure of rime"—a poetics which, by making all of the elements of language and parts of speech available to the "scale of resemblance and disresemblance," would insure the coherence of the "emergent" poem. As important was his discovery in "the structure of rime" of a principle that would allow for the individual poem, as well as larger passages of poetic activity, to participate in an event commensurate to the Biblical cosmogony, namely, the visionary realization of "the image of man." The radical departure from Olson, as well as from other contemporaries, is not only that Duncan refuses to treat the individual poem as the privileged object of a poetics; it is also that he has come to conceive of the poem, as he puts it to Blaser, "as the working of syllables, phonemes, stresses, words, phrases, lines, sentences, stanzas, movements towards, in service of, totality," which, all together, is "the only discovery of the law."

The emphasis on Duncan's reading of Whitehead is only an instance of the common interpretation of Duncan's relationship with Olson, which takes both poets as exponents and practitioners of "projective verse." Indeed, till the end of his life, Duncan spoke frequently about the singular influence of "Projective Verse" on his sense of poetry, and he certainly understood Olson

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[186] In the Buffalo repository, notebook 11 and notebook 20 contain Duncan's notes on Olson's lectures Whitehead notes and the bulk of his notes on Process and Reality.

as an ally. Yet their poetries diverge not only as *different realizations of the same principle*—as is generally acknowledged—but as *different realizations of different principles*.

Although Olson's announcement of "COMPOSITION BY FIELD" in "Projective Verse" and, later, his evocation of "the large area of the whole poem,"[187] suggest that "totality" has an important role in his poetics, this suggestion is mis-leading. For such formulations function to emphasize the spatial existence of the poem, on which depends Olson's crucial and peculiar interpretation of the units of the poem as "OBJECTS." Olson intends to free the elements of language from the hierarchically ordered syntax to which, even in poetry, they are usually subordinated—and which uses words not "exactly as they do occur" but according only to their generic function, i.e. Jakobson's "principle of equivalence." In this "parataxis" (as he calls it elsewhere), Olson writes, "each of these elements of a poem can be allowed to have the play of their separate energies."[188] This is very close to Duncan's vision of "the dance," but Olson is curiously silent about "the whole poem," as perhaps he must be, whereas for Duncan this is the central issue.

Thus, we can locate Duncan's efforts at another juncture. We have already found him striving to save the soteriology of a certain Romantic or visionary tradition with the polyvalent forms of Modernism. Now we see him attempting to reconcile Olson's work towards an "open" poetry with "the structure of rime." From this perspective, the two components of Duncan's departure from Olson can be seen as one. For, in several of the texts we discussed in the previous chapter, Duncan understands the poet to be one who is initiated in the gradated mystery of language. In this initiation, the structure of the "life within life" or of the "Self," which is only partly realized in any discrete event of poiesis, comes to correspond to "the structure of rime," which itself is "*music in the actual world*." Recall Duncan's definition of "love" as the poetic connection between "the fiction"

[187] Olson, *Collected Prose*, 243.
[188] Olson, *Collected Prose*, 355ff. Olson's review of Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato*.

and "the actual." Duncan the post-modernist hesitates to speak of the self or the poem as microcosm, or of a *musica universa*, not because he is averse to hierarchies or orders as such but because he does not imagine a superior or essential thing of which an inferior thing is the representation. Nevertheless, for Duncan, the principle of "*resemblance and disresemblance*," which is the structure of language itself, does establish a material limit for poetry.

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The earliest version of "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport" does not express an awareness of "the structure of rime." It presents the crisis of the poet's "love" under the Accuser's dominion. In the first draft of the first two sections of "The Structure of Rime," however, that visionary drama is transposed onto those entities that are, in a sense, the actors of language: the lines "Now I see the Woman that I name the Sentence/ I shall read the Sentence that I name the Woman" make the translation explicit. It should be noted that what will be two sections in *The Opening of the Field* are not divided here; nor are they numbered. Thus, the serial form that the poem will ultimately have (and that it will come to exemplify in literary history) is not aboriginal to it. Moreover, it immediately follows a poem which is titled "Her Voice Across the Water Comes," which will come to be called "The Law I Love is Major Mover"; "The Structure of Rime" is joined to that poem not only by its repeated evocations of "the Law" but also by the Orphic voice that reprimands the poet. The last line of "Her Voice" occurs less than an inch above the title of "The Structure of Rime"; they were written with the same pen, and perhaps in the same session.

This early version of "The Structure of Rime" is caught between the poetics of salvific drama and the poetics of "rime." In one sense, it equivocates the entities of the myth and the entities of language. In another sense, in line after line, it strives to resolve the crisis by fashioning a new myth in which the salvific drama is subordinated to the greater drama of language. The vatic

utterances of the Woman conserve the rhetoric of accusation that dominates "Having Been Enraged," while the dance of sounds, so crucial to Duncan's theory of "rime," appears, at best, faintly. This is true, as well, of the published version of the poem, but by then it will have been not only split in two but also set in an extended serial form that, for the first time at least in Duncan's work, imposes "the structure of rime," i.e. the "absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance," upon disparate narrative units, passages of discourse, and even complete poems. As we will see in the next chapter, it is this innovation that allows Duncan to interpret the book as a poetic composition.

We ought to note one set of lines found here that were eventually omitted from the published poem. These, but not only these, evoke the antinomies of representation that structure both the revelation on Sinai and the hermeneutic enterprise of the *Zohar*. The lines left out are—

> Moses got the Law and went down
> from the Law with the Law.
> And lost it. Returnd
> before the Law.
>
> I saw myself standing, no more a man
> than I am,
> Who am Man. And the Law
> was brought before me.
> And I layd down the Law, by dawn
> I gave Sentence.[189]
>
> I, the master. O Beloved
> that withholds from me
> the hearts of men.

[189] Box 2, Notebook 19. We may hear echoes in "no more a man/ than I am,/ Who am Man" of the alternations of affirmation and negation with which "Often I am Permitted" begins—in fact, echoes not only of those lines, but also, uncannily, of lines from Charles Olson's "Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 [Withheld]": "…it is coming/ from all that I no longer am, yet am, the slow westward motion of// more than I am…" Olson wrote these words in 1957. See Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983): 185.

There are, it is fit to say, many books mentioned in the Torah that have been lost or have gone under the cover of darkness: the Book of Yashar, the Book of the Wars of Yahweh, the Manner of the Kingdom, the Acts of Solomon. These are only a few of the names we come across, and even these few open vertiginous prospects for speculation. But no lost book so deeply unsettles the edifice of the Torah as the first tablets do, bringing forth and, almost in the same moment, retracting a Law before the Law. Their irremediable silence at the very source of tradition dwells also in the heart of every sentence that has followed, a primal uncertainty that makes the certainties of *halakhah* presumptions upon the not-known. That the text itself hints marvelously that the second tablets are idols, that the Torah in its entirety is an image in the likeness, but only in the likeness, of God, brings us into dangerous duplicity in our reading. Now, the proposition of two Torahs is conventional within Judaism, for the books of Moses, the prophets, and the writing are named the Written Torah, and all the centuries of commentary thereon are said to make up the Oral Torah. But the iconoclasm and the ambition of the Kabbalists lead them to multiply the written Torah itself, so that there were Torahs before the Torah of Sinai and there are new Torahs to be written. In the writings of Isaac the Blind, a Provencal Kabbalist of the late 12th century, we find a classic statement of the myth:

> In God's right hand were engraved all the engravings that were destined some day to rise from potency to act. From the emanation of all sefiroth they were graven, scratched, and molded into the Sefirah of Grace, which is also called God's right hand, and this was done in an inward, inconceivably subtle way. This formation is called the concentrated, not yet unfolded Torah, and also the Torah of grace. Along with all the other engravings, two engravings were made in it. The one has the form of the written Torah, the other the form of the oral Torah. The form of the written Torah is that of the colors of white fire, and the form of the oral Torah has colored forms as of black fire. And all these engravings and the not yet unfolded Torah existed potentially, perceptible neither to a spiritual nor to a sensory eye, until the will inspired the idea of activating them by means of primordial wisdom and hidden knowledge. Thus at the beginning of all acts there was pre-existentially the not yet unfolded Torah, which is in God's right hand with all the primordial inscriptions and engravings that are hidden in it, and this is what the Midrash implies when it says that God took the primordial Torah, which stems from the quarry of repentance and

> the source of original wisdom, and in one spiritual act emanated the not yet unfolded Torah in order to give permanence to the foundations of all the worlds.[190]

No less an authority than Gershom Scholem cites this passage—and cries out: "A far-reaching idea! What we call the written Torah has itself passed through the medium of the oral Torah, it is no longer a form concealed in white light; rather, it has emerged from the black light, which determines and limits and so denotes the attribute of divine severity and judgment. Everything that we perceive in the fixed forms of the Torah, written in ink on parchment, consists, in the last analysis, of interpretations or definitions of what is hidden."

Duncan's lines respond to the Woman's double accusation, which is mostly preserved in the published poem: "Cheat at this game? she cries./ Thou art a man or art nothing./ You, you are a man, a maker,/ stand then/ so I can see you, a fierce destroyer/ of images./ Will you drive me to madness/ only there to know me,/ vomiting images into the place of the Law?" The second and third lines, which set the quandaries of representation and iconoclasm in a moral paradigm, will be replaced by a single sentence, which suggests a cosmic context for the poet's work in which there can be no error or transgression: "The world is what you are." In the draft of the poem, Duncan's lines answer her attack with a version of the Kabbalistic myth quoted above. There is some ambiguity whether or not the poet is identified with the first Moses, and poetry with the perdition of the first "Law." It seems more likely than Duncan means to identify the poet with the second Moses, and poetry with the second "Law," that is, the "black fire." The oblivion of the first, supernal "Law," the concealment of the original Word, would then be the event that establishes the conditions of poetry; and poetry would be not a second "Law" but the perpetual incarnation of that "Law" as the "Sentence." At the same time, our analysis in the previous chapter suggests another reading, for we saw Duncan move away from a pessimistic myth of insuperable loss—in that case,

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[190] Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, 1996): 48-50.

of the "poetry before language." Perhaps, here, we should understand the oblivion of the "Law" as the first phase of poiesis; the second would be the bringing forth of the "Law" in or as the donation of the "Sentence." In a sense, then, the myth of the two tablets is a primary figure of "the structure of rime," and suggests a Biblical analogy for the "*absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance*" that "*establishes measures that are music in the actual world*."

If we wonder why these lines were ultimately omitted, one answer might be that the contradiction in the Woman's speech makes their twofold gesture redundant. Furthermore, these revisions conform to Duncan's new poetics. That the dramatic conflict between the speaker and the Woman would be suppressed in favor of an unresolved disresemblance within her speech (between "a fierce destroyer of images" and "vomiting images into the place of the Law!") is almost predictable. And we are not surprised that the moral discourse about the ethics of "man" as image-maker has been removed: not dialectic, and not the crisis of a soul brought into judgment, but "the dance of my pages" will realize the possible "man" ("the man I will be").

In the course of this draft, therefore, we see that the question that opens "The Structure of Rime II"—"What of the Structure of Rime? I said"—had a quite different rhetorical function, and it is notable, in this respect, that the direct speech was marked by the verb "askd" and not "said." (In both versions, "askd" is the verb of the second instance of the question.) Originally, it interrupted not only the Woman's severities but also the entire discourse of accusation and apology, in order to remove the poem from the discourse of "Law" and "Sentence" into the fourfold revelation of "Rime."

What Duncan accomplished in "The Structure of Rime II," by extirpating the lines about Moses and by dividing the single original poem into two, is worth considering, as such and as it anticipates the later revisions of "Having Been Enraged by John Davenport." This section or poem, like the first, seems to be a mystical or hieratic interrogation. Here, however, Duncan has suppressed

the dialogical function of the utterances. Instead, they develop according to "Rime": as a whole, their structure is a play, or dance, of contrasts, i.e., is determined by the very principle they state ("resemblance and disresemblance"); and, in each instance, the content of the utterance is determined by the permutation of a set of elements. Let us say something more about the latter. There seem to be seven discrete acts of speech or vocalization in the section. The elements in play include the identity of the one who speaks or makes sound (including whether or not the speaker is disguised and the speaker's relation to "a Lion" or "the Lion"); the name for his act; the content of the speech or sound; whether or not speech is italicized; and the syntax of the sentence describing the act, specifically, the order in which subject, verb, and the direct discourse (or its description) are placed. Duncan is not procedural about these variations. Nonetheless, he rigorously applies the rule of "disresemblance." This accounts for the subtle revision of the statement of the opening question. For it subverts a perfect repetition ("What of the Structure of Rime?") by distinguishing between an initial "saying" and a secondary "asking." Likewise, "The Messenger in the guise of a Lion" is transmuted into "I in the guise of a Lion;" subsequently, the latter undergoes both an inversion and a negation into, first, "A lion without disguise" and then "The Lion in the Zodiac." The poem distinguishes between a "roaring" that has verbal content and a "roaring" that is pure sound; between direct speech that is italicized ("*the actual stars moving are music*") and direct speech that isn't ("He that sang to charm the beasts…"); and between an act of wordless vocalization that has a speaking subject ("I in the guise of a Lion…") and an act of intelligible speech that has no speaker (*"An absolute scale of resemblance*…"). And so on. The combinatorial magic that controls the movements of this section exemplifies Jakobson's poetic "criterion" and the principle of "Rime" as Duncan has theorized it. It is not so much the form of a specific sentence that undergoes substitutions and displacements according to the "principle of equivalence" (Jakobson); rather, what we are tempted to call the "lasting Sentence," which Duncan invokes in the first section and which

we might understand, here at least, as the potentiality of speech, the fundamental situation of its possibility, is realized in a series of sentences whose various articulation is determined by that principle. The distance from the operations of "the tone leading of vowels" is unmistakable.

If, however, this "dance" were restricted to syntax and grammar, it would not participate in the "Splendor" or salvation for which Duncan's thinking, beyond the gestures of an "unrevolutionary" formalism, yearns. Thus, we must consider the meanings set in motion by what is said—how they relate to the "Structure of Rime" and what sort of progression, if any, they form. It must be said that the dialogic function of the statements is not perfectly suspended. Although the foregrounding of linguistic transformations relegates it to subordinate role, it persists nevertheless. And, in the second statement, that of "The Messenger in guise of a Lion," we can hear even the obstinate voice of the Accuser. Yet the poetics towards which Duncan is striving would not absolutely exclude the Accuser but would make him a part of the dance. This is precisely what we find here. The speaker of the poem has said, "What of the Structure of Rime?" An ambivalent opening: not "what *is*" but "what of," as if turning a preexistent (but now *absent*) discourse from some other matter to this one, in the hopes either that the one asked will have something to say about it or that "the Structure of Rime" will contradict something that has been said; and yet, it is not "askd" but "said," a question that is not a question, in uncertain relationship in any case to that discourse. The trepidation, the doubtfulness, of the question is what elicits the Messenger's challenge: "*Why does man retract his song from the impoverishd air? He brings his young to the opening of the field. Does he so fear beautiful compulsion?*" This may be the first instance of the full title of the book, *The Opening of the Field*. It is notable that the sense here is nominal, a place, a portal, rather than gerundive; if we construe the title in this sense, we see that it casts shadow of doubt—that perhaps the opening of the field is not yet happening but, instead, that the book stands at the threshold of that field, in "fear," or that it is the aperture but not the field itself. The obliquity of the Messenger's

response does not make it impossible to render, in several ways, its relationship to the speaker's question. First, there are echoes of Duncan's critique of Stein and Stravinsky in the thought that turning to "the Structure of Rime" is less the discovery of the structure of reality than a withdrawal from, or aversion to, the fallen (but not irremediable) condition of the cosmos, i.e. "the impoverished air." Over against that view, the Messenger evokes the initiation of human generations apparently as the promise of restoration and recalls for us the many ways in which Duncan sought to ground his new poetics in Zoharic and scientific accounts of the infant's emergence into his linguistic community.[191] The leonine guise rhymes with the "roar" of severity as well as with the reference of poiesis to the sexual reproduction of the species.

"Song" and "speech" seem to stand over against one another in the beginning of this section. "Song" is associated with the withdrawal from "the impoverished air" and with Orpheus who "charm[ed] the beasts" and "was false of tongue," whereas "there is a melody within this surfeit of speech that is most man." Recall that in the February 1956 letter to Helen Adams the ur-version of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" is "this 'song' I do like," spared from Duncan's condemnation of the rest of "Having Been Enraged." What is the "fear" of "beautiful compulsion"?

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[191] Why a lion? In his discussion of Duncan's Shamanism, Peter O'Leary cites the following sentences, written (he says) in 1964, from *The H.D. Book*: "Life of poet crossing and interpenetrating life of poet in the imagination of something 'to gain magic-possession' of that most coveted animal power, *the lion-voice,* the serpent-wisdom, the nightingale-song, the antlered crown—to commune with the animal force felt in the pome return to the working of the poem" (my emphasis). O'Leary, *Gnostic Contagion*, 126. "The Lion in the Zodiac" of course evokes all the traits of that sign, but for a mind like Duncan's it might also point us to consider the precession of the equinoxes, which was also a matter of concern for Olson, and which is one of the senses of his line "the slow westward motion of// more than I am" (see above). According to astrological calculations, the last decades of the 20th Century would see the retrogression of the Spring Equinox from Pisces to Aquarius, and the replacement of the Fish (i.e. Christ?) by the Water-Carrier as the "sign of the times." But we find, in certain esoteric interpretations, a stress laid on the antipodal constellation as the unconscious or negative sign. Thus, the poet Gerrit Lansing, in his editorial for the second (1963) issue of *SET* (Duncan had been in the first, 1961), wrote,

> 1963 A.D. The negative afterimage of the vision of Man poised in the electromagnetic currents of space is a roaring Lion.
>
> It is still hard to distinguish the form of the Lion, who walks in flame.

See Gerrit Lansing, "The Burden of Set (editorial," *Set* 2 (1963): 44. For Duncan, might this "Lion" be the "negative afterimage" of the restored "Man"? Finally, we cannot ignore the punning echo of Moses de Leon's name.

Of course, it has something to do with the withdrawal. It also dwells in the sense that the poet "brings his young to the opening of the field" and no further—that he does not enter. Yet the speaker neither accepts this judgment nor explicitly repudiates it: in a way that does not resolve the emerging contradictions, he appropriates the "guise of a Lion" from the Messenger and transforms the adversarial "roar" into a roar that celebrates the "great vowels" and their pre-linguistic "patterns."

Reading the third phase of the poem, we are reminded again of Duncan's "tone leading of vowels" and his early explorations in the *Zohar*, and we cannot shake the suspicion that, at one level, the unfolding of this poem recapitulates (and perfects?) his own initiation into "The Structure of Rime." The language of guises and disguises appeared once in "Having Been Enraged," which spoke of the human person as a "poor disguise," worn by the "Great Adam from whom we fall & to whom we rise." The myth of a Primordial Man hidden in the throngs of the species is not merely inverted in "The Structure of Rime II," although in certain statements the speaking subject ("I") dons the mythic or great mask of the Lion. Here, as the dance of identities proceeds, what was "guise" becomes the revealed body or face, and that essential face itself undergoes several exchanges or metamorphoses. We can say that the dichotomy between the self and the mask is not totally neutralized—the guises and the disguises are entirely of the first half of the poem, as if the poem or the speaker has passed through those degrees—but it is interpreted as a relationship of "*resemblance and disresemblance*."

When "a lion"—lower-case—then speaks "without disguise," it is to judge the man who sings, named in the earliest draft as Orpheus, to be "false of tongue." Yet the lion's second sentence is ambiguous and mitigates not only the accusation in the first sentence but also the earlier estimation of "song." For it appears to equate that "false[ness]" with a "surfeit of speech." The key term "melody" we encountered in Duncan's unpublished preface to *The Opening of the Field*, where it

denoted the "law" that Rime—what he calls there "the working of syllables, phonemes, stresses, words, phrases, lines, sentences, stanzas"—continuously discovers. In part, "surfeit" would refer to the way Rime exceeds the communicative function of language or to the fecundating and overflowing quality of its extravagancies, its puns, sound rhymes, assonance and consonance, the "tone leading of vowels," homonymy, and so forth. Perhaps, however, this "surfeit of speech" is actually to be identified with "the Structure of Rime" itself, in as much as any particular utterance is understood to be possessed of, or to carry within it, all of its equivalents and non-equivalents. "Most man" itself points in at least two directions, and Duncan's characteristic use of the relative pronoun "that" solicits further ambiguities (does it refer to the "melody" or the "surfeit"?): on the one hand, to be "false of tongue" could be the defining characteristic of "man"; on the other hand, "this surfeit of speech" contains a "melody" that is the restoration, i.e. the fullest realization, of "man."

After the speaker repeats his question—"What of the Structure of Rime? I askd"—the last three utterances in the poem depart not only from the realm of "guise" and "without disguise" but also from any discourse of "man" (who says "I," who "retract[s] his song," who "charm[s] the beasts," etc.). There is a suggestion of a passage from the merely personal or human to the impersonal and cosmic, in the speakerless statement that follows ("*An absolute scale…*"), yet this is not the final word. Even such an unqualified proposition, in the Structure of Rime becomes but one dancer in the dance. So, the Lion, now "The Lion in the Zodiac," returns and produces a sentence that, on the one hand, derives the world's music from the kinesis of "actual stars" instead of from that "absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance" that represents itself in actual "measures." On the other hand, the Lion's sentence, somewhat polemically, submits the first sentence to the operations of Rime, so that even that definitive statement of Rime becomes subject to the kinesis, or dance, of similarity and dissimilarity. In particular, the status of the "actual" and the "real," as well as

all statements whatsoever concerning the "real" or concerning "man," the status of the "Law" and of the "Sentence"—all of this is made a matter of the universal "music," which is to say, of Rime.

*

How this initial "Structure of Rime" came not only to be divided but also to be set in the series of poems that would unfold throughout the decade is not our concern here, although later in the 1956 we find "The Structure of Rime IV" and "The Structure of Rime VI." What does concern us is the relationship of this poem to "Having Been Enraged" and eventually "Often I Am Permitted." To a certain extent, the "song" that is the earliest version of "Often I Am Permitted" exhibits operations similar to those we have observed in "The Structure of Rime." Let us look at it again:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> that is not mine, but is a made place
> —as if the mind made it up—a poem
>
> Often I am permitted to return to a hall
> that is a made place, created by light
> wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall,
>
> Wherefrom fall all architectures I am,
> I say are likenesses of the First Beloved
> whose flowers are flames lit to the Lady,
>
> Often I am permitted to return to a poem
> where I too stirrd may burn however poor
> and turn my face to the shadowless door.

It is in the obvious recurrences, many of which will be eliminated in Duncan's revisions, that this "song" diverges from "The Structure of Rime": the anaphora of "Often…" and "wherefrom…", the visual length of the lines (we might instead identify a principle of word-counting, since the lines range from seven to nine words), the tercets, the clusters of assonance and consonance, the end-rhymes. One feature they share is a basic numerical principle of seven, or three and four: here, the

four stanzas, i.e. the totality of the poem, are divided into the three stanzas beginning "Often…" and the one that does not; there, the seven utterances are divided into three that are disguised or guised and four that are not. Yet, just as in "The Structure of Rime" we saw that no utterance was entirely without a recurrence that linked it to some other utterance, and that utterances in many ways similar had to be, as a rule, in some way distinguished, so here the discordant third stanza is joined to the first and second by the metaphoric function of its second line, whereas the fourth stanza, although joined to the first and second by its opening line, stands apart, because its second line preserves the noun (i.e. the name of the place) from the first line; instead, it presents a second verb, consecutive to "return," which the subject performs in the same "place." In these ways, and others, this "song" manifests, partly, "the Structure of Rime." In fact, the first two sections of "The Structure of Rime," in their original and revised forms, strike us as more conservative that this part of "Having Been Enraged," insofar as they retain the adversarial drama of mythic personae. There, the dance of "resemblance and disresemblance" exploits the dialogic situation; here, it occurs entirely within a single speaker and so has to develop its variations, and its coherence, by other means.

In general, the 1958 revisions to "Having Been Enraged" produce a poem in which the principle of "disresemblance" is applied as rigorously as in "The Structure of Rime." Yet here it is not the sentence, or even a single linguistic unit, that is the focus of the recurrences and the variations; instead, in the fluctuant continuity of a single speaking, that principle is applied at every level of language: "the working of syllables, phonemes, stresses, words, phrases, lines, sentences, stanzas."

Duncan did not mark up a draft of the "song." He tried, several times, to realize the further form of the poem by writing it again, from the beginning. Thus, on 1 August 1958, he writes down the first three lines of the original poem:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> that is not mine, but is a made place
> —as if the mind made it up—a poem.

But then he is compelled to interrupt the recurrence of "Often I am permitted…" The adverb is a proper beginning to the poem; it tells us that "the Structure of Rime" is subject to its advent in time, and it indicates the undetermined measure of recurrence and non-recurrence by which the poem will cohere. The regularity of the anaphora, in a sense, had contradicted the openness of this time-marker. Duncan goes on. The fifth line is kept intact, but he invents a new fourth line:

> That is mine—it is so near to the heart
> that is a made place created by light

Apparently, that would not do, and he starts again from the first line:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> that is not mine, but is a made place
> —as if the mind made it up—a poem.

This is the same. And then:

> That is mine—it is so near to the heart
> an eternal pasture folded in time
> so that there is a hall therein

The "hall" has been rescued from the previously extirpated fourth line and displaced to the sixth line, in a very different relation to the nesting locations. And, with the displacement of line five to line seven, there follow five consecutive lines exactly as they appear in the original:

> that is a made place, created by light
> wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.
>
> Wherefrom fall all architectures I am
> I say are likenesses of the First Beloved
> whose flowers are flames lit to the Lady.

The rest of this entry seems to be of the same version, and all of it is new, except for the half-line "where I too stirrd":

> Often I am permitted to return to a poem

that is a field folded of time within time.
It is only a dream of the grass blowing,

where no wind blows, ripple upon ripple
east against the course of the sun
in an hour before the sun's going down

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

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

Where I too stirrd at the edge of fear
may find my flower in the First Beloved
whose song is as grass that
    pleaseth the Lady."

This passage of revisions is bracketed by two entries in Duncan's hand. We read the following on the two pages beforehand:

> It came to me again in the counsels of the night, in those hours when the *Zohar* tells us the Ancient One walks with His friends in the Garden, that wherever I laid claim to the poem there was violation. Violation in presenting the poem, in performing it—of a possibility, a garden I envisioned in the language that writing we might keep. "The wild thyme unseen" Eliot says and H.D.'s "invisible"—as who she is is hidden behind the initials, as she has no photograph in two decades. And the other day I was ashamed to be photographhd by Jonathan Williams, because [Richard] Duerden was there and I believe he is devoted to the inner orders of language.
>
> On the stage, the dramatist is not present. But here in the public readings, shows of personality, admirations, denigrations—so that the City provides perhaps no refuge from fame or obscurities distraction: what care of the poem? How as exclamations of admirations for "what I have done", for "my" poem, come from friends, I sicken. For I thrive where I keep the field—there are no successes, no failures, no publications, no performances there—in my childhood it was shown to me. A hill where, moved as by an unseen wind, all the grasses bent in one direction. And in that dream: this show was there. The children in the ring, I in the center to be crownd. Poet! Scapegoat of the play. Then the world flood. O such a flood of tears might sweep all away, all—to the place of quiet.
>
> It is this quiet, this solitude that these hours (that the Zohar beautifully said was "of god"; after the witching hour, the turn, return toward dawn.
>
> Can it be done slowly, surely, toward grace? To ask, only that, that I not perform? The book on the record give grace: for the writer remains invisible.

We must not linger too long on this note, in which that old despair of the poet returns, but several connections should at least be mentioned. The entry indicates how close the *Zohar* was to Duncan's mind on those crucial days, and in particular its commentary on "Haye Sarah" (Genesis 23:1–25:18). The passage Duncan alludes to must be that which we find at 132b: "For that reason the evening prayer is optional, inasmuch as it is a continuation of the day prayer, having for its aim to illumine the obscurity of the night. That obscurity prevails until midnight, at which hour the Holy One disports Himself with the righteous in the Garden of Eden. Hence it is an opportune time for a man to busy himself in the study of the Torah, as already explained elsewhere."[192] The very same commentary, but four pages earlier, is the source for Duncan's use of the term "folded," which we will discuss below.[193]

This entry also discusses that "Atlantis dream" which appears here for the first time in the life of the poem. In Featherston's article, as well as Michael Davidson's interpretation of the poem in "A Book of First Things," this dream is taken to be the key to the poem. For Featherston, it reveals a repressed trauma or loss (thus his reference to Eleusis) that is "blowing…against" the progressions of "Rime."[194] For Davidson, likewise, "the loss of the mother, a field of waving grass and the persistence of a childhood circle dance become primary images of loss" and the poem becomes a "ritual" to restore a "prelapsarian state"—a poem, for him, of the "romantic imagination."[195] How we are to understand the belated entrance of the dream-material into the poem? Even if the "meadow" named in the first line of the "song" is the "field" of the dream, we would at least need to account for the development to which the archive gives testimony, that is, the

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192 Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol 2, 29.
193 Note Duncan's emphasis on the hour of his writing. The conjunction of the children's "ring" with "turn[ing]" and with a time just before dawn also connects the *Zohar* passage to the ending of "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar": "A line of Pindar/ moves from the area of my lamp/ toward morning.// In the dawn that is nowhere/ I have seen the willful children// clockwise and counter-clockwise turning."
194 Featherson, "A Place of First Permission," 682.
195 Davidson, "A Book of First Things," 60.

three phases in which the "meadow" appears first and then the grass blowing without a wind and finally—not in this second revision nor in the third—the children's "game." We would have to understand not only this development but also the placement of the dream material within the order of the poem. In the quoted notebook entry, Duncan himself connects the dream to the judgment of the Accuser and the perilous relationship of the poet to the "ring" of children or to the crowd.

The critique of ownership—not precisely authorship—anticipates the introduction of the play of "mine" and "not mine" in the 1 August draft and the changes Duncan will make to this in the next draft, where "that is not mine, but is a made place/—as if the mind made it up—a poem.// That is mine—it is so near to the heart" becomes "that is not mine, but is a given place// That is mine, it is so near to the heart," with the interference of several possible referents ("mind," "poem") for "That" now removed. Below that entry, Duncan copies out George Herbert's verse dedication to *The Temple*: "Yet not mine neither, for from thee they came, And must returne." These pious lines, and the complex oscillation of pronouns throughout Herbert's six lines, must be behind Duncan's "mine" and "not mine."[196] Duncan adds: "which I see true to of the coming out of and return to the genius of the language." His devotion is to language and not God, or to the God of language, but he reads out of Herbert's dedication a grammar of participation. And Duncan here comes very close to Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, in "Experience"—in response, it would seem, to would-be arbiters much like those who haunt Duncan—writes:

> Let who will ask, where is the fruit? I find a private fruit sufficient. This is a fruit,--that I should not ask for a rash effect from meditations, counsels, and the hiving of truths. I should feel it pitiful to demand a result on this town and county, an overt

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[196] See George Herbert, *The Country Parson, The Temple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981): 118.
The full dedication is:

> Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
> Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
> And must return. Accept of them and me,
> And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.
> Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
> Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

effect on the instant month and year. The effect is deep and secular as the cause. It works on periods in which mortal lifetime is lost. All I know is reception; I am and I have: but I do not get, and when I have fancied I had gotten anything, I found I did not. I worship with wonder the great Fortune. My reception has been so large, that I am not annoyed by receiving this or that superabundantly. I say to the Genius, if he will pardon the proverb, *In for a mill, in for a million*. When I receive a new gift, I do not macerate my body to make the account square, for, if I should die, I could not make the account square. The benefit overran the merit the first day, and has overran the merit ever since. The merit itself, so-called, I reckon part of the receiving.[197]

Immediately below the 1 August revisions, Duncan quotes the following from Plutarch's "Concerning Isis and Osiris": "They shld take very good heed and be apprehensive lest unwittingly they write-off the sacred mysteries and dissolve them into winds and streams, and sowing and ploughing, and passions of earth and changes of season."[198] The context of Plutarch's statement is a critique of the reductive identification of deities with natural forces, for those who proffer such interpretations are, Plutarch says, "in nothing differ from those who regard a pilot as sails and ropes and anchor." For, he goes on, "For a God is not a thing without a mind or soul, or one made subject to the hand of man; but it is from these doings that we deduce that those who bestow them on us for our use and offer them [to us] in perpetual abundance, are Gods." We are initiated into "the mysteries of the Gods" by "consecrated symbols," which "guid[e] the intelligence" but "not without risk. The relevance of Plutarch's comment to "Often I Am Permitted" is not obvious. In a sense, Duncan's struggle in these years has been to realize the divine or half-divine figures who haunt him as manifestations of what Plutarch, in the same passage, calls "the Reason that orders all things" and to recognize all things whatsoever, whether beneficent or from the "other side," as such "symbols" guiding the intelligence upwards. The quotation may have a local relevance as well: he may be warning himself off the stanza with which this version ends, the repetition of the image of

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[197] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2003): 309.
[198] The translation is G.R.S. Mead's, which Duncan would have found in Mead's *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*. See G.R.S. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* (London: Theosophical Society, 1906): 347.

the "grass" and the doubled identification of the "lady" with the natural scene. "For some," Plutarch writes, "go completely astray and become engulfed in superstition"; to the pattern of Duncan's thinking, the final stanza runs the risk of substituting for "rime" the related idols of "meadow" and "lady." This final stanza is nowhere to be found two days later.

The 3 August pages run as follows. Four times Duncan writes out the initial stanza of the poem. First:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> that is not mine, but is a place made,
> a made-up thing of the mind, a poem

And then:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> that is not mine, but is a place made-up
> —as if

Both of these are crossed out. Third:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> that is not mine, but is a given place

Fourth:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> that is not mine, but is a given place

Then, at last, with the fifth, the entire poem unfolds. It is still not in its final form:

> Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
> —as if it were a scene made-up by the mind—
> that is not mine, but is a given place.
>
> That is mine, it is so near to the heart
> an eternal pasture folded in all thot
> so that there is a hall therein
>
> that is a made place, created by light
> wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.
>
> Wherefrom fall all architectures I am
> I say are likenesses of the First Beloved

whose flowers are flames lit to the Lady.

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow[199]
~
She it is Queen of the Hill whose hosts
Dark
She who is Queen under the Hill, whose hosts[200]
are a disturbance of word within words
that is a field folded.
It is only a dream of the grass blowing,
east against the course of the sun
~~where no wind blows~~
in an hour before the sun's going down.

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

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

The final steps Duncan took from this version to the published poem are not apparent in the available record. (See Chapter 2, above, for the few things that are visible, e.g. the changing name of the poem.)

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Davidson says of "The Structure of Rime" that it is "a variable form answering to its own necessities."[201] We would rather say, at least in regards to the second section, that it is a recurrent form answering to its own necessity for variation; and we would emphasize that the variations are as much systematic and linguistic as they are organic and mysterious. That section, as we saw, comprised a structure outwardly determined by recurrence in which the mythological continuity (i.e.,

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[199] This seems to be Duncan's way of indicating to himself the context of what follows. It starts a new page, and perhaps he had left off the composition after writing the preceding lines.
[200] "whose hosts" is circled; an arrow indicates that it should be moved to the beginning of the next line.
[201] Davidson, "A Book of First Things," 66.

the event, the initiation) was entirely implicit. By contrast, "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" presents a pure continuity, an unceasing flow of speech, in which that principle of "disresemblance" or variation is applied to the higher orders of the poem and resemblance or recurrence plays a constitutive, but subliminal, role.

If the sequence of revisions documented above shows anything, it is that Duncan tried to diminish the loud, rhetorical recurrences that dominated the "song" in "John Davenport. Thus, as noted above, the end-rhymes (of whatever closeness) are eliminated. The anaphora of "Often…" on 1 August is distracted, so that the three instances stand further apart, and then on 3 August is reduced to two; the final version of the poem introduces a discrepancy to even this repetition by using the first line as the title. The stanzas are no longer only tercets; they alternate between couplets and tercets, with the exception of the stanza beginning "She it is…", which we would expect to be a couplet but is a tercet. Those are the major changes in this direction. There are others. The doubling of "an eternal pasture folded in time" and "a field folded of time within time" becomes "an eternal pasture folded in all thought" ("thot" in the draft) and "a disturbance of words within words/ that is a field folded." The doubling of "time within time" and "ripple upon ripple" becomes the single spatial figure of "words within words." The second appearance of the Beloved-Lady pairing is eliminated.

What of the recurrences that are intensified? The variety of patterns we hear in the twenty-four (counting the title) lines of the final poem—the organization of stress and syllable quantity, the duration of the line, the placement of caesuras, the coincidence and non-coincidence of the line with syntactical units—should not obfuscate the central importance in Duncan's revisions of two phenomena, one prosodic and the other syntactical. Both are present in the "song" before being multiplied in the later revisions.

The first phenomenon is a demonstration of the physiology of vowels, and of the "dance" that the mouth performs in shaping exhalations. We get the sense, in almost every line, that Duncan is playing variations on the full "scale" of vowel qualities, which he seems to classify, in a somewhat rudimentary way, according to a single ("absolute"?) scale that combines both the syllable length and the openness of the mouth in producing the sound. Some lines move from the "narrow"/"short" vowels to the "wide" /"long" vowels: "as if it were a scene made-up by the mind"; "wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall"; "It is only a dream of the grass blowing"; "as if it were a given property of the mind." Some lines move the opposite direction: "Wherefrom fall all architectures I am"; "I say are likenesses of the First Beloved"; "whose hosts are a disturbance of words within words." But the full range is never enunciated in a single line, and the "run" through the "scale" is, as we can see in these examples, never linear. What can be observed, however, is that the lines are characterized by the differentiation of vowel sounds and by the systematic exploration of contrasting effects both between contiguous syllables and within the measure. In particular, we notice that Duncan's revisions multiply clusters of syllables wherein the narrowest and shortest vowels are immediately contrasted with the widest and longest ones. Sometimes he sets several in a row of the former against several in a row of the latter. That line—"as if it were a scene made up by the mind"—, new to the 3 August draft, and properly the first line of the final poem, offers an excellent example of this phenomenon, in the contraposition of five short/narrow vowels ("as if it were a") with two long/open vowels ("scene made") and the subsequent alternation of qualities ("up by the mind"). In the opposite direction, the line "Wherefrom fall all architectures I am"—kept from the original "song"—sets its initial five long/open vowels against three consecutive short/narrow vowels. A line like the second line ("that is not mine, but is a made place"), in which a basic pattern (from "middle" to "narrow" to "wide") is paralleled across the syntactical break, with the subtle asymmetries in the opposition of *a* and *u* and the extra syllable ("a") in the second half, offers another type of these

"disresemblances." So, in this context, does the line of perfect iambic tetrameter—"of ring a round of roses told"—where the contrasting stresses coincide with opposing vowel qualities.

These events, if we can call them that, for Duncan would give a special sense to "the opening of the field," insofar as their dilations and contractions set the mouth in motion, opening—and closing. They also have a suggestive iconicity. The alternations of the last line quoted, for example, and the density of different soundings of "o" evoke the circle dance. Or consider how the contracting movement of "Wherefrom fall all architectures I am" rhymes with the "fall" of "form" from the "light."

They contribute, on the whole, to the drama of perpetual transformation that the poem puts on. And, as in the dialogue of "The Structure of Rime," in a way that stretches back to Duncan's argument with Olson about the incarnation of the body in poetry, insofar as we enact or reenact the movement of the sounds we are initiated into their patterns and participate in their dance.

Before describing the second phenomenon, we should note a special prosodic event, which participates in the general "dance" of contrasting vowels. It occurs only a few times in the poem, but it forms, in each case, a node of such intensity that this dance seems somehow to ascend from the materiality of its linguistic construction. It entails, simply, the immediate reduplication of vowel sounds. One (actually, triple) instance had already been present in the first "song": "Wherefrom fall all architectures I am." A second instance, in which two repetitions are paired, is worked into the poem when Duncan revises it between 1 August and 3 August: "that is a field folded of time within time," which is neutral in this respect, becomes "an eternal pasture folded in all thought," where the doubled vowel of the last syllable of "folded" and "in" is contrasted with the doubling in "all thought." We can add as well "She it is Queen…" where the doubled "it is" distracts the repetition of the vowel in "She" and "Queen."

*

When Duncan makes "a field folded of time within time" into "a disturbance of word within words/ that is a field folded," he is locating rime within the structure of language, as opposed to within a configuration of time, where rime would pertain to periodicity of some kind. And, while the "field" has several senses in his usage, one of them seems to be precisely this duplication, in an etymological sense, of vowel sounds.

It is true that, in subsequent years, "fold" and "folded" will take on wider significations in Duncan's thinking. We can briefly survey his usage of the terms. One association is with the four-fold hermeneutics articulated by Dante in his "Letter to Can Grande"; in "The Sweetness and Greatness of Dante's *Divine Comedy*," an essay of 1965, he writes: "The operations and mysteries of Poetry itself as Dante reveals them are as subtle and central to his vision of the Real as the operations and mysteries of Love are. They are not separate, for their reality is one; they have their source in the same literal ground of the poem. Poetry as well as Love is revealed in terms of that four-fold understanding that Dante would have us have."[202] The 1971 "Iconographical Extensions" develops a related four-fold theory of "vision": there is 1) a "language" of the painting "as if there were a tongue in the mouth of what we see"; there is 2) "a world and lexicon of its things and beings" that is represented; there is 3) a version of "Rime," the language of concordances or visual rhymes—emblems, hieroglyphs, symbols, constellations and associations" that "arises in the purely visual world, even as it does in the logical world, felt as rhythms and melodic constructs appear in the field of color activities and ratios, giving rise to possibilities in relationship of continuity and discontinuity, of sense, nonsense, irreal and surreal conjugations of the seen"; and, finally, 4) there is "the apprehension of the identity of the painting itself appears, at once primary and ultimate, of the

[202] Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 105. Here Duncan sets forth an interpretation of Dante's four-fold as a device the Italian poet used to protect his revelation of angelic presences from the charge of heresy.

Real with the Vision and its Way."[203] We will come back to this important association in a later chapter, but it is important to note that Duncan does not conceive of these as independent levels of a static text but as dynamically interrelated aspects of an emerging reality.

In a fascinating interview of 1980, Duncan comments directly upon "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow." Not only that—he recalls his revisions of the poem, in certain places contradicting or mis-remembering what we have found in his notebooks, and assigns to the revisions a decisive role in his realizing "everything that I was going to unwind/wind in the book."[204] Here he gives "folded" a cultural sense and a theosophical-psychological sense. On the one hand, it signifies the "the union of the Judaic, the classical, and the Celto-Germanic"; on the other hand, it evokes "a queen folded in the fold of God" and means that "while we pose this father—right into the center of this poem which has its hidden reference to that Cave at Machpelah, which is fathering yourself again—you pose inside the queen who becomes the queen of the whole hive."

Yet, in Duncan's usage up to 1960, these are not the operative senses. Instead, what is "folded" are two entities, both of which appear in the drafts of the poem. One is the structure of language, the other is time, and these interchange throughout the first decade of Duncan's career. Thus, in "Africa Revisited," from *A Book of Resemblances*, we read:

bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb
of the nightbird,
honk and konk of senseless sound.

Giraffes of noise
that running thru sound
fold and unfold themselves,
keeping their necks
in eternity motionless[205]

[203] *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 286-287.
[204] Robert Duncan, *A Poet's Mind*, 123-124.
[205] Robert Duncan, *Early Collected Poems and Plays*, 366.

That's 1949; the recognition of a "senseless sound," an animal of mere "noise" moving within sound, which somehow connects our temporal language with "eternity," anticipates Duncan's discernment in "Poetry Before Language" of a remnant of free or primal sound, unconquered by the repressive regime of language, which is poetry's salvific hope. Likewise, in 1951: "All our sheep are hidden in the fold/ Words are soft pockets to be seald."[206] In *The Opening of the Field* itself, in a poem written in 1959, we read these lines, which register their own end-rhymes (and perhaps the parallelism, excluded from "Often I Am Permitted, of "fragrance…/ tone…") as "slack undulations" and manifestations of "inertia": The skull of the old man wears a/ face that's a rose from the renewd Adam thrown./ Slack undulations fall,/ radiant teachings from the gospel bone,/ fragrance folded upon fragrance,/ tone twisted within tone, of gold,/ cream, rose, blood, milk—a ruddy paroxysm/ flowering from inertia."[207] One also finds phrases in which time is said to be "folded." The 1953 Stein imitation "This Is The Poem They Are Praising As Loaded" speaks of "A loaded folding up in which history is folded."[208] 1959's "Night Scenes" envisions "Time in the folds of their skirts' motion," and in 1960's "Apprehensions" we read, "The elemental man is a humpt bank where/ the hair grows, heapt up of time,/ folded upon fold," with a slight variation on the "x upon x" construction that recurs throughout Duncan's texts.

There is good reason to think that the change from "time within time" to "words within words" arose from Duncan's reading of the *Zohar*, since the revelation of "words within words" is the primary activity of the *Zohar*'s hermeneutic. By means of strategies like gematria (numerological substitution), anagrammatic permutation, and notarikon (treating the letters of a word as an acronym), it is able, in principle, to find any word in any other word. This is, in any case, Duncan's

[206] *Early Collected Poems and Plays*, 423. The book is *Names of People*, the poem "A Song is a Game."
[207] *Later Collected Poems and Plays*, 70. "Bone Dance."
[208] *Early Collected Poems and Plays*, 423. The book is *Writing Writing.*

"rime" or Jakobson's "principle of equivalence" *in extremis*, since it is the shared materiality of the words in a single language, the fact that they are inscribed in the finite set of letters in their common alphabet—rather than, for example, a grammatical function or sound structure—that establishes the basis for the *Zohar*'s poetry. It is only in a certain sense that "time" or "time within time" plays an important role in the Kabbalistic book, namely, that the mythologically distinct moments of, say, the generation of the "spark" out of "no-end," the creation of the world as described in Genesis, Jeremiah's lamentation for the destroyed temple, and the speculations of Simeon bar Yohai and his companions are not, even in the visions of cosmic destruction and redemption, splayed out in linear sequence but nest within one another. So, time is "folded" within time, but this seems only to be so in language and as language—because the cosmos, in all its many dimensions or spheres, is made of letters. Once we examine the relationship between the *Zohar*'s mystical historiography and this linguistic cosmology, it seems more accurate to say that time is constituted *by* the complications of words. The shift in emphasis from a primarily temporal structure to a primarily linguistic structure recalls the transformation in Duncan's interpretation of the *Zohar*, from his pessimistic division of the period of poetry ("before language") and the period of writing to his Hermetic vision of single continuum in which all the potencies of language remain active.

It is certain that the poem's usage of "folded," specifically a "pasture…folded" and a "field folded," has its source in the *Zohar*.[209] In the same 1980 interview quoted above, Duncan tells us that not only this phrase come from the *Zohar* but also the very first line of the poem, too:

> And if we take just that opening sentence, "Often I am permitted to return to a meadow," at the same time that I recognized it meant you have permitted me now to return to this meadow (I will be safe from angels) that is not what happened by the time I'd done an "eternal pasture folded in all thought." I knew the idea of a "folded pasture" or a "folded field" as a proposition given in the Zohar for the Cave of Machpelah, so my field was identified initially in this poem, in its very first version, with the cave that Abraham sees, and he recognizes before he buys it that it is the

[209] See Michael Davidson, "A Book of First Things," 60.

> center of the universe, and also that the forefathers are gathered there, are buried there, of whom he is going to be the fourth. You find in the same period in my writing to Olson, I was building a picture of the quartet; I had kept trying to picture what was happening in the generation of Pound and Williams and Lawrence. The quartet, as I finally designed it, was Williams and Lawrence and Pound, and then Olson became both an ancestral figure and a fellow figure, and I got to be the son. In other words, I am re-creating a father and fathering myself. In the H.D. Book I talk about poets mothering themselves in the language, in the loss of their mother, and frequently I have father constructs, just as I construct an architect almost immediately.

Duncan's comparison of his poetic "forefathers" to the Biblical forefathers who would be gathered in the cave sets his reading of this passage, somewhat ambiguously, within the crisis of poetic tradition we previously described. It is particularly interesting because, in the *Zohar*, "the forefathers" do not seem to be "gathered there"; the text's astonishing invention is to propose, with no explicit basis in the Torah, that Abraham had made an earlier visitation to the cave and saw "Adam and Eve buried there," and "whilst he was gazing a door opened into the Garden of Eden."[210] The only sense in which Abraham could be understood as the fourth would be if Adam, Eve, and then Sarah are counted as the first three burials.[211] The paternal sonship he declares when he says "I am re-creating a father and fathering myself" is its own creative folding or duplication and corresponds exactly to both to Duncan's peculiar understanding of himself as "a seeker after origins" and to the *Zohar*'s mythopoetic usurping of the Bible of the forefathers. There is another sleight besides: by placing "an eternal pasture folded in all thought" in the "very first version" of the poem, Duncan is running together the several revisions that we have noted. But his sense of the different values of the "meadow"—"(I will be safe from angels)," with its Rilkean resonance—and the "eternal pasture," as well as his sense of the difference between the two of them as something that "happen[s]" in the course of the poem's transmutation, is instructive. Featherston's description of the poem as a

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[210] Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, Vol 2, 29.

[211] Or else it is a revision of the Zohar's statement that there "David joined the patriarchs." Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar,* Vol 2, 10.

"matrix of creation and destruction, history and prophecy" appertains to the juxtaposition of these phrases, and to the status of the "place" more generally within the poem[212]: its oscillations between being a bounded precinct and "an eternal pasture" where, as Al Filreis says, "the dead are buried" is not resolved.[213]

That the *Zohar* is the source of the "folded field" in Duncan's parlance has been noted by Filreis, Davidson, and others. The most serious discussion of Duncan's engagement with the Zohar is Filreis's argument, in his book on 1960—the year of the publication of *The Opening of the Field* and, his subtitle says, "when art and literature confronted the memory of World War II and remade the Modern"—that Duncan's workings in "Jewish non-rationalism" and "poetic gnosis" constituted a radical intervention in "the doomed politics of intellectual culture."[214] But the importance for Duncan's poetry of the Kabbalah at large, and this passage from the *Zohar* in particular, is not well understood. We have attempted to address the former in the previous chapter. Now we will consider, in detail, what we can perceive of Duncan's reading of the *Zohar*'s vision of Machpelah, and we will show its ramifications for Duncan's poetics in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow." Even if Machpelah only appeared here, it would merit such attention. As it is, Duncan evokes it both in "Yes, As a Look Springs to Its Face":

YES, AS A LOOK SPRINGS TO ITS FACE

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

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

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212 Featherston, "A Place of First Permission," 683.
213 Al Filreis, *1960: When Art and Literature Confronted the Memory of World War II and Remade the Modern* (New York: Columbia University, 2021): 79.
214 Filreis, *1960*, 79.

but one joyous thread…[215]

The underlined words are the translation of Genesis 23:20 that provide the text for the passage of commentary in which Duncan found the special usage of "folded." It is interesting that the first version of this poem, from December 1957, has no reference to the *Zohar*. It begins: "a life colors the meadow/ that is green with grass or in harvest/ in stubble aroused…"[216] In the middle of 1958, before the revisions to "Having Been Enraged," Duncan worked through several pages of attempts at rewriting this poem, trying out many different versions of the opening stanzas. Some include the quotation from the *Zohar* and the evocation of Abraham's cave, some do not. In fact, Duncan's wavering about the inclusion of this material seems to be what is driving his revisions; ultimately, he chose to keep it in. The second text where Duncan discusses the cave and the field is a "Preface" to *The Opening of the Field* that appears in several drafts in the archive but was not published with the book. There, in 1959, Duncan writes:

> What we do do ourselves is the design of our preoccupation; conscious of our task—the thematic development, the interweaving of the consciously analyzed and synthesized—we are unconscious and must have faith in the work. In this book the task moves along lines referring to the Field: it is the field which appeard in my earliest rememberd childhood dream, where children danced and an omen came of bowing grass where no wind was and of a king chosen for the game, followd by terror, deluge, by what I do not remember. It is the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite saying: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. Machpelah, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about. Remembering too, Zukofsky's lines from Songs of Degrees:
>
> > The sound in the Temple built after exile
> > Is never worth the sound
> > At the earth where no temple stood
> > And on which no law of exile can fall.
> > …
> > Crabbed and lovely both is root.
> > What is never imposes.

[215] Duncan, *Later Collected Poems and Plays*, 54.
[216] Box 2, Notebook 26.

> The Tree's good of the field of Machpelah
> Of Persia or of Mytilene.

> It is the field of the poem described by Charles Olson in Projective Verse (extended here to the field of a book projected by the poems). It is the field of Roman law: the domestic configuration of ancestral tomb, fire of the hearth, Lares and Manes of the house, the private property: that there be sacred enclosure, guarded by the conceald gods; of woods or stone or hedge, a square obstacle; and around the field a band of wild earth, kept sacred, with great stones or trees or previous poets as markers, termini. It is a ground upon which something is drawn like an heraldic device, or a game is played to show in contest specific vitalities.[217]

We have here the full set of Duncan's associations with "the field": the field of his Atlantis dream, the field of Machpelah, Olson's poetic "field," the sacred precinct (taken from his reading of Fustel de Coulanges), the blazon, the gamecourt. It is curious that this account omits the attribute of the field as "folded." Perhaps this is because, a year later, Duncan is more concerned with the "book projected by the poems" than with the structure of the single poem; thus, "the field" here is a total symbol which binds together the poet's plural works as aspects of a single place. Perhaps, in another sense, the field's foldedness is implied by its manifold significance, which Duncan recites here—and the recurrence of "it is" echoes out of "She it is Queen…" and "It is only a dream…" from the poem.

We will come back to these predications, and to the poem's syntax in general, below. At that point, we will consider the entire structure of the pertinent section of the *Zohar* and examine its relevance to Duncan's "rime." For now, let us look only at that part of the section where Duncan found his "field folded":

> 'Observe that when Abraham entered the cave for the first time he saw there a bright light, and as he advanced, the ground lifted, revealing to him two graves. Adam then arose in his true form, saw Abraham and smiled at him. (Abraham thereby knew that there he was destined to be buried.) Abraham then said to him: "Could you tell me, is there not a tent for me close to you?" Adam replied: "The Holy One buried me here, and from that time until now I have been lying hid like a corn seed in the

[217] Box 24, Folder 13.

> ground, until thou camest into the world. But from now there is salvation for me and for the world for thy sake."

Did Duncan read that as a figure of his (belated) poetic election and of his task vis-à-vis the poetic past? We read on, and come immediately to the line quoted in "Yes, As a Look Springs to Its Face":

> Hence it is written, AND THE FIELD AND THE CAVE THAT IS THEREIN AROSE, that is, there was literally an arising before the presence of Abraham, as up to that time nothing there had been visible, but now what had been hidden rose up, and thus the whole spot was devoted to its lawful purpose.'

We get a taste of one way the *Zohar* reads Biblical language, if we compare its version of the Biblical verse (in all-caps) to the Hebrew original. The *Zohar* gives us the words in their original order, but from between the verb ("arose") and the two nouns it has omitted relative clauses that state the ownership of the cave and the field. Moreover, it reads the verb (*va'yaqqam*) in a physical rather than, as usual, an economic sense (thus, KJV "the field, and the cave which was therein… were made sure unto Abraham").

> R. Simeon said: 'When Abraham brought Sarah in there for burial, Adam and Eve arose and refused to receive her. They said: "Is not our shame already great enough before the Holy One in the other world on account of our sin, which brought death into the world, that ye should come to shame us further with your good deeds?" Abraham made answer: "I am already destined to make atonement before the Almighty for thee, so that thou mayest nevermore be shamed before Him." Forthwith Abraham after this buried Sarah his wife, to wit, after Abraham had taken upon himself this obligation. Adam then returned to his place, but not Eve, until Abraham came and placed her beside Adam, who received her for his sake. Hence the text, AND AFTER THIS, ABRAHAM BURIED (*eth*) SARAH HIS WIFE: the augmenting particle *eth* indicates that the burial included, as it were, Eve. Thus they were all settled in their proper places. Hence the Scripture says, "These are the generations of heaven and earth when they were created (*b'hibar'am*)" (Gen. II, 4), which according to tradition, means "on account of Abraham" (*b'Abraham*). Now "the generations of the heaven and the earth" can only be Adam and Eve, they having been the direct issue of the heaven and earth and not of human parents, and it was they who became established through Abraham; before Abraham, Adam and Eve were not established in their places in the other world.'

This discussion ought to return us to Duncan's comparison of the Biblical forefathers (which, as we saw, were partly his insertion) to his poetic forefathers. For, here, the task of Abraham—whom

Duncan explicitly identifies with Olson but who doubles, as well, Duncan himself—is given in terms that echo not only Duncan's vision of paternal sonship but also his aim of restoring the fallen Adam or the "image of man." Perhaps he associated Abraham's "establish[ment] of the original parents" with his own work vis-à-vis received poetic tradition.

Now we come to the key sentences. Suddenly,

> R. Eleazar asked his father, R. Simeon, for an explanation of the term Machpelah (lit. "twofold", or "folded"). 'How is it,' he said, 'that first it is written "the cave of Machpelah", and subsequently "the cave of the field of Machpelah", implying that the field and not the cave was "Machpelah" (doubled)?' R. Simeon replied: 'The term *Machpelah* belongs properly neither to the cave nor to the field, but to something else with which both were connected. The cave belongs to the field, and the field to something else. For the whole of the Land of Israel and of Jerusalem is folded up beneath it, since it exists both above and below, in the same way as there is a Jerusalem both above and below, both of the same pattern. The Jerusalem above has a twofold attachment, above and below; similarly the Jerusalem below is linked to two sides, higher and lower. Hence it is folded in two; and that field partakes of the same character, seeing that it is therein situated.

We see, immediately, how thinking of this sort draws out the inevitable complexities of the Hermetic schema, "as above, so below." In Duncan's terms, for the *Zohar* the microcosm-macrocosm relationship is not characterized by resemblance alone, but by both resemblance and disresemblance. We can anticipate our discussion of the *Zohar*'s poetics by noting that the improvisatory and dynamic way this passage unfolds, from R. Eleazar's spontaneous question to R. Simeon's propositions (about possession, like Duncan's "mine") that, as they emerge, change the scope and focus of the mystic's perspective, even as they invent variations on the folded "pattern." The passage concludes as follows:

> The same reference is contained in the passage, "as the smell of the field which the Lord hath blessed" (Gen. XXVII, 27), to wit, both above and below. Hence its name, "field of folding", but not "folded field". Further, the esoteric implication of the term *Machpelah* relates it to the Divine Name, in which the letter *Hé* is doubled, though both are as one. It is, indeed, true that the cave was a twofold one, a cave within a cave, yet the name "cave of the field of Machpelah" has a different connotation, as already explained. Abraham, on his part, who knew its true character, in speaking to the children of Heth called it simply "cave of Machpelah", as if to

> imply merely "double cave", which it also was in fact. Scripture, however, describes it as "the cave of the field of Machpelah", this being its true description. For the Holy One has disposed all things in such a way that everything in this world should be a replica of something in the world above, and that the two should be united so that His glory should be spread above and below. Happy the portion of the righteous in whom the Holy One finds pleasure both in the world and in the world to come!'

The crucial contribution of this discussion to Duncan's poem, and to his poetics, in a sense is summarized by the sentence where it construes *Machpelah* as a verbal noun rather than as an adjective. Although the two explicit references to this passage in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" will use a rendering of the phrase ("pasture…folded" or "field folded") that this text would seem to reject, it is the text's preferred sense—"field of folding"—to which Duncan is indebted. When, as we have seen, Duncan understands "folded" as a special prosodic phenomenon involving the duplication of vowels sounds, he literalizes the *Zohar*'s cosmology. But he does not stop there and found his poetics on sound patterns, as he might have done five years earlier. Instead, he follows the Zoharic passage's own enactment of "folding" in its repeated displacement of every proposed entity as the ultimate locus of "folding." The key phrase is "something else": "The cave belongs to the field, and the field to something else." It is not, let us be clear, "something greater" in some cosmological hierarchy, but "something else," or, in other words, disresemblance. But this disresemblance, which obtains both in the relationship of cave to field (or above to below) and also in the motions of the mystical discourse, clearly does not exclude that to which it is contrasted. That is, even as the Kabbalistic text reveals unseen aspects of the phrase, the literal sense is not destroyed. We are told that the cave was truly "the cave of the field of Machpelah" but bore the exoteric name "cave of Machpelah… double cave;" yet this latter, rather than being a falsehood guarding the true name from the children of Heth, "it also was in fact." As the esoteric meanings multiply, they come to form, alongside the literal, dimensions of the "folded" reality that has one of its manifestations in "the cave of the field." This is not the only instance where an interpretation is simultaneously

supplanted and retained as it is, without its survival requiring a sublimation to a higher meaning. At the same time, however, the movements of the Rabbis' discussion, in their stepwise fashion, expand the area of the text's awareness, so that the structural alternations, like the permutations of the section of "The Structure of Rime" discussed above," are more than the pulsations of "casual" play; these alternations, instead, are what give coherence to its multiplying and contrasting meanings. There is in this passage no single entity that can form the ultimate term for the Kabbalists' inventions—only "folding," and that, the text makes clear, does not inhere in any one entity or place or realm but supplies, apparently, the coherence of each with all. To insist on any one entity as ultimate would constitute an idolatry false to the *Zohar*'s primary vision of *ein-sof*, but to insist on the equalization of all entities would likewise betray its knowledge of the different and higher realms. This rhymes with Duncan's thought that there is no one linguistic element or category (let alone something further afield, like the soul or history or the earth) that alone can form an ultimate basis for poetry. It also resembles his refusal to accept the pure, non-hierarchical play of language as the culmination of the art, for he, like the *Zohar*, knows "Man" as fallen and believes that, in fact, the structure of language, set in motion by a special kind of writing, promises our salvation. In this way, this passage, which we know was at the center of Duncan's attention, fully answers his crisis, at the limits both of Romantic and of Modernist tradition.

If such a description seems excessively "technical" for the emphasis we have given it, let us recall Duncan's repeated inscription, in his notebooks, of the Poundian motto: "from τεχνη back to σεαυτον." *From the Art back to Yourself.* If this seems excessively "technical," so must Duncan's pedagogy and the several phases of his poetics described above; it is, simply, how he worked and

thought. In his mind, the minute events of language are events in the realization of the Self; they are, he will write two decades later, "a primary ground of experience."[218]

We have postponed until now consideration of a series of "Notes on the Structure of Rime," "done," their header tells us, "for Warren Tallman, Spring 1961."[219] As it has been published in the *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, it comprises an initial set of pages from 1961 and then a 1973 extension that Duncan calls "A Psycho-Physiognomy." Only the set of initial materials concerns us here. It, too, is divided in half. Its first part draws heavily on Trager and Smith, which it cites as "the best description" of "how much a poet has all his life to do." Most of it is devoted to a schematic illustration of "our possible awareness between total disresemblance of sounds and total resemblances," from which "*Rime*… is derived."[220] This part presents an example of "total resemblance" ("O *light* of the sun,/ *light* as a feather,/*light* on this branch/ to love so *lightly*," i.e. a total resemblance that runs across grammatical disresemblance"), an example of "inverse resemblance" ("*Tile* of light grey hot *isle* of pleasure"), and of "total disresemblance" ("*m, n, w*" against the "*fricatives*: *f* and *v*"). There follows as well a spatial diagram of the physiology of vowels. As in his reading notes on Trager and Smith, Duncan is preoccupied with phonemics more than phonetics, and above all the key word is "aware" or "awareness," that is, the phenomenon of sound as it is perceived in complex linguistic events and not in the abstract:

> When we are aware of the number…
> If we can make the listener aware that a line in poetry is longer than he can count…
> *Rime*… is derived from our possible awareness…

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[218] The full statement, in which that phrase occurs, deserves reading: "What is it that is truly unspeakable? As a poet I find myself attackt for my being ultimately concerned with the experience of poetry and language. We may have begun to accept that sex is not a mere instrument but a primary ground of experience, but it is still rank heresy to take language, the pleasure and functions of words in their operations as such, as being the ground of primary information. Words are supposed to properly refer and to relate, and all the realm of their actual presence and the powers of language to use every other realm of experience to refer to and relate to its own realities, of the poem to use politics, religion, history, biology, love, autobiography, to illustrate itself, is forbidden as the realm of Narcissus, whom the Neo-Platonists saw as Creator of the World in his self-fascination, is forbidden."

[219] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 290. It was first published in *Maps* 6, in 1974.

[220] The phrasing repeats, almost verbatim, the way Duncan puts the matter to Blaser in the 1958 letter cited above.

But, unsurprisingly, a merely phonemic awareness is insufficient for Duncan: "we also hear in the symbolic order the letter 't'." Ultimately, Duncan writes, "This structure of rime means the poet is not only to depend upon his *ear* but *what he is doing*," and, although "*There is no end of the task of bringing the sounds into our conscious art*… the same holds for meanings, for correspondences," since "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," he adds, "of sentence structure. There are rimes of gender."[221] Thus, these "Notes" offer another expression of that "absolute scale" we had found in "The Structure of Rime" and another demonstration of Duncan's application, to an ascending series of phenomena or categories, of a principle he has discovered at the most elementary level of language. That suggests how we should interpret the three equations that immediately follow the above passage:

> Rime in Poetry = the doctrine of correspondences in life feeling.
> Rime in Poetry = reference (to take the measure of a man)
> RIME = morphological intuition[222]

Here, as elsewhere, we get a sense of Duncan's excitement as new and different aspects of his matter come into view. The particular excitement here seems to be the way that disparate things are acceding to, and being illuminated by, the theory of "Rime." Each of these lines equates a reality—which might have otherwise been taken as the pattern from which poetry derives its reality—with "Rime in Poetry." If we can trust Duncan's earlier mention of "the doctrine of correspondences," where it is in apposition to "meanings," then here it not only signifies the theory of linguistic signification and the occult doctrine by that name that is the basis of magic but also suggests that, as "Rime in Poetry," the two are one. The second equation perhaps can be parsed with the help of

[221] In the passage from I have been quoting there are various bracketed insertions that, presumably—although the editors don't make this explicit—date to the 1973 revision of the "Notes."
[222] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 292.

Duncan's distinction, at the beginning of the notes, between "rime" as "prototype for crude measurement—the ruler with its convention of regular units (metrics)" and "rime" as "the artist's eye taking measure (difference between the draftman's rendering and what Monet sees in the Doge's palace)."[223] "Reference" in language is not, according to Duncan, a mimetic "resemblance" nor an arbitrary "disresemblance" between a sound-shape and a concept. In his thought, as we have seen (especially in his argument with Olson), everything that happens in a poem is at once a made thing that bears the signature of its maker and itself a creator that shapes the self's becoming. It is in this sense that "reference… takes the measure of man," for the resemblance or disresemblance of the word to the entity is a function of "the artist's eye." Think of the *Zohar*'s several revisions of the "reference" of several words ("cave," "field," "folded"), or for that matter the shifting reference of the "field" and the "meadow" in Duncan's poem.

Does the third equation ("RIME = morphological intuition") name a realm outside of poetry? Duncan's thinking poses a challenge both to conventional literary-criticism, which would find his speculations about language and form too mystical, and to readers of his poetry more sympathetic to his occult interest and his devotion to the organic mystery of poiesis, for whom Duncan's technical and structural analysis would reek of artifice. Especially the latter would hope to answer this question in the affirmative; and they would have some support from the second part of the 1961 "Notes," which is a Duncan's enumeration ("if I can recall them") of his sources for "The Structure of Rime": "my early adoration of the poet St.-John Perse"; *New Directions* 14, including texts by Lamantia, Mallarme, Poe, et al.; study of Blake and of the *Zohar*, George MacDonald, Rimbaud's *Illuminations*; "my imagination of *who Nietzsche*'s Zarathustra was." All of this implies a background for the series in "the shamanist drama," in "psychic double-talk… incubations… the

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[223] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 290.

Hermetic tradition in Poetry," and so forth. Yet, at the end of this list, Duncan summarizes the series in the following terms, where language returns as Language, a hypostasis or god:

> From all which I projected an open-end series having reference to a constantly changing theory of rime, measure, correspondences, as kosmos:
> like Perse—trance-projection
> like the shaman—let the persons of the Language speak thru me; to send myself into the Language
> like Mallarme—aesthetic projection
> like Nietzsche and Rimbaud—[224]

*

Enough of "folding" and the play of "folded" sounds. The second phenomenon, introduced and intensified by Duncan's revisions, involves the poem's sentences. Three of the four sentences (=stanzas) in the earliest version of the poem, as we have seen, were commanded by the syntagm, "Often I am permitted to return to a ______"; in each of those three, there is a different indirect object ("meadow," "hall," "poem"), and in the fourth a completely different sentence obtains ("Wherefrom fall all architectures…"), but in all four the second and third lines consist of a relative clause specifying and characterizing the place to which the speaker returns. We have already noted that Duncan breaks open that pattern. But there is more to say.

If we look at all the notebook versions of the first stanza, we see frequent changes to the stanza's diction—"given" instead of "made"—that surely reflect some subtle movement in Duncan's thought. Yet any of these could have fit in the final poem. There is one syntagm, however, present in the earlier versions, whose eventual removal is remarkable. It is in the third line of the original: "as if the mind made it up." Now, even in that first version, and all the more so in the 1 August versions, this is an anomalous form. In the stanza as it *was*, which appears in the same form both in January 1956 and August 1958,

[224] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 293-294.

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
that is not mine, but is a made place
—as if the mind made it up—a poem

the clause interrupts the sequence of predications that all have "a meadow" as their explicit or implicit subject. In August 1958, after this interruption, the poem continues the initial pattern—

That is mine—it is so near to the heart
that is a made place created by light

—wherein, again, "a meadow" is the nominative subject to every verb. Even the second attempt of 1 August 1958 continues and, by means of a result clause ("so that"), introduces a new nominative subject

That is mine—it is so near to the heart
an eternal pasture folded in time
so that there is a hall therein

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

the "hall" that is now nested within the "pasture" or "meadow" becomes the nominative subject of "that is a made place" and "created by light;" and when "shadows" form another "fold" within the "hall" they are the nominative subject of "fall." It is crucial to point out that this is the case even when the voice is passive ("created by light" or, in meaning if not form, "made place"). The poem does not insist that the "meadow" or any one of its constituents is the sole actor or solely an actor, but it does seem to insist—and this holds in entirety of the final version of the poem—that, as the "meadow" becomes a "scene," as a "place," a "pasture," etc., and as it unfolds the "architectures I am," and as those are revealed to be "likenesses of the First Beloved," and as her hand releases "flowers" that are "flames," as all of this unfolds in "the Lady," the "Queen Under the Hill," her "hosts," and so on, a chain of relative clauses or prepositions enables Duncan continually to transpose the nominative position to the new emergence. *Not once* does one of these nouns function as the direct object of a verb. And there it is: in that clause, "—as if the mind made it up—," the

"meadow" is set as the direct object of an action done by a "mind" that is, apparently, divided from it. It is a clause, too, that, by placing the new noun ahead of the relative pronoun, and thus by distracting the relative pronoun from its antecedent and the new noun from the clauses to come, inverts the unremitting syntactical direction of the poem.

These observations point us toward a consideration of the syntax of the poem as a whole. To the special phenomenon described above, we can add that the copula is the main verb of all but a few clauses. After "permitted" and "to return," except for the quasi-stative "folded" (which appears throughout the poem) and "created," the next verb that is not a form of "to be" is "fall" in the eighth line; it is repeated in the ninth. "I say" seems like a metalinguistic expression, a kind of discourse particle. "Lit" is again quasi-stative. "Grass blowing" and "the sun's going down" are participial and gerundive respectively. The next properly independent verbal phrase is "we see," the function of which is to further disclose the ontology of the scene. "Told" is like "lit." "Permitted" and "return" are then repeated before the final verb ("hold") appears. That amounts to four other verbs in twenty-four lines, against sixteen forms of the copula. The function of this, in general, is to suppress the temporality of language and emphasize its spatial presence; specifically, the spatial nature of language is presented in its mere existence, since the sequent condition of writing prohibits total simultaneity, but is presented in a non-linear structure of "foldings" formed by consequent utterances. When the verb is the copula, this happens by means of metaphor, not so much one entity, as equivalent, substituted for another, but the presiding entity (e.g. the "meadow") being revealed in the flow of statement in a new form or being. When the verb is something else, generally that verb functions to disclose depths or extensions of the presiding entity: thus, "the shadows that are forms fall" from the "hall" that is "folded" in the "pasture"; "all architectures I am," likewise, "fall" from those "shadows"; "we see," i.e. disclose, the "secret" of the "dream of the grass blowing east" in the "children's game." When it is said that "certain bounds hold against chaos," this both

participates in the metamorphosis of the central reality of the poem (it reveals the "meadow" as "bounds that hold against chaos") and poignantly, in its own way, holds that place almost still, right as the poem closes.

It is within this pattern, which is a kind of constraint or "rule," that the perpetual variation of the subject can occur. Yet it is important to observe that, like the prosodic structure of the lines, the syntax of predication itself is unstable. The principle of perfect non-resemblance does not obtain ("that is not mine…/ that is mine"; or, "it is so near to the heart" and "It is only a dream…"), but the poem investigates a range of possible syntactical and prosodic usages of the copula. In a certain sense this perfectly contrasts with the previous phenomenon, where the non-resemblance of the nominal subjects was woven across a deeper, unchanging grammar; here, a variable syntax and prosody is woven under the unchanging verbal diction of the copula. Both of these phenomena contribute to the magic of the poem, which is to flow unceasingly with as if no accumulation and, at the same time, to project itself as a non-temporal, manifold entity in space. The mutual coherence of these two phenomena is an expression of "the structure of rime."

The "splendor" of their coherence is that the poem restores us to the dimensional place of which it speaks. And this restoration, or "return," is enacted twice within the unfolding of the poem; in the folded "structure of rime," this is fitting. The first instance comes in the middle of the poem, when, after the inversion of "wherefrom the shadows that forms fall" in "Wherefrom fall all architectures I am" (an inversion that is, as noted above, phonemically inscribed), after the poem has descended from the "pasture" to the "hall," through the "shadows" and "architectures," to the subterranean redoubt of "the Lady" and her "hosts," it comes round, as if in a ring structure—but in slightly different words—, to the "field folded." It achieves this "return" at last by means of a simple relative clause, identifying the lowest reality it has reached ("a disturbance of words within words") with the place from which it had begun. This phrase, which the *Zohar* has given Duncan, is the

pivotal moment in the poem, when the vertical spatiality of the first fourteen lines terminates and, in the last ten lines, begins to move, through all its changes, across and around the field on a horizontal plane. It is as if that other side—netherworld—of doubt or darkness or evil, which Duncan saw cast out of the great cathedrals of the imagination, and which is here discovered within the "structure of rime" (which excludes nothing), is reunited with the "meadow" of permission. The second restoration is the repetition of the opening line of the poem in the penultimate stanza. This event could not be more different from its formal repetition in the first version of the poem; here, its significance is in the course of, and in contrast to, the transformations of the poem. In the final version of the poem, Duncan disrupts the repetition by presenting the first instance as the title, so that the second instance has the sense of an epiphany or incarnation, as what was outside enters and becomes part of the body of the poem. This is a symbol of the unification of what, years before, Duncan had envisioned as "the image of man." In other hands, this recurrence would have formed the conclusion of the poem. Not for Duncan. He goes on for another four lines that are marvelously distinguished from the kinetic mode of the poem's beginning, with its oscillations between affirmation and negation. Instead, the "bounds" of the lines "hold" the "meadow," we are told, "against chaos"—as much, for Duncan, the primal chaos as the mere play of language. There is no outward or inward spatial development of the "meadow." What does happen is that, in a way very much like the Kabbalists' reading of Scripture, this ending, evoking not only the continuous present of "I am permitted" but also the "first permission," returns us to an initial moment earlier than, or perhaps contemporary with, the beginning of the poem.

We will now close this chapter by tentatively suggesting one more way, besides its linguistic myth and its vision of the "field of folding," in which the *Zohar* contributed to the formation of Duncan's poetics. Throughout his life, Duncan insisted on reading the *Zohar* as a work of the "poetic imagination," as he puts it in his notes on "the Structure of Rime." For Duncan, the "poetic

imagination" is not the image-making but the form-making faculty, and so the form, or the unfolding, of the *Zohar* is also at issue. While we have already observed some of the "dance" of the commentary on *Machpelah*, we have not considered the larger structures of that text, and we will now describe one such structure and hope its uncanny similarity to "Often I Am Permitted to Return to A Meadow"—the special fusion of an improvisatory or open unfolding with a deep pattern of recurrences—will be sufficiently apparent.

In Jewish liturgical practice, the whole Torah is divided into fifty-four *parashot*, or "portions," which provide the passage of Biblical text to be read in synagogue on a given Sabbath; in the course of the year, then, the entire Torah will be read in sequence. The *parashot* are named, usually after the key word or phrase in the first verse.

In the edition Duncan was reading, the primary ordering of the text is according to these *parashot*. The chapter, if we can call it that, in which Duncan found his "field folded," is *Haye Sarah* (Genesis 23:1-25:18), named thus after the first verse ("And **the life of Sarah**…", my emphasis). In the *Zohar*'s treatment of the *parashah*, what would conventionally be understood as a section of a larger narrative, in this case of the ancestral generations before the descent into Egypt, becomes a complete myth of human salvation—which is not simply stated or told, but which is played to its conclusion, as if in a musical fashion, through the development and variation of contrasting themes. The central theme, however, is taken from the name of the *parashah*. It is "life" or, as it is put in the tonal (?) conclusion to the section, "the resurrection of the dead," that second or true life which Duncan also longed for. That is the new "life" of which the section's last Biblical verse (Ezekiel 36: 27) speaks: "And I will put my spirit within you…"

It is not quite possible to distinguish the thematic and textual structures of the section. But it should be noted that the organized variation of thematic material has its correspondence in the pattern of citations. It is the case that the *parashah* furnishes the "melodic spine" of the text (in

Duncan's phrase, which itself comes from Stravinsky) as the recurrent—and most frequent—locus of commentary; that, like a conventional commentary, the *Zohar* moves sequentially through the two and a half chapters from Genesis[225]; and that, at least in Duncan's edition, the verses from these chapters are typographically distinguished from the other Biblical citations. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the section, where the first comment is on a verse from Jonah, to the concluding citation of Ezekiel, the unfolding of the Zoharic text has a complex and surprising intertextuality. Surprising, because, again unlike a conventional commentary, in several instances, the introduction of the intertext is spontaneous or non-sequitur and, as a result, the association of the primary Biblical passage with its intertext is unclear—although its place in the unfolding of the commentary may subsequently become intelligible.

The progression of the section goes something like the following, with page numbers from the Soncino edition in parentheses:

> —The soul of "Man" is in danger: "Every night when a man retires to his bed his soul leaves him and ascends to be judged before the King's tribunal" (3)
>
> —Sarah, however, had reached a higher "grade" of life, related to wholeness: "'The abundance of the earth,' [R. Jose] said, 'is certainly in *kol* (the Whole), as that is the source from whence issue spirits and souls, and from which beneficence is vouchsafed to the world.'" (4)
>
> —This is like a field, although "there are fields and fields. There is the field in which abide all blessings and sanctities… and there is another kind of field which is the abode of desolation, impurity, war and slaughter." (5)
>
> —Sometimes a "king" is enslaved to that second field, until he purifies himself. But Sarah, "though she went down, came up again, and never attached herself to the serpent… Sarah attached herself throughout to life, and thus life was made her own." The number of years Sarah is said to have lived encode the structure of the cosmos. (5-6)
>
> —Suddenly Psalm 98 is cited: "*O sing unto the Lord a new song.*" The companions relate this to a verse that speaks of kine singing in 1 Samuel. The question is asked: how can a song be actually new? Here we have the first note of resurrection: "When will

225 It is not exhaustive, however, but selective. It ends up commenting on a fraction of the total verses.

that Psalm be chanted? When the dead will come to life and rise from the dust; then there will be something new that had never yet been in the world." (7)

—But then the text turns its attention back to "sin." (This happens as if paratactically, without discursive coordination.) There is "mankind in disgrace" (8); there are the labors of the world (9); there is Adam's seduction, Balaam's curse, the defilement of Eve (10-11), and the uncleanness of woman (13).

—This serpent, it "will remain with us until the Holy One removes him." Isaiah, whose prophecy will be brought in with increasing frequency as the section goes on, is cited: "He will swallow up death forever…" (13)

—At this point we come to the long passage concerning *Machpelah*, with its evocations of death, resurrection, and the "folded" cosmos.

—The following commentary splits between the discussion of "man's" means for purifying himself—penitence and sanctifying oneself (18)—and the frightful vision of the demons who abduct transgressive souls back to Gehinnom (19).

—Then, returning to the earlier presentation of Sarah's pure life as an image of the cosmos, the text evokes the creation of Adam, whose body was built "out of the four corners of the world… Adam united himself to the Divine and was endowed with mystic Wisdom." But this is not a lost prospect; it is the paradigm of human life as such: "Each son of man is, after the same model, a composite of the heavenly and the earthly…" (20)

—Therefore, we have hope. There will come a "time when the Holy One will bring the dead to life again." Although, "life in the present dispensation is cut short through the influence of the evil serpent…" and "under the same influence, the celestial waters, as it were, fail, and life is not dispensed in the world in proper measure," in that time to come, "the evil tempter…will be removed from the world…" (21)

—The note of "sin" is played once more. We hear of defilement and of men who are ignorant of Torah. (23-25)

—But the Torah is a vehicle of salvation, and at last the text evokes the "company," i.e. those wandering Rabbis whose conversations provide the fictive frame for the commentaries. We hear about prayer, especially the erotic magic of prayer, and other devices of redemption. (26-29)

—Actually, the Biblical narrative conceals a deeper meaning than that progress of the generations. The ancestors are seen as if in a "structure of rime": Rebekah is "the very image of Sarah" but with a difference, just as Abraham's marriage to "Keturah" is not just another marriage but is the redemption of Hagar, for "Keturah is none other than Hagar." whereas Hagar "went astray after the idols", as Keturah she "again attached herself to a life of virtue." The arts of divination are cast out. (32-34)

> —Then the text enters its final movement. "Shake thyself from the dust, arise…" The Shekinah, who is the "rime" of all the female ancestors, has in the land of exile but will soon return. Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and its Temple, and the dispersed of Israel will be gathered in. But the text does not fixate on this return; in quick succession, it substitutes for that homecoming the healing of the broken heart, the binding of wounds, the resurrection of the dead, and, at last, the Ezekelian vision of the divine breath entering the mortal body. (34-35)

We can read this sequence several ways. It is an interpretation of the passage from generation to generation as a pattern of repetition and difference, of defilement and purification. On another level, it is a drama of salvation, in which sin is the first scene, returns obstinately to thwart our purification, and is at last overcome in the eschaton. Yet, from the perspective of Duncan's poetics, it also appears strikingly as a poetic structure composed according to that absolute principle of "resemblance and disresemblance," as, indeed, a salvific structure from which "sin" is not cast out. Instead, here it participates in a dynamic play of repetition and difference, at every level of language, that ultimately achieves redemption in its total structure. That structure is represented in the text as the "Temple," which gathers together "the dispersed of Israel… the broken in heart," the fragmented cosmos as much as the divided "Man." As R. Jose has said earlier in the section, "'The abundance of the earth… is certainly in *kol* (the Whole).'"

CHAPTER 6:

POWERS IN A THEOGONY

One consequence of Duncan's new poetics (and, for that matter, of Jakobson's poetic "function") is the complication of the relationship between poetry and prose; for prose, though it may not cut its lines, can very well be composed according to the "principle of similarity." In the original draft, but not in the final version, of "Often I Am Permitted" there were hints of the break-down between poetry and prose. In "The Structure of Rime," prose and verse alternate in the angelic dialogue, even as the persons of the dialogue change places or lose their identity altogether.

Did the conventional alienation of prose from poetry correspond, for Duncan, to the fallen and divided condition of "Man"?

If "the Structure of Rime" furnished Duncan with an absolute principle by which he could measure the relationships between all the elements of language, from the minima of sound and morphology to the larger orders of syntax and form, then it also allowed him to interpret the relationship of poetry and prose as one of "disresemblance," i.e. as different aspects of a single poetic event concomitant with the cosmos.

There is a venerable tradition of literary works from Europe that mix verse and prose. The systematic alternation of forms—poetic text, prose commentary—in prosimetrum (e.g. Boethius's *Consolatio* and Dante's *Convivio* or *Vita Nuova*) is exemplary. The Menippean satire, from Petronius through Rabelais and on to Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, furnishes another, very different, set of instances of the mixed form, even if these depend more on the variety of styles and genres than the binary distinction between poetry and prose.

In the first half of the 20th Century, American poetry produced a number of important works in the mixed form, some of which resorted to historical patterns, and some of which discovered new

methods for juxtaposition. Ezra Pound's prose-headers to some of the poems in *Personae* (1909) made use of and expanded the convention of the *razo,* common in manuscripts of Troubadour poetry. In the exfoliation of his *Cantos* over the next half-century, despite the frequent and substantial incorporation of prose materials, these are usually subjected to the measures of a verse pattern; yet Canto IX and Canto XXXIII provide examples of prose left as prose in the midst of the poet's incantation. William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All* (1923)*,* which switches between prose meditations on the nature of the imagination and poetic epiphanies of vernacular perception and speech, takes the shape of the prosimetrum but releases poetry and prose from the hierarchical relation of text and commentary, so that they pulse in alternating revelations of the real. Jean Toomer's *Cane* (also 1923), his "song of an end," has a radically composite form that unfolds in poems and prose vignettes (many of which include songs and hymns), as well as dramatic dialogue. And there are there are many others besides. Among the works of the period after the war, and especially of Duncan's contemporaries, we could single out Charles Olson's various usages of prose in *The Maximus Poems* (1950-1968); the intricate narrative structure of the prose captions in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* (1961); the sensuous poetic contractions and vatic prose expansions of Robert Kelly's *Weeks* (1966); Robin Blaser's "Great Companions" series (1971-1997), where long encomia to Pindar, Dante, and Duncan himself are composed dialogically by weaving in excerpts of prose from Yeats, de Certeau, Agamben, etc.

The French tradition of the prose-poem, beginning with Baudelaire, is also immediately relevant to Duncan's poetry. In "From Notes on the Structure of Rime," the very first source of *The Structure of Rime* Duncan names is his "early adoration of the poet St.-John Perse" ("trance-projection"); and Mallarme is cited as well.

Yet, with the exception perhaps of Kelly's *Weeks*, which comes later, none of these present a configuration of prose and poetry quite like the one we find in Duncan's "A Poem Beginning with a

Line by Pindar." Some of the poems in the first volume of Olson's *Maximus* bear comparison, and we will take that up in the following.

To consider this poem in relation to its mixed form, and particularly to a single eruption of prose into the field of poetry, brings into view the difference between *The Opening of the Field* and all of his preceding books, precisely in its enactment of a new understanding of the nature of the book. It is not that Duncan had ever thought the book was merely a vehicle or container for individual poems, but the publications of the early 1950s—and even *Letters*, the completion of which was more or less contemporaneous with the inception of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow"—conceive of the limits of the book as either a) parameters for the investigation of a technique or b) identical with the boundaries of a single, extended (i.e. serial) work; in effect, these may form a single conception. Thus, one can describe *Writing Writing* as a book of Stein derivations or *Letters* as a single sequence of numbered sections called "Letters." Such a definition of *The Opening of the Field* is not at hand. Actually, *The Opening of the Field,* along with Duncan's books in the following decade, seems to systematically decouple the unit of the work from the unit of the book. At least this is the case for the two series, "The Structure of Rime" and "Passages," which are frequently interrupted by poems not of the series, and which stretch across multiple books.

In that sense, but not only in that sense, the scales of "resemblance and disresemblance" determine the organization of the books. The alternation between series and non-series is only one aspect of the general diversity of forms and genres. In *The Opening of the Field*: lyric poems entirely within the grammar of the first-person and governed by its reflexive subjectivity; open "musical" structures like "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow"; traditional forms, especially ballads; poems in several sections, whether titled or numbered; vatic prose as in "The Structure of Rime" and occasional or topical prose. Some commenters have also interpreted the book's organization in accordance with a principle of thematic variation or counterpoint. For Lisa Jarnot, these are "the

dead… the field and the law."[226] Duncan himself would later say that he had "begun to see that the theme in the matter was going to make a union of the Judaic, the classical, and the Celto-Germanic."[227] If we look through those eyes, we can in certain cases classify individual poems accordingly; but, in many others, we perceive the interaction of all three elements in the unfolding of a single poem.

Both of these principles deserve careful study. Their articulations are as rich and as complex as those we observed in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow." Although we will not presently undertake that analysis, the indication of a homology between the order of a single poem and the order of the book allows us to describe a very important, and perhaps surprising, feature of Duncan's new poetics. It is this: despite Duncan's rigorous pursuit of the right pattern in his revisions of "Often I Am Permitted," in principle "the structure of rime" does not entail a singular poetic form. Whereas, for example, a poetics based on "tone-leading of vowels" would determine the material composition of particular poems, this does not seem to be the case for a poetics based on "the structure of rime." Actually, we wonder what the adoption of such a poetics necessarily entails. Duncan's own conversion doubtlessly inflected his poetic practice, in such a way that the patterns of "resemblance and disresemblance" were multiplied and intensified at every level of his language; and, in a certain sense, a poem like "Often I Am Permitted" is an epitome of the new poetics. But, strictly, "the structure of rime" obtains in every poetic text and does not require the extraordinary multiplication and intensification that Duncan undertakes. Perhaps this delineation allows us to see a separation in Duncan's thought, between, on the one hand, his radical or mystical concept of poetic language and his own writing, in which his aims are soteriological—thus, greater or, at least, other than merely the representation of the nature of language. Yet even in his poetry the

[226] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 179.
[227] But that is in 1980. See Robert Duncan, *A Poet's Mind*, 123.

absolute principle of "Rime" fecundates in several distinct forms, each of which, nevertheless, refers to the salvation of "Man" and the restoration of His "image."

Compared to "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar"—at least at first glance—seems closer to Olson's poetics of "projective verse" than "the structure of rime." If we subtract the characteristic features of Duncan's rhetoric, it looks and sounds like a poem emerging, moment by moment ("perception" by "perception" in Olson's terms), in accordance with the shifting exigencies of the event of its own composition and the poet's self-registrations. It has several markers of a "projective" poem: the incorporation of alien textual materials (the Pindar line, the lines from Pound and Whitman, the line from a hymn sung in Charles Williams' novel *The Greater Trumps*), the juxtaposition of multiple levels of discourse and the subordination of critical discourse to the dynamics of poetry (the scholarly evaluation of Pindar), the treatment of the page as a field for words as kinetic "objects" (at the beginning of section three, the grains Psyche must sort). Olson attends the poem in other ways, too. Section three is dedicated to him. The statement in the second section that "Only a few/ posts of the good remain" sounds with Olson's evocations of "pejoracracy," and the assertion here that "West/ from east men push," which Duncan's poem uncovers (for example) in Hellenistic and Greek myth as well as in the history of the American frontier, recalls *The Maximus Poems*' vision of the "slow westward motion" manifest in the corresponding movements of the stars, the earth, and human populations with their myths and histories.[228]

Its closeness to the poetics of "projective verse" would be affirmed by the archival evidence of its writing, which testifies to a genesis very different from "Often I Am Permitted." Whereas that poem, as we have seen, underwent revisions that essentially transformed its shape, contents, and

[228] Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 53ff.

kind, the "Pindar" poem emerged in the first writing almost in its final form. The changes we can see are mostly verbal and minute: a word added or taken away or replaced with another. The most substantial alteration is to the prose paragraph in the fourth section, where what will become

> An ode? Pindar's art, the editors tell us, was not a statue but a mosaic, an accumulation of metaphor. But if he was archaic, not classic, a survival of obsolete mode, there may have been old voices in the survival that directed the heart. So, a line from a hymn came in a novel I was reading to help me. Psyche, poised to leap—and Pindar too, the editors write, goes too far, topples over—listend to a tower that said, Listen to Me! The oracle had said, *Despair! The Gods themselves abhor his power.* And then the virgin flower of the dark falls back flesh of our flesh from which everywhere…

shows itself to originally have been

> It should have been a short poem. Had I been sure. But even a hymn quoted in a novel by Charles Williams comes to help. She, poised to leap, listend to a tower. The oracle had said, "Despair. The gods themselves abhor his power." And then the virgin flower of the dark falls back flesh of our flesh from which everywhere[229]

Like "Having Been Enraged," unlike "Often I Am Permitted," it is not "a short poem." The manuscript record, however, speaks of a certainty in composition that we did not find in the revisions that produced the highly condensed form of "Often I Am Permitted." We are not surprised that the deprecations were removed; this conforms to what we observed in the trajectory of "Often I Am Permitted." They are displaced by paraphrases and unmarked quotations of Wade-Gery and Bowra's evaluation of Pindar's poetry in their introduction to the Nonesuch edition of the "Pythian Odes," which is the one that gave Duncan the first line of his poem. In that introduction, we find the following statements: "Pindar's art is not classical but archaic"; "Sometimes when he writes in a hurry… he topples over"; "The accumulation of metaphor… is Pindar's most notable characteristic." When the editors also tell us that, "Where Plato destroyed, Pindar revised," that he

[229] Box 2, Notebook 26.

"omitted, he altered, he even contradicted the old stories," this echoes in Duncan's evocation of the "old voices" and, earlier, of the "old poets."

Why did Duncan suppress Williams' name? The poet Robert Kelly has told me that he remembers Duncan expressing disdain for Williams' novels. Perhaps that is it. There is a relevant local explanation close at hand, that is, that the adverb ("But even…") in the first draft participates in the rhetoric of self-deprecation. Perhaps Duncan was surprised that aid came from such an undistinguished source, and this (the "status" of Williams' novel) is the meaning of the naming in the first draft; thus, the redaction of the name and the neutralization of the minimizing force of the adverb go together. If we were to search for an explanation in light of the entire poem, we would see that the final version of the paragraph relates the two sources with which the poem began and, thus, forms a kind of ring structure: alongside the reference to Apuleius, Pindar had to be evoked.

Perhaps Duncan sought to emphasize, rather than the identity of the author (who would not in his mind constitute one of the "old voices"), the nesting generic structure his source ("a line from a hymn came in a novel") and its inverse correspondence to the situation of this prose interlude.

But, exactly as in "Often I Am Permitted," the repetition of the incipit (in that case, the repetition of the first line) does not conclude the poem. Nor does it continue in the same way that the first instance had. It is disturbed by disresemblance: in the Pindar poem, this is realized by both the line from the hymn in Williams' novel, which is a shadowy twin of Pindar's line, and of course the break-down of the prose paragraph into the ringing verses with which the poem finally does end.

Nevertheless, the relevance of Williams' line to this poem and to Duncan's poetics in general is manifold and remarkable—so much so that, from the present perspective, Williams' novel could be read as an allegory of "the Structure of Rime" and Duncan's poem could be read as a kind of ekphrasis of the transformations of the novel. Duncan's library at Buffalo has the 1950 Pellegrini & Cudahy edition of *The Greater Trumps*; the bookplate in Duncan's name is dated to 1951. In the

novel, the church hymn that Nancy hears on Christmas Day is the second of two verse interruptions; the hymn itself is interrupted by prose:

> *Christians, awake, salute the happy morn,*
> *Whereon the Saviour of the world was born:*
> *Rise to a—*
>
> Her voice ceased; the words stared up at her. The choir and the congregation finished the line—
>
> *adore the mystery of love.*
>
> "The mystery of love." But what else was in her heart? The Christmas associations of the verse had fallen away; there was the direct detached cry, bidding her do precisely and only what she was burning to do. "Rise to adore the mystery of love."[230]

The earlier incursion of verse is from *Macbeth.* Again the prose that follows represents Nancy's internal reflections:

> *The weird sisters, hand in hand,*
> *Posters of the sea and land.*
>
> "Posters of the sea and land"—was that what she had been yesterday in the car—in her sleep, in her dreams? Or that mad old woman? The weird sisters-the old woman and Aunt Sybil—hand in hand, posters of the sea and land? Posters—going about the world—from point to point in a supernatural speed? Another line leapt at her—"Peace! the charm's wound up." Wound up—ready for the unwinding; and Henry ready too. Her expectation terrified her: this day which was coming but not yet quite come was infinite with portents. Her heart filled and laboured with its love; she pressed a hand against it to ease the bursting pain. "O Henry," she murmured aloud, "Henry!" What did one do about it? What was the making of earth beside this? [231]

Compare the first of these with Duncan's recollection of his writing of the "Pindar" poem, which he included some ten years after that night in "The Truth and Life of Myth":

> When in the inception of "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar," reading late at night the third line of the first Pythian Ode in the translation by Wade-Gery and Bowra, my 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 my reading, these were no longer words but 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.

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[230] Charles Williams, *The Greater Trumps* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993): 107-108.
[231] Williams, *The Greater Trumps,* 67.

Duncan's description of his mind losing hold of Pindar's text, in which Pindar's words, being set free from their context and from their syntax and from Duncan's reading, become the creative gods of the poem, resonates immediately in Williams' narration of Nancy's internal discourse: the "Christmas associations" of the verse fall away, and its words, free of that context, announce her inmost "burning" desire. Williams' chapter, and certainly Nancy's development, proceeds as if it were unfolding those words, exploring their many possible senses; likewise, Duncan's poem grows from the six (or eight?) elementary words of its first line. It is notable that, whereas the hymnal line departs from its text, in Duncan's poem the Pindar line returns, at last, to its context in the prose paragraph already quoted.

As for the correspondence between the structure of Williams' novel and the "structure of rime," there is much we can say. If we refer to the beginning and the end of the novel, we are confronted with a movement from "…perfect Babel" (its very first words, Mr. Coningsby's—immediately contradicted by his daughter, Nancy: "But Babel was never perfect") to the coming of the Messiah (Mr. Coningsby: "And is Nancy Messias?"—Sybil: "Near enough… for the moment, near enough").[232] Throughout the 1950s, "Babel" was an important problem for Duncan's poetics; in "Poetry Before Language" especially, it plays a central role in his reconciliation of a cosmological and poetic unity with the multiplicity of language; it is reinterpreted as an aspect of language, i.e. as sound, which, after the "Fall," has been stigmatized by the triumphal intellect as mere "nonsense." The vision of world-creating letters which Duncan got from the *Zohar* and transformed into a "dance" of all the elements of language, measured by "resemblance and disresemblance," allowed

[232] Williams, *The Greater Trumps*, 7; 230. Note that the surname Coningsby etymologically identifies Mr. Coningsby with the "Kingdom" literally and with royalty in general; it is an unlikely pun at the start of the novel, but in retrospect it has hidden Nancy's messiahship in plain sight from the very beginning. We might have early on connected his name with the Tory politics of the eponymous novel by Disraeli, so in a sense the shifting connotations of his surname track the modifications of his character, or spirit.

the Babel of pure sounds to participate in—rather than be superseded by—the restoration of the "image of Man."

In the unfolding of *The Greater Trumps*, the imperfect and painful "Babel" of the family's confused relations is followed by an initial revelation of the Tarot as possessing "the meaning of all process and the measure of the everlasting dance."[233] The book tells us, at this point, that the ordinary or social view of the world, epitomized by Mr. Coningsby when he inherits from an old friend of the original deck of Tarot cards, is an insufficient account of reality; the clumsy articulations and understandings of Mr. Coningsby, Ralph, Nancy, and even Sybil are rendered superficial by Henry Lee's disclosures of the hidden realm of the "dance." According to this vision, the apparently incoherent multiplicity of the external world reflects the multiple but essential forms of the "dance," which, in the novel, is actually performed (in a special room in the Lees' house) by a set of carved figurines corresponding to the cards of the Tarot.

The reunion of the cards with the figures, we are told, is the great ambition of Henry and his grandfather. Yet their ambition falsifies their relationship to the "dance," because they seek to accomplish it by a single anomalous act—the murder of Mr. Coningsby, who is reluctant to hand over his deck—driven by their own desire and not the will of the "dance." In that sense, they hold a position akin to Duncan's Romantics: while their vision is a revelation, it is shown to be only partial and its realization to depend on an exclusion or exception that betrays its essential lack of faith. Henry's relationship to Nancy focuses these contradictions and comes to form the site of their transformation via "the mystery of love." The initial phase of the novel presents him as the active, and Nancy as the passive, subject in their relationship, and—briefly—it presents him, without irony, as someone possessing knowledge of that "mystery." When he has announced that the Greater

[233] Williams, *The Greater Trumps*, 21.

Trumps are "the measure of the everlasting dance," and Nancy has asked him what that dance "*is*," he takes her in his arms and indicates the seventh of the Major Arcana, The Lovers; Nancy looks at it and sees "two lovers, each aureoled, each with hands stretched out; each clad in some wild beast's skin, dancing side-by-side down a long road."[234] As the novel proceeds, both Henry and his wisdom are displaced from their authority. It becomes clear that, once Henry discovers the value of Mr. Coningsby's deck, he starts to view his relationship to Nancy as strategically useful, and Williams several times makes a point of showing us the darkness of Henry's machinations. Simultaneously, and inversely, both Nancy's love and her awareness of it are enlarged, ennobled (as above: "Her heart filled…"). This process overwhelms Henry's proposition about the identity of the dance with The Lovers, as the polar structure of that card is replaced by the omnidirectional love of The Fool. And it is The Fool's incarnation in the novel—Sybil—who abets Nancy's initiation into this greater vision, the true "mystery of love." The nature of this initiation corresponds precisely to an argument Duncan will make on behalf of Walt Whitman's democratic Eros, and at the expense of Dante's Romance; we will come to this in the next chapter. This is what Williams' novel gives us:

> "I don't think you're particularly selfish," her aunt said, "only you don't love anyone."
>
> Nancy looked up, more bewildered than angry. "Don't love?" she said. "I love you and father and Ralph very much indeed."
>
> "And Henry?" Sybil asked.
>
> "Well—Henry", Nancy said, blushing a little, "is different."
>
> "Alas!" Sybil murmured, but the lament was touched with laughter.
>
> "What do you mean—'alas'?" Nancy asked. "Aunt Sybil, do you *want* me to feel about everybody as I do about Henry?"
>
> "A little adjustment here and there," Sybil said, "a retinting perhaps, but otherwise—why, yes! Don't you think so?"
>
> "Even, I suppose," Nancy said, "to Henry's great-aunt or whatever she was?" But the words died from a soft sarcasm to a softer doubt: the very framing of the question, as so often happens, was itself an answer. "Her body thought"; interrogation purged emotion, and the purified emotion replied to the interrogation. To love…

[234] Williams, *The Greater Trumps*, 21.

> "But I can't", she exclaimed, "turn all *this*"—she laid her hand on her heart—"toward everybody. It can't be done; it only lives for—him."
>
> "Nor even that," Sybil said. "It lives for and in itself. You can only give it back to itself."[235]

At the outset of the church service, in which the hymn is sung, Sybil names "the hypothesis of Christianity" as "the Deity of Love and the Incarnation of Love." Then the hymn is sung, and the Christmas associations fall away. There is an uncanny resemblance between the crossing of Christian Love and the cosmos of the Tarot here and Duncan's effort to reconcile Modernist form and Romantic soteriology. In Williams' novel, this crossing—or, to put it differently, the paganization of Christianity and the Christianization of the Tarot—is made explicit first when we are told that Nancy's "legs wouldn't hold her up in the midst of these dim floods of power and adoration that answered so greatly to the power and adoration which abode in her heart, among these songs and flights of dancing words which wheeled in her mind and seemed themselves to become part of the light of the glorious originals of the Tarots." It is emphasized again in the congregation's rapturous declaration of the Athanasian Creed: "God and man is one in Christ… One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God… One altogether, not… by the confusion of substance but by unity… of person."[236] The Greek theological term for the mode of this unity, this interpenetration, is *perichoresis;* it is a key term, brought over into English as "co-inherence," in Williams' history of Christianity in *The Descent of the Dove*. And in the roots of the Greek word—peri-choreo: to dance around—the figure of "the dance" thus unifies the Tarot and the Trinity.

Duncan's identification with the "dance" of the novel must have been strong. In the notebook original of the Pindar poem, in the middle of the fourth section we find the following

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[235] Williams, *The Greater Trumps*, 69.
[236] Williams, *The Greater Trumps*, 110.

copied out of Williams: "And then the measure, turning here and there, perpetually harmonious, wrought out these forms of gold in correspondence with something at least of itself, becoming its own record, change answering to change." This sounds uncannily like a description of Duncan's poetics. In any case, it is remarkable that Duncan took this statement from the chapter immediately preceding the chapter in which the hymn is presented; the suggestion is that he was reading, or otherwise going, through Williams' novel as he was composing the poem.

And what is the "help" that the line offered Duncan?

It is hard to say, but its function in the poem is manifold and powerful. The statement about measure is Henry's, and he utters it to Nancy as he reveals to her, in the room of the figures, the secret history of the Tarot, how, "once, some say in Egypt long before the Pharaoh heard of Yussuf Ben-Yakoob, and some in Europe while the dreaming Rabbis whispered in the walled ghetto over fables of unspeakable words, and some in the hidden covens of doctrine which the Church called witchcraft—once a dancer talked of the dance, not with words, but with images."[237] Then, he says, the dance "doubled" on itself and produced the figures, which, doubled again, produced the "cards." The speculative historiography (or "mystic pseudepigraphy," in the phrase Filreis uses to describe Duncan's "aims" in *The Opening of the Field*)[238]itself forms another link between Williams' text and Duncan's work. Duncan's suggestion in the poem that for Pindar there "may have been old voices in the survival that directed the heart" tells us that he understood the line from the hymn, and implicitly the connection between Christianity and the Tarot, as an "old stor[y]" returning to "whisper once more," as if the "mystery of love" constituted the once-repressed center of Christianity.as a "searcher after origins." After all, Duncan is, he tells us, "a searcher after origins," and especially in *The H.D. Book* he is concerned with unfolding the convergence of occult and

[237] Williams, *The Greater Trumps*, 95.
[238] Filreis, *1960*, 79.

heterodox traditions—those "old voices"—that gave rise to, and nourished, Modernism. But the connection between the Williams passage and Duncan's poetics is even stronger, since the significance of Henry's history is unmistakably apocalyptic: if history began, in a certain sense, with the doubling of the dance, so it will culminate and be eclipsed in the restoration of its unity; at the same time, the dance is not outside of that history, but pulses in it and governs it. The course of a poem like "Often I Am Permitted to Return to A Meadow" exhibits a like interaction between an emergent or contingent process and a timeless form, which, following Duncan's thinking about the "image of Man," we have called soteriological but which could properly be called apocalyptic as well.[239]

In the poem, the line completes what might be called an ideogram that, in brief, promises such a transformation of history into eternity. Mount Segur was the temple, and last redoubt, of the Albigensians in Provence. It is a city sacred to Pound's *Cantos*. In Canto 76, Pound had written:

> and in Mt Segur there is wind space and rain space
> no more an altar to Mithras

And in Canto 92:

> O Anubis, guard this portal
>   as the cellula, Mont Ségur.
> Sanctus
>   that no blood sully this altar.

This is what Duncan has to say about the Albigensians, or Cathars, in *The H.D. Book*.:

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[239] It would be fruitful to compare Giorgio Agamben's discussion of the Messianic function of poetic form in *The Time That Remains*, e.g.: "The sestina—and, in this sense, every poem—is a soteriological device which, through the sophisticated *mēchanē* of the announcement and retrieval of rhyming end words (which correspond to typological relations between past and present), transforms chronological time into messianic time. Just as this time is not other to chronological time or eternity, but is the transformation that time undergoes when it is taken for a remnant, so too is the time of the sestina the metamorphosis that time undergoes insofar as it is the time of the end, the *time that the poem takes to come to an end*." Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2005): 82-83. In particular, we would want to consider what we have already observed about how each of these two poems returns to the beginning *just before* it ends, but how such a "ring structure," such closure, is averted by the variant or disresemblant lines that actually do terminate the poem. In each case, in a sense different from Agamben's, there is a remnant that has not been utterly used up by the recursions of "rime."

> Christ, *verus imperator mundi*, in the person of His vicar, Innocent III…released the horrors of the Albigensian crusade upon Provence, where the specter of an other Christ had invaded the Empire. If we do not believe, as the Albigensians were said to have believed, in a dualism throughout the universe between forces of light and forces of dark, eternally alien to each other, what we see here is a God divided against Himself. The Eros within Christendom was permitted or gave His permission only in the orders of generation; all other Eros was forbidden. So, from outside the Empire, from the margins where things mix, a Christ returns, and an Eros too, whose law is now the verso of the law of the established Church. In this new Law, the generative order is forbidden; all other Eros is permitted… whatever correspondence there was or was not, between the heresy and the *ars amatoria* of the poets and their Lady, the *trobar* of Provence came to an end when the Cathar came to an end.[240]

Mount Victoire would seem to name the mountain (Mont Saint-Victoire) in Provence that Cezanne took as the subject for a series of paintings. Again, *The H.D. Book*

> Cezanne working at his vision of Mont Saint-Victoire and Dali at his paranoiac vision of the Catalonian landscape not only draw but are drawn by what they draw. From body and from world toward an other body and other world, man derives meaning in a third element, the *created*—the rite, the dance, the narrative; the painting, the poem, the book. And in this new medium, in a new light, "man" and "environment" both are made up.

And Mount Tamalpais is that mountain that frames the San Francisco Bay and looms over the Marin County coastline, including Stinson Beach immediately to the north. (The Pindar poem was first composed in December 1957; Duncan and Jess would move to Stinson in March of 1958.[241]) Thus the line discloses a hidden historical phenomenon, in which the spirit of Eros is transported from Provence to California; yet the culmination of this process in Duncan's life, in California, in his poetry, converts the distances of time and space into a synchronous and unified movement, as the mountains "rise to adore the mystery of love." The myth of Berkeley as a new precinct of Eros is the theme of "A Poem Slow Beginning" (also in *The Opening of the Field*); as in the Pindar poem, Duncan envisions it as a type or resurrection of an ancient topos for the fusion of poetry and love:

> remembering powers of love

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240 Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 92-93.
241 Lisa Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 175.

and of poetry
the Berkeley we believed
grove of Arcady—

The past-tense and epistemological qualification distinguish this statement (the very first lines of the poem) from the ecstasy of the Pindar poem, but the melancholic retrospection, the nostalgia, is redeemed in a beloved (the "one Nature/Plato named the First Beloved") "in whom," the poet says, "I dwell/ past Arcady"; a "thou" that has "lifted" such "sad lines to gladness." This "beloved" is properly a Messianic figure, a bearer of "fearless happiness," who is "Dionysus in wrath, Apollo in rapture,/ Orpheus in song, and Eros secretly/… Christ-crossed in one Nature."

While the announcement of "the mystery of love," in its local function, fulfills the historical symbol, it also defines the final movement of the revelation of "love" across the poem's four sections. The first section presents the awakening of Eros, that "carnal fate" by which "the soul" is sent "wailing/ up from blind innocence," still "ensnared/ by dimness/ into the deprivations of desiring sight." The visual rhetoric and the dominant third-person plural are indexes as much of the poet's novitiate as of Psyche's. Although the epistrophe of "serves them" at the close of the section, as well as the reference to what cannot now be seen beyond the scene or the frame (e.g. "They exist in an obscurity"), points the way towards the solution of those "deprivations" and towards Psyche's transformation, there is as of yet no revelation of "what Love will be." The second section, in a different way, both reiterates the "tragedy" of the first and closes by announcing, but not fulfilling, a prospect of restoration. However, from the deixis with which it begins ("This is magic"), through the presiding grammar of the first-person singular and plural, this section departs from the visual mode of the first and draws the poem into greater involvement, and identification with, its emerging matter, i.e. "what Love will be." This is not quite an antithetical movement, but if we compare the speaker's statement that "smokes of continual ravage/ obscure the flame" with the earlier description of Cupid and Psyche ("They exist in an obscurity"), if we consider Psyche's candle in the

story and how the lovers' bodies there "absorb the flame," and if we note the absence of their "Love" from the second section, then it does seem that the second section constitutes itself in opposition to the first, that it occurs as if in that "obscurity" that had surrounded the vividly rendered scene of "visual pleasure." The setting here is American, not European, and, thematically, the section registers the "deprivations" of "Love" not in romance but in poetic tradition and in the alienation of the poetic spirit (which, via the figure of Whitman, arises not so much as the "spirit of Romance" but as "the song of kindred men") from the history and politics of the "nation." In the third section, the first two sections are not so much integrated as mingled together so as to suggest correspondences (e.g. the description of the American west, "all legend/ in my grandfathers' time," in its "diffuse light" and "melancholy," recalls the Goya painting and thus the painful novitiate of the visual; the Westward expansion of the Americans is compared with both Psyche's impetuous disclosure of Cupid and her agonized search for him when he has vanished); they also come into combination with new materials, above all with the myth of the Golden Fleece and with the poetry and life of Ezra Pound. In fact, despite the dedication to Olson, in its configuration of diverse materials and its unattributed citation of two lines from Canto 74 and one from Canto 76, this section should be read as an homage to, and a sort of re-reading of, Pound. Pound's contribution is first of all to fully develop the "resemblance" of poesis with the transformations of Psyche—we might call this an allegory—which the beginning of the second section evoked tentatively. Pound, who here is Pound as "The old man at Pisa," has, like Psyche, been "brought to despair" in his attempt at the "sorting of seeds" and has been forced to "obey the counsels of the green reed"—or, as Pound himself has it in Canto 81:

> Learn of the green world what can be thy place
> In scaled invention or true artistry[242]

[242] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1996): 541. The sometimes overt, sometimes subtle, connection between this section and *The Pisan Cantos*—not just the connection, but Duncan's significant use of phrases and

At the end of that Canto, Pound offers this apology—"Here error is all in the not done,/ all in the diffidence that faltered"—in which, in this context, we can hear certain echoes of Psyche's fateful transgression of Cupid's injunction, but Duncan makes Pound's ordeal a version of Psyche's, rather than the opposite. That is, Pound's "error" is initiatory; as it does for Psyche in Apuleius, it eventually brings him into the "impossible" service of the Goddess of Love, in which all he can do is "obey" the ants and the wind to govern "the process." If she is Proserpina (in Apuleius) or Persephone (in the Cantos), i.e. Rilke's "rose thorn/ blackend toward Eros" or "Cupidinous Death! that will not take no for an answer" (in Duncan), she is also Venus, and the (Poundian) formal strategy of this section—gathering and sorting diverse "seeds" to discover hidden likenesses—is a "station" on the way to "what Love will be," or may be a rite of Love itself. The fourth and final

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associations within Pound's poem—is manifold. For example, the tower that saves Psyche's life rhymes with "the tower" that looms over Pound at Pisa: "in sight of the tower" (450); "Περσεφονεια under Taishan/ in sight of the tower…" (463); "Moon, cloud, tower, a patch of the battistero/ all of a whiteness" (504). And in one of the passages Duncan quotes:

> Pisa, in the 23rd year of the effort in sight of the tower
> and Till was hung yesterday
> for murder and rape with trimmings plus Cholkis
> plus mythology, thought he was Zeus ram or another one
> Hey Snag wots in the bibl'?
> wot are the books ov the bible?
> Name 'em, don't bullshit ME.
> ΟΥ ΤΙΣ
> a man on whom the sun has gone down
> the ewe, he said had such a pretty look in her eyes; (450)

This allows Duncan to connect Psyche with Jason, the "hero who struggles east" (thus a searcher after origins, moving against the Westward trajectory of America and "against the source of the sun"). But Pound's bitter presentation of the execution of Louis Till—an American soldier and Emmet's father—as a stupid sacrifice is also a striking instance of Pound's critical treatment of mythology as a mystifying and legitimizing story (a "plus") of violence. In this, Pound is close to Olson's critical investigation of mythology as the truth of what has been said. Duncan's allusion to this particular passage deepens the resonance of the American material, such that that we can see the Psyche-narrative unfolding over against it, Duncan's "he must struggle alone toward the pyres of Day" in alignment with Pound's resolution (just below) "that the drama is wholly subjective." Duncan's statement, in his commentary on the myth in the *H.D. Book*, that "Eros is the very vitality felt by the sculptor in the stone" (83) connects his thought again with Pound's, for the working of stone is a crucial topos in the *Cantos* and in the line after the one just quoted Pound writes, "stone knowing the form which the carver imparts it" (450). When the speaker exclaims, "O, light the light!" in the fourth section, we have the ambiguous result that both "The Indians give way" and "the clearing"—which the "tame mind" had established against them—"falls."

section then corresponds to the second or celestial marriage of Cupid and Psyche in heaven; ecstatic, its key utterances are exclamations: "Oh yes!" "Light the light!" "*rise to adore the mystery of love*!*"* As the poem recapitulates the initial scene—not only the initial scene of Goya's canvas, but also the "wilderness" of America—it is transformed; the speaker's invocation of "that foot   informd/ by the weight of all things" as "this/ most dear/the catalyst force that renders clear/ the days of a life from the surrounding medium" properly describes a kind of purification of the earlier material, as Psyche's search becomes "*Finders Keepers*," as the trials of Eros and "violent requiem" of history first become phases of the dawn and then—without being subsumed—join in the dance of the cosmos that is "the mystery of Love."

But the dance is "clockwise and counterclockwise" and "the children" who perform it are "willful." Just as it exceeds mere repetition and averts closure in the way described above, Psyche's "yearning"—her willfulness even—which is now "the information" that "flows…everywhere," in every direction, disturbs any sense of final stasis. And yet, as in Williams' novel, this disturbance too, even the most extreme "disresemblance," coinheres with all things in the dance. The adoration of that "mystery" at that juncture in the poem is no coincidence; the disruption of tone and syntax that comes with the intrusion of the prose paragraph is an extreme figure of "disresemblance," and yet "the mystery of love," towards which the poem has been moving "life after life," binds "disresemblance" and "resemblance" and ensures that it is of the whole. As if in proof of this, the paragraph returns to the movements of verse in a way very unlike the way in which it broke in; in its course, it transforms that disruption, which caricatures the separation of prose and poetry, into a magnificent continuity, wherein the final prose sentence overleaps what would have been the term of the paragraph and "flows" over into the "clockwise and counterclockwise" turnings of the last lines of the poem.

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In earlier chapters, we have described in detail Duncan's argument with the poetics of Pound and Olson; we have also been at pains to show that Duncan's poetics diverge from Olson's more than has been acknowledged, however compatible "projective verse" and "the Structure of Rime" may be in certain respects. Even if "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" is more sympathetic with Olson's ideas and practice than the compositional intensities of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to A Meadow," in the pattern outlined above (however intuitive) it remains essentially distinct. Nonetheless, that sympathy is suggestive, and, given its conjunction with the dedication to Olson and the quotations of Pound—not to mention the lines from Pindar and Whitman, and of course (Charles) Williams, that are also cited—it deserves a further word.

Our summary indicates not only the linguistic and formal dimensions of the poem's progress through an initiation into "what Love will be" but also the capacity of Duncan's poetics to organize radically diverse materials of history and poetic tradition into a reading, or re-reading, of those materials. In other words, while "Often I Am Permitted" constitutes the first expression of the new poetics, the Pindar poem can be read as a recapitulation and transformation of Duncan's agon above all with Pound and Olson in the 1950s. It can be read that way, and in fact the opening of the second section suggests that critical appropriation is indeed the activity of the poem: "It is toward the old poets/ we go, to their faltering,/ their unaltering wrongness that has style,/ their variable truth…" In this perspective, we wonder what Whitman's "faltering" is (is it that his "love" attached him to the nation and to the president?), and what is Pound's and what is Olson's (does their location in the third section imply that their poetry cannot finally complete Psyche's labors and consummate the celestial marriage or enter the dance"?). But it is crucial to note that the poem does not spend a word on an indictment and allows all three a place in its "dance." (Whitman's bit-part is also remarkable; as we will see, he plays a central role in Duncan's poetics in the late 1960s.)

Duncan's commentary on Apuleius's story in *The H.D. Book* casts further light on the singular importance of Psyche in his confrontations with Pound and Olson:

> …The plot we are to follow, the great myth or work, is the fiction of what Man is.
> Soul and Eros are primordial members of the cast. To imagine ourselves as souls is to become engaged in all the mystery play, the troubled ground, of a poetry that extends beyond the reaches of any contemporary sense. Eros and Psyche are personae of a drama or dream that determines, beyond individual consciousness, the configurative image of a species…
> If the Work has to do with Eros—and for the poet the poem is a return to the work in the charged sense we would pursue here—the would-be poet stands like Psyche *in the dark*, taken up in a marriage with a genius, possessed by a spirit outside the ken of those about him…[243]

"The fiction," the making, "of what Man is" is the restoration of the sundered "image of Man" which we have seen Duncan striving for. In Duncan's reading of the myth of Psyche and Cupid, it is precisely these chief personae who stand apart and must be reunited, for "we are tracing the path of Psyche and her Eros as workers of a fiction in the art of poetry." The possessive is the key: as in the passage quoted, Cupid is at once an individual deity and an autonomous element, an entity ("genius") that somehow is possessed by, and possesses, Psyche. Their marriage Duncan does not give us as some kind of Jungian integration of the self. "The path," he writes, "that poetry creates between reality and the soul is the path of a conversion." These terms are very close to his earlier definition of "love" as that bond between a verbal "fiction" and the "actual" that is the basis of the poet's transformation, but here "fiction"—"a fiction in the art of poetry"—is the third and supervening term in a triad that includes "reality" and "the soul." Recall Duncan's comment about Cezanne:

> From body and from world toward an other body and other world, man derives meaning in a third element, the *created*—the rite, the dance, the narrative; the painting, the poem, the book.

[243] Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 79-80.

Not integration, but the fiction in which "reality" (Eros, perhaps, the deity within whose visitations are the beginning of poetry) no longer imposes upon the "soul" (Psyche, "*in the dark*), and in which the "soul" no longer impetuously and willfully imposes upon "reality," but, rather, in the perpetual exchanges of "the rite, the dance," the "soul" is converted into "reality" (no longer merely gazing upon it or desiring it from the outside) and "reality" is converted—out of its hiddenness, out of its childish delight in being beheld—to the "soul." We could think again of "the fiction" or the "third element" as governed by Venus.

The argument of this myth of poetry with Pound has been suggested above: the early Pound is the impetuous Psyche, seeking to subject the "genius" of poetry to his own culture-building ambitions; the later Pound, for whom the drama has become entirely "subjective," who has been "brought to despair," is the penitent Psyche who serves the vatic "green reed." The implicit argument with Olson tacks differently. We recall that in "Against Wisdom as Such" Olson had taken Duncan to task for his "outside concept and measure of 'wisdom'," because "Wisdom is the man" and nothing else; Duncan's "concept" for Olson means a false separation of "the man" from—to use Duncan's term—his "genius" or his inspiration. But the myth of Cupid and Psyche, in Duncan's reading, is the myth of precisely such a separation, and its overcoming, not in unification but in "the dance." Part of Duncan's response to Olson had been his rejection of the spatio-temporal boundedness of the poem; his peculiar understanding of the division or fallenness of "man" led him to think of the individual poem as but a phase in the unfolding of the poet's "life within life," his initiation to poetry. And the meaning of Psyche is metamorphosis, even in some sense metempsychosis—thus, the passage from the third section:

> **Scientia**
> holding the lamp, driven by doubt;
> Eros naked in foreknowledge
> smiling in his sleep; and the light
> spilld, burning his shoulder—the outrage

that conquers legend—
passion, dismay, longing, search
flooding up where
the Beloved is lost. Psyche travels
life after life, my life, station
after station,
to be tried

without break, without
news

Compare the terms of this revision of the Goya scene with the following from *The H.D. Book*: "The light must be tried; Psyche must doubt and seek to know; reading must become life and writing; and all must go wrong. There is no way then but Psyche's search, the creative work of a union in knowledge and experience with something missing. At the end, there is a new Eros, a new Master over Love." Here there is a hint of the "conversion," for both Psyche and Eros are transformed; Eros, Duncan goes on, is like "Osiris," is "a Lord over us in spirit who is dispersed everywhere to our senses" (not unlike language in its multiplicity), and even as "We are drawn to Him… we must also gather Him to be." The ambiguity of "life after life, my life" is unresolved. Are there several lives in one? That would be compatible with Duncan's notion of a "life within life." But perhaps he really does mean the transmigration of the soul, even as a version of poetic tradition in which "my life" would be no more than a temporary incarnation of a soul in common.

Finally, Duncan's evocation of "a new Master over Love" brings us to the last of the "old voices" that survive in the poem. It is in the opening of *The H.D. Book*, in that extraordinary fugal exposition of Duncan's calling to poetry, that Duncan speaks of a "life within life" and identifies it with Dante's "*la vita nuova*." Duncan even takes Dante's first periphrasis for his Beloved (Duncan quotes the Italian, "*La gloriosa donna della mia mente*") as a description of the teacher who first "awakened" in him "an objective for ardor."[244] In fact, the entire first chapter of Duncan's book

[244] Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 40.

could be read as a translation of Dante's text, and the "First Beloved"—that central figure in both poems we have been reading, and elsewhere—probably ought to be seen as a version of Dante's "Lady." Dante's narrative in his *Vita*, like Apuleius's in his *Metamorphoses*, like Duncan's in the Pindar poem, commences with a fateful seeing. He writes, in the translation by Wicksteed that Duncan kept in his library: "At that point I verily declare that the vital spirit which dwelleth in the most secret chamber of the heart began to tremble so mightily that it was horribly apparent in the least of my pulses, and trembling, it said these words: *Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi*."[245] We could translate this as "Behold a stronger god than me, who, coming, will rule over me." This is "the new Master over Love," and the double-conversion of Dante and his Lady, of lover and beloved, poet and god, resonates Duncan's interpretation of the Cupid and Psyche myth, while also bringing to mind the special syntactical development of "Often I Am Permitted," where the transformation of the speaker is parallel to the perpetual substitution of one "objective" entity for another.

Even more than the *Vita Nuova,* however, it is Dante's "Letter to Can Grande," where the poet gives an account of the structure and "sense" of his *Comedy*, that seems to stand behind Duncan's poem. We already have had occasion to mention its four-fold hermeneutics in connection with some of the associations of "folded" in Duncan's work, which are explicitly inscribed in several texts, including 1971's "Iconographical Extensions." A comparison between the Pindar poem and Dante's epistle is justified by those associations, by the four-fold organization of the poem, and by the likenesses described below, but it will be more suggestive of an unconscious background in Duncan's mind than definitive as an account of the poem's filiation. This is the relevant paragraph from the "Letter," again in Wicksteed's translation:

> To elucidate, then, what we have to say, be it known that the sense of this work is not simple, but on the contrary it may be called *polysemous*, that is to say, 'of more

[245] Dante Alighieri, *The Vita Nuova and Canzoniere of Dante Alighieri*, translated by Philip Wicksteed (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1948): 3-5.

> senses than one'; for it is one sense we get through the letter, and another which we get through the thing the letter signifies; and the first is called literal, but the second allegorical or mystic. And this mode of treatment, for its better manifestation, may be considered in this verse: 'When Israel came out of Egypt, and the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech, Judaea became his sanctification, Israel his power.' For if we inspect the letter alone the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses is presented to us; if the allegory, our redemption wrought by Christ; if the moral sense, the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to the state of grace is presented to us; if the anagogical, the departure of the holy soul from the slavery of this corruption to the liberty of eternal glory is presented to us. And although these mystic senses each have their special denominations, they may all in general be called allegorical, since they differ from the literal and historical; for *allegory* is derived from *alleon*, in Greek, which means the same as the Latin *alienum* or *diversum*.[246]

If Duncan's poem simply presented the process of a transformation in four stages, the connection would be extraordinarily tenuous. But that structure seems to correspond more closely to Dante's and thus warrants closer consideration. We can resort to our summary of the four sections above. However, from the outset it will be crucial to note that, whereas, for Dante, in his analysis of the polysemous nature of language, a single "verse" (like the one he quotes) contains all four "senses," for Duncan they are somehow phases of the emergent poem. In other words—and here Davidson's term "interpretive" verifies itself—Duncan turns this hermeneutic structure into a poetic structure, or, properly, turns that four-fold revelation, which, in Dante, is latent in the poem and available as if only to interpretation, into the process and content of the poem. But, at the same time, the poetic structure remains "interpretive," as section by section it unfolds the text and image with which it began. Thus, it could be said to emphasize an historical relationship between the four "senses" that is at once implied (by the movements named in the series "departure," "redemption," "conversion," "departure" and by the representation of an interpreter moving through the series) and excluded in Dante's thought, insofar as the "senses" are treated as contemporaneous, or atemporal, dimensions

[246] Dante Alighieri, *A translation of the Latin works of Dante Alighieri*, translated by A.G. Ferrers Howell and Philip H. Wicksteed (London: J.M. Dent, 1940): 347-348.

of a single verbal unit. In this way, Duncan makes explicit two aspects of Dante: first, the notion that interpretation has a salvific function, i.e. that the passage through the "senses" of a text is ultimately anagogical; and second, from a certain perspective, the annulment of history that occurs between the second and third senses, where the discrete and past temporality of the Old and New Testaments converts to the eternal, or continuous, aspect of the moral and the anagogical. However, precisely by incorporating these "senses" as successive moments in the poem, he turns Dante's extra-linguistic hierarchy into a poetic form, in which, not only at the end, the salvific vector of its sequence is subject to the "dance" of "resemblance and disresemblance."

From this perspective, we can refer again to 1965's "The Sweetness and Greatness of Dante's *Divine Comedy*." That entire essay, especially in its rapturous interpretation of the vowels of *Purgatorio*, presents Dante's *Comedy* as an allegory of the poet's art. Duncan wants to show how the narrative ascent of the poem transpires in the very sounds of Dante's Italian, and he finds his basis for this reading in an analysis of the four-fold hermeneutics we have been discussing. We have already quoted the following, but it must take on a new significance in the current discussion:

> The operations and mysteries of Poetry itself as Dante reveals them are as subtle and central to his vision of the Real as the operations and mysteries of Love are. They are not separate, for their reality is one; they have their source in the same literal ground of the poem. Poetry as well as Love is revealed in terms of that four-fold understanding that Dante would have us have.

Duncan proceeds to praise Dante's statement in the *Convivio* that "The literal sense should always come first as the one in the meaning whereof the others are included, and without which it were impossible and irrational to attend to the others" and adds the following remarks:

> This doctrine of the literal, the immediate and embodied sense, as the foundation of all others, is striking to the modern poet, for it very much is the meaning of the insistence of the Imagists upon the image in its direct presentation, from which all meanings may flow, as the primary in poetry, and of their abhorrence of all abstractions if they be divorced from the primal reality of incarnation.

Then, regarding "the allegorical," he writes:

> If we view the literal as a matter of mere fact, as the positivist does, it is mute. But once we apprehend the literal as a language, once things about us reveal depths and heights of meaning, we are involved in the sense of Creation ourselves, and in our human terms, this is Poetry, Making, the inner Fiction of Consciousness. If the actual world be denied as the primary ground and source, that inner fiction can become a fiction of the Unreal, in which not Truth but Wish hides. The allegorical or mystic sense, Dante says in his letter to Can Grande, is the sense which we get through the thing the letter signifies. It is our imagination of what the universe means, and it has its origin in the universe. To put it another way, it is by the faculty of imagination that we come to the significance of the world and of man, imagining what is in order to involve ourselves more deeply in what is.

And, finally, briefly, regarding "the moral and the anagogical," he writes that these

> take their life in the fictional and ultimately and primarily in the literal, and are each clarifications of the intent of the whole, as they are deepenings of our personal, psychological and spiritual involvement—of *our* intent then—in the destiny of the universe and of man.[247]

Duncan is accurate when he describes this reading as a "Duncanian heresy in which the literal is so identified with the actual, and the linguistic with the universal"—words which evoke his debt to the *Zohar* and apply as well to the poetics of "rime" in general. If, here, his version of Dante's hermeneutics makes the higher levels components of the "literal," this conforms to the logic of "the structure of rime," in which the distinction between sign, or signifier, and signified is obviated. In Duncan's thought, as we have argued, all of the elements of language—from the phonic minima to the higher orders of syntax and structure—are not only signs but already significances, because meaning seems to be, ultimately, the participation of any or group of elements in the "dance" of "resemblance and disresemblance." But, in this dance, the significances are nothing other than signs, and finally, according to Duncan's Kabbalistic vision, they are nothing other than letters, which is to say, Gods. For Duncan, as he writes in the Dante essay, "one of the secrets of Poetry…is that for the poet the actual experience of his life and the literal body of his work are not to be abstracted as if

[247] Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 105-108.

one stood for the other. The reality of the world is immediate to his writing as the poet works."[248] In these terms, the Pindar poem incorporates into its "literal body"—into "the primary reality of incarnation"—its own significances. The paragraph of commentary that follows upon the line from *The Greater Trump* hyperbolizes this process, as it is drawn into the patterns of the poem. Duncan's heresy, even as he affirms the essentially fictive meaning of poiesis, even as his poetry admits various modes of discourse which would seem to be separated by degrees in their relation to the literal, is to claim there is no representation, only presentation—no figuration or metaphor, only reality. This is apparently the meaning of Duncan's comment on the four "senses" ("their reality is one"), and of the doubling of Psyche's "yearning" at the very end of the Pindar poem.

As for the alignment of Duncan's structure with Dante's, we can specify the following. The first section presents "the literal," in a textual sense by means of Pindar's line and in a visual sense by means of the ekphrasis of Goya's painting. The doubling of the content of this section is characteristic of Duncan's poetics, disturbing the self-identity of the literal by means of the "resemblance and disresemblance" of the footsteps of Pindar's dancer and Goya's Cupid. The second section presents "the allegorical," or typological, and it too is double. The changes in the grammar in the first passage of this section—the deixis, the first-plural—enunciate the typological relationship of poiesis to the anti-type of Psyche's "faltering." In the second passage of the section, as Duncan (himself like Psyche) follows the litany of presidents backwards ("widdershins") in search of "the holy matins of the heart" and "the quiet of morning," his interpretation of the Psyche myth begins to treat the two persons of the myth as one, or as participants in one entity. That one entity is America, "the nation," and its unfolding in history, formed of contrasting resemblances with the lover and beloved of Apuleius's tale but comprising in its entirety "the continent's violent requiem,"

[248] Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 108.

is identified with Psyche's loss.[249] We can add that the litany of presidents itself participates in the transmutation of the literal, and especially in the literal adherence to the distinct reality of persons. For, while Whitman's "love for Lincoln" could be understood as the object of Duncan's nostalgia, its "sad[ness]" is ambiguous; the recital that precedes it, as well as the lines that follow it (e.g. "I too/ that am a nation"), suggests that it is not the "disresemblance" from Lincoln of his successors but the singular erotic investment in the fictive person of the president that is the "mistake" of history. There may be a truer Eros in the background, which is the land or continent itself, wearing "great scars of wrong," different from but associated with the peoples Duncan calls "Indians"—the very object of their "requiem."

Like Dante's "literal" and "allegorical," however differently, both of Duncan's first two sections are historical. In the third section, i.e. the "moral," we are under the aspect of eternity or, properly, in the time of the poem. It, too, exhibits a doubling, but one that is different from the preceding and one that separates it significantly from Dante's schema; because Duncan is presenting a process of transformation, there must be even greater "disresemblance" between his sections than there is between Dante's "senses." Thus, in this third section, we are brought into the allegorical recapitulation of Psyche's illumination of Cupid as "Scientia" lighting up "Eros," into the eternal condition of the doubting and yearning soul, and thus taken out of the narrative contexts of the first two sections; at the same time, the poem moves along the track of the myth, so that its primary matter is not that tragic revelation but Psyche's labors. The allegorical substitution and the narrative displacement are joined in those lines already quoted: "Psyche travels/ life after life, my life, station/after station." Even though Dante's definition of this "sense"—"the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to the state of grace is presented to us"—is specific to his Biblical

[249] The imagination of the presidents as "idiots fumbling at the bride's door," for example, transfers Psyche's willful impatience to an utterly humanized and distorted representation of Cupid.

example, it fits the metamorphosis of Psyche and the movement of Duncan's poem. And the same is true of Dante's definition of the "anagogical": "the departure of the holy soul from the slavery of this corruption to the liberty of eternal glory." Duncan's exclamations are the exuberances of just such a soul, as "Great Death gives way" and "Day gains." Dante uses the same word ("departure") to describe the signal event of the "literal," and while Duncan's final section is a final purification of the "literal," it is also a return to its beginning, on another level: the cry to "light the light," the parallel between the epistrophes of "gives way" and "serves them," the resumed flow of "yearning." The meaning of this return is in some sense that of a conversion, of Psyche into Eros, of the poet into the poem, for it is Duncan's own "footfall/ step by step," "that foot informed/ by the weight of all things," that treads on "Maverick Road" like a latter-day Cupid—and it is as if as Cupid, in such liberty beyond prohibition, he cries out "O, light the light!"

At the end of the paragraph in which Dante defines the four "senses," an ambiguity arises that threatens the articulated structure of the hermeneutic. "Although these mystic senses each have their special denominations," he writes, "they may all in general be called allegorical." And he construes "allegorical" in an etymological sense: "*allegory* is derived from *alleon*, in Greek, which means the same as the Latin *alienum* or *diversum*." Allegory is then not so much a trope or device but a mode of "disresemblance," an "other-speaking," constituted in discourse by its difference from, and bondage to, the original "letter." Whether or not the correspondence between Duncan's poem and Dante's four-fold is exact, the poem, between and within its four sections, is allegorical in this sense. And so is "Often I Am Permitted to Return to A Meadow." There the allegory is intensified at the level of phoneme, phrase, and word, but, as we have noted, there is remarkable and enchanting continuity to its speech, formed despite the meticulous "alienations" of its sounds. Here, "the structure of rime" works in another order to form a poetic continuity out of a verbal event that is radically diverse, or discontinuous, in its speech: its materials, its register, its rhythms, and indeed

its relationship to itself (i.e. its hermeneutic). The structural articulation is one aspect of this. The performance, in the second section, of a stroke is another. Of course it rhymes the stroke with Psyche's loss and with the bewilderment of the poetic afflatus. But it is an allegory, too, of an extremity of language, call it "poetry after language," just as the prose paragraph is at another limit perhaps "language after poetry." Poetries have taken shape out of one or the other of these, constructing opacities of sound or transparencies of prose, and poetries have arisen emphasizing one "sense" or another. The prospect of Duncan's poetics is a poetry that realizes the entire range of possibilities, a poetry in which, in its course, every "sense" of language can participate, and "their reality is one."

*

We return to that paragraph from "The Truth and Life of Myth":

> When in the inception of "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar," reading late at night the third line of the first Pythian Ode in the translation by Wade-Gery and Bowra, my 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 my reading, these were no longer words but 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.

From Ezra Pound's ox who moos the tetragrammaton ("Mn-YAWWH!!!"[250]) to Charles Bernstein's definition of the poem as "a wizened shaft of yellow disconsolance,"[251] 20th and 21st Century

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[250] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, 216. This is from Ezra Pound's "Canto XLIII," which earlier invokes "the Name of Omnipotent God." The pun recalls the Israelites fashioning of the Golden Calf in the Book of Exodus. That calf was made of coins—and Pound tells us in Siena "there was shortage of coin." It is an amazing heresy. But it is part of complex sequence of puns that Pound has stretched out across all of the Siena Cantos. For example, Siena puns as "Loco Signi" in "Canto XLII," which resonates in its meaning and its sound with "Sinai" (210). And that Canto is littered with bits of the tetragrammaton as deformed the ox's: "YYHH," or "YYour HHighness."

[251] Charles Bernstein, *Near/Miss* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2018): 52. The definition goes on: "that pricks like sin, making runic tattoos/ on the mind's skin…/You never believed it, no matter how often/ I failed to tell you. Make mine a double,/ one more time, then call it a night." The pun hardly needs explication. The "shaft" becomes the jet of piss ("yellowed disconsolance"), which is spiritualized as "sin," but a sin that "tattoos" the mind's skin with runes. And so forth. Really what is at issue here is the demonstration that poetry's knowledge or science (*Wissenschaft*) is nothing but wordplay, or the incessant experience of language's duplicity ("make mine a double").

American poetry is rife with puns. The functions of the pun range widely: now it will appear as a means discovering the truth of language and myth, now as a subversive or skeptical means for quickening the duplicity—the "polysemy"—of language. Olson in his "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," declares: "Pun is Rime."[252] By "Rime," like Duncan, he means the poetic art. And, in his *Maximus Poems*, "pun," especially etymological punning, is one of the means by which linguistic generalization is driven back to the reality of concrete particulars. But "Pun" itself is there taken to name many kinds of repetition or doubling, whether of syllables, names, landforms, or events. Olson's work is one crucial dimension of the pun in recent American poetry. Another, in a very different mode, would be Louis Zukofsky's homeophonic translations of the Book of Job and Catullus. Yet another would be Jack Spicer's wry and acerbic explorations of language and nothingness, which is in a way summarized by his most famous pun, "Lowghost" for Logos, a campy figure of the dead voice he took to "dictate" his poetry, here deforming the hypostasis of the living, divine Word.

And Duncan? He is closest to Olson's proposition, but with a very different meaning. An examination of his special sense of the "pun" in "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" will illuminate yet another dimension of this poem and further illustrate his notion of "Rime." For Duncan's thinking about the "pun," the touchstone is as much Joyce as Olson or anyone else. We

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[252] Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, 252. Compare Sitney, *Figures of the Present Dance*, 165ff, which not only elucidates the letter but which presents a close-reading of Olson which focuses on crucial puns in several texts. Olson's letter is from 1959—a little later than the Pindar poem, but several years earlier than Duncan's reflections on its genesis. Actually, Duncan is highly sensitive to the relevance of Olson's "letter" to his poem. And consider Robert Duncan, *Imagining Persons*, edited by Robert Bertholf and Dale Smith (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2017): 37. Lecturing in Vancouver in 1961, Duncan says: "What was happening in Olson's mind? It was partly the influence of Jung, it was partly the vision you could have of Whitehead. This is a heady thing, *Process and Reality*, where you have a picture of a cosmos, and you'll find it in that letter that follows 'Projective Verse,' and then the following 'Letter to Elaine Feinstein.' He apposed [sic?] cosmos to psyche, absolutely for this, absolutely this world of psyche. Now I have ways of reading things so much for my own use. This appears after the Pindar poem was written. I didn't even register cosmos and psyche, because they were so charged with importance for me. I had to finish "The Field" and I did not want to have results happening from the Pindar poem outside the ones in this area of "The Field." I had to go for a year and a half. At the end of that, I read that letter again and noticed that it was about cosmos and psyche. This is part of the magic operation. You become blind to these two terms because they have gathered some kind of prohibition."

have already had the occasion to quote the following from his "Notes on Poetics regarding Olson's *Maximus*":

> Finnegans Wake returns (turns back) to the beginnings, not only in reference (intestinal alimentary mythic meanings levels) but in mimesis, as a thing done (the alimentary babbling speech; the gobbling, the breaking down into). Here meanings are being churnd up, digested back into the original chaos of noises, decomposed.
>
> Certainly the masterpiece of a psychoanalytical period. In logopoeia meanings then may be puddled as in Joyce, or they can be playd as in H.D.'s War Trilogy by a sleight-of-mind. The one poses uniquely the proposition of letting go, back to the visceral process.
>
> Olson insists upon the active. Homo maximus wrests his life from the underworld as the Gloucester fisherman wrests his from the sea…
>
> We are perhaps as deraild by the excitements of Freudian psychology as the Middle Ages were by the excitements of Aristotelian logic—with psychoanalysts as counterparts of scholastics, with infantology replacing angelology, and the phantasmagoria of metapsychology in place of the phantasmagoria of metaphysics.
>
> There are so many, children,
> who want to go back, who want to lie down
> in Tiamat.
>
> Not a digression: but to indicate the "taking hold" of the Maximus poems is pitted against "letting go," is a conquest of Tiamat. The emergence from vitality of faculties. Joyce retreats from his faculties to his mere vitalities.[253]

That is from the middle of 1950s, and Duncan is striving to get beyond the Steinian play of his derivations and beyond "the tone-leading of vowels"—to become a *makar,* like Maximus, who "wrests his life" from the underworld of sound. Subsequently, Duncan strove for a vision of language in which the vitalities and the faculties, or "poetry before language," and the orders of writing, would neither merge in the confusions of "Tiamat" nor be polarized in her conquest, like the formed earth and the underworld, and that meant developing a poetics in which, as we have said, the full range of linguistic phenomena, from "alimentary babbling speech" on upwards, could participate in the "dance."

In the Pindar poem, we can see this in what must be one of the most egregious and extravagant puns in literary history. That is its "mimesis"—in which "meanings are being churnd up,

[253] Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 51-52.

digested back into the original chaos of noises, decomposed"—of the stroke. The "faltering" of the old poets, and of Duncan himself, becomes physiological:

> A stroke.   These little strokes.   A chill.
> The old man, feeble, does not recoil.
> Recall. A phase so minute,
> only a part of the word in- jerrd.

Pun: the neurological event ("a stroke") is also the gesture of the writer marking letters ("these little strokes") and of the painter. Yet the "stroke" also leads Duncan back to Greece, for in the next line "*The Thundermakers descend*," as if it is the wound of Zeus' "warlike thunderbolt" which Pindar at the beginning of the Pythian Ode says the lyre quenches.[254] Who "the old man" is has been given different answers. Michael Davidson, for one, suggests a triple-identification with Whitman, H.D., and William Carlos Williams, "all of whom had strokes later in life that impacted their physical and verbal abilities."[255] However, H.D.'s stroke, which plays an important role in the beginning of Duncan's next book, *Roots and Branches*, was not until 1961. Williams had at least three, the latest of which was in 1958, October, so immediately preceding Duncan's first writing of this poem.[256] Thus, it seems more likely, and the example of Williams conforms more closely to the theme of this section. Perhaps we can hear in "in-jerrd" an echo of Williams' "To a Dog Injured in the Street," and in Duncan's evocation of "courage" at the end of the section Williams' conclusion: "With invention and courage/ we shall surpass/ the pitiful dumb beasts,/ let all men believe it/ as you

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[254] Where this italicized sentence comes from is not clear. Strangely—since all the other italicized phrases can be easily located in poets crucial to Duncan's work. The language is redolent of Pindar or Hesiod, but the plural form does not fit. When one casts about for other usages of this name, one finds a cluster of them in studies of aboriginal rituals from Australia. For example, in Jane Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927)—a book Duncan knew well—one reads on page 65: "The initiated boy when taught to twirl the Bull-Roarer feels himself actually making the Thunder, his will and energy and action conspire with its uncanny potency. There is no clear severance; he is conscious of control, he can alter the pace and thereby the weird sounds, he is a Thunder-maker and we are landed straight into Magic."

[255] Michael Davidson, "'how to dance/sitting down'" in *Aging Experiments: Futures and Fantasies of Old Age*, edited by João Paulo Guimarães (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2023): 80

[256] See, e.g. Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, *Selected Letters*, edited by Hugh Witemeyer (New York: New Directions, 1996): 285

have taught me also/ to believe it."[257] On the other hand, perhaps the figure is not a poet at all: Eisenhower, who is named later, suffered a stroke in office in 1957 and developed aphasia. In any case, the initial mimesis is taken to an extreme in the following:

> *The Thundermakers descend,*
>
> damerging a nuv. A nerb.
> The present dented of the U
> nighted stayd. States. The heavy clod?
> Cloud. Invades the brain. What
> if lilacs last in *this* dooryard bloomed?

As we can see, the sheerly phonetic performance of aphasia, which resembles some of the subtle sound effects of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," develops into puns of a more common sort. The entire operation calls to mind the phrase at the physical center of that earlier poem ("a disturbance of words within words/ that is a field folded") and that definition of "most man" in "The Structure of Rime" ("a melody within this surfeit of speech").

These are the first lines of the Pindar poem:

> *The light foot hears you and the brightness begins*
> god-step at the margins of thought,
> quick adulterous tread at the heart.

The italicized line is indeed from Pindar, in the translation of the first Pythian Ode by Wade-Gery and Bowra—although in Pindar's poem this is the third, not the first, line. And while Duncan faithfully transcribes their translation, the translation itself contains an error or pun. For Pindar's line is, τᾶς ἀκούει μὲν βάσις, ἀγλαΐας ἀρχά, literally, "to which the step listens, beginning of splendor." That to which it hearkens is the "golden phorminx" that Pindar's first line invokes. In this respect, and in the context of the third section of the poem, it is tempting to think of Duncan's opening as hiding a more proximate resonance or pun with Pound's fourth Canto, which also begins with

[257] William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: 1939-1962* (New York: New Directions, 1991): 257. The poem was published in *The Desert Music* in 1954.

Pindar—a word, not a line: "ANAXAFORMINGES," from the second Olympian Ode. We could even say that Duncan's line (and, to an extent, Pindar's) displaces the poetics of Pounds, in a way that can be taken as symptomatic of the entire difference between the two modern poets. For, in that Olympian Ode, "songs" (*hymnoi*) rule the lyre (*anaxaforminges*). But, in the Pythian Ode, the prime mover is the lyre (*phorminx*, unruled) and the steps of the dancers (*basis*) hearken (*akouei*) to it (*tas*). So Duncan's poem will be led by the "*resemblance and disresemblance*" of musical words.

As we can see from looking at the Greek, the translators have added a word, for the dancers' "step" or "foot" has no attribute there. They have doubled the "brightness" that in Pindar's ode follows upon the step of the dancer. Partly this is to make the line "dance" in English, insofar as it doubles the final sound of "foot" and rhymes "light" with "brightness." But, in fact, "brightness" itself is something of a literalization of what Pindar means by ἀγλαΐας, for that word more usually would mean something like "splendor," and here a splendor associated with the festivities beginning, rather than an actual radiance emanating from the steps of the dancer. In light of this special translation, "light"—which, as an attribute of a "step" or "foot," would only evoke its agility or swiftness—now makes the "foot" glow in its dance.

"My mind lost the hold of Pindar's sense and was faced with certain puns," Duncan tells us in the paragraph quoted above. He does not mean the losing-hold that we see in the translation. In a different text, "Toward an Open Universe," he writes:

> I was reading one evening the *Pythian Odes* translated by H.T. Wade-Gery and C.M. Bowra. I have an affinity with Pindar, but here it was my inability to understand that began the work, or it was the work beginning that proposed the words I was reading in such a way that they no longer belonged to Pindar's *Pythian I*…In Pindar it is the harp of Apollo that the light foot of the dancer hears, but something had intruded, a higher reality for me, and it was the harp that heard the dancer. "Who is it that goes there?" the song cried out…I had mistaken the light foot for Hermes the Thief, who might be called The Light Foot, light-fingered, light-tongued.[258]

[258] Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 136.

This is from late 1963 or early 1964; "The Truth and Life of Myth" is 1967-1968. So we must be somewhat cautious about reading the poem through these later texts. What they offer us are senses of the poem, and the function of the pun, that connect suggestively to Duncan's poetics in the late-1950s. Although he does not call this a "pun," here, again, Duncan describes himself losing hold of Pindar's sense and projecting a "higher reality," in which the Pindaric celebration is doubled and inverted: the harp becomes the "song," and, by extension, the poet; the dancer becomes Hermes the Thief, who had "intruded" upon the scene, and to whom the song would have to listen.

Just before that passage in "The Truth and Life of Myth," Duncan comments on the relation between, or identity of, poetics and theology:

> Families of men like families of gods are the creative ground of key persons. And all mankind share the oldest gods as they share the oldest identities of the germinal cell. This share is so real that even the most racial tribalism—the ethnocentric laws of Ezra—cannot render the Jews other than or more than men; and Jahweh for the Christians is the Father, one of Three Persons in the Nature of God. For those of us who search out the widest imagination of our manhood—our piety must seem as appalling to the Christians as the Christian's piety is to the Jews—God strives in all Creation to come to Himself. The Gods men know are realizations of God. But what I speak of here in the terms of theology is a poetics. Back of each poet's concept of the poem is his concept of the meaning of form itself; and his concept of form in turn where it is serious at all arises from his concept of the nature of the universe, its lifetime or form, or even, for some, its lifelessness or formlessness. A mystic cosmogony gives rise to the little world the poet as creator makes.

The correspondence between cosmos and poem as microcosm ("little world"), as well as the identification of the object of the poet's "search" as "the widest imagination of our manhood," is familiar. Without mentioning the *Zohar,* this is Duncan at his most Kabbalistic, from the myth of history as the restoration of "God" to the displacement of the "Gods" as emanations or "realizations" of the one "God," to the crucial equations between theology and poetics and between cosmogony and poetry. Theology is taken as a concept of form, the several gods in their orders as individuated forms in creation. Theological differences, even "the most racial tribalism," do not hold—as the stigmatization of the Accuser and the unbelievers—but are taken as formal relations, as

patterns of "resemblance and disresemblance" in the total "realization." In this respect, perhaps we can hear a stronger resonance in the oracle's statement in the poem—"*Despair! The Gods themselves abhor his power*." If "he" is Eros, then he may be that first and ultimate God who binds together all disparate things, fearful to the sharply distinguished beings on Olympus. Duncan's "appalling…piety" is not only the construal of "the widest imagination of our manhood" as the vehicle of God's restoration to "himself;" it is also to treat the "Gods" and "the manhood," and indeed all things that have some definition, as myths or fictions in a universal poetics, the ultimate aim of which is not simply the completion of the "image of man" but actually the restoration of the whole.

After the description of the advent of the poem, Duncan begins to confess himself a trinitarian in these matters; then, abruptly, he is brought to an awareness of a reality greater than that trinitarian myth. This leads him to disavow any abstract determination of the forces—and their number—that, by their various operations, could be said to bring forth poetry. Think of Pound's trinity of *logopoeia, melopoeia, phanopoeia*, or Olson's (in the Feinstein "letter") of *topos/typos/tropos*. What Duncan does instead is make poetics, or theology, a function of poetry—and not of poetry in general, but of each "configuration," that is, each poem, as it searches after its own origins and invents its own "Gods":

> In the imperative of Poetry three forces move to incarnate themselves in the poem: the words, come alive in their resonances of sound, pulse and meaning—this is the reservoir of our humanity; the life experience and imagination of the poet—this is the reservoir of his craft and recognitions the range of his creation of person; and the actual body of the poet—the reservoir of his lifestyle. But name two First Movers of the poem. Name Seven. Name the Seventy-Two. In every configuration the Myth of the Poem will write itself anew.[259]

[259] Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose,* 155.

What does Duncan mean by "puns"? What does he mean by "powers in a theogony"? The astonishing thing is that Duncan takes not only "light" as a pun, but every word in that first line except for "the" and "and." And what the words seem to pun on, or what makes them puns, is not that multivalence that makes "light" mean bright and weightless. Duncan tells us that these words—"*light, foot, hears, you, brightness, begins*"—became "powers in a theogony." Thus, and especially in the context of Duncan's theological discourse, they are puns on "God." God as light. God as the dancer. God as the being who hears. God as *thou*. God as radiance (*Zohar*). God as origin, source, or beginning. They might be some six "First Movers" or various emanations or aspects of a single being, which might turn out to be what Duncan refers to as "the Poem." He calls them the "first Words," *Logoi* not *Logos*. Duncan's commentary seems to insist that we take these as the "Gods" of this particular poem, which control not only the theme of the poem but its rhythm ("pulse"), too. The multiplication of divinities of light makes this conception resemble the myths of Kabbalah and Gnosticism, and, as in those cosmogonies (or even the Hesiodic and Orphic cosmogonies to which Duncan refers), we can read this poem as the myth of their descent, their estrangements and their reunions, and their redemption or restoration.

But there is an even more radical implication to Duncan's thought, which, in a way, takes up Dante's *alienum* as a poetic principle in the manner of Jakobson and draws it down from the heights. of sacred hermeneutics into the minimal articulations of speech. The implication is simply that every word in this poem puns on those six words with which the poem begins, and, moreover, that every word in this poem, and perhaps in any poem, is a pun on every other. "Pun is rime." If, thus, every word is a pun on a divine name, we must recall that Duncan's reading of the *Zohar*'s myth of the Hebrew letters led him to evolve a poetry in which the permutations of not only names but of all of the elements of language would create, and constitute, the cosmos. The poem, he says, is a "mystic cosmogony." But Duncan's vision of "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" does not even rely,

as the *Zohar* partly does, on the material fact that the entire vocabulary of the language is built of the finite set of letters. His vision is closer to the extreme implications of *gematria,* which, by assigning numerical values to the letters, allows even words that have no material in common to be equated with one another. For Duncan, we could say, it is not the alphabet and not such numerology or any other hermeneutic technique (no matter how expansive and extravagant) that forms the basis of this impious creativity, which incessantly seeks out a wholeness wherein "the devil" is a pun on "God" and "doubt" puns on "belief." What he says of the several "Gods" would be true of those hermeneutics, and Dante's, as well. They are particular "realizations" of a single, higher reality: the "absolute scale" of "the structure of rime."

CHAPTER 7:

THE NATION OF NATIONS

The previous chapter departed somewhat from our continuous and chronological exposition of the transformation of Duncan's poetics in the mid- and late-1950s. Its involvement with the archive of Duncan's writing was more sporadic, partly because the materials themselves are not as copious, partly because its account of "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" was to take a more speculative route. But its connection to the genesis of the principles of "the structure of rime" and to "Often I Am Permitted to Return to A Meadow" was still strong. Despite its differences from that poem, it shares in the same world of imagination and is, finally, a manifestation of the same poetics, even as it brings forth new and other aspects of "the structure of rime." In the following chapter, we leap forward to the end of the 1960s and Duncan's final book of the decade, *Bending the Bow*, and the connection between the matter at hand and the reconstruction of Duncan's poetics in the earlier chapters becomes more nebulous. It is obvious—but it must be mentioned—that how poets think about poetry changes over time; Duncan would claim, as we have seen, that each poem is a new configuration of the "Myth of the Poem." And while the web of making and thinking in the 1950s through *The Opening of the Field* is tightly wound, in the following we will not insist on the perfect relevance of "the structure of rime" to the individual poems. But we will suggest that it is relevant, even if this relevance is only evident to comparison and not in the textual record. And if, at the end of the previous chapter, the correspondence that controlled our discussion was between theology or cosmology and poetics, here it will be between politics and poetics, as Duncan strove to understand it in the context of the war in Vietnam and the social upheavals in the United States.

We are in San Francisco again. Duncan and Jess had moved back from Stinson in the Spring of 1961.[260] *Roots and Branches* was published in the fall of 1964, with *Bending the Bow* already begun in January of that year.[261] When, that same fall, the Free-Speech Movement rose against the repressive policies of Berkeley's administration, Duncan wrote "Multiversity (Passages 21)," which excoriates the University and its Chancellors, and, in closing, declares:

> There being no common good, no commune,
> no communion, outside the freedom of
>
> individual volition.[262]

That poem was first drafted January 5, 1965. "In Place of a Passage 21," begun on January 10, opens with this proposition: "That Freedom and the Law are identical/ and are the nature of man—Paradise."[263] On February 7, the United States started bombing the North Vietnamese; by the spring, the government had deployed American soldiers on the ground.

In the years since *The Opening of the Field*, Duncan had grown alienated from Spicer, Blaser, and the Bay Area scene in general.[264] At the same time, his participation in a sort of 'republic' of poetry had quickened. He joined Olson, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, and other poets at the Vancouver Conference in the summer of 1963. He traveled frequently, giving readings across the country. As their collected letters and the volume of scholarly essays on their correspondence clearly show, Levertov came to play a new and important role in Duncan's

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260 Lisa Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 207.
261 Lisa Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 229.
262 Robert Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 359. The first draft is in Box 2, Notebook 35, Robert Duncan Collection.
263 Robert Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 360.
264 Cf. Lisa Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 214ff.

emotional and imaginative life during the early years of the decade.[265] On February 26, 1965, he writes to her:

> dear Denny,
> It is no wonder before the specter now of Johnson making like a ham Lincoln and his vice-president grinning and laughing—behind which moves all the evil that one saw openly in Goldwater's presentations—that our minds choke in outrage and can barely move—to write a letter or a poem or a passage of the H.D. book means each time clearing away the thought of the do-nothing policy in regard to the plight of the Negro and the bomb them policy in regard to the opposition of the Vietnamese to American occupation. Blake and Boehme with their revelation of what a time of wrath means may give a key as to the vision one must have…

The Berkeley Poetry Conference was that summer. Jack Spicer died. And Duncan composed "Up Rising (Passages 25)" and "The Soldiers (Passages 26)," which he completed in 1966. "The history in which our spirits now all but despair appears to me as a raging of the waters," he writes further on in the letter; "my mind flounders and has no sure course in navigating but must ride it out."[266]

Robert Bertholf's contribution to the collection of essays about Duncan and Levertov provides a useful, if incomplete, summary of Duncan's involvement with political action and political thought from the late 1930s onward.[267] In his telling, in the 1940s Duncan exchanged his youthful Socialism for a resolute, if idiosyncratic, Anarchism, and held that position more or less through the 1960s, when it formed the basis of his critique of the mode of Levertov's opposition to the Vietnam War.[268] Their friendship began to fray in 1965 and 1966, as the exigency of the war sharpened their different senses of the poet's responsibility; by 1970, it had completely broken

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[265]Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov, *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov* and *Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of* Poetry, edited by Robert Bertholf and Albert Gelpi (Stanford: Stanford University, 2006).
[266] *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, 488.
[267] Robert Bertholf, "Decision at the Apogee: Robert Duncan's Anarchist Critique of Denise Levertov," *Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of* Poetry, edited by Robert Bertholf and Albert Gelpi (Stanford: Stanford University, 2006): 1ff.
[268] On p. 9, Bertholf quotes a July 1944 letter Duncan wrote to Pauline Kael: "I started reading Kropotkin again and got into bed reading Kropotkin and got up in the morning walking to work reading Kropotkin—against his confusions on the nature of arts—there are such basic principles of human behavior, ethical and social understanding at last found expressed that I have been beside myself with joy."

down. Bertholf's essay gathers from the correspondence various statements of Duncan's attitude, all from 1969 and 1970:

> —"The urgency that demands the poet to reveal what is back of the political slogans and persuasions…"
> —The "failure to project anywhere the force of Revolution, of Rebellion…"
> —Her "empty and vain slogans because those who use them are destitute of any imagination of or feeling of what such greed, racism or imperialism is like. The poet's role is not to oppose war, but to imagine it…"
> —"To imagine what the good is and to imagine what evil is, what goods there are and what evils: this is releasing to our powers, it helps us prepare for actual works—and we're often mistaken in our imaginations…"
> —"the poems have been removed from the field they belong to poetically…"
> —"Within the plurality of forces the Heraclitean opposites have the drama and pathos of a heightened figure upon a ground in which a multitude of figures appear…"[269]

As Bertholf has it, Duncan's argument is that Levertov's poetry has been compromised by her conformity to the anti-war position; such a stance, by taking one side, is false to the "field" of poetry, both to the "anarchic" freedom of its emergence and to the manifold strife of "Heraclitean opposites" that it sustains. In Bertholf's own words: "Duncan again maintains that because she has given up her individuality to the cause, she has betrayed the position of the artist; she accepts the mass position, the passionate appeal, and no longer imagines or projects the very nature of the work, the evil, she is protesting… And while both poets would agree that the powerful greed of the government was causing terrible tribulation, death, and slaughter on the people of Vietnam, Duncan would maintain that in joining the movement Levertov was helping to create another bureaucracy strong enough to confront the present government; that the direct result would not be the destruction of one form of government and economic system but the replacement of it with the same kind of government and economic system… By joining the cause she joined an organization that was as corrupt and coercive as the one she thought she was protesting."[270] This seems more or

[269] Robert Bertholf, "Decision at the Apogee: Robert Duncan's Anarchist Critique of Denise Levertov," 12ff.
[270] Robert Bertholf, "Decision at the Apogee: Robert Duncan's Anarchist Critique of Denise Levertov," 13.

less to the point, although some of Bertholf's terminology is foreign to Duncan's thought; "individuality" especially seems out of place.

If we return to the 1965 letter quoted above, we might hear in his "despair" resonances of Duncan's earlier crisis. And that crisis of the 1950s also found Duncan disturbed, by Pound and de Leon and Blake—their "opposition" to, and not "imagination" of, "what evil is." On the basis of what is now a surer sense of "the field [poems] belong to poetically," he takes Levertov to task for this opposition. Yet, however clear he is about her transgression, his own bafflement persists—how is he to respond to what does seem "evil" to him? He is tempted on the one hand to "clear away" all thought of the war, to put it out of mind; on the other hand, "Blake and Boehme with their revelation of what a time of wrath means may give a key as to the vision one must have…"

It is interesting that, in a letter of the beginning of 1966, Levertov criticizes in the same terms a poem ("Earth's Winter Song") Duncan has sent her. "The part," she writes, "about Humphrey's head emerging from LBJ's asshole doesn't convince me the way similar things in Dante do." Duncan's attempt at prophecy has turned out like (she says) "a newspaper cartoon," and she thinks it is down to "the reduction, to a willed 2-dimensional state, of a living person… so that however strongly one may condemn by their present actions one cannot assign them to hell while they live." And more:

> …compassion is indivisible, & if one is to learn to really feel compassion for the victim one must learn to feel it for the—what's the pair word?—victimizer?—too.[271]

In her own way, Levertov finds that Duncan has divided what is indivisible, has "opposed"—cast down to hell—rather than "imagined"—really "fe[lt] compassion for"—the personages of evil.

At Berkeley, Duncan, along with Spicer and Robin Blaser, had studied with Ernst Kantorowicz in the 1940s; according to Lisa Jarnot, they participated in his seminars on Medieval

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[271] Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov, *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, 519-520.

architecture, the history of the Albigensians, English political history, and the history of the Renaissance.[272] Duncan's notebooks show that he returned to Kantorowicz's thought, especially his writings on political theology, throughout his career; Duncan's reading of part of Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* will play an important role in the present discussion. (As for an early encounter with political repression at Berkeley: Kantorowicz had refused to sign the university's anti-Communist loyalty oath and resigned.) There are meditations on "the Law" in *The Opening of the Field* and in *Roots and Branches*, and in the latter book there are brief allusions to the World Wars, but we must say that politics—the contemporary matters of nations as much as political theology—has a minor place in Duncan's writings before the mid-1960s.

Of course the second section of the Pindar poem is the major exception, and it gives us an index of the status of politics in Duncan's poetry at the start of the decade. One way of defining this status would be to say that what he speaks in the terms of politics is a poetics. But that will continue to be the case even through *Bending the Bow*; it is the poetics, in some sense, that will have changed. It is more to the point to note the identification of the political with that initial moment of the Psyche myth, the "carnal fate" of Cupid's illumination, which precipitates "jealousy, ignorance, the hurt." Thus, it is acknowledged as a phase in the initiation, but it brings a painful awakening, if it is an awakening at all, which seems to lead the soul down to a deeper darkness. We can take the performance of the stroke as exemplary: the political is a violent interruption, which makes the orders of language and thought unavailable—and suspends the operations of the poem. One thinks of Wallace Stevens' comment in "The Noble and the Sound of Words" that poetry "is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality."[273] This is not quite Duncan's idea, but that section of his poem produces a

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[272] Jarnot, *The Ambassador from Venus*, 113-117.
[273] Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011): 36.

similar opposition, between the "spirit," "Noble men," "kindred men," and "posts of the good" on the one hand, and the presidents, the "factories of human misery," "meaningless debt and war," and the "idiots," on the other. (These are even divided in the structure of the poem, where they alternate every two lines or so.) But it illuminates another sense of the moment when the Pindar poem is "in-jerrd": that the performance of the stroke reflects not the intrusion of the political itself but the poem's attempt to resist, to ward off, that intrusion—which it ultimately cannot or does not do. And so it must come to a different understanding of the functional relationship of poetry to that particular "pressure of reality." That is what the last lines of the section articulate, where "lilac blossoms of courage" emerge from the very injury ("in-jerrd") of the incursion:

> I see always the under side turning
> fumes that injure the tender landscape.
> From which up break
> lilac blossoms of courage in daily act
> striving to meet a natural measure.

The crucial lines, however, which bind this poem to *Bending the Bow*, are these:

> … I too
> that am a nation sustain the damage
> where smokes of continual ravage
> obscure the flame.

What sort of statement is this? And what sort of "nation"? At first it looks like the projection of a Whitmanian ego ("I am large… I contain multitudes…"[274]), yet this self is curiously limited. This self apparently does not participate in "the nation" but is "a nation" of its own. Somehow it suffers from what happens to "the nation," but it is not clear how or why. This effect does not seem to occur via a microcosmic repetition, the "nation" of the "I" mirroring "the nation" of the nation, nor is it a kind of natural or occult sympathy. The lines almost suggest that physical adjacency is what makes that "damage" touch the speaker's "self," as he "too" is "a nation," as if alongside America-a

[274] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The Complete 1855 and 1891-92 Editions* (New York, Library of America, 2011): 87.

relationship properly described by Dante's *alienum.* The "sense" of that poem is the ordeal and release of the soul, of which the fate of "the nation" is but an allegory.

We must say more about the connection with Whitman. While the dilation of the ego to a degree resembles Whitman's magnifications, to a careful reading the identification of the poetic self with the nation does not. In fact, Duncan's metaphor runs in exactly the opposite direction of Whitman's famous statement his preface to *Leaves of Grass* (which is the locus of Duncan's quotations in the second section of the Pindar poem). There, Whitman writes:

> The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.[275]

Duncan's remark is confined to the poetic ego, proposing that "I" is "a nation," but in his poetics the telos of the poem is the convergence of the self of the poet with the total structure of the poem. So, the remark at least suggests that the Pindar poem, in its organization of a manifold reality, is as much "a nation" as America is. In fact, more so, since poetry, in Duncan's thought, seems to be the ultimate measure of the nation. But, for Whitman, it is the nation that is the ultimate measure of poetry; it is poetry that is an "other-speaking" of the nation; and it is poetry that must aspire to the "largeness and stir" of America.

In the same way that revelations of language and soul brought him to crisis in the 1950s, the matter of the nation and the matter of Vietnam disturbed Duncan's conception of "the structure of rime"—which could, in the Pindar poem, dispose of America as but a phase of an awakening—and made him despair of its capacity to restore "the image of man." In the first section ("The War") of the "Introduction" to *Bending the Bow*, which he first drafted on the 17th of July 1967, we read the following:

> Cities laid waste, villages destroyed, men, women and children hunted down in their fields, forests poisoned, herds of elephants screaming under our fire—it is all so

[275] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* 5.

> distant from us we hear only what we imagine, making up what we surely are doing. When in moments of vision I see back of the photographt details and the daily body counts actual bodies in agony and hear—what I hear now is the desolate bellowing of some ox in a ditch—madness starts up in me. The pulse of this sentence beats before and beyond all proper bounds and we no longer inhabit what we thought properly our own.[276]

Further on in the text, he returns to terms of the earlier poetics, but with a poignant difference. Again, the matter is that what Duncan had known as the "proper bounds" of poetry no longer hold, not "against chaos" (as "Often I Am Permitted" puts it) but against an ineluctable "moment of vision" and the sentence to which it gives rise. Somehow the poet's perception in such a moment of "actual bodies in agony"—an act which Duncan opposes to "only what we imagine," as if he is striving through layers of allegory to reach the literal reality—coincides with a transformation in language itself, or anyways in the poet's awareness of it. For it is not strictly the outside coming in but language, which is both inside and out, that renders those "bounds" inadequate and that makes "us" realize what "we inhabit" is not "properly our own."

> The poem is not a stream of consciousness, but an area of composition in which I work with whatever comes into it. Only words come into. Sounds and ideas. The tone leading of vowels, the various percussions of consonants. The play of numbers in stresses and syllables. In which meanings and ideas, themes and things seen, arise. So that there is not only a melody of sounds but of images. Rimes, the reiteration of formations in the design, even puns, lead into complexities of the field. 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.[277]

This formal consciousness is implicit already in Duncan's quarrel with Olson in the previous decade, as well as in his sense of the poem as but a particular phase in the realization of Poetry. But, in practice, "the structure of rime" in its earlier formulation points towards the completeness and integrity of the poem and the book. We saw as much in the two poems from *The Opening of the Field.*

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[276] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 293.
[277] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 297.

The emphasis on the incomplete here has a temporal sense that is in sympathy with the earlier implications, but its other sense is new. This other sense corresponds to the fact that the poet belongs to the living and historical community of speakers—the speakers not only of English, but, as *Bending the Bow*'s continual reference to etymology suggests, of the Indo-European languages and of human language in general—a fact which Duncan alludes to elsewhere in this "Introduction" when he speaks of "the language of our commonness, alive with them" ("the enemy" or "the audience") "as well as me."

A few pages later, Duncan writes, "I'd like to leave somewhere in this book the statement that the real 'we' is the company of the living, of all the forms Life Itself, the primal wave of it, writing itself out in evolution, proposes." Like "the structure of rime," this is not by any means a homogenous unity, but a configuration of "like" and "unlike," "kind" and "unkind." Duncan's "we" is ambiguous: now it names "the nation" that masses against the enemy, now instead the "company of the living," inclusive of both "the nation" and "the enemy." Neither homogenous, nor peaceful: Duncan associates this "company" or "commune" with Pound's pursuit of "coherence" in his *Cantos*, "But," he clarifies, "the '*SPLENDOR, IT ALL COHERES*' of the poet's Herakles in *The Women of Trachis* is a key or recognition of a double meaning that turns in the lock of the Nessus shirt."[278] The dying Herakles at the end of Pound's translation speaks those words in ecstasy, as the enmities of the drama—Nessus's abduction of Deianeira, Herakles' killing of Nessus, Nessus's deceit, Deinaeira's jealousy of Iole and unwitting participation in Herakles' death—are revealed as fitting parts of a single, terrible form or event. The myth is not only a figure of the poem's coherence out of striving opposites, but, specifically of the poet's obligation, as Duncan wrote to Levertov, "to imagine what the good is and to imagine what evil is." Peter O'Leary does not deal at

[278] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 295.

any length with Vietnam, but he perceives that Duncan's stance toward the War involves "open[ing] himself" to the "nefarious and poetic effects" of its "contagion."[279] As O'Leary sees it, Duncan takes up a sacrificial position, and in a Christic or shamanistic fashion accepts as his own the evil or "poison" of his society. (In his telling, this is a physiological fact: Duncan's rage at the War increased his blood pressure, and his blood pressure medication led to the kidney failure that would ultimately kill him.) The difference from Levertov's adoption of a concrete political position, and especially from her "compassion" toward the "victimizer," is marked. Duncan says he "would speak to those alike in soul," but he cannot; he has, to quote it again, "only the language of our commonness," and, despite the restored or peaceful community such a phrase evokes, his possession by that "language" also means that his voice will be the vehicle of the nation's "madness," of "wrath," of "evil" as much as "good," of—as in the "nightmare" of "a boy raised in Iowa"—the "defeat of all deep dwelling in our common humanity, this bitter throwing forth of a wall of men moving." Herakles' "moment of vision" comes as the blood of the snake he thought he had conquered, having escaped his control and now working its poison in his body, unites itself with him. In the first sentences of Duncan's introduction, where Duncan means at once America's war against Vietnam ("as if to hold all China or the ancient sea at bay") and the terrific hatred and fear of what is not us or ours that seems to him the general condition of "our own history," we find the following formulations:

> … where other nations before us have flounderd, we flounder. To defend a form that our very defense corrupts. We cannot rid ourselves of the form to which we now belong. And in this drama of our own desperation we are drawn into a foreign desperation.[280]

Now, Duncan's vision of "coherence" is darker and more uncertain than earlier in the decade. For, as his frame shifts from the self to the nation, "the structure of rime" seems no longer

[279] O'Leary, *Gnostic Contagion,* 116.
[280] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 293.

to restore "the image of man" in a "dance" of "resemblance and disresemblance" but rather to manifest, fully, the strife of opposites. Thus, poetry's function may be not the restitution of a fallen state but the fullest presentation of that state, a task for which it nonetheless retains a unique capacity. And the historical mood is different: rather than anticipating an end to history, an apocalypse, in the restored dance of the cosmos, Duncan finds himself actually living in "the last days," when "everywhere living productive forms in the evolution of forms fail, weaken, or grow monstrous, destroying the terms of their existence." What is to come after these "days" is not said, and perhaps not seen or known.

Yet, in these years—between 1965 and 1968 or 1969—,there is at least one area in which Duncan continues to detect a possibility for transformation. It is the gap between (in his terms) the fact of America "the nation" and the fiction of America "the nation of nations." This may be a more explicated version of the equivocation of the first-person plural in the introduction to *Bending the Bow*, where "we" denotes both the nation and the species, even all of the living. But it is also, to put it simply, a more optimistic version, whereas the impossibility of distinguishing between the senses of the pronoun in Duncan's text is an index of confusion and despair. Reconstructing his development of these terms in prose and poems, we will be able to see, in any case, a transformation in his thought in this period. The first set of terms is used in his lecture, "Changing Perspectives on Reading Whitman," which Duncan wrote in the Fall of 1968 and delivered the following April at New York University's celebration of the sesquicentennial of Whitman's birth. It was born of an intensive reading in Whitman's prose and poetry during the early part of that year.[281] We can already note the distance between Duncan's "Introduction" and this text's ideal or vision of America—specifically, America—as "the states of being or of Man united, all states of mind brought together

[281] The other text cited at length in this notebook (41) is the Book of Job, and Duncan is explicit about the analogy between Job and the Poet in his despair.

in one governance…"[282] In comparison to the second section of the Pindar poem, the distance is even greater. There America had itself been the poison that sickened the spirit and wasted the land. But it is now the nation, in a special sense, that is the locus of human fulfilment; in sharp contrast to the punning discomposition of "U/ nighted stayd," here, in one of this nation's names—the United States—Duncan finds an omen of that ideal unity, not, however, as a political federation, but as "the reawakening of earliest oneness with all peoples—at last, the nation of Mankind at large." The earlier defensive posture against the nation on behalf of the spirit and the later prophecy of the nation's "madness" and "wrath" have become identifications of America as "the nation of Mankind," in which all human possibilities are gathered and realized. It is no surprise that the two sentences Duncan comes back to again and again are from the "Preface" to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*: "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem."

In the lecture, the mention of "the nation of Mankind at large" comes as Duncan is discussing his composition of "The Soldiers (Passages 26)." That poem cites the same sentences from Whitman, in lines that disturb the limits of any concept of "nation":

> *"The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem"*?
> Then America, the secret union of all states of Man,
> waits, hidden and challenging, in the hearts of the Viet Cong.
> "*The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth,"*
> Whitman says—the libertarians of the spirit, the
> devotees of Man's commonality.[283]

A paradigm of a "nation" that is not defined conceptually by opposition to the other, but dwells, it seems entirely or essentially, inside of the other—what does this mean? What distinguishes America the "nation" from this "nation of nations," or "secret union of all states of Man"? And, especially, in

[282] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 240.
[283] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 394.

what sense does Duncan evoke the "nation of nations" in his prophecy against the "nation"? To answer these questions, we will examine Duncan's thinking as it evolved over the last half of the decade. It goes without saying that the Vietnam War played a decisive role, but in the following pages I will focus on Duncan's reading—of Whitman, but also, it turns out, of Dante and Ernst Kantorowicz.[284] For Kantorowicz's elaboration of Dante's "Man-Centered Kingship" in the last chapter of *The King's Two Bodies* appears to be the basis for Duncan's new duality of "the nation" and "the nation of nations."

Let us return to Duncan's lecture, "Changing Perspectives." If his sustained exposition of Whitman's politics is not what surprises us most, then it must be that Whitman's politics are defined in contrast to Dante's. But Dante is more than a counterpoint to Whitman. The two poet's differences are meticulously established over the first half-a-dozen pages of the lecture. What they have in common Duncan states simply from the beginning: "Whitman, like Dante, projected a poem central to his civilization and his vision of the ground of ultimate reality—*Leaves of Grass*, like *The Divine Comedy*, being not an epic narrative but the spiritual testament of a self-realization. Whitman, as Dante did in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, wrote, in the Preface of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*…a poetics grounded in a science of the language of the common people." That it is a "science" of that language distinguishes this poetics from Duncan's position in the introduction to *Bending the Bow*, where the poet is as if overcome by "the language of our commonness." But the more important, perhaps more subtle, distinction may be from the efforts of de Leon, Blake, and especially Pound to make a poem "central to his civilization," their "cathedrals of faith" that haunted Duncan in the 1950s. In the foursome of "civilization" and "the ground of ultimate reality,"

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[284] *The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of Poetry*, offers several interpretations of Duncan's response to the war. It also includes a long essay by Graca Capinha on Kantorowicz's influence on Duncan's thought. Lisa Jarnot's biography of Duncan, *The Ambassador from Venus*, presents much of the biographical information.

"self-realization," and "the language of the common people," it is the third and fourth terms that stand out and separates Whitman and Dante from the others. Pound would share with them the fourth to a certain extent, and in *The Pisan Cantos* the third as well. It seems that the function of "self-realization" in the set is to mediate between "the language of the common people" and the "civilization," and it names a role for the poet that joins together, somehow, the shamanistic reception of "the language of our commonness" and the initiatory process presented by the Pindar poem. As in that poem, "self-realization" for Duncan is an erotic event, and Love—once more, in Duncan's thought—forms the conduit of transformation. In our discussion of Sybil's revelation of the polyvalent love of The Fool in *The Greater Trumps*, we have already anticipated Duncan's discussion of this matter in Whitman and Dante. Duncan writes:

> Whitman in *Democratic Vistas*, like Dante in *De Monarchia*, had written a definitive—even *the* definitive—politics of his time…Whitman, like Dante, had this vision of Time, of Self and World, in his poetic conversion, through the medium of a falling-in-love, where the inspiration of that falling-in-love being never exorcised in a sexual satisfaction, longing had been the seed of a creative desire transforming the inner and outer reality…[285]

That they share. But Eros is also the aspect in which the two poets, and their epochal works, separate. Whereas, via Beatrice, Dante

> had cast over and through the real the enchantment of a commanding romance…Whitman, again and again, resolves to release man from romantic entanglement

instead disseminating, Duncan says, "the Beloved…in throngs of men." Whitman's is "a vision of democracy in which the Beloved is equally apprehended in all the variety and generative potentiality of mankind."[286] In a sense, Dante represents the earlier Duncan, not only in *The Opening of the Field* but reaching all the way back to *Medieval Scenes*. For, even in the poetics of "the structure of rime,"

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[285] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 233.
[286] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 234.

with its multiplication of "powers," such a "commanding romance" continues to form the governing structure of Duncan's vision, whether it is that "Queen Under the Hill" in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to A Meadow" or the Psyche-Eros myth in the Pindar poem. Whitman's "vision" as Duncan describes it here would most closely correspond to the third section of the Pindar poem, with its collage of several voices and its unresolved dispersal of energy. That third section anticipates, precisely in these respects, the "Passages" series of *Roots and Branches* and *Bending the Bow*; the drama—and dialogue—of archetypal persons in "The Structure of Rime" series, in contrast, appears in this view as another manifestation of that "romance."

Concluding this first movement of the essay is Duncan's most sustained differentiation between the two poets, now according to the opposition between the past and the future. Again, Dante seems to be not only himself but also a shadow of the earlier Duncan. Dante, we are told, having been led by Virgil and Beatrice out of "contemporary disorder"—politics as what stymies poetry—into "the grand architectonic orders of the eternal," writes the "monumental memorial of a perished hope, the mausoleum of Christendom."[287] With the exception of the last phrase, that is very close to a description of the treatment of politics in the Pindar poem; there, the "hope" of "the nation" has indeed "perished," and has been left behind as poetry seeks the form of "the dance." So, that poem was already of "the last days," even as it sustained a "hope" in poetry that *Bending the Bow* does not. But, by 1968, Duncan is seeking in Whitman prospects for "Mankind" that may also restore the latter "hope." Whitman, Duncan says, "did not believe he came at the end of a civilization but at the beginning, even, before the beginning, at the apprehension of what was yet to come." This is a matter of politics. It is also in Duncan's text a matter of poetry, Whitman's poetry being

[287] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 236.

> a poetry in which the poet seeks to keep alive as a generative possibility a force and intent hidden in the very beginning of things, long before the beginning of the poem, *Leaves of Grass* having its form not, as the *Commedia* had, as the paradigm of an existing eternal form, but as the ever flowing, ever Self-creative ground of a process in which forces of awareness, Self-awareness, of declaration and of longing work and rework in the evolution of what they are, the evolution of a creative intention that moves not toward the satisfaction of some prescribed form but towards the fulfilment of a multitude of possibilities out of its seed…

The final phrase of the passage just quoted exactly defines the operations of "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar." But it is not only poetry that at once "keep[s] alive as a generative possibility a force and intent hidden in the very beginning of things" and also accomplishes "the fulfilment of a multitude of possibilities." For immediately thereafter, Duncan writes, "Whitman saw within the actuality of These States the idea of an America latent and at work," just as he himself, in "The Soldiers," would find "America" waiting, "hidden and challenging, in the hearts of the Viet Cong."

We might have said the poem relates to its multitude of possibilities in exactly the way "the nation" pertains to "the nation of nations." But while the individual poem, according to Duncan, conserves that "multitude of possibilities," "the nation" excludes all but one or a few of them. In any case, Duncan's rigorous treatment of this point—not to mention his "outrage"—takes him beyond such equations and analogies, beyond such "rimes." He asks, as we would ask, "Is it the deadly boast of the Chauvinist, the patriotic zeal of a spiritual imperialism, that fires Whitman's 'The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem'?"[288] Though he is an enthusiast of Whitman's creed, this question is not flippant. He knows that "presidents, congresses, armed forces, industrialists, governors, police forces, have rendered the meaning of 'America' and 'the United States' so fearful," and that they repeat endlessly similarly exceptionalist formulae. Duncan's immediate response to his own question is twofold. First, he writes, "unless we do come to change

[288] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 239.

the meaning of 'nation,' of 'state,' of 'America,' of 'at any time upon the earth,' so that these are terms of 'the fullest poetical nature,' we must disown" them. This proposes, without stating positively, another, and truer, meaning to each of these abused words, a poetic redoubling of sense to produce the redoubling of "nation." Second, he considers that Whitman is writing in what Duncan calls an "oracular mode," which "enters poetry and history where profound contradictions come into play."[289] This is a more trying answer for us to weigh, and yet it points immediately to Duncan's own "mode" as a reader of Whitman and Dante—and as a poet. For, although Whitman, in contrast to Dante, is the avatar of democracy and an "ever flowing" cosmos, and although it is Whitman who guides Duncan beyond the self-sufficiency of "the structure of rime," Whitman's vision of America troubles Duncan. The separation of "the nation" from "the nation of nations" forms the key moment in Duncan's attempt to define the status of actuality and potentiality in Whitman's concept. Nevertheless, Duncan will not be satisfied by cliches about what America "could be." The statement, quoted above, about "the idea of an America latent *and* at work" (my emphasis) is characteristic.

Duncan's derivation from Whitman of the necessary enlargement of "the structure of rime" depends on an idea of poetic tradition, about which the lecture is explicit. In fact, the opening of Duncan's address distinguishes between Dante and Whitman on the grounds of their standing in such a tradition. Duncan tells us this was to have been a "companion piece" to "The Sweetness and Greatness" before he realized that "the very fitting misfits," not only because "Whitman nowhere presents the architectural ordering of the universe and spirit that Dante presents" but also because "Whitman presents no such settled business" as Dante does. Duncan refers, again, to the "settled

[289] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 240.

business" of Dante's cosmos and also to the continued "evolution" of Whitman's poetry in Duncan's time:

> *Leaves of Grass*…is an event in Poetry which today we see, as Whitman saw Shakespeare gathering the glory of Feudalism, gathering the grand sweep of a Democracy, an expanding nationalism, into a great sun that casts its splendors long after its time has past. For surely, no less than Shakespeare's kings and commons and his courtly lovers, Whitman's heroic workers and comrades in love, strong in their individual selves, come to our minds as grandeurs out of perished worlds. Like dragons, they have entered the generative stuff of our humanity.

Moreover, for Duncan, in the "evolution" of Whitman's poetry (which is the "evolution" of "Poetry" itself) it overleaps the work of "the generation of Pound and Williams." The conceptual schema is dialectical: Whitman is the "thesis," Pound and Williams—"with their efforts to 'objectify' the poem, to free it from the complex associations of life and history"—are the antithesis, and, implicitly, Duncan's own vision, in which Whitman returns, is the synthesis. These are its terms: "Williams's language of objects and Pound's ideogrammatic method were transformed in the light of Whitman's hieroglyphic of the ensemble," which at once (and paradoxically) entailed his "tak[ing] the ground of his identity and person" and his intuiting "a grander and deeper reality potential in Man's evolution, beyond the awakening of philosopher-kings and poets, the awakening of the mass." Duncan's thinking here resembles his confrontation with that "generation" a decade earlier, insofar as Whitman's synthesizes the formal visions of Pound and Williams with a vision of "self-realization" or salvation.[290] Behind this account of the dialectic is Duncan's expansion, via Whitman, of his own poetics, from the pejorative "awakening of…poets" to the "awakening" of the nation. Duncan acknowledges his awareness of his own evolution in a notebook entry from April 18th of the same year, which anticipates a paragraph in the lecture just following the above. He writes: "The Leaves of Grass were leaves of a book, were lives… The Beasts of the Field I found reading The

[290] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose,* 259-260.

Zohar in the 1950s were angels that devourd the lives of men like grass… by pun, by visual rime and image rime Whitman extends the meaning of his Leaves, returns to it, deepens it, leaves it again to its own in him as a generative force… the leaves of grass were words of a language…"[291]

Duncan's reading of Whitman's nationalism is both an adaptation of "the structure of rime" and a democratization of Dante's *De Monarchia,* a text which he considers immediately following the passages quoted above. More precisely, it is Duncan's democratization of Kantorowicz's interpretation of that political-theological treatise. When Kantorowicz was teaching Duncan (and Blaser and Spicer) at Berkeley, he had not yet published *The King's Two Bodies*—his study of the "body natural" and the "body political" in Medieval legal theory and theology would not come out until 1957. But Duncan, in his lecture on Whitman, although he has no use for any monarch, returns to this text and, in order to articulate the distinction between "the nation" and "the nation of nations," appropriates its dualistic model: the natural body and the political or mystic body, the "Dignity" of an office and its "human incumbent," the separation of the human being from the Christian person.[292] It is remarkable that Blaser makes recourse (in several texts) to the Dante chapter of *The King's Two Bodies* in order to "imagine and measure a human community worthy of our words."[293] To come up with this vision of Dante, he has no need for Whitman; that may be because he is not speaking of a poetics in terms of a politics, and as we saw Whitman's role in Duncan's effort was partly to turn Dante's "prince" into a "poet." Despite this, and despite the differences in tenor of the two old friends, in Blaser's word "imagine"—or just before, "create" ("create a human community")—they would be in perfect agreement.

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[291] Box 6, Notebook 41, Robert Duncan Collection.
[292] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2016): 456, 465.
[293] Robin Blaser, *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser,* edited by Miriam Nichols (Berkeley: University of California, 2006): 74. The essay is called "The Recovery of the Public Word."

When Duncan writes, "Dante imagines the Empire of One Spirit, a Princedom extending over and preserving the peace and guaranteeing the fulfilment of all beings and things, each free at last, dwelling in the law of its own nature,"[294] or when he imagines a "nation of nations" that is "the fulfilment of a multitude of possibilities," or when he speaks of America as "the states of being or of Man united, all states of mind brought together in one governance," he echoes Kantorowicz's statement that, for Dante, "…only the whole body corporate of mankind was able to achieve what neither the individual nor a local corporate body could achieve: to allow *all* potentialities of the *total* human intellect to be actualized *semper* and *simul*, 'at all times' and 'all at the same time."[295] Such resonances bind Duncan's lecture very closely to the last chapter of Kantorowicz's book, and insofar as, in Kantorowicz's account, Dante translates the dual nature of Medieval kingship into the dual nature of "Man" as such, Duncan can be seen as extending Dante's gesture by transposing Dante's vision of "Man" to "Mankind" at large. Duncan's thought has followed an analogous path. For, as Graça Capinha says, Kantorowicz seems to understand Medieval kingship itself as a reflection of the dual—divine and human—nature of Christ, which was the framework for Duncan's poetic soteriology in the 1950s.[296] ("In Pound," Nathaniel Mackey writes, "we see a poet hankering to get into government, wanting to dictate policy, to wield decision-making power, to sit in smoke-filled rooms. In Duncan we see not so much an eye to the actual grind of political authority as a Shelleyan sense of the poet as actual, though unacknowledged, king."[297])

Even as Duncan seems to displace Dante in favor of Whitman, again, he is not casting aside *De Monarchia*. What we can perceive, instead, is a sequence of adjustments or compensations for that

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[294] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 242.
[295] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 472.
[296] Graça Capinha, "Robert Duncan and the Question of Law: Ernst Kantorowicz and the Poet's Two Bodies," *Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of* Poetry, edited by Robert Bertholf and Albert Gelpi (Stanford: Stanford University, 2006): 23.
[297] Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2018): 77

text's shortcomings—and that Dante and Kantorowicz are everywhere used by Duncan to save Whitman from his excessive nationalistic particularity. For example, Duncan finds it necessary to characterize Dante's *Commedia* as an abandonment of the "wild and rough and stubborn wood" of the actual world, in order to claim for Whitman that very Dantean ground. However, in a lecture of 1965, "The Sweetness and Greatness of Dante's *Divine Comedy,* Duncan had praised the Italian poet in these terms: "Dante, I think, incorporates the actualities of history, of his own life and of the history of man, as essential to his poem, because it is essential in his religion that God was actually and historically incarnate."[298] Even just a few months earlier in 1968, in "Man's Fulfilment in Order and Strife," Duncan tells us that, "reading Dante's *De Monarchia* in this last year for the first time since some eighteen years ago when I was in Medieval studies, I saw Dante's vision of World Order anew in terms of my own emerging ideas of cosmos and life orders." What vision is this? A world in which, Duncan says, "there no superfluous part in the process of the whole, but in turn the very multiplicity of parts, the variety of individualizations, races and species, is essential to the design, creative of the design: no one a goal but each a function in the creation at work."[299] Not only are these terms approximations of Kantorowicz's exposition; they are also almost the same terms he applies to Whitman *in contrast to Dante* in the lecture on the American poet's sesquicentennial.

In turn, Duncan's use of Whitman certainly is more than the reiteration of Dante in an "American" mask. What Whitman gives Duncan is, in a sense, a fundamental translation of two entities from Dante's *De Monarchia* and from Kantorowicz's study of that text. "The poet," who is "the first member of the democratic possibility," will replace "the prince," who "can only be identical with the intent hidden in the true nature of each individual man if he be free to follow his

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[298] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 106.
[299] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 206.

own inner law, the Christ within."[300] And "the nation" will replace the "Empire of One Spirit." These translations will finally allow Duncan to re-orient himself in his "outrage" against the War. He is not quite there in the 1965 essay, where he hews closely to Dante and Kantorowicz, and still speaks of the "World Order," and even in 1967 when he is writing that "Introduction" to *Bending the Bow* he has not yet realized his new direction. The key, in fact, seems to be the troubling particularity of Whitman's "America," which nowhere is mentioned in that "Introduction." Only his re-reading of Whitman will finally give him a notion of "America," in this case America "the nation" in opposition to America "the nation of Mankind," a particular place, like a particular language or particular body, for the poet to be "the first member of democratic possibility." Yet the urgency of just such a concept of "America" still is informed by Kantorowicz's text. For Kantorowicz stresses Dante's invention of the concepts of *humanitas* or *humana universitas* not as such, but as Dignities or ideals against which the incarnate Pope and Emperor are to be measured.[301] Whereas for Dante the "body natural," as it were, of *humanitas* would be one such official, Duncan sets "America" in that position. This can be said to ground the very notion of "Mankind" in Duncan's text, for merely as an ideal it would be inoperative; it would be as lifeless as the edifice of Christianity that, Duncan says, Dante builds in the *Commedia*. Moreover, Kantorowicz's special dualistic model helps Duncan distinguish his argument from mere "chauvinism": just as the king is not the King, but temporarily, under certain conditions, becomes the King, so, too, America is not "the nation of Mankind" but is can, under certain conditions, become it. America properly offers a "body natural" which can be measured against the ideal of "Mankind."

The poet's task is now not to measure the nation against the poet, which was Duncan's mode in 1960, but to measure it against the "nation of Mankind." More precisely, if we are to follow

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[300] Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, 242.
[301] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 459, 465.

the indications of the poems in *Bending the Bow*, it is to set in motion the dance of these two entities. Those poems know, as the "Introduction" yet does not, the distinction between the two "nations," one "natural" or "actual," the other "mystical" or "potential." Like the "absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance," like Dante's fourfold which is at the same time a two-fold (*alienum*), the dualistic political theology Duncan gets from Dante and Kantorowicz forms the basis of a poetics and a politics that realize themselves in pluralities. When Duncan reveals to us that "America, the secret union of all states of Man,/ waits, hidden and challenging, in the hearts of the Viet Cong," he is operating in the space between the two terms of the dualism. He is performing such a measurement and judgment. At the same time, he is testifying to a "moment of vision… beyond all proper bounds," a haunting glimpse of the "nation of nations."

A final compensation that must be made clear is that, although Duncan tries to dispel the charge of "chauvinism" against Whitman, he cannot do this simply on the basis of Whitman's texts. Not only does Whitman correct Dante; Dante, in Duncan's working through of this problem, corrects what may seem to be Whitman's excessive particularity. In other words, Dante is not simply evoked to be negated by comparison. Instead, Duncan sets his *humana universitas* in "oracular" tension with Whitman's vision "America." For, even if it is read in its "fullest poetical nature," Duncan knows that the "body natural" of this nation is haunted by its

> …hatred of Europe, of Africa, of Asia,
> the deep hatred for the old world that had driven generations of America
> out of itself,
> and for the alien world, the new world about him, that might have been Paradise…
> this specter that in the beginning Adams and Jefferson feard and knew would
> corrupt the very body of the nation
> and all our sense of common humanity…[302]

[302] Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 367.

Thus, the central function of Dante in the lecture on Whitman, even though he was writing the "mausoleum of Christendom," is more than conceptual. Throughout the essay, the two poets shift in relation to one another, now strictly opposed, now identified, more often than not implying the other's revelation or realizing the other's intuition. Like the poems themselves, like *The H.D. Book*, it is an instance of what Duncan, in the preface to *Bending the Bow* calls "the company of the living, of all the forms Life Itself, the primal wave of it, writing itself out in evolution, proposes," which "needs, as our poetry does, all the variety of what poets have projected poetry to be." It ought also to be seen as gesture towards the realization of America as "itself the greatest poem," a reconciliation with the most European of poets, which solicits the paradoxes and contradictions that are said to be harbingers of the new life.

CHAPTER 8:

THE GROUND OF PRIMARY INFORMATION

After all this, Duncan's notebooks remain mostly in the dark. And Duncan's reading in the poets and lore of the past, Duncan's politics, Duncan's relationship with his contemporaries—all the primary aspects of this dissertation are only understood, at best, in part. I have read in depth three or four poems, no more. Meanwhile, the relation of Duncan's work to cultural and historical phenomena, as well as its ramifications for posterity, has been left to the side. These have been the costs of a) a fidelity to the particulars of the material record, in aversion to opinion and theory; and b) a commitment to order these particulars according to whatever pattern or sequence I could discern in their multiplicity, to make "sense" or "senses" of them and not to merely arrange them as historical data. Of course I have allowed myself a couple of infidelities when a connection, however lacking in textual basis, was unusually pressing, whether in likelihood or sheer likeness. The former was the case in the comparison of the Pindar poem with Dante's hermeneutics, the latter in the comparison of Duncan's linguistics with Jakobson's. The gains have been a) an account of some of "the ways" of Duncan's "imagination," an immersive and detailed picture of a poet at work, as much in the intensities of a night's reading as in the sustained and rigorous striving of a year or years; and b), from that account, complex and subtle inferences of the nature of poetry as they first formed and then evolved through the writings, and the recognitions, of one poet.

Too much, and not enough, has been said about the importance of Duncan's work, without an accurate perception of that work. I would rather present the perception and forgo the importance. Yet this is true of so many of the poets of the last century: even though the unprecedented availability of what they have written offers us equally unprecedented apprehensions of their poetries, their proximity has let us presume too much about the particulars.

In the course of this work, I have had in mind only a few models of textual and philological intimacy. These by no means comprise a 'canon' of scholarship or methodology. I have already mentioned the Livingston Lowes study of Coleridge's notebooks. I have alluded, at least, to traditions of Biblical and Classical scholarship; I recall in particular reading Marvin Pope's commentary on *Song of Songs* for the Anchor Bible series, its astonishing and vertiginous suggestions of a Cult of Love in ancient Israel. Roman Jakobson has been evoked, but as I thought of my task I was more concerned with his essays on "the grammar of poetry." And, of course, Susan Howe's book on Emily Dickinson and Charles Olson's book on Melville, as well as Duncan's own *H.D. Book*.

One other text I have often had in mind Daniel Heller-Roazen's *No One's Ways: An Essay on Infinite Naming*. It is, on its face, a history of negation in philosophy, from Aristotle to Heidegger. But really what it shows us is how, in diverse languages, particles of negation (e.g. *non-* or *in-*) have played a central, if unacknowledged, role in that history. Yet, at its close, it points beyond any such retrospection:

> There is more in the voice than has yet been discerned. Thinking can learn from listening to the indefinite sayings of languages, not to define their constraints, after the fashion of linguistics, or to discipline their ambiguities by a notation devised "in the image of arithmetic," but to gather from their unruly multitude some keys to the dim workings of our speaking reason. Philology, which bears on parts of languages, in partial attestations, will prove itself a precious method in such an investigation. In fragments of discourse, in words, declined, case by case, according to grammars that are still to be uncovered, an unfamiliar logic and illogic will make itself more audible. It will be our own. The task of thinking with languages, and not only in them, and against them, may still be at its inception.[303]

There was a time when I imagined I would follow the tracks of the relative pronoun in Duncan's poetry, which allows him, as in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," another kind of "infinite naming." At the time, however, such an effort seemed to entail an adherence to my

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[303] Daniel Heller-Roazen, *No One's Ways: An Essay on Infinite Naming* (New York: Zone Books, 2017): 251.

impression of his poetry; even more so, as I read and re-read his writings, unfamiliar possibilities of poetry came into view, which, insofar as it sought out a single principle by which all of the parts of language could be related to one another, were exactly opposed to an exclusive focus on a single word. I have attended to the relative pronoun, and to other parts, but above all I have taken it as my task to "think with," as largely as I can, the writings that have brought forth these possibilities.

In a later essay about "Santa Cruz Propositions," in which he is thinking of the writings of Norman O. Brown, Duncan writes:

> What is it that is truly unspeakable? As a poet I find myself attackt for my being ultimately concerned with the experience of poetry and language. We may have begun to accept that sex is not a mere instrument but a primary ground of experience, but it is still rank heresy to take language, the pleasure and functions of words in their operations as such, as being the ground of primary information. Words are supposed to properly refer and to relate, and all the realm of their actual presence and the powers of language to use every other realm of experience to refer to and relate to its own realities, of the poem to use politics, religion, history, biology, love, autobiography, to illustrate itself, is forbidden as the realm of Narcissus, whom the Neo-Platonists saw as Creator of the World in his self-fascination, is forbidden.

Brown's remarkable passage from the philological scholarship of *Hermes the Thief* to the intuitive juxtapositions and bold speculations of *Love's Body* is for Duncan above all a passage into the creativity of "myth," which in Duncan's parlance is name for what poetry makes. But, in Duncan's view, in treating sex as *the* "primary ground of experience" Brown has been repressing or evading the recognition of the "ground" of his work as language, the nature of his work as poetry. We are again in the vicinity of what Duncan himself describes as that "Duncanian heresy in which the literal is…identified with the actual, and the linguistic with the universal," his vision of language as reality itself and all of the parts and particles of language as the primary actors in "Life Itself, the primal wave of it, writing itself out in evolution."

I have tried not to pursue my disputes with what others have said. But, thinking with Duncan's body of work, I have, I realize, been compelling what discourse there is about that work

back to particular poems, particular texts, in short to the actualities of what he has written. The Gnostic Duncan, the Queer Duncan, the Anarchist Duncan, the California Duncan, Duncan the New American Poet or the Poundian, Duncan the Traditionalist, Duncan the Formalist are concepts or frames of more use to the edifices of criticism than to the understanding of his, or any, poetry. Like the "lenses" of theory, in my view, they are devices of ideological conformity that neutralize the particular insurgencies of poetry. Such a view depends on an intuition that poetry, being somehow "the ground of primary information," and our reading of it are not thoroughly predetermined—that poetry is a kind of freedom, call it aesthetic or spiritual, which puts into abeyance the available orders of thinking, if we think with it. I mean, simply, that as we go we might not presume to know what language is but instead bear witness to it as it "illustrate[s]" itself. In other words, that scholarship, too, renouncing its own certainties, might "take language as being the ground of primary information." That is what I have sought to do, and as a result this study, despite the refinement of some of its articulations, remains in important ways inconclusive.

Inconclusive—yet one thing this study has shown is that Duncan's poetics, at least in the relevant period, were more materialist, even scientific, than those who see Duncan (skeptically) as an inveterate mystifier or (enthusiastically) as hierophant or "Mage" would allow. It has been easier to see the magical or Hermetic or kabbalistic dimensions of his thought, but their basis in his idiosyncratic understanding and experience of language has been underemphasized. This is the beginning of one of two perceptions that I would like to leave here in their suggestiveness. The first of these has also been implicit in the chapter on the Pindar poem. It is, namely, that one of the outstanding features of Duncan's work against the manifold background of poetry in the 20th Century is that it accomplishes a poetry in which all of the "senses" of language participate, not only as ensouled matter, not only as social convention, not only as an arbitrary organization of sounds and letters, not only as a physiological or "somatic" function, or a fact of psychology, biography, and

personality—and so on. Duncan's poetry, as it proposes the "absolute scale" of rime, is also an argument against the specification of the nature of language according to any one of these senses or "functions." And, more than any other poet in this time, Duncan has established the "ground" of his poetry in the "primary information" of language, its forming or creative activity.

The second perception considers the role of the episode I have discussed in the larger history of American poetry in the last century. It seems to be the case that Duncan was working, in the 1950s, toward some kind of reconciliation, or synthesis, of Romanticism and Modernism. But there is something to be said about his posterity as well, and the consequences of that labor. In general, Duncan's writing over four decades played a central role in translating the powerful impetus of that earlier Modernism—perhaps characterized, at its poles, by the projection of a total cultural order in Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and by the radical dislocations of linguistic order in Gertrude Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation*—into the range of polyvalent and serial forms that proliferated during the last half of the 20th Century. If that is so, then this episode may be seen as one of the pivotal moments in that history, in which, through Duncan's discovery of a principle of language that allowed for infinite coherences, an "open" poetry first emerged.

Guy Davenport once described the earlier phase of Modernism in poetry as a "renaissance of the archaic."[304] His point is not only the well-known fact that the Modernists were profoundly engaged by ancient art, myth, and ritual, nor quite that the artists found the new by means of the old. It has often seemed to me that Duncan's efforts during the late-1950s form an important moment in what might be called a "renaissance of the occult" in post-World War II American poetry, which powerfully abetted the transition from Modernism to post-Modernism. Over several decades, an extraordinarily diverse group of poets turned its attention to an array of pre-modern sources—

[304] Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1997), 20.

Gnosticism and Hermeticism, Christian and Jewish mysticism, Sufism, astrology, the Art of Memory, natural and theurgic magic—that had been driven into secrecy in the ascendance of scientific rationalism and religious reaction in the 15th and 16th centuries.[305] Davenport's provocation helps us see that the poets did not collage these elements as if they were the detritus of history but, instead, developed poetic strategies to recover, and even reanimate, the "sense of reality," lost until now, embodied by those traditions. Here, the key texts are of course the *Zohar* and the poetry and prose of Dante.

Davenport's remark suggests a method like the one employed in this study, rather than the approach of a literary history that searches out and classifying the uses of the Medieval in late-20th Century poetry. And, from the beginning, his remark has been a touchstone for my understanding of what I have been doing, and a justification for my narrow focus. And now, in that context, I would like to say that, by carefully tracking the poet's work through correspondence, marginalia, notebooks, dream-journals, and drafts, the preceding study has not only reconstructed a previously hidden apprehension of poetic form but has also given a rigorous account of how poetic form might bring to life another "sense of reality."

Especially in the references from Blaser at the end of the last chapter, the question of the Medieval and its relevance to any contemporary thought of a totality (however heterogeneous, e.g. "Mankind," "Cosmos"), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to the any prospects of human community—this question presses in on us. But it is not to be answered. Instead, not as a conclusion, I would like to present a poem of 1968. It has many senses. It is a sustained demonstration of language as "the ground of primary information." It is also a commentary on, or

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305 Ioan Culianu, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987). In particular, the chapter "Censoring Phantasy" provides the rubric of such an interpretation, as well as potent site of comparison for Duncan's poetics.

unfolding of, the ultimate reality in the Kabbalistic cosmogony, called *Ein-Sof,* or "No-End"; it is a belated, and tender, reconciliation with Spicer *in Memoriam,* perhaps an homage to his "Thing Language" ("No/ One listens to poetry"); and it is a testing of "the structures of rime" (now, plural) in the "madness" of war. But this poem is an attendance to the song of Paul Celan, and so what the Shoah has done to the world we are in, the language that we are in and that we "think with," haunts the poem's crossings of wreckage and restoration:

A Song from the Structures of Rime Ringing
as the Poet Paul Celan Sings

Something has wreckt the world I am in

I think   I have wreckt
      the world I am in.
It is beautiful.   From my wreckage
      this world   returns
to restore me,   overcomes its identity in me.

Nothing has wreckt the world I am in.
      It is nothing
in the world that has
      workt   this
wreckage of me   or my "world" I mean

the possibility of no thing so
      being there.

It is totally untranslatable.

Something is there that is it. Must
       be   nothing ultimately   no
thing.   In the formula derived
       as I go
the something is   Nothing   I know
obscured in the proposition of No-thingness.

      It is Nothing that has
wreckt the world I am in so that it is
      beautiful,   Nothing in me

being
beyond the world I am in
something
in the world longs for

nothing there.[306]

[306] Robert Duncan, *Collected Later Poems and Plays*, 439-440.

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