

## Dennis Cooley / KEEPING THE GREEN: ROBERT DUNCAN'S PASTORAL VISION

The vision of pristine radiance with which Duncan concludes "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" expresses his recurring interest throughout *The Opening of the Field* in the freshness and imaginativeness of childhood innocence. Both the title page and the cover of the original Grove paperback edition, which show two different pictures of children dancing in pastoral settings, illustrate that preoccupation. Like most romantics, Duncan values the ability of the child to live in a world of play and fantasy, uninhibited by degenerate and fragmented adults who are alienated from nature and unable or unwilling to open and receive the rich world of a highly charged unconscious. Throughout his life he has perceived children's fantasies as "A world of our own marvels. Doors of language. Adoration . . . the reality of romance . . . the innermost enchantment of mind . . . a world transformed and inhabited by spirits" (Allen, 402). Duncan recognizes that such magic is usually lost by adults who suffer from

the crippling of the imagination or rather its starvation. The world of wonders is limited at last to the parent's will (for will prospers where imagination is thwarted); intellectual appetites become no more than ambitions; curious minds become consciences; love, hatred, affection and cruelty cease to be responses and become convictions . . .

It is the key to our own inner being that the child offers us in his self-absorption. He would eagerly share himself with us, were we not so determined that he be heir to our achievement.

. . . Andersen, Macdonald, Baum tell us that wisdom belongs to the child as well as to us. But we have turned from, indeed "willingly" forsaken, wisdom for what we might acquire. (Allen, 404)

To overcome the limitations of ordinary "grown-up" existence it is necessary to become a little child again. Duncan is explicit about what that means:

A child can be an artist, he can be a poet . . .

The Christians thot of the lion as Christ the King; because the lion was a terrible power and at the same time a beast of great beauty.

For me, the Lion is the Child, the unfettered intellect that knows in his nobility none of the convictions and dogmas which human mind inflicts itself with. (Allen, 404-5)

"I too," Duncan says, "must go back, as I knew from the beginning I must, to childhood, where the germinal experience of poetry and myth lay" (Myth, 43). He feels so strongly about his early fantasies that he returns to them time and again:

The roots and depths of mature thought, its creative sources, lie in childhood or even "childish" things I have not put away but taken as enduring realities of my being . . . Like the poet, the child dwells not in the literal meanings of words but in the spirit that moves behind them, in the passional reality of the outraging or insidiously rationalizing adult. (Myth, 13)

However, sophisticated adults, too much "in the know" to be "taken in," are quick to ridicule such possibilities. That is why a child's fancy "was to become, when one was grown-up, a repressed, even a despised source, put away among childish things" (SB 1/2,4).

Usually those who have fallen into a constricted and hardened mentality refuse the salvation that becoming children offers them. Take the stern adults in "The Structure of Rime VI" for instance:

The old women came from their caves to close the too many doors that lead into pastures. Thru which the children pass, and in the high grass build their rooms of green, kingdoms where they dwell under the will of grasshopper, butterfly, snail, quail, thrush, mole and rabbit.

*Old Woman, your eye searches the field like a scythe! The riches of the living green lie prepared for your store. Ah, but you come so near to the children; you have almost returned to them. Their voices float up from their faraway games where. The tunneled grass hides their clearings. Swords and blades cut the near blue of sky. Their voices surround you.*

*Old Woman, at last you have come so near you almost understand them. Have you recalld then how the soul floats as the tiger-tongued butterfly or that sapphure, the humming-bird, does, where it will?*

Lying in the grass the world was all of the field, and I saw a kite on its string, tugging, bounding — far away as my grandmother — dance against the blue from its tie of invisible delight.

In the caves of blue within the blue the grandmothers bound, on the brink of freedom, to close the too many doors from which the rain falls.

Thus, the grass must give up new keys to rescue the living. (OF, 19)

Perverse old women, having "come so near to the children," having "almost returned to them" and the "riches of the living green," "bound [like predators?] . . . to close the too many doors from which the rain falls." Themselves trapped in enfolding caves, the atrophied old crones in turn try to confine the young by closing "the too many doors that lead into pastures." On the other hand, the children play and "build their rooms of green" in the bright, open spaces of the meadow. They make up their creations from the rich green of the grass, and the flowing energy of nature informs their art. The children have no mastery over the small, timid animals in the pasture. On the contrary, they enjoy the intimacy of vital, shared experience, mingling with the animals in the illuminated field and touching the living green. Like Pound of the *Pisan Cantos*, child-like in the state of first things, they live in spontaneous union and communion with sacred and humble creatures. Being "faraway" from their disapproving grandmothers, the children become undifferentiated members of the natural kingdom who play and in effect dance with the simple life in the pasture.

The conflict between the negative grandmothers and the independent children represents the proverbial battle of wills, "for will prospers where imagination is thwarted." There is a will to dominate and a will to live. What moves lives, what stops or is dammed up dies. Duncan's sympathies clearly are with the energetic and impulsive children.

Those limitations that the prohibitive guard-ians would impose on the young are defined spatially in the poem. The struggle between the forces of denial and the forces of vitality is expressed in terms of closing and opening, as it always is in Duncan's poetry. In fact, the children in "Rime VI" are enjoying what he constantly seeks and writes about — *The Opening of the Field*. In Duncan's poetry the Blakean Lion which represents the child's unfettered mind "brings his young to the opening of the field" (OF, 13). By the same token, those constrictions that the stubborn authority figures insist on are supposed to stop the children from moving upward or outward from the jails that their caves have become. Keeping in is keeping down. The proscriptions are designed to bring the flight of imagination "down to



earth." Conventionally minded adults would protect common sense and good sense from the "nonsense" of play and whimsy.

Appropriately, the enclosed caves symbolize the small minds of their occupants.

We protect our boundaries, the very shape of what we are, by closing our minds to the truth, remain true to what we are. And man's mind itself has moods when it would take refuge in being no bigger than and no more than the brain in his skull; and again, his mind has only those limits that his imagination of the universe itself has. (Myth, 70)

Having lost their sense of wonder and imagination, the inhibited old women, like Blakes's Urizen, obliterate their dreams and, as self-made shut-ins, cut themselves off from the free creative play of the young until they lock themselves up within the walls of their skulls. To live is to open, to die is to close up. Though "on the brink of freedom," finally the repressive females cannot stir from their dull stupor. Shackled with unbending rational minds, they have exorcised all memory of a free imagination. Because they are no longer children they are already dead.

What is more, they are determined that their young charges should not really live either. Though for Duncan "Responsibility is to keep / the ability to respond" (OF, 10), authoritarian adults deliberately try to frustrate the spontaneity and energy of the young. Because "The world of wonders is limited at last to the parent's will, Many children . . . [are] never . . . allowed to stray into childhood" (Allen, 404). And many adults never wander back into childhood.

That decline into inert adulthood is characteristic of modern rational and technological man, made to learn duties and taught to forget pleasures. Renouncing the child's rich inner life means losing the creative past. The remembrance of earlier times, however, retrieves that innocent life. As Duncan says, "Memory / holds . . . / and quickens / as if Spring had arrived" (OF, 28). But the domineering custodians, like those "who declare themselves part of the rational mind at war with all other possibilities of being" (Cat 1, 12), refuse to open up to the uncontaminated vision and lapse back into their torpor because they are severed from the past, the enchanted and capricious realm of childhood.

Although the grandmothers in "Rime VI" almost "recall" their primal origins in nature, the faint glimmer soon fades, and they "close the too many doors from which the rain falls." They would shut up

the spontaneous children and they would shut out the refreshing rain. The acts are equivalent. Since they attempt to limit rather than to extend possibilities, doors become for them points of containment and exclusion rather than exits and entrances. Not satisfied with keeping the children out of the pasture and reclaiming them, they hope to destroy the animated grassland itself, either by stopping the rain or, like Death the reaper, by rancorously sweeping the field "like a scythe" with their eyes. The eye that "searches" also suggests a hawkish vigilance in the grandmothers, especially since the grass "hides" the children among the very animals — "quail, thrush, mole and rabbit" — that such birds prey upon.

The aggressiveness of the old wardens' attack demonstrates their spiritual isolation from "the living green." Their distance and hostility vividly contrast to the children's immersion and integration in nature. The children build their playpens "*in the high grass*" and " *dwell under the will of*" the small animals that live there. The difference between the children's life in the bright, airy greenness and the grandmothers' assaults on the grasslands is the distinction between an ecological and an alien vision of the earth. On one hand, the children are at home in the natural world; on the other, the egotistical adults feel that they are no part of nature and that it is no part of them.

Their dislike of the pastures finally corresponds to their denial of imagination. Suppression on the outside is repression on the inside. The sterile grandmothers have not "recalld" the childhood delights of a free, vivid and fantastic life. That refusal takes the form of a special obliviousness since amnesia is the denial of Mnemosyne, mother of memory and of the muses. Because there can be no poetry, no restoration of lost life, without memory, their forgetfulness is disastrous. For that reason an Isis figure appears in many of Duncan's poems (especially as Psyche in "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar"), re-membering scattered fragments of lost consciousness.

For their part, the children in "Rime VI" escape from adult constrictions at least momentarily. The bright vibrant flare of the "tiger-tongued butterfly and that sapphire, the humming-bird," as

they break loose from the pull of gravity and rise to a free, intense life, show that they can. Like the butterfly that symbolizes man's psyche, the child's soul, freed from the constraints of the grandmothers' caves, "floats . . . where it *will*." It soars like the dancing kite in a flight of heedless fantasy.

Still, the adults remain unresponsive to the attractions of the green world. If they are ever to be saved from their atrophy, "the grass must give up new keys to rescue the living." Grass — "forbidden hallucinogen / that stirs sight of the hidden / order of orders!" (BB, 112). To loose their minds. To lose their minds. The ecstatic experience comes "like seeds of a forbidden hallucinogen, marijuana or morning glory / hidden away among the grasses of the field" (BB, 117), generating the beatific vision of green fresh grass and the golden morning glory, the sun. To "bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower."

More importantly, if worn-out grown-ups are to accept the children's life of make-believe and the world of cosmic vision, they must recover their suppressed dream world where "green shoots of a child inhabit the dark of man" (OF, 21). They must open doors instead of closing them. "I hate locks," Duncan says. "I wish I could give you / such openness" (OF, 49). As a liberating force, poetry "does not lock but unlocks, what was closed is opened." Against the unmoving, solid fact of the grandmothers' prisons Duncan would turn his energies to the opening of the field and to the service of "Hermes, god of poets and thieves, lock-picker" (BB, iv). To open a door. "Thus, the grass must give up new keys to rescue the living [prisoners]" — the keys to unlock doors and open the field. The keys of music. "The music [that] restores / health to the land" (OF, 10). The keys of music, the poems themselves, unlock and open the field that the one-dimensional adults try to shut up. "This is the Yule-log that warms December. / This is the new grass that springs from the ground" (OF, 51) — the green world, the children's playful games, and the poet's creativity.

Duncan has always hoped that "human greenness" will be "tough as grass that survives cruelest seasons" (OF, 9). Having by *The Opening of the Field* passed beyond his earlier "Wasteland" poetry, however, he seeks more than survival in a pastoral retreat or a child's dream-world. Intensely aware of seasonal and cosmic rhythms, he incorporates into his vision — and this is at the center of his poetry — the kinds of fertility myths that Frazer describes in *The Golden*



*Bough.* Much of his poetry organizes itself around myths of the death and rebirth of gods and goddesses responsible for plant life.

The cosmic energy that makes and maintains the grasslands brings health to the world. As goddess of corn or grass, Kore induces natural plant growth by infusing seeds with force and purpose. Since the germination and growth of those seeds also represents new life in human terms, she, who is "Queen Under the Hill" (OF, 7),

must be revived,  
Cora among the grasses.  
Hearts  
revive with her. (OF, 28)

The earth goddess that appears in many Duncan poems figures most prominently in "Evocation," his hymn of praise to her (OF, 40). Excited by the numinous presence of the chthonic deity at the annual harvest festival on All Saints' Day, the day after Hallowe'en when the dead spirits return to earth, and disturbed by the quaking of Kore's "radiant desire underground," the poet in his mind joins in the peasants' harvest dance, inducing the return of the fertility spirit:

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

It is worth noting, however, that the call is an evocation rather than an invocation. The distinction, though slight, is important in what it tells us about Duncan's mythic perceptions. An invocation is a petition for divine help or support, an evocation a prayer for a god's presence. An invocation primarily seeks utility, an evocation mainly expresses reverence.

Still, the harvest ritual in which Duncan participates is, in part, an attempt to call forth the powers of rebirth and to ensure a productive crop as Kore returns to renew the vegetation in the spring. Because he is attuned to her, he apparently foresees, perhaps even provokes, the goddess's answering earthquake: "for / I was thinking of her," "for I was thinking of her when the quake came." Anticipating the return of Kore, he gladly accepts the seasonal rhythms of birth, growth, death, and absence of life, for "It is my song of the whole

year I sing." That "whole year" includes *all* the seasons — not just the eager anticipation of a relieving and reviving spring. At the same time, the song or poem of the whole year becomes the dance of each of the four seasons:

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

The dance and the seasons are linked by their shared "melody," "rounds," and pounding feet. They are also deftly identified by the puns on "fall" and "spring." The dancing Threshers, the cycles of nature, and Duncan's poem (the "song") all become one and the same thing. In "Evocation" there is an acceptance of nature's dance and a celebration of it in a corresponding ritual dance. "The myth-teller, beside himself with the excitement of the dancers" (Myth, 7), breaks into song. The thresher joins the Threshers. The private, personal life disappears as the worshipper enters an impersonal and communal ritual: "the poem as a supreme effort of consciousness, comes in a dancing organization between personal and cosmic identity" (Nemerov, 135). The dancer enters the Dance.

As for Kore, the seed that she becomes in the harvest returns to the "stores of ancestral grain," the "living grain" teeming with "radiant desire underground." The knowledge that she lies in the nether world, waiting restlessly for her release to regenerate plant life at the spring equinox, permits the peasants to dance in joy. If there were no hope for the spirit's ascension, her death would be a tragedy. But it's not. Since the dancers assure her "thunderous" return, the emphasis in "Evocation" is on her rebirth rather than her death. The queen of the grass lies as a dormant but pulsating seed buried in the earth for one season of the year, only to come back when nature releases its prodigious energies once again.

The plain Threshers in "Evocation," like the children in "The Structure of Rime VI," are closely in touch with primal realities. Recognizing "in the wretched and contemptible . . . the presence of a divine life" (Myth, 34), Duncan has always been upset with the aristocratic arrogance that relegates ordinary people to oblivion, and peasants' literature, the ballad and the folk tale, to insignificance. In his radical romanticism, he admires "the soul in its lowly and outcast



experience — . . . the poor laborer, the ignorant cottager, the demented mariner, the child” — the very people “righteous middle-class minds” scorn (Myth, 41). That is why the “thought of primitives, dreamers, children, or the mad — once excluded by the provincial claims of common sense from the domain of the meaningful or significant — has been reclaimed” in romantic poetry (including his own) (Cat 1, 7).

One of Duncan’s most effective poems dealing with folk people, “A Song of the Old Order” (OF, 52-3), is a sustained expression of his central myth of vegetative renewal. In it, he typically emphasizes the simplicity of ordinary people, here John and Joan, in lines that possess a ballad flavour:

Joan grows sullen  
and Joan delights

John has known grief  
and John’s known joy

(The terminal stresses, fairly regular and emphatic rhythms, and frequent use of conventional rime in “A Song of the Old Order” all are deliberate departures from Duncan’s common practice.)

However, Joan and John are far more than simple country lovers. For one thing, it is rather noticeable that Joan is called “our Lady” and John “our Lord.” Duncan likely has in mind the popular medieval fertility myth associated with the Lord and Lady of the May. Certainly the refrain, “*burnt leaf of november and green of may*,” points toward pagan spring rituals, since in most early European ceremonies May was celebrated as the month of fertility. On Mayday, at the height of the festivities, the May queen was crowned and the young women danced around the erect May-pole from which a quaint hoop was sometimes provocatively suspended.

John and Joan clearly resemble such classical fertility deities as Attis and Cybele, Venus and Adonis, Isis and Osiris, and Persephone and Pluto. Like them, the Lord and Lady participate in the return of life in the spring. In fact, the peasants even induce its re-appearance by releasing their own generative powers, a belief common in simple

agricultural societies. By the "replenishing work," expressed in their sexual union, they give green to the earth. Appropriately, that process corresponds to the natural cosmic cycles of days, months, and years. The man and the woman invoke the dawn each day, fluctuate (in the case of the waxing and waning Lady) with the monthly "rounds of the moon," and correspond (in the annual movement of the Lord or sun) to "the change of the year." There is creative order in natural change. Hence the comic refrain "*burnt leaf of november and green of may*." And hence the *song* of the old order. ("It is my song of the whole year I sing.") Birth follows death as surely as green May displaces black November.

The "replenishing work" the betrothed man and woman do in order to "raise the day's light" "by their love" presumably is conceiving a son, "For the Lord has redeemed the abyss. / He gave the new law." Quite clearly, the new law that the Lord John gave, and which issued from the Lady Mary, is the Christ Child, for May is a month which the Christian mother shares with the pagan. The merry marry Mary month of May.

The simple peasants also sound like an unorthodox version of Jesus and Mary, who themselves appear in the poem as a variant on divine fertility couples and who join in a hierogamous marriage that renews the land. The evidence for those connections is strong. The Lady in the poem, who is also called "our Lady," clearly resembles Mary. But since "our Lady gives and returns us," she also is the Great Earth Mother who bears new life, then absorbs everything back into herself when it ages and subsides. The references to "*our Lord*" are even more convincing. He, not the Lady, "has awakend our hearts." And "the Lord has redeemed the abyss. / He gave the new law. / He suffered the kiss." The Biblical references are unmistakable. Hence the very simple lines describing Christ, yet another fertility god, resurrected on Easter Sunday: "Know you your Father / that gave you your name? / . . . for the way I go is by your side." The "Father," of course is also the God that impregnates Mary, who in turn gives birth to Christ himself during the winter solstice to reverse the decline of plant (and other) life. That birth gives "green to the earth" and raises "the day's light" which is "the source of light" and life, both the "Father" and the son in the sun.

Even the personal experiences of the young pair in "A Song of the Old Order" parallel those of the deities they personify. Like the moon

goddess which wanes and waxes, Joan is by turns sullen and merry. John, too, alternates between grief and joy. Presumably, Joan's delight and John's joy occur when the feminine moon, emblem of dark and receptive passion, lures the masculine sun, symbol of conscious intellectual enlightenment and deliberate imposition, into a sexual union. As the two complements fuse in a symbolic reunion of earth and sky, the land is freed of its barrenness, and with the coming of spring, the green returns to the burnt-over land.

Un-adult-erated children and simple people enjoy the kind of vital, basic, and imaginative life found in "the old alchemists' dream" that Duncan describes in "The Structure of Rime XXIV":

In the joy of the new work he raises horns of sublime sound into the heat surrounding the sheets of crystalline water to make walls in the music.

And in every repeat majestic sequences of avenues branch into halls where lovers and workers, fathers, mothers and children gather, in a life, a life-work, the grand opus of their humanity, the old alchemists' dream. They must work with the first elements, they must work with the invisible, servants and students of what plants and insects say,

not of the future. This city and its people hide in the hideous city about us, among the hideous crowds in this street. Was there ever before such stupidity, such arrogance, such madness? But from these cinders the old dame who appears again in our story works transitory hints of the eternal, whose jeweld gowns, coaches, palaces, glass shoes . . .

and lights in the hearts of certain youths the unquenchable yearning for bliss, so that they know not what to do but must go as the thought of bliss sends them. So these horns pierce the blue tents above us, rending the silence because what illusions? faeries? have awakend in the Real new impossibilities of harmonic conclusions?

And we have made a station of the way to the hidden city in the rooms where we are. (BB, 36)

The creative, liberating old dame in that poem is an antidote to the stern grandmothers in "Rime VI." She transforms the hideous people and city, symptomatic of the modern world, into a beautiful enticing fairy world. From out of cinders, she creates Cinder-ella. She is the fairy godmother who fashions a world of child-like wonder and enchantment. Inspired by their intense "yearning for bliss," and having broken out of a confined existence, the youths in the poem



reach toward the newly exposed signs of the eternal "hidden city" that she reveals as "Real," "transitory hints of the eternal," "new impossibilities of harmonic conclusions." The alchemist can make such magic because in her "dream" she works with the "first elements" and "invisible" powers. Freed from the domination of the "hideous city" ("such stupidity, such arrogance, such madness") through the powers of her charm ("illusions" and "faeries"), the restless youths approach the "Actual" which is imaginative.

Like H.D., one of Duncan's mentors, the young have found "'The Dream was greater than reality. Out of it, they built a city . . .'" (TQ, 80-1). That the old woman miraculously frees them from the stupidity and squalor of the "real" world suggests there is some chance to escape from it and even to transform it.

But no one can work such magic without preserving and cultivating the "land of spells and secret knowledge" (SB 1/2, 5) in the primitive, unconscious forces of the human psyche. Duncan's long fantasy, *Adam's Way*, is an imaginative rendition of the evolution of human consciousness and the loss of paradise that usually accompanies that intellectual growth. Preserved in the "green womb" of nature, "this vegetable Dame" (RB, 136), Adam at first lives as a "dreaming infant" sheltered urobically within a "mothering world" (BB, 103). Later, when released from his green pod, which is the uterus of the Earth Mother, he is warned that "This is your last green season" (RB, 156). Forcibly awakened from his unconscious Night-World, Adam loses his simple fantasies of dragons, fairies, and romances. In *Adam's Way*, man passes from his beginnings of totally unconscious submersion in the fetal fluid of the sea upward out of crevices, out of a Dark Wood, out of an enfolding pod, and into the light that is the fall. His experiences parallel Psyche's progression in "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" as he moves from darkness to light, from downward to upward, from wholeness to separation, from passion to intellect, and from "immaturity" to "maturity."

Though he knows that Adam must change and evolve, Michael, the kindly advisor in *Adam's Way*, urges him toward "the keeping of this place" (RB, 156). "For Eden is a magic you must keep," he warns Adam (RB, 157), knowing that at his best man is child-like as well as sophisticated. However, when Adam falls out of paradise into knowledge "Some part of God's then driven underground" (RB, 149).

The old order, the dark green world, sinks to the bottom of Adam's new waking consciousness when he loses his Edenic "homeland of the pleasure principle in the libidinal sea" (BB, 106).

Though initially "There is no division in his [Adam's] sight" (RB, 161), he becomes severed from the "green place/sacred to the Moon whose seed is Man" (RB, 135) as he ages. As Eve learns, she will,

having the knowledge of that tree,  
divide

light from light, sun from moon,  
within from without, man from woman,  
above from below, this side from that side,  
good from evil, nation from nation —

much more. (RB, 162)

When man falls into en-light-enment, the original ring is broken and the primordial womb is ruptured. Knowledge, the contaminant, fragments the world of wonders. Being aware is being apart. To be conscious is to be self-conscious and therefore to be distinct and separate. Knowing oneself apart from everything else is living in a dead and disintegrating world. Once he has "taken breath under a new law" (RB, 162), therefore, Adam cries out "The dark! The dark!" in terror at his shocking exile. The world loses its magic and its comfort for single-mindedly rational people. In fact, the moon that represents imaginative life "went dead on them they knew so much about it" (RB, 131). Fallen man languishes in a diminished world of dark dreams dying.

It is possible to regain or retain the green world, however, by immersion in the subterranean realm, even if it is at times threatening and diabolical. For instance, in many of Duncan's poems the currents of the earth flow through plants and the demonic powers thrust up out of the dark, unfolding as a full green tree or a delicate flower. What most people fear as a horrible eruption out of hell turns out to be an exfoliation of exuberant and exquisite beauty.

The underground, since it is the dark churning womb of the earth and the human mind that gives birth to all things, offers a release from the constrictions of the daylight world. That revival is ecstatically expressed in "Nor is the Past Pure" (OF, 41-3), in which Satan-Pluto strives out of the darkness toward *scientia*. Nevertheless, reaching toward the light is "not permitted without corruption." No one can be born until he dies. As in "Evocation," then, death is welcomed as life:

the full burgeoning, ripeness that is ready,  
the generous falling  
into the raptures of heroic death, the ground,  
the mulch, the right furrow.

For man can and must "come up out of" the dark world. His seed-soul, though dormant, lies teeming in the rich, dank ground full of festering and discarded garbage:

It is only the midden heap, Beauty: shards,  
scraps of leftover food, rottings,  
the Dump  
where we read history, larvae of all dead things,  
mixd seeds, waste, off-castings, despised  
treasure, vegetable putrifactions.

Like Satan, the seed is dynamic:

O seed occult we planted in the dark furrow!  
O potency we rested and covered over!  
O life thriving lightwards, gathering strength!  
The image of our longing is the full head of seed,  
the wheat-gold ready  
to give in its ripeness (our labors) food  
everlasting!  
in the dirt

Nurtured by the decaying refuse, like Kore temporarily returning underground, the seed renews itself in the spring and returns green to the land.

Since she was worshipped in the mysteries at Eleusis as a spirit of new plant growth and therefore of human immortality, "Kore brought / out of Hell, health manifest." As Duncan indicates, "Death is prerequisite to the growth of grass." Though temporarily buried in the ground, the seed of life sprouts upward and outward, its roots clinging to the rotting mulch in the earth, its branches and leaves touching the pure blue light in the spring sky.



The movement toward new life in Duncan's work is downward into the dark like a seed taking root, then upward like the green shoot of a tree stretching toward the sun in "perpetual thriving at the edges of the light" (OF, 82). Hence the title of *Roots and Branches*.

In spatial terms downward is equivalent to inward, both fundamental sources of generation for the romantic poet. Believing in art as expression released from within, Duncan recognizes that extending out is rising up. Creation begins from inward and downward and emerges upward and outward. Hence in "Now the Record Now Record," Duncan says "the spring of an urgent life / pushes up from the trunk of the idea of me." The Dionysian poet feeding on the dark life forces and teeming with the rising sap, sings his urgent rhapsodic hymn. When he becomes the tree and is the flower, he exists both "in" and "of" the world. Like the children in "The Structure of Rime VI," he participates as a fellow creature in a nature that he sees as his home. He does not dominate it or withdraw from it like the old women in that poem.

Since Duncan believes in the inspired artist shaken by numinous forces and flowing with the energies and transformations of life, his writing describes a shifting, fluid nature instead of a solid, unmoving universe. Energy (whether it is potential, arrested, or released) infuses and in-forms all of the processes at work. As a result, Duncan's poems are crammed with words describing motion: opens out, out-folding, uprising, return, shaking, breaks out, blaze forth, bursts forth, seeking, incite, break thru, pushes up, urgent life, a storm, force to come green, presses forth, thrown out, scattering, leap forward, waken, unquenchable yearning, raven, radiant desire, flow, sending, trembling, wave, hidden away, stirs, quickens, the rush, singing, drawing, yearning pierce, shaking, bloomed forth, raying out, emerging, receiving, falling, raging, loosing, releasing, mingled, burning, contending, flooded, shudder, cleared back, blasts, override, blow out. The language expresses not sensuous intensities, but processes and powers. Duncan is more a poet of the verb than of the noun or adjective. It is startling to realize that his poems contain few if any odours, textures, or sensations of heat and cold, very little sound from everyday life around him, virtually no sensations of taste, and, except for the symbolic patterns of light and dark or green, blue, red, and possibly white in varying contexts, scarcely any colours. Although his poetry is full of visual images, almost nowhere in it do we find any sensuous

transport or intense physical exuberance. In fact, Duncan's language is amazingly abstract for a contemporary writer.

Even when tangible scenes do appear in his writing, they tend to represent a mythic consciousness rather than to focus upon objective details. Take the following passage from "A Poem Slow Beginning," for instance:

and sought from tree and sun, from night and sea,  
old powers — Dionysus in wrath, Apollo in rapture,  
Orpheus in song, and Eros secretly

four that Christ-crossed in one Nature  
Plato named the First Beloved. (OF, 15)

Here, elemental experience, which easily lends itself to personal and sensuous expressions, is described in mythic terms. The classical gods become primarily emblematic: Dionysus as tree, Apollo as sun, Orpheus as night, and (presumably) Eros as sea. The four elements are four gods, the four gods are "crossed" or united by Christ into one whole, and the four elements of air, fire, earth, and water are also joined in one Nature. The subjects possess no properties of sound, taste, smell or touch. Instead, they are defined as formidable *powers*: Dionysus is wrathful, Apollo rapturous, Eros hidden, and Orpheus singing. Phenomena are defined in terms of what they do or what they could do. Their physical qualities as solid objects don't count as much as their potential and performance. When a poet is concerned with first things and last things, the particular nature of present matters can become less important for him.

However intangible they may be, the whole complex of renewing powers that Duncan mingles together — innocent children, fairies, devils, witches, bright Edenic pastures, rank piles of refuse, common people and outcasts, seeds and libidinal thrashings, natural growth, dark forests, black depths, and tribal echoes — all offer the chance for reviving an essential part of ourselves that in modern times has for the most part has been despised and banished to our unconscious life. Those forbidden experiences grow out of our imagination and appeal to it. In Duncan's words, "whatever realm of reality we seek out, we find it is woven of fictions" (Myth, 17) because "We are such stuff . . . as

dreams are made of' " (Myth, 67) . Genuinely inspired artists as creators of fictions offer us glimpses of what is and what could be. If we are going to find the richness and exuberance of the green world, it is important, Duncan insists, not to be taken in by "the dreams . . . of mean and vain imaginations" (CJ 8, 30) or those suffering from "a poverty of imagination" (Cat 2, 133) . Yet, because "the real has just those boundaries we are willing to imagine" (Cat 8/9, 238) , Duncan puts his trust in "the formal demand the spirit would make to shape all matter to its energies, to tune the world about it to the mode of an imagined music" (CP 8, 29) in a poetry that will draw us "home" "from the world's music" (OF, 58) . "Thus, the grass must give up new keys to rescue the living" (OF, 19) . To share the dream greater than reality. To keep the green. "This is the Book of the Earth, the Field of grass / Flourishing" (OF, 43) .



#### ABBREVIATIONS USED

Allen	"Pages from a Notebook" in Donald M. Allen, <i>The New American Poetry</i> . New York: Grove, 1960.
BB	<i>Bending the Bow</i> . New York: New Directions, 1968.
Cat	<i>Caterpillar</i>
CJ	<i>Coyote's Journal</i>
Myth	<i>The Truth &amp; Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography</i> . Fremont, Mich: Sumac, n.d. (rpt. from the House of Books 1968 edition).
Nemerov	"Towards an Open Universe" in Howard Nemerov, ed., <i>Poets on Poetry</i> . New York: Basic Books, 1966.
OF	<i>The Opening of the Field</i> . New York: Grove, 1960.
RB	<i>Roots and Branches</i> . New York: New Directions, 1969.
SB	<i>Stony Brook</i>
TQ	<i>TriQuarterly</i> , No. 12 (Spring 1968)

## H. D. BOOK

There is an early excerpt from the book: "From *The Day Book*." *Origin*, Second Series, 10 (July 1963), 1-47.

The book itself as it has appeared from time to time now includes the following chapters:

### PART ONE: BEGINNINGS

1. *Coyote's Journal*, 5/6 (1966), 8-31.
2. *Coyote's Journal*, 8 (1967), 27-35.
3. & 4. *TriQuarterly*, 12 (Spring, 1968), 67-98.
5. "Occult Matters." *Stony Brook*, 1/2 (1968), 4-19.
6. "Rites of Participation" I. *Caterpillar*, 1 (1967), 6-29.  
"Rites of Participation" II. *Caterpillar*, 2 (1968), 125-54.

### PART TWO: NIGHTS & DAYS

1. "March 10, Friday, 1961. (1963)." *Sumac*, 1, No. 1 (Fall 1968), 101-46.
2. "March 11, Saturday, 1961 (1963)." *Caterpillar*, 6 (Jan. 1969), 16-38.
3. "Part 2, Chapter 3." *Io*, 6 (Summer, 1969), 117-40.
4. "March 13, Monday (1961)." *Caterpillar*, 7 (April 1969), 27-60.
5. "March 14, Tuesday. 1961 (1963, 1975)" [section one]. *Stony Brook*, 3/4 (1969), 336-47.  
"March 14, Tuesday. 1961." [fragment of section two] Chapter 5, 50-52.  
"October 8, 1964." "March 20, 1960." Chapter 7, 53-67.  
"March 21, Tuesday. 1961." Chapter 8, 68-94.  
*Credences* 2 (1975), 50-94.

At least one other piece of the *H.D. Book* has appeared with the following title: "Glimpses of the Last Day [from chapter 11 of the *H.D. Book*] May 25, 1961. Thursday." *Io*, 10, [1971], 212-5.