In *Letters* (1956), written after a phase of plays & Stein imitations and a time at Black Mountain, Duncan, 37, was "permitted to return" not merely to San Francisco but to structures and a tongue kin to that of his strongest early works with a wider formal capacity, able now to do that towards which he had long worked: create a rich, musical poetry with precision. He, who in 1950 could permit

"Sims lands of peace" (The Imagist anthology took its stand against)

Then came the unexplored jungles of sorrow
so filled with beasts that the poet was bewildered.

For this, for this I was unprepared

1951

Africa Revisited

can, by '56 attain.

**What he could "permit" in 1950, he did not admit to his post-literary works until 1966.**

went

up to the Denials of Poetry: those Dames

Poe saw who combed their brassy hair and sang.

True To Life

("The Venue Poem")

The poems which immediately succeed *Letters* are presented as *The Opening of the Field* (1960), a book in the assertive Spicerian sense of an energy internally complete, yet "open-ended," that terms, pieces, sequences might refer predictively to later work. Outwardly, this concept of Book as formal unit contradicts the Duncan aesthetic, a calculation "a little heavy, a little contrived," not in keeping with the continually proposed gestures of risk, "primordial bellowings...batting, inarticulate, blindly making it" that have more commonly been the public self of a writer whose most well-known sequences (*Passages* and *The Structure of Rime*) have never been gathered into volumes of their own, who once wrote (feeling strongly enough about the matter to reprint it—in spite of Olson's critique of many of the other concerns therein, in his *Against Wisdom As Such*—in the Allen anthology which appeared only months before *Opening*)

What we expected poetry to be when we were children.... We dreamed not originally of publishing. What a paltry concern....

But resurrect everything: and one will discover my true book....

*Letters*, poems 1952-1955 (*The Preface being written in 1956*) is contemporaneous with later Stein imitations and Faust Touch, and previous to Black Mountain (1956) where Medea was written.
yet who concludes this orchestrated volume with a piece containing "This is what I wanted for the last poem, a loosening of conventions and return to open form."

Opening, tho, what field? Unlike Roots and Branches (1964) and Bending the Bow (1968), this title does not derive from that of any individual piece. More than those others, this is an announcement. Duncan, conscious that his craft ("What we call Poetry is the boat") is broader, his ability to make precise technical decisions, e.g.,

SKILL

the precision the hand knows
necessary to operate.
The incisive line contains this study, releases search.
Ocean seeks verification—attack, retreat.
These passions of the moon define
shore lines

more keenly tuned than at any prior time, sets forth, much as any mature artist in like position (Joyce, say, having completed the Portrait), to create a literal body of master's work. Preparatory to anything else, he seeks to define principles and propose directions, that the promised field of verse to come might literally (as well as formally) be open to all that might enter. This is the task of the first six poems, especially the first three, which are this note's focus. To the extent that the general course here set has not significantly been deviated from (tho surely there've been detours, new possibilities, especially with the advent of the Vietnam war, brought into play) even into the Seventeenth Century Suite, these pieces, through A Poem Slow Beginning, posit a path straight to the work's heart.

"Often," trochee's heave, "I am permitted," begins the book, its first aggressive act the assertion of a passive stance, "to return," verse literally, also claiming a place in-the-tradition (contrary to Rexroth's jacket note to the effect that Duncan is "easily recognizable as a member of the international avant garde") and, further, that the location of poetry is, in some sense, Back There; to a pinball sequence of signs:

\begin{itemize}
  \item [meadow] extended from self created reality formal process
  \item [scene made-up] extended from self created reality formal process
  \item [field composition of the poem] extended from self created reality formal process
\end{itemize}

The Propositions,

* but see, Structure of Time II, page 13: "He brings his young to the opening of the field."
The clean separation of self and other inherent in "so near" indicative (one hears "so dear") of the precision present, the watershed is "but", before which rides the denial that the cognitive locus of poetry is ego or superego, beyond which lies the affirmation: poetry abides in the heart's mind, but one that is just not quite the self (indeed, it's that old disconnected self, First Beloved, the Lady, aka mom). Duncan would invest the passing show with a formal order that, should it prove solipsistic, would be emotional at the source, the Romantic ethic reposed, the organizational imagination serf to the organic (which includes, naturally, the assumption that they are not, in fact, one). This locus, in its clearest presentation, is "an eternal pasture folded in all thought," uroboric, a Moebius strip of mental and physical. The universe its own stream of consciousness:

The drama of our time is the coming of all men into one fate, "the dream of everyone everywhere." The fate or dream is the fate of more than mankind. Our secret Adam is written now in the script of the primal cell.... All things have come now into their comparisons. But these comparisons are the correspondences that haunted Paracelsus, who saw also that the key to man's nature was hidden in the larger nature.

H.D. Book, 1:6

"She it is", that larger nature, "Queen Under The Hill", hidden, subverbal, "whose hosts are a disturbance", as tho the sum of a plurality might be pure force, the it she is, "of words within words", that realms be signs or made of them, "that is a field", a thing to be opened, "folded". The large claims made (for Duncan speaks neither so much for himself nor his self as for that external primacy of order, that he should be passive before it, not a maker nor shaper but a watcher of..."
Ron Sillyman's aversion to Mother ("aka mom", or later, "the offensiveness of his mystification of the female principle", p. 89) and Child ("kid's play") decays him mildly, leading light
wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall.
Wherefrom fall all architectures I am),

Duncan attempts, unconvincingly, to locate the poem in the actual, a revery on kid's play, then to re-solve the work via a restatement, as clear as, for the very fact of this new hard edge, it is misleading, that the place of work is "a given property of the mind" (as if THAT, no matter how modified, was an explanation!). It's here, in the final four stanzas of the initial piece, where the larger intentions, the definitions and demonstrations, dislodge the work. The inventiveness in term-choice and even syntax (cf., for example, the verb/line structure of the single sentence of the fifth stanza, its multistabilities) drops away, the resultant lines so conventional that they seem not to have held, fully, Duncan's attention; if a function of the "return" in the first poem is to lay aside the outlander's question as to whether or not one can perform in the "usual" forms, it's come here at some cost.

Out of four twelves, one disrupted, Duncan develops, in the second poem, five possibilities of voice: (1) dance mimed,

This
would-have-been feverish cool excess of

... Lovely their feet pound the green solid meadow();

(2) a dream dialogue between Duncan's rhetorical self and "Beloved", She-it-is-Queen-Under-The-Hill,

Where have I gone, Beloved?
Into the Waltz, Dancer();

(3) a monolog of speech, with inner and outer borders of syllable and breath,

In Ruben's riotous scene the May dancers teach us our learning seeks abandon!
Maximus called us to dance the Man.
We called him to call
season out of season-
d mind!();

(4) a monolog of quieter comment,

I see now a radiance.
The dancers are gone.
The Dance. Dancers become flowers become meek until the number ends, entered into a system with a useful and precise sense of the advantages of ambiguity, meaningful decisions within the writing — some minor points are well noted, for one of Duncan's finest qualities is his ability to balance the constant temptation to merge everything into a system with a useful and precise sense of the advantages of ambiguity. In fact, his way of making decisions within the writing is that such as Duncan, thoroughly a creature of the mind, where the ends are not at all clear.

They lie in heaps, exhausted, dead tired we say.

Why "Zukofskian"?

The Dance. Dancers become flowers become meek until the number ends, entered into a system with a useful and precise sense of the advantages of ambiguity, meaningful decisions within the writing — some minor points are well noted, for one of Duncan's finest qualities is his ability to balance the constant temptation to merge everything into a system with a useful and precise sense of the advantages of ambiguity. In fact, his way of making decisions within the writing is that such as Duncan, thoroughly a creature of the mind, where the ends are not at all clear.
Sillyman has the major difficulty of being unable to imagine the dancers and the dance.

fifth and, even moreso, the fourth modes. (One consequence of the inward push of cohesion and the outward shove of possibility is that time, place and self are never stable, constantly subject to change, resulting in a melange that could be called the personal-omniscient voice.) Middle level ambiguities are also present. Locate, for example, a precise definition, without imposing private assumptions, of the term “joy...” Another instance, this time on the vertical axis, all the more impressive for its total lack of content other than within the word itself, is the term cool in “This would-have-been feverish cool excess...”

In the third work, Duncan shifts our concern away from the language of the poem as dance (voice) to another order of its existence altogether. The initial assertion,

THE LAW I LOVE IS MAJOR MOVER
from which flow destructions of the Constitution

period, is powerful language (first line halved along the caesura, the key terms on either side initiating from repeating letters, double L, double M, this device itself used then to divide the second line, the latter portion, Latinate, of a wholly different tone; also the use of condensation and the recurrence of OV in the first line) that ought, brought this taut, to resonate a chord in any current reader of Pound’s dictum that any erosion in the language is equal (rhymes) to one in government. But how can law destroy the Constitution, from which flows the law? What of the missing (eroded) term, a or the, prior to “MAJOR”? Whichever, its function is only one of ordering, syntax, of determining whether the law is the principle or merely one of several movers from which flow etc., yet its absence creates an approximation of personhood, Major Mover, that the title-line caps do not disclaim. Duncan follows this deliberate dislocation with another:

No nation stands unstrirred
in whose courts.

Period, but without the completion of thought (which comes actually in the jump from this sentence to the clearspoke of the italicized witness, outside of the words). The next sentence, begun with a conjunction of contradiction, carries no less than 5 verb phrases — (1) “who judges”, (2) “he who judges must know”, (3) “a man knows”, (4) “She is fair”, (5) “we...serve” —, strung delicately by a series of terms (who, as, for, whom) whose function is principally one of syntax, governing the flow of speech. Such ordering is identified in the sentence as he, its object, She (again), a marriage of judgment and service, the demands of which, Duncan continuing to allude to Pound, Adams expounds on. The key term in the quotation is virtue, because, for Pound, it is virtù, the potency of one’s self (“beyond the reach of human infirmity”), that which invests one’s acts upon and among the common materials of the

*He has no idea of “laws” passed by legislatures and legislators that can be found to be evil before our sense of lawful relations. The Constitution (of the U.S.) here...
world with indelible traces of one's personality. If one is to be a poet of such aggressive derivations as is Duncan, then influence needs be justified, and how better than to define the ability to respond (virtú) to other writings as a condition for that service which is judgment, the government of speech? (Oddly, Kenner credits Pound's insights into Greek literature, his respond-ability, to the fact that "he could not follow the syntax." However, he takes virtú as argument against "influence," the difference being that Duncan correctly takes other works and writers also to be facts of the universe through which to work his virtú.) When, taking it into a larger context, Duncan writes that

The universe is filled with eyes then, intensities,
with intent,
outflowings of good or evil,
benemaledictions of the dead,

he resembles Kenner, writing of (and quoting) Pound:

In London, 1912, sober men alive to living thought inhabited a universe of ordered dynamisms. . . . Newton's universe . . . was gone . . . . 'The latent energy is made dynamic or "revealed" to the engineer in control. . . .' For 'the air about him' is alive with invisible dynamisms. . . .

Pound Era, pp. 154-5

But, continues Duncan, the would-have-been passive engineer, (thinking perhaps of that last quote of Pound, from Canto 94, about "Justice/Acre," in what was then that poem's most recent book),

the witness brings self up before the Law.
It is the Law before the witness that makes Justice.

Duncan now extends the theme of virtú-in-the-field, now into musick, where the scale performs a judgment
previous to music. The music restores health to the land.

Bringing us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to the meadow, which Duncan now invests with a form of personhood, reminiscent of Major Mover, kin to Finnegans living Dublin, the boy in the Boyg of Peer Gynt, to which the writer, still in passive

Jefferson and Adams both saw would be unfortunately taken to be the measure of the lawfulness of laws, in place of the active and creative sense of lawfulness in each man.
posture, speaks: "I try to read you, lad, who offer no text." The "missing" letter in lad is n, suggesting perhaps an occurrence in the later double-negative of "not no/even simpleton need demands my ear." Swamp and garble, two muddlings of the field, erosions, lead to a place "less than hell," where "disorder is not, order is not...." The solution to which is

Hear!

Hear! Beautiful damned man that lays down his law
lays down himself creates hell
a sentence unfolding healthy heaven.

Duncan then makes judgment, lays down the law, addressing Thou as tho both bog ("the law under which you lie") and boy ("fall upon your face/ or upon knees"), a land-lad who shall play no "game/ of ring a round of roses" without submission (the passive stance), but, resisting, would be "twisted out of shape, crippled/ by angelic Syntax." Exterminating angel! Duncan then concludes by stating the assertion openly, then affirming his faith (submission) therein: "Him I love is major mover."

The gears and springs of this life-machine thus defined, Duncan recirculates them, with some minor extensions, in the next three pieces, the first two sections of The Structure of Rime and A Poem Slow Beginning (meaning not just the piece, but the book and the whole of Duncan's (future) work as well). They continue to occur:

In the dawn that is nowhere
I have seen the willful children
clockwise and counter-clockwise turning
concludes A Poem Beginning With A Line By Pindar, while, in his most recent large collection, in a piece entitled An Interlude, we discover that

My heart beats to the feet of the first faithful,
long ago dancing in Broceliande's forest....

The dancers come forward to represent unclaimd things.

That law which destroys itself (cf., on this point, what Olson has to say of sentences in Against Wisdom) is the subject and title of a work in Roots and Branches, which includes:

"Is"
we think of as intransitive,
who are exchanged in being,
given over from “I” into “I”
law into law, no sooner breaking
from what we understood, than,
breaking forth, abiding,
we stand. . . .

What is
hisses like a serpent
and writhesto shed its skin.

The Law follows, directly, A Dancing Concerning A Form Of Women, those 2 other
signs, the Form being that same Shining Lady who emerges in Passages 23, and, in the
company of the Master of Rime, in Passages 35 (The Judgment), where her “breast
is in language”. The examples were chosen rapidly, and almost wholly at random.

Duncan’s virtù is a synthesizer, a systems builder, a sizeable minority on this
planet (including such diverse souls as Pound, Tolkien and Pynchon). Like all such,
he is apt, to any unlike mind, to be impenetrable, a problem not eased by his fascina-
tion with the unworldly (the mention of Rexroth is the only name, other than in
dedications, of a then-live person Duncan might have known until Zukofsky arrives on
the 88th page of this 96 page book), the assertions implicit in some of his major
definitions (Olson rightly accuses him of courting religion, and the offensiveness of his
mystification of the female principle is all too constantly present), or his utilization
of rhythms and rhetorical modes often associated with those works which, as dutifully
as if it were cod liver oil, are thrust down a student’s throat (Duncan, in an interview
with George Bowering and Robert Hogg, April, 1969, actually admits that “Of course
I have never written in American language”; he also indicates his own recognition of
the arrival which Letters was for him: “most of the time I have been writing away
since the latter part of the book Letters’’). Duncan’s attempt to set down the keys and
directions to a larger, lasting body of work is the act of one confident in capability; it is
also the concession that, whatever the reason for writing, the intention is that it be
read.

— Ron Silliman

Poor Fred! don’t get to be a then-live person.
Marianne Moore and Edith Sitwell were both
certainly alive (“The Maiden” 27-29)
self is in order or out of 70’s order?

** I propose no passive underwent, but an active
wrestling with the angel, the what’s, the it twirls
name the wrestler anew in his confrontation.