

DOWNLOAD PDF THE LETTERS OF ROBERT DUNCAN AND DENISE LEVERTOV

Chapter 1 : Review: New Collected Poems by Denise Levertov | Books | The Guardian

The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov involve a long and complex friendship involving their evolving sense of poetics, the blossoming of their careers, shared situations in their lives, and ultimately a split when Robert made tactless comments about her pro-peace poems.

He emigrated to the UK and became an Anglican priest after converting to Christianity. In the mistaken belief that he would want to preach in a Jewish neighbourhood, he was housed in Ilford, within reach of a parish in Shoreditch, in East London. She wrote about the strangeness she felt growing up part Jewish, German, Welsh and English, but not fully belonging to any of these identities. She notes that it lent her a sense of being special rather than excluded: At the age of 12, she sent some of her poems to T. Eliot, who replied with a two-page letter of encouragement. In 1945, when she was 17, Levertov published her first poem. During the Blitz, Levertov served in London as a civilian nurse. Her first book, *The Double Image*, was published six years later. In 1950, she met and married American writer Mitchell Goodman and moved with him to the United States the following year. In 1951, she became a naturalised American citizen. But as she accepted the US as her new home and became more and more fascinated with the American idiom, she began to come under the influence of the Black Mountain poets and most importantly William Carlos Williams. Her first American book of poetry, *Here and Now*, shows the beginnings of this transition and transformation. Later life and work[edit] During the 1950s and 1970s, Levertov became much more politically active in her life and work. As poetry editor for *The Nation*, she was able to support and publish the work of feminist and other leftist activist poets. Also in response to the Vietnam War, Levertov joined the War Resisters League, and in signed the "Writers and Editors War Tax Protest" pledge, vowing to refuse tax payments in protest against the war. She also lived part-time in Palo Alto and taught at Stanford University, as professor of English professor emeritus. Franciscan Murray Bodo also became a spiritual advisor to her. In she uncovered notebooks of her mother and father, resolving some personal and religious conflict. On the West Coast, she had a part-time teaching stint at the University of Washington and for 11 years she held a full professorship at Stanford University, where she taught in the Stegner Fellowship program. In she received a Litt. After retiring from teaching, she travelled for a year doing poetry readings in the US and Britain. In she joined the Catholic Church at St. Edwards, Seattle; she became involved in protests of the US attack on Iraq. She retired from teaching at Stanford. Despite this she continued to lecture and participate at national conferences, many on spirituality and poetry. In February she experienced the death of Mitch Goodman. Her papers are held at Stanford University. University of Illinois, Levertov was published in the *Black Mountain Review* during the 1950s, but denied any formal relations with the group. She began to develop her own lyrical style of poetry through those influences. Some of her war poetry was published in her book *To Stay Alive*, a collection of anti-Vietnam War letters, newscasts, diary entries, and conversations. Complementary themes in the book involve the tension of the individual vs. In her poetry, she promotes community and group change through the imagination of the individual and emphasizes the power of individuals as advocates of change. She also links personal experience to justice and social reform. Some "Broader Dimensions" revolve around war, injustice, and prejudice. In her volume *Life at War*, Levertov uses imagery to express the disturbing violence of the Vietnam War. Throughout these poems, she addresses violence and savagery, yet tries to bring grace into the equation, mixing the beauty of language and the ugliness of the horrors of war. The themes of her poems, especially "Staying Alive," focus on both the cost of war and the suffering of the Vietnamese. In her prose work, *The Poet in the World*, she writes that violence is an outlet. Some of the themes of this book of poems are the experience of the North Vietnamese, and distrust of people. She attacks the United States pilots in her poems for dropping bombs. Overall, her war poems incorporate suffering to show that violence has become an everyday occurrence. This opened the door wide for her religious-themed poetry in the later part of her life. Religious influences[edit] From a very young age Levertov was influenced by her religion, and when she began writing it was a major theme in her poetry.

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Levertov always believed that her culture and her family roots had inherent value to herself and her writing. Furthermore, she believed that she and her sister had a destiny pertaining to this. She drew on the experimentation of Ezra Pound and the style of William Carlos Williams, but was also exposed to the Transcendentalism of Thoreau and Emerson. Although all these factors shaped her poetry, her conversion to Christianity in was the main influence on her religious writing. Sometime shortly after her move to Seattle in, she became a Roman Catholic. These poems range from religious imagery to implied metaphors of religion. One particular theme was developed progressively throughout her poetry. This poem uses the metaphor of a tree, which changes and grows when it hears the music of Orpheus. This is a metaphor of spiritual growth. The growth of the tree is like the growth of faith, and as the tree goes through life we also go through life on a spiritual journey. Also among her themes were nothingness and absence. In her earlier poems something is always lacking, searching, and empty. In "Work that Enfaiths" Levertov begins to confront this "ample doubt" and her lack of "burning surety" in her faith. Levertov cannot find a balance between faith and darkness. She goes back and forth between the glory of God and nature, but doubt constantly plagues her. In her earlier religious poems Levertov searches for meaning in life. She explores God as he relates to nothingness and everything. In her later poetry, a shift can be seen. A Door in the Hive and Evening Train are full of poems using images of cliffs, edges, and borders to push for change in life. Once again, Levertov packs her poetry with metaphors. She explores the idea that there can be peace in death. She also begins to suggest that nothing is a part of God. "Thomas Didymus" and "Mass" show this growth, as they are poems that lack her former nagging wonder and worry. She writes about experiencing God. These poems are breakthrough poems for her. When clouds cover a mountain, it is still huge and massive and in existence. God is the same, she says. Even when He is clouded, we know He is there. Her poems tend to shift away from constantly questioning religion to accepting it simply. In "The Tide," the final section of Evening Train, Levertov writes about accepting faith and realizing that not knowing answers is tolerable. This acceptance of the paradoxes of faith marks the end of her "spiritual journey. She wrote a great deal of metaphysical poetry to express her religious views, and began to use Christianity to link culture and community together. In her poem "Mass" she writes about how the Creator is defined by His creation. She writes a lot about nature and individuals. In the works of her last phase, Levertov sees Christianity as a bridge between individuals and society, and explores how a hostile social environment can be changed by Christian values.

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Chapter 2 : The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov | Edited by Robert J. Bertholf and Albert G

Ranging widely over the poetry scene and the issues that made the postwar period so lively and productive, this volume contains the complete correspondence of two of America's most influential poets.

Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. His mother, Marguerite Pearl Duncan, had died in childbirth and his father was unable to afford him, so in he was adopted by Edwin and Minnehaha Symmes, a family of devout Theosophists. They renamed him Robert Edward Symmes; it was only after a psychiatric discharge from the army in that he formed the composite of his previous names and became Robert Edward Duncan. There were terms for his adoption that had to be met: He grew up surrounded by the occult in one form or another; he was well aware of the circumstances of his fated birth and adoption and his parents carefully interpreted his dreams. The family adopted a second child, Barbara Eleanor Symmes, in She was born one year minus one day after Duncan, on January 6, She also was selected under circumstances similar to that of her brother; her presence was expected to bring good karma into the family. At age three, Duncan was injured in an accident on the snow that resulted in his becoming cross-eyed and seeing double. In *Roots and Branches*, his second major book, he wrote: One image to the right and above the other. Reach out and touch. Point to the one that is really there. He began writing poems inspired in part by his left wing politics and acquired a reputation as a bohemian. He thrived as storyteller, poet, and fledgling bohemian, but by his sophomore year he had begun to drop classes and had quit attending obligatory military drills. In , he briefly attended Black Mountain College , but left after a dispute with faculty over the Spanish Civil War. Duncan and homosexuality[edit] Long before it was safe to do so, Duncan "came out" in both his personal and public lives. In Duncan was drafted and declared his homosexuality to get discharged. In , he had his first heterosexual relationship, which ended in a short, disastrous marriage. In , Duncan wrote the landmark essay *The Homosexual in Society*. He returned to Berkeley to study Medieval and Renaissance literature and cultivated a reputation as a shamanistic figure in San Francisco poetry and artistic circles. These are generally considered to be his most significant works. His poetry is modernist in its preference for the impersonal, mythic, and hieratic, but Romantic in its privileging of the organic, the irrational and primordial, the not-yet-articulate blindly making its way into language like salmon running upstream: Neither our vices nor our virtues further the poem. His friend and fellow poet Michael Palmer writes about this time in his essay "Ground Work: The story is well-known in poetry circles: There would be chapbooks along the way. He felt that this decision would free him to listen to the demands of his supremely demanding poetics and would liberate the architecture of his work from all compromised considerations. It was not until that *Ground Work I: There will be a total of six volumes including The H.*

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Chapter 3 : Jacket 28 - October - Robert J. Bertholf: The Duncan / Levertov Correspondence: Duncanâ€™™

One cannot, Duncan's letters to Levertov imply throughout, present the horrors of a particular battle or bombing, a government edict or military law, without contextualizing it. To talk of War in the abstract is meaningless.

Click on the link to be taken to the note; likewise to return to the text. This piece is 6, words or about 10 printed pages long. This piece is 5, words or about 8 printed pages long. The intense emotional and intellectual engagement radiating through the letters of Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan testifies to the commitment the poets made to one another. Each was a spiritualist. Each comprehended meanings in realms of apprehension different from the physical world. For both of them, events of the physical world and perceptions about the nature of living had an order and validity in a spiritual world which existed as a non-morphological presence. They shared an intensity of engagement usually reserved for lovers. They were not together that many times over the course of the correspondence, and most of those meetings were sponsored by one household or the other. Poems and letters were their media of communication, not regular visits. Two larger forces coincided with the relationship. The first is the Viet Nam war. This book was originally intended as a birthday present to H. Duncan published some chapters in little magazines. He did not finish it, but it like the war dominated his writing and directly fortified his ideas about poetics. Duncan prompted me to ask Levertov to write an essay on their correspondence for a book of essays on his poetry that New Directions published. In , I had no idea that I was entering one of the most complex relationships of contemporary poetry, no idea about the dimensions and magnitude of the issues that influenced and determined their relationship. Robert Duncan at Gotham Book Mart, New York City, From to , the correspondence between Duncan and Levertov was filled with splendid accounts of the derivation of the poetics of open form by both poets. The letters are intensely literary, full of the news of the day, comments on people and events that we now comprehend as the literary history of the period. Duncan finds his poetics of derivation and revelation, and Levertov takes control of poetic form and in the process emerges as a mature poet. They sent typescripts of the latest poems to one another as the hottest news of what each was doing. It is a marvelous correspondence full of passionate literary discussions. The Viet Nam War infected the relationship while it provoked serious and poignant reactions in protests against the War. Duncan was as much against the war as Levertov was. He was not as active in the social protests, the marches around the nation, and the organizations that protested the war as Levertov was. Finally, their relationship broke apart under the pressure the War generated in their personal lives and in the entire nation. Robert Duncan in his apartment, San Francisco , photograph by Helen Adam Duncan was dedicated to the idea of being a poet. The poetics of being a poet were as much a part of his daily living as shopping and cleaning up the dishes. His own work comes into the correspondence from the completion of the book *Letters in Paris* in , to *Bending the Bow* in *With The Field*, published as *The Opening of the Field* , he wrote and published books as integrated whole books, with a design and a structure. Only when the poems were read together did he have a sense of a whole book. In like manner, he reacted strongly against Allen Ginsberg and Philip Lamantia using the poem as a case study in oratory, of overly-dramatic readings which put the personality of the poet before the presentation of the poem. We must understand what is really happening. If the verse makers of our time are to improve on their immediate precursors, we must be vitally aware of the duration of syllables, of melodic coherence, and the tone leading of vowels. The function of criticism is to debunk by lucidity. It was a hostile attack, belligerent and attacking from a high moral standard of literary practice, a passionate defense against what he thought was an assault on the tradition and company from which he was defining himself as a poet: If shape be taken to mean the appearance of a work as distinguished from form taken to mean the significant structure, Mr. By the time the word pentameter describes the measure of blank verse and also of Dr. Tomlinson has copied only the appearance of a line articulated into three phrases in which case he cannot be said to have imitated Dr. Tomlinson has taken Dr. The essay broke the friendship between the two poets that began in in

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Berkeley. That MacLeish, for instance, is acceptable and even opportune in relation to a public activity like the Poetry Center where it is apparent to a rudimentary sense of the course of poetic spirit that he is neither a minor nor a major poet but a versifier whose skill is limited by the crudity of his sense of language so that he can only imitate preceding styles and by his total lack of inspiration. Or that minor poets like Eberhart or Louise Bogan whose inspiration has never moved into the realms of form, who have no poetics, might be considered as teachers. The use of passages to be quoted in the course of essays on poetry by critics or scholars can be assumed to be permitted; and I would certainly like to see them so useable for free wherever that can accord with your practices as publisher. To Senator Cranston Duncan wrote: I think you will understand how grievous it is for us concerned Americans to come to this day when both the Democratic party and the Republican party have shown in their highest levels addictions to arrogant power, contempt for all truth, and have indulged themselves and defended the insanity of this Asian war and increasingly of an undermining of all domestic welfare even as they mouth good intentions. He takes a very high-minded approach to the smallest matters, and with a rhetorical approach practiced by Thomas Carlyle in his essays of social criticism, he complicates the first impressions with an abstracted ideology of poetics. In the end he is unable to change his position, even though new information and ideas come forward to make his position untenable. There are times when my own views regarding the nature and meaning of poetic form flash forth with an intolerance that betokens remnants of the Puritan bigot in me, whipping the poor would-be heretic anthologist or critic publicly in the stocks or driving him forth from the covenant of the righteous into the wilderness. L Levertov responds in a note dated April 4, She gives the news, but does not engage in the discussions of poetry or public policy that appeared in most of the letters between them since the beginning. Will send it to you soon. He responded to her personally. But Art has only one place in which to be and that is in our own lives right now. She has betrayed the principle of the poem as revelation for the poem as a means to advance political revolution. But this letter which roams through Nietzsche, Celtic and Roman history, discussions of Kali and Blake, is a prelude to the long attack on the poems in a letter dated October 19, November 3, But our initial breakthru was not to be concerned with form as conservative or as revolutionary, but with form as the direct vehicle and medium of content. Which means and still means for me that we do not say something by means of the poem but the poem itself the immediacy of saying "it has its own meaning. And in that is as immediate as the dream. These, Denny, are 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. To imagine what the good is and to imagine what evil is, what goods there are and what evils! Levertov has betrayed the poem as revelation by allowing it to speak for revolution in place of the assertion of poetic form. However, the means of argument spins around and around until it gets woven into an ideology intolerant even of itself in particular events. I mean really "do stop it. And then in a strong exclamation in caps: And I find your tone here offensively patronizing into the bargain "sounds like Uncle Cid [Corman] at his worst. It seems to me, Denny, that both the protestation of an esthetic and of an historical justification are mistaken. Your decisions are so clearly not esthetic in character but "as I once as I remember in writing to you realized mine own were "sentimental. We both need to intensify and keep alive as a challenge the challenge of the esthetic. She proposes that Duncan suspend the writing on his essay about her poems for a year and a day, so after one more long letter about her positions dated November 11, , he accepts in a short note dated November 12, At this point the intensity of their relationship has ended. The break is clear. When Duncan began writing about To Stay Alive, he launched himself into a reiteration of his poetics based on his own derivations, and his own speculations about the nature of poetry and poetic form. Some of these speculations he shared in letters of the late s and early s with Levertov. This self-analysis from applies directly to the writing of the s. Duncan sought out complexity. They agreed that the poem was a revelation, a spiritual statement that could reveal aspects of living even as it enacted poetic form. He was using the idea of the poem as revelation to substantiate a method of writing prose as revelation: It was a cumbersome process. He had defeated himself with his own procedures. The years of reading and deriving himself from a multitude of

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sources, and the years of practicing the process of writing with the sounds of words leading on to meaning were now focusing into major poems and essays. He was thinking and writing and talking in his most concentrated and articulate way. He created great complexity waiting for revelation. When he finally was able to write to Levertov as one person to another he did not renounce his position or change his mind. And it was a footnote in James F. The human level suffered for the guarantee of a poetics. Works Cited Bertholf, Robert J. Stanford University Press, The University Press of Kansas, Bertholf and Albert Gelpi Stanford: Cited as L plus page in the text. In the letters he talks about not taking the medications in order to ride the high of the high blood pressure to new perceptions. He might have had high blood pressure, but he also had a malfunctioning valve in his heart that forced his heart to pump more vigorously to circulate the blood. The heart developed a large extra muscle. When he takes up the letter again on November 3, he states his procedure: These pages above have waited now two weeks and returning I am still involved in tracing out and unwinding lines of thought and reaction until a structure of response appears. Sharing with you the working out of a contentionâ€”not to change your cause but to bring into that course, into your reading of the poem, the consciousness of an other reading, or other readings. Mersmann , Out of the Vietnam Vortex: Please respect the fact that this material is copyright:

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Chapter 4 : Book robert duncan pdf free download

Evolving the Organic: The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov. There may be no other document of the culture of postmodern North American poetry more comprehensive than The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov.

And his blurb for *Overland to the Islands* goes like this: Denise Levertov in these poems brings me again and again to the most intense thing, to that crossing of the inner and the outer reality where we have our wholeness of feeling in the universe. She has no superior in [the] clarification of a scene—moving traffic, mexican girls after First Communion kicking a baseball, or the arrival of sharks off shore at sundown. In the dance of word and phrase to express feeling, in the interior music of vowels, in subtlety of changing tempo within the form, in the whole supple control of freedom, she excels. Both poets were outraged by U. Both read their poetry at anti-war rallies. But by , Levertov was on the barricades, writing and reading from the anti-war poems she was to publish in *Relearning the Alphabet* and *To Stay Alive* No, I very much do not subscribe to the Old Testament idea of a covenant or a commitment as a morality. Freedom is of the essence, the freedom to represent the human universe as the poet imaginatively reconstructs it. Poetry, he suggests again and again, is always already political in that it presents us with the motives and results of the political process. Great political poetry, moreover, is apocalyptic in the Blakean sense, visionary in presenting the events in question as part of larger and more universal paradigms. Let us look at this reaction more closely. Wheels would sing it we are among the clouds, gliding, the roar a toneless constant. Which side are you on? Revolution, of course, Death is Mayor Daley. Do we believe in unilateral peace? Then surely it is we who must create it where we are. But the revolution, like Nixon, believes in inflicting peace on their own terms. I do not ask for a program of peace; but I do protest the war waged under the banner of Peace, no matter who wages it. It is false to the word. Men at war against the State are one thing—and that can at least be true to itself—even if it is not successful; but men at war against war are hypocrites if they argue that there can be no peaceful ways in a time of war. And any peaceful ways and deeds of peace have had to be created in the face of the need for war—for war against oppression, for war against injustice, etc. In the midst of apocalypse, that present most vividly the test of Art. Revolutions have all been profoundly opposed to the artist, for revolutions have had their power only by the rule that power not be defined. And as workers in words, it is our business to keep alive in the language definitions as well as forces, to create crises in meaning, yes—but this is to create meanings in which we are the more aware of the crisis involved, of what is at issue. The wheel of torture. Heavy, heavy, heavy, hand and heart. We are at war, And the buying and selling buzzes at our heads, a swarm of busy flies, a kind of innocence. Gowns of gold sequins are fitted, sharp-glinting. And weddings are held in full solemnity not of desire but of etiquette, the nuptial pomp of starched lace; a grim innocence. And picnic parties return from the beaches burning with stored sun in the dusk; children promised a TV show when they get home fall asleep in the backs of a million station wagons, sand in their hair, the sound of waves quietly persistent at their ears. They are not listening. They wake in the dark and make plans. Their sequin plans glitter into tomorrow. They fill freezers with food. Neon signs flash their intentions into the years ahead. And at their ears the sound of the war. They are not listening, not listening. The poem leaves the reader no freedom to interpret. And we get in its place the displaced bigotry in which women are concerned about their gowns of gold, sequins. I think the poems like. It is as if women would give their assurance that although they are filled with rage, they will be good helpmates in the politics of the revolution. The tone of this poem is one of lament—solemn rather than wild, lament; note its slow pace. The sequin gowns and the white weddings are out of the newspaper pages right next to the war news. Certainly I feel all this with anguish. Rather I am keening over them. That does not make it moralizing in any way I find aesthetically unacceptable. For he is making the case, later to be made by, say, Steve McCaffery or Susan Howe, that poetic form is itself what Wittgenstein called a form of life and hence a form of knowledge. To talk of War in the abstract is meaningless. Empty, no doubt, because

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the abstract nouns in question can point to any number of conditions and situations, because there is no map on which to locate them. How about, for example, another event of “one never mentioned in *To Stay Alive*”—namely the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, with its attendant purges, arrests, and killings, designed to squelch the liberation movement known as the Prague Spring? At the microlevel, poetic knowledge involves the interrogation of words, images, or metaphors. One of the most interesting debates in the Duncan-Levertov correspondence has to do with the meaning of specific terms, for instance spider web and coprophilia. To which Duncan responds in turn: Images in poems like images in dreams are not incidental or mere devices of speech, chance references, but go deep into our experience. And who in this world has not watched with fascination the activities murderous and cannibalistic of a spider in its web? And I care not if it seem creepy. What is demanded by poetry is that we see as [Henry] Adams sees his beloved Gothic the web in its full truth and loveliness. If we have to suppress one of the crucial meanings of a given word or phrase in order to make the implied comparison convincing, then surely language is not doing its work. Levertov answers with exasperation: Their actions and their lies smear shit all over the White House walls not that they were ever clean before—but this is a new thick layer. Babies playing with shit are not coprophiliacs, they wd be just as happy with dough or mud or applesauce. They are interested in all the textures and smells to be explored. Coprophiliacs are people with a yen for shit in particular. Because clumsy—and sort of gross, like the gesture of little Jack Horner—and because its thick monosyllable was what I wanted for sound there. And what is the relation of the President to Little Jack Horner, an innocent if there ever was one? On November 11, he replies: My complaint about the passage about the coprophiliac spasm that smears the White House walls with its desensitized thumbs is that unless there is some actuality to the President or someone smearing the White House walls with shit then there can be nothing but projection. The idea of coprophilia as having to do with desensitized thumbs and with murderous phantasies and hence with war does have to do with Freudian ideas of a phase—“thinking the unthinkable. If this is indeed the case, surely it demands more thorough treatment. Was it Johnson who started the war? Or trying to fulfill the mandate of his assassinated predecessor? If not, why not? Her outrage, he implies, does not have what Eliot called an objective correlative. Where it should present, it merely preaches with righteous indignation. Thus his attack on the war poetry is never petty or personal, never directed against Denise herself but against what Duncan takes to be a wrong turn in what was heretofore an important poetic oeuvre. And he tries to convince her how much more successful the Olga poems, which form the first section pp. It is hardly surprising, however, that the pressure of this extensive and insistent commentary was too much for Levertov. Duncan took this hard. On January 25, , he responded apologetically: For much of what I suspect you of, or accuse you of, I suspect as some womanish possibility in myself. But to no avail. Levertov was not the forgiving type and although she later wrote on her early friendship with Duncan for *Scales of the Marvelous* and occasionally commented on his work in a blurb or book promotion, she kept her distance right up to the time of his death in . But from our perspective a quarter-century after the Vietnam War, the question is not whether Duncan was too cruel to Levertov, whether his authoritative pronouncements may or may not have been sexist, or even whether he was unfair to specific passages in her poems. Is what seems like a one-dimensional and simplistic lyric outburst against injustice or racism to be praised because its author is a member of a minority group and hence not to be subjected to the literary norms of the dominant race and class? Is every poem about AIDS ipso facto moving and worthy? Or, for that matter, is there an unstated taboo against one Language poet actually criticizing the work of another? It suggests that precisely those who know each other well should be willing to argue about their work. *New Directions*, , pp. Subsequently cited in the text as RDSP. Bertholf and Ian W. The collection is subsequently cited as SM. All subsequent references to the Duncan-Levertov correspondence are to the Stanford archive. I also want to thank Robert Bertholf, the executor of the Duncan estate, for granting me permission to cite extracts from the Duncan letters. *New Directions*, , p. Poems *New Haven*: Henry Wenning, p. Subsequently cited in the text as TSA. Perhaps Duncan is recognizing his own earlier weakness in his critique of Levertov.

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Chapter 5 : Robert Duncan's Letters to Denise Levertov " Marjorie Perloff

The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov has 36 ratings and 6 reviews. Rodney said: I don't know that the Duncan/Levertov correspondence is either.

This is an eight hundredplus page book that constitutes the bulk of how the most idiosyncratic twentieth century poetry friendship played out. Duncan and Levertov are two of the most important poets of the second half of that century, both being associated with the Black Mountain School, though Levertov never attended or even visited the school and Duncan taught there only briefly. Yet it is the development of what they termed the Organic approach to poem-making that allows us to identify them with Black Mountain, and it is the development of that approach which makes this friendship critical for poets seeking to use a poem-making process to deepen their consciousness. Robert Duncan was born in Oakland, California in and, along with Charles Olson, was one of the leading voices of the New American Poetry, as determined by the influential anthology of the same name, based on a poetics that diverged from the reigning school of North American Poetry. The New American Poetry was more interested in utilizing forms indigenous to North America, rather than extend the British Literature tradition. Levertov was drawn to the organic form as practiced by William Carlos Williams and had a substantial correspondence with him. She, too, was included in The New American Poetry anthology. The letter also became the first poem in a book of poetry by Duncan ironically called Letters. Yet to suggest that this falling out was limited to an aesthetic disagreement is misleading, or at least only a partial representation of the truth of the situation. For Duncan the poetic gesture was more than a vocation, it was a life-path and reflection of cosmology. While the same could be said for Levertov, she did dedicate large amounts of time to her duties as mother, homemaker, teacher and anti-war activist, Duncan comes across as more interested in sharpening his craft, his potential potency? As early as Duncan writes about what would turn out to be the main difference between what motivated each of them: Olson called for a verse with the ear as measurer and speech where it is least logical and least careless. Fifteen years later Duncan, having further developed his poetic theories through the dialog with Levertov, goes on to elaborate what was at the core of what he felt was her inner conflict and that he felt was communicated in an unconscious manner through the content of her anti-war poetry: This is not to say that one approach is right, and one wrong, or one better than the other, but Duncan was betting everything on the organic. Now here she was, in his eyes, abandoning that approach to communicate those political convictions. A look at how these differences manifested in verse is called for. Could I say of it, it overflows with bitterness. We are the humans, men who can make; whose language imagines mercy, lovingkindness; we have believed one another mirrored forms of a God we felt as good " who do these acts, who convince ourselves it is necessary; these acts are done to our own flesh; burned human flesh is smelling in Vietnam as I write. Yes, this is the knowledge that jostles for space in our bodies along with all we go on knowing of joy, of love; our nerve filaments twitch with its presence day and night, nothing we say has not the husky phlegm of it in the saying, nothing we do has the quickness, the sureness, the deep intelligence living at peace would have. Is it not this act which makes all war possible? Is this not the root cause of war? Is not the field swirling out from Duncan a balance of the horrors committed in the name of Duncan and his fellow citizens along with the realization of and compassion for people who in making this war are simply unaware and doing their work, their patriotic duty? Yet it was in a letter that Duncan brought up his concern about this poem and this as he saw it sadism, when he wrote: Duncan elaborated further in November And who in this world has not watched with fascination the activities murderous and cannibalistic of a spider in its web? He was concerned about this and as a friend brought it to her attention. She had been interested in his perspective for some thirteen years at that point, considering him on some level at least for a time a mentor. By late fall of that year, Duncan was more direct in his expression of what he saw happening to Levertov: There is a cataract filming-over my inner eyes. By , Levertov was still following the path of opposing the war in her poetry and in anti-war activism. And we begin to see betrayal

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and murder and theft in a new light. History will be the ultimate arbiter of the strength of the field these poems emanate. Yet the warning he wrote of in a letter remains as the best clue for anyone seeking to use poetry as a wisdom teacher, as a feedback system in our effort to become more conscious human beings: Duncan, Robert and Denise Levertov. Bertholf and Albert Gelpi.

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The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov, edited by Robert Bertholf and Albert Gelpi, Stanford University Press, Represented in anthologies, including Faber Book of Modern American Verse, edited by W. H. Auden, , The New American Poetry: , edited by Donald M. Allen, , and many others.