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THE FACTS ON FILE

COMPANION TO

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Poems," which becomes a place for prophecy and spiritual exercises, where he can talk about the obligations of a spiritualistic poetics. The serial poems are imbedded in the context of the other poems, and here the idea of a large collage poem takes the form of a "grand collage," collecting and modifying ideas and images in shifting relationships with other contexts.

The conflicts raised in the cultural and poetry communities by the war in Vietnam dominate poems such as "Up Rising, Passages 25" and "The Soldiers, Passages 26." That theme continues in the following book, *Ground Work: Before the War* (1984). This volume collects groups of poems published separately: "Tribunals," "Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's *Moly*," "A Seventeenth Century Suite," and *Dante Études*. Duncan stands before the war as he would stand before a mirror contemplating the themes of corrupt manipulation of government against the will of the people, the destruction of natural geography and the spiritual landscape, and the grimness of war suppressing human desire. "Passages 35, Before the Judgment" is Duncan's prophecy about the power of war over the human will. Duncan summons the support of ancient gods of wisdom, "The Golden Ones," who "move in invisible realms" to fight against political leaders, in whom "stupidity thickens," and to reveal the laws of eternal goodness "against the works of unworthy men, unfeeling judgments, and cruel deeds." The intensity of this prophecy also shows up in Duncan's everyday life. As shown in "The Torn Cloth," his friendship with Denise LEVERTOV was shattered under the strain of political and poetic protests. "Years of our rapport," he writes, were wrecked by "War and the Scars upon the land." The *Dante Études*, on the other hand, trace the origins of Duncan's poetics in Dante's ideas of empire and human worth. The volume ends with Duncan's dynamic affirmation of human love in "Circulations of the Song."

The theme of the darker meaning of life in a constant state of war continues into the final volume, *Ground Work II: In the Dark* (1987). Again, poems appear in groups—"Veil, Turbine, Cord & Bird," "Regulators," "Structure of Rime: Of the Five Songs"—as well as separately. In "To Master Baudelaire," the French poet becomes a model for defining the sick-

ened life of the mind, as the theme of entering a "foyer," the entrance to a new language, tries to lift the gloom of the dark to reassert human vision and worth. In the late poem "Passages, the Dignities," Duncan takes stock of his life in poetry; his ties with Olson—"Wisdom as such must wonder"; and his relationship with Blaser, "the moth's / ephemeral existence." Despite the "black Night that hides the elemental germ," he perceives that the persistence of "the extending scale of imagined humanity" has a difficult time surviving in the bleak contemporary world. The elegiac mode of his early poems now reaches points of despair about the possibilities of humankind redeeming itself. The final poem of the volume, "After a Long Illness," recounts the failure of Duncan's kidneys that controlled his life from 1984 onward, even as the darkness of war and spiritual suppression controlled society. Only "the imagination knows" the vision in the meadow, the brilliant "pool of thought" that redeems life itself. Duncan's imagination transforms the elegiac lament of his early poetry into that "grand collage" of poetry powerful enough to gather the persistent wisdom of humanity into a prophecy of fulfillment, surrounded by the darkness of corrupted political systems.

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Robert J. Bertholf

DUNN, STEPHEN (1939–) That Stephen Dunn's work is difficult to categorize may account for his slow but steady rise to recognition. After working himself out of his IMAGIST training, he eventually found

his mature voice in a discursive, abstract, but highly accessible style. Dunn has forged his own way, writing lyric poems composed of an appealingly intimate voice and a restrained, if pulsating, emotional fabric (see LYRIC POETRY).

Born in New York City, Dunn received a B.A. in history from Hofstra University and an M.A. from the creative writing program at Syracuse University. A prolific writer, he has won many awards and fellowships. His book *Different Hours* earned him the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 2001.

Dunn has been criticized for flatness of language, and it is true that he avoids rhetorical and linguistic extravagance. A poet of the local and the ordinary, Dunn is suspicious of high passion and purple verbiage. The quiet intimacy of his voice gains power from his use of anecdotal material as a basis for philosophical reflection.

Where Dunn's poetry gauges the nuances of emotional states, he risks courting the maudlin or sentimental. But he successfully avoids this trap in the dialectical movement of his poetry: An idea is proposed, then qualified, with the goal of swerving away from the conclusive and toward the paradoxical.

Dunn's verse is controlled without a reliance on traditional forms, though the line break and the stanza have always held weight as formal elements in his work. One recurring form is a tercet, or three-line stanza, with a truncated second line. Over this unique stanzaic form, Dunn brushes loose-limbed sentences, enjambed and punctuated to bump gently and swerve; the meter then bubbles up from syntactical groupings rather than from variations on a set beat. Note, for example, how this rhythmic effect is created in one such tercet, from "Diminuendo" (1996), which begins: "These were among the unreachable; emblems / of how they felt / once, about each other."

A recurrent theme of Dunn's poetry is how we live together in a fallen world. Hence, the aesthetic dimension is deeply informed by the moral. But that moral dimension is empathic rather than didactic or political in nature. Characteristically, Dunn questions the efficacy of political gesturing in art; yet, a true poet of paradoxes, he does not absolve himself of complicity in the world. In "Loosestrife" (1996), whose back-

ground includes the Oklahoma City bombing, a philosopher-speaker is imagined sipping a drink in the ambivalent quiet of afternoon; meanwhile: "Far away, men were pulling bodies from debris, / a moan the sweetest, most hopeful thing."

Although Dunn admits the darkness of human experience, hope usually wins out in his work. Suffering a career crisis, the eponymous character of "The Guardian Angel" knows that his guardianship has been useless. But even though he cannot keep the poor from being thrown in the street or stop insults from hitting their targets, the angel tries to convince himself that "everything he does takes root, hums / beneath the surfaces of the world."

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Jayne Stayer

DUPLESSIS, RACHEL BLAU (1941-)

Rachel Blau DuPlessis is a poet-scholar known for feminist experimentation (see FEMALE VOICE, FEMALE LANGUAGE). Her work is associated with the LANGUAGE SCHOOL and the OBJECTIVIST ideals of George OPPEN and Louis ZUKOFSKY, especially in its attention to the relationships between poetics, language, and lived social practices. Additionally DuPlessis's poetry continues the experimentation of modernist writers, including William Carlos WILLIAMS, Ezra POUND, and H. D. (see MODERNISM).

DuPlessis was born in Brooklyn, New York, and remained a New Yorker through her childhood and college years. In 1973 DuPlessis settled in the Philadelphia region, where she has been a professor of English at Temple University. She has published seven books of poetry since 1980, including a long, continuing project, *DRAFTS*. She has received a Pennsylvania Council of the Arts grant for poetry (1990), a Fund for Poetry award (1993), and Temple University's Creative Achievement Award (1999).