

commentary on H.D. His 1947 "Venice Poem," weaves the themes of love and loss with the architectural beauties of St. Mark's Square; like the Venetian empire his love was transitory, first he won the young man, Gery Ackerman, who then ran off with Paul Goodman.

Duncan's love life may be divided (like his poetry) between an earlier period of promiscuity and a later period of domesticity. One New Year's Day, 1951, he and Jess Collins, a painter, set up house together and were only separated by the poet's death on February 3, 1988. Among the domestic volumes are *Caesar's Gate* (1955), *The Opening of the Field* (1960), *Roots and Branches* (1964), *Bending the Bow* (1968), *Ground Work Before the War* (1984), and *Ground Work II, In the Dark* (1987).

In *Ground Work Before the War*, the battle is "that War which rages throughout the world today, as enormous in its crimes and madness" as the ancient wars of religion, a war including gay liberation. In 1973, Duncan wrote John Wieners about the gay liberation fronts, "With the way words have of drawing us into their depths, that term 'liberation' that is so much the jargon of the day (so that while the bosses of the U.S. . . . move in on Asia burning and exterminating as they go it is called 'liberating') does draw us deeper into searching out for ourselves true liberations." And he predicted that the word/world "gay" would "be searcht out until it rings painfully true to us."

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Robert Berthoff, *Robert Duncan: A Descriptive Bibliography*, Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1986; Ekbert Faas, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society*, Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983.

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DYKE

This word is a slang term in American English designating a female homosexual, which elements of the

American lesbian community have adopted as a self-designation. It was originally a term of abuse, and only in the 1970s, with the reversal of values that accompanied the radical upsurge following the Vietnam War, did it obtain a positive, political value.

The term may stem from an earlier compound expression *bulldyke*, which is recorded from the black American slang of the 1920s in the forms *bull-diker* (with the variant *bull-dagger*) and *bull-diking woman* in the sense of "mannish lesbian."

Several theories are current concerning the etymology of *dyke* or *dike* (both spellings are found). There are a number that do not bear serious examination: the suggestion that *dyke* stems from the Greek word *dike*, fancifully identified with Athena, the "man-woman" who is the principle of total order; or from *hermaphrodite*, with only the last syllable retained and then mispronounced as *dyke*; or from Boadicca, the queen of the ancient Britons who fought against the Roman occupation of her country. The last is impossible on both historical and philological grounds.

More plausible is the derivation from the verb *to dike*, "to attire oneself faultlessly for social purposes," or *to be diked out*, which is recorded as American student slang as early as 1851. Somewhat later *dike* is attested in the meaning of a man so attired, or merely the set of male clothing. Since the original usage of *bulldiker* is a form denoting the agent of a verb, the meaning would thus be "a lesbian wearing male, particularly formal male attire."

However, this still fails to explain fully the compound *bulldiker*, which is all the more noteworthy as *bull* is an English word that is quite prolific in compounds in the literary language and even more in the dialects. Two of these are *bull-dog*, known from the beginning of the Modern English period (with counterparts in Dutch *bulhond* and German *Bulldogge*), and *bull-bitch* "female bull-dog," first

recorded in 1681. Now in the same semantic field there is also the word *tyke*, whose primary meaning in the Germanic languages is "bitch," but which in the dialect of Yorkshire (northeastern England) came to be the usual word for dog, and in the Scottish dialects meant a dog, "generally with contemptuous force, a hulking uncouth ill-bred dog, a cur." Since the *bull* is the zoomorphic symbol of maleness par excellence, it is possible that the putative compound *bull-tyke* yielded *bull-dyke* with the notion of "a bitch who behaves like a bull" = a woman who behaves like a man in dress and mannerisms. The influence of the verb *to dike* then produced the forms which later gave the monosyllable *dyke* through such expressions as *dyking ourselves up* which for members of certain lesbian subcultures meant "dressing in a most beautiful, proud, defiant masculine manner." Thus what had been a vulgar epithet with connotations of self-hatred and shame has been adopted as a badge of rebellion against the values of a heterosexual, male-dominated culture by the militant lesbian of today. There is even an organization of lesbian mothers with the name Dykes 'n Tykes. Modern Dutch has borrowed the Americanism but in the spelling *dijk*, the same as the word meaning "sea-wall."

BIBLIOGRAPHY. J. R. Roberts, "In America They Call Us Dykes: Notes on the Etymology and Usage of 'Dyke,'" *Sinister Wisdom*, 9 (Spring 1979), 2-11.

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DYSPHORIA, GENDER

Gender dysphoria is the feeling reported by a few individuals (sometimes labeled "preoperative transsexuals") that they are acutely uncomfortable in their own bodies, and that their sex organs in particular "should not be there." The concept may ultimately stem from Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' formulation *anima muliebris corpore virili inclusa*, "a female soul trapped in a male body," although he

applied the phrase to subject homoerotics, that is to say, homosexuals who identify with the opposite sex and play the corresponding role in relations with their own. *Gender dysphoria syndrome* is a broader concept that may include homosexuality and transvestism as well as transsexualism.

From the early 1950s until recently, individuals with gender dysphoria were often guided toward transsexualizing operations in which their sex was surgically "corrected." After recovery from surgery they were resocialized and legally reassigned to the desired gender. Lothstein (1982) estimated that there are 30,000 transsexuals in the entire world, of whom 10,000 are believed to reside in the United States. Male-to-female transsexuals outnumber female-to-male ones by at least four and perhaps eight to one, perhaps suggesting a psychological origin of the problem. While such operations seemed to alleviate the gender dysphoria of the subject, follow-up studies have shown that in many cases drastic medical intervention is not the answer, and in fact approximately two-thirds of those classified as transsexuals have not undergone surgery, but are nonetheless living as members of the other gender on a full-time basis. They have assumed the role of the other gender in mannerisms and appearance in all their varied social functions and are, presumably, passing in the eyes of the rest of society as apparent members of that sex.

Although the contradiction between transsexualism and anatomy suggests to some that the condition is pathological, the real problem lies in society's dichotomization of masculine and feminine forms of behavior—in its belief that because there are only two sexes, there can be only two genders. The transsexual has commonly heard about sex reassignment before approaching the medical counselor and knows the questions and the "correct" answers even before they are formally posed. In other words, the individual seeking treatment has made a self-diagnosis