

Classic Poetry Series

Laurence James Duggan
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Laurence James Duggan(1949 -)

Laurence "Laurie" James Duggan is an Australian poet, editor, and translator.

Laurie Duggan was born in Melbourne and attended Monash University, where his friends included the poets Alan Wearne and John A. Scott. Both he and Scott won the Monash Poetry Prize. He moved to Sydney in 1972 and became involved with the poetry scene there, in particular with John Tranter, John Forbes, Ken Bolton and Pam Brown. Duggan lectured at Swinburne College (1976) and Canberra College of Advanced Education (1983).

His poetry grows out of contemplation of moments and found texts. His interest in bricolage started early: while still at Monash he was working on a series of 'Merz poems', short poems about discarded objects, inspired by the work of Kurt Schwitters. His book-length poem *The Ash Range* (1987) uses diaries, journals of pioneers, and newspaper articles in its construction of a history of Gippsland.

A Literary Life

1

Listening to the Dandenong line trains
exploding detonators all day long,
hearing at one o'clock sharp
Blue Hills on the radio while eating
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
spices herbs & curry, & now
reading some of Pound's letters to
Joyce, noticing my selected Browning lacking
Sordello & thinking I have paid
a miserable dollar twenty-five:
such fare!, I consider at times
my life a curious & amusing thing;
a play of passion never ending,
to relish every babe left on my doorstep.

2

Listening to the Dandenong line trains,
Blue Hills on the radio while eating,
reading some of Pound's letters to
a miserable dollar twenty-five . . .
a play of passion never ending,
exploding detonators all day long;
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
Joyce, noticing my selected Browning lacking
such fare, I consider at times
to relish every babe left on my doorstep,
hearing at one o'clock sharp
spices herbs & curry, & now
Sordello, & thinking I have paid
my life: a curious & amusing thing.

3

Listening to the Dandenong line trains

to relish every babe left on my doorstep
exploding detonators all day long,
a play of passion never ending;
hearing at one o'clock sharp
(my life a curious & amusing thing)
Blue Hills on the radio while eating
such fare. I consider at times
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
a miserable dollar twenty-five,
spices herbs & curry, & now
Sordello & thinking I have paid,
reading some of Pound's letters to
Joyce; noticing my selected Browning lacking.

4

Listening to the Dandenong line trains,
spices herbs & curry, & now
such fare, I consider at times
exploding detonators all day long,
reading some of Pound's letters to
my life (a curious & amusing thing),
hearing at one o'clock sharp
Joyce, noticing my selected Browning lacking
a play of passion; never ending
Blue Hills on the radio, while eating
Sordello & thinking I have paid
to relish every babe left on my doorstep
a strange mixture of coddled egg &
a miserable dollar twenty-five.

Poet's Note: June 1971

Laurence James Duggan

At The Bar-Code Ranch

<i>A stellar job in the bullpen </i>
C.B.S. Baseball

I lie in a converted garage, sun coming up
and the chuck-chuck of unfamiliar birds
from Lake Mizell.

The lamp grows ineffectual
under a skylight; the great world
washes in, humid, composed of small numbered parts.

Sometime after nine, the classical music station stops
for the landing of a space shuttle

a sonic boom
shakes the bungalow
and Vladimir Horowitz
is abruptly terminated.

Yesterday, at New Smyrna, north of Canaveral:
knotted shoreline
looking out from a timbered interior
on the Atlantic;
driving inland on Local 40,
a two-lane, the Beach Boys on air,
to Winter Park, inches above the water table.

Today, flying north, from Florida's eighty degrees
to Washington's forty-something
a river far below
in South Carolina.

Salt-pork and black-eyed beans
"soul food" – and cheap – in D.C's low
where U.S. presidents
fall like leaves . . .

Consume and Die!

Wednesday

 under the pines
looking out over the waters of Potomac
 a torn Bush-Quayle poster in the grass
the morning after the election,
and down on Canal St
a bag of crushed Busch beer cans
reminds me that poetry exists.

Up at 3040 R St N.W.
where the leaf vacuum cleaners roam,
three cards from New York!

The sun descends
through Mt Pinatubo clouds,
its weird rays on Georgetown,
glass to the south,
Arlington's tower blocks
 Confederate and Republican (still).

Meanwhile there is art to look at (Hirschorn Museum):
the hand, thrust forward,
of Ernst Barlach's
streamlined (and sentimental)
"Begging Woman"
in which someone has placed a dime

– all it takes

to stitch up expressionism.

I liked better

the pieces by Balla

'Boccioni's Fist'

and the nice little things
by Henri Laurens
their mild
three-dimensional cubism.

 A postcard from Sarah
features a moose, lettered CANADA,
though it's from Australia
 and the New York letters
(a room to stay in in Brooklyn!

drinks with some people.

The world, its streets, places, people

(a title

from Edwin Denby?

No, that was

'Dancers, Buildings, and People in the Street'.

Maybe it was Larry Eigner?

I've no way of checking.

The Dewars and Gordon's Gin bottles
sitting on a shelf in this basement
are huge, flagons almost, so very American:

The World and its Drinks

(the comment August made
in England, up in the Peak District,
confronted with folk rituals:

"Where's

the bar?"

a ritual enough.

Auden's clock ticked towards martini time.

My friends in their various places
bear with me

stretched out in a bedroom

which a door, cunningly concealed, separates
from the condo laundromat.

Our yuppie neighbours upstairs

dropp dumbbells – I think – on the floorboards.

In this suburb, they say,

the Clinton/Gore voters are basement dwellers
like us,

ight off to the south
through the claret ash

brighter as we tilt

away from the sun and the leaves fall

– that line about the world and its streets,

was it William Bronk?

the catalogue of American poets

not yet on autoshred

though who'll be laureate

in the new administration?

(Ed Dorn once suggested

Robert Bly for Hubert Humphrey

as if poetry

were a parody of presidential style

(and now

somebody has put together an anthology
of "poems for men" . . .

☐ In Australia

we did that long ago: it was called

'Poems of Spirit and Action'

– John Forbes

had it at school, still prefers it

to the ones with close-ups of flower stamens

opposite poems by William Carlos Williams.

It was raining in the capital

and radio heartbreak was on,

Respighi

"laugh or cry music"

as Terry McGrath

☐ would have it.

I have ruined our landlord's floor with oven cleaner

(photo: close-up: a container of oven cleaner)

Tonight I eat with the lawyers

on Capitol Hill

while the President packs his clothes.

Actually, the Respighi

is developing more into laughter mode,

its overblown pictorialism.

What's this bit?

A conga chain of
ex-presidents in bathrobes
enter a steaming sauna
flanked by unsmiling CIA types.

Cut to close-up of incumbent
(played by Frankie Howerd).

T-shirted in this basement
(photo: T-shirt)

I feel no need to go out. It's 46 degrees.

But I do (go out)
across mean streets to the Law Center
and thence, a restaurant,
where a loud tool of the employers
down one end of the table
seems suddenly like a kid
arguing over a football.

Autumn so vivid
the stars and stripes washed out
against the yellow.

 □ cross Dumbarton Bridge
toward Dupont Circle,
 Rock Creek Parkway below
only weeks from icing up,
 black branches over the creek.

At Dupont, leave exposed film,
walk down Massachusetts and K
 to the Greyhound terminal
and further, to Union Station
taking in the character some guy said
this city lacks.

 K St past Thomas Circle grows funky,
urban wreckage round the bus terminal.

Subway to Farragut North, and on
up Connecticut to pick up photos
 (photo: photos)

In the afternoon, sweep leaves
off the back porch (a screen door
slams!).

 ☐The sky darkens,
branches, parts of buildings
 picked out by light.

The photographs, taken months back
seem ancient:

 Manchester late summer,
Dentdale, Durham,
faces of
Jonathan, Tom, Roy,
Joyce, Tony and Ric
(Hadrian's Wall, its hill forts built to
 prefabricated plans,
gates opening onto nowhere;
moss on the rocks at Godrevy;
outcrops on the gritstone edge, Winster . . .

One summer displaced since
by the tail of another.

When things go wrong
 the Ginsberg line (in Philip Whalen)
about "severance pay"

 i.e. "there wasn't much
severance pay in that"

 seems to apply
in instalments, to life here
in this capital
where everything has its hidden cost
(Rosemary's clothes
dry-cleaned and dismembered;

 ☐pstairs
a pre-adolescent party:

10 year olds

with their own fax machines

and probably more than a notion of litigation.

At 4 a.m. there is peace to read
about the Wobbly strikes in Paterson N.J.
but later the yuppies stomp above our heads again
so that I feel like shouting

“stop drinking coffee”

Hal Roach is dead

– the man who put
Laurel and Hardy together, incredibly still alive
till just now.

He lived to see movies become boring.

And my father

dressed for Shakespeare, circa 1920,
on the cover of my first book;
the backdrop: dry grass,
weathered grey trunks up the hill;
an impossible country I try to picture segments of
in detail

lose them soon enough.

There is no plot

unlike Coronation Street
“better than real life and only
ninety minutes a week” (Jonathan Williams)

The morning cold and clear
after rumoured flurries.

I remember some 19th century painting
of Washington under snow (by Eastman Johnson?)
sentimental in ‘de ole plantation’ mode

– cold air that makes the head to hurt
though the sky is bright over Oak Hill Cemetery,
the beggars more assertive on the lips of escalators.

Fifty-one auto license plates spell out
the preamble to the constitution of the United States
at the Smithsonian,

and Frank O'Hara looks out
from a Larry Rivers painting, very present
here amid the art he loved

a memorial to him

by Grace Hartigan

"Grace to be born
and live as variously as possible . . ."

– words which could be attributed
to (the Rev.) Howard Finster

his fountains issuing from faucets,
a river of blood just that

though the source
may be a cut finger

and plenty more "just folks"
whom circumstance and vision worked through
so that they figured how art could be done
(as I write now on Rosemary's sleeping shoulder
arranging a table to jot in haste though not to disturb)

– something happens
that you walk away from
as you walk away from your own history

my father: the cover of a book
my mother: a gold ring

enigmatic, unsequenced
for plot or rhetoric,

more interesting
when decontextualized than as 'psychology'
(the t.v. character last night
who went to analysis because
her mother and father hadn't given her a hard time).

Anything can be fixed here (even poetry)
though nobody wants to do it anymore
(fix things that is, not write poetry,
everybody wants to do that).

We work our way (walk away) through breakfast cereals
(freedom of choice!)

and I like the ad

where a guy in surgical outfit
on an emergency ward set, says

“I’m not really a doctor, but . . .”

(days after the election
the new president appears in a soap opera
as a plot device.

I pour myself a gin,
listen to Earl Bostic – Coltrane’s mentor –
thinking I have patched the drafty cracks
so that Washington’s night will be kept out of this condo
and wondering how to duplicate
the American ‘r’ and ‘a’
so that cab drivers will get our address right
and my name will be spelled correctly
by petty officials.

Earl Bostic and Bill Doggett:
sounds that would ‘invoke’ (if I were Robert Duncan)
instead ‘remind’ me of Ken Bolton,
now probably waking up in Adelaide,
even this moment cleaning his teeth,
a thought balloon above his head
(‘thot balloon’ Duncan would say,
the figure of Ken rising through the poem
like the Corn God . . .

As in ‘One Night in Washington’,
the record where Charlie Parker
played the wrong tune over an unaccustomed backup
and they had to figure out what he was doing
– the pianist slightly haywire, feeling for tempo and key
as Parker doubles up, oblivious,
knowing where he’s going

so ‘The Poem’

Leaves behind
any notion of what its Arnoldian simile
is about
– just one manner of
jumpin in the Capital
(better than jogging in the capital
though less characteristic I guess –
and waves to its friends on another shore,
dancers, buildings and drinks in the street.

Down on Rock Creek's tributary
a maze of branches, leaves, undergrowth;
advanced puzzle in which I make out
the figure of a young woman sketching,
and further, a man, stripped to the waist,
washing shirts in the rivulet.

Halfway up the slope to Safeways
a concrete divan, shaped for Mme Recamier;

the human figures, characters escaped from paintings
like the ones in the background of 'Dejuner sur l'herbe'
which seem to occupy a different dimension
– even these rustic details of L'Enfant's city
suggest French analogues

Though up the hill
Washington Cathedral – twentieth century gothic
with elevators and climate control
suggests a big nothing

at least that
only a nation of fundamentalists and show-biz types
could put a gothic cathedral on a hill top.

I move about through these environs
grasping colour and light
as the capital slides into winter,
warm air chilling after three,
darkness by five

ham hocks over gas

simmering

a gold ring
the cover of a book

It's time for drinks and music
(no photos)

'Autumn in New York' or
'Moonlight in Vermont'?

'Dumbarton Oaks'!

– where Igor Stravinsky stayed,
only a block away,
gardens laid out
for pleasure, all seasons.

Veterans' Day:

Glover Park

a leaf impasto underfoot for miles;
the grey tree trunks producing an effect of haze.

From The Palisades an old railroad bridge, boarded up,
cuts over Canal Street to the towpath,
pairs of mallards on the waterway.

A man (veteran?)

with bedroll and sixpack
asks if I'm a local.
Sorry, you're 12,000 miles off.

Return from the drizzle to a call from Vermont
for Rosemary.

Take a message
or try to

– our landlord
collects pens that don't work
and places them all in jars near the telephone.

(according to John Tranter it was Martin Johnston who said

'If you want to communicate, use the telephone',
but Martin probably got the line from John Forbes
– and he was quoting Frank O'Hara at the time.

I'm a spook on the bus through Shaw,
wreckage still from 1968,
gentility bordering the ghetto
with window boxes and fresh paint
up on Le Droit Park.

In Howard University's

African collection, a small gold chameleon
illustrates the limits of personal power,
'changing its colour to suit what it sees,
not what is hidden in the box';

an Akan ceremonial vessel

shows Picasso even stole his doves from Ghana.
But Africa has come back
I think, to reclaim its own images
as Romaire Bearden, his art
at the American Museum.

Africa! Lorca

and Vachel Lindsay loved you
but you go further,

☐ chameleon

in the box,

not my personification of a continent.

I walk back on Columbia, a break in the drizzle,
to the border at 14th St

where signs become Spanish.

Turbulences cross the map,
snow falls in the panhandle of Texas.

This morning Classical 104FM
advertises a book (illustrated)
of poems by Robert Frost
that

“makes profound truths
really accessible

in a language

everybody can understand”

Out on the street

Latinos with air compressors on their backs
blow the dead leaves away.

Poet's Note: Washington D.C. November 1992

Laurence James Duggan

Blue Hills 1

. . . . dragon shape clouds over the national capital
Malcolm Fraser's feet stick out the end of the bed

thick forest around Brindabella

eel-shaped reservoir & visible snow-caps
then white cloud

NOTHING NEXT 400 MILES
continuous cricket pad

warm bread roll
apricot jam in foil rip-top package
black coffee
– avoid weird milk substance
in thimble-shaped container

hostesses in casual uniforms
disappear into bombalaska
a huge Mark Rothko painting
whitens &
turns into dumb Olitski

then it clears outside Melbourne

Poet's Note: September 1980

Laurence James Duggan

Blue Hills 27

Ascending Mt Cannibal in rain-heavy air
– a few moments between downpours
 allowed for the summit.

North, Mt Towt,
and below this outlier
an aqueduct traces through foothills
to Cornucopia.

 South,
under Mt Worth's mohawk
the valley opens up to power lines,
stud farms, the light industrial corridor.

Twigs snap underfoot
 bolting a wallaby
from a clearing of mossy rock,
 then silence,
the faint register of leaves;
pink heath and yellow wattle
aglow in the ultramarine.

Laurence James Duggan

Blue Hills 32

Layered mountains:

the nob of Ben Cruachan, sharper from the west,
blighted Mt Hump emergent for some distance.

Above Cheyne's Bridge the road swings up Hickey Creek
towards a gap; bared rock diagonal
hard under McMillan's Lookout.

A dirt track

skips a cutting, follows a shoulder to the point of the ridge
a few steps from the road; lichen on half-buried stone,
purple flowers in clefts.

Campfire ash in a small clearing,

Big Flat below, where the Macalister erodes edges of pasture;
cattle on the open ground, sheep dotted in rising scrub.

At Licola the settlement is boxed in for two more months,
its general store closed mid-week.

No sound or movement here, save a chain-saw
somewhere across the oval.

Poet's Note: September 1990

Laurence James Duggan

Blue Hills 44

So much of a city
is light on stonework, woodwork;
demolition turns us into archaeologists
using the maps;
 memory,
a particular daub of colour
there, to the right,
of that mountain down the street.

Laurence James Duggan

Blue Hills 51

From a place deeper than the larynx
the voices of Tibetan monks
broadcast into the gallery cafeteria
as an undertow to all that is available:
the harbour, arrayed for delectation outside,
a crane above it like a John D Moore painting
(blue letters on the counterweight spell GREED).

*

A southerly, off Botany Bay
moves the palms in a backyard
at Hurlstone Park
chimes hang in the air
talking wind
spiky fluttering
of the natives
all modulation and
cracking branches
then the riff
of the Bankstown train
shadowy behind
dark timber.

*

Nearby shops fall into decrepitude
as the centre of gravity moves
to the new strip:
my former city remade
as a remote configuration,
its familiarities stars
in shifting nebulae,
a body recomposed to perform
different tasks. The burden
of memory is drawing
the same old figures,
earlier lives, disjunctions
fused for a moment

in broken light.

Laurence James Duggan

Blue Hills 8

Q: "Who's going to tell me who's he?"

A "Ned Kelly"

Q: "And who was he?"

A (chorus): "A BUSH-RANG-ER"

The Shohaku scroll cracked & ridged
the monk grins on

at the fish & crayfish
4 feet away to the left
across a desert stretch of
hessian

& twenty years into the future

his back turned on 2 centuries
where schoolgirls in green uniforms
hiccup & giggle

Behind plate glass the diners seem to hang
like mannikins from join lines

Chambers & palace grounds obscured by low gold clouds
views in & around Kyoto c. 1650
colours on gold paper folding screen
purchased in 1980 with funds donated by Mr Kenneth Myer –
merchant of this city

Human motives count for nothing

only the objects & observations of several centuries scattered cultures

"two gross of broken statues"

flowery codices
their edges broken off like
Sapphic postcards

a number of birds, plants & rocks

Red painted columns
bear up slate blue tiles

Court lady under a tree
showered with small poems

I'm irresponsible I guess
want to retire to an
ENJOYING RAIN PAVILION

Muscular schoolgirls dwarf grey haired art historian type
who looks like a suave version of Bertrand Russell
– maybe it's Bernard Smith?

"everyone's madly
taking notes"
drawing painted faces of court ladies
"mine looks very westernish"

Gold coated bronze Ming temple guardian
(shortarse)
gumboots poke out below armoured kilt

"Conversing learnedly
in a garden landscape"

banyan (?) leaves – thousands
of little arrows

many thanks to Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

a pointillist tree overhanging a mountain stream

"The plum blossom source"

Goodbye monks

taking notes on the stairs

– what am I looking at?
white projection screen?

art lovers in strange
ironed suits?

Poet's Note: October 1980

Laurence James Duggan

British Columbia Field Notes

1

Japanese brides drink red wine in the rose garden;
patches of snow (all the way from here to Hokkaido) .

2

The inhabitants of this continent eat potatoes for breakfast
their coffee is German (or Polish) not Italian;
they mix the sweet with the savoury.

The houses could be in Wolverhampton
the apartments, Irkutsk;
from Beacon Hill the horizon is American.

Seabirds (sooty gulls? Pacific gulls?)
appear outside on the entablatures.
Techno resonates from a distant car.

Attached to the old meridian,
a siren carries me back to Brisbane.
When I wake I don't know where I am.

3

From an old photograph, the movement of redwoods, □
heads and faces imposed upon stages of totem;
deities vomited up outside the weatherboards.

4

Circa 1890
jail sentences imposed for potlatch because
the government thought it wrong
that the people should receive, gratis, sewing machines;

an assumption that existence, no longer considered
'primitive'

should obey

the laws of economics
(all other kinds of transaction,
politics, art
 subsumed or erased
as extravagant or
unnecessary entities.

Item: a silver mask
partly burnt
 on entry
into the Christian life.

Smallpox 1862,
again, in Vancouver, 1888-90.

In the period of measured history
the events are too familiar:
logging, the fur trade, mineral extraction;

on the flat calm of Georgia Strait
chained timbers float,
the beach shored up with dead wood.

Advent □1843 or thereabouts.

5

In the hall beneath the smoke hole
shadows give life to shapes
discovered in redwood trunks
(beaks and other protuberances added on) ,

figures produced from figures,
from the womb or from the mouth,
as naming regenerates the dead
(and the sur-name, imposed,

breaks this continuity for another:
the purpose of statistics and control,
a hunt for 'the family'
as normative ethnology.

6

The Provincial Legislature appears
"like the Brighton Pavilion
backed by the Himalayas"; a Brighton
gargantuan and colourless;
high Victoriana
larger than the governance halls of whole nations.

The Empress Hotel - 1908
built on reclaimed land

(back at this smaller establishment
a light well, grimy astroturf at its base,
rear of a nearby hotel
its regular windows,
a low sky over placid water of James Bay

(invisible from here) .

7

Though the air chills
the thick green is summer,
a late light on the horizon,
across the esplanade
moored bulk carriers
the wooded park at UBC.

Cirrus clouds grid
at cross-purpose, around the point
in the wind of English Bay,

the colours of buildings luminous
against the clouds, the shadowed mountains;

two yellow cones of sulphur
across Burrard Inlet, a space
beneath the bridge (the Lion Gate)
denoted Indian Reserve #5.

8

Emily Carr's cowed or hooded trees,
her grids of darkness and light

(the provincial dilemma: is the work overvalued
regionally? nationally? because she's 'ours'?)

those vertical totems, the trees themselves
and what shadows they make available;

under the cool white dome of the Vancouver gallery
these charcoals imitate the sky, cirrus and crossbar,

as I catch the trolley back to West End.

9

Apartments date mainly from the 1950s,
an erasure of wooden housing from the city to Stanley Park.

Burrard Inlet is still a working harbour
(containers, sulphur and woodchips)

logs chained, floating downstream
the odd escapee beached and weathered

fit for sunbathers to shelter, leeward from ocean wind
or rest a bicycle against.

10

The disposition of things.

Neighbourhoods of a strange city □
escape from the map;
a district without _____ [name the missing convenience].

These tall glass buildings
in front of snow patches,

mountains at the end of every street.

11

Hotel ceilings creak,
beams visible through plaster,

voices audible;
an extractor groans.

From the bus stop you can look down, either direction
to Burrard Inlet or English Bay.

12

Go to where the trees cross the numbers
to spend money near Arbutus and 4th,

Kitsilano; the houses protected
by security firms, back onto the water

as the city towers appear, whitened
in a bleaching wind, against the mountains and clouds;

to Green College, UBC - Arts & Crafts in an English garden,
bagels over the Georgia Strait

(below, on Third Beach: rocks
woodchips, nudists and Italian fishermen.

13

Bill Reid's
glacial curvature of bird shapes
fits the materials
to the landscape

and the body
(fine delineations
of a bracelet) .

Old people tell each other what's happening
as they read museum labels, dramatising the educative;

a Haida man
spends all day in a dark room
explaining.

14

Victoria below, then, south, the Olympics,
Washington State's snow ridges.

Cartoon birds on a washed-out screen.

Diagonally back, two Canadian businessmen
(retired) register anecdotes and statistics

all the way to Honolulu.

Laurence James Duggan

Composizione (1914)

Soffici's painting (my colour photocopy
from a 1946 book):

the glass and cup
flattened – glass with a thick base,
cup with an edge turned into a spout
– heraldic almost, either side
above a slice of watermelon, red
white, green: an Italian flag
though with black spots, seeds,
on the red. Near its base
the shape of a fig? (left)
and (right) the letters SOF
stencilled, emerging from a shadow
(of the watermelon slice): the slice itself
functioning perhaps as an A
(for Ardengo), its upward point
continued by an indeterminate
grey shape

Laurence James Duggan

Five Poems

looking at a sunset
mango stains on my shirt!

*

waking in the middle of the night
– the digital clock radio!

*

the washbasin in my bathroom
it's like soap held in a big pink hand!

*

my disco suit
falls off the chair
like an advertising executive!

*

a paper butterfly
sails over the windowsill
– my Australia Council cheque!

Laurence James Duggan

Five Spot

Monk's Coming
on the Hudson's
about appropriate
for breakfast.

White frost. Trains
in the clear air.

Discrete piano notes.

Outside,

sharp red berries,
grass shoots in the mud,
waiting – ghost moon
in a blue sky – for words.

Laurence James Duggan

From The Front

Fixed ideas arrive on the beach;
as the storm falters□
they disport themselves, will make
colourful patterns for art photography,
even then, fade, become one with their surrounds,
uninteresting edges to be tripped over.

So the mind makes a sequence:
freeze-frame, rusty nail in a gate,
weathered lines radiating, lost
in the whorl of the grain, the iris
disappearing to depths
beyond the back of a head

like a diagram of Garden City
and its bus routes, grey and red-brick
familiarities which make a door-knocker,
a set number of steps, some guide
to location. When streets take a semi-circle
blocks are thrown from perspective.

Hewn wood, chunks of mallee root,
brown against grey palings, carpets
of muddied sawdust, patterns in hard
concrete there for the invention of games:
hop this one, miss the lines, step on
a crack; ridges of moss on broken pipes;

old dog in a wooden box, flesh
lapping against splintering sides,
will sleep through noon, wake
when a downpipe cuts off the sun
and potplants strain forward. Observed closely
this landscape induces vertigo;

the ball spins back from New Right graffiti
to the half-cupped palm, is pitched again
and takes a tangent from a white line across asphalt,
shooting leftward over grass and nets,

and the park's inhabitants, barrelled in prams
or propped on sticks; its language. . . .

Poet's Note: 1988

Laurence James Duggan

Poet's Note: 1988

Laurence James Duggan

Lines For A Reading

I have to write a poem
for a poetry reading
in the House of Parliament.
It's the House they don't use
since they closed it
some time ago. But it will do
for poems, the 'Dorothy Dixers'
that live forever. Well, what to put
in my poem for the poetry reading?
Should I take a 'heroic' theme
in tune with the atmosphere
of an historic building? Or would this
be wrenching my voice
a little too far? With a diaphragm
like mine, booming is an impossibility.
So I'll take a casual route
allowing accident to mingle
with intention. It could be
a Frank O'Hara type poem
as in "I did this, I did that"
(I looked at a map of Kent
calculating how long it would take
to walk from Sandwich to Canterbury
– Sandwich, because
it's just near Pegwell Bay
where William Dyce painted
his wonderful painting of people
on the beach, standing, as the sun falls,
in isolated groups in this liminal space
as though waiting for the end of something
– the nineteenth century? or some even more momentous
occurrence, like, say, the arrival
of visitors from another galaxy.
Actually they have just witnessed
(or failed to witness) the passing
of Donati's comet; an event
that dates the picture
precisely. It is October 5th, 1858.
(But now, as I write this poem

to be read in the Upper House
it is 6.30 p.m., July 20th, 2001.
On the SBS News, George W Bush
visits Europe, reads to uncomfortable children
in the British Museum Reading Room and offers:
"Marx, Lenin, Mark Twain, George W Bush".
A naked man sprints across the road
near Buckingham Palace. Genoa is fortified
against 'anti-Globalist' protesters. In Nepal
the Prime Minister decides "to leave these
corridors of power" . . . Corridors
like these I'm (at this very moment) reading in?
"Corridors of poetry" sounds too
High School Confidential
(but all this detail draws me still further
from my objective: to introduce something
in a not inappropriate tone
to the present setting: red plush
of a House of Review
(though my poems are stuck
on a lower level, or at least somewhere
between the high ideal (the metapoetic?)
and the mundane;
bicameral in Spirit
if not in Action.

Laurence James Duggan

Melancholia

or the light reflected off metal structures on the roof of the laboratory prior to a storm. The whitish sheets over a darkening sky, a series of regular solids, an obsessive repetition of inarticulate demands. Elsewhere there are holidays, banks circulating notes, a surfeit of intention, but here there are only moments, blocks of consciousness arrayed as patterns in fabric.

When the server goes down the sense evaporates. Corridors become walls, the narrative fades. The novelist has unravelled her plan in which moths have eaten holes. We are left as vegetation in a suburb is a memory of wilderness, a crossed wire bringing back thoughts of the past. Rumour itself ordains our history. Those marks on a fence speak as the lines of a book close upon themselves.

The blue distant hills beyond which is conjecture. The unnamed walking the wall, using up their time in the office. Everything nonetheless has a perfect three hundred and sixty degree clarity, is open to scrutiny. The top of the box removed, the silkworms among the leaves. Those white fibres form an elaborate chain in which the small and large circumferences are cemented forever.

Laurence James Duggan

Pastoral Poems

1

The sky reflects the wilderness.
There are miles on the map without
 "interesting features";
the blank spaces Dorn talks about
& which are usually somebody's home;
places I know nothing of
 save those blanknesses,
colour of highways, unfathomables
suggesting more from less.

 A kind of geography
which isn't, finally, a nationalism
- isn't a wallchart for a mining company -
announces there's more out there
than we can take in.

2

Clouds hang at high altitude.
A tin windbreak shelters a rotating sheep.

Figures group and regroup against the gust,
suit collars turned up in the spring air

an hour away from the capital
in the town where the poet bought groceries

whose books you could recognise birds from.
Outside the church, wedding guests gather;

dots on the map, imitating Brueghel
and a distant notion of the picaresque.

A pile of green logs near the station
treated with a foreign substance

await dispersal, assembly of stockades,
invented landscapes in distant suburbs.

3

Gay sailboats & bloodless nudes
 in Art Deco bathtubs;
a vision of country `progressives'
lumbering the 1920's into the 40's;
war poetry of urgers and speculators
in a district where a river winds
 sluggishly to coastal lakes
- this notion of style, though rare,
aligns with the golf & polo clubs
& does not postulate Italians or Chinese
in the gardens of Wy Yung or the hills
 round Bullumwaal
- Billy Ah Chow's now empty shack
 near the summit of Nugong;
the last photo of him in overalls
at the Blue Duck Hotel, fifty years back.

4

Dark edged piano
in a badly lit room;
the concern with tone;

a likeness now visible
between the white folding screen -
summer japoniserie - and this:

rhombus of sunlight
on an 18th century ornament;
the sky outside painted in 1946.

5

The young man, whom they called
"frighteningly close to genius";
moves easily in his role
among Edwardian furnishings.

An alter-ego, he is "taken up";
because of an adjectival facility
& a bohemian facade - his books
widely praised, seldom discussed.

The drug 'experiments' prove marketable.
He moves to an ancestral dome
where wealth and imagination fall apart
in a district noted for its cheese.

6

Across a saddle from Mt Ainslie
looking northeast over open tableland
- pine plantations mark the border between
 here & Bungendore;
a dirt road cut off by the forest's edge.
Behind, the triangulation with Majura &
 Black Mountain,
an environment of campus suburbs
- no more than an address for notions
 of Human Endeavour.

A tourism of sorts continues
in foreign landscapes where light is mud
& the young men (mostly) pick over
brown artefacts in green fields:
what they call 'identity'
 a failure of imagination.

Laurence James Duggan

Rapture

there is nothing
to make of it
or to make it of
save what lies about
heaped on the floor
laid out like a map
outside the window
not to laugh at
objects on a desk
tools of trade
arrayed so to speak
to speak so
of nothing in particular
the patterned refrain
of Euro disco
where chromosomes
bang together
in a small box
as a coloured light
goes on and off

Laurence James Duggan

September Song

Bill Doggett and Earl Bostic: Trading Licks

a great compilation

always reminds me of Ken

probably still at work

in Adelaide, though thinking by now

of coffee and writing

at Baci's (or the Flash),

Hindley Street.

Here it's hot

unseasonable September

leaves of brown

come tumbling down

Friday evening of the poetry fest

I'll stay home

watch the light dim over Bulimba

cook mushrooms

a la Grecque

(bougainvillea a mass of crimson

on the balcony, the door

waving in the wind though held

by an elastic fastener).

The versifiers will be hot . . .

I mean hot, not

'hot'

(a seven part performance

of the deadly sins sounds

deadly)

but it will be great

to hear what the poets in Sydney (and Melbourne) are doing

these days.

Bostic's 'Flamingo':

that great blast, rescues a tune
from 'lightness'

(Coltrane would take this on)

half-a-century old

like me

the 1950s

a now unimaginable world

of bright lights, electricity

coloured drinks

"we don't need alcohol

we just like it".

Whatever you say, Frank.

Are Pam and Jane

wandering Rome

or escaped to a cool villa elsewhere?

Is Pam writing

a view across Trastevere to the Tiber

positioned at a desk in the apartment

as Ken

sets up in the Baci with coffee, cake,

The Guardian,

me

on my back on the sofa

my preferred writing method

. . . from which I watch aircraft

descend over Hamilton,

my friends in their various places

in the fading twilight

like a line from The Star Spangled Banner

a couch

Kerouac was too patriotic to sit on.

*

I cook dinner to

Danny Gatton, 88

Elmira Street,

the moon, yellow

gibbous

over Morningside,

thinking 50s hits

a teenager imagining

being there

(on the moon)

away

from all this

the cream-puff face

of George Méliès satellite

(Satellite of love?)

Danny G an heir to this philosophy

(he

hanged himself in the garage,

though his music now

seems benign enough

especially the theme to The Simpsons

or, heartbreak, a version of

'In my room'.

*

A day later:

I'm sitting on the floor

(not lying down)

at the Judith Wright Centre

– the poetry

and Frank Sinatra

continue –

Jill Jones

not liking the heat,

Michael Farrell

('the man wears shorts')

reading in tandem with Martin Harrison

“Re-

New the Word”

says the poster.

Sitting, I view

legs of the poets

(“Gimme da word . . .”

said a cartoon in Pam’s early book;

the frightened reply

“I . . . I’ve forgotten it.”)

When Michael reads

a guy with beard and sandals

walks out.

*

Home,

post-reading

the hottest it’s been in this room

a moon

like the one that hangs over

fields of Shoreham

Samuel Palmer’s harvest

except here

suburb, not ripened corn

or both?

(suburb and corn)

that would be Brisbane

the “blessed city”

as Gwen Harwood had it

in wartime

and me

an age

of consumption

a river-side

of plasma screens.

Who needs the moon?

*

Coffee at Jamie's Espresso

a minimalist model plane above the refrigerator

wire body

pathetic wooden wing

propeller spun by the fan

(what was the line from EM Forster

highlighted METAPHOR

by some scholar:

"the fan rotated like a wounded bird"

a metaphor for poetry?)

Another coffee

"Hi Bronwyn"

is that sculpture on stage

really fish fucking?

The poet takes notes.

New poetry

a veneer of theory

John Forbes

invoked by the multitudes.

Outside, the heat

"neon in daylight"

(the 24-hour grocery)

inside

FAME

I wanna live forever . . .

No Joke!

*

James Street Bistro.

Will my coffee arrive? (the waitress busy
chatting up the young 'suits').

It does, but it's the
wrong coffee.

'The Reverend David Sheppard . . . Freddie Trueman
. . . I'll remember that forever'

Revelation of the year:
John Howard doesn't like cricket.

"Downtown Huddersfield . . ."

I want a bistro, not an open-plan office.

*

At Vroom, figuring
what it is I like about
music played in cafés

generic 'acid jazz'

neither 'acid' nor 'jazz'

but ok for coffee

('Ambulance Music'

invokes cool for the texters

and me

I'm part of this theatre

wet ink dries visibly

charades of western life

as, at home, on the wall

the fall of Capa's republican soldier, over

an exploding sand dune

somewhere in W.A.

by Tim Burns

(not the Tasmanian Tim Burns
the formerly Sydney one)

rain on the suburbs

drill vibration

from the building site

*

Max Planck said

“paradigm shift always happens

after the funeral”

apparently.

As I age I look

more and more like a thug

waiting

with Basil Bunting

for that fad

(fiction)

to pass.

(at the writers’ festival

the mild boredom of hearing people

discuss their work

– it’s what you do –

Hello Ivor!

the clouds mass

promising STORM

like the rain last night

horizontal

as I drove Rosemary to the airport

(‘airpoet’

said Richard Tipping.

Thanks Richard.

At the New Farm Deli:

Alla Zonza!

Already

it's October

Poet's Note: 2003

Laurence James Duggan

The Submerged Cathedral

Pain won't last, neither will beauty;
once everything is registered as atmosphere
only change is left: each waving branch
or fall of light upon water, each
scent or sound suggests as it fades
a world diminished against a myth of plenitude.
Tectonic shifts of orchestral sections
modulate tones a later minimalism will
catch or freeze from the end of a lost century;
amber doorways long encased in soot,
underwater gongs rusted, their particles
cast into colourless depth
beyond a continental shelf.

Laurence James Duggan