

Crab & Winkle

Also by Laurie Duggan

Poetry

East: Poems 1970–74 (1976)
Under the Weather (1978)
Adventures in Paradise (1982, 1991)
The Great Divide, Poems 1973–83 (1985)
The Ash Range (1987; 2nd edition, 2005)
The Epigrams of Martial (1989)
Blue Notes (1990)
The Home Paddock (1991)
Memorials (1996)
New and Selected Poems, 1971–1993 (1996)
Mangroves (2003)
Compared to What: Selected Poems 1971–2003 (2005)
The Passenger (2006)

Cultural history

Ghost Nation (2001)

Crab & Winkle

East Kent & Elsewhere
2006–2007

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This long poem contains many quotations, some identified, some not. Some are from anonymous sources, various technical instructions, Berlin wall graffiti, the Faversham History website, advertisements, legal documents, newspaper and radio items, the voices of various pub inhabitants and an audio recording of myself aged five. Others are from specific individuals, some long dead, some very much alive, some fictional.

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Crab & Winkle

Prologue

Through cumulus, the hump of Thanet, then Pegwell Bay.

The University of Kent, Canterbury downhill like a 19th century painting,
Cathedral dominant. A low-rise city in the valley of the Stour.

A half-timbered hall: Beverley Farmhouse.

A bed that barely fits its room.

September

gathering swallows &c

a rabbit crushed on the road is removed within hours

mown paths

words for angled brickwork?

to dive in amidst all this difference

§

mushrooms, spongy underside, meaty consistency,
found in Church Wood near Blean, a warm mid-afternoon

today 80°, September's hottest recorded?

§

stillness, at 6 pm,
as though readying a season

I sit in the Gulbenkian
(the nearest boozier)

the numeral 19 amid
the verdure

(large spaces,
plinths with hewn objects
mimicked by insignias on bins,
neat trees

the 1960s
thought this the closest

architecture came to paradise

no gargoyles to mock aspiration

HIGH VOLTAGE

a man
struck by lightning (*timor mortis*
conturbat me) on the side
of a generator

the air thick with smoke

§

compost (this notebook)

vapour trails

it's a pleasure to sit in the slight cool
viewing the campus

a province (so close to London),
the land of Soft Machine and Caravan

§

I have to do battle with Ron Silliman's notion of 'music': that this makes him seem not so unlike that same School of Quietude he denigrates. 'Music': shouldn't it take care of itself? And the American sense of 'expertise'? We are all inspired amateurs around here.

§

rumori, thunder clouds over the campus
(these move rapidly north-east)

a sense of rain

lighten up
(or tighten up—
Archie Bell & the Drells (or
loosen up—
The Nazz—
or the Alan Bown Set (a
different 'loosen up')

(O'Hara understood
the importance of all this: a version
of flaneurie

with a misplaced accent
(mine? here?)

(Get the picture?

Yes, we see.

§

everything at ground level seems quite still

the language of trucks
en route from the tunnel

and news from Australia: the image
of Sasha, Denis and others
in pyjamas, reading books

timor mortis . . .

Sasha's enthusiasms
(how could he *write*, an act
of solitude?)

Harry Hooton,
a bad poet, but one he cared about
—enough to see the work in print again

O'Hara would have written him up
had he had an O'Hara

I remember him
disrobing to white underpants
(a piece on Percy Grainger),

later, walking, with aid
of a stick

§

model aeroplanes in mist
over the White Horse

the poets gather
at the Dark Barn

(Rudford, Gloucestershire)

. . . outside the Barn
a monument to the Welsh
killed in 1643

—Gloucester stone

§

I can't wrap my mind round the book I'm supposed to review. My lamp,
tested for electrical safety, is no use now (in broad daylight)

I rage in a

white *room at* an institutionally coloured
desk

unaccountably, the memory
of Kathy Kirby singing
'Secret Love' and 'Dance On'
from 1964.

§

The road signs don't always work (lost between Ash and Meopham, having missed the A2). Each village signposts only the next.

The couple on the London train—brought together by an introduction agency? Comfortably middle-class, nervously drinking beer on their way to a blues concert. They seemed patently ill-matched though unaware of this, filling each other in with their histories. He was obviously on the make and lacked a degree of self-awareness. She was quite possibly alcoholic, not wishing for sexual intimacy but not wanting to be alone.

On Radio 4 this morning, a debate between the presenter and a radical Muslim from London who keeps using the strange metaphor: *Wake up and smell the coffee!*

§

St Dunstan's: A corner of the cemetery reserved for small children. One grave features a black marble teddy-bear with the photo of a baby on its belly. Next to it, a parrot with wings rotated by the breeze.

the cathedral in the hollow; the army base on the opposite hill.

the light behind the trees
of, was it, Samuel Palmer
signalling an end to something,
the season, or more portentous . . .
late September the fruit
still falling

footsteps in the courtyard
the rattle of leaves on the path

those spade-like leaves
are they alder? (the fruit above
like candles)

the gents stride back to the Registrar's
carrying the kind of cases that ought to contain
bundles of bank notes

Hürlimann / Braukunst seit 1836

The spread of architecture as landscape reacts against Piranesian
compression;
it assumes 'breathing space'.

§

I have functioned as though things put together stood for something, or
rather become something other than what they were before.

the disjuncts are too great . . .

o.k. so Pound said *mind is shapely*
—my mind? I wonder.

elusive bar talk
always seems more than the sum of its parts

a woman picks several leaves of the Alder(?) for
what purpose?—and one decays, blown in,
at the base of a table

(there's no place in a writing school for a poetic predicated on doubt)

our 'worldly goods' somewhere in the Indian Ocean

§

a man
a map
amen

§

a huge black & white cat crosses the plaza
& climbs the grassy verge of the library

a curved corrugated roof
begins to merge with the sky.

what's out there will always exceed art

rab éfac / amenic / ertaecht

remembering that line of The Angelic Upstarts:
I want two pints of lager and a packet of crisps please

§

back to the old drafts of a poem that
has lost its way

the sky darkens
and everything seems quite still

across the road a fortnight ago
the bus shelter was stripped of flyers
and painted brown

a week later
it was bulldozed.

an orange spotlight
directed at this building is often turned off
at night

this is the season
for mosquitoes

a pattern: the sky clears late afternoon

§

In Oxford: the Ashmolean

Tintoretto's resurrection

Piero di Cosimo—animals fleeing a fire

an anon (?) work showing a French siege, where the armoured figures
inhabit flattened perspective like Wyndham Lewis

Uccello—the Hunt

Sickert's 'Ennui'

the sculpted head of Lorenzo di Medici

a watercolour by Natalia Goncharova

some old men in a work by, was it, Veronese?