Allotments
Also by Laurie Duggan

Poetry

Under the Weather (1978)
The Epigrams of Martial (1989)
Blue Notes (1990)
The Home Paddock (1991)
Memorials (1996)
Mangroves (2003)
The Passenger (2006)
Crab & Winkle (2009)*
The Epigrams of Martial (2010)
The Pursuit of Happiness (2012)*

Cultural history

Ghost Nation (2001)

*Shearsman titles
Laurie Duggan

Allotments

Shearsman Books
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My thanks to all of the editors.
Allotments
Allotment #1

Live, at the local…  
not, I imagine
like the bar in Rome Ken went to,
just one brooding Irish accent over by the log fire
the crunch of crisps… mine

women sing in the back bar,
the Irish guy and his son (?) are monosyllabic,
maybe a death in the family?  
though not a wake

I’m awake
not Paul Blackburn
the hops
dangle, as hops do
from the dark wood
(not the ‘dark wood’)
the light gone by four
a gent reads the Daily Telegraph
(‘the darkness
surrounds us’)
then orders a pint
without speaking a word

an old door
leads through to a French delicatessen,
bolted, probably, for decades
At the Norfolk Arms
pressed tin and Corinthian columns
smoked *jamón* and cut glass,

a gilt Madonna hemmed
by dried peppers: W1 *español*.

This neighbourhood’s Georgian,
the pub, named for Norfolk who?

Thomas Howard, the 4th duke,
Norfolk in Sussex, recusant?

The Spanish barman says
of the wine list I stare at
‘the most expensive is the best’

I remember instead the edict
on an album cover
 (*The Dictators Go Girl Crazy*):
‘quantity *is* quality’
Allotment #3

halfway round the world
friends assemble an exhibition
of our former lives:
Coalcliff circa 1980;
photos of us, younger,
me washing dishes before the louvres,
out of my depth in a ‘career move’
that didn’t come off: scriptwriter
with skills for neither plot nor dialogue;
a house on sinking land,
(warped corner of the living room)
Allotment #4

William IV, Shoreditch

will anyone be here?

I have books to sell (ha ha)

and pints to go before I weep

I have at least figured out what to read
(give or take)

and, is it,
Apache?

not the Shadows:

a new version, ornate
with percussion, brass, organ and bells.

no sign of the poets…
or the audience
they’re all, I suspect
at Allen Fisher’s lecture

the sardines are good, with new potatoes, green beans and capers

scales fall from my teeth
if not my eyes

sufficient is the funk unto the day

still nobody here

though the guest beer
stands me well (if that
be the expression
in, on, or about  
the promises

premises

strange rhyming voices 
and clinked glass, a party 
on the opposite table

the one-eyed 
spill fewer beers

and the bust of (Beethoven?) blinded in one eye 
on the upright, 
a candle, stuffed birds, 
art, 
a blurry Rowlandson?

still no poets

the music 
ramps up

I’m sonically enabled

13 ways 
to stuff a blackbird

I’ll be pissed off 
if not pissed

a plucked guitar 
and a ‘sincere’ piece of ‘spoken word’

(Solomon Burke would do this better
'I'm so glad to be here tonight,
so glad to be in your wonderful city…'

(Everybody needs
somebody
to love their poems)

In advance of the broken arm
(the Broken Arms Hotel)

Simon arrives.

there are now four people
(plus the poets)

an audience

Fat Billy on the wall

(William IV)
Allotment #5

Last days of the Gulbenkian? Possibly to be closed (or privatised) & the last day of Olson (the reading group)

Koch warns about getting too universal at the end of a long poem (his alter ego
(Olson’s) fucks Gloucester harbour which gives birth to…?

except O is ‘conventual’ (as in a convent?)

then he mixes up his Greek gods
(‘But we are the Greeks’
(Olson to Michael Anania))

It was, I guess, easier
than scouring logbooks and citizens’ accounts (O now famous after Donald Allen, after the conferences

the gods wore suits (or worked for the government)

such the fate of epic

the breath of a man struggling for same

in the light of lecture rooms

my writing

cuts corners, loses the thread
the notebook
steers towards November
towards (including) disorder
(Olson’s final line: he’d lost the lot)

Allotment #6

Breakfast at Samphire
on the corner opposite, the Duke of Cumberland,
Knot’s Yard

a friend across the road
too far away to signal
heads uphill for Whitstable station

small fluffy clouds
a promise of rain

will I walk the Crab & Winkle Way?
or bus it to Canterbury?
Allotment #7

for once, perfect clarity
the air heavy with malt
from Shepherd Neame

Allotment #8

a beer
in The Bear
where I’ve not been before
pressed tin
between the beams

a day barely exceeding 8 degrees

front doors
of The Sun
closed to the street, renovators
still at work

day barely exceeding 8 degrees

this narrow place (The Bear)
facilitating the guild Hall, the market square

fires not yet lit

I’ll return to mine
Allotment #9

the small gnats
have ceased to wail;

dogwood’s leaves lost
red branches bared

Allotment #10

The Sun half-full of builders
ceilings repainted
the back bar sheeted off with plastic

there are few people about
while this goes on

the fire stoked
the floor swept
the tools stowed