The Pursuit of Happiness
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)
Allotments (2011)

Cultural history

Ghost Nation (2001)
Laurie Duggan

The Pursuit of Happiness

Shearsman Books
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Letter to John Forbes

lit up in a window
with a burger & glass
of African chenin blanc

I’m reading the later Creeley
on Charing Cross Road

you, ten years back
in limbo (Melbourne)
of which you made the best

I inhabit an England
you mightn’t recognise
though you would have read
the fine print that led here

(the market didn’t decide
in your case).

will I echo Le Douanier, who
celebrated Picasso as ‘traditional’,
himself as ‘modern’?

maybe

this notebook’s
no ‘art pad’,
nor is this place

(everyone behind the counter
is from Poland)
the music:
‘I am a cauliflower’
misheard from the Stone Roses

opposite: BUDWEISER,
ENGLISH BREAKFAST
‘OPEN’,

the only art here
is civic (a ‘water feature’
from the seventies)

the buses all head north
to Clapton Pond,
but I’m southbound
for The Cut, Southwark,

poetry, spotlit
on a tiny stage
Angles 1-18

1
to be sensible
of cold, the decay
of light

2  (Uplees)
a silence
on the Swale,
or near enough:
incoming tide,
bird calls

cement slabs, on which
black-faced sheep forage

the explosive factory
blew up in 1916

3  (London Victoria)

the shake-spe-herians
rant at a neighbour table

(as the deaf would drink
at the Forest Lodge, their signs

speedy, erratic)
(poetry is not endless speech)

the roaring queens roar on

we in the pits
put up with it

then head out for Kent

4

on Clapham High Street:
  – VOLTAIRE –
  – drycleaners of distinction –

5 (Brighton)

the Sunday market:
battered legs of a shop dummy
fireplaces
a broken exercise machine
Cliff Richard’s ‘Hits’

6

ice expected
the night of the launching

long shadows across fields
a hint of mist
sunset, south of Rochester
a sickle moon over Westminster

7
the door knob
cold to touch
frost on the western rooftops
ethereal blue plastic
on rows of vegetables

8
past the shortest day
at last
arthritis
apparently
the writing, shaky
the fog
(at least)
lifted

9
I’m not allowed to be ill
I oughtn’t be, shouldn’t be
lying on my back in late sun
it’s chill outside, then dark

take meat out of the refrigerator
chop the Chinese cabbage

(movement of leafless vines on a neighbour wall
a rusted blue ventilator

the head of Gautama
transported into the yard
stone among the shoots

an old filing cabinet
moved to the garage

10

hop poles recede in fog
‘a delay in services
due to a fatality
in the Meopham area’

11

hail over Ferry Marsh
mud underfoot at Halstead
fields of chipped crockery and stoneware
12 (Chanctonbury Ring)

after the Great Storm a broken crown
wild anemonies under the lip of the hill

13

At night

all things sleep
save rats

in the walls
(wondering if

they’re any good
or not)

outside, yellow
streetlight on gillyflowers

a moss rooftop,
who knows what con-

tellation overhead
or the whereabouts

of ducks at 3am

14

a sky
full of
small
movements

15 (May again)
creeper on a wall
turns ochre green

a young blackbird
becomes
a black
bird

16 (Imagined America)
Confederates take over the village square
guitar, snare, voice and double-bass
twang, reverb & hiccup from the pub

17
a large chick balances
on the edge of a bucket

18
late light
hits the bar window
Written in a Kentish Pub
on Hearing of the Death
of Jonathan Williams

a

generous man

a modern
epicure

gone from
our midst

(I could knock
together something

like gammon &
mushrooms

(here, the schoolteachers
figure pints will

write reports.
another Bishop’s finger?

yes, and
in memoriam.

for J.W.,
what?

photos of
Kent’s finest?
(this Thatcherite province, its
councils
comprised of
Tory
stayputs
the idiots
of small business?
(blue bins
appear
then dis-
appear
the populace
have no-
where to
put them
plastic bags
resume).
what’s for
Jonathan here
the gastro-pub?
(fine unless
you contract it
(gastro)
a walk, coast
to coast

drive, for coffee
fuel

(‘O’NAN’s
AUTO SERVICE’)?

it’s a world
of open

parentheses
a world

minus J.W.
‘You can tell

white trash, but
you can’t

tell it much
...

(or you could
give it

the Bishop’s
finger?

a man
in absurd

green hat
represents
St Patrick’s Day
(when is it?)

now, here?
nowhere?

or a joke
(I don’t know

as I don’t
so many items

of customary
ritual

(no hot-cross-buns

in this town,
Monday,

the bakery
closed.

tonight, here
in the pup

(the ‘pup’ . . .
no, the pub

(in the Sun
where I sing

escaping
plumbing
responsibilities, reviews, a Yeats biography

the drummer from Caravan, again?

(the sadness, progressive rock

in the provinces in, on

or about the premises

incognito no less (a glow

of light behind glass

over the bar: pump

& circumstance, a trail (trial?)

of spilt beer (spilt images?)
lachrimae
rerum

& death
(over all)

jamon?
gammon?

(on the Ham
Marsh?

J.W.
R.I.P.