
A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in English at Massey University

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1995.
Abstract

'A Critical Biography of Maurice Duggan, 1922-1974' aims to provide a detailed and fully researched picture of Maurice Duggan's life and its inter-relationship with his literary output. It describes Duggan's personal history, and intersperses these chapters with sections giving New Critical 'close readings' of his stories. The thesis also goes some way towards providing a portrait of a literary generation, of the remarkable, 'larger than life' writers who lived on the North Shore of Auckland in the middle of this century, during a crucial period of New Zealand's literary history.

Duggan died tragically young at the age of fifty two, and much of his life was dogged by ill health. Osteomyelitis led to the amputation of a leg at seventeen. He contracted tuberculosis while travelling in Spain and suffered a severe relapse after his return to New Zealand. Later he became an alcoholic, and it was only a short time after going into recovery that the cancer which ended his life was diagnosed. Duggan was one of the most talented writers New Zealand has produced. James K. Baxter shrewdly described him as 'our finest poet writing in prose'.

Duggan's output was small, and his oeuvre is considered difficult to read. Most of Duggan's troubled inner world remained hidden, both in his public and private life, despite the evidence that much of the material in his stories is based on self-analysis of aspects of his history and psychology. Thus his stories become clearer, and more satisfying for the prospective reader, when approached with a knowledge of the writer's life.
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