Mezzaluna
Selected Poems

Michele Leggott
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swimmers, dancers
Dear Heart

dear heart it was a coast road
long past lilac time and well out of town
  the sea out of sight and driving north
  in the far south the radio swelled
  nostalgia
  and I want you to know
  that I remember it all the time
it was ‘just’ part of your afternoon repertoire
a dance-floor pick-up
  kept on at you all those years the romance the real
  life dance we were brought in to share
the sun and the son
you were making it true with a late-fifties step
  up the coast into heaven
  and some memorable parties
  fishing trips
  carnivals
  a dog a truck a baby sister
  a walk to the swing bridge
  and back
  and more . . .
then it was moving into town settling
down and later the piano
you were picking out Mancini arrangements

Nat King Cole My Fair Lady and the theme
from Mondo Cane
you sang them into the woodwork
and when it really was
a table for one and a single rose
that hard lost time

I heard Errol Garner play I only
have eyes for you in a winter house dancing
with knots in my throat past midnight
and your brave tra-la-la
half a world away
it's a lonely thing to do
and you couldn't get used to the cold
or the hole in the bed
the silence after you sang out
the songs that would never mean dancing again

oh my sentimental mother
you died
and I saw you in each other's arms again

an hour from dawn

just as it should have been

my dear

I took your rings and came back to the real
life dance of these years

a song by songs and it seems I don't know all the words
because you never did

but

here we are driving the coasts of our dreams and
bending again in time

over the precious cradle of the heart
Colloquy

virgins plus curtains minus dots claret and celestial blue

people still go to cottages in moody seaside weather
to read for a week how will we do it now?

when I go for walks words stalk along too
I’ll be travelling mid-February and can't guarantee a lucid mind

what about a big table in a room with windows
looking over the wild and wavy event?

or good merganser fans unfolding folding thought out there

one of these days we’ll tend to them
those fair fictitious people the women
Oldest and Most Loyal American Friend

I

more to our liking—
the idea of a winged victory
headless to be sure

but lucidly and in good humor
she'll answer our questions:
when did the line begin
to curve underwater like that?
why are the roses (which aren't
even here) suddenly twisting

into circles? why are we drawn
to these figures? Samothrace
you've vanished

in your place, le juste milieu,
Gertrude stalks
the little lobsters of Perpignan

replaces the bright water with
a clear chablis she'll drink
them with tonight

make a feast of tumult eat
its flesh crack the golden shell
and suck confusion's juice

wet ankles tucked-up skirt
prismatic drops in the bucket
on the stolen stele
knock it off

fish it out

2

Common cheap and tender
the pleasure of a purely predatory
recipe, say crawfish étouffée

we were seduced at once by
the little town (no poetry) and thought
what a happy life it would be

only to cultivate white
raspberries (sea also) iced
champagne by the approved method

then go to the Lyric Restaurant
drink solstitial dazzle on the terrace
and order the house specialty

you’ll wait an hour but it will fly
hot dry white wine, bouquet and bouillon
the rifts and the tears are your own

in the interstices of the lobster meat
a rich dark roux from which the bouquet
may be removed They did not in Perpignan
Reading Zukofsky’s 80 Flowers

lavenders blue
roll your eleven weeks onto summer’s late belly and look out
at the world with your black olive eyes
this was promised under the apple tree at Christmas
when you swam in deep pools of picture space nine days out
among the dream polaroids jacaranda diamante
simulacra of before and after
the visceral rub of pōhutukawa in bloom
good established labour the sun going down the Carmel geese
shrieking and flocking the big movie of us coming apart then
waterboatmen on the lake at dawn
and we began the long haul from Recovery nine floors up
to Tranquility a sea *a somer-séson*
all the pretty little horses pretty things pretty soon
the goodnight fine art getting
the lullaby to work the baby to sleep merrigolds he smiles tell me
another one and the story remembers itself by rhyme settles easily
into songs he likes the made-up rock
and roll the stroller doing its stationary miles in the next room
the two of them the two of us too whacked to
(what??) read proof
quote dear one sweet heart lover unquote air of heaven
half hyphen moon bee time energy colon coffee colon
the feeds the changes the drinks of water the spiders on the cistern
nightlife Horace and Chick Corea at it again
in the lamplight heliotrope splash! mother of thyme stomma cock
mares nest and moonshine wakerobin oh yes
and again and again the all-night frogs go la-di-da-di-dah
to the tune of John Brown’s body
the household gets up at midnight and stirs about
paradise garden I would write you down he said
in a style of leaves growing
eyes curving
toward that question just where do the roses swing
are they pink and blown and warm as sleep
at the gate where lavender works the bees all year round
or red and sweet as tea grown cool because everyone went to check
some story about wind roses you already knew were lining the nest
with scent and bloom and two quarter-view profiles
flickering out of the frame
Boosey & Hawkes
Black & Decker where do we get to
slow nights when the book clears off to Baltimore unimaginable
in the time of tearwater tea and willpower cookies
Hobans Ahlbergs Lobel Wise Brown I Can Read
two wind-ups with outstretched arms and joined hands
dancing around and around the parameters
goor jaggery plums and palm sugar
dates with stratagems the minute hand sweeps away
some things have to be written in later some things
look like porcelain fingers on the coverlet unforgettable
inhabitation the moment hand-painted plaster of pearls
some things to be said for low orbit
cosmos nods
Hippolyte and Cornelia rumble over the picket
which line is his? which hers? moonbeam you smile around
then again it is not night when I see your face thefts modifying
or migrating winging along close to a shelving coast
where the expedition has wandered out of its hinterlands at last
whooping like kids walking on sand dollars at dead low tide
a stone’s throw from the lacewing villas way on out to the channel
sea biscuits cake urchins (placenta to you) walking on the sea bed
the rider in the backpack wants to bite them all
mouthfuls of breast and he doesn’t care if it’s salty
he cries out and when he gets what he wants we’ll be there
Mare Tranquilitum see horse the flowers
Merylyn or Tile Slide or Melete

I've fed the baby and put him down it's eleven ten
winds like trades sweep the phoenixes high airs for highchairs
a story of palimpsest and simulacra a house of replicas
writing over its fictions sticking them on the machine hitting PRINT
and away it goes
over the rooftops the thrashing pompadours the stunt kites that whistle and hum
their lines in contemplation of the image
templum a shape to bite with
pleasure

    they share genetic material they could be coeval
    they speak together they've travelled from the same place
    so when one slides back to the power station she is pleased

finessed a
projector

    by the return THAT'S MY SLIDE she says
    a good one I'll loan you details help yourself
    the real thing THE SIGNIFICANT OTHER is up at the gallery
    Julian's hung the tiles sideways stet but Alexa has my letter
    as if I

put the baby slides through as well TENDERNESS
reading one face in the other
dear Flossie Teacake Posy Fossil Sugarplum
phantoms
a fall ARE ALWAYS INTERESTING they warm by association
of raw sugar in the demerara jar is always a space
December filling up again he's turning one marked out
sweet darling one standing by the peg basket by himself a
waves of applause steady piece of ground set apart a shape
as she goes cut out for travel through a number of worlds
happens
here
what I can do where I can go what they can give
and what they keep me from
establishes focal length sitting in the dark five years old
optician's glasses testing testing cold hit precision and footnotes
magnification sharp edges bright lights in the dark
I can feed him change him put him down feel my way back
can it be done?
who by?
subvert or obscure existence of the narrative
who?
position
she gave me cut lunch a blank cheque also volumes of information
he heard me get out the cutting board and say
let's eat
THE WOMAN OUTSIDE THE ART GALLERY SELLING AVOCADOS

got to sleep thinking
muscle carapace flesh position action —

push your fingers in
the secret folds of semi-soft sculpture blushing shape
creamed tongue puffs the rose and star a world of wonder high fidelity
sweeping with the phoenix feather palms thrashing
taking eating having layering icing on the cake
when he gets back
lemon angel surprises


oh
the hell out of tartan touring with Betty
petit
from the deck of the Earnslaw binoculars in hand remarkable
berceau
what is to be seen once the soft interiorities
marlin boats at Whitianga
of the voice strike out instruction
identifying the Douglas Fir at Lac Maligne
bye sunshines
changed her tack went horseback riding left them squinting at a sail
sobriety sobriquet, girls

SHE OPENED HER FIRST ONE-MAN EXHIBITION

AT THE LABYRINTH GALLERY the old question (the cake stalls) (ack)
can history do more than amuse? replies A MUSE does it better
rewrites replays returns TIMES OF OUR SOCIALISATION

she now
underfoot together on the kitchen floor crawling over diamonds
and squares (Mondrian a cinch later on) crosseyed with the effort of
ESTABLISHING FOCAL LENGTH and tearing up yes newsprint
NO laid down against the flood the bin the cooker the cat’s plate
clouds the epic defrost the highchair detritus three times a day
or just grubby rage for activity a bit of fun SOME
flooral tile on the wall wall
paper on the tiles SLIPPERY humming with xerox
and saving the text and blowing it up and staging repeats
MERYL SLIDES critical vocals ACCREDITED AS A POET was a
does that person in a pointy hat
square simpering it’s the way you hold your mouth
like BARE around the word PO-
FACED lies there on the page HEY ROSEBUD little
bottom your mom’s goodlooking a sundried nappy straight off the
line folds one through four two pins and away sweep
she’d sooner be doing this of the printer left to right right
critical fiction to left pull on the line when interpolation breaks
in into the digit count cursor hauling you over a landscape
florescence whose every window fluoresces at a touch
where's Nicola? where's Betty? under the resin
folding napkins with Mrs B studying the butter finger the power
a transitive verb has to eat everything in its way
she bosses it (vanishes) but if nothing has been taken
a way very much has been added the baby in his berceauette
showing clearly how every fold is made in terms of pink creases
a body of knowledge

Bella Merylyn meet Janet
she's wrapping the folks remarks in flimsy tissue we set the stall up
on the library steps beside a trestle groaning with
donated fairy cake dispensed vital signs

no no no no no no
steaming wringing scrubbing operas amalgamation
the glue that holds it together
many soft interiorities musculature a growing body carefully
happy as the boy Ambrosius and will
hours when he's covered his new school books with yes wallpaper
a fight about pattern competence (pigheadedness) well you do it
pinning then she stays up late ruling cutting pasting
pattern at the end there's a little pile of damp books to be pressed
pieces under the books of knowledge volumes one through six
dry and wrinkle-free
in the morning
she's filling handbags
with plaster of Paris it took three or four minutes but I made it
to go on the wall it took a long time but the family is full
next of December babies tenor and vehicle they all resist
Tigers

wavejumping down the coast a
eight months a year call up step
the weather office every morning into
second-guess the winds at the cape heaven
at Kina Rd deliberate
the swell more coffee a look around the windows
west sou’west getting up now more avocado on toast
good thing that long season on Hass
why settle for less the best avo the best coast
another balanced judgement the best driver in the world
from those who should know (best) load up Bluey and go
nose into the slipstream that may or may not be worth it
he learned in the summer of cold southerlies we all remember
he was out fierce concentration it was strange
in the waves pulling in the new as the old weather
when she died stripped heart and sail from him then
late on a windy afternoon in January she just stopped
one of those days around the bed breathing
he said to us back there in the house on the hill
I’m going after scares vigils the descent
to blow glass hyaline and its stations
oh WAVE, DURABLE FIRE she’d gone
yes A SEA AZURE A CLEAR SKY
and went off to measure up
the workshop
a pot of tea
at six o'clock
a quiet smoke looking at points
the day beginning dear Phoeb it's
black as the proverbial or almost sunrise
you could reach out and touch the mountain
bare maybe funny and unpredictable
or snow down to the ranges any time of year some
I'll be very low key he said horsetrading
at least JACKIE V. THE BANDITS a bloody performance
for starters workboots on the stairs Jack at his shirtiest
read guns smoking in the manager's office best
about it the rushes show them all shaking hands afterwards
at Lucy's Gully the redwoods wave about but he's gone
in powerful upper airs she was the only one saw him go
in the grove itself break apart in her arms
shelter she didn't miss a thing the tears
he might have courted her there POLYVALENCE came
a Taranaki girl from way back into her heart
good at connections a survivor then she called us
you aren't going to hear these shapes (snarl)
but here you are reading them
right onto it touch and turn around
half a world away he's there don't
take it too hard cry now
Phoebe dear
dear bird
there it is       stormy locus
MATER CARA       of your conception
she who is beloved chick you are care
staying up late    and it will keep you
again              the sailors take care nestling
Mother Carey      call you your stars prove gentle
a lineal sign      out in the waves singing NOW
to kick away WELCOM SOMER WITH THY SONNE SOFTE
suckling from this time he's gone to learn (huh)
they knead the soft belly from Master Lino one's
fierce             they tear (the best) good two
tiger eyes        then spring off swinging better get them
lock away planetary December babies all
that perfect distance from rings three a pride
down curve when her off the punty of tigers
The Child sets in turn around and full eyes
drives deeps and skies planetary it's done like
winds howling around the tank reading painting
Mercator's world isn't everything there is pictures
aerodynamically the old lingua letters
drive edge a set of reef breaks singing
where four metre faces HO the tiger
someone is attempting the
always nemesis

cutting loose
Leggott, one senses, never stops ‘looking about’: always listening, questioning, searching, peeling away layers of the familiar to see what lies beneath.
SARAH QUIGLEY, NZ LISTENER

A delicious and sustaining collection across the writing life of Michele Leggott . . . an affectively thrilling read.
LISA SAMUELS, AUTHOR OF TENDER GIRL

Leggott illuminates, like a lightning flash, the delicacy and fragility of a world made of poetry.
DAVID EGGETON, NZ LISTENER

From Like This? (1988) to Vanishing Points (2017), Mezzaluna gathers thirty years of selected poems by the inaugural New Zealand Poet Laureate (2007–09).