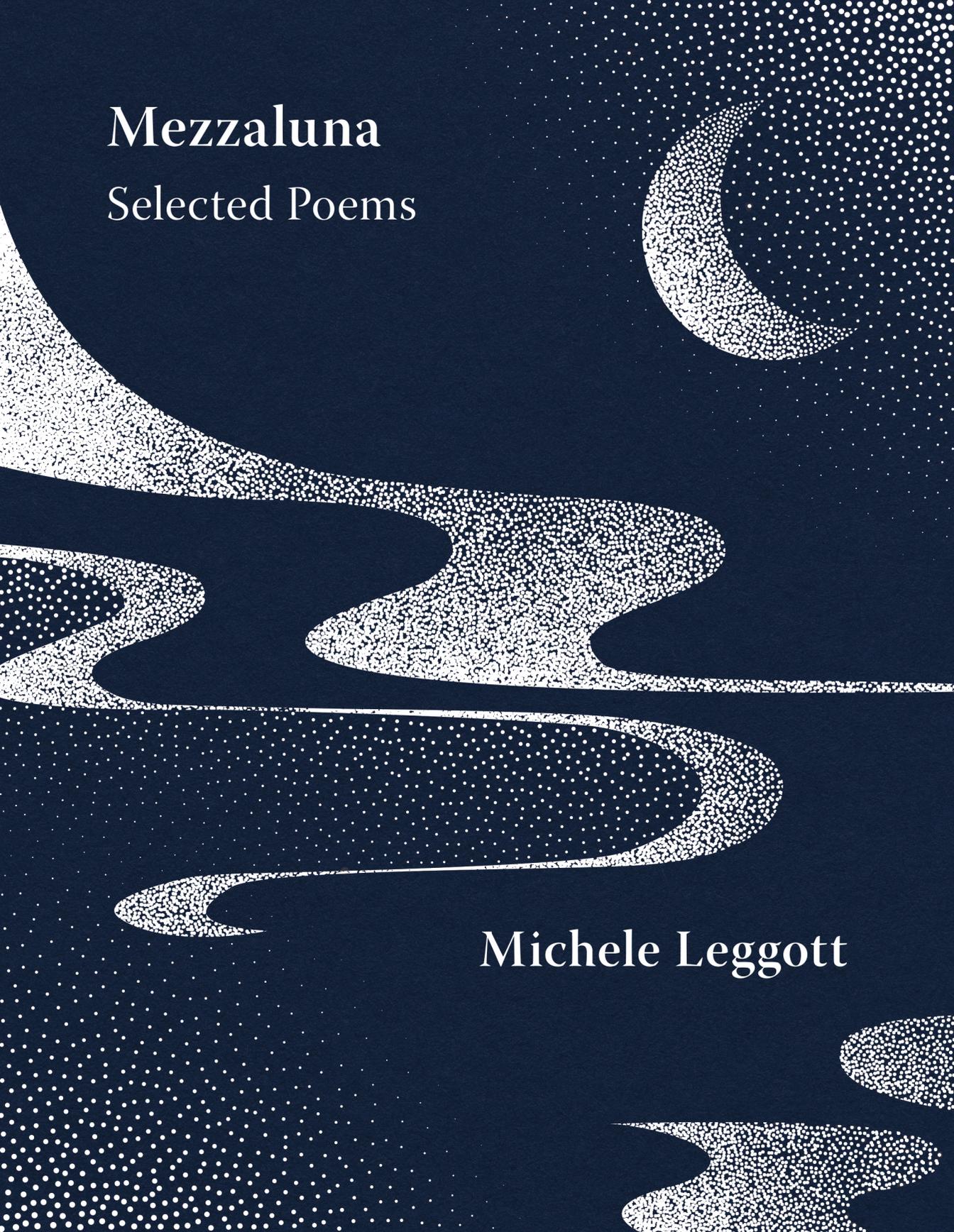


Mezzaluna
Selected Poems

Michele Leggott



Mezzaluna

Selected Poems

Michele Leggott



AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Contents

Like This?

- "on white you fall" 3
Watermelon World 4
27 5
An Island 6
Withywind 14
"think this" 16
Road Music 17
"it's an evening warm as your
unfinished conversation" 19
Garbo in a Gown 21

Swimmers, Dancers

- Dear Heart 25
Colloquy 28
Oldest and Most Loyal
American Friend 29
Reading Zukofsky's 80 Flowers 31
Merylyn or Tile Slide or Melete 36
Tigers 40

DIA

- "Where exactly are we?" 45
Micromelismata 46
Blue Irises 47
dia 47
honeybee 54
ladies mile 61
Keeping Warm 68

As far as I can see

- dove 73
hesperides 78
torches 83
from a woman, a rose, and what
has it to do with her or they
with one another? 88

Milk & Honey

- wilderness 97
faith and rage 98
cairo vessel 1 109
cairo vessel 2 112
future song 115

Journey to Portugal

- the words 121
verde, verde, verde 122
she counts ten angels 124
domingo 126
house of the fountains 128

Mirabile Dictu

- work for the living 133
mirabile dictu 136
tell your mama 138
slow reader 140
primavera 142
keep this book clean 147
peri poietikes 150
more like wellington every day 152

Heartland

spirits bay 157
listening 159
degli angeli 161
never dreaming 162
lomu 164
olive 165
experiments (our life together) 167
a brief history of time 169
matapōuri 172

Vanishing Points

The Fascicles 175
Emily and Her Sisters 180
from Figures in the Distance 184

Coda

the wedding party 193

Notes 197

Acknowledgments 201

About the Author 202

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 . . .

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 they are very close
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 by the return THAT'S MY SLIDE she says
projector 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 what I can do where I can go what they can give
 here 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
 m a g n i f i c a t i o n sharp edges bright lights in the dark
 I can feed him change him put him down feel my way back
 can it be done? to sleep thinking
 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
 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

where's Nicola? where's Betty? under the resin tear
 folding napkins with Mrs B studying the butter finger the power away
 a transitive verb has to EAT everything in its way s
 she bosses it (vanishes) BUT IF NOTHING HAS BEEN TAKEN
 A WAY VERY MUCH HAS BEEN ADDED the baby in his berceaunette
 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
 she's filling handbags in the morning
 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 vantage
 a quiet smoke looking at points
 the day beginning dear Phoebe 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
 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 EGGLETON, 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).



AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

COVER ARTWORK & DESIGN: KEELY O'SHANNESSEY