

HEARTLAND
MICHELE LEGGOTT



*I stood in the dark with many others, some of them close enough to touch,
some further away.*

*One by one they turned, light fell on faces that were at once strange and
familiar, and they began to speak or sing. Soon the riot of their voices was
everywhere, the plane of memory tilted at 36,000 feet, fractals caught in the
blink of an eye, the clearing of a throat. Heart us invisibly they said, and I saw
the land waiting to invent its people. We walk into the clearing, we wait for
light to saturate the eye, we remember.*

*Heartland is a destination and a song, a shadow and a single word with
two chambers.*

Michele Leggott received a Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in Poetry in 2013. She teaches at the University of Auckland and coordinates the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre (nzepc) there with Brian Flaherty. Leggott was the inaugural New Zealand Poet Laureate from 2007 to 2009 and her publications out of that period include a CD of selected poems, *Michele Leggott / The Laureate Series* and *Mirabile Dictu* (both 2009). *Heartland* steps on from *Mirabile Dictu*, tracing the idea of family as a series of intersecting arcs – some boat-shaped, others vaults or canopies, still others vapour trails behind a mountain or light refracted through water.



CONTENTS

a little ahead, my shadow	I
unwinding the bird	2I
many hands	4I
the mezzaluna rocking	59
some day	8I
wind and weather	99
matapouri	III

harbour lights

my father's blue eyes shining
with tears he won't admit to and which
we can't see up here on the afterdeck
of the Picton ferry he is looking up waving
from the wharf we are waving back and calling
though we know he can't hear us all day
we drove to catch the ferry that is taking us
away he got us there in the nick of time
triumphant now as the boat pulls out green water
between us up here and down there
he waits until he can't see us any longer
then tangles with rush-hour traffic
on the motorway north two semis give him
trouble but he pushes on a cup of tea
at Levin then the four hours to home
a long day when the Valiant pulls in
my mother gets up and they talk into the night
drinking cocoa we're over the strait and safe
in the next house on the journey to Canada but
I remember my father's blue eyes and the tears
we couldn't see against the late sun my father
driving north as we sailed south the last time
I saw him his blue eyes full of tears

lomu

and now the other black dog
grinning and wagging bat ears hoisted
nose to the wind eater of gravy-soaked
tea towels pie thief rabbit digger co-pilot
riding shotgun in all the vehicles deaf mute
weight on all the beds now the black dog
sleeps under the avocado at Weld Road
wrapped in an old blanket and keeping an eye
on the three pig's ears luck has brought
his way now the black dog sleeps

olive

the day of the explosion they postpone
her arrival two men walk out and agony
begins its clinch we crouch by the radio
unable to help thinking *they could all be dead*
hoping for a miracle twenty-nine times
the size of a mountain in the eye of a needle
stitching blue heaven to green earth
let them walk out let them walk out alive

it is too dangerous when they bring
her at last three days have gone by each
more terrible than the one before angels
look out of the eyes of this dog who is here
because I am blind and the world is huge
with possibility we walk her in a raw wind
not knowing we shouldn't a mistake
that costs but is not the end of the world
under the dark mountain of sorrow

when they show the dust blasting
out of the portal for fifty seconds we know
there is no hope but listen as machines prepare
to enter the shaft today I learned how to comb
how to check ears eyes nose teeth and all over
for the baseline that is hands on a warm body

when the drill breaks through the images
show that nobody reached the oxygen refuge
when they find a cap lamp still flickering
in the camera's eye four and a half days

and a kilometre in we go out for the first time
just around the block only to hear
there's been another explosion

dog I hold my breath as you take us
into the world I can't see each day
a little further a little more command a little
sliver of hope under the dark mountain
where fear waits with its next fuse
and rescue is unlikely any time soon

from all over the world gear and advice
pours in a third explosion sets the coal burning
deep underground *the trapped miners*
become *the lost men the men who lost their lives*
and finally *the entombed men* now they gag the mine
starving the fire of oxygen and the violent language
of despair cries out upon us threading the path
between light and darkness pain and rage
care and the undoing of everything we cared for

my dog how can you move with such grace
through these days pulling sea and sky along
with you under the red-flowering trees mixing it
up and down the road with all comers this is not peace
but motion ten thousand people looking up
the valley to a dip in the ranges while someone sings
You'll Never Walk Alone not peace but motion
what is her name they ask me and I say
she has been here since the start her name is Olive

honey meadow

what do we know about her only
that she was in these places Clare Castle
1835 Hereford 1837 Gloucester 1838
and 1839 Clonmel 1840 Leeds 1842 Doncaster
1843 St John's 1845 these are the births
we have found but of her nothing
his armful of lilies a girl turning back to look
at one who can't see a voice in the dark
singing to the first baby wrapped in a summer shawl
and to the last as the bright leaves fell
on Newfoundland stone and the ships
that would take all of them home and beyond
swung at anchor in Avalon lamenting
her disappearance the hem of a skirt
her warm arms and that clear voice let them fly
my babes let them fly over the ocean let them
find happiness in the bright world a blue stone
I put into each small hand and this song
of the summer place and the snow blanket
the end wrapped around the beginning
and footsteps gone far away from me

dear sister anne

I write at the first possible moment
from the place we have come to knowing
you will be anxious to hear and the news
so long getting there a ship leaves
tomorrow on the evening tide so I have
this passage of hours snatched from sleep
in which to scribble and weep a few wet drops
but not on my words or they will be spoilt and nobody
the wiser about our adventures

darling the boat was a murder
though I must smile and say it was nothing
out of the ordinary the world turned
upside down and beloved faces veiled
behind ocean spray you won't remember
the voyage from Halifax but mama's white face
haunts me still and the rocking of a boat
is the rocking of a dark cradle in my brain

it was long ago and this voyage
ended with shouts of joy from the quay
as the Grahams spied us being brought off
and were round us in an instant children dogs
bags hullabaloo of sister falling into brother's arms
my Lewis teasing tall nephews with tears
running down his cheeks they have named
the baby after me which is an honour
and a delight she runs to meet us calling
for a kiss a song a story from over the sea

we are staying with John and Sophia
and already there is talk of buying land
adjacent to theirs in this perch above the town
and going into business together
there are folk who will pay and well
for the green-fingered touch of the Carrells
meanwhile gardens burst with early summer
new potatoes sugarsnap peas fat strawberries
each day for the table I wish you could see us
feasting after the months of salt beef and biscuit

three icebergs we saw in the southern ocean
each one afloat on the deep past summer in
St John's when you were a baby we counted
white castles drifting outside the harbour mouth
and filled them with splendid dreams they say
we have come far enough south to see the aurora
and that it holds a singular beauty dear sister
I will lift my eyes to the great darkness beyond
this hillside and when I find curtains of light
shimmering gold blue purple orange and green
I will know you are watching from your high place
among the ceaseless artistries in circumstance

AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS



\$27.99

230 x 165 mm, 120pp, paperback

ISBN: 9781869408084

