

**work for the living**

one by one they come out  
the piece of paper with the poem transcribed  
at five in the morning and folded  
into the driver's pocket  
another with the words of the song  
the Yorkshireman doesn't need  
he's brought cucumbers from his garden  
she found puriri around the corner  
I'm looking up the Latin for *big flower*  
or maybe *really big flower*  
and pulling it from the tree

too many funerals but the road  
is clear to the north the driver  
puts his foot down  
the words in his pocket speed  
the conversation the weave of  
bad singing bad hearing bad eyes  
stopping only for a bad joke  
across the road from the Hundertwasser  
toilets *they call me mellow yellow*  
the tourist train rolls up the main street  
someone takes a picture on a phone  
stories flash by Ruapekapeka Ohaeawai  
Culloden the Spanish Armada  
the wars the families deaths and clearances

at Te Kotahitanga we find him  
whose words have brought us  
to the north *wheear 'ast ta bin sin'*  
*ah saw thee* he asks silently  
did you clean up the shattered teacup  
the milk spilling onto the floor?  
the Lake Poet walks in trailing clouds  
the Persian Ecstatic takes a spin  
around the room and King James  
does benison in both languages  
body and soul light and air  
puriri grieves and the Really Big Flower  
opens its lemon soap heart *Ephphatha!*  
the birds in the trees are suddenly uproarious  
and then we hear rain outside

it's gone by the time  
we emerge and the van has him  
safely on the road to Wharepaepae  
we are slower getting up there  
*the carter on the horizon calls out*  
*in the arms of the road* a translation  
anyone might understand  
replying to the voice in the wind  
as the old lady opens her arms  
and takes him into the earth

lost children  
and talk that goes on into the night  
around a table in a house on another hilltop  
where an old friend pulls out the first book  
and inside it another piece of paper  
with a handwritten poem she reads  
remembering where it came from  
taking the path between that coast  
and the travellers she is feeding tonight  
the cucumbers went into the salad

more books more history more wine  
the driver's poem is unfolded  
as a full moon gets up over the valley  
*A red libation to your good memory, friend.*  
*There's work yet, for the living.*  
in the morning a bird will call from the trees  
*visible invisible* riro she explains  
to the man without a hat who knows  
the song but can't sing it now  
to save his life riroriro little stranger  
the wars the deaths the clearances  
*one who intrudes into my shadow*  
*I don't recognise shadows* his face  
a translation anyone might understand

**Michele Leggott**