

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