

Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?

JANET CHARMAN

Abstract

In this article, Janet Charman explores how the immediate post-war poetics of Mary Stanley exemplify the precepts of feminine generativity. She also examines poet Allen Curnow's motives for Stanley's astonishing exclusion from his three highly influential post-war poetry anthologies. According to Charman, Curnow's suppression of Stanley was integral to his attempt to defuse homophobic attitudes towards male artists that were prevalent at the time in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It also helped to resolve his own Hero-Genius complex. The latter point is analysed using Bracha Ettinger's theorisation of the patriarchal myth of the Hero-Genius, whose predatory terms symbolically annihilate 'woman' as a subject, reducing her to a sacrificial object in order to covertly expropriate feminine generativity. Charman argues that the effects of and motivations behind Curnow's erasure of Stanley resonate to this day in Aotearoa/New Zealand literary critical discourse. She therefore draws on Ettinger's supplementary Matrixial model to bring relief from such phallogocentric erasures, signalling a (pro) creative avenue whereby woman-identified artists may reclaim agency and actively occupy the role of She-hero.

Key words

Mary Stanley, Allen Curnow, poetics, Hero-Genius complex, Matrixiality, feminine generativity

This year marks a century since the birth of poet Mary Stanley. So it seems a good moment to acknowledge her poetics and to examine the motives of the most prominent literary critic of her era, Allen Curnow, regarding his exclusion of Stanley from the poetry canon of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Curnow edited three influential post-war poetry anthologies, published by Caxton (1945; 1951) and Penguin (1960). Within these anthologies, he suppressed any mention of Mary Stanley's work. Furthermore, in the volume introductions, he critically demolished the literary reputations of Robin Hyde, Jessie Mackay, and Eileen Duggan – the most recognised women poets of his era. This repudiation of feminine voices was buttressed further by his posthumous condescension in the Penguin volume towards the poetics of Ursula Bethell and his outright dismissal of Katherine Mansfield's poetry. Amidst this hostile climate for women poets in which Curnow was invested, his silence about Mary Stanley's award-winning work and her hitherto positive critical reception carried the implication that her woman-identified subject matter was simply unspeakable.

Stanley had a degree in philosophy. Immediately after World War II, her poem 'The New Philosopher' was published in the *New Zealand Listener* magazine (1946).¹ In it, Stanley dares to question women's forcible exclusion from public life after the arrival home of their men from the fighting. She begins her poem, 'It is small use now to bid us sit/ With futile hands clasped like old men/ Praying for rain in a dry season' (1946, p. 21). She wants those destined for the 'dry season' of provincialism and obscurity to be compensated somehow for the frustration of their ambitions. The war is won, but her narrator insists that 'Such hard-won prize/ Will not be spent on sport for fools/ Or cranky knaves who garner wealth/ Out of our comrades' tears and cries' (p. 21).

Who are these ‘comrades’? Stanley’s poem refuses to forget that those who are now our enemies in cold war propaganda were, in recent memory, ‘our comrades’ in battle. She acknowledges the political divide that has opened between the capitalists of the West and their erstwhile Russian communist allies. But subtextually, she also alludes here to the wartime comradeship between men and women on terms of sexual equality – not only in the workplace but, for some, in the bedroom too. However, there was now an expectation from the patriarchal institutions of her society that women should leave public life and settle into, and for, domesticity and childbearing. Stanley’s poem refuses to relinquish sexual comradeship and equality. But it also contains another heresy. Her Shakespearean vocabulary and phrasing slyly offer the voice of art as an alternative to the ‘sport for fools’, omnipresent at the time in the droning radio commentaries of male-only rugby and racing.

Stanley omitted ‘The New Philosopher’ from her first collection, *Starveling Year* (1953), which appeared eight years later. Louis Johnson’s review of this volume would praise her imagery and erudition in quasi-mystical terms, but his bland assertion that her poems are ‘capable of several extensions and interpretations’ tactfully suppresses any acknowledgment of their transgressive sexual politics. His superlatives carefully pigeonhole Stanley herself as an exception to the sexual rule:

Mary Stanley is the most impressive woman writing poetry in this country. She consistently refuses to write in terms of the conventions which women writers seem to feel are imposed on them. Poetesses (who may also be male) too often insist they are soft and soulful creatures inhabiting a man’s world ... They work still in a Victorian tradition, knowing woman’s place, and what she dare write about. Miss Stanley defies the conventions and emerges as a most completely expressed woman, a poet rather than poetess. (Johnson, 1953, p. 32)

Johnson’s claim that Stanley rejected the ‘soft and soulful’ Victorian tradition appears an attempt to isolate her from ‘other’ women artists. But he also inadvertently reveals a horror towards femininity and effeminacy under which he and many male artists then laboured. Moreover, he misrepresents the Victorian period and its influence in Aotearoa/New Zealand, offering the same false dichotomy Allen Curnow would go on to advance in the introduction of his Penguin anthology (1960). Here, Curnow fetishises colonial poetics in Aotearoa/New Zealand as pathologically feminised: ‘We may catch them in absurd postures, trying to concoct the “national” by colonial pressure-cookery, with much sentimental steam and scraps from Victorian kitchens’ (1960, p. 22). This m/Other-blaming domestic metaphor is then exteriorised by Curnow as ‘that violent and disabling oppugnancy between a Victorian sensibility and an antipodean situation, which so stultified the endeavours of colonial versifiers to set imagination at work in their new surroundings’ (p. 23). Curnow and Johnson identify the connotations of ‘Victorian’ as pejoratively feminine and hence a tendency to be expunged.

Nevertheless, ‘Victorian’ sensibilities foreground traits valued both then and now as generically ‘Kiwi’. These include the right to personal freedom, the questioning of authority in the pursuit of fairness, and the need for individual accountability when faced with an ethical dilemma. The principal Victorian texts that signified these sensibilities for New Zealanders were the works of Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and the Brontë sisters, writers who – melodramatic or not² – rigorously interrogate moral expedience. There are undoubtedly ‘soft and soulful’ aspects to Victorian literature, but it has an intellectual inheritance from the social radicalism that produced, for example, the abolition of England’s legal involvement in the slave trade. Moreover, the consciousness raising that saw New Zealand women in 1893 become the first in the world to gain the vote had as its precedent the advocacy of equality before the law – a value well evinced in Victorian fiction.

Mary Stanley's work is fully in sympathy with the progressive tendencies of the Victorian era. However, *Starveling Year* was not immune to self-censorship since Stanley was indeed 'inhabiting a man's world', as demonstrated by her treatment in Aotearoa/New Zealand literary critical discourse. Also omitted from *Starveling Year* was the sonnet 'To B—', which had been included in Charles Allen Marris's (1944) wartime anthology, *Lyric poems 1928–1942*. The long dash in the poem's title invites the subtext: *or not to be*, and anticipates the trauma to which the narrator's lover will be exposed in battle. The poem was highly transgressive as Aotearoa/New Zealand had, since July 1940, enacted conscription into the armed services. The poem dreads the loss of the beloved but attempts to console, not by valorising patriotic self-sacrifice but by celebrating the intimacy the couple have shared. It therefore also violates the code that a woman should have no sexual past to speak of. Born in 1919, Stanley had married on 2 January 1943, aged 23, and her wedding photo shows the men of the party in military uniform (New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre, n.d.). As a tragic complement to this early poem, Stanley's later sonnet 'Record Perpetual Loss', which she included in *Starveling Year*, would register the narrator's memories of her lover wearing away with the passage of time. Yet paradoxically, the poem also asks the reader to recall with her the husband taken from her in the conflict.

In August 1946, aged 27, Stanley married again. Her second husband was a fellow poet, Kendrick Smithyman. In 'Put off Constricting Day', another poem from *Starveling Year*, she celebrates sexual desire, but also reveals the ambivalence with which the husband of this piece responds to his passionate wife. It is transgressive material for a woman artist of any period – work every bit as 'adult' as Allen Curnow, writing of his high expectations of New Zealand artists, could have wished (Curnow 1945, p. 26; 1951, p. 25). On these grounds alone, Stanley should have been a shoo-in for inclusion in Curnow's 1960 Penguin anthology. A number of Stanley's poems had appeared in various local and overseas journals, and in 1946, three of her poems won the Jessie Mackay Memorial Poetry Award. This meant her publishing record and critical notice were equal at that time to fellow newcomers C. K. ('Karl') Stead and James K. Baxter, both of whom Curnow's anthologies go out of their way to include and praise. She was also part of a thriving writerly milieu in Auckland, where she and her husband knew Curnow personally. Not surprisingly, a four-page sequence of Smithyman's poetry was included in the second edition of Curnow's Caxton anthology (1951), a representation Curnow then tripled to 12 pages in his 1960 Penguin volume. But Mary Stanley is conspicuous by her absence from all three of Curnow's collections. What is more, Curnow snubs the publication of *Starveling Year* in his Penguin introduction with his concluding note that, 'Nowhere in the last decade have there been any poetic departures worth mentioning' (1960, p. 64).³ That can only have been salt in Mary Stanley's wounds.

Stanley's absence from Curnow's critical compass is partly explicable by the broad displacement during the post-war era of women from 'men's work' – of which Stanley was all too aware. But Curnow also had a more personal motive for her exclusion. According to Curnow's biographer Terry Sturm:

The discourse Curnow used to connect such 'universal themes' [as birth, life, pain, and death] to New Zealand was, essentially, psychoanalytical – an extension of his own long engagement in the 1930s with the psychic effects of colonisation on the behaviour of settlers. (2017, p. 155)

Throughout his anthology introductions, Curnow's historical illustrations mask the 'psychoanalytical' ideas with which he rationalises his colonising society's anxieties over separation from the m/Other(land). But psychoanalytics are equally at work in his efforts to resolve his own Hero-Genius complex.

A 'complex' can be defined as a core pattern of emotions, memories, perceptions, and wishes in the personal unconscious, organised around a common theme. The complex Curnow had to resolve was how to marry, on the one hand, his desire to achieve at the highest level in his chosen field of poetics with, on the other hand, his society's assumption that the arts were not an appropriate masculine activity. In the post-war era in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where the pinnacle of patriarchally approved 'manliness' was the warrior-athlete, male writers were susceptible to condemnation as effeminate-aesthetes.⁴ Curnow's aspiration to artistry therefore led him to seek aesthetic legitimacy in terms of the Hero-Genius mythos, in whose phallogentric strictures the erasure of the woman's voice is fundamental. Bracha L. Ettinger explains the Hero-Genius mythos as follows:

From the phallic point of view, the elimination of the archaic m/Other is the sacrifice necessary for heroic male sexuality to become productive ... Anyone, male or female who takes upon him – or herself this hero configuration becomes by definition a man who eliminates the archaic Woman-m/Other. The price to be paid for this is very high if you are a female artist whose sexuality fits badly into Oedipal father-son circulation. (2006, p. 174.5)

Mary Stanley's sexuality fitted very badly into Oedipal father-son circulation. Her focus on feminine generativity also makes her disqualification from artistic recognition mandatory for Curnow. In a letter he wrote in 1958 to his editor Eunice Frost, he justifies Stanley's omission from the Penguin volume on the specific grounds of her (pro)creative femininity. He was responding to a series of formal complaints that James K. Baxter had made to Penguin behind Curnow's back about who and what was – and was not – in the forthcoming (1960) anthology. In terms of 'father-son circulation', this was indeed a suggestively Oedipal conflict between Curnow as 'the king' of Aotearoa/New Zealand poetics and Baxter as 'heir apparent'. Mary Stanley became the collateral damage in their standoff. Of the five writers whose treatment Curnow felt obliged to justify to his editor, Stanley was the only woman. But despite his cutting remarks about the four men he mentioned, they are all represented in the Penguin volume. Only Stanley is entirely blocked, her omission implied by Curnow as unarguable:

Mary Stanley (Mrs Kendrick Smithyman) – I know her well, and she would be the last to rail at me for excluding her. The verse of hers that has appealed to a very few people I know is mostly obstetrical phantasy and mother-wife-sentiment. I know nothing by her which gets across her private frontier. (Curnow, 1958, p. 4).⁵

In a classic blame-the-victim manoeuvre, Curnow's hostile attitude to Stanley's work is off-loaded here onto the poet herself – 'she would be the last to rail at me'. His implication of her inferior personal status is also asserted as self-evident in the revelation that she is wife to Kendrick Smithyman, whose work Curnow featured. And with the phrase 'a very few people I know', Curnow also obscures the significant level of public recognition Stanley's work then enjoyed. In fact, Stanley is not disqualified from inclusion in Curnow's anthologies because of the impermeability of *her* 'private frontier', but because of the impermeability of *his*.

Under the terms of the Hero-Genius complex, Curnow is intent on installing his own phallogentric phantasies at the core of Aotearoa/New Zealand poetics. To facilitate this, Mary Stanley's work in the area of feminine-generativity – what Curnow terms her 'obstetrical phantasies' – must be erased. Ettinger has theorised that the Hero-Genius complex, which I consider motivates Curnow at this time, is one in which, 'For the hero to be born of himself, the archaic becoming-mother must melt into obscurity and senselessness as a Thing of no human significance' (2006, p. 173.4). This erasure of feminine generativity can be tracked across Curnow's three post-war anthology introductions, as he enlarges the scope of heroic masculinity by incrementally dismantling and erasing the poetics of his women peers. The

psychological imperative for these suppressions is asserted in Curnow's 'Attitudes for a New Zealand Poet I, II & III', first published in his 1943 collection *Sailing or Drowning*. He revised this triptych at age 63 for the 1974 publication of his collected poems. The minor changes he introduced in that volume are justified by Curnow on the grounds that for a poet, revision 'is a good risk to take. If he doesn't revise, he is in effect concealing something from the reader: some part of his own better understanding' (1974, p. xii). But despite these late changes, Curnow's 'better understanding' does not cause him to resile in any substantive manner from the predatory psychoanalytic premises of the earlier version of 'Attitudes'. However, in keeping with his wishes, I have worked here from his emended later version of the triptych, as also preferred by Elizabeth Caffin and Terry Sturm in their recently edited volume of Curnow's collected poems (Curnow, 2017, pp. 98-99).

Over the years, the third sonnet of the 'Attitudes' triptych has been repeatedly anthologised and referenced in both critical and popular culture as a touchstone for post-colonial Aotearoa/New Zealand identity. But the near absence of references to its two precursors, which remain critically under-read, suggest that the full significance of Curnow's 'Attitudes' remains culturally repressed. This points to the continuing currency of the phallogocentric premises Curnow employed in his triptych, which are still circulating unacknowledged in Aotearoa/New Zealand poetics to this day. And it should also be recognised that whenever 'Attitude III' is published alone, as has become the convention, Curnow's and his editors' insistence on including the 'III' in its title functions as an unheimlich 'tell', pointing to the otherwise repressed significance of 'Attitude I' and 'Attitude II'.

In 'Attitude I', which begins with the line, 'That part of you the world offended so', Curnow establishes his psychoanalytic frame of reference by making his narrator an analyst in session with a mentally conflicted analysand. In 'Attitude II', beginning 'World, up to now we've heard your hungers wail', the poet commands the reader's compassionate empathy for the suffering of the nation's soldiery, returned from the theatres of war. Curnow valorises the trauma of these warriors, contrasting it to the merely theatrical abjection of the heroine of John Webster's play, *The Duchess of Malfi*. This seventeenth-century work served Curnow as a historic exemplar of female erasure, which Ettinger recognises as integral to any ascription of Hero-Genius.

Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* subverts patriarchal authority by marrying and (pro)creating without male permission. Her brothers punish her with a ritualised act of theatrical gloating after murdering her unauthorised husband and all her children. This cataclysmic extinguishment of the Duchess's generative femininity drives her to suicide. Webster's play illustrates dramatically Ettinger's criterion that the archaic becoming mother must succumb to 'obscurity and senselessness' so that a male artist can fulfil the terms of the Hero-Genius mythos. In 'Attitude II', Webster's symbolic annihilation of feminine sexual agency is thus restaged by Allen Curnow in a specifically Aotearoa/New Zealand setting.

'Attitude III' is the only sonnet in the 'Attitudes' triptych with a subtitle. The subtitle alerts the reader to the Duchess of Malfi's local transfiguration as m/Other in 'Attitude II' into 'The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand'. Through imagery which strips the maternal Duchess of her voluminous, pregnancy symbolising and fertility signalling Elizabethan skirts, *the Mother* is [re]presented to the reader as *the Moa*, whose feminine generativity has been symbolically emptied out of her, leaving an extinct skeletal artefact displayed on 'iron crutches' (Curnow, 2017, p. 99). In Ettinger's terms, this indeed makes her 'a Thing of no *human* significance' (2006, p. 173.0; my emphasis). But since this bird is also specified by Curnow as egg laying, she is nonetheless indisputably female even though he refers to her now as 'it' (2017, p. 99). But then, in an audacious change of gender, her acknowledged feminine generativity is plundered for masculinity in Curnow's

phrase ‘bone to *his* bone’ (p. 99; my emphasis). This pronoun sleight of hand sees Curnow incrementally and covertly redirect the generativity of the archaic, (pro)creative Mo(th)a from femininity to masculinity. It is her secretively appropriated (pro)creativity that then endows the poet with the Hero-Genius required to vanquish the ‘dark continent’ of indigeneity.⁶

Following this colonising triumph, in the concluding couplet of ‘Attitude III’, Curnow offers the conjuror’s humbly innocent tears-of-a-clown disclaimer that, ‘Not I, some child of a marvellous year/ will find the trick of standing upright here’ (2017, p. 99). But for readers who see through the misdirection in Curnow’s triptych, recognising its symbolic crippling and expropriation of feminine and indigenous voices in Aotearoa/New Zealand poetics – hence their ‘iron crutches’ – this coda must ring hollow. Yet it should not be forgotten that Curnow’s sequence, in all its brilliant trickery, adheres to an aesthetic progression prescribed and authorised by patriarchy.

In further service of his own Hero-Genius complex, Curnow would source for his (1960) Penguin introduction yet another historic textual exemplar of the covert appropriation of feminine generativity. An extract from New Zealand writer Samuel Butler’s novel *Erewhon* (1872) offers Curnow a legitimising precedent for the attacks on his women peers in his two Caxton anthology introductions (1945; 1951). It also supplies him with symbolic justification for his further denunciations of women poets in the 1960 Penguin volume, and validates, psychoanalytically speaking, the entire erasure of Mary Stanley. The extract quoted by Curnow is as follows:

I dreamed that there was an organ placed in my master’s wool-shed; the wool-shed faded away, and the organ seemed to grow and grow amid a blaze of brilliant light, till it became like a golden city upon the side of a mountain, with rows of pipes set in cliffs and precipices ... In the front there was a flight of lofty terraces at the top of which I could see a man with his head buried forward towards a keyboard, and his body swaying from side to side amid the storm of huge arpeggiated harmonies that came crashing overhead and round. Then there was one who touched me on the shoulder, and said, ‘Do you not see it is Handel’; – but I had hardly apprehended, and was trying to scale the terraces, and get near him, when I awoke, dazzled with the vividness and distinctness of the dream. (Butler, 1872, pp. 29-30; cited in Curnow, 1960, pp. 23-24)

For Curnow, Butler’s extract offers the reader ‘an experience of the primitive stuff of New Zealand mind’ (1960, p. 23). Whose mind we may ask? This phantasy sequence from *Erewhon* appears (out of *nowhere*) to validate Curnow’s assertion that local poetics must be purged of a sentimentally feminised ‘Victorian sensibility’ (Curnow, 1960, p. 23). And, as a precursor to the ‘Attitudes’ triptych, it encapsulates the process whereby woman’s feminine generativity is secretively expropriated, and woman herself ritually annihilated and expunged, all in the service of the male Hero-Genius. But Curnow also privileges Butler’s phantasy because of its anxiety-allaying illustration that the artist authorised as a Hero-Genius – no matter how conventionally unprepossessing their masculinity – is absolved of any taint of femininity/effeminacy. Curnow is signalling Butler’s phallic dream as the originary and precedent-setting primal scene of Aotearoa/New Zealand literature.

Butler’s phantasy begins in a womblike ‘wool-shed’. The fibres from wool-gathering, otherwise a form of feminine dreaming, are specified by him as under ‘my master’s’ patriarchal regulation. This reservoir of female (pro)creativity is then summarily ‘faded away’ so that what was a symbolic storehouse of feminine generativity can be secretively repurposed as fuel for the ‘great organ’ that suddenly arises from it, to be played on by Handel. The *handling* associations of the composer’s name and his accompanying ‘head buried forward’ posture with gestural ‘swaying’ are a symbolic assertion of sexual *self*-stimulation. Yet the composer’s symbolically phallic *instrument* is fuelled by covertly expropriated feminine generativity. Nevertheless, in the majesty of his newly engrafted, purportedly self-created ‘cultural’ surroundings, ‘Handel’

– despite his unassuming appearance – is presented as a peak-conquering soloist. And since his ‘organ’ is responsible for a deluge of musical delights, the passage’s narrator aspires above all else to make his acquaintance. In this phantasy of phallogentric ascendancy, high art is treated by Butler and endorsed by Curnow as the exclusive province of the male-identified virtuoso. As Ettinger explains:

This is the psychoanalytic basis for understanding the genius-male-hero-complex: born from no womb, the Artist-Genius is in fact the idea of a god transferred to man, now self-creating and holding the power of creation. Thus, the denial that allows for secretive and buried appropriation of maternal gestation, begetting, birth-giving, and love in the service of father-son relations creates the Genius-Hero myth on the sacrifice of the eliminated and evaporated archaic Woman m/Other. (2006, p. 174.5)

Curnow’s cultural consecration as Hero-Genius has likely reached its apotheosis in Sturm’s sumptuous biography (2017), which appeared in tandem with an equally handsome companion volume of Curnow’s collected poems (Curnow, 2017). In his review of the biography, Simon During expresses some gentle bemusement at this annunciation (2018, p. 21). But for me, the superlative production values enjoyed by these works register the deep love and respect for the poet, which are shared by those who have benefited from and empathise with the evolving resolution of Curnow’s Hero-Genius complex. His ‘consecration’ recognises that in the post-war period, at a time of traumatic recalibration of warrior masculinity, Curnow courageously asserted that artists in Aotearoa/New Zealand who identified as men were entitled to aspire to the highest levels of aesthetic achievement recognised in patriarchy. That the Hero-Genius paradigm Curnow advocated has continued to fuel the work of Aotearoa/New Zealand artists to this day is entirely understandable, since warrior masculinity remains as prominent in the world as it ever was, while those who operate from alternative (aesthetic) models often feel as though they are taking a leap in the dark.

Understandably, the male poets and critics of Curnow’s time – of whom he was the leading light – welcomed his male-exclusive myth making with some relief, as much for its alleviation of imputations of effeminacy as for its affirmation of high aspirations. But with the feminist resurgence in the 1970s, Curnow’s efforts to drown out the poetic voices of his women peers increasingly seemed too convenient to be true. Anyone who cared to listen more carefully (though few did) found that transgressive artists like Mary Stanley – for whom feminine generativity is a central premise – had been left out in the cold. As Peter Simpson notes:

Stanley differs in important respects from women poets of her own or earlier generations such as Blanche Baughan, Ursula Bethell, Eileen Duggan, Robin Hyde, Ruth Dallas, and Janet Frame. All were single women not blessed or burdened with marriage, motherhood (except for Hyde) and domesticity. (2000, pp. 46-47)

Starveling Year was Stanley’s multifaceted examination of a woman’s (pro)creativity and how she expresses it through compassionate hospitality towards the unknown Other. But the male-focussed literary climate supported by Curnow saw to it that Stanley went unpublished for over two decades. Then in 1977, nine of her poems appeared in *Private Gardens*, the anthology produced by Riemke Ensing to mark the 1974 United Nations International Year of Women. If it were not for Ensing’s anthologising intervention, Stanley’s work could so easily have ‘evaporated’.

What had we been missing? The *Private Gardens* anthology reopened the question of how a woman-identified artist (wherever they might be situated with respect to sex or gender) could evade the phallogentric Hero-Genius model to which Curnow subscribed, and so fulfil their full aesthetic potential. According to Ettinger, such artists will recognise that:

If the elimination of the archaic m/Other as the source of life is in the service of male narcissism and identification, then for female narcissistic development, such an elimination is dangerous: it is precisely what constitutes her as the sacrifice. If creativity is to be rethought through the feminine, it should not, in my view, follow the pattern of that [male] hero. If it does the sacrificial components will destroy the she-hero – not even from the outside, but from within, because her modes of differentiating will be extinguished. I dare say that as long as this [phallogocentric] pattern of that hero is the only possible model, only a dead woman-artist, or a woman-artist that is in principle out of the procreation cycle, can become such a ‘genius’ and represent the creative, symbolic begetter. (2006, pp. 174.5-175.6)

However, Ettinger also suggests that there is a way to occupy the role of the Hero-Genius that does not require the symbolic extinguishment of an archaic m/Other as fuel for such an aesthetic identity:

Against this [phallogocentric] position, the concept of the matrix moves the womb from nature to culture, making it the basis for another dimension of sense ... and for a supplementary feminine difference that is the human potentiality for a shareability and a co-poiesis where no ‘hero’ can become creative alone. (2006, p. 180.1)

In the interests of such a Matrixial shareability and co-poiesis, there follows here my own short survey of some of the poems from Stanley’s oeuvre that are significant to me – both personally and aesthetically.

Stanley’s poem ‘For My Mother’, included in *Starveling Year*, recognises the ambivalence of a daughter towards a m/Other described as ‘Nearer than lover’ (Stanley, 1994, p. 12). This sexually charged phrase registers the intimacy of prenatal ‘non-prohibited incest’ that, for Ettinger, installs into each of us during late pre-birth the human propensity for compassionate hospitality towards the unknown Other (2006, p. 141.2). Ettinger describes this as a capacity ‘modelled on intimate sharing in *jouissance*, trauma and phantasy in the feminine pre/birth sphere, [where] the womb stands for a psychic capacity for shareability created in the borderlinking to a female body’ (p. 180.1). The mother in Stanley’s poem attempts to mitigate the constraints of patriarchy for her daughter, though bound by them herself: ‘The multiple face/ of her kindness was peace in a warring house’ (1994, p. 12). The daughter then conceals her immaturity from her mother, even as she grows in ‘disobedience’ towards her (p. 12). But at the same time, she remains deeply receptive to the compassionate hospitality that arose from their borderlink as adjacent ‘unknown others’ in their originary, Matrixially premised relationship of late pre-birth: ‘Our parallels may never meet/ yet I return, my sons at my back ... in the debt of her love ... the stranger/ climbed out of her cradling breast, my manger’ (p. 12).

Stanley explores mother-child relationships again in ‘Nursery Tale’, also from *Starveling Year*, where the poet brings scholarly erudition and technical brilliance to my own memories of what it’s like to be up in the middle of the night, soothing and feeding a beloved child. The narrator describes her maternal body in this poem, not as a passive receptacle but in terms of her independent agency, as she offers herself in compassionate hospitality to her infant: ‘My mendicant, caught between two seas/ with the world at your elbow for a begging bowl’ (1994, p. 18). Which elbow? I think both. The poet recognises here the inner ‘world’ in which the child has been formed out of the m/Other’s entrails, and equally the outer world in which the mother now cradles her son. Her own belly is a begging bowl, containing her womb as the active site into which she once gifted her growing infant’s nourishment. That nourishment is now drawn down by him from her milky breasts, represented here as ‘two seas’.

Family is likewise at the heart of Stanley’s ‘The Wife Speaks’, a poem I read out at my own mother’s funeral. In this piece, clocks whose faces have ‘asking eyes’ mutely question how ‘The Wife’ who winds their hands now spends the time they tell (1994, p. 23). But despite her unfulfilled ambitions, she accepts that she must close her books, because hers is a setting in which even ‘Night puts/ an ear on silence where/ a child may cry’ (p. 23). To meet her

children's needs, the poet must be hyper-vigilant; her underlying desire for a change in her domestic circumstances is stifled by the horrors that she anticipates any such change could produce. Her longing to express her audacious creativity is self-rebuked by the image of Icarus fallen, 'feathered/ for a bloody death' (p. 23). The brutal eloquence of the poem thus subverts its ostensible theme of wifely self-abnegation.

I read another of Stanley's poems at the funeral of my mother's closest friend. 'Householder' (in *Starveling Year*) embraces the covert hedonism of a Kiwi summer and expresses delight in nature's exuberant will to misrule. The pines planted around the house usually afflict it with an inveterate chilliness, but once immersed in lazy seasonal heat, the poet glories in a chill made subversively sensual. Stanley's ability to capture a timeless cultural mood is evoked in other poems too. 'Sonnet for Riri' (also in *Starveling Year*) is an expression of full empathy for a stranger – an emigrant, a refugee. So painfully relevant to the post-war period, this poem could not be more current today.

The dangers that patriarchy and its unacknowledged phallogocentric discourses continue to represent for woman-identified artists are epitomised by the critical marginalisation of Mary Stanley's life and work. However, the acuity of her poems also suggests that it is now time to consider her not as a solo, sacrificial, and silenced victim, but as somebody whose (pro)creative sensibilities can be a touchstone for any artist determined to treat feminine-generativity as both inspirational and unhidden. What is more, to encounter and share Mary Stanley's poetics on these alternative Matrixial terms employs a model that collegially recognises the writer herself as a she-Hero.

JANET CHARMAN is a poet, whose latest poetry collection Surrender (2017) chronicles her writing residencies in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Her monograph, Smoking: The homoerotic subtext of 'Man Alone'. A Matrixial reading (2018) can be downloaded here. A paperback edition is forthcoming from Steele Roberts.

Notes

1. This sonnet, along with other poems and images of Mary Stanley can be found on the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre website: <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/stanley/index.asp#gallery>.
2. Erin Mercer (2018) makes an indispensable case for the literary legitimacy of the melodrama genre.
3. Curnow also ignored the work of his Māori contemporaries, most obviously Hone Tuwhare. As Tuwhare's biographer Janet Hunt notes, 'From early 1958 [Tuwhare's] poems appeared in a range of magazines and periodicals. *The Listener* and *Northland Magazine* printed regular contributions and poems also appeared in *Te Ao Hou*, *WAG* (the official publication of the New Zealand Workers Union), *Landfall*, *Mate*, *Monthly Review*, *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook*, *Historical Review* and *Motive*' (Hunt, 1998, p. 65).
4. Karl Stead has given an account of his own homophobic anxieties at first meeting the *Landfall* editor Charles Brasch. The 21-year-old Stead protected himself against what he refers to in this piece as a 'whiff of Oscar Wilde' in the other man, by 'acting in a way that was quite false, playing the part of what would now be called a "jock"' (Stead, 2008, pp. 19-20). Poet Peter Bland also testifies to the post-war pervasiveness of homophobic anxieties: 'The 50's were very repressive. People don't realise. People used to put brown paper covers on poetry books so they weren't seen reading poetry on the bloody tram. The number of times I was told in the street to get a haircut' (quoted in Broatch, 2012, p. 32) Hone Tuwhare had similar experiences: 'My workmates would say, "What kind of rubbish have you written today, Hone?" I'd be so excited I would want to show people. They'd just groan. Thought I was queer' (quoted in Hunt, 1998, p. 65).
5. Thanks to the Curnow estate for access to related correspondence at the Alexander Turnbull Library.
6. Curnow described the 'archaic' Māori work he chose to feature in his Penguin volume as 'salvaged' from 'the colonial phases of the 19th Century' (1960, 19). For a discussion of the phallic gaze that informs Curnow's selection and placement of this indigenous material, and a Matrixial supplementation of the patriarchal significance customarily accrued to the haka *Ka Mate*, whose 'sporting' mana Curnow also seeks to symbolically appropriate to Aotearoa/New Zealand poetics, see Charman (2017).

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