

Shape shifter

Old man, I heard you on the radio,
last week it was; e koro
you are fading fast, silvering, slowing down.

The bouncy girl on the other mike
had a voice taut and springy as a rubber ball,
while yours flowed deep and slow,
soft-edged, eddying in quiet swirls,
singing a rhythm closer to the earth than us.

E koro, you call for women
to write their passion boldly on the page –
as if you weren't the only man brave
and humble enough to do just that
in this cool, reserved land of ours;

you call for poetry to be as real
as every thing that moves us
be it anger, humour, exaltation
or the loves and lusts which shape
the singularity of our lives.

You're not afraid of death;
I 'know' – I've read it in your poems.
I've heard you on the telly,
and on the radio last week I heard

her rhythm in your voice and one day soon
she'll snap her knees together
and you'll be flung into her distant night.

Hine-nui-o-te-po.

E koro,
you will ravish her:
sly-fingered, you will offer
greenstone words, leaping silver fish,
the lumbering laughter of Tangaroa,
and the aching passion of the land
that has licked your feet these many years;
she will lap you up!

Old man, I heard you on the radio □ last week,
soft-edged, calling for passionate poems,
from women.

Kei te pai, e koro,
lean on your laurels a little,
let us give to you a while;
gather your strength – even for you,
that Hine will be a real tough nut to crack

Miriam Richardson

1999