

The Limits

Alice Miller The Limits

AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS



First published 2014

Auckland University Press
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand
www.press.auckland.ac.nz

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ISBN 978 1 86940 806 0

Publication is kindly assisted by



National Library of New Zealand Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Miller, Alice, 1982-

The limits / Alice Miller.

ISBN 978-1-86940-806-0

I. Title.

NZ821.3—dc 23

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Cover design: Philip Kelly

Cover image: Neil Dawson, *Canopy*, 1993. Carbon fibre and stainless steel suspension sculpture, 8 x 5 metres. Acc. 1994.307, commissioned 1993, collection of Queensland Art Gallery. Photographed by Mark Sherwood, QAGOMA

Printed in China through Asia Pacific Offset Limited

*for my parents,
Peter Miller and Sue Oakley*

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They gathered in council
And spoke, carrying objects.
They were credulous,
Their things shone in the forest.

They were patient
With the world.
This will never return, never,
Unless having reached their limits

They will begin over, that is,
Over and over

– *George Oppen, from 'Of Being Numerous'*

skin

BODY

It's strange to want to give someone the earth
again. It's strange to be the same planet
but split to forge a new, raw globe,
past plundered by lovers and strangers. Forgot
the way my own earth cracks, and tries to make
its half an other's, forgot old stories re-made
to fable, to a minor bible for a plastic land.
We walk our planet and the print of our feet scrawls
onto our bodies. Each morning we walk to unearth
more mountains. Each day I sing the valleys
alive. Each night you find a dark pool,
and when you test it with your toe, a green
river ruptures. A quiet mirror opens.

APPLE

The night the earth's crust cracked
under us, great
hands reaching

to brush the earth's skin

to crane red fingers up

and caress the green

we felt the planet wrench herself,
rip soil from rock, split trees
shudder buildings till they broke

and tore our eyes wider

AFTER BATTLE

This stitching between bodies isn't skin.
It's only old rope, easily cut.

Where the seam tears there's blood.

I found a body under the trees,
thrown from its horse.

I wrapped taut silk around its bones
and watched the rivers roam the roads.

It was just me and the body.

I pretended it lived, and together we listened
to the sly sounds between trees.

*

I want you to come here,
restitch your head to your shoulders,
and form a word with your soft mouth.

Come here and surrender.

Because there are still days that my army
loses horses, days I lose sun

and try to saddle up the darkness –

and whenever we ride to battle together, it rains
and we cannot see sky for water,
and the grass becomes dirt, and

waves break the fields, and the bodies
all muddle into the earth.
And although your breath

was once pressed into mine,
I no longer know who's against me.

steps

WAIATA

Morning and your eyes

blow open, encircled by ripples of skin.

You're looking at the wall – at the white square the mirror
once covered.

Did you really let out all the birds? you say. I put

my hand on your neck

but your head won't move. Your eyes

look like the holes left

when two stones are

thrown in a river.