



J. Hillis Miller. *Topographies*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995. Pp. xiv, 377. \$49.50, \$16.95 pb.

During the last decade the scholarly output of Hillis Miller has been truly prodigious and of consistently high quality. Professor Miller remains a remarkably astute reader of texts in several languages and a scrupulous student of those texts' variant forms and critical reception. The collection of essays under review, most of them previously published but all revised for publication here, reveal the consummately professional scholar refusing to cut corners. Deriving from 12 lectures and seminars given across the world, this collection hangs together by virtue of its commitment to exploring the sense of place available in language, literature, philosophy, and "political or legislative power" (4). It is given further cohesion by Miller's recurrence to his favourite authorities and tools: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, de Man: phenomenology, speech act theory, rhetorical analysis, deconstruction. All of these are deployed in an unswerving if somewhat dated and naively New Critical attempt to "take each text at its word, without presuming to know beforehand how its generic [or historical] placement ought to impose a way of reading" (6).

Miller's long and ambitious opening chapter on "Heidegger and Hardy" suggestively traces the interanimation of mimesis and self-reference in *The Return of the Native* with the aid of three difficult but influential essays on "The Origin of the Work of Art," "Building Dwelling Thinking," and "The Thing," essays which Miller for the time being reads less politically than he will in chapter nine. His texts are well chosen because their celebrity in different quarters helps him create space for much of what follows. If he can reconstitute Hardy's chthonic Wessex as prosopopoeia and catachresis, then some of the more confident claims for verisimilitude, reference, causality, realism, can be set aside in favour of endless undecidability and "perpetually reversing metalepsis." There is salutary challenge and defamiliarization in abundance here, but Miller's argument is often vexed, or worse, by the citations he uses. For example, Hardy's celebrated opening chapter invoking Egdon Heath may be "an extended prosopopoeia" (26) but it is much more than that. And so, for the first of numerous times in Miller's reading, while he is pulling the rug from under more traditional readers of fiction, the novel escapes his reductive anti-grip, so that a phrase like "singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony," a phrase weakly paraphrased by Miller, virtually shouts the words "RACE" and "EMPIRE" out of the citation and into the 'world' to which even the most regional of novelists cannot help belonging. Not for the first time, Miller's textualism, his patient following of the links of rhetorical "concatenation," seems to blind him to the politics and ethics of reference, to the fact that we may be accountable to

something other than (though of course in part available through) language. Miller works hard, if not always plausibly, to link toponymy to topography, as in the following: "‘Eu’ matches ‘yeo,’ but ‘stacia’ is a dark counterpart of ‘bright,’ or sounds so to me, in spite of the presence in the ‘sta’ of Eustacia’s standing erect above the heath or the barrow" (48). But such manifest over-reading endangers his overarching claim that in understanding the "relationship between landscape and story" the familiar doublet of figure and ground is less appropriate than that of "figure and figure." And in any situation where "nothing but figure is possible, that figure is always catachresis" (52).

Taking such constitutive "incommensurability" as a "possible law," Miller explores in the ensuing chapters a "range of textual territories" while "respect[ing] what is most idiomatic, most special, about the work in question" (56). He reads Plato, Kleist, Dickens, Tennyson, Hopkins, Nietzsche, Faulkner, Heidegger, Stevens, Derrida, and the Book of Ruth. In each instance, Miller teases out the complexities of the canonical text before him, a number of which complexities will probably be new to even the most rigorous of readers. As usual with Miller, the "real" floats in and out of his argument when it suits him; history is put firmly in its place ("There are no degrees of distance from the past" [72], though we hear also that "Distance in the landscape is the immediate correlative of distance in time" [141]); literature becomes to a degree a source of "legislative power" (104), while in a wide range of predictable and unexpected performatives, "The words work on their own, mechanically, impersonally independently of any conscious, willing subjectivity" (124). For Miller, "speaking poetically" still means "speaking through image and rhetorical structure rather than through conceptual formulation" (137), and communicating more directly than, say, Althusser's "quaint Marxist language" (193), and more flexibly than, say, "the Three Fates of contemporary cultural studies: race, gender, and class" (201). The poetic speech of "The Idea of Order at Key West" is masterfully read as series of "new starts that display the ethics of topography" (290), an ethics of a piece with Derrida's future anterior tense and literature's "undecidability, inviolable secrecy, and the irresponsibility that is the most exigent responsibility" (312). And Miller closes with another spirited defence of deconstruction, engagingly honest and accurate one moment, while sounding the next like a naive liberal critic of the unequivocal brutalities and injustices of globalization. His final contribution is to show with great skill via the Book of Ruth how "a work of theory [can] cross borders, occupy a new territory, and make a new place for itself in a new language" (324).

As well as describing his essays as a set of texts which can "dictate" the terms of access to movement within their "terrain," Miller also conceives his chapters as "like transparencies superimposed in palimpsest on a map, each transparency charting some different feature of the

landscape beneath: annual rainfall, temperature, distribution, altitudes and contours, forest cover, and the like. The landscape 'as such' is never given, only one or another of the ways to map it" (6). After reading through these essays one can appreciate the way this figure, derived from Derrida's celebrated essay on "Freud and the Scene of Writing," is a testimony to *personal* modesty achieved by imperilling the *collective* knowledge of the land "as such" on which, for instance, indigenous peoples continue to pursue land claims. Miller's work will, because of its themes attract students of postcolonialism, but may disappoint many by its lack of that political agenda which has, willy-nilly, sustained the efforts of every cartographer of whom I am aware, in whichever traditional, exploratory, or regulative medium they may have worked. The eyes of satellite societies, overlooked and overflowed by dominant powers and their allies, are no less objective but surely more deserving of our support than the eyes of the orbiting satellite or the fighter pilot. Never mind asking a text, or uttering a neo-colonial performative, or reciting some Heideggerian mantra about "the ground of things, the preoriginal ground of the ground" (7). Just ask the Innu, and then listen.

LEN M. FINDLAY



Martin Allor and Michelle Gagnon. *L'État de culture: Généalogie discursive des politiques culturelles québécoises*. Montréal: GRECC, 1994. Pp. iii, 103. \$10.00.

Elspeth Probyn. *Love in a Cold Climate: Queer Belongings in Quebec*. Montréal: GRECC, 1994. Pp. iii, 70. \$8.00.

Though these two books are already three years old, their relative critical neglect is indicative of their limited distribution rather than any intellectual lack. Published by the Groupe de recherche sur la citoyenneté culturelle/Research Group on Cultural Citizenship, which was based jointly at Concordia University and the Université de Montréal and which has now been superseded by the Centre for Research on Citizenship and Social Transformation (Concordia), both books are exemplary of how cultural studies is being developed in important, compelling ways within the Canadian context. They may focus on Quebecois phenomena but their methodologies can also make important contributions to Canadian studies.

L'État de culture: Généalogie discursive des politiques culturelles québécoises (which is primarily in French but comes with a bilingual introduction) as the full title suggests is much beholden to Foucault. It is an archival project mapping and citing at length a complex genealogy of texts which reveal the power-knowledge relations of governance in Quebec since the dawn of the Quiet Revolution that have been most involved in the construction of what it is to be Quebecois. More specifically, the