

SETTLER'S POINT: A NOVEL

by

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(Under the Direction of Reginald McKnight)

ABSTRACT

“Settler’s Point,” began as a reimagining of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Set on an imagined religious commune in the Upper Midwest in the 1930s, the narrator is Anda, the preacher’s daughter. From its beginnings, the novel expanded into an exploration of the great American myths of pioneering, racial purity, and independence. Against the backdrop of the Dust Bowl, Prohibition, and rising KKK influence, “Settler’s Point” explores a community seemingly living outside of racial boundaries and yet founded on segregation and racial violence. My work scrutinizes the American desire to create “new” spaces and “new” means of existence. I examine how this pursuit of newness, which commits violence on existing cultures, also prioritizes the lie of racial and cultural purity.

INDEX WORDS: Settlers, Creative Writing, Fiction

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BA, Brown University, 2008

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2017

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August 2017

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*Writing In Tongues: A Critical Introduction To “Settler’s Point” [Adapted Electronic*

*Version]*

*Barbaric Language*

How do we speak of these crimes without speaking their language? How do we look closely enough at violence to tell its stories without turning its victims into a spectacle? Theodor Adorno famously stated that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34). In Lyn Hejinian’s essay, “Barbarism,” she addresses and rewrites that declaration, beginning with an analysis of the etymology of *barbaric*. Hejinian argues that the word comes from the Greek *barbaros*, meaning “foreign,” or more specifically, “not speaking the same language” (326). Twisting Adorno’s syntax—and thereby reflecting his later statements—Hejinian argues that poetry *must* be barbaric, it must not “speak the same language as Auschwitz” but instead “assume a barbarian position . . . occupying (and being occupied by) foreignness—by the barbarianism of strangeness” (326). This position, which Hejinian characterizes through the figure of *xenos*—a Greek word which is the root of the seemingly contradictory English words *guest* and *host*—exists in a borderland between foreign and local, self and other.

Hejinian’s command to speak strangely, rather than being linked to a Modernist or touristic pursuit of “the new,” is a means of exploring structures of language that, whether through formal, stylistic, or material means, do not replicate systems of oppression. For Gloria Anzaldúa, the “barbarian position” is a reality she already occupies. In her cross-genre work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa delineates the space not only of the physical border between the U.S. and Mexico but the psychological borders between the

different cultures she exists in and all the languages that she writes/speaks. At the crossroads between white and non-white cultures, femininity and machismo, straight and queer, Spanish, English, and Spanglish, Anzaldúa's borderland is "*una herida abierta*" (an open wound) (25). Her first action is to name and claim this space. Only then can she find strength in her mestiza identity, by learning to walk and write the "barbed wire" of her home (Anzaldúa 35).

My work inter/relates to both these overlapping definitions of borderlands, finding in writing both the process and the occurrence of *xenos*. I write from and to strangeness—or what Flannery O'Connor calls "mystery"—while seeking a means to not speak the language of colonialism and genocide (79). At the same time, I attempt to investigate how these structures have contributed to my identity.

Any American writer—whether they concede to it or not, whether their writing consciously reflects this reality or not—is writing after colonization, after slavery, after the Middle Passage. What for Adorno was an essential question is for those living in the Western hemisphere a *foundational* condition.

What then does it mean to speak barbarian? I see this practice as writing a mongrel language: a way of speaking, through the written, in tongues. *Tongues* relates not to language as unintelligible, but plural, paradoxical, and rooted in the body. When Cecilia Vicuña asked passersby in Bogotá what is the meaning of poetry, the best answer she received was "que prosiga," which she translates as "that it may go on" ("Language is Migrant"). Writing in tongues recognizes language as a form of revision as well as a possible conduit and process of the sacred. This language practice engages the past even as it rewrites it: becoming both the process and product of continuance.

Writing in tongues acknowledges and traverses the borderlands: it remixes and revisions, as it writes deeply of place and the connection between body and earth. This practice claims the doubleness of both self and stories, understanding language as a system which contains multiple interpretations and meanings. In this essay, I will outline the various tongues my work speaks and the ways in which it speaks multiple tongues at the same time. Through the consideration of writing as revisioning, I will trace the roots, influences, and major theoretical concerns of my writing in order to create an *ars poetica* of writing in tongues.

### ***Writing as Revision/ing***

Writing in tongues performs a literary pentimento in which the previous text is accessible within the new one. Revisioning is a form of writing in tongues in which the “original” and “rewrite” are in communication with each other. “Settler’s Point” began as a revisioning of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Set in the Upper Midwest during the Great Depression, the novel opens when the narrator Anda Surric’s father brings home a young boy to join his family and the religious commune he founded. Anda and her “new brother” instantly form an intense bond but the boy’s very presence begins to unravel long-hidden family secrets, throwing the Surric’s racial identity into question and threatening the stability of their sheltered community. In remixing the plot structure and characters of a canonical British novel, I drew on a tradition in postcolonial literature that rewrites “classics” of European literature. These works include Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Nilo Cruz’s *Anna in the Tropics* (a revision of *Anna Karenina*), and Cherríe Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, to name a few. These works are often called “rewrites” or “revisions” of their “originals.” The fact that these are the same words used for the process that brings a piece of writing from notes to drafts to published work is no

coincidence. Rather than function as mere sequels, remakes, or copycats, these revisions are themselves a way of writing in tongues by rewriting and reimagining the “original” work.

These works complicate the function of the novel in society, destabilizing its position as a means to secure and cement the values of the white middle class. Through revision (meaning both “seeing again” and “rewriting”) these works provide additional commentary on their predecessors, filling in the gaps and explicitly connecting the canonical works to issues of colonialism, imperialism, and inequity. Their revisions are often formally different from the “originals”—moving from novel to play (as is the case with Cruz) or from Classical Realism structures to narratives that combine traditional oral storytelling with meta-fiction techniques (in Rhys and Moraga). In following in these authors’ footsteps, I ask: what is the meaning of “original” and “revision” for colonized/post-colonial subjects? In what ways might a revision *rewrite* the “original”? Why revision elements of dominant culture to create new work?

Syncretism and hybrid engagements in culture are ways for writers of color and post/colonial subjects to engage in their lived experiences and cultural heritage. Artist and critic Coco Fusco writes that artists of color remix cultural traditions to make visible “a legacy of inequity by addressing the power relations involved in symbolic representation” (32). In their work, artists “stres[s] hybridity as a cultural experience and formal strategy” (32). In many instances, because of colonialism, the legacy of the slave trade, and economic conditions created by neoliberalism, few communities live in isolation from either the dominant culture or other marginalized cultures. Drawing on multiple cultures becomes a powerful means of survival, resistance, and expression: “rather than reject dominant culture for its exclusionary tendencies and retreating, literally or figuratively, many artists of color . . . are forcibly engaged with it in ways that make it new” (Fusco 33). Fusco’s words are not a refutation of Audre Lorde’s famous

statement that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (110). Rather, Fusco points out the ways artists work in both old and new tongues to *remake* the master’s tools through syncretic processes that acknowledge difference. These practices create new traditions through the revisioning of oppressive dominant culture.

Hybridity and revision are not postmodern buzzwords but creative practices embedded throughout the history of the Americas. In his seminal work, *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. maps how African American people use “signifying”—a form of wordplay that allows for multiple interpretations, also called double speak or talking with a double tongue—in diverse cultural traditions. Signifying created art forms that adapted aspects of dominant culture to both resist white supremacy and celebrate Black traditions and individuality. In Cuban culture syncretism allowed enslaved people to maintain outlawed religious traditions. Through the use of recycling the icons and language of Catholicism, Afro Cubans infused these symbols with their own meaning, thereby creating a new culture and religion. In their syncretic practice, Santeria practitioners speak in tongues: uttering the name of Catholic saints and, in doing so, invoking the once forbidden name of the Yoruban orisha the saint stands for. These syncretic cultures also provide/d means for the survival of indigenous Taino traditions in ways that are only recently being recognized, allowing for a continuance of culture despite colonialist atrocities.

Symbolic actions, whether in art or sacred practices, are sites of resistance, perhaps the “most important” because they are “signs in everyday life of an ongoing political struggle” (Fusco 34). Repressive governments’ attack on symbolic representation proves the power of these imaginative acts of covert and coded resistance. Looking at the practices of Latin American and African American cultural traditions, we can recognize resistance as a daily practice that has always been artistic. Through revision and speaking/writing in tongues, artists can “lie up a

nation” (Hurstun 19), creating within their practices sovereign communities that exist within and across imposed nationalistic borders.

Writing as revision is a way of reminding us that our true relationship with injustice is not “never again,” but, as Bernice McFadden wryly contends, “so long until next time” (“A Conversation about Race”). The persistent reoccurrence of violence and the continued ramifications of injustice call for continued return to stories that remain relevant despite the passing of time. *Que prosiga*: each generation revisits and rewrites new and old hurts in tongues of remixed language.

### ***Re/writing Heathcliff***

One of the most obvious sites of revision in my novel is the transformation of Heathcliff into Hurin, which can perhaps be understood as the *reoccurrence* of Heathcliff as Hurin. In both *Wuthering Heights* and “Settler’s Point” the central mystery of the novel is also its first question: Who is Heathcliff?/Who is Hurin? Even at the beginning, I want readers to question the origins of the unnamed boy Anda’s father brings home from River City. Is he related to Anda’s family? What is his race? How does his identity shape Anda’s own?

In choosing how to adapt *Wuthering Heights* for an American setting, my first line of inquiry was what would become of the novel’s most complex character—its crux and crucible—Heathcliff. Central to understanding Hurin was an exploration of Heathcliff’s race and his role both in the Earnshaw family and in larger forces of slave trade and globalism. In Brontë’s novel, Heathcliff is described alternatively as a “lascar” (a term for Indian, Arabic, or Cape of Good Hope sailors), a “dark-skinned gipsy,” and, by Cathy, as perhaps more royal than them all. He is brought from Liverpool—the center of the British slave trade—to isolated Yorkshire. Heathcliff

arrives without a name, without parents, his heritage unknown. He is named for the land formations that surround his new home, though he is surely not from that land. Maja-Lisa Von Sneidern argues that Heathcliff's introduction—Mr. Earnshaw inquires as to who owns him and he is described as “dark almost as if it came from the devil”—leaves no doubt regarding Heathcliff's “racial otherness” (172). When placed together these details refute a history of reading *Wuthering Heights* as a romance separated from racial, social, and political concerns. Moreover, rereading (and rewriting) the book with these considerations allows for a broader comprehension of the role of people of color in Western culture and history.

In Brontë's novel, Heathcliff's race and family history are never clarified. Perhaps this is because Brontë was raising with these details questions of colonialism and the slave trade that were so provocative and unnerving she could not address them head on but had to rely on suppositions, intimations, and clues. Another possible genealogy—that Heathcliff is in fact the illegitimate son of the white man he calls father—is addressed only circumspectly. These accusations are denied but not satisfactorily and the doubt of their possible kinship lingers over Heathcliff's romantic relationship with Cathy. The brilliance of the novel lies in not resolving either of these possible origins. Both remain possibilities. Therefore the question of Heathcliff's race and kinship weaves in and out of the reader's conception of him and his actions. In my own work I wanted to retain this sense of mystery, though by different means and under different terms. In “Settler's Point” the possibility that Anda and Hurin share a father exists until near the end of the novel. It was my intention that this possibility act not just as a red herring, but as a means of emotionally connecting Father to Hurin and implicating Father in larger issues of inequity.

Even considering the racist language and symbolism surrounding his character, Heathcliff is *Wuthering Heights*' most important figure and certainly its best remembered. This staying power is due both to his character and to the racial inequities his character covertly explores. If, as Paul Gilroy writes, "slavery is capitalism with its clothes off," Heathcliff is slavery's chickens come home to roost (15). In the most recent film adaptation of the novel, director Andrea Arnold cast two Black British actors to play Heathcliff—the first time an actor of color was cast as Heathcliff in film. Young Heathcliff (played by Solomon Glave) speaks no English, but curses and shouts in an unnamed language, terrified of the Earnshaws whom he regards as his captors. However, Arnold's choice is complicated in the second half of the film. James Howson, an unknown actor, plays the older Heathcliff, yet in post-production his voice was dubbed over by another actor's. In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison address the convolutions and contortions white artists sometimes go through rather than fully humanize a character of color (73). Both this contemporary dubbing and Brontë's own dehumanizing of Heathcliff are examples of an inability to fully allow characters of color to have agency. Yet Heathcliff's story, even deracinated and bleached in contemporary film and television versions, still carries immense cultural power. In that way he lives beyond the limits of the book, claiming a hold over the reader's imagination and a kind of immortality and agency through haunting and reinterpretation.

I see Heathcliff as a Gothic Caliban made brutal and monstrous by a white author. Yet even in that inhuman depiction he carries enough complexity to reveal both Brontë's racism and her attempts to confront that racism. Cuban critic and writer Roberto Retamar famously reclaims Caliban as a representation of Caribbean people and history: a figure who uses the language of his oppressor to vividly and eloquently curse him (14). This revision of Caliban—the work of

revealing a supposed monster's humanity and in doing so rewriting the identity of postcolonial subjects—is continued in Aimé Césaire's *Tempest*, Elizabeth Nunez's *Prospero's Daughter*, and recently Safiya Sinclair's poetry collection *Cannibal*. In my own writing, the reimagining and rewriting of Heathcliff/Hurin allowed me to interrogate U.S. cultural narratives while revising *Wuthering Heights* as an American (as in North, Central and South) story.

### ***Re/visioning Race***

The racial violence in the novel's opening pages makes the ground my work stands on very clear. However, rarely in the novel is race (as it is discussed in current terms) mentioned. Skin color is referenced in relational language. Anda's brother is pink. Hurin is copper and looks like her. (Though in the U.S. "copper" has historically referred to Native American heritage, in Cuba and the Caribbean it refers to people of mixed ancestry.) Other than a few instances, race is not mentioned until the final third of the novel when it becomes essential to the narrative and proves that it was essential all along. My intention was that the opening belies this silence and places race and racial violence as the foundation of my novel.

From its beginnings, the novel expanded into an exploration of the U.S. national narratives of pioneering, racial purity, and independence. Against the backdrop of the Dust Bowl, Prohibition, and rising KKK influence, I wished to explore a community seemingly living outside of racial boundaries and yet founded on segregation and racial violence. I hoped to scrutinize the American desire to create "new" spaces and "new" means of existence. I wanted to examine how this pursuit of newness, which commits violence on existing cultures, also prioritizes the lie of racial and cultural purity.

### *Seeing the Racial Subject*

As a mixed race Cuban American, issues of race and whiteness are deeply personal. For Cubans both on and off the island, whiteness is a status symbol and many Cubans deny the extent to which the African Diaspora influences and creates Cuban culture. It was important for me to set this novel in the United States to explore how the cultures of people of color have shaped the U.S. imagination and national identity. Through “Settler’s Point” I examined the conceptions of whiteness and white supremacy in the United States. I did this in order to, as Toni Morrison writes, study the “impact of racism on those who perpetuate it” and make visible the racial subject (*Playing in the Dark*, 11).

Whiteness as an identity is marked by generations of deracination, racial violence, and denial of the ramifications of that violence. These realities and their erasure produces insecurity and fear. James Baldwin writes that:

Something very sinister happens to the people of a country when they begin to distrust their own reactions as deeply as they do here, and become as joyless as they have become. It is this individual uncertainty on the part of white American men and women, this inability to renew themselves at the fountain of their own lives, that makes the discussion, let alone elucidation, of any conundrum—that is, any reality—so supremely difficult. The person who distrusts himself has no touchstone for reality—for this touchstone can only be oneself. (57)

I wished to explore white guilt and the fear of this guiltiness. Some refuse to accept guilt, while some attempt to assuage, but it cannot be assuaged, because it is centuries older and nations larger than any one person. This knowledge of complicity creates a sense of insecurity.

Stories of hidden kinship figure heavily into early African American and Latin American literature and were major influences on my novel. These narratives were means of highlighting both the sexual abuses of slavery as well as the realities of mixed race lives. The narratives of Victor Séjour's short story "The Mulatto," William Wells Brown's *Clotel: or, The President's Daughter*, and Francis Harper's *Iola Leroy* all hinge on kinship ties that were hidden to preserve the lie of racial purity<sup>1</sup>. Cuba's national novel, *Cecilia Valdez*, by Cirilo Villaverde (1882), was another important influence for "Settler's Point." In the novel, which was written before the abolition of slavery in Cuba, a beautiful young *mulata* falls in love with the son of a wealthy slave trader who is soon revealed to be her half-brother. Though the reader is quickly aware of this information, the two lovers are not, and the other characters in the novel work to maintain the secret. The motives behind this occlusion are multifold. By denying the lovers' kinship, the myths of racial purity and white supremacy remain intact. Incest is less taboo here than the truth incest reveals: that of kinship between the races, familial connections between people who are free and people who are owned, who are not considered people.

The doubleness of these sibling relationships—where the sibling is both self and other, both the same race and not—is a way of writing in tongues about the complexities of mixed race identities. In novels of passing, the trope of two siblings with different complexions is common. In Nora Larsen's *Passing* (1928), the narrator's sister is unable to pass due to her complexion. This trope continues through Helen Oyeyemi's 2014 novel *Boy Snow Bird* (itself a revision of Snow White), when the birth of a child with dark skin reveals that a central family has been passing as white. In these novels siblings often represent the experiences of mixed race families,

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Chopin's 1893 short story "Désirée's Baby," represents an effort by a white writer to examine the lies of white racial purity and white supremacy.

while simultaneously revealing the sometimes fluid nature of race and the lie of white supremacy. In their open examination of the hidden, novels of passing allow the reader to confront unspoken conceptions about whiteness, thereby undermining white supremacy. Whiteness is only possible and powerful in its agreed upon invisibility. It is the opposite of the emperor's new clothes: everyone sees it and everyone pretends they do not. As Danzy Senna writes in *Caucasia*, a novel that follows two mixed race sisters with different complexions, whiteness does not like to be seen, it likes to look (61). By undermining structures of racial purity, these novels allow whiteness to be seen.

In his nonfiction work *Nothing Ever Dies*, Viet Thanh Nguyen argues against this concealment of history and for a type of memory that remembers both one's own and the other. This "just memory" is a complex system in which both sides in a conflict are understood to be human and inhuman. The concept draws "attention to the life cycle of memories . . . how they are fashioned and forgotten, how they evolve and change" (Nguyen 12). In my work, I try to use writing as a form of just memory which acknowledges that the war over the memory of conflict is as important as the physical battle itself.

### ***The books within the book: Syncretism and Intertextuality***

Writing in tongues acknowledges the inherent intertextuality of artistic practices. Through my writing I hope to deeply consider cultural syncretism and revision practices by highlighting the "books within the book." This phrase refers to both the intertextuality of the novel's structure and my syncretic influences as a writer. Early in "Settler's Point" the narrator Anda finds a book buried in the forest that she calls "the atlas." Throughout the novel the atlas interrupts Anda's narrative, forming a mysterious linkage between the two texts. Anda's story is

interwoven with excerpts from the atlas that contain rewritings of sacred stories. As the novel continues, the tales from the atlas begins to shape and predict the narrative, revealing important occlusions in her family's past. The question of narrative perspective is key: is the novel the atlas's story or Anda's? Where do the borders to these two identities/narratives meet?

In Yoruban religions and in Santeria, the trickster is Eleguá, Lord of the Crossroads, sometimes an old man, sometimes a child, and despite his playfulness, extremely powerful. He is the orisha of communication between humans and gods. Without him there is no way to reach the heavens. In the U.S., Eleguá evolved into Papa Legba, a powerful figure of survival able to live in both white and Black worlds. As Henry Louis Gates writes in *The Signifying Monkey*, Papa Legba's ability to signify, or speak with a forked tongue, provided a model for Black people to exist, create, and thrive in a country that denied their humanity. The convergences of these sacred stories on land familiar to me but not mine was the genesis of much of the novel.

Writing "Settler's Point" was a continual movement between four sources, like the cardinal points on a compass or the different tongues the novel speaks. Inspired by their content and imagery, I began with a remixing of *Wuthering Heights* and TV on the Radio's song, "Family Tree," written by Tunde Adebimpe. This song constructs a lyrical, imagistic narrative of a mixed race relationship that takes place in "the shadow of the gallows of your family tree" the image out of which grew the gallows tree in "Settler's Point" (TV on the Radio). In terms of style, tone, and politics, I moved between Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. These novels, perhaps more than any others, have shaped my creative practice. I wished in my work to have these novels speak to each other, to traverse the distance between them, and try to understand a history that could create them both.

These questions of intertextuality are iterations of broader question of authorship. Who and where is author? Where does the text begin and end? Trinh T. Minh-ha asks “if writing . . . does not express language but encompass it, then where does the written stop? The line distinguishing societies with writing from those without seems most ill-defined and leaves much to be desired . . . Living is neither written nor oral” (126). Where then does Anda’s story start and the atlas’ begin? The atlas speaks in tongues, and the written-ness of the words are unclear. The atlas swells and shrinks, stories hide within it for years. Father, though the most literate of the characters, cannot read it. In this way, the atlas functions closer to oral and physical cultural traditions that pass on stories and knowledge in ways that are difficult to understand from an outsider perspective. Difficult or impossible: a song leaves no trace unless you are there to hear it.

### ***Reimagining Place/Revisioning Self***

Writing in tongues both places writing in the body and grounds writing in place. It claims writing as a bodily act and highlights the situated-ness of self. As Louise Erdrich writes, “it is difficult to impose story and plot on a place. But truly knowing a place provides the link between details and meaning.” I cannot imagine a story without a place. From setting emerges character, desire, and conflict. Erdrich’s words apply not only to “real” places but “imagined” ones that exist at the nexus of, or, in the case with “Settler’s Point,” as revisions of different cultural narratives. The setting of “Settler’s Point” is a dream space of an idealized Upper Midwest—according to white settlers. The land is fruitful and pristine. It is called a “new world.” The specifics of the novel’s location are left opaque, but the setting is clearly a northern U.S. state, one with a large coastline of a Great Lake. I imagine the location to be like the farms in Ashland

County, Wisconsin: thick forests painstakingly cleared for pastures, brutal winters, and Lake Superior stretching into the horizon like a forgotten coast. However, this utopian space reveals itself as both a literal and figurative graveyard: contested, written upon, bled on, fought over, and holding many bones. The U.S.'s cultural narratives, no matter how idealized, reflect the realities of our violent history. Therefore, an revisioned setting can function not as an escape but as a means of seeing and engaging with the realities of inequity.

Setting the novel in the Upper Midwest was important to me because of the sense of impunity that exists among Northerners regarding U.S. history of slavery and genocide. Growing up in Wisconsin, slavery was regarded as a Southern sin rectified by brave Yankees. I wanted to place this novel in a location not usually associated with this history as a means of addressing how slavery and colonialism have shaped all aspects of U.S. history and society. Though Wisconsin was never a slave state, major crimes of colonialism such as the Black Hawk War of 1832, broken treaties, and forced removal from tribal homelands took place there. Across the Wisconsin border in Mankato, Minnesota 38 Dakota men were lynched in 1862 by the U.S. government, the largest execution in U.S. history. Now, according to several markers, such as incarceration rates and educational failures, Wisconsin is considered the worst place in the U.S. for Black people to live.

Through my work I seek to examine how nationalistic cultural narratives stratify and oppress those outside of the dominant narrative. "Settler's Point" is set *within* dominant U.S. narratives yet the earth itself bucks against these lies and reveals a more complicated history. Within the imagined setting, I drew on the historical reality of the Dust Bowl to speak slantly about global climate change and directly about our dependence on the earth. Writing about the natural world today is a form of mourning but also a hope for survival.

The horror of climate change can be too awful to consider, yet as Erdrich writes, “to American Indians it is as if the unspeakable has already happened, and relatively recently.” In my own work I am heavily influenced by the work of writers of color, Native writers, and survivors of atrocities whose writings continue culture and inquiry in the face of loss. The work of these artists can be guides to others for how to honor the survivors and victims of these atrocities and prevent further ones. If we, as a species, are to survive the coming flood, we must listen to those who have already survived. I believe that our connections to the earth and to other species contribute a great deal to what makes us human. Climate change forces the question: “Are we going to be human, or will we de-humanize ourselves to the point where the Earth itself will dream our end?” (Vicuña).

A profound engagement with setting and place involves all the senses and is also a form of re-engaging with one’s body. Critic and artist Trinh T. Minh-ha reminds us that “we do not *have* bodies, we *are* our bodies” and she proposes a mode of writing in which language is “linguistic flesh” (36). She argues that there is a difference between writing the body and self and writing *about* the body and self. The second approach adheres to the fallacy that an artist’s work exists separate from rather than “simultaneous with” the artist’s life and self (Minh-ha 35). Writing is a means of becoming and this process both engages the body and forgets the ego: “I write when I leave speech, when I lose grip on it and let it make its way on its own. I am there only to provide it with a passageway” (Minh-ha 35). In my own writing, I hope to practice “hearing with the others’ language and seeing with the others’ eyes” because I agree with Minh-ha that the “more ears” I hear with (and the more tongues I speak with) the more I am able to see the “plurality of meanings” and the less I lend myself “to the illusion of a single message” (36). In Minh-ha’s nurturing-writing (“nourricriture”) the body is revealed as both site and

passageway for one's own and others' experiences and memories. The body is a rich text and an unfurling setting.

### *Settler's Point*

My new brother, no longer so new or my brother, but I will call him that because he had no name when he first came. Not in the way that I did, Mama impressed upon me. Even if I had not been born, I would still have a name. My new brother had no such luxury. He was born nameless, drifting through River City like Moses through the reeds. My father plucked him from the docks, reached his long arm and shook the pigeon feathers and refuse. My father, the Pharaoh's daughter. He brought my new brother home and gave him to me as a gift.

My new brother was not pink and soft like my first brother, Jacob, who took years to turn into a person, who even then stayed pink and soft. My new brother arrived complete, with no spots on him too delicate to touch.

It was October, cold, but the grass still green. I watched from the gallows hill. My new brother mapped the known world when he entered it, riding beside Father on the buggy. Just by looking, not saying anything, following Father's finger when he pointed across the fields, to the homestead, to the gallows. My new brother laid it bare. He delineated whole swaths of space and he called some things monsters and some things ghosts and some things by words I am still too afraid to shape. He understood the world was as complex as a vein. It hurt to uncover it.

I did not ask for my new brother, but he was finer than anything I could dream. He came the year I turned eleven, two years before the nation fell into a hole so deep and endless that even

we, in our new bright world felt the tug downward. He began as a black speck against the fields, growing slowly until he eclipsed everything in sight.

My new brother stood in the middle of the kitchen. Only his breath was audible, heavy and catching in his throat. All other sound had stopped. He was a dirt smudge on Mama's clean floors, a snag in her pressed white linen.

The sun does not shine in River City, Father said, Mountains of coal along the river catch fire and the poor gather around them for free heat.

Is that where you found him? Jacob said.

Yes. Huddled beside the smoldering coals, barely clothed as you see him now.

Is that why he's so dirty?

We are all as filthy in the eyes of God. Thank your new brother for reminding us.

Out of here, Mama said.

She would wash my new brother and I would think of a name. I crept across the porch and peered through the shutters. My new brother was covered with streaks of black soot. His stomach, a pale copper, stuck out. Mama scrubbed his whole body. When a rag would not do, she brought the brush she used to scour pans. More and more of his body uncurled. Mama was tearing too hard, she wanted him to whiten. I knew then only of boys who cried, the Olsens, the Larsens, pink, pink Jacob, but my new brother's face was unmarked.

All I could see was the back of Mama's black dress, shiny from wear, and her white headscarf wrapped three times. A drop of sweat eased out from under the cloth and unfolded down the curl of her nose, but not a wisp of hair escaped. Mama leaned down to gather more water from the tin tub. Then she stopped.

She kissed my new brother on the back of his neck, swiftly, pressing her lips through his matted hair. He made no reaction and she bent down again to wet her brush. She kissed me only when I begged for such a ballast—rarely even then.

Mama stayed stooped, her back turned. But through the steam and wood smoke, my new brother rooted me out.

I pulled my own white headscarf tighter around my ears until the two ends juttied out like a cat's, alert where mine were hidden. But my new brother didn't smile. He stared, face unmoving, until I dropped below the window frame.

I had to think hard on a name for my new brother. Without a name he had no words. Without words, his staring stopped my breath.

Of all our land, the woods were never completely settled, but deep in them I had found a whole iron stove someone must have trucked in piece by piece. It was large enough to climb into and hear the wind around me, the voices of bears and pines. I cleaned it and lined it in pine needles so no one would know where I went.

I only wanted to show my new brother the stove. I could not have known what would happen next.

He had never been in a forest. I told him to chase me but he could hardly run in the new shoes Mama gave him and I shouted at him to take them off. He did, pulling at the laces, hopping on one foot and then the next, but not stopping. He outstripped me, legs exactly my length but stronger. We tore a path between the ferns and princess pines, scaring black squirrels and chickadees, our feet pounding over the loam potent with oxygen and able to carry a fire underground for miles.

He was far ahead and then he raced back to me, grabbed my hand. With his fingers wrapped tight around mine I could run faster than I ever had. Sweat beaded on his cheeks and above his lips so dark they were almost purple. We ran until there was only the sound of our breath and our heartbeats thudding in our ears. The light filtered into scent, wet light on wet pine. I closed my eyes, stretched my arms. My feet knew nothing of ground, only air and entering it. His hand was cool and I loved him as I knew I would never love anything else.

Our running must have scared the buck, rutting towards its mate or rival, itching its antlers against the rough bark of black ash. He was a great, old beast, his antler's stretching into more rungs than my years. He pawed the ground with his hooves, stirring up yellow pollen and my new brother stomped his feet in answer.

The buck should have been frightened, the noise we were making, we should never have seen him. But he was not frightened. He charged, head down, before I could pull my new brother from his path. My new brother did not turn or shout, instead he held out his arms and ran to meet the charging animal.

For a breath, my new brother was crouched in the dust, reaching for the white diamond at the buck's throat, and then the buck was above him, antler's thrashing and hooves crushing. He leapt into the forest before I could scream, leaving only a trail of crushed green branches and my new brother, lying still on the pine needle floor.

I knelt beside him and looked down. I could see him better than when Mama was washing him, when he stared and stole my breath. His eyelashes were long and black, the closed lids heavy and set deep in his skull like mine. I slipped into his skin like into warm, clean sheets. Like into my own reflection in the pond. My chest hurt and my mouth filled with hot liquid I didn't want to swallow. I touched his chin and he opened his eyes, spit

blood on both our collars. I wanted to pet his black curls, to feel my way deeper inside him, but he was already standing.

I pointed in the direction the buck had gone. He ran and I ran after him.

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