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“I HAVE BEEN SOMEWHERE:” PLACE IN THE SOUTH CAROLINA POEMS OF NIKKY
FINNEY AND KWAME DAWES

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by

PURVIS CORNISH

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis focuses on the role of “place” in the poems of two black South Carolinian poets, Nikky Finney and Kwame Dawes. Borrowing from cultural and humanistic geographers’ myriad understandings of place, as well as philosophers’, I examine the ways in which Finney’s *Rice* and Dawes’s *Wisteria* function as meditations on and transmutations of the South Carolina low country in both its physical and non-physical dimensions, ultimately shedding light on historically silenced and marginalized emplaced realities. I also examine how Finney and Dawes employ different strategies of emplacement and their influence on the poems’ structure and meaning. In the final chapter of my thesis, I put my own emplaced poems in conversation with Finney’s and Dawes’s, and I further analyze my creative process and product to understand more deeply the range of choices available to poets interested in poetry of emplacement.

DEDICATION

For the millions of African herbalists, educators, scholars, architects, merchants, mothers,
fathers, sons, and daughters pulled to sea,

For the millions of women and men whose lives and labor were stolen in this country's
holocaust,

For the millions whose voices guide everything I do,

This is for you, the beautiful and unbreakable ones. This is because of you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many, many thanks to my advisor and friend Dr. Chiyuma Elliott, whose guidance and encouragement were unwavering and timely when I faced bouts of stress and doubted my own abilities—your words were always a calming voice amid the chaos. I would also like to thank my readers, Drs. Katie McKee and Leigh Ann Duck, for their invaluable insight and suggestions. To my Black Graduate and Professional Student Association family, Curtis Hooks, Aida Solomon, Devin Geary, and Tonell and Courtney Jones, thank you for being the most supportive friends that anyone could ask for; I am forever indebted. And a final thanks to my wonderful family—I love you all.

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INTRODUCTION

THEORIZING POETICS OF PLACE

Poetry has always enrolled geography in its imaginative work. However, despite the potential congruencies between literary scholarship about place and cultural and humanistic geographies (an academic field devoted to the study of place), literary criticism in the main has not made use of definitions, insights, and approaches from the latter field. In my study, borrowing insights and frameworks from cultural and humanistic geographers and philosophers of place, I will examine place in recent works by two South Carolinian poets, Nikky Finney (a South Carolina native) and Kwame Dawes (who has spent a significant portion of his career in the state). Their respective works *Rice* (1995) and *Wisteria: Twilight Poems from Swamp Country* (2006) are both “rooted” in South Carolina (S.C.), and concentrate on the low-country region—specifically, the Sea Islands and Sumter. While the two collections are concerned about place, they both use different emplacement strategies to bring to light (and life) the historical, mental and experiential layers of place via narratives of black men’s and women’s lives, from the Middle Passage to the reign of Jim Crow.

For Finney, place is bound up in personal memories and history—history of coastal South Carolina, Sea Islands and the black residential Gullah-Geechee culture. In the preface of *Rice*, Finney writes, “I believe South Carolina has disregarded much of its African heritage....In my ongoing passion for South Carolina, I continue to seek out all seeds of its African lineage” (Finney xvi). What unfolds, then, is a collection highly attentive to place as having been shaped

by history, specifically that of chattel slavery along the state's coast, and contemporary issues regarding the removal of their descendants—Gullah-Geechee people—from the land that they were promised in the dawn of emancipation.¹ More, she is interested in reinserting black bodies and voices into historical narratives that have conventionally effaced them. Place figures largely in this text as both human and non-human, as the poems in *Rice* seek to reestablish the connection between the bodies of her ancestors (both conceptual and historical) to the land that they occupied and cultivated. In order to reclaim the history of place(s), of land, Finney delves in its palimpsestic potential and creates a poetics of emplacement that acknowledges and is guided by the *genius loci*—or “spirits of place”—of the Sea Islands and its natural components.

Dawes also explores the social, cultural and historical layers of place, focusing intently on the landscapes of human feeling and action that are circumscribed by and corollaries of the social and cultural dimensions of place that beleaguer the black body and mind. Instead of focusing on the direct connection between land and self, ála Finney, the natural, physical world stands in as a kind of backdrop against which action and narrative occur. Place often feels more generalized and “Southern” (rather than particular and South Carolinian) in these poems, which is where Dawes's poetics of place diverts from Finney's. However, there are key moments in

¹ In his 1906 article, “Forty Acres and a Mule,” historian William Fleming examines freed blacks' expectations of land ownership during the latter years of the Civil War and in the dawn of emancipation. Under the Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862, the federal government deemed any property aiding the Confederate army, and any property owned by Confederate soldiers as abandoned and liable for confiscation. As the Northern army pillaged the South, freeing millions of enslaved men and women, the newly freed African American relied heavily on the support of the Union forces and the Treasury Department, but neither entity desired the onus of supporting millions of African Americans; this prompted the federal government's deliberate efforts to distribute land to black men to encourage self-support. The most sweeping confiscation and distribution occurred along the sea islands, starting with coastal South Carolina down to the tip of Florida. “On January 16th, 1865, General William T. Sherman issued ‘Special Field Order No. 15,’ which set aside for the settlements of negroes all the sea islands south of Charleston, the rice-fields along the rivers for thirty miles inland from the sea, and the country along the St. John River in Florida. In the territory thus set apart for negro settlements, no white persons were allowed to live; the management of affairs was to be left to the blacks.” Walter L. Fleming, “Forty Acres and A Mule,” *The North American Review* 182.594 (1906): 725.

Wisteria when the particularity of place emerges, sometimes in order for the poet to accurately render the action in the poem. Dawes also differs from Finney in that his poems delve deeply into the mental and- emotional-scapes, especially those of children's, during the mid-twentieth century. While Finney historically emplaces her poems in both the present and the antebellum past, Dawes's temporally situates his poems in the early to mid-twentieth century. The poems in *Wisteria* are oral history poems centered on the narratives from men and women in Sumter; transmutations of intimate revelations and private occurrences that reflect individual subjectivity, rather than overt political and social statements akin to Finney's. Put differently, Finney's poetics of emplacement unapologetically functions as political and social commentary on the South's (and more specifically South Carolina's) historical amnesia and erasure, whereas Dawes's poetics of emplacement—which is equally interested in preserving local and regional memories and history—privileges the individual's emplaced subjective experience to subtly rupture the historical euphemisms and inaccuracies to which history's "lions" have conveniently clung.² Although the poets employ different dimensions of place, they both create and guide us

² In his essay "Politics of Poetry," Poet David Orr provides a constellation of perspectives regarding the relationship between poet and the political. He argues that what poets and politicians have in common is their "totalizing vision," the belief that they are representatives of a community larger than the self, which derives from the nationalism of late nineteenth century poetry. Cautious to give a definitive explanation, Orr suggests that political poetry "demonstrates a...spirit of public involvement," and, echoing Percy Shelley, carries the responsibility of awakening the people (Orr). Expanding on Orr's arguments, poet Robert Archambeau notes that most (white, male) contemporary American poets "no longer see themselves as representative of the nation. In fact, most poets who see themselves as representative of a group are either post-colonials or members of other historically or currently oppressed groups" (Archambeau). He notes that while poets might have cultural and symbolic capital, poets and poetry are semi-insulated from echelons of power associated with governmental politics and market forces, which naturally aligns their totalizing visions to the "left". "The left leaning 'totalizing vision' of poets, tend to share the concerns of the poor, or at least the not-rich, having only moderate incomes and job stability" (Archambeau). Archambeau's most poignant remark, however, is when he notes that the poet who hailing from racially or gender oppressed groups look beyond the connection between poetry and politics to identity politics; the "political" then is congenital, to some extent, to the poetry these groups. His argument is apposite here, especially with regard to Finney and Dawes. David Orr, "The Politics of Poetry," *Poetry Magazine*, July/August 2008 (July 2008): np., online, 3 May 2015. Available: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/181746>; Robert

through the rupturing of history, where, to borrow from Amiri Baraka's "Political Poem,"
"theories / can thrive, under heavy taurpalins / without being cracked by ideas."

Regarding why the poets might avail different constituents of place, one could argue that the poetic stakes of connecting black subjectivity to the physical land might not be as high for Dawes as it is Finney, because he has no familial or historical linkage to South Carolina; his characters, though based on real women, are not kin. Despite that different connection, the poems of *Wisteria* are interpretations of how self and place, in its more intangible permutations, conflate to inform black subjectivity in the South Carolina low country.

Often considered the phenomenological extension of "space," "place" carries a multitude of definitions and conceptualizations across a number of academic fields. While the term "place" might be highly familiar, it is a surprisingly opaque concept. Nevertheless, scholars of place agree that there exist boundaries and understandings that relieve place from total amorphousness. Humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, who is often cited as a preeminent revivalist of place in geographical scholarship, observes that place is less abstract than space, and is the transformation of an undifferentiated space to place as humans "get to know it better and endow

Archambeau, "Poetry, Politics and Leanings Left," *Poetry Magazine*, Nov. 2008 (Oct. 2008): np., online, Internet, 3 May 2015. Available: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/181746>.

It is important to note that what generally characterizes Nikky Finney's poetics, from her earliest collection, *On Wings Made of Gauze* (1985) to her 2011 collection *Head Off & Split*, is an unwavering allegiance to the "political." Finney's works pulsate with unrelenting critiques of American institutions, particularly the politicization of race in America as a mechanism to ensure black inferiority. In *Rice*, Finney's poetics of emplacement folds together memory and place to address historically political issues of slavery and violence against black bodies; it is political in that, through the realms of symbol and language, she unsettles mainstream historical narratives by witnessing, paying obeisance to, the chorus of voices from the old. Similarly, Dawes's poetics of emplacement is political; however, he is quieter, more distanced from his anger (and the anger of the women he interviewed). His poetry glares through the sullied heart of American society, while fashioning a renewed pride in the triumph of South Carolina's black ancestors. By his own admission, Dawes suggests that the "politicalness" in his poetics seeks to "help us understand the historical significance of the world we live in today." Kwame Dawes, "Political Poetry," *Harriet: A Poetry Blog*, Poetry Magazine. 9 May 2007. Web. 3 May 2015.

it with meaning” (*Space and Place* 6). Place is space imbued with culture, history, human experience and understanding; it is “an organized world of meaning” (179). Lucy Lippard, apropos of Tuan, holds that place is:

a portion of land/town/ cityscape seen from inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. Most often entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is longitudinal and latitudinal within the map of a person’s life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there” (Lippard 6).

As a concept that privileges the subjective and the experiential over the cool, hard logic of space, place naturally requires, as Eric Prieto avers in *Literature, Geography and the Postmodern*, “both space and time in order to make its coherence felt to an observer” (29).³

Spatially, places exist within other places and are therefore free of any definitive scale, yet are still bounded in the sense that,

sense of place arises when a space is grasped from within, as a unity...To be perceived it must be perceived as having boundaries—limits of some kind although they need not be of a physical nature...[B]oundaries provide a way to

³ In *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern*, Eric Prieto “examine[s] the ways in which literary representations help us to understand the often misunderstood properties of emergent forms of place” in the late twentieth and early-twenty first centuries.” Drawing from geographers, phenomenology, post-colonial theory and an assortment of other fields, Prieto makes the case that literature and literary criticism provide readers with a framework to help them “resist the dualist tendency to oscillate between reactionary conservatism and utopian futurism” (4). Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place*: (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013): 2, 4.

define the unity and coherence of any given place...[T]hey may, on the other hand, be *porous*, in the sense that they do not exclude an awareness that there is an enviroing world that interacts with and impinges on the locally defined place in various ways (28).

In a world riddled with constant fragmentation and disruption (i.e. globalization), place, then, is most commonly understood as antithetical to motion and to the objectivism and freedom of space. Place, as Tuan avers, is a pause in movement (*Space and Place* 6).⁴ As a pause in motion, place is perspectival, subjective, as “an active experiencing agent...both shapes and is shaped by the environment” (Prieto 29). If we are to place Finney and Dawes within Massey’s framework of place, then we are to frequently encounter tension and incompatibility, though there are nuances in the poets’ approaches that simultaneously position them within Massey’s camp. Both Finney’s and Dawes’s poetries are poetic pauses in moments in that they are reactionary, meaning that they actually seek to preserve the histories and uniqueness of place developed over time. Finney’s poetics of emplacement is conspicuously reactionary in that she responds to the conceptual (marginalized histories, the black body, and memory) and literal (coastal sea islands)

⁴ Offering a counterposition to Tuan is feminist geographer Doreen Massey, who vies for a more “progressive”, global sense of place that is less reactionary (“certain forms of nationalism, sentimentalized recovering of sanitized ‘heritages’, and outright antagonism to newcomers and ‘outsiders’”) and one that accommodates the acceleration of time-space compression and the possibility to *know* a place or have a sense of place from the outside (Massey 147). She adds, “For what is happening is that the geography of social relations is changing in many cases such relations are increasingly stretched out over space. Economic, political, and cultural social relations, each full of power and with internal structures of domination and subordination....In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that is it a weaving together at a particular locus” (154). Massey succinctly sums up how one can understand into four points: 1.) places are process; 2.) places do not have boundaries and is in fact linked to outside world, which is too viewed as a threat to place; 3.) place do not have a singular, unique identity by virtue of the fact that places have internal conflicts and struggles; 4.) None of the aforementioned arguments actually deny “place” or that place has importance and uniqueness. “The specificity of place is continually reproduced, but it is not a specificity which results from some long, internalized history” (155). Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: U of Minn. P, 1994): 147, 154-55.

incursion of time's erasure. Massey's "certain forms of nationalisms" that she deems problematic in reactionary senses of place are Finney's very deliberate form of "localisms," which derive from the Sea Islands and other coastal towns/cities "long, internalized histor[ies]" that Massey believes are anachronistic. However, Finney's forms of localisms are aligned with Massey's when thinking about the relationship of the black body in light of southern nationalism, especially the brand of "southernness" long propagated by the Southern Agrarians' 1930 manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, which defended the conscience-soothing, romanticized Lost Cause narratives of the Old South that excised the South's black brothers and sisters. The Fugitives Poets, as they were also called, resisted the incursions of industrialization, longing instead for the bucolic and pastoral, and for a reinvigoration of the "southern" identity.⁵ In light of their legacy that dominated most of the twentieth century, Finney's *Rice* (as well as Dawes's collection) is a tome of historical emplacements and emplaced histories—some imagined, others unimagined—responding to ideological and symbolic violence of southern myths channeled by the Agrarians. Finney's pause is responding to, even if circuitously, the Agrarians' endemic racism as if to say, *we are here, too, and are here to reclaim.*⁶

⁵ For a detailed look at the Southern Agrarians and their determination to sustain an idealized, invented "South" in order to keep the realities of histories at bay, see Michael Kreyling, "The South of the Agrarians," *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: U of MS P, 1998): 3-18.

⁶ For compelling discussion on how two black southern poets—Terrance Hayes and Natasha Trethewey—engage in the work of historical excavation as reclamation, see William Ramsey, "Terrance Hayes and Natasha Trethewey: Contemporary Black Chroniclers of the Imagined South," *The Southern Literary Journal* 44.2 (2012): 123, online, Internet, 3 May 2011. Available: <http://0-web.b.ebscohost.com.umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/>. The crux of Ramsey's argument is that the poet "must enter history as a self-aware, reconfiguring maker of history. Resourcefully imaginative excavations are required to recover materials deeply buried and long suppressed. The result is an ongoing birthing of mutli-vocal history that presupposes the chronicler engages not in neutral reception but in a constitutive act. The past is never past, and yet it must be newly constructed." Ramsey's inquiry is apposite to Finney and Dawes, because it demonstrates a proliferating poetic trend in contemporary southern black poet's, as accomplished poets like Hayes and Trethewey also respond to the realities suppressed in the social geography of slavery and Jim Crow. When thinking about Dawes's and Finney's works, Finney's reflects Ramsey's argument more clearly because she inserts herself in the text akin to Hayes and Trethewey, and is the daughter of South Carolina who desires to belong to the land of her birth, while being a proxy for the land's ancestors. Regarding

Dawes pauses in the moment of the individual anecdote, the personal revelations that could only have been rendered in their unique places and time. He resists Massey's position that it is possible to know a place from the outside, and turns "progressivism" on its head by offering an alternative "progressivism" that requires the heritage(s), and sometimes esotericism, of place. More, if pause is the "brief suspension of the voice to indicate the limits and relations of sentences and their parts" (Merriam-Webster), then perhaps Finney's and Dawes's poetics of emplacement *unpauses* voices rendered silent and abeyant memories. Poetry's pause in place, however, is the image and its ability to transmute emplaced experiences that are recent, yet distant, realities, bounded by (to?) place and time. Tuan writes that experience "has a connotation of passivity; the word suggests what a person has undergone or suffered. An experienced man or woman is one to whom much has happened" (*Space and Place* 9). He posits that experience intimates one's ability to learn from what he/she has undergone. "To experience is to learn; it means acting on the given and creating out of the given. The given cannot be known in itself. What can be known is a reality that is a construct of experience..." (9). Tuan continues, stating pithily, "[e]xperience is the overcoming of perils... To experience in the active sense requires that one venture forth into the unfamiliar and experiment with the elusive and the uncertain" (9). In Tuan's vein of thought, a phenomenological approach to Finney's and Dawes's

Wisteria, Dawes never "enters" the text and is thus unencumbered in that way. However, through oral poetry, he too chronicles the South as a collage of places by "taking possession of the [Sumter] soil" on behalf of the men and women from whom history's pen has been withheld. Also true of Finney's and Dawes's respective poetics of place, Ramsey notes that Hayes and Trethewey did not perceive historical inquiries as "memorializ[ations] [of] the past into granite fixity," but instead as "excavation of pliable materials for revised narratives. Their poems are keen moments of individual consciousness in which the poet feels free to find and reshape the clay sediments of dug-up history."

works is to enter the experience of the poetic subject, to make sense of what it means to overcome in a seemingly unprincipled world, what it means to be alive.

In *Place and Experience*, a philosophical examination of topography, J.E. Malpas observes that place and identity are interdependent, and that it is by means of emplacement, or being in place, that subjectivity can be had. “It is, we can say, in the dense structure of place that subjectivity is embedded and, inasmuch as subjectivity is only to be found within such a structure, so there is a necessary dependence of subjectivity on the other elements within that structure and on the structure as a whole” (Malpas 175). All that makes up a place—the history, natural landscape, human landscape, social practices, culture, etc.—constitute the subject and the ways in which he/ she *is* in the world:

Our identities are thus bound up with particular places or localities through the very structuring of subjectivity and of mental life within the overarching structure of place. Particular places enter into our self-conception and self identity in as much as it is only in, and through our grasp of, the places in which we are situated that we can encounter objects, other persons or, indeed, ourselves. In this respect, it is important to recognize that...we are the sort of thinking, remembering, experiencing creatures we are only in virtue of our active engagement with place; that the possibility of mental life is necessarily tied to such engagement, and so to the places in which we are so engaged; and that, when we come to give content to our concepts of ourselves and to the idea of our own self-identity, place and locality play a crucial role—our identities are, one can say, intricately and essentially place-bound (Malpas 177).

Place is most commonly associated with natural and external landscapes; however, in *In Place/Out of Place*, Tim Creswell aptly notes that “Places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either” (13). More, he argues that:

[p]lace combines realms that theory has sought to hold apart. Place as a phenomenological-experiential entity combines elements of nature (elemental forces), social relations (class, gender, and so on), and meaning (the mind, ideas, symbols). Experience of place, from a phenomenological perspective, is always an experience of all three realms, each of which affect our actions in place (157).

Applying Creswell’s theory, nature, social relations and meaning are usually framed together to varying degrees in *Rice* and *Wisteria*, as the Finney and Dawes are interested in weaving together these items that are conventionally held separate in order to (re)make and make sense of place. Finney, who is often times the speaker, emplaces herself in the poem and pulls together the natural coastalscape of the Sea Islands and its historical (and sometimes present) social relations of race and gender in order to “seek out all the seeds of its African lineage” (*Rice* xvi). Dawes’s poems, on the other hand, are devoid of the poet-speaker and move in and out of the particularity of place, engaging more deeply with how the subject makes meaning (or struggles to make meaning) of the experiential as the social and cultural dimensions of place permeate and circumscribe their lives.

Malpas, building on German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*, observes that in our poststructuralist age the rising resistance to place is due to its seemingly tenuous analytic power, which philosophers of space such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault

and Michel de Certeau believe puts too high a premium on the human individual and the subjective. However, Malpas offers a remedy to this dualism—subjective dimension and objective dimension—stating that “place begins with the recognition that is a concept that has both a subjective (experiential) dimension and an objective (material and spatial) dimension and that amputating place of either of these dimensions would gravely undermine the analytic power of the concept” (Prieto 26). For Malpas, place is an entity that precedes the subjective and objective and is “something *out of which* emanate both apparently objective facts, like location, and apparently subjective facts, like sense of place” (26; emphasis in original). Although he pays little attention to the cultural/social elements of place, Malpas nonetheless offers valuable insight into human subjectivity as a corollary of place that emerges in conjunction with the formation of place (30). As previously mentioned, Finney and Dawes reject Massey’s model of place that asks one to jettison place as an entity defined from the inside out; however, both poets recognize the currency in both the objective and the subjective, demonstrating that poetics of emplacement requires the two.

In thinking about the relationship between poetry/poetics and place, it is important to note that poetics itself is, as Jerome Rothenburg writes, “a process of cognition; of creation in that sense: knowing, coming into knowing where we are. To say, articulate, *our sense of being in the world*, however changeful, dangerous, & slippery” (Rothenberg 6; emphasis added). Knowing *where* one is and their *sense of being in the world* = place. That we might enter a place, know it, dwell in it, both imaginatively and physically, and thus produce a new “place” via the page where the “self” and place might become one and/or enter into conversation is one aim of poetry of place. The role of the poet, as Nikky Finney suggests, is to witness. On this score Annie

Dillard avows, “We are here to witness. There is nothing else to do with these mute materials we do not need.... We can stage our own act on the planet—build our cities on its plains, dam its rivers, plant its top soils—but our meaningful activity scarcely covers the terrain” (Dillard 72). She adds,

We do not use songbirds for instance... we cannot befriend them; we cannot persuade them to eat more mosquitoes... We can only witness them—whoever they are. If we were not here, material events like the passage of seasons would lack even the meagre meanings we are able to muster for them. The show would play to an empty house, as do all those falling stars which fall in the daytime. That is why I take walks: to keep an eye on things (Dillard 72-73).

Dillard’s emphasis on witnessing and indulging the material world echoes Mary Oliver, who reminds us that “[p]oetry was born in the relationship between men of earth and the earth itself. Poetry is a product of our history, and our history is inseparable from the natural world” (*Blue Pastures* 58). Accordingly, one way to understand poetics of place and emplacement is as an expression of the union between place and self, place and writing, and of how details and distinctiveness of place shape, influence, and even challenge the work of poets like Finney and Dawes.

Poetry of place, however, is not just limited to the inseparability of humankind and nature. As Pacific Northwestern poets and editors of *Windfall: A Journal Poetry of Place* Bill Siverly and Michael McDowell note,

Much contemporary poetry focuses on psychological states, feelings, intellectual concepts, or language play totally devoid of reference to the real, lived, sensually

experienced and infinitely varied physical world. Poetry of place may focus on such interior subjects, but it lets us experience them more profoundly and more authentically because they're rooted in a specific time and place... In its fullest sense, the term "place" in poetry includes not only the geographical location and natural environment, but the history of human presence and before ("Poetry of Place" 2).

I would argue that the understanding of place as history of human presence and this emphasis on the psychological and internal-scapes of place are particularly useful when thinking about poetry written by African American writers, in that what it means to *have* place is historically and conceptually fraught. At least for Finney and Dawes, their poems suggest that a major responsibility of black poets who are committed to poetry of place is uncovering, unearthing, the buried presence of ancestors whose *sense of place* is vexed due to their positions in society's racialized and gendered social strata. Put differently, poetics of emplacement emerges from borderlands, namely the beings and ways of being that we often overlook. Poetics of place is not just '*interested in*' History's overlooked and interstices, but is also the road there. *Knowing* the place is the only beginning, the point of departure for the poet. But it is not the destination; "the destination, rather, is rupture" (Johnston). And as stated earlier, Dawes's and Finney's poetics of emplacement traverse palatable narratives of confirmation (knowing), and it is not until the unsettling of place's visible and invisible borderlands of social relations, meaning and experience therein, and the natural world that place is fully realized in these poems.

In *The Role of Place in Literature*, Leonard Lutwack so ably writes about the currency of place in English literature and the balancing act the poet is caught up in, noting that:

the poet is restricted in his use of place. Place is only part of the phenomenal world at his disposal, and if he exploits it for his own sake his writing sinks to the rather insignificant sub-genre Dr. Johnson called “local poetry” or place poetry...A place may inspire, but a balance must be maintained between the place that inspires and the poet who is inspired, between object and subject (Lutwack 14).

Lutwack observes that “if landscape is viewed too objectively, mind is threatened,” and, while referencing William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot, notes that “place [can be used] as frames within which the poet ranges freely in pursuit of a chain of reflections that spring from associations with places but ultimately transcend place in order to use it as a symbol for a variety of ideas—freedom, faith, divinity” (15). Lutwack’s statement brings to mind Dawes’s strategy of using the languages and “codes” of swamp country (or more vague regional signifiers) as a framework, or foundation on which he launches examinations of more abstract musings—for example, a domestic’s seemingly unrequited love for her own daughter, or inquiries into the immensity of the hate it takes to string up a child as though he were a man. With respect to Finney, whose poems are more legibly “South Carolinian,” place in its conventional and unconventional incarnations provide a framework for Finney to personally celebrate and bemoan the vestiges of the coast’s palimpsestic past, while also reminding the reader that she is our valiant one that “bronco buck[s] the clouds and cares...”⁷ reinforcing her commitment to grappling with history on behalf of everyone’s humanity. To ultimately transcend place means that while poetry of place is ostensibly about distinct places, place (natural, external place) attenuates at some point,

⁷ Nikky Finney, “The End of It,” *Rice* (Evanston: TriQuarterly/ Northwestern U P, 2013): 182.

and “one looks in vain for the substantiality of place in them, [given that] so dense is ‘the metaphysical fusion of thought and reality, of psychic and urban physiognomy’” (Lutwack 16). In other words, the poets’ primary responsibility allegiance is their craft, which favors the internal landscapes to the outer.

Now consider Gaston Bachelard’s assertion that the poetic image affords the reader and poet an opportunity to (re)experience place as the image reverberates and causes a “change of being”:

...a phenomenological inquiry on poetry aspires to go so far and so deep,...
[I]t must go beyond the sentimental resonances with which we receive (more or less richly—whether this richness be within ourselves or within the poem) a work of art. This is where the phenomenological doublet of resonances and repercussion must be sensitized. The resonances are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence. In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet’s being were our being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberations’ unity of being (Bachelard xxii).

In other words, the poem invites the poet and reader to experience place in such a way that it is felt and not just seen. Like Lutwack, Bachelard’s assertion assumes that the poet is the poem’s subject/speaker, in which case Dawes presents a challenge because the voices in *Wisteria* are all distinct voices. Notwithstanding the absence of the poet-speaker, Dawes’s attention to the emotional and psychological engenders within the reader the reverberation of, for instance, the

naïveté of a black child during the mid-twentieth century and the incessant sense of threat and worry. In contrast, Finney is often the speaker in *Rice* and uses the poetic image as a means to give herself back to place, while allowing her place of birth to give the poem its language. The poem—a collage of place—becomes the medium to transmute place into one that affords the poet the freedom to merge and explore various layers of place in a way that ultimately illumines the human condition. In this vein of thought, Malpas writes:

The language of place, of self and other, of subject and object, describes the world in a way that is tied to the possibility of agency and attitude, and not in terms of physical process alone. And, while the existence of a place may be causally dependent on the existence of certain physical processes, the capacity to describe, experience and understand those processes – for those processes to be grasped through notions of objectivity and regularity and even through ideas of process as such – is, in turn, possible only with the framework of place (*Place and Experience* 37).

On the score of “agency and attitude,” Finney reconstructs the subjectivities and intersubjectivities of men and women long gone under the institution of slavery, imagining them as courageous and resilient enough to withstand and subvert languages and physical objects of place that totally dehumanized them and deemed them incapable of autonomy; this is also evident in her poems about her “girl-self,” who grows to challenge her restricted agency as a black woman. The liberation of historically plundered voices is Finney’s strategy to agency. To quote the poet in her 2011 National Book Award Speech, Finney illustrates what could never be controlled: “the will of the human heart to speak its own mind” (*Head Off & Split* 101). Dawes,

whose poems engage more recent histories, reiterates too the necessity of place in properly rendering agency and attitude. Through persona poems historically emplaced during the Jim Crow era, Dawes demonstrates the ways in which racial oppression and immanence of racial violence affect agency and attitude. However, the beauty of his poetics is that, like Finney, he provides a fuller language of place, tapping into the experiential borderlands, which, in the case of some of the women and children subjects/speakers, are often times marked by external silence but are coupled with the speaker's internal cries and laments, and how they are to understand themselves in a hostile world.

This thesis is an extended reflection on all of these theories of and ideas about poetic place—its power, nature, meaning, and shifting focality. In chapter one, I examine several poems from Finney's *Rice* and the various constituents of place she avails in the text, from placelessness and palimpsests to the body as a place within a place. By searching for the African seeds in places of S.C.'s coastalscape, Finney is ultimately searching for herself, becoming a witness to history and to the ways in which "the land that black folk built" is now the land that is missing their presence. In chapter two, I examine Dawes's *Wisteria* and the ways in which he challenges conventional notions of poetics of place as simply the relationship between self and place by focusing on the meaning of relationships between mother and child. And while simulacra of place—of swamp country—arise in the text, material and natural place do not figure regularly as features that are central to and/or carry the meaning of the poem. They are nonetheless important in creating the conditions, frames, and possibilities for poetic selfhood in the book. In the final chapter, I turn my analysis to three of my own poems set in South Carolina and about the 1968 Orangeburg Massacre and family history. I discuss how I see my work in conversation with

Finney and Dawes by using their poems to explain the role of place in my work, and the various elements and choices that either reflect a poetics of place that is attentive to humans and the natural world or a poetics that rests outside of that and is more focused on what Siverly and McDowell term the “invisible landscapes” of place, namely those of history and memory.

CHAPTER ONE

NIKKY FINNEY'S *RICE*—FINDING AFRICA, FINDING SOUTH CAROLINA

Born to civil rights activists—her father a civil rights attorney, her mother an elementary school teacher—Nikky Finney came of age during the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements (nikkyfinnet.net). In a recent interview with *Sampsonia Way*, when asked how she approaches history, Finney remarked, “There is an old saying: ‘As long as the lion hunter tells the story, the lion’s story will never be told.’ The hunter will only tell the story of hunting and shooting and killing the lion...I have to protect my family. I’m a lion...” (Sampsonia Way). Finney is interested in decolonizing historical narratives that exclude African Americans and in her poems, seeks to record and tell those “peripheral” histories. Having come of age during contentious times, Finney states that she never wanted to lose the memories and stories of her own community— so she became a witness of place.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Finney avers that South Carolina has eschewed its African heritage, lamenting, “This beautiful country of my birth is being turned into one-half golf course and one-half toxic dump...Black people never got their *forty acres and a mule* as promised” (Finney xxvi; italics in original). More, Finney calls South Carolina “land that black folks made, because it was on the backs and knees, the minds and muscles of enslaved Africans that acres of timber-dense South Carolina were transformed into rich rice fields” (xv). Notwithstanding such encroachment and the consequent erasure of “Africa,” black coastal South Carolinians, Finney notes, have maintained their rich traditions and kept alive their culture. The

American slavery metanarrative centers African (Americans) bodies but has simultaneously delegitimized and marginalized their experiences and histories; Finney pushes back against this totalizing narrative through a poetics in which black voices and lives are recuperated and emplaced in South Carolina—and the South. Part of this recuperative work for Finney occurs as she enters the private sphere, one’s interior place—from an imagined community of enslaved women circulating a root to induce abortions, as well as the intimate memories of her own family history, which serve as a point of departure as the poet/speaker leaps across time to delve into realities long, long gone, realities that move us toward finding the residual of Africa. Endemic to Finney’s recuperative work is addressing the silences, elisions and loss of place that become the “texts” of South Carolina, and the history imbued therein allows Finney to “see” poetry, and the poetry allows the poet, through the image, to transmute a new place that emplaces and resituates the formerly exiled.

Philosopher J.E. Malpas observes in *Place and Experience* that place, identity and the “self” are inextricably linked; identity is formed in and bound to place, and the contours of place are occasioned by our subjectivity (Malpas 177). If Malpas’s assertion is true, then to be *of or from* a place means that we are, to some degree, the place we inhabit. Further, like human experience, the past “cannot be prised away from the places” (180), and “[t]he binding of memory to place, and so to particular places, can itself be seen as a function of the way in which subjectivity is necessarily embedded in place, and in spatialised, embodied activity” (176). In other words, both identity and memory are unfathomable without place, and memory is a prerequisite for the formation of subjectivity and self-identity (181). This connection is vivid early on in *Rice* with the collection’s third poem “Yellow Jaundice..” “Yellow Jaundice” opens

with the poet-speaker reimagining her birth by the sea, conjecturing that “I must have seen trees first” (*Rice* 10). From the outset, the reader detects the speaker’s desire to connect to and emplace her identity in the place of her birth and childhood. Finney emplaces the poem by not only calling on a particular memory, but by also incorporating specific place signifiers: “5 3 hundred year old / live oaks / on racepath avenue / southern coastal / Carolina / nineteen hundred and fifty-seven” (10). In Finney’s transmutation of place, she imaginatively engages with the land and invites the reader, like herself, to be a witness to her personal history as she embodies “racepath avenue” in coastal South Carolina.

In a later stanza, the poet-speaker continues developing the imagery, imagining how, in her childhood, the three hundred year old oak trees “must have sung / tree songs / for me” (12). The forest of trees become more than a surface on which action takes place; it is personified to further root the speaker’s identity in the coastalscape of Conway. The short lines and sudden pauses in this particular stanza emanate the tenderness associated with a relationship to a place of (positive) memory and significance. The music of Finney’s home place suffuse the line via the long ‘u’ and ‘e’ sounds are music themselves, enhanced by the off-rhyme of “sung” and “songs”.

Embedded throughout the poem are African signifiers, some of which are embodied by the speaker, the most pronounced being, “this madagascan nose pointed for / the atlantic-african sea” (11). The speaker’s description of her nose as “madagascan” and renaming of the Atlantic Ocean as the “atlantic-african sea” are acts of obeisance towards a past that she realizes is rooted in her home- and coastalscape and is ever near, pulling her in. I would also argue that by re-naming the sea, Finney writes *another* place—a different place—to which she and black South Carolinians can belong, another South Carolina to which her poetry can speak: a South Carolina

whose *genius loci* is the African men and women of the old. Later in the poem, Finney writes, “I walk through and sleep in / that village of woody bones / the days and nights of childhood / still deeply rooted there” (12). Like many of the poems in *Rice*, pulsing through these lines is simultaneous (be)longing for and reclamation her home-place, where she has planted roots, and the places of the sea and Africa, whose abstractness correlate with the abstraction of history yet also are the sources of her sense of rootedness.

In this vein of thought, Finney declares in her adulthood that she wants “[to] claim / my horizontal and vertical view / and walk that village path of old trees / that stood calling me for so long / to be home for the first time” (12). Leaping to the present, the poet-speaker’s desire for a connection with her home land and the nearness of place informs the language at the stanza’s end in that she evokes a sense of rootedness that in the very real and material components of this particular place.

Palimpsest/Placelessness

Beginning with “Yellow Jaundice” is important because figuring prominently throughout the collection are other family history-persona poems that function as not only the individualized subjectivity in narratives of place, but also as gestures towards seeking out the seeds of Africa (which include familial histories). They are also portals into public histories as Finney becomes witness through emplacing her family’s roots and stories. By claiming place as her own through *emplacement*, Finney becomes an authoritative voice and place a site of origin for the poetic voice. The particularities of place—history, memories, materiality— enter the lines of the poems, and consequently, the work is not only responds to place but enters into a collaborative relationship with its physical dimensions as well as the chorus of voices from the past. Thus, it is

incumbent on the poet-daughter of the sea to rupture historical euphemisms that have nearly expunged the historical, social and cultural realities that imbue the place from which she hails. Place is codes and languages, and a palimpsestic past, or, to borrow from critic Stephen Cheeke, “the hidden layeredness of historical experience within a singular place or text” (Cheeke 134). The threat of placelessness looms large over the poet’s desire to peel back place’s hidden layers and resituate its historical subjectivities.

Leonard Lutwack’s *The Role of Place in Literature* provides acute commentary on placelessness as a concern that “poets and novelists have been observing for the past hundred years,” adding that it has now come to the attention of geographers as well (Lutwack183). Lutwack asserts “the centralization of governing power and economic processes, the development of transportation and the radical redistribution of dwelling places are among the conditions that have diminished the importance of place and increased the importance of movement in the twentieth century life” (183). Placelessness, then, is the loss of difference, the loss of uniqueness. It is a casualty of globalizing processes that are transforming various, distinct places into a mirror image of another. Theodore Roszak warns that within a few generations ‘worldwide technological coalescence’ will create ‘an oppressive urban-industrial uniformity over the earth, leaving no place worth visiting since ‘Almost every place is becoming Anyplace’” (qtd. in Lutwack183). In the poem “God Ain’t Makin No More Land,” Finney’s language of placelessness is wrapped up in the historical and contemporary dispossession of black sea island residents and the mishandling and destruction of land.

Written for South Carolina, “God Ain’t Makin No More Land” stages a conversation between two women, one of whom is an elderly resident of Johns Island, S.C. The epigraph of

the poem is the “Civil War Field Order No. 15” given by General William Tecumseh Sherman, which reserved the abandoned rice plantations from Charleston down to the Georgia-Florida border for newly freed women and men. A critique of capitalism and homogenization through the eyes of a black resident, the title (a quote from Abraham Jenkins found in Guy and Candie Catawan’s *Ain’t You Got A Right to the Tree of Life?*) and the epigraph set the tone of the poem in that they provide the significance of this place, historically, and the impending threat of loss. When the poem begins, its most immediate distinctive feature is the elderly subject’s use of dialect, specifically that of Gullah-Geechee. Stanza three reads::

*like the time the mannish hurricane
swo swo swoon
and the blue roof shingle fly off somewhere
into the field and he spare he life T’ank God!
and in the mornin’ there go Coakley in he truck
tryin’ to tack it back pretty good
this here ain’t so easy as that (54)*

Finney’s employment of dialect throughout the poem is crucial on a number of levels. The poet’s emphasis on the dialect not only emplaces the poem in a specific region but also counters the whitewashing inherent in modernity’s agenda that will eventually obscure blacks’ presence and their physical attachment to home. More, the use of dialect functions not only as an extension of the Gullah presence and history on the coastal islands, but of Africa as well, as place is not just reconstructed in the poem but infuses it. Unlike that of natural disasters, the damage of capitalism, as the speaker suggests, cannot be so easily undone. Repeated throughout the poem is the line, “*when the land go everythin’ go*”—or the variant, “*the land is going*”—evoking the speaker’s mourning as she witnesses the loss of her ancestors’ land and ways of life. Central to the processes of capitalism and coastal tourism is the question of ownership and the subsequent

reimagining of a place by those with economic and political power. To put it differently, the land is a palimpsest, being rewritten and newly inscribed with the representations and discourses (for sale signs, golf courses, refurbished plantation homes, etc.) of the elite class.

This idea of reinscription is highlighted more in the following stanzas:

*the land is going
ain't no more land like this heah land
where the brown slow-moseying folk
with their old tortoise ways...*

*this heah the bought-up land free and clear
from emancipation auction
taken back by deception
they say the African in these heah Carolinas
talk funny
say we cain't understand
no developmentin' (56)*

Critical to discussions on place and the creation of place is the concept of palimpsests. Writing specifically on colonialism Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffins note that palimpsest is:

[o]riginally the term for a parchment on which several inscriptions had been made after earlier ones had been erased. The characteristic of the palimpsest is that, despite such erasures, there are always traces of previous inscriptions that have been overwritten” (Ashcroft et al. 174).

More, colonial discourse and machinations efface previously existing constructions on a landscape through denigration and displacement, “allowing it to be seen as a empty space, ready to receive their own inscriptions” (175).⁸ The elderly woman appears to echo the definition of palimpsest when she exclaims, “*Great Da! Money sho will bleach a memory clean!*”(Finney 57). Her sense of place, of home, of rootedness, is disrupted, and the very cross-hatching of histories

⁸ While I certainly do not wish to suggest that “capitalism” and “colonial forces” are interchangeable terms, the processes of the two are analogous in that they both rely on dispossessing the underclass.

and representations within this specific place occur simultaneously on the page as the perspective of “they”—the island’s wealthy newcomers— are interwoven throughout (via the speaker).

In line two—“*ain’t no more land like this heah land*”—the speaker suggests that there is no place like this place, because of the people that inhabit it. But what is interesting about these stanzas is Finney’s use of metaphor to glimpse into the social and cultural ways of the black residents: *slow-moseying folk / with their old tortoise ways*. The sage-like, folkloric tone of the speaker is, in some ways, Finney’s refusal of allowing the Gullah-Geechee culture to suffer total erasure by reintegrating the past of place in the present. The poem becomes a space of resistance against palimpsestic processes of erasure and the threat of placelessness by employing the island’s particular images, codes, and languages.

The elderly speaker’s presence and yearn for preservation illustrates a component that Lutwack neglects to recognize in his conceptualization of place: if place is contingent upon cultural and social practices, then place is not totally annihilated in the proliferation of technology, time-space compression and motion. While the voices mourn the loss of land in the poems, their culture and distinctive qualities (i.e. language) still remain. Important to note, too, is the woman’s atavistic self-identification as “African”, evoking a sense of out of placeness: though she is not in Africa she and the other black residents on Sea Islands are still of it; she is both emplaced and yet displaced. By the poem’s end, the island resident comes to terms with the fact that her existence parallels the destruction her home—as it goes, she will eventually go too: “one day / gonna be no more of this heah worration... / one day I be gone too” (60). On the intricate connection between self and emplaced experiences, Malpas writes, “Recognising our inextricable tie to our surroundings means also recognising our own finitude and mortality...our

mortality, our capacity to think and feel, and our embeddedness in place, are bound together as part of the same structure that makes us who we are” (192).

Similarly, the poem “In South Carolina: Where Black Schoolmarms Sleep,” which precedes “God Ain’t Makin’ No More Land,” imagines the loss of Mary McLeod Bethune’s school for educating African American women as the land (Sumter, South Carolina), like that of “God Ain’t Makin’ . . .” is slowly being sold and consequently stripped of its history. Stanza one reads:

All around the Palmetto State
ten years before
the 2000th
we are still
ruining the neighborhood
still depreciating the community

Like “God Ain’t Makin’ No More Land,” the palimpsestic impulse of place enters the language of this poem, specifically in the stanza’s final two lines. The speaker notes that Bethune and her school daughters built the school to have “a place around other places / where schoolteachers might borrow sugar / and hand soft linen to the wind” (*Rice* 47). A few lines later, the speaker imagines a portrait of Bethune witnessing the arbitrary “them” “staking up For Sale sign / instead of shaking off their welcome mats / instead of coming with a vat of welcome lemonade” (48). The speaker is concerned with the ultimate loss of “the belief / the land the water the air / never to be reclaimed never pure enough again” (48). “Human places become vividly real through dramatization. Identity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life” (*Space and Place* 178). For example, in the second stanza’s final three lines—“a place around other places / where schoolteachers might borrow sugar / and

hand soft linen to the wind”—the subjects share a common identity (schoolteachers) and the image of a woman “hand[ing] soft linen to the wind,” coupled with the emphasis of their own place in the first line, evoke a sense of unique rootedness and a distinction from “other places.” The poem’s palimpsestic images are analogous to Gaston Bachelard’s “resonance-reverberation doublet” of poetic imagery, which invites the reader and poet alike the opportunity to witness subjectivities and realities of place, even if they stand outside of it (xxii).⁹

What might be called a corollary to placelessness is motion.¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan holds that place is a pause in motion and that motion precludes the possibility of possessing a sense of place, of rootedness. While “In South Carolina: Where Black Schoolmarms Sleep” is ostensibly concerned with black residential emplacement amid palimpsestic alterations, the turn in the final stanza suggests that even if the spirit and history of this place must move, motion is not totally unfamiliar to the black experience, either:

Take to the air
if you must
but we fly there too
our brown ghosts know all

⁹ Regarding Finney’s work, it is important to define what exactly constitutes a palimpsestic image sequence. The term “palimpsests” typically suggests a document or landscape that *has already changed*, its erasure final; however, in “God Ain’t Makin’ No More Land” and “In South Carolina: Where the Black Schoolmarms Sleep,” the speaker enters the place-in-transition, a place on the brink of becoming a palimpsest, slowly being effaced by capitalism. As demonstrated by these poems, the palimpsestic image sequence appears dominant and more vivid to create both an effect of exigency and an effect of rootedness, creating tension within the line. More, Finney’s strategy of building image on top of image in the manner of palimpsests might be read as a countermove to the literal palimpsestic processes to which her homeland is subjected.

¹⁰ Lutwack observes that “Motion, it must be concluded from literary works that explore it, cannot be an entirely acceptable substitute for place. Man’s deep-seated need to orient himself in space by means of familiar locations cannot be altogether neglected, and there is despair in an exclusive diet of motion” (Lutwack 228). Tourism, then, is one way by which Lutwack explores motion. He notes that tourism is “Another way of satisfy[ing] the need for engaging places is to seize upon the few unique places that are still to be found. The passion for tourism is the attempt of people to acquire a commodity in short supply, unspoiled and truly distinguished places. And truly distinguished places, for many people, are those that are associated with a supposed golden past in distant lands” (229). Key to Lutwack’s assertion is the final statement, that a truly distinctive place is one that has a sort of mystic connection and past history in some distant land, which, in this case, is Africa and its influences on the lower coastal region from which the speaker hails.

there is to know of flight
and travel in even more
tainted ways
than
we (48,49)

While the threat of placelessness looms large over the speaker's environment, so too do the "brown ghosts [that] know all / there is to know of flight," namely the Africans who were transported to the Americas and who continue to haunt the text. In other words, Africans are accustomed to movement, and, as this stanza suggests, coastal black South Carolinians are encountering another era of forced movement from their home, "ten years before / the 2000th" (47).

Emplacement and the Body

Critical to and underlying phenomenological discussions on place is the role of the "lived" body—"a body understood not just as a material object but as a locus of perception and intention" (Tanner 181). In *Getting Back Into Place*, Edward Casey says of the relationship between place and the body,

My body continually takes me into place. It is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in place... Without the good graces and excellent service of our bodies, not only would we be lost in place—acutely disoriented and confused—we would have no coherent sense of place itself... Our living-moving bodies serve to structure and to configure entire scenarios of place (Casey 48).

In other words, without the body there is no place. The body is the conduit by which we enter place, and "[m]an, out of his intimate experience with his body and with other people, organizes

space so that it conforms with and caters to his biological needs and social relations” (*Space and Place* 34). Place exists only in relation to the orientation or position of the body, meaning that no matter where one’s body is positioned in a space, they remain just *here* and not *there*. On this score, Casey concludes, “we have not so much chosen the here as we have exemplified it: I am here. And I exemplify it by embodying it: I am here in/as my body” (Casey 50). Thus, “a literal reference point and what Merleau-Ponty defines as a ‘general medium for having a world’” (Tanner 181), the body, as Casey asserts, “*is itself a place*” (Casey 52; emphasis in original).¹¹ Attention to the lived body as both a vehicle in place and as is itself a place figures significantly in the poem “Permittable Thunder,” a poem all about the poet-speaker’s body. Further, the poem expands the contours of what it means to be *here* as various places—multiple heres and bodies emerge throughout the poem. Ultimately, the speaker finds definition for her own body through imagined movement across the diaspora.

In “Permittable Thunder,” Finney imagines the female subject’s body as a geography constituted within a patriarchal society insistent on keeping her in her social place. Throughout the poem, the speaker’s body is under constant negotiation as a child, but she eventually grows to take ownership of it and reclaim it. The poem begins with the speaker describing the restrictions that southern society places on her body, the racialized circumscription of her physical movement as a black girl and woman. To preclude the labels of untoward or “frisky” befalling her, the speaker is sure to control her hips: “My hips / Should never get there ahead of me / Or

¹¹ Preceding his assertion that the body is a place, Casey writes, “even within my lived body, I can distinguish a corporeally localized here from the here that is coextensive with my body as a whole. At this level, my here is often identified with my head, and even more particularly with a region between or behind the eyes. But it can very well migrate into other parts of the body...Although we may not be accustomed to thinking of a particular body part as a habitual locus of a here in relation to other body parts as theres, the fact that such a here-there relationship obtains indicates that the body, taken as a single entity, is itself a place—if it is the case that anything that exhibits a here-there relationship counts as a place in some minimal sense” (52).

turn any boy's head on the way" (*Rice* 149). She is quiet, reserved, respectable, "so as not to entice / incite / Or bring the female wrath / Upon myself" (149). She is a woman "Who has known the rules / Memorized the warnings / Felt the restrictions"; she is a woman adept in the art of stillness. As the female speaker grows into womanhood, she observes the freedom with which her brother is able to move, how wide society allows him to spread his legs on a church pew or a train seat. The turn of the poem occurs when the speaker decides for herself the course of womanhood she will travel and that she has "to move / More than this allotted respectable inch." She continues, "I have to have all of what I come from / I need / Then want / Each of my twists and turns / My bends and bows and curtsies / Gracious but free" (151). Although the speaker does not name her specific location, the reader is given clues to the region wherein her emplaced experiences are shaped by her gender.

In "Embodying Social Geography," Moss and Dyck, apropos of Cresswell, observe that:

[p]laces are also encoded with meanings that signal out of 'placeness' or inclusiveness, which are embodied through, for example, class, 'raced and gendered performances which reconstitute, or alternatively transgress, such place meanings. Transgression may be contested, as in the use of threat...or alternatively through self-surveillance in fear or acceptance of dominant norms (67).

As she transitions from girlhood to womanhood, the speaker of "Permittable Thunder" decidedly follows her own course of being—one that is transgressive as it breaches the "societal law" that holds her body under restriction. Yet, it is one that also liberates her because the freedom of movement means, too, the freedom of self, which the speaker locates in the various African and

African diasporic cultures of the world, wherein black women's bodies move unencumbered, liquidly, "with some other ancient permission" (152). In other words, "Africanness" functions as a proxy for the speaker's journey toward a self that embodies all of which she comes from— her African roots.

The speaker locates the origins of the "twists and turns" that she was admonished to control as a young girl in the millions of women of African descent and African influenced cultures around the world from the Bajan woman of Barbados to the Senegalese woman of Senegal to the Guyanese woman of Guyana to the Kingston woman of Jamaica to the Fulani woman of West Africa to the Burksport Bahia woman of Salvador, Brazil, to finally the St. Helena Island South Carolina woman of Charleston's Gullah-Geechee people. Beginning with stanza fifteen, Finney utilizes similes to point to women in the African diaspora and their bodily autonomy, which become the foundations on which the speaker builds a self that is rooted in "all of what I come from" (151):

Like Bajan woman
Walking across her sand
Riding her own seven hips
As if there were a trusty steed beneath her
Taking her across safely
Yet there is only her
Self
Moving without a pass
Armed only with some other ancient permission (152)

The simile, prefaced by "all of what I come from," suggests that the Barbadian woman's control of her body and the sway with which she moves is not alien to a black woman's body but is precisely the opposite. Finney suggests that "moving without a pass" or permission is characteristic to African cultures and peoples and should be embraced; to restrict and strait-

jacket one's "hips" is to deny their girl- and woman-self the core of their being. Line three's "riding her own" evokes the Bajan's woman's autonomy that is then manifest through her "seven hips." On this score, line seven's "Self" and subsequent line break is the muscle of the stanza, functioning doubly to highlight the woman's action as a solitary one ("her / Self"), and the "Self" that stands alone is demonstrative of the woman's connection to, presumably, her African roots, the "other ancient permission." The following stanza emplaces the speaker's roots in Senegal:

Like Senegalese woman queens
Standing doing nothing
Only moving the chew stick
From one side of her mouth to the other
Before she crosses the street
That claps around her
Like Permittable thunder
That through the house curtain
That as a girl
Mama showed me once
How to hide from
Or else get struck by (152)

Dissimilar to the speaker's culture of respectability, the streets celebrate the Senegalese woman's body, clapping. The unabashed visibility of the woman indicates that she is in a place that has not lost its "roots," a place where the woman determines for herself how and when she will move. In line eight, Finney imagines her younger self and her mother watching the "thunder" from the window, thunder representing the response to a woman whose movement is proudly on display, which is countercultural to the place and culture from which the speaker hails. However, as a woman, the speaker says in the next stanza: "I reach for this kind of mortar to pestle / Movement to put on myself / To tighten around myself / For myself" (152).

The speaker continues, stating that she *is* “...this kind of torrential grinding quiver” (152), again drawing a connection between herself and her ancestors that stretches across time and continent. In the lines: “I want all of the mango and motion / That I got coming to me”; “I’m taking whatever’s mine /... I know the movement I come from”; and “I’m claiming the inside and out of all my bloodlines /.../ I come from ground / And genetically I know sweat” (153), the speaker gestures toward embodying what all she comes from; she is both emplacing herself and the place she embodies.

In the poem’s final stanzas, the speaker ties her body to not just the ground of South Carolina but to those of other countries and continents that are African at their roots; in other words, to borrow from Julie Dash’s film title, she is a daughter of the dust. What is produced by the poem’s end is not just the speaker’s transformed self but also depictions of Africa’s various permutations across the diaspora, signifying the African “bloodline” that tethers the world’s black people. Africanness as movement is what’s left when one—the speaker and other diasporic Africans—is removed from their continental roots. The speaker’s gendered body within a time-region-specific culture (American South in the mid-twentieth century) is liberated through the practice of naming women elsewhere and their various emplaced experiences within social and cultural locations that allow freedom to control. Finney’s African and African American subjects permit her the possibility of “figuring out” place—images stand as cultural signifiers that distinguish them from Westernized models of womanhood and expectations inscribed in the female body politic.

The historical poem “Cotton Tea” (the fifth poem in the collection) has a similar focus on the body and its relation to place, but differs from “Permittable Thunder” temporally and is

rooted in a singular place. More, embodiment and its relation to place differ drastically in “Cotton Tea” by virtue of the fact that women’s bodies under the institution of slavery are deemed property and therefore threatened by sexual assault. While both “Permittable Thunder” and “Cotton Tea” focus on female bodily autonomy and the desire for liberation, it is the latter poem that illustrates the connection between the white male and black female bodies as they are conscripted within the place that is the plantation. The epigraph to “Cotton Tea” reads, “In 1840, a French writer, Bouchelle, reported that the root bark was widely used by Negro slaves in America to induce abortions” (Finney 24). From its outset, the poem is emplaced historically: slavery was bodily phenomenon as an emplaced racial experience in America, specifically the American South, and by focusing on her homeland, Finney is able to carefully evaluate “centuries of entrenched prejudice, cultivated hatred and institutionalized dehumanization” (Finney xv). The poem depicts the dissemination and crucial role of the cotton tea root throughout the communities of enslaved women and the violence against their bodies by “forcing mens who answer to no god” (24). The poem begins with the cotton root being circulated among the community of women: “Jordie give some to Mondie / Mondie pluck some for Lou / Lou wrap piece up for Lil” (24). From the outset of the poem, the movement and action of enslaved women enters the pace of the first three lines as the subject verb disagreements pull the reader into the quickness and exigency of the moment. A few lines later, the speaker observes that:

all these ones and all they new girls
chaw on the cotton root
just for the jus-in-case
of forcing mens who answer to no god
(the evilness does so pass pants to pants) (24)

Returning to Casey's notion that the body is a place, these lines suggest that the body of the enslaved woman is a place on (in?) which forcible acts of violence occur at the hand of her master, namely rape. In light of such violence and invasion, abortion functions as a form of bodily autonomy in a context of routine bodily loss (via rape). If the "text" of Finney's South Carolina is characterized by the violence against black bodies, this poem furthers that notion, suggesting that the loss of bodily autonomy is a manifestation of how enslaved black women embodied place, place in antebellum cultural constraints and the place of the cotton fields . Put differently, to embody place as an enslaved black woman means to actually not have total control over *how* the body experiences place.

Near the end of "Cotton Tea" are the names and codes of place that root the experiences and the narratives of women, thus giving the poet a way to locate their voices; it is as if the poet is steadily zooming in on the place and by its end the physical landscape is given shape though naming:

Maewood African woman in a Daufuskie dark
when they birth girls
before they count toes
or name her
be out in the field with her still sticky wet
pickin' the whole root stalk
right out the ground...
just for the jus-in-case
for all the forcing there will surely be
on these here sea islands

"Daufuskie dark", "in the field", and "on these here sea islands" are all collages of place on which the enslaved women's bodies move. Sonically, Finney infuses hard consonants towards the poem's end—"j" and "f"—as if to emphasize the violence done against the female body. Following the hard consonants is the long 'e'—"be", "these"—and the rhyming thereof, as if to

direct the reader back to the sea, where it all begins. Emplacement not only reclaims the history embedded in place, but, more importantly, it allows the emplaced subject to take control of her own narrative “on these here sea islands,” to be the center of a place that, historically, relegates her to the margins. As place is given shape and emplaced subjects are given names in the poems, the poet works to forge into the landscape the history of Africans on Daufuskie Island, disrupting historical euphemisms, and by reemplacing particulars in the poem, the subjects’ experiences are made available.

Finney’s poetics of emplacement unremittingly takes to task the realities of both her childhood and the imagined realities of enslaved communities on the coastal sea islands in order to seek out the African seeds of South Carolina. It is witness to the rapid transformation of the land from which she hails that is now recognizably un-africanized. She inserts herself in the text as interlocutor between place’s past and present, and, in the process, transmutes a version of South Carolina, of the sea islands, that recuperates the imagined realities of the past and the memories from her own childhood. The particularities and languages of place, the calling of their names, often enter her poems, rooting her re-creations of place historically and geographically. More, palimpsestic impulses appear frequently through Finney’s evocative images, recalling and reconstructing places of the past and places on the precipice of becoming the past.

CHAPTER TWO

KWAME DAWES'S *WISTERIA* AND THE INVISIBLE PLACES OF PLACE

In their essay, "Poetry of Place," poets Bill Siverly and Michael McDowell observe that while modernist poetry of place values the natural landscape,

[m]uch contemporary poetry focuses on psychological states, feelings, intellectual concepts, or language play totally devoid of the reference to the real, lived, sensually experienced and infinitely varied physical world. Poetry of place may focus on such interior subjects, but it lets us experience them more profoundly and more authentically because they're rooted in a specific time and place.

Siverly and Dowell continue, "In its fullest sense, the term 'place' in poetry includes not only the geographical location and natural environment, but the history of human presence and before ("Poetry of Place" 2). Place is not only limited to the natural world, but is a portmanteau of invisible landscapes as well. Siverly and McDowell define the "invisible landscape" as "an unseen layer of usage, memory and significance...superimposed upon the geographical surface. [It is the] unseen layer [that] typically holds a powerful emotional charge which can be tapped in a poem" ("Invisible" 37). Put differently, the invisible landscape of place poetry includes the elements of memory and history, and the psychological and emotional registers of a poem as the body experiences place.

Published in 2006, Kwame Dawes's eleventh collection of poetry, *Wisteria*, draws its inspiration from interviews he conducted at the South Sumter Resource Center in Sumter, South

Carolina, in 1995, with black women and men who came of age during the height of Jim Crow during the World War II era. He notes in the Acknowledgements section that the poems “are not transcriptions of their voices, but a rendering that comes through our shared language of the Middle Passage and the many journeys we have all taken” (Dawes 6). Divided into five sections—“Wisteria,” “Traveling Woman,” “Domestics,” “Vengeance” and “Obituaries”—the collection guides the reader through the mental- and emotional-scapes of black women’s lives and children in a small southern town in an effort to bring to life the voices and realities (or salvage them perhaps) of an era recent enough in our local, regional and national memories that we still live its ramifications, yet distant enough that it is threatened by un-remembrance. Tim Creswell writes that:

Place as a phenomenological-experiential entity combines elements of nature (elemental forces), social relations (class, gender, and so on), and meaning (the mind, ideas, symbols). Experience of place, from a phenomenological perspective, is always an experience of all three realms, each of which affects our actions in place (Creswell 156).

Although “place” as the physical world and natural landscape make regular appearances throughout *Wisteria*, “place” as social position and the contiguous subjective experience as a black person during the mid-twentieth century figure more prominently. In this vein, I argue that Dawes’s poems expand our understanding of place in that he privileges and focuses more intently on the subjectively emplaced experiences of the world and is less concerned with obvious particularity of location à la Finney. If place, as Creswell suggests, is “not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world, [framing our ways of seeing and experiencing]”

(*Place* 11), then Dawes's poetics of place flows in this vein as the poetic subjects/speakers, especially the children, who come of age to quickly learn their social emplacement in the world to be a corollary of their physical location—a poetic equivalent to that of a *bildungsroman* (call it then a *bildungsdichtung*?)

Indoctrination: Social Dimensions of Place

The third section of *Wisteria*, “Domestics,” imagines the fraught relationship between black housemaids and their children, from whom their jobs keep them separated. Told mostly from the perspectives of children, the poems in this section explore their emotional- and mentalscapes and as they witness their mothers, as one child puts it, be “trimmed down / ...like a pet dog” (Dawes 59). These poems pursue the experience of black women's and children's lives during the Jim Crow era. And if we are to subscribe to Siverly and McDowell's position that “poetry of place in some respects is a poetry of witness...[that says] this place existed like this” (“Entwining” 46), then these poems are witnesses to the witness of children struggling to make meaning of the conditions of place that renders them and their mothers silent.

These poems delve into the intricate relationships between children's emotional- and mental-scapes the social and cultural practices within place that suffuse their subjectivities, rendering these voices in their historical and social locations. “In each instance, the poem exerts more power, gets closer to the complexity of reality, and makes place more significant when it recognizes the layers of stories in the ‘invisible landscape’ and enables them to reverberate throughout the poem” (“Invisible” 46). While particular physical/natural places make several cameos in this section (and, at times, must be read in-between the lines), landscape figures significantly in that, through inductive logic, public spaces shared by blacks and whites, or

private spaces owned by white but cared for by blacks during the Jim Crow era, contain codes and languages that interpellate bodies and assign to them various scripts which their lives must follow. Although place-names and collages of physical landscape are sometimes indeterminate, the invisible landscapes that are place's cultural and social dimensions frequent the text, imbuing the poems with personal and historical resonances.

The poem "Mama" begins with the young speaker making an address to her/his mother after defending herself/himself from a white child who assaulted them. The speaker begins,

Mama,
down by the lake
under the live oaks

the boy punched me
in my belly, I couldn't breathe

everything turned white
'til the lake reached the sky

and him there laughing
face all red with the sun (Dawes 57).

Siverly and McDowell note that "the surest way to capture the flavor of a place is to choose words that belong particularly to that place," ranging from landscape features to its flora, fauna, and human artifacts ("Entwining" 43)¹². The action that unfolds "under the live oaks" emplaces the poem not only in a natural setting, but also importantly beneath a species of tree unique to the

¹² The full quote reads, "Perhaps the surest way to capture the flavor of a place is to choose words that belong particularly to that place. In this issue alone, many poems employ terms particularly tied to Pacific Northwest places, for landscape features—high tide, flood tide, estuary, rainforest, basalt, coulee, high desert, fumaroles, mist, glaciers, permafrost, muskeg; for flora—salmonberry, cedars, Douglas fir, hemlock, sagebrush, Ponderosa pine; for fauna—hermit and Swainson's thrush, bittern, barred owl, spotted owl, jackrabbits, rattlesnakes, chum salmon, elk, caribou; for human artifacts—purse seines, gillnetters, crabbers, Iron Chinks. Then there's the naming of human activities that are particularly likely to be found in the Pacific Northwest: dry wheat farming, composting food scraps, climbing mountains, working on a ship in drydock, hiking a trail. These are words of the language of Northwest places" ("Invisible" 43).

South Carolina low country and coastal regions. The poem takes an emotional turn when the mother reprimands her child for physically retaliating. The poem continues,

And you came and grabbed me
shook me up there before all of them

till all I could do was
close my eyes and pretend I was flying

or walking down to the bottom
of the lake where everything is soft,

everything is warm and gentle
like how it is when I crawl in the space

where your body has just been
on a real cold night (57).

When the mother enters the scene to reprimand her child, notice the repetition of “feminine” (unstressed) syllables—“flying”, “bottom”, “soft”, “gentle”, “night”—as if to both emphasize her presence and the deep connection the child feels for her, yet simultaneously (and subtly) juxtapose these soft endings to the preceding image of the mother shaking her child. Notice too how Dawes encapsulates the mother’s absence even in the tender image of the child lying with her—“where your body has just been” suggests that the mother is always near but is not *here*. The poet places the poem’s action in a natural context and even uses aquatic imagery as a metaphor for finding sanctuary from the shame that accompanies a black child “getting out of place.” Dawes’s use of the child’s perspective is salient here because it speaks to the intimate relationship between a black child’s innocence during this era and how it becomes as a casualty in the processes of social emplacement as the child grows to learn the codes and languages of place’s social and cultural dimensions, namely racial etiquette. In her historical examination of

racial etiquette's role in keeping blacks in their place and sustaining white supremacy during Jim Crow, *Growing Up Jim Crow*, Jennifer Ritterhouse writes,

Etiquette, meanwhile, although sometimes learned as a set of discrete and specific rules, serves in practice as a sort of script, guiding interracial encounters and providing a framework within which black and whites alike could understand their experiences, albeit from different perspectives. White children might embrace the deference-demanding performance of racial etiquette more or less enthusiastically because it reinforced their own sense of worth. Black children might reject etiquette's lessons of inferiority but not its lessons of difference (5).

The last three stanzas reflect Ritterhouse's observation:

Mama, I could hardly breathe.
How come you gather him up

in your arms, telling him to hush
all cooing, hush baby, hush honey;

leaving me there in the soggy leaves
to suck my tongue, Mama, how come?

Towards the end of the poem, Dawes repeats the apostrophe-like strategy when the speaker directly address the mother again, reinforcing the absence and distance between the speaker and her/ his mother. The consoling alliteration of "h" sounds in the repeated "hush" and "honey," coupled with the affectionate "baby," in the second stanza shifts from a tone of maternal comfort to the third stanza's subtle, sibilant "s": the muted hiss, the inchoate chasm, the injunction to silence. The speaker's final question to their mother is Dawes tacitly probing the ironies of place and emplacement and the fraught emotional landscape—specifically love—between domestics and their children.

“Mother and Daughter” functions in a similar vein. The poem, which appears later in the “Domestics” section, mimics the concerns of “At The Lake,” of the speaker questioning and contemplating a seemingly emotionally aloof mother, but concludes with a temporal shift to the present that accommodates the speaker’s self-reflexive moment of growth as she comes to understand the social and cultural constraints in place that circumscribe her mother’s subjectivity. Dissimilar to “At The Lake,” which draws its language and imagery from the natural landscape, “Mother and Daughter” emplaces the action of the poem in the home of the maid. The poem begins,

And when you came home at night,
you would step out the backdoor of the Ford
like the queen of England, with your pink
coat and your navy blue uniform; toss

back that gratitude laced smile to them... (72).

Notice that the flattering, dignifying image of the smiling mother “like the queen of England” transpires outside, just before she walks into the privacy of her home, functioning as a kind of preface to the quick tonal, image and diction shifts that occur in stanza three:

Then your face would grow hard with fatigue
like a mask, and you would chew slow
the tepid meal I laid before you
and hold your jaw and stare

into the voice of an insignificant radio drone.

I saw you and wondered what made you
gather your body each morning to go back ,
and what made you gather the courage to come home (72).

The diction, like the mother's face, grows cold and emanates withdrawal, starkly contrasting the image and tone used to describe the mother in stanza one. The medley of sonics—hard plosives (the “d”, “g” and “k” sounds, soft fricatives (“f” and “h” sounds, and the steady “s”) and liquids (“w” and “m” sounds)—create a tension between the tenderness and hardness in the lines, reflective of the speaker and mother. More, the simile “like a mask”¹³ alludes to the preceding double images of the mother taking on and taking off her “mask,” feigning happiness until she returns home. Her face hard and demeanor uninviting, the daughter “wondered what made you / gather your body each morning to go back, / and what made you gather the courage to come home” (72). Home for the domestic, perceived through the eyes of the speaker, becomes a burdensome place and appears to be the cause of her mother's ostensible disdain. Harkening back to Siverly and McDowell's idea that contemporary poetry of place focuses on the psychological and emotionalscapes, the reader enters the daughter's concern and sympathy for her mother, and even feels enters the speaker's self-deprecation, when she says, “Foolish, ungrateful child that I was, / I thought maybe you had a choice, / that maybe you loved it there, loved them so / that if you could you would stay with them” (72).

¹³ The image of black women and men wearing “masks”—or “double-consciousness”—appears regularly in the African American (and the wider diaspora) literary tradition. Coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1903 groundbreaking text *The Souls of Black Folk*, “double consciousness” refers to the African American's psychological struggle to reconcile his/her two identities as African and as American. Du Bois writes, “. . .this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. . .” (Du Bois 2). While Du Bois might have termed the famous concept, anticipating this idea nearly seven years earlier was poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. In his poem “We Wear the Mask,” Dunbar captures the performance of feigned deference by black people in the late nineteenth century in order to maintain social order and, more importantly, preserve the dignity they could in light of racial adversity. The first stanza reads: “We wear the mask that grins and lies, / It hides our checks and shades our eyes, / This debt we pay to human guile; / With torn and bleeding hearts we smile, / And mouth with myriad subtleties.” Like the all-encompassing “we” in Dunbar's poem, the mother in Dawes's poem wears “that gratitude-laced smile” out of social custom; she wears it because she has to.

In “Place: An Experiential Perspective,” Yi-Fu Tuan observes the importance of “home” in shaping one’s experience of place. According to Yi-Fu Tuan,

The primary meaning of home is nurturing shelter. It is the one place in which we can openly and comfortably admit our frailty and our bodily needs. Home is devoted to the sustenance of the body. In the home we feed, wash, and rest; to it we go when we are tired or sick, that is, when we can no longer maintain a brave front before the world.

He adds, “Home is the pivot of a daily routine; we leave it to work in the morning and return for sustenance, rest, and the temporary oblivion of sleep at night. We go to all kinds of places but return home, or to homelike places. Home is where life begins and ends...” (“Experiential Perspective” 153-154). In the space of the poem, the speaker views her home as a place almost antithetical to that of Tuan’s; home is bleak, austere, “squalid monotony” as the speaker says in a later stanza. Reminiscent of Robert Hayden’s famous “What did I know, what did I know / of love’s austere and lonely offices?” in the autobiographical sonnet “Those Winter Sundays,”¹⁴ Dawes’s speaker’s moment of self-deprecation illustrates the childlike ignorance that prohibits her from fully realizing why her mother must leave. She expresses that “Sometimes, I was scared, while cooking, / that you wouldn’t come home, would just / stay there, become one with them, love them, / free from the squalid monotony of our home” (73). The enjambment after “just” and the subsequent “stay” is the felt distance in the interstices of the mother being away from home, the incertitude of her return.

¹⁴ Like “Mother and Daughter,” Hayden’s “Those Winter Sundays” explores memory and the alienation the poet-speaker experiences between him and his father.

Not only is it the experience of “home” that the speaker believes hardens her mother’s face but the experience of her own presence as well. To explain how intimate relationships and people stand for place, and how individuals can “nest” in one another, Tuan cites the examples of a scene from Tennessee Williams’ *The Night of the Iguana* and St. Augustine. He writes,

In the absence of the right people, things, and places are quickly drained of meaning so that their lastingness is an irritation rather than a comfort...For Augustine the value of a place was borrowed from the intimacy of a particular human relationship; place itself offered little outside the human bond (*Space and Place* 139-140).

In Dawes’s poem, in which the familial bonds are profoundly strained (and perhaps severed), the speaker becomes an extension of the home and thus sits outside the affection of her mother. The final two stanzas of the poem bring the reader into the present, the speaker now older and a mother, who, “doing what I have to do to make ends meet, / I understand now that desire to run away, run away” (73). In the present, the speaker, by inference, is now aware of her mother’s “place” in society and is able to empathize, because she now inhabits a similar one.

Carrying similar concerns is the two-part poem “Love Oil.” “Love Oil” directly follows “At The Lake” and reads as a kind of continuation. Although the first part of the poem is subtly emplaced in the natural world and the speaker is young, similar to “At The Lake,” the second part of the poem mimics “Mother and Daughter” in that the speaker comes to us as an adult and delves into the residual abandonment she/he felt, yet, in the present moment, reciprocates the tenderness they never received. “Love Oil” unfolds as a memory of a child, who witnesses “how they trimmed you down, / called you Rosie, like a pet dog, / and you smiled and called the boy /

same age as me, Mister, like you calling / love.” (Dawes 59). Similar to “At The Lake,” in “Love Oil” the speaker is reprimanded—in this case—for not watching over the white child when both their legs are taken over by ants. The first four stanzas read,

I saw how they trimmed you down,
called you Rosie, like a pet dog,

and you smiled and called the boy
same age as me, Mister, like you calling

love. How you grabbed him up from the grass
when fire ants took at us in the yard,

and you made your face like it was
your own feet aflame with sting;

The poem opens with a jarringly inferior image of the mother, whose occupation, in the eyes of her own child, belittles her humanity in a way that suggests the white child deserves more respect than the mother, cementing her “place” in society as one below a child’s. On forms of address and whites withholding courtesy titles from blacks, Ritterhouse writes,

Within a few years after 1865, “Boss” and “Captain,” as well as “Mister” and “Sir,” had replaced “Master,” while “Ma’am” and “Miss” (used with either the first or last name) had replaced “Mistress” and “Missy.” All of these terms proved acceptable to whites because they marked a clear status distinction that was made all the more apparent by the fact that whites continued to withhold the courtesy titles “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” and “Miss” from blacks (37).

Dawes weaves together hard sounds (“g,” “t,” “d”) with softer sounds, especially the “f” consonance in the fourth stanza, emphasizing the mother’s softness and console that she wraps the white child in. The simultaneity of the sounds, coupled with the images of the mother’s deference and the white child’s denial of a courtesy title, create tension within the reader that allows them to experience the moment as does the speaker. This is more conspicuous when the mother “bawled me down for being such a fool / for not knowing no better than to take the boy / out into the yard like that...” (59).

The speaker remembers: “...how you laid him down / and sung your song oiling your palms / soothing him like a baby / his eyes drinking you in” (59). Very generic symbols of the natural world emerge in the poem—grass and yard—without any further definition, yet they supply the concrete images to frame the poem’s abstract musings on abandonment and shame. Language’s musicality in the final four lines—the assonance of “song” and “palms,” and the round vowel sounds (long ‘o’ and the ‘s’ sounds (“sung”, “song”, “soothing”))— builds and crescendos into a palpable tenderness that underscores the place-moment (action that transpires in a particular place and time) and image of the mother tenderly caring for the white child. Further, the repetition of “you” used to address the mother throughout the poem intimates the estrangement felt by the speaker who watches her/his mother nurture another child with her love.

In part two of the poem, the speaker comes to us in the present tense, her mother older. Similar to part one, this poem ends with a sensibility of tenderness and music—“with songs you never sang for me, Mama, / with tender ever felt for you” (60). Dawes prepares us for the poem’s closure by playing on the long ‘a’ sound that permeates the beginning of each line in the first couplet and the internal rhyme of “complain” and “rain”: “You complain of the arthritis in your

legs / when the rain gathers over the swamp” (60). Drawing together the human and natural layers of place, the speaker draws a direct relationship between the mother’s physical ailment and the landscape, as though the former is contingent on the latter. The following stanza is soft with ‘f’ sounds—“and I drive through the fog to find you / and fill my hands with sharp Bengay” (60)—which is then trailed by the soft ‘v’ sounds and long ‘e’ sound, evoking a sense of intimacy and closeness to her mother—“And I love those legs, mother, love / those veins, green on your tender yellow skin” (60). The rhyme of the first syllable of “tender” and “skin,” and the slant rhyme of “vein,” “green” and “skin,” move the rhythm of the poem, wending the reader to the final image of a child’s forgiveness and unabated love, despite the fact that the mother “never sang for me” (60).

In *A Poetry Handbook*, poet Mary Oliver writes that the finest of contemporary poems
brim from the particular, the regional, the personal, and become—as all
successful poems must—‘parables’ that say something finally about our own
lives, as well as the lives of their authors. . . . [T]hey slip from the instance and
become the exemplum of the general; they glow with unmistakable universal
meaning (80).

On this score, “Love Oil” closes with the unresolved tension and strained affection between a former domestic and her child, which, I would argue, represents the emotional reality of many other children whose mothers were forced to shame them and put their own children’s needs second to that of white children.¹⁵ Oliver suggests that the absence of symbols and/or codes of

¹⁵ In *Growing Up Jim Crow*, Ritterhouse observes that black parents reprimanding their child emerged during slavery, when “slave parents, like slaveholders, ‘beat slave children to make them into good slaves.’ Slave parents also taught children to suppress their anger at being beaten and encouraged them instead to feel guilt and shame at having to be punished for their own good” (Ritterhouse 33). Citing the work of historian Wilma King,

the particular and regional implies that the reader may emplace the poem wherever their imagination desires, in which case place then “become[s] interchangeable and standardized” (“Entwining Human Concerns” 3-4). Particularities of place are vague and the action can be happening anywhere (in the South); however, I contend that the presence of “swamp” in part two functions as a unique local place marker, and is a gesture, however vague it may be, toward saving the poem from *anywhereness*, which, as these poets suggest, is *nowhereness*. As previously mentioned, the poem seeks to work beyond the natural and physical landscapes of place in order to explore the complicated layers of emotion and the mind; yet human relationships are rendered like landscapes, and the nuances of human feeling and interaction then elaborate those otherwise abstract vistas into very particular places. According to philosopher of place Edward Casey, landscape “is what encompasses those more determinate places, such as rooms and buildings, designated by the usual idiolocative terms” (Casey 24). Tim Cresswell, apropos of Casey, adds that landscape “is an intensely visual idea. In most definitions of landscape the viewer stands outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place. Places are very much things to be inside of” (*Place* 10). Using these observations as a framework to approach poetics of emplacement, then, Dawes’s poetics traverse and sit squarely within these veins of thought simultaneously, ebbing and flowing between the subjectivity and particularity congenital to place, while suffusing the narratives with the conceptual musings of landscape that are the human emotions. The legibility of the particular, at times, comes second to the poem’s

Ritterhouse continues, “Enslaved parents viewed compliance with the deference ritual as a way of avoiding slavery’s punitive arm...however, they knew that it did not accurately represent their feelings. They juggled public behavior and private convictions without upsetting the routine established by whites.’ When this juggling act succeeded, it ‘embodied a major act of resistance and equipped children to defend themselves on the psychological battlefield” (33). Following emancipation, black communities carried the ritual of deference well into the twentieth century to preclude white violence as best they could; however, the deference evolved into the “politics of respectability,” which was a form of bourgeois racial etiquette that emphasized the importance of self-help and piety to earn respect from whites.

pursuit of universal meaning and the meaning of human life in a racially tumultuous climate.

This is evident in the poem “Long Memory.”

Located in the first section, “Wisteria,” “Long Memory” opens with a contemplative tone as the speaker reflects on the hate required to lynch a child,

And if it is not hate
it must be something
more insidious than hate,
something like the cold
nonchalance with which
small boys slaughter lizards,
must be something
like the casual bloodletting
of livestock

The “must” statements used by the speaker indicate him/her trying to define the world and the violence around them. Similar to “Love Oil,” Dawes employs fauna as similes to carry the abstracted indifference required to lynch a child, and also to allude to the devaluation of black bodies under the Jim Crow regime. The following stanza reads,

The sheriff does not suspect
hate in the stringing-up
of a nine year old, choking him
beating him—no hate there
in calling him “Little nigger shit!”
No hate in that at all,
Just drunken mischief,
for this is the sport of couples
there in Mount Zion
in the dry cold January low country (34).

The enjambed lines finally arrive to an end at “Little nigger shit!” layering the element of surprise that is the image of a child being lynched. More, it functions to emphasize the limitlessness and far-reach of violence down to a child during the Jim Crow era. Perhaps the most jarring of images, however, is line eight’s “sport of couples.” Yi-Fu Tuan posits that

“[p]lace is a center of meaning constructed by experience,” and that the experiences that give shape to place are “mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells...The feel of a place is registered in one’s muscles and bones” (qtd. in “Invisible Landscape” 39). Dawes’s word choice (“sport of couples”) is crucial because it suggests that lynching is engraved in the fabric, the ethos, of this place; it has assumed such a deep commonness and familiarity that white on-lookers are not moved emotionally. Dawes’s geographical emplacement through place-names like “Mount Zion” (South Carolina), and the broader appellation “low country” (the vagueness of which almost pulls the poem into an “anywhereness”), gives the poem’s philosophical endeavors a physical rootedness that gestures toward demonstrating how place and the actions performed therein are intricately entangled. While obvious physical rootedness makes passing appearances in previous poems, the physical rootedness figures more prominently here because it is located outside of Sumter and is the poet’s strategy to distinguish it from the more broader term “low country,” which encompasses a number of determinate places. More, the poet attempts to root the specificities of the memory in a particular place as an act of recovery, of witness.

The following stanza is the speaker’s deepest moment of introspection, as he/she slips into a state of despondency. The speaker asks,

How can I explain to you
that I have searched their eyes
and it is still there, the light,
that tells me all this is at the edge
of their precarious lives? How can I
tell you that I still weep
at the news of such cruelty? (34)

The long ‘i’ sounds dominate the first question, emphasizing the “I” that is the speaker and the light of a child’s eyes that the speaker expects to be snatched away through violence. The final stanza is the speaker remembering his/her father bringing home the news of the “lynched family friend” and how “father stared into / the fading embers of our home fires, / silent as a stone in water” (35). Its tone morose and its diction melancholic, the steady ‘s’ sounds in the final stanza—“cold whispers,” “deepest silence,” “closed, inscrutable night,” “silent,” “stone” and “embers”—reinforces the solemnity and stillness of the moment and the quiet, hissing anger of a father trying to make meaning of a lynching.

Collapsing and Transcending The Social and The Geographical

The poem “Train Ride” functions similarly in that it is more concerned with the social dimensions of place and its effect on the lives within it. The speaker reflects on nine African American teenagers, notoriously known as the Scottsboro Nine, who were accused of raping two white women on a train in 1931. The poem begins,

Hard to picture those sweet boys
Nameless black boys in the gut

of a slow moving freight train
crawling towards a new place (49)

Line four’s “new place” suggests that that place is not limited to a geographical place (Alabama) but also one’s social place, the place of the white girls’ bodies, and even death. On the score of the girls’ bodies, stanza four continues in this vein, “Hard to see them take turns / on the pinkness of those white girls” (49). Vital to the maintenance of Jim Crow was the *de jure* practice of spatial segregation in public spaces that was then buttressed by *de facto* practices of racial intimidation and violence as a form of social control in order to keep blacks “in their

place.” African Americans were expected to observe a sense of deference and racial etiquette in order to preclude violent rejoinders from whites, especially in an emerging consumer age, when blacks and whites were beginning to occupy more frequently public areas. Further, as Gunnar Myrdal noted in 1944, “Sex is the principle around which the whole structure of segregation...is organized” (qtd. in McGuire). On this score, J. William Harris writes, “As racial subordination was reimposed in the long process of ‘redeeming’ the South, racial boundaries had to be drawn in new ways. A taboo on sexual contact between black men and white women became central to that boundary...Racial subordination also was continually recreated in the routine actions of the everyday world,” where “racial etiquette and violence served to mark a new color line” (qtd. in Ritterhouse 27). Under segregation, then, the bodies of both black men and white women are highly policed and controlled to ensure that one does not transgress ethnosexual boundaries. Both the bodies of black men and white women become spaces on which certain characteristics are ascribed that essentially set them against each other, and define them as incompatible—black men are bestial, primal, and unfit for citizenship, while the white female body is virginal, fragile, and in need of protection from the lasciviousness of black men. The “new” in “new place,” then, alludes to the feat of black men sexually entering whiteness.

In stanzas ten and eleven, simulacra of place emerge—“hall there on 155th Street/ and Rockland Palace, where we gathered / to pray for them Scottsboro boys (49)—emplacing the poem in Harlem and, at the very least, work to linking these geographical places; just as the men collapse and transgress sexual boundaries, so too are regional geographies collapsed and transgressed as if to emphasize the profound import of their actions and their reverberation in black communities in the North. The subsequent stanzas turn their subject-focus to that of the

speaker, who implicates herself in the narrative, comparing her unadulterated body to that of the two white women, stating that “I strengthen the pure resolve of my ways, / the intact hymen of my twenty-year old womb, / not loose and wayward like those crazy two.” She continues, “We cherish the dignity of our righteousness / gleaming white beside the white girls’ sin” (50). Here, the speaker engages female respectability to then turn the notion of white purity on its head. While there can be redemption for the boys historically, the speaker, by comparing them to her own body, suggests that there can be no redemption for the women symbolically. The poem concludes: “Can’t believe those Scottsboro boys / had no idea what history they was messing with / rocking on that old freight train, / cutting through the heart of America” (50). The structure of the poem’s end mimics the disbelief expressed at the beginning to demonstrate the gravity of the boys stepping out of their social place, which the final line evinces. “Cutting through the heart of America” is not only the image of a train moving from one point to another but also a metaphor for the white female body as central to the preservation of Jim Crow. The poem itself is not concerned with “place” per se in its most traditional manifestation of the word but instead offers the reader and poet alike alternative definitions and manifestations of “place” that have profoundly shaped the African American experience in both the poem’s *here* and throughout the American South.

The poem “Traveling” imagines a young girl who desires to escape the hardship of her home place for the streets of the New York. The speaker begins with the cadence of a song, accentuating her gladness to leave:

SS Cherokee going to take me
going to take me far
far from the muggy
soft earth mist

of these cotton-picking lands (45).

Clues into the particularity of place enter the line as a symbol of onerous labor that has, presumably, shaped the speaker's subjectivity. The songlike quality of the stanza derives from stanzas two and three's repetition of a word or phrase preceding it. Also, metrically, line one contains ten syllables that begin with an iamb, "SS Cherokee"; followed by a spondee "going to"; and closes with a trochee "take me". More, the long 'ee' sound of "Cherokee" and "me" help to further create a blues-like tone. Figuring regularly in the blues aesthetic is the trope of the traveling and womanizing bluesman that wanders nomadically and is the antithesis of stasis. Similarly, the traveling female speaker—a figure underrepresented in the blues aesthetic—desires to transcend "these cotton-picking lands" and travel northward. The last three lines of the stanza function as a collage of the speaker's current emplacement and thus a glimpse into her experience as a sharecropper. The poem continues,

Sailing to New York
where you learn names
of streets like songs,

Leaving behind the farm
and tired, broken folk.

Charleston Harbour,
like a picture book.

Seems I am going far,
the way my feet feel
like walking on water.

The way my feet feel
like walking on water,
Seems I am going far.

I'm a traveling gal (45).

In stanza two, the speaker names her destination, conveying a desire to re-embed herself somewhere (New York) that is an improvement from her current lot. The speaker's adoration about New York, along with the New York in "Train Ride," from whence comes the prayers for the Scottsboro boys, establishes the North, or at the very least New York, as a place, a sanctuary, from the social and cultural tyrannies of the South that place black bodies in the margins as inferior and second-class citizens. The reader glimpses in the placeness of her present place: "the muggy / soft earth mist / of these cotton-picking lands" and stanza three's imagery of "farm / and tired, broken folk"—the latter a corollary of the former. That the speaker names her destination and references the streets, and that she is "leaving behind the farm" lends itself to the centrality of the landscape to her experience: the brief pastoral appearance of the farm and an archetypal depiction of black southerners contrast with the busy streets of New York. Stanzas five and six are a palindrome that reinforces the desire for distance and movement. At the poem's end, the final line reiterates the speaker's pursuit of transcending the total of her current place.

On the sense of place, poet Maxine Kumin once wrote, "In a poem one can use the sense of place as an anchor for larger concerns, as a link between narrow details and global realities. Location is where we start from" ("Form in Poetry of Place" 1). The poem "Dream" immediately emits a tone of longing as the self-exiled speaker, now emplaced in New York, longs for the comfort of home as the pastoral landscape of the rural north is reminiscent of the South:

In New York state, the farms spread
with familiar patient grace;
the sky is big, a fabric of colors

changing in the dazzling light,
the worn wood of ancient barns,
the timeless drag of farm critters (53).

From the outset of the poem, place matters as a portal into reveries of home. In the following stanza, place the speaker sees “the trail of a train, / crawling south, / naming the mystery of cities”. She continues, “I long/ for the simple smells of swamp earth / the fingers of soil holding me” (53). Dissimilar to other poems in the collection, place does not recede into what Merleau-Ponty terms the “matrix of habitual action,” but becomes instead an active subject in the poem and the speaker’s desired object, which is emphasized through sensory imagery of the smell of swamp and the security of the soil. “A poem’s abstractions, philosophy, and generalizations,” Siverly and McDowell begin, “become real through a vivid evocation of the natural world: The poem’s ideas are made substantial, and our subsequent experiencing of the natural world becomes tinged with the poem’s ideas” (“Local Habitation” 1). The lingering ‘s’ sound in this stanza is the very sound of the speaker’s longing, the very sound of the swamp. As the woman dreams her body into the landscape of swamp country, her memory recalls the “stern street-lamp / there on Monroe Street, the flashing / scared eyes of the Klansmen”. Place, then, for the speaker becomes enmeshed in history, and the image of the Klan circling a street-lamp stands in as a simulacrum of the place for which she longs. The speaker responds to this memory of home by “turn[ing] away from the memory” and centering her “longing for the swamp only” (54). In their essay “Entwining Human Concerns and Place,” Siverly and McDowell observe that “Even in poems of place set in the natural world, human concerns typically take center stage, entwining themselves with the particular locales in which the action unfolds so that place and idea become inextricably linked (“Entwining Human Concerns” McDowell 49). Thus, the “human concern” that the poem pursues is the relationship between reconciling one’s body to place in spite of the painful memories associated with that place. More, the enjambment after “longing” invites the

reader to experience the effect of waiting, of the lingering in-between two places as the body is emplaced *here* yet longs for the embrace of *there*.

Throughout *Wisteria* Kwame Dawes draws on a range of emplacement strategies and place's many constituents. He explores the landscape of human feeling as an extension of the social and cultural dimensions of place that weigh heavily on black subjectivity, rupturing relationships, for example, between mother and daughter; in a word, this is the corpus of Dawes's poetic strategy of emplacement: to work intensely at guiding us through the ruptures of the mind's and heart's places that are constantly fraught with what it means to *be*, to love, to transcend swamp country's (or the South's in general) dimensions of place that render them unworthy of esteem. Dawes's poetics of place privileges the subject's interiority, while simultaneously linking the poem's abstract musings to the external landscapes in which the subjects are emplaced. Whereas as Nikky Finney's poetics of emplacement speaks largely to the social transgression that was the entire institution of chattel slavery, Dawes appears to be interested in the transgression of and collapsing of physical and social geography, which situates and unsituates his work within place simultaneously. Both Finney's and Dawes's poetics are, to echo Tuan, pauses in place in that both poets rely on history and memory of places that are threatened by Massey's "progressivism," yet they simultaneously un-pause the voices, stories, and histories of those rendered unworthy of carrying history's pen. Put differently, they must pause to un-pause.

CHAPTER THREE

IN CONVERSATION WITH FINNEY AND DAWES

As a South Carolina poet, part of my literary critical study of Nikky Finney and Kwame Dawes has involved making and thinking about my own emplaced poems. In this chapter, I include poem drafts of South Carolina and Mississippi poems—complete and incomplete—that I analyze as a way to think about the range of choices available to poets writing about place. My poems are in dialogue with the Finney and Dawes, from whom I take my lead. My hope is that exploring both the creative process and the creative products in tandem will yield a deeper, more layered understanding of how we might read and think about the nuances of poetic place.

When I originally approached place and its relevance to my work, Alice Walker’s widely anthologized essay “The Black Writer and the Southern Experience” was on my mind. Walker asserts that the black southern writer “inherits as a natural right...a sense of community” and, more importantly, “we inherit [the] great responsibility[:] for we must give voice to centuries not only of silent bitterness and hate but also of neighborly kindness and sustaining love” (Walker 21). Walker, with a strong *must*, essentially beckons fellow southern black authors of all genres to write about their respective places and the many, many stories therein so that he/she might intone his/her history. At risk, Walker suggests, are the truths of our past. Thinking in this vein, my earliest conception of a poetics of place meant incorporating elements of history that have profoundly shaped the human dimension, with an occasional nod to the natural dimension. Along with *Rice* and *Wisteria*, on my shelves were other texts doing similar work—including Natasha

Trethewey's *Native Guard* and Dawes' *Gomer's Song*. These are all poets who know each other, and who are literally in conversation (and occasionally publish work in the same anthologies).

As I worked on these poems, I tried to imagine the nuances of that conversation—the ways these poets challenge and compliment each other's meditations on place. This thesis is a way of joining that important conversation as a student, a listener/reader, and as a fellow poet.

"Call It By Another Name" is a sonnet dedicated to my 101 year old great-grandfather, Henry Scott. It was occasioned by a sepia-toned photograph I saw as an adult: him on a train platform newly returned home from World War II. The poem corresponds with both Finney and Dawes in that the poet enters the poem as narrator and subject (Finney's strategy), but it is the grandfather who stands at the center of the poem and around which the action of the poem revolves (Dawes's strategy). Written in two stanzas, the first stanza presents the image of the grandfather tending his garden, the speaker peering through a window, while the second stanza, using the technique of ekphrasis, transitions to a depiction of the grandfather in a time past. The poem opens,

I watch Granddaddy separate carefully the edible plants from
the small or dying ones, the good fruit from the bad—
he called it a "dance of discrimination". He does this quietly,
like the quiet man he's always been, occasionally humming,
The world didn't give it to me, ohhh ooo-oo, this joy I have.
My brother joins me at the window, placing in my hand
what he's discovered in a closet of our great-grandparents' home:

In an earlier draft of this poem, grandfather tends the garden, a "brown arc of body / beneath Columbia's summer sun." Siverly and McDowell write that "to capture the flavor of place is to choose words that belong particularly to that place" ("Invisible" 43). In this particular instance the word that captures the place is the place-name. While "Columbia" might not fully capture the

essence of place or its particularities, the significance of locality and of the place's specificity reverberate within the reader nonetheless; the speaker's utterance of a place name alone suggests (or would have suggested, rather) the importance of Columbia as home, especially with regard to stanza two when the man in the picture "has returned home." Also, before the current first line, I originally incorporated specific vegetables and fruits—"black walnut", "persimmon", and "muscadine"—flora native to South Carolina and, more specifically, to my grandfather's yard and garden. Finney and Dawes often use the broad term "Carolina" to emplace the action and subject(s) of the poem; however, I employed an even more specific name—the city's—to enunciate the importance of place to the poem's action. Although these items stand-in as details of place to make place more legible, I excised them for the simple fact that such emphasis on the natural world might have suggested (to the reader) that the poem was about the relationship between the grandfather and the natural world; it might have disrupted the potential of the poem, pulling us out. The act of gardening is at the root of the work in the poem, but it is the act alone and not the *what* of gardening that pushes the narrative, which is a story about the long and deeply personal reverberations of Jim Crow in South Carolina.

Resonating in the first stanza is a quietness (accomplished through the images of a child engaging his quiet grandfather with his eyes only and the repetition of "quiet"), the only sound we hear is the grandfather occasionally humming a gospel ditty. This tone is sustained through the second stanza:

In the middle of the photograph, my great-grandfather is caught
mid-stride, his mouth the shape of uncertainty, his eyes
the color of a freshly ended war. He has returned home. The sign
hangs in the corner, partly out of the frame, showing only COLOR
in black letters. His duffle bag falls across his back like
a mute body, leaden. The train stretches behind him, a dark

horizon. Imagine it whistling like a young boy.

Borrowing a technique from Kathleen Peirce's poem "Goodbye, Everyone" (see Appendix A), the second half of my sonnet utilizes ekphrasis to describe the image of the grandfather in the past. The line break after "caught" reinforces the function of the photograph: to capture, to eternalize a pause in time, place. The first three lines describe the grandfather's face through abstract metaphors to emphasize the strangeness of returning home where his dignity as a soldier is juxtaposed by the sign that shows "COLOR," reinforcing his position in a society as a second-class citizen. The solemnity of the moment is also reinforced by "He has returned home," which asks the reader to pause and weigh the significance of what it means to return home during this era. Like the young child in Dawes' "Mother and Daughter" for whom home is marked by austerity and bleakness, home for the veteran *is* uncertainty; home is the "dark horizon" of the train.

Regarding place, I took my lead from Dawes, choosing regionally specific identifiers ("COLOR") over more specific local markers. Also, the grandfather calling gardening "a dance of discrimination," coupled with the final stanza, illustrate the relationship between the man and the invisible landscape of his *social* place, which requires a geographical, material place. The line break (the interstice) between "sign" and "hangs" and the line's final word, "COLOR" is the space not only between the sign and the man, but it is also the interstice between a hanging "COLOR" and the ground, evoking the all-too-familiar lynching iconography—a violent form of social control to ensure that black bodies "stay in their place." While these imageries might not derive from a singular place, they stand as general signifiers of a Southern past, replacing the urge for a particularity with the urgency to address larger historical concerns that existed across

myriad places throughout the American South. The train as a “dark horizon” in line six compels the eye to move as if it were examining a horizon, the line stretching across the page. The final self-enclosed line, an imperative, summons readers into the action of the poem, beckoning their minds to impose sound on the photograph.

“We begin with history,” Nikky Finney uttered at the opening of her 2011 National Book Award Speech. “The line is both literal and figurative,” writes poet Terrance Hayes in a commentary for *Head Off & Split*. “It suggests that we begin attached to history: the umbilical cord connecting the child to everything the mother has encountered. It suggests we begin not with the Self, but with all that precedes the Self” (nikkyfinney.net). Like her speech, Finney’s works (and Dawes’s as well) begin as testaments to being alive, while acknowledging our inextricable bind to the past (nikkyfinney.net): “If my name is ever called out, I promised my girl-poet self, so too would I call out theirs” (*Head Off* 101). As Finney elucidates in her speech, history begins with acknowledgement, with witness. Similarly, my poems (or fragments of poems) that follow are acknowledgements, acknowledgement as revision and acknowledgement as witness to a particularly emplaced event that, though very recent, is threatened by the switchblade of erasure: the Orangeburg Massacre of 1968. As we slowly approach the fiftieth anniversary of the event, it remains the white elephant in S.C.’s historical room; there has been no proper F.B.I investigation or Blue Ribbon Commission. However, despite state officials’ unwillingness to commemorate the massacre, Finney references it in “Dancing With Strom,” presenting the place name as evidence that black people are extraordinarily willing to forgive. Community members also remember and continue to honor those who braved the bullets and batons to fight racial bigotry and injustice. Orangeburg is the town from which my great-

grandfather hails, so we are deeply connected to the community of S.C. State University (one of Orangeburg's historically black universities) and to Orangeburg's black community. This is the history to which I am tethered; I grew up hearing stories about 1968 during conversations with my great-grandparents, and reading about the massacre in the tiny pamphlet I once found nestled between dusty *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines in my great- great aunt's sweet grass basket.

On Thursday, February 8, 1968, state troopers opened fire on the campus of S.C. State University following a three-day protest against Orangeburg's only bowling alley by the university's Black Awareness Coordinating Committee (a grassroots organization that highly resembled SNCC). *De jure* segregation had been struck down nearly four years prior, yet the bowling alley's owner still practiced *de facto* segregation. By midnight, three young men—Delano Middleton, Samuel Hammond and Henry Smith—had been killed, their backs torn apart by deer rifles; more than twenty others had suffered mild to severe injuries. Left out of the state's civil rights narrative, the Orangeburg Massacre is virtually unknown to many of the state's residents as it received very little news coverage. More notably, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated exactly two months later in Memphis, TN, to which poor, urban black communities responded with riots that broke out across the country. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy brother, Robert Kennedy, occurred nearly four months later. Nonetheless, black residents in Orangeburg (including my own family) and in surrounding cities remember the local event to this day, and every year hold vigils to awaken the state from its amnesia.

The first untitled Orangeburg poem I discuss is a fragment of an unfinished whole that was, at one point, a completed (rough) draft but is now undone. The initial draft read,

How quickly can you count to death?
When you've arrived, ask us who has listened.

As your prostrate body bleeds itself into palimpsest,
your mother's given herself to mythomania, hardly believing:
when you wore those stars across your back
like a British monarch, history might remember you.
But we know better, tucking you away
in our memory like a game of hide-and-seek,
your name always hiding, our mouths the seeker —
the game that betrays us all....

With this draft, I wanted to emplace the poem by focusing on the idea of palimpsest; I also wanted to either address or tell the story from the perspective of the youngest protestor, Delano Middleton, who was killed. The idea of palimpsest, of buried historical layers in a particular place or text, resonated with me because the process of erasure is perpetual. In this instance, while the Orangeburg Massacre remains an underdiscussed episode in South Carolina's history, the scars remain and are manifest in the unwavering annual observance of vigil for the lives lost and threatened in 1968. In the vein of Finney and Dawes, I wanted to be a witness to history, capturing the sense of place in a time replete with racial division and strife. In an earlier version of this draft, I created an image in the first stanzas of the boy's "prostrate body bleed[ing] into Orangeburg dust, / into palimpsest," but decided that making the boy's body—or his name even—into the palimpsest was a more surprising and nuanced strategy.

Central to poetics of place, if we poets are to follow the models of emplacement written by Finney and Dawes, is the presence of a human subject. I struggled with this idea because, just as I did not want to focus so heavily on natural signifiers in "Call It," I also did not want to feel encumbered with trying to accurately capture the human dimension of place as it existed in reality. I felt bound to fact and concreteness because I felt (feel?) that the subject—specifically Delano—needed his voice to be heard. Is this not the aspiration of palimpsestic poetry of place?

Yet I also struggled to “write off the subject,” to use poet Richard Hugo’s phraseology. About writing off the “trigger subject,” Hugo notes,

The point is, the triggering subject should not carry with it moral or social obligations to feel or claim you feel certain ways. If you feel pressure to say what you know others want to hear and don't have enough devil in you to surprise them, shut up. But the advice is still well taken. Subjects that ought to have poems have a bad habit of wanting lots of other things at the same time. And you provide those things at the expense of your imagination.

In writing emplaced work, historical veracity and the integrity of the poem sometimes come into conflict. Heeding Hugo’s advice, I created the image in line four of a grieving mother “giv[ing] herself to mythomania.” Rather incautiously, I employed the word “mythomania” as a strategy to cast off the responsibility of describing a grieving mother in purely laudatory terms; my aim was to take the poem in a direction that still worked toward memorializing the child yet remained loyal to the poet’s demigod: imagination. Palimpsestic words like “history” and “memory” signal what the poem is rooted in, where its primary concerns lay. While writing off the subject is the poet’s first responsibility, á la Hugo, I have come to realize that poetics of place requires not a writing off of the subject per se, but rather an alternative way of conceptualizing the trigger subject’s being; it also requires creating a harmony between the human and non-human dimensions.

For example, in her poem “Brown Country” from *Rice*, Finney grapples with reconciling being black and “country,” a lover of the physical land, in light of the land’s history. She writes:

I am country...
Natively black foot

With land earth ocean
where fathers and their mothers smoldered
in the name of the Union
how come ain't no sad country songs
about Indians being holocausted
or Africans jumping the broom on Sundays
for to never see their sweetie again

...how do you explain being African
and loving country
not the red or white in the blue
but the green and the amber and the ochre-orange (113-114)

Similar to “Yellow Jaundice,” Finney tethers her body to the physical land and the sea, and in the process delves into historical concerns regarding the displacement of Native Americans and the denial of marriage for enslaved Africans. She balances the human dimensions of history with the non-human dimensions (the land and the social institution of racism) in order to make some sense of her own identity as a black, southern woman who loves country music and the “country” landscape.

When thinking through poems that I have written of this nature—history and memory—(and really any poem based on a real event or person) I am often confronted with the question, *how accountable to truth do I have to be? To what or whom is the poet most responsible?* And as my adviser once remarked, *What if the lie is more interesting?* In her essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” poet Adrienne Rich, apropos Hugo, explores the tension between balancing reality and the imaginative in poetry:

But to write poetry or fiction, or even to think well, is not to fantasize, or to put fantasies on paper. For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed—freedom to press on, to

touchstone to rewrite and revise historical narratives of emplaced experiences, I too borrow from the particularities of place and its historical layers (and the historical's social and cultural layers) to *witness* via imaginative work. To say “this place existed like this” (“Invisible” 46); to say, as the speaker in the poem says, “we know better.” The following poem, “Orangeburg, 2/7/68,” is a manifold feat of acknowledgement to the Orangeburg Massacre and is a response to what Walker termed earlier as the black writer’s “great responsibility.

Taking structural directions from Lucille Clifton’s “alabama 9/15/63” (see Appendix B), which focuses on the 1963 bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham “Orangeburg, 2/7/68” is a meditation set on the eve of the massacre. This poem is told from the perspective of the youngest protestor, Delano Middleton, who was a seventeen-year-old senior in high school. The poem begins:

On asphalt black as a trigger,
glass crashes with a sound
too large for our small town. In front
of the sole bowling alley, our bodies
are a bank of tension and riot,
our fists lift. Glass glints like hope.

From the outset, the title emplaces the reader both geographically and historically. Naming the place, as Tuan argues, “is power—the creative power to call something into being, to render the invisible visible, to impart a certain character to things” (“Language/Naming” 688). In a less direct way “the sole bowling alley” figures importantly here because it suggests the particular place’s centrality; it becomes a site of tension and gestures toward connecting manmade place to its human dimensions. Stanza one has a tone of rupture and tension, created in part through imagery (the “glass crash[ing]” and the trigger—the prelude to rupture) and in part through diction. The sound of the glass crashing that is “too large for our small town” ruptures the calm

of the town. The image of tense, rioting bodies concretizes the tone, complimenting the hard “k” sounds (“black,” “crashes, and “bank”) and “t” sounds (“tension,” “riot,” “lift,” and “glints”) repeated throughout. Returning to an explanation from Bachelard, the poetic image recreates place through reverberation and through sound and image play; the readers and the poet are able to “feel” the emplaced action as they imagine glass shattering and college-aged protestors raising their fists in solidarity against injustice.

The final line of my poem plays with the short “i” sound and monosyllabic words that staccato the breath, as if to emphasize the emotional affect—*anxiety, fear, courage*—that accompanies the subjects’ act of lifting. Stanza two reads:

Not like other Tuesdays,
when I am simply seventeen.
I stand breath to breath with
an agent of the state, his face
clenched tight enough
to break my fake bravura.
Not like other Tuesdays.
I wish to part my lips, to ask
“Who is the agitator in this place?”
“The one that is broken or the breaker?”

As mentioned previously, the speaker of the poem is a teenager, and I thought to tell the story from his perspective (ala Dawes) in order to heighten the emotional impact of the poem; historically, Middleton was one of the three people killed (deaths which do not occur in this poem), which hopefully adds to the poem’s complexity. With the exception of the speaker’s age, this stanza relies mainly on the imaginary. I do not know if Middleton stood “breath to breath with / an agent of the state.” I do not know if he wore the façade of a resolute, unbreakable man. However, in the poem’s transmutation of emplacement and action, he is circumspect, he does carry the imitation of bravura, and he is subjected to that night’s violence.

Similar to the rupture of the first stanza, the line “Not like other Tuesdays” and its end-stopped repetition in line seven suggest the disruption of the sense of place and the speaker’s reality. More, the second, self-contained “Not like other Tuesdays.” creates a pause in which the reader is meant to contemplate *this* Tuesday’s gravity, its difference. Borrowing a strategy from Clifton’s “jasper texas 1998,” the poem employs questions; the final two questions of the stanza pursue more abstract musings about violence and the irony; the hard “k” sounds in line six and their reappearance in the final line, coupled with the long “a” assonance (“agent,” “break,” “face,” “break,” “fake,” “place”) dominate the stanza to reinforce the act of breaking, the hardness and tension of the moment.

Orangeburg, 2/7/68 currently concludes with the following couplet: “And then I feel the torrent of his nightstick / across my back like heavy rain.” In an earlier version, these lines were the first two lines of a four line stanza, followed by a final fourth stanza. The stanzas originally read:

And then I feel the torrent of his nightstick
lose composure across my back like heavy rains.
We retreat. Dart like fish into the swamp of town,
tearing down where we do not belong as we go.

“We try again tomorrow,” a voice utters,
us all gathered around the bonfire’s warmth.
I, who in two days will become martyr,
sit still, eyes juggling the fire,
waiting.

Upon receiving feedback on pacing and strengthening the imagery, I removed “lose composure.” Regarding emplacement, I wrote the original last two lines to mark the relationship between the town and the student as one of opposition, with the town containing markers of places where “we do not belong.” More, Orangeburg’s nickname, “Garden City,” initially stood in for “swamp of

town,” but the softness of the image concerned me; its ability to deliver a greater affect was unpromising, although it would have served as a “language of place” in some of the ways that Siverly and McDowell discuss. Using “Garden City” might have also suggested that this poem could not have taken place anywhere, that the place itself enters the line of the poem down to the image (but it was at this point in revisions that I changed the title to include the name and date to “seal” this impulse). The third line in the former final stanza—“I, who in two days will become martyr”—mirrors a technique by Yusef Komunyakaa’s “A Break from the Bush,” (see Appendix C) which utilizes the temporal shift as an element of surprise, but I opted instead to end the poem precisely at the literal breaking of tension and waiting embodied by the “...” after the final question, as if the nightstick responds to the boy’s cogitations.

When I first approached writing emplaced poetry as a means of historical excavation, the first place that came to mind was not South Carolina but rather Mississippi, perhaps because it is here that I met my fascination for poetry and for the history of particular sites and places. More simply, it has been my home for the last two years, and as such, I have come to establish roots here. Befriending a number of Mississippi natives, reading myriad texts about Mississippi history (and southern history writ large), and talking with family members from home who came of age during the twentieth century yielded both a longing for home and a longing, in the words of my grandmother, to cultivate the land where I am, *this* place. That longing meant making poems that reach deep into the history and cultures of this place.

Embedded throughout *Rice* and *Wisteria* are poems that immerse the reader in places outside of South Carolina. Alongside Finney’s South Carolina poems are her “Kentucky poems” that transmute the historical landscapes of Lexington, where Finney spent the majority of her

career before returning home a few years ago. For example, in the poem “Mary Mary Quite Contrary,” Finney imagines the story of Mary, “who [, in 1799,] sued her owner claiming she was entitled to her freedom” (*Rice* 72). This poem, like “Permittable Thunder” and “Cotton Tea,” focus on the body as a place that, under enslavement, becomes an extension of the slave owner’s power and control. Dawes’ “Scrapbook,” “Traveling,” and “Train Ride” also focus on the poetic subject longing for home from a New York City park, or passing from one place to another. Similarly, when I began thinking through my own poetry and its relation to place, the many places in Mississippi that I have visited over the last two years seemed like promising potential poetic material.

Taking my lead from Finney and Dawes, I responded to my current emplacement and wrote about a particular visit to Holly Springs, for the “Behind the Big House Tour.” This annual event offers plantation tours and includes interpretations of former slave dwellings, memorializing the many women and men who lived and worked the land. On the interconnectedness of places while being emplaced in a singular location, Malpas writes,

Place contains sets of interconnected locations that are nested within those places such that, depending on how broadly I think of the place in which I now find myself... I can grasp the interconnected character of a variety of locations within my current location... In being acquainted with a single place, then, one is thereby acquainted with a larger network of places” (Malpas 105).

Though I am not from Mississippi, I feel a spiritual connection to this place by virtue of the shared African American experience in the American South—this shared history connects my birthplace to my current place. Like the fragmented Orangeburg poem, “Pilgrimage to Holly

Springs, MS” was also a finished poem but is now undone for a number of reasons (mainly because the poem felt flat and did not answer the question posed by a reader, *where is the speaker in this?*). Nonetheless, the poem draft draws from a romanticized tale told in the main house during the “Behind the Big House” tour, during the recitation of which, all the elderly, white on-lookers, stood enthralled. Written in two sections, part one of the poem reads,

The fleshy woman
Dressed
in antebellum garb
utters a story:
He loves the one
that tends
to his daughter,
she who gilds
the girl’s mouth
with her round
tit.
A love story,
she says.

Returning to Tuan’s idea of naming place as the exertion of its influence on the subject, the title (“Pilgrimage to Holly Springs, MS”) carries the place name in order to strengthen the connection between place and memory. The particular locale renders the action and language of the poem: “The past cannot be grasped independently of location in place” (Malpas 180). If we were to remove the title, however, no other simulacrum of place emerges; thus, the poem might be understood as a “southern” or regional poem and not necessarily a “Mississippi” poem. Regardless, what I imagine for this poem— contrasting my experience with that of the other visitors—requires that Holly Springs and this tour be lucidly present. The quote in the epigraph, “Captain Black come out and tell us we free, free as the water run,” comes from William Edward Black, who was formerly enslaved on the plantation where I then stood; reading this quote on a

piece of plantation signage occasioned this poem and my desire to write about what I witnessed. The quote from Black imbues the poem with a feeling of “realness,” changing how one reads and experiences the poem. Having the words of a historical person headline the poem matters to its genesis because it demonstrates my use of the historical materials as a preliminary step toward recovery and remembering. Although the poem is written in present tense, the second speaker in the poem, “the fleshy woman / dressed/ in antebellum garb,” speaks of a time past in the present tense, conflating two temporalities. The short, enjambed lines force the reader to slow down, to briefly pause, and to listen as if they too were in attendance. The fragment’s diction is simple, using language that naturalizes and validates a story; while based on truth, is reminiscent of romanticized southern dramas all too familiar to us in the present.

The second section of the poem speaks more broadly to the pilgrimage and the permanence of the past in the present:

Each spring
the ghosts
put on flesh.

Mississippi’s sons find
their breath
again
in the pulses of the living
who relive
the lives
of the dead
each year.

They return to
the valley of bones,
bringing myth,
a thousand repetitions
on their thin, white lips.

This section of the poem opens with a phantasmal image, tethering the “ghosts / put[ting] on flesh” to the materiality of spring. The first line of the stanza evokes a sense of the land’s ownership over the ghosts as “Mississippi” enters to claim her heritage and history. “Again” alludes to the regularity of not only the pilgrimage but also the insistence of the ineradicable traces of the past in the present—of palimpsest. Like the ghosts who find breath in the “pulses of the living,” the “l” sounds (“pulses,” “living,” “relive,” and “lives”) pulse throughout the stanza, emphasizing the connection between life and death. Accompanying the sustained “l” sound is the sibilant “s” in the final two stanzas that allude to the elongation of history, of memory. Unclear in the final stanza is “they” (which, for clarification’s sake, are the visitors who bring with them myth). The repeated “th” and “t” sounds in the final two lines mimic the imagined repetition of myth and our inability to elude place’s ghosts. For what is place without them? Its *genius loci*?

Finney states in her National Book Award speech that if her name were ever called out, so too would she call out theirs—the ghosts of South Carolina, of our nation. “The ones who longed to read and write, but were forbidden...who lost hands and feet, were killed by laws written by men who believed they owned other men.” She continues: “Tonight, these forbidden ones move all around the room as they please. They sit at whatever table they want....Some have just climbed out of the cold wet Atlantic, just to be here. We shiver together” (*Head Off* 101). As the speech suggests, the ghosts of Africans and their descendants, and the urgency to acknowledge and render their silenced histories, drive the work of Finney, forever haunting why she writes. By focusing on a specific place (and sometimes on the South as a whole), Finney and the ghosts of place become a duet, as Finney becomes the conduit through which their voices might be heard and their realities seen. In a different vein, ghosts do not appear as prominently in

Dawes's work as they do Finney's; however, like Finney, he is nonetheless interested in recalling place's ancestors.

Finney and Dawes are important models for emplacement because their work forces writers and scholars to ask a number of questions about how place is created by names and other markers of the local, and how they interact in the context of each poem. As this chapter on the making of emplaced poems shows, choices about framing, pacing, surrounding details, and order of presentation all coalesce to create different kinds of place poems. The lively local details of a poem (what Ellen Bryant Voigt calls texture) combined with formal and structural choices mean that one Orangeburg poem is not like another, even when written by the same author. The question this raises: what does this variability say about emplacement? It says that the variability of choices and strategies that might be employed in poetics of emplacement reflect the various nested arrangements of place itself, ranging from its social, cultural, historical and geographical features. Different poetic strategies can be used to capture place's myriad constituents in an effort to elucidate alternative ways of looking at, interpreting and/or experiencing place. As mentioned earlier, poetics of emplacement for Finney and Dawes is about recalling place's historical and contemporary borderlands, and through their works we gather that "place" and "emplacement" are as complex as the realities and details revealed within them.

CONCLUSION

Place compels both Nikky Finney and Kwame Dawes: the coastal islands of South Carolina where a poet is born and finds ancestral and familial connection; ships that carried the men and women “of the then and there” whose histories find voice in the line; the mental and emotional landscapes of children whose mothers mothered other children; the edge of the swamp where a child learns not to transcend his place in society; and the home of a domestic and her daughter, empty of the semblance of love. As a medley of the social and the cultural, the personal and the collective, the intangible and the material, place shapes the poems in *Rice* and *Wisteria*, driving the language and imagery, and ultimately shedding light on subjectivities that are situated between silence and erasure.

As demonstrated throughout my analysis, place carries a consortium of potential meanings, each poet summoning those that fit their individual engagement of its particularities. Finney, who seeks out the seeds of South Carolina’s African heritage, engages the human history along the coastal Sea Islands, ranging from imagined communities of enslaved men and women to the contemporary destruction of the land and the removal of Gullah-Geechee people. She taps into the material layers of place through palimpsestic language, establishing her poetics of place as one that is a corollary of and renaissance of the Sea Islands *genius loci*, namely the memory and spirit of Africans and their descendants. Throughout *Rice*, Finney inserts herself and draws a connection between self and place, illustrating what J.E. Malpas observes as the inseparability of the body and emplacement: “Our identities are thus bound up with particular place or

localities...Particular places enter into our self-conception and self-identity inasmuch as it is only in, and through our grasp of, the places in which we are situated that we can encounter objects, other persons or, indeed, ourselves” (Malpas 177). Violence, loss, historical interstices and euphemisms all coalesce to eventually guide the poet to a sense of reclamation. Harkening back to Rothenberg, this is a poetics of knowing where one is and articulating his/her being in the world; thus, Finney’s achievement of self-understanding hinges greatly upon finding Africa in South Carolina.

For Dawes, poetry of place means guiding the reader through the tense and tender emotional and mental landscapes of black women and children in Sumter, South Carolina; *these* places are determined by the cultural and social layers that force their bodies into performances of deference that operate to “keep them in place,” to borrow from Creswell. Dissimilar to Finney, Dawes never inserts himself in the text; he establishes a poetics of place that looks beyond knowing and into the borderlands of the psychical realm of children and women gone North. The book’s subtitle tells us that these are “Twilight poems from the Swamp Country,” and while the text makes use of the natural, material landscape, it is often captured only by pedestrian, non-place specific places. More, poetry of place at its core is about the relationship between poet self and the world around, which implies that poetics like Dawes’s sit outside of conventional understandings. Bachelard’s reverberation of the poetic image buttresses this point, arguing that through the poetic image we are able to experience the poet’s sense of emplacement—but this of course requires that the poet inserts himself or herself into the poems. Though personal emplacement is not the case with Dawes, he engenders a new way of conceptualizing a poetics of emplacement that allow the voices of the subject to be heard without the obvious interference

of the poet's voice. Similar to Finney, Dawes finds value in the violence and losses of these women, but he attempts to move them past victimhood and restore to them the dignity they "give up / all week long" (Dawes 61). His poetics of place, and Finney's alike, to borrow a phrase from Charles H. Rowell, is a poetics of "inscriptive restorations:" exploring emplaced subjugated narratives through place's many constituents.

Doreen Massey argues for a less reactionary and more "progressive" sense of place that accommodates the increasing time-space compression and constant movement of our world, arguing that we can understand ourselves and the world around us with a sense of rootedness. However, I contend that Massey's conceptualization of place opposes the ethos of a poetics of emplacement, which cannot be fathomable or possible without the historical and material attachments to place; ergo, poetry of place is the antithesis to the "place" Massey proposes. Etymologically, "emplacement" derives from a militaristic lexicon, meaning "a platform for guns replete with defensive epaulements that afford cover from enemy attack" (Phillips). A poetics of emplacement, then, is the poet's defense of place against forces that seek to erase and disturb a sense of place, be they symbolic or literal. As Dawes and Finney demonstrate, poetry of place is reactionary in the best and broadest sense of that word. I contend that these poems demonstrate a will to create and preserve a sense of place and rootedness—to heal centuries of deracination, and to tether displaced bodies and identities to that land that is their own. Poetry of place, then, is Tuan's "pause in movement."

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: "GOODBYE, EVERYONE" BY KATHLEEN PEIRCE

Of course what I remember most
is what we used to call the Park
Edition. That is where we had our cottage
Which was as purchased years before my great
Grandmother, Helen Hascall Woodward.
Down on the riverbank, in front of the cottage,
Was a huge oak tree with a bench built all
the way around it. Then of course
there was the old chain ferry, operated by Jay Meyers
and his helpers. The ferry consisted of two
chain barges being pulled across the river
by a large cog wheel running on the chain
turned by hand cranks. Then too
there were two scows that held
six passengers plus the oarsman. There was a bell
on each bank to signal the ferryman in case
he happened to be in the ferry shanty
on the other side. Then down the river
was the ferry store, run by a wonderful
lady, May Heath, who was really Mrs. Doe Heath, Mrs.
Marshmallow because her beautiful
snow-white hair was always fluffed so high on her head.
I would like to leave you with a picture
of that tree. You can see my whole family
sitting on the bench. That is me there
on my grandmother's lap. I am only two weeks old, 1914.

APPENDIX B: "ALABAMA 9/15/63" BY LUCILLE CLIFTON

Have you heard the one about
the shivering lives,
the never to be borne daughters and sons,

the one about Cynthia and Carole and Denise and Addie Mae?
Have you heard the one about
the four little birds
shattered into skylarks in the white
light of Birmingham?

Have you heard how the skylarks,
known for their music,
swooped into heaven, how the sunday
morning strains shook the piano, how the blast
is still too bright to hear them play?

APPENDIX C: "A BREAK FROM THE BUSH" BY YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA

The South China Sea
drives in another herd.
The volleyball's a punching bag:
Clem's already lost a tooth
& Johnny's left eye is swollen shut.
Frozen airlifted steaks burn
on a wire grill, & miles away
machine guns can be heard.
Pretending we're somewhere else,
we play harder.
Lee Otis, the point man,
high on Buddha grass,
buries himself up to his neck
in sand. "Can you see me now?
In this spot they gonna build
a Hilton. Invest in Paradise.
Bang, bozos! You're dead."
Frenchie's cassette player
unravels Hendrix's "Purple Haze."
Snake, I7, from Daytona,
sits at the water's edge,
the ash on his cigarette
pointing to the ground
like a crooked finger. CJ,
who in three days will trip
a fragmentation mine,
runs after the ball
into the whitecaps,
laughing.

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