

## CHAPTER 11.

# ANOTHER ENDING, OR LET ME SAY THIS ANOTHER WAY

Words can be acts of violence. And I'm not speaking just metaphorically. What I hope this book has argued well to you is that words ain't never been just words.

Sticks and stones *may* break our bones, but words, they can wound our psyches, break our spirits, and harm us in ways that keep hurting long after the exchange is over. Words make us as much as we make them. This means they also hurt and help us, wound us and salve the wounds that need healing. Words are the weapons of a racist war we've been fighting for centuries.

Most of the time, though, our intentions for our words are good, or we want them to be good. We don't mean harm. And yet, harm happens every day, everywhere, to everyone. So I wonder, how meaningful or useful or productive is it to use our intentions for our actions and words as a yardstick by which to measure their worth or goodness or fairness? Let me state it plainly: A person's intentions to be fair do not matter when it comes to reproducing racism and White language supremacy in the world. Our intentions about our actions or language really only help us sleep better at night by ignoring the pain and hurt that our words, race-judgements, and ideas about language and intelligence do to others. Our intentions allow us to wage a tacit racialized language war against others, against those whom we say we wish to help or don't want to harm.

Because we do not control most of the variables and conditions in our lives, we hold on to our good intentions. We control those, but our good intentions do not control the outcomes of our actions, language, and judgements. If this is true, we should stop using personal intentions as the main measure for whether we engage in or contribute to racism and White language supremacy in the world. This does not mean we don't need good intentions or can't see the value they provide us. In other words, I don't want to ignore the good intentions of people, White, Brown, or Black. I want to separate our intentions from how we measure the appropriateness and effectiveness of our actions and words, of our institutions and classrooms, of our policies and guidelines, of our language standards and how those standards are used against people.

The problem is that in systems of scarcity, hierarchy, competition, and singular linear standards for language use—systems that are predicated on a few winners and a lot of losers, where most decisions are ones about who is right and who is wrong, what is true and what is false, what is professional sounding and

what sounds unintelligent—helping ourselves ends up harming others because of how those systems use and circulate our decisions.

Let me say that more simply. Too often, helping yourself harms others. In systems of limited resources, helping yourself usually means keeping something from others or denying them something that you want or allegedly deserve more. It's usually a zero-sum game. Either you win (and they lose) or you lose (and they win). The system of grades and GPAs works this way. But I don't think our systems have to be this way. We can change systems.

One difficulty in applying any lessons you might take from this book about White language supremacy, about fighting structures that hurt us all, is that it is too often very difficult to imagine alternatives. What alternatives are there to grading by a single standard in writing classrooms, or to a single standard of English for U.S. news anchors on TV programming, or the English offered in all grammar and style guides, or the English used in international business settings? How do we as individuals change our habits of language and judgement so we do not unconsciously reproduce White language supremacy yet still communicate effectively with one another? How do we simultaneously change the systems that demand, use, and reward only one standard of English? How do we create a world where it doesn't require a rare exception like me to get what I have, to achieve what I have?

Not easy questions to answer. Much of the difficulty is because we are talking about systems that need changing, not one, not two, but many all at once.

I'm not gonna try to offer a list of systemic changes for schools, or language tests, or language practices for business settings, or media. I cannot. These are things everyone must figure out together. I'm also resisting trying to answer these questions because that rehearses a HOWL that experts and professors have been enacting for a long time that reproduces their conditions of language and judgement as if they represent universal conditions for language and its judgement. I don't know all the conditions or answers.

People like me giving THE answers to complex problems that affect lots of people not like me in places I do not know, speaking languages I do not speak, is how we got in this mess in the first place. Conditions and people, places and languages, are multiple and context-specific. We all have to do this changing with each other, for each other, in our ways together.

So I'll end this book a second time with a fable, a futuristic-fantasy-tale of anti-structural magic, a made-up story that's also about White language supremacy and systemic change. It's a fable about you, a future you, or someone like you, or not you, or who could be and cannot be you. It's about the places that make you and unmake you. It's about languaging—that is, those places and you and what you do. And it's about not your languaging, not your places, not what

you do, and not you. It is not a blueprint for what we should do today or tomorrow, but it points in the directions we might go, directions that offer ecological freedom without denying that we always create the boundaries of the places where we live and commune.

I'll leave it up to you to decide what my fable means and what to do with it. It's not the answer, but if we care about addressing the systemic problems of White language supremacy in our world, we shouldn't ignore such possibilities. The possibilities of a world without White language supremacy are painful and wonderful and everything in between and outside these things. I offer the fable not as a solution to follow or figure out but as a bit of languaging that I hope instigates, prods, pokes at us all, gives us cause to language more and perhaps do some non-languaging as well. We are the languages we do in the places we do that languaging with the people there. Our languaging are the structures we need to rebuild and celebrate, to make new places, people, and practices for a more socially just tomorrow and today.

It's tempting to end this book with the previous chapter. It would make this book an even ten chapters. It would bring many of the ideas in the book back full circle. It's about me, not something more seemingly abstract, like a fictionalized fantasy fable. But ending on chapter 10 would be exercising a habit of White language that I'm trying to avoid, so I cannot end it there. This is my story, but it ain't just my story. I must resist the hyperindividualism of that urge to end on me, since I don't think you should leave this book thinking about me alone. Instead, I end with an odd chapter, a prime numbered chapter, one that is meant to be a kind of critical counterstory, a fictional fable of a make-believe world that I want. I hope it urges you and makes you uncomfortable. I hope it is more than a story.

## **A FABLE ABOUT WHITE LANGUAGE SUPREMACY**

On a clear, bright day, much like today, everything changed. Hundreds of thousands of visitors came from somewhere, maybe space, another dimension. They appeared floating around us. Gravity meant nothing to these visitors, neither did objects nor the alleged laws of physics. At first, everyone was scared of them. They were frightening, translucent beings of nothing and everything, floating in the spaces between objects and through things, walls, buildings, tables, cars, everything.

They moved through matter as if none of it was there, yet was. The closer and longer you looked at one of them, the more infinitely filled their jelly-like translucent bodies seemed, filled with everything—the universe, sticks and shiny objects—and nothing, like clear running water, moving but not. Some of them

were two and three stories tall at the same time—impossible. Others were the height of an average walking cane. All had no mouths or noses or arms or legs, just a body, like a stock of moving clearness, always moving, with three dark spots that moved around their column-like bodies, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, growing and shrinking.

They said that they didn't believe in physics or science as we knew them, said they could talk the fabric of space and reality, so moving in time and space, being and not being, was nothing more than thought or word. At least, "That's how you might think of it," they said to us. "We know your languaging because we have been in your places," they told us. Distances were not important to them. How things are typically done wasn't important to them. Nothing seemed important to them. They seemed so foreign and untouchable, so unusual, that no one knew how to approach them. So people waited.

It took 48 hours before they reached out to everyone on the planet, all at once.

They called themselves a series of clicks, column gestures, and scents that smelled like rain on roses. "In your languaging," they said, "you may call us 'The Doers.'" Everyone knew this instantly, the minute they communicated in a silence that was as loud as anything could be because no one could escape the messaging. They said that they have attended to all of our knowledges, languages, sciences, arts, histories, religions, everything. They know all we know, have done all we have done. They said they wanted to commune with us before it was too late, before we destroyed each other with the way we hear and see others' words. "There is everything here," they said. "You are missing it all. These are your choices."

It was the hierarchies, categories, and rankings by the "reifications of race" that everyone inherits, that's how they worded it. *Racial reifications you have inherited*. These are the organisms, they told us, in the DNA of our languaging and judging that we have used to hierarchize, categorize, and rank everything and everyone. They explained that we do this ranking even when we say we are not, that it is in all our languaging. It is in how we think and make decisions, how we make our world and each other. It makes us think we see everything there is, but really it hides more than it shows.

We are doing race in all that we do, in all that we say, in all that we think. And we don't have to, and we must. It's how we unequally make ourselves from the material of difference, they explained. It appears that we come by this naturally, but it is not natural, not necessary. Nothing is natural. We control our naturals, they told us.

They said that we must move past the "virus of White supremacy, of single standards for things." Once you or something you've built is infected, you cease

to see the virus as a virus. It seems to be normal, part of you or the process or the thing built, as well as the ideal, what is accepted and expected. They ended their message by saying, "Every place has a legitimate claim to reality. Language openly your way through." And we knew in our bones that they were not speaking of individuals doing, or feeling, or intending to do by themselves. It was communal action. It was the actions of structures around and of us all.

People were stunned, unsure what was happening. And yet, many people felt The Doers had always been there. It was like recognizing something right in front of you anew. It was like gazing upon something you had seen every day of your life dramatically differently, like a picture of your mother as a child after the day she dies and now that picture isn't a reference anymore. It's not a decoration, a wall-hanging. It's a window into love, and sorrow, and tears, and smiles, warm safe hugs, and sacrifices of the small important things that make us and unmake us each day.

The picture becomes your mother in a past that recedes ever faster by the minute, but it's not just a fucking picture. It's symbolic. It's real to you, more real than any picture has ever been. It's not a reference to a person. It's not a memento. It's all you have left of your mom, all you have left of the first nurturer who showed you the world with soft warm hands, who spoke your name to you for the first time, then again and again until you were made with that word. This was the feeling many people had about The Doers. They were knowable and mysterious, beloved and feared. People felt in ways to know more.

The Doers' technology was so advanced that it didn't make any sense to people on Earth. It looked like nothing. It was just small stones, various scents, waving stalks, and whispers. Sometimes it appeared to be nothing. Some people said they were gods, had superpowers. The Doers said, "No, we are not gods. We do not have superpowers. You just don't have the proximity to us, to what we do. You are not from our places to understand us on our terms."

They said they'd long since abandoned what we called technology. Ideas about things that might help us do what we need to do is old fashioned to them, they said. They said that it's all in how you language and let language do. It's all in how you realize where you become and what your languaging already is becoming. "We are all becoming," they would say. Everyone can become in all that they can, and that is all that is needed.

The Doers said they are making the world and themselves "always and already simultaneously." "We do it all," they said, "and we don't do any of it. It just is, and we accept that." And yet, they said, "We control it all in its uncontrollable-ness. We hope you will become to accept in your ways."

They explained that once you realize this idea, there are no such things as impossible and astounding, exotic or same, difference and conflict, good and

bad, right and wrong, hierarchy and levels. There are so many other ways than ranking things by some kind of yardstick that make the kinds of futures and landscapes you yearn for. All these things are just constructions, thought-systems that are us and not us, that are out there and not real at all yet also so very real and inside us and everything in between these places.

They said that you may come to see how Whiteness has made you simultaneously sharp, dull, round, square, prickly, smooth, wet, dry, fire-hot, ice-cold, and so very, very limited. In a soft, compassionate way, they explained that we were like a child in a playpen, you and me. You walk in circles in a small enclosure for weeks with your eyes to your feet, telling yourself how much you are learning and experiencing of the world, and call it a transcontinental hike. This has been our conditions, all of us.

The Doers told us that all these thought-systems are becoming. Whiteness is becoming. Blackness is becoming. Brownness is becoming. All your languaging is becoming. “The places in between these locations are becoming,” they explained. “They are all necessary and disposable.”

Someone important, a national leader, asked them on the fourth day why they had come to us. What were their intentions? The Doers were perplexed. They answered in unison from all over the globe.

“Our intentions? We are here for the doing. We are beyond intentions, at least in the way you mean it.”

“But surely, you have some purpose or goal for your visit, some outcome you hope to achieve? Do you intend to wage war on us, to enslave us, to colonize us?”

“We do not wish to be evasive,” they said. “We have come to do language with you. This is our way. We want nothing from you but to nurture our connections, our interbeing-ness with you. We only want to become with you on your terms and ours.”

The leader was confused.

“From across the universe,” The Doers said, “we felt your suffering and sorrow. It moved us to commune with you, to become our shared tangled destinies.” And then, they made the offer: “If you are ready, you can do from your places too.”

The leader was still confused.

“It will take time to become,” they said. “Time is what we have.”

Many people were suspicious of The Doers. None of it made sense. You don't travel across the expanse of space and time and other dimensions of existence just to be with someone else, to communicate for no reason. There are always reasons and purposes for communicating, right?

But many people, especially the disenfranchised—the poor; most people of color; those in countries ravaged by poverty, or under the boot of dictators, or

struggling under the historical weight of colonialism and the theft of their lands, labors, languages, and lives; women of all stripes and temperaments; transgender people just trying to walk in worlds that take their legs away—these were the first peoples who felt a kind of connection to The Doers. They were the first to see the systems and their oppressions because the systems and languages hadn't worked for them ever. They were the first to try to give up the judging of languaging, to feel languaging in its differences and be okay with it all. They attended to themselves and those around them in a world that does not ask for attending but only listening. They took in and gave up many things that most of the White people with power on the planet saw as important.

The Doers said, "Let us become with you. It's not really a demonstration, but you may think of it as such. It will help us do together, but you must agree to become." So the disenfranchised went, group by group, first cautiously, then as word got around from those returning, they went in rushes, by the millions, as if their lives depended on it.

The Doers took these groups of people on one-second trips to faraway planets in distant galaxies with civilizations that were based on the exchange of hugs or the weaving of what only could be described as hair, but it wasn't hair. It was more than that. It was each being's destiny and inheritance and other things that have no human expressions for them but are understandable if you are there weaving hair that is not hair.

Or they went to places that were so ancient that those there no longer had need for their origin tales or the need for emotions like envy or selfishness. They went to planets just born, rich with new foliage and life starting to understand itself. The people would come back completely changed. They'd say, "I was there for years. I watched the first word invented by a tribe of beings with eyes behind their heads. They lived on the edge of a milky river that ran both ways. I cried because I knew them in this way. How can I live the way I have after having experienced this thing, that word? I am not me anymore. My eyes are behind me."

The people who'd travelled had not aged either, and only a second went by on Earth. Most who didn't travel were White and didn't believe in the travels, said it was a hoax. The Doers were drugging people, or maybe it was an elaborate mind-trick. The disenfranchised want to believe these things. "It's like a religion," the White doubters said. "They want to believe liberation or freedom or the answer to their problems is in something so simple as a one-second trip," the White doubters argued. "They just need more patience and perseverance," the White doubters said.

But too many had gone, too many came back a second later and told long tales of other words and worlds and people and places and languages and ways of

understanding, and they learned all these things. These different ways of doing things, of languaging, and of understanding the world and themselves, came from people who were not known to be creative or inventive or to lie about such things. They even came from those few growing numbers of White people who left for a second. Every last one of them was now of these places and people. That's what they said, "I am now of another place." But still, the White doubters who had not travelled were stubborn.

So the Doers took more people on trips, but this time it was trips in time on Earth. Some went to Arles in southern France on the day that Van Gogh at thirty-five found yellow and sunshine and the beauty of sunflowers in the fields, and they wept with him as he saw yellow like no one had seen it before, and felt his sorrow and pain as he expressed it on canvas after canvas, throwing each one aside only to grab another, subtly dying of joy and grief, screaming in his head, "How yellow the flowers are!" with paint on his fingers and face. "I wish someone could feel the yellow like I feel it."

And the travellers came back stunned and shocked in jubilant despair.

Some went to the moment when Basho first discovered that he loved poetry on a street in Edo and dedicated himself to mastering how to do poetry with as few words and as much love as possible, and they felt in their bellies the lightning and fire of the world and everything in it, the connections of disconnected things, toads and water, a word and the screams of every person who had died in all the wars that had ever been fought, each scream clearly articulated and exclaiming the life that that person had lived and wanted to live.

And they all came back with a calm sense of knowing and speaking of these things that made everyone around them at peace with an itch that needed to be scratched.

Some went to the death bed of Marie Curie in a hospital in Passy, Haute-Savoie, and could see the lack of blood cells not being created by her bone marrow because of all of the radiation she'd been exposed to, without which she'd never have been awarded her two Nobel Prizes, one in physics and one in chemistry, and they followed across the globe the path of radiation particle-waves from a tube that contained an isotope she kept in her pocket, passing through people and things, witnessing the ionizing of particles in its wake that made up people and things, and it seemed like tragic magic, a wonderful phenomenon that is so clearly not what we think it is, and they experienced the elation and joy of millions of people cured and the pain and angst of millions more killed by that particle-wave, and then they spoke with her words as she told one doctor after another, "No, it is not the radiation. I know radiation, radiation knows me. We are bedfellows. We will live our lives together. We do not get to live apart!"



And they returned in subtle awe of insignificant things.

Some travelled to the last ceremony in a small cave in Argentina on a starry night, where a tribe of unnamed dark, beautiful people danced at a wall in that cave by firelight. They watched as the tribe screamed and hooted, sang unknown songs of beauty and tragedy, then one by one, the members of the tribe dipped their hands and feet into a pot of warm blood just emptied from a four-legged, horned creature long-since extinct and placed them on the wall, hand by hand, foot by foot. An elder in leaves and vines cried and dusted each hand and foot with a White powder, and the members each went off to the shadows of the cave and made love to each other as if the universe depended on their love-making. And they saw the future of this tribe after the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers would come and take it all away with iron and crosses, calling their ceremonies hedonistic and devil-worshipping, then whipping them, enslaving them, and making them say words they did not know, or die.

And the travelers returned in shame of past deeds done with a hope of rebuilding and making love like the universe depended on it.

Still more went to the last buffalo hunt of an Apache tribe who did not use the word "Apache" in the North American plains before the knowledge of White Europeans changed them, before they'd slowly lose the sacred practice of buffalo hunting, before the hoop of stars in the sky stopped talking to them, before it all stopped, and they experienced the hunt with the hunters, riding their proud horses, standing on the plains in bare feet in the same way that thousands of their ancestors had done before them exactly like that, and they saw the beauty and horror and mundaneness in it all in a flash, and they realized that they were the plains, and the buffalo, and the arrow, and the axe, and the feet of the hunter and his ancestors, and the hoop in the sky, and the grass, and the sun and moon, and the words spoken and unspoken between us all.

And everyone returned and wept in ecstatic sorrow and excruciating joy at all they had not seen while looking straight at it.

Others went to the moment that an African slave who had survived the transatlantic slave route on a leaky boat with a slave master named "Hicks" had lost his name because Hicks said it was not important anymore. They followed that slave as he survived the voyage and stepped his first foot on North American soil as the brilliant sun crested over a faraway mountain, and they squinted through his slave eyes that saw more than anyone around him did in ways no one could see or has ever seen since, and they felt his sea and home sicknesses deep in his belly, felt his brilliance and determination to live and be human and be all that he was, felt his deep humanity and love for all things around him. They felt his words in his chest that could free nations and open minds and reveal so much in the world that was needed, so much that the world begged

for at the time, and they saw his eyes and strong body that had withered on the voyage to America but knew that he would rebuild himself and come to be the most important philosopher and artist ever to have lived that was never known because he was a slave and would die at 27 years old because he had spilled his master's wine on a new rug.

And everyone came back and bowed their heads in shame with the courage to look at such things in their faces and call them what they are.

And then, after days of the travels, after every last person on Earth had travelled somewhere, after people became other places, The Doers vanished. They said nothing in parting. But everyone knew why, and everyone knew what needed doing. And everyone realized how much they could do and what they'd been squandering. They realized their own compassion and need for each other and their differences. And they got to tearing down and remaking everything. They remade everything from scratch. It seemed the only answer.

They didn't do away with race, or Whiteness, or Blackness, or Brownness. Instead, they let those constructions be on their own made up terms as self-identified, self-conscious things that were useful in the world as ways to know one's self in community and to become community. They created new structures that did not hierarchize or rank or use one's place as a synecdoche for all places. They gave up overly simple and selfish ideas, like grades, and first place, or second, or winners and losers. They chose to build collaborations and walked away from competition. They chose to build systems and machines and ways of walking on the Earth that smiled at failure and confusion, and they reached out their hands to hold others softly. These new structures were not sacred or natural. They were not more important than people but important to people in innumerable ways.

Each person became to feel and experience their us-ness on landscapes of us-es. They became to language the presence of many standards that are not standards, only local norms. They felt it not as the loss of rigor but as the presence of people, ideas, words, knowing and unknowing, discernable, and confusing. A single standard inflicted on all, Whiteness as the standard place, was understood as irrelevant and someone's beauty. Standards were replaced. In their place always was the sacred place of communion, of what we do in the places we are at with those there. They became to build the sacredness of their places as multiple.

Most important of the remaking from scratch was how they remade their own languaging, becoming rainbows of their own minds and judgements and habits of languaging. They did it in such a way that even those generations after the travels and the visit from The Doers, people understood and saw and heard and felt their worlds in ways that allowed for the multiplicity of paradoxical

words. People began to speak and hear the Aurora Borealis. They began to hear the color yellow and feel their feet on the earth, placed in the footprints of everyone who had come before them. The sacred hoop in the sky began to talk. And some even made love as if the universe depended on it.

It didn't take long before people on Earth began to float, then they seemed almost translucent with everything inside of them and nothing. The so-called laws of physics and all the other impossible ideas and constructions that limited them and their lives just wasn't, and it was. Everything was becoming.

And they came to continually realize in innumerable ways that the point of languaging isn't to make others understand you, or to win, or persuade, or even encourage or inform. These things happen when they happen. Languaging is always doing, communing, suffering with, becoming in communities of becoming. And everyone in their ways became languagelings, bright as the sun, dark as the cosmos, clear as running water, and always and already simultaneously.