“The Settlement.” Written 1930 (or late 1929); published in Maushart 1993.

As alluded to in the chapter on Harris, settlement was not just about the establishment of white British culture, with anomalous European and Chinese additions. It was also intent on the forced resettlement of Indigenous people, particularly children, and especially lighter-skinned children: with a view to assimilation. What follows is something of an ironic gift: a reading of a meta-text I would rather did not exist, or at least that the conditions that produced it had not. It is a text called “The Settlement,” referring to a particular place on Moore River in Western Australia where Indigenous people were resettled (the Australian version of reserves). Gladys Gilligan (1915–c. 1944), a removed (or “stolen”) child resident of Moore River Native Settlement, wrote “The Settlement” under direction from A. O. Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, at the age of 14.

When “The Settlement” was published, it was as part of a greater assemblage: the oral and document history Sort of a Place Like Home: Remembering Moore River Native Settlement (1993) edited by Susan Maushart. The book includes a representative assemblage within it. What Maushart refers to as the “unsettling” “inspiration” of “The Moore River Scrapbook” (10, 207–269), is a self-conscious gesture that could be said to be her guiding aesthetic: breaking up Gilligan’s text through the insertion of photographs. “The Settlement,” constituting the book’s first chapter, “Introduction One: The Place” also represents a kind of scrapbook (13–21).
Before focusing on “The Settlement” in terms of its poetics, there are implications that relate to reading it as an instance of life writing. In an article on Indigenous life writing, Michele Grossman records that Jackie Huggins, in writing about coauthoring *Auntie Rita* (1994) with her mother, Rita (1921–1996), uses the dual terms “liberated” and “literated.” While the latter term “literated” evokes the forced schooling and Anglicization of Rita Huggins’s generation of Aboriginal people, and the consequent loss of their own culture, the term “liberated” is also, as Grossman notes, “complex”: adding that for the younger Huggins, as a member of a different generation, and as an academic, “writing is not only a tool or technology of oppression and dispossession that was historically used against Aboriginal people; she also deploys it self-consciously as a weapon of cultural resistance, a medium of self-expressiveness and an instrument of political change” (Xen 295). Grossman argues that *Auntie Rita* “is an instance of . . . the vernacular text . . . [a] strategy [of writing that] hollows the majority text from within, minoritizing and unsettling both Standard English and conventional writing and reading practices in the process,” adding that it “tenants an interstitial zone between the polarities of ‘black orality’ and ‘white writing’” (296–297).

In what follows I draw on several articles by Grossman on Indigenous life writing: though only one, “When They Write What We Read: Unsettling Indigenous Australian Life-writing,” addresses Gilligan’s text specifically. “The Settlement” can be read as a vernacular text. According to the *Concise Oxford*, “vernacular” is “native, indigenous, not of foreign origin,” and ultimately derived from the Latin *verna*: “home-born slave” (1193). By this definition, the concept of vernacular English in an Australian context is oxymoronic. As adapted by Grossman above, it becomes the English practised by the “native,” and in Gilligan’s case, the “slavishness” or otherwise of her composition is a matter for debate. In Grossman’s terms, it is a matter of reading for agency or resistance toward the project of settlement.

“The Settlement” is a “literated” commentary on Moore River Native Settlement: which, however unintentionally, functions as a meta-commentary on the settlement of Australia. Is Gilligan’s text settled, or unsettled, by the editing practices of Maushart? In one sense, “The Settlement” is an exemplary “literated” text: written by Gilligan upon the request of the Protector, Neville. It serves doubly as propaganda: as both a description of the Settlement and as a product of it. It purports to show what the Settlement can do with and for Aboriginal children taken from their parents and brought up under a white regime (later known as the Stolen Generation). As edited by Maushart it is also a collaborative text, as Maushart supplements Gilligan’s words with 14 photographs of the Settlement: apparently