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Sacral Grooves, Limbo Gateways

Travels in Deep Southern Time, Circum-Caribbean Space, Afro-creole Authority

KEITH CARTWRIGHT

on Hurston

2013

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CHAPTER FIVE

"Come and Gaze on a Mystery"

Zora Neale Hurston's Rain-Bringing Authority

I was to walk with the storm and hold my power, and get my answers to life and things in storms. The symbol of lightning was painted on my back. This was to be mine forever.
—Zora Neale Hurston on her initiation as "Rain-Bringer,"
Dust Tracks on a Road

Oya who causes the leaves to flutter
Oya, strong wind who gave birth to fire while traversing the mountain
Oya, please don't fell the tree in my backyard
Oya, we have seen fire covering your body like cloth.
—Praises of Oya collected by Fela Sowande and Fagbemi Ajanaku

"What is the truth?" Zora Neale Hurston was asked while doing what her Baptist minister father might have called "two-headed work" as a novelist-anthropologist serving the *Mystères* of Haitian Vodou. She received unforgettable ritual answer from a mambo who, "by throwing back her veil and revealing her sex organs," gave bodily testimony that "this . . . is the ultimate truth"—"There is no mystery beyond the mysterious source of life."[1] The mambo's flash of revealed truth would find publication in 1938 in *Tell My Horse*, but it also shaped the "creaming" and "frothing" of the erotic beneath the blooming pear tree of Hurston's best-known novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), written while she was doing her fieldwork and initiatory seeking in Haiti in 1936. There, "ever since the first tiny bloom had opened," this ultimate truth inscribed in *Their Eyes* "had called her to come and gaze on a mystery."[2] Hurston's Haitian encounters with the Vodou *lwa* had been prepared by earlier travels of ritual seeking in the Gulf South and the Bahamas and were fed too by her Florida broughtupsy and orphaning. She carried all this—her initiate crowning in New Orleans as storm-walking "Rain-Bringer," her experience in 1929 of a powerful hurricane in Nassau, and her anthropological work in Jamaica and Haiti—into the storm-swept hierophany of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.[3]

The work that Zora Neale Hurston did in Haiti marks some of the deeper channels of her reroutings of literary and folk authority. "You got tuh *go* there

tuh *know* there," Janie Woods famously insists to her friend Pheoby Watson (and to the readers of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*).[4] Such a journey may swamp an author (as well as her characters), make and break a career, and Hurston paid a steep sacrificial cost for her eventual literary canonization. In *The Nation's Region*, Leigh Anne Duck—assessing modernist skepticism toward folk culture (even in works shaped by attraction to it)—points out that the folk "allure" was often held to be "a dangerous nostalgia for an experience inaccessible to modern subjects": "too deep an immersion . . . must prove destructive to a modern, urban subjectivity."[5] Many a reader may feel that the overall-clad, vernacular-speaking Janie Woods of the opening and closing pages of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has hauled herself back from too deep an immersion in the Everglades muck as she returns to her two-story central Florida home telling a tale of storm mayhem and of her trial and acquittal for the shooting of her much younger, rabies-possessed husband. Hurston's novel indeed becomes a vehicle of spiritual travel and of the annihilation of its primary avatar's bourgeois subjectivity. What we are left with is a novel of experiential female authority not bound by progressive models of temporality or by national models of space but given over to periodicity and antiphony, polyrhythm and heteroglossia. By the late 1930s Hurston had already answered Wilson Harris's 1972 call for a body of Caribbean/Gulf writing ready and able to risk the disparagement directed at artist-intellectuals who would step—with the limbo imagination of the censored (black) majority—into the Atlantic's submerged perspectives of time and space.

Hurston's entire body of work paid the accompanying price of critical disavowal or neglect, but her "Rain-Bringer" body of writing has also gifted us with openings to a Gulf sublime hardly accredited even now—despite the veritable Hurston industry sprung up to capitalize on the author. Hurston's most famous fictional avatar (Janie Crawford Woods) goes into the muck in her overalls to escape the limitations of certain bourgeois notions of femininity. She leaves the muck with an initiate orphan knowledge akin to that dropped on the anthropologist Ira P. Lowenthal in his study of market-women or "garden-women" in Haiti. The anthropologist was told by one of his entrepreneurial subjects that "Every woman is born with a carreau of land between her legs" (a plot of over three acres) for the cultivation of her garden.[6] Of course, we hear something of this postplantation *konesans* in the blues songs of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, perhaps in the ministry of Mother Catherine Seals, but hardly in the progressive literature of uplift expected by Hurston's critics.

In all of Hurston's writing, the abject and the sublime lurk together, in the muck, the jook, the storm, in looking up the skirts of the real—Janie's unforgettable seekerly time-space beneath a pear tree where "from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom," there comes "[t]his singing she heard that had nothing to do with her ears."[7] In what amounts to an altar (or alter) call, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* issues its doxology. It bids us to "come and gaze on a mystery," pushing its reader, like the Louisiana Creole (as well as Cuban and southeastern Indian) trickster Turtle, "face to face with the truth," whether this truth be the muck-raising period of some god or "monstropolous beast" immersing us all in her flows, or the mambo's ritually unveiled vagina, or any number of instances in which Death finds folk "watching, trying to see beyond seeing."[8]

Something of the *konesans* of both the Haitian *femme-jardin* (garden woman) and the Vodou mambo informs the initiatory narrative of *Their Eyes*. The text points to Seminole and Caribbean knowledge of God's reproductive cycles. And it follows a sacrificial, periodic logic. Like the St. Kittitian Cinderella sent to the river to wash a daub of blood from her mistress's punch bowl, Janie goes to the muck and returns to claim her own house, land, narrative, and womanly body. She becomes the text's readerly avatar for an initiatory gathering of *konesans* out of what had been "radically excluded," "what disturbs identity" and "does not respect borders."[9] In all this the text carries a powerful initiatory mythopoesis. This does not mean, however, that Hurston's vision excludes the historical and the real. Rather, it uncovers possibilities, identities, horizons, histories that our disciplinary categories and periodizations have excluded from consciousness.

Much question remains, however, about what Hurston may have excluded in her writing's charged hold on life. Among her most challenging critics, Hazel Carby insists that Hurston's work displaces an increasingly urban, northward-bound culture of the black masses by nostalgically keeping black folk culture in its place: the plantation South. Carby points to a reactionary displacement whereby "the geographical boundaries of Hurston's black folk are rural, but their Southernness is not defined through a difference to Northernness as much as it is related to cultural practices and beliefs of the Caribbean."[10] Hurston, in effect, is accused of not being national enough, urban-contemporary enough, *real* enough. As I underscore throughout this chapter, Hurston's spatial and spiritual positions *do* differ from the popular and academic norms of national (even U.S.-bound black national) culture, which is a big reason why her call went so long unanswered. Her earliest scholarly publication, a 1927 *Journal of Negro History* piece on "Fort Moosa" (Ft. Mose), an eighteenth-century outpost of black maroons commissioned by the Spanish to defend St. Augustine, points to Florida's foundational colonial difference and its strong ties to Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean.[11] Even before the founding of the fortified Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose in 1738 (two miles north of St. Augustine) as North America's first free black settlement and as site of refuge for Carolina maroons, Florida had been a southern terminus of an underground railroad leading to a decidedly Carib-

bean space.[12] This station fed other southerly routes: Bahamian, Cuban, and Seminole. Given Hurston's knowledge of Florida's historical Hispano-Creole difference, her representation of the Okeechobee muck as fertile site of ongoing circum-Caribbean labor migrations—and the degree to which Florida remains shaped by Caribbean and Afro-Atlantic agency—her embrace of Florida's diasporic crosscurrents may be seen as pioneering and prophetic.

Their Eyes Were Watching God took on an even more unsettling poignancy in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The novel's attentiveness to hubristic dismissals of storm warnings, its focus on economically driven decisions to stay in place rather than to seek a ride out, its depictions of high ground commandeered by whites, and its racially charged aftermath of segregationist burial crews testified anew to enduring gulfs of race, security, and belonging in America. Martyn Bone has done a good job of re-historicizing how the path of the storm in *Their Eyes* followed the trail of devastation left by the second deadliest hurricane in American history: the 1928 Florida storm that killed over 1,800 (and perhaps as many as 6,000) people when the levees holding Lake Okeechobee gave way, releasing an eight-foot tidal wave on the mostly Bahamian and black southern agricultural workers encamped on "the muck."[13] Hurricanes lay bare the plantation zone's systemically violent economy—one that has rendered Florida's poorest subjects and seasonally migrant "aliens" particularly vulnerable. Amidst the death and destruction such storms bring, they can also unveil much that is otherwise kept under ideological wrap. We think again of George W. Bush crony and FEMA director Michael Brown admitting cluelessly in the wake of Katrina, "We're seeing people that we didn't know exist."[14] Anyone who has read Hurston closely cannot doubt that she identified powerfully with storms, their time-space of climatic violence, their archetypally feminized (and inescapably colored) outings of invisibilized truth. Come Atlantic storm season, tropic nature asserts a sovereignty that black majority cultures of the Americas have recognized with long-memoried tropes of respect and dread rapport. In all the writing that followed her 1928 New Orleans initiation as "Rain-Bringer," Hurston showed herself to be the true autoethnographer of subjects periodically swamped (and rendered visible) by the powers of Atlantic storm.

Whoever would bow to kiss the mysterious source of life in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* would do well to consider what Hurston brought to the Haiti-scripted text from earlier initiations in New Orleans as well as how her investment in tropes of storm-walking found manifestation in her subsequent body of writing. My own re-readings of Hurston while teaching a University of North Florida seminar on her work just after Florida's perspective-changing 2004 hurricane season (when Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne struck the state) have convinced me that the coastal South's most celebrated author found signature authority in her 1928 "Rain-Bringer" initiation into repertoires of the orisha Oya—divinity of storms, death rites, and shape-shifting bush transformations. Oya provides indispensable keys to reading Rain-Bringer's texts.

Of all the New Orleans initiations represented in Hurston's earliest book project, *Mules and Men* (1935), the one in which she seems most deeply invested was her receiving "the crown of power" from Luke Turner (188), who traced his crowning to a famous aunt, Marie Laveau, in a storm-dominated narrative genealogy. After accepting entry into this ritual family and undergoing three days of intensifying visions in ritual isolation, Hurston emerged to receive Turner's spirit-divined re-naming: "I see her conquering and accomplishing with the lightning and making her road with thunder. She shall be called the Rain-Bringer" (191). She describes how Turner painted her face in red and yellow, then "painted the lightning symbol down my back from my right shoulder to my left hip." This was her sign: "The Great One was to speak to me in storms" (191).

Hurston would reinvoke this initiation years later in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), insisting "it was not only elaborate, it was impressive. I lay naked for three days and nights on a couch, with my navel to a rattlesnake skin which had been dressed and dedicated to the ceremony," all of which led to sky-walking "dreams that seemed real for weeks," full of "lightning flashing from under my feet, and grumbling thunder following in my wake."[15] *Mules and Men*, then, presents a young "Zora" much like the Janie of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* who must go there to *know* there—in an initiating encounter with the sublime, in order to bring the text across gulfs of ritual and narrative authority. Hurston's storm-walking initiation as Rain-Bringer appears to have left its mark on all the writing that followed, inscribing itself most forcefully in the storm of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* but signifying as well in every book she authored.

Despite the fact that Hurston's first published story, "John Redding Goes to Sea" (1921), featured a deadly Florida hurricane, it was only after her crowning as Rain-Bringer in 1928 that her signature zigzag lightning sign and storm motif found steady inscription in her work. Her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), opens with God "grumbling his thunder and playing the zigzag lightning thru his fingers."[16] The horrific hurricane of 1928 gave dread inspiration and title to her second and most-celebrated novel, whose storm-struck characters "seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God."[17] Undergoing initiations in Haiti for *Tell My Horse* (1938), Hurston concluded that book with a tale deferring to her lightning sign: God summons "Shango, the god of thunder and lightning," to fashion "a shaft of lightning," allowing storm-music of the cosmos to land in "Guinea" to work its dance rhythms throughout the world (261). *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) signs off as Moses lifted his hoodoo rod, "and the zig-zag lightning

above him joined the muttering thunder."[18] *Dust Tracks on a Road* places Rain-Bringer's ritual signature in its final paragraph, signifying to and upon her readers: "You who play the zig-zag lightning of power over the world, with the grumbling thunder in your wake, think kindly of those who walk in the dust" (769). And Hurston's final novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), has at its narrative center Jim Meserve's courting tale of "a terrible thunderstorm come up all of a sudden" with lightning "zigzagging around something awful," a tale in which Jim's violently taming husbandry of his wife, Arvay, and his anti-Puritan irreverence find flashpoint: "It's a habit of mine, Miss Arvay, when I catch a streak of lightning aiming at me, to stand in my tracks and slap it right back where it come from."[19] An initiate spiritual authority appears to root the work of one of our most celebrated writers, whose ritual death as Zora and rebirth as Rain-Bringer transformed what got authored through her reassemblies of dismembered mythic corpora. When Rain-Bringer is read in dialogue with Judith Gleason's articulation of the orisha Oya's manifestations as "I" of the storm's winds, spirit of death and ancestral representation, and spirit of shape-shiftings in wilderness, the counterclockwise spin of Oya's grooves and gateways may be recognized for giving Hurston's writing its hermeneutic integrity, its animation.

Ellease Southerland suggested in 1979 that "perhaps the culmination of Zora's folklore is the form it gave her religious thought," adding that "if one were to trace her religious thinking in her fiction, there would be discovered a new dimension of religious thought."[20] Since Southerland's provocative call, relatively few contributors to the booming Hurston critical industry have followed up on Hurston's immersions in circum-Caribbean ritual communities and her ministration of those rites in fiction. Most notably, Daphne Lamothe (1999) has examined the Haitian Vodou divinity Ezili as model for the characterization of Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Edward Pavlić (2002) has recognized that Hurston was "clearly initiated into a New Orleans version of the cult of Oyá," but his crossroads modernist readings of Esu-Elegba's presence in *Their Eyes* lead away from tending more fully to the agency of Hurston's patron Oya.[21] More recently, Teresa Washington (2005) argued compellingly for recognition of Hurston as "African America's Iyá-Iwé, or Mother of Letters" and offered a fuller picture of Oya-typologies in the narrative formation of Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.[22] My own focus on Oya as hermeneutic key to Hurston's mythopoesis calls attention to real powers of storm read through folk narrative, fiction, and divination repertoires, but I also seek to point out how Hurston's Afro-conservative, preservationist aesthetic operates from another kind of conservatism—sustained through creolization's complex transformations. Her grounding in Florida's history, culture, and landscapes fed her efforts to muddy the water of national, disciplinary, and psychic boundaries, reopening the coastal South to currents of

flow and exchange that have imparted to the region much of its cultural vitality as well as its foundational navigations of trauma. Rain-Bringer's textual reassemblies of "*Ajé*"—of woman-born(e) power or truth—may well bring us new dimensions of religious thought, new archives and affiliations of spirited knowledge.[23]

"De Wind Is a Woman"—Revolver Who Twists to Create

New dimensions of religious thought may be drawn from Rain-Bringer's storm-walking presence, and from how "[r]adical transformations in the weather," according to Judith Gleason, may "signal the need for radical transformations in human thinking and feeling," in economic and ecosystemic relation.[24] Although we may identify Rain-Bringer as a "road" of Oya, her energies share much with the fiery domain of the orisha Shango, with whom Hurston also likely identified. The south Florida *Regla de Ocha* (Santería) ritual leader Miguel "Willie" Ramos describes Shango as owner of "lightning and thunder" but notes that Oya wields and enables much of his repertoire, especially lightning, since Oya is the divinity "of the winds and tempests . . . represented by the lightning rod which she gave as a present to her husband."[25] Like her husband, Shango, Oya is fiery and charismatic. Her whirlwinds and storms ventilate and *work through* repressed or climatically imbalanced conditions. Oya's praise poetry speaks of her cosmic "housecleaning," including calls to "Let her rip" in "clean sweap."[26] In Oya, Gleason sees the means "to wrest women's fire back from Promethean culture-bearers of the Western tradition," a fire that includes the libidinal heat of Oya-Ajere, "carrier-of-the-container-of-fire," known in Brazil as "Oya de esteira" or "Oya of the mat"—an erotically charged manifestation of Oya performed in the "'plate-breaking' dance: hands on hips, buttocks prominently extended in saucy rotation."[27] The truth-and-rain-bringing Oya hyped in song—"Storm wind is arriving, strong wind / Oya likes a good hard lover, strong wind / Oya dances a wicked bamba, strong wind!"—performs a cleansing dance that may conclude "with a series of down-stroking flicks [of Oya's *irùkè* or horsetail whisk] . . . to get rid of negative energies clinging to whomever is whisked."[28] Oya, as musicologist Katherine Hagedorn affirms, is the ventilating whirlwind, "Revolver who twists to create."[29] Aptly situated for such steamy work, Hurston's home in Eatonville lies in a region of Florida that gets more lightning storms per year (over one hundred) than any other North American location.[30] Moving off West Africa's coast in trade winds that carried Africans to the Americas, Oya's tropic systems convey some of the most dramatic and traumatic linkages between Africa, the Caribbean, and the coastal South.

Hurston's initiations into Oya-energies led her to many mentors. Big Sweet, for example, models Oya's warrior role in Florida's Polk County jooks.

In *Mules and Men*, she warns Zora, "If anything start, Little-Bit, you run out de door like a streak uh lightning and get in yo' car" (147). The sermons of Rev. C. C. Lovelace of Eau Gallie (recharging memories of her father's Baptist preaching) were sampled for *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and offer another source for Hurston's ritual signature:

> You are de same God, Ah
> Dat heard de sinner man cry.
> Same God dat sent de zigzag lightning tuh
> Join de mutterin' thunder. (76)

Hurston witnessed a devastating 1929 hurricane in Nassau just months after her Rain-Bringer crowning and recounted the experience in *Dust Tracks on a Road* (702). In her Caribbean travels, Hurston received many pointers into the sublime. Instructed by teachers ranging from Mambo Etienne to Bessie Smith, Hurston nevertheless put a special significance on her New Orleans initiation under Luke Turner, so much so that even when studying Vodou in Haiti, as she writes in *Tell My Horse*, "Mambo Etienne tied my red and yellow handkerchief on my head in the proper loose knot at the back of my head" (418). These were the colors of Turner's earlier crowning of her.

There remains, however, reason to doubt Hurston's account of her Rain-Bringer initiation. She was such an accomplished fabricator that it can be tough to judge when she is telling the truth, when she is telling mythopoetic truths, and when she is telling bold-faced or evasive lies. Harry Hyatt, a widely successful white collector of hoodoo lore, was stunned enough by Hurston's account of her initiations that he traveled twice to New Orleans to confirm the vitality of religious Voudou there, only to be told such rites no longer existed in the practice of the 1930s. Other factors suggest fabrication of the Turner initiation. First, there is Hurston's plagiarism of material on Cudjo Lewis published in 1927, the year before her New Orleans studies. More vexing is language from the May 1928 publication of "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" that reveals either a jazz-fed oracular vision of her upcoming New Orleans initiation or a fictionalizing pattern of initiatory desire: "My face is painted red and yellow, and my body is painted blue."[31] The colors that would be painted on her face half a year later in New Orleans, red and yellow, also happen to be—along with blue and white—fundamental colors used to paint the crowned head in Afro-Cuban orisha initiations.[32] But if we couple this earlier body-painted "Colored Me" possession scene with Rev. Lovelace's sermonic zigzag lightning (1929) and consider possible "liftings" of material from ethnographic texts, the cynic may read a self-crowning story of Voudou initiation fabricated for literary consumption.

The bottom line is that Luke Turner could well have been teaching vital ritual traditions received from Marie Laveau via Saint-Domingue refugees who came to New Orleans after a six-year exile in Cuba. Afro-creole religious knowledge likely found continual lines of transmission in the Gulf South. The presence on the Gulf coast of people like the Cuban Tata Gaitán, a key Lucumi *babalawo* (diviner) and Ochosi priest in Havana who, according to David Brown, "was a *tabaquero* by trade and is believed to have worked in Tampa, Florida during the 1890s," could have contributed to sustaining initiations such as those Hurston describes.[33] Given the shipping activity and migrations surrounding the banana and cigar industries as well as the U.S. military occupations in the Caribbean from the 1890s to the 1930s, surely Tata Gaitán was not the only Caribbean priest who may have been crowning godchildren in the Gulf South during this time.

In the end, Hurston's investment in the "Rain-Bringer" initiation bears its own witness to the Oya authority inscribed in her life work. We can see that the primary object of spiritual seeking in *Mules and Men* is an initiatory quest, making the text, as Cheryl Wall argues, "a paradigmatic immersion narrative" in which the narrator, "Zora," finds transformation under the jook tutelage of Big Sweet and spiritual repertoires of a storm-ruling Marie Laveau.[34] Thereafter, all of Hurston's texts would be immersion narratives, journeys into storm-ruled mucks and low places of abject and sublime encounter. Even the Marie Laveau hagiography narrated (from Luke Turner to Hurston) in *Mules and Men* moves through immersion in Oya's windswept waters. Turner, who claims to have served the spirits under Laveau on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain and in her New Orleans residence on St. Ann Street, puts himself on the scene of what had become a widespread memory of Laveau's final hurricane transfiguration. He tells how Laveau set water on her altar and called on Lake Pontchartrain to answer: "lightning raced . . . and the lake heaved," and a "terrible strong wind at last tore the house away and set it in the lake." Although "the loving ones [ritual family members] find a boat and [go] out to where her house floats on one side and break a window to bring her out," the storm passes with Laveau's own willed passing. She famously insists, "I want to die here in the lake," but gets pulled ashore by her "loving ones," and she "sing a song and is dead, yes" (185). Here, Luke Turner (along with Hurston herself) narrates the lineage by which Rain-Bringer enters a ritual family of mutual aid and empowerment. In the end, Hurston would not remain within this "house" of loving ones to serve the spirit in the traditional sense. She writes, "He wanted me to stay with him to the end. It has been a great sorrow to me that I could not say yes" (195). We might insist, however, that Rain-Bringer's signature authority remained so much at the core of Hurston's subsequent work that she extended the housing of the spirit and its community of loving ones. Rain-Bringer's submerged authority seems to have called for transformations in emergent textual rites of passage, gathering and crowning new generations of "loving ones" in ways that foster

new solidarities and commitments. *Mules and Men* marks an initial crowning of authority.

Like the fiction that followed it, *Mules and Men* intuits a unified reading of black Atlantic folk narrative and religious practice. Traces of the ritual domains of Afro-creole divinities emerge from folktales Hurston collected from the Gulf South, several of which feature diviners and the agency of Oya herself. These tales are a bridge between the authority of old divination corpora (such as Ifa) and the integral mythic vision of Hurston's fiction. When we look to a Yoruba Ifa tale associated with the figure Ofun Osa (one of the divination system's 256 *odu* or narrative "windows" on life), we hear how Oya in whirlwind form destroys many houses until she is finally welcomed and pacified with a sacrifice. Given ritual hospitality by the sacrificing diviner, Oya then vomits her storm-swept riches upon his floor. Judith Gleason writes that the oracle "stages the bringing in or 'owning' of one's own violence, thereby transforming its capricious, destructive aspects into creative, libidinal energy." Divination presents Oya as cosmic house-cleaner: "Swept-clean means Oya." And we are instructed that "Who knows how to calm me down / Knows how to prosper." In offering a sacrifice to Oya and applying part of it to our own eyes, we learn to encounter the storm "first by calming the eye of the beholder" and then by wooing the storm and hosting it while remaining open to the restorative balancing it may bring.[35]

In Hurston's final novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, Jim Meserve takes the place of the diviner who pacifies the eye/I of the female storm. Having developed the habit of having fits and fainting spells as a means of avoiding repressed desires, Arvay responds to Jim's courting like "a hurricane [that] struck the over-crowded parlor. Arvay gave a yell from the very bottom of her lungs." Jim pacifies Hurricane Arvay with a drop of turpentine in her eye, to which she responds: "That varmint! Ooooooooh! He poured teppentime right in my eye!" Her father adds, "Quickest cure for the spasm-fits I ever did see."[36] Arvay's yell, like Oya's guttural cry of arrival, *"heyi!"* or a Polk County blues cry, announces a turbulence that would refuse supplication but may find it in the act of vocalization.[37] The primary female warrior in the orisha pantheon, Oya brings sublimated rage and release to her storming fields of action.[38] She can reduce any of us to refugee status, as Janie and Tea Cake see clearly in Palm Beach following the storm of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Straggling in to their hoped-for "city of refuge," they come face to face with "Havoc . . . with her mouth wide open" (310). Oya may destroy those in her way, including the vulnerable and the hubristic who do not read or respect her signs, but she may also "whisk" and transform open-eyed devotees such as Janie at the novel's end: "The wind through the open windows had broomed out all the fetid feeling of absence and nothingness" (333).

One tale from *Mules and Men*, "Why the Waves Have Whitecaps," insists

"[d]e wind is a woman, and de water is a woman too" (127). Here the women brag on their children, with Mrs. Water ending up drowning Wind's young seabirds. As their white feathers float, Mrs. Wind lets loose her storm of retribution on the waters. Oya's ritual dance often communicates this whirlwind energy and finds conclusion in akimbo warrior posture.[39] Such kinetic remembering figures prominently in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, which carries strong currents of Oya's erotic charge, particularly in the appearance of Lucy, who "put herself akimbo" and, after flirtatious signifying, "was gone up the hill in a blue whirlwind" (34). Without such rain-bringing, embodied expression, we face drought conditions of the desiccated terrain forecast by the Oya-associated Ifa sign Irete Ogunda:

> Rain never falls again
> Penis has withered into whips all over town
> Vaginas have dried up like leather bags
> All the little rivers are dying of thirst
> And all the streamlets have put on garments of dried leaves.[40]

Hurston remedied such drought conditions (the drying up of life's mystery itself) in her blues immersions. In *Mules and Men*, when Ella Wall, for example, was toasted by Florida-flip players who sang "Oh, go to Ella Wall / If you want good boody," Wall eluded their objectification by shouting "Tell 'em 'bout me!" as she moved in subject performance, "snapped her fingers and revolved her hips with her hands" (146). Challenging her sworn rival, Big Sweet, Ella "stood up akimbo," unnerving Zora with the prospect of "dying in a violent manner in a sordid saw-mill camp" (147) until things were quieted by the patrolling "Quarters Boss" whose gaze and pistol would becalm without bringing release, keeping a turpentine and sawmill jook economy steaming, its bloodletting inwardly directed.[41] But as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the boss cannot control the gathering storm, no matter how much he would segregate (or deny the costs of ignoring or blocking) basic, increasingly heated flows.

If folk blindly follow the boss in disregarding storm signs and trust to the boss's arrangements of security, the folk (especially folk of the global South) will stay caught in the trap Hurston describes in *Their Eyes* in the face of hurricane warnings: "The folks let the people do the thinking. If the castles thought themselves secure, the cabins needn't worry. Their decision was already made as always" (303). Clearly "folks" let "the people do the thinking" at folks' tremendous peril. We must all attend to this element of Rain-Bringer's recuperative project. Through the novel's storm, she brings us to a specific moment on the muck (but also to a larger global moment of authority) when "[t]he time was past asking the white folks what to look for" (304). Through ritually engaged thinking of the folk, Hurston gave *Their Eyes* sub-

lime mythopoetic performance and eye-opening vision. Oya rites dispersed and creolized throughout the circum-Caribbean convey the importance of owning one's own violence, the need in facing a storm to becalm the eye of the beholder—even to host the storm (as climatic event or raging subaltern) with sacrificial offerings so as to seek reparation of the torn fabric of natural, social, or household domains. Oya's praise songs remind us: "Who knows how to calm me down / Knows how to prosper."[42]

"We All Bloody Bones Now in de Drift Together"—Egungun Oya

While our world may thirst because of an absent Rain-Bringer or be buried in a deluge of her rage, even the dead may thirst and trouble the living whose neglect ruptures lineage continuity and decenters every subject. This too is a realm of Oya and a signature concern of Hurston's; here, too, folk narrative and religion find recuperative, transfiguring convergence in Hurston's steady attentiveness to the dead. Oya is the only orisha who will attend to funerals and their transitional time-space between life and death. As Gleason observes, her "[s]torms, intrinsic to radical shifts of being, also mark the passage of life into death."[43] She is the mother of ancestor masquerades, the *egungun*, whose patchwork, multistripped cloth's "zigzag borders . . . speak lightning."[44] And Oya's repertory of restored behaviors calls us, perhaps uncannily, but also through initiate lineage and purpose, to keep in mind that Hurston not only signed all her initiate texts with storm or zigzag lightning but also with an unusual rapport with death and the ancestral dead. It is Rain-Bringer's re-creative capacity for mourning that can perhaps best help us understand her deep investment in the folk culture's saraka ethos—its sacrificial feeding of the children through ritual payment of ancestral respects.[45]

An Ifa oracle under the sign Irosun Osa tells how Oya founded the *egungun* masquerade of ancestral spirits. In order to give birth, Oya is called to carry nine whips in her right hand and nine in her left, to offer nine cocks in the market, and to cover her head in red cloth. Blessed afterward with nine children who later fall ill, she goes to two diviners, named "It-is-a-great-occurrence-when-rat-is-found-in-a-hole-of-water" and "It-is-a-great-occurrence-when-fish-is-found-in-grassland," both of whom direct Oya's children to continue the masquerade that enabled their births.[46] The *egungun*, in this Yoruba divination tale of their origin, are bound to Mother Oya, to storm floods, and to the blood-red periodicities of fecundity and women's power. The orisha mediating at funerals and the "owner" of cemeteries in much of the Caribbean, Oya works, as Judith Gleason writes, to "mend 'the broken connection' between ourselves and those who have gone before."[47] The *egungun* are figures of a lineage authority and localized judiciary that—under colonial, white-supremacist, and national conditions of modernity—account for something more than mere folk nostalgia. They assert a submerged yet enduring hold on authority from gulfs of unsurrendered resistance.

As mother of the nine *egungun*, Oya made her presence felt in Hurston's crowning in *Mules and Men:* from the nine days of ritual preparation (189) to the final blood sacrifice of a sheep in whose bleeding throat were inserted nine sheets of paper with Rain-Bringer's name written nine times on each (192–93). Befitting Oya, a broom was "dipped in the blood . . . and the ground swept vigorously" for "as long as the blood gushed" (193). Oya's ritual number nine is the most used number in Hurston's collected "formulae of hoodoo doctors" (258–59). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Tea Cake cuts nine of Janie's hairs for good luck before going gambling in Jacksonville (277). And in the Caribbeanist text *Tell My Horse* (the anthropologically grounded twin of *Their Eyes*), Hurston observes that "[t]he most universal ceremony in Jamaica is an African survival called 'The Nine Night'" (309), an extended wake releasing the spirit on the ninth night after death, directed under the authority of women. In all of Rain-Bringer's texts, nine is the number associated with initiation and mourning, luck and fate.

We may read *Their Eyes* as both initiatory orphan text and as a Nine Night text of mourning, a wake. Claudia Tate has identified Hurston's early orphaning and specifically the mourning of her mother's death as a key component of the writer's steadfastness in pursuing a career as literary and anthropological professional, and as part of the orphan daughter's drive to conserve "the folklore of her mother's speech community."[48] Indeed, Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, served as fictional wake for Hurston's parents (Lucy and John) as well as an attempt to mend broken connections and promises. These broken promises included the mother's admonition to her daughter to insist on departure from the community's traditional death rites. On her deathbed, Lucy instructs nine-year-old Isie (Zora) to intervene against the practice of pulling the pillow from the head (intended to ease transition into death) and the traditional covering of the clock and mirror. The child proves unsuccessful, and the adulterous John soon dreads Lucy's freed spirit in Oya's winds: "That night a wind rose about the house and blew from the kitchen wall to a clump of oleanders that screened the chicken house, from the oleanders to the fence palings and back again to the house wall, and the pack of dogs followed it, rearing against the wall, leaping and pawing the fence, howling, barking and whining until the break of day" (113–14).

John's preacherly, performative life is the focus of this novel dedicated to honoring (and transforming) something of the imparted broughtupsy of the mother. John's life gets funeralized at novel's end (and eulogized throughout) with an insistence on *African* American congregational rites. The text invokes

"O-go-doe, the ancient drum" and "voice of Death," swinging his Baptist funeral service: "With the drumming of the feet, and the mournful dance of the heads, in rhythm, it was ended" (168).

As contrarian modern text, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* calls for acts of mourning going lower than Zora's mother, Lucy Hurston, ever likely embraced—even as it may be driven by the mother's independent-minded savoir-faire. The novel moves (in)famously away from models of racial uplift, northward urbanization, and bourgeois ideological ascent (symbolized by the raised front porch and the organ in the parlor). Janie leaves behind her grandmother's desire for a sermon "about colored women sittin' on high" (187) and taking "a stand on high ground" (188) as she moves ever lower in social and geographic positioning, traveling southward into the Okeechobee muck, into the mires of a regional (circum-Caribbean) folk culture, to face death and its flows of abjection head-on: the "manure pile after a rain," the blood required of "[r]eal gods" (293), the "black earth clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants" (282), the rabid slobber of her initiating lover as he is possessed by some strange snarling thing. Abjection and sublimity share low terrain in a Rain-Bringing text that summons "[t]he monstropolous beast" of the Okeechobee out of its diked bed (305).

Their Eyes commences with invocations of the Oya-deluged dead: "The beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead . . . the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead" (175). The novel's windswept breath of life moves through death-traps of bourgeois aspiration and patriarchal protection set everywhere. Janie's first husband, Logan Killicks, whom she married for his land, is already an ancestor: "He look like some ole skull-head in de grave yard" (185). To her second husband, Janie announces, "you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut's left after he died" (244). Following the deathly end of her first two zombifying marriages, Janie meets life in the muck with Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods. The Oya-driven sweep of the text, however, forces her to kill and bury that life as well. Finally at novel's end, "[c]ombing the road-dust out of her hair" and "[t]hinking" (333), Janie/Rain-Bringer honors the "roads" of an initiate life and recuperates the dust of ancestors as empowering sources.

So it is only after Janie's travels, after speaking of the brass band's funeral grooves for Tea Cake back in the muck, that Janie concludes the sharing of her tale with Pheoby by projecting another grove—the garden she intends to plant "for remembrance" (332), presumably at "the right time of the moon" from seeds Tea Cake bought just before his death (331). Janie's/Rain-Bringer's "liminoid" memory garden—allied to the Creole gardens of New Orleans and Fort-de-France—honors a *konesans* communicable within the gro(o)ves the novel constructs.[49] Like the hip-shaking Ella Wall of *Mules and Men*, Janie is ready to share her dawn and doom story: "[T]ell 'em [bout me]," she says to Pheoby, even as she has Pheoby realize that "they" cannot receive what has been shared in this narrative grove "cause dey's parched up from not knowin' things" (332). Indeed, ground may be so parched as to not be able to receive the rain brought to it, and this is a parching born of a cultivated lack of *konesans*.

All of Rain-Bringer's initiate work aims to remodel and cultivate the sacred in a manner similar to Nigerian and Afro-creole Ifa divination repertory. To get more accurately at Hurston's peculiar Gulf South conservatism, we may turn to an Ifa divination tale that found a place in the memory garden of *Mules and Men*. In an Ifa tale for the figure Otura Obara, Earth seeks divination to bear a child. Told "the child would wear a crown" but that Earth must sacrifice so that her child would be crowned while Earth "was still alive to see it," Earth neglects the sacrifice and dies while her son is just a boy. After the son becomes king, a farmer cultivating yams on Mother Earth's forgotten grave hears Earth cry to him: "Ha! Did you chop my head with your hoe?" When the farmer runs to tell the king of this strange talking skull—vowing on his own head to the veracity of the tale—he precipitates a cycle of violence. The king sends various officials to verify the tale, and the skull's subsequent silence leaves the oath-bound farmer decapitated, whereupon the hitherto silent skull asks the farmer's executioners accusingly, "Ha! Did you kill someone?" The scene is repeated with the official witnesses to the skull's speech being executed by other government officials, until the king intervenes directly and divination-prescribed sacrifices for the skull (Earth) bring reparation as well as a restoration of credibility linking speech and act. True to its prescriptive function, the tale ends with a plan of action for its client, announcing that a neglected ancestor demands proper burial or graveside attention: "Ifa says that there is a dead person who has not been buried. Ifa says we should hurry and bury this dead person in fine style, so that it will not draw many people to their death after it." Amidst cycles of violent contagion, a forgotten ancestor, Mother Earth herself, insists on ritual respect and sacrificial reparations to be carried out by the son for "sins" of the parent.[50]

The Ifa divination tale of Earth's speaking skull is reassembled and given voice in "High Walker and the Bloody Bones," a tale from *Mules and Men*. Here, High Walker, who "had power" to get cemetery bones to rise and shake and do an *egungun* dance, encounters a skull that speaks back to him, telling him "My mouf brought me here and if you don't mind, your'n will bring you here" (170). After rushing to report this incredible oracular experience to the white man, Walker attests to his credibility with an oath: "If it don't speak, you kin chop mah head off right where it at" (170). It should come as no surprise that when the skull refuses to speak, the white man lops off Walker's head, after which the "skull head" remarks to his new neighbor, "Ah told you dat mouf brought me here and if you didn't mind out it'd bring you

here" (170). The bones then rise and shake, terrifying the white murderer and speaking collectively, in congregation: "De bloody bones say, 'We got High Walker and we all bloody bones now in de drift together'" (170). The "High Walker" story carries occult warning and sacrificially fed instruction from the African dead. It speaks from enduring Afro-creole junctures of the religious and the juridical and especially from a *konesans* of the difficulties of reliable two-way communication across gulfs of our contact zones. The white man is left haunted by a nondisclosable secret knowledge. Hurston herself seems well aware that this body of gulf knowledge—from the bloody bones in the drift together to Mother Earth's talking skull—places dread claims on humanity itself. Thus, Hurston took up obligations to the skull-head of Earth herself, a conservatism that would seem anachronistic but which she found necessary to the establishment of any credible practice of holistic relation. If we ask then, May folk remembrance speak to moderns? (or "does the subaltern speak?"), the answer is clearly *yes . . . but don't stake your head on having other folk hear it.*

Hurston's respect for ancestors and their landscapes of residence is one key unifier of her entire body of work. A recuperative vision drives *Mules and Men* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to conjoin subalternized knowledges to new openings in diasporic modernism for women's agency.[51] Yet Hurston herself was to lie forgotten—her gravesite unmarked, her body of work out of circulation—until Alice Walker took it upon herself to honor this most indispensable of American culture-bearers.[52] When Hurston wrote to W. E. B. Du Bois in 1945 with a plan to establish a national "cemetery for the illustrious Negro dead," she asserted, "[l]et no Negro celebrity, no matter what financial condition they might be in at death, lie in inconspicuous forgetfulness." She further insisted, "We must assume the responsibility of their graves being known and honored." Hurston knew the spiritual and political costs of such neglect since "the lack of such a tangible thing allows our people to forget, and their spirits evaporate."[53] She proposed a hundred acres in Florida's subtropical lake country, starting, she suggested, with reburial of the dust of the bones of Nat Turner. To plan to open such a memory garden with ceremonial reburial of Nat Turner is to assert another kind of authority. As her first two books insisted with "High Walker and the Bloody Bones" and the novelized wake for her parents in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* brings to rich detail in its funeralizings (for a mule, Jody Starks, and Tea Cake), Hurston attended to death rites in order to conserve a full range of potential resources for the living so that our spirits might not evaporate in patterns of drought, dread, and violence.

It makes sense that death rites have marked some of the ultimately policed color lines in the South, with the resting places of the dead being among the last legally desegregated spaces. Hurston writes of the Palm Beach hurricane aftermath in *Their Eyes:* "miserable, sullen men, black and white under guard had to keep searching for bodies and digging graves. A huge ditch was dug across the white cemetery and a big ditch was opened across the black graveyard" (314). Told "they makin' coffins fuh all de white folks" and that he must be careful to separate corpses by race, Tea Cake asserts, "Look lak dey think God don't know nothin' 'bout de Jim Crow law" (314). Tea Cake's cosmic conservatism (conserving the basilectal critical voice and the soul repertoires of subalternized humanity) signifies on the blasphemous hypocrisies of a Jim Crow conservatism that guards uninterrupted access to goods and power. Tea Cake laughingly adds that this nationalized Jim Crow brand of civility directs blacks without white sponsorship to be "tried and sentenced tuh six months behind de United States privy house at hard smellin'" (315). This hard-to-escape national privy house smells much like our own "Dirty South."

Often noted for refusing to vocalize black rage, Hurston should be reread for her blues laughter and artful cursing in the face of doing time at hard smelling in the nation's southern privy house. For starters, we could turn to the blistering curse attributed to Marie Laveau in *Mules and Men*, delivered in righteous anger since "My home has been disrespected, my children have been cursed and ill-treated. My dear ones have been back-bitten and their virtue questioned" (187). This Laveau/Rain-Bringer curse is of such extended (three-paragraph) virtuosity that it need not be repeated to readers likely to recognize its longstanding effects and its continuing Dirty South vocalizations. Readers focusing on the bright side of Rain-Bringer must also tend to the "mean and impressive" side, the ill-treated bones of Nat Turner, High Walker, and Earth herself.[54] Working to (con)serve the spirits of Afro-creole memory that disrupt universalizing conservatisms, liberalisms, and radical "isms" of Euro-creole hegemony, Rain-Bringer's is a testy prophetic "road" of Oya that reminds us of obligation to the unattended dead, calls all our bloodied bones—caught in the drift together—into oaths of renegotiated relation.

The Wonders of the Forest—Oya's Shape-shifting Ecologies

In "Swamp Sublime: Ecologies and Resistance in the American Plantation Zone," Monique Allewaert argues that "[t]he entanglements that proliferated in the plantation zone disabled taxonomies distinguishing the human from the animal from the vegetable from the atmospheric, revealing an assemblage of interpenetrating forces that I call an ecology."[55] The deep basilectal sources of creolization—African and indigenous—conserve orientations to a world of ecosystemic interpenetration. The bodies of knowledge surrounding the orisha Oya—whether the orisha appears in human, atmospheric, animal, or botanical form—have long been built upon this in-

terpenetrative awareness. In the swamp or Everglades, much as Allewaert observes, "the possibility of an Anglo-European sublime vanishes" (345). The terra firma of an all-encompassing vantage point or objective (and objectifying) perspective of detachment is hard to find in Hurston's Gulf South. Since Euro-colonials perceived that Africans and natives could navigate the swamp's ecology more adeptly than they themselves could (350), one recourse of white colonial mastery, according to Allewaert, was in "[r]epresentations that bound Africans to swamps" and that "worked to delegitimize ecological knowledge by making it into a sign of primitivism" (353). It is precisely here that Hurston's twentieth-century forays into Florida's swamps and into circum-Caribbean bodies of *konesans* prove most revolutionary and contestatory. For Hurston's embrace of "Rain-Bringer" authority and her southerly compass setting took ecosystemic directive at a time when so many other authors (in the South and the Caribbean) were following an urban, true-north bearing bound up with the old Enlightenment project of producing model citizen-subjects.

Mules and Men moves in another direction. It presents the Gulf South's spiritual foster-daughter of the Haitian Revolution, Marie Laveau, as its authoritative reader of what Hurston later called "the three layers of life" (an eco-semiotics of intermeshed plant, animal, and human life; tied to a divinatory ability to "see and feel the immense past, what is now, and feel inside you something of what is to come").[56] The "Rain-Bringer" initiation narrated in *Mules and Men* depicts Laveau's three-layered altar-work summoning lightning-flashes over Pontchartrain as "the lake heaved like a mighty herd of cattle rolling in the pasture" (185). Buffalo herds (and in the Americas, bison, cattle, or deer) are Oya's animal avatars. Having once crossed paths with an isolate buffalo near the headwaters of the Gambia River, watching it whirl round in rapid decision of flight or fight, I can attest to the dread power Oya repertoires convey of the most dangerous animal in the African bush. Hurston's Rain-Bringer work forces us to re-essay our ecosystemic knowledge of relation—the loss of wetlands, diminishment of a three-layers-of-life vision, the likelihood that the planet's heated energies (from burning a fossil time's photosynthetic energies to fuel our own moment of time-space compression) may birth more destructive storms and droughts.

As rain-bringing manifestation of Atlantic storms, mother of the nine *egungun* who mediate ancestral passages, and finally as shape-shifting buffalo-woman of the bush, Oya's fields of agency are familiar to Hurston's readers: the contact zone of the abject and sublime, maroonings in wilderness, in hunting and fishing, border crossings beyond nature/culture binaries. Oya teaches us a certain courted and learned permeability. Her bellowing "*heyi!*" cry of possession hails us with a difference. As "the only Orisha to arise out of the animal," Gleason writes, only Oya "is willing to assume a mediating position between the living and the dead at funerals, because her animal nature protects her . . . because Death stands somewhere behind it [the animal], or inside it, not out there in a projected future." In Oya's water buffalo avatar, devotees may find a fluid terrain where "animal wisdom and ancestral representation coalesce."[57]

To follow Rain-Bringer's paths into what Barbara Ladd calls the sublime's "proving ground of authority and authorship," we enter Florida's mucks in an act of tracking akin to the hunt.[58] Here, Oya's shape-shifting takes forms that Hurston incorporated, most visibly in an Ifa tale for the sign Osa Ogunda, in which a hunter spies a buffalo cow from his stand. After the buffalo shucks her hide to become a beautiful market woman, the hunter secretly steals the hide, follows the woman to market, and wins her submission to marriage with an oath to never reveal her identity. Within a few years, Buffalo-woman's "bush" fertility arouses the jealousy of the hunter's co-wives, and her husband drunkenly breaks his oath to her, revealing the secret of her origin to his wives. Remorseful for this betrayal, he soon comes to his wilderness wife's defense against the mockeries of her human co-wives, demanding, "What do you skinny women know / Of the wonders of the forest?"[59] By then, however, Buffalo-woman has slipped into her rehydrated old skin to begin acts of deadly revenge against her hounding tormentors before returning to the wilderness. Just before her disappearance, she breaks off one of her horns to give to her now orphaned children and abandoned husband as a means of communication with her bush powers. Oya returns to the wilderness, leaving husband to hunt new wives in town and otherly companionship elsewhere, and leaving her initiate children orphaned yet with sustenance and communications from beyond.[60] Readers of Rain-Bringer can see that she felt drawn to both Buffalo-woman and hunterly roles. A single letter gets at this most playfully. Writing of fishing from her houseboat and her fondness for hushpuppies and softshell turtle, Hurston shared a postscript on the wonders of the forest with her "three layers of life" Florida "sister," Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: "Literary secret: I am getting fat where a cow does under the tail."[61]

Hurston's earliest manuscript of traditional Gulf-South narrative performance contains a tale of the forest's carnal wonders, "The Orphan Boy and Girl and the Witches," with precedent in an Ifa Irete Ose narrative of hunting dogs saving a treed master from being eaten by witches (usually a shape-shifting bush seductress and her herd).[62] The Ifa tale of a hunter's encounter with a forest-spirit foresees the finding of a breathtaking spouse "who will be with our soul," but who might also "carry our soul away."[63] Hurston knew the shape-shifter to be a breath-taking hunter herself, one who could—much like a Caribbean soucouyant—"git out her skin and go ride people."[64] Marooning as she did, outside of bourgeois social convention, Hurston has been criticized for what Homi Bhabha dismisses as a strategy

of "representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic." It was not, however, obsession with the archaic that kept Hurston afield tracking shape-shifting traces of orisha-presence. She tracked what inhabits the in-between spaces of repressed alterity and hybridity, entanglements wherein, as Bhabha proclaims, "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves."[65]

Hurston's frontier-savvy elasticity of consciousness emerges from both basilectal Afro-creole modernity and from modernism's return to the primal and its ecosystemic entanglements. Her ritual crowning as Rain-Bringer revealed the skin-shedding other of herself to be the snake, yet Oya's herds move familiarly through her work and take us into a "preservative ethos" as Gleason remarks of the hunt's sacrificial economy, "which goes back as far as the mind can imagine a distinction ever having been made between ourselves and the other species."[66] With the opening storm of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* comes Oya's emblematic presence: the mother "took the cow-horn that hung on the wall and placed it to her lips" to call her sons (3). Out-of-control libidinal energy (an oath-breaking or erotic indiscretion) leads the novel's protagonist, John, to the Yoruba hunter's trouble divined in the Ifa tale. John "was really searching for a lost self and crying like the old witch with her shed skin shrunken by red pepper and salt" (153). Carnal intimacies of hunting and fishing often script Hurston's scenes of mutually satisfying, marooning romance, as in John's marriage proposal to Sally in *Jonah's Gourd Vine:* "Less go git married and den got [*sic*] set on de fish pond and ketch us uh mess uh speckled perches fuh supper" (159). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Tea Cake Woods shows his desire to share a life outside the domesticating confines of bourgeois conventions by insisting on taking Janie fishing. And after listening to Mrs. Woods tell of love on the muck, Pheoby is converted, swearing, "Lawd! . . . Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin' wid him after this" (332). When the book ends, Janie's life has been "broomed out" by Oya, and the textual cast-net of her memory catches "[s]o much of life in its meshes!" (333). That Hurston found deep peace in fishing from her Florida houseboat should surprise no close reader.

The hunt in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* centers on Janie's initiation as rabbit-and-gator-hunting Mrs. Woods, who quickly "got to be a better shot than Tea Cake" (281). Her transformation marks an utterly transformed "Alphabet" (Janie's earliest name), one who—after being saved from hurricane floodwaters by a swimming cow—can, weeks later, have the self-possession to kill her snarling, rabies-stricken husband with one shot. Following Tea Cake's beating of Janie and his sentimentally narrated claims to paternalistic control, the novel's narrative logic ultimately demands the monstropolous bestiality of the storm and rabid dog to take Tea Cake's life and blood. Tea Cake teaches Janie how to handle a gun only to enable her to become woman

enough to shoot him and stand trial for the killing. Mimetic desire (to be like Tea Cake Woods) drives the novel toward violence: "Real gods require blood." Janie becomes "her sacrificing self with Tea Cake's head in her lap," and she "thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service."[67] The story of Janie Woods's gender marooning, her refusal to be the hunter's game, her insistence on being a gun-toting player, her mature rapport with the bush, may have found some of its own initiation just months before the writing of *Their Eyes*, in Jamaica where Hurston accompanied maroons on a five-day wild boar hunt that ended in flavorful jerk pork.[68]

Hurston seems to have recognized the Jamaican maroons' counterparts in the hunters of the Everglades of her native Florida. There she encountered Seminoles (from Spanish *cimarrón*)—the Florida maroons who had welcomed black maroons and assimilated "all who spoke their language."[69] Hurston recognized Florida (and really the entire Gulf South) as a prime marooning space, a location for originating identities and orientations unbound by "domestic" Anglo-nationalist readings of America (or African America). She knew that Cuban, Bahamian, Haitian, West Indian, and Seminole bodies of knowledge had been circulating in Florida in ever-creolizing ways.[70] Her Florida was aflow with "the boiled-down juice of human living," which she saw as "still emerging from the lush glades" with a peculiarly "Florida flavor . . . accumulated in this sort of culture delta."[71] She glimpsed too that the entanglements of postplantation cultures in Florida pointed to dynamic narrative arts unified by an Afro-creole/indigenous core that could substantiate a more holistic consciousness of relation:

> Also in Florida are the Cuban-African and the Bahaman-African folk tales. It is interesting to note that the same Brer Rabbit tales of the American Negro are told by these islanders. One also finds the identical tales in Haiti and the British West Indies. Since it is not possible for these same stories to have arisen in America and become so widely distributed through the western world wherever the Negro exists, the wide distribution denotes a common origin in West Africa. It has been noted by Carita Doggett Corse that these same tales are told by Florida Indians. But this does not mean that they are purely Indian tales . . . On the contrary, it merely accentuates the amount of contact which the Negroes have had with Southeastern Indians in the past. Since it is well known that runaway slaves fled to the Indian communities of southern Georgia and Florida in great numbers, the explanation of the Brer Rabbit tales among Indians is obvious.[72]

These tales link the trickster cycles and divination rites of Nigeria and Mali, Cuba and Brazil and the West Indies with the fabulous encounters narrated by Joel Chandler Harris, recorded by ethnographers among the Creeks and Seminoles, and performed by Hurston herself. Rain-Bringer's Florida was a

fluid state of convergence where new ritual families shared old tales to refamiliarize new ground.

In relation to national norms, Florida is certainly a marginal frontier or liminoid time-space devoid of "real" trees, real seasons, and even real culture or history. In relation to most of the rest of the hemisphere and to the black Atlantic, however, Florida can offer the closest thing in North America to the normative ecologies and cultural affiliations of home. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, when Lucy moves from Alabama to Florida, an atavistic or soul sense of ecological homecoming is conveyed, from which her prior life had been orphaned: "Lucy sniffed sweet air laden with night-blooming jasmine and wished that she had been born in this climate. She seemed to herself to be coming home. This was where she was meant to be. The warmth, the foliage, the fruits all seemed right and as God meant her to be surrounded. The smell of ripe guavas was new and alluring but somehow did not feel strange" (93).

As with the muck of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* where the domesticated goes marooning—"big beans, big cane, big weeds . . . [g]round so rich that everything went wild" (280), or the "creaming" blossom of Janie's pear tree, or the Haitian Mambo's revelation in *Tell My Horse* that "[t]here is no mystery beyond the mysterious source of life" (376)—this is landscape in which nature is neither exterior to humanity nor a mirror of the self but immanent: a familiar strangeness.

Whether in the Everglades or on the St. Johns River aboard the sprawling *City of Jacksonville*, Hurston wrote as a native to the mysterious source of life:

> The boat trip was thrilling on the side-wheeler *City of Jacksonville*. The water life, the smothering foliage that draped the river banks, the miles of purple hyacinths, all thrilled me anew. The wild thing was back in the jungle.
>
> . . . Wild hogs appearing now and then along the shore. 'Gators, disturbed by the wash, slipping off of palm logs into the stream. Schools of mullet breaking water now and then. Flocks of water fowl disturbed at the approach of the steamer, then settling back again to feed. Catfish as long as a man pacing the boat like porpoises for kitchen scraps.[73]

This marooning return to native land shares the hunter's desire to slip past domestic frontiers to enter a zone of intercourse with the other. We should also note, however, that her reentry into subtropic "jungle" points our attention to the nonnativeness of much of the "smothering foliage." There had been no "miles of purple hyacinths" on the St. Johns River or anywhere else in North America prior to the Louisiana cotton exposition of 1884–85. The "Wild hogs" came to Florida with the Spanish. From Hurston's Floridian vantage point, we see an aqueous terrain of marooning, creolizing systems. Here, native, invasive, and acclimated creole systems interact in a shape-shifting manner that aligned the West African Oya with the Mayan deity Hurakan and brought "the wild thing" (Rain-Bringer/Zora) to write from her hyacinth-lined, native, jungle waters.

Winds of Orisha—Between-beat Dance Possibility

In her Oya-inspired poem, "Winds of Orisha," Audre Lorde channeled something of Rain-Bringer's mean and impressive side:

> instead of an answer to their search for rain they will read me
> the dark cloud
> meaning something entire
> and different[74]

We may indeed read "something entire and different" in Rain-Bringer's "dark cloud." What has been least understood is the conservative, trauma-tested ethos at work in Rain-Bringer's authority, preserving and transforming "something entire and different." Rain-Bringer's work as conservator of an ethos at the core of Afro-Atlantic religion truly "brings it" to textuality: a different kind of conservatism, working from basilectal agency and nevertheless wholly modern.

Hurston's identification as Rain-Bringer and her invocation of Oya have rarely been taken seriously and could be dismissed as whimsical self-fashioning by an artist who built a career inventorying exotic and potentially remunerative traditions of the folk. Of her entry into the spirits' hermeneutic circles she wrote, "I did not find them any more invalid than any other religion."[75] "People need religion," she insisted, "because the great masses fear life and its consequences," and added, "I do not pray" because "I accept the means at my disposal for working out my destiny."[76] Still, it is hard to see the spirited rites of Afro-creole practice as the avoidance of life that Hurston recognized in scriptural religions which have repressed both the body and female power itself. Perhaps she did not pray to the "Man-God" addressed in *Mules and Men* (187), but her writing suggests other means at her disposal.[77] I insist, along with Edward Pavlić and Teresa Washington, that Hurston's Rain-Bringer/Oya initiation and visionary intuition (crowned on an Afro-Baptist base) presented her with more substantial authorial and personal grounding than has been recognized. But I also agree with John Lowe that her belief system was protean, moving between idiosyncratic "syncretic beliefs" and the "skepticism that kept them in a shape-shifting boil."[78] She consistently gave herself to what Karen McCarthy Brown calls the "inseparably mind-and-body" rites of Afro-Atlantic religion to reach her own between-beat attenuating response.[79] As Hurston explained in a letter to Franz Boas, "I mean by attenuation, the listener to the drum will feel the space between

beats and will think up devices to fill those spaces. The between-beat becomes more and more complicated untill [*sic*] the music is all between-beat and the consciousness of the dependence upon the drum id [*sic*] lost."[80] Moving to the between-beat, Hurston is the model of the insider/outsider described by Trinh T. Minh-ha: "She stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out . . . the Inappropriate Other/Same who moves about with always at least two/four gestures."[81]

Pitched "headfirst into the Baptist Church when I was born," Hurston acknowledged in her autobiography that Afro-Baptist rites "were a part of me" (713). Although she contended with the theology and patriarchal heft of scripture, she remained a child of Baptist performance traditions. Insisting that "Negro-made church music is dance possible," she calls the Sanctified Church "a revitalizing element in Negro music and religion."[82] From her work on Baptist and Pentecostal churches to her New Orleans study in Mother Catherine's Spiritualist Temple, and from within Jamaican balmyards, Kumina, Voudou, Vodou, and elements of Afro-Cuban tradition, Hurston sought to revitalize circulation of an Afro-Atlantic Gulf Stream of spirituality. Rain-Bringer's "sanctified" attenuation of scriptural authority was simultaneously culturally conservative (of Afro-creole roots) and modern—as exemplified in the jazz-backed preaching of Mother Catherine Seals: "Don't teach what the apostles and the prophets say. Go to the tree and get the pure sap and find out whether they were right."[83] In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a maturely authorized Rain-Bringer went to the tree, to the truth and its mystery, and transformed Mother Catherine's injunction for her own novel ministry.

Since Hurston herself has become a much-invoked godmother of many branches of disciplinary and popular attention, we would do well to attend to the politics of her enshrinement as saint. She was, of course, no saint in the Christian sense. Her great leaps of faith and fearlessness could be followed by fear and faithlessness, fed by the difficulties of her insider/outsider position in the Caribbean, the Polk County jooks, at Columbia University or Barnard, or the daily trials of life in the Jim Crow South. She often emphasized the sensational and exotic in writing on "Voodoo," and her words of support for military occupation of Haiti are hard to stomach.[84] But as much heat as Hurston has taken for her conservatism (which could at times be naïve, self-protective, and/or born of creolized ties to Euro-conservative southern values), the grounding of her Afro-conservationist southern ethos lay elsewhere, outside the policings of nation, closer to the performative zone of loving ones that Paul Gilroy has described as a "politics of transfiguration" and that Cornel West envisioned as a "politics of conversion."[85]

Although Hazel Carby argued influentially that Hurston fostered "a discourse of nostalgia" for black folklife in the rural South, allegedly rewriting the representational boundaries of black southerners "in relation to the Caribbean rather than to the northern states," critics from Daphne Lamothe to Edward Pavlić, Teresa Washington, and Martyn Bone have situated Hurston's boundary-crossing work within the ongoing concerns and migrations of the black Atlantic.[86] Going beyond an aesthetic mining of folklore and rural nostalgia, Rain-Bringer's immersion in Afro-creole repertory locates its authority within hermeneutic circles that have navigated New World (and new World) contact situations and wrought much that made the modern ethos possible. Finding ensoulment in Oya rites, Hurston created new openings for congregation across nations and regions, catching wind of hurricane forces that are no respecters of frontiers, of ancestors to whom we are all variously indebted, and of shape-shifting zones that call us to the gaps between beats in attenuation of forces that would own and consume our lives.