

# Sacral Grooves, Limbo Gateways



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

KEITH CARTWRIGHT

*on Faulkner,*

*The Sound + The Fury*

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own region's hoodoo pharmacology, attesting to the need for young men to eat red spaghetti sauce prepared only by trusted kin . . . because Jacksonville women can still do a thing or two with their blood. These manifestations of Guif/Caribbean sanguine knowledge are not merely a matter of sensational mystification. Rather, they signify an attitude toward embodiment and desires. These are women who will not be shamed by their blood-stained calabash or punch bowl—women who will instead draw power from their sacral journeys.

A strong undercurrent of matrifocality and women's agency shaped the basilect of creolization in New World plantation societies. Neither the Choc-taw women of *Shell Shaker*, nor the Haitian *femme-jardin*, nor the women of Hurston's jooks and spirit-houses need a man to legitimize them or their "blood." Women of power and knowledge have, nevertheless, had to face steady, high-hegemonic ideological currents that work to shame the very mat-rices of their (and their children's) hold on corporeal, intergenerational, and ritual *konesans*. These modes of shaming have had a heavy hand in the disap-pearance of narrative bodies of knowledge at the contact zone. For instance, nowhere in African American bodies of folk narrative do we find "Turtle Looks up Women's Dresses." We encounter the tale in Creek, Yuchi, and Cu-ban narrative, along with traces of it from Louisiana, and strong prototypes in contemporary Nigeria. Afro-creoles (and Nigerians) may very well have deselected and disappeared Turtle's quest for vision of women's private parts out of the same cultural shame and focus on racial uplift that led to the disap-pearance of the ring shout, initiatory "seeking," saraka, junkanoo, and ser-vice to the *lwa* and orisha across much of North America: a self-censorship of access to the limbo gateway (encouraged by black elites via ideologies of racial uplift or radical/nationalist politics).

Most often, all we find of Turtle or Kumba are traces of the wake of Gulf or riverine submersion. The *hippikat* vision of Langston Hughes's "Jazzo-ria" however, refuses to be shamed, and moves steadily low and into the waters of its brazen Harlem cabaret vision-quest:

A dancing girl whose eyes are bold  
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh singing tree!  
Oh shimmering rivers of the soul!<sup>18</sup>

Drawn through a *Fe Chauffe* swing-space into deep time, all eyes gaze upon the sacred here—as the poem and dancer move us from the reassembled souths of jazz-age Manhattan back to Egypt (Cleopatra), Eden (Eve), and the tree of an African *monte* blooming with life's mystery. In the shimmering rivers of "Jazzonia" and the embodied rhythms of its dancer's flows, we may find access to what Dana Medoro describes as a pharmacy of remediation

for "patriarchal monotheisms" and their "repudiation of all that menstrua-tion and menstrual blood signified." Medoro helps us see that Kumba's and Turtle's sanguine knowledge "did not disappear; it went underground, so to speak, and it continues to inform our cultural narratives and myths"—giving a poem like "Jazzonia" its perspective on the sacred, and giving even a novel like Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* its curative initiatory project.<sup>19</sup> Mov-ing steadily through the breakages of phallic and racialized legitimacy, *The Sound and the Fury* forces author, plot, and comprehensibility to lie low and submit to Turtle's quest around a single, multiply observed image: "Caddy Compson climbing the pear tree to look in the window at her grandmother's funeral while Quentin and Jason and Benjy and the negroes looked up at the muddy seat of her drawers."<sup>20</sup>

Turtle's entire re-assembled body of tales and texts (in Gouge, Cabrera, Howe, Hurston, et al.), along with a body of *hippikat* criticism (Dana Me-doro, Ruth Salvaggio, Minrose Gwin, Valérie Loichot, Monique Allewaert, Édouard Glissant) prepares us to reread a text like *The Sound and the Fury* for the ways its blood-periodicities course through the wetlands of the Yoknap-tawpha County it constructs. In its swamping displacement of the ego and persona of the author, *The Sound and the Fury* serves as a sacral retreat of becoming-Turtle and becoming-Caddy. This is how Faulkner recalled the time-space of the text's remaking of self and imagination: "One day I seemed to shut a door between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write . . . So I, who never had a sister and was fated to lose my daughter in infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl."<sup>21</sup> In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner *makes* girl akin to the way followers of Santería *make* saint by becoming-bride (*iyawo*) in initiation. This becoming-girl/woman must always be *made*, and is never given. Not for Hurston who had to make it, not for Cabrera or Mendieta, not for Kumba or Oya's children. What was once a widespread practice of initiation has gone underground and made the modern novel an uncanny refuge. Strangely enough, as both Glissant and Harris have insisted, it was a man of Missis-sippi's patriarchal planter class who did as much as anyone to reopen and transfigure this limbo gateway to initiatory knowledge of the blood.<sup>22</sup>

### "Blood en de Ricklickshun"—Moaning Deciduations, Sanguine Knowledge

Western modernity's awakening to perspective—what we might call the par-allax effect—meant that any effort to write responsibly from a gulf of con-tact zones must emerge from multiplicity, contrapuntal awareness, basilectal as well as acrolectal renderings. It is not too much to speak of Faulkner's performance in *The Sound and the Fury* as constituting, according to Wendy Belcher, a form of discursive possession hailing from modes of "reciprocal

begin

enculturation" whereby the discursive or performative agency of Afro-creole genius may "penetrate, we might even say animate or possess, European identities and literatures."<sup>23</sup> Yoknapatawpha presents such a transcultural space that it fills with the seepage of all that plantation rule had excluded. For Faulkner, this text marked the death and birthing of another kind of author(ity), recognized less by filiation than by carriage of—or possession by—what had been called contagion. Faulkner acknowledged this in his multiple attempts to narrate perspective upon what he recognized as the novel's catalytic image: "the muddy bottom of a little doomed girl climbing a blooming pear tree in April to look in the window at the funeral."<sup>24</sup>

Dana Medoro has attended most powerfully to how *The Sound and the Fury* adopts what she calls a "menstrual economy," pushing it "to fathom the extensive conceptual alignment of menstrual blood with other forms of flowing blood—from the blood of wounds to the sacrificial blood of Christ."<sup>25</sup> She observes that the writing allies itself with a rhythmic/periodic bleeding that is "a poison and remedy at once" and ultimately "pharmacopoetic."<sup>26</sup> I follow Medoro (and LeAnne Howe and the orphan Kumba/Cinderella tale) in examining what Faulkner's initiatory novel reveals about *why* white (wo)men of the Gulf South have never known what to do with their blood, and *how* folk pay for this lack of sanguine knowledge. In Faulkner's Jefferson, Mississippi, when white girls reach the age of the Senegalese Kumba (with her dirty calabash) or the St. Kittitian Cinderella (with her blood-daubed punch bowl), they have no process to guide them in becoming-woman. This lack of a journey into the bush to be swallowed under the guidance of a wise and wounded crone marks the first erasure of gulf *konesans*.

Since no time-space of initiation exists for Jefferson's "ladies," the hegemonic cultural space faces an underdeveloped rapport with periodic, repeating time and the ethics and erotics of antiphony. The suppression of women's periodic time diminishes the possibilities of stepping outside the steady march to a universal standard time geared toward apocalypse. With the suppression of periodic time comes an accompanying suppression of (wo)men's shaping, becoming-animal, becoming-sorcerer, linked to the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and childbearing, menopause. For white women, as for good colonial subjects, there would be no more becoming-porcupine-spirit (as in *Shell Shaker*), no more becoming-buffalo (as in Ifa tales and in Cabrera), no more becoming-vulture (as with Kumba's initiating crone), no more becoming-river siren or Fury or Turtle. Deleuze and Guattari argue that "[a]ll so-called initiatory journeys include these thresholds and doors where becoming itself becomes."<sup>27</sup> It is for this reason that *The Sound and the Fury* has readers approach Caddy first through the autistic, rather alien Benjy, whose narrative moaning makes for a threshold of rapport with the animal and vegetal worlds, and with alterity itself.

In the advent of a neoplatonic Christianity geared for transcendence and ticking toward apocalypse, the pharmacological value of menstruation and the carnal knowledge attached to Eve's curse came to be displaced by a questionable cure: Christ's sacrificial blood-spill. All subsequent blood spillage (other than the apocalyptic) would be meaningless. Nevertheless, specters of older and other periodicities find their way into the Christian calendars and evangelized colonial spaces. Beyond Christian patriarchal reroutings of sacral time-space, the determinative block to white (wo)men's blood-gnosis was the advent of the racializing modifier itself. Whiteness, as (non-)marker of ethnicity, positioned whites as a people who could not possibly know what to do with their blood (save keep it consanguine, i.e., "in the family") since to spill or mix blood was to enter into the denaturing stain of color and impurity. Certainly since the Enlightenment and the making of lucrative plantation economies out of transatlantic chattel slavery, "Whites" could not know what to do with so much impure blood on their hands. Nor could whites know what to do with the rhythmic blood-spill from those fragile vessels of whiteness: the women whose purity carried the white man's burdens, *his* powers of legitimization. We see that the burdens of (im)purity took on their most explosive form at the threatened margins of the Western colonial system—in the contact zones of plantation southlands inhabited by bloodsucking hags, soucouyants, bluegum sorcerers—where whiteness gets backed into impossible corners of sacrificial crisis, leading demographically and symbolically to choices of incest and/or miscegenation. Every text and ledger of Yoknapatawpha County reveals this "impossibility of being able to assume a stable identity," an impasse, according to Benítez-Rojo, that "can only be made right through the possibility of existing 'in a certain kind of way' in the midst of the sound and fury of chaos."<sup>28</sup> The character of the black matriarch Dilsey models the possibility of being fully and enduringly present "in a certain kind of way" amidst the chaos of *The Sound and the Fury*. However, as the narrative of the failed or "spoiled" sister Kumba acknowledges, African women do not necessarily know what to do with their blood either. *Konesans* is no given. It must be courted and fetched in seerlike rites of adoptive reaffiliation.

From the novel's opening page, when Benjy is told to "Shut up that moaning" after the golfer's call, "Here, caddie," Faulkner scripts Caddy Compson in the role of carrier of the burdens (white balls) of Compson and Bascomb blood. Caddy's mother, Caroline, admits, "I am not one of those women who can stand things" (6), and insists that Caddy not carry her little brother: "All of our women have prided themselves on their carriage. Do you want to look like a washerwoman" (40). Caddy must paradoxically carry the burden of Compson/Bascomb blood by not carrying anything, anyone, any stain at all. We meet Caddy, a little girl squatting in the branch (the creek that signifies tree) "all wet and muddy behind" (12). When the black servant-child Frony

asks if the funeral (for Caddy's grandmother) has begun yet, and then defines the word for little Jason Compson—"Where they moans"—Caddy is right to insist, "Oh . . . That's niggers. White folks don't have funerals" (21), meaning white folks (other than "idiots" like Benjy) don't moan. They don't know what to do with life or death and fear making a show of their fear—their lack of containment, lack of *konesans*. So Caddy climbs up into the pear tree to see for herself: "We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers . . . We could hear the tree thrashing" (25). It is finally the black surrogate mother (Dilsey), charged with raising all the Compson children, who points to Caddy's carriage of sanguine knowledge, a gnosis that white Mississippians view only as curse or shameful contagion. Dilsey tells Caddy, "It done soaked clean through onto you . . . But you won't get no bath this night" (48). Caddy can't know what to do with this muddy, abject "it" that has soaked clean through onto her. And despite Caddy's carriage of a transcultural osmosis, her racialized relationship with Dilsey does not foster the respect that would allow her to receive Dilsey's mentoring. So Caddy ultimately carries the text into its doom and unladylike hope, described via her brothers' projections. She does "*like nigger women do in the pastures the ditches the dark woods*" (59). Caddy moans from sacred gulfs.

The text's initial avatar, the autistic Benjy, also carries the burden of moaning in *The Sound and the Fury*. His perspective launches the novel's plunge into becoming-animal, sorcerer, syncopator of a moaning word-flow. Benjy is constantly rendered in a quasi-animal state—"He just runs along the fence" (34); "*Has he got to keep that old dirty slipper on the table*" (45); "*It's like eating with a pig*" (45); "He must learn to mind" (41). His narrative, aligned with what Dilsey calls "*the Lawd's own time*" (16), forces readers to unmind much of their learning—pushing us into a deeper, more periodic time than anything registerable on Jefferson's or Harvard's clocks and calendars. The older, castrated Benjy also shares a certain ball-lessness with his young black "keeper" Luster, who tells him, "That white man hard to get along with . . . You see him take my ball," even as Luster threatens Benjy: "They going to send you to Jackson" to be "with the rest of the looneys and slobber" (35). Faulkner throws readers—sink or swim—into a zone where legitimacy (based on having [white] balls) falls apart, where names change and a hoodoo contagion asserts authority: "*Versh said, Your name Benjamin now. You know how come your name Benjamin now. They making a bluegum out of you. Mammy say in old time your granpaw changed nigger's name, and he turn preacher, and when they look at him, he bluegum too. Didn't use to be bluegum, neither. And when family woman look him in the eye in the full of the moon, chile born bluegum*" (44). In this first great novel of Gulf modernity, strange conversions take place, including this tale of becoming bluegum preacher (attributed to Dilsey's authority) with a vampirelike bite.<sup>29</sup>

Blood, however, remains the ultimate pharmaceutical here, and the novel's viral "bluegum" subnarrative thickens Dana Medoro's argument—that this is "a story obsessed with blood, purity, and Caddy's torn hymen," tied to an "inability to keep women and black servants in their place."<sup>30</sup> Quentin Compson, the eldest son obsessed with the relentless march of clock-time, is heir to his region's and blood's racialized ideology of gender: the notion "that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not" (66). Quentin finds himself continually called to restore unvarying plantation patterns of racialized behavior since "a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among" (55). The novel, however, moves in contrapuntal loops of behavior since Caddy ends up behaving "like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods" (59), and Quentin's obsession with becoming-Caddy brings him to obsess over his obverse reflection—"my shadow leaning flat upon the water"—as transculturally defined for him: "Niggers say a drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time" (57). Driven finally to lynch the incestuous nigger he has obversely become, Quentin first ponders the possibility of genital mutilation that was performed upon his brother Benjy: "Versh told me about a man who mutilated himself . . . did it with a razor . . . flinging them backward over his shoulder the same motion complete the jerked skein of blood backward not looping" (73). Despite Versh's exemplary tale, Quentin finds that he cannot fling the stain backward in time. Caddy and her daughter must serve as the carriers (and scapegoats) of otherwise shorn Compson balls.

An incestuous and suicidal white logic drives Quentin's obsession over "Oh her blood or my blood Oh" (85), as he yearns to be the defender of his sister's (and blood's) honor. In an attempt to fight one of Caddy's lovers, however, he "just passed out like a girl" (103). As Medoro points out, Quentin bleeds like a girl after a fight with a fellow southerner at Harvard, and is told he "lost caste . . . by not holding your blood better" (105). Quentin almost becomes Caddy in the way this fight stains his vest with his blood: "You can't get that off . . . You'll have to send it to the cleaner's" (104). A culturally cultivated lack of *konesans* leads to his Charles River death-plunge (obversely—for readers—a baptismal immersion) in a narrative colored by Quentin's "Father said" perspective on women's time and transcultural space: "Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons balanced," "Liquid putrefaction like drowned things floating like pale rubber flabbily filled getting the odor of honeysuckle all mixed up" (81). In this postplantation space, everything's being "all mixed up" and out of metronome time drives the white need for sacrificial differentiation, spatial and temporal control.

Dana Medoro has thus far been the best reader of the menstrual economy of Faulkner's initiatory novel. Medoro is especially insightful in illuminat-

ing how it is left to Caddy's illegitimate daughter, "Miss Quentin," to follow her mother's path and escape the Compson/Bascom entombment of life via an Easter-morning descent of her mother's old pear tree: "on the floor lay a soiled undergarment of cheap silk a little too pink . . . The window was open. A pear tree grew there, close against the house. It was in bloom and the branches scraped and rasped against the house and the myriad air, driving in the window, brought into the room the forlorn scent of blossoms" (176). Jason, Dilsey, and Mrs. Compson stare together here at an absence and at the Truth of resurrection: the pear tree's scrape and rasp, the sexed "myriad air" pungent with blossoms. Caddy's illegitimate daughter (here, no female can legitimate anything) follows her mother's path, moving down a pear tree in Easter bloom, to the carnival man in the red tie, some Tea Cake who can impart something like the moaning and shiver of Dilsey's church.

It takes Benjy, in Dilsey's care, to get the narrative perspective of the novel inside Dilsey's black congregation on Easter Sunday. Through Benjy the text can bring readers to moan with Rev. Shegog's Easter sermon and its rites of spirit possession: "the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words" (183). A blood-consecrated gnosis gets summoned by the Reverend's initiate call: "I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb!" "Is you got de ricklickshun en de Blood of e Lamb?" (184). The erotic response of a congregation come aflow knows what to do with its blood's recollection: "Mmmmmmmmmmm!" . . . 'Yes, Jesus! Jesus!' (184). In its seemingly apocalyptic call to all the "arisen dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb!" (185), Rev. Shegog's sermon invites us to see our way through apartheid zombifications—to kiss the truth and moan what we know: not save in our moaning. In spite of the church's theology (its base in apocalyptic scripture), the congregation's behavioral performance is hardly concerned with the alpha and omega of the book of Revelation. Rather, it awakens a durational balance across time, exemplified in Dilsey's moaning: "I've seed de first en de last . . . Never you mind me" (185). What Dilsey speaks of from a repeating performance knowledge of the blood is not a matter of apocalyptic doom but a more limited damnation—that of who-ever cannot endure whelming flows of change. Shegog's Easter sermon and Dilsey's response co-create a repeating, periodic wash of blood for which one name, as Édouard Glissant tells us, is "creolization," the unstoppable conjunction . . . (like a tumultuous Mississippi) that brings the drowning or "the damnation of those who fight it."<sup>31</sup>

Faulkner's figure for a cultivated ignorance of symbolic and ritual wisdom is Caroline Compson, the text's real and symbolic white mother. She speaks for all white women who have never known what to do with their own or their

wayward daughters' blood: "Fiddle sticks . . . It's in the blood . . . It can't be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady" (186). A lady, of course, neither sweats nor bleeds. God would not permit her moaning (though she may whine and complain like hell) since God is a gentleman. A lady remains the altar built in God's honor—on the backs, sweat, tears, and blood of others—and drained of life's every abject fluidity by a host of help. Of course, neither Caddy Compson nor Janie Crawford Woods nor the shell-shaking mothers of Turtle's quest will turn out to be ladies. Medoro's menstrual rubric for reading *The Sound and the Fury* is most apt in positioning menstrual blood as the *pharmakon's* paradigmatic fluid element, and in insisting that "[as] *pharmakon* or abjection, the contamination Caddy and Miss Quentin represent is also the cure of an ideology that divides women into 'ladies' and 'bitches.'"<sup>32</sup>

Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha itself, when read "in a certain kind of way" as Benítez-Rojo advocates, provides a potent bush-pharmacy. All of Yoknapatawpha becomes a sacred grove for new genealogies of affiliation. From the Yoknapatawpha River's often engulfing waters and tributaries, to Frenchman's Bend (and its links to ports in Haiti and Martinique), to the initiatory frozen creek of *Intruder in the Dust* (into which the young Charles Mallison falls and is rescued by Lucas Beauchamp's hospitality), to the "branch" in which Caddy muddies her drawers, to Quentin's final plunge into Boston waters, Yoknapatawpha's fluvial sacraments conjoin abject and sublime experience.

In public appearances, Faulkner often occluded the sacrifices his texts obsessively unearth. His discussion of a single story, "Red Leaves," is most telling on this point. When asked in Virginia of his choice of title for the story (which chronicles the ritual-funerary chase and sacrifice of a dead Chickasaw chief's African slave by Chickasaw clan members), Faulkner described the blood on those leaves in naturalistic terms: "The red leaves referred to the Indian. It was the deciduation of Nature which no one could stop that had suffocated and destroyed the Negro . . . it was normal deciduation which the red leaves, whether they regretted it or not, had nothing more to say in."<sup>33</sup> Faulkner's explanation of the Darwinian sacrifice of "the Negro" by Indians, attributed to the "normal deciduation" of Nature itself, uses a menstrual/periodic trope (the decidua of the vaginal lining . . . or of autumn leaves) to try to slip free from white responsibility for genocide against decimated "red leaves" (the entire process of Indian removal) and from white supremacy's daily racial suffocations at home in Mississippi. But those of us who enter Yoknapatawpha's woods know that its texts always say more, that this has less to do with Indians or the periodicities of unstoppable Nature than with white southerners' perceptions of their own deciduations.

Doubly uncanny for its transcultural intertextuality is the way Faulkner's

scripting of human sacrifice in "Red Leaves" parallels the Yoruba sacrificial rite that structures Wole Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). Engaging historical incidents in the Nigerian Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo in 1946, Soyinka's drama also presents a funerary ceremony at a moment of sacrificial crisis. The play features the king's "Horseman," Elesin, as he watches for the new moon in order to fulfill his role of committing ritual suicide at the appropriate lunar period following the death of the king. In both Faulkner's and Soyinka's narratives, the funeral of a leader is delayed for the sacrifice of a retainer who will accompany the dead leader's horse and dog to serve him in the afterlife. Both funerary texts find resolution (a carrier of their ills or traumas) in human sacrifice at a moment of contagious cultural crisis, and both seek to open encounter with inadequately mourned losses by invoking the judiciary Dead (the *egungun* society for Soyinka and the clan/Klan of "Red Leaves"). Faulkner's feel for the temporal-spatial-cultural interpenetrations of Yoknapatawpha's sacrificial crises and blood consecrations moves readers into unfathomably creolizing swamps. A single scene from "Red Leaves" plunges rereadings of *The Sound and the Fury* into Yoknapatawpha's deep, repeating time—into fluid periodicities that link the creeks and branches feeding the Mississippi and Niger deltas.

We enter this swamp in "Red Leaves" as the parricidal Mokerubbe is goaded to lead the hunt for his dead father's runaway slave so that burial may be completed and he may hold the chiefly title "the Man" and claim a pair of fetichized red slippers. Only until Mokerubbe can open "the door to the earth" by saying to his dead father, "Here is thy dog, thy horse, thy Negro . . . [B]egin the journey," can he legitimately wear the ill-fitting Cinderella shoes that mark his status as the Man (327).

As with Soyinka's rhythmic backing for Elesin's moon-appointed death-passage, the African creek bottom rites of "Red Leaves" take on a polyrhythmic intensity in the Afro-Chickasaw funeral rhythms for their own man's passage: "let the drums talk . . . let the drums tell it" (328). These drum rhythms of sacrificial blood-spill across deep time constitute something of the de-creation that Caddy Compson steps into when she muddies her drawers in a creek on the Compson property on the eve of her grandmother's funeral. The creek branch of *The Sound and the Fury* is really the same fluvial body as the one in "Red Leaves," "where at certain phases of the moon the Negroes would . . . [go] to the creek bottom, where they kept their drums" (314-15). Moon-phase ceremonies held in the creek bottom with drums normally "buried in the mud on the bank of a slough" (328) attune our readings of *The Sound and the Fury* to feminine gulfs and to circum-Atlantic time-space. When we read Caddy in antiphonal dialogue with the pre-Removal time-space of "Red Leaves" (wherein "Tomorrow is just another name for today"

[327]), we see that she also becomes the object of a narrative hunt and a carrier of others' decimations—her slippers a fetish, her blood-rhythm mixed with honeysuckle and leaves. The old creek bottom from which her muddy-drawered image emerges up into a pear tree turns out to be a locus harboring transcultural genius . . . along with a certain unmourned grief.

The death rites of "Red Leaves" reveal Yoknapatawpha's creek bottoms to be sites of moon-phase ceremonies for otherwise mud-buried Afro-Chickasaw drums. The Compsons do not know how to respond to those waters and rhythms—though Faulkner's art (rather than the author's public statements of Nature's decimations) does. We can understand the bottom's mud—what's "done washed clean onto you"—as sign of sacral flow, initiatory blood. According to René Girard, spilt blood's "very fluidity gives form to the contagious nature of violence" since "Blood stains everything it touches the color of violence and death."<sup>34</sup> In considering how the flow and stains of menstrual blood may find equation with blood spilled (and vengeance demanded) by violence—which the Greek symbology of the Furies acknowledges—Girard would have us "inquire whether this process of symbolization does not respond to some half-suppressed desire to place the blame for all forms of violence on women."<sup>35</sup> Yoknapatawpha's decimations do place a heavy sacrificial load upon the Indians, Africans, and bitches scripted to carry white ladies' and gentlemen's unthought blood-gnosis. "Red Leaves," however, like *The Sound and the Fury* and Faulkner's subsequent work, points to the profound dysfunction of these old scapegoating displacements, a doom served in channeling this repeating violence . . . in not knowing what to do with our blood.

"Red Leaves" and *The Sound and the Fury* present readers with a de-creation of relations to sacral bush, a surge of dispiriting violence, and a yearning for something simultaneously old and new in what's left of Yoknapatawpha's sacred swamps and branches. Glissant positions Faulkner as a circum-Caribbean creole whose texts ceaselessly plumb the breakup of Western legitimacy (the single root), offering in Yoknapatawpha a composite "new type of origin," a rhizomatic "open frontier" entered "only through initiation into the wilderness of the unnamed," a time-space in which "Thought rides from one person to another, the way the loas . . . ride those they have chosen to possess."<sup>36</sup> The West African novelist Tierno Monénembo writes similarly of his first encounters with *The Sound and the Fury*, calling it a virtual sacred grove: "to read Faulkner is to be initiated."<sup>37</sup> It is to learn how to read in such a way as to be ridden by thought and restored behaviors of the gulf.

The decimating pharmacy of "Red Leaves" helps us learn to hear Caddy's voice, resense Benjy's moaning, and recollect ourselves in Dilsey's calling-responsive Easter rites. As text, *The Sound and the Fury* swamps and pos-

## The Way of the Saints—Welty's Worn Path

I want to take a parting look at initiatory travel narratives to test a circum-Atlantic reading of Eudora Welty's and Phoenix Jackson's "A Worn Path." Welty's "A Worn Path" has been one of the most widely read stories in introductory literature classes in America. It has not, however, been read with adequate enough orientation to the Gulf's commonplace experience and *konseans*. It makes poetic sense that "A Worn Path" first appeared in *The Atlantic* (1941) and found book publication as the final "travel" of Welty's first book, *A Curtain of Green* (1941). Engaging periodic ritual time, referencing festival figures, and depicting its fabulous central avatar as a bird-woman (Phoenix) on a mythic errand for a "peeping" grandchild, "A Worn Path" carried Welty into the gulf authority that the tale essayed and affirmed from behind the initiate's veiled *Curtain of Green*.

I step into Welty's "Worn Path" in the tradition of Baptist praise-house travelers by acknowledging key "pointers" or guides along the way. Dawn Trouard has charged us with reading "the fiercest secrets" of orphaning in Welty. Trouard takes the following exclamation from the character Nina Carmichael in Welty's "Moon Lake" as a rubric for our journey into the wilderness to be swallowed: "The orphan! She thought exultantly. The other way to live . . . It's only interesting, only worthy, to try for the fiercest secrets. To slip into them all—to change for a moment into Gertrude, into Mrs. Gruenwald, into Twosie—into a boy. To have been an orphan."<sup>40</sup> To speak from the position of *having been* an orphan is to bear witness from the reaffiliated position of a blood-consecrated initiate. Barbara Ladd also points us (with an emphasis slightly different from my own) on our path by calling attention to Welty's assertive handling of an editor's demand for a preamble to be added to "A Pageant of Birds" (1943) recounting a black Baptist performance from Mississippi. The cheeky sanguinity of Welty's *New Republic*-decreed opening to "Pageant" bears its own cosmopolitan witness to gulf authority: "I have been told that this little account needs a generality of some kind made in the first paragraph to Northern readers. I do not think it does, since any generality could only be the commonplace belief I have that magic-making is often the strange compound of humbleness and pride, or in the other direction, out of pride to humbleness, the way the saints, for instance, achieved it."<sup>41</sup> Welty refuses to exoticize or provincialize a church pageant that she clearly finds most common to human experience across time and space on the planet. The provincial is the one who cannot recognize this. She would move her reader "out of [Yankee or white and male] pride to humbleness" in the path of the saints (what Cubans call "Santería"). This includes a wresting of normative, accrediting authority from the metropole, laying claim to an authority of "the

sesses us, moves us into a limbo gateway. Faulkner's malleably wrought sentences, Wilson Harris insists, serve as carriers of premises and intuitions that "are reluctant to be raised to consciousness," sending writer/reader across "a prickly regionalism or fortress homogeneity" in a "demanding art in which . . . a transformed mosaic of community comes into play."<sup>38</sup> Following Harris, Glissant, Monénembo, and Medoro in acknowledging so much that has done soaked clean through onto us, I'm inclined to take my final pointer directive for entering *The Sound and the Fury*'s initiatory groves from Minrose Gwin, who in calling for a kind of hyperattentiveness to Caddy's voice in the novel, uses a language aligned with spirit possession's ritual displacements of ego: "Our willingness to relinquish mastery, to admit that we do not know, frees us to seek out what it is we do not know," and she asserts that "by relinquishing our (imagined) mastery over it, our attempts to fix it, we may find ourselves being engulfed by it (much, I think, as Faulkner allowed himself to be) and losing ourselves in it and to it. We may believe ourselves in danger."<sup>39</sup> Faulkner's first *great* novel of Gulf-modernity takes away the space that would separate the reader from the co-writing participant, who must also bleed, not mind, drink the black drink, and vomit up poisons to endure Yoknapatawpha's most trying cure—immersion in its tannin-stained waters.

In the beginning of *The Sound and the Fury*, the Man that was Faulkner let his writing lose its balls. In the end this is the only way to get us all inside Dilsey's church. We have to open ourselves to periodic lunacy and a bleeding from our private parts, maybe even be sent to Jackson (to the looney bin and/or to the "Great White Father with a sword" [203]) just to get a glimpse of it up there in the pear tree. The Truth . . . the great mystery. Think of Turtle, beaten to bloody pulps—doing that wicked shell-shake thing of recollection. Turtle strays after a vision of it. You can wrap those necklaces round his neck, throw him in the deepest river. Shake his bones till you bleed. But Turtle keeps going low for an immersion in it. Caddy and daughter keep climbing and descending the pear tree for a vision of death and resurrection in the blood. We may also recall Kate Chopin's women's immersion in gulfs and bayous. Or we return to Hurston, our eyes watching "it" become God rolling in stunning waves over our heads. We have to be ready to read across these waters for guidance: Jean Rhys's Antoinette having her third eye opened with a rock upside the forehead by Tia in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, or the "divine window women still have on life" that serves as a reading lens in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*. Turtle and the mothers point to a writing that relinquishes mastery in its bleeding, that moves like Quentin's Harvard friend (Spoadie) "in the middle of them like a terrapin in a street of dead leaves" (50), seeking what, all mixed up, smells like leaves, like honeysuckle, like Truth's rickickshun of the blood.

end