



Series Editors

Jon Smith, Simon Fraser University

Riché Richardson, Cornell University

Advisory Board

Houston A. Baker Jr., Vanderbilt University

Leigh Anne Duck, The University of Mississippi

Jennifer Greeson, The University of Virginia

Trudier Harris, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

John T. Matthews, Boston University

Tara McPherson, The University of Southern California

Sacral Grooves, Limbo Gateways

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

KEITH CARTWRIGHT

*on Welty,
"A Woman Path"*

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS Athens and London

2013

E
185.86
C327
2013

Contents

© 2013 by the University of Georgia Press
Athens, Georgia 30602
www.ugapress.org
All rights reserved
Set in Sabon MT Pro and Whitney by Graphic Composition, Inc.
Manufactured by Thomson-Shore
The paper in this book meets the guidelines for
permanence and durability of the Committee on
Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the
Council on Library Resources.

Printed in the United States of America

17 16 15 14 13 P 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cartwright, Keith, 1960—

Sacral grooves, limbo gateways : travels in deep Southern time,
Circum-Caribbean space, Afro-creole authority / Keith Cartwright.

pages cm. — (The new Southern studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8203-4536-9 (hardcover : alkaline paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8203-4536-9 (hardcover : alkaline paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8203-4599-4 (paperback : alkaline paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8203-4599-7 (paperback : alkaline paper)

1. African Americans—Southern States—Social life and customs.
2. Creoles—Southern States—Social life and customs.
3. Blacks—Caribbean Area—Social life and customs.
4. Creoles—Caribbean Area—Social life and customs.
5. Space and time—Social aspects.
6. Authority—Social aspects.
7. Southern States—Social life and customs.
8. Caribbean Area—Social life and customs.
9. American literature—Southern States—History and criticism.
10. Caribbean literature (English)—
History and criticism. I. Title.

E185.86.C327 2013

305.896 073075—dc23 2012041531

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

Acknowledgments	vii
A Note on the Illustrations	xi
Invocation. To Bust Your Shell	
INTRODUCTION. Reborn Again: <i>Orphan Initiations, Motherless Lands</i>	3
Part One. The Ancestral House	
CHAPTER ONE. Down to the Mire: <i>Travels, Shouts, and Saraka in Atlantic Praise-Housings</i>	35
CHAPTER TWO. Lift Every Voice and Swing: <i>James Weldon Johnson's God-Met Places and Native Lands</i>	65
Part Two. Les Invisibles	
CHAPTER THREE. <i>Fe Chauffe, Balance, Swing:</i> <i>Saint-Domingue Refugees in the Govi of New Orleans</i>	97
CHAPTER FOUR. Making Faces at the Sublime: <i>Momentum from within Creole City</i>	128
Part Three. Sangre y Monte	
CHAPTER FIVE. "Come and Gaze on a Mystery": <i>Zora Neale Hurston's Rain-Bringing Authority</i>	159
CHAPTER SIX. "Vamonos pa'l Monte": <i>Into Florida's Repeating Bush</i>	184

**ENVOI. "White Women Have Never Known What to Do with Their Blood":
*Gulf Carriers and Sanguine Knowledge*** 214

Notes 241

Bibliography 271

Index 293

W E L T Y

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 *konians*. 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."⁴⁰ 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."⁴¹ 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."³⁸ 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 pointerly 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."³⁹ 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 (Spoade) "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 ricklickshun of the blood.

other direction," from Jackson, Mississippi, in what is truly a commonplace performance of belief, "a strange compound of humbleness and pride."

Keeping mindful of the useful potentialities of plagiarism, I should also note how a student's appropriation of Alfred Appel's now-dated but strangely apt praise of "A Worn Path" via enotes.com helped hasten my travel down a path that, as Appel and enotes present it, "passes far beyond its regionalism because of its remarkable fusion of various elements of myth and legend, which invest the story with a religious meaning that can be universally felt."⁴² Welty's story of Phoenix Jackson's saintly journey seems to me to draw its subtle power directly from its deep temporal/mythic foray into its region. This is a region where elements of myth and legend have come to us already remarkably fused and invested with religious meaning. We recognize this commonplace practice as creolization. But we may also recognize in Appel's commonplace statement from 1965 the claims to universal appeal found on so many of the era's back-cover blurbs, replete with assertions that although the author writes of Southside Chicago, a Nigerian village, Haiti's revolution, or Mississippi, the text nevertheless speaks from a human world. We are only beginning to see how Welty's or Hurston's Gulf regionalism emerged out of a remarkable and violent fusion shaping, as Glissant would have it, Whole World relation. Welty's "commonplace belief"—like the lines of Phoenix Jackson's face—exerts "a fierce and different radiation" revealing the Gulf region's worn paths to be, as Barbara Ladd sees it, no mere backwater but a common space of cross-cultural history and destiny.⁴³

Whatever else it may be, "A Worn Path" is an initiatory travel narrative emergent from Gulf contact zones. All the New World texts I have treated here come at us from spaces of a generalized and profligate creole "contagion" capable of baffling any literary or canonical genealogy of placement. If, as Derrida argued in *Dissemination*, writing always is orphan, in the terms of Phoenix's pharmaceutical travel both soothing medicine and poisonous lye, then all writing needs the godparentage that Phoenix Jackson brings to her readers, moving us all from habits of reading grounded in Euro-colonial hubris into new compounds of humbleness and pride.

Gulf-matrix models for walking and reading "A Worn Path" have, however, long been available. The Senegalese orphan tale of Kumba had fostered extensions of ritual family throughout the black Atlantic. Additional paths to commonplace belief (braided out of diverse practices) may be found in Geechee praise-house practices of "seeking" religion. In the Gullah/Geechee path to praise society membership, as we have seen, pointers (or spiritual parents) guide their mourning "travelers" in prayer, in dream interpretation, and in composition of their travel narratives delivered to the congregation for examination. With Phoenix Jackson as both its traveling avatar and spiritual parent, "A Worn Path" moves readers to the medicinal vision of the "seeking religion"

narratives collected in Lorenzo Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. In the initiatory narratives collected by Turner, the seeker might travel to a multi-storied house to meet a welcoming white-bearded man (God), or she might envision being given a baby, as with Rosina Cohen, who recalled her pointer's clear instruction: "Don't let nobody fool you; the baby is your soul."⁴⁴ From the Sea Islands to Grenada, St. Vincent, and Trinidad, praise-house novitiates have undertaken "travels" to receive spiritual gifts. Their heads are banded to seek "an authoritative energy" that emerges in the Holy Ghost's "sacred wind," bestowing medicines, newborn songs, and a feeling "like a baby coming out of the womb."⁴⁵ The travel schools "mourners" for the authoritative spirit possession called "adoption." This spirited authority and tradition reached Mississippi from thizomatic pathways—through New Orleans, through Chickasaw and Choctaw Afro-enculturations, and from the Gullah lowcountry, as we find with Faulkner's revered "Mammy" Caroline Barr.⁴⁶

Scripted according to ritual protocol, Phoenix Jackson steps into "A Worn Path's" second sentence as "an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag."⁴⁷ The color of this head-tie signals an initiate elder who has long known what to do within the pathways of her (and others') blood. Beginning in the Christmas season of the journey of the Magi, "A Worn Path" sends Phoenix on her errand in ritual time. "She makes these trips just as regular as clockwork," a nurse notes, in the only measure of time available to this clinic's school-trained observers. Phoenix carries herself with a certain sense of swing—"from side to side in her steps with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock" (142). Head bound, stepping to *balance* latent energies, she taps the ground with a cane, making "a grave and persistent noise in the still air, that seemed meditative like the chirping of a solitary little bird" (142). Not only an Egyptian bird of repeating rebirth, Phoenix Jackson becomes a whole pageant of birds: mourning dove of Holy Spirit, hunted quail, bone-picking buzzard, and Yoruba bird-of-the-spirit's-head. The sugar-sack apron that she wears bears its ties to economies of slavery as do the cotton and cornfields through which she moves. Even Phoenix's skin, which "had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles . . . as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead" (142) bears sacrificed witness to that performative "certain kind of way" embodied in the banter and carriage of Havana orisha initiates.

Performing Orphan Kumba's and Creole Cinderella's test of animal empathy, Phoenix wields her cane with care, driving beetles, rabbits, and bobwhites out of harm's way while protecting herself from harmful critters. The path presents her with its familiar repeated challenges: "chains about my feet" in facing a hill, "the thorny bush" greeted, "the trial" of crossing a creek by log as Phoenix shuts her eyes and levels her cane to march "like a festival figure in some parade" (143). This festival crossing shows Phoenix that her own

limber/limbo access remains viable. In deep trance then, beneath “a tree in a pearly cloud of mistletoe,” she is kissed by the vision of a boy offering “a plate with a slice of marble-cake,” which summons her lovely response: “That would be acceptable” (143). Phoenix’s and Welty’s acceptance of a most-marbled reality speaks to what Fredric Jameson calls the “marbled structure” of heterogeneous novelistic narratives, carrying with it a certain openness to what is really global creolization itself.⁴⁸ When Phoenix’s path gets blocked later by barbed wire, she limbos down “to creep and crawl, spreading her knees and stretching her fingers like a baby trying to climb the steps” (143). She faces yet again the infancy of her soul’s initiatory travel even as sheponders being (becoming again) the initiating wilderness crone (Osain’s double) who has sacrificed many parts of herself to the barbed wire blocking the path: “she could not let her dress be torn now . . . and she could not pay for having her arm or leg sawed off if she got caught fast where she was” (143). Finally limboing free from the fence, and gazing at “dead trees, like black men with one arm, standing in the purple stalks of the withered cotton field,” Phoenix meets the gaze of a buzzard perched over the old field. She faces the amputating costs of plantation endurance, hails the buzzard unflinchingly (“Who you watching?”), and sticks to her groove: “In the furrow she made her way along” (144).

When Phoenix leaves the cotton field and steps into “dead corn,” she enters “the maze” where no path is marked. In this dead maize, she greets a dancing ghost matter-of-factly before recognizing it as a scarecrow. Given Phoenix’s identification with birds, her response, “Dance, old scarecrow . . . while I dancing with you,” marks another triumph against fears, and she morphs into a raffia-clad festival figure: “She kicked her foot over the furrow, and with mouth drawn down, shook her head once or twice in a little strutting way. Some husks blew down and whited streamers about her skirts” (144). After her “adoption” of death and its *egungun* strut, she goes lower into a swamp-mire, a deeper green underworld beneath a dense live-oak canopy. The hunter who encounters her upended by a dog there, and who “gave her a swing in the air, and sat her down” (145), is familiar to initiates of Afro-Atlantic divination lore. But he is no Ogun adept and brings real arrogance to the ritual economy of the encounter, assuming “I get something for my trouble” (the sacrificial quail in his bag) while Phoenix could not be getting anything for the trouble of her own journey. She replies in terms of binding commitment (*refigo*): “I bound to go to town, mister,” since “The time come around” (145).

In her red head-tie and deep into postmenopausal life, Phoenix remains bound to an engrained periodicity and to an enduring reproductivity. “A Worn Path” turns out to be an initiating narrative of authority from below and beyond. The young white man with the gun (emblematic of the ruling ideological structures of the state and the literati) assumes that he carries the author-

ity in the encounter: “I know you old colored people! Wouldn’t miss going to town to see Santa Claus!” (145). But his *naïve* assumption only renders *him* a clownish Santa taxed by Phoenix’s gaze when—after a nickel falls from his pocket—the wrinkle-lines of the tree on Phoenix’s forehead coalesce “into a fierce and different radiation” (145). Her hands move slyly to pocket the gift-sign of Afro-creole initiation tales: “with the grace and care they would have in lifting an egg from under a setting hen” (146). Placing this magic egg (or nickel) in her sugar-sack apron as a witnessing bird soars overhead, Phoenix Jackson practices the ritual theft common to Santería initiations and to writing authority. As we consider Welty’s appropriation of Afro-creole authority (via the avatar of Phoenix) in the face of a patriarchal authority that reads the fierce and different radiation of powerful women’s writing condescendingly, we can trace something of Welty’s travel in the hunter’s words to a woman unimintimidated by his pointed gun: “Well, Granny . . . you must be a hundred years old, and scared of nothing. I’d give you a dime if I had any money with me. But you take my advice and stay home and nothing will happen to you” (146). Ms. Jackson, like Ms. Welty, however, is set on getting her dime and adamant about her ritual commitments: “I bound to go on my way, mister,” she says, and “inclined her head in the red rag,” departing into “shadows [that] hung from the oak trees to the road like curtains” (146) with her first egg in her apron.

Any fear of violent threat that Phoenix may feel is trumped by transgenerational need and by the wisdom of her mindful body. Phoenix’s feet “know where to take her” in the paved city of Natchez (146), and she climbs one particular building’s steps “until her feet knew to stop” (147). What she arrives upon there attests to her travel narrative’s intent: “she saw nailed up on the wall the document that had been stamped with the gold seal and framed in the gold frame, which matched the dream that was hung up in her head” (147). It is Phoenix Jackson’s dream (packed with very marbled ideological formations) that hails her. And when she announces “Here I be” with “a fixed and ceremonial stiffness over her body,” the medical office staff identify her as “[a] charity case” (147). Phoenix’s charity case, however, certainly marks an excess of charity’s Latin or Anglo-Christian meaning and is supplemented with Afro-creole notions of *saraka* (rooted in Arabic *sadaqa*—alms, charity, sacrifice, practiced in West Africa and the Caribbean as we examined in chapter 1’s focus on saraka rites in Georgia, Trinidad, St. Vincent, Grenada, and Carriacou).⁴⁹ Saraka rites allow the living to receive the blessings of ancestors whose grace and protections are activated in festive offerings to their freshest representatives on earth: children. Such an energy industry sustains a nonapocalyptic worldview that counters the hegemonic consumer individualism surrounding us. Saraka’s attentiveness to the cooperative recycling of resources and energies places an enduring value on performance. Behavior

trumps theological credo since it may be more important to make saraka and to feed the children than to profess any sort of fundamentalist belief in the reincarnation or agency of the dead. It may be most important to *behave* as if we inherit the earth and belong here intergenerationally since performed ritual behaviors actualize belief. Saraka rites feed the children with a vision apart from savage capitalism and its ruthless competition, apart from nihilism and apocalypse, and offer the only salvation or “charity” we need.

The economy of the text insists that Phoenix Jackson is an energy generator whose journey to a Natchez health clinic does not reduce her to submission to clinical authority. The attendants who call Phoenix to “Speak up,” insisting “We must have your history, you know” (147), are incapable of inscribing such a history’s fusions. What they would write would be in the terms of an authority that cannot read Phoenix Jackson’s worn path. Incapable of understanding Phoenix’s saraka-work, they hold themselves to be paternalistic dispensers of “charity” to her. Their school-taught understanding of history (its chronological periods and parades of eras) would differ markedly from the restored behaviors of Phoenix’s mindfully embodied periodicity itself. The clinic and the systems that certify it cannot possibly “have” Phoenix’s history, at least not without a system-altering apprenticeship to it.

We begin to get at this when a nurse more familiar with Phoenix announces: “She doesn’t come for herself—she has a little grandson” (147). The nurse’s question concerning the grandson, “He isn’t dead, is he?” (148), gives an apt sign for reading “A Worn Path.” As a praise-house elder would point out, “the baby is your soul.” The question of the grandson’s death thus becomes a question of spiritual sustenance and rebirth for Phoenix—and for all readers whom she carries with her as medicine-seeking textual avatar. The endurance of a people, the soul-survival of our whole species (and even species in vulnerable relation to us), may be at stake in this moment. The nurse now plays the role of pointer, reminding Phoenix why she made the trip: to restore breath and voice to the grandson. Phoenix apologizes for her memory lapse, explaining that she “was too old at the Surrender” to attend school and receive the kind of certification of authority sealed in gold that she so admires. But she immediately conveys another, unsundered though submerged Afro-creole authority. The orphaned grandson’s throat and voice have been damaged (perhaps in his inevitable subject formation within Jim Crow schooling): “[t]hroat never heals” from having “[s]wallowed lye” and “[h]e not able to swallow . . . get his breath,” thus the periodic travel for “the soothing medicine” for this “obstinate case” (148). Against swallowed lies of history, the school curricula, white supremacy, patriarchal religion, and Jacksonian democracy, an unsundered Phoenix Jackson travels for medicine for her own soul and for all the fostered (and fosterable) grandchildren for whom she may serve as medicine-fetching avatar. It may be an obstinate case, but the grand-

son “going to last” as he waits, bound in “a little patch quilt” and peeping, “his mouth open like a little bird” (148). This little bird of Phoenix’s spirit-head won’t be forgotten again “the whole enduring time” (148). And Phoenix’s apocalypse-deferring travel narrative is validated with the awarding of the medicine, marked “Charity” in a notebook.⁵⁰ Any adequate readerly performance of “A Worn Path” must tend to this “whole enduring time” of Phoenix’s travels through deep time, and to her unsundered saraka-patchwork supporting a grandson’s ability to last.

As Welty’s avatar, Phoenix went on an errand on behalf of a spiritual child for medicine to speak and publish. Phoenix journeys to treat and initiate a peeping author’s voice, a southern young “lady” who had inevitably swallowed much lye. Traveling through Phoenix to voice and authority, Welty placed “A Worn Path” as final testimonial to the author’s ritual death and rebirth behind *A Curtain of Green* (1941), her first published collection. In Welty’s South—like Faulkner’s, Hurston’s, Cabrera’s, Chamoiseau’s—any quest for authority emergent from deep time-space has had to travel across gulfs of dispossession to fetch medicinal spirits for the toddy that cuts through the lyeblocked throat, soothes and gives voice. This is a regionalism of the contact zone’s remarkable fusions. To write or read powerfully from this zone may require a surrender of a certain kind of authority, an orphaning of the “I” of the story in order to travel and seek reaffiliation. Something (of blood and ego) must be surrendered to voice something unsundered and submerged of a repeating, nonapocalyptic vision. It may take an orphan text with a dead or gone mamma and a sacrifice of blood-pride to step into our fiercest secrets and radiations, into wildnesses of transcultural intertext wherein we recognize built-in gulfs in our fabric—and find binding in the repair work of saraka.

The remarkable fusions of “A Worn Path” lead to a common place of knowledge that we still—like Governor Wallace or the hunter of Welty’s story—too often block. In this particular story the white Protestant lady that was Eudora Welty had to die to become orphaned grandson of the strangely grooved text. Herein our avatar keeps (us) always on the verge of becoming spirit bird. Requesting and receiving a final gift egg—the “[f]ive pennies is a nickel” that completes her dime—Phoenix “stared at her palm closely, with her head on one side” (149). The nickels nesting in her palm like eggs radiate a rebirthing power and serve as currency for the text’s gift-sign—the wonder of a paper windmill for her grandchild: “He going to find it hard to believe there such a thing in the world” (149). Let’s make no mistake about it, Phoenix’s march home is a crowned procession of commonplace belief down a worn Gulf South path. What we are left with at story’s end is the sound of her slow step “on the stairs, going down” (149). Soothing medicine for the voice presumably in her sugar-sack apron, left hand holding Oya’s (and the Holy Spirit’s) paper windmill high, right hand with cane tapping out the ground

home—this is the way Phoenix Jackson makes her way down, back to, out of a limbo gateway opened somewhere between Natchez and Jackson, Mississippi, routed through Kumba's Sea of Ndayaan, Cinderella's Johnson River, and a Haitian manbo's gombo patch.

Phoenix Jackson carries an unsundered, nonapocalyptic knowledge on behalf of a grandson who has swallowed lye. Her sacrificial journey along the grooves of a worn path can remediate the lies we have swallowed and allow us to receive our gift-eggs. Phoenix, Caddy Compson, Janie Woods, Auda Billy, Kumba, and Turtle take us into spaces of our real and potential breakup and reassembly. As avatars, they move us to an all-okay sign more focused on the dance of reassembly than on the dread of facing a heap of broken images of ourselves. Through them, we may learn not to be paralyzed by the fluidity (or seeming impassess) of gulf spaces or by the moment when we recognize that the Gulf's mires and blood consecrations have always done soaked clean through onto us.

Knowledge of relation to sacred gro(o)ves is something we "make" repeatedly in ritual reassembly. It comes simultaneously in porousness to the time-space that precedes and exceeds us. My backyard patio in Jacksonville has been a space of my own cultivation of fraught relations to the wild and to a creole city that misrecognizes itself. For me, the planting of little *montes* (citrus, figs, herbs, flowering plants, lemongrass, pomegranate, palms, sugarcane, avocado, loquat, and jujube); the tending of plants in containers (mango, guava, baobab, cocoa, star fruit, and tamarind); the nurturance of animal relations (wormpiles and treefrogs, birds, fish, turtle, the family dog), amidst a skyline of huge live oaks (holding Spanish moss and resurrection fern, raccoons and owls) has made for an utterly necessary spirit-sustaining space of parties and grilling, libations and fish-cleaning, reading and writing, through the cumulative draftings of *Sacral Grooves*, *Limbo Gateways*. Each year I have freed up a little more of what had been a mostly paved-over backyard by taking a sledge-hammer to a bit more concrete, building up soil in the sand beneath for planting. Only in this way am I able to read and write—and especially to assign and grade essays—in response to the obligations of a profession that seems to have more to do with the pouring of concrete, the maintenance of disciplinary boundaries and national fortifications, than with relations of give-and-take hospitality to each and every other. My work remains an apprenticeship to submerged authorities and relations, an ongoing saraka-cycle.

I received my orisha warriors (*los guerreros*: Eleggua, Ogun, Ochosi, Osun) in a time and place of intense national refortification. Shortly after the events of 9/11, at the very beginning of the nation's War on Terror, I traveled to complete some tasks necessary for receiving the warrior initiation in an *ilé* (spirit house) in our nation's capital. Even now, some nine years later, this night

stays washed in surreal memory. The blood sacrifices central to Santería rites have been much sensationalized. Still, there is no getting away from the fact that there is a power in the blood: ritual sacrifice creates thresholds of sacral time and space. Spilled blood calls the living into larger circles of relation and makes us acknowledge the momentariness of our lives together. On this night we had to dispose of carcasses from a family member's "making" of Olokun: a number of dove, rooster, and duck carcasses were to be received at the end by this spirit of salt- and freshwater comminglings, down by the Potomac River. The only one attending with a pickup truck, I volunteered, helped load my truckbed with the sacrificed birds, and headed to the Potomac with an Afro-Cuban elder—an Eleggua initiate—as my guide to the side streets of D.C. It was a strange world out there. For with a truck-bed full of bloody carcasses, and the two of us bound to be on our way (dressed in skullcaps or berets and ritual white), we needed to avoid the numerous crossroads blocked off and monitored by soldiers. With the military manning nigh every key crossroad in heavy armor, my ritual elder's knowledge of the back-routes and the military's guard assignments was crucial to avoiding what might otherwise have been a most trying detainment. Taking direction from this Cuban-American Eleggua, dodging the sandbag-fortified crossways, and moving in labyrinthine detours toward the Potomac—with the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial looming in the background—I was driving my old hand-me-down truck in a space that was strikingly unfamiliar and quite truly and strangely home. We came to a park on the river not far from the National Mall, and my Eleggua guide-and-elder took a slug of rum, passed the pint flask my way. When we stopped the truck at the Potomac's banks and successfully slipped the birds into its waters for crabs and turtles to feast upon, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace. The moonlit river rolled through *el monte* to the Atlantic with the Washington Monument's white obelisk like a hard-to-believe wonder behind us. Never had I felt so simultaneously at home and estranged in the nation's capital, nor have I ever been so sure of the wild and cultivated heterogeneity inside the fortress gates.