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Naming Names: Three Recent Novels by Women Writers

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This paper will take up the question of language – as it centers on names and naming – in three recent novels by women writers. I will try to show how names, and the factors that bear on the process of naming, are employed by Alice Walker in *Meridian* (1976), Margaret Atwood in *Life Before Man* (1979), and Toni Morrison in *Tar Baby* (1981). Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) would clearly be an appropriate choice for such an inquiry; however, this novel is so nearly given over to the problems of naming and identity that it seems prudent to reserve a close reading of the book for a future study of Morrison's fictions. For the purposes of the present investigation, I have organized my remarks under a number of more or less distinct headings intended both to suggest traditional fictive uses for naming and to reflect some typical thematic concerns to be found in works by these contemporary writers.

I. LEVELS AND BOUNDARIES

An author's intention in naming a place or character may be seen, in part, as a desire to make clear distinctions, to suggest connections or motifs within the text, or larger patterns that extend between texts, and to erect borders – a will toward accuracy and richness. Margaret Atwood, in *Life Before Man,* provides us with numerous examples of this movement toward clear boundaries. Here is one instance: "Nate sits in the Selby Hotel. . . .TRANSIENT, PERMANENT, the sign in the entranceway reads. . .as if the two things are the same (59)."[1] Often such labeling is simple and relatively unambiguous, as indicated by these descriptive jottings from *Meridian:* Walker tells us that Altuna Jones had a head that "was shaped exactly like a person's head would be shaped with such a name, like a melon, long, and with close-cut hair. . .(161)."[2] Somewhat more allusive are Walker's depiction of a white farmer – " 'My name is Scott,' he said, 'after Scott Fitzgerald. My mother loves his books (105)' "– and her reference to Camara Laye in the naming of Lynne and Truman's ill-fated child.[3]

Examples of more layered and ambiguous labelings include Walker's use of "Meridian" for her protagonist. Certainly, this is one of the more multileveled names in modern fiction and Walker is careful to underscore its various connotations by providing a rather complete dictionary definition directly after the excerpt from *Black Elk Speaks* that serves as epigraph to the novel. We learn, for instance, that Meridian stands for the South, that she signifies a culmination of geographical and historical forces, that she is meant to stand as an embodiment of "distinctive character," and, perhaps, that her life is to be taken as a courageous gesture toward closing the "nation's hoop" that Black Elk understood to have been irreparably broken. Truman Held is another of the complex labels in *Meridian,* with its Everyman-like suggestiveness and political overtones – a name made still more resonant by Meridian's playful misnaming of Truman early in the novel: " 'Why, Che Guevara,' she said dreamily. . . . 'Truman? (24)' " And note that this reference to the assassinated revolutionary leader is given additional weight and context at the opening of the next chapter, where Walker lists more than a dozen victims of contemporary political murders (33).

Still more ambiguous and allusive are those names that seem intended to elevate the narrative to a level of myth. Here, Toni Morrison's use of place names in *Tar Baby* comes immediately to mind. Early in the novel, Son (as yet undesignated so for us) stands at the railing of H.M.S. *Stor Konigsgaarten* (King's Great Garden?) and stares at the harbor of Queen of France. Soon after, he jumps ship and swims until he climbs aboard Valerian Street's sailing craft, *Seabird II*.[4] The island he comes to is known as Isle des Chevaliers[5] – a refuge for the ghosts of Haitian slave laborers brought there by white owners to clear the land. He then finds his way to the "oldest and most impressive" of the houses built there – it is Valerian's – L'Arbe de la Croix (Tree of the Cross), which is set in the hills overlooking "a swamp the Haitians called Sein de Vielles. And," says Morrison, "witch's tit it was: a shriveled fogbound oval seeping with a thick black substance that even mosquitoes could not live near (10)." In this way, and as his strange journey toward selfhood and revelation continues, Son comes to the palatial home of Valerian Street, Candy King and emperor of all he surveys, and Margaret Lenore Street, nee Lordi, Miss Maine and, in Ondine's sarcastic phrase, the Principal Beauty.

Clearly, Son's progress through this vividly labeled landscape is intended to assume a mythic dimension. So, too, is his journey home to Eloe (from Elohim, God?), Son's edenic Floridian birthplace, where there are "no birth certificates (174)" and one is named in an elemental and richly personal way. In Eloe, children are not named after candies or

commercial products or media "personalities," nor are they labeled randomly by pulling names from the Bible, as is the case in *Song of Solomon.*[6] Indeed, we learn in Eloe that Son's father has been called Old Man "since he was seven years old...(247)" and that Son had been called, simply, Old Man's son "until the second child was born. ..." This elemental form of naming exists in Eloe because Eloe is meant to represent the past, home, at-one-ness, original identity. As Son, aka William Green, concludes – he has just named a series of inhabitants of his childhood home – "They had all been in this house together at one time – with his mother (247)."

Still another level to this mythic use of names can be found in the narratives of contemporary black writers: the connection with the slave past. This is evident in Walker's various references to the Sojourner magnolia, and to the events and legends surrounding it, in *Meridian,* and also in Meridian's recollection of her father's shrine to Indian culture (53), itself a prelude to vision in the coil of the Sacred Serpent burial mound and her deeper immersion into her familial and racial history. In this light, it should be noted that the Indian ancestors of black people were usually named according to personal eccentricity, special deed, or, yes, distinctive character – Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Yellow Flower, Black Elk, even Walter Longknife...names to respect and treasure, that contain their own authentication, having been generated within a relatively intact culture.[7] At the polar opposite of this happy union of heritage and identity, we have all those individuals, such as Gideon and Thérèse in *Tar Baby,* who are known collectively, according to their function in the dominant white society – Yardman, Mary (a generic island label for laundress or charwoman) – or whose names have been, almost irrevocably, obliterated or mutilated through contact with that society, as is the case for Macon Dead and his family in *Song of Solomon.*[8]

II. CLASS OF STATUS

In *Tar Baby,* Toni Morrison gives us a relentless study of the effects of status, class, and wealth on naming and identity. This exchange between Valerian Street, white emperor of L'Arbe de la Croix, and Son, disenfranchised outlaw and black wanderer, is telling:

"Good morning, Mr. Sheek," said the man.
"Street. Valerian Street," said Valerian. "What did you say your name was?"
"Green. William Green."
"Well, good morning, Willie..."
"...Your name really Valerian?"
"Yes." Valerian shrugged helplessly. ...
"I used to eat a candy called Valerians."

"Ours," said Valerian. . . .
"No kiddin? You named after candy?"
"The candy was named after me. I was named after an emperor (146)."

The passage is certainly humorous, but that diminutive "Willie" gives the lie. Son is here brought face to face with a survivor of white America's mercantile wars, a rather self-assured and dominant individualist who is apparently quite at ease in the dominion he has created – a domain that automatically relegates men like Son to the bottom of the hierarchical order. That this order is intractably rooted in one's name is driven home by Valerian's servant, Sydney, who pulls rank on Son as soon as an opportunity arises: "I know you, but you don't know me. I am a Phil-a-delphia Negro[9] *mentioned in the book of the very same name* (163, my italics)." Son quietly informs Sydney that he plans to leave the island, using a visa supplied by Valerian. Sydney's uppity response to this explanation is "You don't need no visa to go home. You a citizen, ain't you?" To which Son replies "I use another name. I mean I don't want nobody checking me out." "Take my advice," concludes Sydney, "Clean your life up (163)."

More immediately paradigmatic of the hierarchical and dehumanizing use of names in the relationships between white property owners and those who dwell under their roofs – under their control and protection – are Morrison's vignettes that focus on Gideon and Thérèse. The demeaning use of the generic label for these individuals is first brought to our attention in a tête-à-tête between Jadine[10] and Son. Jadine refers to Gideon as "Yardman," as if that were actually his given name. "Who?" asks Son. "Yardman. The gardener." "That his name?" "No," admits Jadine, "But he answers to it. Which is something at least. Some people don't have a name of any kind (115)."[11] However that may be, it is nonetheless true that whenever Gideon makes the trip from Dominique to L'Arbe de la Croix, he brings with him a woman who Valerian as well as his family and staff refer to as "Mary," although "she looked a little different to the occupants of L'Arbe de la Croix each time. . . ."[12] Morrison informs us that they "all referred to her as Mary and couldn't ever be wrong about it because all the baptized black women on the island had Mary among their names (40)."

This wholesale indifference to the actual identites and personal lives of the servant class is an important thread that meanders through the novel, until the final strand is knotted when Son is delivered to his fate on the "far side" of Isle des Chevaliers by Thérèse.[13] It is a thread that binds together all members of Valerian's household, revealing and darkening the lines of power and affection that radiate between them.[14] And, finally,

it is a thread that glints also, though intermittently, in Alice Walker's *Meridian*. For, surely, it would seem that Walker intended to show that a similar hierarchy of naming and labeling was at work in the South remembered by Meridian's mother, Mrs. Hill, who, "though not a maid, had often worked for white families near Christmastime. . . (107)." It was Mrs. Hill who confided to her daughter that "the lusty young sons" of the white families she had worked for had yearned after her, "calling her by her first name, of course. . . ." And it is Mrs. Hill who, not incidentally, gives us one of our clearest definitions of the term *oppression*: "She was black, wasn't she? And a female. (Not a lady, not even woman, since both these words conjured up something larger than sex; they spoke of a somebody as opposed to a something.)"

III. MIS-NAMING AND OTHER BARRIERS

The absence of human dignity she experienced in her relations with white people moved Mrs. Hill to question her own status as a person, and clearly it is this same implicit sense of absent respect for the individual that provoked Son's anger, in *Tar Baby,* in regard to the mis-naming of his island friends. As Morrison puts it, "It bothered him that everybody called Gideon Yardman, as though he had not been mothered (161)." This dehumanizing, because distorting and distancing, use of labels is an important concern in all three novels under discussion. Consider, for instance, Margaret Street's reference to Sydney and Ondine (she is speaking to Valerian) as "Kingfish and Beulah" and her underlining of Valerian's patriarchal and proprietary stance toward his hired help – "They are yours for life (31)." It is not surprising, in this context, to find that Ondine speaks to Sydney about her employers with at least as much bitterness, amusement, and condescension: "The Principal Beauty of Maine is the main bitch of the prince (35)."[15]

This sort of labeling is often a byproduct of misinformation, as when Jadine is dubbed "Son's Northern girl (250)," which, not by the way, occurs while Jadine is busy erecting additional barriers between herself and Son's people by studying them through the miniaturizing lens of her camera. For Soldier and the other inhabitants of Eloe, Jadine is readily distanced from them via the application of a standardized label, as they are kept at a safe remove from her through the mis-naming implicit in her act: these are not individual human beings worthy of love, commitment, respect, but mere *subjects* for her art. Similar instances can be located in *Life Before Man* and *Meridian*. Here, for example, is Atwood on the relationship between Lesje and William:

> William Wasp, she used to call him, fondly enough, before she realized that he found it a racial slur.
>
> "I don't call you Lesje Latvian," he'd said, aggrieved.
>
> "Lithuanian," she said. "Litvak." William had trouble with the Baltic States. "I wouldn't mind if you did." But she was lying. "Can I call you William Canadian? (20)"[16]

Often, the mis-naming in these fictions is quite intentional and more pointedly denigrating than suggested by this fairly benign give and take between Lesje and William. At worst, the labeling descends to outright name-calling of the most vicious and wounding variety. In *Tar Baby,* we see Son's outcast – or, at least, outsider status – draw the most cynical responses from his supposedly civilized hosts. Jadine, for example, calls him "river rat" and Sydney, not to be outdone, labels him "swamp nigger (159)." In turn, when Son recalls Jadine's mocking voice (she had been scolding Sydney and Ondine in regard to their unsolicitous treatment of him), he thinks of her in the nastiest terms he knows: "Gatekeeper, advance bitch, house-bitch, welfare office torpedo, corporate cunt, tar baby side-of-the-road whore trap. . .(219/20)." Even more intensely corrosive is the vitriol poured on Margaret Street's head by Ondine, during their Christmas dinner outburst: "Held tightly in the arms of Son, Ondine was shouting wildly, 'You white freak! You baby killer! I say you! I saw you! You think I don't know what that apple pie shit is for? (208)' " Margaret's come back is at least as excoriating: "Shut up! Shut up! You nigger! You nigger bitch! (208)"

Clearly, such violent name-calling erupts at those points in a novel at which a character's sense of personal authenticity and integrity are most seriously challenged. Indeed, an analogous response in *Meridian* is provoked when Lynne Rabinowitz, disaffected northern Jew – dead to her family and ineffectively assimilated member of the southern black civil rights movement – confronts the similarly self-deluded Jewish proprietor of a deep-South deli. "*Shithead,*" she thinks – it is a kind of exorcising chant – "*Unliving creature. Maker of money. Slicer of salami. Baker of Challah!* (180)" The verbal assault between Lynne and Truman that takes place in Meridian's backyard in Alabama after their relationship has all but ended is marked by equally abusive rhetoric: " 'What the fuck do you mean, nigger?' Lynne's voice, harsh and wild. . .dropped into the quietness of the neighborhood like a stone." Truman's retort is intended to match her caustic and dehumanizing choice of words: "Will you shut the fuck up, *beast* (148)."[17]

IV. POWER: REAL AND IMAGINARY

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the barrier-word or name can, on occasion, attain almost magical power in the mind of a depressed or otherwise emotionally overwrought character – if not quite actual transforming power in speech or thought. Several interesting examples of this level of naming occur in Atwood's *Life Before Man*. One noteworthy instance records Elizabeth's venting of years of suppressed resentment of Auntie Muriel's intrusive and manipulative dis-ordering of her life. This passage occurs after Elizabeth's separation from Nate:

> "Get out of my house," Elizabeth finds herself saying, screaming. "Don't come back, don't come back!" With the release of her voice, blood surges through her head. "You moldy old bitch!" She longs to say *cunt*, she's thought it often enough, but superstition holds her back. If she pronounces that ultimate magic word, surely Auntie Muriel will change into something else. . . giving off deadly fumes (200/01).

Elizabeth's belief in the transformative power of specific words emerges again somewhat later in the novel when her separation from Nate has reached the point of divorce. She has been thinking obsessively of her dead lover, Chris Beecham, a suicide:

> She doesn't want him involved. To have his name uttered in that ritual way might cause him to materialize in the witness box, pale and accusing or – worse – fragmented, his head watching her with a Cheshire grin, his body still contorted in agony. She's got him safely buried, she wants no resurrection (241).

A variant form of magic naming is utilized by Elizabeth's co-worker and rival, Lesje, who has created an imaginary, prehistoric world that is the fleshed-out edenic counterpart to the desiccated museum landscape in which she works. Lesje is a kind of secular witch who practices the art of extreme discrimination in labeling. For her, the product of a mixed and warring heritage – half Jewish, half Ukrainian – attaining precise control over things, through impeccable knowledge of their names, becomes a driving current in life. Indeed, for Lesje, the names of rocks and dinosaurs constitute a secret language which only she and a few other chosen initiates have mastered (83). When unnerved by Elizabeth's discovery of her affair with Nathaniel, Lesje reaches for control over her powerful rival by classifying her, utilizing exactly the same formula she has learned to apply to giant tortoises or flightles birds.[18] Atwood is careful to point up her intentions in giving Lesje this predilection for magical naming. In fact, we are not permitted to overlook the significance of Lesje's given name: "If you discovered a new kind of dinosaur, you could name it after

yourself. Aliceosaurus, she used to write, practicing. Anglicizing her name. When she was fourteen this was her ambition . . . (177/78)."

Lesje's sense of the power inherent in names and labels extends to creatures other than reptiles and rivals. We see this when, in thinking about Nate and Elizabeth's children, she convinces herself that "the children were not individuals, they were a collective, a word. *The children.* He [Nate] thought all he had to do was say *the children* and she would shut up, like magic (269)." When asked by a sixth grader why the Mesozoic Era is given that label, Lesje ruminates over the question as if it enclosed within it a key to existence: "*The Mesozoic isn't real. It's only a word for a place you can't go to anymore because it isn't there. It's called the Mesozoic because we call it that.* (267)." This is Lesje, the mystic, at her most lucid and least characteristic. More typically, the practical designations assigned to things – and to people – are doors for her, doors that open to wished for, perfectly imagined, and undismissible, though alternative, realities. *That* Lesje is the one we recognize in Atwood's previous entry on her: the *Alice* who, though unmarried and apparently pregnant with her lover's child, and despite the fact that "many women no longer use their husbands' names, hungers to be dignified – one might say clarified – by his name. "She wants to be classifiable," says Atwood, "a member of a group. There is already a group of Mrs. Schoenhofs . . . (246)."[19]

V. ROOTS OF IDENTITY

To be quickly identifiable, "a member of a group," is often desirable, but only if the group label vibrates with dignity and power – dignity, at least. In this sense, it was clearly the object of Valerian's parents to locate him within the class of rulers, for, as noted earlier, Valerian's historical precursor was Emperor of Rome. Here, though, Morrison appears to have set a complex trap for the ruler of L'Arbe de la Croix. For Valerianus came to power during an epoch of near national bankruptcy and, after his defeat at the hands of the Goths, he was taken prisoner and, to put it succinctly, disappeared from history. And, further, as we have seen,[20] Valerian has suffered the indignity of having the context in which his name might assume genuine power confused with the purely commercial origin of the candy his uncles, in a fit of shortsighted exuberance, named after him – dubious honor![21]

In contrast to this very white worrying of identity – and note the counterpoint supplied by Valerian's rather proletarian family name, Street

– Morrison gives us Son's quest for wholeness . . . for Eloe, and for the historical roots of all he identifies as *home*. In eight years of running, says Morrison, "he'd had seven documented identities and before that a few undocumented ones, so he barely remembered his real original name (139)." For William Green, as for Milkman Dead in *Song of Solomon,* retrieval of the "original name" is necessary for his continued spiritual progress. For William Green, that name is Son, "the name that called forth the true him. . . . the one he did not want to die." And, finally, for *Son,* the other selves were like the words he spoke – fabrications of the moment, misinformation required to protect Son from harm and to secure that one reality at least (139)."[22]

It is while he lives with Jadine in an apartment in New York City that Son comes to realize how other black males have sacrificed their youths in a desperate groping after authenticity: because they live in a country that has deprived them of a knowledge of their history, even their "original names":

> They had wrapped it [their childhood] in dark cloth, sneaked it underground and thrown it all over the trains. Like blazing jewels, the subway cars burst from the tunnels to the platforms shining with the recognizable artifacts of childhood: fantasy, magic, ego, energy, humor and paint. They had taken it all underground. Pax and Stay High and the Three Yard Boys. Teen, P-Komet and Popeye (215).[23]

Ironically, Son's contemplation of this graphic form of self-documentation moves him to question, once again, just exactly who he is (216/17).

Compared with Son's soul-searching quest for dignity and documentation, many of the white characters in these novels seem to navigate in less turbulent waters, even when their identity is seriously challenged. In part, this may be attributable to the easier accomodation society is willing to make for white eccentrics who are able to find a productive niche within the communal superstructure. Here, Atwood's portrait of Lesje comes again to mind. For, although she is haunted by a fear that she will be found out-of-order, an outsider – that her document "will have someone else's name stamped on it (98)" – no very dark or abiding consequences attend the occasional mispronunciation of her name or the accompanying knowing looks. Even the appeal of Lesje's friend, Marianne – for Lesje to change her last name, in order to "get a Multiculturalism[24] grant" – is benevolent, although there is a decidedly gloomy side to Lesje's recollection that "her father's family has already changed its name at least once (80)" to evade the Nazis.

Indeed, Lesje's difficulty in adjusting to the world may be more completely a problem of language – of discovering or inventing the correct names of things – than is true for any other character in a novel since

David in Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep*. Torn between Ukrainian Grandmother Smylski and Jewish Grandmother Etlin, both of whom talked "in languages she couldn't understand and which her parents never spoke at home (82)," Lesje "had never known the names for – *pirogi, medvynk* (81)" and, for two years, had told her teachers "that her name was Alice (80)." It was during that time of discovery and deception that Lesje had longed to escape to a tropical paradise, an Eden, called Lesjeland, which "sounded almost African," whereas names in her childhood fantasy book, *The Lost World* – Lake Gladys and Maple White Land, for instance – were *"too goyish* (81)." Fortunately for Lesje, she has been able to partly heal these wounds of naming caused by her divided ethnic inheritance by applying her acquired expertise as a cataloguer, a filer, in the museum of experience. For her, growth comes with the acquisition of particularized knowledge, which brings with it more harmoniously individuated selfhood – as long as she is able to avoid translating self and family, lovers and friends, into "fixed, mounted specimens . . . (248)."

Ultimately, what Lesje seeks in her cataloguing, her naming, is "to be endorsed, sanctified. . . . She wants a mother's blessing (249)." That is to say, she wants what she had at the start of her life, before language took on complex, often confusing and threatening, guises. It is what Truman Held requires of Meridian – "Meridian is my past, my sister . . . (149)" and what moves Son to follow Mary Thérèse Foucault to the slavehaunted side of Isle des Chevaliers. In the naming of a child is the seed of his future and in recovery of the "original name" is the chance to be "sanctified" by immersion in the holy waters of one's real history, which bear the living name of one's soul. Is not this, precisely, what Lesje means when she asserts that "the bones have to be named, you have to know what to call them, otherwise what are they, they're lost, cut adrift from their own meanings . . . (140)?" And is it not also what is implied in Joyce Carol Oates' wonderfully incisive remark that "the narrative impulse predates the wish for a sacred text. . ."?[25]

Notes

[1]All notes on *Life Before Man* refer to the Fawcett Popular Library edition, New York, 1981. For a similar questioning of terms – names – see *Meridian*, 115, for Meridian's response to Truman's use of "sonte fox," or Meridian's uneasiness about her first lover, Eddie, 61 and 70, in the Washington Square Press paperback edition, 1977.

[2]Compare her remark about Hedge Phillips: "Like his name there was evasion in his looks (161)."

[3]Similar one-dimensional names are used by Walker in labeling the pale blonde exchange

student, Jill – the "Dutch Boy (100-103)" – and the mortuary assistant who seduced Meridian, who is, in fact, not given a standard name at all but, instead, is known to the reader as the Voice, his main "tool of seduction (66)."

[4]Though confused with a candy named after him, Valerian is actually named for a Roman emperor, Publius Licinius Valerianus, A.D. 254–60.

[5]But see the dispute between Jadine and Margaret over this name (47) and also Gideon's matter-of-fact "island of the rich Americans (150)." It is also interesting to keep in mind Margaret's entangling of Jadine with her memory of Eurydice in *Black Orpheus* (64).

[6]Note that the epigraph to *Tar Baby* throws light on Morrison's use of First Corinthians for one of Macon Dead's spinster daughters in *Song of Solomon:*

> For it hath been declared
> unto me of you, my brethren, by them
> which are of the house of
> Chloe, that there are
> contentions among you.
> I Corinthians 1:11

[7]See also Margaret Treasure's angst over the loss of "her good name," which, she feels, attaches to her house and property (*Meridian,* 209).

[8]Here is the crucial and illuminating passage in *Song of Solomon* (Macon Dead is speaking interiorly while on his way to his office, a shop that is still labeled with another man's name):

> Surely, he thought, he and his sister had some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name (17).

Indeed, Macon's son, Milkman, will – at the end of a name-haunted journey – uncover such an ancestor, will retrieve dignity and meaning thereby for his family and for himself.

[9]Morrison may intend the pun "Phil" = *fils,* since we are informed that, despite his objections to the unwanted guest, "Sydney was calling him Son (164)" by that evening.

[10]Alternately "Jade," for worn-out, white-educated (and owned?) sophisticate of Paris modeling salons, a less-than-precious gem of a black woman who Son must leave to her jaded life at the novel's end.

[11]A comic note to the ongoing dialogue about Gideon and Thérèse is provided in a three-part aside. Jade to Margaret (re upcoming Chritmas dinner): "Oh, I meant to tell you, the von Brandts sent a note . . ." " 'Brandt, Jade,' " said Valerian. 'Just plain Brandt. The "von" is imaginary. . . (65).' "

[12]Compare Clarence's misapprehension of Akisi in *Radiance of the King.*

[13]At this point, Thérèse appears to have assumed the mystic character of her namesake, the Spanish Carmelite nun, Saint Theresa, called Thérèse of Lisieux. Perhaps Morrison also has in mind Mauriac's novel *Thérèse.*

[14]See, in particular, the dialogue at the Christmas dinner, which leads to the explosive argument between Ondine (Undine) and Valerian and Margaret Street (201), noteworthy also for the cook's defense of *her* servants; Son's protestation of Jadine's misuse of Gideon and Thérèse as well as her guardians, Sydney and Ondine, and her misunderstanding of his life (265); and, finally, Jadine's failure to recognize Thérèse's friend, Alma Estée (probably to be read as Soul of the Island, in any case, a figure out of the slave past, 290), and Alma's outraged sense of her betrayal by Son, "who did go to the truble of knowing her name (300)."

[15]By way of contrast, note that, for Jadine, Ondine remains "Nanadine." And, says Morrison, Ondine "loved it when her niece called her that – a child's effort to manage Aunt Ondine (38)." And there is genuine pleasure in Jadine's naming of Son when, later in the book, they have become ardent lovers (yet note the distancing stance): "She would look up Dawn and Betty and Aisha and show him off: her fine frame, her stag, her man (222/23)."

[16]Compare the mis-labelings in *Meridian.* Here are two: a. The Wild Child is called "Wile Chile" by the townsfolk who, Walker tells us, said the name "slowly, musically, so that it became a kind of lewd, suggestive song. . . (35)." b. "Lynne said, 'My name is Lynne Rabinowitz. . .' "

" 'Lynne Wizz,' the lady [Mrs. Mabel Turner] repeated. 'Yes, ma'am,' said Lynne (101)."

[17]Lynne, in a position of strength, if not entire selfconfidence, is capable of far gentler responses: "How could she tell him [Truman] that his six-year-old daughter – whom he insisted on nicknaming Princess (tacky, *tacky,* she'd told him) – had been attacked by a grown man and was now lying nearly dead in the hospital (169)."

[18]And note the irony, in that we were informed quite early in the novel of Elizabeth's skill "at cataloguing the reactions of others. . . (12)." Compare, also, Morrison's description of Margaret in *Tar Baby* who, following Valerian's crippling stroke, "laughed lightly, indulgently, and went on sorting, piling [his possessions], like a confident curator who knew the names of everything in his museum. . . (178)."

[19]The surname signifies a beautiful court – ruled over by a benevolent prince?

[20]See above, p. 4.

[21]There is at least one other "turn" in the trap: Morrison advises us that Valerian was intitially attracted to Margaret Lordi because she looked "like the candy that had his name. His youth lay in her red whiteness, a snowy Valentine Valerian (54)." Shades of Grimm!

[22]See Morrison's additional comments on Son's membership in "that great underclass of undocumented men. . . (165/66)." And note that Son is able to leave the West Indies only by using "Jadine's ticket and Gideon's passport. . . (217)."

[23]Se Jadine's memory of her early love, Oom (222).

[24]Compare Lesje's "soothing word," invoked in a moment of stress: *Multituberculata* (205). This reference is clearly ironic, since this term, in anatomy, would be descriptive of an organism having many – likely abnormal – hard knobs or projections. For Lesje, of course, the word has a "soothing" quality because it articulates factual, known, encompassed conditions.

[25]"Stories That Define Me," *New York Times Book Review,* July 11, 1982, p. 15.