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Names in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and *Home*

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The titles of Marilynne Robinson's complementary novels *Gilead* (2004) and *Home* (2008) and the names of their characters are rich in allusions, many of them to the Bible and American history, making this tale of two Iowa families in 1956 into an exploration of American religion with particular reference to Christianity and civil rights. The books' titles suggest healing and comfort but also loss and defeat. Who does the naming, what the name is, and how the person who is named accepts or rejects the name reveal the sometimes difficult relationships among these characters. The names also reinforce the books' endorsement of a humanistic Christianity and a recommitment to racial equality.

KEYWORDS Bible, American history, slavery, civil rights, American literature

Names are an important source of meaning in Marilynne Robinson's prize-winning novels *Gilead* (2004) and *Home* (2008),[1] which concern the lives of two families in the fictional town of Gilead, Iowa,[2] in the summer of 1956. *Gilead* is narrated by the Reverend John Ames, at least the third Congregationalist minister of that name in his family, in the form of a letter he hopes his small son will read after he grows up, while in *Home* events are recounted in free indirect discourse through the eyes of Glory Boughton, the youngest child of Ames' lifelong friend, Robert Boughton, a retired Presbyterian minister. Both Ames, who turns seventy-seven[3] that summer (2004: 233), and Glory, who is thirty-eight, also reflect on the past and its influence on the present. The names in these novels help to bring out the books' themes and point to the characters' situations and relationships, many of the most significant references being to American history and the Bible. These names reinforce the novels' endorsement of a non-doctrinaire, humanistic Christianity and the ideals of racial equality which were largely abandoned after Reconstruction but revived by the Civil Rights Movement.

Gilead,[4] the name of the town as well as the title of the first book, most immediately suggests the hymn "There Is a Balm in Gilead," and, appropriately, the book's most enigmatic figure, the regretful and charming Jack Boughton, does seek balm by

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returning to Gilead despite having been notorious there in his youth as a drunkard and petty thief. Since the hymn originated before the Civil War as a Negro spiritual, it also points to the theme of white America's injustice toward African Americans. Although biblical Gilead — both the mountain and the area around it — was the source of the ointment alluded to in the spiritual (Jer. 8:22), Gilead also is the name of "a city of them that work iniquity" (Hos. 6:8). Robinson has said she chose the name because biblical Gilead was both "a town that's criticized for being rich and hard-hearted" and a symbol of "what can be [. . .] hoped for" (Gritz). This theme is made explicit at the end of *Gilead*, when Ames thinks his insular, self-satisfied town "might as well be standing on the absolute floor of hell for all the truth there is in it" (2004: 233) because, though it was founded by abolitionists, it has become indifferent to racial justice.

The second book's title, *Home*, is too rich in implications to be ignored, though it is not a place name in the same sense that "Gilead" is. While the idea of home implies comfort or safety, it has a dark side, which is implied in Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man": "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, | They have to take you in." Returning home implies defeat, and indeed both Jack and Glory, his youngest sister, have returned separately because their lives have gone awry. Having discovered that the man she thought of as her fiancé was married, Glory has left a teaching position in Des Moines and come to Gilead to care for her dying father while nursing her own sorrow. Jack, who has been out of touch with his family for twenty years, has lost a job in St Louis due to racism. In desperation he has sent his son Robert and Robert's mother, Della, whom he cannot marry under Missouri law because she is Black, to her family in Memphis while he tries to find a way to support them. Jack hoped they could make a life in Gilead with his father's help and blessing, despite his own bad reputation and race prejudice,[5] but he "was scared to come home" (2008: 210). Once there, he keeps Della and Robert's existence secret to avoid wounding his father, whose frailty he has not anticipated. He also fears that he might react badly if his father "cast an aspersion" on Della (2008: 209).[6] Boughton might well do so, for, although Jack is horrified by the violence perpetrated against demonstrators during the Montgomery bus boycott, his father says the races should stay separate and one must "enforce the law" (2008: 98). Home for Glory and Jack may be a refuge, but it has its perils, and living with their father revives often painful childhood memories. This is why their six brothers and sisters "call it home, but they never stay" (2008: 296).

Another double-edged meaning of "home" is implied by the title of Thomas Wolfe's novel *You Can't Go Home Again*: home is an unrecoverable world of simplicity and happiness. Jack and Glory fail at restoring their home to what it was like when they were children, despite Glory's nostalgic cooking and baking and Jack's summer-long attempt to recreate the garden he remembers from his youth. Jack has always loved the house but never felt at home in it, and when he leaves Gilead at the end of summer, he becomes homeless. Glory once hoped to live in a sunny and bare modern house — a home with no history — with a husband and children, but she ultimately decides to make the large, old, awkward, and overfurnished house her home, in a symbolic acceptance of her family's and America's troubled past. She is, however, also looking toward the future, hoping that, if she stays, Jack's son will find her there after he grows up.

"Home" also refers to Christianity, which Jack has never been able to accept, and to heaven, as in the hymn "Softly and Tenderly," which he plays for his father.[7] Its chorus says,

> Come home, come home,
> Ye who are weary come home;
> Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
> Calling, O sinner, come home![8]

These words apply primarily to Jack, whom Glory often thinks of as "weary" and who despite being an agnostic considers himself a sinner. He even tells his father and Ames, "I really am a sinful man. Granting your terms. [. . .] Granting my terms" (2008: 224). Yet he cannot feel that either his family or the Presbyterianism in which he was raised is a home to him. Perhaps the only home he will find is in the afterlife, if Ames is right that death is "like going home" (2004: 4). Thus both books' titles, *Gilead* and *Home*, allude to disappointed hope but do not close out the possibility of improvement: Gilead may finally live up to its abolitionist past, and new homes — real or figurative — may be created or discovered, the old ones made welcoming again.

Like the books' titles, many of the characters' names are rich in meaning, much of it religious and historical. John Ames is the name of at least three generations of Congregationalist ministers. The first one we know of, the grandfather of the narrator of *Gilead*, left Maine for the Kansas Territory to work for Kansas' entry into the Union as a free state, and he helped John Brown escape capture there. Later he lost an eye fighting in the Civil War. In his youth he had a vision of Jesus as a slave in chains (2004: 49; 2008: 204), and as an old man living in Iowa with his son he believed that he had frequent conversations with Jesus. His first name, John, links him with John Brown; his wife's name, Margaret Todd (2004: 9), evokes the name of Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd. His first name also alludes to John Calvin (and thus Congregationalism) and John the Divine, to whom the book of Revelation is ascribed. That allusion is made explicit by a passage in which his son associates him with John the Divine (2004: 85) and by his grandson's memory of a baseball game he took him to, when there "was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (2004: 47), a reference to Revelation (Rev. 8:1[9]). Like a biblical, even apocalyptical prophet, this first John Ames despaired over the sins of his country, particularly in the 1890s after America's abandonment of Radicalism, or Reconstruction's promise of racial "equality before the law, overseen by the national government" (Foner 115). Iowa was no longer, in the words of Ulysses S. Grant as quoted by both this first John Ames and Jack, "the shining star of radicalism" (2004:176 and 220; 2008: 210). The end of Radicalism was the beginning of Jim Crow.

Robinson says she meant the names "Ames" and "Boughton" to be no more than "historically plausible" or connected to her own memories, but she adds good-humoredly that one does "abdicate" interpretation to the reader: "it's called publication."[10] In fact, the names invite interpretation. Ames is associated with Iowa because of Ames, Iowa, founded during the Civil War and the seat of Iowa State University. The name also alludes to the differing aims of the men who bear it. The first John Ames' goals included racial equality; he sometimes attended Gilead's "Negro church"

(2004: 84) in preference to his own son's, and he was friendly with its pastor (2004: 36–37). In about 1890, after the failure of Reconstruction, he told his son, "The summer is ended and still we are not saved" (2004: 192), a reference to Jeremiah's condemnation of Israel for impiety (Jer. 8:20) but also — at least for readers of the novel, though not for the characters — to Derrick Bell's 1989 book *And We Are Not Saved: The Quest for Racial Justice*.

His younger son, the second John Ames, who also served in the Civil War, had different aims: he became a pacifist because the war horrified him, and he was revolted by his father's having shot and perhaps killed a soldier so John Brown could escape. Despite their opposed politics, these two ministers resembled each other in their intransigent commitment to moral principles. Their similarities are echoed in their wives' names, for the younger Ames married Martha Turner, a woman with the same initials as his mother, Margaret Todd, though "Turner" suggests turning away from his past. This second John Ames named his first son Edwards, after his oldest brother, who in turn had been named for the electrifying preacher Jonathan Edwards, the "leading theologian of the [Great] Awakening" (Wills 100) and an inspiration for abolitionists in the following century.

The younger Edwards, however, changed his name to Edward, foreshadowing his conversion to atheism. Robinson notes that by changing his name Edward was "jettisoning" not only Jonathan Edwards' religious "rigor" but also the "reformist" elements of his preaching, which helped inspire abolitionism.[11] Edward's change of name, then, reflects the country's abandonment of Reconstruction, just as his grandfather's actions and convictions represent New England's commitment to abolitionism and as his father's beliefs indicate the country's post-Civil-War revulsion against war and its subsequent lack of dedication to racial equality. After Edward persuaded his father that Iowa was a backwater and Congregationalism narrow-minded, his parents moved to a home on the "Gulf Coast" (2004: 234). This name evokes the "great gulf" dividing the saved from the damned in the parable of Lazarus and Dives (Luke 16:26)[12] and symbolizes the spiritual gulf separating the second John Ames from his younger son, the narrator John Ames, who remained in Iowa and took over his father's church. His aims, though, are less sharply defined. He is inclined to pacifism but is not outspoken about it, and he does not think about race relations until events force him to do so. Nevertheless, he has convictions, and theologically he focuses more on the "gravity of sin" than the "sufficiency of grace" (2008: 221). In an echo of his father's and grandfather's disputes with each other on doctrinal and humanistic grounds, he angrily rejected his father after the man left Gilead.

Intergenerational dispute and rejection have marked these three ministers, all named John Ames, all deeply concerned with doctrine, conscience, and righteousness, often to the point of rigidity. As if to break the chain implied by their having the same name, the last John Ames has named his son after his friend and fellow minister Robert Boughton, and he calls the little boy Robby. Robby's mother, Lila, has an Arabic name meaning "night."[13] Its exoticism, suggesting Lila's "former worldliness" (2008: 160), makes it unlike the names previously found in the Ames family. The difference of Robby's and Lila's names from those of the other Ameses suggests that their lives will be different, too, which is what Ames expects to happen. He knows that they will probably leave Gilead when he dies and will have to make their own

way in a difficult world, one not like his, which has been centered around his and his father's small-town church.

The last name of the books' other family, the Boughtons, links them with the boughs of their majestic oak tree, which may represent the nation, for the oak, besides being a traditional symbol of strength, is the national tree of the United States and the state tree of Iowa. The Boughtons' oak is beautifully evoked at the beginning and end of *Home* as a symbol of the paradox of change combined with continuity. Though it seems firmly rooted, it could be destroyed by one of Iowa's tornadoes: "Every time a tree gets to a decent size, the wind comes along and breaks it" (2004: 235). This paradox is also represented by Snowflake, the horse the family owned when the children were young. A snowflake should be a symbol of impermanence, but the horse lived long beyond anyone's expectations, and its memory haunts the barn. Jack calls his pallid body "snowflake" for its insistence on continuing to live even though doing so often seems pointless: "it is an oddly patient beast, my carnal self," he tells Glory. "It reminds me of my youth" (2008: 198). His and Glory's brothers once joked that Snowflake went to the glue factory; in fact, Snowflake is one of the family's glues, a memory which helps unify Boughton's geographically scattered children.

The given names and cognomens of the members of the Boughton family reveal how they see themselves and each other. Boughton's daughters call him "Papa" (2008: 64), his other sons sometimes call him "Dad" (2008: 90), but Jack "never had a name" for his father to use "to [his] face" (2008: 311). Jack finally tells his father that he felt he "didn't deserve to speak to [him] the way the others did" (2008: 311). Jack calls his father "Sir" and like his brothers usually refers to him as "the Old Gent," but when Jack tries calling him "Dad," as his father has implicitly requested, Boughton rejects the name as "ridiculous" (2008: 272). This naming difficulty symbolizes their estrangement despite their love for each other, and it reflects Jack's belief that he is an unworthy son.

This charming, talented man who feels that he is wearing disrepute like a scarlet letter is a puzzle at the heart of both books. His parents named him John Ames, yet Ames has always ignored his namesake as much as possible. His rejection seems to be one reason for Jack's lifelong alienation from ordinary life. This estrangement resulted in Jack's youthful alcoholism and crimes which, ironically, led to Jack's name appearing on occasion in the local newspaper in its full form, embarrassing Ames as well as the Boughtons (2004: 87). When Jack sometimes calls Ames "Papa," he is needling him by asserting a relationship that Ames denies (2008: 127) but also reaching out to the man who refused to be the second father he needed. Jack pleases Robby by calling him "little brother" (2004: 92), but Ames, predictably, tells Robby to call Jack "Mr Boughton" (2008: 283). Ames wants to maintain a distance between Robby, his biological son, and Jack, the man who is virtually though not literally his godson. Shortly before Jack leaves Gilead, however, Ames finally accepts being called "Papa" after he learns that despite Jack's earlier misconduct he has worked hard for the last ten years to stay sober, lead a decent life, and establish a family with Della and Robert despite the Jim Crow laws in St Louis which have made life together impossible, outlawing both racial intermarriage and cohabitation (2004: 232; 2008: 308).[14]

Boughton says that he named Jack for the third John Ames, not the first one, who was "about as crazy as it's possible to be and still be walking the streets" (2008: 204), but there are important connections between Jack and the abolitionist. Because Jack suffers from his lack of faith, he is impressed by the first Ames' "certainty" that Jesus spoke to him: "I always thought it sounded enviable" (2008: 204), he says, to have visions proving Jesus' divinity. Despite the contrast between the first John Ames' religious conviction and Jack's agnosticism, Jack has been trying to live the life the first Ames wanted to make possible, one in which whites and African Americans live lovingly as equals. He is not only Della's husband and Robert's father, but he has lived in a "mixed neighborhood" (2004: 229) and sometimes played piano for Della's church choir practice and occasionally at services (2008: 120). Jack has even made friends in the Black community, though he never had white friends. He is thus a spiritual heir of the first John Ames, whose name he bears.

The various forms of Jack's name are revealing. He was called Johnny as a boy (2004: 184) but later insisted on the name Jack (2008: 45). He may have chosen that name to spare Ames' feelings, perhaps as a sort of abnegation. "Jack" can an endearment, especially for the Irish, but it also can connote a lower-class or disreputable person ("every man jack," "to play the jack," "jackanapes") or a lesser or an unpleasant thing ("jackrabbit," "you don't know jack"). The name may derive from the name Jacob, which means a supplanter.[15] Jack is in some ways like the biblical Jacob, in others like Jacob's older twin, Esau, whom Jacob maneuvered out of his birthright and tricked out of his father's blessing.

Jack is not a twin, but Jack's brother Theodore Dwight Weld, who was named after a famous abolitionist preacher and is called Teddy (the diminutive perhaps indicating Teddy's gentle, reassuring personality), is only fourteen months younger, and as children they looked like twins (2008: 261). In a way Teddy plays Jacob to Jack's Esau by supplanting him, for Teddy was given the name their parents had intended for Jack (2004: 188). Unlike Jacob, Teddy did not cheat his brother but attempted to help him throughout their youth. Yet he does resemble Jacob. Like him, Teddy is successful: he has a doctorate in theology and a medical degree, has a wife and children, and runs a clinic where he treats polio victims. Like Esau, Jack has given away his birthright, for he walked away from his family and respectability, did not finish college, served time in prison, and is fighting alcoholism. Yet when Jack compares himself to Esau,[16] his father insists that Jack is not Esau but Jacob. Jack agrees on the grounds that he is the "one who has to steal the blessing" (2008: 149), though his father replies that Jack never had to steal anything. In fact, Jack began stealing in youth. His youthful petty thefts still puzzle him, though we can see that they responded to psychological needs caused in part by his alienation from his family and Ames' rejection. Jack, then, is in some ways like Jacob, in others like Esau, for he gave up his birthright like Esau but also was a dishonest person who left home after offending his father, like Jacob.

In a moment of antic optimism, Jack calls himself Jacques Bouton and Bouton de la Rose (2008: 105). His choice of a French version of his name reflects his courtship of Della, which included reading French with her. The name he gives himself is logical, for "Jacques" sounds like "Jack" and corresponds to "James" and "Jacob"; "Bouton" sounds much like "Boughton." Yet while *bouton* means button, *bouton de*

la rose is "rosebud" — the name of Citizen Kane's sled. Jack is not like Orson Welles' Kane, but Glory has just been comparing him mentally to his homophone Cain (2008: 101), speculating that Jack's guilt over his worst youthful misdeed, abandoning a baby he had fathered and its mother, may resemble Cain's guilt for Abel's murder. She thinks that because in Hebrew the same word means both "iniquity" and "punishment," then for Jack as for Cain, "His crime was his punishment" (2008: 101). Jack has held guilt at bay for twenty years, but now that he is back at "the scene of the crime" (2004: 199) he is constantly reminded not only about the baby but of her death at age three, for which he feels "metaphysically responsible" (2008: 278). Because he did not acknowledge his paternity, his parents could not gain custody and raise her in a safer environment than her family's unsanitary farmhouse, where she died from an infected cut.

The baby's mother, Annie Wheeler, was just fourteen or fifteen when she had the baby. Most of the other diminutives in these books belong to children: "Johnny," Jack's childhood name; "Bobby," Boughton's name as a boy; and "Robby," the name Ames calls his small son. "Annie," then, as opposed to "Ann," emphasizes her extreme youth. On the other hand, if we think of Annie Oakley or Little Orphan Annie, the name suggests independence and determination. Like the rest of her family, Annie resisted the Boughtons' attempts to be involved with the baby although she accepted money and food from them. Her last name, "Wheeler," appropriately implies motion, for after her baby died she vanished to Chicago.

The baby was neither named nor baptized because Annie "never really settled on a name for her" (2004: 159), and this lack of a name reflects Jack's desertion of her and the fact that she had virtually no life. Boughton, who buried her, put on her headstone "their angels in Heaven always see the face of My Father in Heaven" (2004: 159; Matt. 18:10). This choice of words associates Jack's baby with the daughter Ames lost many years earlier in childbirth, along with his wife. Ames was out of town, so it was Boughton who, just before the baby died, baptized her. He called her Angeline in reference to this same verse (2004: 56).[17] The angels/Angeline parallel points to the similarities between the dead little girls and also indicates parallels between Ames and Jack. Ames returned in time to hold his daughter in his arms before she died (2004: 17); Jack's daughter died in Boughton's arms (2008: 295). The babies' graves are near each other, both lovingly tended by Lila (2008: 100). Ames was not to blame for Angeline's death, while Jack was at fault for fathering the child and then refusing even to acknowledge his paternity, but their situations were similar in that both men let their sorrow — Ames' grief, Jack's shame and guilt — cast a shadow on their lives for years.

Ames' and Jack's wives, Lila and Della, who are also parallel characters, have similar sounding names, both of which were moderately popular in America at the time. "Lila" ranked 230 and "Della" 171 for girls' names in 1915, when Lila would have been born (2004: 20) and Della might have been.[18] Lila's marriage to Ames caused "some talk" because she was about thirty-five years younger than Ames and, probably, because of her lack of education and unknown origins (2008: 60), so the couple could have been considered "unequally yoked" (2004: 230; 2 Cor. 6:14), but after eight or nine years of marriage their union has become accepted. Jack initially hopes for similar acceptance in Gilead of his "unequal" union, especially as he and

Della could marry in Iowa, which repealed its anti-miscegenation laws before the Civil War.[19] Lila's and Della's influences on their husbands are similar; each woman has brought warmth and love into a life that had been solitary and full of regrets.

These women's little boys, Robby and Robert, are about the same age[20] and were each christened Robert Boughton in honor of Jack's father. The fact that the boys have the same baptismal names may foreshadow a future of interracial acceptance and reconciliation. Robinson herself has said, "I fervently wish that America will some time be a good, welcoming home to [Della's] whole family" (Painter 490). On the other hand, "Miles," Della and Robert's last name, points to the distance that has separated them from Jack throughout the summer, just as the fact that their last name is not his reminds one of the anti-miscegenation laws not only in Missouri but in nearly every one of the United States at the time. The distance between Della and Jack is spiritual and mental as well, for her family — and especially her father, who is also a minister — has consistently rejected him, and although Jack writes to her nearly every day, she does not reply. When his most recent letters are returned unopened, Jack despairs of having a future with her and Robert, begins drinking, and attempts suicide. Her only letter, which arrives as Jack is about to leave town, seems to tell him that she will accept the offer of a family friend to marry her and adopt Robert (2004: 220). It is likely that both boys will grow up without their fathers, who love them dearly and worry about their future.

One key name remains to be considered: that of Glory, the viewpoint character of *Home*. Her name must be seen in the family context. Glory's older sisters are named Faith, Hope, and Grace, and she barely escaped being named Charity. There is a logical progression in going from the virtues of faith and hope through God's grace to heavenly glory, but Glory dislikes her name because naming girls after concepts denies their humanity. As she complains, she and her sisters were named "for theological abstractions and the boys got named for human beings" (2008: 82).[21] (Her awareness of the power of names shows in her refusal to tell Jack the name of the man she considered her fiancé.) The two oldest Boughton sons, Daniel and Luke, would have been named for either biblical or historical figures; Teddy, as noted, was named for Theodore Dwight Weld. Glory does not mind having been called "Pigtails" by her brothers, a nickname Jack occasionally still uses in a gentle teasing which recalls her status as the youngest sister, and which she accepts as brotherly. However, she resents the teasing that she and her sisters received about their given names. This raillery, though, asks one to consider the meanings of her name, which at first appears inappropriate, since she seems to be plain, even dowdy, and she does not seek fame or praise — all of which are possible kinds of glory.[22] Yet the name fits her in ways which allude to religion and American history.

Glory is not a particularly feminine name, so it reflects her childhood aspiration to the ministry, which at the time did not admit women (2008: 20). More significantly, "glory" can mean heaven, "sanctification" (2008: 53), and salvation, linking her with the family's commitment to Christian beliefs. Glory has remained a Presbyterian, but she is not doctrinaire, as is shown by her decision that she likes Jack's troubled soul "the way it is" (2008: 287): hers is a loving, accepting religion. Her name also associates her with abolition. For one thing, it evokes the first words of Julia Ward Howe's abolitionist "Battle Hymn of the Republic," written to the tune of "John

Brown's Body": "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the lord." One of the names her brothers called her as a child was actually "Glory Hallelujah," reflecting that hymn's chorus (2008: 53). For readers, though not for the characters, her name also alludes to *Glory*, Edward Zwick's 1989 film about Colonel Robert Gould Shaw's all-Black volunteer infantry regiment, which fought bravely at Fort Wagner in the Civil War despite the scepticism of many whites. Glory never discusses race, but when she meets Della and Robert, she is loving. She accepts them immediately although Jack, despite having told her a little about Della, never told her that Della was Black or that they had a child. As previously noted, one reason Glory decides to remain in the awkward old house after her father dies is so that her mixed-race nephew can find her if he returns to Gilead as a young man. She wants him not only to be a part of the Boughton family but to feel like one. Glory is one of the glories of the Boughtons.

This array of names, realistically chosen but laden with allusions, enriches *Gilead* and *Home*, providing insight into the characters' relationships and, notably, linking their lives with the Bible and with American history. These Iowa families are living through America's journey from slavery through abolitionism, Radicalism, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and, finally, the first stirrings of the Civil Rights Movement. As readers, we should ask ourselves how far we have moved since 1956 toward realizing American aspirations for a just and egalitarian society.

Notes

[1] Among other awards, *Gilead* has won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, the National Book Critics Circle fiction prize, and the Grawemeyer Award in religion. *Home* has been awarded the Orange Prize for Fiction and the Christianity Today Book Award for fiction.

[2] There is a real town in Iowa named Gilead, but it is north and east of the fictional one, which is near the West Nishnabotna River and the Nebraska border. Robinson did not know that there was already a real town of that name (Neary).

[3] On his birthday Ames writes, "So now I am seventy-seven" (2004: 186). There is a slight discrepancy, however, for he has earlier said he was born "in the Year of Our Lord 1880" (2004: 9). If he turns seventy-seven in 1956, he should have been born in 1879.

[4] For easier reference, boldface marks the first discussion of each name this paper explores.

[5] Gilead might not accept Black residents. It has been "many years since there was a Negro church" in town (2004: 231), and now there are "no colored people in Gilead" (2008: 318). Gilead may have become a "sundown town," a town in which no African Americans were permitted to live (and, in some cases, in which they could not even set foot after dark): "Beginning in about 1890 and continuing until 1968, white Americans established thousands of towns across the United States for whites only," often driving out Blacks to do so (Loewen 4). The first sign of this exclusion in Gilead was an arson fire at the Black church in about 1892, shortly before the first John Ames left in disgust (2004: 36). The church was not seriously damaged and African Americans lived in Gilead for what seems to have been several more decades, but in diminishing numbers (2004: 36 and 231). An interracial couple probably would evoke more racism than a Black one. Insight into feelings about miscegenation years later is provided by a recording recently released by the National Archives in which, on January 23 1973, President Nixon said that "abortion is necessary. [. . .] When you have a black and a white" (Savage).

[6] Jack is referring to how he might react if Boughton should disparage Della, however unintentionally, for "cohabitation" with him. Jack would also fear how he would respond to comments his father might make about her due to her race.

[7] In a podcast interview Robinson says that "vernacular hymns" "almost inevitably refer to heaven as home" and that in them home is where difficulties will be "alleviated" and one will be "forgiven" (Segundo).

[8] Jack quotes part of this refrain at the end (2008: 316).

[9] The biblical quotations do not correspond exactly to the King James version or the Geneva Bible but

may come from a different translation. Robinson has said that she normally consults "eight different translations" of the Bible to "sort of encircle what the probable meaning is" (Abernethy).

[10] This statement is in the Bat Segundo podcast previously noted.

[11] Segundo podcast.

[12] The parable is explicitly evoked in *Gilead* (170) and alluded to in *Home* (56).

[13] This is according to *Parents.com* (http://www.parents.com) and *Meaning-of-Names* (http://www.meaning-of-names.com).

[14] For a fuller discussion of this and related themes in the novels, see my "Finding Flannery O'Connor's 'Good Man' in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and *Home*."

[15] Meaning-of-Names provides a Hebrew etymology for the name and gives the meaning as "supplanter." The literal Hebrew meaning is "seizing by the heel" (*Webster's New World*), referring to the fact that Jacob, though born after Esau, grabbed his brother's heel at birth (Gen. 25:26), foreshadowing his later actions to supplant his older brother.

[16] When Jack takes his father morels he has found, Boughton quotes Isaac speaking to Jacob, who has disguised himself as Esau: "the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which Jehovah hath blest" (2008: 148; Gen. 27:27). Jack answers with Esau's request: "Bless me, even me also" (2008: 149; Gen. 27:34).

[17] Ames had planned to name her **Rebecca** but had not told Boughton. The fact that Ames sometimes refers to her as Rebecca shows that he resents Boughton's displacing him by naming his daughter, just as he resents Boughton's having named Jack after him.

[18] These rankings come from "Popular Baby Names" in Social Security records at http://www.ssa.gov. Della seems to be about Lila's age but might be somewhat younger or older.

[19] Iowa's liberalism is indicated by its legalization of same-sex marriage on April 3 2009, the fourth state to do so.

[20] Robert was born at about the time Ames and Lila married (2004: 226). Robby is almost seven, and the chronology indicates that Robert is about eight. Jack and Della have considered themselves married for about nine years (2004: 225).

[21] Boughton's naming Ames' daughter "Angeline" is another example of calling a girl child after an abstraction rather than a person.

[22] Worldly meanings of "glory" are "honor and admiration" and "radiant beauty"; religious ones are "worshipful adoration or praise," "heaven or the bliss of heaven," and a halo or "circle of light" (*Webster's New World*).

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