The Journal of Ecocriticism
A New Journal of Nature, Society and Literature
JoE

"Loud with the presence of plants and field life": The Ecology of Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*

Anissa Wardi, (*Chatham University*)[1]

Abstract

Tar Baby occupies a peculiar place in Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's oeuvre. Following the epic Song of Solomon and preceding her masterwork, Beloved, Tar Baby has received little critical engagement. This article posits that the critics' discomfort with Tar Baby lies in the fact that the politics of the novel are largely encoded in, and voiced by, the nonhuman world. After reading the natural world as the primary, though not exclusive, vehicle of postcolonial resistance in the novel, this article maintains that given the current interest in ecocritical reading, Tar Baby deserves to be repositioned in Morrison's canon.

Tar Baby occupies a peculiar place in Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's oeuvre. The novel was published following *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, and directly preceding *Beloved*, for which she received the Pulitzer Prize and which catalyzed her status as a literary icon. To be sure, Morrison was a celebrated author when she published *Tar Baby*, and the novel garnered generally positive reviews.[1] Nevertheless, compared to Morrison's other novels, *Tar Baby* has received comparatively little critical engagement. [2] On the face of it, *Tar Baby* is a bit of a departure for Morrison. The locale of this imaginative narrative is the Caribbean, marking the first time that Morrison set a novel, in large part, outside of the United States. Further, and perhaps more significantly, white characters occupy center stage. However, these circumstances alone cannot account for the novel's marginalized status in Morrison studies. Rather, what I will argue is that the critics' discomfort with *Tar Baby* lies in the fact that the politics of the novel are largely encoded in, and voiced by, the nonhuman world, which is the primary, though not exclusive, vehicle of postcolonial resistance.[3] If, as Fanon argues, colonization "is a success when. . . indocile nature has finally been tamed" (qtd. in Giblett 74), it is tenable to read nature[4] in *Tar Baby* as a foil to the destruction wrought by the influx of Europeans and Americans in the Caribbean. However, given our tendency toward anthropocentric reading practices, it is perhaps not surprising that *Tar Baby* would be the least studied of Morrison's novels.

Morrison attempts to cushion the ecocentrism of the novel by presenting Son Green as an ally to the natural world and as a site of resistance himself. The fugitive Son, having hid in a luxury liner, the

[1] Anissa Wardi, Chatham University, wardi@chatham.edu

H.M.S. Stor Konigsgaarten, jumps into "soft and warm" waters as the novel opens. Though Morrison's diction suggests comfort and safety, Son's actions belie this tranquility: the sea tosses him into a vortex; he is prevented from swimming to the pier by a "bracelet of water." and rather than make his way to solid ground, he is "nudged" out to sea by the "water-lady," a Mami Wata or Mother of Water spirit. Although worshipped throughout Africa, Mami Wata, as her pidgin name implies, is a foreigner, often identified with Europeans and some conjecture originating in the Caribbean (Drewal 160). Her realm is beneath the sea and she is an amalgamation of a mermaid and an African water spirit. That she is a foreigner and presides over the water provides a context for reading Son's move to the island, as he, too, is an outsider who throughout the novel is paired with water and other natural elements.

After the "water lady" tosses him further into the sea, Son locates another boat and hoists himself onto the deck. The terra firma, then, is illusory, a temporary solid footing that is buoyed by water. In fact, the reader comes to realize that this instability is metaphorically tied to the chaotic lives of the characters on the fictional Caribbean island of Isle des Chevaliers. A white couple—a retired candy manufacturer, Valerian Street, and his wife Margaret—not only build a mansion, L'Arbe de la Croix, on this island, but purchase the island, itself. Living with and serving them are Sydney and Ondine Childs, an African American butler and cook, who have worked for the Streets for decades. The relationship between the Streets and the Childs is as contentious as it is intimate, crossing boundaries between homeowner and servant, the possessed and dispossessed. Complicating relationships further, the Streets are patrons of the Childs' niece/surrogate daughter, Jadine, a light-skinned, Sorbonne-educated fashion magazine model residing in Paris. Opening *Tar Baby* with a man poised to jump overboard, Morrison does not begin with fear; rather, "he believed he was safe" (3), a pairing that foreshadows the tensions throughout the novel. Yoking freedom to water, this passage also introduces Son, who brings forth the material presence of the water. The fluid interfacing between Son and the elements foreshadows his autonomy within the rigid hierarchy of the Streets' environs. Fleeing his ship, Son inadvertently ends up on Isle des Chevaliers and his desire for water prompts him to steal away to the Streets' home. Although this home is designed to keep the island in abeyance, Son inserts himself and the island into this inanimate surrounding. It is fitting that Son's surname is Green, for he greens the environment of L'Arbe de la Croix, bringing an understanding of the natural into the Streets' world of artifice.

After this cryptic prologue, Morrison begins chapter one with the voice of the island, narrating its beauty, inhabitants and ruin. Building the "collection of magnificent winter houses on Isle des Chevaliers" (*Tar* 9) signaled the permanent alteration, if not destruction, of the island's ecosystem. The felling of the champion daisy trees, which are "part of a rain forest already two thousand years old and scheduled for eternity" (9) reads as a murder: they were "wild-eyed and yelling," sinking their roots deeper into the ground as the men "gnawed through" them. Sudden death is followed by grieving: "trees that had been spared dreamed of their comrades for years" (10).[5] Morrison's personification of the trees discloses Valerian's occupation of the island, paralleling the indigenous community with the natural world. Silvis, in his analysis of trees in Southern literature, argues that "[t]he concepts of human and tree bodies are so related that many trees take on anthropomorphic characteristics. . . '[A]ssociation between. . . sap and blood, leaves and hair, limbs and arms, bark and skin, or trunk and the human body should not be taken as merely analogical, for they establish a kind of identity between signifier and signified'" (90). As such, the trees in *Tar Baby* morph into the indigenous bodies, those who are likewise displaced and cut down, despite roots that run deep in the Caribbean. Here, the trees problematize the binary between the "natural" and "human" world, characterized, in this instance, by Valerian's power, indifference and greed as he consumes the

island's natural resources and its inhabitants. Giblett, who offers a cultural analysis of wetlands, maintains "Colonisation [sic] is as much about the colonisation of nature as it is about the colonisation of 'the natives,' and the colonisation of nature is just as much about the colonisation of 'swamps' as the colonisation of 'the bush'" (74).

The condition of the river manifests the devastation wrought by the building of seasonal homes:

> The men had already folded the earth where there had been no fold and hollowed her where they had been no hollow, which explains what happened to the river. It crested, then lost its course, and finally its head. Evicted from the place where it had lived, and forced into unknown turf, it could not form its pools or waterfalls, and ran every which way. The clouds gathered together, stood still and watched the river scuttle around the forest floor, crash headlong into the haunches of hills with no notion of where it was going, until exhausted, ill and grieving, it slowed to a stop just twenty leagues short of the sea. (*Tar* 9)

In this description Morrison reveals the devastations associated with gentrification. The river, functioning as both a literal waterway and metaphorical device, is displaced by the built environment, just as the island people are radically dislocated by the influx of Americans and Europeans.[6] As this passage makes clear, geographical displacement and racism underscore *Tar Baby*. Centralizing place, though, Morrison does not use the river solely as a means of highlighting the travails of the human world; rather, its devastation is rendered in its own right. It should be noted that the natural world, though not indifferent, is powerless, the clouds reduced to merely "watching" the tragedy unfold. And it is a tragedy, as the river's confusion, exhaustion and grief attest.[7] The reconfiguration of the "poor insulted, brokenhearted river" (10) results in the stagnated water and the creation of the island's noxious swamp: "Now it sat in one place like a grandmother and became a swamp the Haitians called Sein de Vieilles. And witch's tit it was: a shriveled fogbound oval seeping with a thick black substance that even mosquitoes could not live near" (10). While numerous critics have read the title of Morrison's fourth novel in terms of its folkloric resonance—the tar baby, hare and farmer—others have considered Morrison's metaphoric usage of the expression in terms of Black female authenticity, or what is referred to in *Tar Baby* as the women's "ancient properties;" however, few have gestured toward the materiality of tar, though I believe it underlies the text and, in fact, provides a lens through which to read water as a racialized body.[8]

Morrison gestures in a myriad of ways to Trinidad's Pitch Lake in her rendering of the swamps on Isle des Chevalier's.[9] Pitch Lake is a tar/asphalt pit, a phenomenon which occurs when a substance known as bitumen, a viscous, sticky, black liquid rises to the surface through fissures in the earth's crust, which, depending on the amount of fluid generated, causes a large puddle, pit or even lake to form. As the largest asphalt lake in the world, Pitch Lake is one of the most well known tar pits, attracting thousands of tourists annually to gaze at what is not an aesthetically striking body of water (it is often referred to as one of the ugliest tourist attractions in the Caribbean), but a moving, active, black lake.[10] The lake, a composite of oil, clay and mud, is impressive in size, measuring 350 feet of tar at its center. Signaling the Caribbean thusly, Morrison implicitly identifies a relationship between Pitch Lake and her fictional geography.[11]

Prior to Jadine's experience in Sein de Vieilles (arguably the principal swamp scene in the novel) Morrison introduces the swamp's centrality to the island's history. Thérèse, a blind island elder, relays a creation narrative to Son: blind horsemen populate the hills of the island; according to a

fisherman's tale, they are descendants of slaves who went blind upon seeing Dominique, men who refused to be enslaved and took to the hills as fugitives. The horsemen couple with the women who live in the swamps, though they are largely invisible to the rest of the island's population. These mythic figures who inhabit the hills and the swamps become part of the topography of the island, acting as a foil to the destructive opulence that the Street's home epitomizes. Here, Morrison references actual Maroon communities who "lived in organized bands in the mountains [and] periodically came down to the plains to steal provisions, pillage warehouses, and carry away livestock" (Fouchard 257). Thérèse recounts this island legend to Son because she regards him as a symbolic horseman, a maroon who belongs with this race of men: " 'I told you!' said Thérèse [to Gideon]. 'He's a horseman come down here to get her. He was just skulking around waiting for his chance' " (*Tar* 107).

Indeed, the novel provides ample evidence for reading Son in terms of maroonage. Looking for water, Son goes to the Streets' home not to cause harm, but to quench his thirst:

> What he went toward the house for was a drink of water. . . . He tried the door and found it unlocked. He walked in. There in the moonlight was a basket of pineapples, one of which he rammed into his shirt mindless of its prickers. He listened a moment before opening the refrigerator door a crack. . . . Three chicken wings were wrapped in wax paper. He took them all and closed the door. . . . The chicken was incredible. He hadn't tasted flesh since the day he went crazy with homesickness and jumped into the sea. (*Tar* 135, 137, 138).

Son's physical state mirrors that of the fugitive slaves, whose continuous malnutrition was a primary cause of maroonage and "appears to have been the most distressing lot of the slave, representing the most serious and incomprehensive negligence on the part of the colonist. In order to adequately feed himself, the slave had frequently to resort to pillage" (Fouchard 161). Like maroons, Son survives by stealing provisions from the nearby "plantation" of L'Arbe de la Croix.

While Maroon societies enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy [some permanent maroon communities "built homes, maintained families and pursued agriculture" (Price 152)], many depended on the fraternity of those who were still on plantations for various forms of aid. Thérèse, the Streets' washerwoman and symbolic field hand, functions as Son's community. Long before she sees him, she senses his desperation: " 'Somebody's starving to death round here. . . . A really starving somebody'" (Morrison, *Tar* 105). Thérèse, supplying him with water and chocolate, purposefully leaves the Streets' house open for this modern day maroon to enter.[12]

The term, " 'maroon' derives, it is believed, from the Spanish cimarron, meaning wild, the word itself coming from the name of an Indian people in Panama, the Symarons, who revolted against Spanish domination" (Fouchard 247). Not only are Son's actions and appearance, with his "wild, aggressive, vicious hair that needed to be put in jail" (*Tar* 113), in keeping with the etymology of the word, but he is frequently described as "wild" in the novel: Ondine claims that she sees "Wildness. Plain straight-out wildness" in Son's eyes, (192); Son's friend cautions that any attempt to control Son "makes him, you know wildlike" (255) and Sydney describes him as a "wild-eyed pervert (100). These depictions underscore Son's relationship to the maroons, as well as the uncharted territories they inhabit. Believed to be untamed and uncontrollable, Son is "threatening to the security and property of the privileged" (Fouchard 257), which he, himself, recognizes: "They are all frightened, he thought. All but the old man" (Morrison, *Tar* 133). Here again, Morrison introduces another trope of maroon

society, namely desertion. The origin of the term notwithstanding, the word maroon has come to mean desertion, which describes Son's actions: he leaves his hometown to avoid serving jail time, and subsequently jumps ship: "There are runaways by sea, who flee by small craft or rowboats, braving a thousand dangers in the search for some shore where one might have leisure to be free. Some were picked up clinging to a rock after being shipwrecked. Others, thanks to the winds, were caught off Jamaica shores. As they set out on their venture 'over liquid routes,' none knew for certain where they were headed" (Fouchard 259).

Beyond these larger intertexts, Morrison nods to maroon practices with what are seemingly insignificant details from Son's life. For example, in their efforts to secure freedom, fugitives used numerous forms of documentation, including "hand-written passes, legitimate and counterfeit, faked declarations of liberty and enfranchisement, faked baptism papers and certificates of all types" (Fouchard 263), a practice echoed in Son's life. Jadine pushes Son on his lack of authentic identification, beginning with his name: " 'I told you already—everybody calls me Son.' 'I want to know what's on your birth certificate.' 'No birth certificates in Eloe.' 'What about your Social Security card. That says Son?' 'No. That says William Green . . . One of them anyways. I got another that says Herbert Robinson. And one says Louis Stover. I got a driver's license that says—'" (Morrison, *Tar* 173-174). All of these textual details catalyze Son as the modern day maroon, the heir (or "son") of the blind horsemen who live in the hills and ride the swamps.[13]

Sein de Vieilles, the island's swamp, is not a primary setting in the text, though it is an anchoring geography sounded throughout. Early on, Son reveals to Valerian that he was in the swamps before hiding in his home, and their conversation illuminates the swamp's folkloric significance: "It couldn't have been very comfortable for you there. The local people avoid it entirely. Spirits live there, I'm told" (93). Though Son admits to not seeing any spirits, he nevertheless offers: "'In a swamp, I believe' " (93). Swamps have long been thought to possess mystical properties: "The American swamp seems a locus of African American magic and spirituality. Often, the plantation conjurer or root doctor was associated with the margins of the community, living in or beside a swamp" (Cowan 62). Even those who remained on plantations would make temporary journeys into the wilderness. For example, some women, especially "older slave women possessed highly detailed medical knowledge about various substances" found in the swamplands (Blum 6). Their knowledge of horticulture was such that they knew not only how to identify plants and herbs in the wilderness, but used the botanical world for various homeopathic treatments as well as nourishment (Blum 6). In this way, Son's foray into the swamps before entering the built environment suggests a connection to the natural world and the cultural practices of his conjuring forebears. Transcending temporal constraints, the swamps become a locus of ancestral immersion as Morison implicitly arcs towards the fecundity and regenerative possibilities of the swamplands.[14]

Son's cultivation of ancestral associations on the island is mitigated by Sydney and Ondine Childs and their reinforcement of class and race hierarchy. Speaking with the dominant voice of society, Sydney debases Son as a "wife-raper" (99) and a "stinking ignorant swamp nigger" (Morrison, *Tar* 100); Jadine calls him a "river rat" (159) and Margaret, upon finding Son in her closet, can only utter "Black" (79). Jadine reinforces Son as a brute: "You rape me and they'll feed you to the alligators" (121), which discursively resituates Son in the swamplands while simultaneously Africanizing him, as "crocodiles are the archetypal swamp monster" (Giblett 32) as well as ancient African symbols for water spirits. His dangerous mystique is historically salient given the reputation of African American males who inhabited the swamp, for they were seen as undeterred by the laws of the antebellum

South.[15] Son, too, threatens the neo-plantation order that the Streets created; his presence unravels its hierarchy and dismantles the secrets contained within.

While Son's time in the swamps serves not only as a means of survival, but as a harbinger for his intimacy and alliance with the island and its people (namely Gideon and Thérèse) Jadine's swamp experience reinforces her cultural disinheritance. Unlike Son who uses the swamps as a refuge, Jadine's time in the "jungle muck" (180) is unplanned and unwanted, as this is, by her own account, the "ugly" part of the island that "she averted her eyes from whenever she drove past. Its solitude was heavy and there was something sly about its silence" (181). Jadine's attitude toward this uncharted terrain reinforces her adoption of European values. Indeed, Tiffin argues that "[a]ttitudes to landscape are intimately connected to social values and mores. The disturbing fecundity and decay of tropical vegetation, the debilitating effects of non-European climates on Europeans, necessarily involved attitudes to bodies" (201). The many bodies Jadine finds unseemly (if not altogether fears) are brought together on Caribbean soil.

Throughout this section, Morrison equates the swamps to Pitch lake—both are oval in size, oozing with a black, thick substance, from which emanates the strong smell of sulfur, a "jungle-rot smell" that deters even mosquitoes (Morrison, *Tar* 181). In the swamps-cum-tar pit, swamp women hang from trees, sway in the wind and watch Jadine with arrogance in their eyes, as she is consumed by the pitch. The presence of the swamp women is fitting, as there is "room for the erratic and irrational" in swamplands (Hurd 106) Like Pitch Lake, which is capable of slowly devouring even heavy objects into its thick tar, Sein de Vieilles begins to consume Jadine. Sinking up to her knees in the tar, Jadine saves herself by shimmying up a tree, in a scene replete with a sexualized idiom of dance:

> Just count. Don't sweat or you'll lose your partner, the tree. Cleave together like lovers. Press together like man and wife. Cling to your partner, hang on to him and never let him go. Creep up on him a millimeter at a time, slower than the slime and cover him like moss. Caress his bark and finger his ridges. Sway when he sways and shiver with him too. . . . Love him and trust him with your life because you are up to your kneecaps in rot (*Tar* 182-183).

Rhetorically, Jadine's survival is aestheticized; beautiful diction jarringly harmonizes her struggle for freedom.

Morrison advances this association as the tar seems to pull Jadine slowly into itself, perhaps in a parallel gesture of intimacy and absorption, which Jadine nonetheless experiences as a kind of death, a reaction befitting the geography: the wetland is "a place of death. . . But it is also a place of life. . . . They are living black waters where. . . the intermingling of life and death takes place. . . In the midst of death and decay in wetlands, we are in the midst of new life being reborn" (Giblett 128). This is particularly apt, for despite the swamp women's indifference to Jadine's apparent suffocation in the swamp, the "mudhole" is active, endeavoring to christen Jadine into its "ancient properties," suggestive of new life. Though it has generally been noted that there are various female characters in *Tar Baby* who act as ambassadors of these ancient properties—namely the woman in yellow with "skin like tar" (45), the swamp women, the night women and even Jadine's Aunt Ondine—I believe it is the natural world, crystallized by the swamps, that first and foremost embodies ancient properties. Morrison gives voice to place, and it is place that endeavors to give Jadine voice. As Morrison explains in an interview with Tom LeClair:

> "I found that there is a tar lady in African mythology. I started thinking about tar. At one time, a tar pit was a holy place, at least an important place, because tar was used to build things. It came naturally out of the earth; it held together things like Moses's little boat and the pyramids. For me, the tar baby came to mean the black woman who can hold things together. (122)

Morrison's circular movement from the African tar lady to tangible tar pits and back to the human embodiment of tar suggests that tar is multilayered in the novel, with strata of literal and metaphoric import.

The swamp's tar, alternately describe as oily, mossy and gelatinous, defies a clear elemental designation. As Jadine expresses to Margaret: "Mud I guess, but it felt like jelly while I was in it. But it doesn't come off like jelly. It's drying and sticky" (Morrison, *Tar* 184). In this way, the "pitch" (184), an apparent reference to race and place, represents the contradictions and tensions of the swampland in African American letters: "Mud runs the whole geological gamut, from mountain to silt to sedimentary rock buried below the surface. It's the one substance we can hold in our hands, smear on our faces, that embodies both birth and death. That can blend the wet grains of both creation and destruction into one matter" (Hurd 20). Despite Jadine's fear of suffocating in the swamps, an attentive reading of the scene reveals an interesting subtext of sexuality and creation. Jadine's insistence on reading the tree as a male partner establishes the sexuality of the swamps. In fact, Jadine's swamp dance is foreshadowed by her romantic outing with Son. Like the swamps, which are filled with dangers, it is at this picnic that Son tells Jadine that he murdered his philandering wife in a moment of rage, a pairing of sexuality and violence that serves as a context for Jadine's experience in the swamps. Hurd sheds light on the swamp as a sexualized body of water: "soaked with danger—its insidious, murky, sexual wet nature always about to leak through the tight barriers of morality and hard work of anyone who goes there" (105). Giblett notes that the swamp, conflated with the "nether regions of the body" is regarded in terms of aberrant sexuality—filthy and grotesque—which Margaret's reaction to Jadine epitomizes. Jadine's body, covered in tar, becomes a site of projection for Margaret, who is horrified by this apparent defilement, a dirtiness that is clearly imbricated with racial bodies, both human and geographic. Interestingly, though, Jadine defies Margaret's tirade against Son: "'Margaret, I fell in, not you. And it was my fault, not his'" (186). Jadine chooses to describe this incident as falling into the mud, which linguistically parallels falling in love, a pairing that is furthered by the description of her "burning" legs long after the confrontation with the swamp. Finally, Jadine's description of the gelatinous tar can also be read as seminal in nature, which returns the reader to the underlying "body" of Margaret and Jadine's discourse, namely Son, who throughout the text is conflated with dangerous sexuality and uncultivated geographies.[16]

Margaret is not the only character who maps herself onto Jadine; Son attempts to imprint himself and his culture onto her: "he had thought hard during those times in order to manipulate her dreams, to insert his own dreams into her. . . . Oh, he thought hard, very hard during those times to press his dreams of icehouses into hers" (119). Son's slumber time interlude illuminates his desire to immerse Jadine into a rural, Black, southern consciousness, which is later materialized as he takes her to his hometown of Eloe, Florida, a trip that results in the dismantling of their relationship.

Jadine, by contrast, is an "orphan," a familial state reflected in her nomadic existence, as she lives alternately in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Paris and Isle des Chavaliers. In fact, Pringle argues that Jadine "turns placelessness—a seat in an airplane far above the sites on earth that would entrap

her—into a home of sorts" (37), and Mobley maintains: "While [Son] values the nurturing aspects of home and fraternity, [Jadine] is rootless and places greater value on what she can own" (289). Son's nighttime visits to Jadine in the Streets' Caribbean home are akin to the swamp's gesticulations, as both he and the mud want to initiate Jadine into her ancient properties; he "assumes the role of ancestor, instructive and protective" (Paquet 510). Despite his intentions, Son cannot remedy Jadine's lack of grounding in physical and cultural place.

Though Morrison does not pathologize Jadine and, in fact, reveals that Son's construction of his hometown is highly romanticized, Jadine's reaction to Eloe bespeaks her racial sensibilities, which again are communicated through a discourse of the geophysical world: she "looked out at the blackest nothing that she ever saw. Blacker and bleaker than Isle des Chevaliers, and loud. Loud with the presence of plants and field life. If she was wanting air there wasn't any. It's not possible, she thought, for anything to be this black. . . . She might as well have been in a cave, a grave, the dark womb of the earth, suffocating with the sound of plant life moving, but deprived of its sight" (Morrison, *Tar* 251).[17] Here, Morrison ties locale to lineage. Just as Jadine fears being buried in the mud and muck of the Caribbean swamp, so, too, does she find the rural South suffocating. Jadine's disparaging remarks about the climate, plant life and people are encoded in a racialized discourse, suggesting an interplay between her rejection of Eloe and her disavowal of blackness.

Son's body is signaled throughout the novel as a sign of Blackness, as his conflation with the racialized body of the swamplands attests, and much of his relationship with Jadine consists of his aborted attempts to "blacken" her body, understood here as another swamp reenactment. Read from this prism, the recurring motif of scent is illuminated. Son, the fugitive swamp dweller is initially odiferous, an aspersion that Jadine flails at him after an altercation: "I know you're an animal because I smell you" (121), to which Son unexpectedly responds, "'I smell you too'. . . and pressed his loins as far as he could into the muted print of her Madeira skirt. 'I smell you, too'" (122).[18] Jadine's threat to tell Valerian is met by Son's loaded response, " 'Leave out one thing. Don't tell him that I smelled you'" (122). While Son repeatedly makes lewd remarks about Jadine's smell, it is tenable to read scent within a larger framework of smell on the island. Mingling with the pleasant horticultural aromas permeating the Caribbean, there is Trinidad's Pitch Lake. The sulfuric odor of this living body is omnipresent and unmistakable, with visitors and residents equating the scent to rotten eggs. Ironically, though, the elemental sulfur, toxic to many bacteria, may be the source of the lake's healing properties. Indeed, legend suggests that Pitch Lake, and the rainwater that collects on its surface, can cure a range of maladies. Breathing into a sleeping Jadine "the smell of tar and its shiny consistency" (120), Son is symbolically returning to the tar pit / swamplands, with its connotative range of race, sexuality and healing. Deliberately destabilizing Son as merely crude and hypersexualized, Morrison connects these various bodies on the island as multilayered sites of cultural identity. In addition to the scent of Pitch Lake, intense smell is also associated with swamplands. Son knew he was in a swamp because of its "foul smell" (134): "Miasma, they called the swamp air, meaning poisonous vapor. Today the word also suggests a funk" (Hurd 103).

Read within Morrison's canon, funk is her overarching metaphor for cultural heritage and resistance to dominant societal norms, "an intrusion of the past into the present" (Willis 325). As Willis in "Eruptions of Funk" notes,

> Morrison's aim in writing is very often to disrupt alienation with what she calls eruptions of "funk." Dismayed by the tremendous influence of bourgeois society on young black women newly arrived from the deep South cities like "Meridian, Mobile,

> Aiken and Baton Rouge," Morrison describes the women's loss of spontaneity and sensuality. They learn "how to behave. The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions." (310)

For Morrison, cultural repression is closely tied to the denial of the body and the natural world, and thus Son's acceptance—if not embodiment—of the funk is in stark contradistinction to Valerian and the plantation order he resituates on Isle des Chevaliers, an island undergirded by histories of slavery, the African Diaspora, forced plantation labor and colonial practices. Morrison does not retreat from the materiality and exigencies of the somatic; both human and geographic are, in fact, funky, epitomized in her description of the "whole island. . .vomiting up color like a drunk" (*Tar* 187) and the sea, "away from the tourist shops, away from the restaurants and offices. . .[throwing] up what it could not digest" (293).[19]

Jadine similarly perceives the island in terms of excess: "The island exaggerated everything. Too much light. Too much shadow. Too much rain. Too much foliage and much too much sleep" (68).[20] Jadine's adoption of Western values is epitomized by her regard of the island's unseemliness, for as Tiffin argues, there is "a reevaluation of the local" through Euro-American perceptions (201). It is because the island's vegetation is as beautiful as it is uncontrollable that Valerian prefers his greenhouse, complete with transplanted North American flora, temperate climates and European classical music. Valerian's desire to contain horticulture is in keeping with the attitudes of Euro-American expatriates, who found the "tropics, with their emphasis on the somatic. . . . dangerous to English reason and control" (Tiffin 201). Indeed, the Caribbean "was often perceived as richly but degenerately tropical, frightening, fecund, even pathological" (Tiffin 201). It is apt that Son would literally shake up Valerian's greenhouse, a microcosm of the main house. Valerian's cyclamens refuse to bloom and Son explains that the plants need chaos: " 'Shake it. . . They just need jacking up'"[21] "Flick[ing] the stems hard" (Morrison, *Tar* 148), Son is met by Valerian's threat, " 'if they die I'll have Sydney chase you back into the sea'" (148). Though seemingly jocular, Valerian's language returns Son not only to the ship he abandons, but on a larger historical scale paints him, a Black man, as a mere commodity, less valuable than Valerian's greenhouse flora. Morrison's prose is a subtle reference to the commerce of the transatlantic slave trade, as Son's body is deemed disposable, threatened with drowning for a minor infraction. Such language notwithstanding, Son's stealth, both in the Street's home and in Valerian's sacred greenhouse, indicates that he is not under Valerian's dominion. Despite Valerian's illusion of control over "his" tropical paradise, the island, though colonized, resists in myriad ways, fighting against the artifice of the seasonal homes at every turn.

Morrison seizes on near invisible elements—ants and fog—to foreground nature as resisting hegemonic control: it is uncontainable and omnipresent. The aggressive destruction of the river and the trees mark Valerian's most dramatic disturbance of the island, but he manifests his disdain for its ecosystem in myriad ways: Valerian has "mongooses shipped to the island to get rid of snakes and rats" (Morrison, *Tar* 39), an eradication which has historic parallel. Caribbean writer Jamaica Kincaid explains: "Antigua is empty of much wildlife natural to it. When snakes proved a problem for the planters, they imported the mongoose from India" (329).[22] Despite Valerian's colonization of the island, the soldier ants prevail. Son, the chocolate eater, leaves on the ground bits of confection that attract ants to the property (Morrison, *Tar* 104), once again linking Son to the island's creatures. Enlarging our understanding of the natural world, Morrison highlights a seemingly insignificant island inhabitant, which is nevertheless a significant presence. Ants, in fact, dominate most ecosystems,

forming 15-20% of the terrestrial animal biomass, and they have colonized almost every landmass on Earth, fighting against Valerian's colonization of Isle des Chevaliers. The impact of these tiny, industrious creatures on the human world is sizeable. The sidewalk bricks begin "popping up out of the ground, leaning every which way. Urged, it seemed to him, out of the earth, like they were poked from beneath" (284). The ants eat the wires of the "entire system to the greenhouse" (284) and begin to make their way towards the copper piping. Aptly, the ants are invasive, wreaking havoc on the greenhouse, the space of controlled nature. That the island's ecosystem reasserts itself by disturbing the home is significant because here it is impossible to doubt the interrelatedness of a biotic community.

Though Valerian wants to create his tropical island home in his own image, he cannot deny that L'Arbe de la Croix, positioned, as it is, "on a hill high enough to watch the sea from three sides" (11), is "situated in the pure sea air" (68) and thus shrouded in fog. The omnipresence of fog within the Street's mansion is lyrically presented. Fog, liminal, ghostlike and eerie, is feminized as the hair of maiden aunts:

> Hair so thin and pale it went unnoticed until masses of it gathered around the house and threw back one's own reflection from the window. The sixty-four bulbs in the dining room chandelier were no more than a rhinestone clip in the hair of the maiden aunts. The gray of it, the soil and the swirl of it, was right in the room, moistening the table linen and clouding the wine. Salt crystals clung to each other. Oysters uncurled their fringes and sank to the bottom of the tureen. Patience was difficult to come by in that fuzzy caul and breathing harder still. It was then that the word 'island' had meaning. (62)

One could conjecture that these water figures are another iteration of Mami Wata, which Morrison subtly calls on in the opening of the novel. After all, Mami Wata is known for her flowing hair and, despite her appellation, is childless and participates in a shared mermaid mythology. However, the maiden aunts do not conform to female sirens with sensuous flowing hair, as Morrison refuses to hypersexualize them. After all, fog is personified as the maiden aunt's hair—wispy and gray—which counsels against a reading of eroticized sea creatures. Instead, Morrison's maternalizes the water as "diaspora mothers" (288) who issue forth African Atlantic history, seething though unvoiced on the island. In this way, fog is the metaphor for that which is felt, experienced, ubiquitous, but mostly unseen.

Since fog is a cloud of minute water droplets that exists at ground level, it once again presences the water which circumscribes the Caribbean island. What is particularly useful for this reading is the merging of water and air; when air can no longer absorb water, fog is formed. Hence, it is not an inconspicuous conflation, but a fusion of water and air that creates another entity. Here, fog surfaces as a layered metaphor with multiple referents. Within the Street's home, fog can be read as the water's refusal to be contained. Despite the alteration of the river into the stagnant swamp, the island's water remains agentic, permeating even the built environment. Given the opulent chandelier's reduction to a clip in the hair of the maiden aunts, fog does not simply enter the mansion, but presides over it, perpetually making its presence known: "Jadine and Margaret touched their cheeks and temples to dry the places the maiden aunts were kissing"; "The maiden aunts stroked her cheek and she wiped away the dampness their fingers left" (62). Among the many permutations of water, fog is its most ethereal, and its lingering presence haunts the home as it becomes synonymous with bodily moisture.

The fog's corporeal inscription is furthered by Morrison's metaphor of hair. Hair, an image of connectivity, serves to link the human to the non-human world and is a recurring trope of race in *Tar Baby*: Thérèse disparages Ondine as "machete hair" (104), Jadine's hair, overcome with humidity, is described as a "rain cloud" (64), and the young woman on the island, Alma Estee, is obsessed with an artificial red wig, a white aesthetic commodity that mirrors the blue eyes that murdered Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*: "Her sweet face, her midnight skin mocked and destroyed by the pile of synthetic dried blood on her head" (299). Son's hair, a sign of blackness which frightens Jadine, is antithetical to Alma Estee's wig: "His hair looked overpowering—physically overpowering, like bundles of long whips or lashes that could grab her and beat her to jelly. And would. Wild, aggressive, vicious hair that needed to be put in jail. Uncivilized, reform-school hair. Mau Mau, Attica, chain-gang hair" (113). The man "with living hair" is understandably horrified by Alma Estee's wig: "Oh, baby baby baby baby,' he said, and went to her to take off the wig, to lift it, tear it, throw it far from her midnight skin and antelope eyes. But she jumped back, howled and resecured it on her head with clenched fingers" (299). Hair is a metaphor for ancestral roots, and in this case Alma's hair is literally rootless, unattached to her body and thus to her race.[23] Alma Estee's body is the site of colonization; though physically placed in the Caribbean, she is psychologically displaced. Harris and Johnson begin their anthology, *Tenderheaded*, with a similar semiotics of African American hair as a symbol of displacement, colonization and rootlessness:

> Our hair speaks with a voice as soft as cotton. If you listen closely—put your ear right up to it—it will tell you its secrets. Like the soothing peace it knew before being yanked out of Africa. Like the neglect that it endured sweating under rags in the sun-lashed fields of the South. And even today, it speaks of its restless quest for home; a place that must be somewhere between Africa and America, between rambunctious and restrained, and between personally pleasing and socially "acceptable." (xv)

In her attempt to replicate whiteness, Alma Estee falls victim to European consumer culture, which Jadine's body services. The tension that Morrison advances is in her description of Alma Estee's hair of dried blood competing with her "antelope eyes," the artificial in collision with the natural. Above all, hair is a recurring link between the island's elements—water, flora, trees, and creatures—conveying a complex interweaving of humans and the natural world. Son's hair, rooted and decolonized, is, like the swamp, a matrix of ancestry. Just as the ecoculture of the swamp is resistant to colonization, Son, the temporary swamp denizen, resists cultural assimilation, as his lifestyle, body aesthetic and relationships attest.

Son carefully places himself in his surrounding ecosystem—humans, animals, plants, rocks and water all coalesce in the novel's final pages. Intertwining ecology with culture, and landscape with race, Morrison employs fog, the trope of interconnectivity, in the conclusion. While the ending of the novel has rightfully engendered numerous interpretations, many of which center on Jadine and Son's future, it is not the fate of this couple's relationship that is of import to this analysis. Rather, it is the final boat ride—which Erickson avers is "a reenactment of the prologue," in which Thérèse "guides him through water to the island" (303)—that has currency for the textured examination of water, place and identity that Morrison advances in *Tar Baby*. Son, who believes Thérèse is taking him to L'Arbe de la Croix to reunite with Jadine, is being led to the hills to join the blind horsemen. Morrison appropriately uses water imagery to catalyze his baptism into maroonage. Near blind, Thérèse, the "archetypal earth mother" (Paquet 508), implores Son to feel the ancestral knowledge that the water offers: "The feel of the current was what she went by" (Morrison, *Tar* 303). The sea mist coupled with the light rain on the rocking boat, puts Son in a trancelike state: "tranquil, dozing, weakly

fighting sleep" (304). Commingling water with the embodied self, Son is on the borderland, as his state of consciousness evinces. Like swamplands that straddle earth and water, Son's final destiny cannot be mapped or represented in this concluding scene.

Mobley argues that in the end Son abandons the quest for Jadine and chooses, instead, a life of maroonage: "He ultimately yields to the maternal powers of nature and joins the blind horsemen in the tree-covered hills. . ." (287). Given the legend of the maroon community on Isle des Chevaliers, it is reasonable to conclude that Son, the temporary swamp dweller, would join this race of men, whose very embodiment is a site of cultural remembering. However, the ending for me remains ambiguous. It is useful to consider that water crossings bracket the novel, and in both instances Son physically enters water. If we want to read this state of fluidity as an objective correlative of his future, then it is not the fixity and groundedness of the hills that ultimately beckons him. Borderless, water carries evidence of human history; thus, Son experiences not merely a baptism of purification in these watercrossings, but an immersion into cultural pasts.

It is reasonable to conclude that Son's water journeys portend further voyages, as his cultural knowledge is interwoven with the cycles of water. In the novel's concluding moment, Son's integration with the natural world is such that the trees recognize and honor him: After leaving the boat, "the mist lifted and the trees stepped back a bit as if to make the way easier. . ." (306).

Tar Baby is at the crossroads of ecology and race. Setting her novel in the Caribbean, a tropical, but by no means pristine landscape, Morrison immediately draws attention to the colonization of people, land, and natural resources. Hence, the nonhuman world is inflected with culture, racism and forced labor practices. However, the publication of *Tar Baby* in 1983 predated the burgeoning ecocritical movement in the academy by nearly a decade.[24] Given the current interest in reading ecocritically, *Tar Baby* deserves to be repositioned in Morrison's canon. Indeed, *Tar Baby* is more than a pause in Morrison's oeuvre—following the epic *Song of Solomon* and preceding the masterpiece, *Beloved*. Rather, by imagining environments of subversion and resistance in which the language of nature is foregrounded, *Tar Baby*, a biocentric text, was simply ahead of its time.

Endnotes

[1] Howard's review of the novel in The New Republic acknowledges the centrality of nature: "The very flora and fauna of the islands are alive, whispering, murmuring, nodding their commentary on the stories that are being played out in the dazzling sun. I know of no other landscapes in contemporary fiction that breath like Morrison's except perhaps the animated bush country in Patrick Whites' Australia" (18). By contrast, John Irving, writing a review in The New York Times Book Review, is not as flattering about Morrison's ecocentrism, arguing, "In Tar Baby Toni Morrison lavishes her strongest prose on descriptions of nature" (22). At times he demeans this narrative strategy as "cute," but, he later acquiesce that "the richness of the best of these passages . . . makes Miss Morrison's excesses tolerable" (22).

[2] I am basing this estimation on Morrison's novels published before she was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Given the publication date of her more recent novels—Paradise, Love and A Mercy—they are not an apt comparison group. An MLA search reveals that Tar Baby ranks as the least written about of Morrison's early novels. For example, there are over two times more articles published on The Bluest Eye and Sula, and three times more articles published on Song of Solomon. Not unexpectedly, the scholarship on Beloved is copious, garnering ten times the critical attention.

[3] While I am not the first to focus on the non-human world in Tar Baby, what I want to suggest here is that it is the centrality of the environment and the concomitant issues of environmental exploitation and imperialism that account for the novel's marginalized status in Morrison studies.

[4] I recognize that "nature" is a fraught term and my employment here is not intended to romanticize a pristine "nature" that never was—wilderness, pastoral, etc. My usage of "nature" takes into account the biosphere as a multi-layered living system as well as a social and discursive construction.

[5] Morrison's embodiment of trees as a critique of colonization recalls Charles Chesnutt's short story, "Po' Sandy" in which Sandy, enslaved, is turned into a pine tree so that he may stay near to his wife, Tenie. However, the tree is eventually felled and Myers argues, "The sound of the tree's "sweekin,' en moanin', and groaning" is a living cry of outrage over the devastation wreaked on the bodies of slaves and the body of nature" (16). Likewise, Alice Walker describes logging in the hills of California as a death: "Each day on the highway, as I went to buy groceries or to the river to swim, I saw the loggers' trucks, like enormous hearses, carrying the battered bodies of the old sisters and brothers, as I thought of them, down to the lumberyards in the valley" (Living 141).

[6] As Tiffin reminds us, it is a misnomer to claim that island residents are indigenous: "In the Caribbean, with the exception of the Caribs and Arawaks, all present-day populations are to some degree in ancestral exile, whether they be descendants of European settlers, Africans kidnapped into slavery, or the Chinese and Indian indentured laborers who followed slavery's abolition in the 1830s" (199) I am using the term loosely to differentiate between residents whose ancestry is tied to the island for centuries (like the race of blind horsemen) and the Euro-American newcomers, like the Streets. The Streets, as their name implies, are conflated with the man-made world, a built environment that they carry with them and impose onto this island community.

[7] Ryan asserts that Tar Baby offers a ecological critique of the "European/Euro-American capitalist apparatus that has unleashed a cycle of destruction on nature which we have only now come to acknowledge, amid the life-threatening realities of acid rain, ozone depletion, toxic waste, the contamination of lakes, rivers and oceans, etc." (73). Throughout, there is a lament on the state of the environment. Water crises are one of Michael's longstanding social complaints (Tar 77), but the most trenchant critique of environmental destruction is voiced by Son, the man who regards the sky as "holy": "From Micronesia to Liverpool, from Kentucky to Dresden, they killed everything they touched including their own coastlines, their own hills and forests" (Tar 269).

[8] Morrison gestures toward tar in the conclusion of Song of Solomon as Milkman's shout to his "brother man" Guitar echoes through the hills: "tar, tar, tar" (337).

[9] Pitch Lake is not classified as a swamp; rather, the swamps on Isle des Chevaliers, Sein de Vielles, share properties that are in keeping with this famous tar pit.

[10] Despite its reputation, there is much beauty to be found in Pitch Lake. In fact a variety of trees ring the lake and lilies and birds of paradise actually grow out of the muck. Further, it is a natural source of revenue; last year the country exported three million dollars worth of pitch to over fifty countries.

[11] Pitch Lake is one of only three natural asphalt lakes in the world; the others are in California (the famous La Brea tar pits) and Venezuela.

[12] The fact that Valerian is known as the "Candy King" encodes Morrison critique of Valerian's occupation of Isle des Chevaliers. His move to this predominate site of sugarcane production reinforces his colonial power and his commodification of landscape and people. Symbolic of the 19th century plantation owner, Valerian "accepted the proposition that nature should be dominated, brought under control, and used for profit" (Blum 2).

[13] In lieu of Michael, the son who never materializes, Son appears. Son's conversation with Margaret highlights that the two men are to be read as doppelgangers: "How old are you? About as old as your son. My son is twenty-nine going on thirty." Okay. Almost as old as your son" (198). Interestingly, Son refers to Michael only as "son."

[14] While the liberty afforded by these uncultivated landscapes is unmistakable, plantation labor was not entirely removed from swamplands. In fact, one of the most lucrative of all plantation crops, rice, was cultivated in

low country coastal swamplands. Although more attention is given to cotton and cane plantations, rice plantations were a major site of forced labor: "the majority of the South's truly rich antebellum slave masters derived their fortunes from rice—not from cotton, tobacco, or sugar" (Dusinberre 6). Rice was initially, in the seventeenth century, grown on dry land, but it quickly became cultivated on swampland, which, in turn highlighted the travail of this plantation economy as the entire cultivation of rice became tied to strensous labor in muddy and swampy environments.

[15] Though women were certainly part of escaped slave communities, maroonage was encoded as a male activity, for women, often caring for small children, "ran away permanently far less often than men" (Blum 3). Moreover, the seclusion of the woods engendered violent acts against women, such as rapes and beatings, which also reduced the number of female fugitives.

[16] Son is not presented merely as a threatening sexual being in the novel; he is also a site of beauty, female desire and charm. In a detailed shower scene, Son carefully bathes, washing the detritus from the sea and swamp from his body, a physical alteration that causes a change of heart for Jadine and Margaret: "They stayed in their rooms all afternoon, and the next time they saw the stranger he was so beautiful they forgot all about their plans" (Tar 130). Here again, water is implicated in another, albeit not as significant, transformation.

[17] While Jadine critiques the natural world, she is comfortable dominating it, as evidenced by her relationship to the seal skin coat. Like Valerian, who purchases the island and begins dismantling it, the ninety baby seals were dismembered for the pleasure of Jadine. Her erotic relationship to the coat is enacted through a position of dominance: "She went to the bed where the skins of the ninety baby seals sprawled. She lay on top of them and ran her fingertips through the fur. How black. How shiny. Smooth. She pressed her thighs deep into its dark luxury. Then she lifted herself up a little and let her nipples brush the black hairs, back and forth, back and forth" (91). Highlighting the blackness of the coat, a near match to Jadine's own hair, Morrison draws attention to Jadine's complex positionality. She shares a racial alliance to the island and its people, yet her actions with the fur coat bespeak her political alliance with European culture and desire.

[18] The wetland is a place which "assaults the sense of smell" (Giblett 13), and this passage suggests that Son carries swamp effluvia with him.

[19] Morrison employs vomiting, a graphic bodily function, in The Bluest Eye, when Claudia, the character who attempts to resist the hegemony of white culture, does not recoil from her vomit, but is fascinated at how something can be so "neat and nasty at the same time" (11).

[20] Jadine's fear is foreshadowed at the supramarket in Paris where she meets the woman in yellow, whose dark complexion and Africanized presence undermines Jadine's Anglo beauty. The woman, with skin like tar, whose only purchase is three eggs, is both a site of beauty and maternity. Jadine's critique of the island's excesses echoes her disparaging remarks of the woman in yellow: "there was too much hip, too much bust" (Tar 45). Thus, race and place are elided.

[21] Son analogizes the shaking up of plant life to his treatment of women whom he claims need to be "jacked up" every once in a while to make them "act nice," a problematic remark that he follows with what promises to be a sexist and racist joke about "three colored whores who went to heaven" (Tar 148). Despite Son's connection to the natural /ancestral world, he, like Jadine, is a flawed character, as his racial essentialism and phallocentric bonding with Valerian reveals.

[22] Kincaid is pointing to the irony of exporting animals from one colony in order to tame another.

[23] In Song of Solomon, Morrison used the metaphor of hair as a sign of racial connectivity, as Pilate tries in vain to convince her dying granddaughter that Milkman's rejection of her hair is a disavowal of himself and his race: "Pilate put her hand on Hagar's head and trailed her fingers through her granddaughter's soft damp wool. 'How can he not love your hair? It's the same hair that grows out of his own armpits. The same hair that crawls up out his crotch on up his stomach. All over his chest. The very same. . . . It's his hair too. He got to love it" (Song of Solomon 315). The relationship Morrison draws between unprocessed hair and liberation is likewise sounded in Alice Walker's "Oppressed Hair Puts a Ceiling on the Brain," in which she argues that her hair was a barrier to spiritual growth. Quickly pointing out that it was not her natural hair

that betrayed her, Walker describes the joy she experienced in her "friend hair": "I found it to be springy, soft, almost sensually responsive to moisture. As the little braids spun off in all direction but the ones I tried to encourage them to go, I discovered my hair's willfulness, so like my own! I saw that my friend hair, given its own life had a sense of humor. I discovered I liked it" (286). Concluding with a botanical metaphor—"The ceiling at the top of my brain lifted. . . The plant was above ground!"—Walker, like Morrison, affirms the relationship between hair and the natural world.

[24] Branch and Slovic maintain that " 'ecocriticism,' the term now widely used to describe scholarship that is concerned with the environmental implications of literary texts (or other forms of artistic expression), was almost unknown in the early 1990s, even when we launched ASLE" (xiv). ASLE, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, was founded in 1992 and ISLE, the society's scholarly journal of ecocriticism, was published in the spring of the following year.

References

Blum, Elizabeth D. "Power, Danger, and Control: Slave Women's Perceptions of Wilderness in the Nineteenth Century. *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 31.2 (Mar-Apr 2002): 247-265.

Branch, Michael Pl and Scott Slovic. *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003.

Cowan, Willian Tynes. *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Drewal, Henry John. "Performing the Other: Mami Wata Worship in Africa." *The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies*. 32.2 (Summer 1988): 160-185.

Erickson, Peter B. "Images of Nurturance in *Tar Baby*". 1984. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present* eds. Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and K.A, Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. -293-307.

Fouchard, Jean. *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*. 1972. Trans. A Faulkner Watts. Preface, C.L.R. James. New York: Edward W. Blyden Press, 1981.

Giblett, Rodney James. *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1996.

Harris, Juliette and Pamela Johnson. "Ms. Strand Calls a Press Conference." *Tenderheaded: A Comb-Bending Collection of Hair Stories*. eds. Harris, Juliette and Pamela Johnson. New York: Washington Square Press, 2002. xv.

Howard, Maureen. Review: Tar Baby. The New Republic. March 21, 1981. Rpt. in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 17-20.

Hurd, Barbara. *Stirring the Mud: On Swamps, Bogs, and Human Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.

Irving, John. Review. Tar Baby. *The New York Times Book Review*. March 29, 1981. Rpt. in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 21-25.

Kincaid, Jamaica. "Alien Soil." *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture*. Eds. Loraine Anderson, Scott Slovic and John O'Grady. New York: Longman, 1999. 327-332.

Mintz, Sidney W. *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture and the Past*. Boston: Beacon, 1996.

Mobley, Marilyn Sanders. "Narrative Dilemma: Jadine as Cultural Orphan in *Tar Baby*." 1987. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*. eds. Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and K.A, Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 284-293.

Morrison, Toni. "The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison." Interview with Thomas LeClair. 1981. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 1994. 119-128.

---. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Penguin, 1977.

---. *Tar Baby*. New York: Plume, 1981.

Myers, Jeffrey. "Other Nature: Resistance to Ecological Hegemony in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*". *African American Review*. 37.1: 5-20.

Paquet, Sandra Pouchet. "The Ancestor as Foundation in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Tar Baby*." *Callaloo*. 13.3 (Summer 1990): 499-515.

Price, Richard. *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Garden City: Anchor Press, 1973.

Pringle, Mary Beth. "On A Jet Plane: Jadine's Search for Identity through Place in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*." *Midwestern Miscellany* 24 (1996): 37-50.

Ryan, Judylyn S. Contested Visions/Double-Vision in Tar Baby. *Toni Morrison Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. ed. Nancy J. Peterson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 63-87.

Sivils, Matthew Wynn. "Reading Trees in Southern Literature." *Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South*. 44.1 (2006): 88-102.

Tiffin, Helen. "Man Fitting the Landscape: Nature, Culture and Colonialism." *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*. 199-212. Eds. DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. Renee K. Gosson, and George B. Handley. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005.

Walker, Alice. *Living By the Word: Selected Writings, 1973-1987*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988.

---. "Oppressed Hair Puts a Ceiling on the Brain." *Tenderheaded: A Comb-Bending Collection of Hair Stories*. eds. Harris, Juliette and Pamela Johnson. New York: Washington Square Press, 2002. 283-287.

Willis, Susan. "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison." 1987. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*. eds. Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and K.A, Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 308-329.