

Granny Names in The Ozark Trilogy

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Abstract

This paper investigates one aspect of the naming systems in Suzette Haden Elgin's science fiction series, *The Ozark Trilogy* (2000). The fictional Ozark society of the novels is organized according to a system of magic in which naming plays a crucial role for females but not for males. Males are named by their parents, following a traditional patrilineal naming pattern, whereas girls are named by Grannys, in accordance with numerological and magical principles. There is, however, a third naming system just for naming the Grannys themselves. When a woman becomes a Granny, she discards the name she was assigned at birth and assumes a new name of her own choosing. The present paper investigates the names of the twenty named Grannys in the trilogy of novels, comparing their chosen name with the numerological properties of other female names and discussing the implications of this self-naming within the context of the fictional Ozark society.

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Introduction

Suzette Haden Elgin (1936-2015) is an American linguist and science fiction author who taught at University of San Diego until 1980, at which time she retired to the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas where she continued writing. Elgin is widely known for *The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense* (1980) and its many sequels. Among feminists, she is perhaps best known for her *Native Tongue* trilogy, consisting of *Native Tongue* (1984/2000), *The Judas Rose* (1987/2002), and *Earthsong* (1993/2002), for which series she invented the women's language, Láadan. However, her less well-known Ozark trilogy is the topic of the current analysis.

First published in 1981 by Daw Books, *The Ozark Trilogy* was reprinted in 2000 in a single volume. Elgin had originally intended it to be written as one long novel, but her publishers felt that formatting it as three separate volumes was the most effective marketing plan at the time (Elgin 2001). Subsequently, in 1986, Elgin published a sequel, *Yonder Comes the Other End of Time*, which brought together two of her series, the Ozark series and the Coyote Jones series, and then in 1990, she published the short story, 'What the EPA Don't Know Won't Hurt Them', as a prequel to the Ozark series.

The fictional premise of *The Ozark Trilogy* is that in 2012 (which was three decades in the future at the time Elgin was writing), twelve families from the Ozark Mountains of Earth board a spacecraft, unbeknownst to anyone else on Earth, and set forth to find a new planet on which to settle, because they were fed up with the environmental degradation and wars on Earth. They travel for nine years before they finally find a planet suitable for settlement, and they name that planet Ozark (Elgin 2000: 495-496). The leader of the expedition, Granny Motley, was later to be known simply as First Granny. The Ozark trilogy is set in a time 1000 years after the twelve families had first settled planet Ozark.

The fictional planet Ozark and its inhabitants operate according to the principles of magic. Specifically, the Ozarkers recognize five levels of magic:

Common Sense level, available to everyone unless they just plain weren't interested, same as the times tables and the alphabet were. Middle Level, for the ambitious, or those as didn't care to be overdependent on the Grannys. Granny Magic, for the Grannys only; Hifalutin magic, for the Magicians. And for the Magicians of Rank, the highest level – the Formalisms & Transformations. (Elgin 2000: 285)

Magicians typically exercise magic over individuals or small groups of two or three, while Magicians of Rank are capable of operating across the entire planet. Magicians of Rank are also capable of fluent mindspeak (telepathy) and have a few other magical skills that ordinary Magicians lack (Elgin 2000: 503). Granny Magic focuses on healing simple ailments, tending to home and garden affairs, and administering minor punishments, such as warts and rashes (Elgin 2000: 502), all of which are considered beneath the dignity of the professional classes of magicians. The one aspect of Magic that is unique to Grannys is that they alone are able to carry out Proper Naming of the girl children.

Naming Systems in the Ozark Trilogy

All Ozarkers descend from the original twelve families that left Earth together, and all bear one of the twelve original family surnames: Airy, Brightwater, Clark, Farson, Guthrie, Lewis, McDaniels, Motley, Purdy, Smith, Traveller, and Wommack. At birth, both male and female children are assigned the surname of their father and they keep that surname throughout their life. For given names, there are two principle naming systems in Ozark society, one for males and one for females, and then there is a third naming practice exclusively pertaining to Grannys.

Male Names

Males are named by their parents, following a pattern in which they are assigned two given names followed by a surname and a numerical designator, e.g. Donald Patrick Brightwater the 133rd. There are no restrictions on the choice of boys' names, and there is a tendency for names to be recycled, so the ordinal number is used to distinguish boys/men who bear the same name. At any given time and in any given generation, there could be several males bearing the same name. So, for example, in addition to an uncle named Donald Patrick Brightwater the 133rd, there could be five cousins all named Donald Patrick Brightwater, so the first of those born would be the 134th, the second would be the 135th, the third would be the 136th, etc. This naming convention does not require that the 133rd be the son of the 132nd or that the 134th be the son of the 133rd, only that the ordinal reflects which of them was born before the other (Elgin 2000: 505). Outside of intimate family contexts, it is usual for males to be addressed and referred to by their full name, including the ordinal.

Female Names

The most important naming system on planet Ozark is the one pertaining to girls. Unlike boys, who always have two given names, girls are assigned only one name, which could be a simple name, such as *Sally*, a compound name, such as *Marycharlotte*, or a hyphenated name, such as *Caroline-Anne*. Girls are referred to by that name and their father's surname, as in *Sally of Lewis*, *Violet of Smith*, or *Rozasharn of McDaniels*. Girls must be named by one or more Grannys, according to the system of Proper Naming, which is 'the system used by the Grannys of Ozark to ensure that a female infant will have the name intended for her by destiny' (Elgin 2000: 504). At the heart of this system is numerology, and the Grannys use magical principles known only to them to discern what number, from 1 to 9, each individual girl-baby is destined to be. Once the baby's predestined number is divined, a name is devised, such that the letters in the name add up to the proper number. Table 1, below, summarizes the letter-number correspondences, with the symbol ` representing glottal stop, not found in Ozark names, but found in the names of another species on the planet and included for symmetry (Elgin 2000: 504).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	`

Table 1. Ozark numerology grid

If a female is improperly named, 'this is a serious matter, and will bring bad luck upon the entire Family in which it happened' (Elgin 2000: 503). Thus, the naming of girl children is a weighty responsibility for the Grannys.

The Ozark numerology system is fairly simple, at least on its surface. Using the grid in Table 1, for example, the number associated with the name *Jessica* would be calculated in the following manner: $1 + 5 + 1 + 1 + 9 + 3 + 1 = 21 \rightarrow 2 + 1 = 3$. This calculation shows that, based on the letter-number correspondences, the name *Jessica* comes to a sum of 21, and the digits 2 and 1 are then added together to yield the number 3. Names must always be reduced to a number from 1 to 9, so the digits must be added together in sequence until a number from one to nine is achieved. The name *Rozasharn* further illustrates this principle. *Rozasharn* would translate to $9 + 6 + 8 + 1 + 1 + 8 + 1 + 9 + 5 = 48 \rightarrow 4 + 8 = 12 \rightarrow 1 + 2 = 3$. Thus *Rozasharn* is a three, according to this system of numerology.

In the Ozark stories, Elgin does not systematically elaborate on the meanings that correspond with each of the numbers. On occasion, either the narrator or another character will make reference to properties associated with a particular number, but this happens only with respect to the numbers Two, Three, Four, Five, and Six. Table 2 summarizes the information directly provided about those numbers.

Number	Properties Ascribed
Two	‘A female whose name came to the number two was intended by destiny to be passive and submissive and weak’ (Elgin 2000: 381).
Three	‘A three she was, and she lived up to the number; in everything that Charity of Guthrie did, she succeeded with a kind of careless ease, as if there was nothing to it at all’ (Elgin 2000: 52). ‘She [Jessica of Lewis] was a true Three: brilliant, creative, high-spirited, and one for whom everything seemed to come easily’ (Elgin 2000: 477).
Four	‘...she could be any number she chose, including the horrible four...’ (Elgin 2000: 69).
Five	‘...but Becca of McDaniels was a true Five, she’d as soon take your head off as look at you, and she ran the Brightwater kitchen the way her husband ran its stables. No sass, no slack, and no time to breathe from the minute you got there until you were through <i>by the clock</i> ’ (Elgin 2000: 361).
Six	‘...a true Six – her loyalty to her Family and her devotion to its members were her ruling qualities’ (Elgin 2000: 351).

Table 2. Direct evidence about Elgin’s number system meanings

The quotations in Table 2 provide scant evidence about the meanings associated with the numbers in Elgin’s numerological system, and in the case of the number Six, the evidence is somewhat unreliable. The passage quoted in Table 2 refers to Gilead of Wommack, who is actually a Two, but who is misidentified on p. 351 as a Six. That error leaves the reader to wonder whether loyalty to family is really a characteristic typical of a Six or is a characteristic of Gilead, and therefore of a Two. Furthermore, about the numbers not listed in Table 2 the reader has even less information and is left to infer the qualities associated with each of the numbers, based on an analysis of the characters who bear those numbers.

Since Elgin’s numerological grid mirrors other numerology grids for the English alphabet, it might be instructive to look at an example of how another source relates the numerals to personality and character traits. In *The Hidden Truth of Your Name* (1999), the unidentified members of The Nomenclology Project provide a description of what each number represents. Their descriptions are briefly summarized below in Table 3.

Number	Ascribed Characteristics
One	the beginning or origin of all things; unity, wholeness, self-sufficiency; masculine energy; aggression (positive or negative); often outgoing, aggressive, achievement-oriented; leaders; dynamic, expressive; occasionally obstinate & overbearing
Two	duality, polarity, the interaction of opposites; feminine energy; good at reconciling and negotiating between conflicting interests; compromising, passive, follower not leader; creativity
Three	family & family values; time (past, present, future); assertive, generally positive; can be blunt
Four	stability, foundations, solidity, the earth, the four elements; equilibrium & balance; reliable, stable, efficient, well organized, calm, respectable; can be dull or slow, even boring, if not balanced with creativity
Five	the material world, humanity, the 5 senses, instability, distraction; uncertainty and chance; activity & energy; adventurous, willing to try new things; risk taker; resilient
Six	health, balance and harmony; an androgynous quality; creative, artistically oriented, willing to take action to accomplish goals; can be nitpicky or fastidious
Seven	spirituality, mysticism, perfection, order, good fortune; artistic, intuitive, empathetic; can be aloof, moody, depressed
Eight	regeneration, stability, new life, eternity, justice, equilibrium, balance; materialism & worldly interests; tenacity; can be hard-headed
Nine	completeness, fulfillment; possibly self-centered and egotistical; can have lofty goals & high ambition

Table 3. The meaning of numbers (Nomenology Project 1999: 35-37)

The Hidden Truth of Your Name is not and does not purport to be an academic reference book, so the authors do not cite sources. However, the book presents overviews of onomancy, Kabbalah, runic interpretation, and modern Western numerology. ‘Western numerology developed primarily from the Hebrew methods of gematria and the Pythagorean techniques of analyzing the meanings of individual numbers’ (Nomenology 1999: 33). Since the letter-number grid presented in this book mirrors the one that Elgin uses, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Elgin based the numerology in the Ozark trilogy on some version of this modern Western numerological system, although not on this particular book, which was not published until nearly two decades after Elgin wrote her novels. A comparison of the properties ascribed by Elgin to each number with those ascribed by the Nomenology Project reveal little overlap, except that in both systems, the number two seems to be associated with a degree of passivity and submissiveness. Even this preliminary comparison demonstrates that there is no consistent scientific basis for numerological inferences; nevertheless, since this study analyzes a naming system in a fictional world, there is little harm in suspending disbelief and proceeding with the analysis of Granny names using these numerological systems.

Granny Names

Grannys are older women (although there is no set age at which one may become a Granny) who are celibate, either because they are virgins or because they are widows. Before they can become Grannys, they must pass tests in Granny Magic administered by those who are already Grannys (Elgin 2000: 502). By no means will every woman become a Granny. *Granny* is a distinct category not to be confused with that of grandmother, and the non-standard plural *Grannys* where one might expect *Grannies* is a visual reminder that *Granny* is a professional title, not a biological one. Grannys, like all females, are given a Proper Name at birth by a Granny, and they bear that name throughout their lives until such time as they become Grannys. At that point, they cease to use the name they were given at birth and they choose for themselves a new name by which they are known thereafter. Although their family origins are not hidden, they also cease to use their father's surname. It is as though the Grannys have entered a different order of being in which their primary identity is no longer that of an individual or of a member of a family, but is, rather, that of a member of a small but crucial order of highly specialized magicians who, together, look out for the collective good of all the people of Ozark. It is common for one or more Grannys to live in the main household of each of the twelve families, but there are no restrictions concerning where they may or may not reside.

There are 29 Grannys on Ozark in the time period in which the novels are set and not all of them are identified by name, so the analysis that follows is based only on the 20 named Grannys, plus the titles *Granny* and *First Granny*, since these are used as forms of address. The fact that Grannys name themselves is somewhat remarkable in the context of a society in which naming is fairly tightly regulated, especially for females. No other group, not even Magicians of Rank, who are ostensibly the highest ranking members of the Ozark magical hierarchy, are permitted to name themselves. Perhaps it is fitting, though, that those who are charged with the weighty responsibility of administering Proper Naming to all girl children have as their first act as Grannys the responsibility of naming themselves. This practice raises the question, however, of whether the Grannys, steeped as they are in the Ozark numerological naming system, use that system when naming themselves.

Table 4, below, lists all the named Grannys in the Ozark series, with their number designate, according to this form of numerological calculation. I have included *First Granny*, even though this is not a name chosen by this Granny, because it is used as a proper name when she is referred to in the books.

Name	Number	Name	Number
Granny	7	Goodweather	4
First Granny	7	Graylady	3
Cobbledrayke	4	Hazelbide	9
Copperdell	7	Heatherknit	2
Dover	1	Leeward	5
Edging	1	Scrabble	8
Flyswift	3	Sherryjake	3
Forthright	3	Stillmeadow	7
Frostfall	1	Twinsorrel	9
Gableframe	7	Whiffletree	9
Golightly	7	Willowithe	1

Table 4. Granny names and numbers

The analysis of the Granny names of Ozark is hindered by the fact that for many of the named Grannys, the reader is provided with little more than her name and sometimes her family affiliation. Thus, there is almost no way to determine the extent to which either Elgin's or the Nomenclology Project's numerological interpretations fit with the personality and character of most of the individual Grannys. The only Granny for which the reader is told her original name is Granny Gableframe (number 7), whose original name was Bethany of Brightwater (number 3). Based on this example, it would seem that Grannys need not choose a name that corresponds with the number that destiny assigned them. Indeed, a comparison of the proportion of non-Granny female names and the proportion of Granny names matching each of the nine numerals suggests that Grannys pay little heed to choosing a Granny name that matches the numeral they were determined to be at birth. Table 5 shows the relative percent of non-Granny female names and Granny names that correspond with each number.

Number	% Grannys	% All Girls
1	20.0	12.7
2	5.0	12.7
3	20.0	19.1
4	10.0	10.6
5	5.0	10.6
6	NIL	17.0
7	20.0	8.5
8	5.0	6.3
9	15.0	2.1

Table 5: Percentage of non-Granny and Granny names by numeral

The name *Granny* itself is a seven, which, in the Nomenclology Project numerology system includes characteristics related to mysticism, perfection, order, and intuition. These characteristics seem to be appropriate for Grannys and they also correlate well with the most fully developed of the non-Granny 'Sevens' in the stories, namely, Silverweb of McDaniels.

Silverweb is a young woman steeped in mysticism and spirituality, who appears to have chosen a life of celibacy and about whom the narrator speculates, ‘...perhaps it was her intention to become a Granny without the bother of waiting around to become a widow’ (Elgin 2000: 22). Thus, there may be some correlation between the number seven, in both Elgin’s and the Nomenclology Project’s systems, and some of the expected characteristics of Grannys. Beyond that, however, there is little evidence to suggest that Grannys make any effort to choose their names to reflect the characteristics associated with particular numbers, and there is no evidence that any characters in the novels interpret Granny names in this manner. Instead, Granny names appear to be taken at face value and to not be expected to bear any magical significance whatsoever.

Of the twenty Granny names, seventeen are compounds. The three non-compounds are *Dover*, *Edging*, and *Scrabble*. While it is impossible to say exactly which meanings or connotations Elgin had in mind when she chose these names, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online) offers definitions that seem more than plausible, given that the Grannys of Ozark are ritually obstreperous in their speech patterns and mannerisms. The explanations offered in this section are drawn from that dictionary, except where otherwise indicated. *Dover* is more likely to be associated with a dialectal meaning pertaining to a slight, unsettled sleep than to the place name, and *Edging* is likely to connote a metaphorical setting on edge, rather than edging as applied to sewing, although the added connotation of the feminine (on Ozark) art of sewing adds an appropriate nuance of meaning. *Scrabble* is probably used in its American sense of a scramble or confused struggle. All of these non-compound Granny names, then, suggest varying degrees of unsettled or edgy character, without suggesting actual instability.

Of the 17 compound Granny names (see Table 4), most can be interpreted as having transparent surface meanings, although some may rely on obsolete or dialectal terms and some may be used ironically. Since humans on Ozark ride flying mules, *Flyswift* may be taken at face value, and it may also carry overtones of a Granny who is likely to be wherever she is needed in the blink of an eye, for better or for worse. Other names whose meanings are likely to be transparent to most readers are *Forthright*, *Frostfall*, *Golightly*, *Goodweather*, *Graylady*, *Heatherknit*, *Leeward*, *Stillmeadow*, *Twinsorrel*, and *Willowithe*. Nevertheless, even though the names may seem simple, the protagonist, Responsible of Brightwater, has comments to make about the names of Grannys Golightly and Leeward that suggest that even seemingly transparent surface meanings may belie the real nature of the Grannys. In the case of Golightly, the name may suggest that the Granny herself steps lightly and is easy-going. This is not, however, how Responsible of Brightwater sees her. Granny Golightly is 129 years old and likes to play tricks on Responsible, prompting Responsible, as narrator, to comment, ‘I intended to go lightly near her, for sweet providence sake, as befit her name’ (Elgin 2000: 33). About Granny Leeward, Granny Cobbledrayke remarks that she ‘is about as much like a leeward side in a storm as a lizard is like a belly button’ (Elgin 2000: 392). In Book Three of the trilogy, Granny Leeward has become corrupted and she supports a harshly theocratic structure. Her corruption is best illustrated when she flays a 12-year-old girl to death as punishment for the girl resisting the marriage that had been arranged for her (Elgin 2000: 379-382). Thus, even seemingly simple compounds such as *Golightly* and *Leeward* can be deceiving if taken at face value.

Six of the compound Granny names may require some explanation, either because they utilize obsolete forms or because the meaning of the compound may not be entirely transparent. In *Cobbledrayke*, the first morpheme, *cobble*, may favour the idea of ‘a water-worn rounded stone’ more so than the meaning of ‘mend or put together clumsily’. For its part, *drayke* is a non-standard spelling that occurs neither in the OED nor in the online *Collins English Dictionary*. It may be related to *drake* ‘male duck’, but the website *Babycenter* also offers ‘dragon’ as a possible synonym. The latter seems more likely to be what a Granny might have had in mind in naming herself. With some imagination, one might, therefore, think of *Cobbledrayke* as alluding to a smooth, round dragon’s egg: a deceptively benign shell which houses the potential for a firestorm.

The name *Copperdell* has multiple possible meanings. *Copper* could refer to the metal, but it could also refer to a cop, a mechanism that forms part of a spinning wheel, once again suggesting concerns that are considered appropriate for females, including Grannys, on Ozark. *Dell* could mean a deep hole, but according to the OED it could also refer to a wench or young girl ‘of the vagrant class’. Combining the various possible meanings, one might think of a deep and strong-minded woman who maintains the gendered order of things without being entirely a part of that system.

Gableframe is at once transparent and not. *Gable* could refer to a roof structure, but it is also possibly a variant of *cable*, suggesting bonds or chains. Likewise, *frame* could refer to a structure of some sort, usually of wood, but the OED offers an obsolete meaning ‘bold, brave, strong; strenuous, active, eager; excellent, splendid; efficacious, effective’. This latter cluster of meanings seems more fitting for the character of Granny Gableframe in the stories. So perhaps Gableframe is meant to suggest a Granny who is active and effective in creating and maintaining bonds. For its part, *Hazelbide* appears transparently to mean something pertaining to hazelnuts or possibly the colour hazel, and *bide* refers to a dwelling place or to the act of staying. Yet the reader may well wonder whether deeper connotations are intended. Granny Hazelbide raised Responsible of Brightwater, the Meta-Magician of the planet, along with Troublesome of Brightwater, Responsible’s older sister. Troublesome was properly named and she more than lived up to her name; raising her would have been no mean feat for any Granny. Raising a Responsible, of which there is one in every Ozark generation, is also a complex and weighty responsibility. The stability and support offered by Granny Hazelbide to both of these girls turns out to be pivotal in resolving the crisis into which planet Ozark is plunged in Book Two.

Sherryjake and *Whiffletree* are both formed using regional United States dialect forms. *Sherry* may be associated with *scurry*, denoting a hurried movement. *Jake* may refer to a rustic individual or to an alcoholic beverage. So perhaps for the citizens of planet Ozark, *Sherryjake* would connote a spirited yet slightly conservative individual. *Whiffletree* is identified in the OED as being a U.S. variant on *whippetree*. *Collins* goes a step further and identifies both as names for *swingletree*, itself a variation on *singletree*, ‘a wooden bar swung at the center from a hitch on a plow, wagon, etc. and hooked at either end to the traces of a horse’s harness’ (*Collins English Dictionary* online). So Granny Whiffletree may wish her name to be associated with hard work, the carrying of burdens, and forward movement: achieving progress by assuming a traditional position and moving forward in tandem with others.

The analysis of these 20 Granny names is, at best, suggestive of meanings and connotations that the author may have wished to convey to her readers. Evidence from the novels is scant and many of the Grannys are only mentioned by name once or twice in over 500 pages of the novels, so any interpretation must rely heavily on contextual clues from the fictional Ozark society portrayed in the stories. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Granny names on Ozark form a distinct category of names that is independent of the primary naming systems for females and for males.

Conclusion

Suzette Haden Elgin's *Ozark Trilogy* draws the reader into a fictional universe in which magic is as essential on planet Ozark as electricity is in the 21st-century industrialized countries of Earth. Although outwardly a patriarchal society, Ozark's true power and stability are in the hands of women. All magic on Ozark flows through the Responsible in every generation and the determination of who that Responsible is depends upon the Grannys. All girl children's names hold magical and numerological significance, none more so than *Responsible*, and Grannys must conduct the Proper Naming of all girls. Although Magicians and Magicians of Rank are male, the magic of males is not tied to Proper Naming, so the naming of boy babies is done by the parents in accordance with their own preferences.

In this fictional universe where family names are used prominently, especially for boys, and where girls are assigned names with magical significance, Grannys stand apart in naming themselves. All Grannys are steeped in the magic of numerology and Proper Naming, yet there is no evidence to suggest that Grannys apply numerology when choosing their own names. In fact, what little evidence one can glean from the stories suggests the opposite. Grannys pay no heed either to the numeral associated with their new name or to the numeral associated with the name they were given at birth and lived with up until becoming Grannys. Instead, Grannys appear to favour folksy-sounding names, particularly compounds. Whether compound or simple, a Granny's name is apt to suggest virtues or character traits embraced by the Granny, or, as in the case of Granny Leeward and Granny Golightly, they choose names ironically, signifying something other than what a surface reading might suggest.

The Ozark Trilogy has long had an in-group following among science-fiction aficionados, but it has received very little attention from academics. As the present paper has attempted to show, however, Elgin the linguist brings her linguistic sophistication into her fiction, and in the case of the Ozark series, she applies her genius to the creation of a magical and wonderful set of naming systems, well worth the attention of literary onomastic scholars.

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