

Introduction

Imagining Adoption

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In one of the most famous works of literature dealing with adoption, Oedipus remembers a strange event of his youth: “At a feast, a drunken man maundering in his cups / Cries out that I am not my father’s son.”¹ How can any man not be the son of his father? This memory sets forth a basic paradox of adoption: it establishes, whether legally or informally, a parental relationship that is not genetic, and thus it forces either a redefinition of parenthood or the definition of adoption as a pretense or fiction.² As the adoptee and poet Jackie Kay says, interviewed by Nancy Gish in this anthology, “It is different to grow up knowing that your mother is not actually your mother, and that your father is not actually your father, but nonetheless they are your mother and father.”

Is an adoptive parent a real parent? If so, is a biological parent who does not nurture after birth really a parent? How does the biological mother’s experience of pregnancy and birth—enforced nurturance—make her situation different from that of the biological father? Adoption makes ambiguous the definition of parenthood and of such other important terms as *family*, *kinship*, and *identity*, as well as *father* and *mother*.

Many well-known works of literature have plots that turn on the definition of parenthood. After discovering birth parents, Oedipus thinks of them as his parents, and, less tragically, so does Perdita in Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*.³ But in such novels as *Silas Marner*, *Oliver Twist*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and, more recently, *The Bean Trees*, the ending is the confirmation of adoptive parenthood. These examples suggest three mythic stories that European and American cultures have typically used to imagine adoption: the disastrous adoption and discovery, as in *Oedipus*, the happy discovery, as in *Winter’s Tale*, and the happy adoption, as in the novels mentioned.⁴

These stories are myths because of the way they act as paradigms (though they conflict) to shape feelings, thoughts, language, and even laws about adoption. In the two versions of the search story, the birth parents are clearly the “real parents.” In the happy adoption story, the birth parents may exist in memory, but no matter how important this memory is, as in *Oliver Twist*, it does not constitute a living complication to the reconstructed family. All three myths assume that a child has, in effect, only one set of parents. To many readers, this will seem

like an inevitable axiom. But for others—including many adoptees—it is not necessarily so obvious.

Although these are the dominant paradigms through which our culture has traditionally tried to imagine adoption, much literature complicates them considerably, as essays in this book will show. Even the works I mention have more dimensions to their analyses of adoption. Some of the literature and media representations discussed in this anthology follow these dominant plots; others, however, look at them obliquely, examine their cost, follow their characters after their supposed end, or play off against readers' expectations, explicitly dramatizing deviation from them. One of the purposes of the book, indeed, is to emphasize how much variety is possible in ways of imagining adoption, even though many of the same conflicts recur in different contexts.

Why has adoption figured so importantly in literature? First, as I have been suggesting, adoption plots dramatize cultural tensions about definitions of family and the importance of heredity.⁵ These tensions, which also appear in recent controversies over such books as *The Bell Curve* and *The Nurture Assumption*, have special relevance for adoptees.⁶ Questions about whether adoptees need knowledge of their ancestry, about whether it is healthy or possible for a birth mother to put the memory of a relinquished child behind her and what her privacy rights are, and about whether birth or nurture is more important in cases of disputed custody, all now being debated in legislative sessions and in courts, are also at issue in such novels as *Silas Marner*, *Great Expectations*, and *Bleak House*.

Furthermore, representing adoption is a way of thinking about the family, exploring what a family is, that is at the same time a way of thinking about the self, exploring distance from the family. While both of the happy-ending stories celebrate the family, that celebration is ambivalent. As Freud discussed in his theory of the family romance, for most people—nonadopted people—the fantasy of discovering that they were adopted and can be reunited with a different family elsewhere is a way of dealing with negative feelings about their parents.⁷ The same could be said, even more emphatically, about the fantasy of being an orphan who is then happily adopted. And the more interesting the outsider in literature that follows the disastrous adoption plot, the more that plot too deals with ambivalence about the family—as in *Oedipus*, where the hero is determined to find the truth about his parents and discovers that he has destroyed them. In each story, one set of parents is erased—either the biological parents, whose death generates the need for adoptive parents, or the adoptive parents, who are superseded when the biological parents return.

In literature about adoption particularly close to these fantasies, the superseded parents are often stereotyped—in one version of polarities the birth parents are irrational and irresponsible, in another the birth parents are warm while the adoptive parents are cold. These stereotypes, closely related to images

of fertility and infertility as well as to class, weigh more heavily on female characters—the ready-made dichotomy (biology vs. culture) that adoption plots provide is particularly useful for dealing with ambivalence about women. Another stereotype found in some literature related to the disastrous adoption story, such as *Wuthering Heights* or P. D. James's *Innocent Blood*, is the pathological, antisocial adoptee. This stereotype, as Katarina Wegar discusses, emphasizes the importance of blood ties and the disruptive influence of alien heredity, and it assumes “that the adoptee is doomed to stand outside the natural order of things.”⁸

Adoption involves many other social issues. Novels in which the happy ending is an adoption, such as *Oliver Twist*, often attack the stigma of illegitimacy and the treatment of the poor. Adoption often implicates in each other's lives people from groups usually widely separated—frequently by economics, sometimes by ethnicity, and increasingly by nation of birth. Its use in fiction can structure an exploration of their contrasting lifestyles and can protest against their split and/or against the victimization of one group by the other. *Silas Marner* uses adoption in part to protest the class divide in England; this issue is at the center of the recent British musical *Blood Brothers*, in which a rich family adopts one of a pair of poor twins. The utopian ending of the American musical *Ragtime* involves adoption of the black orphan Coalhouse Junior by the WASP Mother and the Jewish Tateh. In the film *Secrets and Lies*, a black adoptee's meeting with her white birth mother helps a whole family bridge gaps of race and economic position. In *Daniel Deronda*, the search for a birth parent involves the search for a cultural history, for a usable past, for the imagined community of a nation.

Surprisingly few literary critics have previously considered literary representations of adoption. More have written about the orphan or the bastard, but such discussions miss the adoptee's specific condition—the relation to two different kinds of parents.⁹ And precisely because adoption is so useful a plot device for dramatizing issues like familial ambivalence or class or race relations, previous literary critics have been more apt to look *through* adoption in literature, rather than *at* it.¹⁰ Only a handful have considered literary images in relation to the institution of adoption itself.¹¹ The writers whose books thus far contain the most wide-ranging references to adoption in literature are not literary critics but pioneering adoptee activists for open records, Betty Jean Lifton and Jean Paton. This anthology is the first extended attempt to look at a group of portrayals of adoption together, along with other examples of adoption discourse. Thus, it begins to identify a group of writings that could be called the literature of adoption and to explore what concerns and motifs these writings share and what issues they debate.¹² To begin this project of analyzing representations of adoption, we must briefly survey some of the changes in how adoption has functioned in history.

Recent historical work has shown how much adoption itself has differed in different times and cultures. John Boswell's *The Kindness of Strangers*, examining a vast quantity of documentary material, concludes that in ancient Rome, as well as medieval Europe, an enormous number of children were exposed with the expectation that strangers would adopt them informally, usually raising them without informing them of their birth.¹³ In another Roman mode of adoption discussed by Boswell, the relation of "alumnus" to foster parent was idealized—hence universities today use the term *alumnus* to emphasize continuing relationships with their graduates. (Imagine how different a "Yale Adoptee Association" would sound from the "Yale Alumni Association"!) Roman adults could also be legally adopted as a way of continuing a family line. Although legal adoption disappeared, other forms of surrogacy continued or developed. Renaissance England's child raising involved not only wet-nursing but also what has been called "a mass exchange of adolescent children," including fostering out, apprenticeship, service, and wardship.¹⁴ Kristin Gager's *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties* explores notarized adoption contracts in sixteenth-century France, a time and place when adoption was long believed by historians not to exist.¹⁵ Two centuries later, the French revolutionary government, during its most radical period, encouraged adoption to eradicate class differences. As Wayne Carp notes, in a number of islands in the South Pacific today, "adoption is common, public, casual, and characterized by partial transfer of the adopted child to the new family and dual parental rights and obligations. . . . it is common for adopted children to maintain a relationship with their biological parents."¹⁶ Similar characteristics occur in informal adoptions among many indigenous people in the United States and New Zealand, as well as among some African Americans.

In the United States, adoption was first formalized as a legal procedure with concern for children's welfare in the nineteenth century, in Massachusetts in 1851.¹⁷ During the second half of the century, almost every state legalized civil adoption—by contrast, Britain did not legalize it until 1926. Informal adoptions existed in both England and America before and during the time that adoption was legally formalized, but the delay in its legalization in England did reflect a difference in national values: in Dinah Craik's English novel *King Arthur: Not a Love Story* (1886), an American doctor says, "In my country, where every man stands on his own feet, where we have neither the curse of primogeniture, nor the burthen of hereditary rank, any respectable person, or any married couple, agreeing together, can legally adopt a child."¹⁸ Carp shows that most of the twentieth century adoption laws in America assumed that adoptees would eventually be allowed to learn the names of their birth family, although this policy gradually changed. Rickie Solinger's *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade* discusses how interest in adoption increased after World War II and how it was structured by race, being seen as appropriate

for white unwed mothers but not for black ones (although black families frequently practiced informal adoption).¹⁹

In the kind of adoption dominant in the mid-twentieth century in both America and England, the background of the plays of Albee (as discussed by Garry Leonard in this anthology), and the novels of Winterson (as discussed here by Margot Backus), adoptees could learn little or nothing about their heredity. Closed adoption—its symbol the birth certificates that replaced the original names with the adoptive parents' names—went virtually unchallenged. Often, adoptees and their parents were expected to be silent about the very fact that they were an adoptive family. If adoption agencies succeeded in their ideal of matching the appearance of new parents and children, the adoption might well be invisible.

This history of silence and invisibility has made it difficult for members of the adoption triangle to form a community or communities. Unlike many minority groups, neither adoptees nor adoptive parents necessarily grow up among, raise children with, or wish to socialize with others in their category. Birth parents have been brought together in unwed mothers' homes, and adoptive parents in preadoption classes, but these experiences have, until recently, not formed continuing groups. Because their relation to adoption has been associated with loss and even with stigma, adoptees and adoptive and birth parents have generally been, for the most part, isolated and fragmented in this aspect of their identity. (Thus, the versions of adoption that they have seen in literature may have been particularly important to them.)

In the 1950s, since adoptees were isolated and generally silent about their feelings and even about their adoptive status, for an American adoptee to be curious about heredity seemed an individual idiosyncrasy; in subsequent decades, it was to be part of the adoptees' rights movement, related to a greater interest in minority history, racial identity, and ethnicity around the world.²⁰ In the 1970s, when for the first time a number of adoptees began to write publicly about their search for their biological ancestors, the models of decolonization and the black search for a heritage had prepared the way for some understanding in a wider audience.²¹ As a result of international activism, adoptees in many countries have a regular procedure for learning the names of their birth parents, at a specified age (for example, eighteen in England, according to a law established in 1975); in the United States, as I write, only six states (Alabama, Oregon, Tennessee, Alaska, Delaware, and Kansas) officially have open records, but a number of adoptees from other states have managed to find out more about or meet their birth parents. In another significant change, in "open adoption" some adoptees are brought up with knowledge of their birth parents from the beginning.²²

In the past thirty years, because of both the adoptees' rights movement and the increased number of international and transracial adoptions, adoption has

become much more visible.²³ Changes in language have marked some of its changing status. Betty Jean Lifton wrote, at the beginning of her influential autobiography *Twice Born*: “The adopted child can never grow up. Who ever heard of an *adopted adult*?”²⁴ Now new words and phrases have come into use. *Adoptee* can refer to either a child or an adult. *Birth parents* and especially *birth mother* provide a way to avoid such terms as *real parents* or *natural parents* (with their apparent assumptions that adoptive parents are unreal or unnatural), while sounding less detached than *biological parents* or *genetic parents*. This anthology’s discussions of the poetry of Sandra McPherson and Jackie Kay, the film *Secrets and Lies*, the rhetoric of the search movement, Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *Pigs in Heaven*, and interracial adoption deal with this new world of adoption. Now, not only have adoptees organized to open records, but also birth mothers have formed continuing groups, and adoptive parents sometimes meet together to provide mutual support. Many local groups include members from different parts of the triad; the American Adoption Congress, which according to its mission statement seeks to promote “honesty, openness and respect for family connections,” is an umbrella organization for those affected by adoption and for adoption professionals.

Yet adoptees vary in their attitudes toward open records (as do birth parents and adoptive parents), and at least one organization, the National Committee for Adoption, opposes such openness. Adoption today exists at the intersection of many contested issues. I have already mentioned the meaning of heredity, the meaning of family, the structure of identity. Let me add the role of culture as distinct from heredity, the rights of children, the rights of parents, the relation of the individual to group membership, the rights of minorities, the rights of poor people, the role of the state in social engineering. We can expand the central questions: Are one’s identity and real family determined primarily by heredity, primarily by nurture, by both, by an idiosyncratic mix that differs for each person, or by neither? Is parenthood determined by genetics? By pregnancy and childbirth? By the work of child care? By fighting to have, keep, or reclaim a child? By not fighting, if it might hurt the child, as in the judgment of Solomon? By the child’s best interest, as determined by a court? By the meaning those involved give to their biological link or child care? By the child’s preference? What criteria of a good family are relevant in custody battles? Should disabled and gay people have the right to adopt? Should more effort be given to finding adoptive homes for children in troubled homes or to preserving the biological family? How important is the right to privacy of a birth parent or adoptive parent in comparison with the adoptee’s right to acknowledgment, information about their heredity, or medical information? What if it’s the birth parent who wants a meeting? If the adoptee is entitled to information and a meeting when adult enough, what is the age? What is the relation of an adoptee to adoptive parents’ ethnicity? Are there some races or ethnicities that, because of their social op-

pression, cultural history, and physical identifiability, should always prevail in an adoptee's self-definition? Which should have precedence, the need to keep children with their racial/ethnic group or the need to find them a stable adoptive home? Are international adoptions exploitative or helpful? Answering these questions is far beyond the scope of this anthology. I list them here to indicate the range and significance of the issues that the representations of adoption discussed here raise. How adoption is represented in the literature and media people see affects how they will answer these questions; even if they experience adoption in their own lives, the way they experience it—and the ways they imagine the experience of those at other positions in the adoption triad—may be shaped in part by the cultural images of adoption they know.

It is part of the general ambiguity surrounding adoption that no one knows how many people are personally affected by the institution. For 1992, the most current information available at this writing, the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse cited a figure of 127,441 children adopted in the United States (42 percent of them by biologically related family members or by step-parents) and estimates that between 2 and 4 percent of American families include an adopted child.²⁵ Such figures, of course, would not include people who were informally adopted. Unlike many other kinds of minority groups, adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents still maintain enough confidentiality that the results of questions about these issues on the 2000 census long form may well be highly unreliable, and though the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare kept annual statistics on adoptions between 1951 and 1975, this practice has ended. The peak rate of unrelated domestic adoptions involved eighty to ninety thousand every year in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The most obvious causes of the recent decline are the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion, the relative destigmatization of bearing children out of wedlock, and the development of new reproductive technologies, such as artificial insemination and surrogate motherhood (to which many of the controversies around adoption are also relevant). By contrast to the number of whites seeking to adopt, relatively few healthy white infants are available for adoption now in the United States—a relatively larger number of adopters now look either for international adoption or for older children, often “special needs” children with serious emotional and/or physical problems. In the United States, more pregnant women who plan to relinquish their children are able to choose among several potential adoptive families. The availability of children for international adoption, which is much more expensive, often varies according to fluctuations or surges in countries' nationalistic interest in keeping their own.

The recent increase in international adoption makes it especially obvious that the adoptive relation evokes the quintessentially North American issue of communicating culture across bloodlines, which these days is also a European issue. Immigrants have often been referred to as America's adopted children;

their teachers and their government deal with some of the same issues about accepting otherness that face adoptive parents. Optimism about how well adoption can work, as about Americanization, can be based on a belief in the universal similarity of human nature and in its infinite malleability, as suggested by Castañeda, but it need not be. The attempt to define America as a culture of pluralism and diversity, in Henry Louis Gates's phrase "a conversation among different voices," parallels the attempts by many transcultural adopters today to learn from and celebrate the culture of their child's birth parents.²⁶ Several contributors to this volume trace the historical development of attitudes toward adoption and acculturation: Julie Berebitsky quotes a 1916 physician's wife praising adoption as a way to Americanize children; Jill Deans shows how Erdrich can present adoption as a way for U.S. policy to erase tribal identity; Kristina Fagan and Claudia Castañeda examine more thoroughly the colonizing dimensions of adoption. These essays make it clear that adoption is not simply a metaphor for intercultural relations; it is a process in which they are often very much implicated.

The essays included here and the writers discussed in them take widely different perspectives on the contested issues involved in adoption. The anthology has greater range not just because of its historical and cultural scope but also because some of the essays are more concerned with adoptees, some with adoptive parents, some with the institution. That the representation of birth parents is not the dominant concern of any essay here is symptomatic of a problem in the field—birth parents are invisible when adoption works as it was long expected to work.²⁷ However, the essays on Eliot, Winterson, Erdrich, Kay, McPherson, and *Secrets and Lies* deal in part with how birth parents are imagined. Tensions within the anthology, between essays prioritizing these different concerns, enact some of the tensions that constitute adoption as a field of study.

Identity is a repeated concern of the anthology: identity issues for the adoptee are the subject, for example, of Leonard's essay on Albee, Jan VanStavern's on McPherson, Paris De Soto's on *Secrets and Lies*, Nancy Gish's on Kay, my own on Eliot, and Modell's on the rhetoric of adoptee rights activists. In some essays identity is seen as primarily biological (or primarily affected by a cultural stress on heredity) and therefore especially problematic for the adoptee because it is unknown in a time of closed records. This is the context for the identity confusion of the adoptee in Albee's works. If heredity is known and/or if nurture is seen as at least equally important, a different set of questions about identity confront the adoptee, as in *Secrets and Lies*, Eliot, McPherson, Kingsolver, Laurence, and Kay. Sometimes the adoptee finds birth parents similar to her, as in McPherson's poetry; sometimes heredity reveals mainly difference, as in *Secrets and Lies*. In all cases identity is complex. Several of the contributors included here suggest that adoptees may respond to their awareness of another

possible family by developing an especially vivid imagination; this theme occurs in discussing both adoptee writers (McPherson, Kay, and Winterson) and fictional adoptees created by others (Anne of Green Gables and Daniel Deronda).

However, all members of the adoption triangle can be seen as deviating from norms in some way. A question touched on in many essays is how much to emphasize the difference between adoptive and biological families and how much to emphasize their similarities.²⁸ Identity can be an issue for all positions. Berebitsky's essay deals with how adoptive mothers between 1900 and 1950 wrote about themselves; Martha Satz's analyzes how members of a (transracial) adoptive family negotiate their identities today. Closely linked with these identity concerns are the essays that deal with representations of the conflicting claims of biological and adoptive parenthood, such as those of Backus and Modell.

Some essayists, such as Tess O'Toole, Beverly Clark, and Julie Berebitsky, discuss texts in which adoption is seen as a personal and social good. Others, such as Castañeda, Backus on Winterson, Leonard on Albee, and Kristina Fagan on Kingsolver and Laurence, discuss adoption as psychologically and/or culturally repressive through commodification, use of the adoptee as a fantasy space, and international/interracial power structures. Beverly Crockett discusses adoption as sometimes commodifying and sometimes beneficial; Deans finds it sometimes subversive and sometimes restrictive in Erdrich. Backus and Castañeda analyze situations in which adoptive parents are represented as feeling the same way as do some of the adoptive parents discussed by Berebitsky and Clark, yet Backus and Castañeda look critically at the consequences for the adoptee. Castañeda criticizes a utopian image of transracial adoption in Elizabeth Bartholet rather similar to the one Fagan criticizes in Kingsolver.

Though this collection treats male adoptees in Albee and George Eliot, adoptive fathers in Eliot and Trollope, and a birth father in Eliot, and although some authors discuss both birth or adoptive parents, most of the essays deal primarily not only with female authors but also with female adoptees, birth mothers, and/or adoptive mothers. This is probably not just an arbitrary emphasis or an accidental result of my interest in feminist criticism. Adoption is a more salient issue for women since family membership is in general more salient for women. Birth (inevitably) and relinquishing for adoption and choosing to adopt (in our culture) have been issues more for women than for men.²⁹ When a girl thinks about her birth mother or about her adoptive mother, it is much more likely to be with the thought that she could be in their situation than when a boy does. Many more female than male adoptees seek changes in the current American system by joining such groups as the American Adoption Congress or the Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association and/or seeking their birth parents.³⁰ Insofar as it is possible to collect statistics about this, it seems that many more birth mothers than birth fathers seek to meet their adopted-away children

as adults and welcome meetings when they are sought.³¹ Thus, the emphasis on representations of women in the anthology may reflect both demography and the cultural associations that in part create that demography.

The insight that these essayists give us into the complex history of how adoption has been imagined comes in part from many other issues they bring into play. The essayists pay attention to issues of racial/ethnic difference (see Clark, Deans, Gish, Satz, De Soto, Novy, Fagan, and Castañeda) as well as to structures of gender and sexuality, with special reference to constructions of infertility and of maternal instinct (see especially Berebitsky and Backus). They concern themselves with different kinds of adoption (informal/formal; infant/older child; open records/closed records; domestic/transnational). They show the implications of laws about who is allowed to adopt (see Berebitsky, Backus, Satz, and Castañeda). They show adoption working to reinforce traditional heterosexual and gender images in the adoptee and the adopter (see Backus), though they also suggest that it can deconstruct compulsory reproductive heterosexuality (see Castañeda). They trace varying manifestations of cultural stigma on adoption and illegitimacy (see Crockett and Leonard). They show different and even opposing images of reunion with birth relatives (VanStavern, De Soto, Modell, Novy). In essays on Albee, Kay, and McPherson, they analyze how treatment of many other issues can be seen as transformations of writers' experiences as adoptees.

We can see a hint of the ambiguity of the institution in the recurring images for adoption that some of the essays present. Deans and Clark emphasize that in the works they discuss, adoption is a way of connecting—an image made most vivid in the web spun by the spider found both as White's Charlotte and in Erdrich's Indian mythology; O'Toole repeats the theme of adoption as connection with regard to some of the novels she discusses. But one of O'Toole's other themes closely relates to the emphasis of those writers more critical of adoption. She compares adoption to "the remaking of the world in which fiction engages." For Backus and Castañeda, however, the image of adoption as a rewriting of history (the adopters', the adoptee's, and the birth parents') has more negative implications than in the novels O'Toole examines. The concealment of one part of their past and its replacement by another is indeed the basis of the complaints against the closed-record system that are made by the adoptees whose rhetoric Modell studies. In this system, adoption is a making of one set of connections and the denial of another set. In a few of the works discussed in this anthology, that concealment is undone and the adoptee regains knowledge of the apparently erased story; the process of making connections returns, but this time it is the birth relatives with whom connections are made.

To rephrase the question posed at the beginning of this essay, does adoption make a real family or a fictive one? Perhaps it does both. Perhaps there is a way

to discuss family that breaks down this dichotomy. Relations of adoption are constructed relationships—at least in that sense, they are fictions. But there is a sense in which the relationship of a parent and child who have always been together, as well as of a reunited birth parent and child, is also a constructed relationship—one built up out of many small interactions. We are used to the idea that mothering is a continuous activity of nurturance—not just childbearing. In her book *Kinship with Strangers*, Modell argues that openness in adoption is forming the basis for a new American system, “in which the significance of *work* in kinship will increase” and “genealogy is only one way of constructing parenthood.”³² Sara Ruddick, developing the concept of “maternal work,” goes so far as to say, “all mothers are ‘adoptive.’ . . . Even the most passionately loving birthgiver engages in a social, adoptive act when she commits herself to sustain an infant in the world.”³³ If Modell is right, then Ruddick’s claim may become more widely accepted.

For many adoptees, connections with their birth family are fictional in a different sense; they have little or no information and so they make up fantasies about their birth parents. Arguably, adoptees ultimately construct a different kind of genealogy for themselves in determining what is meaningful to them in both their families as they know and imagine them, somewhat as writers construct their genealogies by their use of literary traditions.³⁴ Perhaps we can lessen the contrast between adoptees and others here too. The enterprise of imagining and claiming a lost familial past is not unique to adoptees; anyone who thinks about her (or his) family’s earlier life and ancestry eventually asks questions that have no clear answers and must decide what meaning she gives her connection to family.³⁵ Indeed, for many orphans, refugees, and others whose loss of familial past is accompanied by much more material loss than most adoptees experience, adoptees’ consciousness of difference may seem like a luxury. And the fictions that adoptive and birth parents may make about their adopted child’s heredity or their birth child’s life have some parallels in the fictions that other parents make about their children, whose lives they can never entirely know.

Still, a family connected by love, effort, habit, and adoption papers (or an informal agreement) *is* different in some ways from one connected by love, effort, habit, and heredity. Knowing that you share an interest with a parent who raised you is different from hypothesizing something shared with a birth parent about whom you have little or no information. Meeting a birth parent for the first time since infancy is different from reuniting with a parent after an alienation during adulthood. And yet the range of variations within adoptive families, and within adoptee–birth parent relations, is probably as great as the range of variations within any other kind of kinship. I hope that this anthology will begin to give a sense of how these differences and these variations have been imagined.

Proposals by the 1996 Congress to remove children from “unfit” mothers and to increase the stigma on illegitimacy show how much adoption practices are interwoven with other aspects of our culture. To some, adoption may seem a simple solution for social problems; but however much the contributors to this book and the authors discussed in this book represent varying views on adoption, none of them thinks it is simple. The techniques of literature and of literary and cultural analysis facilitate exploring its complexity.

NOTES

1. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, in *The Oedipus Cycle*, trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1939), 40. David Grene’s translation (1954; reprint, New York: Washington Square, 1967) has, instead, “accused me in his drink / Of being bastard” (45). The key word in the original is *plastos*, which is translated as “invented, fabricated, supposititious” by R. D. Dawe in the notes to line 780 on p. 171 in his edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See Pietro Pucci, *Oedipus and the Fabrication of the Father* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 99–100.

2. *Fiction* is the word chosen to describe adoption by J. S. Maine in *Ancient Law* (London: J. Murray, 1861), 239, and, following him, Judith Modell in *Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2. The informed adoptions dealt with in this anthology can also be, and sometimes are, discussed as “foster parenting.”

3. I discuss adoption in Shakespeare in “Multiple Parenting in Shakespeare’s Romances,” in *Domestic Arrangements*, ed. Kari McBride (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001); and in “Multiple Parenting in *Pericles*,” in *Pericles: Critical Essays*, ed. David Skeele (New York: Garland, 2000). See also Heather Dubrow, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss: Forms of Deprivation, Mourning, and Recuperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

4. The happy and disastrous adoption stories correspond approximately to the two kinds of adoption novels identified by Patricia Howe in “Fontane’s ‘Ellernklipp’ and the Theme of Adoption,” *Modern Language Review* 79 (1984): 121, and developed further by Tess O’Toole in “Adoption and the ‘Improvement of the Estate’ in Trollope and Craik,” in this collection. Howe suggests that disastrous adoption plots are more frequent in German literature than in English.

5. Katarina Wegar (*Adoption, Identity, and Kinship* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997], 99) views images of adoption in literature and popular culture “in terms of a deep-rooted ambivalence regarding the nature of family bonds.” However, Elizabeth Bartholet (*Family Bonds: Adoption and the Politics of Parenting* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993], 164–86) sees our culture as stigmatizing adoption.

6. In *The Nurture Assumption* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), Judith Rich Harris argues for the importance of heredity and peer environment as opposed to parental environment. She frequently refers to her adopted daughter and to adoption studies. In *The Bell Curve* (New York: Free, 1994), Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray argue, overall, the importance of heredity but refer to adoption studies to support their argument that illegitimate children should be moved to better home environments. For a critique, see Valerie Hartouni, *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies*

and the *Remaking of Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). See also Barbara Katz Rothman, *Genetic Maps and Human Imaginations: The Limits of Science in Understanding Who We Are* (New York: Norton, 1998). Rothman, a medical sociologist, also discusses her experience as a mother by adoption and birth.

7. Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," in *Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1959), 9:237–41. Freud argues that these fantasies are also disguised ways of manifesting the child's affection for original parents, who can be seen as appearing in them exalted in rank.

8. Wegar, *Adoption, Identity, and Kinship*, 103. Use of the term *blood* with regard to biological kinship comes from the ancient (false) tradition that semen (once thought to be produced by both women and men) is refined blood. See Elise V. Lemire, "From Blood to DNA: The Failed Narratives of Interracial Kinship," paper delivered at MLA convention, Chicago, December 28, 1999; also Clara Pinto-Correia, *The Ovary of Eve: Egg and Sperm and Preformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 85–86. Rothman (*Genetic Maps*, 16), while pointing out the inaccuracy of this use of "blood ties" to refer to "genetic ties," emphasizes that pregnancy is a literal blood tie.

9. Some of the critics who have discussed related motifs in literature are Northrop Frye, in *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) (mysterious birth); Edward Said, in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975) (orphanhood); Peter Brooks, in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) (orphanhood and surrogacy); Marthe Robert, in *Origins of the Novel*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) (the bastard and the founding); Marie Maclean, in *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1994); Alison Findlay, in *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); and Michael Ragussis, in *Acts of Naming: The Family Plot in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Some adoptees self-identify as orphan or bastard; two adoptee organizations are named Orphan Voyage and Bastard Nation, and as Garry Leonard writes in his essay in this volume, attitudes toward bastardy are crucial to the history of adoption. However, the position of a person born to and raised by the same single mother is quite different from the position of one born outside of marriage and adopted by someone else.

10. For this distinction, I am indebted to Marjorie Garber. In *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 389, she comments on how frequently cross-dressing is looked *through* rather than *at* in critical and cultural analysis.

11. One of the few books of literary criticism to include a historically informed study of literary representations of adoption is Marc Shell's *Children of the Earth: Literature, Politics, and Nationhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

12. Two recent anthologies that collect—but do not analyze at length—the literature of adoption are *The Adoption Reader: Birth Mothers, Adoptive Mothers, and Adopted Daughters Tell Their Stories*, ed. Susan Wadia-Ellis (Seattle: Seal, 1995), and *A Ghost at Heart's Edge*, ed. Susan Ito and Tina Cervin (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1999).

13. John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

14. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Row), 107; see also Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 54–64, and Paul Grif-

fith, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 33.

15. Kristin Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties: Adoption and Family Life in Early Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

16. E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4.

17. Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 271–72.

18. Dinah Craik, *King Arthur: Not a Love Story* (London: MacMillan, 1886), 40, quoted by Tess O'Toole in her essay in this collection. See George Behlmer, *Friends of the Family: The English Home and Its Guardians* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 272–300, on de facto adoption in England before 1926 and its abuses.

19. Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

20. The first nonfiction book about adoptees' interest in their heredity was Jean Paton's *The Adopted Break Silence*, privately published in 1954. As she says in *Orphan Voyage* (1968; reprint, Cedaredge, Colo.: Country, 1980), after a few favorable reviews, "a great silence fell" (41).

21. When *Roots*, Alex Haley's book about finding his African ancestors, was televised, the article "Everybody's Search for Roots" *Newsweek* (July 4, 1977, 25–38), described it as expressing a widespread interest in family genealogy beyond the black community, with a sidebar about the developing adoptee search movement. See Carp, *Family Matters*, 164; the article is also part of my own file of clippings. See also Judith Modell's essay in this volume.

22. According to the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC), a service of the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 69 percent of public and private agency adoptions in recent years are open by their definition: the birth parents have met the adoptive couple. Modell's *Kinship with Strangers* describes a type of adoption much further on the spectrum of openness: "The exchange of a child by people who know one another, expect to have an ongoing relationship and to share a child" (16).

23. According to the NAIC, quoting figures from the U.S. State Department, between 1989 and 1998, intercountry adoptions to the United States per year increased from 8,102 to 15,774. For an overall picture of adoption in the United States today, see Adam Pertman, *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America* (New York: Basic, 2000).

24. Betty Jean Lifton, *Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter* (1975; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1977), 3. Jean Paton (*The Adopted Break Silence*) similarly made a point of using the phrases *adopted people* and *the adopted* instead of *adopted children*.

25. The NAIC cites K. S. Stolley, "Statistics on Adoption in the United States," *The Future of Children: Adoption* 3 (1993): 26–42. Carp (*Family Matters*, 1, 239) quotes an estimate that 2 to 4 percent of the population (5 to 10 million people) are adoptees and cites a figure for 1990 of 118,779 domestic adoptions, of which he implies about half are between biologically related family members. His most specific figures come from the National Committee for Adoption.

26. Henry Louis Gates, *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 175. On transcultural adoption, see Drucilla Cornell, "Reimag-

ining Adoption and Family Law," in *Mother Troubles: Rethinking Contemporary Maternal Dilemmas*, ed. Julia E. Hanigsberg and Sara Ruddick (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 213–15. Imagery of adoption is also used of immigrants in Victorian England. See Edward Augustus Freeman, "Race and Language," *Contemporary Review* 29 (1877):711–41, reprinted in *Images of Race*, ed. Michael D. Biddiss (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 214–35.

27. Many people currently writing about adoption in literature have identified themselves as adoptees or adoptive parents; some have identified themselves as not personally involved. No scholar on this topic has identified herself (or himself) as a birth parent. Perhaps the stigma is still greater for birth parents; perhaps their socioeconomic position (especially if they are women) is lower on the average and they are less likely to be in a position to do academic writing; perhaps the topic is either too distant from them or too painful to be dealt with academically. Experiences of birth parents are represented in *A Ghost at Heart's Edge* and *The Adoption Reader* and analyzed in Modell, *Kinship with Strangers*; Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*; and Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption* (Wellington, N.Z.: Bridget Williams, 1991). See also recent personal narratives such as Carol Schaefer, *The Other Mother: A Woman's Love for the Child She Gave Up for Adoption* (New York: Soho, 1991); Jan Waldron, *Giving Away Simone* (New York: Times, 1995); *Out of the Shadows: Birthfather Stories*, ed. Mary Martin Mason (Edina, Minn.: O. J. Howard, 1995); and Margaret Moorman, *Waiting to Forget* (New York: Norton, 1996).

28. This issue is discussed by H. David Kirk in *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health* (New York: Free, 1964), as well as by Wegar (*Adoption, Identity, and Kinship*), who uses the theories of Kirk and those Martha Minow develops in *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion, and American Law* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

29. However, in classical Greece, where legal adoption was usually of adults, only men could adopt, and Shakespeare's plays focus more on men's feelings about lost and found children than on women's. Perhaps one of the reasons that George Eliot entered the literary canon earlier than most women writers is that she dealt with such issues as adoption with regard to men as much as with regard to women.

30. The newer Bastard Nation (founded in 1997) has attracted more male adoptees.

31. Wegar notes (*Adoption, Identity, and Kinship*, 63): "Adoptees who do search are predominantly white, middle-class females in early adulthood. . . . the overwhelming majority initiate the search for the biological mother." Wegar also emphasizes the overwhelming predominance of women among the biological parents who search. It is possible that there are more female adoptees than male in the United States, since adoptive parents often express preference for girls, and since in some of the cultures from which parents adopt, girls are more likely to be relinquished than boys.

32. Modell, *Kinship with Strangers*, 229 (emphasis Modell's), 238.

33. Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking* (1989; reprint, New York: Ballantine, 1990), 51. Ruddick defines a mother as "a person who takes on responsibility for children's lives and for whom providing child care is a significant part of her or his working life" (40). Among the factors that contribute to her distinction of mothers from "birthgivers" (the term she uses instead of *birth mothers*, perhaps partly to emphasize that giving birth is a phase of experience also for those who will keep their children) is a desire to "empower birthing women while not detracting from the work of adoptive mothers" (49). Ruddick admits (40) that her definition, which includes males who are primary caretakers, is "somewhat

eccentric;" it is aimed at identifying a "distinctive thinking" involved in mothering. See also Mary Lyndon Shanley, "De-essentializing Family Ties: Feminist Reflections on Transracial and Open Adoption," paper delivered at NOMOS, Sept. 2, 1999. Thanks to Iris Young for a copy of this paper.

34. See my anthology *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) and my *Engaging with Shakespeare* (1994; reprint, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1998) for discussion of many women writers' claiming of Shakespeare as a literary ancestor.

35. See, for example, Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity, Identity, and Difference," *Radical America* 23, no. 4 (1989): 19. I thank Margot Backus for pointing me to this essay. Gates's interpretation in *Loose Canons* of black tradition and community as a story of "elective affinities, unburdened by an ideology of descent" (151) or "blood" (127) or "ancestral purity" (xvi) could provide another analogy for adoptees' connections with either their hereditary or their adoptive line. See also Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).