

Three Adoption and Shakespearean Families: Nature, Nurture, and Resemblance

In the airplane on the way to Wisconsin to meet my birth mother, I thought, “This is it—*the* recognition scene.” I had spent years writing a dissertation focusing on recognition scenes in Shakespeare, in many of which characters were reunited with long-separated relatives they thought they would never see again. In those plays, family members usually mirrored each other closely. But in my own life the issue was how to have a close personal connection to someone with whom it seemed I had nothing in common except the nine months of her pregnancy, the first month of my life, and—in some unknown way—half of my heredity.

I already knew from our correspondence that Geraldine and I did not look very similar and did not share interests. Meeting her, I could find no more resemblance, no mirroring in our gestures. According to most of the stories of reunions of adoptees and birth parents I knew, in literature, in autobiographies, and in personal conversations, this is not the way it was supposed to be.

But she was glad to see me. She had bravely told her family about me, and she wanted to welcome me into that family. It was a large one, with seven sons, the five who no longer lived at home mostly still in state. I had often wished for a larger family, but having grown up as an only child, I had little idea of how to deal with one. One of her sons came home to meet me, but the evening I met several others of my half-brothers, they seemed more interested in watching their usual television than in me, and I was so disappointed that I had no idea of how to get their attention. These were not, as in a myth, my lost people. They were a challenge, people I would—from my previous everyday life—be

unlikely to get close to, who had suddenly been transformed into relatives.

When I was alone with Geraldine at other times, I listened eagerly to the story of her life. There wasn't much of my thirty-three years that I could tell her. She (perhaps like her sons) didn't know how to ask, and I didn't know what I could tell her considering the restrictions of her own horizon and mine. Feminism, the main focus of my academic, personal, and political life at the time, was something she couldn't understand and was mostly against. She hadn't gone to college. She didn't read much except the Bible, and she read it as an evangelical fundamentalist with right-wing political views. I, on the other hand, was a left-wing Catholic. I had had conflicts with my adoptive mother, but after this experience, if I were to call anyone my "real mother," it would be Dorothy and not Geraldine.

My dominant impression of Geraldine was that she was tired. This may have been the inevitable result of raising seven sons in poverty in a family that believed that certain things were only women's work, or it may have been partly a constitutional lack of energy—one ominous similarity, since I am not the most energetic person myself. Either way, her life seemed confined and sad, and I wondered if I could help. Her sons and daughters-in-law seemed not to pay her enough attention. She needed friends and activities. She sat around the house too much, not even taking a walk. But improving her life much was impossible for me to do from a distance, with no one local or in her family to reinforce any of my suggestions or ideas. Or perhaps they had made some of the same suggestions without effect. I did give her a copy of *The Book of Hope*, a self-help book on dealing with depression. She found it shocking because it suggested self-assertion rather than prayer.

At first we corresponded a lot, and tried to deal with our different views in the letters. Now we correspond less, though we send cards and occasionally talk on the phone. For a long time I would spend a few days there, with my daughter, every other year. I would take Geraldine for a shopping trip and a drive to see some scenery outside the nursing home walls. Once my husband came instead of my daughter. Recently I have been taking more frequent and shorter trips by myself.

Seeing her is never as intense as was my first conversation about being raised by nonbiological parents. That conversation took place before I met Geraldine, with someone who shared a similar experience and had met his birth mother. It seems that I felt the shared story—

which was also rather different from that in Shakespeare's romances—more than the shared biology, as if the taboo against talking about being adopted was more basic than the prohibition on reunion. I maintain contact with Geraldine not just because of the hereditary link, however, but because of the relationship we have made during the more than twenty-five years since my first visit.

Near the end of his career, Shakespeare wrote three plays that conclude with the reunion of parents with grown children separated from them when very young. He had used a similar plot in one of his first plays, *The Comedy of Errors*. But three of his late plays, often called romances, muse with greater depth on the situation of a child who is born into one family and grows up in another. Shakespeare seems to have been fascinated by hereditary parent-child resemblance—or at any rate, many of his characters are fascinated, and many of their lines about this theme are his additions to his sources for the plays. These three plays, *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, and *Winter's Tale*, are full of comments about the contrast between the transplanted child and her or his surroundings, and the genetic similarity revealed when she or he meets hereditary family. This was not the outcome of my reunion.

How different my story is from the plots of Shakespeare's romances, plays that appealed so much to my wish for reunion and produced visions of impossible harmony. What were the beliefs about family embedded in these plays? What were the contexts for those beliefs in Shakespeare's society? Is the family in these plays only determined by heredity, or is value given to adoptive parenthood?

In many of Shakespeare's plays, parents and children are heart-breakingly alienated from one another, in spite of a common heredity. As Miranda points out in *The Tempest*, another one of the late romances, "Good wombs have borne bad sons."¹ However, the plays I consider here present a mythology of blood as love and as identity (with the suggestion, sometimes, of "being identical to"). In the happy endings of both *Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*, a daughter miraculously re-creates her mother before her father's eyes, and even more miraculously, the mother returns in her own right in the final reunion. In *Cymbeline*, a sister and her brothers, separated in childhood, are mysteriously drawn to each other when they meet.

The mythology of blood in these plots has sometimes been taken for granted. Isn't the sense of similarity and unity inevitable in reunions of

long-separated family members? Sometimes it occurs, but those of us who have experienced reunions differently know that often it doesn't. Nevertheless, the mythology of blood is not the only element in the family dynamics of these plays. All of them present nurturing by foster parents, and it could even be argued that all of them also present family as a construction. The plots always define the birth parents as the real parents, and some foster parents in two of the plays are murderous, but the plays all present alternative images of foster parents as actively benevolent.²

"Shakespeare's art," wrote the critic C. L. Barber, "is distinguished by the intensity of its investment in the human family, and especially in the continuity of the family across generations."³ The romances restore that generational continuity in their family reunions, but in them and in other plays by Shakespeare, the investment in the family is so great that we can sometimes see adoption also creating, after discontinuity, another kind of continuity. As Angela Carter writes in *Wise Children*, a novel full of parodies of Shakespearean family plots, "If human beings don't have a family of their own, they will invent one."⁴

A belief in "blood" was part of the Renaissance worldview, even though there were conflicting views about how heredity worked. The writings of Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen, with their differing views of "seeds" and "blood," were still influential.⁵ But early modern people also knew that, on the one hand, children were often very different from their parents, and, on the other hand, good or bad nurture had a significant impact on how children developed.⁶ Nurture was often discussed with regard not only to teachers but also to wet nurses (who were thought to transmit moral qualities very literally with their milk) and teachers, and the concept is clearly relevant to the foster parents of these plays.⁷ There was no formal legal procedure for adoption in this period; the terms *foster* and *adoptive* could be used interchangeably.

The relative benevolence of the foster parents in comparison to the biological parents increases from the first of these plays to the third. *Pericles*, written first, poses evil foster parents against good biological parents. Thinking his wife Thaisa is dead, Pericles gives the newborn Marina to his friends Cleon and Dionyza to raise, emphasizing that they should educate her according to her noble rank. Because she outshines their daughter in weaving, sewing, and singing, Dionyza plots Marina's murder, and only the chance kidnapping of pirates saves her—to be sold to a brothel. She is skillful enough to escape the brothel by her tal-

ents at sewing, singing, and persuading to chastity, and at the end of the play is reunited first with her father and finally with her mother, who turns out to be still alive in a temple of Diana.

Cleon and Dionyza clearly exemplify evil foster parents—although the term *parent* or *foster parent* is never used in the play to name the relation they have to Marina. The key word is *nurse*. Pericles plans to leave his daughter “at careful nursing” (3.1.80); when Dionyza thinks about how she will tell Pericles that his daughter is (as she thinks) dead, she says, “Nurses are not the fates, / To foster it, not ever to preserve” (4.3.14–15). This usage both connects the couple to the common practice of wet-nursing and points up their opposition to Marina’s good foster parent—her nurse Lychorida.⁸ The murder plot occurs after Lychorida’s death; Dionyza tries to gain Marina’s confidence by saying, “Have you a nurse of me” (4.1.25).

Lychorida is a shadowy figure who appears only in the scene where Marina is an infant, but she is credited with passing on to Marina the story of her birth, and an admirable image of her father’s courage and patience.

My father, as nurse says, did never fear,
But cried, “Good seamen!” to the sailors,
Galling his kingly hands, hailing ropes;
And clasping to the mast, endured a sea
That almost broke the deck.

(4.1.55–59)

Furthermore, Lychorida’s importance in transmitting memories is explicitly honored when Marina, unknowingly reunited with Pericles, says that her knowledge of her mother’s ancestry and death is “As my good nurse Lychorida hath oft / Delivered weeping” (5.1.164–65).

The nurse’s repetition of memories about Marina’s parents and ancestry is in significant contrast to earlier versions of the Pericles story. In the ninth-century *Apollonius of Tyre*, it is only when the nurse is dying that she tells Marina’s prototype her ancestry: the girl exclaims, “If any such thing had happened to me before you revealed this to me, I should have been absolutely ignorant of my ancestry and birth.”⁹ In Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1554), Shakespeare’s main source, there is no reference to what the nurse says about parentage, but in Twine’s *The*

Patterne of Painefull Adventures (1594), which Shakespeare also used, and in George Wilkins's *The Painful Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre* (1608), probably a novelized version of Shakespeare's play, the girl thinks of the murderous surrogates as her parents, as in the ninth-century version, until the nurse, at the point of death, enlightens her.¹⁰ Shakespeare's alteration not only gives more emphasis to the nurse as a purposeful bearer of family memory but also means that Marina knows her ancestry during her life and does not have to undergo the revision of identity necessary on discovering that people she thought of as her parents are not simply foster parents but also intended murderers.¹¹

Heredity is dominant over environment in *Pericles*, but environment is not as weak an influence as generalizations sometimes assume. Not only is the nurse's image of Marina's parents important, but also nurture and nature must combine to produce Marina's superlative musical skills: Cleon teaches her, but when her talents far surpass those of his daughter, we might remember that Thaisa's father Simonides had, after all, called Pericles "music's master" (2.5.30) and said, after hearing him, "my ears were never better fed / With such delightful pleasing harmony" (27–28).¹² We might read the supremacy of nature over nurture in the way Marina's goodness escapes the bad influence of Cleon and Dionyza, as well as in the way she shows the courage and patience that the nurse has told her her father exemplified, but we could also credit Lychorida's influence. None of these points is explicitly made—the spectators can analyze Marina's virtues and talents however they wish.

Perhaps partly because the one good foster parent in this play, Lychorida, has such a tenuous presence, *Pericles'* focus on the father-daughter reunion is particularly intense. This long scene involves a complicated tension between recognition and lack of recognition, which puts the audience at the edge of their seats waiting for signs of the characters' discoveries. Like the early recognition scenes in Greek tragedy, this one contains a prolonged questioning that heightens emotions as it suspends the characters in time. When Pericles' ship comes to Mytilene, where Marina, who he thinks dead, is living, she is sent for simply as a gifted singer with no knowledge of their relationship, in the hope that she will cheer him up from his paralyzing melancholy. The dejected Pericles, unresponsive to anyone else, resists speaking to her at first—perhaps even pushes her away—then begins to talk to her slowly with incoherent echoes of her words. After a few more questions he says,

My dearest wife was like this maid, and such a one
 My daughter might have been. My queen's square brows;
 Her stature to an inch; as wandlike straight;
 As silver-voiced; her eyes as jewel-like
 And cas'd as richly.

(5.I.II0-14)

But if he does guess who she is, he does not acknowledge it. Instead, he asks questions about her origin and education, to which she replies enigmatically. Yet even when she says, "My name is Marina" (145), reveals that she was born at sea, and names her dead nurse Lychorida, he still cannot acknowledge that she is really his daughter.

At various places in this long dialogue, he wonders if she is flesh and blood, or if this is a dream; and when she finally identifies herself as daughter to King Pericles, he does not respond directly to her until he has consulted with his friend Helicanus; then finally, almost one hundred lines after the first hint that he recognizes her, he welcomes her as "Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget" (5.I.200), and even after that wants confirmation about her mother's name. For the audience, his caution dramatizes his melancholy, but also the importance of her return to him. As Pericles says, "Truth can never be confirm'd enough" (206). The spectators know that his sense of her similarity to his lost wife is indeed a true guide to her identity—but the plot, in a sense, stops, to maintain suspense about whether he will trust this partial recognition and whether the questions that he asks will lead him to security about it.

No line in this scene gives Marina's reaction to her discovery that Pericles is her father, or to her reunion with him. This scene is written to make us imagine his point of view much more than hers; critics seldom discuss the question of when she recognizes him. Terence Cave argues that she "believes that she is healing a disturbed mind, so that his agitation as the truth gradually sinks in seems to her only a symptom of that disturbance."¹³ This is the most likely interpretation, since she has not seen him since her infancy, and she asks him his name after he greets her as his daughter.

The imagery of the final scene makes the impossible suggestion that all the points of view could merge. The characters all speak of melting into each other. First Pericles imagines disappearing into Thaisa, then he imagines her disappearing into him, then Marina speaks of merging

back into Thaisa, reversing Lychorida's early description of her as "this piece / Of your dead queen" (3.1.17-18):

PERICLES: [to the gods] You shall do well
 That on the touching of her lips I may
 Melt and no more be seen. O come, be buried
 A second time within these arms! [They embrace.]
 MARINA My heart
 Leaps to be gone into my mother's bosom.

(5.3.42-46)

These images of death and disappearance in reunion reenact and reverse the earlier apparent deaths of Thaisa and Marina.¹⁴

This play began with a scene in which Pericles, in his first quest for a bride, discovered that the princess he sought was living in incest with her father; the ending transforms this malignant mingling of identities in the family to a benign version. Physical ties are emphasized—flesh of flesh, heart and bosom, lips and arms. At the same time, the ending occurs in the temple of Diana: both Marina and Thaisa are emphatically chaste, and the night oblations that Pericles promises to Diana in thanksgiving sound to at least one critic, Janet Adelman, like a disturbing attempt to erase sexuality from the reunited family.¹⁵ Marina's ancestry is now confirmed as noble, and accordingly she is married to Lysimachus, who was impressed with her purity when they met in the brothel, but little emotional weight is given to their relationship. The heart of the play is with the parent-child bond, emphasized as a bond of flesh and blood—and yet the parents and their daughter Marina are to be separated again at the end, when she and Lysimachus are to rule in Tyre while Pericles and Thaisa are to go to her family home in Pentapolis. However joyful parent-child reunion is, however long delayed, in this play it is still fragile: none of the other romances of family reunion is so emphatic that the family is again separated at the end. Perhaps this is another way to measure the strength of the threat of incest in *Pericles*.

In *Cymbeline*, the distribution of good and evil between biological and surrogate parents is somewhat more ambiguous than in *Pericles*. Imogen has a wicked new stepmother, who begins by denying that she is "After the slander of most stepmothers, / Evil-ey'd unto you" (1.1.71-72). But is *Cymbeline*, Imogen's father, good or bad as a parent?

He has brought up the orphaned and admirable Posthumus in his household, but upon Posthumus's marriage to Imogen, and his own to his new wife, Cymbeline banishes him and rages at his daughter. Is Belarius, who has been raising Cymbeline's sons (Imogen's brothers) as his own in the pastoral setting of Wales, good or bad as a foster parent? Belarius criticizes the insincerity of the court world, and gives the boys training in religion and morality. But he is a kidnapper. On the other hand, his kidnapping is in retribution for Cymbeline's injustice to him, and in general he seems morally superior to Cymbeline in spite of the kidnapping. When he says that the boys "take" him for "natural father" (3.3.107), there is also a pun on the way he is raising them with the virtuous discipline of living in nature. At the end the wicked queen dies, Belarius is reconciled to Cymbeline, and his sons return to him, and Posthumus, who has, in disguise, fought bravely on the king's side, is reconciled both to Cymbeline and to Imogen, whom (in a familiar Shakespearean motif) he had planned to kill because he suspected her—without cause—of adultery.

Cymbeline as a play goes in for excess. It multiplies to three the one "adoption" in a source, *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, where a foundling brought up at court and unhappily in love with the princess discovers that his father is a banished, but noble, hermit.¹⁶ Posthumus, Guiderius, and Arviragus are all presented as virtuous by both heredity and nurture. In the first scene we learn both of Posthumus's noble and heroic deceased father and of Cymbeline's breeding and education of the highly teachable orphan.

Characters are more emphatic about the power of heredity here than in *Pericles*. Belarius believes that his boys' true identity appears in their ambition and desire to fight. "How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature! . . . their thoughts do hit / The roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them / In simple and low things to prince it much / Beyond the trick of others" (3.3.79, 83–86). As Susan Baker has noted, however, the fact that Belarius himself knows they are princes can be seen as influencing his upbringing of them, and so one can argue that it is he who so prompts them, not nature—just as one could argue that Lychorida's image of Pericles' courage is more important in influencing Marina's courage than her heredity. But Baker with this reading is countering scores of critics who emphasize "blood."¹⁷

Posthumus, Guiderius, and Arviragus are praised in terms of their heredity by male characters, and the emphasis falls heavily on the male

side of their ancestry. After nine lines about his father, all we hear of Posthumus's mother is this: "his gentle lady, / Big of this gentleman our theme, deceas'd / As he was born" (1.1.38–40). Belarius never mentions the mother from whom he kidnapped his boys; she enters the play only in Imogen's recollection—"This diamond was my mother's" (1.1.113)—as she gives it to Posthumus. Apart from this one example, when women figure in the discourse of heredity either as speaker or as subject, the effect is usually negative, until the last two scenes of the play. When the queen, for example, urges Cymbeline to refuse tribute to Rome by recalling his ancestor kings and their defeat of Caesar, the argument is presented as dubious. The one explicit counterexample to the principle of hereditary resemblance is the relation between the current queen and the son she brings to her marriage and wants to wed to Imogen. The Second Lord muses about the contrast: "a woman that / Bears all down with her brain, and this her son / Cannot take two from twenty" (2.1.53–55). There are strong suggestions that women's hereditary influence is either lacking or bad.

These suggestions are developed further—and perhaps finally exorcized—in Posthumus's odyssey away from and back to belief in his ancestry. When Posthumus loses faith in Imogen, he loses faith in his mother and in his connection to "that most venerable man, which I / did call my father" (2.5.3–4) and believes he is a bastard, and rails against what he calls "the woman's part in me" (20). However, when he repents of his plot against his wife—remarkably (for the time) converting her adultery, which he still thinks happened, into "wrying but a little" (5.1.5)—he regains faith in his family and prays, "Gods, put the strength o' th' Leonati in me!" (31). After his heroic performance in battle, his deceased family appears to him in a dream vision praying to Jupiter on his behalf. His mother finally appears and speaks about his painful birth. His father, confirming the restoration of Posthumus's heredity, says, "Great nature, like his ancestry, / Molded the stuff so fair, / That he deserv'd the praise o'th'world, / As great Sicilius' heir" (5.4.48–51). As Meredith Skura has pointed out, "Posthumus cannot find his parents in the flesh; he must find the idea of his parents . . . he must make what he can of the past, recreate his family in his dreams."¹⁸

A different kind of temporary alienation from womanhood takes place in the other plot that dramatizes the force of blood connections, Imogen's trip in masculine disguise to Wales—magnet for all the characters since it is pastoral and a port for travelers from Rome and (in

Shakespeare's own time) the titular land of the crown prince, who was invested in 1610, probably within a year of the play's first performance.¹⁹ Her kidnapped brothers have not seen her since very early childhood, but all three at once feel a strong, though unclear, connection. Guiderius says that if Fidele (Imogen's name in her boy's disguise) were a woman, he would woo her in marriage; Arviragus says, "I'll love him as my brother" (3.6.72), and Imogen, guessing better than the others, says to herself, "Would it had been so, that they / Had been my father's sons!" (76-77). In their next scene, when Imogen/Fidele is mysteriously ill, both boys at once compare their love for "him" with their love for their father (Belarius), and Arviragus even says, "The bier at door, / And a demand who is't shall die, I'd say, / 'My father, not this youth'" (4.2.22-24).

Cymbeline's last scene is extravagantly full of many different kinds of partial, incomplete recognitions leading up to the very end. As Ann Thompson writes, this play allows "the audience to savour the recognitions and reversals at more than naturalistic length. . . . The pleasure we take . . . depends on our anticipation of the characters' pleasure."²⁰ But as she notes, precisely because there are so many reunions and recognitions in this scene, *Cymbeline's* ending is in many ways funny. No matter how forceful the sense of some connection with another, characters often fail to recognize exactly what that connection is. There are so many characters to follow that the effect, opposite to that in *Pericles*, may be somewhat distancing for the audience, who know the connections the characters, one after another, are stumbling toward.

Cymbeline himself is slow to recognize the children who have been separated from him; but he does have the excuse that his sons have been raised without knowledge of him and his daughter is in boy's disguise. After his sons, in their own figurative disguise as Welsh gentlemen, join his warriors, and bravely save his Britons from defeat by the Romans; he hails them as "Preservers of my throne" (5.5.2) and creates them "knights o' th' battle . . . Companions to our person" (20-21). Introduced to Imogen in her disguise by the Roman she has been serving as Fidele, he says, "I have surely seen him; / His favor is familiar to me. Boy, / Thou hast looked thyself into my grace / And art mine own" (93-96). Note the etymological connection of "familiar" with family as the play provides another example of mysterious affinity stemming from "blood."

However, this affinity does not by itself dispel confusion. Although

Belarius and Arviragus do recognize the disguised boy Fidele as the same Fidele they thought was dead, they and their father don't recognize this page as Imogen until other characters guide them. The first to recognize Fidele as Imogen is not a relative but her servant Pisanio, who is, after all, the one who gave her the disguise to wear in the first place. After Posthumus strikes her, thinking she is an unrelated boy intruding on his grief for Imogen, whose attempted murder he is loudly repenting, Pisanio finally names her, and the revelation proceeds. Belarius eventually confesses his kidnapping to Cymbeline. When he says, "First pay me for the nursing of thy sons" (5.5.324), he alludes to the practice, discussed in John Boswell's chapter on Roman law in *The Kindness of Strangers*, of requiring the father of an exposed child to pay the expenses of the parents who had raised the child before returning him to the original family.²¹ To prove that they are really the king's sons, he calls on a token such as is found in many classical recognition stories. Arviragus, he says, was wrapped in a "most curious mantle, wrought by th' hand / Of his queen mother" (363-64)—finally mentioning that woman. Cymbeline remembers, "Guiderius had / Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star" (365-66), and Belarius—the adoptive parent again paying reverence to nature—says, "This is he, / Who hath upon him still that natural stamp. / It was wise nature's end in the donation / To be his evidence now" (367-70). Imogen is so delighted to find that the boys she already loves are her brothers by birth that when she is reminded that Guiderius will now inherit the throne she might have expected—"Thou hast lost by this a kingdom"—she replies, "No, my lord, / I have got two worlds by 't" (5.5.374-76). (These lines, among the few passages in this scene that were never cut,²² have a close analogy in *Jane Eyre*, when Jane is much more happy to discover that the Rivers family are her cousins than she is to inherit money, and divides her inheritance among them. The Victorian audience's delight in Imogen and in these lines makes it quite likely that Charlotte Brontë knew them.)

Nevertheless, relations of adoption are given some tribute in the conclusion: Belarius's wrong in kidnapping the children is easily forgiven; Cymbeline says to him, "Thou art my brother" (401), and Imogen echoes, "You are my father too" (402). Blood relations are important in this play, but, as in *Pericles*, the blood tie does not lead to clear recognition without additional evidence, and adoptive relations are not erased.

The Winter's Tale is ambivalent about the adoptive father, referred

to only as “Shepherd,” in a different way than *Cymbeline* is. It is even more ambivalent about the birth father, Leontes, who, unlike any other father in the romances, threatens his child with death and commands her to be abandoned, because of his suspicion about her parentage. When the shepherd enters the play, he is highly preferable to King Leontes. Unlike his counterpart in the source, Greene’s *Pandosto*, the shepherd at once decides to take up the abandoned babe, Perdita, even before he knows that gold has been left with her. For a while, as Carol Neely notes, he seems admirable in his lack of possessiveness of his children, including his acceptance of Perdita’s teenage sexuality as he encourages her romance with Prince Florizel, disguised as a shepherd but obviously high-born.²³ His pastoral world seems, emotionally, a better environment for child rearing than the cold and suspicious world of the court, and this helps to present his nurturing of Perdita, even more clearly than Belarius’s raising the boys, as an act of nature as well as of adoption. (This alliance of adoptive nurturing with nature will be developed more emphatically by George Eliot in *Silas Marner*, as a later chapter will show.)

The shepherd’s evocation of his dead wife, Perdita’s adoptive mother, shows an appreciation of her energy and sociability remarkable both because of Leontes’ suspicion of his own wife’s friendliness to others and because of the scantiness of the recollections of Euriphile, Belarius’s deceased wife and the boys’ past foster mother, in *Cymbeline*. Clearly there is more for a mother to do in this social pastoral than in the wild mountains of Wales:

When my old wife liv’d, upon
 This day, she was both pantler, butler, cook,
 Both dame and servant, welcom’d all, serv’d all;
 Would sing her song and dance her turn; now here,
 At upper end o’ th’ table, now i’ th’ middle;
 On his shoulder, and his; her face o’ fire
 With labor, and the thing she took to quench it
 She would to each one sip.

(4.4.55–62)

This figure is far from the wicked stepmother; nevertheless, the shepherd evokes her explicitly only as a hostess, and Perdita does not follow him in citing this adoptive mother as a precedent for her behavior.

Unlike Desdemona, who speaks of doing “such duty as my mother show’d” (1.3.188) she says, “It is my father’s will I should take on me / The hostess-ship o’ th’ day” (4.4.71–72).

Thus, imaginatively the play makes still tenuous the role of the shepherd’s wife in nurturing Perdita; Hermione’s place is to be left unfilled until the very end. And the shepherd’s benevolence to Perdita disappears when he sees that Polixenes, Florizel’s father and the old friend whom Leontes mistakenly accused of adultery with his wife, is angry about the apparently cross-class betrothal. He calls Perdita a “cursed wretch” (4.4.458)—perhaps a relic of the myth of the curse on adoption, found in *Oedipus*—and plans to protect himself by telling him that Perdita is, as his son says, none of his “flesh and blood” (4.4.692). He shows Polixenes the birth tokens he found with Perdita, and this fear-motivated virtual disowning helps bring about the happy ending, as the shepherd, his son, Polixenes, and, in a different boat, Florizel and Perdita, all meet at Leontes’ court, and Leontes and Perdita are reunited.

Critics have seldom noted that in the report of the recognition, Leontes “thanks the old shepherd, which stands by like a weather-bitten conduit of many kings’ reigns” (5.2.55–57), and that, after this depersonalizing image, there is, nevertheless, a brief dialogue between the shepherd and his son after this scene, suggesting utopian possibilities of an extended cross-class family of biological and adoptive parents: the son says, “the King’s son took me by the hand, and call’d me brother; and then the two kings call’d my father brother; and then the Prince my brother and the Princess my sister called my father father; and so we wept” (5.2.141–45). But clearly Perdita has been restored to Leontes as *his* daughter, and in the next scene, as he discovers that his wife is still alive, Perdita’s other family is lost from sight. The characterization of the old shepherd, at this point, is designed to reduce interest in him, and to focus attention instead on the reunion of Leontes, Hermione, and Perdita. Leontes is regenerated and his family reconstituted; when Hermione asks her daughter, “Where hast thou been preserv’d? Where liv’d?” (5.3.124), the questions are generally taken as a sign of her love, but they can also be taken as questions whose answers would bring several different characters into the charmed circle of the family.

Descriptions of Perdita by observers often hint at the influence of heredity by suggesting that she is superior to her surroundings:

Florizel's father, himself a king in disguise, says, "Nothing she does or seems / But smacks of something greater than herself, / Too noble for this place" (4.4.157–59), and Florizel himself tells his father's friend Camillo, "She's as forward of her breeding as / She is i' th' rear 'our birth" (4.4.581–82). Although in other plays of Shakespeare it is clear that aristocratic heredity does not inevitably produce intelligence or moral nobility, the standard reading of this scene stresses influence of Perdita's heredity over her environment. For Shakespeare's audience, the argument goes, the royalty of this young woman emerges though she thinks she is a commoner. There are particularly complex moments when Perdita consciously plays a royal role (first, queen of the harvest, later, princess of Libya), and the audience knows that this role corresponds to her true rank. However, the play allows a more open reading of adoptee and class identity; in Shakespeare's time, Perdita was played by a commoner boy, who was able to imitate the gestures that suggested aristocracy as well as femininity. Furthermore, Baker has pointed out that the shepherd knows about her aristocratic birth, because of the clothes and gold left with her, and though he has not told her, might be imagined as having influenced her by having higher expectations of her.²⁴ (A partly environmental reading of the superiority of an adoptee to her surroundings will be developed by the narrator in *Silas Marner*, as I will discuss in another chapter.)

Many other speeches in *Winter's Tale* explicitly emphasize heredity in commenting on physical resemblance—and while the issue of marital fidelity is in *Pandosto*, this emphasis on resemblance is not.²⁵ After Leontes is first reunited with Perdita, but before he knows that Perdita is his daughter, he says that he thought of Hermione, "Even in these looks I made [admiring Perdita]" (5.1.228). When the old shepherd has produced the tokens he found with the child, observers who describe the achieved certainty that the lost daughter has been found stress "the majesty of the creature in resemblance of the mother" (5.2.36–37). In several other comments, Leontes makes father-child physical resemblance the test of a mother's fidelity to her husband. At the beginning, he is worried about whether his son looks enough like him to prove Hermione's faithfulness ("They say we are / Almost as like as eggs. Women say so, / That will say anything" [1.2.129–31]). He greets Florizel for the first time by saying, "Your mother was most true to wedlock, Prince, / For she did print your royal father off, / Conceiving you" (5.1.124–26).

A textual emphasis on physical similarity has a complicated effect in the theater; Anne Barton remarked of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* that it would be an extremely rare theater company that would have two characters as similar as Viola and Sebastian are supposed to be; so, in many cases of family resemblance in these plays, the play's language is in tension with the stage picture in which the actors are not really identical, and given this problem, it is interesting that Shakespeare sometimes added such emphasis to his source.²⁶ Perhaps the issue is analogous to the issue of how the Elizabethan audience saw boy actors as female characters: most of the time most of them focused on the female character, but for some of them most of the time and most of them some of the time (cued by textual self-consciousness) awareness of the actor's sex might surface occasionally. The plays are providing much material today for reflections on gender as a construction; they may also provide some material for reflections on family relationships as a construction as well. The audience, guided by the dialogue and the plot, will want Marina to look like Thaisa, and Perdita to look like Hermione, and will probably imagine that they look similar, if this is at all possible. Sometimes these mothers and daughters are doubled in performance, which means that the experience of the hereditary resemblance in the reunion scene is less of an imaginative construction; but then the audience would still have to use its imagination about the other figure who is brought into the play to perform the mother in middle age.

One moment in *The Winter's Tale* particularly exemplifies the ideology of resemblance as a sign of family relationship: the moment when Paulina enumerates all the details in the baby girl's face that are like Leontes' to prove Hermione's faithfulness. When Paulina refers to the baby as having "the trick of 's frown, his forehead, nay, the valley, / The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles, / The very mold and frame of hand, nail, finger" (2.3.101-3), she is describing details that the audience must find impossible to see; indeed, most likely the baby would have been "played" by a doll, not a live baby at all. This passage briefly pictures Leontes as himself an infant (there is no other passage I know of in Shakespeare where the "pretty dimples" of an adult male are mentioned); more significantly here, it evokes the persistent tendency to *look for* details of resemblance between family members, and to imagine them into existence, especially in relation to babies. Clearly it is part of a still dominant ideology that babies are supposed to look like someone else in the family, and if that resemblance is not obvious,

it will be imagined. In the theater, the question of what members of the audience believe about the baby's similarity to Leontes could be like the question of whether they believe the idealistic Gonzalo or the villainous Antonio about the island in *The Tempest*. Paulina may be credible in her description to the extent that she seems to be morally reliable in general; yet already in Jacobean times it must have been obvious that even if the baby was not as identical to Leontes as she claimed, it would not necessarily have meant that Leontes did not beget it. Some might well consider any exaggeration on Paulina's part justifiable as an attempt to save the baby and Hermione from Leontes' rage. This would then suggest how the desire to preserve a child—not just by confirming its paternity, as here, but also by flattering parents' frequent desire to see themselves re-created—may generate the ability to imagine resemblances between child and parents. Ultimately Leontes' recognition of Perdita as his daughter takes place offstage, and the play subordinates the question of whether Perdita looks like him; the emphasis on her resemblance to her mother, which has nothing to do with fidelity in marriage, testifies to the fact that Leontes has regained his belief in Hermione.

The recognition scenes of these plays in general tend to develop the perspective of the genetic fathers much more than the perspective of any one else in the large family constellation. We see the anxieties of Pericles and Leontes, and we hear their joys in much more intense language than their children's. There is no attention to how Perdita, Guiderius, and Arviragus feel about discovering a different set of parents, or how they come to terms with those they earlier thought of as their only parents. (In his rewritten last act of *Cymbeline*, George Bernard Shaw imagines that Guiderius would say, "We three are fullgrown men and perfect strangers. / Can I change fathers as I'd change my shirt?" and then refuse to inherit the throne.)²⁷ Nor are they much concerned with the feelings of the foster parents, though the foster fathers receive somewhat more attention than the foster mothers. With the exception of the shepherd's wife and Euriphile (significantly both deceased), foster mothers are characterized in a way congruent with the general cultural prejudice against stepmothers.²⁸ And although birth mothers are recovered in two of these plays, the final reunion is clearly seen from their husbands' points of view, not theirs.

Many of Shakespeare's plays can be discussed with reference to an absent mother. Romance is the genre in which he gives mothers, com-

paratively, the most attention, and an idealized image of motherhood is evoked most vividly in the return of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*.²⁹ Her silence to Leontes may be, as Gail Paster suggests, a sign of her diminishment by patriarchal discipline (she would be justified in reproaching him, as she does at the beginning of the play for lesser faults); yet in her words of affection and attention to Perdita, suggesting that it is through concern for her daughter alone she has preserved herself, she is the mother that any separated daughter would want.³⁰ The fact that Hermione speaks only to Perdita, and indeed says that it was because of hope to see her that she remained alive, appeals to the fantasy that any child might have, that it was she her mother loved best after all. When she asks, "Where hast thou been preserv'd? Where liv'd?" (5.3.124), she is, in a sense, the perfect mother, because she wants to know about the other family without criticizing them, giving her daughter room to assimilate the complexity of her experience.

The idealized birth mothers Hermione and Thaisa contrast sharply to the evil foster mothers, Dionyza and Cymbeline's nameless queen. While Stephen Collins relates the negative view of stepmothers in the Renaissance to a general misogyny, these plays show that misogyny could be part of a polarized view of women.³¹ Hermione and Thaisa, in their return, are as idealized as a dead or absent mother is likely to be by a child who lives with an unsatisfactory substitute. And indeed they are accompanied in the romances by a third idealized birth mother, appearing only in a dream-vision, Posthumus's mother, who died at his birth.³² Perhaps the point is to focus dramatic attention on the birth mother (recovered at the end of *Pericles* and *Winter's Tale*) by removing motherly competition from her. When women do foster maternally in Shakespeare—Lychorida, Paulina—they are no threat to the prerogatives of the birth mother. Indeed, they present her or her memory to her daughter.

The recognition scenes of all these plays emphasize bodily connections in the family. The characters' words are often, among other things, stage directions indicating that characters should embrace. Rediscovered relatives are introduced to each other as "Flesh of thy flesh" (Pericles says this of Marina to Thaisa [5.3.47]) or "The issue of your loins . . . and blood of your begetting" (Belarius thus returns Cymbeline's sons [5.5.332–33]). The plays are full of the imagery of birth, pregnancy, and conception—most often in literal references to characters' origins.³³ This imagery reinforces the plays' mythology of "blood"

and their emphasis on biological relatedness. But it is often used metaphorically, and sometimes the point of the metaphor is to make the reunion of parents and children into a rebirth or a reconception. Pericles, seeing Marina, says, “I am great with woe, and shall deliver weeping” (5.1.109). Cymbeline, recognizing his sons upon Belarius’s proof, says, “O, what, am I / A mother to the birth of three? Ne’er mother / Rejoiced deliverance more” (5.5.370–72). And Pericles welcomes Marina as “Thou that beget’st him that did thee beget,” using of her generative power a word primarily used of male actions. These images stand out because of the intense moments in which they are uttered, but birth/pregnancy imagery is also used at other times—Camillo alludes to folklore about pregnancy when he describes his desire to see “Sicilia” (a name that refers to both his king, Leontes, and his country) as “a woman’s longing” (4.4.671) and Imogen describes her desire to see Posthumus by saying, “Never long’d my mother so / To see me first, as I have now” (3.4.2–3). Though good mothers here are largely absent or dead, imagery of biological maternity is frequent in the words of both male and female characters.³⁴ Concern with the link between generations is so strong that images of pregnancy and childbirth appear frequently partly because they are the most vivid way to picture that link, and occasionally images of begetting also figure. But the plays also show, and use for images, child rearing as well as childbearing. A memorable line when the young Pericles declares his love of Thaisa puts “fostering” and “blood” together and suggests fostering may be seen as just as basic.

SIMONIDES: What, are you both pleased?

THAISA: Yes, if you love me, sir.

PERICLES: Even as my life my blood that fosters it.

(2.5.88–90)

In each of these plays, the characters raised in a second family are described by others as extraordinary. Marina and Perdita speak exceptionally well and outshine others in beauty and talents; Guiderius and Arviragus are brave, ambitious, yet gentle and civil. Marina transcends the brothel, and Perdita surpasses all expectations for shepherdesses. Belarius comments on the boys whom he has raised, “How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature,” and many critics have analyzed these plays in terms of the supremacy of heredity. The tendency of the romance

genre to idealize its central characters (found also in the portrayal of Imogen and Miranda, raised by the fathers who begot them) here uses the lost child theme among its strategies. But in spite of all the blood-and-birth imagery, much of these plays' presentation of heredity could be seen as a construction mediated by the good foster parent. Belarius knows the boys are princes; the old shepherd infers that Perdita, found with fancy clothes and gold, comes from a wealthy and perhaps aristocratic background; and Lychorida passes on to Marina the image of Pericles' bravery. Perhaps each of them makes a connection comparable to Paulina's emphasis on the similarity between Leontes and his infant. Is modern psychology necessary to imagine this? The only concept required is the self-fulfilling prophecy, a dynamic arguably exemplified in many of Shakespeare's plays. Nevertheless none of these plays makes this aspect of the foster parent's role explicit, and only the dead Lychorida receives tribute for the memories she has passed on.

The family separations and reunions in Shakespeare's plays have many possible relations to early modern family psychology. Adoption was not part of the legal code under that name in Renaissance England, but there were many different ways in which children were raised by people who did not give birth to them, and the word might even be used, as it is when the countess in *All's Well that Ends Well* says, "Adoption strives with nature, and choice breeds / A native slip to us from foreign seeds" (1.3.142-43).³⁵ The word was also familiar from various biblical passages, especially in the Epistles of Paul, where Christians are referred to as adopted children of God.³⁶ But the events in the plays also connect with everyday family experience in Shakespeare's time. Gail Paster writes, in *The Body Embarrassed*, that Perdita's experience is "a version, romantically heightened, of what happened soon after birth to countless babies in the wet-nursing culture . . . inexplicable extrusion from the birthing chamber, enforced alienation from the maternal breast, and a journey to the unknown rural environment of a foster family lower in station than its own. Even though the birth parents knew where they had placed their baby and occasionally visited it, the physical and social separation of the two environments was virtually as complete as it is here."³⁷ A similar analysis could be made, though with more qualifications, of Marina's, Guiderius's, and Arviragus's experiences. Perhaps these events glamorize also the many other family separations common in Shakespeare's culture; from about ten years of age on, upper-class children might be sent to other families to

learn manners and to bond dynasties, middle-class children to learn trades and professions, and lower-class children to become servants.³⁸ Here these ordinary separations are transformed into the more dramatic separations of abandoning, kidnapping, and shipwrecking. Perhaps these romance plots also provided a fantasy transformation for the more permanent separations caused by frequent mortality, which was much higher than ours for both parents and children, and highest, it seems, in London, where the plays were performed. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the life expectancy in London was only 22.3 years, and “by age twenty forty-seven percent of women born in London had suffered the death of their fathers.”³⁹ Furthermore, infant and child death rates were, in general, high in early modern Europe. “An infant in the first four months of life had in general a 20 to 40 per cent chance of dying before his or her first birthday. . . . the chances of surviving to age twenty were in general no better than fifty-fifty.”⁴⁰ Shakespeare’s own son Hamnet had died at the age of eleven.

Members of the original audiences in different family circumstances probably differed to some extent in their responses to these plays, just as do members of the audience in different circumstances today. Paster has argued, for example, that the emphasis on the difference in behavior between Perdita and her foster family and on characters’ identification of her with nobility “offers a powerful counternarrative for the specific fears and repressed anxieties of the wet-nursed child.”⁴¹ We could imagine that the play could also soothe anxieties of parents of wet-nursed children. Similarly, the emphasis on resemblances between biological family members might have reinforced the sense of solidarity between those who had been wet-nursed or fostered out in childhood and their parents.

On the other hand, what of the many audience members whose parents had died early and who had been raised by stepparents? How important was it to them to emphasize their connections with their deceased parents? How much did their stepparents take on parental roles in their imagination? The orphaned Posthumus, who has been raised by Cymbeline, is left without a household again when he is banished for marrying Imogen; in absence from her, his suspicion of women alienates him from her as well as the memory of his parents (“That most venerable man which I / Did call my father was I know not where / When I was stamp’d” [2.5.3–5]).⁴² How much does this dramatize anxieties of the time? For some members of the audience, who

could never hope for a reunion in real life, Posthumus's dream-vision of his family could have served as a reassurance of their continued connection with their family, but Posthumus's marriage to Imogen reconnects him with his foster-father Cymbeline as well as with her. In *All's Well*, Helen's strong bond with the Countess of Rousillion, her foster mother as well as Bertram's mother, coexists with her frequent references to her dead father (even though at 1.1.84 she claims to have forgotten him to emphasize her obsession with Bertram).

Adults raised by stepparents could have enjoyed the wish fulfillment of the reunions with birth parents presented in these plays, but on the other hand they might also have drawn another kind of satisfaction—as could parents who were raising stepchildren—from the fact that actors seldom have as much similarity as the characters they are playing are supposed to have. The doubleness of effect—characters are biologically related, and the text tells us to see them as similar; actors are not related, and probably don't look very similar—is analogous to the doubleness in the meaning of family terms such as *father*, *mother* that stepfamilies and adoptees have to deal with. The term *role* is used in connection with parenthood, in ordinary language today, almost as much as it is used in relation to sex and gender. Is there a theatrical aspect to parenthood? Or is this usage a sign of inauthenticity? What are the strengths and limitations of the formulation, “The real parents are those who act like parents”? Leontes does not act like a parent when he commands Perdita to be exposed. Does Pericles when he leaves Marina at Tharsus? For much of the rest of both plays, penance is the only way these fathers have of acting like a parent.

The plots of these plays, somewhat like contemporary American adoption law, are largely structured to limit a family to one “real” set of parents, male and female, and the conclusion of *Pericles*—following the play in which the good foster parent, Lychorida, appears only briefly and the wicked foster parents are more vivid—stays closest to this model. But knowing something about the frequent uses of nursing, fostering out, and other varieties of child care beyond the nuclear family in Renaissance England, as well as the high infant death rate, may help to explain one of the most vexed aspects of this play: why is Pericles not only grief-stricken, but also virtually immobilized and apparently also in need of prolonged penance after he hears about his daughter's death from Dionyza, since he acted in good faith believing that she and Cleon were responsible people?

It may well be that parents whose children died while in someone else's house had a particularly complicated sense of self-blame. They were following the accepted pattern in their society, but was that why their child had died? Within England, Gottlieb notes, while wet-nursing was often criticized, sending children away after seven was not openly questioned. But at least one Italian observer felt that this showed "the want of affection in the English."⁴³ When Pericles assumes that he must give Marina to others to raise in their home, instead of taking her and Lychorida or another nurse with him—the years he stays away pass quickly in Gower's act 4 chorus—perhaps those whose children had died, or who feared their children might, while away, had particular reasons for interest in his story. Both the death of children and their boarding out might well have been especially frequent in 1608–9, the probable first year of *Pericles*' performance; plague closed the theaters part of that time.⁴⁴ Perhaps it is because such ordinary behavior on his part—rather than the insane jealousy of Leontes, for example—preceded disaster, that *Pericles* was, apparently, one of the most popular Shakespearean plays of its day.⁴⁵

While adopted children in these three plays all have happy endings, there are at least two other places in Shakespeare where the concept of adoption appears with negative connotations. When Brabantio gives up on his daughter Desdemona, after her defense of her marriage to Othello, the disgusted father says, "I had rather to adopt a child than get it" (1.3.194). The idea, if not the word, is repeated by another disgusted father, Leonato of *Much Ado about Nothing*, when his daughter's fiancé has broken up their wedding by accusing her of unchastity, and this speech may gloss Brabantio's meaning:

Why had I not with charitable hand
Took up a beggar's issue at my gates,
Who, smirched thus and mir'd with infamy,
I might have said, "No part of it is mine;
This shame derives itself from unknown loins"?

(4.1.130–34)

The second passage, and more elliptically the first, convey the sense that because parents identify more closely with children of their own

blood, it is easier to disown an adoptee—as indeed the old shepherd does with Perdita when she has offended Polixenes.

These are striking passages to find in a culture where adoption was not regulated by law, and their presence is particularly interesting because adoption is not part of the plot of these plays, and because their world seems closer to that of Shakespeare's audience than do the worlds of the romances, which are all, in spite of references the audience would have found contemporary, placed in the distant past. They suggest that the adopted child could be a second-class child, of whom not much was expected, who could be easily disowned—an image closely related to the idea of the adoptee as cursed. The fantasy elements of *The Winter's Tale* contain and then reject this view.

Perdita, thought to be illegitimate and brought up from childhood by another family, unconnected to her first family, and unaware of her own origin, is the character in these plays whose situation is most similar to that of modern adoptees under the closed-record system; she is probably also the most familiar, since *Winter's Tale* is the play among these three that has in recent years been most performed and taught. However, many adoptees reading Shakespeare might identify with a figure very different from those I have been discussing: Edmund in *King Lear*, a play much more often taught and performed than the three romances together. *Lear*, unlike *Oedipus* or the romances, confronts birth out of wedlock, significant in this discussion as one of the key social phenomena that the modern institution of adoption was designed to correct, and one of the sources of the emphasis on secrecy involved in that institution in the United States, where birth records are legally unavailable to most adoptees.⁴⁶ Although a full treatment of illegitimacy in Shakespeare is beyond the scope of this book, I want briefly to discuss the topic in relation to the image of the possibly or certainly illegitimate adoptee, using further the contrast between Perdita and Edmund as representative figures of the literary adoptee and the literary bastard. Illegitimacy is handled differently in *Lear* than in modern adoption, but there is enough continuity in the issues for an adoptee to find Edmund's words and situation resonant. Indeed, the contemporary adoptee activist group Bastard Nation reprinted Edmund's most famous speech, quoted below, in an early issue of its newsletter under the heading "Shakespeare on Bastardy."⁴⁷ Edmund is introduced in the first scene of the play by Gloucester, his father, who immediately identifies him as a source of

shame: “His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blush’d to acknowledge him, that now I am braz’d to ’t” (1.1.9–11). Gloucester jokes that “there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledg’d” (1.1.23–24), but he has not really seen much of Edmund, and thinks he can keep him under control: “He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again” (32–33). Like many other critics, I read these lines as intended to show Gloucester’s insensitivity, and suggesting his contribution to Edmund’s sense of injustice. We never see the family where Edmund spent those nine years, and it is not clear whether his mother, who is never named, is still alive.

Edmund’s most notable speech, which relishes imagining his conception in a way rather similar to his father’s, challenges the law that disinherits for birth out of wedlock. This is one of those moments in Shakespeare when momentarily a cultural outsider challenges the assumptions that exclude him or her:

Why bastard? Wherefore base?
 When my dimensions are as well compact,
 My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
 As honest madam’s issue? Why brand they use
 With base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base, base?
 Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
 More composition and fierce quality
 Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed
 Go to th’ creating a whole tribe of fops
 Got ’tween asleep and wake? Well, then,
 Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.

(1.2.6–16)

Edmund is protesting a general cultural prejudice against bastards, a belief in their moral evil and their physical and mental disability, and the law forbidding them from inheriting.⁴⁸ Belief in their disability he can easily refute, but suspicion of their moral condition he confirms. At the time the play was written, the stigma of illegitimacy had recently increased. Inheritance law had been tightening up so that provisions previously made for children born out of wedlock were lessening; on the other hand, largely because of economic difficulties that made the responsibilities of married fatherhood seem too great, the number of births out of wedlock were increasing.⁴⁹ A few years earlier, Shake-

spere had written *Measure for Measure*, in which at least one character feels that illegitimacy is getting so out of hand that fornication should be punished by the death penalty.

Edmund's speech begins, "Thou, nature, art my goddess" (1.2.1). It is a commonplace of criticism now that the beginning of the speech is a kind of pun on the use of "natural" to mean illegitimate, as well as a contribution to the play's dramatized debate between different concepts of nature and of human nature—a debate that will continue in later literature, often in connection with adoption, as we will see in the chapter on George Eliot. The discrimination Edmund speaks against here can be seen as the historical antecedent of the discrimination that adoptees experience when their birth certificates are sealed and they cannot get information about their medical and other family history. This connection (though without explicit reference to Edmund) was made when *Bastard Nation* took its name. Lack of this information may seem trivial by contrast to economic disinheritance—though on occasion it can be lethal—but the most significant tie is in the persistence of the possibility of cultural stigma that can be taken seriously enough to provide both legal and psychological consequences.

Edmund is never adopted, but there are details in the play that hint parodically at substitute families for him: when he betrays his father (for trying to help Lear) to the duke of Cornwall, Cornwall, soon to blind Gloucester, says, "I will lay trust upon thee; and thou shalt find a dearer father in my love" (3.5.25–26). Edmund then develops liaisons with both Regan and Goneril, usually now played by women old enough to suggest, in those so minded, an Oedipal scenario but also linked with him because both of them have been called bastard by Lear.⁵⁰ At the end they kill each other over him; mortally wounded himself when he discovers this, he says, "Yet Edmund was belov'd" (5.3.243). No matter how bitterly or mockingly he speaks, it is hard not to read this as a wish for a kind of life different from the "lusty stealth of nature" and "fierce quality" he earlier gloried in, and this suggestion of a change in Edmund is confirmed when he says, "Some good I mean to do, / Despite of mine own nature" (247–48) and tries, though unsuccessfully, to stop the death he had ordered for Cordelia. In the London National Theatre production of 1997, he also tries to hold on to Goneril's dead body, but is pulled away.

Recently Garry Leonard has compared the passive image of the adoptee in Albee's plays to the energetic image he sees in Edmund as

indicating the destructiveness of the closed adoption system.⁵¹ Perdita, by contrast, spends much of the play in a closed adoption system of her own, neither as passive as Albee's adoptee nor as rebellious as Edmund; she adapts, doing gracefully and creatively what is expected of both adoptees and females. It seems to be a difference already established in the Renaissance that the image of the bastard is mostly gendered masculine and the image of the adoptee is more often gendered feminine. In Renaissance drama, 90 percent of the bastards are male (including Shakespeare's Caliban, Don John in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and the Bastard, as speech headings usually name him, in *King John*).⁵² As a word of insult, *bastard* is much more often applied to men, then and now—though Leontes applies it to the infant Perdita, everyone knows that he is wrong in doing so. The only males in Shakespeare for whom both birth and foster parents are alive are kidnapped: Guiderius and Arviragus. Both Marina and Perdita are transferred to foster parents in circumstances—for all their differences—somewhat more like that of the adoptee today. There have usually been more girls adopted than boys, and organizations of adoptees usually contain more women than men; the founders of Bastard Nation wanted an organization that would draw more men—one of the reasons they chose their name—and they seem to have succeeded.⁵³

Perdita herself has been called a bastard, not only by Leontes but also, in effect, by the old shepherd upon first seeing her: "Sure, some scape. Though I am not bookish, yet I can read waiting-gentlewoman in the scape. This has been some stair-work, some trunk-work, some behind-door-work" (3.3.70–73). Then he moves outside the realm of leering or gossip to the realm of sympathy, anticipating the language—"O, she's warm!" (5.3.109)—used to describe Hermione's rediscovered life: "they were warmer that got this than the poor thing is here. I'll take it up for pity" (3.3.73–74). However, like a bastard, Perdita is, for much of the play, denied inheritance from her genetic parents, and she also, at least once, voices a belief in social equality that is sometimes associated with the subversive voice of the bastard:

I was about to speak, and tell him plainly
 The selfsame sun that shines upon his court
 Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
 Looks on alike.

(4.4.443–46)

Yet her occasional alliance with nature leaves many social and cultural categories untouched: Perdita is uncomfortable with flowers called nature's bastards because of her own view of what is rightfully part of nature:

the fairest flow'rs o' th' season
 Are our carnations and streak'd gillyvors,
 Which some call nature's bastards. Of that kind
 Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not
 To get slips of them . . .

 . . . For I have heard it said
 There is an art which in their piedness shares
 With great creating nature.

(4.4.81-88)

The defense that Polixenes uses of the grafting that created these flowers is a defense that can also be made of adoption as itself natural. The defense can be made as well of cross-class marriage, which Polixenes will soon, ironically, reject for humans when he finds out his son is engaged to this apparent shepherdess.

nature is made better by no mean
 But nature makes that mean. So, over that art
 Which you say adds to nature, is an art
 That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
 A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
 And make conceive a bark of baser kind
 By bud of nobler race. This is an art
 Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
 The art itself is nature.

(4.4.89-97)

Both characters link themselves to nature: Edmund links himself and nature and bastardy in opposition to "custom," while Perdita—who of course does not know she is adopted—links herself and nature in opposition to bastardy and "art." Nature is a key issue in conceptualizing both the adoptee and the bastard, for both fit into some definitions of nature and not to others.

Both mix parents in an unconventional way—whether by having both birth and adoptive parents, or by having parents who are imperfectly “mixed” because of not being married—or, if one person is both, in both ways.⁵⁴ Both the adoptee and the Renaissance bastard are outsiders on the inside to the family in which they are raised because they violate the norm that children should be born of sexual reproduction to the parents who raise them.⁵⁵ And since both of them have biological links to other parents, they both may raise questions about the relative importance of heredity and environment.

While for Edmund his individual nature is more the issue than his inherited nature, Shakespeare’s characters often see similarities between bastards and their birth fathers: for example, in *King John*, the title character and his queen both see physical resemblance between the character known as the Bastard and Richard Coeur de Lion, and are eager to knight him and sign him up for a soldier and change his name from Philip Faulconbridge to Richard Plantagenet. In *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron emphasizes the similarity to himself—especially in blackness—of his infant son by Tamora.

But occasionally such resemblances, like those involved in the adoption plots of the romances, could be interpreted as mediated by environment. Might it have influenced Lady Faulconbridge’s upbringing of Philip that she knew he was begotten by a king? Might Edmund’s evil come not so much from his mother’s viciousness, as Edgar later charges, as from Gloucester’s neglect? When Prospero greets Caliban, the bastard who is in a sense his foster child, as “Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself / Upon thy wicked dam” (1.2.321–22), he is demonizing the birth parents even more literally than usual, but there is no reason for the audience to take his curse as a statement of fact within the world of the play. Prospero, who has in effect raised him, insists that he is someone “on whose nature / Nurture can never stick” (4.1.188–89). But his descriptions of Caliban are among the lines in Shakespeare most often considered as self-fulfilling prophecy. Could those much-debated lines “This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine” (5.1.278–79) have as one of their meanings partial acceptance of responsibility for Caliban’s behavior?

And as with adoption, onstage discussions of physical resemblance in bastardy are inevitably in tension with a stage picture in which the actors are not really identical. The audience will want Aaron’s infant to look like Aaron, but the family resemblance they perceive is, like adop-

tion, a construction. Heredity is mediated by imagination on the stage, as in Shakespeare its effect is often mediated by the character who, in a tragedy, sends the child away, or in another genre, raises the child as someone special or passes on the family stories. With bastardy as well as with adoption, in studying Shakespeare's treatment of heredity we are dealing with his treatment of ideas and prejudices about heredity rather than with his treatment of heredity itself.

Alison Findlay ends her book about bastards in Renaissance drama by discussing the affinities between bastards and theater; there are affinities between adoptees and theater as well. The plot of adoption or fostering and reunion is theatrical because it is the matter of fantasy. As Marina says, "If I should tell my history, it would seem / Like lies disdain'd in the reporting" (5.1.118–19). Furthermore, the theme of multiple identity, which adoptees incarnate, is an inherently theatrical one. Perdita by no means glories in this condition, nor does she even know about it for most of the play, but she might say about it, as she says about a more limited adventure, in which she will pretend to have yet another set of parents, "I see the play so lies / That I must bear a part" (4.4.657–58). Adoption, like plays where kings are sometimes deposed and are always played by commoners, can destabilize classes and hierarchy; if we see the self as defined by genetics, then the adoptee is, in a sense, unconsciously acting when behaving as the child of adoptive parents; if we see the self as defined by environment, then the reunited adoptee is acting a role in behaving as a child to birth parents. If neither defines the self to the exclusion of the other, adoption, like theatrical cross-dressing—or indeed like any successful acting—reveals again the extent to which the self is a construction.

Like Shakespeare's recognition scenes, recent narratives of reunions between adoptees and their birth relatives almost always include some words about physical similarity. Sometimes they are inevitable because the similarity is so obvious. But they are, also, part of the script expected at such occasions, and they may also be an attempt to strengthen the relationship, like Paulina's words to Leontes. Shakespeare's plays are among the texts that wrote these scripts.

But unlike his plays, many searches provide meetings in which similarity is not so obvious. Even if physical similarity exists, contrast of personality or values may be the strongest impression. Reunions—or subsequent meetings—often frustrate any wish to find spiritual kin with whom communication is effortless. In my contact with my birth mother,

I had to accept her differences, see what I could learn about her as she is, work on bridging the gap between us. It was not so different from any other relationship, except that it was a larger gap than in most, and—even though Geraldine has other children, and I had another, closer, mother—we each somehow had irreplaceable roles in each other's lives. Perhaps physical similarity could be seen as a metaphor for that bond.

Before my work on adoption in literature, I wrote about a different kind of genealogy, women writers' uses of Shakespeare.⁵⁶ Like adoption, and like adoptees' relationships with birth parents, study of George Eliot's and Charlotte Brontë's rewriting of Shakespeare's plots and cultural image involves bridging a gap, in this case a gap between historical periods and genres whose literary relations are not often discussed. Partly because Shakespeare's plays are so much concerned with families, including adoptive families, women writers' interests in Shakespeare often coalesce with interest in adoption; for example, as I will discuss later, *Silas Marner* and *Daniel Deronda* can both be read as stories about why the plot of *Winter's Tale* doesn't always work. But perhaps the greatest significance that my previous writing has for my thought about adoption is in providing another model for how adoptees can construct their own genealogies. Writers look back on earlier literature and create their own literary tradition by what they write. Adoptees also can construct their own genealogy in deciding what is meaningful to them in both of their families as they know and imagine them. Thus I write Geraldine into my genealogy—not just in our physical connection, not in any of our obvious beliefs and interests—but most importantly in our basic openness to relationship.