

## Seven Nurture, Loss, and Cherokee Identity in Barbara Kingsolver's Novels of Cross-Cultural Adoption

My daughter once joked that she must have been born to soccer players from Latin America. In reality she was born to my husband and me, two of the most unathletic people to live in Pittsburgh in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first. Yet, physically, she is recognizably my daughter, as much as a strong young woman at ease in her body can look like a middle-aged one whose favorite sport is walking.

In thinking about raising a daughter markedly different from myself—though in our case it is not a question of heredity-related differences—I have had the figurative companionship of the large number of parents in the United States who have adopted cross-culturally. Many of their adoptions, involving obvious ethnic differences, pose issues about the relative importance of environment and heredity. In two recent novels, Barbara Kingsolver takes on these questions about adoption. In a way surprisingly like George Eliot, with whom she shares an interest in science, she moves from a novel that redefines family to emphasize nurture to another one that uses an adoption and search plot to emphasize contrast between cultures as well as dramatize the loss of culture to the adoptee not in contact with birth heritage.<sup>1</sup>

In *The Bean Trees* (1988), Taylor's adoption of the abused child she calls Turtle is seen as an unproblematic good for Turtle; in *Pigs in Heaven* (1993), Turtle's Cherokee relatives and how she will deal with anti-Indian prejudice must be reckoned with. Both of these novels, unlike Eliot's, turn on legal child custody, but like Eliot's the novels prepare for the conclusion partly by the way they present the adoptive parent's nurturing, in the first case, and the history of the adoptee's hered-

itary culture, in the second. Unlike Eliot's, however, and unlike any of the previous works I have discussed except *Emma's Child*, these novels represent in depth the perspective of an adoptive mother. They also represent, more directly than most previous novels dealing with adoption, the effect of the traumatic loss of a parent on a young child and the attempt to heal that trauma.

In *The Bean Trees*, Taylor, a poor white woman from Kentucky, on her way west to find a better life, is handed a small child by an Indian woman who says it's her dead sister's; "there isn't nobody knows it's alive, or cares" (18).<sup>2</sup> This encounter is close to the one of *Silas Marner*, in that conflicts about whether to adopt are removed from the narration. As in *Silas*, nurturing a child integrates the adoptive parent into a new social system, and, again, adoptive nurturing becomes a natural process. The novel even includes a reference to *Silas Marner*, as an answer in a crossword puzzle.

But together with the emphasis on nurturing, *The Bean Trees* pays more respect than *Silas* to the importance of hereditary ties—particularly in oppressed groups. Not only is Taylor's small fraction of Cherokee ancestry brought into play in her relation with her daughter, but her adoption is contrasted with the experience of two Mayan refugees from Guatemala, Estevan and Esperanza, whose daughter was forcibly kidnapped to be adopted by their oppressors.<sup>3</sup> Taylor meets Estevan and Esperanza because her mentor, employer, and friend Mattie shelters them as part of the sanctuary movement. Mattie's care for the abused refugees parallels Taylor's care for the abused child. On the other hand, Estevan and Esperanza, in their indigenous ethnicity, figuratively represent Turtle's dead birth parents, and the close bond that Esperanza, in particular, develops with Turtle, suggests the bond of physical similarity that is missing in Taylor's close relationship with Turtle.

Nevertheless, *The Bean Trees* champions nurture throughout. Taylor's narrative teems with examples of how parental expectations influence children. She repeatedly recalls her own mother's encouraging pride in her—"no matter what I did, whatever I came home with, she acted like it was the moon I had just hung up in the sky and plugged in all the stars" (10)—and contrasts her success with the misery of characters such as Jolene Hardbine, who got pregnant too young because, she says, "my daddy'd been calling me a slut practically since I was thirteen, so why the hell not?" (9). The novel even includes a cat who is good because one owner calls it Snowboots and thinks he is good, and bad

because the other owner calls it Pachuco, a name for a “bad Mexican boy” (74).

The novel also highlights nurturing by images of natural growth, often in improbable or unpromising circumstances. Turtle gets her name because her hands cling to Taylor in a clasp that reminds her of the bite of a mud turtle, “like roots sucking on dry dirt” (22). In the backyard of Mattie’s tire store, fruits and vegetables grow luxuriantly from old tires. The night before the trip to Oklahoma, a homely, spiny plant bursts out in enormous flowers for one night of the year; it is the night-blooming cereus. When the three-year-old Turtle finally speaks, her first word is “bean,” and her early vocabulary is mostly names of vegetables. These details further associate her recovery from trauma with natural growth. She is so fascinated by plants that she can see the similarity between the beanlike pods of wisteria and ordinary beans, and gives wisteria the name that becomes the title of the book. Near the end Taylor and Turtle discover that beans and wisteria are indeed both legumes, and learn that “wisteria vines, like other legumes, often thrive in poor soil” (227). Microscopic bugs called rhizobia live underground on the wisteria’s roots and get fertilizer for the plant from the nitrogen in the soil. Taylor makes explicit a comparison between the plant symbiosis that maintains wisteria and the human communities that she sees and experiences in the novel. Rhizobia are

a kind of underground railroad [a term also used, in this novel and historically, for the sanctuary movement as well as for the anti-slavery safe houses of the nineteenth century] moving secretly up and down the roots.<sup>4</sup>

“It’s like this,” I told Turtle. “There’s a whole invisible system for helping out the plant that you’d never guess was there.” I loved this idea. “It’s just the same as with people. The way Edna has Virgie, and Virgie has Edna, and Sandi has Kid Central Station, and everybody has Mattie. . . . Put them together with rhizobia and they make miracles.” (227–28)

When she speaks of miracles, Taylor is thinking of her friends as well as of rhizobia.

Taylor’s sense of community leads her to a redefinition of family. When she moves in with Lou Ann, who has a new baby and needs to cut down on expenses, at first she rejects the idea that they are a family and

is uncomfortable with the way they seem to fall into conventional gender roles, with Lou Ann doing the child rearing and cooking and Taylor the paid work outside the home. But at the end when Lou Ann says to her, “You and Turtle and Dwayne Ray [are] my family. . . because we’ve been through hell and high water together” (231), Taylor concurs.

In addition to surrounding adoptive child-care and child growth with imagery of nature and foregrounding the importance of nurture in families begun by birth as well as by adoption, the novel stresses the similarity of the relationship between Taylor and Turtle and relationship of a mother and daughter begun by birth. Contrary to the popular use of language, the implications are, Taylor is an adoptive mother *and* a natural mother *and* a real mother. As an unintentional parent, she is similar to that of many mothers by birth. She tells a coworker, “She’s not really mine. . . . She’s just somebody I got stuck with” (52) and Sandi, whose child’s father has disappeared, identifies with those words. Taylor’s anxiety about child rearing is juxtaposed with Lou Ann’s, which is even greater because of the sense of danger her mother has passed on to her.

Taylor’s mother Alice, from the beginning a model of nurturance, repeatedly speaks of similarities between her and Turtle. When Taylor says of Turtle, “You never know what she’s going to say,” and Alice says, “Well, she comes by that honest,” Taylor protests against the phrase: “if it acts like you, it proves it’s legitimate. . . . I’m just sensitive, you know, since she’s not blood kin” (223). But Alice redefines “honest” and makes explicit the point about the importance of nurture as opposed to heredity. “I don’t think blood’s the only way kids come by things honest. Not even the main way. It’s what you tell them, Taylor. If a person is bad, say, then it makes them feel better to tell their kids that they’re even worse. And then that’s just exactly what they’ll grow up to be.” After this Taylor herself can revise conventional language about kinship: “Turtle’s my real daughter. I adopted her” (223). She confidently defines herself to Turtle near the end: “I’m your Ma, and that means I love you the most. Forever” (225). When she gets the adoption certificate, she shows it to Turtle, saying, “That means you’re my kid . . . and I’m your mother, and nobody can say it isn’t so. I’ll keep that paper for you till you’re older, but it’s yours. So you’ll always know who you are” (232).

However, *The Bean Trees* does not leave heredity totally out of the

question. Taylor is one-eighth Cherokee, the only ethnicity that she ever mentions, and she sometimes affirms her relationship with Turtle as a kind of ethnic solidarity. In one of the earliest times she acknowledges a bond with Turtle, speaking to someone trying her out for a place in a commune, she says, “Her great-great grandpa was full-blooded Cherokee. . . . On my side. Cherokee skips a generation, like red hair” (71–72).

Even before meeting Turtle, Taylor takes advantage of the ride through Cherokee country in Oklahoma to think about what this heredity means to her. Seeing two Indian women in a picture postcard, she identifies “the long, straight hair and the slender wrist bones” (15) as Cherokee traits she has inherited, and notes that one is wearing her “two favorite colors, turquoise and red.” Taylor’s love of bright colors is, she has said, a family trait shared with her mother, and when she bathes Turtle, she acts out this bond by dressing her in a turquoise-and-red T-shirt. “Indian colors,” she says. The shirt comes from “one of Mama’s people,” and bears the message of self-confidence she has derived from her mother’s nurturing: “DAMN I’M GOOD” (23). Thus the emphasis on Cherokee affinity by heredity and the emphasis on nurturing are combined.

As positively as Taylor’s relationship with Turtle is described, near the end of the novel Turtle’s loss of her birth mother emerges as a significant issue. This becomes clear on the trip to Oklahoma, in which Taylor drives Estevan and Esperanza to their new home, hoping that she will find some of Turtle’s relatives in that area. There is no trace of anyone she met on her earlier trip. Instead, Turtle begins to respond to cemeteries by crying, “Mama.” And when she buries her doll and repeats the same word, her fascination with planting becomes revealed as the transformation of watching the burial of her mother.

Taylor acknowledges and shares Turtle’s sadness at the permanence of loss in death, and resolves to make her adoption of Turtle legal in whatever way she can. She asks Estevan and Esperanza to impersonate Turtle’s parents for a notary. The act that they put on functions in the novel in many more ways than deceiving the judge to get official papers. Estevan and Esperanza in their indigenous ethnicity resemble Turtle’s dead birth parents—Taylor says they have “the same high-set, watching eyes and strong-boned faces [she’d] admired in . . . the Cherokee Nation” (92–93). The novel suggests that their impersonation both helps Turtle to deal with her loss and helps them to deal with their loss of their own daughter. As Esperanza says to the judge, “We love her,

but we cannot take care for her. . . . We move around so much, we have nothing, no home" (214), she is reenacting the kidnapping of her own daughter and her choice not to approach the corrupt Guatemalan police about it.

The effect of this leavetaking is heightened because of the close bond that Esperanza has developed with Turtle, who so much resembles her kidnapped daughter Ismene. This bond has increased the tension between Taylor's valuations of different forms of family life and her desire for the unique position of mother to Turtle. In this respect, Esperanza, with her physical similarity to Turtle and her own lost daughter, is particularly appropriate for representing the emotional challenge to Taylor of Turtle's birth mother. Taylor can accept Turtle calling all women "Ma" before their first name, but is more uneasy about Turtle calling Esperanza "Ma," even if she knows "Esperanza" is too difficult a word for her. But when she sees Esperanza holding Turtle before the judge she says, "Here were a mother and her daughter, nothing less. . . . I couldn't have taken her from Esperanza" (215). In the middle of this scene, Estevan gives Turtle a kind of blessing that is also a blessing for Taylor: she must be "good and strong, like your mother." At this one point, Taylor acknowledges the possibility of many mothers, as she wonders "which mother he meant. . . . I was touched to think he might mean me." It is significant then that her final affirmations of her relationship with her daughter emphasize that "you've only got one Ma in the whole world" (225). In Turtle's vegetable-soup song, which now includes names of people, too, she says, in the last line of the novel, "I was the main ingredient" (232). In two successive scenes near the end, then, characters relive a previous loss by relinquishing a substitute. Turtle reenacts the loss of her first mother by burying her doll, as Taylor grieves with her.<sup>5</sup> Then Esperanza reenacts the loss of her daughter by giving up Turtle to Taylor, which also helps Turtle reenact her own loss again. While earlier she responds to trauma by retreat into catatonia, at this point she comments on Esperanza's tears ("Try, Ma?") and has "the sniffles" (215). In both cases the novel suggests that these rituals work.<sup>6</sup> Turtle returns to thinking about beans and is willing to leave her doll behind. Esperanza's face shines "like a polished thing, something old made new" (216). Estevan, who is already established as an intelligent and educated English teacher, gives the process a name: "catharsis." We are suddenly in the world of Greek tragedy.<sup>7</sup> This word names the purgation or purification of pity and fear that Aristotle thought

tragedy should accomplish. Theatrical imagery has already framed the adoption-hearing scene: Esperanza “was first in line for the Oscar nomination” (213). But there is a certain strangeness in Estevan’s use of the word “catharsis,” even if Kingsolver has plausibly made Taylor herself not know the word.

Why does Kingsolver bring in the concept of catharsis at this point? The application to Esperanza does stretch Aristotle’s concept, which has been interpreted in literary criticism to apply to the purgation of the audience, by some, and the character, by others, but not to the actor. Kingsolver is suggesting not only the use of the word in aesthetics but also the use of the word in psychiatry: the German equivalent of “the cathartic method” was one of Freud’s own terms for his method of bringing repressed material to consciousness by encouraging his patients in revisiting the past.<sup>8</sup> What Turtle does with her doll is like what previously traumatized children may eventually do in play therapy.

But using a word from classical Greek theater theory also helps to activate the literary allusion in the name Ismene. Ismene is, perhaps, imaginable as a Guatemalan or Mayan name, but in a context in which *catharsis* appears, it must be relevant that it is also the name of Antigone’s sister. Antigone, a Greek tragic heroine who chose to go against state law to bury her brother, is still honored by dissidents in many different countries; she has been associated, for example, with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, whose children were kidnapped by the Argentine government between 1976 and 1983, and a feminist bookstore in Tucson, Kingsolver’s home when she wrote this novel, is called Antigone Books.<sup>9</sup> In Sophocles, however, Ismene was the traditionally submissive woman who rebuked her sister for her daring. If Kingsolver’s Ismene, the missing child, adopted into a prosperous fascist family and apparently without knowledge of her past, is comparable to Sophocles’ Ismene, then at some level Turtle, her physical double adopted into Taylor’s subversive working-class family and obsessed with burial, is a version of Antigone. Antigone is the prototype of the characters in the novel involved in the sanctuary movement, who are committing civil disobedience to protect refugees persecuted in their own country and illegally escaping through the United States to Canada. But she is also reflected in Turtle’s obsession with burial. In many ways the novel tries to show how public and domestic issues are connected; Antigone is one of the classical figures for such a link made when the state makes a law that threatens an individual’s sense of fam-

ily. Indeed, in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Judith Butler sees her as a figure for all those who maintain nonnormative kinship, including adoptive relationships and multiple families.<sup>10</sup>

The use of the term *catharsis*, by associating human actions with both theater and healing, also helps link another central issue of the novel to aesthetic theory. Most of *The Bean Trees* defines parenting as nurturance and treats adoptive parenting as real parenting, championing it against the view that it is just “pretend parenting.” But here, as the issue of loss emerges, the view that adoptive parenting is pretense is treated indirectly. In Taylor’s discussion with Estevan, the pretense most immediately at issue is not adoption but Turtle standing in for Ismene. Taylor says that Esperanza seems “as happy as if she’d really found a safe place to leave Ismene behind. But she’s believing in something that isn’t true” (220). Estevan calms Taylor’s objections, saying “in a world as wrong as this one, all we can do is to make things as right as we can.” The imagery defends the pretense in the courtroom in part by making it a theatrical performance that heals, using a word—*catharsis*—from both theatrical and medical language. Estevan’s defense of this substitution works at the same time to defend the other aspects of pretense here—the Mayans representing the Cherokees to make the adoption legal. His defense of this substitution is a substitution for a defense of the other substitution. Perhaps through him Kingsolver is also defending her own novel as another pretense that heals.

Does pretense work in *The Bean Trees*? What judgment does the novel ask us to make of the adoption, and what should we think of the novel’s strategies? At the end, Taylor is more prepared to raise Turtle in many ways. She has developed a support community now identified as a family, with Lou Ann. She has help from Mattie, who is used to caring for traumatized children. She knows that Turtle needs special attention. Although at the very beginning she considered returning the “Indian child” to “its rightful owner” (22), she now knows that Turtle isn’t an “item of commerce” (178). She has heard from Lou Ann—whose usual insecurities give her occasional wisdom about parenting more force—“your kids aren’t really *yours*. They’re just these people that you try to keep an eye on. . . . everything you ever get is really just on loan” (231).<sup>11</sup> She has some sense of the impact on Turtle of looking different from her surroundings, coming from her observation of how Esperanza and Estevan look different—more relaxed, even taller—when they are in the Cherokee Nation and everyone around them looks

Indian (204). She has a sense of Cherokee tradition as valuable, involving, for example, the beautiful places of the Ozark Mountains and the Lake of the Cherokees, as well as the government of the Cherokee Nation.

Kingsolver, it seems, has tried to meet many of the possible objections specific to cross-cultural adoption by giving Taylor some Cherokee ancestry, by showing that even Esperanza and Estevan recognize that Taylor is a good mother and give her a kind of indigenous blessing, and by presenting a caregiver who feels powerless to help her as Turtle's only remaining birth family member. Readers for whom Cherokee history is not vivid will probably find this convincing—and I am, viscerally, still among them when I read the novel. But on the last page, when Taylor says to Turtle that she can have the adoption certificate so that, as she says, “you’ll always know who you are,” though Turtle nods excitedly, she keeps “her eyes fixed on something outside the window that only she could see” (232). This is a kind of anticipation of all that *Pigs in Heaven* will show Taylor of what she doesn't know and Turtle needs to learn. “If her relatives want her back, then I’ll think of something” (183), Taylor has said. It is only a threat to her, not a question of divided rights. While I admire Kingsolver's ability to inform readers about the sanctuary movement and political torture in Guatemala, after reading *Pigs in Heaven* it becomes clear that in adopting Turtle, Taylor needs to know more specifically about Cherokees. I can't help loving *The Bean Trees*, but I can see why a Native American might hate it.

What of my personal experience contributes to my affection for *The Bean Trees*? I first read this novel when my daughter, Liz, was only a little older than Turtle. Like Taylor, I was inexperienced with parenting, and had spent years successfully avoiding pregnancy, though unlike Turtle's, Liz's arrival was by birth, expected, and long hoped for. And emotionally, I came from almost as much a one-parent family as Taylor did—though my mother was not quite the ideal that Taylor's is, she was a warm, nurturing person who expected the best of me. Kingsolver wrote this book when she was pregnant with her first daughter, as I later discovered, and in some ways the book offered a kind of return to the occasional euphoria of a wanted pregnancy. The repeated emphasis on the similarity between loving motherhood by birth and loving motherhood by adoption, between Taylor's motherhood of Turtle and Alice's motherhood of Taylor, drew me in to this book and reassured me. I loved Taylor's language and her personality, confident about

much, aggressively identifying with the underdog as a cleaning woman's daughter who has been taught to feel she's as good as anyone, lovingly observing her daughter's growth. Because of my politics, I appreciated the way Kingsolver linked the sanctuary movement with the attempt to care for an abandoned child. I have had students who think that Taylor should have called the police about child abandonment, or should have returned home where her mother could help her with Turtle, or should have at least seriously considered giving her to Esperanza and Estevan, and also students who felt that she, or the doctor she sees, should have reported the earlier child abuse to the authorities, and were shocked by the impersonation of Turtle's birth parents that she arranges for Estevan and Esperanza. None of these possibilities ever occurred to me. When I first read the book, in spite of my own interest in my birth parents, I don't remember thinking about whether Turtle would ever want to find hers.

Thus, I have personal reasons for giving Kingsolver a chapter to herself as the main representative of twentieth-century American fiction about adoption. But she deserves that chapter also on other grounds: she has received critical and popular acclaim and, especially with *Bean Trees*, a place in high school and college curricula; she has written about adoption repeatedly; and, like George Eliot, her novels seriously debate the definition of parenthood and the claims of heredity, changing emphases as her angle of vision changes.

At the end of *Bean Trees* it seems that Turtle has a comfortable hybrid identity in which both nurture and heredity are recognized. However, in *Pigs in Heaven* Taylor must do much more to recognize Turtle's heredity. Kingsolver comments, "I had the option and the *obligation* to deal with the issue because the moral question was completely ignored in the first book."<sup>12</sup> This novel contextualizes Turtle's adoption with the history of forcible removal of children from Indian families, which, as late as the 1970s, affected 25–35 percent of Indian children.<sup>13</sup> It also portrays the Indian practice of informal adoption within a large extended family, and gives Turtle a concerned grandfather, Cash Stillwater, with a legal advocate. Annawake Fourkiller, a young Cherokee lawyer whose brother was taken from their family, emphasizes Turtle's need to learn more about her Native American identity. She stresses the power of the negative Indian stereotype as well as the need to deal with hereditary physical conditions such as lactose intolerance. But even more, she

urges the importance of having an identity as part of a community, not just as an individual. Much dialogue contrasts the communal identity of the Cherokees with the critically portrayed individualistic emphasis of the dominant white culture. The support system of the earlier novel now seems too fragile by contrast to the Cherokee Nation.

Kingsolver adds to the Cherokee side of the equation by turning the bravery Taylor showed in *The Bean Trees*, especially in her stressful, vulnerable position as a single parent, into a foolhardy attempt to escape from Annawake's investigation into the staged adoption. Instead of helping admirable refugees, Taylor helps a pop-culture-obsessed counterfeiter who has renamed herself Barbie with a trademark sign, after the doll. She is useful as a babysitter but feeds Turtle junk food and steals their savings. Instead of being the attentive parent of the first novel, Taylor fails to notice that the ice cream and milk she is urging on Turtle are making her sick instead of healthy.

Nevertheless, even Annawake recognizes the value of Taylor's nurturing, and she and the Child Welfare Services ultimately allow Taylor shared custody, while they give Turtle her grandfather's last name of Stillwater and make him her legal guardian. Here Turtle's hybrid identity will cost Taylor some control; the child must spend three months of the year in the Cherokee Nation. Classically minded readers may think of the compromise between Demeter and Hades, through which her daughter Persephone spends part of the year in the underworld with her husband and part of the year with her mother. But such agreements are common in custody cases. To soften this one, however, in a reconciliatory move so improbable that it has to be set up with a scheme devised by Annawake to make them fall in love with each other, Turtle's grandfather and Taylor's mother plan to get married at the end.

The plot, which involves the revelation of Turtle's social and family history as a Cherokee and its final integration with her situation as Taylor's daughter, structures a novel in which much of the dialogue also debates the meanings of parenthood, kinship, and families. In considering where Turtle belongs, the novel enters into current controversies about the relative influence of genetics and nurturing, and also contrasts current dominant American understandings of family with Cherokee ones.

Conventionally, debates about custody in contested adoptions begin with the question of whether nurture or birth makes a parent. From the beginning, Kingsolver gives something to each side in this debate, and

ultimately tries to move beyond it. While in *The Bean Trees* Turtle's ethnicity is acknowledged from the start, that novel establishes the importance of nurture and the reality of Taylor's parenthood; here nurture, while important, has less directive power, and there is more emphasis on children's own temperament as influential. Taylor wonders "where all that persistence [in Turtle] comes from and where it will go." She "has had many moments of not believing she's Turtle's mother" (10). Taylor says of Turtle, "Doesn't she walk like a queen? I swear I didn't teach her that. It's a natural talent" (128). Both Alice and the uncle who raised Annawake see their child rearing in terms of responding to the child: "When you're given a brilliant child, you polish her and let her shine," thinks Alice (127). "If you have a frisky horse you put him in a race," says Ledger (332). Similarly, Cash tells Alice that when a child is selected to be a medicine man, the training builds on a prior temperament; "the medicine man can tell from the child how they'll be" (306). When Alice looks at Taylor and Turtle together, she thinks, "they share something physical, a beautiful way of holding still when they're not moving. Alice reminds herself that it's not in the blood, they've learned this from each other" (138). Note that here the learning goes both ways: she imagines Taylor learning from Turtle, not just Turtle learning from Taylor. And here there are limits to what nurturing can do. Alice "is ready to adopt" their former waitress Barbie when she loses her job (141), but after Barbie steals their money, clothes, and furnishings, Taylor realizes, "You don't adopt a wild animal and count it as family" (214).

The bonds of pregnancy and genetic parenthood are more important in this novel than in *The Bean Trees*, not just on the level of plot but in other ways as well. In the free clinic where Taylor and Turtle go near the end to find out why Turtle has a stomachache, there is a poster picture of "one half of a pregnant woman with an upside-down baby curled snugly into the oval capsule of her uterus," which reminds Taylor of cutting a peach in half and seeing a "little naked almond inside" (293).<sup>14</sup> This is an image that Alice will reverse when, near the beginning of the next chapter, "naked, curled little nuts [which she is separating from their shells as Cash prepares their meals] remind her of babies waiting to get born" (298). The poster makes Turtle wonder about "the real mom that grew me inside her" (293) and Taylor, without commenting on the "real," reminds her that her "mother had died": "you remembered seeing your first mama get buried" (294). It is in this clinic

that an African-American doctor explains to Taylor that she has inadvertently caused Turtle's stomachache by feeding her dairy products without recognizing Turtle's lactose intolerance, a condition frequent among people of color.<sup>15</sup> Not understanding Turtle's genetics has made her intended nurturing occasionally toxic.

Though nurturing controls less here than in *The Bean Trees*, its impact is still strong. The narrator says of Turtle, "She's been marked in life by a great many things, and Taylor's odd brand ["marked" revivifies the dead metaphor in "brand" here] of love is by far the kindest among them" (12). Taylor's motherhood is clear in this novel. Taylor is always spoken of as Turtle's mother. Even Annawake calls her "the mother" (65) and says, "I'm sure you are a good mother" (77).

As the novel progresses, the two versions of parenthood seem more and more similar. The fact that Taylor's motherhood is adoptive does not exclude her from a protectiveness that seems instinctive. Alice says, "She's protecting her child, like any living mother would do, man or beast" (308). Jax recalls the idea that "getting between a mother bear and her cub" is dangerous (84) and refers to both Annawake, trying to get Turtle back, and Taylor, trying to keep her, as "Mama Bear" (84, 90). Jax thinks of this conflict when he sees a coyote, either pregnant or nursing, devour a nest of dove's eggs. One mother, to help her own child, consumes the children of another.

As Jax tries to put this event in a larger context, his analysis eventually dissolves the conflict between biological and adoptive parenthood in another way. "The predator seems to be doing only what she has to do. In natural systems there is no guilt or virtue, only success or failure, measured by survival and nothing more. Time is the judge. If you manage to pass on what you have to the next generation, then what you did was right" (180). Both biological and adoptive parenthood pass on something to the next generation.

What will be passed on to Turtle? What has been passed on to her? In this concept is one intersection between the two definitions of parenthood—as genetic and as nurture. A Cherokee appearance and biology have been passed on to her. How will her nurture take this into account?

Furthermore, as Cash's role develops in the novel, it becomes clear that his relation to her has been more than simply genetic. After Taylor sees Cash with Turtle, she understands that "He's still just aching for Turtle after all this time," and this continued relationship becomes the

example that she uses to define family: “That’s what your family is, the people you won’t let go of for anything” (328). Kind, parental Cash, with his memories of caring for his granddaughter, makes Alice’s phrase “any living mother, man or beast,” quoted above from the conversation in which she tells him about Taylor and Turtle, particularly appropriate. He approximates what Sara Ruddick calls the “male mother.”<sup>16</sup>

Cash’s nurturing qualities are also emphasized in his relationship with Alice. He cooks for her—something she has never seen a man do before. And at the end of the chapter they go to bed, and the description of their lovemaking moves toward a description that, remarkably, assimilates both female and male sexuality to nursing. “She is pierced with a sharp, sweet memory of nursing Taylor, and when he puts his mouth there she feels once again that longing to be drained, to give herself away entirely. Slowly Cash moves himself against her, and then very gently into her, and she feels the same longing coming through his body to hers” (302–3). “Just aching,” quoted above from the following chapter, is, in part, an echo of the imagery here. If sexuality is like this—if sex is giving yourself away, as nurturing is—here is another perspective providing an intersection between procreative and adoptive parenthood. It is no wonder that the title of this chapter, and its last phrase, ending the sentence after the one just quoted, is “the secret of creation.”

But for the resolution of the novel, the two Mama Bears, Taylor and Annawake, both move to a more abstract plane of motherhood, seeking that much-evoked goal, the best interests of the child. Annawake argues on the basis of Turtle’s welfare instead of the tribe’s. “There are a lot of things she’ll need growing up that you can’t give her. . . . Where she comes from, who she is. Big things. And little things, like milk” (77). The wording might remind us not just of lactose intolerance but also of the fact that Taylor could not give Turtle her breast milk.<sup>17</sup> Even though at this point Annawake is convinced that Turtle’s identity comes from heredity and Taylor is convinced that it comes from her nurturing care for Turtle, the fact that they are discussing Turtle’s identity rather than the tribe’s need turns the discussion toward Western concepts.<sup>18</sup> While Annawake begins by identifying Turtle’s fate with the fate of her brother Gabriel, adopted by a white family who mistreated him, as the story progresses she becomes able to see how different Turtle’s situation is.

Meanwhile, Taylor learns to deal better with Turtle’s hereditary

appearance and biology. Not only does she learn about the lactose intolerance, but she gains more understanding of what it feels like to look different from most people around you. At the end of *The Bean Trees*, it seemed that she had that insight when she arrived in Cherokee Nation, but in this novel she learns it all over again and explicitly applies it to Turtle. “Since her arrival in Oklahoma, she has felt her color as a kind of noticeable heat rising off her skin, something like a light bulb mistakenly left on and burning in a roomful of people who might disapprove. She wonders if Turtle has always felt her skin this way, in a world of lighter people” (318). After she confesses that she has wronged Turtle by making her drink milk and by living “on the edge” in poverty as she tried to hide Turtle and stay independent, there is an image of rapprochement. “Taylor and Annawake gaze at each other like animals surprised by their own reflections” (321).

When Uncle Ledger, her adoptive father and the one person to whom she goes for advice, translates the biblical story of Solomon into Cherokee terms, Annawake concludes that she doesn’t “want to jump for joy to see a baby cut in half” (331). Mourning for her lost brother, Annawake has been, in a sense, this novel’s politically active reflection of Antigone. But unlike the original Antigone, Hegel’s paradigmatic example of an individual in a tragic situation facing a conflict between two absolute but irreconcilable principles—family and state in the original—Annawake realizes that she is facing a conflict between family and family, with love on both sides, and reconciliation may be possible.<sup>19</sup>

In the final court scene, Annawake articulates the compromise she has reached: the child “should be called Turtle, since she’s grown to be a fine little person under her adopted mother’s care, and that’s the name she connects with her conscious memory of herself,” but “we have to reinstate her as the granddaughter and legal ward of Cash Stillwater. We recommend her legal name be recorded as Turtle Stillwater. So, we’ve figured out *who* she is” (337–38).

In *The Bean Trees*, the certificate of adoption was to tell Turtle who she is. Who she is here is both Turtle—the Indian-sounding name given her by Taylor because of her behavior—and Stillwater, the name that connects her to Cash and to the Cherokees. But what does it mean to have an Indian identity, and how does this relate to the possibilities for Turtle’s upbringing? The novel discusses these questions from several different points of view.

One of the perspectives is in the contrast presented between the

“extended” family that Cherokees have to offer Turtle and the “contracted” white one—Annawake’s term (284)—she lives in with Taylor, so informal and attenuated that Turtle doesn’t recognize it as one. The novel gives vivid pictures of the Cherokee family. It’s exemplified by the happy, affectionate household constituted by Annawake with her brother and sister-in-law, who live together with her though they are divorced, and their children. Annawake sees family as “a color, a notion as fluid as *river*. She tells Alice, ‘I used to work at the Indian hospital at Claremore, checking people in. Sometimes it would be years before we’d get straight who a kid’s mother was, because one aunt or another would bring him in’” (227). The child belongs to the tribe more than to one or two parents.<sup>20</sup>

The white family imagined most deeply is the warm loving bond between Taylor and Alice, which is nevertheless closely linked with aloneness, here equated with alienation from men. The unhappily married Alice thinks, at the beginning of the novel, that aloneness is “a defect [that] runs in the family, like flat feet or diabetes” (4) and calls it “her inheritance, like the deep heartline” (23) on her palm, but also thinks of it as something her influence has transmitted to Taylor, who is emphatically not married to her housemate and boyfriend Jax. Alice traces the individualism in her family back to her mother who “had hogs by the score but nothing much to offer her fellow man, other than ham” (27), even though during the Great Depression she honored the extended family enough that second cousins such as Sugar Hornbuckle “showed up at Minerva’s door once they’d run out of everything except relatives” (7).<sup>21</sup> A less attractive version of the white family is Jax’s. His mother was or is an alcoholic, and he doesn’t know where either she or his sister is. Then there is Barbie, who has left her family, never mentions them, and has apparently replaced her family name with a trademark sign. While in *Bean Trees* Taylor sometimes sees her extended network of close friends as her family (328), in *Pigs in Heaven*—especially when fleeing from a custody battle—she feels that the family is just her and Turtle, and that “isn’t enough. We’re not a whole family” (291). It is no wonder that when Turtle is questioned about her family by an Indian social worker, she says, “I don’t have one” (324). Taylor’s discovery that Turtle feels she doesn’t have a family is part of what motivates her softening toward the Cherokees and her desire for a more permanent relationship with Jax near the end.

However, while the novel portrays many happy Cherokee families,

it also shows Cherokee (as well as white) families gone wrong. Alice raises the question: “So with all this love going around, how does it happen that somebody walks up to my daughter’s parked car one night and gives a baby away?” (227). Cherokees do not all live the happy “natural” life. Annawake explains, “Our chain of caretaking got interrupted. . . . Federal law put them in boarding school. . . . Family has always been our highest value, but that generation of kids never learned how to be in a family.” Contrary to the image of nurture as instinctive—as in the Mama Bear motif—the presence of broken Cherokee homes shows that it needs to be learned; under oppression such learning may not happen.

The images of Cherokee families are mirrored in many different images of animals in groups. The most frequent form of observation of nature here, by contrast to that in *The Bean Trees*, is not of individual plants growing or being nurtured, but of animals moving as a group, like the Vietnamese pigs trying to get into a garden full of petunias, the finches all flying to Taylor’s apricot tree, and the salmon trying to swim upstream to where they were born. Alice, learning about connections among the Cherokees, wonders “if the butterflies are all related to one another too” (221). These images of animals in groups present an image of life as basically social.

The chapter in which Cash is introduced puts special emphasis on his isolation from his community by counterpointing his isolation with a flock of pigeons he repeatedly observes as a bird shoot approaches. At first he thinks of them as “shining creatures whose togetherness is so perfect it makes you lonely” (113). But birds can go wrong, and they come to mirror his current condition as well. Like Cash’s daughters and his friend Rose, who ruins her eyes making bead jewelry on display at the Trading Post in Jackson Hole, they have lost their place. They want to live in Jackson Hole, but they can’t. These displaced birds are echoed in the birds that shriek unhappily in the office of Mr. Crittenden, the melancholy white man who makes money from Cash’s fine Indian beadwork.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, when he returns to Oklahoma, Cash is met by one image of harmonious living things after another, culminating with “five beagles . . . reverent as a choir, blessing his overdue return” (176).

Could Turtle be a Cherokee in isolation from the Cherokee Nation? This possibility is negated not only by the pictures of the Cherokee family and the birds, animals, and Indians out of place, but also by the novel’s treatment of inadequate, even exploitative, white attitudes

toward Indians. Indians are figures of fantasy identification for Crittenden, who sells their jewelry, and for Taylor's landlady Gundi, who buys it and wants to paint their land, but neither one of them has much sense that Indians are a live community.<sup>23</sup> Taylor observes the scanty and partial representations of Indians in popular culture: an Indian actor in a movie, "The innocent-looking girl on the corn-oil margarine." The hook-nosed cartoon mascot of the Cleveland Indians, who played in Tucson" (95). While she can critique the negative images, she has little positive to put in their place, "no idea what she should be telling Turtle about her ancestors" (206).

However, in her awareness of her own lack of knowledge, Taylor has a perception that the novel's representations of Indian identity seem to bear out. "Maybe being an Indian isn't any one thing, any more than being white is one thing" (95). What is an Indian? As the anthropologist Circe Sturm shows, this continues to be a disputed question.<sup>24</sup> Kingsolver's novel, like Sturm's study, shows that it's not a simple matter of biology: characters with less Indian heredity may be more committed to Indianness than the "full-blooded."<sup>25</sup> Alice's cousin Sugar, biologically no more Cherokee than Alice, explains, "It's kindly like joining the church. If you get around to deciding you're Cherokee, Alice, then that's what you are" (271). Annawake's mother "was a die-trying acculturated Cherokee, like most of her generation, who chose the Indian Baptist Church over stomp dances and never wore moccasins in her life" (59).<sup>26</sup> For Annawake, being Indian means having a sense of belonging to a place of natural bounty: "All those perch down there you could catch, any time. . . . A world of free breakfast, waiting to help get you into another day" (67). Cash, on the other hand, thinks that one of the things you have to be an Indian to know is "how to stretch two chickens and a ham over sixty relatives" (111). Franklin, Annawake's boss, grew up in an Indian/white mixed family that kept no Indian customs, and became a "born-again Indian" while studying Native American law; he "knows he isn't white because he can't think of one single generalization about white people that he knows to be true. He can think of half a dozen about Cherokees. They're good to their mothers. They know what's planted in their yard. They give money to their relatives, whether or not they're going to use it wisely" (68). While Sturm argues that "most Cherokee people still live and imagine their identity as something rooted in essence, inextricably linked to their race, biology, genetics, phenotype, blood and culture,"<sup>27</sup> Kingsolver is particu-

larly interested in defining Cherokee identity in terms of behavior.<sup>28</sup> She may not expect us to take Franklin's generalizations as true of all Cherokees, but they suggest something of how he gives content to his identity as a "born-again Indian."

Some of the novel's most vivid pictures of what it means to be Cherokee come at the stomp dance. Around an old flame thought to contain embers as old as the Trail of Tears, members of the community greet each other and welcome Alice. They trace family connections, converse mostly in Cherokee while mixing in English words like "distributor cap" and "gall bladder," listen to the medicine chief (Annawake's Uncle Ledger), smoke the peace pipe, and dance.<sup>29</sup> "For the first time she can remember, Alice feels completely included" (271). Tradition is maintained, but variations exist (the young people speak more English among themselves), and there is a place for everyone. For Alice it is an experience of self-transcendence: "Alice's life and aloneness and the things that have brought her here all drop away, as she feels herself overtaken by uncountable things. She feels a deep, tired love for the red embers curled in the center of this world" (272). Describing the stomp dance through Alice's eyes is, of course, calculated to make it more comprehensible and appealing to the white reader, and the welcome the Cherokee community offers her is a kind of prefiguring of the welcome to be extended to Turtle.

In writing a sequel to *The Bean Trees*, Kingsolver relied to a very large extent on the difference that adding a more detailed picture of Cherokee life, characters, and history would make. But there is another large attitudinal contrast related to the concept of family.<sup>30</sup> While *Bean Trees* repeatedly emphasizes the self-sufficiency of families without fathers, here Taylor discovers that she and Turtle need not only a connection to the Cherokee Nation but also a more stable bond with Jax. The end of the novel reverses the end of *The Bean Trees*, in which Taylor establishes her unique place in Turtle's life. Here Taylor faces the fact that she has lost the "absolute power of motherhood" (341). But at the same time she has lost power, she has added relationship: "From now until the end of time she is connected to this family that's parading down Main Street, Heaven" (341). The emphasis on aloneness in Alice's family is reversed at the end as well, as Cash proves he will meet Alice's requirement of paying attention to her by shooting his television, which she hates. "The family of women is about to open its doors to men. Men, children, cowboys [Jax is in a rock group named Renaissance

Cowboys and Cash is “one step away from being a cowboy” (113)] and Indians” (343). Alice has returned to the heritage of her great-grandmother, whom she had heard of just as somebody who died young. But she also has, for the first time in her life, it seems, a truly companionate marriage.

*The Bean Trees* is easier than *Pigs in Heaven* to read as a feminist book, with Taylor’s self-confidence, Mattie’s abilities and hers in non-traditional areas, and the household with Lou Ann; yet it has some of the historical problems of the feminist movement in its consideration of race and color. The only nonwhite woman is Esperanza, who is relatively silent in the novel, partly because of the torture she has experienced as well as the traumatic loss of her daughter—both of which the novel is, of course, protesting against. In order for Taylor to have secure custody of Turtle, Esperanza has to be someone who cannot mother at this time because of her refugee position, yet in order to substitute for Turtle’s birth mother legally and emotionally she must look like her. From one point of view she is sacrificed to the plot somewhat as the Creole Bertha Mason is sacrificed for Jane Eyre’s happiness.

On the other hand, in keeping with the greater appreciation of ethnic, racial, and cultural difference of the more recent feminist movement and indeed the greater diversity of U.S. society today, *Pigs in Heaven* contains one very powerful Cherokee woman, Annawake, and many others. Much more than any character in *Bean Trees*, Annawake, who shares parental loss and adoption with Turtle, imagines her experience as a woman of color later in life. “Some boy will show her that third-grade joke, the Land O’Lakes Margarine squaw with a flap cut in her chest, the breasts drawn in behind the flap, and ask her, ‘Where does butter come from?’ On the night of the junior prom, Turtle will need to understand why no white boy’s parents are happy to take her picture on their son’s arm” (149). Though Annawake seems a threat to Taylor’s happiness, her dynamism, intelligence, and love of her tribe, her family, her brother, and her niece are attractively portrayed. Annawake, furthermore, is nontraditional in Indian terms in her resistance to marriage, though her alternative to marriage is not living as an individual, but living with her brother’s family—her *brother’s* family, not her sister’s.<sup>31</sup> There is a symmetrical contrast between Annawake’s family without other women as she was growing up and Alice and Taylor’s family without men, made explicit at one point in a way that suggests the incompleteness of both. While Annawake never indicates a sexual

interest in men in the novel, she does change at the end in that she decides to try to contact her imprisoned brother Gabe directly, rather than giving up on him. The possibility of reading Annawake as discovering during the course of the novel that she is a lesbian adds further to the diversity that she represents.<sup>32</sup>

Even though Taylor says, “I never missed having a dad” (133), men are more important in *Pigs in Heaven* than in *The Bean Trees*. The issue is not exactly sexuality or even marriage—there is more sexual feeling in her relation to Estevan in the first book than in her relation to Jax in the second, and she says, “I don’t know if *married* is really the point” (327). The real point is presented as permanence—a distinction suggested in the fact that Annawake’s brother and sister-in-law (as she calls them) live together and produce and raise children together in spite of the fact that they are, for some unknown reason, divorced. Taylor may not be sure about marrying Jax at the end, but she is sure about wanting him as Turtle’s “official daddy” (341).

This vision of permanent families requiring men, though countered by Alice’s memories of her unstable former husbands, may well reflect the move away from all-female feminist communities—except for lesbian ones—that has continued since *Bean Trees* was written (though it was already well under way at that time). It is perhaps easier to read this as related to the change in Kingsolver’s own perspective, moving from the circumstances in which she wrote *Bean Trees*, pregnant in a marriage soon to break up, to the new marriage in which she wrote *Pigs in Heaven*. But it should be clear that the two men who enter the previously all-female family of Alice, Taylor, and Turtle are decidedly non-patriarchal—Daddy and Pop-pop, not “Father.” Taylor is definitely the dominant partner in her relationship with the laid-back Jax, who worships her, and Cash cares enough about Alice to give up even television for her.

And though *Pigs in Heaven* does not experiment with the two-mother family, there are still new-style families at the end. From the white standpoint, at least, Annawake’s household, with her brother and sister-in-law, divorced, and their children, seems unconventional. But the unconventional family that will be formed by the shared custody of Cash and Taylor is, of course, central to the novel. The sharing of Turtle is presented in a relatively nonthreatening way because of Cash’s marriage to Alice; there are many families in which a child visits grandparents for part of the summer, with no Native American heritage.

However, in those families the grandfather and the mother do not share custody, with the primary custody going to the grandfather. And of course the custom of moving the child around among relatives is more common among Native Americans than among whites.<sup>33</sup>

Both *Bean Trees* and *Pigs in Heaven* can be seen as commenting not just on adoption custody issues, but also on American culture and the terms of its inclusion of Cherokees, as a representative case of individuals or a community marked as different. Both novels make frequent comments on the limits of the American mythology of individualism, yet in *Bean Trees* Turtle is to a large extent included only as an individual, apparently without a history. Her Cherokee identity is mainly relevant in that prejudice against her skin color is voiced by a few characters who are critiqued. Turtle is able to give her a few bits of information about aspects of Indian culture with which she identifies—for example, Indians like bright colors—but not much else. The inclusion of *Bean Trees* is close to the inclusion of transracial adoption in writers like Elizabeth Bartholet.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, in *Pigs in Heaven*, when the family of women opens up to Cash as well as to Turtle, when the life of the Cherokee Nation is portrayed so attractively, the implication is more emphatically that the United States should welcome minority cultures and communities, not just individuals who can assimilate, whether as adoptees or as immigrants. In fact, since Cash and Taylor are given joint custody, the image may even be one of joint partnership with other cultures, not admission of them on the basis of their childlike status.

Kristina Fagan critiques the suggestions of such an allegorical reading in *Pigs in Heaven*, writing, “By individualizing this utopian racial harmony, Kingsolver avoids the task of imagining how Native people and settlers can learn to live together as large communities. This is a challenge that will need to be met on a much larger scale—involving the settlement of land claims, changes to the educational and legal systems, constitutional changes, and other daunting tasks. . . . a big part of the appeal of this novel comes from the way in which it sidesteps these big issues by working them out in a way that is apparently natural. The reader is reassured that all the ethical and cultural conflicts that the book lays out can be solved by individual acts of love.”<sup>35</sup> Fagan is right to say that the ending of this novel includes a kind of utopian racial harmony worked out as an individual solution for Turtle and Taylor—though with so much emphasis on the community of the Cherokees it is

not as much of an individual solution as she says. However, I question her conclusions. The utopian quality of the solution in the book requires the very particular situation that Taylor and her mother are part Cherokee, that her mother is planning to leave her husband and has a cousin in the Cherokee Nation she spent time with as a child and can locate, and then that Annawake spreads gossip to Alice and Cash about their interest in each other, in a way that works as effectively as in *Much Ado about Nothing*. The solution would not even have worked so well with most other Indian nations; the Cherokee Nation is, according to Sturm, “remarkable for having no minimum biogenetic standard, no minimum degree of blood, for citizenship.”<sup>36</sup> For this resolution of the second novel, it was, in a sense, just good luck that a Cherokee great-grandparent, rather than one from some other tribe, was one of the autobiographical pieces that Kingsolver used in creating Taylor. As Fagan herself says, two sentences later, “[The novel’s] resolution is so unusual and so particular that it does not offer a feasible approach to either interracial adoption or the broader issue of community versus individual interests.” This is so obviously a manipulated happy ending that it is more like a *deus ex machina*, or the sudden conversions marked as “most strange events” at the end of *As You Like It*, than “a way that is apparently natural.” It is a less sardonic analogue of the point in Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* where suddenly the royal messenger arrives to commute Mackie’s death sentence, and we are reminded that “Saviors on horseback are seldom met with in practice.”<sup>37</sup> Readers of *Pigs in Heaven* will not expect that transracial adoption issues will be solved in life by allowing transracial adoption only to people with parents related to the nonwhite group who will marry into it if the adoption is contested. “Utopias” need not be read in such a literal way.

On the contrary, *Pigs in Heaven* helps its readers see the complexity of transracial adoption and the tragedies of Native American history. Its readers are more likely to pay attention to a child’s need for contact with an ancestral community if they have already adopted, to think more about this issue if they are considering such adoption, and to support the public policy changes that Fagan advocates.

And we should note that, while the ending may be utopian from Turtle’s point of view, or from the allegorical perspective that it joins Native Americans and whites, Taylor’s point of view is different. She is losing the unique maternal power and position that is so important to her. At the end of this novel, Turtle is in an “open adoption,” rather

than a “closed adoption” though it originates in a different way than open adoptions typically do. As Judith Modell has argued, open adoptions and blended families are contributing to a “new kind of kinship, in which genealogy is only one way of constructing parenthood.” As Modell explains, open adoption is more radical than closed adoption: “eliminating the separation between giver and taker of a child, distributing the components of motherhood over several individuals, and attaching a child in different ways to different parents represent substantial revisions of familiar customs” by which closed adoption has maintained ideologies of the family, parenthood, and gender.<sup>38</sup> Molly Shanley argues similarly that “open adoption . . . would undercut the blood-based understanding of family bonds” because it suggests “that a child can have multiple sources of family identity and multiple mothers and fathers.”<sup>39</sup> Like the more typical openly adopting parents that Shanley writes about, Taylor must “receive [her] child in his or her specificity and acknowledge his or her social history . . . make room in [her life] for those things that ‘belong to’ [her] child.”<sup>40</sup> The novel emphasizes, as Shanley does, that “the child is no one’s possession. . . . That parenthood is not a proprietary relationship is true of all families, but is easier to see when two sets of parents must cooperate (even if only in the moments of relinquishing and assuming custody) to provide for a child’s needs.” This is a similar vision—normalizing some of the uncertainties associated with adoption—to the one that Lou Ann articulates in *The Bean Trees*, in a passage even more confirmed in *Pigs in Heaven*: “your kids aren’t really yours, they’re just these people that you try to keep an eye on, and hope you’ll all grow up someday to like each other and still be in one piece. What I mean is, everything you ever get is really just on loan” (231). The ideal for Taylor and for other parents in open adoptions is a more obvious version of the paradoxical ideal for any kind of parents—supply permanence for their children while giving it up for themselves.<sup>41</sup>

At one point in the novel Taylor mentions that she amuses herself during car trips by imagining what “improbable combinations” (102) of people would say to each other. This is a homey version of what Kingsolver announces as her goal in fiction. “I want to know, and to write, about the places where disparate points of view rub together—the spaces between. Not just between man and woman but also North and South, white and not-white; communal and individual; spiritual and carnal.”<sup>42</sup> Is there a point of intersection in this dialogue? That is Jax’s

phrase to Annawake; it is also a phrase that Kingsolver uses in discussing this novel when it was still in progress.<sup>43</sup> The opposition between the two sides is most clearly articulated in the first exchange between Taylor and Annawake:

“How can you possibly think this is in Turtle’s best interest?”  
 “How can you think it’s good for a tribe to lose its children?” (76)

But the discussion moves on, even when it seems they are at an impasse. Cross-racial adoption provides a situation in which Kingsolver can work on this and other dialogues. Turtle is young enough and Taylor and Alice and Cash and Annawake open-minded enough that the intersection is possible to find; thus, even though Taylor has given up some power at the end, the novel closes with a tone of triumph.

Jay Clayton has discussed the focus on family, home, and community in recent novels by women, and has contextualized this focus in relation to feminist and communitarian theory. Kingsolver’s novels can be located with those he discusses, others of which deal with adoption as well. “These novels present the family as a partial, contingent structure, vulnerable both to internal and external pressures, yet open to revision. Further, they see the boundaries of home as permeable, subject to renegotiation.”<sup>44</sup>

But at the end of *Pigs in Heaven*, however permeable the boundaries are, Turtle’s family ties both to Taylor and Jax and to Cash and the Cherokees are seen as permanent and joyous. The novel offers hope that a cross-cultural adoptee can be happily bicultural and bifamilial, though many cross-cultural and open adopters will have to put more effort into finding a community and individuals representative of that other culture, or establishing the trust of the other family, than Taylor. Perhaps this utopian quality is dependent on the fact that the adoptee in this novel remains a child. Yet perhaps today’s cross-cultural adopters have learned enough lessons from the past that their children, with the many cross-cultural camps and support groups now established and, more importantly, a different consciousness in society, will also be able to integrate their identities happily. Bicultural identity is the subject of many recent books, and even the census now accommodates mixed race as a category and encourages respondents to list multiple ethnicities. The possibility of a multicultural family resulting from one or more

adoptions can be seen as an image of the possibility of embracing diversity in our country.

Turtle opens Taylor up to the whole history and ongoing life of the Cherokees, helping her to see much more in an aspect of herself that she has never thought much about, but at the end of the novel there is no sense that she will move into the Cherokee community as her mother will. Some transracially adopting parents do, on the other hand, make geographic and other changes to make sure that there are, for example, African Americans in their neighborhood, schools, and friendship networks, apparently the strategy associated with most successful identity formation of such children. One says, "People may see us a white family with black children, but I point out that we're a black family with white members."<sup>45</sup> Parents who adopt children from overseas are less likely to be able to find a U.S. community into which they might integrate, but they may find themselves strongly motivated to learn more about their child's birth culture, developing, for example, every bit of their linguistic ability to learn Chinese.<sup>46</sup> The attempts that adoptive parents can make to give their children some share in their children's hereditary culture is an image of the openness that all parents need in order to deal with the fact that their child is a separate person; they must try to connect in a way respectful of that separateness. In the words of my friend and colleague Nancy Glazener, "part of what happens in parenting is an ongoing search for grounds of connection."<sup>47</sup>

Like Taylor's Turtle, my daughter has educated me. Yet I am aware of the differences between my situation and that of an adoptive mother, and I will return to this topic in the afterword.