Reading Adoption
Reading Adoption

Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama

Marianne Novy

The University of Michigan Press

Ann Arbor
For my daughter, Liz Carrier

and in honor and memory of her three grandmothers

Dorothy Kern, mother by adoption
Louise Carrier, mother by birth and adoption
Geraldine Govier, mother by birth
Acknowledgments

It took the equivalent of a village for me to write this book.

First, it took a social movement—the open-records movement and its founding mothers, Betty Jean Lifton, Jean Paton, and Florence Fisher, who were helpful to me personally as well as through their writings, and in Jean's case through the resources of her collection of books about adoptees and orphans.

It took other people personally involved in adoption, and especially in adoption and literature, with whom I talked about my experience. I'll begin with the adoptees and near-adoptees: long ago, Jim Simmonds, Suzanne Polen, Pat Hinchevy, Anne Steytler, and Jean Vincent; near the beginning of this project, Penny Partridge, Amy Cheney, Katie Lee Crane, and especially Margot Backus, Jill Deans, and, more recently Emily Hipchen, who have been active in the Alliance for the Study of Adoption, Identity, and Kinship. Judith Modell, Barbara Melosh, and, especially, Carol Singley, longtime cochair with me of the Alliance, bring the professional and personal together in studying adoption as adoptive parents, and they too have been helpful to me for years.

I needed audiences to try out my ideas, and I thank the audiences and organizers at a number of conferences: the American Adoption Congress; the University of Richmond conference “Shedding Light on Secrecy and Openness in Adoption”; the Pennsylvania Adoption Forum Conference; the Three Rivers Adoption Council Annual Meeting; Seen and Heard, a conference on early modern childhood; the conference of the Association for Research on Mothering; the International Shakespeare Congress; the Shakespeare Association of America; the American Anthropological Association; the International Conference for the Study of Narrative Literature; the Kansas State Cultural Studies Symposium on Family, Kinship, and Cultural Studies; conferences at the University of Pittsburgh on Theater, Drama, and History and on Children, Literature, and Culture; and the University of Auckland Women’s Studies Program. I would also like to thank the students in my classes on adoption literature.

In chapter 5 of this book I expand on my essay “Adoption in Silas Marner and Daniel Deronda,” previously published by the University of Michigan Press in my anthology Imagining Adoption: Essays on Litera-
ture and Culture, and I use a few sentences from my introduction to that book in the first chapter of this one. A portion of chapter 3 was published in 2000 as “Multiple Parenting in Pericles,” in the anthology Pericles: Critical Essays, edited by David Skeele, and is reproduced with additions by permission of Routledge/Taylor & Francis Books, Inc. A larger portion was published in 2002 in the anthology Domestic Arrangements in Early Modern England, edited by Kari Boyd McBride, and is reprinted with additions by permission of Duquesne University Press. I am grateful for permission to reprint.

I also thank the many people who helped by reading and commenting on my work in progress. Kathryn Flannery, Molly Shanley, Carol Singley, and Emily Hipchen read the entire manuscript carefully. Others who commented thoughtfully on more than one chapter, or an especially difficult one, are Nancy Glazener, Barbara Melosh, Margot Backus, Barbara Katz Rothman, Lynne Dickson Bruckner, Meredith Skura, and my classicist colleagues, Nicholas Jones and Mae Smethurst. Rachel Brownstein and Suzanne Juhasz answered my request for advice on personal writing with regard to an early version of my Eliot chapter though I had never had any previous contact with them. I am also grateful for readings by B. J. Lifton, Tess O’Toole, Heather Dubrow, Rebecca Bushnell, Nancy Henry, Susan Harris Smith, Anita Mallinger, Sarah Beckwith, Iris Young, Michael Witmore, Peggy Knapp, Kellie Robertson, John Twynning, Susan Andrade, Jean Ferguson Carr, Magali Michael, David Moldstad, and Jonathan Arac. And I would also like to thank my editor, LeAnn Fields, for many kinds of help with this project.

For contributions to the appendix, I thank Bill Gage, from whose online bibliography most of the entries were drawn, and also Jill Deans, Paris De Soto, Susan Ito, Marah Gubar, and Carol Singley, whose reading lists I used, and the many other people who sent in proposals in answer to my calls for papers in the newsletter of the Modern Language Association since 1993. I am also grateful for the texts of two plays sent to me on e-mail before publication—Carol Schaefer’s Sacred Virgin and Lauren Weedman’s Homecoming—and to Pam Hasegawa for her listserv.

Finally, I would like to thank Kathy Coulter-Wein, with whom I talked about this project in recent therapy, and Morton Aronson, the therapist with whom I discussed my search for my birth parents while it was in progress in the 1970s. And I am especially grateful for the love of my husband and my daughter—David and Liz Carrier—and my two mothers—Dorothy Kern, who accepted my search, and Geraldine Govier, who accepted me when I found her.
## Contents

**One**  Reading from an Adopted Position  

**Two**  *Oedipus*: The Shamed Searcher-Hero and the Definition of Parenthood  

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

**Four**  Adoption in the Developing British Novel: Stigma, Social Protest, and Gender  

**Five**  Choices of Parentage, Identity, and Nation in George Eliot’s Adoption Novels  

**Six**  Commodified Adoption, the Search Movement, and the Adoption Triangle in American Drama since Albee  

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

Afterword: Locating Myself as an Adult Adoptee  

Appendix: Other Adoption-Related Fiction and Drama  

Notes  

Select Bibliography  

Index